

Advent of the Three Calamities

#Chapter 171 Escape [2] - Read Advent of the Three Calamities Chapter 171 Escape [2]

Chapter 171 Escape [2]

Squench. Squench.

....The sound was one that I was now starting to get used to. I took a sharp breath in, trying my best to calm the increasing anxiety.

Alongside the sound were the roots that would sprout from beneath the ground, slowly crawling up from the ground and tangling my feet and body.

At the start, they had only covered my ankles.

That was at the start.

"Haa..."

They now covered my body all the way up to the chest.

I felt my chest squeeze at the sight of the roots.

When...

Just when were they going to stop haunting me?

But if that wasn't bad enough,

"Who are you? What are you doing?"

I was now stuck in the middle of the hall with my back turned. With my head turned to face their direction, I made sure to keep my hat lowered to keep my face hidden.

"....What ridiculous question is this?"

I hoarsely said, trying my best to keep my tone calm.

The two guards appeared to both be around Tier 3. They were stronger than me. In a fair fight, the likelihood of me losing to just one of them was high.

Two...?

That was nearly impossible.

Of course, that was if I excluded Emotive Magic. With it, I'd be able to deal with one fast. However, by then, It'd be unable to deal with the other.

"Pardon?"

"We were just asking. It's protocol."

Though I couldn't see, just from the tone of their voices, I could tell that they were confused.

It made sense considering how I had blatantly dodged the question.

'...I should've taken this into consideration.'

My situation was not good at all.

I understood that.

However, it wasn't hopeless. They had yet to see my face.

Closing my eyes, I immersed myself in my mind and the world turned black. There were several dozen entities residing within my mind. There used to be more, but with time, I slowly started to forget them. There were only a few that actually remained.

They were the ones that I chose to keep.

At this very moment, I was looking for one specific entity.

'There.'

a familiar face appeared in my mind.

Walking forward, I reached out for it and memories coursed through my mind. They were the same memories I had relieved before. However, unlike last time, I made sure to properly analyze the tones, emotions, and habits.

I started to relieve his memories.

The process seemed to last forever. However, I knew all too well that only a few moments had passed.

Opening my eyes, my tone lowered.

".....I've got a job to do. Don't start annoying me."

It wasn't just my tone that changed.

From the way I was breathing, to the way I carried myself. An outline appeared in my mind, and I just followed it.

At this very moment, I was mimicking Javier.

A stern man who was hellbent on following rules and orders.

"This..."

"Sir, if you—"

"You two should already be aware of who I am."

Turning to look at the door, I opened the door and took a step in. Just before entering, I placed my hand into my pocket and took out a pair of black gloves which I proceeded to put on.

"Ah...!"

That seemed to do it.

In the exact moment that I took out the gloves, the two guards appeared to have recognized me.

"Sir Javier!"

"....Sir Javier!"

Just as one greeted, so did the other.

"We apologize. Because of your hat, I wasn't able to recognize you."

"I apologize!"

"...."

I didn't say anything and took another step into the room.

Despite my outward composure, my heart was beating out of my chest. Maintaining the facade wasn't hard, but just a slight slip up and I knew I was done for.

"If I may ask, what brings you here sir? This is merely a storage room. From what I understand, you should be undergoing a task."

I stopped in my tracks.

I was just about to answer with a 'mind your own business' when I stopped myself. The real Javier would never do such a thing.

He was someone who disliked dragging things and always stated his business.

".....The cadet isn't budging."

As such, I could only try to make up some bullshit.

"I'm looking for other means to make him talk."

"Ah, that makes sense. But why the storage room?"

"I've asked my assistants to look elsewhere. I'm thinking of using something from here to get the cadet to talk."

".....I see."

Judging from the tone, he appeared confused.

I thought that everything was flowing smoothly, and for a brief moment, my heart calmed down. That was until the guard spoke again.

"If you don't mind, is it okay if I accompany you?"

"...."

I swallowed my saliva and felt the sound of footsteps drawing near me.

They were coming closer and closer before stopping right behind me.

I slowly clenched my hands.

"Sir, I'm sure I'll be able to help you if you allow me. Would that be okay with you?"

"...."

Yet again, I didn't answer.

I focused my attention on my hand.

'Shit.'

Then, taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes.

"How long?"

"Pardon...?"

"...For how long did you know?"

"I'm sorry, I'm not following."

Opening my eyes, I looked behind me and faced the guard directly.

"For how long did you know that I wasn't Javier."

"Ah."

To that, the guard smiled.

"...Since the start. While you act like him, you aren't the same height as him. Your hair is also not the same."

Right, I had thought about this and tried my best to hide the flaws. From the hair, to the way I carried myself.

I thought I had done a pretty good job at that but it was clear I hadn't.

"Did you seriously think I wouldn't notice?"

As he spoke, he was already making his move.

I stood in silence for a short moment before speaking again.

My voice layered.

"If you knew I wasn't Javier, why aren't you scared?"

"Eh...?"

The guard stopped in his tracks, his face turning pale.

I raised my hand and pointed my finger at his forehead. Our eyes met for a short moment before I pulled my finger away.

Thump!

With a low 'thump' the body fell to the ground, a small hole appearing on his forehead as blood pooled out from behind his head.

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

I started to breathe heavily in the process. While Emotive Magic didn't use much mana, the mental toll it took, alongside my immersion was quite high.

The mental toll was especially intense when dealing with someone who was stronger than me.

"Shit."

Still, this wasn't the end of my problems.

There had been two guards moments prior. Although I had been able to dispatch one, the problem was the fact that the second guard had been missing.

"He must've used the chance to leave and relay to the higher-ups about the situation."

I clenched my teeth.

The worst-case scenario had occurred.

Soon, the entire bunker was going to come after me. It became abundantly clear to me that I was on the verge of getting caught.

My body tensed all over.

However, strangely enough, I wasn't scared. In fact, my mind started to calm down as I immersed myself in Javier's memories and recalled the map of the inner area of the bunker.

Soon, I had a direction.

Glancing at the body on the ground beside me, I rushed forward.

Time was ticking, and if I lost my chance, I knew it'd be the end of me.

Thinking about the vision, I clenched my teeth.

'Over my dead body.'

....I didn't want to face such a scenario.

—At the same time.

"Let me get this straight... Did you just say, you'll make sure that you won't break him?"

A certain regal air surrounded Aoife as she sat down on her chair while staring at the post-leader of the Black Hound Guild.

There was a clear difference in strength between her and the rest, and yet, for some strange reason, the aura around Aoife's body appeared to suppress that of those in the room.

'As expected of the Megrail Bloodline.'

Many of the Post Leaders thought to themselves while staring at Aoife.

It was a pity that they could not covet her given that in the future, she was most likely not going to join a Guild.

"Ah, yes. That's what I said."

Offering a smile, the Post Leader of the Black-Hound guild rubbed his hands.

"...Currently, he's the most suspicious person present. I took it upon myself to make sure that we extract all possible information from him. You might never know who might fall next. I hope you won't mind my methods."

'Won't mind...?'

Aoife frowned.

Of course, she minded. he was directly talking about torturing a cadet to get information out of them.

This was clearly something that she didn't look favorably towards.

Perhaps noticing Aoife's displeasure, the Post leader spoke,

"Are you perhaps acquainted with the cadet? Please don't worry. Like I said, I made sure to tell the people in charge to not go too hard. He might suffer a bit, but his mind will rema

—"

"Pfft."

His words were abruptly stopped by Aoife who laughed.

Confused, everyone looked at her.

This was especially so for the post-leader of the Black Hound Guild.

"Princess? Is there something funny?"

"....I apologize."

Covering her mouth with her hand, it took a few moments for Aoife to recover.

When she did, she looked at the Post Leader before shaking her head.

"I'm disappointed in you."

"Pardon?"

Aoife turned her head to look at all the Post Leaders present.

"....It looks like none of you here did your research."

"Research? About...?"

Staring at them, Aoife shook her head again.

Given that they were extremely busy with the raids and situations, it made sense that they didn't know. However, it was still disappointing.

Looking at them, or more specifically Karl, the Post Leader of the Black Hound Guild, Aoife leaned back on her chair.

"That guy that you're torturing. He's a maniac who reached a score of 8.23 in the mental examination."

Her words brought silence to the room.

It gripped it in its entirety.

"....I saw it with my own two eyes."

During the mental examinations, Aoife had been there.

She had seen him seated in that chair.

Completely unmoved as the numbers counted. Recalling the moment that his score was revealed, Aoife remembered her mind blank.

It was a score she refused to believe was possible.

And yet,

He had done it.

For that reason, she found the entire situation funny.

Break his mind?

She found that to be laughable.

Aoife looked straight into the Black Hound Post-Leader's eyes. At the same time she did, she found herself unable to hide her smirk.

"Make sure to not break him? It'll be a miracle if you can even get him to say a single word. What a waste of time."

It truly was.

...And following her words, the room once again fell into a complete state of silence.

None of the post-leaders said a word. This was especially true for the post-leader of the Black Hound Guild whose face was red. He looked like someone who had eaten shit.

Just as someone was about to say something, the door of the room burst open.

Clank—!

"Emergency report!"

A man rushed into the room. With heavy breaths and a red face, he looked around in panic. Before anyone could say anything, he shouted.

"There's an emergency! We've got an intruder! I believe it to be the cadet who has been put under interrogation! Dressed as Sir Javier, we caught him in one of the corridors as he tried to escape."

"What?!"

"What did you say?"

Immediately, several people stood up.

However, before they could move, Aoife's cold voice echoed.

"Sit down."

Instantly, all eyes turned on her.

A tremendous pressure bore down on Aoife.

'I can only do so much.'

Bearing the pressure, Aoife closed her eyes before opening them up again.

".....Until I say so, nobody is to go out of this room. That's an order."

Chapter 172 Escape [3]

"Princess...?"

Everyone's attention was focused on Aoife who tried her best to keep her composure.

Feeling the pressure that was bearing down on her from the post leaders, she withstood it all and tried to act as calmly as possible.

"Don't move. Everyone stay here. That's an order."

"Excuse me?"

Frowning, one of the post leaders looked at her.

Aoife recognized him.

Andrew Colnell of the Raging Bulls Guild. With his tall stature and burly body, he was quite intimidating to look at.

"The potential culprit has escaped, and you're telling us to stay still? What sort of situation is this? Could it be that the two of you are collud—"

Aoife squinted her eyes and he stopped speaking.

"....The Megrail family gains nothing by doing this to you."

Her gaze quietly swept the room.

"If we wanted to get rid of the fifteen Guilds, we would be able to do so in a heartbeat. Those of Central would be more than willing to help. After all, without the fifteen Guilds, that would mean that fifteen Mirror Cracks will be available for the noble houses to take."

One of the main reasons why the Megrail family allowed the Guilds to be in power and granted them access to the Mirror Cracks was specifically to tie down the noble houses.

There had been several coup d'état attempts in the past.

It was for that reason that the Megrail family was so hell-bent on keeping its power and pressuring those beneath them.

While it did affect the overall growth of the Empire, it also made their ruling far more stable than that of the other Empires.

....It was such action that allowed them to become the strongest Empire of the four.

A strong nation with a dysfunctional head was just an empty shell in Aoife's eyes.

"If you really think I'm colluding with him, you can go ahead and file a report to the Megrail family once this is over. Of course, that will be after you deal with the aftermath of Haven's wrath. Do I even need to remind you who the two current heads of the Academy are?"

Aoife's words continued to reverberate across the room.

The eyes of the post-leaders changed.

Clearly, there were many that wanted to refute her words, and not take her seriously. However, the 'Megrail' name continued to hang over their heads, preventing them from making any rash movements.

Such was the power Aoife was bestowed since birth.

