

VILLAIN 197

Chapter 197 The Hardship of the Nightmare

—Frey Starlight's Pov—

How much light does one need to keep moving forward?

To keep standing in the middle of endless, suffocating darkness?

If you asked me that question... I wouldn't answer you.

I'd show you.

Standing there, surrounded by a void that swallowed everything—

I held onto that thread.

A single thread of light that had fallen from above.

A fragile line of hope that I've clung to all this time.

It wasn't much—barely anything, really—but I clung to it desperately.

Afraid it might snap one day... and take with it the last bit of light I had left.

I prayed—fervently—that this light would lead me to salvation... and not into another hell.

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Slowly, I opened my eyes, a splitting headache throbbing through my skull.

My body felt impossibly heavy, and a harsh light was shining down on me.

I lifted myself with difficulty, noticing wires and tubes attached to my body.

As I moved, the sound of glass shattering reached my ears.

That cursed sound only made my headache worse.

Turning my head, I saw a woman staring at me, her hands covering her mouth in shock.

"What are you looking at?"

I stood up with effort—only to realize I was completely naked.

"L-Lord Frey...! I'm so sorry—I'll call Lady Ada immediately!"

"Ada...?"

Did I return to House Starlight?

The woman didn't give me a chance to ask anything.

"Damn it... what happened to the test?"

I remembered blasting those bastards—Kaiser and his partner—to hell... but everything after that was a blur.

"Did I... fail?"

The very thought made my heart sink.

I forced myself toward the door.

"How long has it been?"

"What happened?"

"Can someone just tell me something?!"

I staggered forward, still naked, barely able to move. I leaned on anything I could, knocking down several medical tools in the process.

Just as I reached the door—it opened.

And standing there... was Ada.

"Frey..."

There was something in her eyes... a mix of emotions I couldn't even begin to decipher.

I could barely stand, but Ada caught me immediately and wrapped a black cloak around my body.

Seeing how I trembled, drenched in sweat, she pulled me close and held me tight—keeping me from falling.

"It's okay, Frey... everything's alright now..."

I raised my hand with effort and clutched onto her, too.

My head was pounding, as if a hammer was slamming into my skull—but I had to know.

I had to know the truth.

"The trial... Ada... the trial—!"

My breath hitched as panic began to take hold of me again.

"What happened to the trial?!"

Ada was taken aback by my sudden panic attack, but she moved quickly, her voice steady and warm.

"You passed, Frey... You made it. It's over. You're safe now."

She didn't know what those words meant to me... but she was smart enough to say exactly what I needed to hear.

Despite the pain, her words rang clear in my mind.

And unconsciously... I held onto her tighter.

I passed.

That thread of hope hadn't snapped.

I stared blankly ahead, my mind slowly processing it.

Carmen was there.

I saw old Vulcan, too.

Several unfamiliar faces stood around me, but I couldn't focus on any of them.

The panic began to fade—like magic—chased away by a few words and Ada's presence.

I let them lay me back down.

The doctors rushed in again, crowding around me, though I couldn't hear a thing anymore.

All I could hear was that persistent, high-pitched ringing...

And all I could see was the blur of lights and shadows above me.

I could feel Ada's hand gripping mine tightly, and I saw her mouth moving, speaking to everyone around me.

As soon as the wires were reattached to my body, the doctors got to work immediately, running checks to assess my current condition.

I paid them no attention.

My thoughts were elsewhere.

I did it.

I qualified for the finals.

In other words—three more matches.

Three more opponents...

Just three more battles...

And I'll finally reach my goal.

I noticed the stunned looks on everyone's faces the moment they checked my condition.

I saw disbelief etched into their expressions.

Ada urged them to hurry and finish. Then, the results came in.

"His body... has completely healed."

That flawless skin, so healthy it looked as if it had been sculpted—painted, even.

Who could believe this was the same ruined body that had been delivered to them not too long ago?

But what shocked them wasn't just that.

It was what lay beneath that skin and flesh.

"His aura pathways... are completely normal."

What they were witnessing simply made no sense.

It wasn't like I'd recovered—it was like I'd never been injured in the first place.

It defied logic.

Even Ada realized just how massive this was.

"Carmen..."

"On it."

Carmen vanished, then reappeared behind each person in the room, striking them in the back of the head, knocking every single one of them unconscious.

Ada bit her nail, staring at the bodies on the floor.

"How many?"

How many knew about the destruction of my aura channels?

Uriel Platini, who left recently...

The temple instructors?

The other students?

"Damn it..."

Even if they silenced everyone in this room, it was impossible to cover everything.

In the first place...

Ada looked at me.

What was that body hiding?

What was her brother hiding?

But even if she asked me...

I wouldn't know the answer either. What happened to me inside the Shadow Sect remains a mystery—even to me.

But I didn't care about any of that.

There was only one thing that mattered to me.

Barely able to speak, still dazed, I muttered—

"Ada... how long have I been asleep...? What about it? What about the Victoriad?"

She looked conflicted—unsure how to react to a brother whose first question, after all that, was about the Victoriad.

But she responded, just as she always did.

"Six days have passed. The finals start tomorrow."

One day left.

I exhaled with relief.

I still had time.

Carmen, observing my reaction, was the one who spoke this time.

"Frey... don't tell me you're planning to fight again?"

I barely registered her words... but I didn't respond.

Her question didn't deserve an answer.

It was like asking if I intended to keep breathing.

She understood.

And so, for the hours that followed, she personally oversaw my recovery.

She helped me circulate aura, bit by bit—making use of the bond we shared. Since we'd once been linked, her aura was naturally welcomed inside my body.

I was grateful to them—both of them.

We didn't exchange any words.

They simply kept supporting me in silence.

Slowly, I came back to my senses.

One update after another reached my ears...

And the one that brought back my headache—

"The next Hero has been chosen... Snow Lionheart."

Too soon...

Way too soon, damn it.

That was a true disaster.

The moment he touched Vermithor, Snow's raw power would increase drastically.

He wasn't supposed to obtain it now...

And yet, here we are.

The world keeps playing its twisted games with me.

"Just how far are you willing to take this?"

The difficulty of the nightmare... huh?

"As I thought... you're the biggest obstacle in my path, Snow."

Time passed quickly, and I had only a few hours left to prepare for my match against Seris Moonlight.

Carrying my worn-out body, I pushed forward once again—just like I always had—until the very end.