

VILLAIN 26

Chapter 26 Wild Card (2)

-Frey starlight POV -

...

"Ah, this is heaven."

I was soaking in an enormous bathtub—the first proper bath I'd had in an entire year.

Lifting a strand of my long, damp hair that had fallen over my face, I muttered:

"I need to take better care of you soon."

"Come, Balerion."

A violent glow erupted from the serpent tattoo on my arm as a cold, black metal spread across my left hand, forming a terrifying blade.

I held my beloved sword close.

"You saved me back there, my dear friend. Well done."

"Come on, let's get you cleaned up too."

Balerion didn't need sharpening or maintenance—his edge was unnervingly sharp, his durability unmatched. He wouldn't break, rust, or dull, no matter how much time passed. He wasn't called the Black dread for nothing.

I spent several hours in the bath before finally stepping out.

With only a towel wrapped around my waist, I exited to find Carmen seated in a luxurious waiting area, clearly waiting for me.

"I thought I'd be waiting here forever... How dare you keep me waiting this long?"

I shrugged.

"You were the one who told me to clean up."

"Look at you. How many people have the guts to talk back to me like that?"

"Haha, what can I say? I find Miss Carmen far too charming to hold my tongue."

She rose from her seat, approaching me with slow, deliberate steps.

"Sweet words won't get you anywhere, you know..."

Her hand reached for my left arm, fingers tracing over my bare skin.

"You got a tattoo?"

Her fingertips brushed over the serpent's intricate design, mesmerized by its fine details.

'My little friend here is amazing, isn't he?'

"You still haven't told me... how did you survive all this time?"

I turned my head away.

"I happened to stumble upon an ancient sect's ruins. I found an old technique there and hid away all this time. Plus, my sister's resources helped."

"Hmm?"

Carmen's hand continued its journey, sliding across my chest and abs.

"Rank D... no, D- ?"

"Miss Carmen, this is harassment," I scoffed playfully.

"Harassment? From whom to whom, boy? You're barely half a man who just recently hit maturity."

I chuckled in response.

"I may be a young fool, but even I can get flustered when a beautiful woman touches my bare body."

Technically, if you add up the years from my previous life, my mental age was closer to thirty.

But I had to admit—Carmen's touch was like a talent detector. She had determined my rank with just a simple touch.

Hearing my last comment, her hand finally stopped.

"Looks like I've been too nice to you, huh?"

She clenched her fist and lightly tapped my stomach.

A surge of force crashed through my body, sending me to my knees.

"Ugh... That was brutal."

With a smirk, she extended her hand to me.

"Yeah, it was. You're Rank D- , You found a technique in Nightmare Lands and survived all this time, huh?"

I nodded.

"Your story has too many holes. You make the Nightmare Lands sound like a playground."

She paused for a moment before continuing.

"And you still haven't explained how you blocked my attack earlier."

She was still digging into that...

"I already told you... I got lucky."

"Luck? You think luck did this?"

She raised her fist near my face.

At that moment, I understood what she meant.

It was small—so small I hadn't noticed right away—but it was definitely there.

A tiny wound.

One I had inflicted.

'Damn it... Balerion, you idiot...'

"The number of people who can wound me is very small... let alone someone at Rank D."

Her piercing gaze locked onto mine.

"What are you hiding, Frey~?"

I remained silent, avoiding her stare.

What could I even say?

Any excuse I made now would only make her angrier, so I chose to keep quiet.

After a long, tense staring contest, she finally backed off.

"Fine. Everyone has their secrets."

Exhale.

"Thanks for understanding."

Carmen returned to her seat while I took the chance to put on some clothes.

Then, a thought struck me.

"Miss Carmen, forgive my curiosity... but I've always wondered—why are you helping me?"

"Hmm?"

She paused just as she was about to light a cigarette.

"That's a bit of a late question, don't you think?"

True... It had been a whole year.

"Better late than never."

"Tsk."

"I need to fix that smart mouth of yours."

She took a deep drag before exhaling smoke into the air.

"I have a good eye, Frey... and I trust my instincts."

"Instincts, huh?"

Did she really help me all this time just because of a gut feeling?

Carmen remained silent for a while, her face unreadable as she took another drag of her cigarette.

