

Advent of the Three Calamities

#Chapter 11: Vision [1] - Read Advent of the Three Calamities Chapter 11: Vision [1]

Chapter 11: Vision [1]

"This is where you'll be living for the duration of your stay."

Today was the inauguration day. Besides the speech, we were introduced to our dorm rooms.

Because of my situation, I was introduced to the dorms before the others. As such, I was separated from Leon.

It was a good thing.

Thinking back at his expression my face nearly crumbled.

"Here's the key. You'll need it to access your dorm."

I stood silently to observe the building.

The Rondeo Building. With over ten floors, it looked rather grand.

It was indeed a building fitting the top ranker.

"Cadet Julien?"

I finally took note of the black card near me.

".....Thank you."

It seemed nothing fancy.

Just a plain old metallic card.

"If you need anything else from me, please feel free to inform me."

"I will."

As I entered the building, I climbed the stairs and headed to the last floor. That was where my room was.

Being the number one rank did have its perks.

"This should be it."

A tall wooden door met my sight.

I didn't hesitate to swipe my card, unlocking the door to the room.

"...Wow."

It wasn't as though I didn't expect it, but...

"It's big."

The place was grand. A lot bigger than I could've possibly imagined. Sizable windows adorned the space at one end, granting me a view of the huge garden below.

Sofas and an array of decorations throughout the room complemented the room.

On any normal occasion, I would've taken my time to explore the place more.

Unfortunately, I wasn't someone who could afford to waste time.

"Haah..."

I sat down on the ground.

And went ahead with my training. My mind was tired, and so was my body. Even so, I had no choice but to push away the fatigue and train.

I was the one who pushed myself to this point.

I had to own up to my choices.

Tzz—

I failed on the first try.

"Again...."

But I didn't lose hope.

I had no choice but to continue.

Once again, this was what I had done to myself.

The current spell I was practicing was called [Hands of Malady]. It was an elemental spell that belonged to the Curse element.

Being a beginner-type spell, its difficulty wasn't very high.

From what Leon told me, spells were classified into five different ranks—beginner, intermediate, advanced, superior, and perfected.

What set the spells apart was the number of runes each spell contained.

[Hands of Malady], being a beginner-type spell, only had twelve runes.

My goal was to connect each rune before fully forming a magic circle.

Which I have yet to achieve.

So long as I managed to connect all twelve and complete the circle, the spell would activate, and I'd be able to summon the spell whenever I wanted.

The key point was that I had to complete the circle before using it.

Tzz—

But things weren't going very smoothly.

"Another failure...."

I had managed to connect four of the twelve runes.

I didn't lose hope.

"Again."

Mana flowed out from my abdomen. Like a warm current, I slowly guided it toward the tip of my fingers, where the faint form of a circle appeared.

That was the first step.

Now the runes.

Rune one.

Rune two...

Rune three...

Rune five...

Rune s...

"Ah."

Tzz—

It shattered again.

I felt frustrated, but I didn't give up.

There was obvious improvement.

So I continued.

"More, just a little..."

As if I were in a trance, my mind worked in overdrive, and runes connected one after another.

The sight left a strange feeling on my body.

It made me crave more.

"Yeah, yeah...!"

I felt my skin crawl at the sight of the runes lighting up in front of me.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight...

I was so excited that I didn't even notice that something wet was trickling down my nostrils.

All I thought about at the moment was...

"A little....! Come on!"

The runes.

"Just a little..."

I could feel it.

So long as I kept going, I could achieve it.

My state of mind was perfect. This was a chance that I was sure I couldn't give up on.

I had to try now.

"More...!"

Before I lost the sensation...

I had to continue.

I could finally summon my first spell.

So long as I...

I...

"Ukeh."

A weird sound escaped my lips, and I realized something.

How could this be...?

.....I can't breathe.

The air just wouldn't enter my body.

"...Hup."

No matter how hard I tried, my mouth wouldn't open. As if I had forgotten how I couldn't even use my nose.

My head felt lightheaded all of a sudden.

The world in front of me started to shift.

In my mind, I knew the reasoning behind this situation.

I stared at the magic circle that balanced at the tip of my fingers.

There were ten runes.

Two more to go.

I could do it...

Yeah.

"Ukh...!"

I pushed myself.

Drip...! Drip...!

Something ran down from both the holes in my nose.

It stained the polished floor in red.

But I chose to ignore it.

I couldn't afford to pause.

My situation didn't allow me to.

It came as a result of my actions.

I had to own up to them.

"Uakh...!"

My mind started to crave oxygen.

The sensation became more and more pronounced.

I felt a weird tingle in my chest.

My toes wiggled.

So did my left arm. Almost as if on impulse.

I couldn't breathe.

My mind desperately told me to let go.

Let the circle shatter.

Breathe.

But.

"Ukgh...!"

I couldn't.

Not when I was this close.

No...!

Not yet!

So... Close!

The tenth rune lit up.

I could feel it.

I was almost there.

"M-more...!"

My voice came out hoarse.

But I was close.

So close. free.c om

Eleven runes.

Yes....!

I was...

Tzz—

Ah.

Thump!

Growing limp, my body gave up on me.

"Uahp!"

I felt my head smack against the floor.

"Haaa... Haaaa.... Haaa..."

And I heavily gulped for air.

The consequences of my actions finally caught up to me.

I lost control of my body.

It trembled furiously on the ground.

"Kh...! Kh! Kh! ...Akh!"

The pain was overwhelming.

But.

"N-no..."

All I could think of was my failure.

I could deal with pain.

But I couldn't deal with my failure.

I was so close.

Just a few seconds away.

"N... Huap... No..."

The sense of desperation felt overwhelming.

It was eating away at me.

"N-no...! Ah."

So much so that the moment I felt I could control my body again, I tried again.

But.

Tzz—

"N-no..."

Four runes.

How could this be...?

"Again."

Tzz—

The circle shattered again.

Three runes.

"Ah..."

My body felt weak.

Realization hit me.

I had lost that state of mind.

The chance for me to finally grasp the circle.

I had failed.

"H-hah."

My chest trembled as my arm fell limp.

I felt weak.

