

PLEASE DON'T DIE, MY LADY

Chapter 2: Prayer

I dreamed of reality.

A man living a life that could be described as unremarkable at best and dull at worst.

He grew up under decent parents, achieved average grades, graduated from an ordinary university, and worked at a routine job.

A peaceful life, precisely because it was so ordinary.

In hindsight, it was an ideal life, as if gifted by the heavens. But at the time, I found the monotony unbearable and wished for the collapse of my mundane existence.

It's human nature to only recognize the value of what we have after we've lost it.

Like how those living in water never realize its preciousness.

Perhaps I was sent here as punishment for such insolence.

To a world where the concept of an ordinary day didn't exist, and each day was a step toward collapse.

I believed with unwavering certainty that the days would continue in the same way until, one day, I would quietly cease to exist, like falling asleep.

And yet...

Living is terrifying.

But dying is terrifying, too.

Because all forms of deliberate death inevitably come with pain.

And I hate pain.

I've grown used to it, but I still hate it.

So, I dreamed of a painless death.

Of falling asleep and, without anyone noticing, having my heart stop so that I would be found as a serene corpse the next day.

The noblewoman's body enters the rest it longed for, and my soul returns to reality.

A happy ending that leaves no one grieving, for there is no one left who cherishes her.

Ah, well, the organization might regret losing me a little.

It's somewhat amusing that the only ones who would lament my death are my enemies.

Even so, I want to see it.

How would her parents react?

Though her consciousness is buried deep within me, I can still clearly recall their faces.

The two who abandoned me—resentful, yet still missed.

I hope they'd shed at least a single tear.

That their forsaken daughter met such a tragic end.

The absurdity of my fantasy made me chuckle faintly.

What meaning is there in clinging to remnants of a world I'll leave behind?

Instead, I'll pray.

God, please, take my life away.

Every night, I went to sleep with that thought in mind.

"...Good morning."

The next day, as always, my hope was betrayed, and I woke up.

The bluish hues of morning light and the chirping of birds surrounded me.

The scent of fresh grass filled the room, thanks to the open window meant to air out the stench of bodily fluids.

I rubbed my blurry left eye, blinking a few times before slowly sitting up.

By any objective standard, it was a refreshing morning.

Except for the lingering misery in my body.

The pain that seemed worse than the night before.

Breathing hurt, as though something was wrong with my collarbone.

I hadn't woken during the night.

Perhaps my body desperately craved rest.

Too drained to move, I sat blankly on the bed for several minutes.

Eventually, the thought of washing off the sticky fluids clinging to me prompted me to lower my feet to the floor.

"Ahk."

The moment my feet touched the ground, a sharp pain shot through my ankle.

Gasping, I glanced down to see it swollen and red.

I hadn't noticed yesterday, likely because other parts of me hurt more, but I must have twisted it—or worse, fractured it.

A groan escaped my lips.

"...Seriously, how much worse can it get?"

Ignoring the pain, I forced my weight onto the ankle to stand.

A stabbing sensation ran through my leg, accompanied by dizziness from anemia, and I almost lost my balance but managed to stay upright.

I hobbled a few steps before my legs gave out, sending me crashing to the floor.

The impact left my wrist and shoulder throbbing as though they'd been broken, adding to the persistent ache in my chest.

"....."

My vision blurred.

If I didn't stop myself, tears would fall, so I bit down hard on my lip.

The tears stayed in, but blood trickled from my mouth instead.

What's the point of all this?

Curling into a ball, I wrapped my arms around my knees.

It hurt, as if my chest might shatter, but I desperately needed some semblance of comfort.

I don't understand.

Why does everyone hate me?

Even if someone approached me with kindness now, I doubt I could trust them.

I'd always fear the blade they might be hiding behind their back.

I'm broken. As a person.

I buried my face deeper into my knees.

It mimicked the comfort of being held, but my frail legs offered no solace.

Maybe it wasn't about comfort at all. Maybe I just missed the warmth of another person.

Longing for human contact but incapable of trusting anyone—not even myself—I've become a wounded animal, pushing everyone away.

A character that belongs more to fiction than reality.

Annoyingly dramatic, in every sense.

“...Heh.”

A laugh slipped out for no reason.

What was it they said about crying and laughing in succession?

I hoped I didn't look strange.

With such idle thoughts, I stood up.

Though I stumbled and fell to my knees a couple of times, I eventually managed to stand on both legs again.

“I can't be late...”

