

## VILLAIN 25

Chapter 25 Wild Card (1)

It's really you...

After messing with my face for a while, Carmen finally confirmed my identity.

"Spare me this nonsense... That strike of yours could've killed me."

With a smile, Carmen supported my exhausted body.

"Yeah... Even though I wasn't serious back there, a blow like that should've been enough to finish you off."

She fell silent for a moment before continuing with a chilling expression.

"But you survived... and with minimal injuries."

I'd been caught red-handed.

I turned my head away from Carmen, avoiding her gaze.

"Guess I just got lucky."

In truth, I had only revealed a fraction of Balerion in that moment. He was the one who blocked Carmen's attack. I prayed she hadn't noticed.

"Luck, huh?"

Yeah... she wasn't buying it.

I needed to think fast—either come up with a convincing excuse or do something reckless.

"I don't know since when luck can block an S-Class strike, but you were right about one thing—you were lucky to run into me before the others."

I nodded silently. She was right.

The moment I escaped Byron, my entire body screamed at me, warning of the storm headed my way.

Several overwhelming auras were closing in fast.

Luckily, Carmen was the fastest.

Had one of the Elders who wanted me dead reached me first, I wouldn't be standing here right now.

Speaking of Byron...

I spotted the giant charging toward us in the distance, his entire body ablaze with a destructive aura.

His furious roar echoed across the entire area.

"You bastard! Do you really think you can escape from me?! I AM BYRON!"

His massive fist hurtled toward me at terrifying speed, growing larger and larger as it neared.

But I wasn't afraid.

The reason stood right beside me.

In response to Byron's attack, she raised a single finger.

One finger.

That was all it took to stop the giant's devastating punch.

But she didn't stop there.

In a blink, her finger pierced his fist—then his entire body.

With my enhanced Hawk Eye, I caught sixty-one precise strikes.

But I was certain she had landed far more than that.

The terrifying part?

Every single strike had targeted a vital point.

Byron collapsed, his limbs twitching, completely helpless.

He had no idea what had just happened.

Carmen stood over him, a wicked grin curling her lips.

"Well, well... Aren't you General Byron or whatever your name is? Tell me—was my presence so insignificant to you? Or... have you become someone important without realizing it?"

Byron's eyes widened in sheer horror when he saw who was standing before him.

He immediately attempted to kneel, but his broken body refused to obey.

All he could do was slam his head against the ground in a pitiful attempt to bow.

"M-My deepest apologies, Elder Carmen... I was blinded by my pursuit of the intruder. Please allow me to—"

"Elder?!"

Carmen's voice boomed across the battlefield.

I barely held back a chuckle.

Byron... you just signed your death warrant.

You shouldn't have called her that.

Beads of sweat rolled down the giant's face as he realized his mistake.

"A-Ah... I-I mean, Miss Carmen... My apologies..."

Before he could finish, his massive body was sent flying by a single, missile-like kick.

He smashed into the ceiling.

Then the ground.

Then the ceiling again.

And finally, he crashed down, unconscious.

The worst mistake you could ever make was reminding Carmen of her age.

That, and the fact that she wasn't married.

Honestly, she was probably more upset about the way he addressed her than the fact that he had ignored her earlier.

"Calm down, Miss Carmen. Giants like him tend to have small brains."

"Tch... If he weren't family, I would've crushed that thick skull of his."

She wasn't joking.

Regaining her composure, Carmen turned back to me.

"So, not only did you survive me, but you also managed to slip past Byron."

"In truth, several guards attacked me on the way here... I just don't get why no one recognized me."

Carmen tilted her head.

"Recognize you? Of course they wouldn't. Have you even looked at yourself in a mirror?"

"My... appearance?"

Now that I thought about it—I hadn't.

I'd been imprisoned in the Shadow Sect for an entire year.

"You look like a noble disguised as a vagabond. That wild hair covering your face? It only made things worse. And let's not even talk about your stench."

"...My stench?"

I raised my hand and took a sniff.

All I could smell was... me.

Did this really count as horrible?

"...What the hell are you doing now?"

"Trying to figure out what you're talking about."

Carmen let out a frustrated sigh.

"Spending a whole year locked up turned you into a damn idiot... Come on, let's fix this mess."

Before I could protest, she grabbed my arm and dragged my exhausted body along.

I knew better than to resist her.

I didn't want to end up like Byron.

After taking a few steps, Carmen slowed down slightly.

"Oh, and I almost forgot to tell you..."

She turned to me with a smirk.

"You're officially a dead man right now."

I stared at her, expression blank.

"...Dead?"

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The Capital – Belgrade

Ada let out a deep sigh as she scanned the mountain of work waiting for her.

Documents were stacked high on her massive desk, all demanding her attention.

Ever since she had assumed the position of Lord, her workload had doubled.

She had always been a busy woman.

After all, she had managed a large portion of the family's affairs from a young age.

But this...

This was nothing compared to what she had to deal with now.

Ada threw the papers aside and leaned back in her chair.

She muttered to herself.

"...I fulfilled my dream."

She had officially become the Lord of the Starlight Family.

It was the greatest desire she had ever held.

Ever since her late father, Abraham Starlight, had left behind a will naming her brother, Frey, as the rightful heir, Ada had felt...

Neglected.

Like a mere shadow in the corner, disregarded by the very person closest to her.

Her father.

So, she worked.

She sacrificed her childhood, a portion of her youth.

She honed her skills, expanded her knowledge, and built a name for herself.

She accomplished what no one else her age had ever done.

She didn't just want the title of Lord.

She wanted the recognition that came with it.

But the words she had longed to hear... never came.

The man she had wanted to hear them from... died.

She never resented her father.

After all, he was her family.

She just wanted to hear...

"You did a great job, Ada."

For the past year, she hadn't smiled even once.

Frey's death had struck her like a bolt of lightning in broad daylight.

She had hated him, yes.

She had wished death upon him more times than she could count.

And he had deserved it.

But as they say...

"You only realize the value of something once you've lost it."

He had been corrupt, yes.

But he had been the last piece of her family.

And towards the end...

He had changed.

Guilt consumed her.

She took full responsibility for his death.

"I should've never let him enter the Nightmare Lands. I should've never left him alone. I should've never wished death upon him..."

It became an obsession.

She now visited the church—a place she had never set foot in before—begging for forgiveness.

Despite Not Being the Primary Reason...

Ada let out a sigh as she stretched out in the chair of her office, her gaze empty.

"Why did you leave... and abandon me?"

She took off her shoes, pulled herself up onto the chair, and buried her face between her knees.

"What am I supposed to do now?"

At that moment, a loud, frantic knock echoed through the door.

An elderly maid hurried into the room, her expression filled with confusion.

"Frederica? What's wrong?"

Ada now resided in the estate that had once been granted to Frey, while she had made the old maid her assistant.

Frederica took a deep breath, struggling to get her words out.

"Lady Ada... Frey... Lord Frey..."

"He's back!"

In that instant, Ada's expression completely shattered.