My head was light, and the world was hazy.

When it finally hit me, though...

"Khh...!"

I clenched my teeth tightly.

Close...!

I was so close!

If only I had lasted just a few more seconds!

Fuck!

How could this body fail me at such an important moment!?

Damn it!

"Ahhhhhhh!"

I screamed at the top of my lungs.

The sense of frustration I felt wasn't something I could contain.

Bang!

I smacked my fist against the floor.

Bang!

I did it again.

"D-damn it....!"

I felt so frustrated.

It was there.

Right in front of me.

I was so close.

I felt it.

So,

"Why...?"

Why!!

Why couldn't I do it?!!!

I felt like screaming again.

But as I opened my mouth...

"..."

Nothing came out.

That was when I realized.

I had lost my voice.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

All that came out of my mouth were my heavy gasps for air.

I closed my mouth shortly after.

And made a resolve for myself.

This wasn't the end.

Until my body broke apart, I was going to succeed.

I wasn't going to let myself die an easy death.

I wasn't...

"...?"

I blinked.

'Where am I?'

I struggled to comprehend my situation.

All it took was a blink and the scenery around me changed.

'Wasn't I just in my room...?'

Trees surrounded me from all sides while the moon hovered in the sky.

It was a completely different environment to my room.

'My body...!'

As if I had lost control of my body, it moved on its own.

Sneakily moving around the trees. As if it was trying to hide from something. This continued for a while.

All until,

"Are you seriously the Black Star?"

A cold voice reached my ears.

My body trembled, and my feet came to a step. Slowly, my head turned, and a figure appeared.

He wore a black hood and hid his appearance.

A strange sense of oppression came out of his body as he slowly approached me.

What's going on...?

The situation confused me.

This scene... Experience... It felt eerily familiar. It reminded me of my first vision right before I came to this world.

Could this be?

"You're a lot weaker than I thought."

The gap between us shrank.

I took a step back.

"Heh."

Though I couldn't see, it felt as if he was smiling beneath his hood. The scene seemed to be amusing to him.

".....How low has Haven fallen for them to select someone as incompetent as you? Not only are you incapable of using any spells, but you even went ahead and challenged everyone with that puny arrogance of yours. It's no wonder you lost your first duel."

Uh?

I lost the duel?

Though I wasn't completely sure, I had a feeling this body... vision... belonged to a future version of myself. Not the previous Julien.

Therefore...

The news of me losing the duel hit me particularly hard.

'So in the end, I still lost...?'

It took me no longer than an hour for me to realize I was way in over my head when I challenged everyone.

There was no way I could beat anyone with my current skills.

A fool.

An idiot.

That was who I was.

And yet...

'No, it's simply because I didn't do enough.'

I didn't stop my resolve for one second.

If I lost, then it meant I didn't try hard enough.

I wasn't desperate enough.

The pain I went through.

It wasn't enough.

"In any case..."

My attention shifted back to the hooded man.

His hidden gaze fell on me, and I felt my entire body shiver. As if two hands had gripped my throat, I had a hard time breathing.

A familiar sensation gripped my entire body.

.....It was fear.

"I should probably end this."

He approached me with a leisurely step.

Coming to a halt a few centimeters from me. His eyes locked on to me, and I felt my breath leave my body.

".....There are other more important people I need to take care of."

The world turned black shortly after.

"Huaaaa....!"

My eyes flared open, and my body sat up.

Sweat poured down from all over my body as I took deep and unsteady breaths.

"I'm-m... Haaa back?"

I was struggling to grasp my situation.

Thousands of questions flooded my mind.

What was that? Who was he...? And why did he kill me? Where did I die?

And just as my head throbbed in pain as I tried to understand the vision, something appeared in front of me, and a weird sound came out of my mouth.

".....Ah."

That was because,

— ●[Julien D. Evenus]● —

Level :17 [Tier 1 Magician]

Exp : [0%—[16%]—————100%]

Profession : Magician

└ Type : Elemental [Curse]

└ Type : Mind [Emotive]

Spells :

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Anger

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Sadness

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Fear

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Happiness

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Disgust

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Surprise

└ Beginner type spell [Curse] : Chains of Alakantria

└ Beginner type spell [Curse] : Hands of malady

Skills :

[Innate] - Foresight

— ●[Julien D. Evenus]● —

A weird screen floated in front of me.

One that multiple other smaller ones accompanied.

?| Lvl 1. [Fear] EXP + 0.01%

?| Lvl 1. [Fear] EXP + 0.05%

?| Lvl 1. [Fear] EXP + 0.04%

?| Lvl 1. [Fear] EXP + 0.3%

?| Lvl 1. [Fear] EXP + 0.01%

Chapter 12: Vision [2]

"What is this...?"

It was the first time I saw this screen. No, not quite... I think I remember catching a small glimpse of it before.

When exactly?

I couldn't quite remember. Most probably the moment I came into this world. Back then, I had been so disoriented that I probably hadn't noticed.

But what gives?

Why did it suddenly appear?

"It sort of looks like a status s—Uh?"

The screen disappeared all of a sudden.

"What's going on?"

I leaned my head back.

Why did the screen disappear? Was it because I spoke? Or... An idea floated in my mind and I opened my mouth to mumble,

"Status."

— ●[Julien D. Evenus]● —

Level :17 [Tier 1 Magician]

Exp : [0%—[16%]—————100%]

Profession : Magician

└ Type : Elemental [Curse]

└ Type : Mind [Emotive]

Spells :

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Anger

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Sadness

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Fear

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Happiness

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Disgust

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Surprise

└ Beginner type spell [Curse] : Chains of Alakantria

└ Beginner type spell [Curse] : Hands of Malady

Skills :

[Innate] - Foresight

— ●[Julien D. Evenus]● —

"Ah."

So there was a trigger.

'Status'

I extended my hand forward in hopes of seeing if I could touch it, but as my hand neared the window, it simply phased through.

".....So I can't touch it."

That became apparent after a couple more tries.

"Huu."

I took a deep breath.

My head was still light and I was still recovering from my training. Therefore, it was hard for me to remain focused.

It took several deep breaths before I could finally concentrate again.

