

H. Academy 411

Chapter 411 93.3 - Duels [3]

The moment the fight between the two students reached its pinnacle, everyone held their breaths.

After all, they were witnessing the true history unfolding right before their eyes.

Emberheart and Frostborne.

Ice and Fire.

Ice Dragon and Fire Phoenix.

The epic of the fight was so clear that the audience felt like they were in a play written by an author. This wouldn't make sense otherwise.

Two heirs were parallel, each having their own strengths and own styles. Even those styles represented their family, somehow matching the lore metaphorically.

However, in the end, they were all sure of one thing.

Seraphina won.

Her abilities were superior. The fact that she was able to Dual Cast two complex spells alone showed her talent, and Irina fell short of that.

At least, that was what they had believed.

Until the last second.

The amphitheater buzzed with murmurs of disbelief and awe. The duel between Seraphina Frostborne and Irina Emberheart had left everyone stunned. The fact that Irina had unleashed such explosive magic was mind-blowing, and the intensity of the clash had exceeded all expectations.

"I can't believe what we just saw," one spectator whispered, still in shock. "Irina Emberheart's magic... it was like nothing I've ever seen before."

"That explosion! It was like a nuclear blast," another person added, their voice filled with amazement. "How did she do that?"

"I've seen many duels, but this one... it's on a whole different level," a seasoned observer remarked, shaking their head in disbelief.

In the audience, Esme, who had been sent by the head of the Emberheart family to observe Irina, narrowed her eyes. The magic Irina had used just now was unlike anything she had ever seen.

'Miss....Just what were you doing all this time?'

Esme thought, trying to analyze the intricacies of the spell. That spell was unfamiliar to her, who had already integrated herself into the family.

The fact that she was unable to analyze it meant the spell was developed by Irina alone. But, it was complex and hard to see through.

'You are changing so rapidly.....But, this change....Will Matriarch be happy with that?'

She couldn't help but think to herself since she could easily envision the past where Irina was scolded after doing such acts.

"That magic was complex, wasn't it?"

At that exact moment, she heard a voice right beside her. "Isn't that right, Miss Esme? Or should I say, the Sister of Fire Emblem?"

Esme turned to see a blonde-haired woman with a stern but somehow familiar face. It was Eleanor, a renowned figure known for her prowess.

Esme's expression remained composed as she replied, "It's nice to hear that I am known by the 'Invoker.' I'm flattered." Her words were polite, but her eyes did not smile at all.

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders. "Was it not a splendid display?" she asked. "Were you able to see what happened in there?"

Esme shook her head, still trying to piece together the details of the complex spell. "Please, do enlighten me, Miss Invoker."

Eleanor smiled, her eyes twinkling with intrigue. "What you witnessed was no ordinary spell. Irina's 'Nuclear' was a fusion of different elements, a definitely unique combination." Eleanor explained, looking at the scene.

"...."

Esme waited for her to continue, but Eleanor had already entered her teaching mode. Seeing that she had no intention of speaking, Esme finally realized what she needed to do.

"What elements?" She asked, like a student listening to her teacher.

Eleanor raised her hand, her three fingers pointing up. "The spell had three fundamental elements that composed most of it. The first one is, of course, utilizing fire psions and manipulating them. This was the core of the explosion."

Esme nodded, understanding that much. "And the second?"

"The second was immense mana control," Eleanor continued, her voice steady. "Irina precisely controlled the mana to create the magic circuit. The circuit had to be perfect to channel the energy into such a powerful explosion without it backfiring."

Eleanor stopped, her eyes glinting with anticipation. Esme, recognizing the cue, asked, "And the third one?"

Eleanor's smile widened. "The third one is precisely the most important block. Telekinesis."

Esme's eyes widened in surprise. "Telekinesis?"

"Yes," Eleanor confirmed. "Irina used telekinesis to manipulate the flow and pressure of the mana within the magic circuit. This allowed her to maintain control over the immense energy and direct it precisely where she wanted it to go. By using telekinesis, she could stabilize the spell and prevent it from exploding prematurely."

Esme stopped for a second to imagine what had completely transpired.

Telekinesis to use control mana flow and pressure the mana within the magic circuit?

It was a concept she wasn't too familiar with, but at the same time, she had heard about this before.

Many psychic mages would do this to cover their lack of mana control. But was there a need for Irina to do such a thing?

"I don't completely understand. Why did she need to use Telekinesis to control mana precisely? Our Young Miss is talented enough to control mana precisely."

Eleanor nodded her head with a smile as if she had been expecting this question. She raised her hand and asked Esme, "What differs an Archmage from a normal mage?"

Esme answered simply, as this was a well-known distinction. "The Archmage occupation is the evolution of the Mage occupation. The condition for evolving is to merge one's consciousness with the will of the world to some extent. Once one does that, they become an Archmage and gain the ability to manipulate psions at the particle level."

As Esme answered this question, she suddenly widened her eyes. "That spell that Miss had used... it was only possible if the user was an Archmage." She realized this since the spell used energies at the atomic level. And then she answered her own question. "She used telekinesis to manipulate the mana like an Archmage on the psionic-particle level."

Eleanor's smile deepened a glint of pride in her eyes. "Exactly. Irina might not be an Archmage yet, but she has found a way to mimic their techniques using her unique blend of skills. By using telekinesis, she compensates for the finer control that only an Archmage would normally have, allowing her to execute incredibly complex and powerful spells."

It didn't make sense. How could it?

The fact that there was someone there who could use Telekinesis in such a manner that was comparable to an Archmage's mana control....

It was not logical at all.

The reason?

To achieve such fine control of Telekinesis, one needed to spend at least a hundred, maybe more years.

And they also needed talent.

Then, why did this not make sense?

One could already become an Archmage if they could train for such a long time while also having such a talent. Thus, it was practically impossible and meaningless.

But Irina achieved such a feat.

Esme took a deep breath, her mind racing with the implications. "This means....."

'Something happened....Something that we don't know.'

This was not normal, yet Esme didn't know. If she had reached such a conclusion, it would have been evident that the matriarch could have done the same.

Since she was an Archmage herself.

"Yes," Eleanor confirmed, misunderstanding Esme's mumbling. "Irina is pushing the boundaries of what's possible with her magic. She's not just relying on her natural talent; she's innovating and finding ways to transcend the limitations of her current abilities. This is the mark of a true prodigy."

The audience's discussions continued, filled with awe and respect for the duel they had just witnessed.

The names Frostborne and Emberheart would echo in their minds for a long time, a testament to the incredible display of power and skill they had just seen.

Suddenly, Eleanor, who had been explaining everything with a smile, narrowed her eyes, sensing something amiss. Her eyes widened for a split second as she felt a disturbance in the mana around them.

'No!'

She didn't have much time to react.

"Everyone, get down!" she shouted, but it was too late.

The world went white.

—BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Countless explosions erupted all across the arena and the seats. The shockwaves from the blasts sent debris flying in all directions, and the sound was deafening. Screams filled the air as people were thrown from their seats, the once peaceful and awe-filled atmosphere now a chaotic nightmare.

Eleanor instinctively threw up a barrier of pure mana, shielding the people around her from the immediate blast. The force of the explosion slammed against her barrier, but she held firm, her eyes scanning the arena.

There were countless other barriers that had already been formed. The professors of the academy, who had been watching the fight unfold, quickly reacted, forming protective barriers to shield as many civilians as possible. They strained to maintain these defenses amidst the chaos.

Amidst the chaos, inside some of the barriers, an ominous energy began to ooze out. Coupled with the sounds of roars and howling, the atmosphere grew even more terrifying. In an instant, some of the civilians began to change, their eyes turning a menacing red.

Corrupted by the dark energy, they lost themselves and instantly attacked the people surrounding them, becoming feral and violent.

Eleanor cursed to herself, activating her communication device.

'Damn it, we expected this to happen during Victor Blackthorn's duel. They've caught us off guard.'

However, even if this was the case, it wasn't like the situation was too bad.

She issued orders instantly, her voice steady despite the pandemonium. "Amelia, Callum. It is starting. You know what you need to do."

Since she was the professor of the academy, she needed to play her own part while the unit she called was going to play the other.

Callum and Amelia, who had been nearby, sprang into action. Callum's expression hardened as he drew his weapon, ready to face the threat.

Amelia, her eyes fierce, activated her own communication device, rallying the nearby hunters.

"Everyone, we are going to proceed as planned. Form squads and follow the plan. No unnecessary risks," Amelia ordered, her voice cutting through the noise.

The amphitheater had turned into a battlefield. The professors and hunters fought to protect the innocent, their barriers shimmering against the onslaught of corrupted civilians.

Chapter 412 93.4 - Duels [3]

From the moment I entered this world, I knew the storyline had changed, or the story of the game wasn't to be completely trusted, just like what was happening right now.

The attack was supposed to happen when Victor was dueling, interrupting the most important duel.

But that didn't seem to be the case any longer. And that was to be expected. 'Disgusting.'

Still, the atmosphere was filled with a disgusting demonic energy. I hated this to my core.

–THUMP!

My trait was acting already, making my heart beat fast.

I had already protected myself from the initial explosion with fast reflexes, a barrier of mana forming instinctively around me.

I activated my trait [Perceptive Insight], channeling mana into my eyes. The world shifted, and I saw it clearly. Many civilians were slowly turning into corrupted forms, their bodies tainted with demonic energy.

The demonic seeds inside their bodies began to act, and they started rampaging. Chaos erupted around the arena as screams and shouts filled the air. The once orderly crowd became a sea of panic and violence.

I watched all this while preparing myself.

'This is how it was supposed to be. The natural order.' I had no intention of interfering with what was happening.

These corrupted people were irrelevant to my goal, and they would stop once the demonic energy in the environment disappeared.

'This is how they operate,' I thought, observing the unfolding chaos. 'Spread corruption, cause panic, and weaken the resolve of the masses.'

My eyes scanned the crowd, noting the transformations, the corruption spreading like wildfire. The arena that had been a place of competition and camaraderie had turned into a battlefield of survival.

In the midst of this turmoil, I remained a detached observer. My purpose was not to save these people. My purpose was to hunt the demons responsible for this, to exact my vengeance.

Though, in a way, saving these people and not letting them get what they wanted was also a form of vengeance since they would stop once the demonic energy disappeared, killing demon contractors was also a way to save them.

'There,' I sensed a stronger presence, a concentrated source of demonic energy. My gaze locked onto the target, a figure moving through the chaos with a purpose.

'First one.'

From how he moved, the speed, the success rate of his erasing his presence, and the amount of pressure he gave, basically everything, I could predict his strength to some extent.

In this chaos, nobody would be here to check on me. Nobody would see what I would be doing unless I deliberately caused a strong disturbance.

Therefore, I was free to go all out slightly.

'Right.' I instantly blended into the shadows, using [Shadowborne] to mask my presence. Since Lilia was in close proximity, I needed to be quick with my acts.

I mustn't make her suspicious of me while gathering attention. It is annoying when it happens, and I hate it a lot.

—Eyes of the Hourglass

The world slowed down. I didn't want to waste any time.

The more enemies I killed, the better it would be for me.

