

The Fall 536

Chapter 536: Sincerity

What an asshole.

She knew that Zac had warned her of this Brazla, but she was still fuming after the encounter. However, she knew that part of the reason she got so angry was that the words of the Tool Spirit were getting to her a bit. The image she had nurtured of herself had been cracking over the past weeks.

Waking up in the tutorial had been horrifying, but also exhilarating. Her life had lacked any drive and goals before, with everything she could dream of readily handed to her. But she suddenly found herself at the edge of life and death, and she had excelled. The pixies had called her a once-a-millennia genius, and her performance compared to the other tutorial takers echoed that remark.

She even had the [Apex Trainee] title to prove it. Not a single human on Earth had performed better than she had. But was that enough?

Zachary Atwood had initially crushed her confidence with his monstrous power, but she had eventually come to terms with the fact that some people were just beyond comprehension. However, her genius' halo kept taking one hit after another as the months passed. There was Inevitability who could only make her feel despair, then the undead, and finally the cultists.

She had pushed herself beyond her limits, but it wasn't enough.

Were the pixies just humoring her? Or was the title of a millennial genius on a god-forsaken planet just worthless? So hearing Brazla utterly disregard her like that had dug at those insecurities, and those insecurities had turned to anger. However, that anger was quickly exchanged with vigilance as she appeared in the Inheritance Trial.

Just what had happened here?

It looked like she had arrived at a compound where a battle just had taken place. She stood in a massive courtyard full of training equipment, but the hundreds of dead bodies were a clear indication that something had gone terribly wrong if this was just an exercise. The corpses were fresh, and the pools of blood still hadn't dried out. However, there were no sounds of fighting anywhere, meaning that the battle was over.

It had obviously been a one-sided slaughter as well, as every single corpse wore the same type of robes. It was likely a sword-sect judging by the weapons in their hands and the insignia covering their backs. She stood frozen for a couple of seconds until she grit her teeth and walked over to the closest corpse.

This was a test, and she couldn't show any weakness. Wasn't part of the reason she decided to undergo this trial early to shake off her weaknesses, both mental and physical, and regain her momentum? A little bit of carnage was nothing special any longer.

She turned over the corpse and inspected the wounds, and she could immediately confirm that she had been killed with one extremely precise cut. Half her throat and her jugular were cut, and an extremely sharp energy emanated from the wound. A stabbing pain prickled her eyes just looking at the wound, and she hurriedly looked away to avoid getting injured.

Suddenly a hidden killing intent assaulted her senses, and she didn't hesitate to shoot out [Petalstorm] preemptively. However, she only saw a flash of light as her weapon was intercepted and thrown back to her side.

"A hidden blade," a tired voice drifted over. "Who are you? You are not a conjuration by my demons, but you are definitely not one of that bastard's descendants either."

Thea immediately understood who she was talking to, but she still didn't dare to move over. That killing intent hadn't been fake. However, she at least spotted the source of the voice, sitting with his back toward one of few still-standing sections of a building.

"I am Thea Marshall. I am not sure what has happened to the original creator of the Towers of Myriad Dao. It was awarded by the System to a friend of mine, and he gave me the opportunity to come here," Thea said, not hiding anything.

"Towers of Myriad Dao," the man snorted. "That's Brazla alright. So that old goat croaked before he could sire any descendants. A shame, but that's what you get when looking for love in the wrong places. No wonder that insufferable Tool Spirit has had the guts to break into my sanctum."

Thea didn't know how to respond to that, and the man seemed content to let the silence stretch out. She cursed her lacking conversational abilities, but the silence at least let her observe the cultivator in front of her. It was a humanoid male, but his skin had a yellowish tint while his eyes were amber with a thin slit, like those of an alligator.

His build was quite slender, but he was still felt extremely muscular. It almost looked like his forearms were covered in steel wires. However, her eyes couldn't help but turn to the massive sword in his grip. Or it would perhaps be more apt to say that he cradled it like it was his only source of comfort, with both his legs and arms entwining the blade in an embrace.

