

VILLAIN 27

Chapter 27 A Good Show

This is impossible.

Even with his mask concealing his face, anyone could tell the expression Khalifa wore at that moment.

A year ago, Leonidas had entrusted him with a secret mission—to kill Frey. Back then, he hadn't even needed to dirty his hands with blood; the boy had walked himself to his death.

When he saw Frey step into the Fog Zone, he was certain. There was no surviving that place—not even for someone like him, an S-rank.

Yet, against all odds, that very boy now stood before him.

Beside him, Leonidas remained expressionless. But Khalifa knew—the man at his side was a volcano, ready to erupt at any moment.

"Lord Leonidas, I—"

"Silence."

Khalifa tried to speak, but the elder's voice cut through the air like a blade, ringing sharply in his ears.

His body stiffened as Leonidas slowly turned to face him. Those silver eyes gleamed with an eerie, otherworldly light, sending an involuntary shiver down the masked man's spine.

"We will discuss this later."

"...Understood."

Khalifa lowered his head, his gaze fixed on the ground.

There was no room for argument.

-Frey starlight POV -

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"Ada, can you let go of me now? I can't breathe..."

"Mmm..."

Hesitantly, she loosened her grip around my neck, as if afraid I would vanish the moment she let go.

"Relax, I'm not going anywhere."

At least, not for now.

She finally released me, and I turned my attention to the crowd surrounding us. Most of them were unfamiliar faces.

"You look surprised by the number of people here... but you should know, they're all from the Starlight family."

"All of them?"

Carmen nodded, stepping closer to me.

"The real show begins once you leave Starlight territory. This place is a military base, so reporters aren't allowed inside. But the moment you step out, you'll be swarmed."

She chuckled, amused by my predicament.

"I'd rather fight inside the Nightmare Lands than deal with this nonsense."

"Bold words. But don't worry—your story will fade soon enough. You'll only have to endure this for a little while."

"Miss Carmen is right."

Ada, who had finally wiped away her tears and regained her usual composure, joined in.

"They're looking for a story, and the tale of a boy surviving a year in the Nightmare Lands was too tempting to resist. Though, most of them don't even believe it."

I sighed.

"As long as it doesn't get out of hand..."

Just then, I noticed Leonidas approaching, accompanied by several individuals radiating immense power.

'So, you've decided to make your move, you old bastard.'

"Miss Carmen, is it alright if I handle this however I see fit?"

She shrugged.

"Do as you please. He won't lay a hand on you—not yet."

A grin spread across my face as I stepped forward.

"That's all I needed to hear."

Moments later, I found myself standing before Leonidas Starlight—the Immortal Lion.

Even now, the gap between us remained immeasurable. But at least... I could finally see him.

Before, I couldn't even grasp the extent of his strength.

With a carefully crafted smile, he greeted me.

"You've returned... son of Abraham."

I returned the expression.

"Indeed. What's wrong, Lord Leonidas? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Hahaha, of course I'm surprised. After all, we believed you had perished there..."

So, you're going to play dumb, huh?

"Perished? I wonder who started that ridiculous rumor."

Carmen, as if to reinforce my words, chimed in.

"The boy raises a valid point."

She paused for a brief moment before continuing.

"A year ago, you reported that a Nightmare Creature had killed him—that his body was unrecoverable. So tell me, Leonidas, what exactly is happening here?"

Well done, Carmen. Corner the old fox.

Yet, Leonidas remained unfazed. He merely closed his eyes and responded with unnerving composure.

"It was an error in judgment—one made by my subordinate."

At that moment, Khalifa's shoulders slumped further.

"I take full responsibility. I underestimated the situation."

"Hmph."

Ada scoffed beside me, clearly unimpressed.

"Your excuses didn't save his life. Keep them to yourself."

Leonidas raised an eyebrow at her audacity.

Ada looked like she was about to argue further, but I stopped her before she could.

"It's fine. I'm here now, and that's what matters, right?"

It seemed my influence over Ada had grown significantly—she simply nodded, her gaze subdued.

"Indeed. I'm glad you're not the narrow-minded type, son of Abraham."

Leonidas smiled.

"Come. The Starlight Palace will welcome you in the grandest way today."

He was trying to appear generous, but the last thing I wanted was to spend a single night under the same roof as him.

"I appreciate the offer, but since my sister is here, I'd rather leave with her."

Grabbing Ada's hand, I gently pulled her forward.

"Shall we?"

"Alright."

She was surprisingly obedient. Maybe the shock of my return would make her listen to me for the next few weeks.

"Miss Carmen, is that alright?"

She nodded.

"Go ahead. If anything happens, I'll find my way to you."

"Thanks."

As I passed Leonidas, he chuckled.

"Are you sure you want to leave, boy?"

