

## **Advent of the Three Calamities**

### **#Chapter 21: Extra-curricular Activities [1] - Read Advent of the Three Calamities Chapter 21: Extra- curricular Activities [1]**

#### **Chapter 21: Extra-curricular Activities [1]**

Inhaling deeply, I recalled the burn.

The familiar smell that wafted through the air.

And the calmness that it brought me.

I used to once hate the smell.

But with time, I grew to love it.

My mind emptied each time.

It eased the pain, relieved the stress, and infused vibrancy into my otherwise colorless world.

That was what smoking meant to me.

But at the same time, it was what killed me.

It gave me something but took everything away in exchange.

Which was why, the sight of it made me lose myself.

".....How do I control it?"

I blankly stared at the ceiling of my room.

Acting on impulse like that...

Losing control of myself and letting the emotions take over...

I couldn't let that continue.

"I need to control myself."

But how was I going to do that...? It was easier said than done. It wasn't as if I could ban all cigarettes from this world to stop them from triggering my memories.

...It was also impossible for me to stop using this power.

For my survival and goal...

I needed to use them.

"How troublesome."

Truly.

This wasn't a problem I could find the solution easily. The realistic approach was for me to slowly grow accustomed to this power.

But...

"No time."

The longer I waited, the more I exposed myself to danger.

I had to sort this problem out now. I couldn't leave it for later.

That's why,

"...."

Staring at my hands, an idea struck my mind. I felt my expression stiffen at the thought, but considering my situation, it seemed to be the most appropriate approach.

"Hooooo..."

I sat down on my chair and took a deep breath.

*'To understand emotions, one must experience them.'*

A few words stuck in my mind.

It was a quote I saw often whenever I researched about Emotive Magic. Thinking about my recent progress, it was without a doubt true.

But merely experiencing them, didn't equate to fully understanding them.

For that, it took time.

One needs to continuously experience them before being able to fully understand them.

Which was why,

Clasping my forearm, I muttered.

"Sadness."

A familiar pain invaded my chest as it started to feel heavy.

The world suddenly seemed to grow cold, and my eyes started to moisten. I bit my tongue and held the tears back.

"Huuu..."

I had to take calm and steady breaths each time.

The pain made it hard for me to focus but I still held on.

Clasping on the side of the wooden chair I sat on, I mumbled to myself,

"...I need to remain composed."

I couldn't let the emotions take over my mind like last time.

I needed to maintain my composure.

My aim in all of this was to develop emotional resilience by deliberately subjecting myself to various emotions.

Compared to the time when I just came out of 'immersion', the emotions I was experiencing were milder.

Mainly because my understanding of them wasn't very strong.

The only reason they had such a great effect the first two times was because of how concentrated my emotions were when I came out of the immersion.

Even so...

*Drip.*

It wasn't easy.

Staring at the tear that stained my pants, I closed my eyes before muttering,

"Anger."

*Grip—*

My grip on the chair intensified and my chest started to rise.

A new emotion took over the last and my face crumbled.

"....Ah."

The sudden shift in emotion made it hard for me to keep my mind clear.

A fire brewed in my chest.

My breath quickened. So did my pulse.

"Kh..!"

My jaw was clenched so tightly that it started to hurt.

Even so, I kept myself rooted in my seat. Even as the world turned red and my vision narrowed.

I kept myself rooted in my seat.

My hands shook.

But my thoughts remained clear.

"C-control."

I forced those words through my clenched teeth.

R-right.

...I needed to control myself.

I couldn't let myself be controlled by my emotions again.

"Never."

\*\*\*

Haven had 'Extra-curricular Activities'.

In simpler terms: clubs. With the world being grim and the student reality harsh, clubs were set up as a way to ease the mental burden on students.

"Swimming... Football... Exercise Club... Cooking..."

There were a lot of clubs to choose from. From physical ones to nonphysical ones. The choices seemed endless.

"Comedy club...?"

My eyes lingered on 'Comedy Club' for a few seconds too long. Enough to warrant Leon's attention as he turned to glance my way.

In order to remain consistent with the previous Julien, I had him help me select a course. It was a necessary step I needed to take to ensure my safety.

"Are you considering it? To understand emotions better?"

"Uh, yeah..."

That was part of the reason, sure. But there was another reason why the club interested me. I kept thinking back at the joke I said a week ago. The Cheetah, one.

It had bugged me for quite a while now.

But was the joke bad?

*'...I don't think it was that bad.'*

Or maybe there was a problem elsewhere? The delivery?

But thinking about it, the ones I did tell the joke to always had stiff expressions. That girl and Leon...

Tough crowd I guess.

"That would make sense, but Julien wouldn't go for something like that. You need to keep in mind that—"

"I think it was my delivery."

Yeah, it had to be that.

"..."

Leon's body stiffened on the spot.

*'Ah, shit.'*

I raised my head to look at him. He looked at me with widened eyes and an expression that seemed to say 'Has he lost it...?'

I felt a little offended by his gaze.

"What?"

Why was he looking at me like that...?

He opened his mouth but closed it shortly after. He then turned around to face the opposite direction.

"What are you—"

"Kht."

Kht...?

I stopped whatever I was doing and leaned my head to get a better look at him.

Why is he...

"Ah."

An idea suddenly struck my mind.

I took a good long minute to think before finally saying,

"What do you call a fish with no eyes?"

"...."

Leon's eyes widened. For a moment, I thought I saw 'fear' flash in his eyes as his body flinched.

I continued,

"Fsh."

"Uhk...!"

His body flinched.

And I continued,

"What did the farmer who lost his rake say?"

"...."

"Where is my rake?"

"....!"

*Step—*

Without looking back, Leon moved forward. The entire time, his shoulders were trembling. Staring at him, I felt the need to continue and raised my voice.

"What do you call a fly with no wings?"

"..."

"A walk."

"....Kehut!"

Holding his mouth, Leon sprinted forward.

I chased after him.

"What did the cow..."

\*\*\*

Krrr...

The form expanded, gradually unveiling its massive, decaying jaws and spiky back. A potent surge of mana swept the surroundings as the figure increased in size.

"Keep it quiet. We're not too far off from the institute." freewebno(v)el

Delilah stood not far from the creature. Her gaze lingered over the creature who stared at her with deep apprehension.

It's growled at her before speaking.

"...You think you can stop us? Your struggles are futile. Our preparations are almost done."

"Hah."

Delilah's expression changed. With a laugh, she looked at the creature mockingly.

"You bastards are always the same. How many of your 'attacks' and 'preparations' have we thwarted over the years? Have you yet to learn your lesson?"

"..."

The beast growled.

"You don—"

Delilah's voice, layered by two other similar ones, cut through the creature.

"You can't hide it from me."

The creature shuddered.

"Hide...?"

"Your fear. I can see it from miles away."

*Crunch...*

The beast unknowingly took a step back as its body shuddered. An unknown emotion welled up from deep within its body, threatening to consume him.

"Y-you....!"

A red glow enveloped the beast's eyes. It understood then that its emotions were being played with.

But it was already too late.

In the moment the beast stepped back, its defeat was already set in stone.

Delilah's expression returned to its usually indifferent one as she raised her hand.

"Krrrrr—!"

The beast screamed, but it was futile.

Within moments of her raising her hand, the space around the beast compressed, and the echoing sound of bones cracking filled the air.

*Thud.*



Just like that, a 'Terror' ranked beast had died.

*Udududuk—!*

But something strange happened the moment the beast died. Black foam escaped its lips and its figure shrank to reveal the silhouette of a figure.

...A human.

*Crunch... Crunch...*

Delilah halted a few meters away from the body, her eyes coldly tracing it. Eventually, she bent down and turned its arm over.

"...."

A four-leaved clover appeared in her vision.

"....As expected."

She let go of the arm, and ambers floated in the sky as the body gradually disappeared from view.

*Crackle...!*

Her cold eyes remained fixed on the disappearing body.

Gradually, her mouth parted open to mutter,

"Inverted Sky."

A figure appeared in her mind.

One that she wholeheartedly preached to be the Black Star.

A crack yet again formed on her expressionless face.

"....I hope I'm wrong."

## **Chapter 22: Extra-curricular Activities [2]**

It was Friday.

The last day of the week.

Just like that, the first week at the institute was almost over. Today marked the second week of my transmigration.

Time seemed to have flown by during those two weeks. I could still vividly recall everything that had happened on the first day as if it were yesterday.

Quite frankly, I was tired.

Both physically and mentally.

But... I was slowly starting to adjust to this world. Slowly but surely, I was getting there.

I just needed a little bit more time.

"Here you go."

"..."

I glanced at the letter that sat on my desk, and I looked up. It was the last lesson of the day, and I was just about to pack up when he suddenly showed up out of nowhere.

"...What is this?"

"An invitation."

Leon answered flatly. I thought about having him elaborate but chose otherwise and just opened the letter.

I was bound to find out anyway.

===

To : Julien of the Evenus Barony.

*We extend our warmest greetings to your esteemed self and cordially invite you to join our exchange.*

*Your presence is certain to elevate the grandeur of the occasion, and we eagerly anticipate the pleasure of your company alongside fellow dignitaries and distinguished guests. The event promises an evening of refined conversation, exquisite cuisine, and cultural enrichment."*

.

.

.

I skimmed through the contents of the letter.

"So, in short... A party?"

"Sort of."

Sort of...?

"...And I have to attend?"

I rubbed my forehead.

I was already starting to feel a headache.

"Yes."

Leon nodded and added,

"Everyone does."

"...Ah."

Fuck.

Leon looked around before lowering his tone.

"It's best if you attend the ceremony. Create some connections. It will help you out in the long term."

"..."

Remaining quiet, I sorted through my thoughts.

Indeed, he had a point. Connections were certainly important in this society. Not only to establish myself better as 'Julien', but for the future when the time came for me to leave this place.

It would certainly make my life easier.

With such thoughts, I looked up at Leon and slid the letter over.

"....Fine."

\*\*\*

The Haven campus was large.

Spanning over a large land, it boasted seven main halls—Leoni Hall, Rondeo Hall, Dorset Hall, Birming Hall, Milnton Hall, Karlson Hall, and Rottingham Hall.

Each Hall had its own distinct function.

The Rondeo Hall was where the dorms were located. The Leoni Hall was where the auditorium was located, the Rottingham was where the professors were situated, and so on...

Each hall served a distinct function, simplifying navigation for newcomers to the academy.

Rottingham Hall.

*Tak— Tak——!*

The hall echoed with the soft click of her heels.

Delilah walked forward without as much as a single change in her expression.

"Good afternoon, Chancellor."

"It's nice to see you Chancellor."

Along the way, she'd get greeted by the staff that passed her. Glancing at them, she'd return them a nod.

This proceeded until she arrived at her office.

*Creaaaak...*

As the door opened, her feet came to a pause.

"....."

Her brows twitched at the sight that greeted her. Scratching the side of her head, she nimbly walked past the rows of documents that were scattered all over the floor before reaching her desk, where she sat down.

Gradually, her gaze fell on several fresh documents that sat by her desk.

They said;

[Extra-curricular Activities First Year Cadet selection]

'Oh, there was that.'

It was her job to review their applications.

*Flip—*

Casually flipping through the pages, she stamped on several of the applicant's submissions.

*Tak. Tak—*

Her stamp raised and fell continuously.

Until...

"..."

her eyes fell on a certain application. It was none other than Julien's.

"Comedy club...?"

It was a fitting choice after a little bit of thought.

It probably had to do with his powers.

The stamp hovered over the application when...

"Maybe not."

She stopped herself.

Though her assumptions about him had yet to be proven, she still didn't feel reassured to leave him to his own devices.

Therefore.....

"Hold."

She put the application on hold.

"..."

*Tak. Tak—*

For the next half hour, she sorted through the documents in front of her.