Several things jumped out the moment I laid my eyes on the screen.

"Exp...? Level 17. Tier 1 Magician?"

As expected, this was similar to a game system. I wasn't much of a gamer, but I understood the concept of levels and Exp.

Magicians were divided in ten tiers.

From what I knew, the classification went as this;

Tier 1-2 : Apprentice

Tier 3-4 : Master-Mage

Tier 5-6 : High-Wizard

Tier 7-8 : Arch-Wizard

Tier 9 : Monarch

Tier 10 : Zenith

"Level 17... So I'm Tier 1."

That was an interesting piece of information. For one to test their Tier, they needed a special orb that Leon told me about it.

For the past week I had been curious about my Tier.

While I was aware through Leon that I had reached Tier 1. What I wasn't aware of was the fact that,

"I'm on the verge of Tier 2."

Who would've thought...?

Or was I?

I felt my brows slowly come together into a knit.

"I'm level seventeen and Tier 1. Is it safe to assume that my Tier changes with every ten levels?"

It sounded logical, but...

"I'll need to observe."

There was no proof of my judgment. For now, I decided to pay close attention to it. When the time came, I'd be able to know if my assumption was correct or not.

My gaze shifted down.

"Spell list..."

I wasn't surprised by the spells listed in front of me.

[Hands of Malady] was a spell I was already practicing. It was Leon who had told me about it.

What I was surprised about, however, was what was written beneath it.

"Ah..."

Innate skill.

Insight.

"....That explains it."

An answer to one of my questions had finally been answered.

The reasoning behind the vision. It was all due to this skill. The thought made me frown, and several more questions arose in my mind.

"Is there some sort of trigger to these visions? Can I activate it whenever I want?"

I thought back to the vision I just had.

'...How low has Haven fallen for them to select someone as incompetent as you?'

'Not only are you incapable of using any spells, but you even went ahead and challenged everyone with that puny arrogance of yours.'

'It's no wonder you lost your first duel.'

'I should probably end this.'

'....There are other more important people I need to take care of.'

His cold voice echoed at the back of my mind.

My hand unconsciously trembled at the thought. The sensation I felt back in the visions... I could still feel it vividly in my mind.

It sent shivers down my spine.

And.

"I need to train."

Reminded me yet again about my situation.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

I sat down on the ground and shifted my right hand forward.

Closing my eyes, I channeled my mana.

"....."

I swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

"....Alright."

I swallowed again.

"Let's start."

But.

"...Come."

Nothing came out of my hand.

I could feel the mana in my core.

It was there.

But...

"I've got to do it."

It just wouldn't flow.

"...Why?"

My hand started to visibly tremble.

So did my lips.

"He-h... Come on... Come out."

I thought back at what I did in the past.

I tried to repeat it.

Having done it hundreds of times over the past week, surely I could do it, right?

But.

"...It's not coming out."

The mana simply refused to move along my body.

"..."

I knew the reason why.

I just didn't want to acknowledge it.

"...C-come on. Just a little."

I swallowed yet again.

"No... N-no."

My mind kept wandering back to moments ago.

When I failed.

And the pain that came after it.

It replayed in my mind.

Over.

And over again.

"...It's nothing."

As if it was a tape on replay.

"H-hah."

In the end.

I was afraid.

Afraid of my efforts going to waste like before.

"What am I even doing this for...?"

To the point where I started to question my own objectives.

Why was I doing so much?

Was it because I was just that desperate for answers? Was that the reason why I was pushing myself so hard?

For answers?

Was I really someone who would push themselves to this point just for answers?

"...No."

How laughable.

Of course, it wasn't.

Deep down, I knew the answer. Why I was pushing myself so hard. Even if it was at the cost of my own sanity and body.

"Go back."

The words escaped from my lips.

Almost as if they were in a whisper.

"Brother."

An image conjured in my mind.

One of a young boy.

Sixteen years old. freeweb . com

And alone.

"H-hah."

What I wanted wasn't an answer.

It was a way back.

I...

"Kh...!"

Mana flowed out from my core.

My entire body shivered as a result. The world started to become a blur, and I could hardly make out what was real and what was fake.

But that didn't deter me from training.

I had a goal in mind.

One that I had to achieve.

So even though I was afraid. My body hurt. And I was exhausted.

"...Kh."

I continued to push myself.

I had no choice.

I...

Had to do it.

Puff

A plume of smoke floated in the air.

Long flowing platinum hair, deep red eyes, curvaceous body. Kiera Mylne casually sat on the stairs of the Rondeo Dorms.

It was a building only the top rankers were allowed to be in.

She was one of them.

That said,

"Tsk."

They didn't allow one to smoke inside.

She had no choice but to smoke outside.

"...Fucking bullshit."

It was an irritating thought. For such a grand and luxurious building... How could they not allow her to smoke?

Like, seriously.

What did she pay so much to attend this place for?

"Maybe if I was the Black Star...."

She thought back to the Black Star. Julien of the Evenus Barony. Maybe he could smoke in his room?

It was a thought that entertained her for a bit.

At first glance, he seemed quite arrogant.

Enough to infuriate practically every first-year cadet.

But unlike the others, she wasn't particularly interested in such meaningless squabbles.

"Lol."

Rather, she found him to be somewhat funny.

"Fucking jokes."

Puff

The plume of smoke drifted in the air as she took another drag of the cigarette.

Kiera, who was enjoying herself at the steps of the building, suddenly raised her head, catching a glimpse of an approaching figure.

She was quick to flick the cigarette away.

"...."

There was a certain aura about the approaching figure that attracted the gazes of all those around. Her graceful movements exuded a sense of authority, flowing with sophistication and ease, concealing any hint of her flaws.

It was a figure she knew all too well. How could she not know her...?

A woman of the Megrail family.

The Princess of the Empire.

Aoife Kell Megrail.

"Tsk."

Though she was in a class of her own, Kiera couldn't help but click her tongue. Her foot dragged over to where the cigarette was and she stepped on it.

Twisting her foot slightly.

Kiera looked down on her. As a noble of high lineage, she was well acquainted with Aoife. They had met many times in past events.