Even in this state, I found myself worrying about being late to class.

Even though being on time would likely only lead to another beating.

Maybe I'm already beyond functioning as a person.

Dragging my left leg, I hobbled to the mirror and began undressing.

As the clothes came off, the full extent of my body's condition was laid bare.

A skeletal frame with ribs protruding, bruises and cuts scattered across my skin, and scars left by the organization.

The unexplained bloodstains I had noticed earlier seemed to originate from a long gash across my upper abdomen.

I hadn't bothered to stop the bleeding, hoping to bleed out in my sleep, but the blood had stopped during the night.

It left a crimson mark on the sheets, but cleaning that up was the maid's problem, not mine.

I stepped into the bathroom and stood under the showerhead.

Turning the lever released a cascade of water onto my head.

The water trickled down my face, neck, and body, washing away the fluids that had clung to me.

If only washing away the past could be this easy, life would be much simpler.

I closed my eyes, savoring the sensation of warmth spreading through my body.

The chill that had seeped into my bones overnight began to fade.

Though the water stung my bruises and cuts, the pain mixed with a sense of relief, making it oddly pleasant.

I could see how this might become addictive.

After drying myself with a towel, I used a hairdryer imbued with magic stones.

Starting at the ends of my hair, I worked my way up, the warm air gradually drying it.

In this world, many items mirrored those in reality but were powered by magic.

The showerhead, for instance, or this hairdryer.

They even allowed finer adjustments than their real-world counterparts, showcasing the convenience of magic.

Unfortunately, the magic I could use was utterly useless.

Once my hair was dry, I dressed in a spare uniform, as yesterday's was too dirty to wear.

This was my last clean set.

I hoped not to ruin this one.

After all, I couldn't very well attend class naked.

Adjusting my appearance and grabbing my bag, I prepared to leave.

Though my ankle throbbed with pain, I was getting used to it enough to walk without drawing attention.

Taking a deep breath, I gripped the doorknob.
This room was my space.
Beyond this door was the territory of those who were not on my side.
Trying to clear my mind, I opened the door.
Light from the hall spilled into the dimly lit room.
It wasn't particularly early, so I could see the other students bustling about.
Even so, a few of them were unmistakably looking at me.
It was obvious what they were thinking.
How dare the daughter of a traitor walk around with her head held high.
Wasn't she infamous even before her family fell?
She should've just died with her parents instead of coming here.
Poor thing, she'll get bullied again today.
Something along those lines.
I felt like I couldn't breathe as I took my first step.
Maybe I really was panting slightly, but I hoped that wasn't the case.
That would look so undignified.
And I couldn't let myself do anything that lacked dignity.
The distance from my dorm to the classroom wasn't far.
Given that even walking made my body scream in pain, I was grateful for that.
More importantly, it meant spending less time under the gaze of strangers.
Slowly, I made my way into the classroom.
The brief relief of leaving the hallway was shattered as the noisy room fell silent, and all eyes turned to me.
Even something intangible like stares seemed to gain weight when there were enough of them.
The combined gaze of just thirty students felt unbearably heavy, as though it might crush me.
I forced myself not to stagger and sat down at my desk.
But the stares didn't stop.

Don't look at me.

Or, fine, look if you must.

But please, don't approach me.

Don't speak to me.

Don't pity me.

Don't mock me.

Don't hit me.

Just don't do anything at all. Please.

While I kept my head lowered, wishing for solitude, the sound of footsteps made me look up.

The group from yesterday had surrounded me again.

Really, they never fail to meet expectations.

"Zhang, are you sure this is okay?"

"I'm telling you, it's fine. We did it yesterday, and nothing happened. See? She's still alive."

"Ah, don't worry. No need to tremble, Lady. It'll hurt for just a moment, and then it'll be over if you close your eyes."

The boy, Zhang, seemed to be the leader and had brought along new faces, reassuring them.

The girl who had slapped me yesterday spoke with a mocking tone, her smile insincere as she addressed me.

Her eyes were utterly untrustworthy, as though she didn't even recognize her own actions as mere venting.

"...If you're going to do it, just get it over with."

I closed my eyes.

I had no intention of resisting.

No one would help me, and this frail body couldn't even put up a fight. What was the point in futile resistance?

It would only tire everyone out.

I'd end up hurt worse.

It was less painful to just comply.

So, I isolated myself in the darkness of my mind, bracing for the violence to come.

“Wait a moment.”

The unfamiliar voice of a girl made me open my eyes.