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Chapter 271

After we finished playing around over bed, we decided to take a warm bath and relax, we had to assess things out and think what to do now, we were quite tired but the plans for the future ahead were not delayed or something, it was just a few hours of fun. We bathed together like we had never done before, the warm water was very comfortable, and Partner was quite aggressive in how much she kissed me in the bathroom, she's really a passionate girl... And I am honestly not that possessive, so I end up submitting to her passion quite easily. Maybe I like being in the receiving end.

"Mooch... Hahh... P-Partner, I think this is enough..."

"Master you're so precious... Let me kiss you a bit more..."

"Uwaah..."

At the end things escalated into some more lewd things... Partner ended playing with my entire body with her playful and devilish hands, and gave me a lot of pleasure. She was moving so dexterously that I began to doubt she used to be a pile of bones almost a year ago... However, at long last, I was freed from her hands and we quickly decided to walk outside after this... I was supposed to go eat lunch with everybody like half an hour ago.

When I took out the barrier which I had tried to make invisible, and we walked outside, I was greeted with Emeraldine and Lucifer... glaring me down angrily.

"What were you two doing? It's already time for lunch!" Said Emeraldine.

"I don't know why you had a barrier set up, did something bad happen?" Wondered Lucifer.

"Erm... Hahaha, nothing happened! I was just... We were practicing some crazy magic around so we had to make a barrier." I said.

"Yeah, I didn't wanted to destroy the manor." Said Partner.

"Oh, alright. Did your magic developed further?" Wondered Lucifer.

"I can make threads now! I think I could also replicate phantasmal flames like the ones your breath attack can make." I said with a smile. It seemed that Lucifer was captivated by such a smile, as he gave me a smile back.

"I see, you've grown pretty good at magic. Turning magic into threads? I never thought such a thing could even be possible... Also you seem to have learned the way to make phantom flames as well? That's also quite rare and intriguing, but quite honestly, I am more amazed at how pretty you look today."

"E-Eh? What with the flirting?" I asked.

"W-Well, I-I thought that would make you feel happy..." Sighed Lucifer, as he grew embarrassed. "Agh, I shouldn't try it."

"Eh? Nooo! I loved it!" I said. "You really mean it?"

"A-Ah, yeah... You look pretty today." He said with a charming smile.

Uwaah! I just came out of being loved by Partner for hours and now this handsome dragon is calling me pretty?! I really feel like I am in some sort of dating sim game now out of nowhere. I think I might have the most amazing harem.

"Heeh~? Lucifer! You're getting bolder!" Laughed Partner.

"Don't mock me..." Said Lucifer. "I-I just think it was the right thing to do... A-Am I a bit out of touch? Should I say something more... something that the people of nowadays say?"

"No, dear, I love it." I said. "I like your old styled way of speech. It is very charming."

"I-I see... That's good then." He said while crossing his arms and puffing his chest, it seems that whenever I praised my grumpy dragon, his ego grew a bit and he felt more dignified.

"Y-You're also looking very beautiful today, Maria-sama..." Sighed Emeraldine. "But I guess praising your beauty just doesn't make the same effect now that somebody else said it, right?"

"I think you're overthinking it, I am very happy to hear you said that." I said.

"Well, I still have to be more original... Oh! Your hair, it looks so silky..." She said. "And your eyes today look like two beautiful jewels! And did I mention that dress looks gorgeous?" Emeraldine was trying quite hard to make me feel happy with myself, and it worked pretty well, I felt like I was floating in cloud nine with all her praises, to the point I started giggling like an idiot.

"Hehehe, okay, stop it already! Why do you praise me so much, I am not even that pretty..." I giggled. "All three of you are way too pretty in fact..."

Suddenly, Lucifer, Emeraldine, and Partner blushed a bit, as they seemed to grow a bit nervous and embarrassed.

"A-Anyways, let's go eat." Said Lucifer.

"I agree..." Said Emeraldine.

"Food... I am starving... I want some blood too." Said Partner.

And like that, we went to eat some lunch, we prepared some different food today, now that we got some conventional meat, we decided to grill some big and meaty steaks, and I also did mashed potatoes, and some salad, a change of pace from the usual stew, although it was very cold so the food would get cold quickly, we hurriedly began eating before that were to happen.

"This steak, what is it?" Wondered Emeraldine.

"This steak is from Ice Bisson, it is a species of cow-like monster but its pretty big and can survive in this cold temperature very easily." I said. "The meat has a lot of fat, and it is rich in calories."

"H-Huh, I am already getting fat with having to eat so much to keep the warm..." Sighed Emeraldine. "Now I have to eat this fatty steak which is... Hmm... so good..."

"See? It is pretty good, you can't really escape it!" I laughed maliciously.

"Geez! You're really a villain when you want to, don't you, Maria-sama?" Cried Emeraldine.

"I am grateful that I don't get fatter, all the calories go into my tail." Said Lucifer.

"What? I didn't knew that!" I said.

"Well, Lizards, Dragons, and other species store calories in our tails, if they get fatter it means we are well feed and healthy." Said Lucifer.

"Interesting... I didn't knew that fact." I said while rubbing my chin.

Imagining Lucifer walking with a very thick tail now is something I want to see.

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After having prepared things for around three days, we were ready for going out now. We had taken another trip to the town of Snowfall, where we resupplied with more food, ingredients, and materials for the Greenhouse, which should be ready in a week or a bit more. Leaving all these supplies to the town, we felt like it would be enough until we came back. Although that town is pretty far away and the food they have is also limited, so I cannot really just go there and buy constantly, and I am also running low on money, we have spent most of it already in supplies and materials, and the only choice I got is

stealing money, which is not a good thing to do in an already very poor duchy such as Snowfall, I wouldn't really want to make these poor people lives even harder, so I won't steal.

