

Death Magic 211

Chapter 211: Wings

A pin-drop silence from those who witnessed a one-sided massacre. The wind blew, the plants swayed, the trees shook, the leaves and branches whispered. The orange hue from the rising sun towards the East, a lovely mixture that could send one into a state of drowsiness. Powerful yet subtle, tis was the rise of a new day.

From afar, a man walked. No visible emotions on his face, all but a firm stance – he approached. “What he said was true,” Ferry murmured, a show of overwhelming power.

“Morning everyone,” a few minutes later, he stood with Adete sat on the head.

“Morning, Xenos,” the adventurers could but shudder – what people saw wasn’t a display of power. In their eyes, this was the wake of a monster far fearsome than any demon.

Return to Reforge continued, as usual, murmurs, whispers, and stories about how that battle unfolded spread as soon as they entered the premises. He who was responsible became a symbol of strength, unwillingly, people looked up to him.

“Good job as usual,” Jannette stood near the entrance, the rest walk past with nods of acknowledgment.

“Thank you,” Staxius stopped and faced away, “-get ready and wake the twins,” the lips moved but no sound was made. “Got it,” Avon replied in the same fashion with the addition of a thumbs up. “Sorry about that,” he turned as quickly as he faced away, the Sergeant stood baffled by what happened.

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“Reforge will forever be in thy debt,” Reinhardt approached. Earlier, the man spoke with the people in charge of taverns and maintenance for the dormitories. A meeting that occurred a mere few footsteps away.

“Good to see you in high spirits,” Staxius nodded and faced the lieutenant.

“With you around, it’s as if the threat of monsters is but a fantasy,” he added in jest.

“You speak true, though we already live in a fantasy, monsters, and demons – what more do we have to endure before it all stops. If this was a fantasy, I’d expect a hero from old to be summoned,” he chuckled.

“He may well be standing before our very selves,” those words were said under the lieutenant’s breath, none took notice.

“Were you saying something?” Staxius asked for he saw the mouth move.

“Nothing particular, was just saying that it’s a shame to see you leave,” a half-asked smile that didn’t seem that appealing.

“This isn’t the end,” he took a few steps and placed his hand onto Reinhardt’s shoulder, “-this continent is far away from having any time to breathe. We must always be on guard. There may be more things unfolding behind the scene that we are aware of. I’ll do my best to discover what it all is, in the

meantime, I leave the responsibility of leading the platoon of well-trained fighters. They deserve far more than is given to them, bear that in mind," he stepped away.

A chill when from the ears downwards, the immense pressure of each word Staxius spoke nearly gave the man a heart attack. "No worries," the fear didn't show for he had kept it hidden, "-the platoon you trained will be in good hands," the sentence ended with a reassuring smile.

"About the special unit," Staxius faced Jannette.

"Oh..." it took her by surprise, "-we sent them back to the main-guild. I don't know what they're doing, probably questing to survive. After all, you did give the order for them to disappear after the first day," her stare felt as if it asked more questions than gave answers.

"Is that so," a sigh later, "-I prefer a team that speaks through actions rather than words," to which the conversation ended. Slowly, step after step, Xenos vanished into the crowd of people wandering about, the military officers could but hold a smile. That man had done far more than words could express. Though the method was crude, almost bullying and intimidating, the ends justified the means. Hard on the outside, and hard on the inside with a little touch of compassion where was needed, this was the man of various personas.

"Everyone ready?" he leaned against a doorway inside which rested Kniq and the Lymsey sisters. They all sat opposite one another and had tea with bread.

"I think so," Undrar replied with heavy eyes – sleep had caught up to the party.

"Well," he took a step inside, "-how are you guys doing," both hands patted each sister's head.

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"M-much better," they replied with a saddened tone, nothing could be done.

"It's alright," he smiled, "-if little by little you feel better every day than sometime in the near future, the sadness might get swapped for a feeling of bliss," a considerate phrase that got the other's attention.

"That's poetic in a way," Achilles added.

"Didn't expect that coming from your mouth," Undrar commented. Avon and Deadeyes focused on their food as opposed to the conversation – more talking meant less food to chew.

"O-okay," the saddened tone relaxed, both Emma and Emmy's face lightened a little. The phrase that was spoken had a deeper meaning, one that touched the girl's heart.

"After breakfast is over, head over to the RFS," the door closed as he stepped out.

'Let me see,' he thought, '-is there anything else I've missed?' whilst thinking, the destination set was at the back of the outpost. Underneath an iron-sheet shed within which the RFS was parked. 'Not that it matters, the bloody lease is going to cost a lot,' the head shook in disappointment. The time now was around seven, the sun had awoken, the warmth wasn't much but it sure was nice.

"Master," Avon called, the party arrived around thirty minutes later. Most were stuck in saying farewell to the squad that trained under them. The wishes of luck and fortune were plenty. A feeling of

accomplishment whelmed from inside the heart out, it was as if the many months of fighting here was worth every single instant.

"Put them all in the back," he ordered to which the now emptied supply bags were placed inside.

"It's good to finally leave," Deadeyes commented.

"I agree with you on that one," Achilles replied.

"We can finally rest," Avon mumbled, "-peace at last," Viola completed their soliloquy.

Rather than Undrar and Avon sitting in the front seat, the decision was made the twins would take that place. The remainder sat at the back with place to spare. No hard feeling nor grudges, Kniq could but smile and try to help those girls out.

"Try and go to sleep," the machine turned on, "-we'll first head to Stonegrove then from there – we'll return to Rosespire."

"Thanks for everything," cheers and applause echoed around the outpost. Everyone without exception watched as Kniq left. The wings on the back of those uniforms did send a feeling of reassurance throughout. It was if those wings had the power to fly and burst through every problem someone might face. The wings that defined Kniq – the wings of freedom. Well, tis was the impression the onlookers and bystanders had. For Staxius, it had another meaning, those wings were a reminder to a tale from another world. Icarus's wings, a reminder to always have his feet on the ground and to never try and challenge the sun. People quickly lost sense of their responsibilities and duties after getting power. Corrupted by greed, many began to self-destruct. This was why he chose to have the emblem as a Wing.

From the back entrance to then a drive around the Outpost. The RFS did a few twists and turns until it stood on the main road, the one that went around the southern border. The same one that was blocked from the general populous. Empty and wide, he drove forth without stopping. As expected, the crew fell asleep within seconds, it would take another few hours till Stonegrove came in sight.

"Greetings Xenos," stood outside with a file in hand, the Lieutenant in charge of Stonegrove. A man with a bald cut, a strongly built body and firm gaze.

"I appreciate the effort," he replied courteously.

"No need for appreciation," the lieutenant fired back, "-you're the man who saved Reforge and helped to maintain the monsters at arm's length. It might not be apparent, but every single outpost is grateful for the things Kniq has accomplished. More companies and businesses have decided to help in the efforts of completing Azure's wall."

"An adventurer must help those in need," a quick reply later, the RFS resumed its journey back to the capital.

"To help others in need," Adete voiced, "-seriously?" she asked smugly. Rather than fall for her shenanigans, the focus was put solely on driving. It would take a day or two to arrive. Teleportation was out of the picture; no sleep meant no mana replenishment.

"Diane," out in the capital.

“What is it?” faced with a horde of adventurers filling out paperwork for quests, Diane barely had time to keep up.

“It’s Kniq,” Melisa replied, “-they’re coming back,” she yelled. All heard what was said, the chaos changed into peace, a name that hadn’t been uttered for so long.

“Xenos...” rumors had reached the capital as well, “-the man of darkness will be here soon,” they muttered and returned to the ordeal of getting job requests.

“Care to inform the Guild master?” she asked to which Melisa obeyed. The reason being that the amount of Qaisars collected by Kniq was an amount none would have dared to speak in public. The one who became entrusted by such wealth was none other than Raulf – the man who recommended that crew.

“Master...” out on the road, twelve hours went by, it was now night.

“Yeah?” he replied.

“Can’t we stop somewhere?” Avon asked, it had been many hours.

“We took a break like five hours ago,” he replied.

“Still...” Avon urged; a small trader’s town came in view. One separated by a river and surrounded by forest and vegetation.

“Fine...” the RFS pulled up against an inn, one that looked cozy and accommodating.

“Three rooms please,” Xenos spoke to the inn-keeper.

“That would be three silvers and fifty coppers with meals included,” the man replied with a smile.

“Here,” the money handed over. ‘With that out of the way, it’s time to rest. If we begin at six in the morning, we’ll make it by evening tomorrow,’ he thought whilst the crew got ready for dinner. For an inn, the place was empty, not many travelers at the start of the year. Many were getting ready and checking which items might gain popularity, trading and making money was a priority.

“This is good,” Achilles voiced. A table for seven, food arrived fairly quick – the party ate their fill. Not much was said in terms of conversation, the only thing in mind was a good night of sleep. Resting in the RFS sufficed but nothing could beat the feeling of a warm bed.

“Here are the keys,” Staxius spoke, “-the sleeping arrangements will be, Achilles and Viola in one room. The twins in another and lastly, the boys and I.”

“Are you sure, master?” Deadeyes asked, “-will it not be cramped?”

“No need to worry, I wouldn’t mind sharing a bed with you or Avon,” a casual smile that sent air of confusion around.

“No use beating about the bush then,” Viola stood, “-time to sleep,” in pairs, the ladies headed to their rooms.

"Goodnight," the chambers were right next to the other. The sisters hadn't said a thing since that morning.

Click, the door opened, "this is a problem..." Avon voiced after a quick walk around, only two beds were seen.

"It's no matter," he replied nonchalantly, "-I'll share a bed with Avon," the voice subtle to not wake the others.

"As you wish, master," without help, right after the eyes closed, Deadeyes fell into a deep slumber.

"You planned this didn't you?" Avon pouted, the face a little flushed.

"Yes, I did," a smug reply, "-you think I would not notice," the voice stern. "The mana inside your body has been getting depleted – I told you to not hold back when recharging."

"Guess I was found out," the spirit sighed and headed to bed.

"Listen," laid next to one another, Staxius spoke, "-I know not the reason, but do me a favor and take as much mana as you need. All I want is to have a team of people that are ready to fight, understand?"

"Honestly, master, the reason is quite simple. I didn't want to impose – the strain of leading all those people seemed to have taken a lot out of you."

"Don't worry about it," sleep crawled from within, the night peaceful, the crew slept.

Chapter 212: Platinum

'No, not again, please,' heavy panting, 'I-let them go...' whimpering, 'Xula...EIRA!' the dream broke. Sat upright with Avon on the left side whilst Deadeyes slept on the other bed. 'Again with the same dream,' sweat dripped down the forehead, '-it's hot,' erratic, he decided to take a walk. Dressed in only shorts – Staxius stood outside, '-I so wish I had a cigar right about now,' he wondered as the chilly morning breeze made its presence known.

'Is the death reaper's curse going to ruin me again,' now leaned against the inn's wall, the mind barely awake, thought about what had happened. 'Was that dream a premonition or a bad memory from when I changed bodies. Maybe it's something the god of death sent.' A feeling of dread surfaced slowly, there was more on the line than hoped. The lives of people he cared about were at risk – the lives of those who saved him. 'Twelve figures slaughtering my family in cold blood,' he sighed, '-can that ever happen?' he asked. 'Xula will take care of everything, she's an angel – far stronger than anyone in Arda. Heck, I'd even venture that she's stronger than Raulf or anyone else.' Teared up, the eyes were wiped quickly, losing people he cared about again was not an option. 'I'll have to face that curse. The immediate option I have at the moment is making that Relic Class scroll. In case something does happen, the scroll could revive despite any injuries even if the body had been left to rot or burnt to ashes. A lingering speck of Mana is all that is required. After people die – their lifeforce stick around for a few years till it's absorbed into the earth.' The heart steadied its beating, '-I guess I do feel fear,' a snicker with a glance inside later – it revealed five-thirty, it was time to move.

"Did something happen?" Adete sloppily hovered out the room.

"Nothing much," a reply that seemed to do the trick, Staxius returned.

"Is it time to wake everyone else?" she asked with a grumpy tone.

"I suppose," he sighed and headed for the first room.

Knock, knock, he tapped gently, "-wake up, it's time to move," he said in a calm yet stern voice. In this fashion, Staxius went around and woke everyone. Similarly, downstairs, the inn got ready to prepare breakfast. The place remained active even late at night for anyone could come strolling through the front door unexpectedly.

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"I hope you had a lovely stay," another person, a lady bearing glasses with chapped lips from the cold with dark-circles under her eyes spoke.

"Thank you for everything," Staxius spoke, the crew stood behind, half-awake and tired. They stretched and yawned, including the girls.

"Let's go eat," Avon mumbled, then headed towards an oak door with a worn-out handle – it led towards the small eatery. "With you on that one," the rest followed behind.

"You sure look worse for wear," Staxius added in a polite voice, the lady turned and stared. With all those footsteps walking into the other room, she thought that all had left.