"Sit down."

Aoife's cold voice echoed across the room.

Despite clearly being the weakest in the room, it didn't seem like that at all from the way she carried herself.

Eventually, several of the post-leaders went ahead and followed her orders and sat down.

Aoife looked at them and acknowledged them with a small nod.

She was satisfied.

Of course, not all sat down and her gaze soon paused on them.

At the helm was none other than the post-leader of the Black Hound Guild.

"Are you perhaps not satisfied with my order?"

"...."

Karl didn't answer immediately.

His expression was blank, and his red eyes flickered slightly. With a twitch of his expression, he soon put up a smile.

"Satisfied? I wouldn't say I'm satisfied. You must understand that I'm doing this to figure out what is going on. Currently, several cadets and members of the supply station have fallen into a coma. The only lead we have is the cadet that we have detained."

".....I understand that"

"It's good that you understand it, princess. If you understand, then you must also understand that his sudden 'escape' is even more suspicious. He wouldn't have run away if he had nothing to hide and was innocent."

"That's not true."

Aoife shook her head while drumming her fingers over the armrest of the chair.

"....Didn't you specifically say that you were trying to not break him? From what I can tell, you were trying to torture him. My best guess is that he's running away because of that. If anything, this is all your fault."

"Hehe, he..."

Karl let out a nervous laugh.

"Princess, didn't you say that his mental score was 8.23? The little torture that I subjected him to is nothing. If anything, it probably tickled."

"So...?"

Aoife's eyes narrowed.

"Just because he could withstand it, that doesn't mean he liked it."

Clenching onto the armrest of the chair, her expression darkened.

"Sit down. I won't allow any one of you to interfere with the matter. If he's truly the culprit, then we'll find out soon enough."

"But—"

"I'm sure you're confident in the bunker's safety system, correct? If that's the case, then what is there to be worried about? He'll get caught even without your interference."

To that, nobody could say a thing.

Everyone present understood how the inner structure of the bunker worked. Escaping was almost impossible.

It was like a maze.

Unless someone knew how the inner structure of the bunker worked, then there was no way they'd be able to escape.

At such thoughts, several of the post-leaders sighed in relief and relaxed back.

"Alright, then."

This was especially so for the Black Hound post-leader.

Looking at Aoife, he nodded his head with a smile.

"I'll follow the Princess's arrangement."

At the same time, he glanced at the guard that had entered the room. Though he didn't say anything, his message was clear.

'Find him.'

The guard nodded, before excusing himself from the room.

Aoife stared at the interaction without saying a word. She couldn't have said anything because he hadn't said a thing.

Not that she would've.

This was as far as her powers allowed her to help.

Though she carried the Megrail name, she was merely a princess without any contention for the throne.

Her words could only hold so much weight.

'I hope this is enough.'

She was a little worried. After all, it was almost impossible to escape without knowing how the inner structure of the bunker worked.

If possible, she would've preferred to help out more.

There was something clearly wrong with the situation and the post-leaders seemed extremely untrustworthy.

'Someone here is definitely behind this.'

Her eyes paused on the post-leader of the Black Hound Guild.

To her, he was the most suspicious.

However, she had no evidence to back up her statement. In the end, she could only sit back and close her eyes.

This really was the best she could do for now.

"Haa... Haaa..."

My breathing was rough. I wasn't sure for how long I had run. Looking ahead, all that met my sight was a long and narrow corridor that split in four directions.

This place was like a maze.

....If it weren't for the fact that I knew which direction to go to, then escaping would've been impossible.

"Run! Run! We've received reports that there's someone on the run! Find him at all costs!"

In the distance, I could hear the voices of the guards.

"Huuu."

Taking a deep breath, I didn't rush forward and took a deep breath.

At the same time, I brought my hand forward and threads flowed out from my forearm. The threads extended from out of my arm, flowing to the ground and separating into several directions.

My chest squeezed at the mana expenditure.

However, this was a necessary step.

"Done..."

Taking another deep breath, I headed to my left where another corridor was.

I ran for a few minutes before stopping and jumping up.

With the aid of the threads, I helped myself onto the ceiling of the corridor. In the process, I maintained my breathing and calmed my breathing heart.

The ensuing silence was one laden with tension.

That silence was inevitably broken by the sound of the passing guards who rushed ahead.

"This way!"

"Look! There are threads on the ground! Follow the threads!"

Following the threads on the ground, they rushed past the spot I was in. I stared at their departing backs with bathed breath.

Thud.

I only fell back down when I could no longer see them.

'It worked.'

With everyone's attention on the threads, nobody noticed my presence right on top of them. Such had been one of my goals in laying the threads out.

Of course, their other goal was to allow me to know how many guards were ahead and from which direction they were coming.

"Ukh...!"

I felt lightheaded.

It was hard to keep the threads out for so long. They took a heavy toll on my mana.

'.....Almost.'

With that being said, I had no other choice but to continue.

Even as my head felt light and I could hardly think properly, I rushed ahead.

There was a certain direction that I needed to go.

And that place wasn't the exit. No, going to the exit was not a smart move. There were probably several powerful guards waiting for me there. Since they knew that my goal was escaping, I was sure they'd be there to wait for me.

It was for that reason that I headed in a different direction.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

With heavy breaths, I continued to my rush.

Whenever guards appeared, I'd repeat the same steps as before.

"This way! Go!"

Thud.

Falling down, my knees buckled.

I was exhausted.

....It had been a few minutes since my mana had pretty much depleted. The number of threads that were on the ground was low, and the speed at which I was running was also extremely so.

"Haa... Haa..."

Thankfully, I was near my destination.

Holding onto the side of the corridor, I laid my eyes on the distant room.

Given the current circumstances, there was only one guard stationed outside. He was on the weaker side and didn't seem at all like a threat. Taking a deep breath, I lowered my hat and straightened my back.

Then, trying my best to keep my face firm, I walked forward calmly.

Tak, Tak—

The sound of my footsteps echoed within the quiet hall.

"Who are you?"

Upon noticing my presence, the guard grew wary. Licking my lips, I spoke,

"Stay put."

His body stopped.

So did I.

Looking up, his entire face was pale as he looked at me with widened eyes.

"Huuu."

Extending my hand forward, a purple hand materialized right beneath his neck.

"Ukeh...!"

It grasped his neck directly.

Following that, his body grew limp and his eyes rolled back.

Thud!

His body fell shortly after.

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

Holding onto my knees, I desperately gasped for air. My lungs were burning, and sweat dripped down from the side of my face.

Still, it wasn't over yet.

Clenching my teeth, I moved forward and reached out for the door.

At the same time that I did that, I used the threads to help keep the guard's body in the same position as it was before.

My body tingled at the effort but I suppressed the pain and entered.

Clank—

"Ukeh...! Who are you?!"

Immediately after entering the room, I was greeted with a white room where over a dozen beds appeared, each with a person lying in it.

In the middle of the room was a man dressed in white who was staring at me with a scared expression.

"Shhh."

He was most likely the doctor.

Bringing my finger to my lips, I looked around.

"I need to—"

My thoughts stopped the moment my eyes paused in a certain direction.

"W-what...?"

I stood frozen in disbelief.

Blinking to make sure I was seeing correctly, my heart dropped.

"H-ha."

My chest trembled as I neared the body.

"H-how?"

It was a familiar face. A face that I was now used to seeing each day.

With wide open eyes, he stared blankly at the ceiling.

Ba... Thump! Ba... Thump!

I felt the beat of my own heart drum within my mind.

"Just what in—"

Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh—

"...!"

A change occurred before I could get my words out.

I stood frozen on the spot as everyone within the room sat up straight. Their white eyes locked onto me.

Leon too.

Something inside me wrenched and soured under their gazes.

Ba... Thump! Ba... Thump!

In the silence that took over, the drumming within my mind completely overtook my senses.

"...."

Rigidly turning my head, the hair at the back of my neck stood on end as my eyes locked onto the doctor's.

He too...

Had white eyes.

Staring at me like the others, his mouth parted open.

And,

"Hieeeeeeeek—"

He screamed.

Chapter 173 Escape [4]

"Hieeeeek—"

An icy current went up and down my spine the moment I heard the scream. Feeling several gazes on me, I felt all hair on my body rise and my heart seized to beat for a split second.

But it was only momentary.

Before I even had a chance to react, the others opened their mouths and screamed.

"Hieeeeeek—"

One, two, three...

The entire room was plunged into a sea of screaming.

Squench. Squench.

Roots sprouted from the ground, taking hold of my entire body, only stopping at my face where I felt a familiar tickling sensation.

"Haa.. Haa..."

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

?| Lvl 1. [Surprise] EXP + 0.6%

?| Lvl 2. [Fear] EXP + 0.04%

?| Lvl 2. [Fear] EXP + 0.08%

?| Lvl 2. [Fear] EXP + 0.12%

Notifications flashed in my vision.

I felt sweat cling to the back of my neck, dampening my hair. Once again, fear started to creep into the depths of my mind.

'...Why?'

Staring at the notifications, I had a hard time understanding my situation.

The situation didn't make sense.

"I-I... haa... should be able to withstand this much..."

I thought I had grown used to fear given how much I had started to understand it.

And yet, all I felt was fear.

It continued to seep into my mind, making it hard for me to think properly. There was something clearly wrong with the situation.

The same was true for the roots.

Why did they keep on appearing...?

Each time, they'd appear to cover more and more of my body, reminding me of the little time that I had left.

Never before did it happen with the visions.

"Hieeeeeek—"

The screams continued to echo in the background, taking hold of the entire room.

I covered my ears while feeling the gazes of all those present in the room. Their white eyes were currently fixed on me as veins protruded from their necks, and saliva started to flow out of their mouths.

I shivered under the scene.

"Haa."

I struggled to breathe.

Blinking, the roots disappeared and I could move again.

I didn't hesitate to take that chance to move away from where I stood.

"F-failed..."

Yet again, my plan had failed.

As if I was being read at every moment, nothing was going my way. But I didn't let that affect me. I couldn't let it affect me.

Taking one last glance in Leon's direction, I clenched my teeth and pushed my way out of the room.

'The room should be soundproof enough to not have anyone notice anything.'

Just as I reached the door, I waited for a few seconds.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

One after another, the bodies fell behind me. Alongside that, the screams also stopped. Only then did I reach for the door and pull it open.

Clank—

As expected, there was no one.

I breathed in relief.

Without hesitation, I retrieved the threads that I used to keep the guard standing and closed the door behind me.

Thump!

The guard at the door fell to the ground.

Swallowing my saliva, I turned to look back. Then, staring at the guard, a certain thought fell and I took a deep breath.

'Yeah, that might work.'

Outer Bunker area.

"Where did that bitch go?"

Kiera looked around for any sign of Aoife. In one moment she had been with them, and in the next moment, she was gone.

She did say something along the lines of 'I have to do something', but that was about it before she went ahead and disappeared.

"She's probably with the post-leaders trying to figure something out."

"Bah."

Kiera dismissively waved her hand.

"...Whatever. This situation is way too creepy for me to even be mad at her."

Had the situation not been like this, Kiera didn't think she'd be able to work with Aoife. Perhaps, she also felt the same way.

That bitch...

The thought pissed Kiera off.

"Fuck, I'm getting goosebumps."

Massaging her arms, Kiera looked around. The outer area of the bunker was extremely quiet. Hardly anyone spoke.

A strange atmosphere filled the place.

While no one spoke, Kiera could see the unrest in many of the people's faces.

Right now, there was a fine line between the silence and total chaos. With just a slight push, chaos was bound to appear.

Kiera understood everyone's feelings all too well.

She too was creeped out by the situation. This was especially so after Leon had also fallen for whatever was happening.

It made it especially clear to her that no one was currently safe.

No one.

