

VILLAIN 28

Chapter 28 The Temple Exam

"Where to, my lady?"

I glanced at the coachman, only to be surprised.

The strongest servant of the Starlight Family was the one driving the carriage.

"Home."

"Understood."

Even now, the old butler refused to look at me. He simply drove in silence.

I turned to my sister.

"Since when did an S-rank servant become a mere driver?"

I burst into laughter at the absurdity of it.

"Hey, Vulcan! What's the matter? Did life finally decide to mess with you?"

The old butler remained expressionless as he answered with practiced politeness.

"I am bound to serve and protect Lady Ada. Her will is my life, and I take great pride in the role she has given me. Welcome back, young master Frey."

"Oh? Is that so? Well, thanks, I guess."

I turned my attention back to Ada.

"Aren't you being a little too harsh on the old butler?"

She responded indifferently.

"He got what he deserved after what he did before."

"Before?"

Was she talking about the incident from a year ago?

So she's doing this... for me?

I hesitated for a moment before asking,

"Tell me, Ada... do you hate me?"

She seemed unprepared for the question, fidgeting slightly.

With a sigh, she finally answered.

"Yes, I hate you... Or rather, I used to."

"Used to?"

She nodded.

"Yes. But those feelings faded the moment I heard of your death... No, I had already been conflicted long before that."

She hesitated before adding,

"Besides... you've changed."

I chuckled as I looked at her.

She was acting all shy, even though she was supposed to be the older sibling here.

"Who said I've changed?"

Ada flinched at my words.

"Maybe I'm still planning even worse things in the future."

I stretched out on the luxurious seat, pressing her further.

"Tell me, Ada... what if I continue doing what I've always done? What if the whole world turns against me?"

Would you still support me, knowing full well that I'm just a piece of scum?"

I saw the sorrow in her eyes as she lowered her gaze.

From the front, Vulcan listened in silence, but he didn't intervene.

Then, after a moment of hesitation, Ada lifted her head.

"I would."

This time, I was the one left speechless.

I hadn't expected that.

I had only tried to provoke her so she wouldn't get too attached to me.

After all, a pragmatic relationship based on mutual benefits had always been enough for me before.

But now...

How the hell was I supposed to deal with the girl in front of me?

I held her gaze for a few moments before letting out a defeated chuckle.

"I was joking."

"What?"

"I don't plan on doing anything bad, so don't worry."

Ada sighed.

"Why do you do this to me?"

"Don't be so mad... For now, all I need to do is enter the temple."

At my words, she suddenly remembered something important.

"About that... Frey, you're a little late."

"Huh? Late?"

"Yes. The entrance exams ended a while ago."

My expression must have been ridiculous because, for the first time, Ada laughed when she saw me.

"Hehe, don't make that face... I'll use my position to arrange a private exam for you."

My face instantly lit up.

"Really?"

"Yes."

At that moment, relief washed over me. After all, if I didn't enter the temple, I wouldn't be able to participate in the Victoriad, and everything I had done so far would be for nothing.

"Are you sure you can do this?"

"Of course. I am the head of the family, after all."

Ah, right... She was the Lord.

"Lady Ada, is it really appropriate to use your authority like this?"

Ada's expression turned cold at the old servant's remark.

"Silence, Volcan... My decisions are none of your concern."

"Forgive my impertinence."

Tch.

I chuckled.

May the gods be with you, Volcan.

The following days passed in relative peace. Thanks to Carmen, Leonidas was temporarily restrained, and Ada had ensured that no one could meet me.

As a result, I spent my days with her in our secluded manor.

She had grown much closer—so much so that the coldness from before had completely disappeared.

And yet, I kept my distance.

I did my best to push her away, reminding myself that I would be living in the temple once I was accepted.

This was for the best. I couldn't afford to get attached to anyone in this damned world.

A few days later, I was finally summoned to take the temple's entrance exam—thanks to Ada's influence.

The exam was held in a separate section of the massive temple. Now, I stood before an enormous facility that resembled a fortress.

For a mere examination center, it was as large as the academies from my previous world.

At that moment, I recalled that the temple itself was a small city in its own right.

Of course, I designed it that way—to provide the perfect environment for the main characters to develop relationships.

Only now did I start realizing how cliché I had been.

Two individuals emerged from the facility's gates to greet me. Both wore formal black attire—one was a woman, the other a man.

Behind me, Ada wore a sorrowful expression.

"You just got back, and now you're leaving again..."

"I'm sorry, but I have to do this."

She forced a smile as she bid me farewell.

"Make sure to visit from time to time."

I raised my hand in acknowledgment, leaving her behind.

"I will."

I approached the two figures waiting for me.

In unison, they nodded.

"Lord Frey."

"Yes?"

"This way, please."

I followed them inside without protest.

The facility's interior was built like an enormous prison. The technology used was highly advanced and seamlessly blended with aura magic, making it impossible for me to fully comprehend.

After walking for some time, the woman in the lead finally spoke.

"Lord Frey, the special exam you're about to take is quite simple."

The man continued where she left off.

"You will enter a simulation program developed within the temple to assess young talents."

They exchanged a brief glance before the woman resumed.

"We will evaluate your strength, speed, intelligence, adaptability, and ability to think under pressure. That is the purpose of this exam."

I sighed.

I already knew all of this.

After all, I was the one who wrote this nonsense in the first place.

Still, I played along.

"Understood."

"Good."

"If you achieve satisfactory results and are accepted, the temple will provide for all your living arrangements, including accommodation and other necessities."

