## VILLAIN 291

Chapter 291: From Nightmare to Nightmare
Time refused to move forward.
Frey and his companions could barely breathe as they found themselves standing before him.
The overwhelming pressure that crushed their bodies made it impossible to think—let alone act.
All they could do in that moment was freeze, awaiting his next move like lambs patiently waiting for the blade.
Snow had lost all awareness, not even realizing he had knocked Frey over—Frey, who could no longer stand after his legs had been blown apart.
Now lying on the ground, Frey stared up at the demon before him.
But this wasn't just a demon.
It was death itself, standing at their doorstep.

Asmodeus didn't speak not even a single word. Whether he was capable of speech at all was uncertain. All that escaped the skeletal maw was a constant hiss, a sound that deepened their terror with every passing second.
Frey had once stood before the Demon King himself Agaroth.
But that had only been a distant echo of the real thing. A projection, diluted and incomplete.
The pressure Asmodeus unleashed now, however, made that memory seem insignificant. This wasn't a projection.
This was the real thing.
'We're going to die'
That thought struck them all at once.
They were going to die unable to lift a finger in defense.
Only now did they realize how foolish they had been to ever believe they could face something like this.

The Lord of Graves extended his hand. Everything moved in slow motion. Frey and the others could do nothing but gasp for air as they awaited the end.
Swooosh.
Their fear blinded them to the fact that the demon's hand had stopped.
Still outstretched toward them, it had been halted not by will, but by force.
In the same instant, a ripple spread outward, releasing a powerful aura that revealed a thin membrane—an invisible barrier separating Frey and the others from the abomination before them.
The air grew heavier as Asmodeus pushed harder against that barrier.
Frey, collapsed on the ground, stared in awe as he gradually began to regain his senses.
Slowly regaining control over his body, stared in disbelief.
The terror the Lord of Graves had buried in their hearts had dulled their senses—so much so that they hadn't even noticed how far they'd been pushed back during their desperate retreat.

Gradually, Frey and the others began to take in their surroundings.
Only now did they notice the transparent veil that split the world in two.
On one side the fertile, green ground they stood upon. And beyond the barrier a lifeless black wasteland.
Then it happened.
A surge of dark aura erupted skyward as the Lord of Graves launched a devastating strike, trying to shatter the barrier.
BOOM!!
His blows rocked the earth, making it tremble as if weeping over its own doom.
Asmodeus wasn't a creature to fight.
He was a calamity.

Each of his attacks far surpassed anything the trio had ever witnessed.
And he didn't stop at one.
He unleashed hundreds.
Each one strong enough to erase them from existence.
But the true miracle wasn't the demon's fury
It was the barrier.
That fragile, translucent veil held.
"Unbelievable"
That thought echoed in their minds.
Even knowing the barrier stood between them and the monster, they couldn't move.

They sat there, helpless, as the Lord of Graves rained down his wrath, the earth quaking beneath them.
Amid the chaos, as he lay on the ground, Frey glanced at his companions.
They were spellbound, completely overtaken by the monstrous display.
Frey closed his eyes.
'Look closely'
He thought, even as the searing pain from his shattered legs failed to bring him back from the terror.
Look closely at the true power of a being that stands at the very top of this world
It was time to wake up.
The humans who believed they had won the war centuries ago
It was time to face reality.

Before a being that had surpassed even the SSS rank
This was the moment to understand.
This one entity alone could wipe out humanity.
Before the embodiment of death, that delicate barrier was their only shield.
And they could only pray it wouldn't break.
Asmodeus's assault continued for only a few minutes—but the destruction he left behind was immense.
The good news?
He failed.
The monster couldn't breach the barrier that stood proudly before him.

Frey and the others were left in awe.
What kind of spell was this?
More importantly
What kind of being had cast such a barrier—one capable of withstanding an assault from the sixth upper rank demon?
By now, Frey and the others had fully regained themselves, scrambling to put as much distance as they could between them and the nightmare that had shown them a new definition of fear.
Their desperate retreat hadn't gone unnoticed.
The Lord of Graves had seen everything through his hollow eyes.
His skull-like face showed no emotion
But the aura around him told a different story.

He opened his mouth.
And from the depths of hell itself, a sound emerged.
A scream.
A wail.
A distorted, soul-chilling shriek.
Frey and the others couldn't even begin to describe that horrid sound.
But it never failed to make every hair on their bodies stand on end.
"What is he doing?!" Snow asked, but none of them had an answer.
Why was that thing screaming?
As they waited for some kind of explanation, the ground beneath them began to shake again—this time, violently.

But Asmodeus wasn't the cause.
Something else was.
Frey was the first to realize what was happening—his Hawk Eyes catching the truth.
"That's not a scream"
His eyes widened.
"That's a call."
From the distance, they saw them hundreds, no, thousands of nightmarish creatures emerging.
Those creatures that had once ignored them completely—allowing them to pass unharmed—were now charging at them like mad beasts.
Grotesque monsters, vaguely shaped like horses, sprinted toward them in a frenzy.

Nightmare beasts, completely mindless.
And the one who had driven them insane was none other than the Lord of Graves himself.
"Is he trying to use that army to attack us?!"
There were thousands of them, and they were quickly closing in on the barrier.
But
"What does he hope to accomplish with this? Even that damned demon's attacks couldn't break through the barrier how would these creatures do it?"
If a being of SSS-rank couldn't shatter the barrier, then what hope did low-tier nightmare beasts have?
It wasn't a flawed observation.
But Snow's words made Frey realize something far more important.



That barrier wasn't absolute.
It was designed to block specific targets.
And those targets could be summed up in a single word: Demon.
Meaning
"Anything else can pass through !!"
And just like that—Frey's warning proved true.
Chapter 292: A Blade in the Blood
The nightmare beasts surged past Asmodeus and continued straight through the barrier, as if it wasn't even there.
The Lord of Graves vanished among the monstrous tide.
And Frey and his companions understood the scale of the disaster the moment they saw that army pouring in toward them.

They were in the thousands.
They had survived the ultimate nightmare
Only to find another waiting for them.
Ghost immediately stepped forward while Snow grabbed Vermethor, channeling as much holy energy as he could in a desperate attempt to heal Frey's legs.
Ghost extended his hands, manipulating the void using his full power.
"space cleave!"
Unleashing the same strange force from before, Ghost tore through space and time, trying to wipe out the oncoming horde.
His strike was strong enough to cut down even the most durable of them—but in the face of an army that size, it was barely a scratch.
Ghost repeated the technique again and again.

But reality hit hard.
Even though he succeeded in killing some, the blood gushing from his eyes and nose was a brutal reminder
He wasn't strong enough to wield that power freely.
Meanwhile, after tending to Frey's legs, Snow looked up at the rapidly approaching army, his mind racing for a way to survive.
'Should I use the Void Step?'
He considered it.
But he quickly realized it was a bad idea. He didn't have enough aura left.
And as if reading his thoughts—
Frey placed a hand on Snow's shoulder, glowing with a deep violet light.

In the next moment, an overwhelming surge of aura poured into Snow's body.
"Don't hesitate. We have to survive. No matter what it takes!"
Drawing both Balerion and the Dark Sister, Frey stood tall as Snow nodded in response.
They knew now that escape wasn't an option. Those monsters would chase them to the ends of the world if they had to.
And so, Frey and Snow charged forward, unleashing their full power in a desperate attempt to survive.
Within seconds, the clash began.
The Champion of the Victoriad and the Hero of the Church the finest of the new human generation dived into the heart of the monstrous tide, tearing through them like madmen.
Frey unleashed wave after wave of dark aura, while Snow unleashed every elemental technique in his arsenal.
They shone brightly.

But their light dimmed slowly amidst the endless swarm.
At some point—coated in blood and filth—they could no longer tell what their blades were cutting.
They simply struck at anything that came close.
As for Ghost, he fought to support them with everything he had.
Swinging his sword left and right
Frey turned suddenly, sensing something touch his back.
But he stopped—just in time—before cutting down the figure behind him.
It was Snow, now standing back-to-back with him.
They had nearly struck each other down but froze instead, bloodied and breathless, as they realized the full extent of the disaster.

They were completely surrounded.
From the east and the west. From the north and the south.
From every direction
Nightmare beasts.
An unending horde of them.
Their eyes met. Frey and Snow exchanged a silent nod.
All Frey wanted to say in that moment was one word:
"Sorry"
Not sorry for his own fate, but for leading Snow and Ghost into a death trap they never should've walked into.



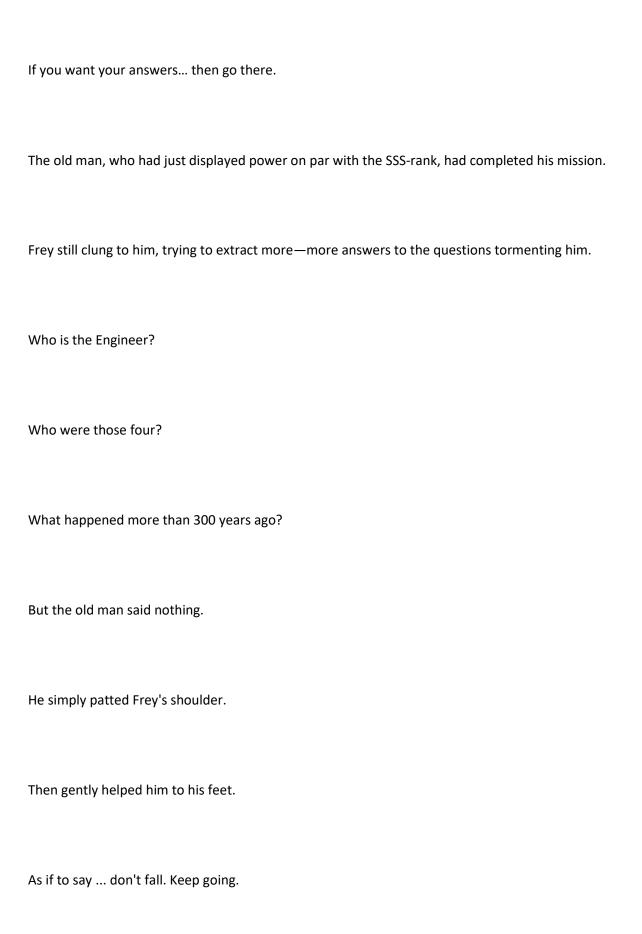
A savage storm descended, and blood exploded everywhere, raining down like a crimson flood.
Clean.
So clean.
That was all Frey and the others could think when they saw the nightmare creatures sliced to pieces—cut with terrifying precision.
Blue slashes of destructive aura, shaped like arcs, swept through the battlefield, turning the horde into shredded meat.
The strikes hit only what needed to be struck, never touching Frey and his companions at the center of it all.
Blood rained over their heads, soaking them until they looked like corpses themselves.
But their eyes—still very much alive—searched for the source of that stunning assault.
And soon, they found their answer.

From within the sea of blood and corpses, with slow, deliberate steps
An old man approached.
Bent over with age, wearing an old black suit—still immaculately clean, a sharp contrast to the filth around him.
He held a katana in one hand, and a cane in the other. His wrinkled face rose to meet them.
Frey, without even thinking, ran toward him staggering through the pool of blood.
Snow and Ghost were stunned
"Another human?"
But Frey recognized him.
His father had once met four individuals from the Shadow Sect.



"Please"
He clutched him tightly, afraid he might vanish.
The old man gently ran his hand over Frey's body, searching for his face.
That's when Frey realized
"He can't see"
The powerful old man was blind.
He had lost his sight long ago.
Frey asked him
"What do you want from me?"

Why had the system forced him through this journey?
"What the hell was I supposed to find in this pit of hell?!"
He demanded answers, desperate and angry.
But the old man only continued to trace Frey's face before offering a calm, deep smile.
A smile of peace.
As if a great burden had finally been lifted from his shoulders.
He said nothing.
Instead, he simply pointed behind him.
He had given Frey his answer.
"There?"



