

# PLEASE DON'T DIE, MY LADY

## Chapter 26

Right now, I...

Ariana only turned to face me after Sena had completely disappeared down the corridor.

The smile that had been so evident on her face vanished in an instant, leaving her expression devoid of emotion.

“Lady Remia, now...?”

Why are you sitting there? And that red stuff—blood? No, why.”

That emotionless expression shattered the moment her gaze landed on me.

The look of shock widening her eyes was striking.

It stood out even more because I had never seen her look like that before.

Well, it wasn't exactly a pleasant sight to behold.

A lady curled up, sitting on the floor, blood dripping steadily from her wrist—

Anyone would surely recoil in horror.

But you've seen this before, haven't you?

I've bled countless times because of you.

Why are you suddenly reacting like this now?

Acting all serious, though it doesn't suit you.

Why? Because you've changed, Ariana.

You never listened to anything before, and now, of all things, you cling to the very words I wish you wouldn't hear.

Just like any common hypocrite, shamelessly.

You were like that.

It might've been easier if you'd remained oblivious.

But your behavior was so transparent, it annoyed me even more.

“It itched, so I scratched a little, and it bled.”

“...Do you think that makes any sense?”

“It’s the truth.”

“Remia...”

Murmuring my name as if sighing, she didn’t look the least bit convinced.

Ironically, that was the first time I had heard my name from her since arriving at the academy, aside from roll call.

It showed so clearly what kind of life she had been leading.

I slowly curved my lips upward and muttered,

“...It’s true.”

The itch was inside my head, but scratching my wrist to resist it was still the truth.

See? Again, you don’t believe me when I tell the truth.

You judge me on your own without even listening properly—how repulsive.

Even if it were a lie, shouldn’t you of all people react differently?

If you’d just mocked and tormented me as usual, I could’ve faced you without flinching.

Why... Why are you carefully lifting me as if handling a precious doll, tenderly stroking my wrist with emotions brimming in your eyes while gently treating my wounds?

Even if the whole world pities me, you—you shouldn’t be like this.

You shouldn’t suddenly act like a different person overnight.

What on earth did I say to you yesterday?

Under the influence of the drugs, what did I even tell you?

“...What’s troubling you so much? Please, tell me.

Don’t hurt yourself—just tell me, and I’ll change. So, please.”

You wouldn’t listen even if I did tell you.

Before I realized it, laughter slipped out.

Yeah, it’s not just you.

There's no one in this world who truly sees me.

"Nothing.

There's nothing about you, Ariana, that needs to change."

So I told her.

After all, you won't change, so, as always, I'll adapt.

If I strip away and carve out parts of myself, I'll manage somehow.

It's only hard at the start. It won't be as difficult the second time.

Where should I go next?

The wrist is always a good choice, isn't it?

"Please, just tell me the truth, Lady Remia.

There's no way you'd cut your wrist without a reason. Communication is crucial."

"Shall we go?"

I deliberately cut her off mid-sentence and grabbed her hand to pull her along.

Fortunately, Ariana allowed herself to be led, her face still blank with bewilderment.

Whether she was too startled to move or simply didn't want to provoke me further because I looked unstable, I couldn't tell.

But it was the first moment where I had seized the upper hand.

Should I be glad?

I didn't know.

From that day on, Ariana began sticking to me all day long.

She sat beside me as if it were the most natural thing in the world and followed me wherever I went.

During lunch, she would drag me to eat even if I tried to skip meals.

The group of commoners led by Jean didn't dare to touch me because of her presence.

After all, they had been sternly warned just the day before.

No one in their right mind would approach me right away.

Even Sena, who had persistently approached me, stopped coming near after that day.

The sympathetic gazes that used to trail me also turned to Ariana instead, leaving me in the background.

Because of that, my life—once punctuated by violence, my only source of stimulation—became more peaceful and monotonous than ever.

The next day, and the day after that.

Even as weeks passed.

Aside from Ariana refusing to leave my side while in the classroom, aside from her sticking close even in personal spaces like restrooms or changing rooms, and aside from her attempting to follow me to my room after class ended, it was an ordinary routine that might seem mundane to others.

In a way, it might be the reality I had long wished for.

Life, back then, had also been peaceful and dull, a repetitive cycle.

After falling into this unfamiliar world, I had prayed endlessly for years for a tranquil life.

That the person ensuring my peace was Ariana, the one who tormented me the most, was a bit ironic.

Still, I wasn't in a position to be picky, so I figured I should gratefully accept it.

In fact, I began to think the me from weeks ago, who overreacted to her hypocrisy, was strange.

Such a dramatic shift.

I must be happier now than ever before.

I'm living the ideal life I dreamed of.

I should be.

I must be.

I have to be.

Then why is it that...

"...it feels so hard to breathe?"

Muttering to myself, I brought the knife I had prepared that day to my left wrist.

My head ached all day long.

It was as if I were in a daze, like something had taken hold of me.

It feels like someone is choking me, leaving me breathless.

Violence, the pain that once tormented me but also made me feel alive—I find myself longing for it.

My mind must have gone completely off track.

Otherwise, why would I crave pain on my own?

Even during the darkest periods of despair, I only indulged in fleeting fantasies.

Yet now, living in an even duller reality, I'm actually doing it.

"How did it come to this, ugh...."

I ran the knife across my wrist.

Horizontally, shallowly.

For a moment, the scratched skin remained still. Then a crimson line appeared, and drops of blood began to fall.

As the sharp pain of the blade slicing through skin—hardly something one could call pleasant—surged through me, words spilled out of my mouth without my control.

"Well, isn't it obvious?"

How could anyone feel at ease living as a corpse rather than a person?"

The pain brought a surge of stimulation, numbing my mind and sharpening my awareness.

That day, the act of clawing at myself to suppress emotions had become something else entirely—a twisted ritual of carving myself to prove my existence, my reality.

I suppose I was adapting in a way.

Though whether this could be called adaptation, I'm not so sure.