"Hm?"

Kiera was just about to sit down when she noticed a sudden change coming from the guards patrolling the area, and the Guild stations.

They all seemed to be rushing towards the inner area.

Before she could voice anything out, someone from the crowd beat her to it.

"What's going on?"

Despite the guards and guild members trying their best to be subtle about their actions, it didn't go unnoticed by the crowd who started to grow rowdy.

"Is there something going on?"

"Why is everyone rushing towards the inner area of the bunker? Are you perhaps leaving without us?"

"....Are they abandoning us?"

The fine line that separated the calmness shattered, and chaos started to take hold of the outer area.

"Everyone, please calm down! There's nothing serious! There are no problems. We are just getting the guild members to move on the orders of the post-leaders who are thinking of a way to resolve this situation!"

"Bullshit...!"

"You're leaving us!"

Despite the Guild member's best attempt at trying to calm the situation down, it only served to add fuel to the fire as more and more people started to stand up.

The cadets also started to protest.

"What exactly is going on?"

".....Do you have any answers? Are you leaving?"

"Do you know who my father is?"

Some even started throwing their family names around. Kiera cringed slightly at the sight. Who the hell was going to care about their family in this situation?

Still, it did do something.

Evelyn seemed to be of the same opinion as her as she shook her head.

"Flaunting their family status like that. It's a bad look."

"I guess."

Kiera placed her pinkie in her ear.

Evelyn tilted her head upon noticing Kiera's calmness. She didn't seem all that bothered about the situation.

"You look rather calm. Do you have a plan?"

"A plan?"

Kiera licked her lips.

Turning around, her gaze fell on the crowd of people who started to protest against the guards stationed at the door that led to the inner area.

Scratching her neck, she looked at Evelyn.

"You know, I kind of agree with them."

"Hm?"

"Well, think about it. There's something clearly wrong with the situation. In fact, it seems like Leon and Julien had been purposely targeted because they found out about the whatever tree. Aoife is also gone."

"And...?"

"...I don't know about you, but I feel like we're purposely being detained."

"Ah?"

Evelyn looked confused, turning her head to stare at the windows outside. The world was still red, a clear indicator that the Crimson Shade was still in effect.

It was for that reason that she struggled to understand Kiera's words.

"Why do you think we're being detained? It's not like we're capable of artificially creating a Crimson Shade."

"Eh, I guess you're right. I still don't like this situation."

"What are you proposing?"

"Simply actually."

Kiera cleared her throat. Then, facing the same direction as the crowd, she rushed forward while shouting.

"Do you have any idea who my father is?!"

"...."

"....Fuck, my father aside, do you have any idea as to who I am? Let me in!"

"Yeah!"

"Let us in!"

Before Evelyn knew it, Kiera had suddenly started to take charge of the entire crowd, leading the protest.

"...."

Speechless, Evelyn didn't know what to say.

However, it was clear that with Kiera's interference, the situation was getting more and more out of control.

And it wasn't like she disagreed with what she said.

Thus,

"Haaa..."

With a long and tired sigh, she weakly raised her hand before saying,

"D-do you know who my father is?"

"Do we still have nothing?"

"Nothing. Let's go to this area."

Two guards ran around the corridors of the inner bunker. Because manpower was limited, and the inner area of the bunker was like a maze, the guards were separated into groups of two and three.

Fiddling with his weapon, one of the guards looked ahead.

"We'll be heading for the infirmary if we head forward. Do you want to check it out?"

"I doubt there will be anyone there. My best guess is that the target is currently headed for the main exit."

"....Good luck with that. Sir Rogers is guarding that area. There's no chance he'll be able to escape."

"True that."

While talking, the guards rushed ahead.

The tunnels were long, but at their speed, it took no longer than a few minutes to come closer to their destination.

"Wait."

Coming closer, they stopped.

Their expression changed the moment they looked ahead.

"Someone has been here!"

Right at the entrance of the infirmary, a guard lay on the floor with their back against the wall. Immediately, the two guards rushed ahead.

"You check up on him, I'll enter the infirmary!"

"Yes!"

Taking out his weapon, one of the guards kicked the door of the infirmary open and rushed in.

Clank!

At the same time, the other guard bent over to check the pulse of the guard that was done.

Placing his finger over his neck, he closed his eyes and tried to feel for a pulse.

Ba... Thump! Ba... Thump!

His eyes flared open the moment he felt something. However, the moment his eyes opened, he felt his own heart stop.

Two hazel eyes stared directly at him.

At the same time, something pressed against his temple.

It was followed by a cold voice.

"I apologize."

Thump!

The guard fell shortly after that.

At the same time he fell, Julien turned to face the direction of the door.

"...."

Silence took over the surroundings until a figure finally walked out.

"You won't believe what—"

A hand reached out for his ankle the moment he came out. Before the guard could even react, he felt his head spin and he started to wobble.

Julien took that moment to raise his finger and point it toward his forehead.

Thump!

Like the first guard, his body limped to the ground.

"Hoo."

Taking a deep breath, Julien closed his eyes before standing up.

Massaging his shoulders, he looked at his hands.

"I've recovered enough mana."

Dragging the body of one of the guards back into the infirmary, he walked towards the other guard and threads spread out from his hand, inching towards the guard on the floor and entering his clothes.

Julien's expression shifted slightly due to the exertion, but it was manageable.

Soon, the guard stood up from the ground.

Drip. Drip...!

Blood leaked from its forehead. Thankfully, it wasn't an issue. Picking his pocket, he used an ointment he picked up from the infirmary to seal the wound.

He then proceeded to clean the blood on the ground. It was a quick process and he was done in a few minutes.

"...."

Silence took over the space as he stared at the guard in front of him.

Extending his hand, Julien lowered the guard's hat.

Then, turning to face the corridor, he took a step forward.

Tak—

With the aid of the threads, the guard similarly took a step forward. It was a little wobbly, but it worked.

Julien nodded at the sight and took another step. As he did, one of his fingers twitched, and the guard stepped forward.

Again, the step was wobbly.

Julien's brows creased.

Moving his fingers, the guard took another step, and then another.

Like a puppeteer, Julien controlled the guard and moved it as he wished. With each step that the guard took, the less wobbly his steps became, and it wasn't long before the guard started to move flawlessly.

Watching from the back, Julien placed his hand in his pocket and caught up with the guard.

"...."

Sorting through his memories, a map of the inner area appeared in his mind, and took a step forward.

So did the guard.

"I can't fail this time."

He had the necessary means to escape.

Chapter 174 Escape [5]

The corridor was long and quiet.

Tak, Tak—

The only sound that I could hear was the sound of my footsteps alongside the guards. Moving ahead, I had yet to meet any other guards.

Of course, that was mainly because I had only just recently left.

I was bound to meet a group soon enough.

'Hopefully, this works.'

Otherwise, I really wouldn't know what to do.

"..."

Calming my nerves, I turned to look at the guard walking alongside me. He was long dead, and at first glance there seemed to be nothing wrong with him with the exception of his closed eyes.

I was able to hide that fact by lowering his hat. Of course, that would be useless if one paid close attention.

Twitching my finger, he moved forward.

It was weird, but it almost felt as if my senses were numbing.

I would've normally felt a little more when killing someone. While it was true that I was starting to get used to the idea of killing, it was still not a concept that I could fully embrace.

And yet,

'I killed so many people without even batting an eye.'

I felt nothing when killing them.

No guilt, no anger, nothing.

.....It was almost concerning.

While this was indeed the point that I wanted to reach at a certain point in my life, the speed at which I had reached this point was the thing that I was concerned about.

It was unnatural.

Almost artificial.

'Did my perception of death numb down due to the time I fought Leon and when I used the first leaf?'

Back then, I remembered dying over and over again.

Was that perhaps the reason for the change?

"No."

Eventually, I shook my head.

No, it wasn't that.

'.....It started the moment I came into the Mirror Dimension.'

Or more specifically, the moment I entered the supply station and the roots appeared. That was when the change mostly likely happened.

I took a nervous breath.

Again I was reminded of the little time that I had.

I needed to get out.

Looking ahead, my fingers twitched and I hurried my pace.

The guard followed alongside me.

At the same time, I closed my eyes and spread threads all over the surroundings. My chest trembled at the mana expenditure, and my face turned pale.

Withstanding the strain, I lowered my head to follow a certain thread that led to the path that I wanted to go to.

All was proceeding smoothly until,

"Are you following the thread?"

"Yes, it leads to this way! Hurry!"

"There's so many of them."

I heard voices coming from up ahead.

Unease unfurled in my chest the moment I heard the voices. Pursing my lips, I lowered my head and picked up the pace, following the thread that I had set up.

Our paths were soon going to cross.

My only hope would be that they would either just move past me.

"Uh?"

But of course, why would they just run past me?

I didn't give them the initiative and spoke first.

"I'm following this thread. I'm coming from the infirmary."

I then pointed towards another thread.

"I haven't followed that one. You should follow that one. I don't think anyone is following that thread."

"Understood!"

"Yes...!"

The guards left right after that.

Feeling their distancing steps, I finally sighed in relief.

"....It worked."

Noticing the urgency in my tone, the guards left before they could properly observe me.

And all of it was thanks to the body next to me. Given that the person who needed to escape was only one person, they had less reason to suspect that I was involved especially since I was also wearing a guard uniform.

At the same time, because our exchange was brief, they didn't notice the threads that wrapped around the insides of the guard's body.

Not that it was easy to detect considering that the threads were extremely thin and I was getting better and better at controlling them.

With that being said, that didn't guarantee a thing.

Had the two stopped to take a proper look, there was a chance that they'd notice something.

Of course, that was only if they noticed my face first.

That was probably the biggest giveaway.

I did after all have quite the memorable face.

It was a sin to be this handsome.

At least, in these situations.

"Huu."

Taking a deep breath to collect myself, I followed the thread I had set up on the ground.

Along the way, I'd walk past several guards, but just like the first time, none of them noticed a single thing.

"...Almost."

My steps gradually slowed after I passed a certain corridor.

In order for me to escape, I needed first to enter the storage space.

Unfortunately, that area was somewhat guarded.

While all the strong individuals were at the main entrance, the people guarding the storage space were not weak.

That wasn't the only problem.

Unless one had the key, they wouldn't be able to enter the storage space. Thankfully, I was in possession of such a key thanks to Javier.

Stopping right at the intersection that led to the storage space, I took a deep breath.

The path in front of me diverged from left to right. To my right was the corridor that led to the storage space, while the left had another corridor that led to another area.

I needed to go to the right.

"Haa... Haa..."

My breathing was somewhat rough.

While recovering my breath, I peeked the corner slightly.

"One, two, three..."

By the side of the corridor was a large metallic door with several guards stationed there.

Judging from the aura their bodies gave out, they all appeared to be stronger than me.

"Shit."

I silently cursed under my breath.

This was going to be a lot more difficult than expected.

But it wasn't like I didn't have a plan.

Turning my head to face the guard next to me, I took a few more minutes to recover my breath before twitching my finger.

The guard moved, passing the corner.

"Who goes there?!"

".....Who are you? State your credentials."

Immediately after passing the corner, the guards stationed at the supply area grew alert. Controlling the guard, I made him run to the left corridor.

"Hey!"

"Stop...!"

Just as I heard their shouts, I also rushed out of the corner.

"Ah!?"

"What the...!"

Coming out, the guards looked surprised and stopped.

Yet again, I took the initiative to speak.

"Q-quick....! Haa... Haa... He's escaping... Haaa... That's the guy!"

While I spoke, I brought my hands to my knees while twitching my fingers to control the body which already disappeared on the opposite side.

"What's going on?!"

"He... culprit... Haa... escape!"

The guards were quick.

Right as I told them of the situation, they picked up the pace again.