Thea's mouth opened and closed a few times, and she was unsure what would happen next. Zac hadn't really explained what would happen inside, true to his laconic self. He just said that there would be a trial to pass, but it was up to the masters to design those trials.

"I am hoping to learn—" Thea finally said, but she was cut off as the swordsman suddenly appeared three meters away from her, the massive sword in his hand.

"Live or die," he simply said as he lazily swung his sword.

It looked like the Blade Emperor was barely putting any effort into the swing, but it felt like the whole universe was splitting apart to Thea as the sword approached. Her instincts were screaming at her to retreat, to activate her life-saving skill. However, a sense of stubbornness bloomed in her heart.

This was a test. She knew it. This was the kind of pressure that guy had endured over and over as he pushed forward, and conquering those obstacles was what had allowed him to push far beyond anyone else on Earth. She couldn't keep dancing around, balancing progress with the burdens of her family.

She wouldn't retreat any longer, she wanted to walk forward with confidence as well. She sent out a mental command, causing [Petalstorm] to immediately return to its original form, a slender rapier just over a meter long. She rarely used this form any longer due to the convenience of it splitting apart, but a bunch of miniature blades wouldn't cut it here.

The blade-master didn't use any skill in his swing, so she wouldn't either. She instead infused her Dao and her conviction into the strike as she met blade with blade, putting it all on the line. It felt like she was trying to keep the whole universe at bay, and her arms were immediately covered with cuts.

But she held on, refusing to relent to the strike. She wouldn't give in even if she was turned into ribbons.

"Rare Class... Tempest Blade..." the Blade Emperor muttered as he looked at her, not sharing her plight in the slightest. "Passable technique... Above Average Strength... Decent control of your Dao... However..."

The monumental pressure disappeared the next moment, and her own swing was simultaneously canceled. Thea's hands were shaking from the experience, feeling that she had just narrowly escaped death. This was a true D-Grade powerhouse, completely different from anything she had encountered before.

Just a thoughtless swing contained the truth of the sword itself, making her Dao Braiding look like a child's plaything. Her emotions were in turmoil as well by the Blade Emperor's comments. Her confidence had soared after hearing one positive comment after another, but that 'however' had felt like a cold shower.

Was she just a nobody after all?

"Is there something wrong?" Thea asked, her heart beating furiously. "I am willing to learn and improve."

This was the most powerful being she had met thus far, even if it was just a fragment of an old cultivator. Any insight he could provide would probably be worth more than a dozen battles or spending years in her library.

"Why did you come to me if you mess about with the elements? I am the Blade Emperor, not the Wind Emperor. My path is one of purity," he said as his aura exploded, and Thea was forced a step back from the pressure. "What is your goal? Where does your heart lie?"

Her eyes widened as his aura towered toward the sky, but what really startled her was its chape. His aura was actually a perfect copy of his sword, though thousands of times larger. Could an aura actually take a shape like that? He was truly the Blade Emperor.

"I- I just want to become stronger. I wanted to hit faster, kill my enemies before they could kill me or my family. I want to become more powerful to stand at the peak. I don't want to be a nobody," Thea said, the words pouring out of her mouth as she bared her inner thoughts. "I attained the Seed of Gale during the Tutorial and incorporated it in my blade. Was that a mistake? I heard I could fuse it with my Seed of Sharpness into a speed-based Fragment of the Sword."

The Blade Emperor didn't immediately answer, but his eyes bore into hers. Even his pupils felt like two swords under his aura, but she shoved away any hesitation as she stared back with steely eyes.

"Well, you are passable I guess. You can call me Irei, and this is Silene," he said as he caressed his sword, and the terrifying pressure disappeared the next moment.

"What? Just like that?" Thea said with wide eyes before she had time to correct herself. "I mean--"

She lost her train of thought mid-sentence though as she noticed that the surroundings had changed, the battlefield replaced with a run-down courtyard located deep in some mountain range.

"I didn't leave many things in this inheritance, but the things I left all hold tremendous value," The Blade Emperor said with a solemn expression.