Turning my wrist to examine the marks from various angles, I spoke back to the lady within me.

"So what should I do, then?"

I already know I lack anything you could call an agency.

Telling someone who's always lived as a corpse to regain their humanity is just baseless delusion."

The horizontal lines etched across my wrist seemed monotonous.

Acting on impulse, I moved the knife again, this time creating a vertical line.

Bright red blood flowed steadily, pooling on the desk.

The pain came belatedly, clearing the fog in my head.

For a fleeting moment, it felt similar to the clarity I experienced when Ariana had administered the drug to me that day.

For someone as dulled to everything as I was, only this level of stimulation could make me feel anything.

This is why I can't stop.

The cross-shaped mark on my wrist looked far more aesthetically pleasing than before.

Beautiful things are best, after all.

Especially if they're something unpleasant, they should at least look good.

"At the very least, you shouldn't do things like this.

What's the point of continuing a life sustained by inflicting harm on yourself?"

The words spilled from my lips as I gazed at my wrist with a smile.

The fleeting improvement in my mood plummeted instantly.

Ah, please, stop it.

Just let me feel better for a moment.

Why am I so desperate to torment myself?

"I'm doing this because of you. Because you won't let me end my life.

Because you won't let me put an end to this filthy, hopeless story!

I had no choice but to find another way!

And yet, how could you—how could you say something like that to me?"

"I never stopped you.

How could I possibly stop something you're so determined to do?

We're practically the same person, after all.

But maybe it's time you stop pushing everything onto me while pretending you don't actually want to live."

Her words made my head spin.

Was it because they weren't true? Or because they struck a nerve?

I couldn't tell.

But I, trembling with anger, spat out curses I hadn't uttered even once since coming to this world.

"Shut up. Shut the hell up!"

"Please refrain from using such vulgar language."

Right now, I am...

"Why? Why shouldn't I say it?"

It's my body, my brain, my mouth."

"It's my body, my brain, my mouth too, isn't it?"

I told you—we're practically the same."

Right now, I am...

"Ah. Yeah, sure. One and the same, yet here I am, acting like a lunatic all by myself?"

Fine, I've been crazy all along. From the start, I was perfectly broken."

"Oh, don't act like it's news. You already knew.

Whether it's schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, autism, dissociative identity disorder, or neurosis—whatever it is, this state can only be explained as madness."

Right now, the lady is...

"Ah, yeah. I know. I know it all too well.

That's why I'm carving up this garbage body of mine.

Because in this damn world, there's no mental hospital.

Because the easiest solution of drowning my broken brain in medication is gone!"

"Do you really have to carve it up?"

I don't want to hurt anymore.

And deep down, neither do you. You don't want to die, either."

Right now, Remia Adelian is...

"I wanted to live. Yes. Who wants to die from the beginning?"

"Then live.

Throw the knife away, look around, find a way to endure this life."

Right now, \*\*\* is...

"I can't. That's why I'm doing this.

Even if I manage to endure until I graduate from the academy, what changes? I'll just return to the organization.

There's no hope. Not even the faintest glimmer of it for me.

Living or dying, there's no real difference! You know it all. Right now, I am..."

Right now, I am.

Right now, I am.

Who am I even fighting?

My wrist dripping blood, my gaze unfocused, staring at the void.

Sometimes I laugh, sometimes I go serious.

I raise my voice, then blush with anger.

I sob uncontrollably.

Now, I'm fighting alone.

Both the lady and 'I' are just me, after all.

Ah, I can't even deny my madness anymore.

I've completely fallen apart, and there's no pretending otherwise in front of others now.

Ariana will use this as an excuse to barge into my room, won't she?

How absurd.

This situation is just so damn funny.

"...Ah, hahaha, hic."

I need medication.

Enough of it to smother this brokenness.



Yes, medicine.

There's one here too, isn't there? A panacea.

"Help me, Ariana. Please, give me some medicine."

Medicine, medicine, medicine.

Laughing, crying, screaming, I let out my hysteria.

My hysterical voice echoed in the dormitory room, where I was utterly alone.

Ah, really.

It's unbearable to listen to.

Chapter 27

"Give me the medicine."

For the past few weeks, my dawns have been like this.

Sometimes tranquil, often horrifying.

Dry, restless mornings where even the luxury of nightmares is out of reach, and closing my eyes for even a moment feels impossible.

During the day, I'd manage to feign normalcy under others' gazes, but at night, I couldn't contain the rampage of my mind.

Or maybe I just didn't.

If I had tried to keep up appearances even when I was alone, I'd probably have ignored any resistance and shoved a blade into my throat long ago.

Is that it?

Maybe.

After all, these pathological behaviors stem from the process of forcibly expressing something twisted within me.

By engaging in physical and mental self-harm, I've been scraping away, cutting, gnawing at, and carving out the "lady" within me. Only then could I barely wear the mask of an emotionless face.

But even that is reaching its limit.

Me and "me."

Me and the lady. \*\*\* and Remia Adelian.

All the aspects of myself, blending together yet trying to remain separate.

The things I had forcibly denied keep raising their voices.

The acts of sympathy and kindness, once the hardest to endure, are now being carried out by the person I should hate the most.

The pleasure of the medicine has taken root in my mind, filling it with obsessive thoughts about it.

And now, I can't even meet the basic needs required to keep going.

Truly, it's remarkable I've held on this long.

Shouldn't I be praised for it?

By someone—if no one else, then at least by myself.

"...This kind of thinking is only possible right now, isn't it?"

After enduring a terrible night and feeling utterly exhausted, in a morning when even raising my voice takes too much effort.

Yes, considering your memories, would you call this a 'moment of clarity'?"

I murmured to myself as I cleaned up the blood and fluids spilled during the night, along with the shattered objects scattered everywhere.

I couldn't burden the maid, Ai, with my mess anymore.

Along with avoiding her altogether, cleaning up was the only repayment I could offer her.

So I moved my clumsily bandaged arms to restore the space to its original, orderly state, a stark contrast to the chaos of dawn.