'Not even one person will escape here.' In the darkness, I transformed the Celestalith into its rifle form. My eyes, enhanced by [Perceptive Insight], analyzed the mana flow and body structure of my target.

'Right shoulder. Cephalic Vein and Sternocostal head.' I pinpointed a weak point on his right shoulder, where his cephalic vein connected to the sternocostal head of the pectoralis. The mana nerves were concentrated in that exact location.

—PIU! In an instant, I aimed the rifle at the identified weak point. The compressed magic bullet flew through the air, nearly silent, and pierced the skin with unparalleled speed. The target had no time to react. Pain surged through his body as his mana flow was disrupted.

Before he could comprehend what was happening, I materialized from the shadows, my cold purple eyes locking onto his.

My black mask, adorned with golden ornaments, reflected on his fearful eyes. He recognized me as the attacker, but there was no time to respond.

'Fear me more.'

His body was paralyzed, not because of the pressure I was emitting or anything, but because of the pain he was experiencing.

But there was quite a high chance that he was feeling my killing intent as well.

STAB! A moment later, my dagger pierced his liver, sending waves of excruciating pain through his body. The agony was unlike anything he had ever experienced, as it seemed to me.

Being a demonic human must have made him feel like the strongest in the world, and it seemed he had faith in his organization, too.

"Pain. Do you know how it feels?"

His eyes widened in terror as he felt me grasp his demonic core. At this moment, he must have understood what I was going to do.

SMASH! With ruthless precision, I crushed it, savoring the pain reflected in his eyes.

"AAAAAAARGH!" This sound was supposed to come out of his mouth the moment he opened it. Letting out a sound is the first human reaction when the person experiences pain.

The reason?

To survive. We humans have always been social creatures. When we do things, we always do it with other people. If not, we wouldn't survive against all those animals and monsters.

Therefore, once the pain receptors are triggered, we seek our companions, aiming to alarm them and alert them of the danger we encounter.

This stupid demonic fucker did the same. His eyes were filled with fear and pain, and he tried to scream, but his vocal cords had been seared, preventing any sound.

Because I had burned them.

Since I already knew he would try to scream.

"In this place. There is only darkness for you. No one is going to save you; no one is going to listen to your pleas. You are going to die here alone, without achieving anything. Do you know the reason why?"

His eyes were unfocused; he looked like a lifeless shell. The small flame danced at the tip of my finger, the source of his silent torment. A basic spell named [Ignite] ranks one spell. But, if utilized precisely well, even that can become lethal from a short distance.

"Because I will never let you."

–THUD! The light in his eyes dimmed as the last of his strength left him. I let his lifeless body fall to the ground, the demonic core crumbling in my hand.

I could feel something entering my body, and I also felt my energy increasing.

Bloodline Resonance.

It seemed that passive skill was doing its work.

Even though I hated getting stronger over the energy of a demon, for the sake of my vengeance, I could do anything.

"One."

It was the start of my hunt.

–BOOM!

Lilia was suddenly blasted by the explosion, her mind not focused. The force sent her crashing into one of the chairs from a faraway distance. Fortunately, she managed to avoid any serious injury, her body rolling to a stop against the wreckage. She quickly gathered herself, shaking off the disorientation and scanning her surroundings.

The situation was chaotic. Smoke rose from the ground as explosions erupted all around, the acrid scent of burning debris filling the air. Lilia's breathing became rough, and a strange feeling in the air affected her body, making it harder to focus.

She looked around, her eyes widening in horror as she saw civilians attacking others. Their bodies showed signs of monstrous transformation, though they retained their human form and most of their body structures. They looked like mindless beasts, their eyes glazed over with a savage hunger.

"What is happening?" Lilia muttered to herself, trying to make sense of the chaos. The term 'demonic corruption?' flashed through her mind, but before she could ponder it further, she was attacked.

A transformed civilian lunged at her, its mouth twisted into a grotesque snarl. Lilia instinctively raised her arm, channeling her mana to create a protective barrier just in time to deflect the attack.

–THUD! She countered with a swift strike, her training kicking in as she fought to defend herself. Even before everything, she was a hunter. Though the course of subjugating other humans was for higher classes, that didn't mean she didn't know what to do.

'Strike efficiently and make them lose their consciousness.'

No matter what, the corrupted civilians were nothing but mindless monsters, and their strength increased a lot.

—Slingshot.

And then, after she had attacked her enemy, she sent a quick dart to the monster. The dart contained a paralysis potion, and it took effect instantly. She always carried things like these so that for the positions when she couldn't draw her bow instantly, she could still protect herself.

But then she realized something.

"Astron."

She called for the boy who was just beside him a second ago.

Lilia's eyes darted around, searching frantically for Astron. He had been beside her just moments ago, but now he was nowhere to be seen.

She considered the possibility that he might have been sent farther away by the explosion.

'This is entirely possible.' "Astron," she called out one last time, her voice calm. But no answer came once again. Then following that, before she could make a move to search for him, an instructor appeared by her side, his presence commanding and protective. "Stay safe under the barrier," he instructed, his tone firm as he conjured a shimmering shield around them.

Lilia glanced at the crowd and the students within the barrier, their faces pale with fear and uncertainty. Her eyes narrowed with a cold glint. She saw this chaos as an opportunity—a chance to increase her fame and prove her strength.

"No," she stated resolutely, stepping out of the barrier. "I want to participate in the fight."

The instructor's eyes widened in surprise, and his initial reaction was one of refusal. "It's too dangerous. You need to stay here."

But then he paused, recognition dawning in his eyes as he looked at her more closely. "Lilia Thornheart?" he asked, his tone shifting to one of respect. He knew of her strength and reputation, and he understood that she was no ordinary student.

Lilia nodded, her expression determined. "Yes. I can handle this. Let me fight."

The instructor hesitated for a moment before reluctantly nodding. "Very well. Be careful."

A small smile curved on Lilia's lips as she turned her attention back to the battlefield. With a fierce determination, she readied herself for the fight ahead, knowing that this was her moment to shine.

Yet, on the other side of the arena, something different was happening.

"Grrrrr..."

A student with purple hair and supposed purple eyes was growling.

Her eyes slowly turning to red.

Chapter 413 94.1 - Not every negative thing is negative

The end-of-the-semester duel festival for freshmen was in full swing, and the academy grounds buzzed with excitement and activity.

Among the many booths set up for the event, one in particular stood out, drawing a steady stream of visitors.

The booth, adorned with colorful banners and enticing aromas, was dedicated to selling chips and snacks. Behind the counter, Maya and her friends worked with cheerful efficiency, their presence adding a magnetic charm to the scene.

Maya, the top seat of the sophomore year, was at the center of attention. Her reputation had spread far and wide, and many students flocked to the booth not just for the delicious snacks but to catch a glimpse of her.

Maya's gentle nature and radiant smile, as she prepared and served the snacks, played a significant role in attracting the crowd. She moved gracefully, her hands deftly handling the various ingredients, while her laughter and friendly banter with customers created a warm, inviting atmosphere.

"Here you go! Enjoy the snacks and have a great time at the festival!" Maya said, handing a bag of chips to a group of excited freshmen. Her eyes sparkled with genuine warmth, making each interaction feel personal and special.

Beside her, Amelia stood, her smile matching Maya's in brightness but with a hint of sadness in her eyes. She helped Maya prepare the snacks, her enthusiasm seemingly masking her deeper emotions.

Amelia's hands moved quickly and skillfully, yet there was a slight tension in her posture, a reflection of the inner conflict she kept hidden.

"Amelia, could you pass me the seasoning mix?" Maya asked, turning to her friend with a grateful smile.

"Of course, Maya!" Amelia replied, her voice cheerful. She handed over the mix, her eyes lingering on Maya for a moment longer than necessary. Despite the sadness she felt, despite how heartbroken she was, she couldn't help but be proud of her 'friend's' accomplishments and the joy she brought to others.

As the line of customers continued, many of them exchanged excited whispers about Maya.

Of course, not everyone there was a student at the academy. In fact, most of them came from the outside.

"Who is this big sister? She is so beautiful."

A young kid looked up, his eyes locked on Maya while he and his mother were passing through the booth.

"That big sister?" the mother teased her young son, a playful glint in her eye. "Would you like to marry her?"

The kid blushed furiously but mumbled, "I want to."

Maya, overhearing the exchange, couldn't help but smile. She called the kid over to the booth, her gentle demeanor putting him at ease. "I'm flattered," she said warmly, "but I'm afraid I can't marry you. There's someone else that I want as my husband."

Suddenly, the chatter around the booth quieted. Her friends, who had been busy preparing snacks, looked up with wide eyes. The crowd, including the mother and her son, seemed to hold their breath as they waited for more. Maya's serene and beautiful smile spread a radiant warmth, captivating everyone around her.

'Ah....She must have said this so as not to let the kid down. Maya, you are too kind!'

Aside from only one person, everyone was thinking about this, as they knew about Maya's character.

Aside from one.

As Amelia knew Maya and about her feelings.

'Right... ' The kid, feeling a bit shy, looked down at the ground, clearly unsure of how to respond. Maya knelt down to his level, her smile never wavering. "But how about I show you a magic trick instead? Would you like that?"

The kid's eyes lit up, and he nodded eagerly. Maya stood back up, flicking her fingers with a practiced ease.

In an instant, the elements responded to her command. Water swirled in the air, forming delicate shapes before cascading down like a gentle waterfall. Air currents danced around, lifting leaves and creating miniature whirlwinds.

Earth rose up, forming intricate patterns on the ground, while flames flickered and twirled, creating a mesmerizing display of light and warmth.

The crowd watched in awe as Maya controlled the elements with grace and precision. She gathered the ingredients for the snacks and, with a flourish, tossed them into the air.

The elements came together in a dazzling display, cooking the snacks as they floated, using only her elemental magic. Fire roasted, air cooled, water seasoned, and earth provided the stability to hold everything in place.

She took the concept of cooking display to the audience to another level.

–THUMP! Yet suddenly, she sensed something. Her heart suddenly strongly hit her body, making her almost lose her balance.

'Huh?'

It was for a subtle moment, but she felt like the world was about to go crimson. The kid before her looked tasty as if she had seen a delicious meal.

'No!' In an instant, she took control of her body once again, making herself feel normal.

In moments, the air was filled with the delicious aroma of freshly prepared snacks. Maya caught the finished product with a smile, handing a perfectly cooked treat to the young boy. "Here you go. Enjoy!"

The kid took the snack with wide eyes, beaming up at Maya. "Thank you, big sister!"

Maya's friends, along with the rest of the crowd, broke into applause as they witnessed the display.

Many wanted to see more, but Maya.

She was having a hard time.

THUMP! THUMP! Her body was pumping blood rapidly, and every breath became a struggle. She knew she couldn't stay any longer.

"Excuse me for a moment," Maya said hurriedly, her voice strained. She didn't wait for a response as she turned and quickly walked away from the booth, each step feeling heavier than the last.

"Maya, are you okay?" Amelia called out, concern evident in her voice. Kiera and the others echoed her worry, but Maya didn't stop to answer. She couldn't risk it.

