

Death Magic 461

Chapter 461: Impulse

The reaches of the capital city of Rosespire came close. A thriving metropolis of wealth, fame, technology, and more. Youths in search of fame often tried their luck in the place of dreams. Compared to the capital of five to six years ago, the city overgrew its own walls. The once main barrier keeping from monsters became the center wall. As for the city itself, the expansion continued into multiple surrounding districts as big as towns in other provinces. Located at the North, South-East, and South-West of the capital city, the expanding districts were given the name: Lai, Juei, and Onela.

Lai, the bigger and more commercially thriving district was known as the place where money matters. If one had Exa, the limitless potential of Lai was there to seize.

Juei, more on the reclusive and meant for residence. Those of status and fame could purchase mansions, villas, apartment complexes – the sky was the limit. Those words were the literal truth as some buildings were so high one couldn't see the summit.

Onela, the business-focused factory of office-workers. Trading and such happened within said boundaries. Thus, were the three major districts of Rosespire. As for the city itself, many builds were replaced for the sake of modernness. Hidros was on par with the technology in Alphaia. The remainder of their past was the Cathedral of Syhton and Royal castle.

"Welcome to Rosespire." The night was naught but a word. The plane landed at a nearby airfield. No red carpet awaited the arrival. He got off with multiple guards waiting below. They saluted Lady Lordon wholeheartedly.

"Igna," she stopped shy of another luxurious car, "-I shan't spare any capital on thee yet. There's a bicycle there and a map on your phone. Go on boy, find your way around the capital, I'll have my husband contact you soon." She graciously entered the car and drove off. Nothing stood beside an enormous shadowy hangar. A chilling wind blew to nullify what clothes he wore. The breeze felt as if cold needles against his boiling red-hot cheeks. 'Was I really left alone?' held onto the bicycle, he walked beyond the shadows of the hangar. Each step filled the heart with excitement, the light's addictiveness, upon reaching the stop where darkness met with glimmer, he peered into a new world. The view over the Adventuring Academy failed to compare. '-This is on a whole new level.' Despite the distance, the lettering, the flashing beams, the airships advertising things of which weren't recognizable, '-so that's the capital city.' Towards the right and left rested the other districts.

"Lai is over there," he stared right, "-Juei is over there," now to the left. "Which means I'm here," the location was marked. The particular airfield was privately owned by some big shot company. 'I guess I need to find the trader's guild.' A search showed the latter to be in Onela. Going through the capital was not an option since the only entry was to the South. 'Guess I'll have to go around,' the sheer scale of the expedition was yet to be comprehended. 'At least the bicycle feels light, I'm pretty sure I saw this model on the sports magazine,' foot on the pedal, he took to the roads aided by the Arcanum.

.....

Meanwhile, at the Academy, the succulent dinner was naught but a faded memory of a friend. Leonard made the mistake of going into more details on 'Viper'. The Arcanum brought forth many answers, most

of them being troublesome. They stood with a suit jacket in hand and arms locked with the ladies who took off the high heels. The view before was a loveable show of mediocre glimmers. "What can we do now?" wondered Jen resting against a simple railing.

"No idea," sighed Lampard sat cross-legged on the roof, "-Igna's going to be fine, right?"

"Not necessarily," interjected Rena, "-I was there once. Rosespire might be bright, sadly, the shadow it casts is very much so dense. Murders happened more often than not. There are even monsters roaming the sewers and dark-alleys. The roads linking the three expansion districts are crude and subject to suspicious accidents. I've even heard rumors of a werewolf roaming the area. Or maybe it was a banshee, I don't know really."

"Oh please," laughed Leonard, "-those are but rumors."

"Rumors do come from a sliver of truth," said Jen with the noble-boy at her side.

"I guess you're right," smiled Leonard.

'What's this feeling...' her cheeks flushed, '-now that I look at him, Leonard is very handsome. He's like a prince, what's this sudden tremor inside.'

"You look bright red," quick to check her temperature, "-Jen, are you ok?"

"I think so," came mindless giggles, '-this is so uncomfortable, Rena, HELP ME!'

The faces met, she smirked to say, "-the night is over, we'll head back and change."

novelusb.com

"Alright," replied the boys.

"Some's got a crush," murmured they running down the stairs.

"No, that's not it," her face melted. Their voices soon blended into the windy night.

"Ahh, finally," breathed Leonard, "-a place to sit. Man, wearing formal shoes takes a toll on the back."

"Look at you complaining as if a geezer," laughed Lampard, "-what do you think of Jen?"

"You've noticed too?" they sat back-to-back, "-she's a nice girl. Her personality might be rigid at times, it's her charm really. What about you, what do you think of Rena?"

"Rena, she's like a younger sister to me. Before you cut me off, just listen. I've noticed how she gets flustered at times when we're alone. I try my best to be dense, it's hard sometimes, her cuteness is just gut tearing. She's cute and adorable... I j-just can't see her as a woman. In my eyes, Rena will always be the snotnose girl with whom we fought."

"Girls are trouble you know," laughed Leonard, "-I'm bound to my family. Well, those can be broken for the right girl. Jen's my type... I need time to know her better. Making a move now will be opportunistic."

"You feeling pity for Igna?"

"No, why would you say that?"

“Jen and he seemed to have a thing a few months ago, I wonder what changed.”

“Who cares, with time, attraction comes and goes. We ought to do our best. Igna’s out there fighting to find a path.”

“Tell you what though,” breathed Leonard, “-I didn’t expect him to be our motivation.”

“I know, he sort of united our group. Remember when Jen and Rena didn’t get along? Look at them now, practically best-friends.”

“The same can be said about us – we’ve grown as Group C.” Under the same sky with the same motivation of becoming better versions of themselves, Group C sprinted forth to new beginnings.

Vrr, cycled he along the empty road cutting across the neighboring woods until the sound of cars came from afar. The dark road ambered with the streetlights. ‘-That must be the road linking the three districts. There should be a smaller lane beside it for people and animals.’ To his surprise, the lane was present but for the tram. He’d have to cross and pedal along the roads. An hour had gone since coming to Rosepire – only now did he reach the connecting roads. The journey ahead was still long.

‘My legs already feel like shit,’ he pulled onto a clear patch before the main woodlands next to the intersection with the airfield. ‘I always feel better at night,’ the cycle rested against a boulder while he laid on the dried grass. Cars often sped past as if lightning or a flash of a camera. *shshhs,* rumbled bushes few steps away. The would-be nap broke, the rumbling continued till a figure emerged.

“Who’s there?” asked Igna a little frightened.

“...” no response came from the cloaked individual. The face was hidden by a mask, the cloud concealed the moon to lower visibility. The slow sound of a blade being unsheathed triggered fight or flight. Poor sight turned as clear as daylight, the mysterious face of the aggressor came to show. Feminine eyes tiptoed in a cat-like manner with her blade drawn. “WHO’S THERE!” he asked to no avail.

Woosh, the blade thrust, *-thud,* ‘-not now,’ he dodged, ‘-the impulse,’ time came to a stop. She turned for a sideways slash, *smack,* her arms met with his hands, the grip increased to force the blade out. “mmmhm...mhm,” she groaned without response. ‘I’m thirsty,’ echoed the words around the head, ‘-I need blood,’ the eyes went blanked of emotions, *-arhm* the teeth bit into the flesh to spray out blood.

“I-let m-me g-go,” she moaned, her face boiled, a feeling of pleasure had her bit her lips, “-n-no m-more,” her legs crossed, “-I c-can’t t-take it.” Force or resisting was nothing, he drank and drank and drank, to finally snap out the craving.

COUGH, heightened senses, sharpened nails, slightly crimson eyes and hair. The attacker knelt with a ripped top. Her body had scratches and bite marks all over, ‘-I c-can’t s-stop trembling,’ he fell backward with blood dripping off the lips and chin.

“L-lady a-are you ok?”

“P-potion... b-bag.”

“Potion in your bag, ok, I got it,” quick to give the drink, her wounds healed into scars. Her undergarments were torn but usable.

"Are you ok?"

"Yeah," her stances felt sloppy, "-who the hell are you?"

"A traveler, what about you?"

"A bandit," she chuckled, "-you nearly killed me, damned vampire," her face remained flushed with a look of wanting more.

"How did you know?"

"Was an ex-adventurer turned rogue. I've met vampires in my time, not as vicious and pleasurable as I'd hope. You're a pure-blooded noble, a compassionate one at that."

"I don't follow?"

"Most noble blood would have drunk without care for the person. We're livestock, well, it's the norm nowadays, can't do none about it."

"I'm sorry."

"Why are you apologizing. Listen, boy," with barely enough strength, she stood to jump and pin him to the ground, "-the outside world is cruel," she tore her bra to slowly caress his stomach. "The act of drinking blood is natural," she licked his cheeks, "-because of the vampiric allure, I'm possessed," her free hand moved to his pants, "-n-nothing can break it unless," the face snapped into a brazen mess of ire, "-you have a mana spell on hand." *Conjuration – Steel Dagger,* the blade went for his neck.

"AHHH," he vanished to knock her on all fours and pull her hair, "-how did you escape!" this time, it was his fingers that caressed her back, "-you said it yourself," came a monotonous voice, "-I'm a vampire," the hands traveled towards her pants and inside the clothes, "-I don't care about you," *-arhm* the teeth sunk in yet again.

"T-this f-feeling," she drooled with moans, her body rocked until the face froze after she screamed. The flesh turned to dust, her life-essence, soul, and blood were sucked out dry with only her clothes remaining. *pouf,* he fell head first, '-how c-can I feel nothing after doing all that?' the trembling stopped, rather, all seemed clearer, the sky, the surrounding, the faint muffling in the forest.

"Lana," shouted a group of five, "-where are you?"

"Boss wait," shouted another shining a light atop a boy covered in blood, "-that's a vampire!"

"Lana..." her clothes caught his eye, "-WHAT DID YOU DO?" the boy simply vanished.

"Let me show you instead," came an ominous whisper. Slashes, tearing out beating hearts, lobbing off heads, it didn't matter, the impulse of wanting blood made it all pointless. He drank, and drank, and drank until the crack of dawn. The first ray slapped him awake, '-what happened?' memories of last night were vivid. The slaughter, the lady, it all came as if a hammer. 'I killed them,' the blood stained his shirt. 'They didn't have much,' going through the items, four phones, a sword, a pistol, clothes, ammunition, a backpack, and around 50k Exa was found on their bodies. 'The legionnaires of Mothra,' read a card in the many wallets. Excluding his clothes, there was no trace of neither blood nor bodies. 'I better leave this behind,' a hole was dug to hide any left evidence. 'There's one thing for sure I know

now,' dressed with one of gang's clothes, '-if my impulses get the better, I might kill other people. I'll need to keep the thirst in check. After the first droplet, I feel as if something has awakened inside.' Back to cycling, the pace increased, '-my body feels lighter and faster. Does it justify killing them? I don't know. My mind doesn't care one bit, nor does my heart actually. Why do I keep repeating the same questions, what is done, is done.'

Chapter 462: Onela

The more the day continued, the fuller grew the roads. Large or not, the lanes couldn't handle the traffic of cargo trucks. Then, at around 11:00, the linking tram passed as he continued biking. 'It's been more than five hours,' thought he hard on the pedal, '-and I've yet to feel tired.' Halfway till Lai, the roads were covered by woodlands.

Glancing the phone at regular intervals, the little dot which was him, soon arrived at the outer-edge. The view that emerged from the prior foliage was a jungle of concrete. There was no barrier nor walls, unlike the other districts, Lai was opened to the wild. Needless to say, security was present in multiple forms of outposts with heavy-looking black vans. The guards atop were armored and ready to fight.

'Intimidating,' he crossed over a speed-bump – an unnatural change from forest to urban. Taking no detours nor rest stop; traffic lights became more frequent. The fast-paced journey came to a halt.