For the past few weeks, my mornings have usually been like this.

Horrifying just moments prior, but ironically tranquil afterward.

A quiet morning, spent returning what was twisted during the night to an appearance of normalcy.

The only conversation happening...

...is with myself.

It's unbearably tedious.

But still, it's a peaceful time.

Yes, I suppose it is.

Compared to a few hours ago, it's almost shocking how much of a person I seem.

After finishing my cleaning, I prepared for school.

The long sleeves of my uniform barely managed to conceal the bandages wrapped around my wrists.

Without them, Ariana would have already burst into my room.

When I first transferred, the situation was similar, except back then, the one inflicting the wounds had been her. Now, it's me.

I can't even begin to fathom how it came to this.

Transforming the sigh threatening to escape into a smile, I stepped out of the room.

Whether or not I was truly smiling didn't matter.

What mattered was that I was making the effort.

Since Ariana started protecting me, the students who once tormented me had begun avoiding me altogether. Even as I passed through the halls, they didn't so much as glance my way.

Upon reaching the classroom without incident, I walked straight up to Ariana and spoke.

"Ariana."

"Oh, Lady Remia.

Did you have a peaceful night? I hope today is as—"

"Give me the medicine."

Her cheerful greeting, consistent with her behavior these past weeks, froze mid-sentence.

What's wrong?

You told me yourself, didn't you?

That soon enough, I'd come to you, asking for medicine.

Didn't you already expect this?

Was it too soon, perhaps?

"Give me the medicine," I repeated, carefully enunciating each word.

Only then did Ariana furrow her brows and respond.

“...No.”

“Why not?”

“Your body hasn’t stabilized yet.

If you take something new now... the side effects and addiction will rebound twofold, maybe even threefold.”

It was a rejection.

A clear and unequivocal refusal, leaving no room for argument.

I wasn’t particularly shocked.

Knowing the current Ariana, I had half-expected such a response.

Ah, I see.

You’ve become so absorbed in Remia Adelian that you’ve even forgotten your own role.

I let out a dry laugh as I rubbed my face with my hands.

Her excuse was so predictable that I couldn’t suppress the laughter.

“Ha... heh. How did it come to this, Ariana?”

You were ordered to drag my already rock-bottom life straight into the abyss.

And you did it. You pushed and pushed until I was hanging on the edge of that pit.”

You tortured me.

Mocked me.

Beat me.

Even used drugs on me.

You’re the one who shattered my last hope of finding solace in this academy, teaching me that such things were far beyond my station.

And yet, now, watching you act with such hypocrisy—it felt like something inside me was boiling over, ready to burst.

No, perhaps it had already burst.

The usual Remia wouldn’t even entertain such thoughts.

“Then don’t stop halfway. Finish it to the end.

Why are you acting uncharacteristically hypocritical?”

“It’s not hypocrisy...”

“Then what is it? What should I call this?”

It’s not genuine goodwill born from sincerity, is it? Humans can’t do that.”

For the first time in a long while, a sneer spread across my lips.

I wanted to provoke her.

I wanted her to throw the medicine at me in anger.

Yes, that’s the truth of how I look right now—all just my desperate flailing.

I feel like I’m going insane, desperate for the medicine right this instant.

So, please understand, Ariana.

You’re the one who made me this way.

It’s because of you that I’ve ended up like this.

I’m not asking for something difficult.

Just push me forward—just one more step.

Then maybe I can make up my mind.

About the end.

At some point, my sneer turned into a bitter smile, but I didn’t stop my words meant to provoke her.

I couldn’t stop.

“If you can’t save me, at least let me go mad gracefully.”

“...I’ll save you.”

“...What?”

“I’ll save you. I, Ariana Warton, will stake everything I have to save you.

So, Lady Remia, just tell me anything.

Ask me for help. Tell me you want to live. Say you don’t want to die. Please.”

Ha.

I felt something break in my head.

What is this feeling?

Self-loathing?

Homicidal urges?

Whatever it is, I know one thing for sure—it's not pleasant.

I started snapping at her almost reflexively.

Somehow, my voice had risen, drawing the gazes of the other students around us.

But right now, I couldn't bring myself to care.

Let them look.

What are they going to do? I'm already at rock bottom.

"...What could you possibly do? You're nothing more than the second daughter of a count's family.

No, you're from a disgraced lineage barely better than an old baron's household.

What? Did the commoners' praise at the academy make you believe you're something special?"

The Warton family has never been a prestigious household to begin with.

Their lowly origins are something they've desperately masked through careful alliances.

She talks as if the Adelian family is entirely unrelated to hers, but in truth, our downfall likely hit her family the hardest.

Isn't she twisting herself into knots now to gain the favor of her new host?

A young lady who should have been learning courtly etiquette back at her mansion is instead playing the role of a torturer at the academy.

"How much value could 'everything Ariana Warton has' possibly held?

You're just a torturer, aren't you? A parasite clinging to the powerful, struggling to survive without a host.

When the Adelians fell, weren't you the one scrambling to dirty your hands just to find a new host?"

And yet, you're telling me to ask for help?

Are you trying to drive me to suicide?

Should I whisper thanks for that?

Or scream at you for being cruel?

Is it your hypocrisy giving me false hope?

That's the worst thing you could do, Ariana.

I've already trusted too much and been betrayed too many times.

I've become a lunatic who picks apart even ordinary kindness, desperate to find flaws.

I never even asked for help in the first place.

All I wanted from the beginning was indifference.

I just didn't want anyone to look at me.

I've lived such a loud, chaotic life; I just wanted the end to be quiet.

But it's because of you.

You're the one who made me like this.

So take responsibility. Please.

Why are you doing this now?

"Tell me. How are you going to save me?"

Are you going to go to the organization and offer yourself in my place?

Will you grab my bleeding wrist and spend years rotting in a coffin for me?

Eating moldy bread and pig slop, treated not as nobility but not even as human?

