

Death 251

Death... and me

Chapter 251: Ambush

Rean and Roan ran quickly and stealthily. In fact, Roan would prefer to move alone. However, cultivators had Spiritual Sense on this side of the universe, so trying to keep oneself hidden wasn't an option unless you had a technique capable of it. That's why Rean came together. As one could imagine, Rean was using the Fourth Form of the Life Style to bend any Spiritual Sense that passed by them, just like light.

Too bad that it was so hard to control. Otherwise, Rean could use it on Malaka and Kentucky as well. Eventually, they arrived at the place where the roar came from.

"Arghhhhh!"

It was then that they saw a cultivator sent flying by the sweep of a tail. At the moment, five cultivators were fighting against what seemed to be a snake made of dark fog. However, on both sides of its mouth and tail, there was something that looked like blades. The cultivator that was sent flying just now had just been hit by it. Rean and Roan couldn't even say if he was still alive or not.

"It's a Fog Blade Python... but this one... is just huge!"

Roan nodded.

"Reliance alerted us before that a few Initial Stage Four demon beasts were also left alive in the Profound Abyss. This one ought to be one of them. The leader among them seems to be at least in the Late Stage of the Core Formation Realm, but even he is being suppressed. And that is already considering that his group has the advantage of numbers."

Rean also agreed with Roan.

"Let's get out of here. Those cultivators will eventually flee once they see they are not a match for it."

Thanks to Rean's Spiritual Sense Bending ability, neither the cultivators nor the python noticed the twins' presence. A few seconds later, Rean and Roan were already gone from the scene.

Malaka and Kentucky didn't have to wait much for them to come back.

"What was that sound?"

"It was a Stage Four demon beast. Let's leave this place in case it has some sensory ability that it can use to find us."

Malaka nodded, and the group immediately departed in another direction.

"We need to be careful. We haven't found a single Decaying Demon Beast at that level until now. From the looks of it, the ones that were left alive were those close to the Decaying Caves."

Malaka and Rean understood that as well, so they also got ready for anything that might happen.

Around one hour later, they finally found the first Decaying Cave Entrance. Of course, this was only one of the thousands. However, it was not because there were thousands that there were thousands of Vermilion Pools. The caves inside were connected, so you could totally bump into other groups that used other entrances. Also, the total number of Vermilion Pools was definitely not enough for everyone.

"Should we enter this one?"

Roan pondered a bit but shook his head.

"The amount of Yin Energy coming from the entrance through the Decaying Fog is not that much higher than the outside. If I'm not wrong, the thicker the Decaying Energy, the closer the entrance will be to a Vermilion Pool. After all, the Vermilion Pools are known to be one of the reasons for the Decaying Fog."

Rean and Malaka nodded.

"Great! Then let's find another one."

Roan then continued to lead their group further ahead, looking for an entrance with a lot of Yin Energy. They passed several of those caves, but Roan ignored them. They found a few groups of cultivators that had just arrived as well. However, after they saw that Rean's group gave up using the same cave as them, they discarded the idea of attacking them. It was better to conserve energy for when they enter the cave effectively.

However, there was one thing that those groups were surprised with. Because the Decaying Fog increased as one moved further into the underground world, it was even harder to proceed forward. The groups, duos, and lonely cultivators that made it to this point so quickly were the ones with the highest cultivations.

Most of the cultivators with lower cultivations were still making their way here and were still far away. Or perhaps, they died or gave up already. Seeing a group with three Foundation Establishment kids and a Stage Two demon bird was not what they expected. Sure enough, they made sure to remember the faces making up Rean's group. Some even recognized Malaka from the settlement gathering challenges.

Finally, Roan stopped in front of a cave entrance that seemed to interest him. He stayed in front of the Decaying Fog coming out of it for a few seconds and then nodded, satisfied.

"This is the one. Let's go."

However, just as they were about to enter the cave, Rean and Roan's hairs changed into black and white colors. Right after, they immediately attacked two dark corners around the cave. Simultaneously, Malaka and Kentucky gathered their energy and attacked another point that Rean told them with his Spiritual Sense. Rean even made sure to use his enhancement skill on Malaka first before dashing forward with Roan.

'Death Style, Second Form, Crescent Moon!'

'Death Style, Third Form, Three Claws of the Dragon!'

'Death Water Style, Second Form, Spinning Dragon Tail!'

Kentucky's body burst with Black and White Flames. He then flapped his wings while using his legs to help with the initial ascension. Right after, he descended like a meteor of Black and White Flames, attacking the same point with Malaka.

Swish, swish, swish!

Bang, bang, bang!

Boom!

"Ahhhhh!*

In the next second, all they could hear were several screams coming from the three points targeted by their group. It turned out that a group was mounting an ambush in that cave entrance. Not only that, but they seemed to know some techniques that also made it hard to detect with Spiritual Sense. Unfortunately for them, they might be able to hide from Spiritual Senses, but they can't hide their Life Forces! The moment Roan stopped in front of the cave, Rean already felt their presence in the shadows.

What was supposed to work in their favor turned out to be their mistake. The position where they were hidden didn't give the ambushers the option for dodging the attacks. With Rean and Roan's combat power at the Late Stage of the Core Formation Realm, plus their deadly techniques, the outcome was pretty much decided already.

In fact, the combo between Malaka and Kentucky was almost as powerful thanks to Rean's Enhancement Ability. The two of them were able to deliver a small area attack with the power of a Middle Stage Core Formation Realm cultivator.

But above all, their greatest mistake was underestimating Rean's group due to their age and cultivation. Their guards were utterly down, thinking that Rean's group was already dead in their hands.

Soon after, two more figures came out of two hidden places. They didn't even try to avenge their companions and turned around to flee into the cave. Rean's group wasn't the least bit surprised, though.

'Death Style, Fifth Form, Mirage Assault!'

Four Semi-Real Mirages identical to Rean and Roan appeared right in front of them and released their own attacks. Although they only had 70% of Rean and Roan's strength, it was more than enough to hold them down.

"Fuck! Who the hell are you?"

Roan coldly smiled as he dashed forward and stated.

"I'm Death. I came to send your souls into the path of reincarnation."

Rean almost burst into laughter after hearing that. Others might think that Roan was only provoking his enemies, but only he knew how real those words were.

With Malaka and Kentucky's help, Rean's group quickly finished them off. Of course, Roan left one alive to ask the same questions again.

"As I thought, you were one more of those guys contracted by Valeu to take this Pendant back. Have you never thought about the possibility that he was sending you to die?"

Roan didn't have to torture the guy. He opened his mouth the moment he was captured.

"I-I couldn't resist his offer. H-he promised that I could go to the capital and join his Samikil Clan. The Samikil Clan is one of the subordinate clans directly under the Imperial Family's rule. The number of resources they're given per year is unmatched by any sect in my country. I had to take that chance. Anyone in my position, even you guys, would do that too, right?!"

Roan shrugged his shoulders. In the end, it was the same promise that the other three groups received.

"You guys are really naive. You don't even know that even if I don't kill you here, you will die later anyway. Oh well, whatever..."

"Wait!"

"Hm? Is there anything else?"

"I-I am not a threat for you anymore, right? I'm only at the Initial Stage of the Core Formation Realm. Now that my companions are dead, I stand no chance for the Vermilion Pools, nor will I try it. Can't you let me go?"

Roan snorted in response.

"For you to rush and tell the others about us? Thanks, but no thanks."

"Roan!"

Malaka then called his attention once more.

"Can't we do it just like the last ones?"

Roan narrowed his eyes before saying.

"These pills are expensive, you know?"

Malaka showed a depressed face.

"But..."

Sure enough, she might kill when they are in a Life and Death situation. But she still doesn't like the idea of killing someone defenseless.

Rean then laughed as he patted the girl's head.

"Oh, come on. I'm the one who is paying for the materials of those pills anyway. Just think about it as making me lose money."

Roan pondered a bit and nodded.

"I have to admit that this train of thought is a lot more appealing."

Roan then took two pill bottles from his bag. One contained just a single black and purple pill, while the other had three white ones.

"Alright, swallow the black one."

The man didn't dare to go against Roan's orders. As soon as he took the black and purple pill, it dissolved and spread through his body. Immediately, he felt a terrifying pain.

Roan then took out a white pill and made him swallow it. Only then did some of the pain disappear. However, he could still feel it.

"Alright. I guess it is pretty obvious. I gave you poison, and the white pill is there to prevent it from killing you. However, it is not the antidote. You have another two white pills inside this bottle. Their effects last for one day. After that, the pain will return, and the poison will kill you not long after. As long as you are fast, it should be enough time for you to run out of the Profound Abyss. This is not a poison hard to eliminate. Just ask one of your Nascent Soul elders to use his Spiritual Energy to drive it out of your body. With their power, it shouldn't take more than a few hours to succeed. Alright, off you go."

The man didn't believe that he survived just like that. However, he didn't dare ignore Roan's words. He immediately gathered his Spiritual Energy and dashed in the direction of the Profound Abyss entrance.

As for trying to find Valeu to tell him the news? Fuck that! All his companions died because of him to start with.

These poison pills that Roan made were not for this purpose but to threaten and force others to make his bids if necessary. However, because Malaka didn't like to kill the ones who surrendered, he decided to use them this way. It was something very naive in his eyes. Still, he decided to do as Malaka asked the last few times.

There was a reason for that, of course. The fact that Malaka was at least willing to kill during the heat of the battle was already a significant advancement. This was only his own way of rewarding her. Besides, he didn't feel any danger from those guys he let go of since he knew they wouldn't be idiotic enough to go alert Valeu. They would definitely prioritize their own lives and get out of the Profound Abyss first.

"Alright, happy? Let's go!"

Malaka showed a smile as bright as the sun as she nodded.

However, just as Rean's group was about to enter the cave, a blue light began to pulse on Roan's chest. Obviously, that caught everyone's attention.

"This... it's Calina's Pendant..."

Death... and me

Chapter 252: Distress Signal

Roan took the pendant out of his robe so that they could all see it.

"Malaka, do you know anything about it?"

Malaka shook her head in response as she replied.

"Calina didn't say anything about this ability."

Rean pondered a bit when he thought about a possibility. He then focused on the Soul Gem Dimensional Realm.

'Sister Orb, I believe there is a Sealed Array inside this thing that seems to be using the pendant's material. Can you analyze it?'