The populous was casually dressed; many fashion icons were up on billboards and advertisements. A particular red-hoodie was worn by a lady with dark-brown hair with Estell written on the bottom. The light turned green, and soon after a few lanes, the same hoodie was spotted by a lady stepping out of an expensive car. The latter stood before a massive building with 'Meldorino' written on it. Besides the giant building, rose another twice its size with 'Diamant' standing out on the walls.

'No time to waste,' thought he continually pedaling.

Incoming call from Guild Leader Haru.

"Hello?" the mess of traffic exploded into the microphone with horns and shouts.

.....

"Where are you?" asked she physically distancing from her phone.

"In Lai, currently heading to the Trader's Guild."

"Did the lady not escort you to her home or restaurant?" the intonation was of a question.

"I don't really know myself, ma'am. She left me at the airfield with a bicycle and said her husband would contact me when was due."

"Those idiots," smothered her voice across, "-Hey, take that at the back of the truck, dumbass," screamed she in the distance.

"Lady Haru, shall I hang up?"

“No, no,” quick to chuckle, “-head to the trader’s guild. I’ll inform them to have someplace to stay arranged. Igna, Rosespire is a harsh place, don’t do anything to stand out. And absolutely no fighting, I won’t back down from my promise.”

“Yes my lady, I won’t fight nor cause harm. You sent me to learn cooking, not fighting, I understand those words deeply.”

“Good, then I’ll call you in a bit, take care,” it ended with a beep.

‘I believed in the lie I told, how low can a person fall. Suppose this is my nature, the personality I’ve forgotten and will probably never get back. Maybe the incident earlier had a clue of my past. For one, there’s me not feeling anything when killing someone else. Next, I can lie without breaking a sweat. Those are the only ones, I think,’ he pressed on biking. At around 13:00 and still on the same road, the other edge of Lai came in sight. Same old guards patrolling the open border. None batted an eye at he who sped past.

The scenery laid into a green flat-lands with occasional fields of wheat and wind-mill over yonder. The terrain after said flat-lands distraught into small hills. The journey along this particular road was idyllic. Warm heat from the sun, gentle breeze from the wind, and strength from the legs. Cars would often slow to check the cycling figure to then continue.

‘There goes the tram again,’ thought he stopped at an intersection. Similar to the airfield back when. The road split to head into the open-field and disappear at the hills. The signpost had ‘-Lengo’s Farmhouse,’ written on it. ‘A quarter of the way there,’ breathing a sigh, rumbling came from the stomach. ‘Guess there’s no better place to stop than this.’

Sat with back against a boulder, he unraveled a plastic bag with bread and butter. The cycle laid on the ground as if taking a nap. The head lean, each bite felt dry and hard to swallow. ‘The difference between this and the food I’m used to is like heaven and hell. There’s no arguing since it’s the Legionnaire’s meal. What even is Mothra, a bandit camp, some vigilante association, I’m confused. Bit by bit, the round-shaped bread or pain maison¹, as said by the locals, rested in the stomach. ‘Something to drink,’ he foraged further until a half-empty water bottle. Cold with frosty tingling, the liquid traveled down the throat forcing him to sigh.

14:30 till 21:30, seven hours of biking led to Onela. Halfway across, the flat-land changed into a gentle hill through which passed the road. A man-made gorge through which flowed cars and vehicles as opposed to a river. Borders erected with guard-post. No stops or verification, the line advanced as ordered by the traffic-stops. The guards were vigilant of the threat of monsters and bandits.

Everything changed, the people returned from work in suits and formal clothes. Onela was separated into two parts, one for office and the other for manual. The former was negotiations of produce by companies to another while the latter was the local factories. The linking road of the three-district served as the border for Onela. Pulling tight on the breaks, it stopped next to a police officer.

“Excuse me,” called Igna.

“...” large and powerful, the officer took a few seconds to glance at who spoke.

novelusb.com

“Hello, can you hear me?” he waved.

“What is it boy?” the deep voice matched the angered expression.

“I’m lost, can you please help?”

“Sure, where are you headed?” the look of anger didn’t match his personality. The stone wall came crashing with the boy asked for help.

“I’m looking for the Trader’s Guild.”

“Oh, which one, Ardanian or Hidros?”

“Ardanian, the one under Guild Leader Haru.”

“No problem, see that road over there,” he pointed, “-turn and carry-on cycling. Should be there faster than you know.”

“Thanks, sir,” with a nod, the journey continued. Over in the distance came the walls of Rosespire with faint-lights atop the ascending road. ‘He didn’t say there was a mountain to climb,’ breathing hard, the ascent all but intensified.

‘We’ve made it,’ it leveled, the road spread into differing routes similar to the veins on the back of a leaf. The buildings increased in size but not height. The towering wall of Rosespire remained prominent similar to an ever-watching guardian.

‘The guilds,’ after a roundabout, well-placed signs told of what laid ahead.

‘Guild Area,’ read one after which came similarly sized infrastructures. The roads were narrower but present, people of differing races walked; sometimes hand in hand, other times with arms crossed, an overall feeling of pleasantness had the mind at ease.

‘I’ve made it,’ stairs led into the centermost building of which was larger and taller. *Ardanian Trader’s Guild,* stood on up high as blocks of glowing white letters. Many people in suits exited the premises to their cars. Some smiled, others frowned, the receptionists waved listlessly.

Following a flight of stairs, glass doors hidden by frost were guarded strongly. Two of the beastmen tribe stood with arms crossed. The uniform couldn’t do much to hide the natural hairs.

“Excuse me,” approached the boy, “-is this the Ardanian Trader’s guild?”

“Yes, why do you ask?” returned he with a surprisingly good accent.

“I’ve come on behalf of Lady Haru.”

“The guild leader sent you?” the fierce eyes narrowed to reluctantly open the door, “-go check with the receptionists,” he gave a once-over as the boy entered.

Bright lights stuttered the high-ceilings. The upper floors were dimmed as it was after hours.

“Hello, how can I help you?” asked a demi-human with sweet eyes and furrier ears and tail.

“Hello, I’m Lyoko Igna, lady Haru said she’d call about my visit.”

“Oh, it’s you,” she nodded, “-Igna right?” the formality dropped, “-she said to assign you to the kitchen. The chefs have gone home already, you’ll stay in the workers quarters,” throwing her fist over the shoulder to point with the thumb. “-Get settled in, our food here is very much desired.”

“Follow me,” came another with a simple outfit, “-I’ll take you to the quarters.”

“About my bicycle?” before putting another word –

“-we’ll have it taken to the underground parking lot,” she exclaimed.

“They sure are strict,” said the guide pushing open another door.

“Aren’t they just doing their job?” unbothered by the ladies, the duo walked.

“Is that the kitchen?” a bar-restaurant rested beyond. Amber with multiple drinks on display, the tables coming after were decorated and luxuriously arranged.

“No, the kitchen is at the back,” pointed he, “-how did you get to come work here?”

“I’m Lyoko Igna, call me Igna,” he stopped to give a handshake, “-nice to meet you.”

“I’m Olra Konoe, nice to meet you too, Igna.”

“Well then, Konoe, what do you do here?”

“A trainee-chef,” he smiled.

“Me too, what a coincidence.”

“Not really,” the eyes narrowed with each smile, “-promising chefs are often brought here to test their skills. Our head-chef is a drill sergeant. Where did you train?” a lift was called forth.

“At a restaurant in the academy, what about you?”

“Never heard of it,” the door opened, “-I went to Leko’s Cooking Academy in Plaustan.”

“By Leko, do you mean Chef Leko?” wondered he coming to the fifth floor.

“Yeah, the founder is a young but very important man in the world of fine dining. I’m curious, how did you get here without going through the academy?”

“Actually, it’s my mentor who sent me. Chef Leko,” he casually smiled, “-I never thought he would have an Academy...”

“Hold on,” they came to a simple hallway, “-are you telling me you were taught by Chef Leko?”

“Yeah,” he laughed, “-we’ve been working together for the past few months.”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” he facepalmed, “-such an opportunity doesn’t come twice. The Founder only comes to the school to oversee the exams. He’s failed more people than I dare to imagine.”

“He’s very strict,” flashbacks to dead chickens flying across the room scarred the face, “-y-yeah, strict...”

“I’m confused though,” now before a plain brown door, “-why did he send you here of all places? Learning from him personally should be a boon in itself.”

“I was recruited to work with Lady Lordon.”

“L-L-Lordon...” light-headed by the name, “-you need to tell me about it,” the door opened to a small apartment. “We’ll share this room, there’s two-bed, a shower, and a small television to indulge,” he leaped onto the couch, “-here, here, come here right now!” the screen toggled to the cooking channel. Lady Lordon sat in the company of multiple actors and actresses, “-that’s her,” said he, “-it’s a recorded episode of a popular talk-show. Her influence is ever-reaching, the world of cooking is diverse.”

“Konoe, tell me about the academy?”

“Oh, it’s the same as any other school. There’s an entrance exam supervised by renowned chefs. They judge based on gastronomy theory and then actual cooking.”

“Interesting,” fully giving his attention, “-how long have you been cooking?”

“Ever since I was four. I come from a rather rich family – my father’s very fond of good food. I guess I wanted to become a chef to see him smile with what I made,” shaking his head, “-what about you, how in the hell did you get noticed by Lady Lordon?”

“It was Chef Leko’s doing. I didn’t know how to hold a knife till a few months ago. It began at the Adventuring Academy, I signed to become a trader and ended on the path to becoming a chef.”

“T-that’s not too long ago,” he watched with doubt, “-Igna, would you please prepare me something to eat. I want to see what a boy who only began cooking a few months ago can accomplish,” the brows crinkled the forehead.

“S-sure,” they stood, “-what of the guards and receptionist, can I cook them something too?”

“We had dinner a few hours ago, I guess it’s cool, let me ask them first,” phone in hand, the conversation ended quickly. “-They said alright – go on then, Trainee Igna, show me the skills.”

.....

Chapter 463: Heon’s Restaurant

The kitchen resounded with the sound of meals being prepared. Hidden from the ‘bar-restaurant,’ two intimidating doors acted as guardians. Inside, after a hard push, it opened to a place with white tiles, multiple counters else referred to as the cooking-station. One rested upfront for plating, it was usually mounted by the supervising chef.

“What smells so good?” wondered the demi-human receptionist wiggling her tail and nose.

“It’s meat,” replied Konoe with arms crossed and half a smile.

“Meat?” sighed the other receptionist, “-how original...”

“Don’t insult meat,” came other workers, “-it’s the staple of what makes a meal great. Besides, we don’t care about the fine dining everyone does here,” a bearded man with slippers and vest entered without tact. “The world of the rich cuisine, who cares,” he laughed.

“It’s personal preference,” argued Konoe respectfully. The bearded man seemed to be strong as the others were reluctant to speak or stare.

"I suppose we have to wait," sighed yet another entering the kitchen. Soon after, the sweet aroma of the simmering stew knocked their senses.

.....

'Late night meals must be light and easy to swallow. The body has to rest for the next morning. A stew should be enough, there's no need for fancy. It's the first thing Chef Leko taught me.'

"Konoe," closing the lid, "-where will you be seated?"

"In the restaurant," replied he.

"Could you please take care of it?"

"Yeah, sure," with a nod as the other stared, "-let's move outside. I think the meal is about to be readied." None could refute until a loud sizzling and burst of fire stopped the line. "-What?"

A musician playing and imbuing each note with emotion. Igna stood there as if the guide. Both hands moved ambidextrously, the calm and compose exploded into the rash and irregular.

"What is he doing?"

"He's cooking," said Konoe reluctantly, "-I've realized why Lady Lordon asked for him. He told me it was less than a few months since he held the knife. I don't doubt the words, why would anyone lie about being a rookie, especially in such a grand setting as here. The techniques being used, the way he checks the pan, there's refinement, unlike anything I've experienced." The show of ability grounded the would-be leaving guests. No words exchanged from that point forth. A hypnotic performance of skill and potential.

Twenty-five minutes later, "-Konoe."

"What is it," approached he to Igna who washed his hands.