By the time she was done, her head throbbed. Reaching out for her drawer, wrappers scattered on the ground when she opened it. Not minding it, she inserted her hand in and dug through the mess before finally finding what she wanted—A chocolate bar.

The most peculiar part of the bar was the sticker that stuck on top of it.

It said, 'Property of Delilah'.

Yeah, because this was her bar.

She bit into the bar.

"Haaa..."

Only then did her expression relax, and so did her shoulders.

Finally, she redirected her attention to her desk, where a crystal device sat. It was glowing faintly. Shoving the chocolate into her mouth, she tapped on it.

A voice echoed across the room shortly after.

[...Delilah]

It was deep and filled with authority.

Tossing the wrapper, Delilah replied flatly,

"I took care of the problem."

[What was it this time?]

"Still manageable... Nothing much yet. A Terror Rank."

[.....Terror Rank?]

A certain gravity seized the room after Delilah's words.

A specific classification existed for those originating from the Mirror Dimension.

It was one that the four Empires came to a consensus with.

The ranks were as follows: Infant Rank, Junior Rank, Terror Rank, Destroyer Rank, and Primordial Rank.

The fact that a 'Terror Rank' beast had shown up near the premises of the Institute served as a deep reminder of how grave the situation was.

[It seems like they're becoming bolder and bolder. When was the last time they sent someone this powerful?]

"Maybe a couple of years ago? I'm not sure."

As she spoke, Delilah's hand reached out for her drawer again, and she took out yet another chocolate bar.

"...But it wasn't anything worth paying attention to."

A Terror Rank was a monster that had the equivalent power of a High Wizard.

Her trivialization of its power showed just how powerful she was.

[Were there any other problems...?]

Delilah pondered before carefully saying,

"...It seems like they're planning something, but I'm not quite sure what. I've already raised the security of the institute, so we shouldn't have any problems, but you might never know."

[Yes... Make sure to keep alert. We've already stopped many attempts over the years, but you might never know when they will make a breakthrough.]

"Understood."

The call seemed to end on that note, and just as Delilah planned to end it, she heard his voice again,

[....Oh, there should be a gathering tonight. Are you going to be attending?]

"Gathering?"

[Did you forget?]

"..."

[So you did...]

"I didn't."

For some reason, Delilah felt the need to deny it.

Her pride wasn't allowing her to admit that she had forgotten.

Because...

She really had forgotten.

[Oh, that's good. I'll be seeing you there, then. I'll be going now, and... clean your mouth.]

"...Uh?"

The call ended on that note.

Stunned, Delilah reached for her lips, where traces of the chocolate remained.

Her brows slowly knit together.

"How did he know...?"

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It was late into the night when I reached the destination.

Since it wasn't far, we walked along the campus road to get to the place.

The venue sat at the Academy's outskirts amidst a cluster of villas. The chosen gathering spot distinguished itself effortlessly.

Towering over its neighbors, this particular villa not only boasted impressive size but also flaunted intricate decorations. Bright lights strategically placed accentuated this further, setting it apart from the others.

"We're here."

Having rehearsed the situation beforehand, Leon went ahead of me and handed over our letters to the butler in charge.

He was a young man with black hair, perhaps about my age.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Black Star."

The butler greeted me after a quick look at the invitation.

His welcoming smile felt rather burdensome as he extended his hand toward the door of the villa, where he proceeded to open it. n ovel.com

[The son of the third head of the Evenus Barony. A first-year cadet and the Black Star. Julien Dacre Evenus.]



Having already been briefed beforehand by Leon, I wasn't startled by the sudden announcement.

I was, however, struggling to keep my face composed.

'I know this is something nobles do... But does it really need to be this exaggerated?'

There was also the issue regarding all the attendees who were now directing their attention toward me.

"Please have a pleasant night."

The butler added. As if he was trying to add salt to my wounds.

"Huuuu..."

Taking a deep breath, I proceeded forward toward the hall.

I once again reminded myself of my identity.

'I'm Julien Dacre Evenus.'

'The Black Star and the number one ranked cadet in the first years.'

'When people look at me, they are the ones who grow nervous.'

'Not me.'

And with such thoughts, I headed deeper into the venue.

There were a lot of familiar faces as I moved forward. From members of my class to some of the staff and professors I had met over the past week. There were also many unfamiliar faces. Some old and some young.

But there was one person that stood out the most out of all of them.

She seemed to be the center of attention.

The one where the focus gravitated toward.

Aoife K. Megrail.

The Empire's one and only princess.

In a one-piece red dress that accentuated her striking red hair, she stood out, her beauty eclipsing many of those present.

Graceful movements and an elegant demeanor added to her image as she eloquently conversed with those engaging her in conversation.

"..."

Just as I noticed her, she noticed me. I thought nothing of it and prepared to look away when, all of a sudden, she smiled.

Smiled...?

I was momentarily taken aback.

So did the many that were looking at her.

By the time I regained my senses, she was standing in front of me. I felt the attention of all those present in the room.

...And just as I looked down to wonder what was happening, her glossy lips parted open, and her crisp voice gently reached my ears.

"I've been waiting for you."

She extended her hand.

".....Would you give me the honor?"

*The fuc—*

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### **Chapter 23: The one the world rejects [1]**

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Princess. There are a few matters I'd like to discuss."

"Princess, it's truly an honor to have you here. May we have a moment to speak...?"

"Princess..."

It was the same as usual. Nothing had changed. The lights shone brightest her way, with everyone seeking ways to approach her.

Gatherings were burdensome to her.

It wasn't that she didn't understand their importance... she did, but... they weren't something she looked forward to. The weight of her role weighed heavily on her shoulders.

"I'll do that."

Aoife lightly massaged her cheeks.

They had grown stiff from the prolonged smiling.

It was proper decorum for her to greet everyone with a smile. Outwardly, she had to maintain perfection; there could be no flaws in her appearance.

Like a thornless rose.

"...I'll most certainly find the time later to discuss the matters with you."

"Haha~ Is that so? Thank you so much."

The man she was talking to was quite handsome in appearance. With short brown hair and deep green eyes, he stood out from the rest.

Although he wasn't from a notable household, his magic was strong. He would certainly make for a good connection.

But...

*'The smell.'*

Aoife felt her nose scrunch up with each breath.

His entire body was clouded with a thick plume of perfume. A very powerful one at that. The smell was so overbearing that Aoife had a hard time keeping her face straight.  
fr(e)e

"....But is it possible to talk about it now?"

Lines were slowly being crossed.

"Unfortunately, I am busy."

Aoife shook her head and made her rejection clear.

"Haha, it won't take long. Please hear me out."

"I'm sorry."

He insisted.

"It really won't take that much time. I insis—"

[The son of the third head of the Evenus Barony. A first-year cadet and the Black Star. Julien Dacre Evenus.]

A certain name resounded across the hall and the noise inside the venue quieted down.

Heads turned, and the doors swung open.

Wearing a black outfit clothing that perfectly accentuated his appearance, his entrance captured the attention of everyone in the room.

With chiseled features and calm and steady strides, he exuded an air of nobility. His dark, wavy hair framed his perfect features.

The noble's piercing gaze carried a magnetic allure, leaving an indelible impression on those who settled their gazes on him.

"He's here."

"Isn't that..."

"That's him, right?"

Whispers spread across the hall as people talked about him.

*'He's here...'*

Aoife's expression remained unchanged as he entered.

As expected, only his presence could garner the attention of all present. However, unlike her, nobody approached him.

He too was a rose.

But unlike her, he was filled with thorns. One that kept those away from him. He could only be admired, but not touched.

A trait that made Aoife envious of him.

But she wasn't like the rest.

*Tak——!*

Her heels clicked on the marble floor as she advanced. All eyes were on her as she moved forward.

The distance between the two shrank.

"..."

And she was soon standing in front of him.

There wasn't much of a change in his expression. He simply stared at her. His gaze felt pressuring, almost intimidating.

*'As expected of a rose filled with thorns.'*

Just standing next to him felt daunting.

That said...

"I've been waiting for you."

Aoife's lips pulled up and she extended her hand.

"....Would you give me the honor?"

Mere thorns weren't anything Aoife was worried about.

\*\*\*

"...."

Should I take the hand...?

I looked at the outstretched hand. Feeling the gazes of all those around me, I lifted my gaze to look at Aoife.

*'What is she thinking?'*

I struggled to understand the motive of her actions.

Was there some sort of secret agenda, or was this some sort of whim? I doubted it to be the latter.

*'....How troublesome.'*

It wasn't as if I could refuse her in front of so many people.

Furthermore, even though I didn't want to have anything to do with her due to the vision, I knew not to antagonize her.

Perhaps the reason she killed me in the vision was because of the way I behaved.

That wouldn't do me any good.

Distance was good, but not at the cost of them hating me in the process.

"Hmm."

Therefore...

"...It would be my pleasure."

I accepted her offer and took her hand. Her expression subtly changed to one of surprise, but she was quick to hide it. With a thin smile, she lowered her head.

"It's settled, then."

The two of us walked toward a more secluded area. Though there were still eyes on us, they were significantly less than before.

None of them seemed keen on approaching us.

I glanced at her as she walked alongside me. Apparently understanding my gaze, she pursed her lips to reply,

"I needed a little break."

"Oh "

I figured that much.

But was that all to it?

"That's all."

Her words seemed to clarify that point.

But I didn't trust her.

"...It must be tough being a princess."

"Would've been tougher if I was the Black Star."

"...."

Was it just me, or did she sound salty?

I raised my brow to look at her.

She frowned,

"I'm not."

"...I didn't say anything."

"Your face says it all."

Did it?

I grabbed a nearby cup and slowly savored the drink. But, just as I took a sip of the drink, I felt my brows crease and my tongue shrivel up.

"....."

"That's grape juice."

"...I figured."

I put the drink down.

Did I hate grape juice...? No, not really. I didn't mind it. However, there was something about the drink that my body rejected.

"Sweet."

It was sweet.

Way too sweet for my tastes.

"Sweet?"

When Aoife tried the drink, her eyebrow rose. She looked at me with a gaze that seemed to say, 'What are you talking about?'

I tilted my head.

Does she not feel the same?

"It's too much."

"...Uh. You are weird."

Me?

"Try this."

She proceeded to hand me a small pastry.

I looked at her weirdly.

"Why?"

"Try."

She insisted. I thought about rejecting her, but seeing how insistent she was being, I decided to go along with it and took a small bite.

It wouldn't hurt anyway.

"...."

The moment I took a bite of the pastry, my lips pursed together and I momentarily forgot how to swallow.

Regardless of how hard I tried, it just wouldn't go down.

What the...

"....As expected."

Aoife's lips pulled up in realization.

"You can't take sweets."

I grabbed the nearest tissue and spat out the pastry. When I glanced at Aoife, I noticed a subtle shift in her expression.

It was as if she found something amusing.

"....I guess you aren't as perfect as you make yourself out to be."

What does that even mean...

And, why does she look so satisfied?

"You..."

My mouth had just parted open to say something when I realized that she was already gone. *'When did she...'* As I glanced around, I found my eyes tracing her back.

For some reason, staring at her back, her steps seemed lighter than usual.



'Crazy.'

"Hm?"

A sudden tug of my clothes attracted my attention.

I looked around but was left confused.

Nothing.

"Wh-ah."

I lowered my gaze and met two eyes.

*Stare—*

"Uh...?"

They stared at me with incredible intensity.

But...

"A child?"

They belonged to a child. A little girl with long black hair, and large crystal eyes. Her appearance was extremely cute.

*'...What is a child doing here?'*

Cuteness aside, I was confused.

What was she doing here? Wasn't this supposed to be a gathering of important people?

Perhaps a child of a professor?

*Stare—*

Her stare turned even more intense. It was as if lasers were shooting at me.

"What...?"

"..."

The child didn't reply and merely shifted her gaze.

Following her line of sight, I realized.

"Ah."

I held up my hand. The one that was holding the pastry.

"You want this?"