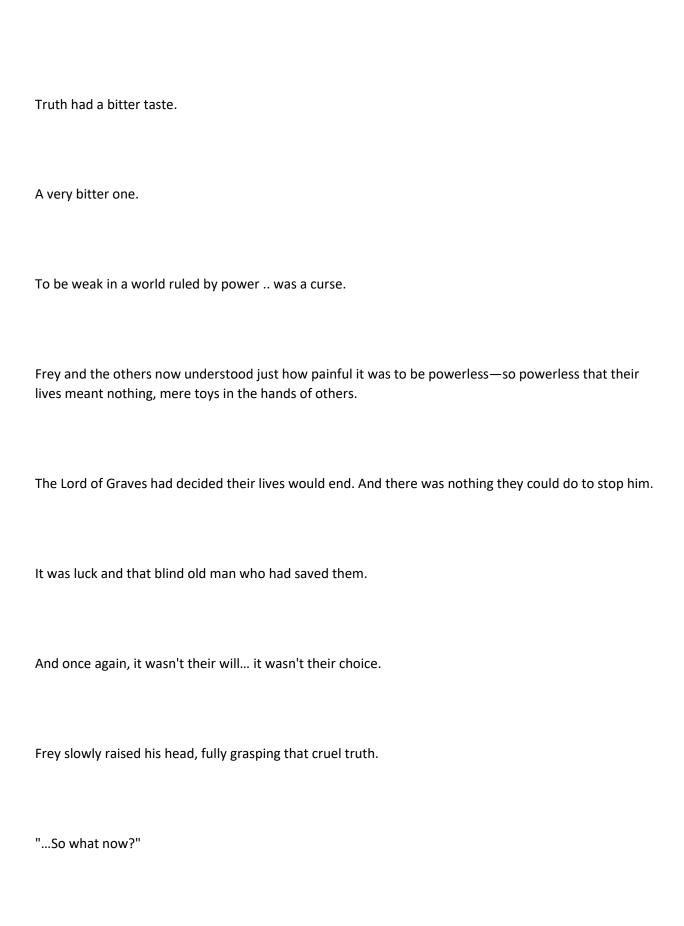
The old man's smile was the last thing Frey saw
Before he vanished.
Like he had never been there at all.
But the sea of blood, and the carefully dissected remains of the nightmare beasts, proved otherwise.
Standing in that ocean of carnage, Frey and the others finally understood.
They had found their next destination.  Chapter 293: Crownlands (1)
Slowly the sky shed its crimson veil and donned the black cloak of night, marking the end of yet another hellish day—
here, in Londor.
As darkness settled, the only source of light for the three battered warriors came from the three colossa moons overhead.

Exhausted, they dragged their broken bodies away from the lake of blood and corpses now a feast for the circling crows.
The elegant armor that once covered their bodies had been torn to shreds, along with their flesh, leaving behind deep wounds and grotesque bruises.
They were drenched in filth, as if they'd been rolling through mud for hours.
In that miserable state, Frey and his companions climbed a hill—slightly higher than the surrounding terrain.
The moment they reached the top, they collapsed.
No longer able to move.
They sat in silence, staring at one another.
The only sounds were their heavy breathing, and the harsh caws of the crow-like creatures devouring the nightmare beasts below.

Looking at each other now, Frey couldn't help but remember their first day in Londor—how they had arrived with excitement, in full strength, clad in vibrant armor
Now, they looked worse than beggars.
"Hehehe"
Frey was the first to break the silence, laughing under his breath.
"Pfft."
Snow followed, sharing the same thoughts.
"They really got us, huh?"
"You said it."
Both of them burst into tired, bitter laughter a kind of mournful amusement at their pitiful state.

"Where's your usual charm now? That signature white hair and those golden eyes of yours You look like a street rat. I bet the girls would run away the moment they see you."
Frey mocked Snow, whose hair had turned reddish from all the blood that had soaked him.
"Oh, look who's talking," Snow smirked. "One glance is enough to see you're the most pitiful one here."
He lightly tapped Frey's leg, earning a groan in response.
"You can't even walk properly! How do you plan to keep going in that condition?"
Laughing despite the pain, Frey bent his legs with effort, looking at Snow.
"Even when I can't walk I'm still faster than you."
"Bullshit. Look at yourself, oh mighty Champion of the Victoriad. If I were you, I'd bury my head in a hole."
"You're no better, promised Hero of the Church. That so-called divine light of yours was pretty dim back there."





What do you do when you finally realize your own insignificance?
Do you turn back? Tail between your legs, burdened by shame and defeat?
Do you accept the dark fate that awaits, and bow before those titans looming above?
Frey and Snow looked at each other—then smiled at the same time.
A weary smile.
No words were needed.
Snow rose to his feet, gripping Vermithor, and walked with heavy steps toward the center of their small camp.
There, at that precise spot, he drove the blade into the ground.
Vermethor immediately released a wave of holy energy, enveloping the three of them in a circular dome that glowed with a soft green light—gently beginning to heal their wounds.

Despite their shattered bodies, despite the blood, the pain, and the filth—
Their eyes still burned sharper than ever.
After all if there was one thing they had grown used to, it was despair.
No matter how many times it crushed them—slamming them into the dirt—as long as life still clung to their bodies,
they would rise again.
Again and again until the bitter end.
The three of them sat there as their bodies slowly healed.
None of them slept.
Fueled by fury, they turned that seething emotion into the fire that kept their broken bodies moving.

None of them looked back.
Retreat was never an option.
Even if they chose to run the Lord of Graves still waited beyond the barrier.
And even if they somehow made it past him
There was no road leading home.
Their path had remained the same from the beginning: the one the strange old man had pointed them toward.
Time passed.
The sky turned red then black then red again, three full cycles.
None of them knew how time worked on this wretched planet.
But they waited.

Patiently.
Until the soft green glow emitted by Vermithor faded—its light disappearing when there was nothing left to heal.
That pure light had mended torn flesh and broken bone, restoring Frey and the others to a state where they could at least fight again.
Once healed, the three of them cleaned themselves up one last time before changing their armor and gear.
As he pulled his new armor from the dimensional ring, Frey realized something.
Looking inside, he saw food and water—just enough to keep them alive.
But what caught his attention was the piece of armor in his hand.
It was the last one.
How long had it been since they arrived in this land?

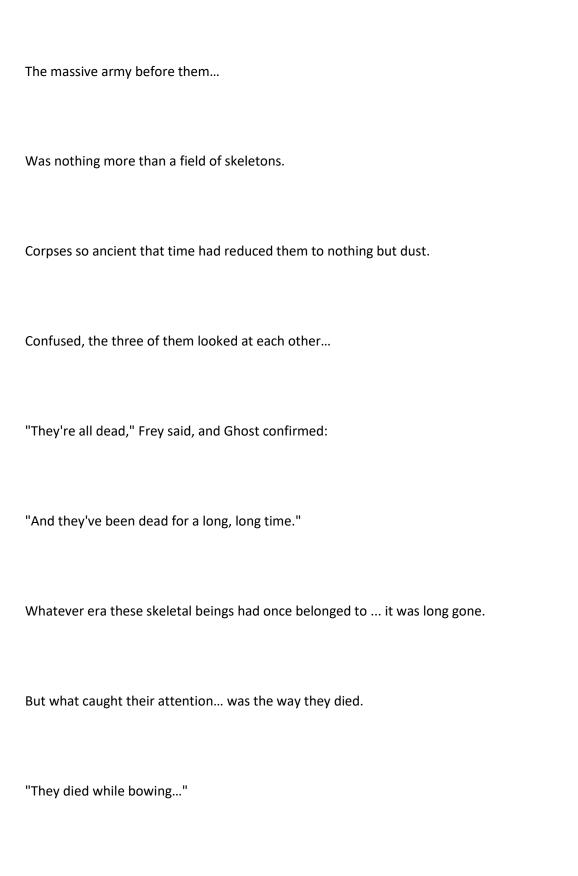
He'd stopped counting after they passed the one-month mark
But it was far more than that for sure.
In that moment, Frey realized
They were approaching their limits.
Whatever awaited them at the end of that dark path, they had to reach it—soon.
"Let's move," Frey said quietly, before surging forward with the others.
Their bodies, now vessels of aura, surged across the land at speeds that left nothing behind but afterimages—blurs like bullets cutting through the wind.
The terrain ahead was wide open.
A vast plain with nothing on it.

It stretched out before them like a ceremonial carpet, as if welcoming them toward the main event.
From the look of the land and the strange barrier they had passed Frey guessed this was Crownlands, the one spoken of by those whipped corpses.
And despite their incredible speed, the scenery ahead never changed
A testament to how immense this land truly was.
They ran.
And ran.
Chapter 294: Crownlands (2)
Frey kept his Hawk Eyes active, constantly surveying the distance far ahead.
But the view remained the same.
Until the third day on Crownlands.



He wondered what kind of battle awaited them now
That question lingered for quite some time as they continued running.
And then after what felt like an eternity, with their nerves frayed and dread mounting under the weight of anticipation
They finally arrived.
Frey and the others came to a stop, eyes wide as they took in the sight before them.
The army was enormous.
So enormous that what they had mistaken for ground in the distance had been them all along.
They all wore the same tattered black robes. Their bodies were slightly larger than an average human's.
All of them lay sprawled on the ground.

Prostrated.
Face down.
Motionless.
Frey approached one of them cautiously, curious why they hadn't reacted to their presence.
The moment he touched the figure
It crumbled.
Collapsing into ash.
The wind scattered it like dust.
Stunned, Frey checked the others—eyes wide—while Snow and Ghost did the same.
And that was when the three of them finally understood.

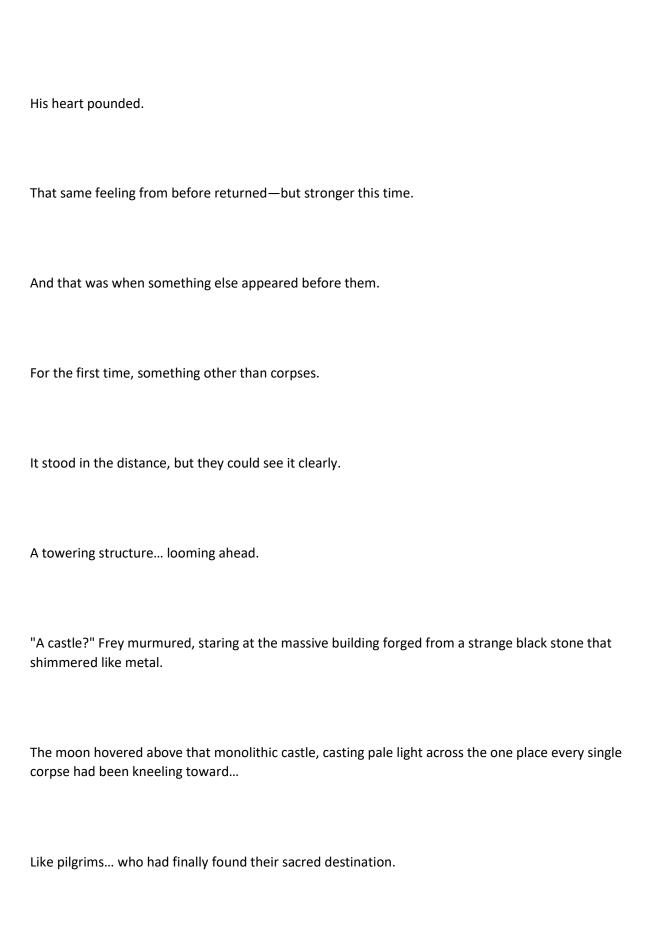


From the remnants left behind the posture of their bodies, the way their heads were lowered it was clear they had died prostrating before something.
Before someone or something.
"They waited until their veins dried, until their bodies withered away"
Whatever strange race they once belonged to
They had died here. On their knees. Waiting for something to come.
It hadn't been demons that killed them.
Protected inside this barrier, their killer had been time itself.
Realizing this truth sent a chill through Frey and the others.
"What kind of loyalty is that?"

Who was this great king that compelled such devotion devotion so absolute that an entire people remained kneeling until nothing remained of them but bone?
To Frey and his companions, that level of loyalty seemed like pure madness.
Frey turned his gaze forward—toward the direction every single corpse had been facing.
But all he could see
Was more bodies. More bowed skeletons. More of the same.
"Let's go," he said flatly, beginning to walk through the field of kneeling corpses.
They wove their way between the fallen.
The scene repeated itself endlessly.
All of them had died the same way.