She moved through the festival crowd, her pace quickening. The curious glances and murmured questions of those she passed barely registered. All she could focus on was getting away before she lost control completely.

Though using magic wasn't prohibited, there were regulations of how one mustn't pass a certain threshold, yet he couldn't care less.

Finally, she found a secluded spot in the academy forest, in a place filled with trees.

Maya leaned heavily against the tree, her breaths coming in ragged gasps. The forest around her was a sanctuary, a place where she could momentarily escape the chaos of the festival. However, her reprieve was fleeting. The sounds of explosions echoed in the distance, a constant reminder of the danger that loomed just beyond the trees.

Her body trembled, the demonic energy in the air aggravating her vampiric instincts. Normally, Maya could disguise her true nature, hiding the telltale signs of her vampirism behind a carefully maintained facade.

But now, with the pervasive corruption thickening the air, maintaining control was becoming increasingly difficult.

"Why now?" she whispered to herself, her voice tinged with desperation. "Why here?"

She clutched at her chest, feeling the erratic thumping of her heart. Each beat sent a surge of hunger through her, a ravenous craving that threatened to overtake her senses.

The scent of blood from the wounded and dying civilians at the festival reached her even here, in the depths of the forest. It was intoxicating, a siren call that beckoned her to give in to her darkest urges.

"No," Maya muttered through gritted teeth. "I can't... I won't."

She forced herself to focus, drawing on every ounce of her willpower to suppress the vampiric features that threatened to emerge. Her normally vibrant blue eyes flickered with hints of crimson, and she felt her fangs lengthening involuntarily. She dug her nails into the bark of the tree, using the pain as a grounding force.

"I need to control this," she told herself, her voice a steadying mantra. "I need to stay hidden."

The thought of revealing her true nature to the world filled her with dread. She had worked so hard to maintain her human guise, to protect those around her from the truth.

But now, with the demonic energy coursing through the air, that facade was slipping.

In the distance, another explosion rocked the ground, sending a plume of smoke skyward. Maya's heightened senses picked up the cries of fear and pain from the festival grounds.

Every instinct screamed at her to go and help, to use her powers to protect the innocent.

But she knew she couldn't risk it. Not now, not when she was so close to losing control.

She sank to the ground, pressing her back against the tree and closing her eyes. She needed to center herself, to find the strength to resist the overwhelming hunger. She pictured Junior's face in her mind, drawing strength from the memory of his calm, steady presence. He had always believed in her, always trusted her to do the right thing.

"I can't let him down," she whispered. "If it is known, I will never see him again."

She manipulated the earth, plugging her nose so that she couldn't smell anything.

Then she focused on her breathing, taking slow, measured breaths to calm her racing heart. Following that, she reached for her spatial storage and took out a small pouch.

GULP!

And then started drinking it. Even though she didn't know if this would quench her feelings, she left herself in the relief of his blood.

The sounds of the festival and the forest blended into a distant hum, and she found a sliver of peace amidst the chaos.

Just like that, she closed her senses, leaning on that tree.

She could hold herself until everything ended. At least, that was what she wanted to believe.

The world was dark, as she intended.

Her senses dulled to the chaos outside.

Until that moment.

Like a whisper through the void, the throbbing sensation returned, a relentless pulse that cut through her self-imposed isolation.

Her eyes snapped open, the darkness replaced by a crimson haze. The demonic energy that had been a distant hum now roared in her ears, and she felt it—three distinct blood scents wafting through the air.

The first two were thick, rich, and tantalizingly close. The third was more subtle, hidden beneath the overpowering aroma of the other two, but it was there, beckoning her.

"No..." she muttered, her voice a faint echo of defiance. But her body betrayed her, muscles tensing, fangs elongating, and her eyes now a deep, unrelenting crimson.

The primal hunger surged within her, overwhelming any semblance of control she had left.

SWOOSH! With a speed that defied her human past, Maya dashed through the forest, her movements a blur. Trees and underbrush seemed to part before her as she followed the scent, her mind consumed by the need to sate the thirst that gnawed at her very being.

As she neared the source of the blood, the scene came into focus. Two figures carried by a slightly tall, bulky person.

One of the figures had fiery red hair, while the other one had silvery long hair flowing down.

"Grrr....."

And she instantly attacked, not being able to contain her desires.

Chapter 414 94.2 - Not every negative thing is negative

<Fifteen Minutes Ago>

The moment the organization decided to attack, when the order came, all of the members immediately started the operation without any doubt.

Since none of the lower-ranked members could go against the orders of the higher-ranked executives, it was pretty similar to the military, where the hierarchy was absolute.

At least, that was how it was for the starters.

Different from the military, though, for the organization, the hierarchy was much clearer than others.

The reason for that?

The repercussions for not directly complying with the orders.

It was pain and death.

The moment one enters the organization, all they do is leave their lives to the control of high-ranking executives.

This is how the demonic energy works.

Higher-ranking demons can directly command the lower-ranking ones, the same as the humans who traded their humanity for strength via demonic core.

[Plans have changed. Carry on with the attack now!]

Thus, the moment the order came, even though it was not expected and slightly surprising, none of the members cared about it and attacked it.

The same went for Bill, who was just a recently joined member of the organization.

Bill's heart pounded with a mixture of anticipation and dark satisfaction as he received the order. He had no hesitation, no second thoughts. From the moment he had joined the organization, he had accepted the path he would take. After all, he, too, had his own past, one that fueled his resolve.

He remembered the day vividly, the day a hunter forcefully broke into his apartment when he was a child. She had assaulted his brother, and the memory of his brother had changed after that day, and the memory of his brother hanging from the ceiling with his head tied to the rope.

It was that day that he saw the ugliness of the world. Joining the organization had given him the power he craved, the means to exact his revenge.

He moved swiftly through the shadows of the amphitheater, his eyes scanning the crowd for his target. The corrupted seeds he had planted were already taking effect, and chaos was spreading.

Screams echoed around him, but he felt nothing for the people caught in the crossfire.

After all, those were the same people who had refused to listen to his brother at all. Some people even thought his brother was lucky.

The insanity was innate to humans, and that was when he understood that.

Bill spotted a group of professors and hunters forming a defensive perimeter around a cluster of students. His lips curled into a cold smile. These were the people he wanted to make suffer, the ones who were the same as that woman.

Though he didn't have the exact strength to go against the professors right now, did that matter?

'They will be here soon.'

After all, the executives were about to reveal themselves. That was the plan as it was constructed. The moment the attack started, the executives suddenly appeared with their formidable strength, and then they caught the professors off guard.

As the lower rank member, his whole job was to slightly distract the professors until the executives revealed themselves.

Bill activated his communication device as the command was issued to his squad. [Group A, converge on my position. We're taking down that professor and the students she's protecting. Move out!]

Within moments, several figures emerged from the shadows, each wearing the dark uniform of the organization. Their clothes had already changed, taking their normal form. After this point, there was no need to keep their disguises anymore.

They nodded to Bill, determination, and malevolence gleaming in their eyes.

"Let's go," Bill growled. "Hit them hard and fast. Distract them until the executives arrive."

They moved as one, charging toward the cluster of professors and students. Bill's heart raced with dark excitement as he closed the distance, his weapon drawn.

The professor, a middle-aged woman with a stern expression, saw them coming and immediately reacted. "Get behind me!" she shouted to the students, raising her hands and conjuring a shimmering barrier of mana.

Bill and his squad struck the barrier simultaneously, their combined force causing it to flicker and waver. But the professor held firm, her eyes narrowing in concentration.

"Focus your attacks!" Bill barked. "Break through that barrier!"

They unleashed a relentless barrage of strikes, their demonic energy crackling against the barrier. The professor gritted her teeth, reinforcing her shield with every ounce of her power.

But the professors of Arcadia Hunter Academy were not to be underestimated. As Bill's squad pressed their assault, another professor instantly joined the place, noticing that this side was being targeted.

One professor, a tall man with a scar across his face, launched a counterattack with a blast of fiery mana, forcing Bill and his squad to scatter.

Following that, seeing that she was being covered, the female professor instantly summoned tendrils of ice to ensnare and immobilize several of Bill's comrades while also casting the barrier on the other hand.

'Fuck. They are really strong.' Bill cursed under his breath. They were strong—stronger than he had anticipated. The professors responded swiftly and with precision, coordinating their defenses and counterattacks seamlessly.

[Don't stop.] The order came once again while his frustration was mounting. [We need to hold them off until the executives arrive!]

'We are trying to, you fucker.'

He wanted to curse, but he didn't have any time at all.

CLANK!

Since the blade of the professor knocked him away.

It had just happened in an instant, and then he was blasted off by the sheer force of the attack. No, it wasn't just a sheer force. It was most likely related to the Professor's mana, which was coated on the blade.

CRASH! Yet he couldn't even think about it anymore as he crashed into the wall, his body breaking down internally.

"Burghk-!"

Blood splattered around as he felt like his body was in shambles.

Bill looked around and saw that their side was getting pushed back. Countless members of their organization were dying on the ground one by one at the hands of the stronger professors. Though the initial chaos was still unfolding, and the corrupted civilians were attacking others, they were getting subjugated even by the students. The professors and the academy personnel who had instantly gotten organized were dealing with the demonic humans systematically.

His eyes searched for the executives, looking for their traces if he could find any of them. He waited for them to make their appearance, trusting them though the uneasiness in his heart grew.

But to his dismay, they did not appear. The executives did not show up, and he witnessed more and more deaths. The realization struck him like a blow to the gut.

They were discarded. They were left alone.

'Right? What did you expect, you dumb fucker?' Bill's heart sank as he saw the truth. The organization had sacrificed them, using them as mere pawns in their grand scheme.

'Did you think they would care about you, huh? Are you that stupid? When have you become that naive, huh?'

His mind raced with the bitter reality that he had been used and abandoned.

'When did this world once do something for you, stupid motherfucker?'

Anger, frustration, and a deep sense of betrayal welled up within him. He cursed himself for believing that these people would care about him. He cursed himself for believing that in this world, something was going on his way.

He struggled to his feet, his body aching from the impact. The sight of his comrades being slaughtered fueled his rage, but he knew that staying would mean certain death.

"They left us," he muttered bitterly, his voice barely a whisper. "They used us and left us to die."

However, there was one reason why Bill was able to stay alive to this point and was accepted by the organization as one of the members.

Something that he had always taken count of.

His quick judgment.

"Urghk-!"

At that moment, he heard a voice coming from his side. Up to this point, he had never once cared about what was happening around him. But then, as he heard the voice, he spread his senses.

Only to see something that could change everything.

"These two. They are still here."

Two bodies lay on the ground. One of them was still unconscious, while the other one was slowly gaining consciousness.

'This.'

And in an instant, something came into his mind.

Something.

A way for him to survive.

Or at least a way for him to pay this world back for all the things he had received.

Bill's eyes narrowed as he focused on the two students. One has short red hair, and the other has long silver hair. Without wasting a second, he rushed towards them. He first went for the red-haired girl since she was about to wake up.

The moment he reached her, it was already a bit late as she had woken up.

"Burn."

She attacked him with a quick-fire spell, but her attack was sloppy since she was not in full control.