Like livestock. Like a doll. Like a slave."

Like me.

I took a step closer with each word until I was right by her ear, whispering.

Gradually, I poured all the sticky emotions into my voice.

Just as she had once done to me.

Slap.

The sound of flesh meeting flesh echoed, and a burning sensation spread across my left cheek.

My head had turned to the side at some point.

"...Ahaha."

Ariana stood there with her hand raised, her face on the verge of tears.

She hit me.

Compared to before, it was weak—barely anything. But still, she hit me.

It had been so long since the last time.

For a moment, a deeply buried feeling floated to the surface.

“See? This is the real Ariana Warton.

This suits you much better than that ridiculous pretense of goodness.”

The classroom had fallen into a silence so tense it was almost eerie.

Every gaze in the room was on us.

This isn’t even that big of a deal, but their stares felt burdensome.

“Ariana.”

The stares that would normally have been unbearable now felt surprisingly tolerable.

Maybe it was because, for the first time, I felt like I’d won against her.

I don’t know if this could truly be called a victory, but does it matter?

“Give me the medicine.”

Forget everything else—just give me the medicine, Ariana.

If you truly care about me, that’s the best thing you can do.

I smiled faintly, tilting my eyes into crescents.

Hoping my feelings would reach her.

Chapter 28

I held eye contact with Ariana for several seconds without saying a word.

For some reason, all the other students in the class were also staring at us.

These were the same kids who wouldn’t quiet down even when the professor told them to.

I wondered how strange we must look to them.

I thought I was okay, but I guess I was just fooling myself.

My limbs began to tingle, and a dull ache spread through my chest.

I lowered my head for a moment to catch my breath.



“...Hoo.”

I couldn't breathe.

Maybe I had gotten too worked up.

This sensation was all too familiar by now.

No matter how much air I inhaled, it felt as though my lungs were punctured, leaving oxygen unable to circulate through my body.

No matter how many times it happened, it was always painful, disgusting, and unbearable.

Ever since the time I fainted in front of Ariana, this would happen whenever I was emotionally overwhelmed or overstimulated.

If it got worse, I'd start gasping like I was on the verge of vomiting before abruptly passing out. Luckily, until now, it had only ever happened in my room.

So it can't happen here.

I can't let myself show such disgrace in front of everyone.

Especially not in front of Ariana.

I'd just barely gained the upper hand—everything would be undone if I faltered now.

I patted my chest lightly with my left hand.

Even if I couldn't stop the cold sweat or my pale complexion, at the very least, I had to keep my breathing steady until I got the medicine.

With that thought in mind, I forced a smile onto my lips.

“Give it to me already, Ari...ana.”

Through my labored gaze, Ariana came into view.

She was staring blankly at my wrist, the one patting my chest.

My wrist.

The wrist exposed because I'd lifted my arm, causing my sleeve to slip down.

The wrist wrapped in bandages.

Ah.

I hurriedly pulled my sleeve back down, but it was already too late.

The shock only made my breathing grow more labored.

Her slightly trembling voice reached my ears.

“...Lady Remia. It’s your wrist again.

This isn’t a coincidence, is it?”

“Haa...”

Idiot.

Even after reminding myself not to let it show, I lose focus at the slightest slip.

The lady is always the same.

Always, always so careless.

Back then, and even now, nothing has truly changed.

The contents may have shifted, but...

No, perhaps not even that.

The merging of me and the lady, once just an ordinary criminal, seems to have birthed some malformed monstrosity.

“Hic... Huh...”

“Lady Remia?”

I bent over, bracing myself on my knees.

My limbs trembled, and my vision started to blur.

My lungs screamed for oxygen, but no matter how much I breathed, I couldn’t fill them.

There it was again—that feeling.

Once I reached this point, neither control nor pretense was possible anymore.

Within minutes, the edges of my vision would begin to blacken.

I’d probably end up sprawled on the floor, heaving and drooling like a disgrace, before passing out.

I could already picture Ariana’s reaction when I woke up.

The momentum that had been slightly in my favor was completely ruined.

Sometimes, it feels like everything that makes up the lady stands in my way.

Her talents, her body, her mind.

As if nothing about me would be allowed to remain peaceful.

As if I were meant to struggle and die.

Well, I'm used to it by now.

Whether it's paranoia or something real, I don't know.

It's sad, isn't it?

Don't get used to this.

Yeah, I know.

How did it come to this?

I let my consciousness drift as my mind grew hazy.

My vision darkened.

The sounds around me began to fade into the distance.

Will I miss my chance to get the medicine?

If I fail this time, I'll have to endure for who knows how long before another opportunity comes.

I'm so tired of carving myself up every night.

Isn't this enough already?

You've been cutting yourself alone anyway.

There's a difference between tolerable and numb, you know.

Then what should I do?

Fool her.

Drown the lady's mind in so much medicine that she doesn't even notice her broken body anymore.

Let her die buried in pleasure and happiness, shedding something other than tears.

Would that really be okay?

Yes, it's fine.

That's enough for me.

If that makes you happy.

What about me?

You...

“...Kehhk! HUU... Haa...”

“Breathe slowly.

If only we had a bag or something...”

I don’t know. Figure it out yourself.

Even taking care of myself is too much.

I forced my scattered thoughts back into order and darted my eyes around the room.

At some point, I had slumped to the floor, clutching my chest with both hands.

The person rubbing my back beside me was probably Ariana.

Her touch was the only thing bringing warmth to my body, which had gone cold as though filled with frost.

As much as I didn’t want to admit it, her touch was so gentle it made me want to lean into it.

...Enough with the useless thoughts. What should I do now?

My breathing was still ragged.

I could barely muster the strength to lift myself, let alone speak in a normal voice.

All I could do was sit there, gasping for air in Ariana’s embrace.

It was too late—I’d already been caught.

There was no way to make excuses now.

So I had to do something, anything.

“...Urk.”

“Careful, hold on...”