"Can you help me plate? It's sadly something I'm not that good at," casually wiping and drying the hand, "-I might have cooked, still, the first impression of the food is what motivates one to eat. Please, I need help." The sincerity in the face and voice couldn't be beaten.

"Fine," he patted Igna's shoulder, "-I understand you a bit more now. The technique you showed was tantamount to a seasoned veteran. Can't believe it's been that little o' time."

"Thank you for the compliments," tasting the food at last, "-here."

'What's this...' an explosion of flavor had the feet stuck to the floor, '-the rashness in his cooking is present in the food. It's strong and unrefined in a good way. I can taste the strength of meat, the wild nature of the beast.'

"It's demon-wolves meat," smiled he, "-I found some earlier and the Blood of a Covenant."

"Are you insane? I thought only Master Leko could utilize such ingredients..."

"Why was it here then?"

"Oh..." the face shifted to cluelessness; "-I don't know myself."

“Yeah, whatever, it’s going to get cold, help me with plating.”

Bowls in hand with side-dish of meat and vegetables, the food came out one by one. The table filled with the aroma of earlier, and soon the staff waited fondly.

“Thank you everyone for taking the time and coming to try the food of a recruit. Let me explain what’s in the meal,” and so, after a few minutes, the ingredients weren’t hard to grasp as well as the technique used.

“Young Igna,” said the bearded man, “-don’t feel bad if we hate the meal. Everyone here has experience in tasting. We’ve been spoiled by the best chefs around the nation, compared to them, there’s no parallel.”

novelusb.com

A lid covered the bowls, none had taken a look at the actual meal.

“Is that true?”

“About them being spoiled?”

“Yeah,” asked Igna with a frown.

“No two ways around it, the staff here have taste tested meals and recipes from plenty o’ chefs. Some are good, many were bad, still, the heightened senses of the Ardanian’s contested by a lot.” The casual chatter faded into silence, “-what happened?”

“They had a bite,” smiled Igna. A bite turned into another, ‘-what’s this flavor, I need to know more.’ Each thought the same, the modest food of a trainee had them craving more.

“Konoe!” screamed the same man, “-who made this?” strong and heavy, the room dissolved into shameless murmurs.

“Igna, vice-director, it was made by him.”

“Vice-director?” asked Igna tapping the shoulder.

“Wait,” said Konoe with a facial expression.

“No, I refuse to believe it,” he sat with twice the force.

“It can’t be him, can it?” argued the receptionists.

“Such a pleasant meal,” sighed the normal workers, “-I’m filled with energy.”

“Yeah, I know,” replied the guards, “-I can work the night without trouble now.”

Those who finished stood, “-the meal was succulent,” compliments were given on the way out.

“I like the explosive taste,” said the demi-human receptionist, “-I’m Ellie, and this here is my partner Ella. Guess you’re not that bad a boy,” they left after patting his head arrogantly.

“Those two,” exhaled Konoe in disappointment, “-they never changed, don’t mind them.”

Lastly came the bearded man, “-Boy.”

“Yes?”

“Let me introduce myself first. I’m Vice-Director of the Trader’s Guild in the Onela region, Carter Lonhe.”

“Suppose it’s my turn. Lyoko Igna, trainee-chef.”

“I’m curious,” he held his chin, “-where did you learn cooking?”

“From Chef Leko.”

“Chef Leko... why are you here then? Isn’t studying under a man of his caliber enough?”

“No...” the head shook, “-he decided it for me. I’m waiting on Lady Lordon as my teacher.”

“It explains it then,” nothing else uttered, the man headed out. Thus, the night of arriving at Onela ended with full stomachs and smiles.

Friday 8th of April came fast with an alarm ringing hard. The sun had yet to rise outside, ‘-so early,’ muffled he with a yawn.

“Morning Igna,” said Konoe parting the curtains, “-you’ll start working at the kitchen today. Early start for us trainees,” the face held enthusiasm.

The minutes turned into hours, many o’ chefs arrived and introduced themselves to the rookie. Igna was tasked with preparing a simple dish as means of a test. The result was delicious and the techniques displayed had taken the chefs by surprise.

“Good to have you onboard,” said a clean-shaven skinnier man. The skin around his face was shriveled and stuck to the bone. “Call me Nole.”

“Yes, Chef Nole.”

“Impressive kid,” said a man wearing a bandana, “-the grandmaster saw your food adequate. Be ready for an onslaught of insults if things get bad. Chef Nole might look old and soft, he’s a devil by heart, trust me on that.”

“A devil by heart,” mumbled he reminiscent to Leko. ‘-Where’s Konoe?’ a scan of the kitchen showed the boy at a washing station. The others continually teased him with certain looks and actions.

“Don’t get involved, Igna,” said he with the bandana, “-those guys are from noble families based off Hidros. We can’t do anything to them except watch.”

‘The disparities of the two kingdoms are still here. What the hell was the story about peace and unity for. A noble being abused by other nobles. The Head-chef seems to not care about the result.’

“Don’t,” said Konoe silently.

Tssk, ‘-how annoying. Part of me wants to help him and the other part doesn’t want to do anything.’

“Order up people,” came a younger man with a darker complexion, “-breakfast is as important as dinner. Work as if there’s no tomorrow because there will be no tomorrow if results are lackluster.”

“That’s Ola,” whispered the man again, “-the right-hand of the head-chef. Make sure to not end up like Konoe.”

“Thanks for the heads-up. I’m Lyoko Igna by the way.”

“Call me Ki,” said he proudly, “-now, let’s get this started.”

“Order up people!” yelled Ola. The slow and easy-going kitchen divulged into a well-oiled machine of preparation. The restaurant would open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, unorthodox for the ‘fine-cuisine’ advertised outside. The purpose of it was to recruit potential talents for bigger places. Many stayed years on end here trying to break and make a name.

Excluding the entrance from the guild, another door rested forwards of the bar. The main-entrance as one would call it. The somber night didn’t make it apparent at first. It continued till stone-pavement after which rested the road. Many decorations in the forms of plants and flowers over-looked the clean and immaculate staircase. Each step was made and crafted out of granite. It elevated the reflecting image. Heon’s Restaurant was calligraphically written above the double-doors.

Soon, the restaurant filled with many o’ workers and casual people. “Let me tell you something about Heon’s,” smirked Ki, “-breakfast and lunch are simple, delicious, and affordable for the common folks. The head-chef is adamant in his belief that delicious food must be given to all. Don’t let the décor fool you, we’re a full-blown diner in the morning.”

“It’s something I can get behind,” he smiled.

“What?” paused midway frying vegetables, “-I thought you’d be discouraged by the thought of serving the norm.”

“Not really,” happily preparing the dough, “-I don’t care who from where is eating the food. As long as it ends up in one’s mouth, it shall come out the other end devoid of the prejudice of wealthy or not.” Stone-cold glares of the other cooks froze and cut across his back, Chef Ola overheard the sentence and nodded.

Thus, trailed the day until three o’clock. “Good job everyone,” added the head-chef, “-go rest for now. We’ve prepared for tonight’s meal. It’s going to be harder since it’s a Friday,” the empty eyes seemed to wander across the room, “-we’ve gotten many compliments today from our customers,” he kept on searching, “-be proud of what you’ve done.” He rested upon a single man, “-Lyoko Igna, come with me.”

“Yes Chef,” he left after folding the apron neatly.

“I saw your techniques earlier,” said he exiting the kitchen, “-I’m impressed.”

.....

“Thank you, chef,” he nodded, “-might I ask where we are headed?”

“To a meeting room, someone has come to visit.” Up the lift and towards the restricted part of the building, a room had, ‘Guild Master’s Office’ labeled on golden sheets.

“Hello again,” smiled a lady behind the desk, “-Igna.”

“Guild Master,” quick to bow, “-it’s a pleasure to see you.”

“Yes, the feeling is mutual,” smugly gesturing the chef to leave them alone, the room shut menacingly.

“-Take a seat.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he sat, ‘-why does she feel so offended today.’

“Igna.”

“Y-yes,” startled by her sharp tone, he stared empty.

“Good job on making it here,” her voice eased, “-I admit Lady Lordon was harsh to leave you to the wild. I guess it’s her way of saying go explore the capital. I heard from the vice-director of the meal you made last night,” paused to breathe, “-listen, this is where it gets serious. Igna, tell me right now, are you sure about becoming a chef? Once you study under the ‘Viper’ there will be no going back.”

“Yes,” he smiled, “-I made Chef Leko a promise of being at his side. Besides, I’m a member of the trader’s Guild, I’ve yet to learn a sliver of what is there in the world.”

“I see you haven’t given up on wanting to visit the tower of Aria. Here, I’ll make you a promise. If you manage to become renowned as a chef, I’ll call onto someone who will teach you the ways of the nightwalker. What do you say?”

“What classifies as being a renowned chef?”

“Basically become an idol,” the conniving grin told of the trouble laying ahead.

Chapter 464: Medusa of Cooking

‘As if doing so will make me a ‘supposed’ star.’ Lost in the mindless moving of Guild Haru’s always luscious lips, ‘-nothing else better to do, suppose I ought to repay what I’m due.’ Soon, her mouth moved as to say ‘Igna,’ quietly, it kept on repeating until she slammed the table.

“Sorry about that,” startled, the chair nearly fell.

“Shesh,” wiping her forehead, “-do pay a little attention when I’m talking.”

“I do apologize for the disrespect, Guild Leader. It’s not without reason,” leaving the sentence unfinished, her ears wiggled in intrigue.

“Go on, what were you thinking?” she smirked with a hand on the table.

“Legionnaires of Mothra...”

“Where did you hear that name?”

.....

“I came across it on the way from the airfield. The guards at Lai were rather intent on letting people know their name.”

“You expect me to believe that?” her eyes sharpened, her nose sniffed in saying she could smell a lie.

“Yes,” returned he with a cold expression, “-lady Haru, I did but mumble the name Mothra. Why is it you seem flustered all of a sudden?”

“Tough nut to crack,” she facepalmed, “-are you sure thy memories are gone?”

“Yeah, don’t remember anything. Besides,” he leaned, “-are they a group of bandits or something?”

“Suppose I’ll tell you,” she eased into her seat, “-Mothra is a less than likable guild. They kill people, steal monsters, slay adventurers for a few gold and blackmail. They provide any service as long as you have gold.”

“Why hasn’t the guild taken action?”

“We can’t. Mothra’s a guild backed by a conglomerate in Alpha. They have diplomatic immunity. Even if we go after them, nothing will come out of it.”

“Alpha?” tilting his face, ‘-sounds familiar for some reason.’

“A continent to the North-East of Hidros. They’re allies of the Argashield Federation.”

“If it’s politic then count me out,” he sighed.

“Wasn’t it you who wanted to know more?”

“Yeah,” distraught by the reality, “-I thought they ought to have been some rare organization. Oh well, matters of states are best suited to the people at the top. A nobody like me doesn’t have the right to even dare look their way.” Tipping his head, “-thank you for the warm welcome, guild master. I’ll work twice as hard to make the Trader’s Guild proud!”

“Wait!”

“Yes?” stopped steps away from the door – her face felt a look of annoyance.

“Chef Leko is a nice man. He pleaded for me to do this,” a tag sprouted out her clenched palm, “-Kinless, welcome to the Ardanian Adventuring Guild.”

“I don’t understand...” back to where he was prior, “-didn’t you say no fighting?”

“I was being selfish. Take it before I change my mind.” Quick to obey, the rugged white-tag had Tier 10 – Porcelain engraved with the adventuring name.

“Why the Ardanian Guild?”

“Do you think Hidros would accept a vampire?” breathing a chuckle, “-with this, you’re now bound to us in Arda. In a way it’s insurance, no harm will come. Ardanian fighters are well-respected with or without a high rank. The process is simple, go to the guild if you ever have things or items to sell. Stock up on weapons and such. Word of advice, do keep to Ardanians on the field, they’ll help out without malice or second-intent.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” the tag wrapped around the neck nicely, “-what about the Academy?”

