

## 136: Anger management

**[Name:** Scarlett Hartford]

**[Skills:**

[Greater Mana Control]

[Greater Pyromancy]

[Major Pyrokinesis]

[Greater Hydromancy]

[Superior Hydrokinesis]]

**[Traits:**

[Dignified August]

[Supercilious]

[Cavalier]

[Callous]

[Overbearing]

[Conceited]

[Third-rate Mana Veins]]

**[Mana:** 1324/5047]

**[Points:** 2]

Scarlett stared at the status window that hung before her, barely paying attention to her other surroundings. She had done this dozens of times already. There wasn't anything new to see just because she kept staring. But it was something to focus on.

She blinked as she noticed her mana depleting quickly, turning away to look at the crackling inferno of fire that hovered in the air a dozen meters in front of her. She hadn't even noticed she'd summoned it. Raising a hand, she closed her fist as if smothering the flames. They went out immediately, and the strong heat that she hadn't even noticed blasting her faded, leaving only the warm summer air that was so ever-present here in Freymeadow.

She sat there for a while, looking out at the empty space.

“Want me to refill it for you?” Rosa's voice rang out from the side.

Turning her head, she looked at the approaching woman. Rosa stopped next to her, pointing down at the [Depraved Solitude's Choker] around her neck. Scarlett considered the bard for a moment, then held up her hand. With a thought, the necklace disappeared and reappeared in her palm, which she extended forward.

Rosa received the artifact and touched her index finger against the violet crystal on it. The crystal lit up as she started recharging the mana inside.

Neither of them spoke.

With everything else that had happened recently, they really hadn't talked much at all lately. Scarlett had been away for a while, and after she returned... well, the somewhat awkward conversation they'd had in her office the night before spoke magnitudes.

She glanced down at her left hand that was resting on her lap. The pan that had flared up from the crest there was still vivid in her memory. She shouldn't have tried asking Rosa about her condition at all. She'd allowed her current mental state to get the better of her and done something stupid. Her words had been far too close to breaking the pact of noninterference she had made with the being inside the bard. If she had pushed things further, it wouldn't have ended well for either party.

"So... How's the practice going?" Rosa asked.

Scarlett looked up at her, and the woman gestured to where the earlier fire had created dark marks in the mud.

"Couldn't help but notice that it all looked a lot more *intense* than it usually does," Rosa said. "Almost scared the living daylights out of me at first. Thought the whole village might go up in flames."

Scarlett eyed the parts of the village square affected by her 'practice'. She had kept all of it a decent distance away from the buildings at least, so it wasn't as if there was an actual risk of her burning the village down. But the traces left on the ground were somewhat erratic.

"...It has been going okay," she eventually answered.

She was just having a hard time concentrating.

"Uh-huh, sure." Rosa smiled, holding the necklace back out to her. "Nice to see you're human as well. That austere look of yours used to have me think you didn't know what the W in 'worrying' stood for."

Scarlett received the necklace, storing it away with the [Charm of Expeditious Change].

Rosa pointed back to a small group of children sitting on the edge of the wooden stage at the center of the square, their legs dangling in the air as they stared at the two of them. "I should probably head back to those little scoundrels. They got scared by your training earlier and thought you were a crazy witch, so I made a bet whether you would gobble me up or not. I just won myself a free tour through their secret forest trail."

Scarlett raised an eyebrow at her. "Are you not already well acquainted with the surrounding area?"

The bard shrugged, then showed a sly smirk. "Sure, but they don't know that. There's nothing quite as amusing as watching the surprise on others' faces as they think you're a fortune teller of some kind. I know you agree."

Scarlett looked at her for a moment, then turned away as she waved her hand through the air. "I see. Then you may take your leave. I will not be needing your assistance for another few hours, at the very least."

"Alrighty then." It sounded as if Rosa made to leave, but then a few seconds of silence passed without any footsteps. "...You sure you'll be okay?" she asked after a while.

Scarlett shifted her gaze back to see the woman with a slightly worried furrow. "...Even if I were not, there is unfortunately not much you could do about it, Miss Hale."

A strange expression crossed Rosa's face for a brief second, but it was gone as soon as it had appeared. "Well, I'll see you later then. Toodles." She started walking away towards the waiting children.

Scarlett watched her leave, then turned back to look at the status window that she hadn't bothered dismissing. She had hoped that going to Freymeadow would help her calm down a bit after all that happened, but she wasn't sure if it had made much of a difference.