Therefore, in search for more money, adventure, and also some more clues about my past, we have already decided to go to the Duchy of Affnaria, where we'll meet with the new Duchess, the niece of the previous Duke, who had been the one responsible for setting up my death by guillotine and ultimately died by my hands, this girl named Julia Memendin Albraun. I have forged a contract with her that I must fulfill, and therefore I must go back to her and see what I can do for her and the people in there, I know there are some shady business she's been tracking down, and I am pretty sure I am faster at finding crime as I am a ghost and can do all sorts of stuff that normal people can't. Especially getting through buildings and all of that.

"Are we ready then?" Asked Lucifer. He had gone back to his enormous dragon form, and he was going to give us a ride to the duchy of Affnaria, his speed of flight even surpasses my Shadow Transportation Skill, so he's ideal for transporting.

"Yeah, I think I've packed enough stuff." I said, as I saved the last provision inside of my Inventory.

"Please, take care!" Said Syllis.

"Don't get into danger..." Said Bellerine.

The two rabbit-kin had grown quite a lot since I first encountered them, Syllis had become a more responsible big brother to Bellerine, his little rabbit sister, and he had also begun to train into martial arts, using his swift body for fast movements. Meanwhile, he had also started practicing magic, although it seems that he hasn't reached that far, I've discovered that beast-kin have special types of magic known as Beast Magic, that can enhance their physical abilities or even summon spirit beast familiars, although those capable of using it are probably very rare, everybody seems to have that hidden potential. Bellerine is small but she's also practicing with her brother, and she seems way more adept at magic than him. Syllis is slowly gaining more self-confidence, and is an innate leader of his tribe, while Bellerine is enjoying her childhood more now that she's out of that forest, with the rest of the children.

"Yeah, we are going to be okay, don't worry. You two should take care of the rest of the rabbit-kin, so I am leaving all that work up to you." I said, Syllis and Bellerine nodded energetically.

"Take care, we'll keep the goblins organized." Said the Goblin Elder, the old man with a long beard seemed to still have some more life yet before kicking the bucket, probably he just needed a healthier diet to regain his strength.

"Yes, rest assured. I will also protect the town with my Hobgoblins, we are training every day to hone our strength to be more useful." Said the Goblin Chief.

"Auntie, don't go...!" Cried Gofumin.

"I'm sorry dear, but I have to go. It is something important that I must do... But you can take care of yourself, right? You're a big girl! The other day you were smacking that tree trunk with a sword, right?" I asked with a smile. Over this time Gofumin had been having a small growth spur and she had become slightly taller, enough for her to attempt to learn sword technique by smacking a tree with a tiny and light sword.

"I will become strong like mama and papa, and I will find mama one day!" Said Gofumin.

"...I see. I will watch over you then. And it's not like I am leaving, a part of me is always protecting all of you. I am leaving the goblins to you guys too, I know I can trust you." I said, as the phantom snakes flew around me.

"For sure, if anything happens we'll talk to you through the snakes as well." Said the Goblin Chief.

"Hm! That's the spirit." I said with a smile.

"Hey! Why are you not letting us go with you?!" Asked Catarina, reaching up to me angrily.

"Eeh? But you're strong! You have to keep in here so you can protect the people, Catarina... Remember that you said you would do anything for me?" I asked while crossing my arms.

"I-I never said that..." Said Catarina while averting her gaze. I smiled teasingly as I provoked her to blush for a bit.

“You sure did~ Now, don’t be so stubborn and protect this people that you’ve grown so close to.” I said. The grumpy Vampire girl had gone through a lot when she was alive, and although she died quite gruesomely, she had changed into a new leaf now that she was given the opportunity to be free, even though she’s technically dead now.

“Okay... Sure. Whatever...” She said, walking away angrily, she seemed to not want to look at my face anymore.

“We’ll miss you!”

“Please summon us whenever you need some fire!”

Silvio and Francesco, the two former Vampires subordinates of Catarina who had become fire ghosts seemed to be about to cry tears of flames as we departed.

“Haha, don’t worry, if we ever need more backup, I’ll summon you guys with Catarina.” I said while petting their heads.

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I have the Summon Skill, with it, I can summon any ally, either raised undead or someone “below” my protection to my side, it pretty much allows them to be teleported to my side even if they are in the other side of the world, of course, I cannot unsummon them and throw them back or something, so if I ever summon them to my side, they’ll have to go back on their own or just stick with me, so unless I am in a big pickle where I really need support, I won’t summon them, as I want the ghosts and Catarina to protect our town from anything dangerous that might happen.

“So you’re going out, huh? We’ll get you done the greenhouse before you come back.” Said Darfu.

“Yeah, go ahead, we’ll get it done by then.” Said Baldur.

“We’ll make some more houses after we get that done, probably we’ll build some more security.” Said Balladur. “I had been thinking on repairing the walls and making a new door for them.”

“What? Isn’t that a lot of work though?” I asked.

“Well you got the personnel for it, look at all these skeleton and zombies walking around, I am sure they can help us out.” Said Baldur.

“So go ahead, missy, we’ll get it done when you come back.” Said Balladur.

“To think that the only thing you two lazy twins needed to get moving was some booze... Well, good thing I went to buy again to replenish the reserves... Thought its taking a big hit into my finances, you two cost a lot to maintain!” I sighed.

“Hahahahahaha!”

The two dwarves began to laugh without answering anything else, and Darfu gave me an apologetic smile. These two guys are really quite something... But they’re competent, so I cannot really say they don’t deserve their booze.

“Now that we are done we should get going... Before it’s too late.” Said Lucifer.

“Yeah, you’re right... But too late for what?” I wondered.

“Mister Dragon!”

“Papa dragon!”

“Dragooooon!”

“Lizard!”

“Big lizard!”

“Agh...” Sighed Lucifer, covering his face in embarrassment, as a dozen of children ran to his side and began playing around his giant body, climbing his tail and arms, as they seemed to be sad that he was going away.

“Oooh! So it was the kids you didn’t wanted to see... Hey, isn’t that super cruel? Have a heart and tell them that you’re coming back soon!” I said angrily.

“I-It’s... Okay...” He sighed. Lucifer looked at the children as he seemed to act gentle and compassionate.