*Nod. Nod.*

Her head bobbed up and down as saliva drooped from the corner of her mouth. She was quick to wipe her lips.

The sight was an amusing one.

"Here."

I handed her the pastry which she quickly took and shoved down her mouth.

The sight left me momentarily stunned.

What sort of situation was this...?

That said, staring at her, my lips gently moved up.

"Clean up your mouth first."

Taking a tissue, I dabbed her mouth.

"Here too."

There were crumbs all over.

"Just how are you eating...?"

She reminded me of my brother a lot.

"Ah..."

I stopped when I realized what I was doing.

She reminded me of him so much that I had acted out of impulse.

"...."

Thankfully, she didn't seem to have minded as she continued to eat the pastries in peace. I sighed in relief and leaned back on the table.

I didn't know how to feel.

I was once again reminded of the fact that my brother was no longer next to me.

That there was a chance I could never see him again.

A little part of me told me to move on and give up. To forget about my old life and move on.

Such thoughts haunted me every day.

But... I couldn't. I just couldn't. Throwing away my past meant rejecting the very existence of my brother... I couldn't do it.

Even if it meant I was chasing the impossible, I didn't plan on giving up.

I lowered my head to stare at my hands.

But.

*'Why can't I progress?'*

Even though two weeks had gone by, and I had been practicing every day... I couldn't grasp my other magic.

It was as if it rejected me.

Regardless of my struggles, I wasn't able to make any progress.

It was frustrating.

"Haaaaa..."

I knew that I had to be patient.

That I would one day get there. But... How long did I have to wait for that day to come? My days were running low, and the gravity of my situation was starting to sink in.

I didn't have long.

That much was true.

## **Chapter 24: The one the world rejects [2]**

It was the fact that I knew that my time was limited that prevented me from enjoying the party.

Seeing everyone converse and interact with one another, I felt a sense of estrangement.

Alienation.

As if I didn't belong here.

Nobody dared to approach me, and when I tried to interact with someone, they'd tactfully distance themselves away from me.

Was I that intimidating...?

No...

*'I don't belong here.'*

That much was starting to become clear to me.

This very world...

It was rejecting my existence.

...Or was it me that was rejecting it? I wasn't quite sure.

"Uhh..."

In the time that I spent here fruitlessly trying to make connections, I could've spent training and learning my second ability.

With such thoughts, I took a sip of water and headed for the exit.

There was no longer a point in staying here.

"Right..."

Because I didn't fit here.

\*\*\*

"What do you think about joining our household? I'm sure we can offer you better incentives than the ones offered by the Evenus household."

"Firstly, we'd be willing to pay you more than they pay you. Not only that, but we'd also relieve you of your knightly duties and support you wholeheartedly."

"If you wish to remain a knight, we may even promote you to commander. With a word, I can make that happen."

Leon casually took a sip of his drink, something called 'Amorena' and pursed his lips.

*'.....Tastes like shit.'*

Far too bitter for his tastes.

"Do consider our offer. We can offer you a lot more than what the Evenus Household has offered you. You don't have to worry about the consequences. We'll be able to tal—"

"If you would excuse me."

"Uh... hey!"

Placing the drink down, Leon turned around and left.

He was starting to grow tired of hearing the offer over and over again.

It wasn't just that. The place... Everything about it.

It felt extremely stuffy.

"....How many does that make?"

A familiar voice reached him from behind. As he turned around, his eyes fell on the familiar figure and he flatly replied.

"Counting that... About nine."

".....A lot more than I thought."

Evelyn scratched the side of her face. Wearing a formal white dress, decorated with purple jewelry and accessories, her appearance attracted the gazes of many of the people attending.

It was hard to stand out given that most of the cadets present looked good themselves, but only a few truly stood out amongst the masses.

Evelyn was one of those few.

"Probably not as many as the times you've got asked out."

"Rubbing salt to my wounds?"

Leon lightly shrugged.

"You started it."

"Right..."

Evelyn nodded before her brows knit together. She then tactfully said,

"Have you never considered their offer...? From what I know, they're quite good. A lot better than what you're currently receiving."

"Perhaps..."

"But?"

"...I can't leave."

The Evenus Household.

Leon's thoughts regarding them were rather complicated. They hadn't exactly been the nicest to him.

Only once he had started to display his talent did their attitude towards him change. Before then... He was a servant.

Someone that they were willing to discard with a thought.

The wounds of his past were still vividly etched in his mind and not a day passed where he forgot. Even now... He was constantly reminded of those days.

And it was with such thoughts that he ambiguously added,

"....Not yet."

"I see."

As if she had expected such an answer, Evelyn nodded her head and no longer pursued the matter.

She could tell it was a sensitive matter.

"Hm?"

Evelyn's expression changed and her eyes stared off in the distance. Leon followed her line of sight and made a similar expression.

Julien, the first son of the household in question, appeared at the end of the hall.

He was also one of the few that stood out in appearance. His every movement and action attracted the eyes of those present.

It was hard to not take note of him when he stood out that much.

"He's changed quite a bit..."

Evelyn started to speak as her eyes traced his figure.

"Though he carries himself in the same manner as in the past, there's something different about him. Am I the only one that's noticing these changes?"

"...It's been five years since you've last seen him."

Leon replied flatly.

"It's normal for him to be different."

"I guess you're right, but..."

Evelyn narrowed her eyes as her gaze continued to trace Julien's figure.

"...Wasn't he usually the type of guy that enjoys attention? Why does it seem like he's leaving?"

"Leaving?"

Leon's face finally showed changes, and to his surprise, it was indeed as Evelyn pointed out.

Julien, who had reached the entrance of the hall, was reaching out for his felt jacket.

His actions aroused the attention of many of those attending.

"What's he doing?"

"Did he forget something in his jacket...?"

It couldn't be helped.

The event had only just begun, and he was already leaving.

The expressions of many of the people present varied. But the consensus was that his decision made no sense.

This was especially so for Leon who put his drink down.

"...."

"You're leaving?"

"...Yeah."

He had no choice but to.

It was his duty to keep Julien safe. Though he wasn't sure why Julien was acting like this, he had no choice but to follow.

Before leaving, he paused to stare at Evelyn.

"I hope you enjoy the gathering."

And with those last words, he went ahead to follow Julien.

As he left, Evelyn's eyes traced his back.

Putting her drink down, she mumbled,

".....Something's off."

\*\*\*

"Huuu..."

The breeze hit my face as I left the venue.

I felt a sense of liberation coming out of the building.

The weight of the stares...

The suffocating environment...

It was all gone.

I could finally breathe properly again.

"Better."

".....Why did you leave so early?"

An expected voice reached me from behind. I didn't need to look to know who it was.



"I felt like it was a waste of time."

"Were you trying hard enough? I doubt you're intimidating to the point where everyone avoids you."

Was that the case...?

I thought about it for a while before nodding.

That was probably the case.

"Maybe so."

But...

"This sort of thing... I'm not fit for it."

My body and mind rejected it.

"It felt too stuffy. I don't think I could've stayed much longer."

"Haaa..."

For the first time since meeting him, I heard a long sigh coming from Leon. Stunned, I turned around to see him massaging his forehead.

Eventually, as if resigned, he also loosened his clothes.

"To be honest, I was feeling the same."

Taken aback by his response, my brow raised.

He was?

"What?"

"No, nothing..."

I shook my head and turned to look away.

"I'm just glad we're on the same page."

I smiled and massaged my shoulders. Then, without looking back, I took the path back to Haven.

The distance back wasn't very far.

Rather, it should've been a very short walk. The path was also nice. With no buildings in sight, it provided a great view.

The entire time the two of us remained quiet as we observed the surroundings.

There wasn't much to say between us and all we could do was enjoy the surroundings.

Everything was going smoothly, when...

"..."

My feet came to a stop.

"Something's wrong..."

The path, which should've been a short one suddenly felt extremely long. What should've been a ten to five-minute walk extended longer than that.

I had just turned around to address Leon when my body froze.

"Hey, did yo—Uh?"

My heart dropped and my heartbeat quickened.

"....."

I was alone.

Leon was gone.

When did this...?

I could've sworn I had felt his presence just moments prior. So when did he...

"Hooo..."

I took a deep breath to calm my nerves which were steadily rising.

Panic was starting to set in, but I was quick to push it down.

"Good thing I trained myself for these situations..."

Though I was still in the beginning stages, I didn't let fear cloud my mind. Take control of my body.

And just as I managed to calm myself down...

*Blink—*

"...!"

The world changed with a single blink.

The familiar path disappeared, and replacing it was a dense forest.

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

It was a familiar environment and my heartbeat, which I had barely managed to calm, started beating crazily.

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

It drummed powerfully in my mind, overtaking my thoughts.

"This place..."

A familiar environment.

One that I distinctly remembered even now that a week had passed.

"Vision."

Only one word escaped from my mouth, but it was all I needed to say to understand my situation.

This place, the trees, the moon that hung in the sky... It was all from the vision I had seen last week.

"It can't be..."

A part of me wanted to refuse the situation. Deny that this was really happening, but...

Staring at the familiar environment, I knew this was the reality.

My reality.

"Shit."

A curse inexplicable escaped from my mouth as my heart drummed with even more force.

It beat with such force that it made it hard to think.

And the fear that I so tried to suppress once again started to take over my mind.

My palms felt sweaty...

My breath grew heavy...

And my mind started to cloud.

"...I have to go."

But even in all of this, I was able to retain some rationality.

I hadn't suffered so much for nothing.

*'Let's think.'*

My memories of the event were still clear in my mind.

All the details from then were still vividly etched in my mind.

*'In the vision, I recall heading a certain direction...'*

It started with me running in a certain direction before meeting a hooded figure who then proceeded to kill me.

I looked around and searched for all the details.

Eventually, a direction became clear to me.

"The hooded figure is that way."

That much was clear.

But what now...?

Run?

That seemed to be the only logical conclusion. I was still weak, and whoever was responsible for this was stronger than I was.

Let alone the fact that I was still unable to use my other magic... the only magic I could actually use in combat.

At this moment...

I was useless.

A walking target.

"If only..."

I clenched my jaw and stared at my hands. A deep sense of frustration welled up within me as I stared at them.

But just as fast as it came, I pushed it down.

Now was not the time.

Processing all the information, I looked back in the direction of my memories and turned away.

*Rustle—*

For now...

This was my only option.

\*\*\*

Bonus chapter for hitting 800 PS! Thank you so much for the support!

### **Chapter 25: The one the world rejects [3]**

With my vision obscured by the darkness, all I could perceive were sounds.

*Rustle—*

The sound of the bushes moving past me.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

The sound of my breath.

*Crunch... Crunch...*

The crunching sound of my feet stepping on the foliage beneath.

How long had I been running for...?

I had lost track by now.

.....I had been running so much that my legs were starting to feel heavy and my lungs were on fire. Questions such as, 'Did I run far enough? Am I safe? Can I stop?' repeatedly flooded my mind as I continued to move forward.

My mind wavered in such moments

*'Will the ending be the same as in the vision...? Am I destined to die?'*

"Haaa..."

I took a deep breath and stopped.

I wasn't scared of death.

Death was something I had already experienced.

There was nothing scary about it.

If anything, it felt liberating.

But...

"Not this way."

This wasn't how I wanted to die.

Not just that... Just because I wasn't scared of death didn't mean that I looked forward to death.

There were things that I wanted to do.

Achieve.

A person that I wanted to meet again.

I couldn't let myself die like that.

And it was with such thoughts that I sat down on the ground.

Running was no longer an option for me. It became quite clear to me after running for the past hour. All it did was waste my stamina.

Sure, it perhaps bought me some time.

But...

For what exactly? Delay my death? Reinforcements...?

What reinforcements?

There was no point in uselessly clinging to some hope that was perhaps never going to come. The only person I could rely on at the moment was myself.

To get out of here alive...

I had no one else but myself to rely on.

"Hooooo..."

I took a deep breath and extended my hand forward.