She clenched her fist. Even just thinking about it made the anger surge up again. Ever since arriving in this world, she had become somewhat used to being at the mercy of the original Scarlett's more negative emotions, but never before had she felt so powerless before them. Never had she felt herself lose *control* like this.

Days had passed since it all happened, and she *was still mad*.

The anger had lurked beneath the surface ever since then. When Gaven had basically admitted to trying to kill the Countess. After that, she wasn't even entirely sure of everything that had happened or what she had been thinking. It had all just been a mess of pure, unbridled rage and destruction like she had never experienced before.

And the worst part was that she wasn't even sure what she was angry *about*.

Was it the fact that Gaven had attacked the Countess, a trusting and innocent woman? Was it that he had essentially betrayed an ally of theirs? Was it because he had gone against Scarlett's order? Because he had *slighted* her? Or was it simply because she knew what happened was very much her fault, and she could have avoided it if she had taken the man's personality into further account?

She genuinely couldn't tell. It was infuriating. Maddening, almost. Both to not know her own thoughts, and to know that she could lose control of herself like that. She had almost burnt down an entire clearing before completely grasping the situation. Pushed a man to the brink of death before realizing that was what she was doing. And she knew, *knew*, that what happened after that couldn't be wholly blamed on the original Scarlett's traits.

The only silver lining in this whole situation was that Gaven's last words suggested the Countess could still be alive. He had poisoned her, but the woman had managed to use the artifact Scarlett gave her to teleport away before anything else happened. She was sturdier than one would expect, and she had access to powers not even Scarlett completely understood. Someone like her *could* survive being poisoned. Scarlett truly believed that.

Unfortunately, she didn't have the chance to stay around and look for the Countess at the time. She doubted the woman would *let* her after what happened. But that meant the Countess might currently be by herself, god-knows-where in the empire. Not only injured, but also betrayed by the man she had worked with—the man *Scarlett* had told her to work with—and without having succeeded in rescuing her sister from the Followers of Ittar. There was no telling what state of mind the Countess was in after all that, or what would happen if the wrong person ran into her.

Scarlett closed her eyes, taking several deep breaths as the emotions threatened to overtake her again. After she had calmed down a bit again, she glanced down at the marks her nails had left on her palm.

Whatever her actual feelings on the matter, she had to find the Countess again, no matter what. Even if not for the woman's own sake, she at the very least had to make sure the Countess didn't speak of what happened to anyone else. From there, she might be able to repair what was left.

From what she knew, the Followers hadn't publicly announced anything yet, which was good. She imagined they had to be in an uproar within their own circles, though. But they shouldn't have any reason to suspect her in particular for the heist. Her escape plan after fighting Gaven had worked without issue, it seemed. She and Garside had hidden inside a nearby dungeon she knew of before making their way back towards Silverborough without getting detected. A couple of trips through the Kilnstone had then brought them back to Freybrook with hopefully none the wiser.

But it was still a precarious situation. Ever since getting back, she had spent hours upon hours looking into how to locate the Countess after the fact. While they didn't have the time or opportunity to find her after Scarlett had caused such a large display, there were only so many places the woman could have gone at first. Scarlett had pored over maps and notes, trying to figure out which were the most likely, as well as written letters addressed to Beldon Tyndall and a couple of other people she was hoping could help discreetly. Unfortunately, there was no guarantee that the Countess would go to a place where there were people. The woman might both be paranoid and confused, so her actions were hard to predict.

And all the while this whole mess was going on, Scarlett had to prepare to attend the Tyndall ball that would take place in less than a week. Backing out now would probably be a bad idea. But there was also the real possibility that, if she did attend, she might lose her temper and accidentally light the first person who was rude to her on fire. And there were guaranteed to be people like that, considering her current reputation and social standing.

She was tired. There was so much to think about, and so much she was unsure of at the moment. Getting a decent night's sleep lately had been difficult, and concentrating was hard. Her magic was acting out, and because she had upgraded her [Superior Pyrokinesis] to [Major Pyrokinesis] in the heat of the moment, she had a hard time controlling the new skill. When she had been facing Gaven, controlling it had been like breathing, but now she just couldn't reach that same state. The fire kept doing whatever it wanted at even the briefest lapse in focus, and it was hard to perform even the simplest of exercises.

She glanced at what remained of her mana.