She shone brightly wherever she went. Was always the spotlight.

That didn't bother Kiera much.

...Not until the day of her coming to age ceremony and her talent was made known to Aoife and the royal family.

As a result?

She, who was supposed to have started her training at age fourteen, was forced to train at seventeen. The same age as low-end nobles.

For what reason...?

'This bitch.'

"Cadet."

Aoife stopped in front of her. Her yellow eyes slowly sank down to meet Kiera's gaze. Her expression didn't say much.

It was hard to read.

There was nothing unusual about this. She had always been like this. A blank piece of paper with hardly any thoughts.

And the thought irritated Kiera even more.

"...What."

"Can you move?"

"Uh?"

Kiera blinked and looked around. Then she realized. She was blocking the entrance.

But...

'Is that all....?'

No form of acknowledgment. A name? Just... Cadet? They had met several times in the past. Even made brief conversation. It was complete disregard.

"Cadet?"

"Hehe."

Kiera pursed her lips and smiled. It was a bright smile. One of the brightest she had ever displayed.

And what followed after her smile was...

"Fuck you."

A middle finger.

Drip... Drip...

Sweat intermixed with my blood.

My eyes stung.

And my vision was blurred.

A day had passed. It was now early in the morning.

And...

Tzz—

"....Failed."

I was met with another failure.

The result of my efforts was the connection of eight runes. A result that was far beneath my desired goal.

"Huuu."

Taking a deep breath, I thought about continuing again, when...

To Tok—!

The door knocked.

"Young master."

And a familiar voice sounded.

"...So it's time."

There could only be one reason for him to call me. The first day of the Academy was about to start.

"I'm comin-Ukh...!"

Thump!

My legs gave out when I tried to stand up.

Fortunately, I was able to stop myself from falling face flat on the floor by grasping the side of the sofa.

"Haaa... Haaa...."

My breaths were heavy and my hands were unusually pale.

It was obvious that my body was in poor condition.

But...

"Huuu."

Taking another breath I forced myself into the shower. I stumbled several times in the process before finally making it to the valve where I turned on the cold water.

Shaaa—!

My skin prickled at the cold.

But at the same time, my mind regained some clarity.

Supporting myself with both hands on the wall, I let the water trickle down my back.

One might think I'd be distressed with the results of my training.

In some ways I was.

But...

"Almost."

At the same time, I was also thrilled.

It wasn't fruitless.

There was definitely a progression.

"Haha."

I laughed out in exasperation.

It was going to take time, but I knew I could do it.

I was that desperate.

Chapter 13: The Weakest Black Star [1]

The campus was large. It took me about five minutes to get to the main building from the dorms.

[Dorset Hall]

That was where we were supposed to be.

It was one of the seven halls of the institute and where first-year cadets attended their lessons.

".....What class are we in?"

The Hall was large.

It was one big building with a pathway flanked by vibrant flowers and trees that guided toward the entrance, where a row of statues stood in solemn formation.

It overflowed with students.

Most troublesome were the gazes they looked at me with. Some avoided me, while others seemed to be openly hostile.

I was fine with that.

It came as a result of my actions on the first day.

"Our class should be there."

Leon pointed towards a certain door. At first glance, it didn't seem all that impressive.

But...

"Why is there nobody going there?"

Unlike the other classrooms, which were open and filled with cadets passing through, this one seemed rather isolated. As if people were avoiding it.

"....Did you not read the manual?"

"Manual...? Ah."

I took a small leaflet from my pocket. I remember receiving it yesterday, but because my focus had been on my training, I forgot all about it.

"This?"

"Yeah."

I scanned through the contents.

In short.

"We're late."

".....That's right."

"And you didn't tell me about it?"

"I thought you were aware."

"..."

There were times when I just really wanted to strangle this guy.

If not for the fact that he was helping me and that he was stronger, I'd already be at it.

That said,

'I wonder what his end goal is...'

I was still not sure why he was helping me. He said something about it benefiting him.

How so?

'As expected, I still can't trust him.'

The same was true for him to me.

In a way, we weren't that much different.

Staring at the door to the classroom, I sighed.

I felt strangely nervous. It wasn't so much because I was scared of people challenging me. I was fine with that. What I was nervous about was my abilities.

They were not up to par at that moment.

I was probably the weakest cadet present.

"Huu."

After secretly collecting my breath, I slowly and carefully approached the door.

Creeaaak—

The interior was sleek; long wooden desks lined up the sides, cascading up. They were all filled to the brim, with barely any empty spots.

Immediately, all eyes fell on me.

They were burdensome. But the most burdensome of them all was the one that belonged to the woman in front of me.

Most likely, our instructor.

"Cadets."

Her crystal blue eyes shifted between Leon and me. She had short brown hair and seemed to be in her mid-forties.

Alternating her gaze between the two of us she finally opened her mouth to say,

"...You're late."

I was already aware.

Things would've been easier if I just apologized, but I recalled Leon's description of the previous Julien and answered flatly,

"That seems to be the case."

"Seems to be the case...?"

My answer left her exasperated as she made a face. I felt a little sorry for her, but I didn't show it on the outside and kept my face stoic.

She opened her mouth but closed it right after.

"Just go. Take a seat."

".....Thank you."

I did just that.

Finding the nearest seat I could find, I sat down and took a breath.

That was easier than I expected.

She was probably a lenient teacher. Or so I thought.

"You're late! Get out of my class!"

Staring at the student who had just entered the class and got kicked out, I opened my mouth to say something when I realized I couldn't say anything.

Why....?

I looked to my left, where Leon sat. He looked at me and then shrugged.

"Probably our looks."

Oh.

The lecture resumed.

"Continuing from where I was... As you all are currently aware, magic is subdivided into three different categories. [Mind], [Elemental], and [Body]."

The classroom fell into silence.

The instructor's voice smoothly echoed throughout the classroom.

"Each category is further divided into subcategories. Take the [Mind] classification as an example. With the [Emotive], [Telekinesis], [Spirit], and [Telepathy] it contains a total of four sub-categories. Or some like to say, 'paths'."

