

## VILLAIN 52

### Chapter 52 The First Exam

-Frey Starlight Pov-

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Bonatiro bombarded us with relentless attacks, like a hail of bullets. We were nothing more than trapped rats in a cage, pelted with stones.

Worse still was the cursed water—I could feel it pressing down on me, as if trying to crush me.

Over ten minutes had passed under this merciless assault. Despite our pitiful state and that lunatic professor's clear enjoyment of our suffering, I had to admit—perhaps this training had its merits after all.

Under constant pressure, my body gradually adapted to the harsh environment. My combat instincts sharpened, my movements became more refined, and my body responded better. I wasn't the only one—others like Snow had experienced the same. We had even started dodging some of the attacks.

At this point, the third pool held seven of us. Along with the original five, Prince Aegon and Seris Moonlight had joined.

I wasn't surprised by the prince's arrival, but Seris was another story. Her physique should have been weaker than the others, given her role as a Wave Controller. Yet here she was, outperforming even the duelists.

Then again, she was cheating. Her primary affinity was water, which explained why Bonatiro's attacks stopped just centimeters from her body.

Clicking my tongue, I made up my mind.

"I've had enough of this nonsense."

I climbed out of the massive third pool and made my way back to the second.

Bonatiro let out a laugh.

"What's the matter, Starlight? Is that all you've got?"

I waved a hand dismissively.

"Yeah."

I had seen enough.

Returning to the second pool, I found the others still struggling to complete their fifty laps.

I sat at the edge, watching them push forward. Most of those here were either the weakest participants or long-range fighters who had never prioritized physical endurance.

My gaze landed on Feyrith and his entourage. Kyle Walker had already finished the second pool, which was expected given his formidable build, yet he hadn't moved forward.

It seemed he was waiting for Feyrith and Jan.

On the other hand, Evan Sunlight was waiting for his sister, Scarite.

I let out a sigh.

What's the point of waiting for each other? This isn't a team competition...

Regardless, I no longer cared about this session. With less than ten minutes left, I decided to relax. It was a pool, after all.

As my mind drifted, my gaze landed on Sansa.

"Hm?"

She was with Adriana... My mouth slightly opened in surprise as I watched the bookworm Adriana thrash through the water like a gorilla, causing a ridiculous amount of commotion.

"What's her class again?"

Was she actually a close-range fighter?

Today was full of surprises.

Sansa, on the other hand, was visibly struggling.

The trembling in her arms, her labored breaths, the way her face tightened in sheer determination to finish the task...

"She's completely out of stamina."

At some point, her body simply stopped responding. I could tell she was about to sink.

"What are you doing?"

"Huh?"

Before I even processed it, I had already reached her, my hand gripping her arm.

Ignoring her question, I pulled her out of the water.

"I'll help you."

"Thanks, but I don't need your help."

Even as she rejected my assistance, I tightened my grip and continued dragging her toward the edge.

"Too late. I already jumped in."

I avoided making eye contact as much as possible... Why had I even jumped in to help her?

Was it pity after hearing her story?

Did I feel responsible for what happened to her?

No, it wasn't that.

I knew what kind of person I was.

Then why?

Within seconds, I had pulled her out of the pool. We both sat at the edge, silence stretching between us.

I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing.

Beside me, she couldn't hide her exhaustion. Her breaths came in heavy gasps, her body trembling slightly.

For a brief moment, our eyes met. Then, she let out a dry, sarcastic laugh.

"What a gentleman."

"Your words don't match your expression."

Sansa sighed.

"Of course not. I know what kind of person you are, after all."

"Even I don't understand myself anymore. How would you?"

She smiled as she got to her feet.

"I know... Thanks for your concern, Frey, but I don't need your pity."

"Pity?"

She nodded.

"Yes... I have a gift, Frey. Or maybe it's a curse... Seems you've forgotten."

She clasped her hands behind her back in an almost delicate manner, taking slow steps away.

"I can read people's emotions just from their facial expressions... And your face, every time our eyes met—it showed pity."

"What I've been through made me who I am today. It made me stronger. So I don't need your pity, nor your help—yours or anyone else's."

She gave me one last fleeting smile before heading back to Adriana, leaving me with a final, teasing remark.

"By the way... nice tattoo."

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With her gone, I sighed and ran a hand through my hair.

"What the hell is wrong with me?"

Since when did I become the type of person who pities others? The only one who deserves pity here... is me.

I needed to focus on what mattered.

Running my hand over my face, I muttered to myself.