Driven by a growing curiosity to uncover what lay at the end of this graveyard path, Frey and the others continued.
But the corpses never stopped.
And that only deepened their unease.
After walking for what felt like an eternity, they realized they had become a specka single drop in an ocean of death.
Their numbers
Had reached the millions.
"Maybe" Snow said, stunned,
"Maybe this is where all of Londor's inhabitants ended up."
Frey nodded, remembering what that lashed corpse had told them.

It had said clearly: they waited for so long that some eventually chose to fight, while the rest remained behind still waiting.
"Those who chose to fight met a fate worse than death forced to face the Lord of Graves himself."
Understanding that grim truth, Frey continued:
"But those who chose to wait died here, kneeling—waiting for a king who never returned."
Between death and a fate worse than death
The three of them finally grasped the full extent of Londor's tragedy.
And with that realization, there was nothing left to do but keep moving.
Step after step they passed through this ancient, forgotten mass of mourners.
Then
Without warning, a strange shiver ran down Frey's spine.



From every direction, the bodies surrounded it making the fortress look like an island in the middle of a vast, lifeless sea.
The castle was larger than anything the three of them had ever seen.
So massive, it made the Emperor's palace look like a worthless shack by comparison.
And the feeling growing inside Frey's chest
Confirmed that this place—this castle—was their true destination.
Step by step, they moved forward
Until at last, they reached the edge of the sea of corpses.
It was there, at the final line of skeletons, that Frey and the others realized something else:
The kneeling dead had left a clear space between themselves and the black castle.

A wide, circular gap.
Untouched.
No one had dared cross that final threshold.
Beyond it stood the castle gate.
But that wasn't all.
Frey's eyes went wide as he saw what stood before it.
Guarding the entrance
Was a statue.
A towering figure, over four meters tall, gripping a double-edged scythe.
His body was made of a dark, metallic material like forged shadow.

A statue.
A statue with a face Frey had never seen before.
He had seen smiles.
He had seen sorrow.
But this one
This one wore rage.
There it stood the statue of fury.
An ancient sentinel, standing guard over a timeless castle.  Chapter 295: Angry (1)
"An angry mask Angry?"

Without realizing it, Frey gave one of his signature nicknames to the strange statue with the furious expression.
Standing amid the sea of kneeling corpses, both Snow and Ghost stared at the massive figure that stood between them and the castle beyond.
"Do you know what that thing is?" Snow asked, eyes still fixed on Frey.
"I know his brothers."
Frey's answer was the last thing Snow expected to hear.
"Brothers?"
"On second thought, he looks more like their father I don't remember Smiley or Sad being this big."
Faced with Frey's cryptic nonsense—impossible to decipher—Snow gave up on extracting any useful information from him.
"It looks dead to me."

Ghost, ignoring the pair's exchange, offered his own take as he observed the statue.
Angry hadn't moved an inch. The hollows in his furious mask revealed nothing but blackness void of light or life.
"Whether it's alive or not doesn't matter. We need to enter that castle."
What Frey sought was inside. He could feel it now more than ever the fire in his chest burning brighter, guiding him to this place.
"Then let's move."
At that moment
The trio took their first step into the empty ring that separated the castle from the ocean of corpses.
One step
Then another.

They moved deeper into the void between the kneeling dead and the silent fortress.
That's when the earth began to shake.
A massive tremor froze them in place as Frey grinned with wild delight.
"I knew it"
As if some hidden mechanism had been triggered
Angry lit up with a violet glow, and his metal body began to tremble violently, unleashing a crushing wave of aura.
"Shit"
Snow cursed, drawing Vermithor, as all three prepared for battle.
The statue pulled his giant scythe from the earth, twirling it effortlessly before assuming a battle stance.
"Wait! I know your brothers!"

In an absurd gesture, Frey waved at Angry.
"We're not enemies!"
He pleaded with the massive figure before him, using logic that wouldn't convince a sane human—let alone a statue with a face carved in rage.
But to everyone's surprise, Angry didn't move.
Still. Silent.
Snow and Ghost stared in disbelief.
"Did did that actually work?"
Was it even possible to reason with that thing?
Their confusion was written all over their faces.

Frey half-smiled—surprised at his own unexpected success.
But that smile vanished the moment his Hawk Eyes reflected the gleam of the statue's massive scythe.
He barely reacted in time
In a blink, Angry had vanished and reappeared right in front of him.
"When did he get there?!"
Frey barely blocked the swing with his swords—
and was sent flying, crashing through the earth, leaving a trail of destruction behind him.
"So be it! No choice but to fight!"
Snow launched himself at Angry, unleashing a blazing star-infused aura as he swung his blade with all his might.

The clash of metal echoed for miles as Angry parried the blow effortlessly, dispersing all the explosive aura in an instant.
From beneath the statue's feet, Ghost's shadows emergedattempting to bind it.
But with a single violent stomp, Angry shattered the ground—and Ghost's shadows along with it.
Then, wielding his scythe at blinding speed, the furious statue unleashed a barrage of devastating strikes on Snow, who struggled to defend as the earth crumbled beneath him.
Ghost, now in his Reaper Form, joined the fray—wielding a scythe of dark, potent aura.
But the moment his weapon clashed with Angry's
It shattered.
"Too strong!!"
Completely outmatched, Ghost adjusted his stance.

"In that case how about this!?"
With his fingers moving like blades, Ghost sliced through space itself—launching his strongest spatial cut.
The ground split violently as the strike slammed into the statue's body.
A move that had once cleaved through nightmare creatures with ease
Didn't even leave a scratch.
All it did was force Angry to take a single, reluctant step backward.
"No way"
At that moment, Ghost finally began to understand just how much he had underestimated the power of the statue.
"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: Black Meteor!"

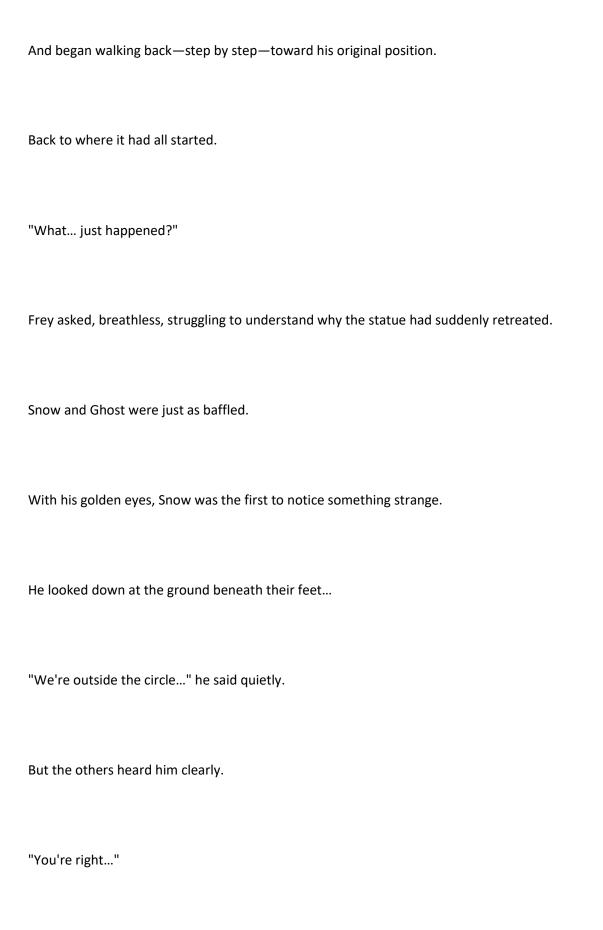
From behind Ghost, a dark beam erupted—crashing violently into Angry and unleashing a surge of destructive aura that shattered the ground beneath them.
"You damn statues all prefer to do it this way!"
Frey had returned to the battle.
BOOM!!
"You want a fight? Then you'll get one!"
To Frey, every memory of statues was a blur of endless beatings brutal training sessions where they had taught him how to fight, day and night.
And from the look of it, Angry was no different except for one critical detail.
As the clash went on and their strikes continued, Frey started to notice the deep, vicious wounds spreading across his body.
Angry wasn't playing.



SLASH!
A sudden blow snapped Frey out of his daze blood spraying from his body.
"FREY!!" Snow shouted in horror as he saw Frey's right hand fly through the air, severed cleanly by Angry's scythe.
His hand hit the ground—along with the Dark Sister—just as Angry raised his weapon again, this time aiming for Frey's neck.
"Void Step!"
Snow appeared between them at the last second, his body flaring with blinding light as he shoved Angry back.
"Cosmic Formation!"
Unleashing his most powerful attack, Snow's explosive aura clashed with Angry's scythe in a cataclysmic burst.

The collision sent shockwaves tearing through the air.
Snow's nuclear strike hit Angry head-on—blasting the statue backward, carving deep trenches through the ground as he skidded across it, struggling to stay upright.
Snow's strongest move had finally pushed the statue back a few meters.
But that was all it did.
There wasn't even a scratch on its armored body.
Realizing the overwhelming power gap, Snow conjured a massive wall of ice between them and the statue, then fled—rushing back to Frey and Ghost, who had already begun retreating.
Frey, barely able to think clearly, clutched his severed arm—still in shock from how close he had come to death.
All three of them knew now
Death was the only thing waiting for them in this fight.

And so, they ran.
But Angry chased after them at terrifying speed.
They leapt, dodged, and rolled between the kneeling corpses—now turning to dust underfoot—desperate to escape the statue's reaping scythe.
He was faster. Far faster.
They were certain he'd strike them down at any moment.
But then he didn't.
Collapsed between the skeletons, the three of them stared in disbelief as Angry froze in place—his scythe just centimeters from Frey's face.
The statue stared at them, glowing with violet light from the slits of its mask
Then slowly lowered his weapon

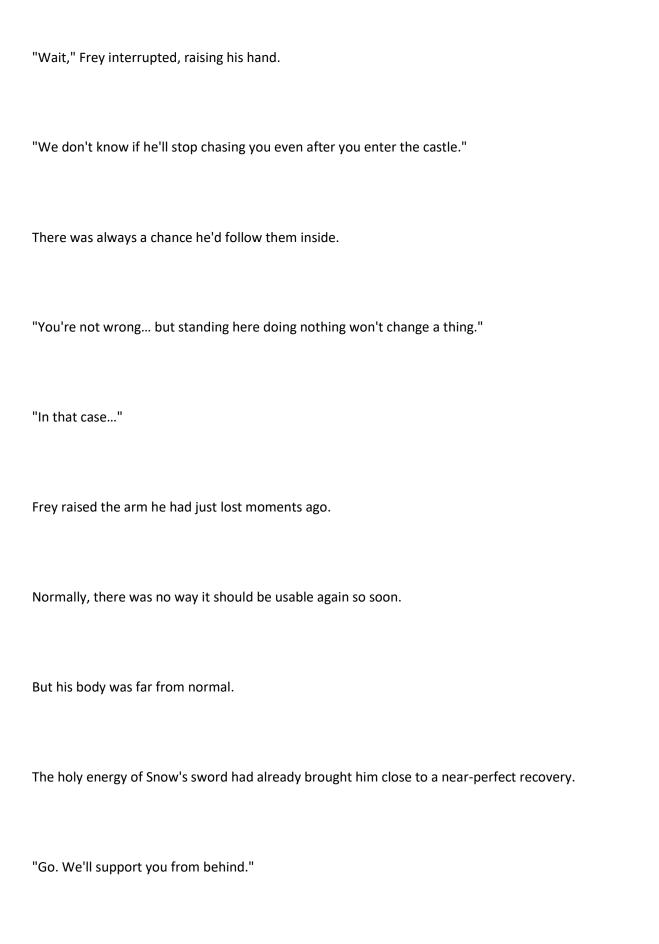


They had run without thinkingand unknowingly stepped outside the circle.
And the moment they did
"He stopped."
Frey finally understood the mechanism behind the statue.
He would never attack unless someone stepped onto the forbidden ground.
In other words that circular space surrounding the castle  Chapter 296: Angry (2)
Frey understood it.
But a searing wave of pain tore through him, yanking him out of his thoughts and back to the empty space where his right arm used to be.
Groaning in agony as blood poured from the wound, Frey channeled all his focus into his limb, trying to reattach it.