"If your results are high and outstanding, you will be placed in a class superior to the ordinary ones—the Abyss Class."

Now, that caught my interest.

"Abyss students have access to exclusive, high-end accommodations and superior facilities. You'll receive a summary of the privileges later."

They paused momentarily before delivering the part I had been waiting for.

"If Lord Frey achieves a top 20 ranking and demonstrates exceptional potential, he will enter the most prestigious class—the Elite Class."

A smirk formed on my lips.

This was my goal all along.

The class where the main characters resided.

We arrived at a gate leading to a massive combat arena.

"That will be all for now, Lord Frey. Face the exam in your own way. Best of luck."

"Thank you."

I stepped forward. The arena was empty, but I already knew what would happen next.

The surroundings shifted, transforming into a vast, fertile field.

A simulated sky appeared above me, and I found myself standing on a lush green meadow.

I knelt, touching the grass with curiosity, enjoying its realistic texture.

"This is incredibly lifelike."

Then, a voice echoed from the void.

"Candidate No. 5780, Frey Starlight."

"You will soon face creatures from the Nightmare Lands, along with various obstacles designed to target you."

"You have one hour to either survive or eliminate all threats in the area."

"If you die before the time is up, you will be disqualified immediately. That is all. Good luck."

Tch.

I chuckled.

Did they really think I'd be afraid of their test?

I, who had survived an entire year in the Nightmare Lands?

I already knew who was speaking.

Professor Elena Shamra—a A-rank Awakened and the mastermind behind this entire simulation.

A massive timer appeared in the sky, counting down.

At the same time, figures began materializing around me.

Golem-like creatures.

Enormous lizards.

Even the giant crabs I had once fought in the past... though these ones looked smaller and weaker.

I stretched before drawing one of my prepared swords.

A burning sensation flared in my left hand.

"Sorry, Balerion. I know you love to show off, but this stage isn't for you."

With a smirk, I advanced toward the approaching creatures.

"Shall we begin?"

Inside the observation room overlooking the testing grounds, a striking woman with brown hair and a lab coat sat, her glasses resting on intelligent eyes.

Professor Elena Shamra watched the young man preparing for battle.

"So this is Frey Starlight, the one they claim survived in the Nightmare Lands."

Despite her interest, she found the rumors laughable.

A mere F-rank boy surviving a whole year in the Nightmare Lands? Ridiculous.

She was here to see him fail.

After all, there had been plenty of talk about him, but she had yet to witness any proof of his abilities.

At that moment, the door behind her opened, and a girl with white hair entered.

The room's temperature dropped immediately.

A breathtakingly beautiful girl with crystal-blue eyes and pale skin.

Elena smiled.

"Welcome back, Seris. Good work."

The girl gave a respectful nod.

Frey wasn't the only one who had taken a special exam.

Seris Moonlight had just finished hers.

Elena glanced at her tablet, where the results were displayed.

At the center of the screen, the time was recorded.

Remaining time: 00:41:45

"Impressive. You finished in just 18 minutes and 15 seconds. That's enough to place you in the top three."

Elena couldn't hide her admiration.

Seris, however, remained expressionless.

"Is it really appropriate to share my results so openly?"

"Haha, don't be like that. You're special, after all. Besides, we're not strangers. It hurts when you act so distant, you know?"

"I am not being distant. This is how I speak to everyone."

Elena sighed.

"That is being distant."

Seris was a D-rank Awakened with an advanced trait—Ice.

That alone was remarkable.

But it seemed her emotions were frozen as well.

She turned to leave, but Elena stopped her.

"Wait! Where are you going?"

Seris tilted her head.

"I got my results, so I'm leaving."

'This girl...'

"Why not stay? A good show is about to begin."

Seris looked at the screen.

There, she saw a young man with black hair tied in a ponytail, dressed in combat gear.

She recognized him.

"Frey Starlight."

With a trace of annoyance in her voice, she spoke his name.

She had heard countless rumors about him—some claimed he was dead, others swore he had survived the Nightmare Lands. But none of that mattered.

What mattered was that he was standing right before her.

"You two are acquainted, aren't you?"

"Something like that."

The fact that she chose to stay and watch was enough to show her interest.

"Tell me... is he strong?"

In response to Elena's question, she shook her head.

"Quite the opposite... He was weak. Very weak."

She spoke as her eyes remained fixed on Frey.

But in the next instant—he vanished.

"Huh?"

Neither Elena nor Seris could comprehend what had just happened.

At first, they assumed it was a glitch in the display. But what unfolded before their eyes shattered that assumption.

Frey flickered into view for a brief moment—just long enough to appear before a monster—then disappeared again, leaving behind only a mutilated corpse.

He tore through the horde with ghostly speed, a trail of black afterimages lingering in his wake.

"What... is happening?"

Elena leaned in closer, her eyes wide with disbelief.

His sword strikes were unlike anything she had seen. His movements—unnatural.

"What kind of technique is that?"

Her astonishment grew as she watched him cleave through a stone golem as if it were made of paper.

From start to finish, he hadn't taken a single hit.

And then, as if bored, he came to a halt.

Standing amidst a sea of broken corpses, Frey stretched his arms, his expression indifferent.

Above, the timer stopped, displaying the final result.

Time Remaining: 00:49:30

"He finished the exam... in ten minutes?"

Elena slowly turned to Seris.

"Tell me... is this monster... weak?"

But Seris wasn't any better off. Her usually emotionless eyes were now wide, locked onto the screen.

"Is that... really Frey?"