

The World 101

Chapter 101: The Battle At The Black Market, Part 2 (4)

"If I'm going down, you're coming with me, you son of a bitch."

As those words escaped my lips, it felt like the world around me began to move in slow motion. It was odd, given that I was teetering on the edge of death. Maybe this was what people experienced just before they die? Strangely, it felt oddly comforting, like a soothing embrace. But no, this wasn't death creeping in. It was as if my mind was sprinting while the world around me slowed to a crawl.

Surveying the faces of the three individuals before me, I realized I was still firmly entrenched in the present moment, yet time seemed to stretch and bend around me, elongating each passing second. It was as if everything had ground to a halt. But it wasn't the world freezing; it was my senses sharpening to a razor's edge.

I lifted my head to gaze at the sky. Dark clouds were slowly amassing overhead, their ominous presence punctuated by booming thunder. The thunderclaps reverberated through the air, loud and menacing, yet somehow slowed, as if time itself was stretching out. Rain would undoubtedly follow soon.

It was odd. Despite the knowledge that I had only an hour left to live - not just knowing, mind you, but feeling the poison gnawing away at me - I found myself strangely serene. Calm washed over me like a comforting blanket. With a deep breath, I summoned the mana around me, attempting to stem the tide of poison coursing through my veins, even if only for a moment.

With that tiny reserve, I could still muster the strength to take on Norman.

As I did so, the world around me seemed to snap back into focus, time returning to its normal pace.

Norman's eyes widened as he took in my defiant stance. "You're still standing after that?"

I lowered my gaze to meet Norman's eyes.

"Is this chick even human?" he exclaimed. "That bullet was coated with poison. Not just any poison, but Golden Cobra venom, you dig!"

While he rambled on, I attempted to move my feet. They shook with pain for a moment, but I managed to walk. The only sound I heard was the echo of my footsteps. My vision started to turn red. I felt like I was on the brink of death, but I forced myself to keep moving.

"...Whatever. You're gonna kick the bucket anyway," Norman's voice pierced through the fog of pain. "Shame, 'cause I kinda dig you and wouldn't mind having you as my bitch. Oh well, I can still bang your corpse once you're dead. Bet it'll still be warm by the time I finish off these two."

He redirected his attention to Leader, who was being showered with his slashes. Miss Arianne, on the other hand, was occupied with the thugs who had finally arrived from the bar. Seizing the opportunity, I closed the distance between us.

"What?!"

My blade aimed straight for his neck, but Norman swiftly blocked it with lightning-fast reflexes.

"Shit! You're still gonna fight even when you're about to kick the bucket? And you're aiming for my neck?! What the hell, woman?! Just keel over and die already!"

I remained silent. Most of what he said didn't register in my mind. I was too focused on trying to stem the flow of poison coursing through my body, even if just for a moment, to delay the inevitable death looming over me.

"...Shredica, you don't have to fight anymore. Pushing further will only hasten your demise. Just stay put and focus on halting the poison's spread in your body. There's no need to throw your life away," the Leader's voice, filled with concern, reached me.

I didn't spare a glance for the Leader.

In that moment, I felt the air tremble around me. Norman was conjuring a portal nearby, intending to channel his slashing attacks through it.

"If you won't meet your end willingly, then I'll gladly do the honors myself!"

With those chilling words, Norman unleashed a barrage of slashes. Each strike was directed towards the portal linked from his position to mine. His assault was even swifter than before, his blade moving with such velocity that it left behind glowing trails in its wake. It was no wonder he was known as the Don of the Black Market.

His precision and swiftness were like a tempest unleashed, overwhelming not just me, but even the Leader. It was clear to anyone watching that he ranked among the top swordsmen in this world.

However, my mind raced so swiftly that even Norman's slashes seemed to crawl along lethargically, leaving me fighting off the urge to yawn. Why was my mind operating at such breakneck speed, slowing the world around me to a crawl?

I effortlessly blocked each of Norman's strikes, as if weaving a protective barrier with my blade, creating a zone he couldn't breach no matter how hard he tried.

It was as if my mind and body had become one, flowing seamlessly together to achieve peak physical performance without any conscious effort on my part. I had no clue how this had happened; all I knew was that I couldn't afford to focus on anything else.

"...Damn it. What the hell is up with this chick?" Norman muttered, finally catching on to something being off. Despite being little more than a walking corpse at this point, I continued to thwart his attacks with even greater precision than before. It felt like I had entered what athletes in my world referred to as 'The Zone'.

At that moment, as I continued to block, I felt something trickling from my eyes. It wasn't tears; this liquid was too viscous. It was blood. Bleeding from my eyes was the grim reminder that time was running out.

"Ha! Just give it up already! You're as good as dead!"

Time was slipping away, and I had no time to waste. So, this time, I chose to advance.

"You're still fighting?! Come on, this is just plain stubbornness! Why don't you just collapse already!"

As I moved forward, Norman persisted in using his Portal Creation to channel his slashes toward me from where he stood, roughly ten meters away.

With each step I took and every slash I blocked, I could feel more of my life seeping away. The poison, the bullet wound, the slashes—all draining me of vitality. Yet, I refused to halt my advance. Even as I coughed up blood, I pressed on, my determination unwavering as I closed the distance between myself and Norman, deflecting his attacks along the way.

But eventually, my strength waned, my knees buckling beneath me as my body refused to obey. Norman seized the opportunity and ceased his assault.

"Finally!"

Blood poured unnaturally from my eyes, mingling with the crimson stains on my lips as I coughed up even more. I clutched at my mouth, trying to stem the flow, but the blood continued to spill between my trembling fingers. Then, I pitched forward, my body collapsing to the ground. As if on cue, the heavens opened up, and rain began to pour down.

"Shredica!"

"Shredica!"

I strained to hear Miss Arianne's and the Leader's voices, but they were drowned out by the encroaching darkness. This wasn't good. I was dying. I didn't want to die yet. There were things I still needed to do, objectives left unfulfilled. I didn't want to die in this godforsaken world.

I wanted to go home. I needed to go home.

But I knew it was futile, just wishful thinking of someone on death's door.

As the thought crossed my mind, even in the throes of death, I sensed a sinister shift in the atmosphere, sending shivers down my spine.

"Hrm?!"

"W-What the...?"

Summoning every ounce of strength left in me, I forced my heavy eyelids open and cast my gaze skyward. There, a man clad in a black suit hovered, his mask twisted into a chilling grin.

At that moment, my consciousness faded to black.

Arianne's POV

When I laid eyes on the man floating in the sky, a chill ran down my spine. It felt like I was staring into the very face of death itself, an entity that had no business existing in the mortal realm. The man's presence caused the sky to darken with his potent mana, enveloping the area in a thick aura of bloodlust that compelled everyone to look up and witness the unfolding spectacle.

"It's him..." I murmured under my breath.

The Playwright. A man of many faces, the one who had managed to defeat him.

As I gazed skyward, the man's eyes scanned the scene below. When his gaze settled on Shredica, lying on the brink of death, it lingered there for a moment before sweeping over the rest of us gathered below.

"...Kneel," he commanded, and in an instant, my knees buckled beneath me. With just one word, I was compelled to kneel. And it wasn't just me; it was everyone, including the Leader and Norman.

"W-What the hell?" Norman exclaimed, his disbelief evident as he gazed up at the sky from his position on the ground. He seemed the most bewildered by the situation, especially considering the palpable bloodlust emanating from the man, directed squarely at him.