"Yes, but it's not my place to complain," she pulled out a half-hearted smile as if holding a grudge to the many hours of work, '-life's already tough as is. I'd rather run myself to the ground as opposed to becoming a toy for those who wish to play."

"Care to elaborate?" he leaned on the counter and faced the waiting area.

"Since it's so early in the morning, I guess its fine," her narrow eyes opened wider as if focused onto the thing at hand. "It's not uncommon to have people sold to not so honorable organizations or nobles. You must already know, seeing the clothes you and your companion wear – slavery is practiced even to this day. As far as I know, the royal family hasn't done anything to address the situation. Even so, it's practiced underground – by gangs and such. I dare not speak their name, but people often come to our hometown in hunt of people. From elder to kids, it's not unheard of that some go missing after the sighting of rogues. The only way to survive is to keep a low profile and not anger those of the underground. First, it was nobles, now the scum from the underworld, when will this oppression stop, I wonder. Adventurers are the only ones that stand before the people and evil," she paused and looked around, "-you better leave as soon as possible," she whispered, "-there are people who've taken notice of you. Leave while you can and never come back. There are more towns like us who go through the same fate. Don't let it bother, the people of Hidros are more resilient than others. Those were the words from Aceline, our pride, and joy," to which the conversation ended.

"Aceline," he chuckled and headed into the other room. A radio in the corner played, a familiar voice spoke – the pride of Hidros. It explained why the lady at the counter knew and held the idol to such high standards. For the people in search of a way to escape, music was the sole entertainment available to the lower class.

'I guess her way of fighting evil with a blade made of music and love has advantages,' he thought and ate. People around were happy in their own way; all he could was but watch. Changing the fate of these people was a hard task. Disrupting their sense of equilibrium was selfish and in no way was he going to get involved in saving others.

"Let's go," the meal ended. Now revitalized and full of energy, Kniq walked through the entrance with confidence. The wings on their back with the rising sun in front had a feeling of if one had died and went to heaven – this was what one would see.

"T-the w-wings of f-freedom," the lady at the counter spoke vaguely. Staxius who stayed back to handle additional payment heard what she said. The rumors had spread, this was a fact, it amazed to see the power of words.

"Farewell," with a smile, he walked.

"Xenos..." the lady called, "-you're Xenos right?" she asked. No response nor replies, he continued and gave his signature wave.

"Alright people," he called, all climbed into the RFS. The twins were still in a state of perpetual sadness and silence. Forcing the issue would create more damage than needed. Intimidation and fear weren't the only way to touch someone's heart. There were a plethora of ways, though the harsh and fast approach suited him best for he didn't care to nurture someone on the brink of despair. More often than not, scaring someone to his very core proved to be more effective than others. There was a sort of underlying beauty about that method, a moment where nothing else affected the victim's thought nor heart – clear and honest. 'People are not born evil; they are made evil.' Wise words that came from the one and only Tempest Haggard.

The machine turned on, it roared into action then drove forth. "Viola, care to get some plastic bags ready?" he asked out of the blue.

"What do you mean?" on an empty road, a few minutes later, she asked.

"Just do it," he urged to which Avon and Deadeyes caught on.

"No..." the spirit called.

"We're going to teleport... aren't we?" the marksman's face displayed fear.

"You know it," Staxius turned and smirked.

"SADIST," Achilles called, *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.* In an instant, they stood on the road leading inside Rosespire, they moved and skipped a day of driving.

"I'm about to hurl," Avon complained. Without wasting time and most importantly, not wanting to stain their iron steed, the rest were teleported outside.

"Here I thought you guys were strong," Staxius shook his head but smiled smugly.

"Achilles spoke true," Avon spat following the puke, "-you're a sadist," he pouted. The spirit wasn't the only one affected, it touched Deadeyes and the Lymsey sisters.

"There goes that lovely breakfast," Viola stepped out with hands filled with water bottles. "Go take care of the twins," she smiled, "-They do remind me of Eira when she was young."

"I supposed it would be my sister that knows me better than I do myself," he bounced out the driver's seat and headed over. A few steps away, the boys gargled water.

"Here," the tone soft and soothing, water was given to rinse the mouths. Afterward, the faces were cleaned without the girls having to do anything.

"W-why d-do you care?" Emma asked, the care Staxius put in had placed doubts on her grieving mind.

"W-we are a burden... why don't you just abandon us," Emmy asked in turn, their feelings matched.

"Come on," he shook his head, "-I'm not that good a guy. This isn't out of the goodness of my heart. But I understand how having a weak resolve crumble can cause a person to shut-down. Honestly," he stared at the RFS as the crew got back in, "-it's not worth losing talent like you over something like that. There's more to gain from helping you girls back on your feet. I'm not fond of charity, therefore, the longer the sulking continues, the higher the payback price will be," both hands held out. "Those are my reason," behind, they others called. "There's an infinite number of possibilities out there, all one needs is to just hold out a hand."

"O-okay," they replied and took up on the offer. The drive continued without stop. Getting past the gate wasn't a problem, the guild card of which the rank displayed Silver, was more than enough.

"We're back home," a sigh of relief later, they slowly drove inside.

"First and foremost, we're headed to the main guild," a plan was given. The time now was around eight, the same time as adventurers slowly made their way towards the guild for quests.

"Who are they?" dressed in armor, the fighters asked; the eyes filled with curiosity, none knew who arrived. It had been too long for many to remember.

"Look outside," Melisa pointed.

"They're back," Diane called.

"Who is?" confused, the gathered crowd inside turned to see the commotion.

Click, the door opened, "-we're back," Avon called and stepped off the first.

Second, came to Deadeyes, then Undrar followed by Achilles, then the twins after which was ended by Staxius. 'It's good to see some familiar faces,' he thought and stepped inside, Kniq led the charge, their uniform and emblem sent a wave of awe across the room. The sternness in their eyes never left, "-it's alright," a voice came from behind, "-go meet up with your friends, I'll take care of turning in the quest." To which the aura around them lessened into one approachable and friendly.

"Thank you, guild leader," in unison, they thanked and parted ways. Welcomed with open arms, Staxius watched as his guild went and bonded with the other parties. Emma and Emmy didn't do anything, they stood quietly beside Staxius and held his hand. They seemed more like father and daughter than an adventuring party.

“Welcome back,” Melisa greeted with a bright smile.

“Glad to see you didn’t die,” Diane fired back with the usual sharp voice.

“It’s good to be back,” he sighed, “-here’s the report which should finalize the quest.”

“Let’s see,” Diane took over, [Quest: Azure’s wall] “-I’m sorry about this,” she apologized, “-but the quest we assigned to Kniq was changed heavily. From name to the description, it had to have been done, the reports from Ground-zero and the military were more than enough. In the end, the rank assigned to this quest was [Tier-One Platinum]”

“WHAT?” a shock wave of bafflement went around the room.

“Yes, as per orders from the guild master, this quest was given the rank of Tier one Platinum, the first-ever tier-one quest to ever be issued,” Melisa heard the scream and explained. “The peril that the guild known as Kniq had to go through is extraordinary. More details will be made public soon enough, worry not, my dear comrades – today is a day of joy and celebration, thanks to them – Oxshield will live to see another day,” she ended, her shyness was overcome by the adrenaline from announcing the completing of the first-ever Platinum quest.

Chapter 213: Enigma

“The first Platinum quest,” those words went from the ground floor up the upper levels. Those who stood baffled, those who sat – stood. The atmosphere changed almost instantly, from trying to get a quest to now being in the middle of a history-changing event. They who were there could not hide the happiness that came from the counter. The guild assistants, mainly, Melisa, was ecstatic. The way she spoke sent many guy’s hearts aflutter. Diane’s not so inviting personality calmed – her mind was filled with what this all could entail.

Amidst this growing chaos, from applause to cheers, flattery, and more, the crowd only got bigger. Tightly, the grip on the girls’ hands increased. It didn’t bother; however, the twins were scared beyond belief. All those people that suddenly became interested could make even the strongest, cower. Strength in numbers, a quick scan later, before the situation grew out of control. A twitch from the eyes of Staxius signaled the assistants to calm the situation.

“Everybody, please stand down,” Diane’s sharp voice felt sharper as if a newly crafted blade. Time stopped, the growing excitement halted for a mere second. That shout placed the minds at ease, they came to reason.

“Congratulations,” one of the many party leaders applauded. The crowd that would have enveloped Xenos, dispersed. Rather than swarming towards those three, the adventurers now stood in a line and watched with amazement. A new goal, a new objective, someone to look up to – the guild leader of Kniq.

“Thanks for everything,” he turned and smiled, “-can we discuss this later on?” a wise decision.

“No worries,” Melisa took over, her confidence remained strong, “-come by later, you must be tired,” with a smile of her own, Staxius walked. Those who blocked the entranceway due to the commotion subconsciously got out of the way. As if a blowing hard into a bowl of water, he carved a path without so much thinking about it. The aura that oozed sufficed, the news about the Platinum quest did also add a

subtle fear onto that man. More and more, paired with the somber persona, he felt out of reach, a being that lived on a higher plain.

Kniq chose to remain at the guild. After the leader stepped off the premises, the crowd swarmed the remainder. "Are you girls ok?" the gaze warm, the girl's frightened face shook a little.

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"Y-yes," Emma replied still unable to stare into his eyes.

"S-sorry," Emmy apologized for they were the reason he left.

"It's fine," now stood in the middle, he patted both in a comforting manner.

'Now that I'm back, there's a lot of stuff to catch up and do. Time to return this baby,' he sighed and caressed the strongly built body. "You've served me well, RFS," a smile later, they entered for the last drive.

"A-are we f-finally back?" slowly gaining back their conscience, the past few days of which was just a blur, grew clearer.

"Yes," he replied with the focus on the jammed roads. The rush to get to work early this morning was overlooked. A mistake caused by lack of sleep and rest. Nightmares about the family being slaughtered always loomed – good moments of rest had been a fantasy for a while now.

"Listen up," a few minutes later, the RFS reached its destination. A yard filled with cars and such, hidden behind a few houses. A place that marked the start of the not so honest district in which the first altercation happened. The fight that began a gang war.

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Scared to reply, the girl exchanged glances with one another then returned to the one who called.

Click, the door opened. A man dressed in a torn and dirtied black-suit waited patiently. A big belly paired with a bald head with a big pair of sunglasses, tis was the leader of said yard. The sight of the RFS forced him out of a quiet little room that served as the office. *Rental for Cars,* was written on a board that inclined mostly to the right. This stood above what appeared to be a door, one with a few window panes broken.

"What is it that you are to do now?" he asked firmly, the voice deep and intimidating. The rather short but large figure of a man approached from the office. He waddled due to his heavy build.

"W-what d-do you mean?" Emma asked, the fear of not speaking replaced by another sensation – the pain of being abandoned.

"This is the fork in the road." Emmy fired back; her animosity grew bit by bit. Whilst her sister's emotions grew sadder, she got angrier. No response apart from a blank stare.

"Are you going to l-leave us?" Emma added tears welled from within.

"..." Anger restricted the ability to communicate properly for the younger sister gritted. It boiled and seemed ready to explode at any time, both the cries and outburst was a ticking bomb.

“Will you calm down,” he sighed and hugged the girls, “-idiots,” he whispered, his hands were at the back of their heads. In said fashion, it was possible to angle their head, thus, the girls’ cheeks rested against his ribs. They could hear his heartbeat – a feeling that sent shivers as well as a feeling of ease.

“Here he comes,” Adete voiced and pointed forward.

“Ahh,” in speaking distance, “-lovely to see the RFS back,” the bald man smiled, it looked as if a smirk, conniving and shady.

“A lovely piece of machinery,”

“I’m glad you liked it,” the tone now demanding and urgent, “-it does please me to see the beast back again, however, haven’t you been notified?” the voice changed yet again, into one confused.

“Notified, I’m afraid but could you elaborate?” he asked, the stare now blank, the face unreadable.

“Yes,” a few coughs later, “-Jason should have told you by now. The RFS belongs to the dark-guild, more importantly,” he came closer and stood on his toe, “-it belongs to the man known as Shadow. If I were you, I’d return the beast to the bar.” Instantly, after the message was delivered, the figured waddled back into the office.

‘Owned by Shadow, I presume that most don’t know who that man is.’ A glance at the girls revealed pale faces. “What’s the matter?” the line of thought broke.

“T-the m-moment the man approached,” Emma began,

“When t-the you s-spoke,” Emmy added.

“The heart stopped beating,” with his hands still around their shoulder, it was hard to getaway.

“Is that so,” he smiled, “-don’t worry about that,” the arms relaxed, giving enough space for the sisters to step back. “Have you forgotten who I am?” a rhetorical question to which the RFS opened yet again.

“Now then,” he sat at the driver’s seat with the doors opened. “-What is it that you want?” a question that had both the girls confused. Their answers would decide what would happen next. Hesitation, doubt, and fear were sensed. “We don’t have all day,” Adete yelled.