I swayed, my vision tilting, and almost hit the back of my head on the floor. Ariana caught me just in time.

I shifted slightly in her direction, using the imbalance to push her down beneath me.

“I caught... Hic... you...”

“What are you trying to do...?”

I climbed on top of her, pinning her wrists beneath my hands.

Ariana's face showed clear signs of shock at being so abruptly overpowered.

"Calm down.

I understand what you want to say, so let's go to your room first—"

"No... It has to... be now..."

I tried to catch my breath as I assessed my condition.

My face was drenched in fluids, and my body was trembling so violently that it looked like Ariana was the one holding me up.

On top of that, our position was suggestive, completely ignoring the stares we were surely attracting from others.

But right now, I didn't care.

I wasn't even aware of whether there were people nearby.

I leaned closer to her, increasing the points of contact between us.

It wasn't as though I had any real strength—more like I was just resting my weight on her. But this way, Ariana wouldn't easily be able to shake me off.

Probably.

"Ariana..."

"....."

I struggled to focus my blurred vision on her and poured out the feelings inside me.

"Huu... Every night... Ha. It's like this.

I can't breathe... Hic. I ache... and hurt myself..."

The words tumbled out raw, unfiltered by my brain, spilling straight from my heart.

Things I would never normally say were now directed at her.

"What... What am I supposed to do...?"

I'm already ruined. My life is twisted... like a dog's.

Haa... And those hands that claim to be helping... Heh, they strangle me.

Even when I say I don't need help, they don't listen. Do they even know what help is...?"

It's disgusting.

Physically.

Mentally.

Pathetically disgusting.

And now, the only time I can let it out is when I'm crying and begging in front of someone who owns me.

"The medicine... was my only... Huh... hope.

It's the only thing that... Hic. Pickles my broken brain... and drowns out all the pain..."

I ignored the voice buzzing in my head.

This is why it has to be now.

On any other day, I'd never be able to overcome it.

It's all true.

"Hic... You said... you'd give it to me. You said you would, didn't you?

I'm asking for it. I'm giving up on my life for this fleeting pleasure... Hic... So why won't you give it to me...?"

But is that my fault?

I didn't choose to end up in this body.

I didn't choose to be captured by the organization.

I didn't choose to come to the academy.

So why has everything gone so horribly wrong?

I've tried to be good.

I've endured so much pain.

Don't I deserve a little, just a little compensation?

I'm not asking for much.

Returning home? That's a luxury.

A peaceful death? I wouldn't even dream of it.

I just want—

Even just the medicine. Enough of it...

So that in the moment I die, I'll be so intoxicated I won't know it's happening.

If my mind stops functioning altogether...

If I can die without knowing anything...

At least I won't be afraid.

"If you don't give me the medicine...! I'll just keep... Hic... I'll keep doing this until I die... Hah. Give me the medicine, please, Ariana. Give it to me..."

I leaned closer until our lips were nearly touching.

The distance was so small it was hard to tell if I was just resting on top of her or pressing against her.

In that nonexistent space between us, I mixed my breath with hers and whispered again and again.

Give me the medicine.

Give me the medicine.

Give me the medicine.

Medicine.

Medicine.

Medicine.

"....."

"Give me the me— Hic...!?"

As I continued my half-conscious, incessant whispering, Ariana suddenly sat up.

My blurred vision caught a faint image of her lifting me into her arms in a princess carry.

I had worried she might just shove me off easily, but I suppose that wasn't the case.

Of course, my body must be so light to Ariana.

This was an embarrassing position, but what could I do?

Even my last resort—whining—had failed. In this helpless state, there was nothing I could do.

I let my half-open eyes fall shut again.

It's over.

I should give up.

I'll just keep struggling in agony and end up killing myself from withdrawal.

Ahaha.

In the end, it all ends exactly as I expected.

"I'll take you to your room."

Ariana's soft whisper reached me as she started moving.

Her steps were slow, as if to avoid jostling me too much.

All I could do during that time was rest my head against her and gasp for air.

No, I couldn't even do that properly—I felt like my lungs were soaked in water.

...It really feels like I might die.

Is this really just hyperventilation?

As my fingers twitched, numbing with the loss of sensation, Ariana's low voice brushed against my ears.

"When your body feels better, let's talk again. And..."

A foreign sensation briefly pressed against my forehead and then disappeared.

Her lips, probably.

"...I'm sorry. For everything, up until now."

Confusion and surprise filled me as my consciousness faded.

Chapter 29

My mind, once submerged in darkness, began to resurface.

Something warm and oddly comforting enveloped my body.

It felt like I'd slept without a nightmare for the first time in ages.

As I lifted my eyelids, strangely light and unburdened, I was greeted by a familiar ceiling.

I was in my room.

It seemed I must've passed out while Ariana was carrying me here.



That much was fine, but the peculiar warmth I'd been feeling was bothering me.

Someone was holding me.

I didn't feel like resisting, so I just turned my head where I lay—and, as expected, it was Ariana.

She was fast asleep.

So deeply that she wouldn't notice if someone carried her away.

"...What are you doing?"

"Hm... huh..."

"Excuse me, Ariana."

"....."

"Ariana!"

She showed no signs of waking up, her face still nuzzling into my shoulder. Irritated, I raised my voice.

Only then did she stir, and I lightly bumped her with my head as she finally opened her eyes.

It was a gesture to tell her to move.

"...Sorry. Why was I even doing this?"

As she rubbed her eyes and removed her arms, the warmth left, replaced by the cold air brushing against my exposed skin.

It felt a little chilly.

The thought hadn't even fully formed when Ariana pulled the blanket over me again.

I must've been trembling without realizing it.

It was as if she could read my thoughts from the speed of her reaction.

"How are you feeling?"

You had a fever earlier. I must've dozed off while nursing you."

So I had a fever.

Now that she mentioned it, my body had felt a bit off.

I pulled the blanket tighter around me and curled up until my body warmed back up.

There was still a slight fever, but not enough to call it illness.

“...I’m fine.”