“Children, I am going out now, for an important mission, so please don’t climb on me...” He sighed.

“Luci, where are you going?”

“I... I am going to a far away kingdom to defeat some evil guys, so you all better behave while I am not here!” Said Lucifer.

“Okaaay!”

“I’ll miss you!”

“BUAAAAH! Don’t go!”

Some children were okay with it, while a few began to cry out loud, Lucifer had to pet them all gently with his giant dragon claws and his tail, until they calmed down when we offered them some caramel-covered fruits.

“You would make a good dad, don’t you?” I laughed while sitting on his lap.

“D-Don’t joke with something like that!” He said while seemingly embarrassed, but it was hard to tell when he was a giant dragon.

Lucifer quickly spread out his wings as he began to flap them rapidly, quickly carrying us over the skies as we started to fly across the clouds. The town became smaller and smaller from the skies, as I noticed the floating island we saw some time ago, it was still in almost the same position as before, I think.

“That island is still there, isn’t it?” Said Lucifer.

“Yep, it seems that it doesn’t even move from there, what’s up with that place?” I wondered.

“Oh, I never saw that thing! Floating Island? Is that how it’s called? It’s just a big chunk of land floating in the sky...” Said Partner.

“Precisely dear, that’s what it is.” I said.

“Floating Island... They’re a rare occurrence, but it is said that in other continents they’re more common, perhaps in the continent of Niflheim, where we elves originate from.” Said Emeraldine.

“Oho? So they’re from that continent then? Do you know their origin?” I wondered.

“My mother used to tell me tales about floating islands before bed...” Said Emeraldine, as she seemed to smile tenderly by recalling those memories. “She said that this world was once dominated by titans, enormous people that walked amongst the land and said to be the parents of the giants. Their very steps flattened the land and made the world tremble... In those times, the sky and the earth were unstable, and as they marched across the world, they kicked mountains that got in their way, these mountains instead of falling began to float instead, becoming floating islands... In the past the world was filled with them, but after the titans were defeated by the gods, the floating islands were destroyed in such a war, and now they’re very rare.”

“Wow... That was more than just a simple tale, isn’t it?” I wondered.

"Well yes, it is part of the religion of the Elves, a small tale told to the children about the past. Religion always tries to explain the existence of things after all." Said Emeraldine. "My mother told me that tale when we saw a floating island once, it was different than this one, it was a floating island covered on ice, with a big mountain on top... I still recall it quite clearly, every time that island passed across the skies, it would snow and get very cold. Some said that it was the palace of the Goddess of Snow, Skadi. And that she brought Winter by traveling across the world and spreading the unforgiving coldness of ice and snow... I think they were partially right, after we saw that island, it began to snow for months until winter ended."

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The Floating Island of Skadi was an interesting tale, it seems that the Elves had come out with all sorts of stories to explain things, although that island... Was that actually real? I wonder if Emeraldine thought she saw something or if she really saw it, but I don't want to insult her by telling her that I don't believe her or something, so I will just believe her words and imagine that it would be a pretty incredible place. I wonder if Gods would actually wander around the world leisurely... I know that Hel is confined in Helheim, but what about the other Gods? How much freedom do they have to walk on the land?

If they really got the freedom to walk on the land as they please, why they don't do it more commonly? Perhaps their very strength could crush the land or destroy it? Or perhaps there is another truth behind it? Well, according to her lore, the titans used to roam the world and they destroyed it by merely walking, maybe they got tired after fighting them. Or whatever was the case, there no point in overthinking things I couldn't find a solution for.

"Well, the cold here is certainly not because of a floating island with snow on it!" Said Partner. "I think the Frost Queen could have something to do, isn't it? How is that ghost that you said was killed by her?" Partner spoke about something and quickly reminded me of that story.

"Oh! Veredorr! Yeah, he's with me, alongside Kuro, Raven, and even Pyro, I brought them all with me... Veredorr is still mostly sleeping for now, but sometimes he wakes up." I said. "I don't want to bother him, as he's going through some sort of metamorphosis with his phantom body, he's slowly turning into some sort of new ghost type monster."

"I-I see... Well, I guess we can bother him all we wanted later when he wakes up." Said Partner.

"Will he become an ice ghost?" Wondered Emeraldine.

"That's my idea, but I don't really know..." I said. "But assuming how the flame ghost came to be, it could be a possibility. An ice ghost or maybe a snow ghost or something..."

"But why is he taking so long compared to the flame ghost?" Asked Emeraldine.

"It is mostly due to the mental damage he got, it is taking him a long time to reform himself into a being that can interact with the world and everything else, it is a hard task to do for him so we have to help him out as much as possible... by letting him sleep! How easy, isn't it?" I laughed.

"I think that's way too easy!" Said Partner.

"I guess everybody can recover in different ways..." Sighed Emeraldine. "Perhaps it hurt him deeply that his friend died as well, and that his friend's sister ended going insane with that crown, killing him at the end... And that's without saying for how long he could had been frozen."

"Hm, well, if you're going to talk about that Frost Queen, I really going to say that she really is suspicious. Who else with crazy ice powers is there? I believe she could have something to do with the people of the Demon Kingdom getting frozen." Said Lucifer.

"I also think that too to be honest... And it still confusing in many things, the people of Snowfall was fine and they were not attacked, and the Kingdom was also okay, so how come she hasn't attacked them if she's so wicked? It really doesn't make any sense, isn't it?" I wondered. "So how come she did this to the demons but not to anybody else? What could have the demons done that they provoked her fury?"

"..."

Lucifer fell in silence, thinking about a reason, but because we were not here in those times, he couldn't really come out with any answer. He felt a bit embarrassed with himself, I could clearly tell, for saying such a thing without thinking it twice. But that's how things are.

"Could the Frost Queen have appeared in the past?" Wondered Emeraldine. "Or... Lucifer, do you remember any of the people we saw frozen?"

"...I don't. They were all new faces, it seems they were the last descendants of the Majin that survived and were inhabiting this place, although the castle seemed abandoned and there was no person frozen inside, so perhaps they were just a mid-scale village living inside the ruins." He said. "Nonetheless, I would say they were frozen a few years ago, but not longer than ten years."

