

VILLAIN 158

Chapter 158 Between Reality and Illusion (1)

—Frey Starlight's Pov—

A cursed one.

I was starting to believe that was the most accurate way to describe myself.

Like a spark that leaves behind nothing but blazing fire wherever it lands.

My heated encounter with Director Ivar had come to an end, and by the time I stepped out of the administration building, the sky had already turned dark.

Still, though I say "dark," the lights of the temple—more of a small city in its own right—lit up every corner, no matter how far.

The students were still bustling about, seemingly full of energy. I could hear their scattered conversations as I walked among them.

Some were simply fooling around with their friends.

Others were discussing exciting topics like the upcoming Victoriad, which, according to rumors, would be vastly different from those before it.

It's also worth noting that I passed by quite a few couples who seemed to be enjoying their dates under an atmosphere soaked in romance—

Despite being fully aware of the impending war.

"These kids are truly living their youth to the fullest..."

Unlike me, who entered the temple treating it as a matter of life and death... to them, it was just a fleeting chapter in their lives.

At some point, I stopped being able to understand them—stopped being able to live like them.

With a heavy sigh, I kept walking.

"That's right... we're nothing alike. That's how it should be."

We come from completely different worlds. That's a truth that must never waver.

After renewing my resolve, I turned away from the main streets and headed toward the student residences.

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Fortunately, I didn't get lost this time. The recent renovations hadn't touched the Elite Dorms—they remained intact after the last attack.

After passing through the iron gates, I walked slowly, taking in the scenery around me.

It was completely quiet. You could barely hear a sound here—quite the contrast to the rest of the temple grounds.

What caught my attention was the peculiar garden surrounding the Elite Dorms.

Apparently, there was no need for further construction here, so they renovated the garden as a form of change.

I saw all kinds of flowers in a variety of colors—red, blue, yellow, and pink.

I was sure each one had a unique name.

Not that I knew a thing about such matters.

As I drew closer to the towering building that had been looming in my view for a while now...

The flowers around me gradually shifted into a pure white. Their petals fluttered in all directions, carried by the wind under the wing of the night.

The scene was beautiful enough to steal my breath for a moment.

Once I felt I'd had my fill of the sight before me, I decided it was time to move on. After all, this was just my first reaction to it.

Next time I pass through here, I won't even flinch.

I took my first step away from the spot. I didn't want to waste another minute here. But then—

"Didn't take you for the flower-loving type, Frey."

I jumped back, startled by the voice that spoke my name.

It was incredibly close—in fact, she was sitting just nearby, toying with some of those white flowers.

Her golden hair stood out more than anything in the sea of white around her.

"Sansa? What are you—?"

The princess.

Had my senses dulled that much after just a month away? I hadn't felt a thing. I wouldn't have even noticed her if she hadn't spoken.

"Hey, Frey... You look like you've seen a ghost. Is that the face you make during our first reunion after so long?"

That familiar mood... that oddly sad smile—it really was Sansa.

"No... I should be the one asking. How long have you been sitting there?"

I asked to confirm my suspicions, and Sansa answered nonchalantly.

"Does it matter? I've been here... maybe an hour before you? Two? Who knows."

Her answer only deepened my doubts. She had been right next to me the entire time, and I failed to notice until the very end?

I could've accepted it if it were someone like Ghost, an assassin. But a Wave Controller like Sansa?

It was strange...

Maybe my senses really had dulled... or maybe—

I shook the thoughts away and grounded myself in the moment again.

"It really has been a while. Have you spent all this time here in the temple?"

Sansa shook her head softly.

"Not exactly... but you could say I spend most of my time here. I only go back to... home occasionally."

"I see..."

She seemed hesitant when she referred to the Imperial Palace as home.

And honestly, I could understand why. Her father never visited the palace she lived in. Her mother had died long ago, and her relationship with her brother was hostile at best—leaving only the servants to keep her company.

It's hard to call a place like that home... I felt the same way about the Starlight family when I first arrived in this world.

"Aren't you going inside? It's beautiful here, sure... but I doubt I could sit around for hours like you."

"It's fine. I find peace in this place."

"Among these glowing flowers?"

Literally glowing—those white flowers looked like tiny lanterns, emitting a soft, silvery light.

Sansa plucked one of the flowers beside her and held it up toward me.

"They're called Lady of the Silver Lily."

"What?"

"These flowers you keep calling 'glowing'... that's their name."

"Right..."

I was never really into flowers, but Sansa had clearly entered full lecture mode.

"Originally, lily flowers were just ordinary blooms—but the natural environment of the land changed a long time ago. The atmosphere became saturated with aura, and this specific kind of lily began absorbing the energy around it."

She gently played with the petals between her slender fingers as she continued her botanical monologue.

"As a result, they started glowing like this... releasing this unique silver light."

Then, suddenly, she pointed at me.

"Just like that white hair of yours."

"Oh..."

I reached up and touched my hair without thinking. I tend to forget about it sometimes...

"You've clearly been through a lot."

"In one way or another..."

Our eyes met, and for a moment, we just stared at each other in silence.

It was easy to understand what was happening here. This princess... was desperate to have a conversation with someone.

I'd already picked up on all her subtle hints.

But I wasn't particularly keen on sitting through another flower lecture, so I decided to sneak away quietly. Yeah... that seemed like the best decision at the moment.

"Tell me, Frey... would you maybe like to come over and sit for a bit?"

I froze.

She didn't hint at it this time—she said it outright.

And to me, of all people... Frey.

No. Maybe that's exactly why she said it now—because I'm Frey.

I was literally about to slip away just seconds ago, but since things had come to this point... refusing her would feel like a bit much, especially considering her status.

Whatever. Maybe it is best to sit and talk with her. I might be able to pull some useful information out of her... and there's no one better for that than her.

With a heavy sigh, I stepped forward into the flower field.

"Alright... I'm coming."

Sansa smiled and scooted slightly, leaving a space beside her.

"Oh—and try not to trample the flowers on your way."

If she was that worried about it, then why sit here to begin with?

"No need to worry."

With swift, nimble steps, I avoided all the flowers around me with ease—thanks to Hawk Eyes and Phantom Steps, it was almost laughably easy.

Sansa smiled the moment I sat down beside her.

"Who would've thought? Frey, the Empire's number one troublemaker, carefully avoiding a few flowers just so he doesn't ruin them."

"Maybe I should go back and crush them all, then."

"Don't be rude... it was just a joke."

"Yeah, yeah..."

From the moment I sat beside her, I tried to clear my mind as much as possible and talk to her naturally.

Even while doing that, I found myself asking questions about what had happened inside the temple—subconsciously trying to dig for information.