I strained my ears to listen closely to the lecture. All information was vital. I needed to pay close attention to all that was being said.

"....As is known, everyone can practice magic. If you can manipulate mana, you have the qualifications to become a magician or knight. That of course, isn't a problem for all of you present."

She seemed to eye certain students; her gaze eventually falling on me.

"Talent is merely a factor that indicates the rate of your improvement. It does not limit you in the practice of other paths."

I took note of this piece of information in my mind.

My talents currently lie in the [Curse] and [Emotive] subcategories.

If it was possible for me to practice things outside of those two categories, then it was worth considering for the future.

"Now, time for a question."

The lecturer looked around the classroom. I felt her gaze linger in my direction for a brief moment.

What sort of...?

She smiled.

"Of all the categories, which do you deem to be the weakest?"

The weakest?

Murmurs filled the classroom as the students discussed among themselves.

Eventually, one of the cadets raised their hands. He stood out immediately with his tall height, blonde hair, and blue eyes.

The fact that his appearance garnered the attention of many of the people present told me all that I needed to know about him.

He was strong.

Probably amongst the higher-ranked cadets.

"Yes? Cadet Anders."

Oh?

I suddenly felt his gaze.

As his mouth parted open, he answered slowly. As if he wanted me to hear his answer.

"...Emotive."

A clear provocation.

Multiple eyes fell on me.

"Emotive?"

The instructor's gaze fell on me for a moment. She seemed to have been influenced by the others in the class.

"What makes you think that's the case?"

"It's the longest category to learn. Not only that, but you must be able to touch your opponent to influence their emotions. If they can't touch you, they're useless."

"That's not the case."

With a shake of her head, the instructor corrected,

"That's merely on the basis that they are on the first level of mastery. At a higher stage, they can influence someone with mere words. Further down the path, and they can read emotions."

I listened to her words carefully.

The [Emotive] sub-category was still an enigma to me. Unlike with my [Curse] sub-category, I couldn't practice it through repetition training.

The only way for me to further the [Emotive] path was through the understanding of emotions. The more I understood, the more I improved.

But that was easier said than done.

'Now that I think about it... She mentioned something about first-level mastery.'

I was reminded of the notifications I received almost daily.

The only regarding [Fear] and Exp.

'...So if I improve it, I'll be able to influence people with words?'

The thought excited me for some reason.

Was there more to it?

The Cadet continued,

"That is indeed true, but it's also true that it's not easy to achieve. It may take a lot of years to get to a level where one can influence another's emotions. To be able to influence them through words?"

He scoffed.

"...You will need to be as old as my father to be able to get there."

"That's not necessarily true."

The instructor shook her head.

"There are many cases where people achieve such a state at a young age. Keep in mind, that there are states above that. Being able to influence someone through words is still considered entry level."

Entry level...?

Influencing with words was just entry-level?

I thought back to my powers. Ever since the examination, I had hardly touched the other field.

It wasn't because I didn't like it.

That was the furthest thing from the truth.

The reality was that I was unsure whether I was capable of handling it. The after-effect from last time left a scar in my mind.

Like a mental block, it made me avoid it.

I was just not ready.

But...

'You're telling me I merely scratched the surface of what's possible?'

"Cadet Julien."

Feeling the instructor's gaze, I turned to face her.

"....As an Emotive Mage yourself, what do you think about Cadet Anders's answer?"

What did I think about it?

He's right.

All his words made sense. From what I experienced, he was right in absolutely every way.

The [Emotive] field was a path that would probably take someone ages to master.

It encompassed all the experiences of one's life and molded them in the form of emotions. Unless someone constantly experiences all those emotions, they won't be able to improve.

In that regard, it was the weakest of all the other paths.

But...

I turned my wrist slightly.

My eyes fell on the clover tattoo.

Was that the same for me?

"...."

The classroom fell silent.

They all were seemingly awaiting my answer. 'What's he going to say?', 'How will he answer with?'

Their faces all said the same thing.

And I looked back to face the cadet.

Anders was it?

I found the corner of my lips lifting slightly.

"...It's bullshit."

An answer flowed out of my mouth.

"Weakest? There's no such thing."

I wasn't just bullshitting at the moment.

These were my true thoughts.

"There's only a weak person. No weak path."

Just because the Emotive field was the hardest to progress in didn't mean it was the weakest class.

From the start, the question was wrong.

"You say that it takes a lot of time for an Emotive mage to be strong. On what basis do you say that?"

"What basis?"

The Cadet looked at me as if I were stupid.

"It's common sense. Take a look at all the strongest mages in the world. Our Empire has seven Monarchs. How many of them are from the Emotive field? None!"

He pointed his finger at me.

All of a sudden, he started talking about something different.

Most probably what he wanted to say from the start.

".....Do you think none of us see it? Your mana flow is weak. You don't even seem to be capable of properly controlling your mana. On good god, I don't know why you're ranked first."

His words seemed to echo the thoughts of many of the people present in the classroom, with many of them nodding along.

I took in the sight.

"My best guess is because of your achievements in the Emotive field. Even then, I doubt you'll be able to do anything to me."

When he finally said what he wanted to say, with a look of scorn, he added,

"Simply put, you're not fit for the role. You're weak."

Once again, the room fell into silence.

All eyes were trained on me.

"Haaa...."

With all attention on me, I leaned my head back and closed my eyes.

'....So they noticed.'

It wasn't as though I didn't expect it.

Everyone must've noticed it during the first day. The fact that I was weak. That I wasn't on the same level as them.

I understood this even more clearly than they did.

It was for this reason that I provoked everyone.

Trained to the point of insanity.

His words made sense, and there was nothing wrong with them.

Still,

"You're wrong."

My eyes were still closed, so I couldn't see.

All that I saw was darkness.

In that darkness, I could feel my hand move towards my forearm. Where the four-leaved clover rested.

I was a little hesitant at first, but then, I was reminded of my goal.

That was when my mind became firm.

Right.

To achieve my goal, I need to make full use of all the advantages I have.

Therefore...

My finger pressed down on my forearm.

'...Nobody but me can be the Black Star.'

Chapter 14: The Weakest Black Star [2]

A familiar darkness embraced me.