Staring at their departing backs, I continued to control the body. I had taken the initiative to delay some time for the body to move forward.

The guards were definitely faster than a body that was being controlled by threads. I needed to buy as much time as possible for it.

I didn't know how much time that would give me.

Probably not much considering that once they got close enough, they'd notice the threads that were wrapped around its body.

'No, maybe that'll make them think he's the culprit even more.'

"Haa... Haaa..."

Leaning back against the wall, another guard walked up to me.

Unlike the other guards, he had stayed behind.

"You must be exhausted."

"Haaa... haaa..."

I didn't answer and just took deep breaths.

This was my own way of saying I was.

"Can you tell me exactly what happened? We've noticed threads appearing all over the place, but because of our orders, we weren't allowed to move."

"This..."

I took another deep breath just to show the fact that I was tired.

And I was, since I was still controlling the body.

Even so, with threads scattered around, I didn't worry about him noticing that they were coming from me.

While keeping my head lowered, I started to relay some information to him.

"I don't know myself what happened. I was just walking alongside my partner when I noticed that something was wrong. When I questioned him, he just started to run away. It looks like he disguised himself as a guard in order to escape. Thankfully, I noticed that something was wrong just in time."

"...Hmm."

The guard next to me frowned.

"This cadet is a lot more slippery than I imagined."

"Right...? Despite chasing him for so long, I was barely able to keep up with him.... Haaa... haaa... I heard he was the top cadet of Haven... Haa... I guess there were merits to the title."

"You did good."

Pressing his arm against my shoulder, the guard tried to comfort me.

I touched his wrist briefly.

"Can you stand up?"

"I think I can."

Supporting myself with the aid of the wall behind me, I was just barely able to stand up.

Nodding the guard headed back to the metal door that led to the storage area. As he did, he knocked on the door.

"Help me guard the supply while we're at it."

"Is... is there water?"

"Water?"

"Haaa... yes, I'm thirsty."

Frowning, the guard looked back.

"There's some in the storage."

Taking out a set of keys, the guard unlocked the door for me, revealing the insides of a massive warehouse.

"Go ahead and take whatever you want. Come back when you're done."

"Th-thank you..."

Thanking the guard, I entered the storage space.

I could feel the guard's gaze on my back the moment I entered.

"I'll close the door. Knock when you're done."

"Sure."

Clank—

The door closed right behind me.

Staring at it for a good few seconds, I lowered my head to stare at my forearm.

'I've been caught.'

That much was clear to me.

By having me enter the storage space, the guard was easily able to tell that the threads were coming from me.

The guards weren't stupid.

They could easily deduce that something was wrong.

In a matter of a few minutes, the other guards were probably going to come back as well.

In more ways than none, the situation had turned even more desperate for me. But I wasn't worried.

I had taken this into account beforehand.

For now, everything was still flowing as I wanted to.

"Right, it worked out in the end."

But it wasn't over yet.

Entering the storage space was the first step in my plan. Looking around, what greeted my sight were hundreds upon hundreds of shelves with dozens of boxes scattered throughout.

...It would probably take a normal person a few days in order to look through all the items that were stored within this place.

That was what the guards were probably thinking.

Unfortunately, I knew.

From the memories of the guards, and Javier, I knew exactly how to navigate the place, and following a certain row of boxes, I stopped at a certain section.

"It should be here."

Pausing in front of a certain box, I brought my finger over it and traced my finger down.

Opening the box, I looked at the contents within.

"...."

I stood quietly for a few seconds before smiling.

"....Found you."

My exit ticket.

Chapter 175 Escape [6]

Cli Clank--

Rupert locked the door behind him.

"I've got you."

A small smile spread across his lips. The escapee was now trapped. He made sure that to be the case.

"Hooo."

At the same time, he felt cold sweat trickle down the side of his face.

Had he not been paying extreme attention, he would've been in trouble.

Thankfully, he had been on high alert. While he did believe the story at first, the fact that his so-called 'colleague' refused to even look at him once was fairly suspicious.

Of course, that wasn't enough to warrant Rupert's actions.

The real reason why he was able to find out was simply because of the threads that were coming out of his body. They were thin, almost imperceptible. And yet, if one paid close attention, they'd notice them.

It was almost as if he wanted him to detect him.

"...No, that's unlikely."

Why would he want himself to be detected if his goal was to escape?

While he wasn't sure why he was there, Rupert made sure to close the door behind him and lock it.

Unless he had a key, he wouldn't be able to go out.

And even if he did have the key, it wouldn't matter since he left his own key in the socket.

Like a rat, he was trapped.

"I'll wait for the others. They should be done chasing the other guy."

The fact that there was someone else helping the cadet was somewhat suspicious, but Rupert thought nothing of it.

Although the cadet looked weak to him, he didn't want to underestimate him.

Given how he had managed to come all the way here, his abilities weren't something he dared to underestimate. That, and the fact that he'd be in trouble if he engaged directly.

"It's a pity that communication devices don't work in the bunker."

Things would've been so much simpler with them.

"Hm?"

It didn't take long for him to hear footsteps.

Turning his head, he could see his other colleagues rushing at him.

"Rupert! It was a decoy! He was dead...!"

"Where is the person that passed? Where is he?"

They looked startled, and worried.

With a smirk, Rupert pointed at the door behind him.

"Don't worry, he's right in there."

"Uh?"

"What...!?"

The two guards paused, looking at him with startled looks. That was when Rupert elaborated.

"I was waiting for the two of you to come. I need one of you to leave and relay the information to the leaders that we've caught him. He was the one disguised as the other guard. Thankfully I managed to catch up and had him trapped in the supply area. He won't be able to escape even if he wants to."

"Ah! I'll be on it!"

Realizing what had happened, one of the guards immediately nodded before dashing away.

The other guard on the other hand looked at Rupert with a frown.

Rupert looked at him.

"What is it?"

".....Do you really think it was a good idea to have him enter the supply area? There's a lot of resources in there. Some dangerous stuff too."

"Ah, don't worry."

Rupert waved his hand dismissively.

"It won't take longer than five minutes for Ryan to get back."

"And?"

"You've seen how big the supply area is. It'll take him days for him to find anything useful. And we both know that the important stuff is locked in protected areas. Unless he knows the codes and has the keys, it's impossible for him to get his hands on them."

"That's true."

Only after hearing Rupert's words did the guard calm down.

Indeed, there was no time for the cadet to do anything significant. And even if he did have enough time, it was impossible for him to know where what was, and have the means of access to them.

Just as the guard nodded his head, the two heard a sound coming from behind them.

To Tok--

It was the sound of someone knocking.

".....I'm done."

And a voice echoed shortly after.

Done...?

Rupert frowned, meeting the other guard's gaze.

"You're done? That quickly?"

"Yes, the water was quite close."

"...."

Rupert pursed his lips.

He didn't quite understand what was going on.

Did he really just go in for water? That made no sense. Why would he risk doing that in the middle of an escape?

'Was he really just that thirsty?'

Either way, looking at the other guard, Rupert made sure to keep the door closed.

"You're done? Great. Just give me a minute. The key is stuck in the socket."

Clank, Clank!

He moved the key up and down to make it sound like it was stuck.

He thought he had done a pretty good job at it.

"It's stuck?"

"Yes, just give me a minute."

Clank, Clank!

"These damn keys...!"

He continued his act for the next few seconds. Rupert could almost imagine the look of anxiety on the cadet's face on the opposite side as he continued to move the keys.

'I would've loved to take care of you myself, but orders are orders, and I'm not keen on seeing whatever trick you have in store. I'll keep you stuck here until reinforcements arrive.'

In fact, he almost wished the cadet could leave the room. That would give him an excuse to be able to fight him.

While he didn't underestimate him, that didn't mean he wasn't confident in taking him down.

"Hmm, this damn key. It's been a very long time since we've used the bunker so I hope that you're n--"

Halfway through his sentence, Rupert felt a subtle vibration coming from the other side of the door.

Frowning, he stopped and placed his ear next to the door.

His colleague did the same.

As he did, he could almost hear the sound of tape being used. Tape...?

Why would he use tape?

'Wait...!'

A thought suddenly struck him, and he hastily turned his head to look at his colleague who was still confused.

Rupert hurriedly grabbed his shoulder and pulled him away.

"Hurry up and le--"

But it was too late.

BOOOM--

A massive explosion sounded, tearing the door apart and swallowing Rupert in it. The same was true for the other guard.

The area rumbled, and the surrounding was covered in a layer of smoke.

Tak.

Shortly after, a figure walked out from behind where the door had once been.

Holding onto a few small circular objects, Julien scanned the surroundings.

Tossing one of the objects and catching it, his gaze fell on a figure lying down on the ground with his eyes wide open.

"You've survived."

....It made sense to a certain degree.

The device in Julien's hand was a mana bomb. Only activated through the injection of mana, it was a rather powerful device. However, its radius was quite small, and it wasn't very effective against extremely powerful people.

In particular, those that were well-versed in the [Body] classification.

But it was a different discussion if they were caught off-guard.

"Pft... Kh...!"

With his back against the wall, blood spilled out from Rupert's mouth as he looked at Julien.

He seemed to want to say something, but he was in no state to speak.

Julien was also not in a situation where he could waste time. Therefore, extending his hand, threads emerged, crawling down from beneath and helping Rupert up.

Staring into his eyes, Julien remained silent.

Rupert appeared to be struggling to say something, but it all went to deaf ears.

Holding onto the mana bombs, Julien slowly placed them into Rupert's pockets.

"...!"

"Shhh."

Bringing his finger to his lips, Julien's other hand turned purple as he placed it over Rupert's face.

Then, with this, Rupert's body grew limp.

That's when Julien finally placed his finger against his temple and ended it.

Because the guard was on the stronger side, it was a lot more difficult for him to kill him with just the thread. A thin, almost imperceptible film of mana had been protecting his body.

Only after using 'Grip of Pestilence' did the film disappear and Julien finished.

Maneuvering the threads around the body, he turned to face the end of the hall.

"Though his clothes are somewhat messy, it should do."

Catching his breath, he rushed ahead.

He only had a few minutes to spare. By now, everyone was aware of the explosion. Guards were going to flock in this direction, he knew that much.

With such thoughts, Julien coiled one of his threads around one of the mana bombs before tossing it away and guiding it away from where he was.

At the same time, he rushed in the opposite direction.

Xiu!

The speed at which the thread moved was a lot faster than he was.

Before he knew it, the bomb was already quite far away.

".....This should be good enough."

He flicked his finger.

BOOOM—

A distant rumble echoed.

"There's growing unrest in the outer area of the bunker! Please send someone to calm the situation down!"

"The unrest is growing!"

".....They're demanding to open the inner area. Please send someone."

Reports flowed one after another from panicked guards as they entered the meeting run. Listening to what was happening, the post-leaders felt a massive headache.

It had been like this for the past several minutes.

"One of the cadets is being especially loud! She's been leading the protests."

"We're having difficulty dealing with her. She's from a rather respectable family, and nobody wants to offend her."

"Not only her, but several others! Please do something!"

The same couldn't be said for Aoife who looked at the scene with strange amusement.

'It must be her.'

She could only think of one person who would do such a thing.

Who else but Kiera...?

'I guess she does have her uses after all.'

While Aoife wasn't sure if Kiera knew of the situation, what she was doing was extremely crucial. With all the attention from the guards focused on trying to capture Julien, Keira's unrest was making the situation more difficult for the post-

leaders.

It was perhaps going to lead to more guards being stationed at the outer area to calm the situation down, making things easier for Julien.

For a moment, imagining how the situation was unfolding in the outer area, Aoife almost found herself laughing.

Thankfully, she was able to restrain herself from doing so.

"Calm down for a moment."

