

THE FALL OF THE DIVINE

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The Choice

The aftermath of the trial lingered in Lucian's mind. His body still ached, but the pain didn't overshadow his anticipation for what lay ahead. He stood in a vast stone-paved square, surrounded by silence, broken only by occasional whispers in the air. Around him were other participants who had endured the same test. Each bore different degrees of injuries, their expressions varied—some smiled with joy, while others looked dejected. Lucian raised his head, taking a deep breath, trying to calm his turbulent emotions.

Suddenly, a low humming sound echoed from the sky. Lucian looked up and saw a figure descending slowly from the clouds, the air around him growing heavy as he approached. Lucian immediately recognized the man—the same middle-aged figure he had seen on the hospital rooftop, the one who had given him hope. Unbidden, a sense of awe and expectation welled up within him. The man's silver robes fluttered in the wind, and his stern face was devoid of any emotion, cold and unyielding like a carved statue.

"My name is Zyros. I am the Overseer of Aetheria. Some of you may have already met me."

Zyros paused, his eyes sweeping across the crowd as if he were observing each person individually. Then, his voice boomed, echoing in everyone's ears, "There were over 1600 participants in this trial. In the end, only 45 of you emerged victorious. These scars you bear are a testament to your challenge of the limits. But to the gods, healing these grievous injuries is a trivial matter."

His words carried a weight that felt like a declaration of fate. A wave of shock rippled through the crowd, brief gasps of surprise erupting as many

participants exchanged astonished looks, realizing they were among the few survivors.

Zyros raised his hand, and an invisible force swept through the air. Light shot from his palm, warm yet commanding, and the surroundings seemed to freeze in time. The beam of light landed on the wounded, as though it were a blessing from the heavens. In that moment, Lucian felt his breath catch in his throat, unable to tear his gaze away from the light. This wasn't just healing; it was a display of power, a symbol of divine authority. Zyros stood still, the light reflecting off his impassive face as if this healing was nothing more than a casual gesture. But to Lucian, Zyros seemed like a towering figure, a being before whom all mortal pain and struggle were insignificant.

The golden light softly enveloped Lucian. It pierced through every wound on his body, filling him with warmth. As he watched his injuries close and heal within seconds, his eyes widened in disbelief. His fingers instinctively touched the place where his skin had once been torn, now smooth as if it had never been harmed. A power beyond his comprehension flowed through him, a mix of awe and terror twisting in his chest, threatening to overwhelm him.

"If I had that kind of power..." The thought made him shudder. He couldn't tell if it was the fear of that power or the realization that it could bring him closer to saving Freya. The sensation of being healed wasn't pure relief; it was more like a temptation—a glimpse into the allure of divine strength. It even made him feel a twinge of dread: if he couldn't master this power, his hopes of saving Freya would drift further away.

Zyros continued, "Each of you has shown unique potential. Next, I will recommend a god-cultivation organization that suits your abilities."

He waved his staff, and a massive map of light appeared in the air, displaying the symbols and descriptions of three organizations:

"1. Obsidian Academy, specializing in the laws of strength and darkness. 2. Dawnlight Church, focusing on light, healing, and mastery over the forces of life. 3. Shadowveil Guild, experts in stealth and assassination."

"You will make your choice based on my recommendation," Zyros went on. "But before you decide, you have one last chance to withdraw—though if you do, all memories of this trial and the gods will be erased." His gaze swept over the group once more. "Your future is in your hands, but you only get one chance."

As soon as his words faded, the square fell into a heavy silence. The atmosphere became thick with tension. But Lucian's heart pounded in his chest as he stared at Zyros. That lofty posture, that immense power floating above him—he was in awe. "Healing, control over life and death... Isn't this why I took the trial? I have to save Freya."

Lucian had made up his mind.

Around him, some people whispered to one another, while others, like Lucian, wore determined expressions. In the end, it was clear that no one was willing to forgo their chance after witnessing the power of the gods.

Zyros smiled faintly and waved his hand. "Very well. You have made your choice."

Then, a voice echoed in everyone's mind:

"Brooks, you are agile. I recommend you join the Shadowveil Guild." "Emma, you are careful and calm. I recommend you join the Dawnlight Church."

"Lucian, your body is strong and your will is firm. I recommend you join the Obsidian Academy to pursue ultimate power."

Lucian paused for a moment, his eyes fixed on the floating map in the air. Zyros's recommendation made him realize that perhaps it was the best choice

for him. But... bowing deeply to Zyros, Lucian made his decision: "I choose the Dawnlight Church."

Zyros smiled again, and another voice echoed in his mind: "As you wish."