Bill evaded the strike and then reached her, striking her on the head and making her unconscious once more. Grabbing her, he instantly dashed to the silver-haired girl. He struck her head to ensure she was unconscious and not pretending.

SWIRL! As he prepared himself to move away, suddenly, he felt an enormous amount of mana coming from one side. Turning his head, he saw a wave of fire coming his way, threatening to envelop and burn everything down.

Turning his head to the side, he saw a woman with her eyes ablaze. A woman that he didn't know before, but he noticed an insignia on her chest. Seeing the insignia, he realized her identity. She was someone from the Emberheart family, and he smirked.

"If you come any closer, this girl will die," he threatened, gripping the unconscious red-haired girl tightly.

"Leave the miss alone. Or you will face the consequences."

The woman replied; however, Bill knew if he were to show any weakness here, he wouldn't leave this place alive.

"What consequences? Are you going to kill me? I am already dead, and I don't care."

"I am warning you one last time."

"I say the same."

He was trying to play it cool, but he didn't know such a strong woman would be here to face him this time.

'Fucking shit. It is never easy.'

He once again cursed himself and his luck.

But before he could say anything more, suddenly, the woman raised her hand as the fire swirled around her fingers.

"Don't come? Don't you care what will happen to your young miss? Do you want her to die?"

She didn't stop. Thus, he could only channel his demonic energy into his hands.

"One last warning."

He said, pointing towards her head.

However, the woman did not stop at all, as if she didn't care, and attacked him with the utmost strength. Seeing that, Bill cursed and instantly activated something he had secretly stolen from the armory of the organization.

[Flag]

A special artifact that made the wearer return to a special place marked by it via spatial manipulation.

It was the reason why he dared to grab these girls. After all, if he were to escape using this artifact, he would be easily found out by the organization, and his death would be certain. But, with these girls in his hand, he would even get a promotion that differed from his previous situation.

WOOSH! Just as the wave of fire was about to engulf him, the artifact activated.

The space around Bill and the two unconscious girls warped and twisted, pulling them away from the immediate danger. In the blink of an eye, they were gone, leaving behind a scorched mark on the ground where they had been standing.

WROOM! However, on the other side. The moment Bill entered the spatial portal, something happened. It was interfered with by something external.

'Huh?'

As if a net was wrapped across the academy. At that moment, he realized why this mission was abandoned.

'The Academy was already aware.'

And in an instant, he had appeared once again in the real world. But different from what was expected, he was in a forest.

In the academy forest on top of that.

He was trapped.

Chapter 415 94.3 - Not every negative thing is negative

The moment he realized that the academy was planning to trap them, everything made sense. But, it was still not the time to think about all those things. After all, in a way, he was running for his life there.

He knew he needed to get out of there quickly since staying here only meant Death, and that wasn't something that he could accept no matter what.

He had a map of the academy and its bird's-eye view, so he had a general idea of which direction to run in to leave the academy grounds.

WOOSH! He began to run, his breaths coming in ragged gasps as he sprinted through the forest.

After all, the amount of mana he had spent while fighting against the professors and the little energy that was left inside him was not enough to coat himself with mana completely.

He also spent quite a bit of mana while activating the artifact, which made it worse. Adding to the injuries he had sustained, it was evident that he would have a hard time.

The slight darkness resulting from the thick foliage made it difficult to navigate, but he pressed on, driven by desperation and the need to escape.

SHIVER! Suddenly, he sensed someone's presence. A bloodthirstiness that made his body quiver from the pressure and the 'intent.'

'What? Is there a monster here?'

The pressure was so much, and the bloodthirstiness was so crazy that he couldn't help but remember that one time when he was a hunter, he faced a boss.

This level of bloodthirstiness was comparable to that.

The world seemed to slow down around him, his senses heightened by the imminent danger. His superhuman senses and intuition parameters that he had honed after years of fighting when he was a child made this possible.

'Too fast.' Despite this, he couldn't react completely in time. The speed of the attacker was much higher than his own.

CRACK! In an instant, he deployed a quick barrier of mana, which lacked depth and good formation.

The barrier managed to block some of the impact, but the force behind the attack was overwhelming.

CRASH! He was sent flying back, crashing through the underbrush and slamming into a tree.

And he was not alone. The other two students that he was carrying on his shoulders also flew up in the sky, each hitting a tree and stopping.

Pain coursed through his body, but he forced himself to stand, groaning in agony. He looked up to see his attacker emerge from the shadows—a figure with long purple hair cascading down to her shoulders.

A figure that looked young, most likely an academy student.

But something was different about that figure.

What was it?

'Those eyes. What the hell?'

Blood-red pupils filled with madness. Symbolizing the bloodthirstiness.

'Fangs?'

And two fangs directly seeping through the mouth.

'That expression.'

The face that would normally pass as beautiful was now contorted. It looked eerie and dangerous.

"Grr....."

Bill's eyes widened in realization. This was no ordinary student. This was a monster, a result of the corruption seeds they had been spreading. But could such a strong monster be created just by those seeds?

Before he could answer that question, the monstrous girl disappeared from his vision. He spread his senses to detect her presence, but his senses picked up nothing.

'Is she gone?'

He thought inwardly that the danger had finally passed.

"What the hell was that girl?"

Leaning against the tree, he released a hearty breath.

But the moment he did that, his eyes met with two crimson spheres.

'!' His body turned cold, his blood stopping. The girl hadn't left; she was just right on top of him.

The monstrous girl's fangs gleamed in the dim light, and before he could react, she lunged at him with terrifying speed. He tried to raise his arms to block her, but she was too fast. Her fangs sank into his shoulder, and he screamed in pain.

Bill struggled, trying to push her off, but her grip was like iron. The pain was excruciating, and he felt his strength draining away as she fed on him.

"Gulp."

He did his best to use the demonic energy in his demonic core, which was recently integrated into him. Though the power was hard to use and it went berserk often, he knew he didn't have a chance.

'But why?'

However, it didn't work at all. The energy wasn't responding to his calls.

No, it was rather about to go berserk. The situation was too dire for him.

'COME YOU FUCKING ENERGY! WHY ARE YOU NOT WORKING!'

He wanted to shout with anger, but even mustering the strength to move his mouth felt like a chore.

His vision blurred, and he knew he had to act fast if he wanted to survive. However, he couldn't use the demonic energy.

Thankfully, because his core wasn't completely integrated into his body, he was still able to use normal mana like other humans, but it was limited to non-delicate type. His connection to normal mana was corrupted, making it a lot harder to control.

Yet, if it was a primal way of using it.

He could do it.

With a desperate burst of energy, he summoned all the mana he could muster and blasted her with a shockwave.

"Grr....."

The force threw her off him, and she landed a few feet away, hissing in anger.

His body was shaking in fear. For the first time in a while, he was feeling such a thing. Even while facing the professors, he hadn't felt like the death was this close.

"Haaaaah....Haaaah....Haaaaah...."

It was as if something was suppressing him initially. Inherently, he was against a superior being from the start.

'Ah....'

And at that moment, the realization hit him.

The reason why his demonic energy didn't work.

Because he was against a demonic being right now.

A demonic being was ranked much higher than him in terms of hierarchy.

'Why is there someone like her? And why is she attacking me?' There were infinitely many questions that lingered in his head, but he couldn't answer any of them.

He staggered to his feet, clutching his bleeding shoulder. He knew he couldn't fight her head-on. He needed to escape.

"Grrrr..."

But how could he do it?

How could he escape from this situation?

As he asked himself this, the girl attacked him once again, instantly appearing right beside him. He raised his hand to attack to fend her off, but the girl just ignored it and went straight for his neck. He managed to push her back once again with a burst of raw mana, sending her skidding across the ground.

'She's not acting rationally,' he thought, panting heavily. 'She's only focused on something... but what?'

Then it hit him. The first time he had blasted her with a shockwave, she should have been able to sense it easily, but she didn't react just as this time. Her movements were erratic, driven by an insatiable hunger rather than strategy or awareness.

His blood.

The moment he realized this, his eyes darted to the two girls lying on the ground. Then, another question arose this time.

Why was she this focused on his blood? Those girls were also there, but her attention was solely on him. And it was not like he posed as a threat either.

'Threat? Ah.....'

Then he understood why, and a plan began to form in his mind.

'Please work...'

"Grrrrr..."

SWOOSH! The girl once again rushed towards his body with erratic speed. It was faster than before. But this time, he was ready for the plan.

"Argh-!"

His body was in pain, but he couldn't care less. There was only one thing that could be done here.

His mana was depleted, and his demonic energy was inaccessible. Therefore, he did something that Hunters would only do when their lives were on the line.

Using his own life force.

The essence that displayed his vitality. The essence of his whole very being. The moment his life force was depleted, he would die.

But what was the use of lifeforce if he couldn't even live to deplete it?

In an instant, amongst the pain that he was feeling, strength started filling his veins. He felt like his body was a lot stronger than before.

Even with this, he knew that he wouldn't be able to face the girl on his own. Thus, he did what he needed to do.

–SWOOSH! He reached the red-haired girl first and quickly smeared some of his blood onto her neck.

The monstrous girl's eyes locked onto the new scent, her predatory gaze fixated on the red-haired girl.

"Growl-!"

She let out a guttural growl, driven by the overpowering scent of blood. But at the same time, something felt like holding her back. She was not moving but rather wriggling.

As if she was fighting with herself.

But Bill could care less.

He took this moment of distraction to move to the silver-haired girl.

He smeared more of his blood onto her as well, ensuring the monstrous girl's attention was fully diverted.

With the monstrous girl now focused on the two unconscious students, Bill began to leave the place, pumping life force into his legs. He felt his skin slowly deteriorating, his body aging rapidly as if he was being drained of years with every step.

But in the face of his death, he could care less. He just wanted to leave the place.

His heart pounded in his chest as he ran, the forest blurring around him. He pushed himself harder, his legs burning with the unnatural energy. He could feel his muscles straining, his bones aching, but he didn't stop.

He looked back and saw the girl was no longer pursuing him. She was completely fixated on the two students, her predatory instincts overriding everything else.

"Yes....I am alive.....Haaah....Haaah...."

A feeling of joy and relief washed over him. He was alive. At least for now.

SWOOSH! POP! But suddenly, something happened.

His vision turned dark. He couldn't see anything. "What...?" he muttered, confusion and panic setting in.

In an instant, he lost consciousness.

His world ended. His body fell to the ground, with blood oozing from his forehead from a small, precise hole.

He lay there lifeless, his skin wrinkled and aged, a stark testament to the toll of using his life force.

All of his desperate attempts, all of what he had done to survive.

It was meaningless.

He faced death randomly by a simple mana bullet burning his forehead.

Right on the side of the monstrous girl, she attempted to attack the red-haired girl, no longer able to control herself. She leaped towards the red-haired girl's neck, fangs bared and eyes glowing with bloodlust.

SWOOSH! But then, suddenly, someone appeared from the shadows, moving with swift, silent precision.

He put his arm right before the girl's fangs just as she was about to sink them into the red-haired girl.

The monstrous girl bit down hard, her fangs piercing the flesh of the newcomer's arm.