Snow rushed toward him immediately, using Vermithor to assist in the healing. Ghost, with a swift movement of his hand, began stitching the arm with incredible speed—trying to reconnect it before it was too late.
When they finished, Ghost stepped back.
"Even with all that there's no guarantee you'll be able to use it again," he said with concern.
Frey just smiled.
"No need to worry. My body's a little different from the average human."
He had never feared losing an arm.
It wasn't the first time he'd lost one anyway
and he could already start to feel his fingers again.
Ironically, the last time he lost an arm had also involved statues.

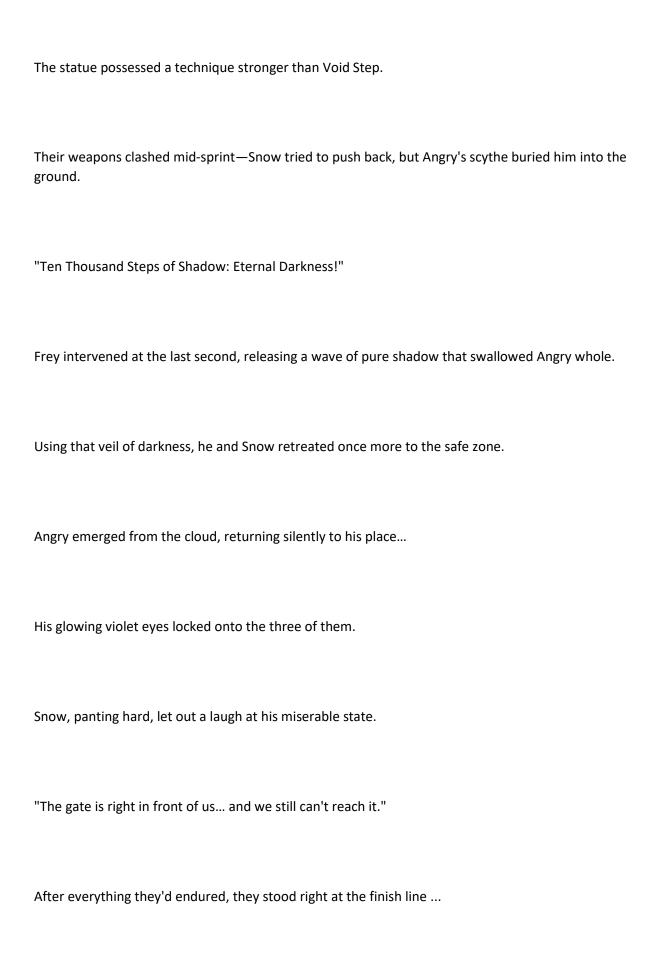


"Even if he doesn't attack us outside that doesn't help if we want to enter the castle."
The only way forward was through the furious statue that now blocked their path entirely.
Ghost, who had been silent for a while, finally spoke having reached a conclusion.
"Our goal is to get inside the castle not to defeat him."
There was no need to kill the statue.
They just needed to get past it.
"You're right," Snow said, stepping forward with a confident smile.
"Frey's faster than me when it comes to combat but overall, I've got the edge."
With his signature ability, Void Step, Snow was confident he could at least reach the gate.



Snow nodded and stepped forward—Frey and Ghost flanking him.
He took a deep breath.
His golden eyes lit up.
"Void Step."
Time halted.
Everything froze in place
Except Snow.
Bathed in pure blue light, he surged forward, his body like a beam of energy racing across the ground.
He passed the statue.
He passed his companions.

And made it all the way to the castle gate.
For a brief moment, he exhaled in relief.
But then his golden eyes widened
Someone else was moving.
Someone who had ignored the frozen world completely
and was now right behind him.
Bathed in glowing violet aura, Angry was in pursuit
and he was faster.
Snow realized, too late, how naïve he had been.



yet it remained just out of reach.
"What now? Do we keep playing with this thing until it kills us?"
It was clear.
They couldn't defeat it.
"We have to find a way" Frey muttered, racking his brain, remembering everything he had learned under Smiley and Sad.
He had never beaten them.
And now he was up against an even more advanced version.
But this time he had to get through.
With that determination burning in them, the three of them charged toward Angry again.

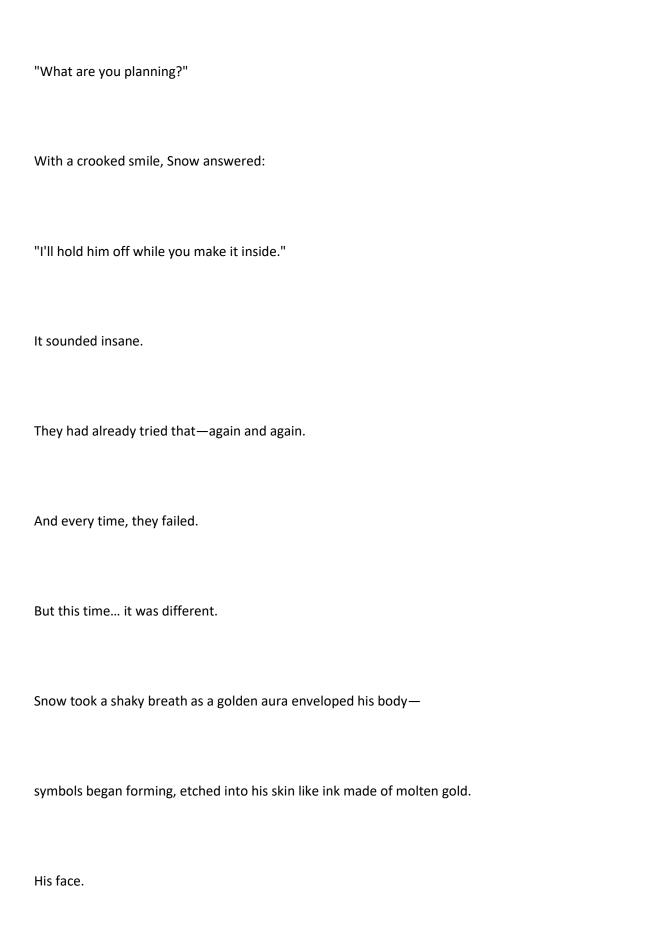
And once more
A devastating battle broke out.
Each exchange released shockwaves of aura that tore through the land.
The ground shattered beneath them, and blood splattered as they fought.
The first clash failed—
forcing them to retreat with serious wounds.
Then, after recovering—
They tried again.
And again

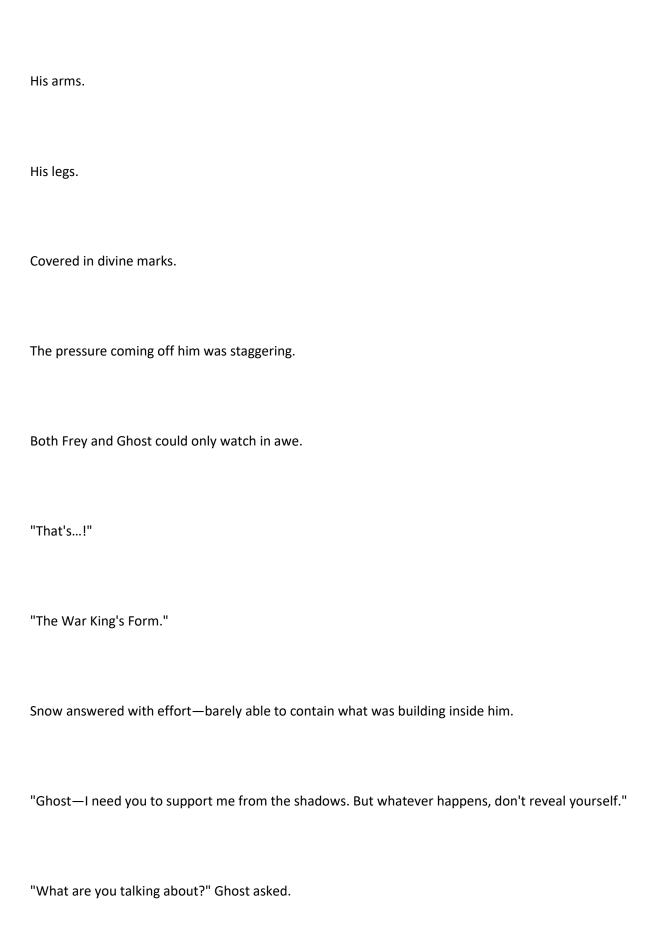
BOOOOM!!

The ground shook harder than ever before more violently, more blood-soaked.
The three fought with everything they had, trying to breach the towering black castle
But the statue was too fast. Too powerful.
Every attempt was shut down—crushed—until they were left with no choice but to retreat to the safe zone.
It was either that, or death.
That same scene—Angry mercilessly overwhelming them—played out over and over.
So many times, in fact, that they had lost count.
They were in shambles.
And one thing became clear: the statue wouldn't budge.

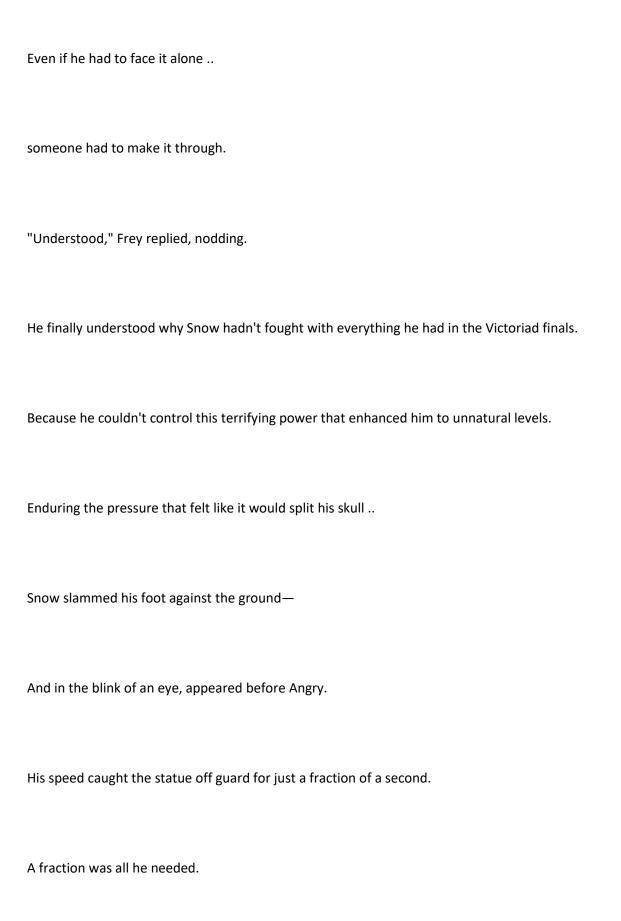
Despair began to creep in.
Angry was simply impenetrable without weakness.
Breaking through him felt utterly impossible.
Caked in dust, blood, and exhaustion,
Snow looked down at his battered comrades, then up at the motionless statue.
He stared for a long moment before raising his fist to his face, thinking deeply about his next move.
He released his aura.
From a distance, it might've looked bright—brilliant, even.
But in front of someone like Angry, it was faint.
Flickering.

In their current state, giving 100% wasn't enough.
They needed more.
Much more.
Snow understood that completely.
And so
He made his decision.
"Frey when I give the signal, run toward the castle with everything you've got."
His tone was serious.
Frey narrowed his eyes.