"I see... I wonder if it could match with the time of the dhampir's narrative... We'll have to investigate when he wakes up." I said. "In fact, he's getting a lot of questions when he wakes up, I hope he can answer them all as best as possible."

As we moved across the skies, Lucifer accelerated his pace and we began to cross the skies at an even faster speed, in a few hours we would reach Affnaria, as he knew the route already and he was confident in reaching the place in time.

The new duchess of the Affnaria Duchy was sighing in exhaustion, looking down at several papers in front of her, she had been working extensively to process all sorts of transactions that her duchy had been doing with many other merchants, it has been a tiring day for her, but she knew that this was what she had to do for the better of her duchy and of her people, she was very tired, but this was the right thing at the end of the day, or so she believed relentlessly, and continued to believe as she moved forward into her hard work.

She had been staying in this office for three days in a row, with barely any bathroom and snack break, and without sleeping at all while sustaining herself with Energy Potions, that could keep people awake for days but would exhaust them tremendously.

"Ugh, Maria... When are you coming back?"

Within the streets of the Affnaria Duchy at night a shady group of people wandered, covered in black robes while carrying a bag with certain illegal products, drugs.

Since the death of the Duke Allan that the entire Duchy had begun to fall apart, and without a proper leader, people began to become restless, business started to fall one after the other, and the entire place became filled with delinquents, becoming a nest for illegal activities of all types.

Although Duke Allan had done something unforgivable to Maria and was killed by her for it, he had been a good Duke, he protected his duchy and was working hard to make it flourish. In the past this place used to be even worse, but he ended driving off a lot of the bandits and thieves living here, while allying another factions to keep the place in order, he had to nasty his hands and create connections with the worst of the worst, even including Vampires themselves, all so his Duchy could keep itself afloat and thrive.

However, he protected the people and kept them happy, he made business flourish for the most part, and although his Duchy had become a place where illegal items were produced by a dark organization led by Vampires, the rest of the place had become a decent town and it would continue to become better as he continued selling the products and gaining a part of the earnings, all while also making connections with many other merchants and duchies.

He had not been in fault of the entire problem that happened to Maria's life, and he had simply been given orders to capture and execute her when she had arrived at his duchy, he barely knew anything about her but decided to use her as a way for people to harbor their hate into and kill her off. This was a strategy that was always used by rulers and religious people, making someone the blame of every sin or evil in the world and make the people harbor their hate to them, often it was the leader of a group of people which they intensively hated, making the population target their hate and the blame of everything to this group of people instead than the own government that was behind everything at the end.

Allan managed to put Maria in fault for things that had been happening, saying that she had cursed the entire duchy because she was called a witch by the Kingdom that wanted her dead now that they had taken away the treasure of her family, and decided to kill her off in front of everybody so they would be pleased. The happiness of his people was important so they would have the energy to keep striving and living in the poor conditions that commoners -his major source of income- lived through.

But when he got killed off by the ghost of the very woman he framed and guillotined, the duchy was left barebones and everybody panicked, a lot of the population started moving out, even other nobles decided to move to a better duchy, leaving the duchy with only poor commoners and barely any business to maintain the economy... And in a whim, while Julia learned about the death of the uncle she hated, who was the one that bullied her mother the most when she was younger, she ended being given the title of duchess.

This was obviously a set up as well, the family of nobles were all wicked, killing one another through schemes and false accusations was commonplace, and that didn't changed in the vast royal family, whose children of the King were plenty. Each child had a duchy for themselves, and most of them had a descendant, except the Duke Allan who was a lonely man and never found a woman capable of loving him, and it wasn't as if he had not gotten arranged marriages, but he ignored these concubines and decided to live by himself, he always believed that a woman would only steal his money.

Julia was given the title of Duchess before even reaching 18 years of age because she was the most competent amongst the "favorite" grandchildren of the King. Because her mother was the daughter of the King and had a good relationship with him, her daughter was obviously favored. However, the King usually gives an order and leaves the rest to do everything else, he doesn't even plan things, leaving all the details to others, making Julia's uncles and the children of her uncles to scheme against her, putting her into the poorest and most terrible duchy there was, Affnaria, all while scheming to fill her duchy with all sorts of illegal activities and even those with connections with the vampires didn't waited to tell them to go storm the place and use it however they pleased. Their ultimate goal was to stress her out, make her live hell, and then kill her off after a few years when the King could have forgotten about her.

Without such a talented girl in the royal family anymore, the other grandchildren of the king had greater opportunities to become dukes themselves, or even princes and princesses, which then would have the chance to ascend to a King whenever this old man were to kick the bucket...

"Please... I need it... The black pills... D-Do you got some more?! Whenever I take them, I feel so strong, I feel like I am somebody...!"

A man on his twenties, completely ruined and wearing tattered clothes approached one of the figures wearing black robes, carrying on his hand a few copper coins and a silver coin, and giving them to the black robbed man that extended the palm of his hand.

"Here, make sure to go crazy... Kukuku..." The black robbed man gave a pitch-black pill to the young man on the streets, who quickly devoured the pill and swallowed it.

“Ahh... S-Sweet release... Hahahaha! AAAHAHAHA!”

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We reached the outskirts forest of the Affnaria Duchy, where my entire journey began, I glanced around my surroundings finding that there was nobody around, and we quickly descended into the ground as the night came. There were nobody around, I believe, so it was fine for us to move to the ground.

BOOM!

The enormous body of Lucifer hit the ground, as he sat down and let us jump down into the floor. I watched at the beautiful starry sky, and the surroundings were all calm, my own aura probably scared any sort of wild beast, but it is bad if I scare everybody, so I tried to suppress my presence.

“And here we are! Where everything started.” I said with a smile.

“Wow, it has been a while...” Said Partner.

“I wasn’t here at the beginning of your journey, so I feel a bit bad... I guess I lack that feeling of nostalgia.” Sighed Emeraldine.