“It’s been handled. Each subject has its own way of teaching and testing. The Trader’s Guild has even more freedom. Train to become a chef, it’s close to being night-service.”

novelusb.com

“Will you be attending?”

“Obviously,” she laughed.

“As you wish, my lady.” The amber light in the hall flashed as the door closed.

Her stance relaxed further in the seat, “-majesty, are you please with the results now?”

“I’m not the queen,” said a monotonous voice, “-I’m but her weapon,” thus it vanished without another word.

‘So much for keeping it a secret. The trouble for taking care of you is worth the backlash. Igna, become the best chef the world has seen. It’s the only way to achieve the later goals. Being famous and of repute will serve in the long run.’

Ding, “-what is it?”

“Guild Master, Lord, and Lady Lordon have arrived.”

“On my way,” said she shuffled along the upper-floors while Igna dashed across the bottom floors. Time showed 17:00 and all rookies were obliged to make it before 16:00. The kitchen filled with unpleasant murmurs. Konoe tried hard to keep at washing dishes.

“Hey, Academy graduate,” fired one across, “-didn’t you take a class in street-food opposed to fine-dining. A poor noble like you can’t even afford a decent meal. He has to prepare it...”

“Stop with the pointless chatter,” blazed across the white floor.

“Shh, it’s Chef Ola,” the abuse turned polite. Seeing preparation going smoothly once again, Igna entered whilst panting.

“Igna?” frowned he, “-do you realize what time it is!”

“Cool it, Ola,” came another voice, “-the boy was with me,” said the head chef. “-Don’t worry,” a pat on the back gave time to breathe. “Go on and help Konoe in preparing the ingredients.”

“Head-chef,” voiced Ola, “-it’s going to set a bad example.”

“Not at all,” he smiled, “-the lateness incurred was beyond his control. He knows of the impoliteness,” shrugged to the boy’s direction. The chopping board rattled with the fast-paced cutting. No mistakes nothing, the knife was handled not as a chef, rather, as a trained swordsman. “Hard-work to make up for the disrespect.”

Knock, knock, “-can I come in?” interrupted one of the waiters.

“Sure, what is it?” they stared outwards the kitchen.

“Konoe,” snickered one of the nobles, “-didn’t you burn water?”

“Hey, hey, don’t say that else he’ll tell the chef.”

“Poor mama’s boy,” *clang* a knife flew across the kitchen to land millimeters away from those who spoke smugly.

“Sorry, my hand slipped?” turned Igna with a nonchalant expression, “-Konoe, do you know how many people die in the kitchen each year?”

“No, why?”

“None actually, there’s always a first for everything,” the steps echoed, “-forgot to introduce myself earlier. I’m Lyoko Igna, nice to meet you.”

“Cathu Fonnt and here’s my brother, Peo Fonnt,” light glimmered across the forehead.

“Nice to meet you, Fonnt brothers. Can I please have my knife back?” the guild tag shimmered.

“Yeah sure,” the hand trembled as the older brother returned the utensil. The tanned expression, sharp facial features, curly hair, and slightly well-built body told of a person who cared about how he looked. Both siblings were similarly dressed.

“Fonnt brothers,” voiced Ola, “-anything the matter?”

“No, no,” said they intimidated by the show of recklessness. Was it intentional or an accident, the questions of whether to be scared or confident forced the duo into a silence.

“Konoe,” said he back at the chopping board, “-I might be the lower-ranked adventurer, however, I’m still a fighter. If the time ever comes where you need my help, please reach out, I’ll do my best then.”
Chop, chop, chop.

“You sound so much like those fictional heroes. Always meddlesome.”

“Fiction is born from reality, that’s how I think of it. I doubt the Fonnt brothers will try anything. Let’s focus on cooking, yeah?”

“Sure,” thus the duo worked at a faster pace than before.

“What did you say?” voiced an astounded Ola to the point of shuffling back. “The Viper is coming to visit?”

“Yes,” said the waiter, “-the Guild Master told me of her arriving soon.”

“What does she want?” asked the clear-headed Nole.

“No idea,” replied the waiter, “-I’m only a messenger.”

“Head-chef,” voiced Ola, “-isn’t this a great opportunity to have our food be evaluated?”

“Yeah, I guess,” he grinned, “-the cooking will be handled by the veterans. Have the rookies take a break from today’s shift. I want the Fonnt brothers, Konoe and Igna can wash dishes and plate.”

As was said, the roles assigned were less than dignified. Konoe on plating the meals and Igna doing the washing. Respect in their place of work was earned. Less opportunity to prove oneself meant being in the shadows of the brilliance of the others.

“Don’t let this get you down,” said Ki embracing Igna and his friend tightly, “-we’ll make you proud, don’t worry about it.”

Minutes turned to hours; the guests came from all over the capital. Expensive cars were parked in the neighboring lot. Sport to comfort, the model’s never-ending variant was close to a dealership. Bystanders would often stop and take pictures. Service came at last with Konoe on duty. Without much else to accomplish, Igna walked out the back-door and into a dark alley with crates and pigeons. The latter went around seeking food from the trash, plastic bags tore open, rats ran circles with cats following close. In no way was it clean and neither that dirty, a sacrilegious balance of the two extremes. Silhouettes of couples shadowed onto the slightly lit ground. He could but stare blankly at the passersby.

‘Standing for that long should have taken a toll, still, I feel nothing. The guild tag has Arda written besides ‘Kinless’. I’m an adventurer now. Still, the fighting is so far away. I’ll return in December. What’s group-C up to anyway.’

The situation inside went along smoothly. Food was served quickly, Haru and the Lordon’s were seated in a reserved area with a few others. The VIP lounge on the second floor of the restaurant.

Under a gem stuttered chandelier with golden candle holders resting atop the table, Lady Lordon waited with a smile for the food to arrive.

“Might I ask why you left my pupil at the airfield?”

“No reason,” said she with a waiter bringing the meal, “-wanted to torment him a little. I suppose it was a test to see if he could manage on his own.”

“How did he fair?”

“Pretty good,” interjected the husband, “-he knew who to contact and made way to the trader’s guild. Dependable younglings are hard to come across, Chef Leko’s uncovered a diamond in the rough.”

“Yes,” smirked Lady Lordon, “-one that I, Yuki Lordon, shall polish.”

.....

“Let’s dig in,” offered Haru.

The famed chef’s table was served. Chef Nole and Ola waited impatiently for the inevitable compliments of their meal. The Fonnt brothers, talent scouted by Chef Ola did their best since coming here.

“What’s this?” her nose moved as if it were excrements. “-In no way did my will-be pupil prepare this,” angered, Lady Lordon dashed across the room to stomp down the stairs.

“What happened?”

“Don’t worry about it,” smiled Lord Lordon, “-she’ll be back soon. I guess the food isn’t to her liking?”

“You guess?” her eyes narrowed, “-it’s pretty obvious she hated it.”

“No, the food is good, it’s very much so expected for the standard of such a restaurant. What she seeks is the raw talent of what we tasted at the Academy. The touch inherit from Chef Leko, none has replicated or mastered it besides that boy. Goes to show the extent of the potential.”

"Lady Lordon, please wait," voiced a waitress.

"Don't touch me," said she shrugging the hand off her shoulders. 'How dare they serve me that bland mix of ingredients.' The double door barged opened with a fiery glare, "-I demand to see the head-chef!" her hair began to levitate and move as if snakes.

"I'm here," whispered the old man running across, "-my lady, did something or someone offend you?"

"Yes," returned she strongly, "-the food offended me very much so!"

"How, tis the veterans of the kitchen who prepared your meal. We did all we could to have it be perfect."

"Perfect it was," said she shaking her head, "-being perfect is good. After a while, it becomes bland and untasteful. The only time I felt alive is when I'm eating Chef Leko's cooking."

"Sorry to disappoint," came a strong sentence out of Ola, "-Chef Leko isn't here, we'll never conform to that man's cooking."

"How dare a lowly cook speak to me in such a manner," in that instant, the taller man felt short, she stared down her nose and into his soul. No care for tact, the superiority of her aura froze him in stone. The Viper, otherwise known as the Medusa of cooking struck hard. Her wrath was feared among the famed and respected gastronomes. Poor were they who experienced her full power, 'Heon's done for.'

Chapter 465: Cook-Off

"Please, there's no need for such animosity," pleaded the head-chef, "-you're a lady of power. Maybe there's something we can do to qualm the failure on our part."

"But..." hearing Nole take the responsibility and blame, Ola's stance grew physical. The anger and injustice rose from within to the point of blowing over. *TSS* and blow did it as the pressure cooker whistled to break the argumentative atmosphere. Smartly holding the hand of the youngling, the head-chef waited through the high-pitch scream.

"Surely my lady, would you have come to a restaurant knowing full well we couldn't satisfy thy pallet."

"No, you're right," she took a loud stance, "-a man in need of liquor will head to a bar, not a pharmacy. Yet, the thing I want can be made available quite quickly."

"I don't follow," inquired Nole as a crowd of preoccupied chefs rallied behind. The numbers didn't matter as the Medusa of Cooking seemed to petrify those who dared stare.

"If I might add, didn't you say that only Chef Leko can suffice thy mouth. Per our teachings here, none would be foolish enough to follow his footsteps."

"Shut your mouth!" refuted Nole, "-a cook in Leko's caliber must be given proper respect. Mind thy tongue, Ola," the wrath of the patient man flickered to make many shudder.

.....

"I apologize, sir."

Her ever melancholic stare basking in the fire of anger scanned the whole room, she made contact with young Konoe then refocused onto Nole. "Head-chef," said she with a softer tone, "-wasn't there a recruit who joined the cooking staff?"

"No, not that I know of."

"Head-Chef Nole," voiced Ki, "-maybe the lady is referring to young Igna."

"Yes, him," she smiled, "-bring the boy to the kitchen."

The tranquil alley rattled as the back door slammed open. The feeding pigeon flapped away, rats screeched as the cat dug its teeth into the pest's neck. Death was never far thought he dazed by the complex surrounding.

"IGNA!" yelled Konoe.

"Here," he called hidden behind stacked crates.

"Why are you out here?" came the boy with hands on his hip.

"Went out to get something to drink," an empty glass bottle of cola dropped into a nearby bin, "-are there more dishes to wash?"

"Are you dumb?" inquired he both in words and actions, the brows were tired, the cheeks pale and the lips dried.

"Did something happen?"

"Yeah," lamenting the situation inside, "-Lady Lordon came barging in."

"She's here?" quick to stand, "-come on, let's go," he barged inside.

"There you are," waved the lady surrounded by angry-looking cooks. "Let me through," she eased across the crowd to hold the boy's hand, "-tell me this right now, did you cook anything tonight?" her pleading glance made it hard to pay attention at them behind.

"Egh-"

"-look at me," she grabbed his focus by force, "-did you cook, yes or no?"

"No, I didn't," the head shook with narrowed eyes. "Lady Lordon," a frown had her quite intrigued, "-why was it you left me out on the airfield?"

"Oh..." playing innocent, "-I don't know," the head turned away defiantly.

novelusb.com

'She came across as delicate the first time we met. A dignified lady who rarely spoke and was given the mantle of a mythical being. The chefs aren't pleased with her arrival. There's more to her actions, I can feel it, why did she run in here, was it merely a whim?'

"There you have it," she turned, "-he didn't cook."

“Why does that matter,” argued Ola, “-a rookie isn’t supposed to cook upon joining. It’s common practice to wait for acknowledgment,” the hands moved on each word spoken.

“No, that’s where you’re wrong,” she laughed, “-this boy right here is unlike any of the people you’ve trained.”

“Lady Lordon, my patience has run low. Have you come here to insult our ways of cooking or will there be a conclusion to this mishap? The customers outside are waiting for their food.”

“Too bad,” she shrugged, “-they can starve for all I care.”

“LADY LORDON!” voiced the entire cooking staff.

“Hey,” she whispered, “-want to have some fun?”

“What exactly are you planning?” wondered he.