A familiar warmth coursed down from my abdominal area as a magic circle started to form.

*'.....Please work.'*

This was my only hope.

\*\*\*

"Where am I.....?"

Leon looked around him and frowned.

He appeared to be around a dense forest. Where exactly... he wasn't sure. He had no time to make sure. Looking around, he called out.

"Young Master?"

But he received no response.

As expected...

He was alone.

Leon's expression turned grim at the thought. It wasn't that he was worried about Julien. He was unsure of the depth of his strength.

Was he stronger or weaker than him?

.....Leon wasn't exactly sure.

But he had no time to ponder over this matter any longer. Sensing something, his expression changed and he lightly stomped his foot on the ground, pushing himself back.

*BANG—!*

Just as his body moved, the spot which he had been standing on just moments prior, exploded.

Pieces of debris flew in the air as a cloud of dust rose in the air, masking Leon's sight.

"Tsk."

A rough voice echoed shortly after.

As the cloud cleared, a hulking figure draped in a large black hood emerged, casually holding an axe over their shoulder.

"...You're a lot more slippery than I thought."

He began to say, the air trembling at the tone of his voice.

Leon's eyes narrowed as he slowly unsheathed the sword from his hips.

*SHIIIIING—!*

He looked around before saying,

"Where is this? And who are you?"

Rather than answering, the hooded figure massaged its chin.

"I was told you were different. As expected... You really are different. I didn't think you'd be this composed in this situation."

"...."

Leon remained silent.

He was carefully scoping out his surroundings. Areas where he could escape in case he couldn't handle his opponent, advantages he could use, and so on...

Nothing escaped his sight.

"I see what you're trying to do."



Almost faintly, Leon caught what appeared to be a smile under the hood.

"Commendable. Observing your surroundings to increase your advantages. Finding escape points in case you're at a disadvantage... I can see what you're trying to do. But..."

*BANG—!*

Stomping his foot on the ground, the hooded figure disappeared from his spot, reappearing right in front of Leon in less than a second.

Axe held with both hands, he whispered.

"Just like the other guy... There's no escape for the two of you..."

*Swoosh—*

And he swung down.

\*\*\*

How long has it been...?

One hour? Two hours? Three hours? A day?

I had lost track of time.

I hadn't moved the entire time and kept my focus entirely on the magic circle in front of me.

But...

One rune.

Two runes.

Three runes...

.

.

.

Eight runes...

Nine runes...

Ten runes...

Eleven runes...

*Tzzzz—!*

"Kh...!"

I still...

Couldn't...

Make...

Any...

Progress.

Even after all this time!!

After doing everything that I possibly could...!

"Shit... Why?! Why...!"

Was I just being too hasty? Was that it...?

*'From what I was told, simply learning to be able to use a spell shouldn't take more than a few hours...'*

So long as one was adept at it, they could learn it.

It was what I had learned in the two weeks I had been in this world.

So...?

*Tzzzz—!*

"Why...?"

Why was it that I still couldn't learn it?

Did I need more time?

But I didn't have time.

This was the only thing I could do. My other power couldn't be used to fight the person in the vision.

There was nothing else I could do.

This was my only option.

"H-haaa..."

My breath betrayed my exasperation as I blankly stared at the night sky.

Was this my limit...?

No, if I only had more time.

Then... Then...

"Kh..."

I quietly called out for my status screen.

A large window appeared in my vision.

└ Type : Elemental [Curse]

Why...

Why was it that I was able to grasp Emotive Magic so easily, and yet struggled to understand this magic?

Was it because of my ability?

...Or was it because I wasn't truly capable of understanding this magic?

Yet again, I was reminded of one fact.

I didn't belong to the world.

"Right... I'm just an existence that casually entered this place."

The reason why I was struggling so much...

Why it was so hard for me to learn...

It had nothing to do with talent.

I...

Was simply, not meant to have learned it.

This world...

I smiled bitterly.

"...It's rejecting me."

Haha.

It was a laughable thought.

But...

Even if the world was rejecting me.

I had no choice but to continue.

"...Again."

I stared at my hand and channeled the mana from my abdomen.

A familiar warmth flooded my body.

One rune...

Two runes...

Three runes...

Five runes...

.

.

.

.

*Tzzzz—!*

I tasted failure.

Over.

And over.

And over again.

*Drip... Drip...*

Blood continuously dripped down from my nose as my eyes grew blurry.

I was getting tired.

Tired of the meaningless practice that held no progress.

It had stopped at eleven runes.

There was just one rune that I was missing before the magic circle would complete.

But...

*Tzzzz—!*

That step seemed an impossible one.

It slowly started to sink in my mind.

*'...This is meaningless.'*

"Right..."

*Tzzzz—!*

"Why waste time..."

*Tzzzz—!*

"Practicing something..."

*Tzzzz—!*

"...That yields no progress?"

I finally lowered my hand and closed my eyes.

My mana reserves were almost empty and exhaustion had taken over my body.

"In the end... I was just meaninglessly struggling."

Chasing after something I wasn't meant to achieve.

If I had more time then...

I'd have pursued things differently.

But I had run out of time.

"Cough...! Cough...!"

My hands stained with my blood as a familiar fire raged up in my lungs.

It became even clearer to me that my time was up.

And as if to further confirm this, the nearby greenery rustled.

*Rustle—!*

A hooded figure emerged from behind the bushes.

"So that's where you were. You really made it hard for me to find you. Thankfully, I was able to track you through your scent, or I really would've never been able to find you."

His poise.

His voice...

They were all similar to the one in the vision.

Finally, he stopped and stared at me.

"...Uh?"

A surprised sound escaped his lips as he stared at me.

"Would you look at that? I knew you were weak from your mana signature, but I didn't think you'd be this weak—"

"....Is that so?"

With what little energy I had left, my voice layered and I forced myself up, dashing away from the area.

"Hoho? Was that your emotive magic?"

The hooded's figure calm voice echoed from behind.

"Not bad... Not bad at all. My chest almost stung. Really... What an interesting power. It's a good thing I came prepared."

*Rustle—*

I ran through the forest, feeling the rough branches scrape against my skin.

The underbrush clawed at my legs, leaving stinging cuts all over.

But I paid them no mind.

One Rune...

Two Runes...

As I ran, I made sure to focus my attention on my hand.

The runes were slowly piling up.

*Tzzzz—!*

But even in such a situation, failure seemed inevitable.

I gritted my teeth and continued running.

The situation seemed hopeless.

My Emotive Magic seemed to not affect him. I couldn't comprehend the other magic, and I was on my last breath.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

At some point, my leg wobbled.

*Crash...*

And I fell face-first against the ground.

"Ukh...!"

I scraped the ground in an attempt to help myself up.

But..

*Thud.*

I couldn't get up.

Sweat poured down from the side of my face as my chest burned with even greater intensity than before.

My lungs were on fire.

"....Already tired?"

The hooded man appeared behind me, seemingly confused by my situation.

Just barely, I managed to turn my body to face him.

"I thought you'd struggle more, Black Star. I did. In the end, the rumors about you were exaggerated. You—"

At some point, his voice had drowned out from my mind.

My eyes wandered over my right forearm where a four-clover tattoo appeared.

There was still something...

I had been saving it up for this moment.

It was my last hope.

So...

I extended my hand and pressed on it.

Yet again.

I had no choice but to rely on this ability.

But...

Would the results really change...?

## **Chapter 26: The one the world rejects [4]**

*Trrrrr—*

I held onto my knees and stared at the moving wheel.



This was my last-ditch attempt at something. Although I knew that this was merely a fruitless attempt at trying to save my skin, there was nothing else I could do.

I had exhausted all my options.

This... was my only remaining option.

It was a futile attempt at trying to do something.

Even though the previous times bore fruit and helped me out in my situations, the case wasn't the same this time.

Emotions.

They were a supplementary power.

.....A tool used to help in certain situations.

But...

That's it.

By itself, they couldn't help me in this situation.

I was doomed.

I knew it.

...And it was because of this that the sense of frustration that I felt further intensified.

*'Damn it. If only...!'*

The wheel stopped.

Red.

*'Anger.'*

The world around me changed. It turned white.

"Hm...?"

I looked around me and frowned. Unlike the previous experiences where memories or environments appeared, the world remained like this.

Completely white.

"What—"

I lost control of my body.

It wasn't an unfamiliar experience as it had happened to me once before.

I didn't reject it.

I let it guide me and my body slowly sat down on the ground.

What...

My hand moved forward and a warm current flooded out from my body, slowly gathering toward the tip of my fingers.

A circle and set of runes hovered over my fingers.

Ones I had grown used to seeing a lot.

"This is..."

One rune.

Two runes.

.

.

.

Five runes...

*Tzzzz—!*

The spell shattered at five.

And it was at that moment that I regained control of my body. My chest tightened a little, but aside from that, I didn't experience anything else.

".....What's going on?"

I looked around me.

The world was still completely white.

There were no changes around me and I was confused.

However, thinking back at my actions after my body was taken over, an idea started to form.

"Is it telling me to practice?"

How did this represent anger?

.....Or was it that my powers understood my situation?

That I was fucked.

Regardless...

"Hoooo...."

I took advantage of the situation and started to practice again.

One after another, runes started to connect.

Rune One—Rune Two—Rune Three—Rune Four—Rune Five—Rune Six—Rune Seven...

*Tzzzz—!*

"....Fail."

Nothing surprising.

I had lost count of the many times I had failed by now.

Looking around and seeing nothing changed, I knew that I was fine. Time stopped on the outside.

I could still practice.

Though I didn't know how long I'd be here, I knew I needed to take advantage of the opportunity.

"Hah, yeah... It's fine."

Though I told myself that, my lips were pursed together.

Yeah...

I can do it.

"...Again."

.

Time passed.

.

*Tzzzz—!*

"Haha, it's nothing big..."

I laughed but my mind didn't.

My chest grew tighter all of a sudden.

Six runes.

My progress regressed.

"...Let's do it."

.

It continued to flow.

.

*Tzzzz—!*

"....Another failure."

How many was it now...?

Hundredth time? Okay... Reasonable.

"H-huh."

My chest trembled and my eyes narrowed.

A weird sensation tangled my chest. It was light. Nothing that I couldn't control. But it was growing.

Steadily.

What was it...?

I pushed it down.

I had no time to ponder over such a matter.

"Again..."

I had to keep practicing.

"Right... Practice."

.

It never stopped.

.

*Tzzzz—!*

My chest felt tighter.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

My vision became narrower.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

My breathing quickened.

The feeling I felt before...

.

.

*Tzzzz—!*

It started to grow.

.

.

*Tzzzz—!*

With each failure...

.

.

*Tzzzz—!*

The feeling in my chest started to grow.

And...

.

.

*Tzzzz—!*

I finally realized what it was.

.

.

*Tzzzz—!*

"Argghhh....!!!!"

I clenched my fists and screamed at the world.

Rage.

...The feeling that was slowly building up in my chest.

It was rage.

"Why!! Why!!!! Why can't I!!!!"

I punched the floor repeatedly in my fit of rage.

"F-fuck...!"

*Bang!*

"Fuuck!!!"

*Bang!*

"Why...!"

*Bang!*

"Can't..."

*Bang!*

"...I do it!!!"

*Bang!*

"Haaa... Haaa... Haa..."

My head felt light.

All I could feel was a strange pulse in my head as my thoughts disappeared, and all I could think of was my repeated failures.

"How many times is it now?!?? Why can't I do it? What is wrong with me?!"

I continued to scream at the sky as I felt my veins bulge from my neck.

"Am I really that shit! Is that the fucking case...!"

I couldn't accept it.

"Fuuuuuckkk!!!"

I didn't want to accept it.

So...

I continued.

.

.

But.

*Tzzzz—!*

Despite all my attempts, I continued to fail.

And the more I failed...

"Arghhhhh!!!"

The angrier I got.

