

H. Academy 897

Chapter 897 Attack

"Tell me everything."

Harin sighed, adjusting himself slightly against the pillows. Pain flared up in his ribs, but he pushed through it, his mind far too occupied with what needed to be said. His daughter stood before him, her gaze sharp, burning with unspoken anger and worry. Ethan remained nearby, quiet but attentive, his presence steady as always.

Harin exhaled slowly. There was no point in sugarcoating the truth.

"I took Team 3 to a dungeon that required caution," he began, his voice low but firm. "As you know, Team 1 and Team 2 were already occupied with high-tier expeditions. They were handling more dangerous territories, leaving only Team 3 available at the time."

Emily's brow furrowed as she listened. She already knew where this was going, and it only made the tension in her chest tighten further.

"The problem was," Harin continued, "Team 3's strength alone wasn't enough. The dungeon's readings were fluctuating. I had concerns about potential distortions, so rather than risk sending them in alone, I decided to join them."

Emily's fingers curled into fists, her nails digging into her palm. The air between them grew heavier.

"Father," she said, her voice trembling with controlled frustration. "You knew that you needed to stay safe!"

Harin met her gaze, his expression unreadable.

"With everything that's been happening lately, the enemy is getting bolder," she pressed on, her voice rising. "The attacks are becoming more frequent, and now the enemy families are stepping in directly. How could you risk yourself like that?"

Ethan, sensing the rising emotions, glanced between the two of them but didn't interrupt. This was a conversation Emily needed to have with her father.

Harin sighed, his fingers curling slightly against the hospital sheets. He knew Emily's frustration, knew exactly why she was angry. She had every right to be. But what else could he have done?

"I know it was risky," he admitted, his voice quieter but unwavering. "But I couldn't just sit there while my guild members were putting their lives on the line. I'm their guild master, Emily. If I start treating myself as more important than the rest of them, then what kind of leader am I?"

Emily's jaw clenched, but she said nothing, waiting for him to continue.

"Besides," he exhaled, shaking his head slightly. "If I didn't go, the dungeon's rights wouldn't have stayed with our guild. You know how it works—if we can't clear a dungeon within the designated time, the association allows other guilds to bid for its rights." He looked up at her, his expression grim. "Do you think our enemies would have let that pass? There's a high chance they were just waiting for us to fail so they could take it."

Emily's grip tightened at her sides, her shoulders rising with tension. "And now what? You almost lost your life," she snapped, her voice sharper than before.

Harin fell silent for a moment before nodding. "You're right," he admitted. "It was a bait."

Emily stiffened, a sharp breath escaping her.

"The dungeon's sudden appearance, the fluctuating readings... and the fact that no one challenged us for the rights at this week's bid. I should have suspected something," Harin continued, his voice carrying a heavy weight of realization. "It was too convenient. Too easy." His fingers curled into a fist on the bed, frustration flickering across his face. "And I walked right into it."

A heavy silence followed.

Then, slowly, Harin lowered his head, the weight of his exhaustion finally showing.

Emily opened her mouth, but before she could say anything, a hand landed gently on her shoulder.

Ethan.

His grip was firm, grounding. When she turned to look at him, his hazel eyes met hers with quiet understanding.

"Right now is not the time," he said softly.

Emily hesitated. Her anger hadn't faded, the frustration still burned inside her—but Ethan was right. This wasn't the time to argue, to pick apart every mistake. Her father was alive. He was safe, for now. That was what mattered most at this moment.

She exhaled slowly, nodding. "You're right."

Her gaze shifted back to her father. There would be time to deal with the rest later. But for now, she needed to be here. With him.

Emily took a steadying breath, forcing herself to push past the lingering frustration. There were more important matters to discuss now. Her father had survived, but she needed to understand how things had played out. The ambush, the sheer scale of it—it wasn't something she could just let go.

She pulled up a chair beside the bed, her expression hardening with determination. "Tell me exactly how it happened," she said. "How did they ambush you? The dungeon was

supposed to have barriers in place. There should have been a limit to how many Hunters could enter. How did they bypass that?"

Harin leaned back against the pillows, exhaling heavily. "They knew what they were doing," he said, his voice carrying the weight of exhaustion and regret. "The dungeon's natural restrictions should have kept excess combatants out. But when we were inside, I noticed something was off. The dungeon's flow was... unstable. At first, I thought it was just the distortion we were worried about, but then the numbers didn't match."

Emily frowned. "Numbers?"

Harin nodded. "At first, everything seemed normal—until we reached the third sector of the dungeon. The number of enemies inside was less than expected, almost as if they had already been culled before we got there. That's when I realized... we weren't alone. Someone had entered before us—without triggering the association's restrictions."

Ethan, who had been listening quietly, crossed his arms. "That shouldn't be possible," he said, his voice laced with skepticism. "Even high-ranking Hunters have to follow the dungeon's natural entry limits. If they bypassed it without detection, that means they had some way of interfering with the dungeon's very structure."

Harin nodded grimly. "Exactly. And that wasn't the worst of it."

Emily narrowed her eyes. "What do you mean?"

Harin's fingers curled slightly over the blanket. "They weren't just inside the dungeon. They were waiting for us outside, too."

Emily's breath hitched. The realization settled into her like ice. "You mean—there was an ambush on both ends?"

Harin gave a slow nod. "The moment we started retreating, the exit was already compromised. It was a coordinated effort. We were boxed in from the start. It was never about the dungeon—it was about eliminating us."

Ethan's brow furrowed. "Then how did you manage to get out?"

Harin hesitated for a moment before he spoke. "I tried to use the artifact Butler Ray gave me," he admitted. "It should have activated immediately—but something was intercepting it."

Ethan's expression darkened at that. "Intercepting it?"

"Yes," Harin said, his voice edged with frustration. "The artifact should have folded space around me instantly, just like it did later, but in that moment... nothing happened. Someone—something—was interfering with it. I had to fight just to get a chance to activate it properly."

Emily clenched her fists. "Whoever they are, they knew exactly what they were doing," she muttered. "They knew about the artifact, about the dungeon's security... They planned this down to the smallest detail."

Harin sighed, rubbing his temple. "And their forces were overwhelming. The number of demonic humans among them was higher than anything I've seen before."

Emily's breath caught. "How many?"

Harin's expression was grim. "At least three peak rank-8 demonic humans. And that's just what I saw. They tore through the team instantly."

Emily's nails dug into her palm.

Three peak rank-8 demonic humans. That wasn't just a simple strike force—that was an execution squad.

Her father should not have survived that.

The sheer scale of this ambush, the level of coordination, the kind of enemies they were facing—it was beyond what she had imagined.

And suddenly, she felt something far worse than anger.

Fear.