[There seems to be one indeed. The formation inside is quite highly leveled. But if it is just to find its use, I shouldn't take long. As for how to operate it, that will take a lot more time.]

Rean nodded. Only now when it showed this reaction did he notice that it might have a Sealed Array inside.

Roan also heard Rean and Sister Orb's words, so he waited as well. Of course, Malaka didn't know that.

"Rean, Roan, the light of the pendant seems to be shining in that direction, no?"

Rean and Roan were taken aback for a moment. As far as they could see, the light in the pendant looked pretty uniform. It was then that they understood the issue. It was basically the position they were looking at the pendant from. They quickly moved to Malaka's side, and sure enough, the blue light seemed to be just a little more inclined to a specific direction.

"So... is this some kind of tracker?"

"What is a tracker?"

Rean smiled at Malaka and explained.

"Simply put, it is used to find the location of other things."

Malaka nodded as she looked at it.

"Can we go take a look then?"

"Wait a little bit. I'm just checking something."

A few minutes later, Rean got his answer.

[Yep. This is indeed a tracker. No, to be more specific, it is a distress signal Sealed Array. This pendant is most likely one of a pair. If the owner of one of the two is in danger, the pendants will activate. However, there is a range limit. If the two parts are more than two hundred kilometers away, the pendants will not react. I will not try to take control of this Sealed Array since it will take too long. Knowing its use should be enough already.]

Rean and Roan nodded. That was indeed more than enough for what they needed. Rean then explained to Malaka what he found about the pendant.

"So, Calina is in danger? Then we need to help her!"

Roan was still showing a puzzled expression in response.

"That doesn't make sense. Why would Calina give this pendant to Malaka in case she needed help? It would have been much better to give it to some other group with high-level cultivators. She didn't know about Tuve and Weren. Even if she did, there was no lack of 'much stronger' groups that would happily take the job of 'protecting the imperial blood' for her."

Roan laughed after hearing that.

"Hahaha! That's what happens when you don't have friends, idiot. You can't even understand such simple logic."

Roan narrowed his eyes. Just as he was about to ask Rean what he was talking about, he noticed that Malaka's expression turned soft. From the looks of it, Malaka also understood why she was given the pendant.

"What the hell you are talking about?"

Rean sighed and then explained.

"Isn't that obvious? First of all, Calina didn't tell Malaka what this pendant was about."

Malaka nodded as she touched the pendant with a smile.

"Calina wasn't expecting me to save her. It was the opposite. She gave me the pendant to help me in case I was in danger. She wanted to help me instead. That's why she didn't tell what the pendant's ability was."

Roan narrowed his eyes.

"Then why didn't it activate when Malaka was almost kille- Ah! The two hundred kilometer range..."

Malaka then looked at Rean and Roan with a pleading expression, almost crying.

"Rean, Roan!"

Rean sighed as he shrugged his shoulder and looked at Roan. There was no need to ask Kentucky since it would just follow them wherever.

Roan, of course, understood those two very well.

"What? That girl had three Peak Core Formation Realm cultivators protecting her. Do you think that we would be able to deal with something that they couldn't? Besides, something that could put that girl in danger most likely already killed everyone. Also, we already spent a few minutes here. It's a waste of time."

Malaka grabbed his hand and insisted.

"But... still..."

Rean patted Malaka's head as he also asked Roan.

"Oh, come on. Didn't you want us to train in life and death situations? This is just another chance. Also, there is nothing bad in getting the favor of the imperial bloodline if she's still alive."

Roan's expression got darker and darker until finally...

"Fine! She planned to help Malaka, after all. It would leave a bad taste if we didn't do the same. However, don't keep your hopes up too much."

Malaka smiled brightly after hearing that.

"Thank you, Roan!"

Roan simply nodded with his cold face and poured his Spiritual Sense inside the pendant. According to Sister Orb, the way to use it was to use one's Spiritual Sense to feel the location, and not really the blue light itself.

"Full speed ahead, let's go."

It turned out that Rean's group did not enter the cave in front of them but moved in another direction. Just another 4 kilometers away, they found another Decaying Cave entrance and rushed inside. They also noticed another thing. The Decaying Energy concentration began to rise even more.

Going back in time, Calina's group was already inside the Decaying Cave.

"It's just like the reports said, this Decaying Fog is a lot more annoying once we get inside."

Other than Valeu, Calina had two more protectors, a man and a woman. The man was called Silo Lavil while the woman was Erna Taran. As Roan mentioned, they were both at the Peak of the Core Formation Realm, just like Valeu. One didn't need to be a genius to understand that they were also part of the Imperial Family's subordinate clans.

"Princess, be sure to keep your Spiritual Energy barrier up all the time. If you see that you can't hold anymore, take one of the Anti-Decaying Energy Pills."

"There is no need to worry. This is not enough to force my hand yet."

While they moved further in the cave, Calina took out a Blue Pendant from her chest and looked at it. This one was identical to the one Malaka had. Seeing that it had no reaction, Calina sighed. The pendant showing no response meant that Malaka wasn't in danger. However, she also knew about the pendant's range limit, so it might just be because she was too far from Malaka.

"Princess, is there something wrong?"

Calina looked at Erna and shook her head.

"No, everything is fine."

Valeu, on the other hand, knew very well why she was looking at the Blue Pendant. He was the only one that knew Calina had given her other Pendant to Malaka. However, he didn't tell Calina nor Erna and Silo.

At some point, Valeu took out a jade slip and put it on his forehead. After that, he told the others.

"Right side in the next cave division."

The Imperial Family really knew the Profound Abyss better than anyone. Their maps were very complete, giving them an enormous advantage. Few had mapped this place as well as them. Of course, no one complained about that. After all, this place was prepared by the Imperial Family themselves. If they wanted to, they could have kept it closed for their personal use, but they didn't. That being said,

everyone was already delighted to be able to participate. Besides, they could draw their own maps while they were at it.

Erna, Silo, and Calina also had the same maps, of course.

Valeu then stopped for a second and looked into the other entrance.

Silo noticed that, of course.

"What is it? Did you find anything wrong?"

Valeu narrowed his eyes before saying.

"I think I heard something... You three go ahead while I go take a look into this other path. I don't want us to be ambushed from behind."

Erna and Silo had no reason to doubt him, so they just nodded and proceeded forward with Calina. After all, they already planned their route, so Valeu wouldn't get lost.

Valeu saw the three of them disappearing in the fog a few meters away. The concentration of Decaying Energy was so high that the visibility of the naked eye didn't go as far as ten meters. Obviously, one's Spiritual Sense became more affected here. Even with his peak Core Formation Realm cultivation, Valeu's Spiritual Sense couldn't go past fifty meters either. Still, he didn't seem to care about it.

It was then that he took another jade slip from his bag and smiled. It was also a map. However, this one was different from Calina's group. He checked the contents of the map and nodded. Soon after, he took another item from his bag that looked like a black stone. It had similar energy as the Decaying Fog, but several times more powerful.

Crash

Valeu then crushed it with his hand, which released that energy in the form of fog. However, it was white instead. Using his Spiritual Energy, Valeu made the white fog enter the path that Calina and the others went in.

'Sorry, Princess. That's just how things are.'

Death... and me

Chapter 253: Breake Out!

Back on Calina's side, her group continued to move forward while keeping their Spiritual Senses spread around them.

At some point, Silo looked behind as he narrowed his eyes.

"Why is Valeu taking so long?"

Erna and Calina stopped as well.

"Could it be that something happened to him?"

"That shouldn't be the case. With Valeu's strength, even if a Stage Four Demon beast appears, he should be able to flee. There aren't many demon beasts in the Profound Abyss that could hold us back."

"Should we go back to check on him, then?"

Erna and Silo pondered a bit, but just as they were about to make a move, they heard a loud sound coming from the front.

Roar!

Suddenly, a Decaying Demon Beast came out of the fog ahead. It looked to have a human form, but it was made of Decaying Fog. That wasn't all, though. As soon as it appeared, several others of the same type began to come out of the cave walls as well. As soon as Erna saw them, her face paled.

"Decaying Devourers! Impossible! This path should not have such a thing!"

Every single Decaying Devourer was at Stage Three level, and there wasn't just a few of them.

Silo's expression also turned dark as he shouted.

"Erna, help me open a path for us to retreat. We need to bring the Princess out at all costs!"

Decaying Devourers were a type of demon beast that assumed the same form as humans. The worst thing about them is that they always moved in big groups and knew how to attack together. They could be said to be one of the most dangerous demon beasts in the entire Profound Abyss. Any cultivator group would try to avoid them at all costs.

Calina became nervous as she got close to Erna and Silo. She could hold one or two of them, but definitely not so many. Erna and Silo were obviously stronger than Calina at the moment, but even they had sour expressions.

'Wind Judgement Tornado!'

'Thousand Water Snakes!'

A tornado manifested around Silo, Erna, and Calina as Erna's water snake attacked the Decaying Devourers outside. However, the thousand water snakes' skill didn't have that much attack power. All it could do was force the devourers back a little.

"Breakthrough!"

Erna and Silo then grabbed Calina's arm and shot forward while being protected by the Wind Judgement skill. However, they underestimated the Decaying Devourers too much. Because of the effects brought by the Surge, all the Decaying Demon Beasts were affected by it. Not only were they getting stronger, but their intelligence was becoming better as well. They were not in a constant berserk state, as Roan mentioned in the past.

Roar!

Suddenly, an even stronger roar came from the back of the cave. Silo and Erna immediately felt despair after hearing that.

"It's a Stage Four Decaying Devourer!"

"What is happening here?! Even if we entered the Decaying Devourers territory, it wasn't supposed to have so many of them. Let alone the leader who always stays hidden."

After hearing the leader's roar, the devourers seemed to understand that Calina's group was trying to flee, so more and more of them appeared in the direction of the exit. One after the other, they threw themselves against the Wind Judgment Tornado.

The tornado's wind tried to keep the Devourers outside, but a few of them kept passing through it.

"Silo, keep the Wind Judgment Tornado active. I'll get rid of the Decaying Devourers that pass through!"

Silo smiled bitterly.

"That's easy for you to say. This skill spends a terrifying amount of Spiritual Energy."

"Stop complaining, and just do it! As long as we escape their territory, you will have more than enough time to recover. What's the point in saving energy and dying here?"

Calina didn't stay still either.

"I'll help too. I'm not as strong as you two, but I can at least hold one or two of them back while we flee. That's still better than doing nothing."