“To get your name out there,” she turned and winked. “Listen up, Chef Nole, upon my name and repute of Master-cook, I challenge your subordinate to battle my pupil here. If he loses, I’ll personally bow my head and apologize. The boy will drop cooking altogether,” the confidence and way of speech made her already fearful name into the description of arrogance.

“A battle?” he paused, “-we’ve spent more than thirty minutes arguing. Let’s treat the guests,” quick to call onto the waiters, the event began right away. Two teams will prepare the same meal for each table, the guests would decide the winner.

“Lady Lordon,” smiled he, “-let’s make this fair. How about its only three members, with us both as the captains,” the pleasures of beating a rival with his hand couldn’t be passed.

“Deal,” she smirked, “-Igna and your friend...”

“Konoe, ma’am.”

“Good, Konoe, where have you trained?”

“The Leko’s cooking academy.”

“Perfect.”

On the opposite side stared Nole, Ola, and Ki. Peculiarly enough, a crew from one of the major channels in Hidros was here to interview up-and-coming stars in the world of music. The commotion downstairs spread throughout the restaurant; each table spoke about it.

“Let’s change location, ma’am,” suggested the cameraman.

“No, let’s wait,” said she with legs crossed. The white-formal vest and dress were fetching. The group sitting across was compromised of four members. Each wore fashionable outfits, the likes of which was flashy and undisputed.

“Ma’am,” came an assistant holding a water bottle, “-it’s the chefs. Lady Lordon, the Medusa of Cooking, and Mr. Nole the Monk are getting readied to do battle.”

“A battle between two renowned chefs is bound to make headlines, come, follow me!” she quit on the idols who but waited patiently.

“Can you believe this?” wondered Konoe, “-I’m getting the chance to cook besides a legend.”

“I know,” said Igna admiring Lady Yuki. Her hair was tied in a high-bun aided by sticks, the sleeves were pulled back with the apron around her waist. The way she flamed the pan and stirred the pot was a dance of elegance. Nole didn’t bow either, the harshness in the way the knife sliced flesh, the way the meat sizzled – the assistants waited with opened mouth.

“Order up,” came a waiter with paper, “-here are the meals.” Two cooking stations went full throttle; the trio of Yuki, Konoe, and Igna clicked as if a well-fitted puzzle. Her technique was gentle and soft while he had perfect control. The scary thing was as perfect as the hand obeyed his orders – he took the liberty of purposefully making mistakes here and there. The explosive nature came from said trait bestowed by Leko. Konoe followed with the ending phase, the dressing of the food was a work of art. One by one, team 2’s plates flew out of the kitchen.

Team 1 with Nole in charge held a few flaws. Ola being the right hand and all was mentally tormented by the prior thrown insult. The food left their corners at a constant rate, still, after a few minutes, the monstrous dexterity of Igna channeled into showmanship of the culinary arts. He took the gathered crowd of spectators by storm, ‘-I got it,’ the mind’s limbo between the conscious and subconscious didn’t affect the team.

‘Good. Not only is the taste unrivaled, but the methodology is also unique. There’s the flare of swordsmanship, just what is your past like, Igna,’ wondered a sweaty Yuki.

The camera swept and recorded the kitchen to the taste test. The hours went on into dessert where Konoe shined.

“We have a clear winner,” said the reporter, “-Yuki Lordon and her team have defeated Chef Nole. There’s no information on the deal between the two – though you can expect little ol’ me to find out.” The tables cheered with light applause and thus the cars left to an empty hall.

“So,” smiled she, “-I’ve won our battle. There wasn’t any condition, call it a whim. Chef Nole, what you made was good, mine was better,” she faced Igna, “-good job. I’m certain you’re a perfect fit to come train by my side. For now,” she held out a hand towards the head-chef, “-take care of him for me.”

“Sure,” no bad-blood remained at the end. The passion shared by rivaling parties surmounted the pettiness of it all. Konoe stood for having held and kept pace with those monsters.

“Good job out there,” said Ola to promptly walk out the back door.

“Nicely done, Igna, Konoe, it’s only the start of greater things to come,” added the Head-chef.

Guild Master Haru smiled across the room as if to say, ‘congratulation’.

“Excuse me,” came a man dressed in a suit, “-what will be of the interview with our band?”

“I do apologize,” said the reporter, “-Star X is very popular with the ladies. Still, a battle between behemoths doesn’t come every day.”

The video of the cook-off made waves across the Arcanum overnight. Many social platforms linked with cooking shared the clip. A demon raging behind the stove with the Viper at his side. The flashy style had many dumbfounded. Needless to say, the boy went viral.

“Yuki, was it all your plan?” the car drove.

“Not really,” she eased onto the window allowing the draft to shake her hair, “-I went with the flow. Lucien, there’s no need for such worries. I’m going to train the boy soon enough – we need the restaurant to be renovated first.”

“Lyoko Igna will return to Leko’s side sooner or later, don’t forget.”

“I’ll make sure he grows to enjoy our company,” and so the duo faded into the ever-stretching roads.

Saturday 7th of April began with the phone ringing constantly.

“Igna, mute the damned thing already,” said a tired Konoe.

“Sorry about that,” the flashing screen between the somber room made it hard on the eyes. *Caller: Unknown*

“Hello?”

“IGNA!” came a familiar voice.

“Who’s this?” asked he still half-asleep.

“It’s me, Jen, have you forgotten already?”

“Jen, did something happen, why call at such an early hour?”

“You don’t sound happy...”

“Obviously not, I’m sleeping, ok, good night,” he cut the call.

“THE AUDACITY,” yelled she inside the half-empty room, “-doesn’t he know about the news?”

“Don’t think so,” said a half-naked Leonard waking beside her, “-I doubt he knows.”

.....

“Come on you two,” came Rena with a disappointed exhale, “-congratulation on being a couple and all, it’s not nice to show-off.” Yuki Lordon wasn’t the only surprise that Friday had in store. A very flustered Jen called Leonard to the roof and proposed, per her words, she couldn’t contain the wallowing sensation. Nothing could have made him happier; it was an immediate yes.

“I can’t believe it,” said Lampard holding a laptop, “-is that the Igna we know?” the video played with millions of views. Spell’s Channel broadcasted the whole event over the Arcanum. “Look at that,” a particular clip showed the boy throwing a knife and catching it with the other hand without turning the head after which he proceeded to slice a tomato. Enthusiast or no, the momentum the clip gathered was tantamount to a raging tsunami. ‘Medusa’s prodigy,’ was assigned as his nickname.

“I don’t care,” said Jen sharply, “-I’m calling again.”

It reached a point where Igna had to shut off the phone to be able to sleep. The reporter responsible for such a find got rewarded handsomely by the channel. The amount of buzz around the clip created a solid ground for growth. Yuki realized the potential and soon contacted Haru to have Igna move inside the walls of the capital.

Leko silently watched the clip and wondered if the decision was wise. 'Medusa's prodigy. Will he be able to come back after all this publicity?' the kitchen resounded silently with the chopping of cabbage, '-the future might be more than was bargained for.'

Chapter 466: Place to place

The crack of dawn brought a pleasant touch to the eyes. 'Jen gave up after a few tries, maybe I'll call her later.' Saturday began with a message from the Head-chef. The recruits would take the weekend off as a recompense for winning the battle. Konoë packed his bags early morning and set out to meet his family. Igna awoke with a heavy burden atop the brows, a heaviness that soon faded into the far reaches of the mind. Warm and comfy to lay upon the cold floor, a jittering flash of discomfort shot upwards to the stomach.

'The days off is fine and all...' the windows opened to a mildly busy alley, '-what am I supposed to do?' The motion of brushing teeth, getting ready, and doing the bed was finished subconsciously. Habits he grew to learn during the stay at the academy were present.

"Good morning, Igna," said Ki across the hallway.

"Ki, do you stay here too?" asked he locking the door behind.

"Yeah," he smiled, "-I moved in a few weeks ago. The wife got angry at my work-ethic, said to focus on being the best cook I can possibly be."

"That's awesome."

"Yeah, thanks," giving a hard embrace, "-I'll head out, have a good day," paused across, "-I forgot. Guild Master Haru is looking for you," the large man turned towards the elevator to empty the hallway.

.....

'Didn't we speak yesterday?' wondered he casually strolling to the stairs, '-Lady Haru's more hands-on than expected.'

Two well-dressed figures sat outside the office. One stared out the frameless window while the other sat with the phone in hand. The appearance seemed to be somewhat of class. Anyone could wear a suit, yet, the slight aura given was of dignity.

"Good morning," said he knocking on the door.

"Good morning," replied the one who sat without lifting an eye.

"Come in."

"Good morning, Guild Master."

"Igna, just the person I was waiting for," she exclaimed rather slyly. A lady sat opposite wearing tailored pants and a buttoned shirt.

'Who's this new character?' wondered he stuck in place.

"About the deal, that is for him to decide," said Haru resuming the conversation.

"Should I leave?"

"No, pardon me," said the lady, "-my lady is Beatrice Jola, the secretary of Mr. Lordon and manager of the Hidros branch of Loron's Restaurant. Lady Yuki spoke her mind about taking you in, right?"

"..." he nodded

"Excellent, yesterday's battle made it to popular news outlets. I'll spare the marketing side of things, long story short, Lady Yuki wants you to come work right away. She had planned on teaching you at a new establishment. Sadly, it's not feasible now."

"Igna," voiced Lady Haru,"-the day has come to train. Go make us proud, I'm sure Leko's waiting impatiently for the day you return. Learn from a legend and create thy own story."

"Should I suppose it's a yes?" asked the lady.

"Yes, the Guild has no qualms, do as is pleased. I do have one condition."

"Which is?"

"Freedom."

"Easier said than done," gritted the secretary, "-I'll see what's possible." Thus, the short conversation ended with Igna accompanying the less than conversational people. They surrounded as if bodyguards around a movie star. It hadn't been a week and the jump from place-to-place spawned mild anxiety.

"Igna, refer to me as Manager from now on, ok?" she grinned fearsomely.

novelusb.com

"Yes, Manager," he nodded. A shiny-grey car came from the left.

"Manager..."

"What is it?" she frowned at his vocal tone.

"May you please input the address on the phone instead?"

"Sure, why, don't you want to ride in the car?"

"No," he glanced over the shoulder, "-Lady Yuki gave me the bicycle as a present. There no way I'm leaving it behind."

"Very well," the door shut with windows rolling down, "-make it back before 18:00," it sped into the distance. No time wasted on his side, the boy pedaled up the hill to cross the massive gate leading inside the capital. The way the bricks and lines craved on said wall was interrupted by the passage. The sharp edges with less aging than the outer side pointed in one direction – the opening was built recently. The

atmosphere changed instantly, there were more people for once. The buildings were taller from the get-go, the sky grew scarce. Not as tall as skyscrapers, but tall enough to be considered desirable. The roads were large with many younger people walking up and down. 'Is this the shopping district?' the multiples of shops and labels gave annoyance of choice. For people who hated the availability of multiple brands of the same item, the district would have been a hell-sent envoy.

As the journey continued, the buildings differed in size, some were without any additional floor. The focus was placed mainly on minimalism and more often than not, 'nature'. Time went by without much thought, cycling across the vast capital was a treat in itself. The trader's district or commercial area was what interested him the most. He wanted to see how business was done and how the Trader's guild affected the area.

Past the Central Adventuring Guild, as told by a sign and the people stood, he continued towards the town square. The roads changed from tarmac to stones. An earlier inn had him more than confused, 'the Pussy Palace.' Pink and far worse than anything he'd ever seen; the abundance of cats was the same as a swarm of flies around rotten food.

Advertising airships would often block the sun, many windows had the faces of idols advertising products. Cars weren't allowed at the intersection into the square. Public Safety spared nothing to make the orders be heard.

"You!" pointed a younger officer, "-get off the cycle and walk."

"Sure," he obeyed, "-thank you for the advice."