One that disappeared with the presence of a wheel.

Trrrrr—!

It spun.

The colors alternated with one another.

The scene was familiar, and I waited with bathed breath. Yet again, I was reminded of the pain I underwent after the experience and nervousness started to creep in. What emotion was it going to stop on...?

'Don't let it be fear.'

Anything but that.

The wheel eventually stopped, and my gaze fell on the long red arrow.

'Ah.'

Blue.

Sadness.

The world quaked. My scenery slowly started to change, and my body sank in what seemed to be a... sofa?

Uh?

Gradually, an environment started to form.

My chest felt heavy all of a sudden.

"Huuu."

Enough to make me want to take a deep breath.

"...Why?"

I licked my lips.

They were dry.

My mouth trembled.

"W-why am I back here...?"

Home.

This place I was all too familiar with.

It was home.

The place I lived before coming to this world.

"H-hah."

The pain in my chest intensified. One that was accompanied by a sense of emptiness. I... missed this place. I knew it was fake. A fabric of the skill I was using.

....That's why it hurt.

Because I knew it wasn't real.

"Shit."

Click—

The door opened and a familiar figure entered.

"Noel...?"

"Yo, I'm back brother."

He looked no different than I last remembered. With his usual smile, he walked up to the desk set up in the living room.

My fingers twisted.

"I've got some takeaway. Kinda expensive, but worth it. Damn Chinese place is so tasty~ ...I think I'm addicted."

"Oh."

The Chinese place.

Right.

It was his favorite place.

He glanced back and smirked.

"Ay~ I got some for you as well. Don't make such a face."

"...."

I opened my mouth but found myself unable to speak. The words just refused to leave my mouth.

All of this...

It felt so real.

'Could it be that all that I experienced was fake...?'

Deep down, I knew that it didn't make sense. The pain I felt. The frustration I felt. And everything that I experienced.

Was that really fake?

All of it?

"Brother?"

Noel turned around. His usual smile was there. Carrying the plate, he walked in my direction before eventually stopping in front of me.

"..."

I studied his face closely.

"Here."

And I realized.

"Eat well."

He wasn't looking at me.

The plate phased through my body, calmly resting on the sofa.

".....Make sure you eat well."

He then calmly went back to the table and started eating, his back facing me.

"Hah."

My heart squeezed. The emotions I felt were wholly mine. It wasn't like last time when they were injected into me.

I felt a sharp pain like my heart was being stabbed. My breath caught, as if my air passages were being crushed...

All because of the simple fact that,

"...It's good, right?"

My brother's shoulders were shaking.

It was strange. In my mind, I knew this was fake. There's no way my brother would act this way. But... was that really the case?

Was what I was seeing truly fake? ...Or was this the reality of his life now?

"Y-you're enjoying your food?"

He never looked back.

It was as if he couldn't look back.

But I could see it.

His shoulders... They were shaking. Even more than before.

".....Why?"

I was running out of breath, and my vision blurred. A pain unlike any other invaded my body.

Why did it have to be like this?

Rustle—

A rustling caught my attention.

"...!"

If not for the fact that I was rooted on the spot, I would've stood up immediately.

"Noel!"

I shouted at the top of my lungs. Panic flooded every part of me as I tried to wrestle against the chains that kept me on the seat.

But...

My voice didn't reach him.

"Stop! Stop now!!! You can't...!"

"H-hah..."

It couldn't reach him.

"....."

Against his temple, Noel held a gun.

"No, no, no, no, no..."

What was this?

What am I seeing?

How did he...

Ahhhh.

"Heyyy!!!"

It was as if a piece of my heart was being torn. Scraped off. My neck twisted, and the veins on my neck protruded.

"What are you doing!?"

Stop!

Stop....!

".....I'm tired."

Noel remained motionless.

His voice seemed to be devoid of anything. As if he had lost track of himself.

"No, don't! I... Ah!"

"Hey, brother..."

Finally, he turned to look at me.

That was when I stopped my struggles.

Drip... Drip...

His face was stained with tears. But the scariest part was his eyes... They were empty. Devoid of any of the usual spark he had.

Ah, no...

".....Why did you leave me?"

I knew he wasn't addressing me. There was nobody in the room. It was just him. He was talking to himself.

But...

I felt compelled to respond.

"I didn't choose to leave."

"Right, you had no choice."

He answered in a manner that suggested he could hear me. But I knew he couldn't.

After all, he wasn't looking at me.

"It's cold. Lonely. I have nobody. Our parents died. You were the only one left. Now that you're gone... Nobody cares."

"....Ah."

My chest pounded.

The pain seemed to strangle the words out of me.

"I-I'm scared..."

Drip.

"I don't know what to do... Why does everyone leave me...? What did I do? Am I the problem... Is that it?"

No, that's not...

"Hehe..."

A hollow laugh escaped his lips.

"....I should just end it, right? That way... I won't be alone anymore. At worst, I'll be with darkness. It's nothing different than now."

"No!!"

I finally snapped out of it.

What replaced the pain that entangled my heart was another emotion.

Anger.

I knew he couldn't listen, but I still spoke.

No, shouted.

"You fucking idiot...!! I stopped everything so that you could live better."

My chemotherapy.

.....I stopped it because I wanted him to live a better life. He had enough savings to survive until he finished school. So... how could he just end it?

Was my sacrifice for nothing!?

No, no...!

"Fuck!!! Stop!"

".....If you were here, you'd probably scold me. Tell me how much of a fucking idiot I am, right?"

I lost my voice then.

"Did I ask you to stop chemo? Do you think I've ever cared about the money...?"

No, that's...

"That was just an excuse from you wasn't it?"

"....What?"

"You were scared."

I felt myself lose my breath.

".....No."

"You stopped chemo because you lost sight of yourself. You were afraid of spending your days meaninglessly, knowing that you had no future to look forward to. You chose the fastest way to leave. Leaving money for me... That was just an excuse you probably told yourself."

"No, that's..."

".....I know it. After all, I'm just like you now."

That...

I brought my hand toward my chest.

It hurt.

It hurt so much.

The pain was taking over me.

"Haaa.... Haaa...."