"But-"

Erna and Silo wanted to stop Calina from doing it, but Calina didn't give them a chance.

"Silence! We need all the strength we can at the moment. The Decaying Devourer Leader is coming for us from behind. If he catches up, we are done for! Understood?"

Erna and Silo gritted their teeth and nodded.

"Alright, Princess. Please lend us a hand."

Calina smiled after hearing that.

"Definitely!"

Erna then switched to the offensive. Lightning began to run through her body as she summoned her water skills. Sure enough, members of the subordinate clans would be able to use two elements together.

'Water Thunder Dragons!'

Different from the small water snakes from before, the Water Thunder Dragons were enormous. Of course, there weren't a thousand of them, just three. Still, their attack power was no joke. They ran inside the Wind Judgement Tornado, attacking all the Decaying Devourers that passed through Silo's protection. Erna was not a weapon user. Instead, she focused on Spiritual Energy skills alone. In fact, Calina did the same thing.

Calina also did what she could.

'Water Compression!'

'Compressed Water Explosion!'

An incredibly simple combination, to say the least. Compressing the water with one's Spiritual Energy with the help of their Water Element control. However, although the combination was simple, squeezing it with enough strength was another story altogether. It was thanks to the Yin Energy accumulated in her body that she was able to reach this stage while still being in the Foundation Establishment Realm.

The spheres of water shot in the direction of the Decaying Devourers that passed through Erna's Water Thunder Dragons. The devourers didn't try to dodge it, so when the water spheres touched them, the compressed water expanded hastily like an explosion.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Those were all Stage Three Decaying Devourers, while Calina was still in the Foundation Establishment. Although she had combat power at the Core Formation Initial Stage Level, she still lacked attack power. Because of that, there wasn't much damage to them. However, that wasn't Calina's objective. Her intentions were quite straightforward, which was to throw those Decaying Devourers out of the Wind Judgement Tornado. The Compressed Water Explosion just so happened to be perfect for it.

Unfortunately, Erna and Calina's efforts were still not enough. There were just too many Decaying Devourers!

"Fuck! Let's do this then! You two, use your Water Elements to protect yourselves."

Silo noticed that his Wind Judgement Tornado wasn't able to keep enough Decaying Devourers outside, so he decided to go all out. The temperature in the surroundings immediately began to climb to terrifying degrees.

Calina and Erna immediately noticed what he was about to do, and a layer of water appeared around their bodies.

'Hell Judgment Tornado!'

Silo's Wind Tornado transformed into an enormous fire one. Sure enough, Silo was also a member of the subordinate clans under the Imperial Family, so using two elements was something he could do. Otherwise, he probably wouldn't have been chosen to be one of Calina's protectors.

His Wind Judgement Tornado was already able to inflict damage to those who tried to force their way in, let alone now. With that, the number of Decaying Devourers that could pass through his barrier plummeted by half. Not to mention that they already arrived inside in a sorry state after clashing against the Fire Tornado. Of course, Silo's Spiritual Energy expenditure increased even more. He even wondered if he would have enough to reach the end.

"Keep running! Fuck, where is Valeu? Why hasn't he come to help us yet?"

"He might have been caught by the Decaying Devourers as well. Forget about him for now. Focus on controlling your Hell Judgement Tornado. We can ask questions later!"

Silo and Erna were wrong about one thing, though. The place where they were at the moment was, in fact, the Decaying Devourers territory. It's just that the Jade Slips containing the map that they had were fake! It simply guided them directly inside the beasts' mouth. As one could imagine, this was also part of Valeu and whoever was behind his actions' plan.

That wasn't all. That white fog that Valeu used acted as a lure for Decaying Demon beasts. It would mix itself with the Decaying Fog in the surroundings, attracting all the Decaying Demon Beasts several kilometers around it. That's why even the Decaying Devourer Leader appeared. They had been driven crazy by the effects of the white fog.

Valeu was still in the same place ever since he separated from the group. He stayed in that position because he knew that this was the limit of the Decaying Devourers' territory. They definitely wouldn't cross this line since the Decaying Fog outside was not enough for them to keep their forms.

Decaying Demon Beasts were kind of different from each other. Some needed vast amounts of Decaying Fog Energy since their entire body was made of it other than the core. Other Decaying Demon Beasts were different, like the Decaying Golems. They could use both the Decaying Fog Energy and contaminated stones/dirt on the ground to form their bodies, reducing the amount of energy necessary. Decaying Devourers were one of the few Decaying Demon Beasts with bodies entirely made of Decaying Fog, so they needed a lot of it.

~~Bo~~oom...

Valeu could hear the sound of explosions in the distance, quickly approaching his position.

'As expected, Silo and Erna still made their way back. Most likely, Calina is with them as well. However, I wonder just how much effort they had to put into bringing the little Princess back.'

Valeu coldly smiled as he vanished in the dark fog.

Death... and me

Chapter 254: Death Style, First Energy Form

Boom, boom, boom!

Shhhwaaaaa

"A little more. We are almost out! Decaying Devourers can't keep their forms if the Decaying Fog concentration decreases."

Arrgh!

Silo and Calina paled as they looked at Erna. Just now, she was hit by one of the Decaying Devourers. They could even see the Decaying Fog entering her body through the injury.

"Erna!"

However, Erna gritted her teeth and pressed forward.

"I'm fine! Go, don't stop!"

Silo and Calina nodded as they continued to run and use their skills. Eventually, the Decaying Devourers stopped in their tracks and looked as those three left.

"We're out!"

Silo's Hell Judgement Tornado only had around one-tenth of its initial size. Two of Erna's Three Water Thunder Dragons had already disappeared as well. She could barely keep the form of the last one. Calina was a little better off, though. Erna and Silo still prioritized protecting her over themselves. Calina knew that trying to stop them would be useless, so she could only help as much as possible. Because of that, she still had some Spiritual Energy to spare.

Finally, both Erna and Silo's Skills disappeared as they dropped on the ground, gasping. However, Erna vomited dark blood and fell on the floor.

"Erna!"

Calina immediately approached her and looked at her injury. She then took one of her own Anti-Decaying Fog pills and fed Erna. Soon after, she used her own Spiritual Energy to create a barrier around Erna other than herself.

Silo wanted to help, but he was almost entirely spent. All he could do was approach the two girls and sit beside them while using the little bit of energy he still had to barely hold his Spiritual Energy Barrier.

Finally, the dark energy inside Erna's body began to leave her body, much to Calina's relief.

"Fortunately, the Imperial Family's alchemists are the best we can find in the empire. Their pills are much more potent than common ones."

Silo also sighed in relief after seeing that.

Erna didn't pass out, though.

"Thank you- cough, cough... Princess."

She then tried to sit once more.

"Don't force yourself too much. Your injuries are no joke."

Erna shook her head as she also sat beside Silo, who started to recover his energy with Spirit Stones.

"I'm okay. That pill was enough to stop the Decaying Fog from entering my body and began to drive out the energy inside. I can start recovering already."

Calina was still somewhat concerned, but she nodded and sat down to recover as well.

Suddenly, Silo and Erna opened their eyes at the same time and looked to the other side. Just now, someone had entered their Spiritual Sense. However, they relaxed right after.

It was then that Valeu appeared from the middle of the fog. His robes were ragged, his hair disheveled, and there were several blood marks everywhere. He walked while holding one of his arms. It looked more like he had just come back from a war.

Silo shook his head before saying.

"As I thought, you were also caught by those Decaying Devourers. Don't ask for help since we also are almost dead here."

Valeu bitterly smiled as he approached their group.

"Seems like your journey was not that good either. It was as you said. I encountered a lot of Decaying Devourers after I entered the other path. What is happening here? Did they move their territory?"

Erna and Silo didn't suspect anything. After all, they had the 'same' map as Valeu. Of course, Calina didn't either.

"We have no idea. We almost died back inside."

Calina nodded in response.

"It might have something to do with the Surge. We were already told that it will definitely come while the trial is ongoing."

Silo, Erna, and Valeu nodded.

Valeu finally arrived at their side when suddenly, he drew his sword in a flash.

Swich!

Erna and Silo didn't even know what hit them before their heads were sent flying! In normal circumstances, they would be attentive enough and try to react. They would even have a good chance of escaping the sneak attack. However, they were at their weakest at the moment, while Valeu was, in fact, completely fine. The injuries on his body were nothing more than just a pretense.

"Ah!"

Calina couldn't believe what she saw. However, she didn't have time to think about it. As soon as Valeu cut Erna and Silo's head, he turned in her direction, aiming his sword for her neck as well! But it was at this moment that Erna and Silo's efforts to protect her paid off. She still had around half of the Spiritual Energy remaining, and she didn't have any severe injuries either. It gave her enough time to react and jump back as fast as she could!

Swich!

A small trace of blood came from Calina's neck. Seeing that, Valeu smiled as Calina's expression transformed into one of fear.

'Water Frame!'

A wall of water immediately appeared between Valeu and her, blocking his path. However, Valeu simply snorted as he sent her a Spiritual Sense message.

"Princess, you are incredibly talented. Unfortunately for you, you're still too young!"

'Lightning Flash!'

Valeu's sword began to draw on the Lightning Element as he used it to pierce through the Water Frame.

Zap!

Splash!

Sure enough, Calina's Water frame wasn't able to hold Valeu's Sword attack even for a second. However, as soon as Valeu passed through the Water Frame wall, he noticed a few shards of blue light on his way.

"Shit!"

Boom! Boom! Boom...

Each of them exploded with Calina's Yin Energy power, freezing the surroundings instantly. This was one of her trump cards that could deal a lot of damage even against someone in the Core Formation Realm. However, that forced Calina to lose a lot of Yin Energy she had accumulated after so long. She wouldn't be able to do it again anytime soon.

Unfortunately, the difference in cultivation was just too big. Not only Valeu was at the very peak of the Core Formation Realm, but he could also fight average Core and Soul Fusion Realm cultivators with his power. Thanks to that, Valeu was still able to create a Lightning Element barrier in front of himself that blocked most of Calina's attack. Sadly for him, it sent him flying back.

On the other hand, that bought enough time for Calina to dash away. She knew she wasn't a match for Valeu, so she had to flee straight away.

'Hahaha! Princess, that was quite a nice surprise. If you were in the Core Formation Realm, you might have caused some serious damage to me. Unfortunately, that isn't the case.'