“It is fine, you’re still part of the main team.” I said.

“Hm, this accursed town where we killed that devil in the form of a human... I suppose it is being taken care by a girl that actually cares about doing what’s right now, so it is not so bad.” Said Lucifer.

I think Lucifer was talking about the duke we killed back then, oh yeah, that one guy I really hated him, I am still hating him even after killing him, I guess that’s part of being a resentful ghost lady.

We began to walk across the forest while leisurely chatting, until we reached the entrance to the duchy, my appearance had been changed since I evolved, so I didn't look at all like I was once shown to look like after becoming a ghost, I doubt anybody would recognize me, to be honest.

I had already come here after my evolution too, and nobody recognized me, the girl, Julia, didn't recognize me either, so it was all fine and dandy for me to do as I please and enter it. I still had my adventurer card which I was going to use to pass through, Partner, Lucifer, and Emeraldine got their own cards as well, so it is all okay.

When we reached the doors, there were five guards guarding it, all of them seemed to be young men on their mid-twenties with strong bodies and physiques, their Levels were around twenty and thirty, so they were rather experienced and had slain a large quantity of monsters. Humans don't seem to be able to evolve as other races and have a set amount of level cap they have, it is said that they can surpass it through special methods when they reach it, but it is usually set at Level 100, some untalented ones could have a cap of 50, and those that have no talent would be between 20 or 30. Although these young men had been slaying beasts for a long time and had yet to reach their cap level, most of them were between cap of 80 to 100, a talented one had a cap of 120, so he had yet to reach his full potential.

Based on blessings, they can be given greater level caps and enhance their power further through leveling up. And even if they reach level cap, they can still develop and learn skills, and level them up or even awaken them if they reach a certain level of comprehension and mastery over it. Nonetheless, there is an easier way to tell a person's strength without calculating stats, danger level. Even humans got one in their status, and these guys were all D- or D+, nothing to be afraid of, but actually quite strong, the normal soldier is barely E or F+.

"Hey there, you're here very late in the night, do you want to enter the duchy?" Wondered one of the soldiers, the friendly one that they probably send to talk with shady people.

"Yep, can we get in?" I wondered. "I swear we are nice people." I said with a smile while nodding.

"I think that only makes us more suspicious..." Said Lucifer.

"Maria-sama, I think your ability to socialize had become even worse." Said Emeraldine.

"Ahh..." I sighed.

"S-Sure, you all look like... quite the party, you're wearing expensive-looking clothes, aren't you? Are you nobles? Why are you not in a carriage? Or are you adventurers?"

"We are! Here is my card." I said.

I showed the soldier my card as he inspected it with his eyes. He looked at it and then covered it on magic, until a sudden magic circle on it glowed brightly.

"Ah, it is authentic, alright, miss Maria, you can pass..." Said the soldier. "Though going out into the wild at this hour... And you're still F Rank?" He wondered.

"Yeah! W-What's wrong with that?!" I asked nervously while crossing my arms. "I-I am a competent adventurer! I help the people! Occasionally... I am also a dark witch so don't mess with me." I smiled at the man mischievously, but he laughed off, he didn't understand I was strong and immediately assumed I was a weak person based in my adventurer rank.

"Hahaha, you're a cute lady, you can pass." He said.

He quickly checked on everybody else and nodded.

"All of you are authentic I guess, F-Rank Adventurers traveling such long distances by yourselves though? From where did you came from?" He wondered.

"I was blessed by the goddess of death, so we were guided by fate to come here without facing many difficulties." I said with a smile.

"T-The goddess of death? Now that's new... I guess you're lying." He laughed. "Don't say such jokes in front of a priest, missy, or you're going to get scolded!"

"I am not joking! Uurrghh! Want me to show you something good?! Hahaha!" I laughed maliciously, he had almost made me blast his head off with a Darkness Sphere, but Lucifer and Partner grabbed me by

the arms and carried me inside the town, while Emeraldine put herself in front of me while apologizing to the soldiers...

“Ugh! Unhand me! I will give him a lesson!”

“Yeah, yeah, sure...”

“Calm down...”

“Now, now, don’t make a scene...”

Chapter 277

...At the end, I was unable to show off, but that’s fine. I think I ended going a bit angry there. As I said, I got crazy mood swings sometimes, I have to calm myself and control them properly before I end up killing people that don’t deserve it, being mocked, or doubted is natural if I am trying to make up a cover after all, I have to accept it and move on with something else, I cannot just stay there thinking about how he offended me and... Urgh! I am going to kill him when- No, I have to calm down. Okay, let’s breathe and count to ten, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, nine, ten. Done... Wait, I think I missed the eight. Well, whatever, I feel much better now.

“Maria, you have to calm down sometimes, don’t let your anger consume you!” Said Emeraldine.

“Yeah, you’re way too crazy sometimes.” Sighed Lucifer.

“You’re also insane!” I said angrily.

“Master, look, a tavern! Let’s go eat yummy food together.” Said Partner.

“Ooohh! Alright!” I said.

“See? You can calm her down like that.” Said Partner.

“I feel like your roles suddenly reversed.” Said Partner.

“Oh so I am not the only one.” Said Lucifer.

“I can hear you!” I screamed.

We made our way into the tavern where we were greeted by a bunch of Adventurers, Mercenaries, and ugly people, there were some pretty people in some groups, mostly the youthful adventurers, the other old people were all ugly guys with stereotypical ugly faces. But being ugly doesn't mean you're a bad person. I used to be ugly in my previous life and I considered myself a good person! I didn't hurt anybody, I didn't went around trying to harm people or something either, I was living on my own with my family.

We walked inside the tavern as I ignored the people, and we sat down around a small table, a girl came to serve us and we asked for whatever was today's special, ending up giving us a very nice portion of roasted chicken breasts, with chicken broth, two boiled potatoes, a piece of bread, a slice of cheese, and a pretty okay mug of wine. It was the food of champs, and it was pretty simple food, but it has been a while since I ate chicken meat! It is so expensive in the snow lands, but in here it seems to be cheap, this entire plate cost only around 20 coppers and you can refill the mug with wine for a coper coin too.