“Our guild was a scam, our friends were killed, our family died – there’s no place we can call home.” Emmy took charge, Emma remained silent. “-What is there for us to do,” a tear flowed, “-without help, overcoming the grief we felt on the first day would have been next to impossible. Slowly, we saw you, Xenos, as a father figure. A person we can rely on, one who was willing to be tough to make us come to reason.”

“Yes,” Emma interjected, “-whatever we say now, you’re going to leave either way. This has been the plan from the start, we were never part of Kniq.”

“We’re the Lymsey sisters,” they teared up, “-in no way will someone like you ever accept us. Making us decide on an absolute outcome takes cruelty on another level.”

“Even so,” Emma fought through the regret.

“We wish to become a part of KNIQ,” they shouted in unison.

A blank stare, the door closed, the RFS turned on. "You were right," the eyes emotionless, "I did plan to leave you, twins, behind," the presumption was true, to which they stared at the dusty ground. Tears fell slowly, neither could gather the strength to stare up.

"However," a rise in pitch, "-you assumed wrong," they looked up. "Plans can change," to which the head shook to the left, it pointed at the door. "I'm not against the idea of recruiting members for Kniq. I'm a guild leader, the stronger the members, the stronger the guild."

"..." neither could believe it, "-are we to continue with Kniq?" Emma asked.

"Do you mean to say that you'll recruit us?" Emmy sought confirmation.

"Get in already, we're late as is," he sighed. 'I can only hope that it helped. Being affectionate and very caring for someone in need is essential. Afterward, when that said person has become somewhat dependent, that's where it's best to become cold. That sudden change in persona will make the victim quiver. It's a method that is tedious but ultimately worth the hassle. Obviously, in the case of those twins – I used it to take their mind off the sadness they felt. Who says controlling people can't be a good thing, either way, that should settle their mind. It's going to take a few days, but...' a glance behind showed the twins leaning on one another and sleeping. 'It's worth the effort,' a smile was seen on their visage.

The arrival glamorous and overwhelming, it took a few hours for Undrar and the others to return to the hotel. Apparently, the quest reward would be handed on the next day. From completing that Platinum quest to the number of monsters Staxius slain. The Qaisar sent back from the border, had to be processed with utmost care. They were looking at five digits... of which the majority was gold.

Asleep in the RFS, Staxius left the twins alone. "Home sweet home," he spoke, Pandora stood insight. The machine was parked next to Void, two vehicles of high value. "It's about time," Adete replied coyly.

"Well, for others, it might have seemed ages," the door opened, "-but for me," he entered, "-I had to visit this place quite a bit during our fight. Delivering God's ale is also one of my responsibilities," he entered the lab, not dusty but cleaned. Cartons of empty flasks laid about.

"You've been working hard," she commented then flew around the room.

"Says the one who stayed by my side throughout this ordeal," given that he visited the lab each week to make God's ale. Never could the body nor mind relax and take it easy. Today, after everything was over, it became a possibility. The dirtied uniform was thrown onto the table, "-I'm calling it a day," time was only ten yet, he slept. "If the twins wake up, tell them to enter the shop and head upstairs. There should be some futons in the storage room. Be a darling and keep an eye out, thank you in advance," the eyes shut and laid peacefully in the attic.

"Really..." Adete hovered with hands on her hips, "-should have expected as much," to which she descended and sat on the bed. Her feet dangled off the edge, '-this is the man who's inherited the curse of Nox,' she thought, '-a human turned vampire, the heir to the god of death. It's good to see him sleep for once. Not many know how much he has to go through daily. I wish people could see what an amazing person Staxius really is. I feel the pain he endures, though the mind might have been numbed to physical pain, the damage being sustain is by the heart and soul. The burden of so many curses to the regrets of being a failure as both husband and father. It slowly chips away. But I doubt he'll ever say

anything. Hidden behind that blank expression and facades after facades, lives a man. One not strong nor weak, one not good nor evil, a man that has no concept of reality nor fantasy. A state of mind that remains in the grey, that is what a newborn babe is – impartial to the world. Staxius in a way has managed to keep that feeling of being impartial throughout the years. The actions he performs may seem crude, evil, and leaning on the dark side – but I have a feeling that it's not all that simple. Despite being a part of him, there's no way I can know what he truly feels. An enigma,' she smiled, 'one unpredictable but that has a common denominator – the absolute hate of losing. Not guided by greed for power, but by the sole goal of always improving, innovating, and never standing on the losing end, that is what I managed to find out. The ideal mindset for one who will someday attain divinity.'

Chapter 214: Fortune

"Wake up," a faint voice called, the bed rocked as if a cradle. "Wake up," another voice called. "Wake up," both voices called in harmony. 'It's too early,' the eyelids felt heavy, the mind refused to work, an overwhelming state of sleepiness had enveloped the psyche.

"Are you going to sleep till the next day or what?" a sharp voice followed by a piercing sensation on the neck.

"Stop biting me," forced to wake, he sat upright, with one eye narrowly opened. The sun outside now bright and rejuvenating, he crawled out of bed and stretched. Paired with a few yawns and subtle shaking of the hands and feet, the mind awoke in turn.

"Good afternoon," he turned and faced Emma, Emmy, and Adete already on the shoulder.

"S-sorry to say this," Emma added in a shy voice, "-but today's a new day," Emmy fired without much tact. A little confused, he turned towards Adete, "-You slept the whole day yesterday. That supposed nap turned into a twenty-four-hour rest," the words physically hit him. Tis was Adete's breath for she stood a mere few inches away.

"I see," he looked down, the body felt more at ease with the mind being clearer than usual. It wasn't all bad for the nightmares that plagued for the past few months didn't appear. The body and mind had an opportunity to relaxed. It showed in the glow the face portraited. "How did you spend the day yesterday then?"

"From napping, we went inside," as usual, Emma spoke first.

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"Then, we slept on the futon Adete shown," Emmy added.

"After that, the others came to show us around," they ended the short explanation with a smile. The emotions, speech, and mannerisms already looked better than before.

"Like it?" he asked then proceeded to pat their heads.

"Yes, it's fun," they spoke in tandem.

Not inclined to rest on his laurels, Staxius headed down from the attic. Lunch was in order for he had slept past breakfast. Behind, the two teenagers accompanied. The clothes worn were still dirtied and seemed to not have been cleaned. They were visibly irritated, to which after they reached the ground

floor, “-care to stay inside for a few minutes. I’m going out,” he stood in front of the door, the shop seemed dusty. “I hate to ask this, but could you girls clean the place a little, there should be dusters in the closet on the stairs.”

“Sorry?” Emma asked, her eyes filled with wonder by the amount of stuff laying around.

“You might have forgotten,” Emmy stepped forward, “-we’re still new here, what is this place?”

“I apologize,” he turned, the hand that once rested on the doorknob was placed onto her shoulder. “-This place is named Pandora, my magical shop,” with a smile the door opened with the other free hand.

“Ohh,” Emmy said in wonder, “-don’t worry,” Emma called, “we’ll take care of the place.” It was too good to be true, but the girls’ mind was finally off the incident.

“Sweet,” the door opened, “-I’ll be back shortly, don’t create too much havoc.” The door closed and he walked, leaving those two behind to clean.

“Did anything interesting happen yesterday?” they went through an alley that led towards the dark district.

“Nothing much,” Adete replied, her eyes wandered around the bars and taverns. Most empty with the keepers cleaning out the mess from the night prior.

“Are you sure?” he asked yet again, losing a day felt as if a month – there could have been a lot happened, things that were essential for him to know.

“Yes, I’m sure,” she sighed and stood, “-having cleared the first platinum quest ever, the attention switched to Kniq. I heard rumors of them getting an interview later today by the news outlets. Someone’s going to get popular,” she whispered then sat back down.

“Is that so,” he sighed and walked till a bar came in view.

“Hello there, timothy,” Staxius waved. Cigarette in mouth with a lighter in hand, the man he called out to, nearly spat. “Ay, long time no see,” the cigarette returned into his front pocket. “Where have ya been,” he spoke with the usual accent and walked inside.

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“Questing,” the door opened, “-what about you?” the room smelled of sweat and alcohol, a few men wearing tuxedos were passed out on the couches.

“Nothin’ much, just the usual business,” he went behind the counter and waited, “-how may I be of service,” the way the words were pronounced felt as if the man was excited about something. Subtle but present, a feeling of joy was there.

“Care to explain to me what that thing is?” he pointed at the cigarette.

“Oh, nothin’ much, just a smaller and lighter version of a cigar. More affordable if ya ask me,” he answered proudly.

“I see, quite interesting,” without wasting time, “-I’m headed to the toilet.”

"Oh alright," the barkeeper knew what to do, they both walked inside, the secret door opened. "Good luck out there," a parting sentence to which the light from the toilet grew dimmer.

"Why are we here?" Adete asked, the voice troubled.

"I'm Shadow..." he replied coldly, "-a member of the dark-guild. Of course, I'll visit this place," he turned, "-We're here to collect the money that is due," a whisper that made her light-headed.

"Fine, fine," she reluctantly answered and leaned on his neck, "-I'll take a nap whilst you do what is needed."

"Sounds fair," a purple glow in the distance came in view. Opposed to how the place was at night, it seemed relatively empty. None worked on the stage, the doors to the pleasure rooms were closed by locks. At the bar, Jason cleaned glasses as well as the marble-top overlay.

"We're closed," a figure at the entrance was spotted, this gave Jason the cue to speak.

"Is that so?" unimpressed, Staxius walked. A single push of a button later, the usual dim lighting changed into one bright and clear. He saw every inch of the bar, the sheer size that seemed small at night, was in fact, very large.

"Oh," quickly realizing who had come, the uninviting tone changed, "-long time no see," Jason smiled, "-take a seat," he offered.

"I thought it was closed," a smug reply to which he sat.

"Yeah," he faced away to fill a mug with beer, "-well, an exception must be made," he turned, "-the famed alchemist from the underworld, Shadow, has decided to grace my presence," he spoke in jest.

"Going by that reaction," Staxius took a sip, "-I guess the God's ale has been growing ever so popular?"

"More than popular, it's a hit, none can resist it. With the fear of impending doom – it's worth it. Stars to commoners, all who took a sip are hooked."

"Damn," the mug emptied after a chug, "-guess it's more potent than I expected." It was true, the alchemist who's been brewing said ale for the past few weeks had grown in popularity. None knew the identity; however, many had tied it with the famed killer known as Shadow.

"Small talk aside," Jason took out a lovely reddish box in which cigars were laid out beautifully, "-care to tell me why you're here?"

"I'm sure you know already," the voice monotonous, he took a cigar out.

"I see," the barkeeper reached for a lighter, *Click,* the top of the cigar was chopped off. A few seconds later, with a cigar in mouth, Staxius waited.

"The payment I assume?" joining him, Jason, both smoked.

"Yeah," he replied, puffs after puffs. Lost in the motion, the conversation stretched on till noon.

“Look at the time,” Jason pointed at the wall. The counter was filled with glasses that once contained whiskey and such. “Give me a second, I’ll go get the cards,” he stumbled and headed into a private room.

“Are you drunk?” Adete asked, seeing the state of his face.

“No, I’m not actually,” the tone cool and composed, “-this much isn’t enough to get me drunk. It’s a side-effect of the immortality, I’ll have to drink a lot more to get a feeling of tipsiness. Though I don’t mind drinking, I like the taste, it’s fun,” the cigar still wasn’t over.

“The personas do change quite a bit depending on the place and time,” she commented.

“Well, you’re right. There must be a separation, else all would go down the drain,” he took it as a compliment.

“Sorry for the inconvenience,” the door reopened suddenly, “-damn,” the eyes opened wide. “It’s been a long time since I drank,” a few shakes of the head later, “-here,” an envelope. “Renaud sent around twelve cards; I took the liberty of putting all the funds into a single card. There should not be any issues, leave all that to us,” a smile later, “-if you want, I could personally be in charge of making sure that the money is delivered into that card you hold,”

“For a small fee, I assume?”

“Spot on,” Jason was out of it but seemed conscious enough to remember what he said.

“Deal,” a handshake later, “-I’ve got a favor to ask,” Staxius requested intently.

“Fire away,” a sharp response.

“Do you mind ordering cigars for me as well. I want the best of the best, and store it in a good-looking box – of course, I’ll pay,” the voice serious, Jason could but accept.

“I’ll send someone to deliver it later tonight,” he voiced confidently, “-we’re the dark-guild after all. We have access to anything one might want – don’t worry about payment. Thanks to you and that new formula, the money we handle every month has sky-rocketed. It’s not far when our organization might monopolize the God’s ale trade.”

“So, you say,” Staxius smiled and stood, “-before I go, what is the deal with the RFS belonging to Shadow?”