"I am here, Senior. You can calm down now."

Chapter 416 95.1 - I am here

When does this flame go down? When does it ever calm down? Will it ever disappear?

Will I be able to relieve this anguish?

That is the question that I ended up asking myself all over again.

I couldn't understand it. Many times, no matter what I have done, I wouldn't be able to keep myself controlled. There were many days when I couldn't get enough sleep continuously, and the same day replayed in my head.

But there were also many days where I would simply sleep soundly. What was the reason, those days, I would ask myself?

Yet the answer wouldn't be clear at all. But at the end of the day, what I need to do is pretty simple, isn't it?

To reach my goal.

STAB! That was why I just stabbed the last demonic human that was right before me.

With each demonic human I killed, I felt a subtle change in my strength. It was almost imperceptible, but it was there—a slight increase in my power, a sharpening of my senses. The demonic energy I absorbed from each kill fueled my resolve, making me stronger and more focused.

As I stabbed the chest of the last demon, her eyes widened in horror. She saw my hand reaching for her core, the source of her corrupted power.

"No," she whispered, her voice trembling with pain and fear.

But I didn't care. My cold eyes pierced through her, reflecting none of the emotions that churned within me. She was a demon, a monster that had abandoned her humanity. She had no right to beg for mercy.

"You're a demon," she gasped, her voice filled with accusation.

I looked into her eyes, unflinching. "You don't have the right to say that after you abandoned your humanity," I replied, my voice devoid of empathy.

"It wasn't my choice," she pleaded, her eyes desperate.

People like these are the ones I hate the most. If you are doing something, why are you not accepting what you did? No one is forcing you to become a demonic human? Even if you are forced to become one, at the end of the day, you are one.

For no reason that you need someone's sympathy. You are not allowed to do that, and you will never be.

"Is that the case?" I said, my voice calm and detached. "Then this is not my choice either."

With that, I crushed her core in my hand. The woman screamed in agony, a sound that would haunt the dreams of anyone who heard it. If people heard a woman screaming like this, or if this was happening where many people could hear, she could definitely evoke their sympathy to make them go soft even if people knew what she did.

And that sympathy would most likely be the reason why she would eventually get a lighter punishment.

After all, such cases could be often seen on Earth with many female offenders.

But her screams fell on deaf ears since no one other than me was there. And I just stood there, cold and unfeeling, as her life slipped away.

The light in her eyes faded, and she slumped to the ground, lifeless.

'This makes it fifteen.' I could definitely kill more than fifteen demonic humans, but that would make me expose myself. After all, I needed to find demonic humans who were away from the eyes of people and needed to make sure that I wasn't being observed.

'Next.'

PAT! As I thought about it, suddenly, something inside me got cut off.

'What?'

Immediately, I noticed what was happening. The slight mana that I had put onto Irina was cut off suddenly.

I used a special liquid and a small needle to do that. After all of the things that had happened to Sylvie, Irina, and Senior Maya, I felt the need to somehow find a way to locate them in case something had happened to them.

And that was when I decided to use my green moon mana.

The liquid was coated with my green moon energy, and I put it under their bodies with the needle. Normally, just using my mana wouldn't be enough.

However, I noticed one thing.

My mana was also somehow sensitive towards demonic energy and intents. After experimenting with it a little, I found a special usage of mana that I could use to create a basic but effective formation.

This formation allowed me to get notified when a demonic presence or a 'Killing Intent' was found in the presence of my target of the spell.

The engineering behind it was simple yet ingenious. I had to manipulate my green moon mana into a state of hyper-sensitivity. This involved channeling it through a series of intricate runes and sigils that I designed.

These runes acted as sensors, amplifying any traces of demonic energy or hostile intent.

The formation itself was small and discrete, easily concealed. It consisted of a tiny, barely noticeable sigil that I could inscribe on a small object or even a piece of clothing. When demonic energy or intent was detected, the formation would trigger a feedback loop, sending a pulse of mana back to me.

The feedback loop was crucial. It allowed me to receive the signal without any significant delay, giving me precious seconds to react. The pulse was subtle, a mere whisper of mana, but it was enough to alert me.

I had created a network of these formations, ensuring that I could monitor the people without drawing attention.

The green moon mana's sensitivity was key—it could detect the slightest fluctuation in energy, making it nearly impossible for demonic entities to bypass it unnoticed.

However, I doubted if I could do this for high-ranking hunters. For example, against Eleanor, such a thing must not be possible, but of course, it is not like the problem she wouldn't be able to solve can be solved by me.

'Irina,' I thought, my mind racing as I adjusted my focus. The feedback loop had been severed, which meant she was in immediate danger.

I needed to act quickly, but I also had to remain cautious and not draw unnecessary attention to myself.

'But who can it be?' Since the executives didn't appear, most of the demonic humans were low-rank. It made sense since higher-ranking demonic humans wouldn't be disposable trash after all.

But that also meant there shouldn't be someone who is strong enough to break my loop.

I moved swiftly through the shadows, my senses heightened. The path to Irina was clear in my mind, the severed connection guiding me like a beacon. I had to be precise and efficient—there was no room for error.

But then, as I checked something else, I noticed something.

'Senior Maya.'

Her mana was also responding from almost the same location as Irina.

If she was also there, and the loop was broken.

That meant one thing.

'Corruption Seeds. Don't tell me?'

Her evolution to a vampire was not completed fully, and she was somehow a half-vampire. But wouldn't that make her prone to demonic corruption?

That was an oversight on my part, as I had never thought about it, but it was possible. And if it is possible, it is dangerous as well.

I rushed to the forest of the academy, my heart pounding with urgency. As I neared the location, I sensed four presences. Two demonic presences and two humans.

Irina and Seraphina lay on the ground, injured and unconscious, while Maya stood over them, growling with her vampiric characteristics fully manifested.

One of the demonic humans, realizing the danger, tried to escape. In an instant, from far away, I activated my [Eyes of Hourglass], and time seemed to slow. I observed the fleeing demonic human.

'So it was all because of you.'

He must have played a crucial role in what happened here, but there was no need to ponder about it now.

His mana was almost depleted, and his demonic energy was about to go berserk. Seeing that, I instantly grabbed my [Celestialith] and turned it into its rifle form.

'Die.'

With precise aim, I sniped the demonic human from this distance, the bullet piercing his head. He fell, lifeless.

But I didn't waste a second. Maya, in her corrupted state, was about to attack Irina.

I used [Shadow Leap] to teleport instantly to their side. The world blurred, and in the next moment, I was there, right as Maya lunged toward Irina.

The logical and correct approach would be to subdue Senior Maya in her vampiric state and wait for her to return to normal.

But, if I were to use logical approaches every time, she should have been dead long ago. I should have killed her there at that time.

But I didn't.

And once a decision is made, there is no going back.

At least I won't.

"I am here, Senior. You can calm down now."

As I put my arm right before her fangs.

PIERCE!

As her fangs pierced my arm, I felt slight pain different from before. It was evident that, right now, she was not in her usual state. It seemed her beastly senses were taking over her body.

But, well, what was the pain anyway? Hadn't I gotten used to it already?

It is not like a slight pain will be too much for me anyway.

Senior Maya started drinking blood from my arm, her grip on my body tightening. Her eyes were red, glowing with an intense hunger, and she growled like a beast. I could feel her desperation, her need for sustenance overwhelming her rational mind.

She pulled her mouth away from my arm, blood dripping from her lips as she looked at me, still growling.

'How pitiful?'

Her eyes were wild, filled with a primal intensity that was both frightening and pitiable since tears were flowing from her beautiful eyes.

I shook my head, saying, "It's fine. You held it enough."

I turned my [Unknown's Armor] into my school uniform and opened my neck wide, exposing the vulnerable flesh. "You can drink as you want."

Maya hesitated for a moment, her eyes flickering with a mixture of confusion and need.

'This the Senior Maya I know.'

She must have come here to lock herself, as she is not someone who can harm others easily.

"So....grrr.....y."

Such a pure person who even apologies in such a state.

She didn't deserve to die.

Chapter 417 95.2 - I am here

Maya's world was a shroud of darkness, a self-imposed exile to control the raging hunger within her. Leaning against the tree, she clung to the fleeting relief brought by Junior's blood. The minutes stretched into an eternity as she fought to maintain control, her senses dulled to the chaos outside.

But then, like a whisper through the void, the throbbing sensation returned, a relentless pulse that cut through her self-imposed isolation. Her eyes snapped open, the darkness replaced by a crimson haze. The demonic energy that had been a distant hum now roared in her ears, and she felt it—three distinct blood scents wafting through the air.

The first two were thick, rich, and tantalizingly close. The third was more subtle, hidden beneath the overpowering aroma of the other two, but it was there, beckoning her with an irresistible allure.

"No..." she muttered, her voice a faint echo of defiance. But her body betrayed her, muscles tensing, fangs elongating, and her eyes now a deep, unrelenting crimson. The primal hunger surged within her, overwhelming any semblance of control she had left.

With a speed that defied her human past, Maya dashed through the forest, her movements a blur. Trees and underbrush seemed to part before her as she followed the scent, her mind consumed by the need to sate the thirst that gnawed at her very being.

After that, she lost control of herself. She didn't know what she did. She didn't know whom she fought.

She still vividly remembered a certain moment when she plunged at someone. The taste in her mouth was disgusting as if she was drinking water with salt. It was bad, but at the same time, something inside her continuously pushed her forward.

Her world was crimson, and she needed to drink blood. And that figure was blocking her. That figure was against her. Thus, she didn't care and attacked.

But then, suddenly, the scent disappeared. Instead, the world slightly changed this time. The source of the blood of her target changed.

As she neared the source of the blood, the scene came into focus. Two figures lay prone on the ground, their bodies mangled and bleeding. The thick, coppery scent of their blood filled the air, intoxicating and maddening.

Her eyes locked onto them, the overwhelming urge to feed taking over her mind. She felt herself slipping away, her humanity being swallowed by the monstrous hunger. Tears of frustration and fear welled up in her eyes, mixing with the crimson that painted her vision.

"No... I don't want to be a monster..." she whispered, her voice breaking. She tried to resist, to hold back, but the primal need was too strong. It clawed at her insides, driving her to the brink of madness. She felt like she was losing herself, becoming the very thing she feared the most.

She tried to pull back to regain control, but it was no use. The hunger was too intense, too overpowering. Her fangs bared, and she lunged at the nearest figure, the need for blood overriding all rational thought.

Just as she was about to sink her fangs into the prone figure, a sudden sensation entered her mouth. She had bitten something. The blood flowed down her throat, rich and intoxicating, a taste that she could never have enough of. Her mind cleared momentarily, and she realized what she had bitten into.

'Junior.' Her heart ached with a mixture of relief and guilt. She was feeding on him, the one person who had always believed in her, always trusted her.

The blood tasted too good, too perfect, and she couldn't stop herself from drinking. Each drop was a lifeline, pulling her back from the edge of madness.

Her grip on his arm tightened, and she drank deeply, the taste of his blood grounding her. The crimson haze in her vision began to recede, replaced by a sense of warmth and familiarity. She felt his presence, steady and reassuring, and it anchored her to reality.