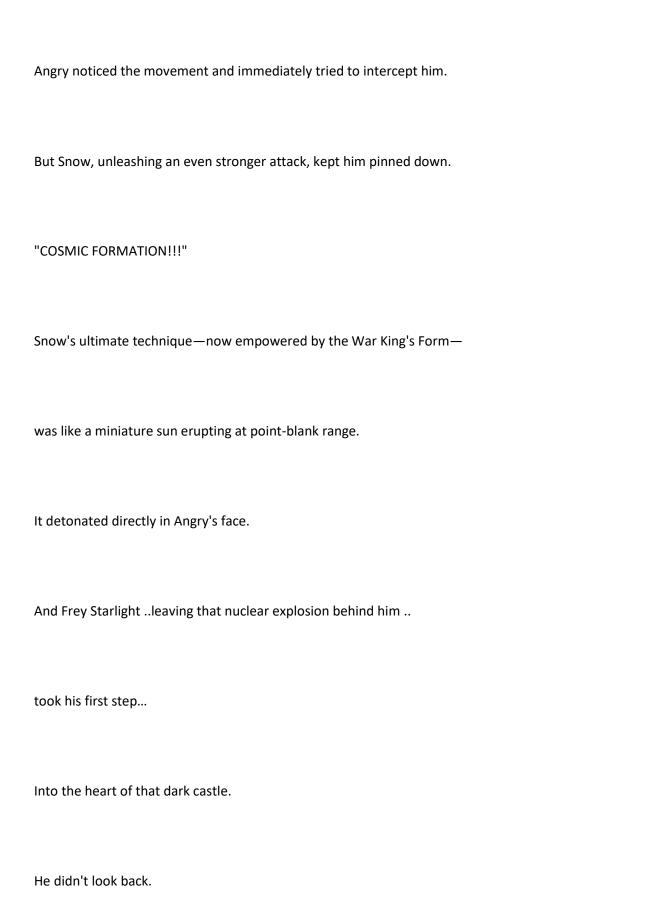




But Snow kept going—time was short.
"Hurry! This form always comes with one thing: an uncontrollable thirst for blood!"
A thirst he would direct solely at the statue.
Once the War King's Form was activated, there was no stopping until the enemy was dead.
"I'll throw everything I have at him so use that chance, Frey, and get inside!"
He shouted as his aura surged with every word.
He didn't know how far this power would take him
but he was betting it would be enough.
Enough to create an opening.



Snow unleashed a devastating star-charged strike.
A massive slash tore through the earth—launching Angry backward, his scythe dragging along the ground as he struggled to regain balance.
But Snow gave him no time to breathe.
Taking full advantage of his enhanced speed and strength, he closed in for close combat
pressuring the statue with a relentless flurry of attacks.
Ghost, from the shadows, sealed the area in a dome of darkness—concealing both combatants from view as they tore into each other.
And in that moment
With everything he had
Frey Starlight charged toward the castle, leaving a blur of afterimages in his wake.



He couldn't.
Not if he wanted his friends' sacrifice to mean something.
With that thought
Frey walked forward.
Into the place where everything would end. Chapter 297: Echoes of a Forgotten Self
– Snow Lionheart's pov –
It had been a long time
Since I last felt like this.
Those golden symbols—whose meaning I never truly understood—had grown stronger ever since I obtained Vermithor.

As if it had been the key that unlocked a new realm of power.
Everything was connected.
The War King's Form burned through my aura at a terrifying pace, allowing me to wield levels of power I was never meant to reach.
And that was what let me face the furious statue head-on.
Locked in a vicious clash with that entity, the two of us spun in a whirlwind of metal—sparks flying with every violent collision.
The explosive auras from our battle drowned out all my senses,
but I was certain of one thing:
Frey had made it through.
There was no longer any need to hold back.

With a bloody grin, I poured more and more Star Aura into my sword,
each strike landing with greater weight, hammering against that giant scythe.
Barely able to hold myself back now, I was fighting to keep the bloodlust in check.
I had to finish this quickly.
Clutching Vermithor in one hand, I raised the other to summon a storm of elemental force—
a barrage of razor-sharp ice spears.
Without hesitation, I hurled them at the furious statue's head.
But he twirled his scythe like a massive fan, shredding the spears into dust.
I didn't give him time to breathe.
Using a surge of black lightning, I unleashed a horizontal cut—aimed directly at his torso.

Preoccupied with blocking the hail of ice, he reacted too late to stop my lightning strike—
empowered by Void Step.
The blow landed clean, forcing him back as the lightning detonated across the ground beneath him.
But even then—on his iron body—
It left barely a scratch.
"Tch"
I held back a curse, wondering what on earth this thing was made of.
Despite everything, he didn't falter.
He simply stared back at me with his glowing violet eyes, as if he was trying to figure out what I was made of.

Time was slipping away
"In that case"
How about this
Swoooosh!
I unleashed a blinding wave of light from Vermithor
an eruption so intense it blanketed the battlefield, even obscuring the entire black castle behind it.
"Void Step."
Using the boosted form of the technique, enhanced by the War King's Mode,
I coated my blade in a blazing stream of blue fire, and hurled it forward like a devastating energy beam.
At the same time, I activated Void Step againthis time channeling black lightning.

The crackling surge tore through the earth, striking from behind the statue.
"Void Step!"
Everything happened in an instant.
This time, I pushed my ice aura to its limits—
igniting a white frost along my sword's edge, unleashing a wave of subzero energy across his exposed flank.
Alongside it came a high-frequency sonic blast, shadow aura chains to bind him,
and even gravity itself—to pull him to the ground.
To destroy that statue
I brought out everything I had.

Surrounded by a storm of overwhelming elemental forces
Angry widened his glowing eyes as the light finally cleared
only to see nature's wrath crashing down on him from every side.
The explosion tore through the battlefield—
an elemental catastrophe that shattered the terrain and sent shockwaves through the sky.
But of course
He survived.
Bathed in violet light, a shimmering aura clung to his body like armor
shielding him from the full brunt of my attacks.
But this was the moment

The exact moment I'd been waiting for.
As the smoke and chaos cleared
and the statue dared to believe the attack was over
He saw me standing directly in front of him.
Just centimeters away.
My stance wide open.
My sword aimed straight at his chest.
This was the moment I'd been waiting for—
The moment the enemy lets down their guard.

When the real attack begins.
Using the War King's Form and Vermithor,
I pushed my aura to its absolute limit.
Elemental particles danced wildly around my blade.
Drawing in a breath of fire
the golden markings on my skin blazed to life as I swung with everything I had.
"COSMIC FORMATION!!!"
This time, it was ten times stronger
No.
Even more than that.

A colossal explosion of light swallowed the statue and the entire castle behind him.
A pillar of pure white aura surged into the heavens, piercing the clouds
a nuclear beam unleashed at point-blank range.
And in the midst of that radiant inferno,
the furious statue was finally obliterated—
reduced to nothingness by the full force of my power.
In that moment
I wished with all my heart
That this would be enough to end it all.

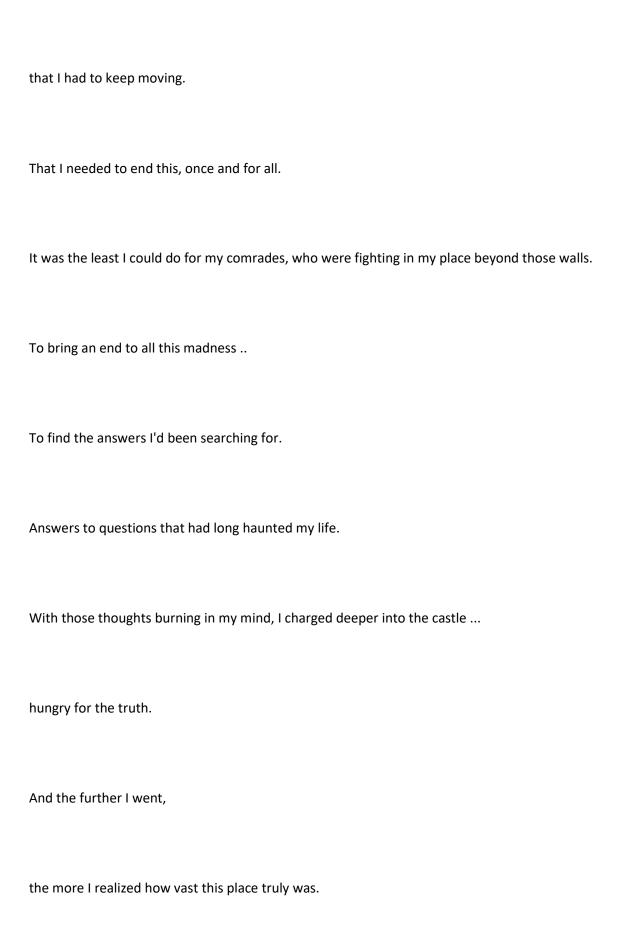
...

·
- Frey Starlight's pov —
had finally entered the castle.
he black castle
The one that made my entire body tremble without end.
glanced at my hand, trying to steady myself
out the way my fingers shook made it clear how utterly I failed at that.
itep after step,

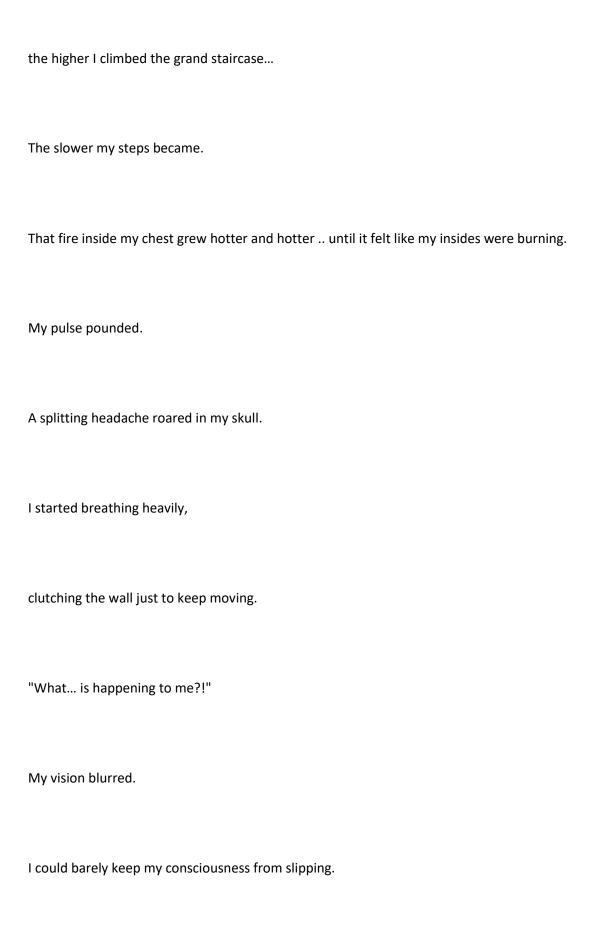
I wandered through the towering fortress.
What I stood upon was the grand entrance to this terrifying place
a hall with walls adorned in symbols and carvings I couldn't understand,
and ceilings so high that even the largest giants could walk—or run—through with ease.
But what truly caught my attention, aside from the incomprehensible symbols,
were the murals that accompanied them.
Illustrations that depicted, as far as I could guess, the life of the one who had once ruled this castle
The scenes on the walls showed glimpses of brutal wars.
Battles that raged across land and sky on a scale I had never seen before—
a scale that managed to send a chill down my spine through images alone, without me needing to live them myself.

The enemy in these wars was familiar—
always the same.
Demons.
But the mystery lay in who fought the demons.
Unlike the demons who all belonged to one race and were easy to recognize
the other side was chaos incarnate.
A gathering of countless different beings and creatures I had never seen or heard of.
I couldn't help but wonder if what I was seeing was real
or just some imagined depiction crafted to embellish this place.