**[Mana: 356/2047]**

She could theoretically continue her current session if she wanted to. Using the newly stored mana in the [Depraved Solitude's Choker] would probably cause her to faint from exhaustion after just a couple of casts since it still used *some* of her own mana, but there was an alternative. [Ittar's Genesis], the divine tier artifact she had gotten from the Sanctuary of Ittar, didn't have that same limitation. In theory, if she used the mana inside that to fuel her magic, she could go on forever without worrying about mana exhaustion. It also replenished its

mana, so even when she emptied it, she only had to wait for about an hour or so for it to refill. Mental fatigue was still a thing, but that was easier to fight through for a while.

Although, in her current state, that would be a terrible idea. She could only barely control her mana as it was right now, so she could only imagine what might happen if she pushed herself even more. Not to mention that this village was the last place that you wanted to bring out one of the holy items of the Followers of Ittar.

Scarlett turned her head, looking up at the porch where Arlene sat by her lonesome. She *was* tired, but she didn't want to take a break either. It just made her mind drift even more than it already did. It was all too easy for her thoughts to wander back to Gaven.

But she didn't have much choice.

With slow, deliberate movement, she rose from her chair and began walking towards the house that Arlene was sitting in front of. The woman didn't look up from her book as Scarlett stepped onto the shaded porch. The cool air wafted over her as she sat down on the empty seat there.

"Doesn't seem to be going well for you," Arlene said in a casual tone.

Scarlett eyed her. "...No, it is not."

"It's to be expected, considering your flames have grown several times stronger than yesterday. Anyone progressing that fast would have difficulties. What's odd is that there seems to be something else causing you problems instead." The woman turned a page. "Most prospective teachers might have gotten annoyed that you were trying to hide your skill before, but luckily for you, I'm not *that* blind. It is a curious development, though."

Scarlett stayed quiet.

The last time they had been here was before the heist, so Scarlett's sudden growth would of course look strange to the woman. The last time Scarlett had upgraded her pyrokinesis, she told Arlene she had a 'revelation' that helped her, but something told her that excuse wouldn't work this time.

That was all well and good, though. She wasn't in the mood to try and come up with believable excuses. This current loop would only continue for two more days, so what did it matter?

"For a person who claims to not care much about others, you sure do seem to cause other to worry about you," Arlene said. "That companion of yours has been keeping a close eye on you since you arrived."

Scarlett looked back to the square, where Rosa had already left with the children. There could be several reasons why the bard had been paying attention to her.

She looked back at Arlene. "I do not believe I have ever claimed that I do not care about others."

“Hmm, no. I suppose that wasn’t exactly what you said. It wasn’t too far off, though.” The woman turned another page in her book. “That said, it surprises me to see you wallowing in your worries like this.”

“...What makes you think I am wallowing in worries?”

“I have eyes.”

Scarlett chose not to argue, even though it irked her to be described like that.

“I am not judging, mind you,” Arlene said. “You simply did not strike me as that type of person.”

“And what do you know of what type of person I am?” Scarlett stared at the woman. “You have yet to know me for two full days. Our previous conversation was far from enough for you to become familiar with who I am.”

Arlene looked up at her. “I know your type well enough.”

Their eyes met.

“I do not think that you do.”

Several seconds passed. Eventually, Arlene inclined her head slightly. “Then why don’t you enlighten me? What kind of person *are* you, truly? I am curious to know.”

Scarlett eyed her for a moment longer, then turned away. “That is not a question that I am able to answer.”

“You don’t know?”

She pressed her lips together. “...It is not something I speak with other about.”

“Then are you even sure of it yourself?”

Scarlett sent Arlene a small glare, but the woman just looked at her quietly.

“To me,” Arlene began, “it doesn’t sound like something you can’t speak about. It sounds like something you don’t *want* to speak about.”

“I...” Scarlett opened her mouth, but not much more came out. Arlene didn’t know exactly what she was asking.

There were a dozen reasons why she didn’t talk about who she was. About her real identity. There were a dozen reasons for why it would be a bad idea, even if she avoided telling the whole truth. And there was no one that *had* to know more than what she had shared already. No benefits in sharing her situation other than to confuse the other person and put herself at risk. So why would she do it? There was nothing to gain.

But...what did that matter here? It felt strange to think about it, but in a way, Arlene was already one of the people Scarlett had interacted the most with in this world. Despite that, the woman was also a stranger to her. And, more importantly, *she* was a stranger to Arlene. There was no actual connection between them. And...the woman would forget everything they spoke of here in a couple of days, anyway.

She took a deep breath, then met the woman's eyes. "I am not the real Scarlett Hartford."