"Did my face really show... pity?"

Wait... Is that why she was angry when I confessed before?

Did she realize I hadn't meant it? Did she think I was just toying with her?

"...I should stay away from that girl."

At that moment, I mentally placed Sansa in the same category as Seris.

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The session ended, and everyone gathered at the entrance, slipping back into their temple robes after a quick bath.

Bonatiro was scribbling furiously on a small board, his excitement obvious.

Previously, he had handed out reports detailing our physical states, abilities, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. I had no idea when he had even written all of that.

And now, according to him, he was finalizing the rankings to determine the winner—or, as he called it, the "MVP" of the session.

At last, he smacked the board and shouted.

"Alright! Come check your rankings!"

I wasn't particularly interested, but I activated Hawk's Eye to scan for my name from where I stood.

Survival Arts: Session 1

Rankings:

1 - Danzo Smasher (B4)

2 - Ragna Cloud (B3)

3 - Snow Lionheart (A1)

4 - Dawn Polaris (A4)

5 - Frey Starlight (B9)

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19 - Sansa Valerion (B9)

Fifth place, huh?

That made sense. I had given up in the final minutes.

Danzo was celebrating loudly after making a remontada against Ragna, who looked dejected.

But honestly, they had every right to be proud. Even if it was just through sheer physical ability, they had beaten the protagonist.

As the others erupted into chatter, Bonatiro leaned in closer to his board, scanning it carefully.

"One, two... three... nineteen?"

His expression darkened as he muttered.

"Nineteen."

It didn't take long to realize someone was missing.

Bonatiro clutched his head, his frustration boiling over.

"Where is the twentieth student?!!!"

A quick process of elimination revealed the culprit.

"Ghost Umbra (A2)!"

I couldn't hold back a laugh as I pieced it together.

Bonatiro, on the other hand, was losing his mind.

Ghost... that sneaky bastard. He had slipped away the moment we left the ancient hall.

Even Bonatiro hadn't noticed his disappearance.

Ignoring the professor's outburst, I turned and walked away.

"As expected of the son of the strongest assassin."

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The rest of the day was uneventful... Another class with Sophia, who announced that our first exams were already approaching.

The temple fostered a fiercely competitive environment, especially for elite students. Weekly exams—both physical and theoretical—were mandatory.

I wasn't concerned about the physical test, but the theoretical one? That was another matter entirely.

As I mulled over the upcoming exam, a sudden, inexplicable sense of danger crept over me.

It only took moments to realize why.

Just as I was about to turn at the end of the hallway, a man in a hooded cloak appeared out of nowhere.

For some reason, I hadn't sensed his presence until the very last second, causing me to collide with him.

Yet, the moment I was about to touch him, he vanished—only to reappear behind me in an instant.

An invisible force gripped my body, keeping me from falling.

I frowned, unable to identify the nature of this power.

"Are you alright?"

Hearing his voice, I took a proper look at his face... and my frown deepened.

A man in his forties, still maintaining a sharp, handsome appearance with neatly combed brown hair and piercing crimson eyes that darkened toward black... Features I recognized all too well.

I forced a polite smile as I met his gaze.

"My apologies, I wasn't paying attention."

"Haha, be careful, kid. If you don't watch your step, you never know what kind of monsters you'll run into."

"I'll keep that in mind. Thank you."

He patted my shoulder before walking away, leaving me behind.

"No worries, kid. Just be careful from now on..."

The moment he disappeared completely, the fake smile I wore collapsed, and a chilling bloodlust spread through me.

"Kai Luc, Grand Sorcerer of the Temple... we meet sooner than I expected."

I rolled my shoulders before continuing on my way.

Sorcerers were a rare existence. They studied separately from us within the temple, and we wouldn't be sharing classes until our second year.

That bastard was the temple's Grand Sorcerer... and the primary cause of the disaster that would strike three weeks from now.

"I need an anti-magic defense. Fast."

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I hurried back to my room, removed my jacket, and carefully placed it on the desk.

"Hawk's Eye."

Activating my full visual capabilities, I inspected the spot where that bastard had touched me.

Within moments, dark sparks flickered over my uniform.

"That bastard."

In just a brief encounter, with nothing more than a pat on the shoulder, he had already cursed me.

Kai Luc—an S-Rank Sorcerer and a contracted demon host.

Barely visible threads of aura in his presence had allowed me to detect his incantation.

I had no idea what kind of effect this curse had, but I needed to get rid of it immediately.