“Call it a gift, it’s Renaud’s doing. The boss has taken a liking to you,” a wave later, Staxius walked out without replying.

‘It sure was wise to enter the underworld. Danger lurks around every corner; however, the return is worth the effort.’ He walked, Adete slept. ‘I wonder how much I earnt if it’s the dark-guild – I’m going to presume it’s in the five-digits. A quick visit to the bank is in order.’ Thus, after reaching the toilet, teleportation was used to travel to the adventuring guild. From there, a few minutes later, he arrived at the bank.

[Total Balance: 203,000 Gold Coins] *Cough,* seeing the balance, “-excuse me,” without arousing suspicion, Staxius stepped outside and dialed a number.

“Hello?” a girl’s voice came through.

“Hello Cake, it’s Staxius,” he replied.

“Boss, how are you doing?” her voice friendly, “-you’ve returned to the capital I’m guessing?”

“Yes, but I have a question,”

“Go on,” her voice seemed composed as if she had been working on another matter.

“I’ve just visited the bank, apparently, Jason merged all my payments into a single card. I appreciate it, but when I checked the balance, it showed 203,000 Gold coins. That much money in two months is impossible, I need answers,” though it didn’t seem obvious by the composed tone, the mind wandered all over the place.

“That’s simple enough,” she replied, “-it’s the blend. The god’s ale has been a hit – I’m sure you know the details, but money is no longer an issue. The amount you see is only a mere cut of the profit. Don’t worry about it, there’s no problem when it comes to a single person having that much cash. Even if it came out of nowhere, the bank won’t say anything. The account that the cash is under belongs to a noble, well ex-noble. Put a big enough title on the line and people forget to ask questions. Keep making that wonder-drug, boss. The war between us and that other organization will take a lot of time.”

“I see,” he interjected, “-you take care then. If ever something comes up, I’m a mere phone call away. If even my expertise is required, I’ll help.”

“My pleasure, boss, also, don’t worry about sending me cash. I’ve also got a cut from the god’s ale business. The big-boss is really happy with the product, Renaud has taken an interest in you.”

“You’re the second person to tell me that today,”

“Is that so, anyways, I better get back to work. Talk to you later,” the phone hung.

‘Here I was expecting a five-figure digit, turns out, I’m rich again,’ he smiled, ‘-a mere percentage of the profit. I wonder how much that stuff is being sold overseas. 203,000 gold coins; that’s a lot of money, like a whole lot, in no way can I relate how much that is worth. Well, I better not get overexcited. Separating the money from the dark-guild is the wiser choice,’ he walked back inside and withdrawn around ten-gold pieces.

‘People can usually live off 500 silver coins for a full month if they’re careful. Carrying around that much coin is dangerous and heavy. This is why the cards the bank has provided is a boon. The transfer of money is done via magic. All the host needs to do is think of the agreed amount then touch their cards with one another. Technology and Magic, what a lovely connection,’ teleportation was used to get back to the shop. ‘If 500 silver is enough to live a single month, then a gold coin is enough to live for two months.’

Chapter 215: Bathhouse

Coins now inside a brown-laced pouch, teleportation was used. It had been around an hour since he left the shop. “The door seems intact, let’s hope the inside is the same,” the handle twisted, it clicked, then opened. Immediately, the smell of perfume blasted the face as if an unchecked faucet.

"Sorry, but the shop is closed," feet scurried to the entrance

"Care to explain?" he asked with a tone that implied something bad happened.

"Welcome back, master," hair tied in a bun, with the sleeves pulled up, no leggings, a shabby looking over-sized shirt paired with a short. Tis was Emma's outfit, a little blue frog was displayed on said shirt.

"Did someone come in?" behind her, footsteps scurried yet again. The same outfit and same hairstyle, Emmy arrived with a shirt that had a lizard instead of a frog.

'Please tell me they didn't overdo it,' he walked slowly, the floor shone with cleanliness. However, to him, it felt like a minefield, with no idea to what extent the twins went through, he continued.

A check to the right, the shelves on which weapons and such were displayed, had the same shine as the floor. To the right, where armor and other essentials were displayed, it lit as well. Not to mention the middle and where the counter rested, all were cleaned throughout. "Awesome job," he said in a joyous tone.

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"It's our way of saying thanks," Emma commented with hands on her hips.

"Yes, what sister said, we are grateful," Emmy added, both holding the same posture. Their faces lit with a smug smile, one that said: praise us more, we did a good job.

A smile later, an inspection of the shop was given. He watched every corner; the girls did, in fact, do a great job. No complaints to which he turned. 'A reward is in order,' he thought and stared. The twins were visibly troubled, the culprit – lack of clothing and uncleanness.

"Girls," he called. "Coming," they answered and rushed over.

"It's indeed a very good job," he patted their heads, "-therefore, I'd like to reward you both. Do you perchance have a change of clothes?"

"We have other shirts," Emma replied. "If that's what you're asking," Emmy completed the sentence.

"It should work just fine," with a pat on their back, the girls climbed up the stairs to change.

"You did that on purpose didn't you?" Adete's slumber broke.

"Did what, I've no clue to what you're saying," the voice felt as if the man was clueless.

"Don't play dumb, the reason you asked for them to clean is simple. You didn't want the shop to be clean, you wanted a reason to get them new clothes. What's simpler than repaying a favor with a favor without looking like an idiot," her voice sharp and word resounding with the truth.

"I still don't know what you're talking about," the face turned away defiantly.

"Plead ignorance then," she sighed, "-it's not like this is the first time I've noticed. Every action you do always has an ulterior motive, the man I serve, doesn't move unnecessarily. Yet another trait that makes my heart flutter,"

"Makes thy heart flutter, that's ironic coming from someone who's dead," he spoke in jest.

"Says the man who can stop his heart at will," a retort that ended the little discussion.

"We're ready," in unison, the twins ran back down. For teenagers, they had the vigor of kids, not that it was a bad thing. Energetic and cheery was always better than the gloomy phase they went through, and still are going through – the path to recovery was long and tough.

The door now locked, Staxius stood before two magnificent beasts. One known as RFS and the other, Void. "Which one shall we use?" he turned and asked. The change of shirt was but one plain, simple with no design.

"Sister, sister," Emmy spoke first this turn.

"Here sister, what is it?" Emma asked as they held hands.

"Don't you think the RFS might be too obnoxious on the road?" Emmy commented seeing its size.

"I think your right sister," Emma agreed, "-let's use the black-car, master," headfirst, the elder sister ran over to the breathtaking vehicle.

"Heh," he chuckled and approached.

"What's so funny?" Emma asked with a pout.

"Yeah, yeah, tell us the joke?" Emmy demanded.

"Nothing, really," the voice cool, the door opened. Though a two-seater, with the girl's physique, it didn't matter. A single-seat sufficed for both to sit.

"Master," Emma called, the voice serious.

"Just who are you?" Emmy asked with the same intent.

"No one particular, a pebble on the road," he replied dodging the question.

"A pebble, more like a boulder if you ask me," Adete fired-back with a snicker. That retort made the atmosphere quiet, none knew how to respond, "-ha-ha," as opposed to returning said word, Staxius laughed instead. "You sure are resourceful today," he patted her head using the index finger, meanwhile the car turned on. The sound of the engine running nearly gave the girls a heart attack.

"Honestly," Emma called again, "-who are you?" she asked.

"A noble hailing from Arda," the voice monotonous for the focus changed onto the drive ahead, "-that should answer the questions," a screech later, the car drove forth.

"Guess that explains why you're rich then," Emmy replied with a chuckle, never had they experience these sorts of things. Getting in a normal car much less a beast-like Void, was a dream come true. A vehicle that was worth more than manors in certain places – one of a kind, a show of power.

"So where are we going?" after a few minutes, Emmy asked for they had no clue to which road led where.

“To a public bathhouse,” he replied, “-I noticed that you weren’t feeling well. Using those same clothes for that amount of time must have taken a toll. Imagine the sweat and smell of...” before ending the sentence, a cold glance from behind was sensed.

“Better not get into details, have you forgotten how to be tactful?” Adete whispered, he dodged a bullet, the twins were visibly embarrassed. “I do apologize,” he sighed, “-I meant no disrespect,” the voice gentlemanly, the girls could but laugh it off.

“No need for that,” Emma spoke with her hand scratching her head.

“You did say the truth, it’s disgusting, not to mention we ran out of panties in the first week,” Emmy added without much thought. As soon as the words rolled off her tongue, the realization hit.

“Sister, you idiot,” Emma quickly placed her hands onto the little sister’s mouth.

“Ha-ha,” he laughed, “-I’m glad,” a smile, “-it’s good to see you both being cheerful for once. It’s relieving if I do say so myself,” the car stopped. “Speaking of relieving,” he pointed at a two-story building. “We’ve arrived,” to which the door opened. The girls could but watch in awe, “now, now, no need to get nervous,” he took both their hands and walked. A quick conversation with the owner later. After the latter saw in what transport those three had arrived in, the man could but smile for someone important had come. Tis was the advantage of looking the part.

The girls were given a private room, one that was reserved for visiting nobles as opposed to the public bath downstairs. As an addition, undergarments would be given without an additional fee. The normal fee for this establishment was 50 copper for commoners, 25 for kids. For people above the average, 500 copper was enough to gain access to a private room. For the nobles, the highest price was 5 silver. A price that Staxius paid without batting an eye, the payment used was by card. Practically everyone from rich to the poor had access to those – it made it safer to wander around the capital. He paid using the first card he had, one that now held no money. The one used to invest in items for the shop – and armor for the party. Throughout their stay at the border, that card was used. Today marked the day it finally emptied.

The current balance was: 202,990 Gold. It was displayed on the card after injecting a bit of mana. An ability he didn’t realize till later in the day, after visiting the bank. ‘With my growing fortune,’ now sat in one of the private baths, he thought, ‘-it’s best to start investing. Maybe a manor, then some apartment complex to rent. That amount of cash is unreal, I still don’t believe it,’ to which he chuckled. ‘I say that whilst driving around a car that was sold for over one million gold coins. I did get it for free; but still, I should be more discreet. People with 50,000 gold coins are considered rich. Back when Dorchester was a place for slaughter, having that amount of coin meant that said person was at least a Viscount. Maybe I’m overthinking this too much, it’s not like this is the first time I’ve dealt with so much cash,’ a few shakes of the head later, ‘-buying a house now isn’t out of the picture. The one that commoners use in the less popular areas can range from 25 to 500 gold. One in an average living environment is 750 gold. When it comes to the manor, the ones that nobles use, it can range from 1000 gold to 100,000 gold. The latter being one that someone of the rank Marquess and higher would purchase. The manor in which Sophie lived was around 75,000 gold coins. Thanks to Cake’s constant messaging, it gave a general idea of the price. For now, I shan’t be hasty,’ he stood, it was time to leave.

A few minutes later, stood outside, the Lymsey sisters with bright smiles. "Feels good, doesn't it?" he asked rhetorically and jumped into Void.

"Yes," Emma exclaimed, "-much better and fresher," Emmy finished on a high note.

"Let's continue then," once the bath was over, the car headed for the commercial district. There, hand in hand, Staxius walked as if a father. The girls were clueless about what happened. In the end, it didn't matter, their minds were off the guild incident.

"Here we are," he spoke, they stood before a massive building, one that specialized in garments of various kinds. Either for soirees or fighting, two opposite end of the spectrum but in the same compound. Though the elegant clothes were on the top-most floor. The gears that were aimed for adventurers were located downstairs. One that was rented by a merchant's guild, a place familiar and welcoming to fighters of all kind.

"I can't believe it," Emma spoke for she stared in awe. The other sister was left speechless. The place was grandiose and well organized. Despite being owned by people that deal with monsters, it had a certain dignity and feel to it. The décor was charming and heartwarming.

"Go on already, go pick out anything you want," he smiled, "-consider this the payment for cleaning up Pandora earlier." Unable to resist, the girls made haste and rushed inside.

"See, I told you," Adete voiced strongly to which he ignored without a second thought. Minutes turned into hours; the girls tried on many outfits from heavy to light. The eyes wandered around as if kids in a toy-shop. Many possibilities and limited choices, at some point, Staxius dozed off.

"This, this," Emma called, they were ready.

"Let's see," he walked. Both outfits were similar with only the color being different. Knee-high boots with a comfortable looking sole. Good for movement, from there, they had a thigh-high stocking, one that had striped colors. Shorts with a belt that had strings and pockets to store potions, and scrolls. The top, shirts that were covered by a vest. The latter was military-grade, multipurpose with resistance to mother nature. Color-wise, it followed the girls' preferences. Emma had a mixture of light-blue and yellow whilst Emmy had pink and white.

"They do look good, and quality-wise," a quick inspection later, "-they seem battleworthy. Are you happy with it?"

"More than happy," Emma answered with an energetic voice.

"This was our dream combat outfit from the start," Emmy twirled in place to show off what they had made.