As she fed, she could hear his voice in her mind, a soothing whisper that cut through the chaos.

"It is fine," he said softly, his voice a balm to her tormented soul. "You held it long enough."

Tears streamed down her face as she continued to drink, her body trembling with relief. She found this taste always so intoxicating that she couldn't help but always like that. However, there was also something that continuously ate her inside.

'I couldn't hold it in even though I promised him. Even though I said, I would be normal.'

"So.....Grrrr.....y."

Even while she was talking, even while she was trying to apologize, she still sounded like a monster.

Like a monster who can only think about its meals.

PAT! But as if he knew about what she was thinking, a hand reached out to her back. Her body was bare; at least, the clothes on her back seemed to be ripped.

SHIVER! She felt a sense of coldness on his touch. His hands were cold, in contrast to the heat that was spreading from her body.

However, this time, she was filled with more and more guilt. His soothing touch awoke the memories of their first interaction after she became a vampire.

At that time, she also had sucked his blood like this as if she was in a frenzy. It might have been because of the fact that she was under the influence of that Vampire Duke, but at the end of the day, what mattered wasn't the existence of the outer influence but her own lack of control.

At that time, she had promised him that she wouldn't lose her control no matter what happened. She would always control her urges and would stay as a normal human regardless of everything.

But what was happening right now?

What had she done? Had she satisfied the end of her deal?

No, she hadn't.

Once again, she disappointed him.

Showing her true self.

Yes, her true self.

Maya felt her sanity slowly slipping away. The realization that she had failed to control herself once more gnawed at her, eroding her sense of humanity.

'What if such a thing happened when he was not around?' she thought, panic rising in her chest.

'What if it happened when I was around my family? What if I had harmed those who were fond of him?'

"What am I supposed to do then?" she whispered, her voice trembling. "How am I supposed to control myself? How am I supposed to look at all those people who have been on my side from the start? How am I supposed to live after knowing all these things?"

Her thoughts spiraled into a maelstrom of fear and self-loathing. She grabbed Junior's clothes, burying herself in his chest, feeling ashamed and guilty about her own existence. Tears streamed down her face as she clung to him, her body shaking with sobs.

"I'm so sorry," she cried, her voice muffled against his chest. "I promised you... I promised I would control myself, but I couldn't. I'm a monster. I'm a failure. What if I hurt someone else? What if I hurt you? No, I am already hurting you right now. Even now, you are dealing with my failure of control. I am just a monster, a monster that shouldn't be here."

PAT! At that moment, as tears continued to fall down from her eyes, she felt a hand on her back once again.

Junior's arms wrapped around her, his embrace firm and comforting. He didn't say anything immediately, allowing her to vent her frustrations and fears. His presence was a steady anchor amidst the storm of her emotions.

After a moment, his hand slowly reached for the tip of her chin, grabbing her from there. Then, in a split second, she found herself looking into his eyes, with her face lifted by his hand.

Maya looked into his eyes, his purple eyes that felt like they contained the stars, making her lose herself in them. It was as if the entire cosmos was hidden in them, as if he could see through everything. But at the same time, they contained a resolve.

He opened his mouth, not breaking eye contact even once. "I don't know what you are even now, or how to cure you from your state. I can't promise you that you will return to normal, as that would make me a liar. But there is one thing I can do for you. I can promise you one simple thing. If it ever comes that you lose your humanity, if it ever comes that you become someone you would hate yourself to be, at that moment, I am going to end your life."

His words hung in the air, heavy with a solemn promise.

"So that I know that you always stay as Senior Maya. So that you can always remember yourself as the human Maya Evergreen. For the sake of this, I am going to end your life with my own hands. You can count on me for that."

Maya's breath caught in her throat. The weight of his words pressed down on her, a mixture of relief and dread. His resolve was unwavering, his promise both a comfort and a burden. She felt the intensity of his gaze, the sincerity in his eyes, and knew he meant every word.

"I... I don't want to lose myself," she whispered, her voice barely audible. "I'm scared, Junior. I'm so scared."

"I know," he replied gently, his thumb brushing away a tear from her cheek. "And that's why I'm here. To help you fight, to be your anchor. But if the worst happens, if you lose yourself, I will be there to ensure you are remembered as you are now. Strong, kind, and human."

His words were a lifeline, a promise that anchored her to her humanity. She nodded slowly, taking in the gravity of his vow. The fear and guilt that had consumed her began to recede, replaced by a fragile but growing hope.

"I trust you," she said, her voice steadying. "I trust you to keep that promise."

Junior smiled, a warmth in his eyes that melted the remaining ice around her heart. "Always," he said simply. "I will always be here for you."

At that moment, Maya felt something.

For the first time in her life, she felt the urge to drink his blood.

Not because of hunger. Not because of the beastly instincts she felt but because of something else.

It was because she could feel her beating so fast.

'I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love
you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I
love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love
you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you.'

She felt unworthy of his feelings, given the monster she had become. She didn't want him to see the depth of her emotions, to be overwhelmed by them. So, she did the only thing she could think of to hide her expression from him. She pushed her fangs towards his neck, sinking them deep into his flesh.

The moment her fangs pierced his skin, she felt a rush of warmth and comfort. It was different from the frantic feeding she had done before. This was intimate, filled with a depth of emotion she had never experienced. His blood, rich and potent, flowed into her, and she felt a connection to him that went beyond the physical.

As she drank, she closed her eyes, her mind flooded with thoughts of him. Every heartbeat, every drop of blood, carried the weight of her love for him. She didn't want him to see her tears, the vulnerability she felt, or the fear that she was not worthy of his love.

Junior didn't flinch. He held her close, his hand gently stroking her hair as she fed. He understood her need, not just for sustenance but for the reassurance that she was still connected to him, still tethered to her humanity through their bond.

'I love you, Junior,' she thought, her heart aching with the intensity of her feelings. 'I love you so much, and I am so scared of losing you, of losing myself.'

She drank deeply, savoring the taste of his blood, not because of the hunger but because it was a way to express the emotions she couldn't put into words. Each drop was a silent declaration of her love, a promise that she would keep fighting and hold on to him.

Chapter 418 95.3 - I am here

She hadn't thought about this until now, but there was a certain feeling she had about this Junior of hers.

As she continued to drink, her thoughts began to wander. Junior's skin was pale, even paler than hers, almost like porcelain. His blood, though different from most people, had a strange, almost enchanting taste that she couldn't quite place. It was somehow richer, more potent, and it made her feel stronger, more alive.

It was rich with mana. Though she hated to admit that she was like a beast, she knew the reason why his blood tasted this good was its potent mana quality that no other human possessed. That was the reason why its smell was a lot better compared to others as well.

His body was also tender, not overly muscular, but his muscles held a strange, almost ethereal quality stemming from its mana absorption, most likely.

And his mana was also different. Being the person who had taught him how to move his mana by pushing her own mana into his body, she inwardly knew that something about his mana and body was inherently different.

For a while, she had been thinking about it, trying to understand what made him so different. There was a possibility, a growing suspicion in her mind, that her Junior was not a normal human and might be something different.

'Why is his blood so unique?' she pondered as she fed, her mind racing with questions. 'Why does he always seem so calm, so understanding, even in the face of danger?'

She remembered the countless times he had been there for her, his steady presence a constant source of comfort. She thought about his uncanny ability to remain unflustered, his knowledge that seemed to surpass that of his peers.

It was as if he had seen and experienced things far beyond the scope of a typical student.

Her mind flashed back to moments when he had demonstrated abilities that defied explanation, moments when he had seemed almost supernatural. The way he moved, the way he sensed things before they happened, it all pointed to something more than human.

There was more to Junior than met the eye. Maya recalled subtle hints about the way he would sometimes hold back in training, hiding his true strength. The way he would deflect questions about his past or his origins.

'What is he hiding?' she wondered, her thoughts drifting as she continued to drink his blood. 'Is he scared of something? Trying to hide from someone? What is his goal?'

Junior had always been a mystery, and the more she thought about it, the more questions surfaced. Was he like her, someone who had been changed into something more than human? Or was he something entirely different, something ancient and powerful, hiding in plain sight?

'Why does he hide his strength?' she mused. 'What is he afraid of?'

Is it because of his very being? Is he an existence that would be an enemy of humans? Why?

'Is it because of the demons? Why do you reek the blood of demons on your body even now? Have you been hunting them? If that is the case, why? Why are you risking yourself? The answer relied on demons. That was what she could be sure about. After all, she still vividly remembered how he brutally killed that vampire. Even though her memories were filled with blanks, she knew the hatred-filled intent oozing from him.

It was not something a normal human could possess.

'What are you, Junior?' she wondered, her fangs still embedded in his flesh, drawing the lifeblood that sustained her. 'Are you like me? Or are you something entirely different?'

It was not something a normal human could possess.

'What are you, Junior?' she wondered, her fangs still embedded in his flesh, drawing the lifeblood that sustained her. 'Are you like me? Or are you something entirely different?'

She felt his cold hand gently stroking her back, his touch both soothing and grounding. Despite the questions and doubts swirling in her mind, his presence was a comfort, a reminder that she was not alone in this struggle.

Slowly, she pulled back, her lips stained with his blood. Her crimson eyes met his pale gaze, and for a moment, the world seemed to stand still. She saw the understanding in his eyes, the acceptance, and it filled her with a sense of peace she had not known in a long time.

"I'm sorry," she whispered again, this time more clearly, her voice tinged with sorrow and gratitude.

"It's okay, Senior," he replied softly, his voice steady and reassuring. "You did well."

As she looked into his eyes, she realized that whatever he was, whatever secrets he held, he was still her Junior. The one who had always been there for her, the one who had never judged her, and the one who had given her hope when she had none.

And that was enough for now. She would find out the truth in time, but for now, she would trust him, as he had always trusted her.

RUSTLE!

Suddenly, she sensed a movement from their side. Maya flinched, turning her head sharply to the side. There, she saw the two girls they had forgotten about starting to wake up.

'Did they see it?' Her eyes widened in surprise, and her face turned crimson. In the intensity of the moment with Junior, she had completely forgotten their surroundings, lost in their emotional and physical bond.

She turned to look at him only to see his calm eyes.

'Right. He is not that clumsy. There is no way he would overlook such a thing.'

She thought after seeing that.

Not wanting to show any weakness or any signs of her vampiric form, Maya focused on controlling her bestial instincts. With her urges calmed, she managed to suppress her vampiric features and return to her normal appearance. She gave Junior one final look, then quickly backed away like a startled rabbit.

In his eyes, she saw the silent communication, the unspoken understanding. He was trying to hide his identity, and she knew what she had to do.

'This is at least what I am supposed to do.'

She nodded her head, signaling that she understood.

Junior moved swiftly, disappearing into the forest, his movements graceful and silent among the branches. In no time, he was lost in sight.

"Hmm...?"

At that exact moment, the first girl woke up. It was the silver-haired girl, someone even Maya recognized as a sophomore.

Seraphina Frostborne.