Calming the situation down was the post-leader of the Moonshine Guild. He was a tall man with dark skin and long, flowing dreadlocks that cascaded to his shoulders. His deep, white eyes scanned the room.

"...Please elaborate on the situation so that we can get a better understanding. You're saying that there are protests outside, correct?"

"Correct."

The guard replied curtly.

"What exactly are they saying...?"

"That..."

The guard looked uncomfortable, turning his head to look around. Frowning, Lennon Conroy narrowed his eyes.

"Spit it out, what is it?"

Feeling Lennon's gaze, the guard pursed his lips before eventually speaking.

"...Do you know who my father is?"

The room turned silent right after that.

None of the post-leaders muttered a single word.

The silence was uncomfortable, almost tense. However, it was soon broken by a certain someone.

"Pfft."

Holding onto her mouth, a laugh escaped Aoife's lips.

Despite her best attempts, she wasn't able to hold herself back and let out a strange sound.

Instantly, all heads turned in her direction.

Feeling their gazes, Aoife's expression twitched.

She was just about to say something when everyone's attention flicked elsewhere. A subtle rumbling could be felt in the distance, accompanied by the muffled sound of an explosion. It came from within the inner area of the bunker.

"This...!"

Several post-leaders stood up simultaneously.

"Wait!"

Aoife tried to call for them, but her words no longer had any effect on them as some directly left the room.

"Quick! Check what's going on!"

"I'll come too."

"Let's go."

It didn't take long for most of the post-leaders to leave the room, leaving her sitting on her chair by herself.

"Ah."

Staring at their backs, Aoife bit her lips.

'.....I hope I've bought enough time.'

This was the limit of her power.

The post-leaders had finally made their move.

Chapter 176 Escape [7]

"You don't want to mess with my damn father! Once I get out, I'll make sure to tell him everything! See what happens to you then!"

"Yeah...!"

"Do you know who her father is?!"

"Oy, your dad is just as powerful as mine."

"Ah, that..."

Evelyn blushed.

"I... just..."

"Whatever, fuck. Do you know who her father is?!"

A crowd had formed at the door that led to the inner area. Kiera, who was leading the crowd, started shouting all sorts of curses while throwing the weight of her father's status around.

Kiera herself found her actions to be cringe-worthy, but seeing how flustered the guards were, she knew it was working.

For that reason, she doubled down.

"If you don't give us a proper explanation, my father will not let you go! Your life will be over before you know it!"

Evelyn on the other hand was having a much harder time helping Kiera.

"Y-yeah... My father too!"

Her sense of shame was much greater than Kiera's.

In fact, did Kiera even have a sense of shame? She didn't seem like the person to.

Biting her lips, Evelyn felt her face grow hot.

"F-father...!"

"Everyone, please calm down!"

The members of the guilds did try to calm the situation down, some even started to target Kiera who was clearly the main source of the chaos.

But she had none of it.

"Oy, fucker! Where the hell are you touching?"

"Uh? It was just your shoulder!"

"Fuck he touched me!! You're done for! My father will get you!"

"No, that's..."

Whether Kiera had shame or not, Evelyn had to admit. She had perfected her craft. The chaos only seemed to worsen with each one of her antics.

"I've been molested!"

The situation was getting so out of hand that several guards had to rush into the inner area to call for reinforcements.

Evelyn thought that a post-leader would eventually come, but all of a sudden, she managed to pick up the sound of a distant rumbling.

Booom—

The rumbling was accompanied by the distant sound of an explosion.

Immediately, all the noise stopped.

While the sound wasn't very powerful and was rather toned down, most of the people present were superhumans. Their senses were far keener than those of normal people. Most people in the room heard it, and Kiera no longer needed to do a thing to sow chaos.

By then, even the people that were not participating started to participate.

"What's going on?!"

"Was that the sound of an explosion?"

"Are we getting attacked? What's going on!?"

"What's happening?"

Kiera, who had been at the lead the entire time, took the chance to dip and join back with Evelyn at the back.

"Hoo.... looks like my job is done."

"Y-ou did great."

"Huh, yeah, sure. Thanks, I guess."

Kiera scratched the back of her head while staring at the inner area with a frown.

"You heard that didn't you?"

".....Yes. I think all of us heard it."

"What do you think happened?"

"I... don't know. It did sound like an explosion."

"....."

Kiera turned quite from that point. Fiddling with her thumbs, she looked at Evelyn and was just about to say something when she stopped, her eyes widening slightly.

"What...?"

Taking note of the look on Kiera's face, Evelyn tilted her head.

"Why are you looking at me like that? Is there something..."

Drip...!

And then she heard it.

A faint, almost inaudible dripping sound that was masked by the chaos around.

Lowering her head, Evelyn looked at the faint red drop that splattered on the ground. All of a sudden, her head felt light as she looked back up to Kiera who brought her hands to her shoulders.

"Oy, dude! Are you okay?"

Dude...?

Even in her state, Evelyn had a hard time getting used to Kiera's words.

Normally, she would've been a bit bothered.

But she didn't have the energy to do that now. Looking around, the world around her started to spin. Feeling a certain tickling sensation on her cheeks, she tried to take a breath, but as if something was squeezing at her chest, she found herself unable to.

"Oy! Oy!"

Her world grew dark shortly after that.

Slap—

Kiera slapped her in the face.

Even in her state, Evelyn was stunned.

Slap, slap—!

But Kiera continued to slap her.

"Oy!"

'I'll remember this.'

Evelyn thought to herself while hearing Kiera's voice.

The last thing she remembered was the sound that came out of her mouth.

"Hieeeeeeeek—"

It was a scream.

....And it wasn't just one.

"Hieeeeeeeek—"

In the background, she heard the sound of multiple screams.

'....I'm almost there '

Tak, tak—

Walking along the corridor, I felt my face scrunch up due to the exhaustion. I was tired, and the little mana that I had managed to recover was now practically depleted again.

'I need to get a better manual.'

With a better one, I'd have been able to recover my mana faster and had an easier time moving around.

Still, the situation was still under control.

With the second bomb going off, I was able to throw off the guards a little bit. The path to the exit was one without interference.

'They're either at the location where the second bomb went off, or they're waiting for me at the entrance.'

The fact that I was able to detonate a mana bomb threw them off and scared them somewhat.

Given how narrow the corridor was, they'd be at a massive disadvantage.

Therefore, the ideal situation for them was to wait and guard at the exit. It made sense, and it was something that I was hoping would happen.

I was too exhausted to put up any fight.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

Walking across the corridor, I could hear the sound of my own breath.

It was rough, marking just how exhausted I was.

Not just physically, but mentally too. From the fear to the possible consequences that I was going to face when all of this was over.

....I had killed quite a lot of people in order to escape.

While I may not suffer at all from this since I had the backing of Haven and my actions were for my escape, it didn't mean that the Guilds wouldn't have resentments against me for what I had done.

In fact, it could very well mean that my actions had turned several Guilds against me.

The thought made my head throb.

But it wasn't just that. I could feel something eerie lingering in the air. It was eating at my mind, and numbing my emotions.

I also felt that the Guilds were acting strange.

....And I had a feeling that all of it had to do with the tree. For some reason, it felt as though everything was trying to stop me from finding out about it.

From the Crimson Shade to the entrapment.

'I need to get out here.'

I was bound to get an answer once I got out.

Right before turning the corner, I stopped.

"...."

Peeking slightly, I could see over a dozen guards standing before a massive metallic door within a large opening.

Pinching my brows, I took a deep breath and looked at the guard beside me.

Patting him on the shoulder, my hand twitched and he turned the corner for me.

"Who goes there...!?"

"He's here!"

I could hear the alarmed shouts of the guards.

"Stay back! He's got mana bombs!"

"Get away from the corridors!"

As expected, they knew I had mana bombs on me. It was for that reason that they avoided being in the corridors.

With the narrow spacing, it was suicide to confront someone armed with explosives.

"Wait a second, don't move!"

A rough voice suddenly filled the space.

The noise died down, and I heard the sound of a rough step.

"Come out."

"...."

My skin prickled at the voice. It sounded oppressive, and my chest felt heavy.

"I know this is a decoy. Unlike the rest of them, I can see clearly that you're controlling him from the back. Get out before I get you."

"...."

Tak—

I stepped out of the corridor and turned to face the opening that led to the exit. From where I was, I could see the last door. Over a dozen guards were guarding it, and at the front was a burly man with bushy brows and a bald head. The pressure he gave out was rather terrifying, almost reminding me of Professor Hollowe's.

No, not quite like him...

A little bit less, but around there.

Tier 4 to Tier 5.

It was impossible for me to fight him.

I was so close, and yet so far.

Currently, he was holding onto the head of the guard whose body I had used as a decoy.

It was an intimidating sight. The guard's hand was massive, grasping the head of the decoy with just one hand and lifting it up.

In the meantime, he stared at me with a little bit of wariness.

"I don't know how you managed to get your hands on the bombs, but we're no longer in the corridors. You'll have a much harder time hitting anyone in this space."

He was right.

Looking around, the space was rather large.

The radius of the mana bombs was small. Unlike the narrow corridors, if prepared, the guards could simply avoid the bombs in this large space.

.....It was indeed impossible for me to use them here.

I took a step back.

"Stop."

The man's voice fell again, and I felt a tremendous pressure wash over me.

"The post-leaders will be here soon. It'll be in your best interests if you stop now."

Looking at the body in his hand, he frowned.

"You've already killed several of the guards assigned here. Don't add up to your crimes."

Perhaps because he too was worried about the bombs in my possession, he didn't approach me and preferred to wait for the post-leaders.

"....."

Standing quietly, I held my breath as I felt sweat trickle down the side of my face.

The silence felt stifling.

Standing on the opposite side of the guards, the situation seemed hopeless.

I had just moved my hand to reach for my pocket when the guard shouted.

"Stop!"

My movements halted briefly.

"....You move even just a bit, and your head flies off. Do you understand me?"

I was unable to answer as I struggled to move.

Raising my head slightly, I met the man's gaze. He was no longer grasping the guard's body, and instead, he was holding onto a large axe, seemingly prepared to attack at any moment.

At the sight, I closed my eyes before nodding my head.

"Understood."

"Good..."

The man nodded in satisfaction.

In that brief moment when he nodded, my hand flicked.

"Uh...?"

Confused, the guard looked at me.

But it was too late.

I had already run back.

"What ar—"

His head flicked to the body next to him. Realization dawned on him, but it was too late.

BOOOM—

A massive explosion sounded.

It shook the entire surroundings.

"Ahhhhh!"

And several screams followed after that.

'While he probably isn't dead, or suffered any major injuries, those were several mana bombs. It should be enough to buy me time.'

Once the bombs exploded, I turned back and rushed for the exit door.

It was hard to see given all the dust that was flying in the air, but it was no problem for me to find the handle of the door.

With the key already prepared, I placed it into the socket and turned it.

Clank—

Shortly after that, I turned the wheel and the door started to rumble.

Rumble...! Rumble!

Using all my muscles, I continued to twist the door. My back was drenched and my muscles were stiff.

"S-stop him!"

"Someone stop him...!"

I could hear the guards behind me, rushing in my direction.

My chest tingled as I continued to turn the wheel.

Rumble!

'Come on! Come on! Come on!'

As an opening appeared, a wave of heat surged into the room, and the color red began to invade the surroundings.

"S-stop him!"

"...!"

A hand grasped onto my shoulder.

Turning around, I met eyes with one of the guards and I let go of the door before rushing towards the gap.

"Sto-p!"

Time seemed to slow down for me.

From the corner of my eyes, I could see several hands reach out for me within the dust that filled the space.

Staring at them briefly, I ducked down before twisting my body into the narrow gap of the door.