'Who was that?' wondered he baffled at the complacency. People had habits of arguing about the orders. Verbal prowess was a trait necessary for guarding the Town-Square. The capital of modernness preserved a moment of history. The older-styled tiled roof buildings were robust and lively. Green-painted lamppost, the reduced amount of technology. A trip to the past; the walk felt long and rightfully so.

The Pride of Hidros returns, plastered on the window of a closed shop. The rotting wooden door didn't spawn confidence. Part of the roof was close to breaking, the insides were dusty and covered by sheets. The produce displayed were telephones and a few electrical appliances. No name, nothing, only the advertisement of a movie and the few items. 'Dates to seven years ago, damn.'

Few steps later the land cleared into benches and a massive fountain with the statue of Syhton. Couples and children alike were spotted running around with smiles. The vicinity was layered with shops and restaurants. The purpose of a town-square was to do business – a market. Plenty o' decorations made it eye-fetching.

'This nostalgic feeling is overwhelming,' he walked to the fountain. *In remembrance of the Hero who saved our apostle, Xenos,* a dragon-crest was engraved onto the top-right corner. 'The hero who saved an apostle,' taking a step back, '-I wonder what sort of person he was. Someone with a strong sense of justice. Adventurers sure have the best job in the world.' Across the fountain laid a building with 'Loron's' written across the black window. Well-maintained flowery bushes grew to accentuate the peaceful look it portrayed.

'That's the place,' thought he reaching the closed doors.

“They don’t open until later tonight,” said a stranger out of kindness.

“Thank you.” 14:00, ‘it’s too early. Should have asked where to meet the manager. I don’t have her number either...’

“Good afternoon, is there something I can help with?”

“Yes,” he turned to stare at a well-build man with short hair, round glasses, and a stern face, “-Is there perhaps a number I can call to reach the manager of Loron’s?”

“Not really,” said the man relaxing into a confident pose, “-might I know the reason for the visit?”

“And who are you?”

“A sous-chef at Loron’s.”

“The manager told me to come by this address, I’m Igna.”

“Lyoko Igna?” the stance relaxed.

“Yes...”

“I’ve been waiting,” he smiled with the mouth only, upper half remained stern, “-I’m Joe Aldina, call me Joe. Follow me,” they took to a back-alley. Cleaned with the trash nicely resting atop bins, “-I can’t believe I didn’t recognize you. The video sure made headlines.”

“What news?” wondered he.

“You don’t know?” the back-door unlocked, “-keep the cycle over there.”

“No, I really don’t,” inside was a darkened room, *-click,* the explosion of light blinded him to the point of covering the face.

“It’s a shame, you’re a full-blown star on the Arcanum. People are searching hard for your identity. Still is peculiar that an unknown would impress our head-chef into bringing you into her sanctum of a kitchen. Word of advice, don’t try to stand out, the lady hates when people try to improvise meals. Tis a fine-dining establishment. I don’t doubt the potential and skill shown. Watch your back, the world of cooking is far more tenacious and heartbreaking than people would often admit.”

“Am I supposed to get scared?”

“Not really,” he laughed, “-you have guts kid, I like it.” He soon took out fresh unprepared ingredients, “-come on and help me. You came to work, right?”

“Sure,” he removed the apron from the backpack and began.

“Lady Yuki.”

“Yes, where is my prodigy?” asked she over the phone.

“My lady, the boy has reached the restaurant.”

“Why there, didn’t I ask to bring him to the mansion?”

"I apologize, the boy asked for the address of the restaurant – the mansion slipped my mind."

"Whatever," she sighed, "-who's going to prep the ingredients?"

"Joe..."

"Please don't tell me..." her reserved tone fluctuated, "-that man is trouble, why is he at the restaurant?"

"I told him to fetch the recruit..."

"Are you out of your mind?" yelled across, "-Joe is known as Carnage, he doesn't care about people. His work ethic is extreme. Manager, take care of the mess you made if Igna is broken before I even have a chance at teaching then-" the phone hung.

'Well, my lady, if the boy can't keep up with Joe, there's no way he'll survive your lessons.'

"Come on boy, move quicker," said he cutting vegetables.

"On it, sir," it hadn't been a few minutes and the pace had him panting. The orders kept on coming, they stacked faster than the body could move.

'Is that the talent my lady chose to teach?' a sigh had him roll the eyes, '-what a disappointment.'

'This chef is worst than I imagined, is this how a real restaurant works?' stuck facing the full chopping board, '-my arms are cramping, this is bad.'

"THERE'S NO TIME TO REST, COME ON, WE HAVE TO PREP THE NOODLES TOO!"

'This guy is insane,' taking a deep breath, '-focus, preparation is easier than cooking. Go one at a time, refine the techniques on the fly, don't waste motion, work efficiently. Those are Chef Leko's advice, there's no room to fail. It's most likely a test.' A heavy presence dowsed the floor in a stomach-turning tension.

.....

'What's happening?' wondered Joe taking a break from the chopping board, '-what the fuck?'

'There's no way I'm losing,' a piece of cloth tightened around the forehead – a makeshift bandana, '-refinement comes with experience, and experience is learned via practice, no wasted motion, come on, do it.'

'I ought to check on the boy my lady fought to recruit,' thought the manager scattering across the alleys. 'The lights are on, that's a good sign,' the closer she got the more the sound of rattling grew ominous, '-what's this supposed to be?' she entered to a show of insanity. Joe leaned across the counter and kept on ordering. Young Igna moved around the kitchen with unusual dexterity, the speed increased, the sous-chef held the biggest smile since being employed.

"This guy is a freak," laughed he at the sight of the manager.

"What's with him?" wondered she shuffling behind the boy's back.

"No idea, he's a great catch that's for sure."

“Why?” she frowned to bit her inner cheeks.

“Look there, everything for tonight was prepared in less than two hours. He’s been like that for more than an hour now; I’m running out of things to say.”

“DONE,” he pulled the sweaty cloth letting the hair crash on his face, “-Chef Joe, I’ve completed what you asked.”

Chapter 467: Loron’s

“You’re a phenom in the kitchen,” said Joe casually checking the ingredients, “-I’m impressed Igna, the video wasn’t for show, the skills are legit. ”

“Igna,” approached the manager with a lifeless smile, “-I’m pleased you handled the Chef’s demands.”

“I came to learn,” he returned, “-I’ve got so much to study. Preparation of ingredients was the first thing I learned as well as tasting. As for cooking itself; the Alphian, Hidrosian, and Wracian techniques aren’t strangers, in theory, as for practice...” he pointed to a bowl, “-have a taste, the lack of flavor will be apparent.”

“Is that what I asked you to make earlier?” wondered Joe, “-a soup without meat, let’s see.” Spoon in hand, it plunged into the murkiness of the liquid. “I see,” said he breathing deep to capture the further taste, “-adequate but not extraordinary. We could serve this here no problem,” the spoon reached for another taste, “-yet, it feels lacking.”

“Yes, sir, my training isn’t complete, tis why I shall do what I can to get better.”

‘This kid,’ thought he, ‘-the drive for knowledge is insatiable,’ putting a hand on the manager’s shoulder, “-Lady Jola, I acknowledge the innate potential of Igna,” softly pulling her back, “-welcome to Loron, boy.”

“Thank you, sir,” they exchanged firm handshakes.

.....

‘How is this possible,’ wondered the manager feeling humiliated, ‘-there’s no way someone like him can be understood by the pallets of our refined guest. I’m certain lady Yuki’s made a mistake. Joe... did you acknowledge him just to face my ire or?’

The brusque breeze carrying the odor of trash welded around the nostrils to burn the inside, “-lady Jola,” came a voice admit the plethora of sense breaking scents.

“What?” returned she with a vein bloating down her forehead – the smell incurred the passive frustration she held.

“Calm it with the attitude,” said he unbothered by the smells.

“Is that all?” her posture closed with arms crossed and a reclined back, “-if so, I’m heading home.”

“I see the scheming ways hasn’t forgotten you.”

“How dare you!”

“The truth is hard to swallow. The jealousy of not wanting people to intrude on our asylum is heart-breaking, honestly. The staff is joined by the strong-will of lady Yuki, adding another to the mix might break the synergy. That pathetic kind of thinking is the reason you’re still single. The boy is so talented a legend of the kitchen dared to make him an apprentice. Can’t you see? The new era is here at our doorstep.”

“What if that’s the case, I can’t possibly acknowledge him from your perspective. That’s being subjective, I’m not interested. A stranger is a stranger no matter what one says.”

“A stray will often be the most loyal if taken care of properly. However,” he paused; “-it can also be the single factor that breaks the family. Think about it for a moment, I’ll go teach the boy a few tricks of the trade.”

“Who does he think he is?” her fist slammed the wall. *click,* the door shut over yonder, ‘-I’m not about to falter at the words of a wanna-be. There’s a reason I was made manager, and that’s to destroy the opposing businesses. The same can be done inwards too,” the clouds hid the sun’s ray. The atmosphere changed with her personality; the resting expression grew into a sadistic half-smile.

“Everything ok sir?” the quiet kitchen spurred to life.

“Yeah, just a little argument between staff. Anyway, want me to teach you the ways of Loron?”

“Yes please,” with a grin and the pleasure birthed by teaching another, Joe filled the gap of ignorance of Loron. The main dishes were explained and cooked expertly; the techniques were far complex than what Leko taught. A product of lack of time. Nonetheless, notepad in hand, he watched, wrote, and studied hard.

The essence of time became naught, the motions of going from a meal to another took precedence. At around 18:00, the synchronous cogs stopped by force. A lady in a chef’s outfit stood whilst juggling a key menacingly.

“Lady Yuki,” said Joe nodding respectfully.

“Chef Joe,” her eyes scanned the room thoroughly, “-where’s the boy?”

“Headed to the toilet,” said he returning to the pan.

“Everything’s prepped. We have six tables booked tonight, where are the other staff?”

novelusb.com

“They’ll be here soon,” and as those words rolled off the tongue, three strongly dressed individuals arrived.

“Good afternoon chef,” said the leader of the group – an older man with grey slicked back hair, rounded nose, wrinkled forehead from the years of straining and mellow eyes. Two beautiful ladies gracefully approached, twins, one held blue hair and the other pink. The sharp noses, ever-youthful fragrance, pointy ears, and well-maintained figures hid the age nicely.

‘Took longer than I thought,’ the return into the more populated kitchen felt as if drowning. Joe’s attitude changed into the description of seriousness.

“There you are,” voiced Lady Yuki nonchalantly hugging the boy.

“Good afternoon, lady Lordon,” said he respectfully.

“Ok,” facing the confused crowd, “-might I have thine attention.” They obeyed without a moment wasted. “I’d like to introduce our new-recruit, Lyoko Igna. I’m sure you’ve seen the video of us battling already. He’ll be my assistant and disciple from today forth. Do help him in whatever he needs – mistakes will be made. Tis where you come on,” she pointed at each and everyone, “-do you understand?”

“Yes chef,” said they in tandem.

“I’ll go check on the front, please introduce yourself,” she skipped into the main restaurant.

“Good evening, young Igna,” approached the angered man, “-I’m Chef Igona, head of the meat-section,” they shook hands.

“Hello Igna,” approached the ladies, “-I’m Emma Lymsey,” said she with a beauty mark to the right under her lips.

“I’m Emmy Lymsey,” said the other with a more fearsome voice, her pink hair and beauty mark to the left didn’t reflect the mannerism at all. “-a guild tag, brings back memories,” soon to face away, “-look, sister, a guild tag.”

“Yes, sister, it does bring back memories.”

“Alright you two,” interjected Joe, “-go back to your stations. Orders will come soon.”

“Should I wash the dishes?”

“No,” came a playful voice, “-you’ll be assisting the Viper of the kitchen.”

Her return changed the mood into utter silence. Each knew their role. The manager would go back and forth saying which table arrived and what meals were ordered. The serving was a three-course dinner – the pace at which the people moved couldn’t compare to the restaurant at the academy. ‘This is hard,’ orders came from left and right, no tact towards the recruit. Yuki’s reprimanding didn’t leave much room for confidence. Any slight mistakes would have him be graced with an earful.

