

# My Infinite Mana System

## Chapter 2: The Late Bloomer

The storm had always fascinated me as a child.

My parents used to say it was my favorite kind of weather.

While other kids hid under blankets at the sound of thunder, I'd press my face against the window, watching lightning split the sky.

I thought it was beautiful.

Back then, I believed in simple things, that the world was fair, that good people always won, and that my parents would always be there.

Those beliefs burned away along with everything else that mattered, that night of the fire.

Sitting on the edge of my bed, I ran a hand through my hair, still damp from a cold shower.

The system's text played in my mind, '**Congratulations! You have awakened.**'

The words didn't feel like it was for me.

They felt like something out of a dream.

I glanced at my reflection in the cracked mirror across the room.

Black eyes stared back at me, shadowed with exhaustion.

My face looked thinner than I remembered, my skin paler.

The restaurant shifts had taken their toll, but the real damage was something deeper something time hadn't healed.

I picked up the old photograph resting on my nightstand.

It was slightly faded, the edges worn from years of handling.

My parents smiled back at me, their faces lit with warmth I could barely remember.

My father's arm was slung around my mother's shoulders, her laugh frozen in time.

"I did it," I said softly, as if they could hear me. "I have now awakened. You were right, Dad, I had it in me all along."

The words tasted hollow.

My father had always believed I'd be special.

He'd tell me stories of powerful Hunters.

And how they're motivated and how they survived.

And sometimes he tells jokes about how stupidly some die in dungeons.

My mother would laugh, shaking her head at his dramatics, but there was always a glimmer of hope in her eyes when she looked at us.

But I hadn't been special.

Not for a long time.

In a world where strength meant everything, I was just...

Ordinary.

Most Hunters discovered their powers by the age of sixteen, while some was earlier.

But by eighteen, the window for awakening had all but closed.

But I was twenty, an anomaly.

A late bloomer.

The world didn't have room for late bloomers.

I tightened my grip on the photograph, my jaw clenching as memories of the fire surfaced.

I was just ten years old.

The details were a blur of smoke, heat, and the deafening roar of flames.

My parents' voices had called out to me, urging me to run, to save myself.

I had to run.

The guilt was a constant weight in my chest, an ache that never quite went away.

No matter how many times people told me it wasn't my fault, I couldn't shake the feeling that I should have done more and it was my fault.

"I'll make it up to you," I whispered, my voice barely audible. "I'll become someone you'd be proud of. I won't be useless, I won't let anything stand in my way."

The photograph slipped from my fingers, landing softly on the bed.

I stood, pulling on my black hoodie and running my fingers through my damp hair one last time.

The air in the room felt stifling, heavy with memories I couldn't escape.

"All right," I muttered. "If this is my second chance, I'm not wasting it."

I stepped outside, the cold wind biting against my face.

The city stretched out before me, its towering buildings and narrow streets alive with noise and movement.

Somewhere out there, people were fighting monsters, conquering dungeons, and making their mark on the world.

I was tired of watching from the sidelines.