"It's final then," he proclaimed, to which a wave of the hand later, some assistants rushed over. "I'd like to purchase what the lovely ladies are wearing."

"H-Hold up," Emma grabbed onto his arms, "-we were joking," Emmy replied.

"It's our dream outfit and costs a lot," they explained.

"Don't worry about it," he smiled, "-it can't be that bad." Once at the counter, the price shone was five gold per outfit.

"See we told you," Emma spoke, "-five gold isn't worth spending on clothes," Emmy added, their voice trailed off in the end.

"Yeah, sure," he smiled, "-I'll take them," he took out the pouch and paid in full. 'Five gold is nothing compared to what Kniq is wearing. 750 gold coin per outfits, that's like a house in a fairly good place.'

"Thank you so much," once outside, both tightly embraced him. "Don't worry about it," a quick pat of the head later, "-we're headed to Kniq's headquarters next. You girls haven't officially joined the guild just yet." The car came back to life, and thus the day continued.

Chapter 216: Education

"Good afternoon," the receptionist greeted out of habit.

"Good afternoon," Staxius returned said greeting then proceeded to take the lift. Amazed, the twins walked at a crawling pace. They were like slugs trying to get around. A quick tap on the shoulder sufficed to snap the growing intimidation. The aura this building gave off was immense. A place only elite could ever dream to access, a place that determined if a guild was worth the effort or no. Many adventurers were envious of stepping foot in here. Once someone had it through those doors, the ones that automatically opened, it was set in stones – life was made.

The receptionists downstairs threw around a few rumors about who walked in. In the end, the pointless chatter was dropped as members from Pegasus returned. If it had been a second earlier, they would have run into one another.

"Sister, sister," Emma called, the voice filled with astonishment.

"Yes, sister, no need to say more," Emmy replied, "-this place is the famed building that all the top guilds use."

"Yes, yes, the place's rent is expensive but worth the effort," Emma ended the conversation. Uninterested, Staxius didn't join for the mind was lost onto something else. Auic's face came to mind, the fox was undergoing training with Diane. 'I wonder how much she's improved over these past few months,' the elevator opened with a ding.

"Here we are," he called, a tap of the keycard later, the closed elegant brown door with golden edges opened. It had been changed from the previous one, a change that he only noticed – one courtesy of the Dwarves. No sound, nothing, the door opened in utter silence, the light coming from the window enlightened the hall.

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"Welcome to Kniq's headquarters," he spoke and walked. Struck by awe, the girls could but hold his hands and follow. Step after step, murmurs and chatter oozed from room number two located on the right side after getting off the lift.

"I presume we have guests," Staxius spoke gently, to which a click later – the door opened.

"Master," Avon called, sat closely around the rather large table, Staxius walked.

"It's good to see you again," Undrar voiced with a smile – it had been a day since their arrival.

"Yes, it's good to be back," he replied then continued the trip to the front. Someone else sat, a familiar face that had been the topic of conversation till now.

"Auic?" stood behind Avon's seat, Staxius asked. The lady whomst sat, gazed at the floor.

"Good afternoon," she spoke, the tone firm and confident. The way her head moved from looking at the floor, to now up and stern, a complete change in persona.

"Good afternoon," Staxius returned the greeting.

"It's been far too long, sir," she stood and walked, "-may I enquire who these lovely ladies are?" the tone friendly yet vigilant.

"Yes, words cannot express how long we've been gone," the tone equally as imposing, "-how's everything been?" he asked, to which she pulled out a tablet and began to search for any relevant information.

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"Nothing much has happened, sir. The situation in general around the capital has been subtle – nothing of any relevancy," a courteous smile later, she stood with a straight posture, one dignified, one of someone who's confident in her abilities. In addition to that, her gaze displayed a whole other array of information.

"She's come quite a long way," Achilles spoke with a smile.

"I agree, our shy Auic has grown tremendously," Undrar, who sat next to Achilles added.

"The eyes of a fighter," Deadeyes voiced.

"More like the eyes of a hunter," Avon added in jest.

"Oh, come on," her tone dropped into one playful, "-it's not like that," she replied with a wink. "All this flattery," her eyes shyly glanced away, "-It's embarrassing."

"What a relief," he sighed, the tone now casual, "-I'm glad to see the confidence. I assume the training with Diane was fruitful," he pulled out three chairs from the table and sat, the twins silent for it was a new environment. "And for the question, these lovely ladies will be joining Kniq,"

"Really?" Undrar jumped with excitement.

"The more the merrier," Achilles added with an enthusiastic tone.

"Welcome to the guild," Avon and Deadeyes gave out a thumb's up.

"T-thank you," Emma added slowly. "-W-we'll do o-our best," Emmy nodded.

"Auic," Staxius called, it took her by surprise. "Y-yes?" she asked a little bit flustered.

“Since we’re back, it’s for you to get to work,” he smiled, “-three months is more than enough. The order of business is to get the paperwork ready for these girls to join. From today forth, room one, also known as the reception area will be yours. If there’s anything you lack or any changes you want to be done, come to me directly. This office will be in your care after all,”

“Very well, sir,” she smiled, “-I’ll do my best to pull my weight from now on,” to which a bow later, “-will you girls accompany me?” she asked politely, the twins could but fall to her charisma.

“Master,” Avon called, “-I don’t know how it was done, but Auic can now fully stand on her feet,” he smiled.

“We all are proud to see her growth,” Undrar spoke on behalf of everyone, “-Kniq is now officially opened, right?”

“No,” he voiced strongly, “-the guild starts the day after tomorrow,” the door opened, “-go out and have some fun,” with a slight nod, he left.

‘Now that I’ve got a secretary; one that will handle the guild – I can be free to focus on researching the Relic class scroll. But first, I’ll go visit Lizzie.’

Knock, knock, “-come in.”

“I apologize for barging in,” Staxius spoke, “-but can I have you for a moment?” sat in front of a computer, Auic’s fingers typed tirelessly, the twins could but wait – the registration was nearly complete.

“Fill out these boxes,” she pointed at an application then headed to the door.

“How can I help?” she asked courteously, the tone stern and appropriate for it was her workplace.

“After the application is done, care to escort the twins to Pandora?” the voice subtle, almost like a whisper.

“Should not be an issue,” she replied, “-but what about the portal?”

“No need to worry, I’ve already added their identity – it should not cause any trouble. Also, on a second note, at what time does Lizzie get out of school?”

“Around two-thirty. You’re planning to go pay her a visit?” the gaze lit with glee.

“I suppose,” the face blank, “-she’s a member of the Kniq family. I’ve been far too distant, guess it’s my way of paying back her efforts in trying to change into a better person.”

“Forgive me if I’m out of line,” the face warm and affectionate, “-but you sure are a good person.”

“Not really,” a tap of the shoulder later, “-I’m not a good person,” followed by a nod, the main door opened to which he vanished.

“I didn’t mean in general, you’re a good person when it comes to people who rely and count on thee, majesty, nothing else from the king of Arda,” without much delay – the secretary headed back to her work.

‘Two-thirty,’ the lift reached the ground floor, adventurers of other guilds were seen at the reception. ‘It’s two,’ a glance behind said counter revealed the time for a diamond-shaped clock rested amidst the trophies. ‘Her school should not be far away. At her age, she must be in secondary. I wonder how the girls were able to get her enough grades to enter that school. Come to think of it, I know she goes to school but have no clue to what that institution actually does. Well, I think I did but it eludes me now. Slacking off is bad, here I thought I was a responsible adult,’ a snicker later, he entered Void. ‘It’s my job to learn more about what kind of education someone under my care is going through. This should be the perfect opportunity to learn more. As far as I remember, education is divided into three levels, Primary, Secondary, then Tertiary. Age six to twelve go through Primary, then an exam later, you get into secondary which is another six years, then finally, tertiary – universities and so forth. Claireville academy is classified as secondary, but away from the main system since students allowed must be sixteen or older. This is for normal people, those of middle-class with enough to get by. Education is expensive depending on the institution. Either way, that doesn’t affect me directly, what people do is their business, the concern at hand is how Lizzie is doing,’ fifteen minutes later, the school came in view.

Barred by a fence gate, the place brought back memories. Trees swayed along the path leading up to the establishment. Located inside the scholar’s district, a place where libraries, research facilities, universities, and so on were built, the place was idyllic. Away from the daily mess of people trying to go to work, this place was a haven for those who wanted to study. Separating districts by districts was wise – students weren’t at risk, also, there laid a barracks for Royal Guards. That district was located after the commercial district, at the top of the capital. Depending on how traffic was, it could take anywhere from one hour to three hours – Rosespire wasn’t the capital for nothing. Its sheer size could put anything to shame. With Adete on the shoulder, Staxius waited outside the entrance with Void parked closely to the stone-pavement. The roads were well-maintained, a lovely breeze that tickled the skin. The silence that loomed, blissful, and tranquil. A perfect environment to study. The clock kept on ticking, as expected, vehicles of high prestige drove forth slowly. Education was considered a luxury, and the place that stared Staxius in the face was more than luxurious. It was a branch of the main Claireville Academy. One that was devoted to normal studies as opposed to a magical oriented environment. The way fate works could be described as annoying.

Leaned on Void’s hood, Staxius watched and waited as butlers from prestigious families arrived. The car reflected the family’s power, it had been a long time – but inequality was still present. As a person, he had moved away from all that unnecessary trouble – he didn’t feel the prejudice of being a low-born thanks to the adeptness at blending into the atmosphere. However, for someone like Lizzie, the same could not be said. That thought ran around the mind – more than anything, he was disappointed.

“Have you decided on doting everyone in Kniq?” Adete voiced, it was close for classes to be dismissed.

“Actually, yes,” he added with pride, “-I’ll dote on anyone I please. More specifically, I’m worried about how Lizzie fits into this school,” the hand reached inside the car.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Look at that board,” he pointed at the gate, engrave and hung inside a small hole in the wall, the words *Claireville Junior Academy,* in an obnoxious golden color.

“What about it?” her mind was fully confused by this point.

"This place is bad," he held a cigar, one that Jason gave as a parting gift earlier that day.

"What do you mean by bad?" the question kept on flowing as if a waterfall.

"All I mean is that this place isn't merit-based," the cigar lit to which he puffed smoke at regular intervals. "Unlike Claireville Academy where the disparities between nobles and commoners isn't that apparent – here, it's way worse. People are only worried about one thing, that is the prestige of the family's name, imagine how the students might turn out to be." As time went on, more and more butlers and maids approached, they gave side-glances at Staxius who had parked Void closest to the entrance. They were angry, for that place was reserved, an unwritten rule to which he had no clue. Despite this animosity, he didn't care. The combination of a firm face, a strongly built body, a blazer with torn-skinny jeans paired with a scarf borrowed from Avon earlier. He looked more like an idol as opposed to the usual formal dress sense. The reason for this change was the bath earlier today – he took the liberty to change during that visit. The clothes were bought months ago but forgotten. It was during the whole incident of not having clothes to wear after the body changed.

"Isn't that spot reserved for that man?" in the corner, maids began to gossip. "Yes, but it's not any of our business."

Chapter 217: Guardian

"Hey vampire," Adete whispered and tucked onto the red scarf, the voice seemed worried.

"What is it?" he asked whilst puffing smoke.

"Something about the glances people are giving us isn't right. Can't you feel that cold stare onto our backs, honestly, it's making me thirsty for blood," she began to drool, the face lit as if a starved man in front of a buffet.

"Keep it down," a quick tap on the head later, the bat-girl flew and sat atop his head. A quick glance inside the car – on the radio displayed *14:28.* Beautiful cars continued to park behind one another. Most had their sight taken by full with Void standing at the front. Many knew about its value – taken by wonder and jealousy, those who served the other families lost. A subconscious strike to their pride. Not only did the masters relish in each individual superiority, but those employed to said families also had pride. Not on the same arrogant level, but similar.

"Don't look over there," the voices died out, their glances befell the surrounding. Most acted as if they weren't present. 'A shift in the aura, someone important is here,' it caught his attention but decided to not pay heed. Said aura came from behind, at the intersection. The road led straight into the school compound, though it wasn't for public use. Only trucks with supplies had the right to enter school premises, and with special orders.

"Who's that impudent fool," a sharp voice yelled. Uninterested, Staxius continued to smoke. To which, the one responsible decided to beep their horn. The sound echoed and disrupted the peaceful atmosphere. After a single try, seeing no reaction, the door opened and closed rather powerfully. 'Guess they're coming to pay a visit,' he thought and waited – the stance unfaltering and cigar lit.

“Hey,” a voice called sharply, around three men dressed in long white shirts and black pants arrived. They wore glasses and seemed imposing; “-don’t you know that this spot is reserved?” they spoke as if owning the place. The one doing all the talking was one of the three who had a vest atop the shirt.