I felt my heart speed up with anxiety as I managed to get half of my body out.

However, just as I did, something clamped at my leg.

Turning around, I saw the burly man from before staring at me with bloodshot eyes.

"Huaak...!"

My insides tightened at the sight.

Regardless of how much I tried to pull away, he wouldn't let go.

"Come back here...!"

I almost lost my footing as he pulled me back into the bunker.

"You...! Are not getting out—"

I tossed something in the narrow gap before he could get his words out.

His expression changed drastically, and the grip over my ankle loosened.

I took the chance to pull my leg away and rush away.

Booom—

An explosion followed suit.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

Rushing away, I didn't once look back. With heavy breaths, I ran and ran and ran.

Mana coated my body as I ran.

Despite the heat and the suffocating air, staring at my surroundings, I felt my breath grow lighter.

Finally,

I had escaped.

Chapter 177 Silence [1]

The familiar heat blanketed over me.

Despite the mana covering my body, sweat continued to trickle down the side of my face as I had a hard time breathing.

I felt an uncomfortable heat at the back of my throat with each breath that I took.

"Haa..."

But it wasn't the heat that was bothering me.

"Mana."

The fact that I was low on mana was bothering me the most. On any normal occasion, I'd be able to last more than a few hours before completely running out.

However, the situation was different.

My mana was almost completely depleted due to my effort in trying to escape.

It was so low that I figured I had less than ten minutes to spare.

'Good thing I brought some water with me.'

The main problem with the Crimson Shade was the fact that everything beneath it would dry up, including living beings besides monsters.

The few bottles of water that I had managed to get for myself in the supply area were going to help me buy some valuable time.

My current destination was the Black Hound Guild.

Not only did I want to go there to get some information regarding the Tree of Ebontorn, but it was also to get some supplies that would help restore my mana.

...If they even had them.

'They didn't have them in the bunker, so it's hard to say if they even have them here.'

No, they probably did have them.

However, they weren't within the memories of those that I had used my ability on.

...And I didn't have enough time to look for them.

'It's a good thing that I read the secretary's memories.'

There was nothing abnormal in the memories of the secretary. It didn't seem like he had any involvement in the situation. However, within those memories, I was able to have a better idea of where I needed to go.

"It should be this way."

The supply station was completely deserted.

Not a single soul was around.

It was deftly silent. To an uncomfortable level as I moved past the mummified remains of the corpses lurking around the station.

Swoosh--

As red dominated the world and a gale of heat picked up, sharp wailing drifted through the air.

It sounded like the cries of the ghosts of the fallen, calling out to me for help. I felt my entire body shudder at the sound.

I ignored it and continued to rush forward.

.....I couldn't afford to waste time.

Thankfully, I knew my way around the supply station. From the memories, and the areas that I had traveled to before.

Flick. Flick.

The lamps stationed around the cobblestone streets flickered as I headed deeper into the station. Towards the Sorrowvale sector.

There was something about the setting of the supply station that made me extremely uncomfortable.

.....It was hard to describe, but I couldn't put much thought into it.

I didn't have much time.

I continued to run.

My lungs were already on fire. Be it from the heat, and from my rapidly depleting stamina.

"Huap. Huap."

Strange sounds came out of my mouth as I ran on the cobblestone streets while passing the buildings and entering certain alleyways.

Eventually, I managed to reach the main square of the Sorrowvale sector.

'Concern Plaza'

It wasn't large, with a fountain in the middle.

Shh--

The fountain continued to function, the sound of the water falling down finally breaking the silence that gripped the station.

The sight was a familiar one as I had been here before.

But unlike in the past, the water was blood-red.

I knew it was just because of the Crimson Shade but the sight added to the overall chill that surrounded the place. It made it seem as though the fountain was recycling the blood of the ones that had died.

"Where is it...? Where is it...?"

Looking around the plaza, my gaze eventually settled over a tall black building where a certain flag hung. With the background in red, a black dog stood in the middle, its muse pointing up.

I recognized the flag in an instant and rushed towards it.

But just as I moved, I felt something crawl up from my ankles. I looked down to see the roots crawling all the way up from the ground and towards my cheeks.

I felt my pulse race at the sight.

But now familiar with the situation, I didn't let that affect me.

Cr Crack--

At the very least, not until I heard a faint cracking sound in the distance.

It was faint.

And yet, amidst the silence, it echoed loudly within the world.

I turned to look in the direction of where the noise was coming from. My eyes paused on the walls of the supply station. Though faint, cracks started to form on them. With the passing of time, the cracks grew more and more prominent.

Thump!

Alongside the crack, I heard what appeared to be a heavy thump. Almost as if someone was striking a tree.

...and for a moment, I thought it had been the sound of my own heart.

Blinking, the roots disappeared and I could move again.

Pressing my hand against my chest, I tried to feel the beat of my heart. It was rapid. Abnormally rapid.

'What's going on...?'

The ground shook beneath my feet.

Despite the suddenness of the situation, I thought I was doing great at keeping myself calm. That was... until the wails came.

Kieeeeeeeekkk--

A single, hair-raising wail resounded throughout the supply station, which was soon followed by another, and then another. Each howl appeared to be louder than the other, sending shivers down my spine with each one that pierced through.

Cr Crack--

More and more cracks started to appear on the walls of the supply station.

I involuntarily took a step back.

Every part of my mind screamed in terror as a thin, black hand emerged from behind the walls, its bony fingers stretching and curling to clasp the walls.

The nails, long and jagged, scraped against the surface, creating an extremely uncomfortable scraping sound that echoed through the air.

My skin crawled.

Thump! Thump!

The thumping continued. This time, I could tell the difference between it and the ones coming from my own heart.

.....My heart was beating faster than that.

Thump! Thump....!

Within the deserted streets, the structures shook.

And then,

Crack!

The first part of the wall tore apart, revealing a hideous-looking face.

"A-ah."

I felt my heart stop.

With thin hair growing on its head and falling to its shoulders, the creature looked human at first glance. However, its eyes... they were abnormally large, bulging with an eerie, unsettling intensity. And that smile... it was a grotesque, wide grin that stretched widely.

That smile...

"H-ho."

I thought I had seen it all, but this...?

I couldn't describe what I was seeing.

Thump! Thump!

The walls continued to break down under the creature's hands. Soon, more cracks appeared, and within those cracks, smaller and thinner creatures emerged. With the same smile as the large monster, they clawed their way into the city, diving down in hordes.

I was long gone by then.

Turning around, I sprinted towards the Black Hound post.

"This is messed up..."

Clenching my shirt tightly, I rushed towards the structure. I could hardly think at the moment.

From the Crimson Shade to this...

Something was clearly wrong with the entire situation.

I didn't know what it was, but I understood that I had nowhere else to run. I was low in mana, and the bunker was no longer an option. Going out of the city was also impossible since it was surrounded from all sides and I didn't have the means to teleport.

.....I was stuck with no way out.

"Haa."

The sense of helplessness that I currently felt was hard to describe.

Despite having overcome so much, I found myself in an even crazier situation. It made my body grow weak.

But at the same time, I kept reminding myself of my goal.

I couldn't die.

I didn't want to die.

So, I continued. Sprinting towards the Black Hound Post, I directly shattered the windows of the building and jumped in.

Crash—

It was dark.

Stepping onto the broken glass, I looked around me. The interior of the post was quite large, with several sofas, and furniture. It would've looked great on any other occasion, but right now, it felt eerie.

".....It should be here."

The reception desk was just a few steps ahead. Going on the other side, I rummaged through whatever I could find.

"No, not this one... Not this one too."

There was a lot of useless stuff. It wasn't what I was looking for. But I eventually did find what I was looking for.

"Ah, here."

It was a set of keys and a small map.

The map wasn't very big, nor detailed. It only labeled the different sections of the building which were arranged from A to F.

In essence, they were just the labels for the floor of the post station. A being the first floor, and F being the last floor.

I quickly scanned the map before tossing it away.

Having read the secretary's memories, I already knew everything. My main goal was the set of keys.

With them, I'd be able to get into where I wanted to go which were;

B - The library.

D - The storage space.

Those were where I needed to be.

I didn't waste time. Tossing the map to the side, I looked around before settling my gaze over the stairs in the distance.

Kieeeeeeeekkk—

Just as I moved, I heard wails in the distance. They were rapidly approaching, and I felt my heart leap into my throat.

I rushed up without hesitation.

".....Ukh."

But just as I moved, the mana film covering my body flickered. My eyes grew wide at the realization.

"Oh , no..."

The film eventually disappeared, forcing me to halt my steps.

"Haa..."

I felt a sudden surge of heat.

Each breath started to tingle the back of my throat, and sweat started to drip down the side of my face.

"Haa... Haa..."

My vision started to grow wobbly, and I felt lightheaded.

In no time, I grew thirsty as my lips grew parches.

In that moment, I reached for one of the water bottles that I had managed to get for myself and quickly drank it.

"Uak."

Tossing the bottle to the side, I grabbed onto the rail of the staircase and took a step.

Tak.

Each step felt heavier than the previous, and I had a hard time breathing through my nose. It felt as though I was breathing fire.

But I continued to force my way up.

"Haa..."

Kieeeeeeeekkk—

The walls grew nearer, and my vision was starting to tilt.

Despite that,

Tak.

I continued to move up the stairs.

"A-almost..."

Chapter 178 Silence [2]

—A few moments after Julien escaped.

Outer bunker area.

"Hieeeeeek—"

Screams echoed within the outer area of the bunker. Taking steps away from Evelyn, who was screaming at the top of her lungs, Kiera cursed under her breath.

"Not this shit again..."

"Hieeeeeek—"

Although she was somewhat resistant to this type of stuff, Kiera felt the hair at the back of her neck raise.

It was creepy.

Fucking creepy.

Looking around, she could see over a dozen figures staring in a certain direction with white eyes. She could recognize a few of the people that were like that. In fact, one of the people screaming was Josephine.

...For some reason, it felt oddly satisfying to see her like that.

'I must be crazy for thinking this.;

Kiera slapped the side of her cheeks.

"Hieeeeeek—"

Their screams pierced through the surroundings, and the protest quieted down for a few seconds.

Thump! Thump!

That was until the bodies started to fall on the ground.

Kiera stared at the scene with pursed lips. Turning her head, she caught a glimpse of Evelyn's body falling in her direction.

Just like the others, she was going to fall to the ground.

It would certainly hurt if she got hurt.

Hurt a lot.

"....."

Kiera licked her lips.

...She then took a step to the side and allowed her to fall face-first.

Thump!

Evelyn fell face-first against the ground.

Kiera winched slightly, but at the same time, found the situation to be hilarious.

'Damn it, if only I could record this.'

Clearly, this was not the time for her to do such a thing, but her impulses got the better of her.

"Let us out!"

"Get out of the way!"

"I'm going to use force! I don't care! Let us out!"

Her thoughts were broken by the shouts coming from the people within the outer area. They all appeared to be rushing towards the door that led to the inner area, swarming the guards who looked totally hopeless.

"Wait...! Please calm down! We can't allow you to get in! We're still trying to find out more about the situation! Please calm down!"

Despite the guard's best attempt at trying to calm the situation down, it only added fuel to the fire as some of the people tried to force their way in.

"Get out of the way!"

".....I don't care about your explanation! You've been telling us the same thing for hours! I'm done waiting here! There's something wrong, and we're all going to turn into them if we stay here any longer!"

"That's right! Let us out!"

"I'd rather be hit by the Crimson Shade than this!"

"There's an exit right outside! Let us out!"

Listening from the side, Kiera frowned. It was true that the Mirror Dimension's exit was right outside the supply station.

In hindsight, having everyone evacuate would've been the best option.

'Well, not like anyone could've predicted for something like this to happen.'