“That’s a relief.”

Ariana gave a soft smile as she stood up.

She swayed slightly as if unsteady, and I felt a twinge of unease.

Come to think of it, she had been holding me.

What if she caught something from me?

I didn’t want anyone, even Ariana, to get sick because of me.

“Why would you hold someone with a fever? What if you caught it?”

“...Are you worried about me?

Or... are you being sarcastic?”

Ariana’s expression turned peculiar at my words.

It was understandable—there hadn’t been any reason for me to say such a thing to her lately.

Still, her reaction annoyed me.

The lack of communication had been entirely her fault, and now this was a sincere concern on my part.

Unfolding my legs, I rolled fully onto my left side.

I could see her, leaning on the desk with a hand for support, looking down at me.

Her complexion didn’t look great.

At this point, I had to hear an answer, even out of sheer stubbornness.

“Interpret it however you want, just answer the question.”

I frowned, signaling my irritation, and Ariana finally gave a sheepish smile and replied.

“A simple cold won’t catch me. My body’s as good as a corpse except for its health.

You’re the one in worse shape, so please worry about yourself.”

“Well, it’s your fault I had to ask in the first place.

You were hugging me while I was defenseless and asleep.”

“...I think I did that in my sleep.

I’m sorry—it must’ve been unpleasant to be touched without permission.”

That wasn’t what I meant.

It had been a purely concerned question, yet seeing her flustered reaction reminded me just how unusually clear-headed I was.

It wasn’t common for Ariana to be caught off-guard by me.

Under normal circumstances, this would have been the perfect moment for self-loathing or self-harm.

“How are you feeling?”

Her question interrupted my thoughts.

Has Ariana done something?

“Much better. Did you do something?”

“I’m glad to hear that. I administered some medicine. Not drugs, though.”

“Medicine...?”

Her response was so unexpected that I unconsciously sat up.

The blanket slipped off, and the chill seeped into me again. My feverish head grew dizzy.

Startled, Ariana pushed me back down with a hand on my shoulder.

It wasn’t much force, but I wasn’t strong enough to resist right now.

I abandoned the effort to rise and spoke to her as she pulled the blanket back over me.

“Lie down. You’ve improved, but you’re not completely recovered—”

“What kind of medicine was it?”

If there was something more effective than what I’d known, I would’ve tried to get it ages ago.

Not that I could have, but knowing and not knowing makes a huge difference.

Fortunately, Ariana didn’t seem inclined to dodge the question.

Compared to her previous reluctance to share anything, it was significant progress.

“Antidepressants, tranquilizers, and various other psychiatric medications.

It’s not my specialty, so the diagnosis was a bit improvised.

But still, it should be much better than before.”

If something like that existed.

If this had been possible.

You should’ve done this sooner.

Why did I end up breaking so completely?

It was because you irresponsibly withheld medicine and refused to leave.

There had been a much better solution all along.

Why only now?

“It can’t be used long-term, but it should serve as an emergency measure to get you through immediate suffering.

If you’re struggling, please come find me.”

“Why all of a sudden? You’ve never done anything like this before.

I thought you’d given up on me.”

“Well... it’s a little embarrassing.”

Ariana lowered her gaze, her cheeks tinged pink.

Her fingers fidgeted like a child caught doing something wrong.

She always seemed more mature than me, so seeing her like this felt strangely out of place.

“When I came to the academy, I didn’t bring any psychiatric medication.

I had to scramble to get some in, so... I was late.”

Somehow, I felt foolish about the hostility I’d held toward her just moments earlier.

It was as if I was seeing Ariana Warton as the kind, gentle girl she had been in my childhood.

I thought that side of her had been buried and lost under a mask.

Is this also the effect of the medicine?

How it makes the pain she caused me seem like distant, decades-old memories, and the good memories she gave me feel like they happened mere minutes ago.

I didn't dislike it.

But I wasn't sure if I wouldn't come to hate it.

Right now, both she and I were so strange, so unlike ourselves.

Once this restless haze in my mind cleared, would I return to how I was, or become even stranger?

I didn't know yet.

Whatever the case, I would likely feel differently then than I did now.

And whether or not I'd still not hate her then, I didn't know either.

I exhaled a deep sigh, turning my gaze toward the ceiling. Ariana, who had been watching me cautiously, turned her back to me and sat on the edge of the bed, her face hidden from view.

"...I've realized how much pain you've been in. I'm sorry I didn't notice before.

And I'm sorry for being so overbearing, for smothering you with my presence."

In a soft, measured voice, she confessed her faults.

She whispered apologies for not understanding, for being a burden.

It felt strange.

This wasn't who you were.

Have you changed?

Or was this a side of you I simply hadn't known?

"From now on, I'll try to consider your feelings first.

I still can't give you drugs, but I'll find a better solution.

And I won't cling to you so excessively anymore... Probably.

I know it'll be hard for you to believe me, given the selfish and cruel person I've been, but I'll work to change, little by little."

Words hard to believe, yet ones I wanted to trust.

If her problems were resolved, then my remaining time at the academy would surely become more peaceful.

And somehow, in this moment, I saw a glimpse of her past self.

The Ariana Warton in this conversation made me think, in an uncharacteristically optimistic way for me, that maybe I could believe her.

“...Little by little? But I’m struggling right now.”

“I’ll change quickly!

Ah, you’re right... What am I doing, acting like I have time to spare?”

Her uncharacteristic flustered reaction made me laugh softly.

It doesn’t suit you.

That kind of hurried, stumbling demeanor.

You’ve always been better when you’re calm and composed.

Noticing my smile, her eyes widened slightly in surprise.

Then, as if resolving herself, she raised her head and took a deep breath.

“...So.”

Even after the deep breath, her voice trembled relentlessly.

I could tell what she was about to say from the way things were going.

“Please, stop hurting yourself...”

Ariana’s hand had found my wrist, the one peeking out from beneath the blanket.

The sloppily wrapped bandage was undone.

The wounds were gone.