Then, she met my gaze.

"Well... that's part of it. But I also owe him a great debt."

"Him?" I asked, intrigued.

"Your father."

"Oh."

Unfortunately, I knew next to nothing about that man.

I sat down across from her.

"I appreciate it. Thank you."

"I don't need your gratitude, boy. I do what I want."

I chuckled.

"Of course."

For the next hour, she caught me up on everything I had missed over the past year.

At first, I didn't care much—this world's affairs didn't really concern me.

But then, my body stiffened when she mentioned the main event.

"The Emperor's wife and daughter were kidnapped by the Ultras. A brutal battle ensued, with the entire noble families taking part. In the end, they managed to rescue the Emperor's daughter... but the Empress didn't survive."

I gripped my head tightly.

'This is a disaster.'

Noticing my sudden shift in demeanor, Carmen raised an eyebrow.

"What's the matter?"

I didn't bother answering. After all, I had just realized how much of an idiot I was.

How the hell did I forget such an important event?

The Ultras' assault on the castle...

It was a major incident—one where Frey had been deeply involved in the original story.

The emperor's daughter had been Frey's childhood friend. Weak and powerless, he had turned to the Ultras, seeking the support of demons.

In exchange, they demanded proof of his worth. He delivered—by aiding in the princess's abduction, exploiting her trust in him.

In the end, the girl died, and Frey obtained the power he sought.

But that very incident became the reason for his eventual demise.

That was how it was supposed to happen.

But I had unknowingly rewritten the entire event.

At the moment when Frey should have caused the princess's death... I had been trapped within the Sect of Shadows.

The princess—who was supposed to die—was still alive.

A wild card had just entered play.

A variable that would shatter the course of events completely.

"Damn it," I cursed under my breath.

Even a single unexpected factor was more than enough to alter everything. Just the fact that she had survived was bound to set off a ripple effect, reshaping the future I thought I knew.

Frey's fate had changed.

"What do I do?"

Should I go and kill her now?

Impossible. I'd die before I even set foot inside the palace.

Suddenly, Frey's memories of the girl surged through my mind.

Damn it.

Fine. Whatever happens, happens.

I don't care—so long as she doesn't stand in my way.

"Oi, Frey, have you lost your mind? Why are you mumbling to yourself?"

Carmen's voice snapped me back to reality.

"Sorry, it's become a habit."

"Well, don't overdo it. Try to keep yourself together."

Just then, Carmen's eyes gleamed.

"Hmm... Looks like they're here."

I frowned.

"Who?"

She smirked.

"Come see for yourself. Your return is the biggest event in the entire empire right now."

I stood up and followed her.

"Seriously?"

As we walked, we passed several servants who were rushing toward us, clearly about to deliver the same news. But Carmen had sensed their arrival far sooner—her presence alone seemed to dominate the entire estate.

When we reached the gates, I saw a massive procession of carriages coming to a halt.

There were so many...

"Do I really have to deal with this?"

With a teasing smile, Carmen responded, "Yes."

I sighed.

At that moment, a familiar figure with white hair came sprinting toward me.

"Ada..."

I smiled warmly and waved at her.

But she didn't stop.

Instead, she threw herself at me, wrapping her arms around me so tightly that I struggled to breathe.

I froze—I hadn't expected this.

Her sobs filled my ears, her voice trembling as she whispered,

"You're back... You're really back."

Tears streamed down her face like twin waterfalls.

For a moment, I hesitated. I didn't want to form any ties to this world.

But this girl was different.

I wouldn't have survived without her.

Even after everything the old Frey had done to her... she had still been my greatest support.

"Just this once."

I returned her embrace, whispering softly into her ear.

"I'm back... Ada."

At the grand entrance of Starlight Manor, under the watchful eyes of all present, the siblings reunited.

Some were in disbelief.

Some were stunned.

And Leonidas, watching from the back, surrounded by his entourage—was furious.

Abraham's son was alive.

Not only had he survived—he now stood before him.

Even as he held his sister in his arms, Frey's gaze cut through the crowd like a blade, locking onto Leonidas.

A cold, predatory stare.

Their eyes met.

Both hunters, ready to devour the other.