Demonic aura wasn't easily dispelled. You either had to be stronger than the caster to destroy it, or you had to visit the church for purification... which was out of the question. The last thing I wanted was to step foot into a place filled with hypocrites.

Fortunately, I had a third option.

Opening my laptop, I quickly searched for what I needed.

"Instant Demonic Curse Purifier – Single Use" Cost: 500 Achievement Points

Current Achievement Points: 6,200

"Tsk."

I had no choice.

I purchased the purifier. Normally, it would cost more, but I had limited it to a single-use effect to make it cheaper.

A white aura enveloped my left hand as I pressed it against the cursed spot. The dark energy resisted briefly before disintegrating entirely.

I exhaled slowly.

"All that from a simple bump? Don't worry, Kai Luc... I always return the favor."

A wasted 500 achievement points...

I changed into fresh clothes and left my room.

That night... I roamed the elite dormitories completely naked.

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The Next Morning

Dressed casually in black sweatpants and a hoodie, I left my room.

I covered my face as I recalled the events of the previous night.

When night fell, I stripped down and activated Phantom Step.

Smoothly, I infiltrated the elite dorms... only to be overwhelmed with embarrassment as I strolled stark naked through the corridors.

Just when I thought I would slip by unnoticed, a girl appeared out of nowhere.

Thankfully, I reacted quickly enough to escape before she could see my face... but in return, I didn't get a look at hers either.

All I remembered was the sound of her screaming.

"Damn it..."

By now, there were probably already rumors about a naked man wandering the dorms last night.

I pushed aside my embarrassment and focused on what truly mattered—achievement points.

Today was important. For the first time in over a week, I would be leaving the temple.

But not for leisure.

The first practical exam was today.

When I reached the temple gate, I spotted a young man with white hair and golden eyes. He wore a white jacket over black pants, his sharp features making him stand out no matter what he wore.

A girl with black hair was chatting beside him. From the way he barely tolerated her presence, I could tell he was struggling.

Deciding to help, I approached Snow.

The moment he noticed me, he interrupted the girl mid-sentence.

"You're finally here, Frey."

"How's it going?"

I waved nonchalantly before glancing at the black-haired girl.

"First time we've met... Frey Starlight."

"Yeah. And you are?"

Even though I knew exactly who she was, I feigned ignorance.

"Lara Croft."

"Nice to meet you."

"Can't say the same about you."

"Excuse me?"

I raised a brow, but she simply turned her head away.

"Nothing."

She had just mocked me.

Behind her, Snow gave me an apologetic look. I sighed and let it slide.

"What were you two talking about?"

Snow sighed.

"Nothing... Lara was just saying some weird things."

At that, Lara immediately snapped.

"You still don't believe me?! I swear, I saw it!"

Her words piqued my curiosity.

"Saw what?"

Her next words sent a chill down my spine.

"There was a naked man wandering the elite dorms last night! I saw him with my own eyes!"

I turned my head immediately.

'Shit.'

The girl I had encountered last night... was Lara Croft.

Snow, having heard this a dozen times already, sighed.

"A naked man in the elite dorms... Well, you're an Archer, so you have good eyesight. Did you see his face?"

Lara mumbled.

"It was dark... and he was too fast."

Snow clearly didn't believe her, which only frustrated her more. Meanwhile, I tried to distance myself from the conversation as much as possible.

At this point, Lara was losing her patience. She was still just a kid—naturally, she'd get upset when no one believed her.

"Why won't you believe me?! You know I wouldn't lie to you!"

"I never said you were lying, but you must have misunderstood something... or maybe you imagined it."

Cold.

Hearing his flat response, Lara's lips trembled before she yelled.

"I saw him clearly! I even got a look at his dick!"

...Oh dear God.

If I could see my own face in a mirror right now, I might just laugh at myself.

She saw what?

Even after that, Snow remained unfazed, which only angered her further. She stormed off toward the gathering area.

"Snow, you're an idiot!"

Snow sighed.

"What's her problem...? Do you actually believe what she said?"

"Frey?"

He turned to me, snapping me out of my daze.

I nodded vaguely.

"Ah, yeah... she's probably just imagining things."

"Of course. I mean, how many first-years could move fast enough to escape an Archer's sight? Me... Ghost... maybe the prince... and... you."

The moment I heard his reasoning, I walked off immediately.

"Let's go. Enough nonsense. We'll be late for the exam."

Cursing internally, I left with Snow.

Mother... my dignity has been compromised.