She must have used healing magic while I was asleep.

Even though not a single scar remained, she still looked at my wrist as if it were wounded, her fingers gently brushing over it with a tenderness that seemed full of worry.

It was because of you.

Not entirely, but still.

“...We’ll see.

It’s not entirely up to me.”

“I suppose not... Ahaha, there I go, rushing ahead again.”

My curt reply made her laugh weakly.

Considering the kind of person I'd been until now, it wasn't exactly a negative response.

Perhaps she interpreted it the same way; her anxious expression faded.

Was that enough?

I still didn't know.

A few minutes of silence passed after that.

It wasn't an uncomfortable silence, and I started to feel drowsy again, closing my eyes—until Ariana suddenly spoke up.

“...Lady Remia.”

“...Yes?”

“Could you... speak informally to me again?”

“.....”

Her tone was tentative, almost testing the waters.

When we were children, I had spoken to her informally.

I guess I wasn't the only one reminiscing about the past.

Memories are such dangerous things.

Times that were good, yet ones you can never return to.

Once you fall into the foolishly nostalgic swamp of longing, it's hard to escape.

Even now, while you're likely still caught up in that haze, I already knew my answer.

“No.”

I haven't forgiven you yet.

Not for things that can't simply be covered up by nostalgia.

I still hate you.

Ariana slowly lowered her head.

I couldn't see what expression she wore.

Chapter 30

Ariana left soon after confirming that I had stabilized.

It felt like she was determined to stick to her word about not being overly attached anymore.

Should I feel grateful for that?

It seems premature, considering she might revert at any moment.

People, after all, are creatures who are lenient only with themselves.

They're harshly unforgiving of others' mistakes, yet when it comes to their own, they become endlessly generous.

I've never seen anyone who doesn't fit that description.

Including myself.

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"One pill a day. One every two days. Two a week."

I rolled the pills Ariana had given me in my hand.

Each one was distinct in color and shape, making them easy to differentiate, and their dosages were strictly prescribed.

She had warned me not to deviate from the instructions, emphasizing that they weren't exactly "good for the body."

Still, just as a healthy mind fosters a healthy body, shouldn't cultivating a sound mind lead to a sound body?

If I greedily swallowed these pills, I'd at least float in a hazy state for a few days.

Then I could live a much more stable daily life than I do now.

When I asked Ariana about it, her answer was absurd:

"These pills don't heal you—they just trick your brain."

Then how are they any different from drugs?

I don't get it.

Still, I told her I'd try to follow her instructions.

But surely, breaking the rules once or twice wouldn't hurt, right?

My mother always said that medication usage is partly up to the individual.



And my father said ignoring doctors' advice was fine, too.

"Most of them are just money-hungry frauds anyway," he'd said. "Only trust medicines that are in the dictionary and proven effective."

On impulse, I swallowed one pill.

Even though the effects shouldn't have kicked in yet, I already felt a buoyant lightness lifting my mood.

The very idea of medicine holds such powerful resonance.

How could anyone resist this?

You can't.

"Will it last three days?"

If you don't restrain yourself, Ariana will intervene. Try showing some self-control."

If I had that kind of restraint, I wouldn't be living like this.

"Well, that's true."

I sighed.

The giddiness I'd felt before Ariana left crumbled like a landslide, exposing its illusory nature.

Because I had been so high, the fall felt even steeper.

Was this because Ariana left?

Or because I was alone again?

Maybe it was both.

I don't know why those are the only reasons I can think of.

I thought I'd been miserable about Ariana's constant presence.

Isn't it funny how reasons always conveniently shift?

Maybe my depression never had a reason to begin with.

Maybe I was just born this way.

Or maybe I became this way the moment I arrived here.

Either way, it doesn't make much difference.

It sucks all the same.

I swallowed a second pill and sprawled onto my bed.

“...The moon is beautiful.”

Indeed.

The window in my upside-down field of view reflected the pitch-black sky of late night.

A luminous full moon shone with a faint blue hue at its center.

No stars were visible.

The unique brilliance of this world’s moon drowned them out, dimming their presence entirely.

A single round, glowing object sat in the vast sky, stark and alone.

Though much larger than any star, its solitary position made the surrounding emptiness feel overwhelming.

It must be lonely.

Watching it made me think so.

A sudden urge to go outside struck me.

“It’s too late.”

So what?

“If the guards catch you, you’ll get demerits.”

Only if they catch me.

And if they do, I’ll take them.

“If you go out in this state, the night air will make you sick tomorrow.”

Why should that matter?

“Ariana will worry about you.”

That’s the least relevant reason.

I got up.

The night air was probably cold, but I didn’t own much in the way of clothing.

There wasn’t anything to prepare—just me stepping outside.

Whatever reasons I shouldn’t go didn’t matter.

For once, I wasn't drowning in misery, and my mind was oddly calm for the late hour.

It had been ages since I'd acted on an impulse like this.

If it's thanks to the medicine, shouldn't I savor this incredibly human moment of delusion?

I grabbed the doorknob.

As expected, there wasn't much outside.

The sky was the same one I'd seen from my room.

The moon was the same one I'd seen from my room.

The night was colder than it had seemed from my room.

There was no reason I needed to come out here.

And yet.

Still.

"Maybe I should've brought a blanket.

Then again, a girl sitting at a fountain wrapped in a blanket would look pretty ridiculous."

The empty field was fundamentally different from the empty room I'd left behind.

Maybe now I understood why I'd wanted to come outside so badly.

I must've felt suffocated.

If I'm going to be lonely, I might as well claim the vast sky like the moon does.

Why hide away in a corner of my room, whining about it?

I could breathe a little easier.

Sometimes, a midnight walk doesn't seem so bad.

"...Still, maybe I should bring a blanket next time."

The cold stone of the fountain's edge and the night air's chill began creeping steadily up my body.

I hugged my knees close to my chest.

It was cold, but I had no intention of going back inside just yet.

If possible, I wanted to stay out here all night.