I stopped in my tracks.

"And why wouldn't I?"

With that same amused smile, he turned to face me.

"It might be dangerous... after all, you never know what could happen outside."

I clenched my fists.

So, you're threatening me now?

I refused to waver.

"I appreciate the Grand Elder's concern, but don't worry—the place I'm going to is far safer than the mighty Starlight Palace."

"Oh? Is there such a place?"

I shrugged.

"Yes. I'm going to the temple."

Leonidas' eyes widened slightly, but he quickly masked his reaction with a smirk.

"Forgive my bluntness, but... are you even qualified to enter that place?"

A sinister smile—one eerily reminiscent of Smiley's—spread across my lips.

I was waiting for you to ask that.

"Oh, trust me... I'm more than qualified."

For the first time, Leonidas' expression faltered as black energy surged around me, releasing a suffocating pressure.

Ada flinched beside me, and the expressions of those around us darkened.

The elders at Leonidas' side tensed, ready to act.

"How dare you unleash your aura before the Grand Elder?!"

Many of them gathered their power, prepared to strike. But before they could move, an overwhelming force crashed down upon them, stopping them in their tracks.

All eyes turned toward the source—Carmen, radiating waves of scorching, oppressive energy.

With a voice as cold as ice, she declared,

"No one interferes."

No one dared to speak at that moment...

Yet Leonidas paid no attention to those around him—his eyes remained locked onto the boy standing before him.

"That aura... it barely qualifies as D-rank."

That was his immediate thought.

A power of this level was nothing but child's play to him. Sure, reaching such a rank at this age was an achievement, but in his eyes, it was insignificant.

So why...

Leonidas struggled to maintain his composure, but he couldn't shake the feeling.

Why...? Why do I sense danger from this arrogant brat despite the overwhelming gap between us?

What Leonidas didn't realize was that the threat he felt wasn't coming from me—it came from the Great Sword slumbering in my grasp.

But that didn't matter.

Watching his expression crumble was worth every bit of effort.

I withdrew my aura, raising my hands in mock surrender.

"Why so tense, everyone? Let's all just calm down, shall we?"

I savored their enraged expressions before turning to leave.

"That concludes our meeting. Thank you for everything, oh great Elder Leonidas."

After walking a few steps, I found myself standing amidst a massive crowd—

The Starlight Family.

The same people who had stood by in silence a year ago while I was moments away from execution in the Senate Hall.

With a sinister grin, I infused my voice with aura and spread my arms in a welcoming gesture.

"Oh? My dearest family!"

I swayed theatrically as I addressed the audience surrounding me.

"I've returned! Did you miss me?"

I cupped a hand behind my ear, pretending to listen.

Silence.

As always.

"What's wrong? Aren't you happy to see your beloved relative? You're hurting my feelings, you know..."

That was when I spotted a familiar figure in the distance.

Through my exhausted memory, I somehow managed to recognize him.

"Ooooh, isn't that my dear cousin?"

Under the confused gazes of the crowd, I dashed toward the white-haired youth.

I saw the disgust on his face as he shouted.

"Stay away from me, you damned bastard!"

Emond stood in front of a woman who appeared to be in her forties, her long black hair flowing behind her. His mother, presumably, who wore the same expression as him.

Beside them stood his twin sister, her face utterly indifferent.

But where was his father—the man who had once tried to kill me?

I laughed at the scene before me.

"What's the matter, cousin? Aren't we close?"

Emond held himself back from lunging at me.

After all, the one standing before him was the very reason his father had suffered permanent injuries and was now imprisoned.

Not that he knew his father had merely been a pawn in Leonidas' schemes.

Seeing the hatred burning in Emond's eyes, I decided to toy with him a little more.

"I remember you challenging me to a duel before... How about it? Want to try again?"

At that moment, white flames flared up around Emond's body.

The signature ability of the family's strongest warriors.

Yet his flames were so weak.

He growled at me.

"I could crush you anytime, you arrogant brat!"

I laughed at his confidence.

"Yeah, yeah. But let's leave it at that for now. We'll both be entering the temple soon... Let's settle this there."

"Hmph, as if a lowly rat like you could even step foot inside the temple."

"Yes, yes, you're amazing, dear cousin. See you there ~"

With a dramatic flourish, I stepped toward the edge of the crowd and took a deep bow.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the show you all came for is now over. See you later ~"

I barely contained my laughter when I saw their expressions—as if they were looking at a lunatic.

Ada, walking beside me, seemed to share their sentiment as we boarded a carriage and finally left the place.

First, I'll crush Emond.

Then, I'll deal with his father when the time is right.

I never forget.

And I always repay my debts.

Especially to that bastard Leonidas...

My instincts told me that my story with that old man was far from over.