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They approached trying to be intimidating, *Phew,* nonchalantly, Staxius blew smoke onto their faces. To which they cough and stepped back a little. “Gentlemen,” a quick push of the hips later, from resting on the hood, he stood; the body twice as imposing as those who came to intimidate. “As far as I’m concerned, it’s first come first serve isn’t it?” the voice monotonous and face emotionless, “-I’d honestly advice to not cause such a ruckus.”

“First come first serve,” the guard spat at Staxius’s feet. “This spot is reversed to Duke Gram Medgel’s eldest daughter,” after uttering the name, he smirked – the use of the high-ranking name was another means of intimidation.

“Duke Gram Medgel,” Staxius sighed, “-should I be impressed or scared?” the voice unfaltering – the bells rang. “Duke or no, I’d rather not cause a commotion. Look behind,” he pointed, “-let’s not give the students any unnecessary stress. And I’ll apologize for speaking out of line,” the guards turned and looked for their mistress.

“Better know your place next time,” the guard voiced smugly.

“Don’t overstep the boundaries I’ve laid out,” menacingly, Staxius wrapped his arms around the guards, “-I said I’m sorry but in no way does that give you the right to look down on others. Next time, be more courteous,” he whispered, “-good manners can get you places in life. However, one day, that belligerent personality will get you killed,” killing intent froze the guards half to death.

“...” silent, none could say a word, “-it was a pleasure meeting you gentlemen,” the grip lessened. Frightened, they shyly stared backward to see a smiling Staxius. “The p-pleasure was o-ours,” they nodded and headed back to the car that drove to the back of the line.

“You enjoy intimidating folks, don’t you?” Adete asked rhetorically.

“Only those who act better than others. If they had come without any ill-intent, I’d have gladly moved,” the stance relaxed once again. Puff after puff, students in classy uniforms exited the premises. All dignified and respectful, they walked and kept the chatter to a minimum. There were exceptions to that rule, mainly the boys who joke and were jolly. Despite this, they seemed to enjoy the company of others. Many formed groups – each fit in different clicks.

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Once near the entrance, their gazes befell Staxius who waited patiently. By the way, he stood, the hair color, handsomely shaped face and dignified aura – it couldn’t be helped. Many grew curious about who he was; they kept on staring till butlers and maids came to escort those privileged. As soon as the students met with the escorts, questions about who that mysterious man was asked. A question that remained unanswered.

“Where’s Lizzie,” Adete asked, a few minutes had gone by. The crowd that returned dissipated slowly, the cars parked drove and left.

“Ha, commoner, why did they even allow you here?”

“Where are you going?” Adete asked; Staxius’s eyes opened to which he entered the compound. “Are you sure this is a good idea?” she kept on asking questions but no reply. Students gave side-glances that seemed innocent for the most part.

“Leave me alone,” held in a headlock, Lizzie with her face drenched in sweat and clothes torn.

“No, you belong in the trash,” a group of five what seemed upper-classmen had surrounded her. Near a bin, they slowly stepped back, the lid opened, Lizzie tried hard to get away but to no avail. Her eyes lit with anger but subsided.

“Throw her in,” the one in charge ordered. *Whoosh,* a gust of wind blew, it pushed away the students who had tied Lizzie. Held as if a princess, she could but watch, her heart rested. In his arm, she felt comfortable, “-you did great holding back,” Staxius whispered. In no way was Lizzie weak, that girl had fought to live. The reason why she didn’t fight back was simple; not wanting to damage the name of her guardian, the girl gritted and endured.

“Now then,” he voiced, “-care to explain what this is all about?” the stare piercing, he eyed the leader.

“N-nothing, j-just playing around,” the leader replied with confidence, blond hair, blue eyes, and expensive clothes, the boy was a high-ranking noble.

“Playing around,” Staxius smiled, “-care to let me in the fun?” instantly he disappeared.

“Where did he go?” they asked, confused about what happened.

“How does a trip inside the bin sound?” a voice came from behind.

“W-what do you mean?” the blond-haired boy backed off, “-there’s nothing here,” he stepped back, “-we’ll pick this up later,” they ran. A good choice seeing that normally, carrying another human would limit movement.

“What are you doing here?” her mind came to.

“I came to pick you up, isn’t that obvious?” he replied with a smile.

“Is that so,” she stood, “-thanks for going through all that trouble, I appreciate it, but you don’t have to trouble thyself,” the short dirty-blond hair had grown a little. The face looked more feminine than usual, her eyes, light-brown – it complimented the hair.

“It’s no trouble,” from casual to serious, “-I’m sorry to not have been able to see what was going on all this time. I should have taken better care of you, I’m sorry,” the head bowed, the seriousness came from a feeling of regret. He unwillingly had put Lizzie in a situation where she could not have escaped the feeling of oppression.

“Don’t worry about it,” she voiced, “-I wanted to change. Enough fighting, I want to be someone new, someone reborn. You gave me the chance to get a proper education, a bit of bullying is fine. I’m grateful for all that has been done. I saw Auic changed into a person strong and confident, I want to be that way. This is a test, one that I have to get through in order to be able to repay the kindness.”

"You don't have to repay anything," he patted her head, "-as a teenager, the focus must be on enjoying what you have and not worry about anything else. That's my job, I'm sorry for having caused such trouble. Honestly," he smiled, "-you're far stronger than I was at your age," the tone genuine.

"T-thank you," she smiled and laughed.

"Listen," her laughter calmed, Staxius' spoke sternly, "-I'd normally not pry into thy life," he turned, "-however, Lizzie, I decided to take you in, therefore it makes me your guardian. This might just be self-satisfaction for not having been able to see my daughter grow. Even so, this is my responsibility, from today forth, I, Staxius Haggard, will plead myself to care for thee wholeheartedly. Too long was it that you were ignored," he held out a hand, "-so what do you say?"

"You know," she grabbed his hands, "-this is the first time I've seen that side. I always thought that Staxius was a man that cares not for others. That bloodshed was the only path he knew, well I guess I was wrong," she smiled, "-you are a good-natured person. I'm honored to have you as my guardian. I don't care if it's a selfish reason; I've never had people that care about me before, so," the grip tightened, "-thank you for caring." They walked, it had been only a few minutes, Lizzie thought that it was now time to return home. However, her face froze the moment Staxius headed inside the school as opposed to outside.

"Where are you going?"

"The director's office."

The way he walked, she could but follow. The man that led was serious, it showed on the face. 'This may be selfish, but I don't care. I do regret not having raised Eira, but it doesn't matter. I should be ashamed, this girl I took in on a whim, had to suffer because of my idiocy. Enough is enough, time to take responsibility and become a better person. Taking everything for granted has made me careless.'

The Director's office, they arrived, the door stood in the middle of the office building. One separate from the school compound, a similar design to Claireville Academy. A knock later, permission was given to enter. Sat behind the desk, a middle-aged man wearing glasses and unnatural black colored hair. The latter had been diminished, the lack of hair at that age was a problem many had to face.

"Good afternoon," he greeted with a cold voice, a quick glance at Lizzie later, the man stared away as if disgusted by her sight. "A delinquent," he said underneath his breath at the sight of Staxius.

"Good afternoon, director," Staxius returned the greeting.

"Please take a seat," the one in charge offered, to which they accepted. "How may I be of service?" both elbows on the table and hands interlocked; he asked as if a tedious task.

"As you see," the voice courteous, "-my daughter here has been victim to some unsightly behavior for a so-called prestigious school. Care to elaborate on how this could happen?"

"Miss Lizzie," not wanting to answer the question, he turned the attention towards the girl, "-I've gotten many complaints about you not being able to cope nor study with the school's agenda. Surely you must understand that it only marks you as a target. This school is a place where the top of the top come to learn and to have someone like you, a commoner, to enroll is preposterous," the stare befell Staxius, "-

therefore, sir, if the girl can't cope with the syllabus. What right does that give me to act on others who've been studying tirelessly?"

"I do understand that she's not that bright," he spoke as if a father, "-I shan't use the excuse that students must be given equal chances..."

"Then that should sort everything..." the director interjected.

"-speaking whilst someone else hasn't finished, is behavior unfitting a director. How is someone who can't respect basic manners allowed to rule?" a shake of the head later, "-I know full well that this place is subject to a hierarchy. The rich rule over the poor, it doesn't matter if one is smart or not, what counts is one's social standing," he took a step back, "-I'm sure you've heard about Arda and Oxshield's alliance?"

"Yes, and how does that relate to this situation at hand?"

"An alliance means that each kingdom is now bound to one another. This also means that the ranking between nobles from each faction is taken into consideration. The son of a noble here or there will always remain a noble. It doesn't matter, they are to have the same amount of respect, do you agree?"

"Yes, I do, but I still don't know how that relates to this situation,"

"Well then," he stood, "-let me formally introduce myself," the voice strong and imposing. "I'm Staxius Haggard, King of Arda, and first in line to the Ardanian throne."

Chapter 218: Connections

"..." silence befell the room. The director who had been smug and defiant up to this point could but stare. Lizzie, on the other hand, sat next to the man who revealed the hidden identity. Out here, in the main province – the title as king was kept hidden. Not out of fear; being revealed as king and known to many would bring about unnecessary problems. Before the alliance, walking around the capital as King wasn't such a good thing. Now that it was set in stone, none could stop it. The Queen of Hidros, one that excluded Arda, was happy to have had an alliance. Time changed people – mostly, a traumatic experience could bring the best and worse out of someone. Luckily, for the Queen, having been a torn in Staxius's side for so many years, had a change of heart. In no way were they friends, but he wasn't the type of person to go ruin someone's life without purpose. Even among the nobles that ruled over Oxshield, none knew about his identity, none except a few close allies. Starting from Gallienne herself to Raulf, the divine blade, Josiah, the director of Claireville Academy, and his close friends. Apart from that select group of people, the name Haggard never accounted for anything major.

A shadow in a dimly lit room, part of the surrounding. That was how he had lived till now, ruling from behind, masterminding everything up to this point. Slowly but surely, all the connections made, actions taken and more, led to the quests being accomplished. However, today, seeing Lizzie suffer because of a whim – a selfish wish for satisfaction, no longer was it fine to stand by and watch. Once responsibility was taken, one must fulfill the job without exception. The sight of someone suffering didn't pull any heartstring, nor was it out of compassion or sympathy. It was out of a sense of duty, one that transcended the illusions of emotions and care – a man of action as opposed to words. The murderer remained fixed, waiting to pounce at any given time. Nothing could ever quail the thirst for blood. 'Nevertheless, I can endeavor to become a better person.'

"You must be joking," the director stood then fell back to his chair, it was a shock.

A faint gripped was sensed on his jeans, tis was Lizzie who had grabbed onto the fabric. She held it as if a child holding their parent's hand in a crowd of strangers, tight and firm.

'He called me daughter,' she thought, the face felt more alive than before, being acknowledge made her skin tingle. A warm glance towards her later, he faced the director whomst was lost for words.

"Do you know the implications now?" he asked in a monotonous voice.

"G-give m-me a moment," sweat pearly out the forehead to which it glistened in the amber light.

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"Time is of the essence," Staxius demanded; not leaving any chance to recuperate. 'Now that he's shaken, time to play a card this man can't ever hope to refute against,' From within the pocket, a black phone was taken out. A few phone calls later, he reached Sophie, then Josiah who was in the middle of training Eira.

"Hello, Josiah speaking," the voice crackled for it was hard to get a good signal.

"Sorry for disturbing," Staxius spoke, the director of the junior academy had one thing in mind, how do I get out of this mess.

"I recognize that voice," the old man proclaimed, "-give me a moment Eira," was heard in the background. "Now then," following a few footsteps, "-what's the occasion of this call?" he asked, the tone curious.

"A pleasure to hear that you're doing well. From what I got told, you were hospitalized? Must be the old age," he added in jest to which Josiah laughed.

"Likewise, nephew, likewise, so how may I help?" calling out of the blue to exchange pleasantries wasn't Staxius' usual demeanor. He knew that there was something brewing underneath.

"I'd like to ask a question first,"

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"Go ahead,"

"What's the administrative order for Claireville Academy. I'm currently at the Junior branch, care to summarize?"

"Is that so, well as the director of the central Claireville Academy, I've got absolute authority if that's what you're asking. The other branches can but bow down to us, so what brings you there anyways?"

"I decided to check up on a girl who's currently under my care – call her my daughter or whatnot. Thing is, since she's orphan with no title whatsoever, it eluded me till now, but that girl has been subjected to oppression. I know full well what that entails – you've already formulated a vague timeline of what happened. Therefore, I'd like you to just call the Director and confirm my title as King to him. Get a hold of Raulf if needed, heck, tell the divine blade to get a hold of the Queen – I care not, what I need is for

that man to understand who stands at the top and who doesn't," the words had power, this was the first time Josiah heard his nephew dead-set on fully utilizing his connections.

"Worry not, Nephew, consider it a present from this old man," with a laugh, the phone hung.

"Say what you want, but I don't believe a man such as you can be the king of Arda," that phone call gave the Director time to recuperate.