Calina's heart went cold as she received that Spiritual Sense message. Since she could hear it, it meant that she was still inside Valeu's Spiritual Sense Range.

"Why are you doing this?"

Valeu snorted after hearing that question. Right after, a flash of Lightning appeared on Calina's side, making her face go pale. However, the moment that flash appeared, several water icicles descended on it.

Valeu thought he had taken her by surprise, but she still prepared a trap for him in that situation.

"Hmph!"

Valeu then changed the direction of his attack, hitting one Water Icicle after another.

Bang, bang, bang, bang...

Of course, he did not let Calina leave his Spiritual Sense range. In the next second, Valeu's body flashed, leaving his position once more. In the place he was just at, an enormous Sphere of Water appeared.

'Water Prison!'

Calina wasn't hoping to hold Valeu inside it to start with. She just needed enough time to escape this place. That water prison was the plan she came up with, using the Water Icicles as a distraction. As long as she locked Valeu inside, even if his cultivation was an entire realm above her, she would still gain a few seconds. That should be enough for her to leave his Spiritual Sense range after considering how limited it was in the Profound Abyss.

Unfortunately for her, Valeu wasn't a run of the mill cultivator. He was part of the subordinate clans under the Imperial Family's rule. From the moment he blocked the Water Icicles, he already thought about the possibility of Calina trying something else.

He quickly regained his balance and used the chance that Calina was surprised by his escapade to deliver a fatal strike.

Unfortunately, it was at this moment that the earth began to tremble! Just as Valeu was about to reach Calina, an enormous surge of Decaying Energy came from deeper inside the Decaying Cave.

"What?!"

Shuwaaaa!

Calina and Valeu were hit by that wave of Decaying Fog simultaneously, which sent them flying in different directions!

"The Surge!"

Indeed, the Surge had just started. And with it, the concentration of Decaying Energy in the entire Profound Abyss began to rise nonstop. But that wasn't all. It also meant the Decaying Demon Beasts that couldn't leave the caves before now could do so!

Calina ignored that thought, though. She immediately recovered her balance and used the flow of Decaying Energy to rush out.

"Princess, you aren't the only one who can use the Surge's wave, you know?"

Calina's heart almost stopped. She was sure she saw Valeu being swept away in another direction. How did he appear beside her this fast?

Of course, Valeu wouldn't give her time to find the answer.

'Thunder God Slash!'

"Bye-bye, Princess."

However, just as the attack was about to connect, Calina heard another Spiritual Sense message.

"Get down!"

Calina couldn't even process whose voice it was before her body acted automatically, throwing herself on the ground. She only had time to see two flashes of dark and white lights passing over her head!

'Life Style, First Form, Enhancement!'

'Death Style, First Form, Stellar Piercer!'

Clang!

"What?!"

Who else could it be other than Rean and Roan?

Valeu was taken aback as those two rays of light hit his Thunder God Slash!

Unfortunately, Rean and Roan were still several meters ahead, while Valeu was just beside Calina. Not only that, but the Stellar Piercer lost power the further it went. Even though Rean and Roan used it together to stop the Thunder God Slash, they were only able to slow it down a little bit.

"Too late, brats! Die!"

However, that small moment was all that Roan needed!

Roan extended his free hand forward as the Dark Element gathered in the surroundings.

Out of nowhere, several shadows that looked like dark ropes, or perhaps vines, appeared around Calina's body! Before Valeu could even react to the sight, the ropes pulled Calina, sending her flying in Roan's direction.

"Ahhh!"

Calina screamed as her body was dragged away at a frightening speed.

Thud!

It was then that she felt her body stop as it was grabbed by something. When she opened her eyes again, she was already in Roan's embrace.

'Death Style, First Energy Form, Shadow Bind!'

Death... and me

Chapter 255: Timely Help

Valeu and Calina didn't notice, but the Blue Pendant inside Calina's clothes was pulsing with a faint blue light at the moment. Back then, Calina's Blue Pendant's Sealed Array recognized that she was in danger, so it immediately activated. This happened while Calina, Erna, and Silo had just been surrounded by the Decaying Devourers.

Reans group had taken a few minutes before they started moving. However, Calina and her protectors also took quite some time to break through the Decaying Devourers' encirclement. They also used another few minutes before Valeu cut Erna and Silo's head. Last but not least, Calina's own struggle and the Surge's sudden start had bought her just enough time for Rean's group to arrive at the scene.

Now, Calina was saved in the very last moment by Roan's first not weapon-related skill, Shadow Bind.

Calina couldn't help but blush a bit as she looked at Roan's cold eyes just a couple of centimeters in front of her face. Wasn't this one of those situations where the hero saved the princess in distress? Unfortunately for her, Roan shattered the young lady's dreams in the very next second.

"Heavy! Get the fuck down!"

Sure enough, Roan already released her. It was Calina that was still entangled around him like an octopus, not letting go.

"Ah!"

Her face got more red as she immediately let go of Roan.

"Wh-who's heavy?! I-"

Bang!

Roan didn't give her the time to talk. Instead, he gave her a kick, sending Calina flying to the back. Calina, of course, was left at a loss for words from that action. Didn't he just save her? How come he was kicking her now? However, as she flew back, she saw a flash of light appear right in front of Roan. Obviously, that was Valeu, who wouldn't wait for them to talk.

Clang!

Arcs of Lightning and Dark Light spread as both swords hit each other head-on. However, Roan was an entire cultivation realm behind Valeu, so the force behind the attack still made him take several steps back.

"I can't believe you brats are still alive. All those idiots that I contracted seemed to be completely useless, but that's okay. Now that your little group is here, I can deal with you myself and recover the Pendant at the same time."

Too bad for him, but Roan ignored his words. At the moment, he was feeling the Yin Power of the Surge interacting with his body. The Yin Energy in the Decaying Fog of the Surge seemed to be far purer than what he had felt so far. Because of that, he could tell that his combat strength had increased quite a bit.

'A temporary boost, it seems.'

Roan was right. He was already a Yin Energy generator himself, so there was no need for him to absorb the Yin Energy in the Decaying Fog. What increased his own power was the environment that made it much easier for him and even Rean to control the Dark Element. Once they left the Profound Abyss, it wouldn't happen anymore. Rean felt that difference thanks to their Soul Connection.

All the way on the back, Malaka had just leaped and caught Calina, who was falling once again. At the same time, Calina heard Malaka's Spiritual Sense Message as she hugged her tightly.

'Calina! I'm so happy we arrived on time!'

'Malaka?! How...?'

'It was your Blue Pendant! You showed us the way to find you.'

'But... I've never told you what the Pendants could do.'

'My brother is good with Formations. He was the one who understood that it had a Sealed Array capable of alerting the others when one of them is in danger.'

Calina was taken aback by those words. As a member of the Imperial Family, she knew just how advanced the Sealed Array inside the Pendant was. It would be one thing if they understood that the Pendant could show the location of the other. But it was an entirely different story to know that it only activated when one was in danger. Of course, she didn't realize that Rean only knew that because of Sister Orb's help. He was still a rookie when it came to formations and wouldn't have been able to analyze that Sealed Array at all at his actual level.

'Your brothers are quite impressive.'

Malaka nodded vigorously.

'They're the best!'

Their conversation seemed to have taken some time, but it was done through Spiritual Sense, so it only took a few seconds in reality.

Back on the side where the action was happening, Valeu noticed how Roan ignored his words and became furious. Roan was right about one point. Valeu considered those from far organizations as nothing but peasants. Compared to his status as a member of a subordinate clan, they were simply nothing.

Lightning Power began to gather around Valeu's body and enter it. Soon after, it spread everywhere.

'Thunder Body!'

Rean and Roan immediately paid attention to Valeu as soon as he saw that. Sure enough, Rean wasn't the only one that could use enhancement skills. However, Rean could tell through his Life Force Sense that Valeu's skill damaged his body. In Rean's Life Style case, not only did it not leave any damage behind, it even healed the body.

Valeu's body then flashed away and moved at a terrifying speed. However, he didn't aim for Rean or Roan. Instead, he circled them and went straight to Calina. Roan understood his reasons for that very well. If he lost his time fighting the twins, Calina would have time to escape his Spiritual Sense Range. Once she exited the Profound Abyss, he would be pretty much done for.

Of course, the twins wouldn't stay still looking at that. Still, Valeu was truly fast. With his Thunder Body, his speed surpassed the Core Formation Realm level. That was something that Rean and Roan couldn't achieve yet.

"Kentucky!"

CREEEEE!

Kentucky immediately appeared in front of Malaka and Calina, blocking Valeu's path once more. Not long after, his body burst with Black and White Flames as he tried to protect the two girls.

"Out of my way, chicken!"

Lightning gathered inside Valeu's Sword once more as he aimed to cut the Minokawa's head.

'Thunder God Slash!'

Unfortunately for him, if there was one part of the body that Kentucky could move quickly, that was his head. Kentucky saw the lightning sword come at him and didn't back down. His eyes flashed as his head moved as fast as Valeu's sword.

Clang!

The sound of metal hitting metal echoed in the cave. Black and White Flames shot everywhere together with arcs of lightning. However, Kentucky was indeed too weak at the moment. Although he resisted the attack, he was once again forced back by Valeu's sword strike. Nonetheless, it was enough to stop him.

"What?! How can its beak be this sturdy?!"

While Valeu was aghast, Rean and Roan didn't let the chance pass up, heading towards Valeu with a full offensive.

'Death Style, Fifth Form, Mirage Assault!'

'Death Style, First Energy Form, Shadow Bind!'

Valeu didn't have time to think as he noticed those shadow ropes appearing around him this time.

Zap!

He immediately used his Lightning Movement once again, dodging the ropes. However, Roan already expected that Valeu would be able to react fast enough. That being said, he used his Shadow Bind in a way that would force Valeu to dodge in a specific direction, theirs!

Valeu was enraged to see that. It was evident that Rean and Roan wanted to have a head-on clash with him.

"Don't get too conceited, brats!"

Valeu's sword continued to flash with arcs of lightning as he changed his target to attack the twins. Immediately, both sides used their own skills.

'Lightning Arc Slash!'

'Death Style, Second Form, Crescent Moon!'

Similar attacks came against each other, exploding in the center. However, Rean and Roan's Crescent Moon proved to be weaker than Valeu's Lightning Arc Slash, crumbling against its power almost instantly. In the end, Rean and Roan could only raise their swords and block the remaining power of the attack.

