

VILLAIN 159

Chapter 159 Between Reality and Illusion (2)

Luckily, she didn't seem bothered by it.

"I heard the Victoriad is going to be different this time around."

Sansa nodded.

"That's right. Normally, there's a qualifying phase to determine the top sixteen from each division. Then it proceeds to one-on-one matches until the finals."

Yeah... that was the standard format—the one I had personally designed.

In the final match , Snow and Ghost are supposed to face off... and, as expected, Snow comes out victorious.

"What exactly is going to change this time?"

Sansa took a few seconds before answering my question.

"I don't know all the details... but the traditional qualifiers have been completely canceled. Instead, there will be a massive test to determine who qualifies."

"A test?"

"Yes."

She nodded, then pointed out something important.

"And the years will overlap."

"What?!"

This time, I was genuinely shocked.

But from the look on her face, Sansa wasn't joking.

"It'll only apply to the test itself. But unlike previous years... we'll be facing our seniors this time."

I couldn't hide the shift in my expression after hearing that.

Normally, the Victoriad is held separately for each academic year... to keep things fair.

But this time... if Sansa's words were true...

I'd have to face second-years—and maybe even students beyond that.

That was a serious problem.

I couldn't use Balerion during the Victoriad... Even if everyone knew I had it, they'd never allow a weapon from the SS tier to be used.

That would literally ruin most of the strategies I've been building for so long.

For the past year, I'd imagined myself fighting against students my own age—hundreds, maybe thousands of times.

But I never planned to face upperclassmen.

I had to restrain the burning urge to curse this world and all the ridiculous changes constantly thrown at me.

"You seem... disturbed."

And why wouldn't I be? This was a matter of life and death.

"From that terrifying look on your face... what does the Victoriad mean to you, Frey?"

At her question, I gave her a strained smile, locking eyes with her.

"It means everything, Sansa... absolutely everything."

Her face twisted slightly the moment she heard my answer.

I must've looked like an obsessed lunatic... and honestly, my words weren't that hard to understand.

"So, you intend to win it all."

"Exactly."

Sansa blinked in surprise, but her expression soon returned to normal.

"Then... I wish you good luck."

I laughed at her response.

"You're not going to tell me it's impossible for me?"

"And why would I do something like that?"

She played with her fingers as she continued.

"I told you before—I can read people's emotions just from their expressions. And I can tell how serious you are. Saying something like 'you don't stand a chance' would be an insult to your resolve."

"..."

I stayed silent for a moment, caught off guard by her unexpected answer.

I suddenly remembered that Sansa was supposed to be someone who died long ago. That's why I never knew how to deal with her... I couldn't predict her at all.

Maybe that's the reason for the awkward air right now.

I tried to say something—anything—just to break the silence. This was getting weird.

"Do I really look that scary right now?"

I echoed her earlier words about my "frightening" face, and Sansa caught on to what I was doing and responded in kind.

"Kinda... You look like a dark lord from a fallen kingdom."

"What a bizarre description... So between this look and my previous one, which do you think is better?"

"Hmmm..."

Sansa seriously pondered my question before answering.

"Not much has changed, honestly. Your old look was scary too... but it was—how do I say this—a bit goofy?"

"What?"

"But now you look more mature. I think the current one is better."

"You really gave that more thought than I expected..."

Did I really look goofy back then?

Seeing my blank expression, Sansa tried to adjust her answer a bit.

"Ah—if you meant it in a different way, then your current look might earn you some popularity with the girls."

"Really?"

"Maybe?"

A moment of silence passed between us as we stared at one another before I continued.

"What about you?"

"Me?"

"Yeah... which one do you prefer?"

Sansa lowered her head before answering in a voice barely above a whisper.

"The current one..."

"I see..."

The conversation had taken a strange turn, but I didn't mind. Somehow, it helped halt the train of negative thoughts that had been tormenting me ever since I learned the details of the Victoriad.

So, I decided to push a little further.

"Sansa, can I ask you something?"

"What is it?"

"You and me... what kind of relationship do we have?"

"..."

Silence lingered for a while.

The princess tended to overthink things, so her answer was quite detailed.

"Frey... was a friend, I guess. Though, he only came to me when he needed something... But I appreciated those times. He was dumb enough to not have any hidden motives, which made it easy to talk to him naturally. So yeah, I suppose he was a bad friend."

A dry laugh escaped me in response to how she phrased that.

"Heh... You talk as if me and Frey are two different people."

"That's because... my relationship with you is different from the one I had with Frey. It's more ambiguous."

"But I am Frey, you know..."

"Maybe... but you're completely different."

"Huh?"

Was she just extremely perceptive? Or simply saying what came to mind? Either way, she had no idea how right she was...

"But..."

Sansa suddenly stopped herself, piquing my curiosity.

"But what?"

This time, she smiled—a sweet, genuine smile. Unlike all the forced ones she'd shown before.

"I think... I prefer the relationship we have now."

...

That smile—and her unexpected words—froze me for a second. But I quickly brushed it off.

"That's good... I guess."

...

What followed was a long silence as we both sank into our own thoughts, realizing this was the end of our gentle little conversation.

"...It's time to go."

"Yeah, it is."

We both stood up at the same time and walked side by side toward the Elite Dorms.

The building looked the same as ever, untouched by the changes outside.

When we reached the first floor, Sansa's room was the second one down the hall.

As soon as we arrived at her door... we paused for a moment.

"See you later, then."

"Yeah..."

I replied briefly, then added jokingly:

"Let's hope I don't face you in the Victoriad... You might find out my appearance isn't the only scary thing about me."

"Is that how you talk to a young lady like me? How rude."

Sansa laughed, then her smile faded just a bit.

"Unfortunately, that won't happen. Even if I pass the upcoming test... I won't be participating."

"Oh? And why not?"

The conversation had been going so smoothly that I asked without thinking. But Sansa hesitated.

She clasped her hands together and lowered her head slightly.

"Umm... I still can't control my powers properly."

Seeing how sensitive she was about it, I didn't dig any deeper. That was the limit our relationship allowed me to reach.

"I see... That means my path just got a little easier, huh?"

"Yeah..."

...

"See you tomorrow, then."

"Yeah... good night."

"Good night to you too."

After exchanging a few more words, Sansa entered her room while I headed toward mine.

Thinking back to her words...

Sansa's golden eyes hadn't shone the way they usually did today.

She seemed, somehow...

"darker."