Driing, a cacophony of telephones and phones overwhelmed the quiet room. "You best pick up those phones," no emotions nor opening, he sat as if nothing happened. Lizzie quickly tried to get a hold of his hands; her mind was troubled by what her guardian had done. "Don't worry," he spoke silently, only the lips moved, his eyes felt warm and comforting.

Desperate at answering the plethora of calls – it took a few minutes till it died out. The face was scared beyond belief. "Who the hell are you?" slumped on the chair, he asked rhetorically whilst exasperated. "From the Director of Claireville Academy to Raulf Serlo, and even Queen Gallienne herself, they all called to confirm thy title as king of Arda," the head shook in disbelief. "I dare not think about the poor guy whoever tries and stand in your way, majesty, I solemnly apologize for the insolence I've shone," he stood and bowed.

"Raise thy head," the voice thunderous and deep, one befitting a king. "There's no need to act differently," he voiced, "-now that you know that Lizzie is under my care and protection. Can I trust that her safety and well-being is your personal priority? I won't say this twice, Lizzie may not have a family name yet, though it's not uncommon for royalty to take on orphans as family members," he stood and held out a hand. "I'd advise you to treat her like royalty. If anything should ever happen – I swear," in that instant, a dark-aura enveloped the room, "-I'll turn this place into the portal leading to hell," the door opened – they left.

"I'm alive," the director sighed, "-Staxius Haggard and Lizzie, who knew that people as intimidating as they exist. To make the Queen of Hidros, one rumored to be heartless and conniving to call and threaten my position as director – I dodged the bullet," the hands went back to filling papers. [Lizzie: Guardian – Staxius Haggard, King of Arda] was written as her parents; the girl's profile was updated from commoner to one under the care of the royal family.

"Master..." Lizzie called, they sat in Void.

"Yes?" the voice gentle, he asked, intrigued to what she had to say.

"What you said about an orphan getting adopted by the royal family, is that true?" her face seemed joyous.

"Yes, it's not that unheard of, though it can't be done on a whim. I'll have to consult my wife first. But never mind that," he patted her head, "-I'm your guardian now, don't worry about anything else," the car turned on. "Let's go get you some clothes first," with a wink, the car sped forth.

The visit to the junior academy resulted in a good outcome. The changes would not be direct – it would take effect in the coming weeks. Students would soon come to slowly accept Lizzie as an equal.

"Now then, order what you want," sat in a café, near town-square with a giant fountain as the backdrop – the duo had tea. Visiting such a place had never crossed her mind before – though it was populated by

students from other academies and schools. At this time of day, the town square and the commercial district would be filled by teenagers hanging out and having fun. Some hosted study sessions on the upper floors of the various eateries. Disparities between rich and poor didn't affect daily life since the prices were moderate. A firm balance that allowed all to enjoy; not too expensive nor cheap. Of course, that depended on the shop and what kind of owner ran the place.

Outside, under a wooden vintage-looking roof, around a circular table for two, they waited. A quick look around showed that this particular café was reserved for the privileged. It showed by a single look inside, men and women wore classy and elegant suits and dresses. A place for business meetings – student wise, a few were scattered around, their posture dignified and tables filled with meals that could be described as an excessive waste of cash.

“Are you sure it's a good idea?” Lizzie asked, her mouth watered but didn't show. The prices on the menu made her on edge.

“Don't worry about it,” he came closer, “-money isn't an issue, go ahead and order anything you'd like. We also need to get you clothes – time is of the essence,” then relaxed again.

The waiter called, food ordered – Staxius decided on sipping tea and watching the surroundings. People eyed the duo, he looked like an actor from the main-land, as opposed to Lizzie who had a shabby outfit on. A hood, and long trousers, to which she seemed boyish. It didn't matter in the end for a person's worth was evaluated by the personality and belief as opposed to materialistic gain. Tis was what Staxius thought anyways.

A good meal later, the duo headed off to purchase clothes. From two-thirty to now six; Staxius and Lizzie kept one another company. Adete joined in the fun a little later. Shorts paired with a white-hoodie with a teddy bear on the front, socks that were knee-high with sneakers with a pink cap – was worn. This was one of the many outfits Staxius bought – the drive home was fun. The girl innocently rested her head against the car window and slept.

“Today was fun,” Adete spoke, “-I think Lizzie had the same feeling too.”

“I agree,” a quick check on the bank card later, [Balance: 202 988 Gold, 500 Silver,] “-a single gold piece to get like six outfits, Lizzie sure is considerate,” he smiled.

“Considering the records of thy money spending, it's good to have someone with a sliver of commonsense around,” she added smugly.

“Ha-ha, very funny,” sarcasm filled the tone, they arrived at the hotel. Held on piggyback, they entered. The reception welcomed him with smiles – it had been a few months since they stayed at Zer's Dorm. The idea of moving to the noble district loomed around head. A few strings would have to be pulled but it wasn't out of reach.

“Over here,” Avon called from the first floor.

“Hello, Avon,”

“Good to see you back, master,” he voiced and helped to open the door in which Lizzie stayed. “Seems like you had fun.”

"It was quite entertaining to see Lizzie come out of her shell. I was a fool to ignore her on my own prejudice." The last sentence was mumbled to which Avon fired back with, "-care to elaborate?"

"No," he shook his head and walked out, "-I'm headed off to Pandora," a smile later, Staxius vanished.

"Where's Staxius?" Undrar rushed out of her room thinking her brother was present.

"Gone," Avon replied and headed off to hang out with Auic.

"Damn it, I had to inform him about the interview..." slumped, the dragon returned to her bedchambers.

'Now that I'm back,' the car turned on, '-it's not far off for the Order to allow the opening of a guild in Arda. I'll have to contact Diane first; information is crucial. For now, buying a mansion is a priority. I should be able to get a good deal if I speak with Raulf. That's a worry for tomorrow,' he drove back to Pandora, thus the eventful return ended.

Chapter 219: News Headline

[Rosespire's News]

[Headline: First-ever Platinum Quest]

The next day arrived faster than usual. Out in the capital, at daybreak – when citizens rushed over to the business and commercial district for work; newspapers sold quickly. It might not have looked apparent at first, the influence of Adventurers and guild had grown over the years. As famed and popular as mages were at one point, that spot was slowly taken by the born fighters with the inhuman potential. For many, that line of work was a dream, one that many wanted to partake despite the dangers.

"First platinum quest to be completed," boys ran around the streets trying to sell issues." Located near the town square, the heart of the capital from where every district could be reached from – small cabinets with papers had opened. The words platinum quest had piqued the interest of many potential buyers.

'The fantasy of being the first to accomplish a tier-one quest has been claimed. Not by a top-guild, but one of the lower and lesser-known guilds: Kniq. Details about the exact quest have been kept confidential. An interview with the guild master has given a vague idea of what transpired. The closed border leading to the south has been subjected to an onslaught of monster's activity. The aforementioned guild's involvement in stopping the siege was imperative. For three months, the guild fought day and night to keep our border safe. From tier-10 to tier-3 monsters, they fought tirelessly to save us all.' A summary of what the news had written was read out loud by Undrar.

"They also go on to quote us from our interview," Deadeyes pointed out. Sat around a lovely breakfast with newspapers on the table, they read and smiled for it was a great honor to be the headline of today's news.

"The fight was long and hard. Though in the end, with the power of teamwork – we survived the assault," – Avon [Sapphire].

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“At times I thought death had had me in its eyesight. Nevertheless, a pull of the trigger later, all my fears fired alongside the bullet,” – Deadeyes [Steel].

“To save others and protect what is precious, tis the job of a hero,” – Achilles [Silver].

“As powerful as we might have been, if it wasn’t for a well-established plan of action, we’d had died without a time to refute,” – Viola [Silver].

“Many comrades were lost, but their memories live on in our memories.” – Emma[Sapphire].

“To endure and power through, that was the teaching given by our guild leader,” – Emmy[Sapphire].

After the quotes, the article went into further details about the fights. This information was directed mostly towards aspiring adventurers. Having a firm idea of how things were done could be the deciding factor between life and death. At the end, written in a smaller font, no quotes from Knig’s guild leader. Thus, being the first party to accomplish such a feat, their name would be forever etched into history. The reaction from said news had taken the capital by stride. Many were amazed by the details of the fight. The standards to which the protectors had to follow was raised. Many of the top-guilds were gutted by said news, though it remained behind closed doors.

“They might quote us, but none really know our faces do they,” Achilles commented then sipped tea.

“You’re right, it’s probably for the better,” Undrar agreed.

A few meters away, stood on the first floor in the hallway, Staxius waited with a bag filled with books. ‘I wish I had more time to spend with Xula yesterday,’ he sighed, ‘I did manage to get the scholar to make me a sword similar to Orenmir, Blood Blade of the Queen. It might take a few days; we’ll have to wait and see.’ After returning to Pandora last night – the Lymsey sister took refuge and slept in the lab. As silent as a cat, he teleported to Arda where a stern-looking Xula waited. The supposed one-week trip turned into months. A little angry, he got given the silent treatment. Nevertheless, after flattery and compliments, breaking through that adorable, angry side of Xula – they made up with a shared passionate night. Before the sun awoke, Staxius returned for there were things to be settled.

“I’m sorry for being such a bad husband, you deserve better,” cuddled under a blanket, he whispered with regret in the tone. A vivid piece of memory that carried over to the next day.

“It’s fine,” she caressed his hair and face, “-you’re working hard for both my and the kingdom’s sake. How it hurts to be away from he who stole my heart,” a kiss later, “-I don’t mind it one bit. Do what must be done, thou shalt always have a home to return. Tis my job as a wife to welcome thee with open arms,” a smile followed by the scent of flowers, Xula’s generosity knew no bounds.

“Living a normal life isn’t in our fate,” he sighed, “-you’re a queen and the heir to the god of death. Excepting normality is a dream, however, I vow to always stand by thy side,” their fingers interlocked, face to face, he smiled and she blushed, “-I adore you so much, queen of my heart and soul, I adore you...”

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“Wake up...” the daydream broke by Lizzie’s voice.

“Oh, sorry about that,” the prior night’s memories returned to the back of the mind. The love that built between the king and queen transcended what people deemed as normal. Both felt exactly the same way, despite not having time to spend with one another. Each moment allowed was precious – what they had was unconditional love. To love without condition, each wanted the other’s happiness and expected nothing in return. Selfless and noble – the bond wasn’t tied to the mortal realm either, it reached their soul as well. Not to forget, Staxius was the conduit for Xula, channeling her power and returning her status as Angel wasn’t a mere act of kindness. He had done something worth much more than words and actions. In Xula’s case, she gave Staxius a new purpose, a new will, and a new mindset. A change that made him into a better person, a change he’d never forget for it was the best thing to ever happen. In that sense, both were saviors to one another, the love story of an angel and the heir to a god.

“It’s fine,” Lizzie spoke with a smile, her uniform, one of white and golden color – the one that was previously torn now replaced.

“Shall we leave?” he offered.

“After we say good-bye to the others,” she smiled, thus their arrival at the hotel’s eatery.

“Morning everyone,” Lizzie spoke with a big smile.

“Morning Lizzie, morning master,” the others returned said greeting.

“I see the newspaper has our name on it,” Staxius pointed to which Avon lent his copy. The chatter continued as if old friends. A few minutes later, Auic descended from her room with a lunchbox.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said whilst panting, her face covered in sweat.

“It’s fine,” Lizzie reassured the fox-lady then took the box.

“Master...” confused, Auic needed answers.

“I forgot to say,” he cleared his throat and gained the table’s attention. “-Starting today, I’ve decided to embrace my duty as Lizzie’s guardian. Change is sure to come; I hope everyone is ready – that platinum quest we accomplished has opened new avenues,” the voice soothing and filled with determination.

“What about the twins then?” Undrar asked, “-from what I found out, they don’t have a place to call home any longer,” her concern was well-founded.

“Good point,” he returned her question with a smile, “-Kniq is a big family. Atop being a guild, we’re one big unit – the twins might not have a home yet,” a quick pause later, “-that is to say that, the change will come. Best be ready, my friends, my comrades, you best be ready – we shall soon enter a new age,” Staxius spoke with a leader’s vigor.

“We’ll trust you,” Achilles replied with a smile, they nodded in agreement.

“It’s getting rather late, I’ll see you all later. If anything comes up, do reach out – I shall be at Pandora, I think,” wearing the same clothes as yesterday, the duo entered Void and headed off to school.

“Something has changed,” Deadeyes commented.

“I think so, yeah,” Undrar agreed.

"Let's not forget that Staxius is still twenty or so," Avon added.

"Age is just a number," Auic interjected, "-in my opinion, I think master is standing up to his many responsibilities. As he said, change is underway, we all can but wait and see," breakfast continued.

"Are you going to come and fetch me later?" Auic asked, her face could barely keep with her smile, one big and large.