Completely captivated by the murals
my senses returned when the ground suddenly shook beneath me.
A violent tremor rocked the castle as the thunderous roar of an explosion echoed through the walls.
"That aura"
Stunned, I recognized it instantly.
It was familiar
yet far stronger than I had ever felt it before.
The source of that attack could only be one person—
Snow, still battling Angry outside.
That blast reminded me—again—



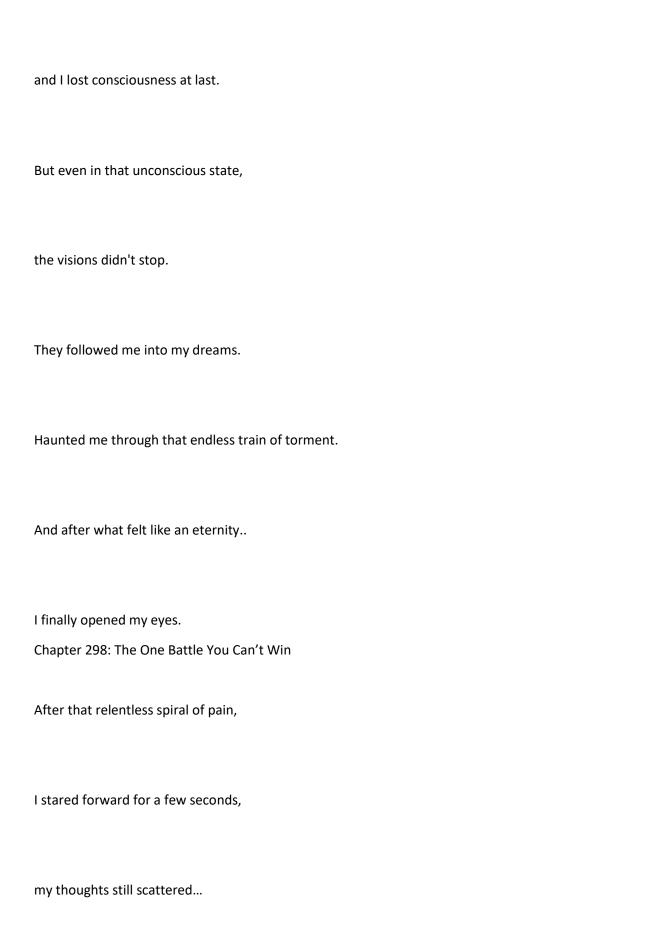
A massive citadel, built like an ancient museum
But completely empty.
Other than the decorated walls carrying those paintings,
there was nothing.
Nothing at all.
Like a ghost house of ancient wars,
left alone in the middle of a sea of kneeling pilgrims
worshippers of a king who never returned.
The more I advanced,



The long corridor ahead of me began to twist and ripple
like an old painting fading with time.
Then the pain struck.
Blinding.
Searing.
Even I—someone well-acquainted with agony—
screamed from the depths of my soul.
I writhed on the ground,
unable to see,
as visions flooded my mind

as if the murals had come to life inside my head.
People I had never met.
Places I had never seen.
All accompanied by torment I couldn't fight.
All I could do was scream
and pray for it to end.
But it didn't.
It never stopped.
It was like someone was crushing my skull with a giant hammer,

again and again and again.
For the first time in my life—
I cursed the strength of my mental resilience.
That ability
which once felt like a blessing,
now felt like a curse.
A curse that kept me conscious through every moment of that pain.
I twisted on the ground for hours
like an insect
Until finally, my eyes rolled back into empty white,



Until my senses slowly returned.
And that's when I realized
I was no longer inside the black castle.
"Where am I?"
That was the first question I asked myself.
But the answers
They were starting to take shape on their own.
I was sitting on a wooden chair inside an ordinary room with a single bed, a desk, and a few simple pieces of furniture. Things that made it obvious the space belonged to a guy in his twenties.
Right in front of me

another person sat.
Also in his twenties, with a look so familiar I recognized him instantly.
We were face-to-face.
I started laughing—quietly at first.
A hollow laugh, wondering if I'd finally lost my mind.
After all
This room was mine.
These were my things.
And the person sitting across from me
Was me.

Or rather—
The version of me I used to look like, long ago
before the reincarnation.
Before everything began.
My past self smiled as I laughed like a madman.
"Welcome back,"
he said, using my old voice.
And something about it felt deeply, fundamentally wrong.
"Welcome back where?"

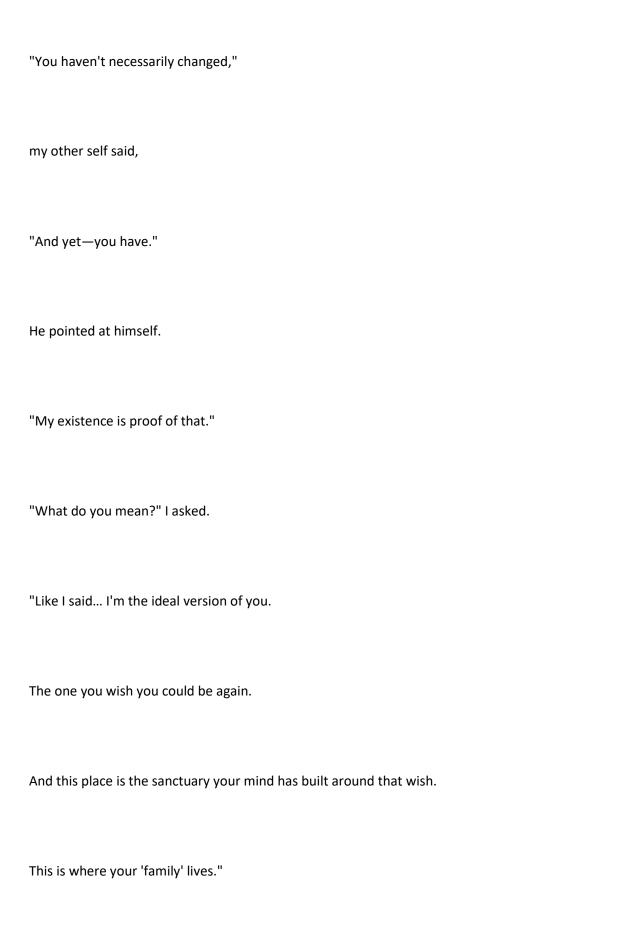


but they hit harder than I expected,
especially coming from an old version of myself.
A version that once lived a peaceful life,
far removed from the endless spiral of blood and death I've endured since then.
If I were still the same person from back then
I probably wouldn't be thinking this way at all.
That realization left a bitter taste in my mouth.
It made me angrywithout even knowing why.
"Who are you? What illusion have you trapped me in this time?"

To be honest, I'd already tried to strike him multiple times.
But neither Balerion nor the Dark Sister answered me
no matter how hard I called for them.
Powerless, I was left with no choice but to play along with this absurd play.
The smile on my former self's face slowly widened,
as if he could hear every thought racing through my head.
He looked around and said:
"This isn't an illusion.
It's what you call 'home,'
but not your real home."

Annoyed, I cut him off.
"What are you even talking about?"
"This place is the safe haven your mind created.
The place you feel most at ease.
And me?
I'm the version of yourself you long for more than anything."
Silence settled for a few seconds as I tried to process his words.
"So in other words all of this is happening inside my head?"
He nodded.
"That's right."

Once I got my answer, I leaned back into the wooden chair.
"I really have lost my mind this time, huh?"
With a smile, my past self agreed.
"You lost it a long time ago."
Sitting here,
talking to myself inside my own head without restraint
I couldn't help but wonder
When did everything start to slip from my hand?
When did I change this much?





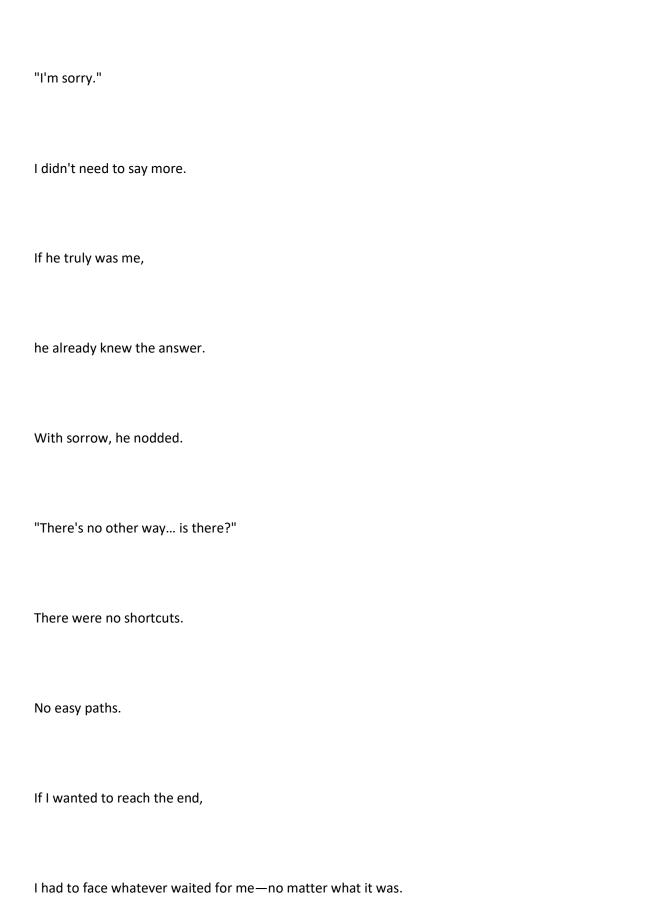
and at the same time you haven't."
Between past and present
A lot had changed.
That much was inevitable, given the life I had lived since my reincarnation.
And yet
deep inside, parts of me remained exactly the same.
Deep down inside
I was still yearning for the life I had lost—
a life I knew I could never return to.



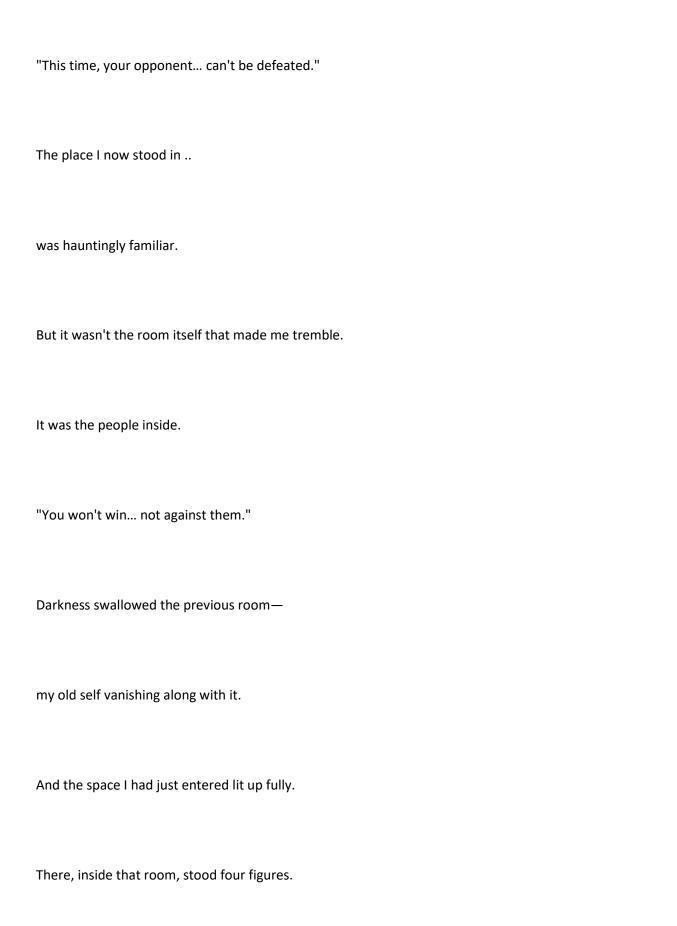


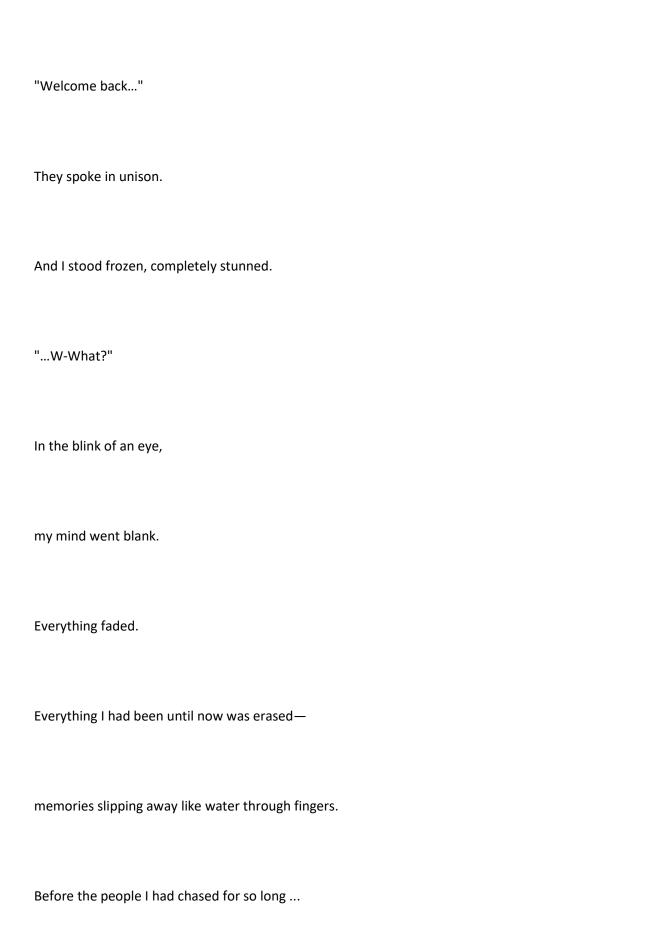






And so, with resolve,
I stepped forward.
And opened the door.
A brilliant light erupted, swallowing me whole.
My other self remained where he was,
watching with a pained smile.
"You won't win this time, Frey"
The light faded slowly,
allowing me to see what was on the other side.





like chasing a mirage
My family.
They were all here.
With a mind too empty to even process it properly,
I smiled—
a smile I hadn't worn in a very, very long time.
"I'm home."
Home at last.
Chapter 299: Welcome Back, Frey Starlight
– Frey Starlight's Pov –

Home
I was sitting at a table with the people I had longed to see more than anything else.
Each of them welcomed me with a warm smile
a smile I had nearly forgotten after all this time.
"I'm home."
My mind went completely blank, consumed by the moment I had wished for so desperately.
"It's been hard, hasn't it?"
my mother said, placing a hand gently on my back as she sat beside me, trying to comfort me.
I opened my mouth to respond
but no words came out.