The girl whose reputation exceeded the other students of the academy with her strength and her notes. To be perfectly honest, she wanted to watch the fight between Irina and Seraphina, but she was a bit late, and the seats were already taken to the full, even at the start of the morning.

But that wasn't what was important right now.

Before Seraphina could ask any questions, Maya reached for a potion in her spatial ring. Covered in blood, her clothes slightly ripped, she looked as if she had just emerged from a fierce battle. She intended to use this appearance to cover the truth—that she had been the one to deal with the demonic human who tried to kidnap Seraphina and Irina.

As Seraphina woke up, she instantly turned vigilant. In a second, her mana started oozing out from her body, even though she wasn't in her best shape. As she saw Maya, she quickly raised her body

to attack her, but Maya only raised her hand. The ice particles that formed around Seraphina and flew toward her instantly hit something like an air barrier and crashed down.

After that, Maya looked at Seraphina with a smile and said, "No need to be vigilant. You're safe now."

Seraphina's eyes narrowed as she took in Maya's appearance. She noticed the uniform on Maya's body, identifying her as an Arcadia Hunter Academy student and a senior on top of that. Taking a clearer look, she recognized Maya and her guard lowered.

"I... I remember you," Seraphina said slowly, her voice still tinged with suspicion but easing out of its initial hostility. "You're Maya Evergreen, right? The upperclassman who..."

"Yes, that's me," Maya interjected gently, not wanting Seraphina to strain herself trying to remember. "I was here when those... attackers came. I managed to fend them off."

Seraphina looked around, her gaze falling on Irina, who was still unconscious but now stirring slightly. She turned back to Maya, her cold expression softening a little.

"Thank you, Senior," she murmured, her previous readiness to fight to subside as she reassessed the situation. "It seems we owe you our thanks."

Maya nodded, offering Seraphina a reassuring smile. "Just rest now. You both need to recover," she advised, her tone kind yet firm. "Everything's under control."

Relieved but still visibly shaken, Seraphina nodded and settled back down, her energy slowly receding as she took the potion that Maya had given to her.

SWIRL! At that moment, suddenly, the two noticed movement. Unlike Seraphina, Irina had woken up silently, awakening unnoticed until a swirl of fire erupted from her side, directed straight at Maya, who was standing before Seraphina.

Reacting instinctively, Maya waved her hand. Water flowed around her body, forming a protective shield, and clashed with the incoming fire. The resulting interaction created a burst of hot steam, but Maya deftly manipulated the wind to lift and disperse the steam away from them, preventing any harm.

As the steam cleared, Irina's eyes were fixed on Maya, filled with confusion and the remnants of defensive aggression. Recognizing the need to reassure Irina just as she had Seraphina, Maya repeated the calming words she had used before.

"Irina, you're safe now," Maya said gently, keeping her tone soothing and her posture non-threatening. "There's no need to fight. I'm here to help."

However, something was different this time.

The eyes were locked on Maya. They were supposed to be calmed after sensing her presence, just like Seraphina's.

After all, even though she didn't like to brag about it, Maya was well aware of her reputation, and she knew that people knew about her in the academy.

Thus, there was no way Irina wouldn't have recognized her by now.

Maya expected Irina to calm down as Seraphina had, recognizing her as a senior and a protector within the academy. Her reputation generally preceded her, and she was accustomed to a certain level of respect and recognition from the student body. Thus, she anticipated that Irina, once aware of who was aiding them, would relax.

However, the expected calm did not come. Instead, Irina's eyes remained locked on Maya, glaring daggers at her as if something was deeply wrong.

'What now? Why is she looking at me like that?'

This feeling wasn't foreign, and neither was this glare. She had gotten such types of glares from other girls before. But right now, she was not sharp enough to make the connection.

'Urghk....'

This reaction created an awkward and tense atmosphere, contrary to the usual responses Maya received.

"Is there something wrong?" Maya asked, her voice tinged with concern and a hint of confusion. She took a tentative step forward, trying to bridge the gap between them, hoping to soothe any fears or misunderstandings.

Irina, however, did not respond with words. Her glare intensified, and her body language remained defensive. As Maya approached to see if Irina was injured or needed further assistance, Irina abruptly waved her hand, signaling for Maya to stop.

"Don't approach," Irina said sharply, her tone leaving no room for argument. "I can handle myself." Her words were firm, and her expression unyielding.

Taken aback by the cold dismissal, Maya halted, her hand mid-air and her face a mask of puzzled concern. Irina then turned to leave, casting one last glare over her shoulder at Maya, leaving the older student bewildered and unsure of what had just transpired.

"That bastard.....He was entangling himself with another woman?"

And Irina was feeling furious.

Chapter 419 95.4 - I am here

Is everything in this world can be seen through?

The answer to this question would most likely be no. No human is omnipotent. Nothing in this world can know everything beforehand. No matter how many plans we make, no matter what we do, or how far we achieve, there are times we realize that we are not that great after all.

But, in our very essence, we want to be like the gods that we believe in.

We want to be the greatest, the ones that direct everything. That is why we fall into the delusion that we are great when everything is going our way.

Those thoughts. They suddenly appeared in my head. While I was hunting down the demonic humans one by one, secretly, suddenly, a bad premonition indulged my heart.

The reason for this wasn't some sort of intuition. It was because my eyes were observing things that I knew subconsciously should happen differently.

When something tells us that the thing in front of us is wrong, most of the time, it is not because of the fact that we somehow get a divine revelation. We are not that special.

It is because our subconsciousness sees and notices the signs of difference. And that was what exactly was happening to me right now. The reason why I was feeling such a thing.

'Why are they not appearing?'

This was the first question that came to my mind. After all, according to the game, the high-ranking executives of the organization must have appeared by now. That was how it went in the game, the plan of their attack.

Even in the cutscenes, it was explained that this attack was being prepared for two or three years. Therefore, I doubted that such a plan would be changed thanks to the derivations from the game.

That was also the reason why I notified Eleanor while securing the evidence that the professor had contacted the 'Mad Puppeteer.'

I precisely waited for that moment. I had already secured a lot of evidence on him, contacting many different people of demons.

They are also recorded in my memory, and I won't forget their faces. But, even then, I didn't stop until I found Mad Puppeteer.

I knew she would not be able to contain her emotions. After all, that Mad Puppeteer is her weakness. Something that can be used against her for a while.

This place was bound to be their grave. I confirmed this. After all, two other S-rank Hunters were also there, and they were from the Real Demonic Human Bureau. Though the situation concerning the Demonic Human Bureau is a lot more complex to explain, those hunters are real Demon Hunters, at least.

Amelia and Callum.

Those two are future-named characters that will significantly impact the storyline, and this is something that won't most likely change.

With their existence confirmed, I was sure that everything was about to go according to the plan I made.

After all, even if Verian Drakos is strong enough to kill professors and go against Eleanor one-on-one, he wouldn't be able to face three S-rank Hunters by himself.

And once Verian Drakos was killed, this would deal a significant blow to the Demon Followers since he has the Bestowal of a [Demon Lord]. Why is this that important?

The answer is related to how Bestowals works.

Once a person Bestowed is killed, the Bestower will also receive significant damage, making them require a lot of time to recover.

And this will become something that is exploitable. After all, just like humans, demons are also greedy and obsessed with power.

No. Compared to humans, demons are worse. After all, the hierarchy of strength runs a lot deeper in their society.

And, if other [Demon Lords] were to be informed that the other one was weaker, what would happen?

An internal war.

This was such a good opportunity to exploit. Since it was also the time for the semester to end, I would have a lot of free time to work against them.

But things didn't happen as I wished.

'They were not here.'

The fact that those people were not even here.

'Why?'

The first question to ask was why. Why did they not appear here?

Did they just abandon the three-year plan that they had made? But for what reason? What could possibly make them abandon such an important plan?

The answer was evident.

'They knew.'

The fact that they knew the academy was preparing to trap them. No other thing could be explained. Then what was the reason?

How did they know?

'Did they see the future? A divination? Oracle?'

But this didn't make any sense. After all, if I can think about this early, Eleanor must have also already thought about it. There is no way she wouldn't interfere with such things.

After all, nothing is omnipotent. Every power has its own weaknesses and counters. Therefore, Eleanor must have already taken countermeasures to address that.

So, if divination or foresight wasn't the reason, then it had to be something more direct and reliable.

'Someone from the inside must have informed them.'

The realization hit me with chilling clarity. Someone within the academy, someone with access to the plans and strategies, had betrayed us.

And that certain someone must have displayed enough evidence to persuade Valkara to abandon the preparation of three years, which would mean they were at least aware of the existence of Callum, Amelia, and other hunters here.

This would mean they knew quite a lot. The most possible candidates would be the ones that Eleanor would have contacted.

It wasn't just an average informant. It had to be someone deeply embedded within the academy's operations, someone trusted enough to be privy to critical information.

'A mole, then.'

Someone who is playing both sides, feeding the demons the necessary intel to thwart our plans. It explained everything—their preparedness, the absence of the high-ranking executives, and the altered sequence of events.

'But, that is still....Eleanor wouldn't trust that many people easily.'

If the traitor was someone from Eleanor's side, then there was no need for me to identify the traitor since Eleanor could easily deal with this alone.

At this point, she must have reached the same conclusion as I did, and she could foresee everything.

But something didn't make sense.

'I had already seen him.'

Verian Drakos.

Most people wouldn't be able to notice his disguise, but nothing can pass through my eyes. Even if he had perfectly hidden his demonic energy and no ounce of it was even leaking, I knew it was Verian from the start.

The way he positioned himself and the way his eyes observed his non-focused areas from his posture gave away the weapon he was using. The clothing he had chosen, everything matched my analysis of his character from the game.

He also mumbled from time to time to himself, which gave away the fact that he was giving orders. I could observe his lips, after all.

Just yesterday, he was in the academy.

But, if he were to be informed by an insider, why would he still risk himself to come here? Why would he show himself? I didn't get this point.

If someone inside knew about this plan, they could have informed him way before then how it was supposed to be, and there was no way, with his personality, he would take such a risk.

And suddenly, out of nowhere, he left the academy last night?

Why?

'Was the informant able to access the information just yesterday? Or are they trying to make a distraction?'

But this wouldn't happen unless the informant knew that someone on our side knew about the existence of Verian, which is not possible since Eleanor doesn't know about his existence.

After all, if they knew, there was no need for them to wait for the attack to happen. They could just attack him to capture him.

This made it evident that something else was in play.

'Think, Astron, think.' I needed to connect the dots. Verian's sudden departure, the absence of high-ranking executives, and the presence of a mole—these were all pieces of a larger puzzle. But how did they fit together?

'The timing.' Verian left just last night, shortly after I had confirmed his presence. It's too coincidental to ignore. If the mole had informed him of our plans, then they must have known I was watching him.

'This is impossible.'

This part can not be possible. No one in this world knows about what I think. Even the ones closest to me only know me on the surface. My interactions were limited, and my movements were careful.

'It must be something else. They must know about this beforehand.' The mole had to be someone with access to such sensitive information and someone who could relay that information without raising suspicion.

'Eleanor's inner circle.' But as I thought about it more, it made less sense. Eleanor was meticulous in her selection of confidants. The mole had to be someone who could bypass even her scrutiny.

