

VILLAIN 102

Chapter 102 Winter's Embrace (2)

"You didn't have to go through the trouble of welcoming us yourself... Allowing me to stay was more than enough."

"Haha, how could I be rude to you, my lady? You are always welcome in Paradiso."

"You have my gratitude."

If the air had been cold before, it was suffocating now , with this SS ranked lord standing so close.

Behind him stood a peculiar woman. Her face was expressionless, her black hair cascading over a blue dress. Yet, her mere presence was overwhelming.

She bowed to Ada first before shifting her attention to Carmen.

"It's been a while... Carmen."

Carmen smiled at the sight of an old friend.

"Eleanor... What are you doing? That dress doesn't suit you."

Eleanor cast a glance at her attire before giving a blank nod.

"I thought so too, but Baylor insisted."

Baylor chuckled, his vibrant expression at odds with his status as a lord.

"Oh? Do you really think so? I think it looks stunning on you."

"..."

A simple yet warm exchange between the lord and his wife.

They were known as the strongest duo.

Baylor was the most powerful individual in the Moonlight family, and his wife stood second only to him among SS-ranked fighters.

Yet, the image they presented now was nothing like the brutal reality of their presence on the battlefield.

What made it even more intriguing was their dynamic—Baylor fought from the rear as a Wave Controller, while Eleanor stood at the frontlines as a warrior.

An odd contrast... but undeniably powerful.

And now, both of them had noticed me.

That explained Baylor's look—and his smile.

"Young Frey, it's been a while."

His smile was gentle, yet unsettling.

Just hearing my name was enough to summon an ocean of killing intent.

It was so vast, I didn't even bother tracing its sources.

Some family members even let out audible scoffs.

But in front of them, I merely kept my poker face intact.

I gave a slight bow, placing my right hand over my chest.

"It has indeed been some time, Lord Baylor. You're as radiant as ever."

Baylor seemed pleased. He suddenly released his aura, lifting me upright before I could finish bowing.

"Haha! Listen to that silver tongue of yours. The only one who has truly shined lately is you—the man who returned from the dead after spending an entire year in the Nightmare Lands. Now, isn't that a fascinating tale?"

I chuckled in return.

"It's not that amazing... but it does make for a decent story."

"Indeed. I'm impressed. How about a drink? You know... to discuss the secrets of your journey."

Baylor's eyes bore into me, as if he were peering beneath my very skin.

But I held firm, swallowing down the weight of his gaze.

"Secrets are common these days, Lord Baylor. You can find them anywhere... but sharing them would mean they're no longer secrets, wouldn't you agree? Still, I'd be happy to share that drink."

Baylor's smile deepened in satisfaction.

"Well said, boy... I can see the change in you. A change I welcome."

With that, Baylor turned his attention back to the gathered guests—Ada and the rest of the temple delegation.

"Once again, welcome... to Paradiso, the jewel of Winterfell."

With a casual clap of his hands, he turned and led the way inside, his wife following closely behind.

Just before departing, Eleanor shot me a final glance before turning toward their only son.

"Father."

"You've done well."

As Baylor busied himself with his son, I turned my attention to the countless gazes of contempt now directed at me—especially after my rather bold exchange with their family's lord.

One in particular stood out.

Ada must have noticed, as she gently held my hand, her expression filled with concern.

"Frey... this—"

I gave her a reassuring smile.

"It's fine, Ada. Everything's fine."

Among these people... one of them could be responsible for cursing this body years ago.

My gaze swept across their faces, analyzing each one.

A new journey begins now.

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Far from Winterfell...

In Belgrade, the capital city—within the Castlevania province...

Before the gates of this royal territory,

A towering seven-meter spear, shaped like a cross, loomed over the entrance.

And nailed upon it was a single, withered old man.

Rain poured relentlessly over his battered body.

He stretched his tongue out, trying to catch the few droplets that reached him, his disheveled gray hair clinging messily to his gaunt face.

His body bore scattered wounds, his dried urine staining his legs.

For weeks now, his only sustenance had been pure aura.

"You look miserable, boy."

Bloodmader slowly opened his weary eyes, staring down at a simple, hooded figure standing below.

The man stood at a distance, yet his voice felt painfully close.

Occasionally, passersby would throw stones and filth at Bloodmader in disgust.

But none of them noticed the hooded figure.

Only Bloodmader could see him—because the man had allowed it.

Bloodmader was about to speak, but the stranger cut him off.

"No need for words, boy. I can hear you just fine."

The former headmaster sneered weakly, sending his thoughts instead.

"Go to hell."

"Such words from a broken man."

Bloodmader barely focused on the ethereal silhouette before him.

He had no desire to speak with this person now.

"I've told you before... don't always believe what you see and hear. The world isn't confined to the small space your eyes perceive... and what you hear isn't always the truth."

Bloodmader couldn't stay silent after hearing those words.

"I saw what I saw. I heard what I heard. And I chose to believe what I wanted to believe. Call me broken, call me a fool... but that future must never come to pass."

The hooded man slowly shook his head.

"The future you envision isn't something you can control with your actions alone."

At those words—the very ones Bloodmader never wanted to hear—he burst into mad laughter.

"And who will control it? You? The man who once stood at the peak, possessing the power to change this world, yet now chooses to remain idle? Don't make me laugh..."

The hooded figure remained silent for a moment before reaching up and removing his hood, revealing a face marred by deep, terrifying scars—his eyes completely gouged out.

"There are many forces steering the tide... My interference now would only accelerate its flow, perhaps even draw those entities down. The one who showed you that future... is one of them."

Then, in the blink of an eye, the hooded man vanished, leaving only his words hanging in the air.

"I've given you a small piece of advice, boy... since you bear my blood. Don't believe everything you see. Your fate is in your hands, yes... but the future of this world lies elsewhere. Consider it my final warning... from a man long forgotten by time."

Bloodmader gazed at the empty space where the man had stood.

Then, he closed his eyes once more... waiting for the right moment.