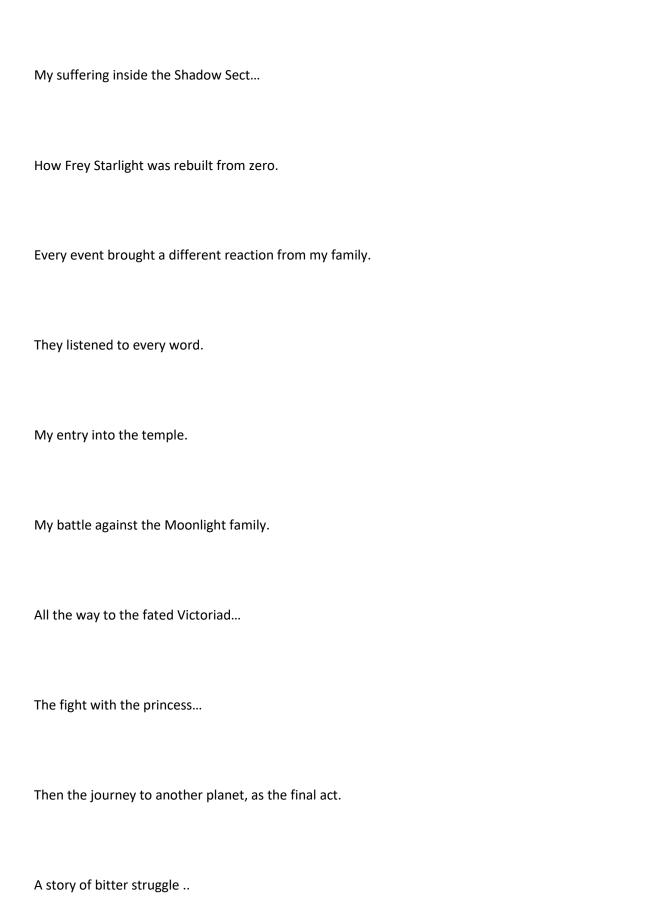


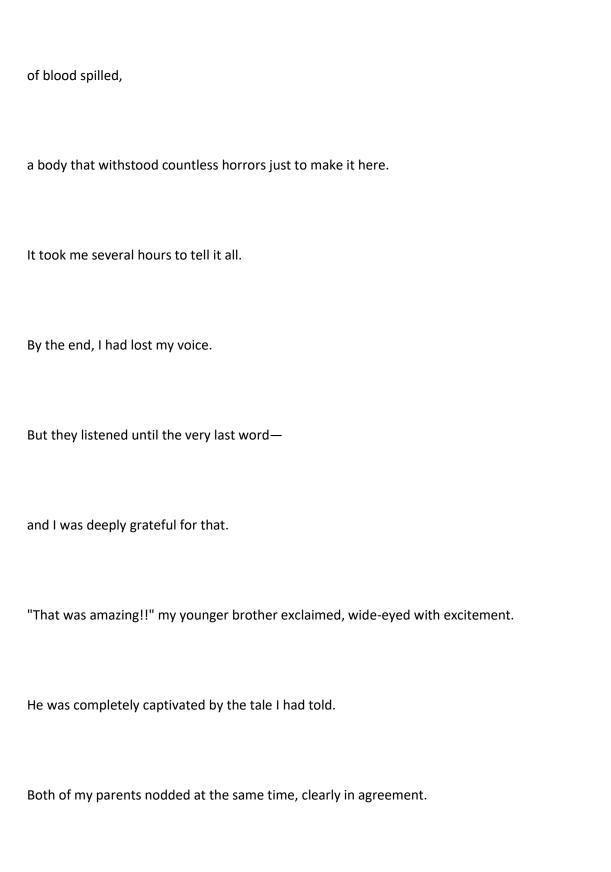
I fought, and fought, and lost
then stood up again and again"
With a shuddered breath, I couldn't hold the tears back any longer.
I clenched my teeth hard, digging my fingers into my palm so deeply they drew blood.
But no matter what I did
I couldn't stop the tears.
As if on instinct, they all gathered around to comfort me.
My father placed a hand on my shoulder.
My younger brother hugged me tightly.

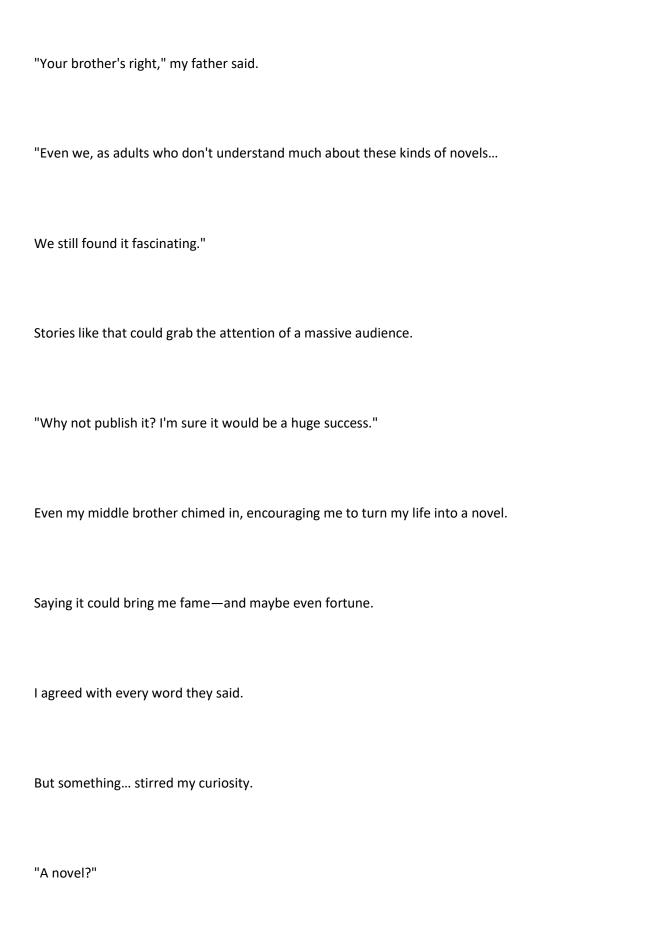
Even my middle brother—whom I'd never been especially close with—stood beside our father.
"It's okay, son."
"You're safe now."
Those words
They were like a drug.
They made me feel drunk with relief.
When I finally calmed down,
I found my little brother still clinging to me—just like he used to in the past.
"Tell me about your adventures, big brother!"
I blinked in surprise.

He wanted me to talk about everything I'd been through?
"Stop! Do you want him to relive all those horrible things?"
As expected, my mother stepped in immediately still thinking of my comfort before anything else, scolding the youngest as he shrank back in guilt.
That's when I decided to step in.
With a gentle smile, I reassured her:
"It's okay
I've always wanted someone I could tell my story to."
And in that moment
who better than my family?

Sitting beside my little brother and surrounded by the ones I loved most,
I began to tell them my story.
"It all started when I opened my eyes in a wide room that looked like it belonged to the Middle Ages"
From the beginning.
I told them everything.
A long tale that spanned hours—
but I didn't leave out a single detail.
How I woke up in the body of Frey Starlight.
The Starlight family.
The journey into the Eastern Nightmare Lands





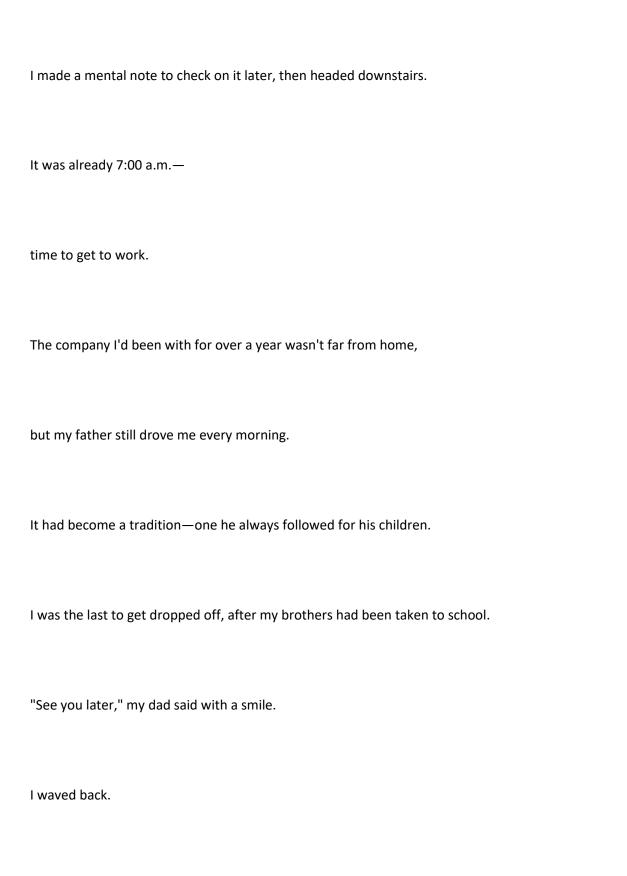


I asked, confused staring at their smiling faces.
At the same time
a strange buzzing sound had been ringing in my ears for a while now
"Yeah, your novel really is amazing."
They all said it at once.
I stayed silent for a moment, listening to the buzzing sound that had gradually grown louder in my ear.
A novel?
The story of Frey Starlight.
The story of my struggle.
Or rather—his struggle.