My vision blurred, and every single breath was accompanied by even more pain.

Noel's hand shook.

"...Since you can run, I can too, right?"

He looked at me.

This time, it really felt like he could see me.

"...."

Tears, uninvited, welled up, and my mouth trembled. What was this? How could speaking hurt so much...?

"You won't mind if I join you, right?"

"...No, no."

My voice came out weak.

I found that I could no longer shout. The energy drained from my body. This sense of helplessness...

It slowly carved itself into my mind.

So did the pain.

"H-hah..."

Noel smiled. In a way, his smile seemed liberating. But all I could feel was helplessness. I could feel myself breaking.

The colors started to drain from the world.

I could see the younger version of him, standing before me, asking me to buy him ice cream. It was just a couple of months after our parent's death.

It was just the two of us back then.

He had only been ten back then. I remember that day clearly because... That was the day he regained his smile.

I worked hard to keep it that way.

To make it so that he wouldn't stop smiling.

So...

Staring at the sight before me, I felt myself lose my breath.

His smile. The one I promised to keep.

It was gone.

I took it away from him.

"It... hurts."

Clank—!

"...!"

I flinched. My breath seemed to be caught in my throat as the gun fell from Noel's hand. His eyes, which appeared to be devoid of any light, lowered.

Drip... Drip...

And tears continuously poured down from them.

Biting his lips, he weakly leaned back.

"I... I'm scared."

He covered his face with both hands.

"I don't want to die."

His shoulders trembled.

"...But I don't want to live."

The world seemed to grow faint.

"W-what do I do...?"

Just before it all faded, his head turned to face my direction once more.

"...Tell me, brother. What do I do?"

That was the last time I heard his voice.

Brightness engulfed my vision and I found myself in a familiar place.

All eyes were fixed on me.

"H-hah..."

But all I could feel was pain.

My chest felt tight and heavy.

Each breath felt heavier than the last.

And my vision was blurry.

It was at that point that I closed my eyes and saw a notification.

?| Lvl 2. [Sadness] EXP + 15%

'Level 2...?'

At first, I was surprised, but then I understood.

Unlike fear, I was familiar with sadness. It was all I ever knew in my previous life. It was no wonder my understanding of it was greater than fear or any other emotion.

And with such thoughts, I opened my eyes.

"...When was the last time that you cried?"

Words flowed out of my mouth all of a sudden. They came out smoother than I thought.

They were directed towards one person.

"Uh...? What are—Huh? Eh... Ah..."

He stopped mid-sentence.

A strange silence filled my surroundings.

One that was broken by me as I stood up from my seat. Under the eyes of all present, I walked up the aisles before stopping in front of him.

His focus wasn't on me.

"T-this... Wha-t is this...?"

Flustered, he touched his cheeks.

They were stained with tears.

Gripping his shirt, he looked up at me.

"W-what's going on? What did you do?"

I didn't answer.

Instead, I asked,

"Did I touch you?"

"Ah... H-ah."

The tears streamed with even more force as his face paled.

I clenched my teeth and raised my head. Recollections of the scene I witnessed replayed in my mind, threatening to force tears out of my eyes.

But I held them in.

I let the pain center towards my chest, where it had all accumulated.

Instead, I directed my attention towards Anders.

I opened my arms.

"...You say I'm weak."

Unfitting of my rank.

"Here's your chance. Hit me. "

"Uekh... I..."

With his hand on his chest, he only looked at me.

I looked back at him.

"So you can't...?"

I reached my hand forward to grasp his shoulder. He flinched at the touch but wasn't able to free himself from it.

"Tell me."

He seemed to be in too much pain to answer.

I could relate.

My body was being eaten from the inside. The pain was unbearable, and every second I stood felt like torture.

But I still held myself.

I couldn't show weakness.

Not yet.

I then recalled the words he threw at me before this; *'Even then, I doubt you'll be able to do anything to me.'*

That was when I asked,

"....Am I doing something now?"

He didn't answer.

Squeezing his shoulder, I murmured,

"I thought so."

Chapter 15: The Weakest Black Star [3]

Drip. Drip.

Tears stained the floor.

Their gentle drip echoing throughout the otherwise quiet room.

Those tears...

"Ah... I..."

They weren't my tears.

"...Do you still think I'm weak?"

Every word that came out of my mouth seemed to liberate me from the pain that was engulfing my chest.

But it wasn't enough.

That's why I squeezed his shoulder. It helped me alleviate the pain further while, at the same time, keeping me from falling. It was hard to remain standing.

"Ukh... Ah... W-what did you do...?"

Helplessness marred his features as he looked at me.

I clenched my teeth. My eyes felt moist. The tears were trying their best to escape my eyes. But I didn't let them.

I kept my eyes fixed on him.

"There's only a weak person. No weak path."

I repeated the same words I said before.

His expression changed, and the tears continued to pour down his face. But... I could see anger interweaving with the sadness.

"You, you..."

His lips quivered.

He struggled to make eye contact with me. That didn't last for long and his jaw clenched tightly, and his expression twisted.

Then...

Bang—!

My face stung, and my head turned. His fist reached my cheek, pushing it to the side. Even so, even as my head turned, I didn't look away. I kept my eyes on him.

It hurt.

But I was already being consumed by pain.

This was nothing compared to what I was currently experiencing.

It tickled.

"...Am I weak?"

I asked again.

His eyes faltered, and the anger seemed to fade. A new emotion started to invade his mind.

One that I was responsible for.

Fear.

The effect wasn't as powerful as the first time I used it. Nor was it as strong as sadness, but under the current circumstances, it was enough.

"H-hah."

Anger was slowly being replaced by fear.

His lips quivered, and his fist lowered. Finally, he looked away from me.

And that's when I finally muttered,

".....Pathetic."

"....."

Coming out of the classroom, Aoife stopped by the statue that stood at the front of the Dorset Hall. Towering over her, it was an imposing statue. One that every student who passed couldn't help but notice.

It was the statue of the first emperor.

Dorset Gaius Megrail.

Her ancestor and the first Zenith.

Indeed, the blood of a Zenith flowed through her. A great honor that came with heavy responsibilities.