"Yes," he replied kindly, "-I'll try to be as regular as I can. Though, if something comes up, I'll make sure to send a message," he took out the phone, "-Is that alright?"

"Sound good," she took out hers and exchanged details.

"If I don't respond, contact Auic,"

"Don't worry," Lizzie pouted, "-it's not like this is the first time I'm doing this."

"I guess not," he chuckled then patted her head.

"What are you doing up so early," Adete awoke from her slumber.

"See for yourself," the car drove forth. An hour later, they arrived, the roads were jammed for the most part. A normal part of life here.

"Here we are," he voiced, the car came to a slow stop before the gate.

"Check that car out," the students pointed at Void, "-it must be so expensive," they commented.

"Whoever that student is, must come from a rich family – I'd not be surprised if they were royalty," the chatter came from a group of students that waited for their comrades to arrive. Judging by their tie, they were in the same grade as Lizzie.

"I'll see you later," Staxius said to which the door opened.

"Later," she replied with a joyful smile, "-don't forget to call if anything happens," her head tilted to the right slightly, then pulled out a peace-sign, after which, she walked away.

'I wonder who she learned that from,' the car sped forth. As opposed to reluctantly enter her classroom, Lizzie arrived with glee on her face. Being cared for by Staxius had done more than he'd thought.

'Now it's time to go buy the place where Kniq can finally live in peace. I wonder who should I call, Raulf or Cake,' parked underneath an array of trees lined on the sidewalk, Staxius leaned on the hood and had a cigar. Leaves from the branches fell slowly to the ground, it seemed as if snow, peaceful and idyllic.

Beep, the phone rang suddenly.

"Hello?" he asked with no idea to who had called.

"Good morning Staxius," a feminine voice spoke, "-it's me, Melisa," she voiced.

"Is something the matter?"

"Yes, could you come by the guild as soon as possible, the guild master has requested thy presence."

“On my way,” the phone hung. ‘Must be the reward for all those monsters I have slain.’ Rather than driving back, he teleported just shy of the guild, none noticed for it was done in an alley barely large enough to fit Void.

‘What’s this all about,’ the car pulled up against the entrance, he stepped out. A crowd of adventurers waited and spoke as if something major had happened. “Pardon me,” he called and made his way through the crowd.

‘What the hell,’ stood near the counter, Raulf crossed his arms and had a giant sword embedded into the floor. “None shall come forth till the Guild leader of Kniq has made himself present,” he voiced strongly.

“Have you called?” the voice monotonous and face unimpressed, he walked and stood before Raulf.

“There you are,” from serious, the face changed into one friendly, “-where have you been,” they embraced. “We’ve got many things to discuss,” the giant sword lifted as if feather. The man stepped away strongly. Baffled, Staxius stared Diane and Melisa in search of answers. The former shrugged whilst the latter mumbled, ‘I don’t know.’ Obligated to follow, he continued. Behind, the gathering crowd rushed the counter since quests were displayed a few seconds earlier. ‘This could not have come at a better time,’ Staxius thought. The door opened – Raulf sat with a gentle smile.

Chapter 220: A New Page

“Well then,” face to face to one another with a desk in the middle. Two of the arguably most powerful men in Hidros sat. Their faces shrouded with mysteries and aura filled with strength and unyielding will. The room, one minimalistic with a single-window behind Raulf. The warm sunlight barely made it through the shutters, the latter’s shadow shone on the table. A quick pull on the string later, it shut, rendering the warm light inaccessible.

“Now then,” the divine blade broke the ice, “-we have matters to discuss. Please relate any questions after I’ve spoken, as a favor – I don’t want to be interrupted,” casual and stern, uncommon at best, tis was how the man spoke or rather, commanded.

Unimpressed, no reaction nor emotions – Staxius sat as an immovable boulder.

“First of all, the matter concerning the Qaisar, the amount collected had me shaking in my boots. Not only did you slay over tens of thousands but the majority weren’t small fry either – tow to tow with tier-seven and above, I must say, I’m proud to have placed my trust in thee. Thou art the pride of the central guild. Overturning the hierarchy and chain of command in that military outpost isn’t a feat I could have done – not to mention, nothing bad came out of it. A passive take-over,” he paused and glanced Staxius from head to the hips for the rest was hidden under the table. The sight of Adete resting didn’t bother in the least. “You sure are scary,” he resumed. “Needless to say, this meeting isn’t about that. It’s about the reward, from monster slaying along and with all the Qaisar collected after taken the processing fee, the total reaches,” he took out a tablet and scrolled through details relating to the conversation. “The precise amount is, 175,000 Gold pieces,” almost thunderstruck, Raulf couldn’t believe it. So much cash obtained from slaying monsters, disbelief couldn’t describe the shock. The reason why it took so long to process was that the people in charge were sure an error must have happened. Rechecking after

rechecking, the conclusion was as so, the adventurer known as Xenos did claim 175,000 Gold pieces from monster slaying alone.

"So, you see, that's the reason why I had to come to meet thy personally. In addition to that, the queen seeks an audience. As known by the public, the adventuring association is governed by me alone. Though there are a lot more at play, first and foremost, The Order paired with the Royal family has a major deal of influence. Attaining Gold or Platinum rank can't be given by me, that authority comes from either the Queen or one of the Sages in the Order. As figured, you know where this is going. Separate from the gold you earnt; the Queen has decided to award thee with the Tier-two gold ranking. To top it off, a cash price of 10,000 Gold has been set aside, this is the actual reward for completing an actual Platinum Quest," the news now delivered, he stopped to check on Staxius's reaction.

"I see," the stance relaxed, "-to summarize, I'm promoted to Tier-two gold with an enormous reward," he nodded, "-sounds good," a smile to dispel Raulf's guard later, "-when's the ceremony?"

"Not an actual ceremony, but a private event hosted away from prying eyes. You see, this whole thing must be kept under wraps," the tone changed into a whisper.

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"No need to say anything further," Staxius stood, "-if it's private, I'm guessing we can attend now. Let's be honest, the guild master would not have come all this way to relay just a message," he figured out the purpose of the visit.

"Nothing escapes thee, does it," Raulf stood with a face of defeat, he had been found out so easily.

"If it's not much trouble, I'd like to drive there personally," the hand reached for the doorknob, "-want a lift?" he offered as a friendly gesture.

"Sure, why not," with a nod, Raulf accepted. The walk downstairs occurred without anyone noticing their presence. Most were busy trying to register quests.

The scenery changed from crowded to empty after a few minutes of driving, the area when approaching the noble district was empty and quiet. Not many people had access to said place. This wasn't the first visit for he had come when Axius requested help.

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"Guild Master," as the drive reached its end, Staxius called.

"Yes, is anything the matter?"

"I'm thinking of the possibility of purchasing a mansion," he spoke calmly.

"Is that so, what brought about this idea?" Raulf asked.

"Nothing major, I wish to have a place where my companions and I can call home. A small house would not be suitable. You see, I've got many people to take care of,"

"Why not ask with the bank or the estate companies that specialize in dealing with property," a good proposition in fairness.

"Not acceptable, they allow places only in the residential district. What I seek is a place in the noble district," the tone lessened into a shady whisper.

"I see," he rubbed his chin, "-buying a property in the noble district isn't possible. Those are given by our ruler's discretion – she decides who stays and who leaves," he sighed. "I'm afraid I can't do much in the ways of helping. The Queen is the only one who can decide such matters," the car arrived at the castle entrance.

"Worry not," they stepped out, "we're meeting with her majesty, I'm sure we can strike a deal," determined, the duo entered. The castle door closed, footsteps echoed around the hall till they reached a private room, more like an office, one next to the throne room after a few twists and turns.

"Majesty," politely, Staxius bowed. The lady in question had her sights outside, on a lovely garden. The room, one heavy and filled with antiques. A portrait of herself stood behind the massive dark-desk. The windows were long and thin with its top as a semi-circle.

"Greetings, King Staxius," the queen bowed in turn, mutual respect for one another. "-If it isn't much trouble, I'd like to have this meet alone," she spoke in a way that signaled the attending maids as well as Raulf to leave. The door closed, no other presence was sensed to which she took a seat and offered the same to her guest.

"With all due respect, before we begin, can I ask a personal question?" the tone courteous and gentle, the guard she had up lowered.

"Formalities are good and all," she spoke, "-though it would please if you'd care to be a little more open and direct."

"As you wish, majesty," he replied with a smile.

"What's this so-called personal question you speak of?"

"Remember when we fought out in Dorchester around seventeen years ago?" memories suddenly rushed her mind, "-I'd like to know what happened to thy right eye. As I recall, a sacrifice to Emes was made so that I'd lose my boon of immortality."

"Oh..." her stance slumped, "-I almost forgot we were enemies till a few months ago," she lifted her hair that always rested over the right eye. "As you see," she tapped the eyeball, "-it's fake. I had it made for it would be unsightly to have a one-eyed princess at that time."

"I see," he paused, "-what about the magic used," the question hit home, "the summoning element, Hydra," matters of one and a half-decade old were brought to the table.

"You remembered," she shook her head in disappointment. "As you know already, the summoning element was artificially made. In the following months after our fight, it grew too hard to control, this in turn corrupted and almost destroyed my Ice-element," she held out her palm and conjured an ice-ball. "At most, I can only use a few spells," regret shone in her face, "-my actions in the past were less than honorable," her head lowered, "-I apologize for all the unnecessary trouble I caused."

"No need to lower thy head, majesty, I didn't bring the past seeking an apology. It was done so we could both move on from that past. I commend thy for changing and trying to make Hidros a better place. I

respect your actions more than the words, you're worthy to be named Queen," a pause later, the voice changed into one sterner, "-I'd like to know what happened to the book Tempest Haggard wrote. The knowledge of artificial elements was something only my father knew about." For the entire duration after getting released from that curse, Staxius had been gathering information about the book, it might not have been apparent. With the addition of so many new occurrences, the initial goal of finding out about that book was placed into the farthest corner of his mind. The whole audience with Queen laid the necessary groundwork for the possibility to turn over a new page.

"Tempest Haggard," she held her breath, "-did you say that he was your father?" it lit deep in her eyes; amazement.

"Wasn't it obvious?" he asked with narrowed eyes, "-I'm Staxius Haggard, the family name should have been a dead giveaway. I thought that you knew about that already, thus the reason for wanting to have my head so many years ago," the situation grew overwhelming.

"No, no," she adamantly refused, "-I did so because mother told me that you had the potential to overturn the continent. After which..." her mouth stopped, "-I don't remember," she met his gaze, pure and innocent, what was said was the truth. "Do give me a second," she stood and rushed outside.

'Is her majesty an idiot. How did she not know that Tempest and I were related? The family name Haggard is obvious. This is beyond foolishness, I'd think a mind-control spell is a reason for her behavior, sadly, there's no trace of anything related to that. In any case, this is perfect. She must have my father's book, and after all this time, I can close that chapter.'

"I apologize," she came back with sweat all over her face, "-here's the book in question." Upon closer inspection, the title and author name were lost, only Tempest remained. The interior seemed intact for the most part. As predicted, it had information about how one could create an artificial element. Sadly, the part about how one could put it into action was burnt.

"Since we're bringing up the past, care to tell me where you got this from?" he asked, intrigued.

"It was a gift from uncle Tempest," she replied with confidence.

"Excuse me," the pitch raised, "-what do you mean by uncle?"

"..." A few moments of silence, questions about whether they were related rushed through their minds. Each gave glances to one another, "-I refuse, this isn't possible," Staxius voiced firmly.

"Yes, I agree, it's not possible," she shook her head in turn. In an attempt to resolve the quandary at hand, a phone call was given to the queen's mother.

"Mother," Gallienne stood, the lady in question arrived without wasting time, "-could you kindly resolve this issue?" to which they explained the whole situation.

"First and foremost, you aren't related in any way," now sat where Gallienne previously was, Sely spoke, "-the reason why you called Tempest uncle was simple, that man was the bodyguard to our king. Most of the history surrounding those two died with them both. Even as queen, I was kept in the dark – all I knew that was Tempest and your father were close friends. As a close friend of your father, Gallienne, you'd often refer to Tempest as an uncle. That's the extent of the issue at hand," her gaze changed to Staxius, "-the reason why he was alienated and deemed as the cursed mage was to protect us. At the

time, the empire fought against the foreign countries over who'd have the right to rule. This happened long before the king was named king, at the time he was but a mage. Long story short, after that war, an incident happened where Blaine lost control and killed members from the imperial family. In hopes of calming the brewing animosity, Tempest took the blame and went into hiding. This was at the time where Blaine and I had been the ruling monarch of Hidros. You were around six – before that incident, Tempest was in charge of protecting us. That's the extent of what I remember – anything else is now long lost. The past should not be brought up any longer, what is done is done. It does come as a shock to know that he who spared my husband's life had a son all along. Also, you should know that I'm the king's second wife," with a smile, she left.