"D-damn it...!!!!"

I trashed my surroundings, screaming at the sky with all my might.

*Bang...!*

I punched my face.

It seemed to relieve some of the frustration that I felt.

So...

Bang...! Bang...!

I punched it again.

"Kh!!"

Faster.

*Bang!*

Stronger..!

*Bang!!*

And faster...!

*Bang...! Bang...!*

"M-motherfuck...! Akkkh!"

I screamed again.

"Ahhhhhh!"

I let everything out.

I knew that my current appearance was pathetic.



That I... was pathetic.

But.

I was desperate. Failure meant death.

I had no choice but to succeed.

Why couldn't I just do it...?

"Ha Ha... Why..."

My eyes started to sting.

The rage that had clouded my mind slowly started to subside, and I lay blankly on the ground.

My entire body was in pieces and my mana reserves were empty.

I was powerless.

"....."

Time passed again.

One hour.

Two hours.

Three hours...

And in such time, I remained motionless on the ground.

*'...When is this going to end?'*

At some point, I started to wonder.

How long was this immersion going to last for?

It had never lasted so long before...

I closed my eyes and embraced the darkness. I was starting to get tired of white.

When I opened my eyes again, a little more time had passed.

I was still stuck in the white space.

"Haaa..."

My mind had recovered, and so did my mana.

Sitting up straight, I extended my hand.

"Again..."

And tried again.

.

.

Time flowed.

A week passed like this.

Or something like that. I had lost track of time.

In the time, the only thing I did was practice. Hunger, thirst, and sleep weren't a problem for me. I could practice for as long as I wanted.

But...

*Tzzzz—!*

Once again.

I failed.

"Ahhhhhh....!"

I reached out for my head to pull my hair, but...

There was nothing left.

.....I had already ripped out all the hair on my head.

"Dammnnnnn it!!"

Rage had already taken hold of me.

But even that had its limit.

"Haaa ... Haa..."

In another week, I had lost my voice.

"....."

I slumped down on the ground and blankly stared at the white world.

I was tired now.

So tired that the anger that had taken control of me was slowly starting to subside.

When will I get out?

Wasn't this enough...?

For how much longer did I have to be here?

I already understood anger.

So...

Let me out!

Let me fucking out...!!!

Now!!

Please...!

I....

Can't...

*C-crak—!*

As if the world had finally listened to my prayers, the space shattered and darkness overtook my vision once more.

One that was broken by a sudden notification.

?| Lvl 1. [Anger] EXP + 23%

"H-hah..."

I felt the coarse texture of the ground beneath.

The cold wind in the sky.

And the faint earthy smell of the soil.

I was back.

Finally...

"Hahahaha..."

I started to laugh, unknowingly. A certain emotion boiled in my chest. It was a raging fire... A volcano that was on the verge of erupting.

It threatened to take hold of my body.

But...

All I could do was laugh.

"Cough... Haha..."

Even as I coughed up blood, all I could do was laugh.

So much time had passed, and yet...

I still hadn't managed to achieve success.

How could I not laugh?

It was pathetic.

I was pathetic.

"Haha-Uekh!"

Then, something held me by the neck, and I felt my body lift from the ground.

"....Have you lost it?"

It was the hooded figure.

"I was told not to kill you, but..."

Though I couldn't see, he appeared to be frowning under the hood. I didn't care enough to wait for his next words.

My chest was burning.

I needed to let it out.

My hands slowly raised. They neared for his arm. So long as I touch him I'll be able to...

"What are you doing...?"

His eyes snapped down to stare at my hands.

".....!!"

*Bang—!*

"Akh...!"

I felt my back crack as I crashed against something hard. My mind buzzed, and my vision blurred.

What happened...?

I glanced around me and noticed the pieces of trunk around me.

'Ah.'

"Shit, I don't know what to do."

The hooded's figure voice reached me from the front.

Ruffling his head, he mumbled,

"Should I just kill you? My orders were to keep you alive. Ugh, when will that bastard get here?"

That bastard?

There was someone else...?

Haha.

I wanted to laugh again. How fucked was this situation? Had it ever been possible for me to escape this situation?

"Cough...! Cough...!"

Blood spilled all over my pants as I coughed.

I looked up at the hooded figure, reaching for every breath.

"Stay put, will you?"

He began to raise his hand, a purple magic circle floating in front of him.

I widened my eyes and prepared to move my body, but the magic circle never pointed at me.

The ground shuddered.

*Tuck!*

And several skeletal hands reached out from the ground.

"What..."

The sight stunned me.

Clawing up from the ground, they slowly pulled themselves up to reveal the figures of several skeletons.

"Necromancer...?"

The hooded figure flicked his hand.

The skeletons approached me from all sides.

*KubKubKubKub.*

"That should keep you from moving. Don't even think about using your powers on them, unlike me, they don't have feelings."

"This..."

I gritted my teeth and stared at the approaching skeletons.

The pain that was invading my chest was growing with each second, and it was getting hard to sustain. But as he said... Skeletons had no feelings, and unless I touched him, there was no way for me to affect him.

*'What do I do...?'*

I grabbed onto the tree trunk and forced myself up.

My legs were shaky and my only support was the tree behind me.

Without it, I'd still be on the floor.

*KubKubKubKub.*

The skeletons were now a few meters in front of me.

It's over.

*'...I don't want it to be over.'*

One more time.

I moved my hand behind my back.

A warm current flowed from my abdominal area.

It was a familiar process.

One that I had done countless amounts of time.

Each time ending in failure.

More!

My mana drained.

I started to perceive pain even more vividly. The pain from my broken back, the pain in my mouth and the taste of my blood, the fire raging in my lungs, and the boiling feelings that were spilling from my chest...

I perceived everything.

Vividly.

And it was tearing my mind apart.

But...

*'Come...!'*

I endured that pain and added to it.

If it meant success...!

Rune One—Rune Two—Rune Three—Rune Four—Rune Five—Rune Six—Rune Seven—Rune Eight—Rune Nine—Rune Ten—Rune Eleven.

The runes were connecting.

This was a step I had reached thousands of times before.

I always failed here.

A part of me was already expecting my inevitable failure.

I thought it'd be like this even now.

I really did.

But then...

*Click—*

"Ah."

As if some shackles broke free, my mind cleared.

The mana flowed without interruption. It didn't stop and shatter like it usually did. As if a path had formed, the mana in my body flowed toward an end.

This is...

I could feel the mana bend and twist at the tip of my fingers.

Purple points scattered around my vision.

They were spread apart.

But it felt like I could do something.

As if I was entranced, I raised my hand which had turned wholly purple, and pointed in their direction.

Tangible purple hands sprouted out from that point.

"Uh?"

They clasped on the hooded figure's clothes.

But they shattered almost immediately.

Still.

"Ukh."



It was enough.

"What the..."

The hooded figure fell on one knee.

"W-What i..."

"Kh..!"

My body moved forward.

I stumbled forward.

Raising my hand, I glanced around and tapped three other points around me.

Hands sprouted again.

They latched onto the skeletons, halting their movements for a brief moment.

But that was enough.

I stumbled forward.

Toward the hooded figure who had grown pale.

[Hands of Malady] — It wasn't a powerful spell. However, when caught, one would experience hallucinations, nausea, and vertigo for a brief moment. The stronger one was, the less effective this was.

It was because of this that I had to keep moving.

As if bewitched, my steps hurried.

But just as I neared him...

*Thump!*

My legs faltered and I stumbled forward.

"Ukh...!"

*'No, not yet... So close...'*

I reached my hand forward and grasped the soil.

Purely out of desperation, I clawed myself forward.

Time seemed to flow slowly, but all of this had happened in a matter of seconds.

I had to be fast.

'Almost.'

His foot was close.

So close to me...

So long as I managed to touch it...

It was only a few centimeters away...

I was the closest yet, and yet... it felt the furthest I had ever been.

It reminded me of a previous thought.

*'The world rejects me.'*

My very existence didn't belong to this world.

I wasn't meant to be here.

...But was that really the case?

Did the world truly reject me?

It didn't.

I was the one who rejected the world.

The existence that was known as Julien.

And everything that came with it.

It wasn't the world that rejected me.

It was I who was rejecting it.

And that made me understand... If I wanted to survive in this world, I needed to accept who I was.

Accept that I was no longer back on earth but in a different place. One with different rules, and set of morals.

I was no longer Emmet Rowe.

I was now Julien Dacre Evenus.

While I mustn't forget my past, I also mustn't forget my present.

And with such thoughts.

My hand...

Ah—

It finally reached his foot.

And I let everything out.

'Anger.'

"Ahhhhhhh....!"

A scream resounded. It echoed loudly in the sky as it pierced through everything.

It was overwhelming.

*Thump!*

He fell on his back and held his head with both hands.

"Ahhh! Ahhhhhh!"

I could relate.

After all... He was experiencing all the anger I had felt in the immersive state. All of it in a concentrated bundle.

All at once.

"Ahhhh! Ahhhhhh!"

He trashed on the ground, pulling at his hair with force.

"....Ukh."

I clung to the ground and pushed myself up.

It wasn't over yet.

Reaching for the nearest rock, I stumbled forward, only stopping a few meters away from him.

"Ahhhh! Ahhhhh!!!"

My lips trembled, and I took a deep breath.

I...

"Kh. "

My eyes closed and my hand raised.

*Pfttt—*

"Ueht!"

Blood splattered over me as I smashed down with the rock.

My entire stomach churned at the sensation and unknowingly, my mouth parted open as something came out of my throat.

"Bleergh!"

It was puke.

But...

"Ukh... Haaa..."

Taking a deep breath, I once again smashed down with the rock.

*Pfttt—*

The sight upset my stomach further as everything flooded out of my stomach.

"Bleergh!"

In my mind...

The thought of killing someone... and witnessing such a gruesome sight...

*'No, he was going to kill me...'*

I had no choice.

Yes.

I had to do this.

*Pfittt—*

"Bleergh!"

But even so...

My stomach continued to betray my thoughts as I continued to bash the head with my hand.

Blood continuously spilled all over me as I raised my hand and smashed it down.

Over.

And over.

And over again.

*Thud.*

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

I only stopped when my body could no longer move.

Lying on the ground...

I stared at my hands.

"....."

Even as I bled, and my bones were broken...

"D-did it..."

The only thing I thought about was the fact that I had succeeded.

That I... hadn't failed.

After so much struggle. I had managed to succeed.

And that...

Felt so liberating.

It tore away at all the other thoughts that were clouding my mind.

"Huuu..."

Gradually my eyes closed and darkness overtook my vision.

I was tired, and I still didn't know what was going on.

But...

For the first time in a very long time.

I...

Felt joy.

?| Lvl 1. [Joy] EXP + 2%

\*\*\*

Oof, that was a very long chapter. And also a bonus for reaching another goal. Thank you so much again!

This chapter is updated by

## **Chapter 27: The one the world rejects [5]**

*Rustle—*

The bushes swayed, and a figure emerged.

It was a little girl with black hair and deep eyes. Casually holding onto a pastry, she tossed it in her mouth and wiped her lips.

Her eyes squinted slightly as she savored the sweet pastry.

Num...

Her form started to shift.

Her height started to increase, and her expression started to mature.

Gradually, the silhouette of an extremely charming woman began to unfold. Glossy black hair, deep hazel eyes...

"...."

Delilah blankly stared at the scene in front of her.

It was a gruesome sight. One that would cause the normalst of people to feel sick.

Lying beside a mushed-up body was none other than Julien.

The Black Star.

She recalled the scene she witnessed, and only a thought crossed her mind.

".....He's weak."

That he was weak.

But...

"His mind is not."

It was strong.

Very strong.

"Not bad..."

All of this had been a test.

Such an attack... as if it could really happen when she was overseeing the institute.

Evaluating the enemy, and judging that they weren't strong, she allowed for them to do whatever they pleased, and let them teleport Julien and Leon out of the Academy. All she did was follow the mana trace from the spell to get to where they were.