Of course, Valeu noticed this chance, following right behind the attack and acting at the exact moment the twins blocked his attack.

'Thunder God Slash!'

Valeu showed a victorious smile. The twins couldn't resist the power of the attack and were cut by the power of the Thunder God Slash. However, his smile only lasted a split of a second. The moment the twins were cut down, their bodies disappeared into specks of light and dark lights. Immediately, he felt a foreboding sensation.

He immediately used his Lightning Movement and jumped back at full speed. Right in the place where he had just been a moment ago, Roan's Shadow Binds appeared once more. Valeu escaped from being confined by just a hair.

Still, it wasn't over. Right behind the dissipating bodies, another Rean and Roan appeared. Not only that, but they were already in the middle of using their skill.

'Death Style, Third Form, Three Claws of the Dragon!'

Six Swords of Dark and Light Element materialized right in front of Valeu. Not only that, but they were even more powerful than usual thanks to the boost that the Decaying Fog's Yin Energy environment provided.

"Fuck!"

'Lightning Explosion!'

Valeu couldn't tell which sword was real, so he immediately counter-attacked all of them together. The lightning energy in his body then burst outwards, sweeping towards both of the twins at the same time. However, Rean and Roan's attack was already on its way, so Valeu could only jump to dodge the attacks.

The Lightning Explosion turned out to be very strong, sending the twins crashing back. It was then that Valeu saw those two bodies disappearing as well. He immediately focused on his Spiritual Sense and found the twins once more, right below him!

"Just how many clones do you two still have, fuckers?!"

Rean and Roan smiled as they shot upwards.

Rean and Roan could only use four clones in total. Now that those were destroyed, only their real selves remained. Still, that also meant that it was going to be their most potent attack so far.

'Death Style, Fourth Form, Soaring Dragon!'

Valeu noticed the power behind the attacks and could tell that they were much stronger than the four clones he destroyed. However, he already used his Lightning Explosion and would need to gather Lightning Energy again to repeat that.

"Do you think I can't do anything?"

He desperately gathered all the Spiritual Energy he could, ready to defend himself from the twins' attacks. However, it was at this moment that Water Element converged around his area in the air. No, that was wrong. The Water Element was already assembled there by the moment he reached that altitude. It's just that his attention was entirely on the twins, so he didn't notice it in time.

He noticed Malaka holding Calina's hands with his Spiritual Sense, sending as much Spiritual Energy as she could.

"Calinaaaaaa!"

At the same time, she helped Calina with the Water Element control. Calina had no intention to flee to start with. She had been waiting for an opportunity. An opportunity to help take revenge on Erna and Silo, and it finally showed itself.

'Water Prison!'

Valeu simply had no time to react anymore. The world around him became a giant sphere of water that bound his movements completely. In normal circumstances, it wouldn't be able to lock his actions. But after so many surprises after the other, he had nothing prepared to deal with it. That was the decisive factor that cost him this fight.

The twins' Soaring Dragon arrived a split of a second later, crashing against his Dantian's position inside the Water Prison.

Swich, Swich!

Crack, Shatter!

Roan and Rean were intending to aim for Valeu's vital points at that moment. However, even they didn't expect that Calina would act at that very last moment. That Water Prison was indeed perfect, so Roan immediately contacted Rean through their Soul Connection, telling him to change the target to Valeu's dantian.

"Arghhhhh!"

Valeu screamed in pain as his cultivation at the Peak Stage of the Core Formation Realm disappeared in a matter of seconds. However, he didn't die. Roan still had a lot of questions to do, and so did Calina.

Death... and me

Chapter 256: Learning the Truth

As soon as Valeu's body hit the ground, Rean grabbed and protected him with a layer of Spiritual Energy. At the same time, he sent a wave of Light Element inside, stopping the bleeding and driving out the Decaying Fog Energy.

Roan saw that and nodded before giving another order.

"Retreat now! With this amount of Decaying Energy, the Decaying Demon Beasts from deep inside will appear at any second."

Everyone nodded, and they immediately dashed away. Sure enough, around a minute after Rean's group left, the area began to be filled with Decaying Devourers! That was to be expected since this was close to their territories.

Rean's group quickly exited that decaying cave and disappeared into the Decaying Fog. With the Surge's appearance, it became even harder to see or use one's Spiritual Sense. Even if Roan didn't know about the Decaying Devourers' territory, he wouldn't have chosen that path anyway. After all, it wasn't as good as the one he felt before.

Valeu tried to struggle several times on the way. Still, without any cultivation, he wasn't anything better than an ordinary person. Finally, he tried to bite his tongue to kill himself. After all, he knew that he wouldn't survive anyway. Unfortunately for him, Rean was present. Such a small injury like that wasn't anything hard for him to heal. In the end, Valeu was only suffering the pain in vain.

Finally, they found an inconspicuous corner and stopped to recover their energy. Of course, they made sure to keep Valeu protected against the high concentration of Decaying Energy. There was no need to worry about it with Rean present, even if Valeu lost his entire cultivation.

"How can your healing skills be this good? No, first of all, how can you completely eliminate the Decaying Energy in my body that easily? I've never heard about cultivators at the Core Formation Realm and below being able to do such a thing."

Calina was also surprised by that. On the way out, Rean had used his Light Element to help her heal the injuries and drive all the Decaying Fog Energy from her body. Even the pills made by the Imperial Family Alchemists were not that efficient.

Rean looked at Valeu and just shook his head.

"That's not your problem. You should be more worried about the block of ice on your side."

Who else would it be if not Roan?

"You shut up! Now, how about you start talking?"

Valeu snorted in response.

"What? You gonna torture me if I don't say anything? That's useless. We, protectors, receive special training to resist such things. Pain is far from enough to make me give in. However, I don't mind making a deal with you guys. If you bring me alive out of this Profound Abyss, I can tell the things you want to know."

Calina couldn't help but explode in a fury.

"How could you have done that, Valeu?! You are a member of the subordinate clans! Erna and Silo have been my protectors with you for over 3 years already! But killing them as if they were stalks of grass? Are you really going to keep silent now that we reached this point?"

Valeu couldn't care less as to what Calina said, responding.

"Being your protector was one of the worst things that ever happened to me, so you can shut up already. I already said what I had to say. If you want to make this deal, then I can talk more."

Malaka and Rean looked at Valeu with a hint of pity in their eyes. They got up and told Calina.

"Come with us for a moment. All you need to do is give Roan a few moments."

Calina shook her head in response.

"I'll stay. Do you think I've never interacted with such things before? Don't worry, I'm fine. Roan, I don't know if you are really able to open his mouth. But by all means, go ahead."

Roan faintly smiled as he looked at Calina. He had to admit that his opinion of her improved a little bit.

As expected, resisting Roan's technique, paired with his own Dark Element, was not something that Valeu expected. Dark Element destroyed Life Force itself. Having his own Life Force being eliminated while not having a shred of Spiritual Energy to defend was terrifying!

What was even more surprising was that Calina didn't even flinch. It's not like she didn't mind it, but that her rage for Erna and Silo's deaths had exceeded her limits. She thought that Valeu deserved that and even more for what he had done. Calina was far closer to Erna, who had been with her the longest.

Roan was surprised by Valeu's resistance at first. Usually, others would give up in the very first few seconds. However, it still took more than a minute for Valeu to finally open his mouth.

"Speak. Why did you attack Calina? Don't tell me that this was because of some deal. With the Imperial Family's power, you would obtain even more if you denounced it."

Valeu gasped for air as he laughed in ridicule.

"Deal? What deal? It was an order, and I was more than happy to take it. You Chroles people had been mixing your blood with our Imperial Family. What bullshit political marriage? This is obviously a scheme to slowly take control of the Sasamil Empire. All the higher-ups of the clans know about it already."

"What?!"

Calina was taken aback by it. She didn't expect that the name of the Chrole Empire would appear at this moment. As mentioned before, Calina was the fruit of a political marriage between the Sasamil Imperial Family and the Chrole Imperial Family. This wasn't the only one, though. The Imperial Family just had way too many descendants. They had sent their men and women to marry other powers several times in the past. Of course, they also received them.

In Calina's case, her father had the Sasamil Bloodline while her mother was from the Chrole Imperial Family.

"What the hell are you talking about? I've never heard about anything like that. Taking control over the Sasamil Empire? Bullshit! Mother's Chrole Empire had a peaceful relationship with the Sasamil empire for centuries. Why would they do something like that now? You're delusional!"

Valeu snorted once again as he replied.

"Hehe... You think so? Seems like they really kept you in the dark. That's to be expected. After all, you are just a twelve-year-old kid at the Foundation Establishment Realm. What help would you be able to offer with such cultivation?"

Pah!

Roan slapped the man's head before saying.

"Stop wasting my time and get to the point. What's it all about?"

Valeu felt a trace of fear when Roan talked to him and immediately continued.

"Just like Calina mentioned, the Sasamil and Chrole Empire had been on good terms for a long time. However, this is just on the surface. A lot of elders from our clans and even high members of the Imperial Family noticed it already. The Chrole Empire lives in the extreme north in the middle of the cold. They want nothing more than to come down and take the territory of our Sasamil Empire that borders them. Accepting political marriages was only one of the ways they used to slowly take control over us. Sooner or later, you will also be recruited by them to do their deeds."

As Valeu talked, he became more furious.

"Still, that idiotic emperor insists that we are just imagining things. That the Chrole Empire doesn't even have the power to conquer us even if they wanted. He doesn't see that the longer we wait, the worse the situation will become. However, this situation will not last for long. Hahaha!"

Calina felt a chill on her back after hearing that.

"What are you talking about? What do you plan on doing?"

Valeu cackled as he continued.

"Hahaha! How would I know? Do you really think that my clan's higher-ups would go as far as to tell me their plans? Don't be naive! All I know is that it won't be long before that idiotic emperor is driven out of the throne. When that time comes, we will immediately wipe out your Chrole bloodline from our ranks."

"No! I don't believe you!"

Calina refused to believe his words.

"So what if you don't believe me? Hahaha! Sooner or later, you will be forced to when the emperor falls, and a new one takes his place. Of course, that is considering that you will be alive by then. Still, there is no need to worry. It won't take long before your mother and her entire Chrole Empire to follow you. Once the new emperor takes the throne, he will immediately get rid of this evil in the north."

Calina's expression turned pale as she fell to the ground. Sure enough, this was way too much for a girl that's barely twelve years old. Malaka noticed Calina's face and immediately hugged her.