'The faculty or higher administration?' But even they were under tight observation, especially during times of heightened security. And I doubted Eleanor would even trust them after seeing the professor.

'The students.' The mole didn't need to be someone from the administration or faculty. It could be a student with the right connections and access. Someone who could blend in without arousing suspicion. This would make sense from the suspicion part. However, it is also limited to another.

It raised another question.

'If they were to be a student, who would be? Which student?' There were many possibilities, but it had to be someone with the means and motive to betray the academy. Someone who had something to gain from aligning with the demons.

There were many students who turned into a villain in the future. The list could go on further, reaching at least fifty.

The amount of students Ethan would need to kill in the future was this high. I knew every one of their names.

But none of them had the necessary access to this information. There was no way a student could know about the plan when even the academy faculty members didn't know about it.

It was not possible.

'Nothing seems to fit into this puzzle.'

I couldn't find the missing piece, no matter how hard I tried.

As I mulled over these thoughts, frustration began to creep in. The pieces of the puzzle were scattered, and no matter how I tried to arrange them, they didn't form a coherent picture. There was something I was missing, something crucial.

And then, suddenly, a thought struck me. It was so simple and yet so profound that it almost felt like a revelation.

I myself was an odd phenomenon. A special being who had the knowledge of another world. Whose soul somehow was split and was not complete.

What if there was someone else like me?

The idea was both unsettling and intriguing. If I existed in this world with the knowledge of the game, why couldn't there be someone else with similar knowledge or abilities? Someone who also knew the events that were supposed to unfold and had their own agenda.

What if the mole was another person with foreknowledge, someone who understood the intricacies of this world as well as I did, or perhaps even better? Someone who could predict our moves, manipulate events, and guide the demons with precision.

It made sense. It explained the discrepancies, the shifts in the timeline, and the uncanny awareness the demons had of our plans. It wasn't just a traitor; it was someone playing a deeper game, a parallel player in this world.

But who could it be? Another transmigrator? A reincarnator? Someone from my world or another with similar circumstances? The possibilities were endless, but the implications were clear.

'A person similar to me but is against me. A person who needs to be exterminated.'

They foiled my plans.

'You are going to pay for it.'

Chapter 420 95.5 - I am here [Interlude]

<Valerian Federation. Linnungham State, Two weeks ago>

The room was dimly lit, with only a soft, warm glow emanating from a single bedside lamp, casting elongated shadows against the walls. The air was thick with the scent of expensive cologne and a hint of perfume.

In the center of the room, on a luxurious bed draped with satin sheets, lay a man with a lean, sculpted build. His face was chiseled and handsome, and he exuded confidence even in repose.

Beside him stood a woman with incredible beauty, her silhouette striking against the muted light. Her raven-black hair cascaded down her shoulders, and her eyes, gleaming with an enigmatic allure, were fixed on the man before her.

"God, I hate them all," the man began, his voice tinged with frustration. "My boss, my coworkers—they just keep piling work on me. Do they think I'm some kind of machine? Every random task, every little thing that goes wrong, it's always my responsibility to sort it out."

The woman listened intently, her presence a calming force in the room. She gently ran her fingers through his hair, her touch soft and soothing.

"Mhmmm.....That feels good...."

It was evident that she was good with her fingers. Her voice, low and sultry, wove through the air like a warm embrace. "Tell me more," she murmured, her tone inviting him to continue.

"They wouldn't be able to do anything without me," he continued, his voice growing more impassioned. "I'm the one who keeps everything running smoothly. They don't appreciate the effort

I put in or the hours I work. It's like they don't even see me. And that woman! Even after all those things I am doing for her, she refuses to acknowledge anything. Not even a word of appreciation. You bet she even looks down on me just because her father is a high-ranking executive."

The woman's lips curled into a subtle smile, though her eyes remained sympathetic. She leaned closer, her breath warm against his ear. "It's their loss," she whispered in her voice, a blend of reassurance and temptation.

"Yeah....."

The man answered while his body slowly relaxed and his breathing slowed down.

"But I heard you have even investigated what happened in that cursed land."

"Cursed Land?" the man asked, puzzled.

"Yes, the place where everything was covered with fog," the woman replied, her tone still sultry.

"Phantom's Land," the man named the place, his eyes narrowing slightly. "Are you talking about that place?"

The woman nodded, a slight smirk playing on her lips. "Yes, that's the one."

The man nodded slowly. "Yeah, I was one of those who investigated that place." Suddenly, his eyes narrowed suspiciously. "How did you know that I—"

Before he could finish his question, the woman grabbed his lips and sealed his mouth with hers. They shared a long and erotic kiss, their breaths mingling in the dim light. When they finally pulled apart, the man's eyes had lost their light, as if he had been enchanted or drugged.

The woman's voice was soft and commanding as she asked again, "Tell me about the investigation in Phantom's Land."

The man, now entranced, began to speak. "We investigated the place and discovered that the phenomenon that bugged the government for at least fifty years was actually related to a demon. An ancient demon, on top of that."

The woman smiled as if she had expected this answer. "What happened to that demon?"

"The demon was killed by Academy students," the man replied.

The woman raised her eyebrows in surprise. "Academy students? They killed such a demon?"

The man started to speak again, but his body convulsed as he showed signs of resistance. The woman's long fingers caressed his body once again, her eyes glowing bright purple. The man relaxed and continued talking obediently. "Three students from Arcadia Hunter Academy reportedly killed the demon on their own. They were rewarded for their accomplishment, though it was hidden that they killed a demon."

The woman's eyes narrowed in thought. "Who were the ones that killed the demon?" she asked.

The man's eyes glazed over as he conjured three faces in his mind, and the woman easily found their faces.

The woman studied their faces, memorizing them with a cold smile.

"Even though the academy students were talented, from the data that I measured, it was highly unlikely that they could achieve such a thing. The demon was too strong. I suspected that there was someone else there, but their traces were fully covered, and no proof was left. The investigation was soon covered up, and it was stopped."

The woman's smile deepened, her eyes reflecting a mixture of satisfaction and intrigue. "Thank you," she whispered, her voice a soothing balm to his entranced mind. "You've been very helpful."

As the man drifted into an enchanted sleep, the woman stood up, her silhouette a dark shadow against the dim light.

"These three faces, huh?" She mumbled as she waved her hand. A black smoke rose from the man's mouth after he fell asleep, not knowing he would forget everything by tomorrow.

"Let's see if they were really the ones."

On the document she had on her watch, three faces and three names could be seen.

Irina Emberheart.

Sylvie Gracewind.

Astron Natusalune. "Students of Arcadia Hunter Academy."

<Arcadia Hunter Academy, Friday 9 A.M>

The bustling grounds of Arcadia Hunter Academy were alive with the energy of the duel between the two strongest mages of freshmen.

In the midst of the crowd stood a woman with an eye-catching presence, her sultry body, showcasing attire, and raven-black hair setting her apart.

Beside her was a young man, his demeanor confident and inquisitive.

"So, what do you think about the duel between the two greatest mages of our generation, Sophia?" the young man asked, his voice tinged with excitement. He was Zark Muckerberg, a scout for a newly rising guild. He turned to the woman with curiosity, eager to hear her thoughts.

After all, she was his girlfriend of one year, and she had been with him for a long time. There were many different times that she had given her own ideas, which turned out to be the best decision that he had made.

The woman referred to as Sophia, kept her gaze fixed on the arena where two students were locked in a heated magical duel. Her eyes, cold and calculating, focused on one student in particular—a young student with fiery hair and amber eyes who moved with fierce determination and grace.

"They are incredible," Sophia replied, her tone measured. "Both possess immense talent and skill."

Yet, inwardly, her thoughts were far from impressed. She recalled the conversation with the man whose memory she had wiped clean.

He had claimed that Irina Emberheart, one of the students before her, was part of the group that had killed the ancient demon.

'There is just no way that Belthazor can be killed by this girl. No matter how pathetic he is.' But as she watched Irina now, Sophia could see that the young woman didn't have the necessary strength to accomplish such a feat.

'Something is not adding up. But, it seems there was really someone who was hiding behind and working behind the scenes.' Something was being hidden.

'But well, isn't this more exciting? After all, I really want to see who that person is. So that I can eat them before my lady does.' She licked her lips with a slight smile.

'And it seems the opportunity will reveal itself soon.' Seeing all the familiar energy surrounding her, she couldn't help but lament.

'Humans surely have a way of inventing all these new things. If not for them directly planting one to me, I would not have sensed what was happening.' She thought after looking at the seed on her hands.

Zark, unaware of Sophia's inner turmoil, continued to watch the duel with fascination. "It's hard to believe they're still students," he remarked. "The future looks bright for the Arcadia Hunter Academy."

Sophia's eyes narrowed slightly as she observed Irina's every move. "Indeed," she murmured. "But there are always layers beneath the surface, hidden truths that need to be revealed."

After the duel ended, suddenly, many explosions started happening everywhere across the place.

–BOOM! And seeing that everything was starting, the woman instantly disappeared.

"Sophia? Sophia? Where are you? Urghk—! My head....." Zark's voice faded into the chaos.

In the midst of the chaos, 'Sophia,' or, originally known as 'Zafira,' moved towards the arena, keeping herself hidden. As she reached the arena, smoke covered the area, and she saw the two students lying on the ground, unconscious after the duel that had tired them to the maximum.

She moved to capture Irina Emberheart, but just at that moment, she sensed the barrier that had been formed over the academy. The spatial barrier would make it impossible for anyone to leave using teleportation. Thus, she decided to let things go for now, as it wouldn't be wise for her to reveal her identity just to capture Irina Emberheart. But as she saw the two professors approaching the students, she had an idea.

'This barrier is no ordinary one,' Zafira thought, studying the intricate patterns of the spatial distortion. 'Someone has gone to great lengths to ensure no one escapes. Interesting.'

As the professors neared the unconscious students, Zafira's mind raced. She needed to find a way to get close to Irina without arousing suspicion. Her eyes scanned the surroundings, searching for an opportunity.

'Perhaps a little subterfuge is in order,' she mused, her lips curling into a cunning smile.

Zafira quickly slipped into the shadows, her form blending seamlessly with the smoke and debris. She moved closer to the professors, overhearing their frantic discussions.

"Get them to the infirmary immediately," one professor ordered, his voice urgent. "We need to stabilize them before anything else happens."

The other professor nodded, beginning to cast a levitation spell to carry the students.

Zafira waited until the spell was in place, then made her move. With a subtle flick of her fingers, she sent a tiny, almost imperceptible burst of dark energy towards the spell. The energy seeped into the magic, embedding itself deep within the spell's matrix.

And then, in an instant, something different happened.

"Huh?"

As one of the professors exclaimed, suddenly, the target of the spell had changed.

From the two students that they were ordered to care about to their own selves.

–SWOOSH! Following that, the two professors flew uncontrollably from arena two and outside of the academy. And in the midst of the chaos, no one noticed what was happening to them.

'That should do it,' she thought, satisfied.

'Now. Let's see if Irina Emberheart is really hiding her strength or if someone else was there.'