It wasn't that far. Took her no time to get there and oversee the situation.

In case they couldn't handle them, she'd interfere.

She had been prepared to interfere during Julien's struggle, but...

Yet again...

He showed her why she had selected him as the Black Star. His anger... desperation... she could feel it from where she was.

The image of his expression lingered in her mind even until now.

To the point where she opened her lips to mutter,

"Anger..."

Her hands trembled, but it wasn't much.

Nothing compared to how he did it.

Her expression showed signs of cracking as she faintly smiled.

"....I guess he's better than me."

In the Emotive field, that was.

It was a funny thought.

It wasn't as though she was talented in such a field. She could use emotive magic, but it wasn't excellent.

In a sense... she felt a sense of defeat.

"...."

Her gaze continued to linger over Julien. More specifically, toward his forearm, where a familiar tattoo rested.

She wanted to see what he'd do in such a situation. Catch him lacking... but he never faltered. His performance was flawless.

To the point where Delilah started to question herself.

'....*Am I wrong?*'

But clearly, the tattoo he had was the same...

"...."

Her delicate brows gently knit together.

"What a headache."



Flicking her hand, Julien's body levitated upwards. Nudging her fingers, his body drifted towards her.

Stopping just a few inches away, she brought her finger to his neck.

"....Nothing serious."

His body wasn't exactly in the best of shapes, but his heart was steady. There were no life-threatening injuries.

He was at most tired.

As for his broken bones and body...

That much could be handled by the infirmary. It would take at most a couple of days for him to be fully healed.

"Hm?"

Sensing something, Delilah's head turned to face the distance. She felt a subtle mana trace coming from there.

That's when she recalled.

"Ah, right."

There was someone else that was here.

Her form gradually started to blend with the world alongside Julien's. Before long, the two of them disappeared.

"...."

*Swoosh—*

Just as the two of them left, a change started to take place in the surroundings.

The broken trees in the distance started to repair, the body on the ground shattered in fragments, and everything returned to how it had been a few hours prior.

*Rustle—*

The trees rustled under the breeze of the wind, and all traces of what had been disappeared.

It was as if nothing had ever happened...

\*\*\*

Dark.

My vision was dark.

And it was cold.

But that cold didn't last for long.

Something warm embraced my body. It felt nice.

To the point where I wanted to bask in it for a little longer. But... I knew I couldn't. This comfort... It wasn't something that I was meant to enjoy.

My reality wasn't as comfortable as this.

That much I knew.

As if a switch had been flipped, my eyes opened, and light entered my vision.

"W-where am I...?"

That was the first thing I thought when I looked up.

It was a white ceiling. One I wasn't familiar with. My head shifted, and I managed to look down.

I was lying in bed.

The room I was in wasn't anything big. With a wooden table opposite the bed and a metal cabinet, the room felt rather lacking.

It was bland.

"...."

The pungent smell of alcohol lingered in the air as my nose scrunched up. The sterile scent hinted at the fact that I was in some sort of medical center.

But where exactly?

"Ukh..."

Just as I thought to check, my face stiffened.

My entire body was in pain, and I could barely lift my head.

But I also understood something...

*'I am safe.'*

I didn't know why I felt this way. The place was unfamiliar, and yet... I didn't feel like I was in any danger.

Of course, even if I was in danger... I didn't have the time to think about it.

"Ukhg...!"

Memories from before started to flood my mind, and my stomach churned.

I hastily looked around before leaning over the bedside.

And...

"Blergh...!"

Once again, I puked.

"Blergh...!"

It all came out at once. I wasn't able to hold it and just flowed out from my stomach.

"Blergh...!"

My throat hurt and my eyes started to sting.

I was also struggling to breathe as I barely had any time to catch my breath. It was just endless.

The reality of the situation finally started to hit me...

I had killed someone.

"...Haa..."

It wasn't so much that I was distraught by that idea. He had been trying to kill me... I was merely defending myself.

But...

As I recalled the way that I killed him.

The blood that spilled with each swing.

The smell of it as it invaded my nostrils.

The pieces of his brain that splattered...

"Blergh...!"

My stomach once again turned over, and I continued to puke.

But this time...

Nothing came out. I only made the sound, but nothing came out. I had emptied my entire stomach. There was nothing left for me to puke.

"..."

I wiped my lips and took deep and even breaths.

I felt like utter shit.

Every time I thought back to the memories, my mouth would gag. I wished I could forget all about that memory and just move on, but...

*'I can't forget.'*

I mustn't forget.

Like I said, it was time for me to accept the world.

Who I now was... And the morals of this world. I had to accept them. I couldn't stay as Emmet Rowe forever. I had to... become Julien Dacre Evenus.

The world didn't reject me.

I rejected it.

And it was time for me to accept it.

From its laws to its morals... I needed to conform my way of thinking to it.

Only this way would I be able to find what I wanted.

Therefore, I closed my eyes and replayed the scene in my mind. Over and over again. I tried to recall all the details. From the sounds to the smells... all that I could think of.

I tried to recall.

"...Ukgh."

My throat gagged each time, but I let my mind immerse in the memories.

I knew that this wasn't going to be enough.

That it was going to take time for me to adjust to this sort of mentality, but... One had to start from somewhere.

And this was my starting point.

Creaaaaak...

The door of the room creaked open as a figure draped in white robes entered. With tall blonde hair and green eyes, he scanned the room and sighed.

"...I was wondering why there was so much sound."

He flicked his hand once, and all the puke on the floor disappeared. So did the smell, which made me feel better.

"Let's start with the introduction. I'm Dr. Gabel Wright. I'm in charge of healing you."

"...Oh."

I lowered my eyes and sat back.

"Am I at the institute?"

"Oh? You're aware?"

"Mhm."

It wasn't that hard to figure out. I had been thinking about it for a bit, but was it really possible for something like this to happen under the watch of the institute that boasted itself to be the number one in the empire?

No...

That was most likely not the case.

But... If that was the case, why did something like this happen? Were they just incompetent.. or was there more to it?

'Fucking game.'

"The Chancellor personally brought you back here in the middle of the night. Nobody is aware that you're here yet."

Taking out a wooden pad, the doctor glanced at it before continuing.

"...Broken collarbone, three fractured ribs, a punctured lung, spinal fracture... What sort of situation did you get yourself into?"

"Haa.."

I inwardly laughed. I wanted to know, too.

In the end, I was going to be stuck here for a bit...

Great.

"Well..."

Putting the clipboard down, he ruffled his hair.

"The injuries aren't anything serious or anything like that."

"...?"

"So you should be fine with leaving by tomorrow."

"...??"

"I'll be leaving to check on my other patients. Rest for now. I'll come to check up on you later."

He left just like that.

"Ah..."

Clank—

The door closed and silence enveloped the room. I thought back to his words and found myself blinking twice...

"Injuries aren't anything serious...?"

Broken collarbone, three fractured ribs, a punctured lung, spinal fracture...

"Should be fine to leave by tomorrow?"

This...

"Haha."

I couldn't help but laugh.

Although this was another world... It still left me stunned.

"...Fucking ridiculous."

"What is?"

"No, it's...!"

I abruptly looked to my left, and my eyes widened.

When did she...

Leaning against the nearest table, her long, flowing black hair draped down her shoulder as she cocked her head.

Her appearance was so blinding that I struggled to comprehend what was before me.

"So...? What's so ridiculous?"

"...."

Memories started to flood my mind, and I felt my face stiffen. It took me no time to figure out who the woman before me was.

One of the seven Monarchs.

The one who was closest to the Zenith.

Delilah V. Rosemberg.

## **Chapter 28: Assistant [1]**

"What... I..."

The words were stuck in my mouth. I had a hard time understanding the situation. No, not quite.

An idea formed in my mind shortly after, and I was able to calm myself down.

"You're here regarding the incident."

This much should've been obvious.

Once my mind calmed down and I processed my situation, I got a picture of the situation.

".....Perhaps you want a report? My side of the story regarding the situation."

The words flowed out of my mouth smoothly.

I had been puking just moments prior, and my head was still throbbing, but even in such a state, I was able to think clearly.

My pain had not been for nothing.

"I can do that, but I'd like to know something in return."

"....."

Delilah didn't answer and just stared at me. With her arms crossed, she casually leaned her head back.

I felt a shiver run down my body as her gaze swept my body. It felt intense, and the hair at the back of my neck rose.

*'As expected of one of the strongest people... Just standing next to her feels pressuring.'*

I had already experienced this sensation before, during the examination, but compared to then, the pressure I was feeling was to a greater degree.

It felt suffocating.

And then,

"...Alright."

She blinked.

The pressure that was covering me disappeared. Almost as if it had never been there.

"Let's do that. You ask me a question; I'll ask one too."

"..."



I silently nodded my head.

Then, musing over my thoughts, I opened my mouth and carefully said,

"....You were there, weren't you? Watching everything."

Even now, the idea that the institute wasn't aware of this incident didn't make sense. Surely, their security wasn't that bad.

For an incident like that to occur to someone as important as me.

The Black Star.

It just didn't make sense.

And it was with such thoughts that I was convinced of my theory.

But that wasn't all.

"I overheard the doctor say, 'The Chancellor personally brought you back'. Since you were the one who brought me back, I have reason to believe that you were the one who was watching."

I paused and mustered the courage to look into her eyes. They were deep. So deep that I felt like they could suck me in at any second.

But swallowing my saliva, I finished,

"...I'm right, aren't I?"

Silence plunged the room after I said my piece.

Delilah's gaze continued to linger over me as if she was trying to gauge my inner feelings.

Just when I thought she'd do something, her mouth opened.

"It is said that when an Emotive Mage reaches the last stage in their path, the fifth stage of completion and the perfect path, they become capable of seeing emotions, not within them, but within others. In such cases, it becomes almost impossible for someone to lie to them. Or hide how they feel..."

I quietly listened to her words.

While I didn't understand where she was going with this, the piece of information surprised me.

*'By the fifth stage...'*

Did that equate to level five?

Was this what she meant by the fifth stage?

If so...

*'Does that mean that if I reach level five, I'll be able to tell whenever someone is experiencing said emotion...?'*

That...

It sounded rather useful.

But still, what did that have to do with our conversation?

Could it be...

"....Are you perhaps implying that you can see my emotions?"

"No."

But she was quick to shake her head.

"With regards to Emotive Magic, I'm inferior to you."

Ah—

Was it just me, or did she look a little annoyed? Her expression hadn't changed the entire time but her tone seemed to give off that impression.

Still.

"What does that have to do with my question?"

"Nothing."

The fuck—

"..."

She looked back at me without as much of a change in her expression.

I didn't know how to feel about this. What kind of weird nonsense was this? Before I could say anything else, she spoke again.

"Yes, I was watching you."

The casualness at which she said those words left me a little stumped.

She spoke in a manner that made it seem obvious.

Well, it was...

"And...?"

"You did well."

That...

What was I even expecting? Still, it did answer one of my questions. I had never been in danger and would've probably interfered if the situation called for it.

A test maybe?

A little part of me felt annoyed by the thought, but another felt grateful.

If it weren't for the situation that placed me in a point of despair, I would've never been able to progress my magic.

*'Ah, yes... My magic.'*

Suddenly recalling the fact that I had managed to progress my other magic, a sense of relief and joy washed over me.

Finally...

"My turn."

"Hm?"

Ah, right.

She also had a question.

I prepared myself to hear what sort of question she had for me. I, too, was curious. Was she just going to ask me about the situation? Or...

"Your tattoo..."

Uh—

"Could you show it to me?"

"..."

I sat stupefied, unable to process the situation. Out of all the things she could've asked, she had asked about the tattoo.

Just what exactly...

"....Are you not going to show it to me?"

Her tone lowered, and my body shuddered. Looking into her eyes, I could only see an icy coldness, and I knew she was being serious.

I remained composed and showed her my arm.