The bunker was supposed to be safe, and everyone should've been able to go back to the supply station right after the Crimson Shade ended.

No one would've been able to predict the current circumstances.

And it wasn't just that.

...The exit attracted a lot of monsters. With a lot of them wanting to go out into the main world, without proper security, the monsters were bound to jump out into the main world.

Going outside to the exit was probably not the best option since the guards stationed at the entrance had probably already left and were defending the hordes of monsters from the other side.

That pretty much sealed that option.

'So what now....?'

Kiera tried to rack her brain over the matter. The more she thought about it, the more desperate the situation seemed.

Cr Crack...!

And it was in the midst of her thoughts that she heard a faint cracking sound.

Raising her head, she looked around.

"Let us out!"

"I'm going to use force...!"

Everyone still seemed to be busy trying to force their way out of the bunker. It seemed like she was the only one who noticed.

No, there was someone else.

Looking in the distance, she noticed a few figures staring towards the windows that displayed the world outside.

Squinting her eyes, Kiera walked forward and headed for the windows.

"I'm not going crazy, am I?"

For some reason, walking towards the windows, Kiera felt a pit in her stomach.

Her body grew tense by the second, and the noise around her started to fade in the background.

Arriving by the windows, she placed her hands on them and peeked outside.

Cr Crack...!

The sound emerged yet again.

It appeared to be coming from the city walls.

Squinting her eyes, she looked ahead.

"Ah."

That was when she saw it.

Cracks.

Cracks had started to form around the walls that surrounded the city. Her mind started to blank, and by the time it took for her to blink, a hand appeared from behind the walls, solidly grasping it.

A tingling dread crept through her body at that moment.

"T-that..."

Stuttering, she took a step back.

From the windows, she could see her own reflection. Her face was pale, and her body was trembling all over.

Without hesitation, she turned around to head for where the crowd still was.

And then,

Hiieeeeeeeek—

A wail echoed in the distance.

The situation wasn't any calmer within the inner area of the bunker.

News of Julien's escape reached the post-leaders.

"What? How is this possible? Are you telling me that a cadet who isn't even stronger than any one of you has managed to escape? Not only that but he's also managed to kill so many of you. How does this make sense?"

The most angered by the news was the post-leader of the Black-Hound Guild who started to berate the guards at the exit.

"Incompetent! Damn it! If only that little girl didn't stop me...!"

His anger was visible for all those to see.

The other post-leaders stood behind him without saying a word. They quite frankly didn't care about him. While they were all working together, it didn't mean that they all liked each other.

They were, after all, in competing Guilds.

"Tell me what happened."

Lennon's deep voice reached one of the guards.

Looking up at Lennon's tall frame, the guard swallowed her saliva before answering.

"Sir, I'm not entirely sure. From what I've heard, the cadet appears to have strange thread-like powers, and..."

She stopped, frowning.

Lennon also frowned.

"Go on."

"That..."

Swallowing her saliva, she mustered up her courage to say,

"It also seems like he knew everything about the inner area. From the general layout to where he needed to go."

She didn't say anything from there.

However, her words were clear.

'There's likely a traitor.'

Picking up her message, Lennon's frown deepened.

'...A traitor?'

Who would that even be? And if that was the case, were they also responsible for the situation? It was becoming increasingly clear to Lennon that Julien was involved with the entire situation.

He didn't seem like the culprit before, but now...?

'He's in cahoots with someone. They're most likely the mastermind.'

But who...? Who could be the mastermind?

Unfortunately, he never had time to dwell on the matter. All of a sudden, a guard rushed in with a pale face.

It was starting to become a familiar scene.

"Emergency!"

The guard shouted, gathering the attention of all the post-leaders.

"The walls have been breached!"

"Huek...! Huek!"

The veins at the side of my neck pulsed as I struggled to breathe. Holding onto the railing to keep myself from falling, I managed to help myself all the way up to the fourth floor.

.....That was where the storage unit was located.

A large door greeted me the moment I entered the fourth floor. I didn't hesitate to insert the keys that I received from reception and opened the door.

Clank—

I was immediately greeted by a large white room with over a dozen shelves and another door.

That door led to the inner supply area and was where most of the important treasures were located.

Unfortunately, I didn't have the key to such a place.

It was something that only the post-leader had. But it didn't matter. The outer area had all the things that I needed.

Crash!

Stumbling over the shelves, I tossed all the useless junk and frantically looked for anything that could help recover my mana.

At the same time, I also drank another bottle of water to replenish my thirst which seemed to return every couple of minutes.

Crash...!

I stumbled yet again, falling on the floor this time.

"Huep."

Taking a deep breath, my vision was blurry. I could feel my thoughts fading away.

"Huep."

Strangely, however, I was still able to keep myself from giving up.

The sensation...

It was somewhat familiar.

I had experienced it before. Where exactly?

Ah.

That was when it clicked.

'The mental examination.'

Indeed, this wasn't the first time I had experienced something like this. Thinking about how I had managed to get past that, all of a sudden, the situation didn't seem as desperate as it looked.

"Huep."

Taking another deep breath, I tried to get my focus back.

Lying on the ground, I looked around my surroundings and eventually laid my eyes on a certain section.

"...There."

Several dozen glass bottles appeared on one of the shelves.

Within them, I could see pills inside. I didn't know which one was which, but I knew that one of them was going to help me.

"Uk...!"

My legs faltered the moment I tried to stand up, forcing me back down.

'No, not yet.'

Gritting my teeth, I crawled towards the shelves. It took every little bit of my energy to get there, and as I tried to help myself up with the aid of the shelf, I once again found myself falling on the ground.

.....I no longer had any energy.

"Huep. Huep."

I didn't give up.

I was so close.

I couldn't give up.

Turning my body around, I kicked the shelf with my leg.

Bang—

The shelf shook.

Bang—

I kicked it again.

The shelf shook once more.

Bang—

I continue.

Bang, Bang, Bang—

With each kick, the shelf shook more and more. So did the bottles that rested up above it.

"Kh."

I felt my consciousness fading with each one of my kicks.

The heat was starting to get to me.

.....As I started to lose consciousness, I felt a weird tingling sensation around my cheeks. My chest felt suffocated, and I felt the corner of my eyes getting pulled.

Crash!

What awoke me from that feeling was a loud crashing noise.

"...."

Turning my head, several pills were scattered around the area I was in.

Opening my mouth, I brought my head closer to the nearest one, and I swallowed it.

A warm current passed through my body.

And,

?| EXP + 1.3%

A notification flashed across my vision.

Chapter 179 Silence [3]

I felt a certain flow from deep within my abdomen.

....It was a familiar sensation, and my body started to cool down. I felt my consciousness return, and I reached out with my hand to grab the other pills scattered across the ground.

?| EXP + 1.4%

?| EXP + 1.1%

?| EXP + 1.7%

?| EXP + 2.0%

?| EXP + 1.1%

Notifications continued to flash across my vision.

I started to feel bloated after a certain point, but I didn't care and continued to gorge the pills in my mouth.

I was in such desperate need of mana that the bloating did not affect me.

'More, more....'

And it wasn't just that. Seeing the notifications flash across my eyes, I started to get greedy. I wanted to see more of those notifications.

It was hard to increase one's power.

....This was the easiest increase I had ever had.

I couldn't get enough of the feeling.

But,

"Uekh...!"

After a certain point, I had to stop. Holding onto my stomach, I turned my body and held onto my mouth.

"Huep!"

Mana had already coated my body, and the heat no longer affected me. I felt a rumbling in my body and I started to gag.

I spat out the pills that were in my mouth. I had done that unconsciously, or more like, my body appeared to reject them, forcing me to spit them out.

It became clear to me that I had reached the limit of the pills that I could eat.

"Huuu... Huuu..."

Taking deep and steady breaths, I held onto my mouth and did everything in my power to prevent myself from puking all that I had ingested.

I had a feeling I'd lose all the progress were I to puke.

"Uekh."

Strange sounds came out of my mouth as I did so.

However, in a matter of a few minutes, I was able to retain everything.

Only then did I relax.

"Haaa..."

My chest heaved up and down rapidly while I slumped back and stared blankly at the ceiling of the room.

It took me a few moments to collect my breath and sit up.

Although my insides were still churning and twisting, I knew that I didn't have much time. Grabbing whatever pill was left on the ground, I looked around me. There was a lot of miscellaneous stuff around.

From food, and water, to unnecessary things like clothes and the like. While it was smaller compared to the bunker supply area, it was still nothing to scoff at.

Grabbing a bag, I tossed whatever I thought was useful and headed out.

".....They'll hate me for sure after this."

I had practically emptied their entire pill storage.

Sure, those probably weren't anything important considering that the most important stuff was locked elsewhere, but to me...?

Yeah, those pills were certainly great.

Creak...

The wooden floor creaked under my steps. Coming out of the supply area, I held onto the handrail of the stairs and carefully moved down.

While it was true that I had recovered, I was still feeling lightheaded.

I would need more time before I could fully recover.

"It should be here."

The library was located on the second floor. A large metallic door greeted me the moment I stepped on the second floor.

Taking out the keys, I put them in the slot and unlocked the door.

Cli Clank—

Immediately after opening the door, a certain smell swooshed over me. From the musty scent of the aging paper and ink, mixed with the earthy notes of wooden bookshelves and the subtle, sweet hint of leather book bindings.

....It was a smell that told me that I was in the right place.

"Finally."

Just standing where I was, I could see thousands upon thousands of books. Compared to the public library, the book selection was much wider and organized.

In fact, the Black Hound Guild was the best place for this type of information.

Compared to the other Guilds, they were the ones that specialized in information gathering with regard to the monsters found in the Mirror Dimension.

This was the best place to choose from.

"Where is it, where is it..."

Instead of diving into the library, the first thing I did was head to where the librarian's desk was.

It was a large wooden desk situation near the entrance that allowed the librarian to overlook the entire library.

Rummaging through the cabinets of the desk, I scanned the documents and papers placed on top.

The process continued for the next few minutes before my gaze finally settled on a certain paper.

"Ah, there!"

It was a detailed overview of the books that were located in the library.

Rather than jumping in straight blindly, I preferred to have a more concrete path of where I needed to go. I didn't have the luxury of wasting time.

"Monster classification... Area A-21."

There were over a hundred different areas within the library, each labeled with different colors and markers.

My immediate focus fell on the monster classification area which was further subdivided into categories.

[Junior Rank]

.

.

[Terror Rank]

And so on.

Because I didn't know what the Tree's rank was so I skipped that area and settled over a certain classification.

[Nature-based/Botanical creatures]

"This is it!"

I felt my heart speed up upon seeing that category.

"It's in A-21, shelf 7."

Once I had the location nailed down, I didn't waste a second and sprinted towards the selected area.

The library was quite large.

Split into several sections, I had to navigate through a lot of books and shelves before reaching the A area where I had to go a further 21 rows before finding the area that I was looking for.

"Monster classifications, here."

Tracing my finger over the books, I moved over to the seventh row where the botanical section was located.

I grabbed whatever book was located in that area.

There weren't many books. In fact, there were only three, but they were rather thick. It would take me some time to go through them.

"...It's too dark."

I wanted to read the book on the spot, but the area was quite dark, making it hard for me to read.

I had no choice but to head for a better area.

Just as I was about to leave, I stopped for a second before picking up another book.

The book had nothing to do with the tree. I still chose to pick it up since there was another creature that I wanted to inform myself about.

It was the creatures that came out from the walls.

I needed to be better prepared for when I was going to leave.

"Hoo."

Finding a seat on the nearest wooden table, I placed the book down before skimming on the last book that I found.

Since it was illustrated, it took no time for me to find the exact picture of the monster that I had seen.

"Silence Eater."