“Oh wow, this chicken is very simple but I really missed the taste! Bird meat is really not that similar... The Snowbird we caught were so rough, and the broth wasn't that good either.” Sighed Emeraldine

“I agree, it wasn't the best thing we could had eaten back then, but it was still decent! Don't be like that.” I laughed.

“I guess it was okay but this chicken is in another level!” Said Partner. “Oh! I wonder if there are eggs?”

“We should buy some.” Said Lucifer. “With eggs we could make pastries, pancakes, cake, and so on...”

"Oh right! I guess you miss my pancakes?" I laughed.

"We only ate them like once or thrice but I do miss them... I like your cooked food." Said Lucifer.

"Awww! You like mommy's food? Fufu..." I giggled motherly.

"I-I am not your child!" Cried Lucifer, while blushing a bit, my mother play seemed to have embarrassed him, maybe it awakened something on him too.

"The potatoes are filling, coupled with the slice of cheese and the bread piece too, and the wine helps get it all down. It is quite sweet compared to others that are higher quality in the Snowfall duchy..." Analyzed Emeraldine.

"I like the wine, it is sweeter, I like sweet things." Said Partner. "Though, do they sell desserts?" Partner seemed curious as if they sold any sweets here to eat after the savory stuff.

"I don't know. Hey girl!" I said, calling the girl, she was a cute country girl with brown haired braids and cute emerald eyes, she was around her late teens I believe, and many of the men here constantly eyed her and asked for her attention while flirting with her, but she seemed used to their play.

"Yes, missy? Want a wine refill?" She asked cutely.

"No, dear, for now not. I was wondering if you got any sweets for my sweet-toothed girl over here." I said, pointing at Partner.

"Hm, we got apple pie! Want a slice? It is six copers for one, it is quite expensive compared to a plate of food because apples are more expensive, but they still sell quick, we got around three last slices." Said the girl.

"I want all three then!" I said happily.

“O-Okay! I’ll bring it here.” She said, as she took my copper coins and went back to the kitchen, after two minutes, she came back with a plate with three slices of apple pie, they were quite big in size, and looked so nice, I was missing pastries like these that are so rare in Snowfall!

Partner quickly began to dig in, but then we were left in a problem, there were only two slices and there were three of us left... We either sacrifice one of us for the others, or do some weird slicing thing to share.

“Okay, I won’t eat, you guys can eat.” I said.

“Eh? We wouldn’t...!” Said Lucifer.

“B-But Lady Maria...” Said Emeraldine.

“Don’t worry, I will take little chunks from both of you with my spoon, hehe.” I giggled.

We ended enjoying the food rather thoroughly, and the girl then told me that they sold eggs in the other side of the town where she also buys the chicken meat, so we went there but it was closed due to being so late. I resisted the urge of entering and stealing eggs, and decided to move to an inn, tomorrow we’ll go meet Julia in her castle I guess, there’s no hurry.

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Chapter 278 The Mysterious Drug

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“More... More...”

“Uugh... It hurts...”

“Give me more...”

The voices of people in seemingly agony resonated across the dark streets of the Duchy of Affnaria, as the people were already inside their homes at night, their groans of pain and insanity could only be heard by the rats wandering in the streets, or by the small children, who would have nightmares about them.

These people used to be mercenaries, or even adventurers, normal citizens, farmers, or other things, normal people that were stressed by the harsh daily lives of this ruined Duchy after the death of the Duke, even with the new young duchess working hard to lift up the economy and combat crime, people's moods were down the ground..

Due to this, many of them were tempted to "feel good for a small price" some would just go to brothels and have fun with prostitutes, others would try to eat tasty food, but others would go even more extreme, when sex nor food could satisfy them and they felt like dying by how miserably they felt... they would then take another option.

People began to appear in the streets of Affnaria some months ago, people wearing black robes with eerie voices. Some of their eyes sometimes shone red, and they only showed up in the night. They were often pale skinned, and smiled rather devilishly, but to those people already drowned in alcohol, it didn't mattered.

"Hye, do you want something to feel better, this is a drug that only the nobles are taking, they say it helps them feel good... Want a taste? Free of charge."

They began offering strange, black-colored pills or even small little flasks with a black substance inside. The people doubted them at first, but those that were already lost began to take them. They were bitter but with some alcohol, anything went down... After a few seconds, unexplainable ectasis hit them, they saw hallucinations of things they wanted, sometimes they were good things, and others were bad things, but this addictive feeling continued lingering within their minds, and after they healed the next morning, they would feel the undying crave for more.

Over time, as they consumed more of them, they began to ask for money, the providers were then given all what their clients had and smiled maliciously as they saw them happy. Of course, the more they consumed this strange drug, the more they wanted it. It was an undying desire for more, it could even be said to be quite greedy... and they developed malicious desires, they stole from people to get more money, and assaulted people at night when they lost their reason.

The guards of the duchy were capturing these people every night, and it was becoming problematic as the cells of the dungeon were getting filled with people drugged, the Duchess was being overwhelmed by all the work, and didn't know what to do. These people were being drugged and made addicted over a magical drug that made these people go insane... She had yet to even catch the people selling these products, but she was slowly figuring things out.

However, the pressure of more people showing up every night was still there, and she was forced to free those that were showing signs to be at least healthy, as they were citizens and not really guilty of anything. She had interrogated some of them, but had barely gotten any responses from them, they seemed to be showing schizophrenia and even losing memories in fragments.

But from what she gathered, people said they were pale, had red eyes, and seemed to only show up at night... Some were described to have seductive voices and long, black nails... Julia didn't know what sort of people these could be, as she had no idea about the differences between races as a young girl that had barely studied the most basic information about the races of Midgard. But she was slowly tying things together on her own... Her soldiers were strong and they were dedicated to her and the duchy, but would that be enough to protect her and also the people of the duchy?

"More...!"

"Ahhh..."

"Unngh..."