While I wasn't sure about her goal, I, too, was curious about my tattoo.

Perhaps... she'd be able to help me figure something out

"Hmm."

As she lowered her head to stare at that tattoo, her hair draped to the side, allowing me to get a better look at her face.

My gaze didn't linger for long, and I kept my expression firm.

But...

'Wow.'

She was really something.

I had a hard time thinking if she could even be measured by 'earth' standards. She was simply something else.

*'Get a grip.'*

I was quick to shake such thoughts from my mind. It was merely a fleeting admiration on my part.

"....Inverted Sky."

All of a sudden, her crisp voice reached my ears, and our eyes met. Her hand grasped my forearm.

"Does that ring a bell?"

Her grip tightened, almost to the point where it hurt. But I remained steady.

"Inverted Sky?"

I pondered over her words and eventually shook my head.

"No."

I had no clue. Was this the name of an organization? Someone's title? Or the name of an object?

I really had no idea.

"..."

Delilah raised her head, and once again, our eyes met.

My body froze.

The deeper I stared into her eyes, the deeper I felt myself sink. An endless abyss seemed contained within those eyes, rendering me stuck on the spot.

Her voice layered as she spoke.

"I'll ask again. Have you heard of it before?"

"...No."

My answer remained the same.

I really hadn't heard of it before.

It was when I felt my breath leave my body that she finally released her grip on my forearm, and everything returned to normal.

Only then did I feel like I could finally breathe again.

"You don't seem to be lying."

She cocked her head lightly, pinching her chin as she leaned back on the wooden table.

"Strange, so strange..."

*'What's going on with her?'*

Her behavior was really strange. While she certifiably carried herself as someone of importance, she also gave off a rather odd feeling.

Like...

'Scary.'

I couldn't quite put it into words.

But she seemed to have two sides of her. A normal one, and one that felt extremely scary. Just recalling her eyes made me shudder.

*'I wonder which side of her is the real one?'*

"Are you thinking something weird?"

I almost flinched but barely held myself back before shaking my head.

"No."

How did she know?

"...."

Her sharp gaze fell on me, and I felt my back shudder.

Thankfully, it was only for a brief moment before she said,

"Your extra-curricular activity. The Comedy Club..."

"...Yes?"

Why was she suddenly bringing it up?

"I've put your application on hold."

Hold?

"Why?"

"...."

She didn't answer immediately and stared at me. Her gaze didn't feel as pressuring this time.

Then...

"You're weak."

She said something I was all too aware of.

"The weakest Black Star. That's what some people call you."

"..."

I pursed my lips.

"...I was the one that nominated you as the Black Star."

"..."

"And my decision was the correct one."

Surprised, I felt my eyes widen."

"Instead of joining the Comedy Club, become my assistant."

"...!"

"I won't be able to teach you much, and I won't protect you, but whenever I'm free, you can ask me for advice. You're talented in the Emotive field but untalented in the other."

For the first time, her face showed signs of cracking.

".....That fifth state I told you about."

Her lips gently pulled up.

"I wonder if you can achieve it."

Her figure gradually blurred, disappearing from my sight like a gust of wind. But not before leaving a few words behind.

"Think about it."

Like that, she was gone.

"..."

I stood blankly on the spot for a couple of seconds before finally snapping out of it.

Did the one closest to the Zenith just ask me to become their assistant?

"This is ridiculous..."

The entire situation was.

Her motive was rather obvious. For whatever reason, she wanted to observe me. It perhaps had something to do with the tattoo on my hand, but I wasn't sure.

For now, it seemed to be the most plausible reason.

*'Should I refuse the offer?'*

It was certainly a good offer.

However, I also understood that it wasn't one without its motives.

But the more I thought about it, the more I realized how beneficial it was to me. To have someone as strong as her occasionally give me tips on an area I lacked... How many people would be jealous of that?

She also wasn't forcing me to become her assistant.

It was an offer.

Whether I took it or not was up to me.

*Creaaaaakk—*

The door of the room opened all of a sudden, and a familiar figure entered. With a cast over his arm, he didn't look to be in the greatest of conditions.

Right, he also must've...

I was the first one to speak.

"...I take it you didn't have a great time."

"I did not."

He looked at me up and down.

"...You seemed to have had a better time."

"Ha, yes."

My entire body felt like it was breaking. Every single movement hurt, and my mind was not in the best of shape.



Leon casually looked around and tilted his head.

"Was someone here?"

I raised my brow.

How could he tell?

"The smell."

"Ah."

That made sense. I proceeded to recount my events with the Chancellor. I didn't tell him everything and left a few things out. I still couldn't trust him. But I told him about the general situation and her offer.

His response after hearing all of it was...

"You should take the offer."

"You think?"

"It's a great opportunity for you. I wouldn't reject it if I were you. It's much better than..."

He stopped his sentence there as I noticed his left brow twitch.

I cocked my head.

"Better than what?"

"....Ehm."

His eyes darted away from me, and he rigidly turned to face the door.

"I have to go."

"Why can't a nose be twelve inches long?"

He visibly flinched, and his expression changed.

At that moment, I recalled Delilah's words.

*'It is said that when an Emotive Mage reaches the last stage in their path, the fifth stage of completion and the perfect path, they become capable of seeing emotions.'*

Staring at Leon, I could certainly see it.

The emotion he was feeling.

Fear.

Had I already reached that stage?

Hmm.

Obviously not.

But...

"|-"

Staring at Leon, I nodded my head.

Poor soul.

".....Because then it'd be a foot."

\*\*\*

Bonus chap for hitting Power Stones goal! Save me...

## **Chapter 29: Assistant [2]**

It was after two days that I was finally allowed out of the infirmary.

Though I was released, my body was still in pain. I hurt all over, and every single movement made me flinch.

"Huaaam...."

I was also rather sleepy. The pain made it hard for me to sleep. I was the type of person that moved a lot during their sleep, so...

".....What a pain."

The current time was 5:30 P.M.

It was currently Monday, and the week had already started. Because it was already so late, I had pretty much skipped all the lessons that I was set to attend.

It was a bit of a pity considering that I was already lagging behind compared to the others, but what could I do?

*'At least, I can use magic now...'*

This wasn't exactly the most ideal situation for me.

Thankfully, all hope wasn't lost. The Extracurricular activities were set to start today. My choice was already set.

I was going to accept Delilah's offer to be her 'assistant'.

Whether her goal was to keep a close watch on me or something else, I didn't care.

If it was going to benefit me, then so be it.

I...

Will do anything to get stronger.

\*\*\*

"I'm glad you decided to take my offer."

Delilah stood waiting for me at the entrance of the Rottingham Hall. I thought her appearance would attract the attention of all those around us, but...

*'How weird.'*

Nobody was glancing our way. It was almost as if we didn't exist.

Why...

That was when Delilah's voice reached my ears.

"I've cast a spell that makes it hard for others to notice our presence."

"Ah..."

To think that there was such a spell.

Impressive.

"Come, follow me."

*Tak—*

Her heels gently clicked against the marble floor as she walked into the hall. I followed her from behind.

'Wow...'

As we walked, I couldn't help but admire the interior structure.

The building had a square shape, featuring a large opening at the top for sunlight. In the middle of the hall, there was a spacious garden with neatly arranged flowers, trees, and benches. Adjacent to the garden, small pillars separated it from the corridor where we were walking.

It was a breathtaking sight.

One that I didn't want to take my eyes away from.

"It's nice isn't it?"

Delilah continued to lead me forward, her eyes never once looking at the garden to our left.

"You might as well get used to it since you'll be working with me from now on."

"Right..."

We continued to walk for a bit before going up a flight of stairs leading up to the second floor where we finally stopped in front of a large wooden door.

"....."

Delilah stood in front of the door for a couple of seconds without saying a word. Just when I thought something was wrong, she twisted the door and opened it revealing her office space.

I stopped dead in my tracks and looked up.

"....."

"....."

We both stood at the entrance without saying a word.

That was until I felt compelled to speak.

"Quit... I'm allowed to quit, right?"

"No."

A flat-out refusal.

Expressionless, Delilah surveyed her surroundings before making her way to her desk positioned at the room's far end. The desk was situated right behind a large window that flooded the entire space with natural light.

As she headed for her desk, Delilah carefully walked around the stacks of papers and wrappers that littered the ground.

How would I even begin to describe this place...?

A dump? A mess?

It was...

"I'm a very busy person."

Delilah went on to say.

"....I don't have time to clean up."

She sat down on her desk and reached out for her drawer where even more wrappers spilled. As her hand dug into the drawer, her brows knit together before finally relaxing as she took out a chocolate bar.

Unwrapping it, she tossed the wrapper to the side before placing the bar in her mouth.

Her eyes squinted the moment the bar entered her mouth.

But...

All I could do was stare at the wrapper that fell to the ground.

*'Don't have time to clean up...?'*

What sort of nonsense...

"What?"

As if noticing my expression, Delilah turned to look at me. I didn't say anything and just stared at the wrapper on the ground.

"Ah..."

And then, as if realizing, her head turned.

".....Force of habit."

At least she was honest...

I honestly didn't know how to feel about the situation. On one hand, I started to think that maybe I had fallen for a trap.

That her goal in having me become her assistant was so that I could help her clean up. But I knew this was ridiculous.

Someone of her stature could surely hire someone to clean up her mess.

On the other hand, I was stumped.

One of the Seven Monarchs.

The one closest to the Zenith.

....Was this her real personality?

This...

I wasn't sure how to feel.

"So..."

Delilah's voice reached my ears. I turned to look at her. Staring at me with an expression of utmost seriousness, she glanced around. She didn't say a word, but her meaning was clear.

Only that...

I pointed toward my mouth.

"You've got..."

\*\*\*

There were over a hundred different extracurricular activities that were offered to the first-year cadets.

Amongst them, the most popular were [Magic Theory and Expertise], and [Sword Unification and Mana Composition].

Because the two clubs shared similar elements, today the classes were unified.

A group of four stood at the end of the training room.

"What happened to you? Why did you skip today's lessons?"

Each of them was dressed in robes, and their appearances and demenour attracted the attention of all those present. It couldn't be helped. They were the top four rankers of the first year. Leon, Aoife, Evelyn, and Luxon.

"Can't you see from his hand that he got injured?"

These were the words of Luxon, a young man with brown hair and deep blue eyes. He was ranked fifth amongst the first years, and just like Leon, he was a knight.

"Uh, yeah... I noticed."

Evelyn, who was staring at Leon's hand, tilted her head.

"How did yo—"

She stopped herself mid-sentence and her eyes opened.

"Ah."

There was someone else that had been missing today.

Could it be...

She looked at Leon who was blankly staring into the distance, his thoughts unknown.

"It's probably not what you're thinking."

Aoife, who had been quiet the entire time, finally spoke.

"No. I—"

"If the two of them really fought, I don't think the situation would be as quiet as this. The two of them would be in the disciplinary hall."

"Right..."

Fighting among cadets was prohibited. If cadets were caught fighting against each other, they'd be severely punished by the school board.

Still, such rules couldn't stop Evelyn from overthinking. .c(o)m

*'But what if they fought without the institute knowing?'*

Would the institute interfere then? ...And if they really had fought, who won between the two of them?

"Never mind that..."

Luxon switched up the conversation.

"The situation is getting rather troublesome, right? ...I thought things would calm down after a while, but it seems like they're hell-bent on pushing us down."

"Right... It's getting quite annoying."

Factions were already starting to form between the first years. Primarily, it was the commoners banding up together against the nobles. The situation wasn't hard to handle, however, there were already a few conflicts between the lower-end nobles and commoners.

The worst part of it all was that Aoife had indirectly become the face of the situation when she interfered with an emerging conflict where she ended up defending the lower-end nobles.

Cooly looking into the distance, she said,

"Two sides were fighting so I just stopped the fight. I interfered without knowing the situation. Because of it... I'm now dragged into this situation. I already warned them that I want no part in this, but they refuse to listen."