“Look at this fucking mess,” her personality changed, “-do it again, Emma, come in and cover his ass. Tell table four that the meat is four minutes behind.” The side-glances were heart-breaking.

‘I can’t take this pressure,’ thought he stuck in place, the room’s motion stopped. A time-warp, only he could move normally, the others were at a snail’s pace. *Thud,* ‘no, not now,’ the canine manifested, the nails sharpened, ‘-this is bad.’ Biting his inner-cheeks, the blood sufficed to calm the thirst but not the killing intent. ‘The enhancement,’ thought he, ‘-it’s returning. I feel lighter, stronger, and sharper. I get it now, it’s my flight or fight response. Each time I feel in danger it comes from within.’

“Where’s the FISH?” screamed Igona.

“Here,” said a monotonous voice.

‘What the hell?’

“Slice the carrots,” voiced Emma.

“Here.”

“Where’s the sauce?” inquired Emmy.

“Here.”

“Table four and five are waiting for their meal. What’s happening?” wondered a pressured Jola. ‘I knew it, the addition of a new member broke our harmony, it’s in disarray.’ A moment of doubt flashed across the thoughts, ‘-was it a mistake to employ a rookie?’

“Igna, do you remember the recipe?” asked an unbothered Joe.

“Yeah,” the silent reply was fearsome. Lady Yuki didn’t care as her focus was on table one, a food critic.

“Then help me out,” said he momentarily giving a high-five, “-assist me, I’ll make it so they won’t care about the wasted time.” The stove burst into flames, the pans went from hand to hand, the ingredients were readied without a word exchanged. Igna’s ambidextrous trait came when matters grew out of hand. Both sink into the zone; a completed synergy of talents. *snap, snap, snap,* “-take them to table four and five,” said Joe sharply.

“Table three wants more meat.”

“On it,” nodded Igna quick to ready the next batch.

‘What’s with them?’ Igona and the twins came to a standstill.

“Take this to table one,” smiled Lady Yuki turning to the duo of Joe and Igna.

“We’re late on the desserts,” said the manager before leaving with the food-tray.

“Alright boys,” said she nonchalantly stepping into their area, “-let’s do this.” The puzzle pieces fit; a team of unrivaled talent burst into ‘overdrive’. The other three could but stand and stare “-Emma, Emmy, take care of table four. Igona take care of table five,” ordered she sensing the limits of their rush, “-we’ll handle the rest.”

‘We’ve done it,’ he stopped with hands on the stove, ‘-I feel lightheaded. Everything is going in circles, my legs feel numb, I can barely raise a hand. What is this feeling, am I tired?’ the hand gave to exhaustion, *smack,* he fell headfirst against the sharp edge and then hit the ground.

“The food was succulent,” said the leaving guests, “-lady Yuki, there’s no arguing your talents.”

“I must say, even a critic can but tip his hat at the talent of Loron. It’s a shame the restaurant only serves on reservation, even that much has a waiting line. Well, good evening, my lady – be on the lookout for the excellent review.”

“Thank you,” said she softly without any harsher movements.

“That was tough,” said Emmy cracking her knuckles, “-how was our performance today?”

“Good,” smiled lady Lordon, “-a rough start to then the rush of adrenaline. I’ve never felt so alive in the kitchen before.”

"I get it," they now stood inside under a well-lit room, "-that was awesome."

"I don't," voiced Igona, "-how did you know the boy would become so fast under such pressure?"

"It's my fault," said him softly, "-I overworked him earlier, he hasn't taken a break since this afternoon."

"Are you insane?" facepalmed Yuki, "-why didn't say he couldn't continue. Even trained cooks known not to be overworked."

"He didn't look tired though," shrugged Emma, "-I'm envious of him using both hands so skillfully."

"There's room for improvement, sister. He definitely has talent."

"Speaking of Igna, where is he?" wondered Jola, "-I'm sure he was here a few minutes ago."

"Take a break," said Yuki, "-I'll go check."

"And off she goes," mumbled Jola with a hint of jealousy.

"Can't believe he kept pace with Joe and Lady Yuki in that last hour. From confused to the driving force, that Igna is something," complimented Igona with a coffee in hand.

'Where did he go?' wondered she stepping into the kitchen, '-Joe overworked him and I only added onto the pressure. How did he cope under all that? I'd have broken with my abuse – there were trained professionals who quit after working at my side. Viper didn't come from a good background, it's a slow poison of my abusive nature strangling the workers into giving to desperation,' along the side and to the back, '-look at him, he passed out on the floor,' with a smile, "-Hey, wake up Igna," gently tugging his shoulder. "JOE!"

"What happened?" the comfortable chatter shattered.

.....

"Don't know and don't care," said he rushing into the kitchen, "-my lady, what happened?" the group arrived at a mess of blood. Yuki held his head over her lap, the large wound kept on spouting blood.

"WHAT HAPPEN?"

"Don't know," her mind turned empty, '-we're responsible for how tired he got.'

"Call an ambulance right-away," voiced Igona, "-lady Yuki, Joe, the boy slipped and fell, ok?"

"Master Igona, what are you saying?" wondered Emma shocked at the dishonesty.

"He's right," added Jola, "-the boy trip and fell. That wound is fatal," she leaned to unbutton the shirt, "-look, he fell onto his knife."

Chapter 468: Syndra Lordon

"Speak to no one about this."

"Lady Yuki, why don't you say anything?" Emma pleaded to have justice, yet, the majority of the staff stared emotionlessly. The shock of the incident had differing reactions. Increased heart rate, unsteady breathing, or quietness, they were all contemplating what would happen.

“What of the ambulance?”

“I’ve called them, ma’am,” said Igona with irregular breaths.

‘How am I going to make up to Leko,’ wondered Yuki stuck in a place of no return, ‘-I took responsibility for the boy, and now he’s gone. Joe overworked him, I should have noticed – I added more onto his mind, a youngling can’t possibly deal with such harshness. In trying to sculpt a gem, the stone broke, what a shame...’

Cough, the paleness of the skin regained a flicker of color. The flowing blood froze instantly as if ice all the way up to Lady Yuki’s clothes.

“Stand back,” yelled Emma pushing the others back.

.....

“Lady Yuki, whatever you do, don’t dare move!” added Emmy frightfully.

“What’s up with you two?” wondered a perplexed Joe.

“Don’t make noise nor say anything.”

The frozen life-essence formed a chain around the open wound, the forehead healed slowly leaving no scars. The knife inside the stomach broke into pieces as a crystal-like substance returned, the injury closed on itself.

“I fell,” said he sitting upright, “-Lady Yuki, why are your clothes burnt?” scanning around, “-is something wrong?”

“Who are you...” wondered the manager shaking to her knees.

“Lyoko Igna,” he shrugged, “-did I cause trouble?”

“Yes,” sighed Lady Lordon, “-I supposed you’re not human?”

“Why would you say that?” he slid back in refusal, “-I look human, don’t I?” quick to cover his mouth, ‘-my canines aren’t sharpened, how do they know?’

“Igna,” chuckled Joe, “-the lady means it as you were extraordinary during today’s service. Congratulations on keeping up with our pace.”

“Yeah,” the others soon lied about what was seen.

“Lyoko,” smiled lady Yuki, “-we still have to decide the place of residence.” On that, she walked out the back with him in tow, “-bring the bicycle. Joe, you’ll close the restaurant,” the duo vanished into the crimson night of misunderstanding.

“Emma, Emmy,” stood around the main cooking station, “-can you explain more on what we saw?”

“Well, Igna’s not human. The body regenerated itself, the crystal blood is the main culprit. He’s from the clan of Nightwalker,” the power of said name sufficed to turn a lively place to a grave.

“I’ve only heard of them in legend, they exist in the shadows of Arda...”

"That's right, lady Jola, they are powerful and fearsome. I've heard ten of them could take on an entire platoon of well-trained soldiers."

"How do you know so much?" wondered Joe.

"Emmy and I were adventurers and members of Knig. Our Guild master was someone powerful,"

"-no," interjected Emmy, "-powerful can't begin to describe him, a vampiric-king with the powers of gods. Tis the nonexaggerated words my mind thought."

"Not the issue here," voiced Jola, "-is Igna dangerous to us?"

"I don't think so," refuted Emma, "-he tried to hide his identity. It's best we leave him to it. He didn't seem bothered with the sun or the human way of living," glancing at Emmy, she followed with, "-we know very little. Still, Igna isn't a normal vampire either. He's a noble, the more powerful of their rank."

"Put into perspective how powerful a noble is?" requested Igona.

novelusb.com

"A noble above the rank of Baron is equal to Tier-3 Silver for our adventurers," said she with fear.

"Sister, I think it's best for us to not go over this topic again," added Emmy, "-don't treat him differently. The boy came to learn. We don't have the right to force our thoughts onto him. There are plenty of non-humans roaming Rosespire and he's no different. We're all children of Hidros."

"I agree with Emmy," nodded Joe with arms crossed, "-I like Igna, he's serious and determined to get better. I'm not going to change the way I treat him."

"The decision is up to lady Yuki," mumbled Jola, "-let's get to cleaning for tomorrow."

Amber lights off the lamps were warm and peaceful, or so was the impression given by the clear starry night. Lady Yuki walked closely to Igna who pulled the cycle slowly. Her eyes would often stray to glance, when the sights met, she'd look away as if nothing happened.

"Lady Yuki," stopped at an intersection leading outwards of the town square, "-I died earlier, didn't I," the voice came across cold and doubtful.

"Yeah," she turned without much say, "-I know you're a vampire. Now what?"

"Nothing really," he leaned onto the handle, "-vampire or not, I came to be your apprentice. Can I still consider you my teacher? If there are doubts, I'd rather leave this instant."

"You don't understand," her cheeks flushed, "-I have a thing for the supernatural," she walked closer, "-romantic novels with vampires are my bread and butter, I love them so much," her usual dignified aura mellowed into the whims of a child, "-are you really a vampire," she clasped his palms together.

"My lady," quick to jump back, "-it's inappropriate. I'm a lowly boy who came to learn, not a gallant with amazing charm and visage. You'd be disappointed, please, don't ruin the fantasy of the idyllic loving vampires for my sake."

"Man," she laughed, "-I'm glad," the craziness in her face diminished.

“Excuse me?”

“I refused to cook until I tasted what you made with Chef Leko. It spurred me to try and return to where I belong, in that aspect, you’ve saved the Medusa of Cooking,” she walked to give a motherly embrace, “-I promise to help you in any way I can,” her silent panting felt uncomfortable. The lonesome lamp onto the deserted crossway felt as if a movie, the parting scene of a lover. Sprinkle rain and strong gust and one would have a cliché love story.

“Thanks,” they parted with her slowly pulling down her collar.

“What are you doing?” he asked with narrowed eyes.

“Don’t vampires need blood, I’m offering mine.”

“No, my lady,” he refused wholeheartedly, “-I’ll lose control and do unspeakable things resulting in death. Let’s drop the topic of my origin since I don’t know myself. About the situation of residence, where am I sleeping?”

“At our mansion,” *clap,* a car summoned from the darkness, “-the outhouse to be precise. My husband’s personal chefs and servants live there; should be a great experience.”

“I suppose,” he stared the cycle, “-can I have-”

“No,” said she adamantly, “-another will bring it to the noble district.”

The drive took to the north-east where a massive castle stood overlooking the capital. The noble district changed with bigger and better manors. Roads were cleaner, a visible difference in maintenance.

‘Lordon’s Manor,’ the car pulled into a long ever twisting driveway. Soon a garage with multiples of vehicles passed them by until an enormous resplendent manor. Countless windows went from left to right, there were no special features, no slated roofs nothing, only decorated support pillars. Counting from the ground floor, there were three with each adorned with immaculate carvings and paints.

“We’re here,” said she with servants opening the door, “-come, don’t be shy.”

‘Obnoxious,’ standing in the less than presentable outfit felt embarrassing. The retainers gave side-eyes at the newbie. ‘How big does a house have to be?’