"It's okay. The actual emperor is someone strong, right? Valeu must be lying. Yes, definitely!"

However, Calina was now thinking about her time in the capital. Valeu's words made her consider the things that had been happening there recently. Her father always had a severe expression while at home. Her mother seemed to be always worried as well. They told her that nothing was wrong, but everything began to make sense after hearing all of this.

Roan then put a hand on Valeu's shoulder and sent a wave of Dark Element.

"Arghhh!"

He ignored Valeu's scream as he asked.

"Who else other than you wants to kill her? Did you act alone? What's the contingency plan in case you failed? Are there more enemies waiting outside the Profound Abyss? Are there more enemies inside? Who are the ones in the capital on your side, clans, organizations, Imperial Family Members, so on? Talk!"

Death... and me

Chapter 257: The Empire's Succession

"I'll talk, I'll talk!"

Roan nodded in response and stopped sending Dark Element into Valeu's body.

"I'm acting alone inside the Profound Abyss. However, there is indeed a contingency plan in case I fail. The elder who brought us this time around is also fighting for our cause. The plan was for Calina to die in the Profound Abyss so that no one would have anything to say. However, if she survives, that elder is supposed to finish the job and put the blame on the Shadow Reapers."

Rean and Roan narrowed their eyes after hearing that. They still remembered that they had been targeted by the Shadow Reapers in the past. But in the end, Elder Tiria got rid of the guy before they even noticed anything. If Mia hadn't commented about it, they wouldn't even know.

Calina didn't seem surprised to hear it this time.

"I guess that's to be expected since Elder Calan is part of your Samikil Clan."

Valeu nodded.

"I don't know how many of the nine clans are on the new emperor's side, but our Samikil Clan is definitely one of them."

Roan then asked something else.

"This 'new emperor' that you talked about, who is he? Could it be that you also don't know this?"

Valeu laughed once again, ignoring his pain.

"As if that was possible. Considering how far things have gone already, the old emperor would need to be even more idiotic than we thought to not have noticed, let alone when even I know about it. The new emperor and true leader of our Sasamil Empire is Lamares Sasamil."

Rean and Roan didn't know anything about this guy. In fact, that was the first time they heard that name. They couldn't be blamed. After all, it was really rare for a small country like Jialin to receive news from the capital. Of course, that was because their communication system up to this point still relied mostly on the bird messages. However, Calina promptly recognized it.

"What?! The Emperor's son, the First Prince?! Absurd!"

Valeu shook his head in response.

"It's not impossible. He was one of the first few people to notice the problem. Now, he is the light that is guiding us out of the darkness. Under his Majesty Lamares, Sasamil will flourish once more."

Rean thought that it was weird, though.

"You keep saying old and new emperor. You even called Lamares His Majesty instead of His Highness. Could it be that he already ascended to the throne?"

Calina immediately shook her head.

"Of course not. The emperor is still alive and well. How could Lamares take the throne with him there? This is just Valeu talking bullshit."

Valeu laughed once more.

"Bullshit? Hahaha! It seems like you also don't know about the condition of the old emperor. He's very old. No one knows for how long he can still live. There is nothing wrong in saying that Lamares is already the new emperor."

Calina shook her head in response.

"So what? The emperor has several other children. Although Lamares is the first one, he has never received the title of Crown Prince. I might be blind to everything else, but I'm sure that his brothers and sisters are also aiming for the throne. After all, their clashes in the court are apparent for everyone to see. Especially the fifth prince, Salael."

Valeu immediately replied.

"Hmph! Just a bunch of fireflies trying to outshine the sun. Salael is just a slightly bigger fly, that's all."

Although Valeu said that, Roan noticed a small change in his expression when Salael's name appeared. It was evident that Valeu didn't really think that Salael wasn't a big problem.

"Who is this Fifth Prince?"

Calina then explained.

"His Highness, the fifth son of the emperor, Salael Sasamil. Just like Lamares, I don't know much about him. However, I do know that he is also contending for the throne, just like the other princes. I heard my father commenting before that he was the only prince with real chances of taking the throne from Prince Lamares."

Roan nodded.

"From the looks of it, cultivation isn't the only thing necessary to become an emperor. Otherwise, you two wouldn't keep talking about the court sessions all the time."

Calina nodded.

"That's true. From what I learned about our Sasamil Empire's history, it wasn't always the strongest prince who got the throne. The throne was always given to the one with the best balance between

governing abilities and cultivation talent. There were even two instances in the past where our Sasamil Empire was governed by empresses instead of emperors. The third Princess, Alanora Sasamil, is also contending for the throne from what I know."

Roan didn't need to think much to understand that this Alanora didn't have much of a chance of ascending to the throne. Still, he was quite surprised that such a medieval world would also allow women to take power. Well, his surprise ended there, though. In the end, he simply didn't care whether it was a man or a woman on the throne.

Rean then asked something that was bothering him.

"You guys kept talking about the princes and all. However, you still haven't told us what the emperor's take on this situation is. Is he not doing anything?"

Valeu shook his head.

"I don't know the specifics. All I know is that the idiotic emperor isn't taking anyone's side. No one knows what's inside his head. It would be better if he died already so that his majesty Lamares could ascend the throne."

Roan pondered a bit before uttering.

"He said that the emperor's condition is not good. Probably, the emperor doesn't know or care about which side is right or wrong. Or perhaps, it is precisely the opposite. He is using this situation to see which prince or princess is worthy of inheriting the throne. As for what they will do after that, that's gonna be up to the next throne's owner."

Rean nodded after hearing Roan. He also thought about the same possibilities.

Rean's group then continued to ask more and more questions to Valeu. Eventually, they ran out of what to say. At that moment, Roan then looked at Calina.

"So, what do you want to do, bring this guy out with you? I'll be straightforward with you. If even the actual emperor already knows about it, exposing this guy's secret won't change anything. His clan will just say that he acted alone. Without any proof, nothing will happen. No, it's already a question whether having proof will be of any help or not."

Calina dropped her head in response to those words.

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

It couldn't be helped. Calina only had twelve years of life experience, after all. Although most things were hidden from her, it was already excellent that she knew that much about the general situation. It's just that her parents didn't want to involve her... or so Roan thought.

Malaka then looked at Roan and pleaded.

"Roan, we need to help her!"

Roan snorted in response.

"Hah! Help? How? Sure! Let's go to the capital and kill everyone involved in it. But no, wait! We can't! Because we are too fucking weak! Didn't you see outside? The Imperial Family sent a SAINT REALM expert just to oversee a small event at the corner of the Empire called the Profound Abyss. Do you have any idea how strong the real experts hidden in the capital are? Those so-called princes contending for the throne have the entire Empire's resources for cultivation, so they're probably even stronger."

Roan continued.

"That's not all. So far, we only heard a single side of the story. Tell me, what if the first prince was right? That the Chrole Empire was really aiming to conquer the Sasamil Empire? What will you do in that case, join the Chrole Empire to help Calina? Ridiculous! Put your head to work before making such an idiotic request."

Malaka immediately dropped her head, not knowing what to say.

Roan didn't measure his words at all. In fact, he wanted Calina to hear every single one of them. It was better to destroy her illusions now before others made it for her in a worse situation. At least, they would not do anything to her in this place.

Calina's expression got even worse. That's right! Who said that the first prince was wrong? If what Valeu told them about the Chrole Empire trying to conquer the Sasamil was true, then Rean's group would need to side with Sasamil and the First Prince. Otherwise, it would be their Empire's Imperial Family being wiped out. Them trying to kill the Chrole Empire's descendants was just another way to protect their Sasamil Empire.

"I... I think I'll go back now. I'll try to talk with Elder Polian outside so that he can bring me back safely."

Polian Sasamil was the Saint Realm expert responsible for the Profound Abyss this time around.

"Can you trust him?"

Calina shook her head.

"I don't know. Still, Elder Calan is an expert in the Soul Transformation Realm. Unless I get Elder Polian's help, I probably won't be able to go back safely. I can only try."

Roan nodded, not trying to intervene. This was an issue of the Imperial Family. The repercussions had nothing to do with them. It was already good enough that she was saved today.

Roan then looked at Valeu and didn't see any use for the guy anymore. Instead, he only saw danger in leaving this one alive. Even if Malaka asked, Roan would still kill the man.

"You did well, goodbye."

Switch!

With a slash of his White Star, Roan sent Valeu's head flying as well. However...

Pin!

[Hidden quest opened, the Empire's Succession starts now.]

Death... and me

Chapter 258: Roan's Analysis

Rean looked at Roan with a weird face, his message obvious.

'You just had to do that...'

Roan felt helpless. It's not like he could predict that killing the man would initiate this thing. Still, they didn't have time to complain as the Soul Gem System's voice echoed in their minds.

[The Empire's situation is becoming more and more complicated by the day. At the moment, the waves that it causes are not perceptible for the majority, but it will not last for many years. The Old Emperor can't decide who will inherit the throne, making the Empire's destiny more unpredictable than it should be. The Empire needs someone genuinely willing to protect it and keep the peace for the sake of its people.]

[Objective: Help Princess Calina Sasamil take the throne.]

[Time for completion: Unlimited.]

[Rewards: 20000 Destiny Points.]

[Authority Reward: Five Levels.]

[Title Reward: Empire's Destiny Saviors.]

[Failure Conditions 1: Another Emperor or Empress takes the throne.]

[Failure Conditions 2: Calina Sasamil Dies.]

[Punishment for Failure: Hosts' Eradication.]

Rean and Roan were taken aback.

'This shit really came out of nowhere!'

They already expected that it would be something complicated. After all, the quest name 'Empire's Succession' definitely sounded grand. However, they never thought that it would be something as ridiculous as this.

'Sister Orb, this doesn't make any sense at all! Roan and I are only Foundation Establishment cultivators. What the hell does the system expect us to do? It doesn't matter how I see it. This sudden jump in difficulty shouldn't happen to us!'

Roan couldn't agree more.

'He's right! We barely know this Calina girl! Why the hell would the Soul Gem System entangle us with her like that? First of all, does she even want to be the Empress? I doubt so! Sister Orb, you must do something! It is obvious that the system is trying to kill us!'

[Shut up! I have nothing to do with it! Didn't you see what the system said? It was a Hidden Quest! It meant that even I was completely unaware of its existence. I told you before, I'm more like a helper. I have little effect on the system's decisions. If you don't wanna die, you better think about something.]