As I pondered what to do, a small sound reached my ears—a faint clatter of something opening.

A sense of unease washed over me, and I turned my head toward the source of the noise.

“...Ha.”

It was a face I hadn't seen in a long time.

A girl was leaning out of a third-floor dormitory window, looking down at me with a startled expression.

Even though it had been weeks since I last saw her, she was the kind of person whose face remained vivid, impossible to forget.

After all, in my academic life, where most people weren't even worth remembering, she was one of the rare exceptions—a decent person.

Sena Blomberg.

For some reason, she always seemed more dramatic every time we met.

Maybe it was because we only ever ran into each other at strange moments.

As soon as our eyes met, she disappeared back into her room, producing a noisy commotion. Moments later, she reappeared holding what looked like a blanket.

Then she placed a foot on the window frame.

And jumped.

From the third floor.

Was she out of her mind?

“Ah... Ugh...”

“...What are you doing?”

If you're having suicidal thoughts, you should probably see someone who can help with that.”

“It's not that! I thought you might run away if I left you alone... Ugh...”

“Why would I run?”

If I ran, I'd just get caught eventually.

It's not like I'd waste energy on something so pointless.

Whatever Sena took from my response, her eyes grew a little sharper.

Not that I was lying or anything.

Sena cast a healing spell over her battered arms and legs and began walking toward me.

From the sound of her coughing, her ribs were probably in bad shape too. Maybe she should take a moment to steady herself.

Not that I was one to talk.

“What are you doing out here, wallowing in misery at night?

Where’s that mangy dog you always keep around?”

“I just wanted to get some fresh air.

Your language has gotten harsh, Sena.”

“Well! What do you expect when she never gives me a single opening?!

That girl acts like she’s someone important, clinging to you and barking away—it was driving me insane just watching it!”

Grumbling, Sena approached and draped the blanket she was carrying over me.

It was already warm.

I wasn’t sure how she had warmed it, but it was enough to thaw my chilled body.

“Still, I thought she’d at least be looking after you. Seeing you out here alone in the middle of the night makes me think otherwise.

Although, considering what you’ve told me, I guess I shouldn’t be surprised.”

“That’s not it.

I just wanted to come outside on a whim.”

“...You? Wanting to go outside?

Unless you were kicked out, that’s hard to believe.”

I didn’t know what kind of impression she had of me.

When I stayed silent, simply gazing at her, her expression twisted slightly, as if something wasn’t adding up for her.

“Really? Why all of a sudden?”

“I don’t know either.

Maybe I was lonely.”

“Lonely? Not wanting to be alone?”

“Both.”

Sena let out a small hum, then patted the spot beside me and sat down.

She seemed confused.

Understandable.

I didn’t even understand myself; how could someone who hadn’t seen me in weeks possibly make sense of me?

Still, the fact that she was even trying was something.

“...You seem better than last time, at least. That’s a relief.

I was worried about what I’d do if things had gotten worse.”

“Do you think I’ve gotten better?”

“Isn’t that the case? You look much better, at least.”

“Well, I’m glad it seems that way.”

“...‘Seems that way’?”

Why do you make it sound like you’re faking it?”

“I don’t know.

I don’t know what I want to do, if I’m sad, if I’m in pain, or if I want to die.

The more time passes, the more confused I get.

So I just let things flow as they will.

If that makes me seem better than before, isn’t that enough?”

Hearing my response, Sena seemed strangely flustered.

She was trying to suppress the tremor in her voice, but her expression gave her away.

“That’s... not enough. Not at all...”

Her wide-open eyes reflected me, yet at the same time, didn’t.

What are you looking at?

Who are you seeing when you look at me?

For a moment, I was curious about her past.

What had happened to her to make her jump without hesitation simply because she thought I might run?

What had led her to fixate on someone like me, continuing to care even after clashing with Ariana?

I didn't ask.

I was too wrapped up in my own issues to stick my nose into hers.

"Who knows."

Instead, I found another way to use the moment.

I wasn't sure if it would work.

"If I end up dying, then I guess it wasn't enough.

But if I manage to make it to graduation, then I guess it was.

No one can know the future, so only the results will tell."

"That's... just putting it off.

Numbing yourself with comforting thoughts, killing even the small chance you might have.

It's the stupidest thing you can do."

"You're harsh.

But there's no hostility in your tone. Sounds more like you're talking about yourself."

Sena bowed her head deeply, shrinking like a scolded child.

It made me look like the one tormenting her.

When, in reality, I was the one venting, and she was listening.

"Don't worry. I won't pry."

"...Okay."

"But don't pry into me, either."

"....."

No answer came.

The silence settled over the fountain, broken only by the sound of our breathing.

I sighed, tilting my head back.

This is hopeless.

The moon, pale as it was, shone so brightly.

I thought it was alone, but if I looked closely, I could see a few faint stars scattered around it.

I almost wanted to laugh.

I did.

My laughter tore through the heavy silence.

A pair of eyes, filled with disbelief as if watching a madwoman, pierced into me from beside me.

Having it come from right next to me was a bit grating.

Brushing away the tears that had gathered at the corners of my eyes, I spoke.

“Haha... Don’t look at me like that.”

“...Sorry.”

“It’s fine. It’s understandable.”

“No... I’m sorry. For everything....”

Sena’s head drooped lower and lower until it was nearly resting on her knees.

Her voice was tinged with emotion. Was she crying?

People have been apologizing to me a lot lately.

Sena, Ariana... They’re all so sorry for everything.

Then why do they keep doing it?

If they know, why act like an apology can make it better?

I don’t get it.

And I’m sure she doesn’t understand me either.

No one truly understands anyone. All we do is compromise.

Why are relationships so damn difficult?

Maybe it’s just you.

If you and I are both the kind of people who can neither understand nor be understood, then everything makes sense.

I hope that’s not the case. That would be too unbearably sad.



My head throbbed, and I looked back at the moon.

It was needlessly beautiful.

Annoyingly so.