It had been centuries since a Zenith had been born into their family.

Their efforts at nurturing a Zenith had been in vain, and despite all their policies to keep others in check, the other houses were catching up.

In particular...

'Delilah Venice Rosemberg.'

A name stood out in her mind. She was the closest to the Zenith and the one with the power to end their reign.

"...I won't fail."

To become the Zenith.

Aoife was willing to do anything.

It was her duty as a princess and her goal.

"..."

Students flowed out of the hall, with many of them glancing in her direction as they passed by. Ignoring them, she lowered her head to stare at her hand.

It was trembling.

Slightly.

"Why?"

Aoife's only question was 'Why'.

But at heart, she knew the reason for this.

She shut her eyes, allowing her mind to delve deep as she rewound the events that had unfolded earlier.

Anders Maddison.

...He was one of the cadets to look out for. Ranked within the top hundreds, he was a very talented individual, and someone Aoife kept in mind.

He was a talented person she thought of recruiting for her faction.

She was especially pleased by his boldness.

"Simply put, you're not fit for the role. You're weak."

His bold words back then echoed the thoughts of everyone present.

The weakest Black Star.

That was who Julien Dacre Evenus was.

'Weak.'

He was truly weak.

To the point where one might wonder how he had managed to get himself into the position. It was a thought that consumed Aoife's mind over the past week.

How could someone as weak as him become the Black Star?

She could recall his expression back then. Under the barrage of Anders's words, he seemed calm. Unfazed, almost.

It was as if he truly didn't care.

But was that the case...?

Did he truly not care?

At the time, when she saw him close his eyes, Aoife thought, 'He's running away.' His actions again made her ask the question,

'Just what is so special about him...?'

His attitude was trash, his mana flow was weak, and he wasn't of high noble birth.

".....Why?"

She was confident that if the two of them were to fight one-on-one, she'd beat him with a simple flick of her finger.

He was that weak in her eyes.

The only one whom she truly deemed strong was not Julien, but his knight.

Leon Rowan Ellert.

He was ranked second, and unlike Julien, Aoife could see that he was strong. She couldn't see herself beating him easily. If she wanted to beat him, she'd have to pull out every card she had.

"...When was the last time that you cried?"

Even now, she could remember his voice. The tone, the smoothness, and the fluidity of it. It wasn't something she could forget.

Never.

"Uh...? What are—Huh? Eh... Ah..."

The way Ander's face changed at his words, and tears flowed out of his eyes...

She could also remember.

The change was so abrupt that hardly anyone was able to react. Aoife was one of the few who was able to understand what had happened.

By the time she did, however, Julien was already standing in front of him.

"Did I touch you?"

He didn't.

His every action seemed calculated. As if he were evoking a certain flow.

First he evoked sadness.

"...When was the last time that you cried?"

Then, he evoked anger.

"Here's your chance. Hit me. "

"You, you..."

Bang—!

And then...

".....Pathetic."

He evoked fear.

"Huuu."

Aoife opened her eyes.

"The entire time, he was in complete control."

It was an unmistakable fact.

What made Emotive Mages so scary? It wasn't their strength. Far from it. They were weak. Even the weakest mage could kill them.

.....But that was only on the premise that they didn't fall for their words.

Through the exploitation of a single emotion, Emotive Mages could evoke and manipulate other emotions. Though different, they were all intertwined together. And the more emotions an Emotive Mage could manipulate, the stronger they were.

Emotions were a weakness.

It was something that Aoife understood all too well.

Aoife's fist slowly clenched.

"He's weak."

That was undeniable.

But...

".....He's strong."

Weak but strong.

"Julien."

A new name crawled its way up in her mind.

It stood right alongside Delilah's.

A familiar feeling.

One that I had grown accustomed to.

My legs were weak.

"Haaa..."

Each breath felt tiring.

And the world felt empty.

Colorless.

It was just.... meaningless. There was nothing that excited me. Every one of my actions felt mundane. A chore.

The tears that were threatening to spill from my eyes before were long gone.

"....Tasteless."

The food was tasteless too.

It didn't even look appetizing.

I placed the spoon down and looked around me. I was sitting alone in the canteen. Several eyes were trained on me, sneaking glances whenever I wasn't looking.

I would've normally not minded.

But...

It perfectly reflected the reality of my situation.

I was a stranger to this world. An outlier. A pebble drifting in the raging sea, doing its best to keep itself from sinking.

The world...

It was suffocating.

'I want to go back.'

There was nothing more that I wanted.

....I was struggling. I truly was.

Picking up the knife near me, I lightly traced my finger over its edge.

"...."

A red line formed on my finger.

But.

"...It doesn't hurt."

What if I cut it off...? Will it hurt then?

Thoughts started to cloud my mind. They became more dangerous with each passing second. My mind was clear. I knew that my thoughts were stupid.

But... My insides were empty.

Just because my mind was clear, it didn't mean I cared.

Right now.

I just wanted to feel something.

Even if what I felt was pain. Something. I needed something. This emptiness that was consuming me... I wanted it to go away.

"H-hah."

My eyes continued to trace over the knife, just as my finger did.

It seemed tempting.

Just a little...? It's not like this body is mine anyway...

"Just..."

I balled my hands into a fist and clenched my teeth. Every part of me tensed.

'I can't.'

Just like fear, sadness was consuming me. It was threatening to devour every part of me. An after-effect of the skill I used.

But unlike fear, pain couldn't save me.

Right now.

I wanted to feel pain.

Something.

"Hah."

I took a deep breath and reminded myself of my goal.

'.....Noel.'

Right.

There was someone waiting for me. He was struggling too. Perhaps even more. I didn't care about myself, but I cared about him.

For him.

.....I could take on the pain.

Taking a look around me, the noise finally entered my ears.

I could hear again.

Color also started to return.

Alongside it was an intense pain. It squeezed tightly at my chest. Covering my eyes with both hands in a way that nobody noticed, I felt something wet brush against my finger.

It took a while for me to realize what it was.

Finally, my lips quivered.

"S-hit."

My tears.

They had finally returned.

As promised, there will be another chapter soon.