[However...]

Rean and Roan's attention was immediately piqued.

'However? However what? Don't hold back, just tell us.'

[Well, I also think that this sudden spike in difficulty compared to what you did before is too unreasonable. Yet, there is one thing that I know for sure. The Soul Gem System will never release a quest or a mission that is impossible to complete. For it to have unlocked this quest, it means that there must be a way of finishing it.]

[Besides, you saw that, didn't you? There's no time limit. That means even the system doesn't know how long it will take for the Emperor to decide on the next successor.]

'Ahh... fuck it! Let me think.'

Roan calmed himself down and began to ponder about the contents of the quest. As unwilling as he might be, he knew that continuing to complain would lead nowhere.

'There are a few points hidden in the Soul Gem System's message. First, it's the waves caused by the Emperor's indecision. It said that those waves are not perceptible by those outside the Imperial Family's circle. That means the situation still hasn't reached a critical point where the Emperor will be forced to make a decision.'

'The second point is the 'will not last for many years.' That means we still have a lot of time before the real struggle for the throne starts. From what the system said and the pieces of information we got from Valeu, all the princes and princesses are still gathering allies. From the nine subordinate clans, only two have chosen a faction up to this point.'

During the interrogation, Roan asked Valeu about all of the subordinate clans around the Imperial Family. The Nine Clans were the Samikil, Lavil, Taran, Fole, Susume, Dekaslo, Mantil, Porem, and Wavile clans. Valeu told them that their Samikil clan had allied with the first prince, Lamares. As for the second, the Wavile clan joined the fifth prince's side, Salael.

All the other seven clans were still indecisive about what they should do. After all, allying with the wrong side would result in centuries of suppression by the clans and the Emperor they were against at first. The only reason they wouldn't be destroyed is that they were still part of the Empire's forces. Yet, none

of them wanted to draw the short stick. After all, the outcome would be directly related to their own share of resources of the Empire.

'The third point is that the system said that the Empire needs someone genuinely willing to protect it and keep the peace. For me, this is the most critical point. The hidden meaning behind it is what bothers me the most.'

Rean and Sister Orb became confused.

[Why? It seems pretty clear to me.]

Rean nodded.

'Same. The objective is to help Calina take the throne. In other words, Calina is willing to protect the Empire and keep it peaceful. Well, peaceful to the point as to what a cultivation world could reach. Compared to Earth, this world had never been peaceful at all.'

[Right? I also think the same.]

Roan snorted after hearing those two.

'Idiots. It has nothing to do with Calina. Although I'm not 100% sure, I'm at least 90% confident of what I'm thinking. The problem here is that the system could have picked any of the more developed princes or princesses. With Rean's Communication System and our talent, although difficult, we would eventually be able to join one of their sides. That means this quest would be a lot easier to complete. Don't you agree?'

Sister Orb and Rean nodded. Well, only Rean since Sister Orb had no head, but she agreed with Roan nonetheless.

Roan then continued.

'Since the system selected Calina, that can possibly mean just one thing. All the other influential princes and princesses also think that the Chrole Empire is a threat! It's just that they are not as loud about it as the First Prince, Lamares!'

'Ah!'

[Ah!]

Indeed. The Soul Gem System wanted someone to keep the Empire peaceful. If any of the other influential inheritors had this wish, it would have been much better to ask Rean and Roan to help them instead of Calina. However, it did not do so. It's not guaranteed, but that possibly meant that they all agreed with the idea of dealing with the Chrole Empire.

Roan added another point.

'This also means that we now know why the Emperor is indecisive. He most likely knows that all his best inheritors all shared a similar view regarding the Chrole Empire.'

It was then that Roan noticed something.

'Oh, I see... Seems like Sister Orb wasn't wrong after all.'

[Of course! I'm never wrong... By the way, what is it that I wasn't wrong about?]

Rean and Roan's mouths twitched.

'Never wrong your ass! Can you be even more shameless than that?'

[Hmph!]

Roan calmed down again and continued.

'Whatever. You said that the system never gives an impossible quest or mission to complete. That's the part you were right about. Just now, I found out where our silver lining is. Of course, I might be wrong about it as well. However, I'm pretty confident in my hypothesis.'

Rean was more than happy enough to know that there was at least a way out of this.

'What is it?'

Roan then explained.

'From what Valeu said, the Emperor doesn't have much longer to live. However, we are talking about a monster with insanely high cultivation. His 'much longer' is definitely a lot bigger than an ordinary person's 'much longer.' That means he still has quite a few years to live. The proof of it is also inside the 'not many years' mentioned by the Soul Gem System's Quest.'

'Anyway, that's not the main point. The crux of the issue here is that the Emperor will not live for long from the perspective of a high-level cultivator's lifespan. Since the Emperor already knows that all his princes and princesses with potential have the same view of the Chrole Empire, why is he hesitating to select one of them? At first, I thought that it was because they were similar that he couldn't decide.'

'In fact, it is still the truth. Because they all think the same way about the Chrole Empire, the Emperor hasn't picked one of them yet. However, the reason for his hesitation was different from what I thought.'

'Don't you think it's weird? We already know that the first and fifth princes are both talented and intelligent. Considering how close to death the Emperor is, why didn't he simply pick one of the two? If push came to shove, he could simply have forced them into some kind of competition to decide which one to pick. He is still the Emperor, after all. However, he did not do so.'

Only then did Rean catch the meaning of Roan's words.

'Ah! I see... The Emperor... doesn't want to attack the Chrole Empire. We don't know if he sees the Chrole Empire as a threat or not. But at the very least, he doesn't think it's worth starting a war against

them. Perhaps he is even friends with the Chrole Empire's Emperor or something like that. Now I understand why Valeu kept calling him an idiotic emperor.'

Roan nodded.

'Exactly! That also brings us to the main point of this quest. To help Calina ascend to the Throne as Empress. That could only mean one thing. The Emperor is waiting for an alternative to appear, someone willing to carry his wishes of a peaceful arrangement. In the Soul Gem System's eyes, the Sasamil Princess with half of Chrole's Imperial Family's bloodline is a perfect choice. Above all, she's someone that absolutely doesn't wish for a war to happen. Because of that, we got stuck with this kid here...'

Roan shrugged his shoulders in the end.

'Well, this is all a theory, but I still think it is at least worth a try. After all, only eradication awaits on the other end.'

Rean didn't mind, saying.

'It doesn't matter. It will be a hell of a ride at the very least. However, a small chance is still several times better than no chance at all!'

[Seems like there is no need for me to cheer you up anymore.]

'Please don't. Things are probably gonna get worse instead.

[You really don't know how to treat me.]

Roan ignored Sister Orb and then looked at the princess. She still had a sad expression as Malaka comforted her. However, Roan simply didn't have the patience for all that bullshit. He moved close to her and...

Bang!

Kicked Calina's butt, making her fall with her face on the ground.

"Stop wasting my time. How are you going to become an Empress with an attitude like that?"

Rean and Malaka looked at Roan with eyes wide open! As much as she wasn't as an important princess compared to others, she was still someone with Imperial Blood, you know?

Calina, who had just eaten some dirt, got up in a fit of rage!

"Yo-you! You dare kick a princess of the Sasamil Empire in the butt?"

But it was then that she noticed a strange point in Roan's previous words.

"Wait! Empress? What are you talking about?"

Roan looked at Calina as if he was looking at an idiot. Oh well, he probably considered her an idiot even before that anyway. In the end, he snorted and said as if stating a matter of fact.

"Rejoice! Because I, Lord Death, am going to help you become the next Empress! There is no need to thank me."

Rean's mouth twitched a little. For some reason, that scene reminded him of a particular event from the past that he would rather forget...

Death... and me

Chapter 259: First Things First

Calina didn't know where to start. Become Empress? Who? Her? First of all, would you kick a future Empress in the butt then? No, wait! What did he mean by Death?

Roan didn't give her much time to think, though.

"You don't want a war to happen between the Sasamil Empire and the Chrole Empire to happen, right? Then the answer is simple, become the next Empress. You might be at the bottom of the barrel, but you're still a princess with rights for the Throne."

Calina and Malaka were shocked by those words.

"Wait, wait, wait! What are you talking about? Sure, I have a bloodline from the Sasamil Family. However, I also have half a Chrole Imperial Family bloodline! There is no way a half-blood like me can ascend to the Throne. All the princes and princesses would join hands to get rid of me in the very first moment I prove to be a threat."

"No, first of all, why did you change your mind all of a sudden? Just a few seconds ago, you were so unwilling that I felt more like a burden. That doesn't make sense at all!"

Rean then patted Calina's head while laughing.

"Don't mind the details. The important part is that Roan decided to help you."

Well, they would die if they don't do anything. Anyone's opinions would change in a blink of an eye in that situation.

Calina then glanced at Rean from the corner of her eyes before asking.

"Since when did I give you permission to act this close to me?"

Rean showed a puzzled expression as he responded.

"You are Malaka's friend, right? I thought you would like this kind of treatment as well."

"Could it be that you dislike it?"

Calina's face got a little red as she saw Malaka arrive beside Rean just to get her head patted as well. She and Malaka had almost the same age, but Malaka seemed to not care about her image at all. In fact, she seemed to enjoy Rean's pampering very much.

"... I don't... hate it."

Rean laughed out loud as he continued to do that. Sure enough, as much as she pretended to act like an adult, a twelve-year-old girl was still more or less a kid.

Still, Calina quickly regained her bearings and shook her head as she returned to the topic at hand.

"No, forget it now! I can't become the Empress. There is no way it will work. We can't fight against all the other descendants. They're gonna kill us!"

Roan snorted in response.

"Kill you? I'm sorry, but they're already very willing to do it. Didn't Valeu just try it a moment ago? You are already on a path of no return. Regardless of which of the princes or princesses ascend to the Throne, the Chrole bloodline here in Sasamil will be wiped out. At the very least, you will all be severely restricted in your actions."

Calina couldn't help but ask.

"I can understand that it will happen if Prince Lamares takes the Throne, but why would the others do that?"

Sure enough, without hearing Roan's analysis, it would be hard for her to understand. At the moment, she thinks that the other princes and princesses have nothing against her.

Rean then looked at Roan before asking through their Soul Connection.

'Just explain to her the whole theory. She might be only twelve, but she's quite smart. I believe she will understand her situation once you put it into words.'