While the Megrail name held a lot of weight, within the institute, it was a meaningless title.

The only title that actually mattered was that of the Black Star. Such situations were not common as the cadets usually banded with the Black Star.

It was the Black Star's role to stop such meaningless conflict.

But things were different this year with the Black Star not caring at all about creating factions and banding the first years together.

He was the primary reason why a situation like this had happened.

Had she been the Black Star, then...

Aoife quietly bit her lips and looked at Leon.

"Do you think you can get him to do something?"



Leon looked down and met Aoife's eyes. He stared at her for a while before shaking his head.

"No."

A flat-out refusal.

"Even if you force him, he won't do it. He hates these kinds of things."

"Are you sure?"

When Luxon asked, Leon nodded.

"Very sure."

"Shit."

With a curse, Luxon ruffled his hair.

"...Why did the institute choose someone like him to be the Black Star? If he can't even fulfill his own role, then what's the point in keeping him there? At the rate the situation is going, the first years will be split into different factions. That has never happened before. We'll become the laughingstock of the second and third years."

At that, nobody answered. His words held some truth.

With Julien not fulfilling his role as the Black Star, the first years were in a mess.

At the rate they were going, the conflicts would get to the point where they would start interfering with everyone's studies.

The grim reality made Evelyn frown as she asked,

"What do we do?"

Aoife, who had been frowning the entire time, suddenly relaxed her brows.

"There's one thing we can do."

Everyone looked at her.

But just as she spoke, Evelyn's eyes widened. So did Luxon's. A figure appeared in their sight.

*Gulp—*

Evelyn felt a lump in her throat.

With calm and even steps, he neared them.

A perfect face.

With an aura distinct from the others, and cold eyes befitting his visage, he seemed to be the center of attention wherever he went.

And...

Finally, his expression...

It was extremely cold. Especially his eyes which shone like well-polished jewels.

"During the mid-terms..."

He stopped right behind Aoife who finished her sentence.

"... I'll take the title away from him."

### **Chapter 30: Progression Analysis [1]**

"....."

Her face remained blank as she felt a presence behind her. Taking note of the change in expressions of Evelyn and Luxon, Aoife had an idea of what was going on.

She coolly turned her head.

"You're here."

He stood taller than her, her height just barely reaching his chin.

*'He heard, didn't he?'*

There was no way he hadn't.

"....I am."

Indeed, hearing his confirmation, Aoife closed her eyes briefly. Then, collecting her thoughts, she spoke,

"Did you hear what I said?"

"I have."

Julien continued to stare at her with his usual detached eyes.

Aoife calmly stared into those eyes.

*'Those arrogant eyes... I wonder how long you'll be able to keep them like that?'*

Regardless of whether he had heard her or not, she didn't care. Her goal had always been to reach the top. Become the Zenith.

The fact that she wasn't ranked first in her year was already a huge blow to her ambition.

It wasn't something she had expected.

And for there to be two people who stood above her...

How could she accept something like this?

Therefore...

"The Black Star is not just a title. It is something that comes with responsibility. The situation is as is because you aren't doing your job."

Aoife didn't care if she came off as uptight, or annoying. There was a little truth in that. She was self-aware of that much.

However, her words were the truth and the truth only.

"It is your duty to make sure that all sides get along. Not me, but yours."

"....."

Aoife expected Julien to say something back, refute her words, and dismiss her in some way. Give her an excuse to openly challenge him.

However...

That never came.

Julien's expression eased and he took a step back. Without saying a single word, he turned around to glance into the distance. Where the other students were.

"...What am I supposed to do?"

Aoife's brows raised in surprise.

Her reaction was the mildest one. The one who had the greatest reaction was Evelyn who opened her eyes and looked at Julien with an expression that seemed as though she couldn't believe what she was seeing.

No, she really couldn't believe what she was seeing.

"I never asked to be the Black Star..."

He started to speak while glancing into the distance. His hazel eyes shone under the light of the sun while his well-kept hair swayed lightly under the breeze.

Aoife quietly listened to his words, her hands silently tensing. She was expecting him to look at her in disdain while saying something along the lines of, *'Do it yourself. Don't bother me with these meaningless tasks.'*

She could already envision the scene in her mind.

"...But just because I didn't ask to become the Black Star doesn't mean that I don't care for it. I have it, so I'd like to keep it."

However, to her surprise, he did none of that.

Rather, he did something completely out of her expectations.

"So..."

Lowering his head slightly, he deeply looked at everyone present.

".....Tell me what I'm supposed to do when the time comes."

Following his words, he walked past them.

Aoife stood dazed even as his scent faded away.

"...."

She just stood blankly on the spot.

The same was true for the others.

"Did he just..."

Luxon was the first one to break the silence as his head turned to stare at the departing Julien.

He turned to look at Leon.

"Didn't you say he wasn't going to do it? Was that just a lie? "

".....No."

Similarly confused, Leon's head turned to stare at Julien's back. Judging from his expression, he too seemed shocked by the situation.

Even though the situation turned out for the better...

*'I don't like this.'*

*'Without meaning to, I got swept in his rhythm.'*

Aoife was annoyed. Her neck heated and her hands tingled.

His mannerisms and the matter-of-fact tone he spoke with... It made it seem as though he was treating her as his servant.

*'Why am I the one that is supposed to tell you?'*

*'You said you wanted to keep your role but demand others to tell you how to do that role...'*

No, if you really wanted to do something, you'd already have done it by now. Just say a word or two... Show them your presence. Interfere personally. We shouldn't be the ones to tell you what you're supposed to do.

I'm not your secretary.

"What should we do? Should we gather the leaders of the factions to talk to him?"

Luxon asked tactlessly. Aoife secretly clenched her teeth and kept her expression firm.

".....You figure that out amongst yourselves."

She then went on to leave on her own.

"Eh? Aoife...! Where are you going?"

"...."

*Tak—*

Aoife kept walking despite hearing her name getting called out repeatedly by Luxon.

*'How laughable.'*

The entire situation was.

She wanted his help.

....And yet.

When he offered his help, she found herself growing mad.

Hypocrisy?

Maybe...

But it also became clear to Aoife.

The entire reason she was acting this way.

She had thought she had managed to bury such emotions—weaknesses—deep within her mind, but...

"...."

She silently stared at her hand. It was trembling slightly.

The reality of the situation hit her and her face cracked.

"Heh..."

A laugh escaped.

"...How ridiculous. Me of all people..."

Indeed.

She was jealous.

\*\*\*

It was late into the night, and I was back in my room.

In this familiar environment, I sat down on the ground and stared at my hand. A beautiful purple magic circle hovered above the tips of my fingers.

*Drip... Drip...*

Even as sweat dripped from my head, I kept my gaze fixed on the circle in front of me.

"I... really did it."

I still couldn't believe it.

The reality that was displayed in front of me.

I... could finally use my first true spell. Outside of Emotive Magic, this was my very first spell.

*Ziing—*

I gently lifted my hand up, inserting it into the magic circle which slowly moved down. Gradually, my hand started to change, turning completely purple.

Just like last time, purple spots started to appear in my vision.

The furthest one was all the way toward the end of the living room. About fifteen meters away.

"....Is that the limit of my range?"

I moved back and the purple spot followed after.

"Seems to be the case."

I pushed my hand forward and lightly tapped on the spot.

*Swoosh—!*

Tangible purple hands began to sprout from the ground. One... Two... Three... Four... There were a total of four. They rose from the ground and tried to latch on to whatever was on top of them.

This persisted for several seconds before the hands shattered.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

By the time the spell was done, I was on my last breath.

My mana reserves were almost depleted. I had been at it for quite a while so it was only natural that I was tired.

"Five..."

That was the amount of times I could use the spell before running out of mana.

My current limit.

"Hooo..."

I lay on the floor with my arms wide.

I was tired.

I was exhausted.

I was on my last breath.

But...

"Haha..."

I think...

I was addicted.

\*\*\*

10:00 A.M. Karlson Hall.

The Karlson Hall was where the training grounds were located. The facility was extremely large, with over a thousand square meters of space, it was massive.

Today was an unusual class.

"Progression Analysis. Every quarter we will examine the cadet's progression throughout the year. There will be three things measured in the test. First, mana quantity and quality. Second, physical fitness, and lastly, mind endurance."

The professor in charge, a tall woman with long blonde hair and green eyes, Olivia J. Kelson started to explain.

"With the institute trying to ready you to enter the Mirror Dimension, it is important that we focus on all three aspects. Even if you are a mage, maintaining your body to a certain standard is necessary. In the chance that you find yourself in a situation where you can't defeat your opponent and are forced to run, your physical stamina will be an important factor."

She went on to talk about the importance of each testing point and how it would benefit us in the long term.

I carefully listened to each one of her words and made sure to take notes in my mind.



I was still a stranger to this world, and although what she was saying could be perceived as 'common sense'. Not all common sense applied to me.

There were certain things that I was unaware of.

"I will now divide you into three groups. There, you will follow your assigned assistant to take on the testing."

Names started to get called out one by one. Alongside the names, she'd point toward a certain assistant.

"Ravenscroft Luxon."

"Dangrove Rose."

"Ellert Leon."

"Tiperl Josephine."

"Megrail Aoife."

"Mylne Kiera."

"Verlic Evelyn."

.

.

.

"Evenus Julien."

When my name was called out, there was a certain pause before the professor frowned and pointed toward a large bald man. He stood tall, towering over my figure, and his thick eyebrows were knit into a frown as he stared at me.

For some reason, I felt the impression that he didn't quite like me...

Was it just me?

*'Maybe.'*

It could just be that he just looked intimidating.

For now, under the watchful eyes of all the students and staff, I made my way toward my group. A couple of familiar faces entered my vision when I walked forward.

More specifically a girl with long white hair and red eyes.

I stared at her for a brief moment and as if she could sense my gaze, her head turned and our eyes met.

Immediately, her face turned to one of displeasure. Loathing almost.

*'...I guess she still remembers the incident from before.'*

The one regarding the cigarette.

Indeed, that was my fault. I shouldn't have acted like that.

"Hurry along, we don't have all day to wait for you."

A rough voice directed itself toward me. When I looked up, I saw the assistant professor glaring at me from the distance.

Ah—

This guy...

He really did hate me after all.

But why...?

"...."

Knowing about the possible agenda against me, I kept my mouth shut and joined the group.

And as if I had some godly timing, the moment I joined the ground, the professor was done recounting all the names.

"I'm done over here."

She looked toward the assistant professors and announced.

"You may begin with the tests. Group one, please head toward the physical test. Group two, head for the mana test, and group three... Please proceed to the mental test."

We were group two which meant that our test was the mana test.

A part of me already dreaded the test knowing that my performance was going to be awful, but at the same time... I couldn't wait for the test.

What other people cared about me or whatnot. That was meaningless to me. What I cared about the most was seeing my current level.

Get a general idea of my overall level so that I could gauge the areas I needed to improve on.

"Once everyone is done with the test, we'll alternate sections. Off you go."

These were the last words of the professor before we were led by our respective assistant professors toward our designated section.

The space was large.

About the size of a classroom.

In the space, a large magic circle was drawn on the ground where a large table sat and three orbs appeared.

"This is the Mana Resonance Assessment."

The rough voice of the assistant professor began to spread.

"The test is simple. There are three orbs on the table. Each orb has its own distinctive function."

He pointed toward the orbs.

"The one on the left measures your mana quantity. The one in the middle measures your mana purity, and the one on the right measures your mana control. All you have to do is place your hand over the orb and channel your mana. A grade will be given to you after the test has ended."

Just as he said those words, his gaze fell on me.

I knew at that moment exactly what was about to happen. And he proved me right as he pointed toward the orbs.

"Julien..."

He called out my name, almost chewing on it.

"You're first."

\*\*\*

Bonus chapter for Power Stone Goal. You guys are killing it—me.