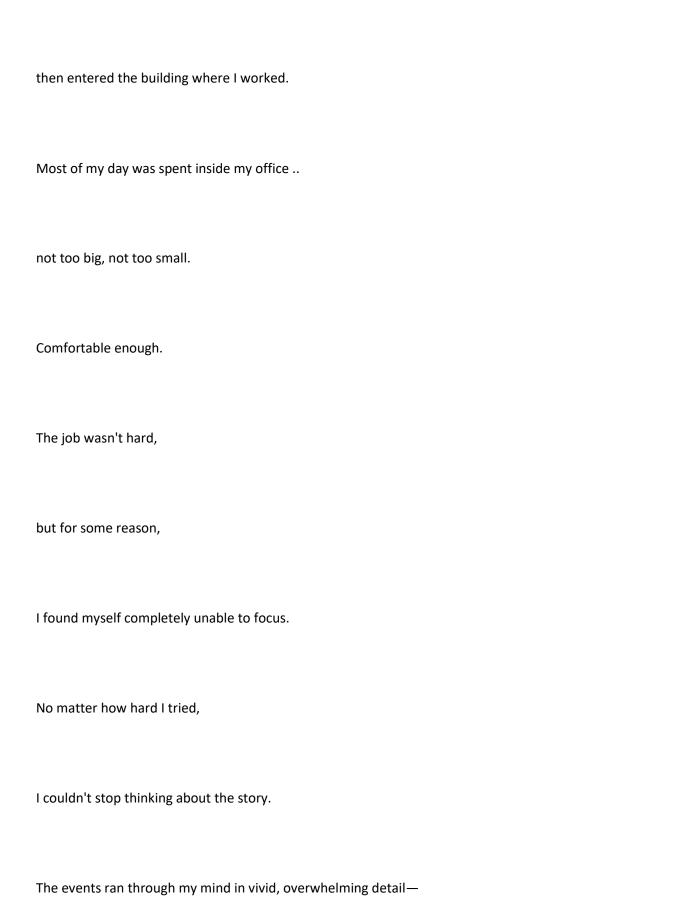
I tried to gather my thoughts, but they slowly slipped away.
All logic I had relied on until now was unraveling, as if it had never existed in the first place.
So I simply nodded with a faint smile.
"Yes it really is a great story."
Maybe I should publish it on Webnovel or something?
Who knows—maybe I could even earn a little money from it!
The idea excited me.
"But how did you come up with something so wild, son?"
My mother's question gave me pause.

Since she asked
How did I come up with all of this?
With an awkward smile, I answered:
"You know me I've always had a vivid imagination.
It all just came together in my mind."
From nothing, I had built an entire world—
a vast and intricate story from scratch.
"Well, it's great to follow your passion,"
she said,
"but don't neglect your work. Writing is fine as a hobby—just remember that."

"Of course. You don't need to worry,"
I reassured her, standing from the dinner table and heading back to my room.
That night,
I slept better than I had in years.
Truly, deeply rested.
But for some reason
the buzzing in my ear never stopped.
I tried smacking the side of my head a few times,
but it was no use.
"Maybe I should see a doctor?"

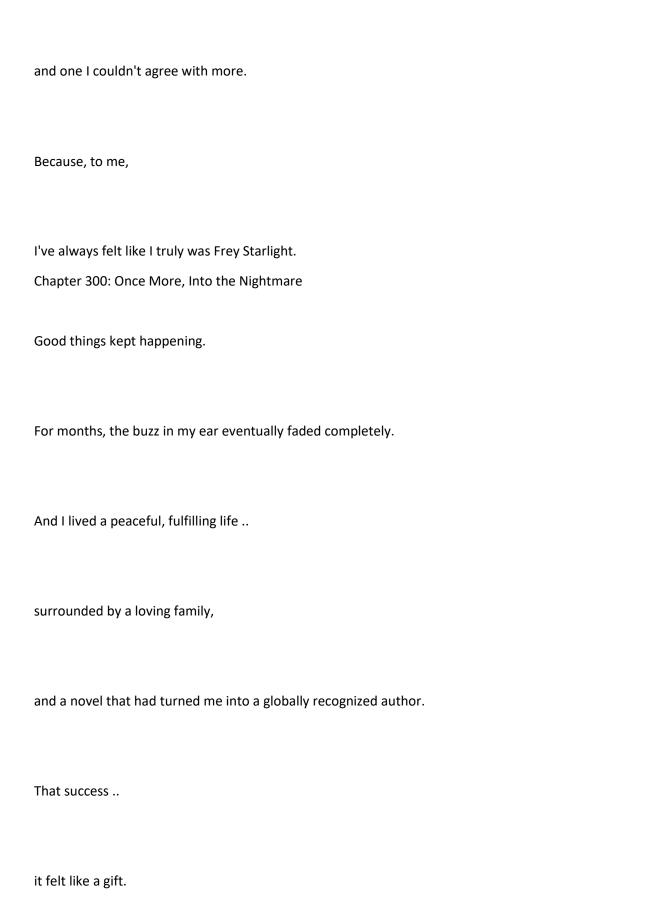




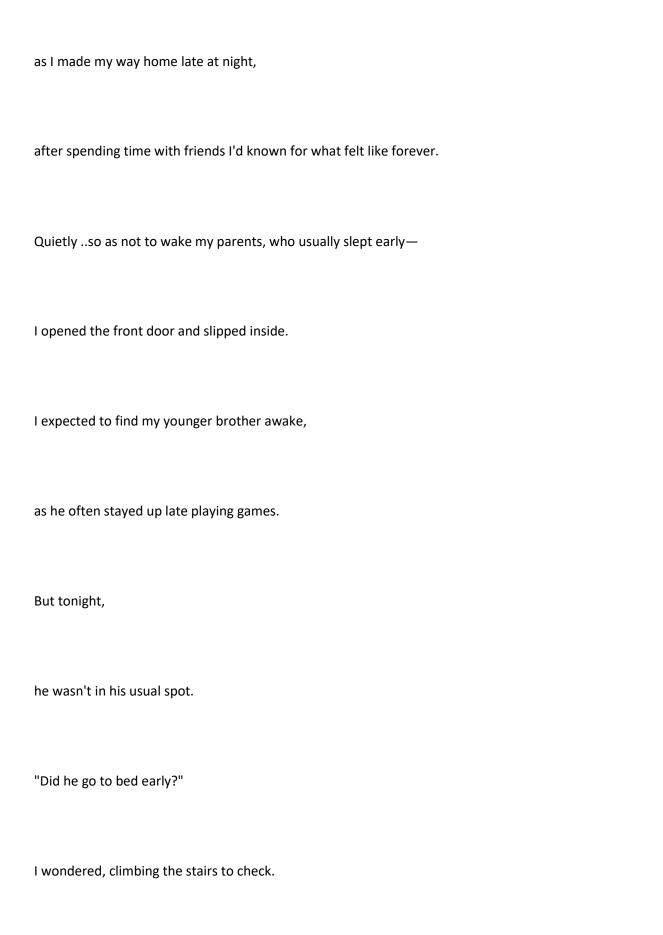




each one delivered with growing satisfaction.
Little by little
Days passed.
Happy days.
Days spent wrapped in the warmth of my family
a feeling I hadn't realized how much I'd missed.
At the same time,
my novel began gaining traction online, building a name for itself around the world.
"A fantasy so vivid, it makes you feel like you're the main character."
That was one of the most common comments I received



A gift I made the most of.
And for once
I was truly, deeply content with both myself—
and the life I had been given.
The smile never left my face.
Not even when I walked the streets at night.
I was truly grateful—
grateful for the life I had been given.
That was what I was thinking



But I stopped abruptly when my foot stepped in something wet.
"Did someone spill something?"
The house was dark,
so I pulled out my phone and turned on the flashlight.
And what I saw
froze my blood.
I dropped to the floor, panicked,
my hand reaching into the dark substance I feared was exactly what I thought it was.
"This is"
I wasn't wrong.

"Blood."
A lot of it.
At that very moment
the buzzing in my ear returned, louder than ever before.
Terrified,
I ran forward,
each step squelching in more of the blood that soaked the floor beneath me.
I didn't want to know the truth.
I was afraid to find out

Whose blood was it?
Panicking, I flung open the door to my parents' room
and time itself seemed to stop.
My world collapsed in an instant.
Blood.
Everywhere.
The room looked like a scene torn straight from a horror movie.
Their bodies—
my parents—
were lying headless on the floor.

And their heads
were neatly placed at the doorway,
staring at me with empty, lifeless eyes.
For a moment
I couldn't breathe.
I staggered back, gasping for air,
nausea rising until I threw up everything inside me.
My body shook violently.
My mind refused to accept what I was seeing.

Tears spilled out on their own—

but the nausea was stronger.
Still trembling, I stumbled away from the room,
unsure of what to do.
Unthinking.
Unfeeling.
Overwhelmed by grief.
But beneath that grief
was something even more powerful:
Dread.

Desperation drove me to my younger brother's room
to cling to any shred of hope still left in this house of death.
It felt like a dream.
No
a nightmare.
A nightmare that had turned my world upside down.
"Please please let them be okay"
With a heart ready to burst,
I opened the door to my brother's room.
And I found him

alongside my other brother.
But this time
the scene was even worse.
Far worse.
Their bodies
were unrecognizable.
What remained of them didn't even resemble human forms.
And then,
past the carnage—

I saw it.

Him.
A towering figure over two meters tall,
shrouded in a black aura that flowed like dark fire.
His face was blurred for some reason—
obscured beneath long, waterfall-like black hair.
But the most vivid, unmistakable part of him
were those crimson eyes.
I stared at the being who had turned my home into this nightmare—
and he turned slowly to face me.

Just one look from him
made me feel like I had already died a hundred times.
I couldn't even think of revenge.
I couldn't muster anger toward the one who had slaughtered my entire family.
All I could do
was freeze in place.
Shaking.
Powerless.
Too terrified to take a single step toward the killer of my blood.
"It's a painful thing, truly"



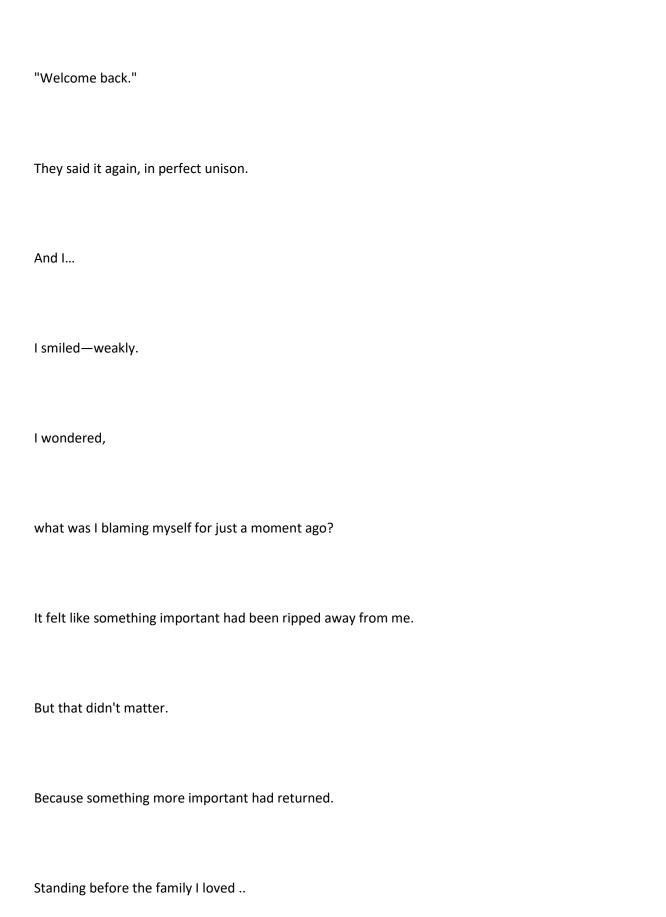
it couldn't be human.
It couldn't be real.
It was something else.
Something that made even the idea of this being a nightmare feel far more believable.
When was the last time I felt this helpless?
When was the last time I couldn't cry,
couldn't scream
when I choked on grief so thick it stopped me from breathing?
The creature with the red eyes said nothing else.

He simply extended his hand toward me.
And with a voice that felt both distant and familiar
he whispered:
"Once more."
The performance failed this time.
As his words echoed—
I was forcibly ejected from my own body,
as if something was pulling time itself backward.
"You're not good enough Frey Starlight."
The moment he uttered that name

Its echo reverberated endlessly in my mind.
Frey Starlight
Frey Starlight
Clenching my teeth, I fought the urge to scream
as I tumbled through the current of time—
cursing everything.
How could I forget?
How did I dare to forget?
I am Frey Starlight.
That wasn't a novel.

It never was.
It was a life I had lived
every moment,
every breath.
"Send me back!!"
I screamed with everything I had
furious at whoever dared to desecrate the memory of my family like this.
Furious at myself for believing that illusion was ever real.
What's happening to me?

I tried to call out to my swords,
tried to unleash everything and tear the illusion apart
But nothing answered.
Time rebuilt itself
and the image returned.
A familiar table
a familiar room
My family sat around it once more,
smiling at me,
offering that warmth I had missed so much.



I smiled, genuinely this time.
"I'm home."
Home, at last .