Six blades rose out of the ground the next moment before they lined up in the air in front of her. Thea's eyes lit up when she saw the exquisite weapons. Each of them emitted both spirituality and power that far eclipsed her [Petalstorm].

They exuded quality, and when Thea prodded the weapons she even felt a sense of spirituality in every single one. She had already learned that her own weapon was barely of passable grade, with neither an attunement nor any spirituality. Its future would be limited, and she had already started looking for ways to acquire something better.

This was exactly why she had chosen this Inheritance; the chance to gain a weapon that could stay with her as she took the next step on her path of cultivation.

"Children, come out," Irei said, and Thea's eyes widened when six projections emerged.

She couldn't believe that every single one of the six weapons had such spirituality that their Tool Spirit could emerge, though they were just small hazy projections. She believed she had a decent understanding of Spirit Tools thanks to Big Blue, and these swords should only be Early E-Grade. It meant that their potential was even greater than she had anticipated.

However, she didn't quite understand what Irei meant by children, as they looked nothing of the sort. For example, the largest sword, a massive two-hander that reeked of bloodlust, conjured what looked like a small devil. Another Tool Spirit looked like a feline predator that would probably turn into the apex predator in any forest it was placed in.

There was even one that just looked just like the sword itself, though its colors were inverted. She quickly realized that there was a correlation between the spirits and their weapons like they embodied the way the weapon was meant to be used. Her eyes moved back and forth between the six Spirit Tools, and she tried to understand which one was the best for her path.

"You can choose to leave here with one of my children, or you can choose to leave empty-handed. It is up to you," Irei said as he looked at the hovering swords, and Thea couldn't help but feel there was love in his eyes as he looked at each one of them.

She soon enough discarded three weapons that were clearly incompatible with her class and fighting style, and also the odd inverted Tool Spirit. Both of the two remaining ones looked quite strong, especially one that had a Tool Spirit that looked like a gemstone with a trapped lightning bolt. The other weapon looked a lot more nondescript.

It was a thin and slightly curved scimitar made from an elegant blue metal that would blend into the sky. Its tool spirit was a fluffy cloud, that continuously changed between a small thundercloud and an innocuous ball of cotton. The weapon didn't look as intricate as the crystalline weapon, and the tool spirit was probably the least imposing one.

However, her eyes kept coming back to it, and she felt some sort of connection to it.

"You've chosen Aigale I see, or [Storm's Break] as the original creator called it. It seems you understand yourself well enough, only Aigale and Naral to a lesser degree are suitable for you," Irei said as the other weapons disappeared. "She is my eighty-fourth adopted child, and she gained incipient spirit after we witnessed a storm of such ferocity that a D-Grade force was killed to the last man. Aigale is meant to dance among the clouds, and strike without warning like a sudden thunderstorm."

The other swords disappeared, and Thea eagerly grabbed the scimitar and cut a small wound on her hand to bind the Spirit Tool to herself. However, the moment she felt a sense of connection to [Storm's Break] she also found herself trapped in a storm of extremely sharp energies. She immediately looked over at the Blade Emperor, but he only had eyes for his own weapon.

"I have fulfilled my bargain with that old bastard, but our business is yet not done. Seeing a woman with a fickle heart brings up some bad memories," the Blade Emperor muttered as a terrifying killing intent started leaking from his body.

"Fickle heart?" Thea said, some anger blossoming in her heart even when she felt herself being under tremendous pressure from the sword energies around her. "I've never messed around with anyone's feelings."

"Not toward men. Toward your weapon, your true companion," the Blade Emperor grunted with disdain. "What if you treat my daughter in the same manner as that little thing you are ready to discard? Wouldn't she lead a miserable existence if that was the case?"

"What do you want me to do?!" Thea screamed as she was left with dozen deep gashes in just seconds.

She tried using her Dexterity to dodge the spiritual blades, but they were simply everywhere. Forcing her way out was impossible as well, as the intensity of the blades just increased as she tried to exit the sphere. She would perish long before getting out.

"Prove your sincerity toward the sword. That is the only way for a weakling like you to leave my Blade Domain," the Blade Emperor said. "Become one with the sword or die. It is up to you."