After eating in the tavern and filling our bellies, we decided to walk to an Inn, where we decided to stay the night in there. In our way there, we saw some drunk people on the streets, it was surprising to see that there were also women and not only ugly men, but these girls looked like... Well, they looked like prostitutes, their clothes, the way they were dressed, and the way they were addressing the other drunks... Wow, this duchy had gone to the worst. I really wouldn't care for it if it wasn't for Julia though. I am partially in fault for how things ended here now... However, I didn't really care before coming here again and then meeting Julia when I was just trying to save some slaves.

She enlightened me and gave me hopes for a brighter future for this rotten society, this girl was really sweet and brilliant, and I really wanted to see how far she could go as a Duchess... And because of the good things she did for me, I feel indebted for her, and I began to once more care for this duchy...

"Look, there's a lot of homeless people..." Sighed Emeraldine. "Can't they afford an Inn?"

"They spent all their money into alcohol, most likely." Said Lucifer. "These people are lost."

"Ugh, so stinky..." Sighed Partner.

"More...! Give me more!"

Suddenly, as we passed near a alleyway, an old man with a bald head and eyes that were completely white jumped towards Emeraldine, grabbing her from the stomach.

"Give me more! G-Give me your money!" He roared, taking out a knife and pointing it at her.

"Eeeh?! G-Get off me!" Roared Emeraldine. Before I could smack the old man into the ground, Emeraldine gave him a kick in the chin and knocked him out in an instant.

BOOM!

"G-Gahh..."

Chapter 279 Several Negative Status Effects

Emeraldine easily dealt with a drunk old man in the streets that came with a knife asking her for money out of nowhere, was that a thief? Well, he got beaten down easily!

Right, she might be a magician but her Strength stat still increases over time while leveling... Huh, she's strong enough to not get assaulted by people in the streets at least, and if that doesn't work, she can vaporize them with a light beam.

"Uuugh... Gahhh...!"

The old man slowly tried to stand up, his eyes looked so white it was a bit frightening, what's up with him? I checked his status and suddenly found something weird.

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[Name: [Alfredo Rockbelt Handfree]

[Status: [Exhausted], [Drugged], [Hallucinating], [Confused], [Memory Loss]

[Race: [Human] [Job: [Mercenary].

[Level: [6/50] [Rank: [H]

[HP: [39/55]

[MP: [11/20]

[Attack: [29]

[Defense: [16]

[Magic: [10]

[Agility: [33]

Wait, what? What with those Status? [Exhausted], [Drugged], [Hallucinating], [Confused], AND [Memory Loss]?! How come he can be inflicted with so many at the same time, is this what drinking alcohol makes people when they get drunk? No, wait, he doesn't have the [Drunk] Status either... What's even going on in here? He's certainly not drunk then... What's... with his Drugged status? Did he consume drugs?

I looked at the man rather worriedly, but Emeraldine was going to kick him again, but I stopped her, she looked at me with surprise, thinking I was going to just let her smack him again.

"W-Wait! Wait, Emeraldine, this guy is drugged... Let me inspect him a bit more..."

"Eh? What? O-Okay..." She said.

I looked at the man rather concerned, it was true, he was indeed drugged and looked quite terrible right now, he looked as if he was going through some extreme pain for some reason... Ah, well, my Emeraldine hit him quite hard.

I looked into his status and found what Drugged was...

[Drugged]

The user has ingested a highly toxic man-made drug, which has caused a series of negative status effects. This status effect represents the user's addiction to the drug.

Um, ok? It doesn't say what drug is though! Uagh! Damn it, how can I get to find which drug is it though?! Tell me more, System! Analyze him!

<Analyzing...>

<The target seems to be being inflicted with a curse of some sort which doesn't show as a status because it is deeply ingrained on his system and spread through it all... It also has high concentrations of miasma, corrupted mana... This is not a normal drug, but I cannot really find anything else> The handsome voice of the system answered, he seemed quite concerned as well.

Huh... I guess we can't really do much now, eh? Well, let's leave him here...

"Emeraldine, he seems sick, can you heal him?" I wondered.

"I-I can try, but I wouldn't really want to heal someone that just tried to assault me!" She complained.

"...True, well, let's leave him to die or something, it's not like I feel emotionally attached to the old man." I said, leaving him to his own fate.

We walked slowly to the Inn, as Lucifer looked at me while raising an eyebrow... I couldn't help but ask him why he was looking at me so angrily.

"What?"

"You showed to be worried but then just kind of dropped him into the ground?" He asked.

"Eh? I was only worried about the drug, not about the random old man!" I said.

"My Lady is like this; she doesn't care about people." Said Partner.

"I mean I know she's not that empathic with random people unless they're slaves or something, but still, your mentality sometimes is weird." He said.

"Well yeah I died." I said. "I am a bit crazy inside, my nature by itself is wicked but I try to not be wicked if possible. Remember the primary reason why ghosts are formed? We are made out of resentment... So... Well, I am kind of insane all the time, if I stop being like this, I might disappear for all we know."

"Eeeh?! No, I don't want you to disappear, Master!" Cried Partner, as she hugged me tightly.

"P-Partner, I am joking!" I sighed, as I petted her. "Calm down..."

"W-Well, if we put it into perspective, she got angry at him because he tried to stab me, Lucifer..." Sighed Emeraldine. "Also, we came here to help the duchy and the new Duchess... So that's include that guy, leaving him there is the convenient thing to do, picking him up like we did with the slaves before is not convenient now that we plan to stay for some time in here, we are not in the move to carry poor people without the ability to do things yet... And honestly I don't care about drunkards that assault women."

"Okay, I get it, I am not defending that random guy either, so let's calm down..." Sighed Lucifer. "I shouldn't had even asked this stupid question... I know Maria is a good person, but being a good person doesn't mean saving literally everybody, it is just trying to do what we can."

"Yeah! Good thinking, I don't really know what's the definitive meaning of being "good" and I do have some wicked sides to me, but I honestly just try to be nice most of the time, since the beginning that I helped you when I could had just ignored you, remember?" I asked.