Roan nodded. That was the fastest way indeed. Of course, Roan omitted the Soul Gem System's existence and everything related to it.

Calina was once again shocked by what she heard. She knew that all Roan said was only his own theory. However, she was still a princess of the Imperial Family. As soon as Roan talked about why the actual Emperor hasn't decided the next Emperor yet, Calina immediately understood that Roan was probably right. She only had to think back to remember how the other princes and princesses with pure Sasamil bloodlines treated her to reach this conclusion.

"What should I do...? I have no idea when someone might appear to attack me. No, the other people from political marriages with the Chrole Empire are probably in as much danger as me as well."

Roan then asked something.

"Have you heard about some of them being attacked or anything like that?"

Calina pondered a bit and immediately remembered a few things. It was not like she couldn't tell odd happenings.

"Yes. I heard about Uncle Ganmon being ambushed by an assassin of the Shadow Reaper Organization. He is much older than me but still has half of his bloodline from the Chrole Empire. Because he escaped in the end, I didn't put much thought into this. There was also a rumor that the Imperial Office manager's wife suddenly passed away. I didn't know her, but I know that she was also someone from Chrole."

Roan nodded.

"Seems like you were not the only one. These two you just mentioned are just the ones you know about. There are probably more of them in the same situation as you in there. Anyway, we already confirmed your status. Now we need to work on the way to make you turn into the next Empress."

"Ah! Are you talking seriously? I don't want to say this to the people who saved my life but, you guys are just way too weak to change anything."

Rean laughed after hearing that. Of course, they knew that. They even complained about that with Sister Orb before.

"It's okay. We're all in the same boat."

Those words puzzled Calina once again.

"Same boat? How come? As long as you don't get involved with me, you should be just fine."

Roan shook his head.

"You don't need to know why. All you need to do is trust us for now. The question here is, if we can make you the next Empress, would you believe us?"

Calina then asked Roan another question instead of answering his one.

"Why would you help me become the Empress? You said it yourself. There is a chance that the first prince is right, and we might be facing an attack of the Chrole Empire. In that case, helping him would be the right thing to do. Don't you want to protect the Empire?"

Roan couldn't care less about that anymore. Empire? Fuck that! What use will that have if they die? It had nothing to do with who was wrong or right, but she had to become the Empress so they could save themselves.

"Who doesn't want to become the reason for an Emperor or Empress to rise to the Throne, right? Let's just say that it will be much better for Rean and me if you take the Throne instead of the others. Sure enough, you would reward us well."

Malaka then hugged Calina's arm before saying.

"Trust Roan. He is super dark but super smart. If he said this much, then there is definitely a way to do this."

Roan didn't mind Malaka's words. Better dark than dead.

Calina couldn't help but feel a little jealous of how much she trusted her brothers.

"Malaka..."

Calina then went silent for a few minutes, not saying anything. Surprisingly, even Roan didn't mind waiting for her this time. In the end, she gritted her teeth and nodded.

"Alright! I'll do it! If I do nothing, only Death awaits me in the end. But you better understand that I have no allies whatsoever. At most, I would get my father's support. But even that would be difficult since he wouldn't believe that I have any chance."

Roan didn't seem to mind, saying.

"Don't worry. If everything works the way I think it will, then your chance will appear by itself in the next few years. At that moment, you just need to grasp it. Rean, I, and the happy-go-lucky girl on your side will help you with the rest."

This time, even Rean was surprised by what he heard. Roan hadn't commented about this chance at all.

"What are you talking about? What kind of chance is that?"

Roan shook his head, replying.

"There is no point in telling you about it now since I'm not 100% sure either. When the time comes, you will know."

As Roan said that, he thought to himself.

'Old geezer, I know very well what you're planning. You better not grow afraid of doing that when the time comes.'

Rean and the others could only nod in the end. If Roan wasn't willing to say, not even God would be able to force his mouth open.

Calina then took a deep breath before asking.

"What should I do?"

Roan nodded and then explained with a cold smile.

"When the time comes, you will need to have the strength to fight for the Throne. I don't mean raw power, but you have to prove that you have the talent and mind to become an Empress candidate. If you can't even do that much, then you are doomed from the very start. Hehe... I hope you are at least confident about your own capabilities."

Suddenly, Malaka's body on her side began to tremble. Soon after, she looked at Calina with an expression of pity. It was as if she was looking at a dead body.

"Wh-what? I'm very confident in my capabilities, okay? Say it, what should I do first?"

Roan nodded with a satisfied expression, saying.

"First off... I need you to die."

Death... and me

Chapter 260: Coming Into Terms

"Uh?"

Malaka and Calina went stiff for a second. Didn't they just save Calina? How come they were killing her now? Of course, only the two kids thought like that. Seeing the two girls' confusion, Rean then explained.

"Well, I don't know what he's planning, but I believe that he wants you to disappear, am I right?"

Roan nodded.

"Yes. What I want is for others to think that you are dead. At the moment, I don't know just how many people want you dead, which will make things quite annoying to deal with. From the looks of it, even the Shadow Reapers are involved. Well, that's to be expected since the Imperial Family definitely doesn't lack money to pay them."

Roan then continued.

"However, this Profound Abyss gave us an opportunity. As long as you don't leave this place, everyone will think that you died, especially after they notice that none of your guardians came out from it as well. That's simply perfect."

Calina immediately asked in response.

"Wait, wait, wait! If I don't leave this place, I will definitely die! Let alone with the surge ongoing, once I run out of Anti-Decaying Pills, I can't resist the Decaying Energy anymore. How do you expect me to stay here? Could it be that you want me to wait for the next time the Profound Abyss is open?"

Roan snorted in response, saying.

"Don't be ridiculous. Let alone you, even peak Core Formation Realm participants in this thing will die in no time if they stay here. What I mean is that others should think that you didn't leave this place."

Calina had a worried expression, inquiring.

"But what about my mother? She's a member of the Chrole Empire who was sent to this place to marry Father. I can't leave her behind. Also, what will we do about telling her that I died? I can't let that happen."

Roan shook his head in response.

"Your mother is different. She's a pure Chrole Family Member, right? She should know her own limits, and there is your father, who's a prince. No one will try to kill one of the prince's wife under the Imperial Palace's roof. The proof for that is that they had to arrange this weird plan of having you dying in the Profound Abyss instead of killing you in the Capital."

"As for the news about your death, this is only a temporary thing. Once the old Emperor makes his move, it will be the moment you can reappear. You can simply apologize as much as you want after that happens."

Calina didn't like that, but she still nodded in the end.

"What about pretending that I'm dead? There is only one way out of Profound Abyss, and it is a very narrow entrance on top of that. There is no way I can pass through it without anyone seeing me—especially Elder Polian, who's in the Saint Realm."

Roan didn't seem to care.

"You don't need to worry. We have a way of doing it. When the time comes, I'll explain it to you."

Calina narrowed her eyes in response.

"Fine! It's not like I have another option other than trust you anyway."

Roan nodded.

"After that, you will come back to our sect with us to spend your time training. I'll be sure to give you some... special attention."

Roan then noticed a certain naughty girl looking into the distance as if it had nothing to do with her.

"Of course, since the one who insisted on saving your ass was Malaka, she will be glad to accompany you during that time. You two are both talented girls with Water Element Affinity. It will be simply perfect."

"Ah! Why me?"

Roan answered as if stating a fact.

"Isn't that obvious? That's your friend. How could you abandon her?"

Roan almost burst out in laughter. It was evident that Roan didn't give a damn to the friendship between them. He only took the opportunity to make Malaka pay for dragging them into this ridiculous quest. After all, if Malaka hadn't insisted on saving Calina, the hidden quest would never have activated.

Malaka wanted to say something, but that would be the same as denying Roan's words. As for Calina, she couldn't help but feel curious about this situation. Every time Roan spoke about training, Malaka's face would become pale. In the end, she sent a Spiritual Sense message to Malaka.

'Is his training that difficult?'

One must remember that Calina was really pretty much like Malaka. She even tried to escape her training sessions several times in the past too. Perhaps that's why these two girls got so well along.

Malaka then looked at Calina with a crying face, telling her everything about Roan's 'Special Methods' of training through a single Spiritual Sense message. As one could imagine, Calina became paler than Malaka. Roan's methods were really... brutal... to say the least.

'I-I-It can't be that... bad... right?'

Malaka shook her head.

'If anything... it might be worse.'

Roan didn't know what the two girls were talking about, nor did he care.

"Alright. We are already inside the Profound Abyss anyway, so we might as well go after the Vermilion Pools. That was our primary objective to start with. It can also help with Calina's training, which will be a great help for her cultivation."

Roan then looked at Rean, who immediately understood his intentions.

"Alright, guess it's my time now. Calina, come over here."

Calina was puzzled but did as she was told anyway. Rean then touched her face with his hands, which made her a bit flustered.

"What are you doing?!"

"Just wait a bit. We can't let you go around with this appearance of yours, right? Just leave it to me."

Suddenly, Light Element began to gather around Rean's hands and enter Calina's face. Calina couldn't help but relax her entire body. Rean's Light Element just felt way too good!

Soon after, a weird scene played in front of everyone. Calina's blonde hair turned into a snowy white color. Not only that, but her eyebrows suffered the same fate. Following that were her blue eyes. It also changed into the same silver-white color as Rean's. Last but not least, the structure of her skin and bones also changed, making her look at least three to four years older! At the moment, Calina looked like a completely different girl!

Wow!

Malaka couldn't help but widely open her eyes! It was the first time she saw Rean doing something like that. Not too long after, Rean finished his job.

Curious, Calina summoned the Water Element to create a clean water mirror in front of her. Sure enough, she couldn't recognize herself. Not only did she get quite a few centimeters taller, she really looked a lot more mature. It's just that her face, eyes, and hairs were not the same anymore.

"How did you do that?!"

Rean smiled but didn't explain. He could increase the body's strength with the Light Element to a ridiculous degree. Changing one's appearance wasn't anything too difficult for him.

"This change is not permanent. I will need to provide you Light Element every few hours to keep the transformation. Besides, it can only fool the Core Formation Realm and below level participants in the Profound Abyss. The elders' Divine Senses outside would notice something wrong with you straight away. Still, that is more than enough for others in here to not relate 'Princess Calina' with us if we are spotted while inside the Profound Abyss."

Roan nodded at the sight before saying.

"Alright, that's good enough. Let's go!"