I tilted my head upon reading the name.

"That doesn't sound right."

Recalling the noise it made just outside, I didn't know if it was an appropriate name.

At least, that was what I thought before I started reading the description.

"....."

That was when I felt my heart pause.

"This is going to be problematic."

Without a doubt.

Pursing my lips, I placed the book to the side and shifted my attention towards the main book.

"Tree of Ebonthorn. Three of Ebonthron..."

Using the index, I tried to look for what I was looking for. Tracing my fingers over any creature that started with 'T' I made sure to re-read each line twice to see if there was anything that I was missing.

However, regardless of how many times I checked, I couldn't find what I was looking for.

"This book is a bust."

I wasn't disheartened. Of all the books, it was the thinnest one.

I grabbed the next book and opened the index. I paused halfway through my actions as I heard a certain sound coming from behind me.

Creak...!

The wooden floor creaked a few meters away from me, and I froze on the spot.

I didn't even turn to look back.

Creak.

The wooden floor creaked again at the sound of a step.

Anxiety started to gnaw at me then.

Creak, Creak—

Eventually, a shadow cast over the area next to me, allowing me to catch a glimpse of a hunched-up skinny figure with long hair that stopped at its shoulder.

I didn't so much as make a sound.

I couldn't make a sound.

'It'll find me if I do.'

The silent eater.

.....It detected its prey through sound.

They were blind and had no sense of smell. The only way for them to hunt was through noise.

It was for that reason that I stopped moving.

I moved, and I was done for.

Especially since I could tell from just a glance the creature was stronger than me.

Ba... Thump! Ba... Thump!

Shifting my hand towards my chest, I tried to calm my beating heartbeat. It was progressively growing faster and faster.

Creak...

The floor creaked again.

I sat still without making a sound.

The silence felt stifling.

Almost suffocating.

Sweat started to form on the side of my face.

Creak, Creak—

In the background, the ground continued to creak. The sound was getting closer and closer, and I felt my breath leave my body.

".....!"

I almost flinched on the spot as I gripped my clothes harder.

Appearing right beside me was none other than the Silent Eater, its face a few inches away from me. With wide eyes and a grotesque grin, its eyes appeared to be locked onto me.

Panic bloomed in my chest as I stopped breathing.

"....."

All that surrounded me was silence.

A silence that seemed to want to engulf me entirely.

"...."

I remained still, staring at the Silent Eater without making a move.

It stared back at me.

Every second felt suffocating, and the sweat trickling down the side of my face added to the anxiety that I was feeling.

But finally, the creature moved its head and looked away.

"...."

Creak.

Creak, Creak—

Its steps grew more and more distant, but despite that, I continued to remain still on my spot.

It was only after several minutes had passed that I finally took a subdued breath.

Ba... Thump! Ba... Thump!

The sound of my heartbeat drummed loudly within my mind, and it took every part of me to make any sound.

Fortunately, I was able to keep it down after a few minutes had passed.

'.....I just barely made it.'

Shifting my attention back towards the book in front of me, my gaze eventually fell on three words.

[Index - Tree of Ebonthorn (Page 516)]

My heartbeat, which had steadily calmed down, sped up again.

But this time, it wasn't out of fear.

No, it was out of excitement.

Chapter 180 Silence [4]

'Page 516...'

I was careful with my movements. I couldn't make any sounds.

Just a little sound, and I was done for.

Swallowing my saliva, I brushed the bottom part of the pages to look for the page number. Unlike the first book I checked, this book was a lot thicker. There were at least over a thousand pages.

'...I found it.'

Eventually, I found the page I was looking for and slowly and carefully pushed the pages aside to get to the page.

I felt the beat of my heart rapidly increase as I did so.

Finally, I was going to find out more about the tree.

Or so I thought.

'This...'

My mind blanked the moment I turned the pages.

Staring at the page in front of me, all I saw was an image. The page beneath it was completely ripped apart.

Gripping tightly onto the side of the book, I tried my best to keep my breathing steady.

'How...?'

What was it that I was currently feeling?

Anger? Frustration..? Or was it a mix of both?

Either way, they both led to a sense of helplessness that didn't seem to go away. Carefully breathing without making any sound, I flipped to the next page. But even then, there was nothing.

I checked the next page, and then the next one, but there was still nothing.

I even tried putting the books upside down in hopes of perhaps finding the page inside of the book, but even that appeared to be fruitless.

'Damn it.'

I wanted to curse aloud with every part of my being.

However, I knew I couldn't.

That would make me a target for the eaters.

'Well, it's certainly a good thing Kiera isn't here.'

Thinking about how she'd fare in this situation, I suddenly had the urge to laugh.

If it was her, she'd be dead in a few seconds.

It would just be one curse after the other. I knew all too well since she had probably thrown every curse in the book at me during the time that I started teaching her.

In fact, there were quite a few that I learned from her

'Fatherless bastard.'

I quite liked it. Rolled well to the tongue.

In the end, I had to take even more breaths to calm myself down and focus on the broken page in front of me.

There was only one image in there.

...It was the image of the tree. It looked exactly like it did in my vision.

Towering ominously, its bark was a deep, unnatural black, and its branches were twisted and gnarled like the grasping fingers of a skeletal hand. The blood-colored leaves seemed to sway in the picture as images of the vision flashed in my mind.

On the bark, several hands were reaching out from it.

I shuddered at the sight.

'....?'

Tracing my eyes down the page, I was able to make up a few words that hadn't been removed from the page.

'Erode the mind...?'

They were only three words, but it seemed as though it opened up a new road for me.

'Erode the mind. Erode the mind. Erode the mind.'

Mumbling the words in my mind for several seconds, I started to get an idea of the situation.

'Could it be that the tree is already in full effect, and is controlling the minds of some of the people in the bunker...?'

It would explain several things.

Like the reason I had been detained and researching the tree. Leon too. That guy... I was starting to miss him. Things would've been much easier for me had he been here. Wasn't he supposed to be the main character of the game?

Why was he so useless at important times?

Where the hell was his plot armor when one needed it?

'Whatever, that's not important.'

I focused back on the three words imprinted on the page before me.

'.....It's not hard to reduce the scope of the culprit behind all of this.'

The Black Hound Guild was certainly suspicious. In particular, the post-leader. While I hadn't met him, I had seen the secretary's memories.

He was the one who had ordered the investigation.

If there was anyone that was suspicious, then it was him.

'He could also be the one that ripped the page.'

It made sense if he was under the control of the tree.

But the real question was...

'Did he do it because his mind has been eroded by the tree, or because he's the one behind the tree...? '

I swallowed my saliva and tried to calm my nerves.

It felt as though I was onto something.

But that sensation didn't last for long.

Creak.

A certain creaking sound startled me out of my thoughts, forcing me to hold my breath. I thought the moment would pass as the eater would leave, but a hot breath ran down the back of my neck.

".....!"

I felt the hair on every part of my body rise.

'Calm. I've got to keep calm.'

I repeated the same word over and over in my mind.

Calm.

Calm.

Clam.

Clem.

Clmi.

CIm.

My hand started to tingle.

I didn't know why this was happening. I had been silent the entire time, making little to no movements.

"Haa... Haa..."

My neck chilled as I heard the heavy breathing of the creature behind me.

I was suddenly gripped with anxiety and my muscles tensed.

I wanted to run away but knew that I couldn't. The creatures were faster than me. The only thing I could do was,

Be silent.

.....I had to remain totally still.

"Haa..."

The breaths continued.

It continued to tickle my neck.

Every second felt agonizing.

The seconds continued to tick, and time seemed to stop. Biting my lips, I carefully wiped any of the sweat that was coming down the side of my face.

I had to be very careful with my movements.

My muscles were stiff, and my heart was beating out of my chest.

The fact that the 'Silent Eater' had yet to hear it was a miracle.

"....."

The breathing eventually stopped.

Creak.

And I heard the floor creaked.

I didn't relax.

Turning my head slowly to face the direction of where the Silent Eater was, I could see its back moving away.

Its figure was lanky and emaciated, the sharp ridges of its spine clearly visible even from a distance. Its entire skin had a sickly pinkish hue, stretched taut over its skeletal frame.

In particular, my eyes shifted towards its unnaturally long nails, extending down to the ground and dragging along as it walked.

Only when its back was no longer in view did I finally relax.

Taking a breath, I turned my head back to face the book when my heart stopped again.

".....!"

Appearing just a few inches away from my face was another Silent Eater. Its wide eyes and grotesque smile looked directly at me.

'When...!?'

Despite my best attempts at trying to keep my breath steady, I was unable to and the creature tilted its head.

Ba.... Thump! Ba... Thump!

Never before did the beat of my heart echo so loudly.

I had hoped.

...Hoped that the creature wouldn't hear it.

But it did.

Opening its mouth wide, displaying the hundreds of different teeth, it lunged at me.

"Hieeeeeek—"

I crumbled back, falling from my chair.

Bang!

"Hieeeeeek—"

"Hieeeeeek—"

"Hieeeeeek—"

I heard several screams coming from the back, and my heart turned cold. Staring at the creature that was on all four on the table, I hastily moved back.

Creak. Creak. Creak. Creak. Creak.

The ground trembled as I heard several footsteps rush my way.

From the sound alone, I could tell several eaters were coming my way.

The situation felt helpless. I was helpless, but at the same time, I didn't panic. Despite my mind telling me to flee, and my heart beating to the point where it was the only thing I could hear, I didn't make any sounds and hastily reached for my pocket where I felt a round object.

"Hieeeeeek—"

The eater before me screeched, its muscles tensing as it prepared to lunge at me.

I was seconds away from getting eaten.

But I didn't panic.

Injecting my mana into the small object, I quickly tossed it away.

Tok—

The ball hit the ground in the distance, and the creature before me stopped.

For a brief moment, our gazes met. Although I knew it couldn't see me, it did seem like it could.

And then,

BOOOM—

An explosion sounded.

"Hieeeeeek—" "Hieeeeeek—" "Hieeeeeek—"

I took advantage of the sound to turn around and leave. As I ran, I didn't bother at all about the sound my footsteps made as all the creatures ran toward where the mana bomb went off.

"Haaa... Haa... Haa..."

I tried to maintain my breath, but it was hard.

Clenching my teeth, I rushed out of the library and headed for the stairs.

Behind, I could still the wails coming from the eaters. My skin tingled, and it served as a reminder to pick up my pace.

"Hoo."

Coming down to the first floor, I stopped my movements and took a deep breath.

It was hard and I could hardly see.

Taking my time to calm my breath, I quietly walked towards the exit of the building. Without knowing what was behind the door, I couldn't rashly make any sound that could expose me.

No, there was no guarantee this was a good move.

Given how loud the bomb was, there were most likely going to be a lot of eaters waiting outside.

For that reason, instead of heading for the main entrance, I turned back and headed for the backdoor exit.

"....."

It was quiet and dark.

If not for the faint luminescent lines marking my path, I would've long lost sight of where I was.

'According to the memories, the exit should be just a few meters ahead.'

Tracing my hand against the walls, I narrowed my eyes to get a better look at the distance.

Walking quietly, I could make out a faint squared outline in the distance. Seeing how the outline was in red, I presumed it to be the light coming from the outside, highlighting the frame of the door.

I hurried my steps and reached for the handle.

Clank—

Despite my absolute best attempts at trying to be subtle with my actions, a faint clicking sound echoed the moment I opened the door, and as the heat rushed in, I felt a dozen pairs of eyes fall on me.

"....."

I stood motionless on the spot, at a loss for breath.

'.....And here I thought they'd only cover the entrance.'

It was a miscalculation on my part.

Looking around and staring at the dozen or so creatures surrounding the narrow alleyway, I pursed my lips.

This time...

I really did miscalculate.