"Yes, I remember, or when you helped the goblins too..." Sighed Lucifer. "You're indeed a good girl. You just have a strong bias against humans."

"Yeah, I am a bit biased against humans but I am trying to overcome this..." I sighed. "I used to be one too, so I have to think that when I get too overly stupid."

After the little discussion, we made our way into a simple Inn; we bought a room with two beds on it and we moved there. My Inventory was able to easily store things, another bed quickly came out, and

then a last one from it, placing them in the room so everybody could sleep in a bed... And then we decided to rest until morning...

Chapter 280 Arachne 1

“Snek! Snek!”

A little girl began to chase me down in my snake ghost form. She was incredibly fast for her small size, and her aura was quite incredibly powerful as well. It would be a cute scene nonetheless, if it wasn't because we were inside a large cave-like dungeon surrounded by giant black spiders walking everywhere while carrying prey they caught.

This place is indeed quite frightening, and every time I got to sleep, I concentrate my mind in the clone I left here to interact more with the sweet little baby that is here, the Arachneia Empress, as I call her.

“Gryshia...! You caught me!”

“I caught chu! Hehehe...”

The girl caught me snake form and squeezed it with all her strength, but because I was phantasmal, I was able to resist it, and even when I couldn't...!

POOF!

I simply exploded into phantom and then reshaped myself into a snake atop her head, materializing once more.

“Hehehe! Squeeze!”

The girl grabbed me again and began to squeeze me, until I exploded one more and then rematerialized once more atop her head.

“G-Grishi... I’m tired... Don’t do it again...”.

“Ohh... Sowy...”

The little girl grabbed me with her tiny hands and smiled. She had eight beautiful spider-like eyes. Six over her forehead were smaller than the more human-like ones in her face, she had long black hair made into braids, and was wearing a white dress made of spider silk. She was so small she looked to be around her 7 years of age.

She was the Arachneia Empress, the girl I have been both spying and interacting with since we left the forest where the Rabbit-kin were living in. Instead of choosing to confront her and her army of spiders, I ended deciding to not waste away time and perhaps my life in the process, and just ran away from the forest and continued my way into the snowy lands where we found the abandoned demon kingdom to build our place there.

But I had left something, I left a few clones made of my phantom in there, one in specific had become something of a friend and pet of her... Yeah, I am the girl’s pet... and friend! So it is not SO bad... I mean, they always say that professionals have standards, so at the very least I am not just a pet, I am her friend now.

The other spiders cannot interact with her like I do, they lack emotions, and are colder, they seem to be guided by the instincts of serving her as her servants. It appears that she was somehow born from one of them, and since then she just became the Empress.

I don’t have any idea how she came to be, it just happened? There are many mysteries in this world, but this girl status says a lot about her though, more than her cute appearance does...

[Name: [Arachne Arachneia] [Status: [Happy] [Developing...]

[Race: [Primordial Dark Arachneia Empress] [Job: [None]

[Level: [4/200] [Rank: [S+]

[HP: [906380/906380]

[MP: [1860620/1860620]

[Attack: [920553]

[Defense: [907030]

[Magic: [905700]

[Agility: [1273300]

Characteristic Skills:

[Dark Element: Lv-]

[Death Element: Lv-]

[Poison Element: Lv-]

[Arachneia Supreme Authority: Lv-]

[Primordial Beast Body: Lv5]

[Body Transformation: Lv2]

[Fiend Language: Lv4]

[God Language: Lv1]

[Primordial Thread Weaving: Lv4]

[Primordial Poison Fangs: Lv5]

[Supernatural Great Senses: Lv5]

[Great Eight Eyes of Destruction: Lv3]

Resistance Skills:

[Status Effect Great Resistance: Lv5]

[Greater Damage Resistance: Lv4]

[Great Elemental Resistance: Lv6]

[Poison/Toxin/Venom Absorption: Lv–]

Normal Skills:

[Masterful Thread Manipulation: Lv3]

[Shadow Magic: Lv5]

[Impenetrable Chitin Shell: Lv4]

[Orichalcum Body: Lv4]

Title Skills:

[Primordial Beast: Lv10]

[Arachneia Empress: Lv10]

[Primordial Thread User: Lv10]

[Primordial Poison User: Lv10]

[Lonely Empress: Lv2]

[Snake's Friend: Lv1]

Divine Protections:

[Loki's Divine Protection]

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Yeah... This is the girl's status. Not even I could believe it when I saw it, but this was her status, her name is Arachne, very simple name, and she seems to be a Primordial Beast! Her lack of Skills is because she had yet to develop them, she had barely ever fought in her life, and she gains EXP passively from whatever her spiders hunt for her... However, her Threat Rank at S+ is already incredibly frightening, and that's without even mentioning her ridiculous stats, there's no way I will ever reach so high in any time soon... This girl is completely ridiculous.

How come she was born so strong? Well, there it is, I probably am guessing things but I bet Loki, the God of Chaos, has something to do with this, who results to be the father of Hel from all things too... She got some crazy Skills and Title Skills though, even though she got a few, they're all insanely strong... Primordial Venom and also Primordial Threads, indestructible chitin shell, and more... They're all crazy super advanced and evolved Skills.

She has enough strength to easily destroy an entire nation, but she's keeping herself in here, as if she were afraid from the outside world. I have yet to figure what's up with her... And if there are other Primordial Beasts out there, but this might be something that could endanger the world...

I have just managed to look into her status, before, I wasn't able to, perhaps now that she became my friend I can look into it, she even got a Title Skill from my friendship, so perhaps that helped in making her trust me. ...I honestly don't know what to do with her other than give her happiness as a friend, she has nobody here except the spiders, who cannot give her love nor happiness, so she always feels lonely, and acquired a Title Skill named "Lonely Empress" for that very reason... I feel like it's my duty to give her happiness and make her feel better with herself.

I think it is okay, right? I just want her to be happy and make her my friend, perhaps what she just needs is a friend to trust her and make her feel not... lonely, I suppose.