“Madia, give him a room and explain what is supposed to be done around here.”

“As you wish, lady Yuki.”

“Before you go,” added the lady, “-make sure to learn from the cooks, they are experienced,” she soon crossed the portal into a life he couldn’t imagine.

The maid kindly gave a tour of the outhouse. “You’ll sleep here from now on. The kitchen is down the hall if you ever need something to eat or want to cook. The chefs usually come here in the morning.”

“Don’t they sleep here?”

“No, they work nightshifts at another restaurant. Don’t worry, it’ll get easier with time.”

A simple room with a warm bed, a single table, and a view onto manor. The gentle breeze inside was refreshment beyond the mortal realm. The body slipped into sleep without realizing it.

'Don't, please, don't kill her,' the sleep broke after a nightmare. The latter had him shaking to the point of hysteria, vertigo and lightheadedness grew into nausea. 'Calm down.' Time showed 04:00, going to sleep would be a losing fight. 'I'll go mess around,' he shuffled along the wooden floor into the ominous kitchen. A flick flared the light across the utensils and marbled floor. 'Looks exactly like the one at Loron.' Fruits and vegetables were placed into baskets, the fridges and cupboards held jars of spices and garnish. 'I can make a feast with this,' quick to tie the apron, the cooking began.

Screech, '-someone's trying to sneak in,' the heightened hearing locked onto a window in the hallway. A twist lowered the sizzling stove to aid and give a clear image. 'He's trying to open from the outside,' he leaped to the door with a wooden spoon.

"Who's there," he barged into the hall menacingly.

"OUCH!" the intruder hit its head onto the frame, "-keep it quiet!" the moon shone onto the figure, a girl with hair tied in twin-tails had her dress stuck onto a nail.

"Who are you?"

"Syndra Lordon, come on, help me, I'm stuck," the attitude came across as pretentious.

'Lordon,' he paused, "-aren't you supposed to be at that mansion over there?" gently pulling out the phone, "-I wonder what lady Yuki might think of this," the flash blinded her eyes.

"Please, help me," it lessened into politeness.

"Fine."

"At last," she made for the kitchen.

"DON'T RUN AWAY!"

Not apparent at first, the girl was around the same age as him, the night's veil made her seem younger. She towered before the stove with a look of dejection, "-what are you making?"

"Don't know," replied he returning to the stove, "-whatever comes to mind. More importantly, who are you exactly?"

"Forgot to introduce myself," she curtsied, "-the only daughter of the Lordon's. Is that sufficient?"

"Impressive," said he ignoring her presence, "-lady Yuki has a daughter."

"Why is that impressive?" asked she sat on the counter.

"She doesn't look like a mother," he shrugged, "-what would an orphan know anyway."

"You say something?"

"No," the attention turned to prepping the other batch of ingredients, "-are you an aspiring chef too?"

.....

“No, I’m more interested in music. I do cook from time to time, mother sort of forces me to do it. What of you, I’ve not seen you here before?”

“Lyoko Igna, Lady Yuki randomly said I was to become her apprentice, and here I am.”

“Oh, the boy I saw on the video,” she took out her phone and showed the clip, “-look, it’s gotten a lot of views.”

“Oh, that’s what Joe referred to. On that topic, why did you sneak into the outhouse, surely there’s nothing of interest here.”

“On the contrary,” she pulled onto a cupboard, “-this here is my secret stash of snacks. I got hungry. Don’t tell mother else I’ll lie about you being inappropriate towards a young lady.”

“I do have photos of you sneaking into the outhouse... I wonder which one will cause more damage, proof, or fiction?”

“Whatever,” she pouted.

“Miss Lordon, would you like to have a taste?”

“Please, let me taste the talent of which mother kept on rambling about for the past few days.”

One bite turned into two, then three, four, five, her hands moved without the mind’s intervention. The deliciousness had her giggling as if a child. “How did you get such a texture?”

“Here,” he wrote the thought process behind the snack, “-I want to experiment with a few exotic ingredients – they might add more flavor.”

“What more flavor?” spoke she gracefully wiping her lips, “-it’s already delicious.”

“I want it to explode on the first bite,” said he staring at the ceiling in search of answers.

“Just ask mother, she’ll get the items for you.”

“No, not that, the items I need can only be found in the dungeon.”

Chapter 469: Dungeon Styled Cooking

Dungeon styled cooking, an experimental method of using monsters and turning them into food. The profanity of the idea was stomach-turning at first; a few chosen elites endeavored to make reality out of a senseless dream.

Needless to say, where the impossible stood as an obstacle, innovators came forth to change the orders of matters. Flying was naught but something the birds and insects could do, yet, per the dreams of two brothers, men could now fly without the use of magic. The same can be said for the world of food-making, the idea of using monsters was fiction until a few years ago. The Phantom research society, or PRS for short, a joint group formed between the infamous arms dealer Phantom and the Elon’s dynasty. They made a special substance that forced the beasts into the corporal form and not dust. The organs, blood, and anything in-between could be harvested. Initially, scholars were interested in what laid inside. The plan didn’t go well since the body would vanish when placed on the operating table. The kitchen was a different matter, the parts would remain despite the strenuous techniques. Some called it

the Humanitarian phenomenon, 'the lingering aura of the beasts senses the ill-intent of those wanting to do an autopsy. The instinct activates to prevent further examination. The kitchen's only intent is the process of eating, thus meat remains,' a quote from the leading researcher at PRS.

"The dungeon?" paused Syndra snacking on potato chips, "-you do realize the price are astronomical. Novice chefs have no business trying the forsaken style. Preparation must be done flawlessly else the diner might be poisoned or turn into an undead. I'm surprised you know of the less than reputable method."

"Yeah," said he doing the dishes, "-my mentor taught me the basics of monster preparation. He said it's the only worthwhile item he sought to master. The explosive nature of goblin flesh is beyond that of the highest-grade meat we have. The disgusting creatures don't look appetizing, yet, inside resides a cesspool of undiscovered deliciousness."

"Never tried then, besides, the shock effect of goblin meat won't last. People prefer comfort and habitual, not uncommon and showiness. Granted, a skilled juggler might capture the crowd, still, the individual behind the mask can't be related too, in that aspect, he's alone at the top of his craft. Relatability, Igna, tis the way of the future."

"You're not wrong," he cleaned his hands, "-time sure went by fast," the sun bloomed over the horizon, "-shouldn't you be heading home, mistress?"

"I forgot," her black hair flowed as she ran down the hall, the miss was a little on the chubby side. In no way did it look unbecoming, rather, the chubbiness came from her training. Muscles that made her figure stand out even more.

.....

'There she goes,' thought he as she dashed out the window and sprinted towards the manor, 'the mistress is eccentric like her mother. Suppose it runs in the family.' The window lifted to allow the cold morning air; '-this feels great.' Tiredness gave into energy and confidence.

"Igna, why are you up so early in the morning?" yawned Madia in her pajamas, the hair was hidden by a bunny-styled beanie. The childishness of her clothes was 'adorable' for someone in her early twenties.

"Came to help out in the kitchen. The chefs aren't here today, what's the matter?"

"No," said she coming to the window, "-they'll be at the restaurant for a few more days," she stood on her toes and stretched followed by a few sharp shakes of the head, "-we need to handle breakfast."

"You can cook?"

"Don't underestimate me," she made for the baskets after a quick elbow to his stomach.

"Let me help."

"Sure, I honestly don't know much about breakfast. Why don't you prepare something," leaned with the elbow on the counter, tiredness hung as dark-circles. "Being lazy is unbecoming a maid," said he scouring the fridge.

“Shut up,” sat on the wall-side table, “-I seriously wanted to sleep the day over. The chefs had to be absent today, such a pain.”

“Yeah, yeah, I got it. Why not sleep in for today, I’ll have the meal readied.”

“Cool.” *click.*

‘No filters.’

The stove blasted without restraint; the aroma seeped into every room of the outhouse. Madia’s room wasn’t spared either, her stomach grumbled at the mere sniff. The laziness and fatigue couldn’t fight against the want of an empty stomach.

“You came back,” added he with a chuckle.

“Shut it, I ought to taste the meal before the main-family eats it. Who knows, there might be poison there,” the words didn’t reflect her emotions, the anxious tapping of the feet made it more than obvious.

“Here you are,” the steaming hot bowl arrived in full on the table.

novelusb.com

Sniff, “-it wets the appetite. Isn’t this a bit too heavy for breakfast?”

“Try it, you’ll see.”

“Alright,” a bite exploded the youth of fresh ingredients, the vigor of the sharply flavored fruits balanced the overall dish. In appearance there were only fruits and vegetables with sliced meat at the side – a lunch dish at best. ‘-How can this be?’ comprehending the idea was a worthless endeavor.

“Peculiar isn’t it?” he laughed, “-I added the Blood of Goblin to the mix, it gives a push of explosiveness close to pepper.”

“Dungeon styled cooking?” she gulped, “-where did you get the ingredients?”

“At the Trader’s guild. I took some for personal use.”

‘He’s right,’ thought she, ‘-the dish is invigorating. The fatigue is gone, it can but put a smile on my face. This is the best breakfast I’ve had in a while.’

Soon a squad of butlers walked into the outhouse with menacing stares.

“Has breakfast been readied? The mistress has woken up,” voiced the older looking retainer.

‘More like never slept,’ thought Igna preparing another tray for the lady, “-yeah, it’s readied. You guys want to have some before heading out?”

“I appreciate the offer,” smiled the leader, “-our needs can be filled later.”

“Suit yourself,” the presentation differed from Madia’s meal, it looked more appetizing and warmer, “-return after delivering the meal, I’ve made more than enough for everyone.”

“Thank you for the sentiment,” nodded they.

“That’s old man Troz, the oldest retainer employed at the Lordon’s. Igna, take a seat. I’ll explain what you’ll be doing from today forth. Lady Yuki’s restaurant opens only at night. You’re welcome to find a part-time job until service hours. Her teaching is more of a handsfree approach.”

“What about the cooking staff at Loron?”

“They’re famed chefs around Rosespire, each one has a specialty that stands out amidst the crowd. Talent must be shared or so that’s what she says when her workers are rated highly by cooking magazine. I’ll honestly advise you to move into the capital and work, experience is better than theory. Learn from a local eatery or some high-class restaurant, it doesn’t matter.”

‘Do I have to move out again?’

“There’s the option of staying here and be a cook. Up to you, Igna,” gently patting his head, “-take time and reflect, the future is something to consider.”

‘Reflect,’ paused he at the idea of moving out, ‘-her service hours are late in the night. I’ll need to find a part-time job. I doubt I’ll be getting paid anytime soon. I keep moving from place to place. I like it...’ a subconscious grin lightened the mood, ‘-traveling is awesome.’

“Madia,” voiced he, “-I’m heading to the town square.”

“Right, good luck on the journey.”

‘The cycle is here,’ awesome.’ The man-powered vehicle dashed out the front entrance to blaze the streets leading to the center. Lordon’s mansion ignited with lady Yuki’s speech. She took a bite out of the breakfast made for the mistress to go onto a run of compliments about the texture. When asked who came up with the idea, Igna came to the mix. She quickly dashed to the outhouse in search of the boy.

“Madia, where’s my prodigy?” asked she strongly.

“Heading to the capital, didn’t you say he’s free to do whatever as long as he returns at night?”

“No, you misunderstand,” giving a facepalm, “-he’s free to do whatever in the premises of the mansion, not the streets.”

“Ma’am, don’t you think it best for him to nurture his own talent?”

“No, I don’t,” adamant on the issue, “-he used the Blood of Goblin. Dungeon style cooking is not something a rookie can learn. I’m going into town, have a car be readied.”

‘Can’t believe the distance between here and there,’ two hours and a half went by pedaling, ‘-good thing the phone shows short-cuts.’ He approached the town-square, ‘-a part-time job,’ thought he pushing the bicycle. ‘Isn’t there some eatery I can join?’ and so while going round the town-square, a particular road filled with students led further to the west. An arched banner had, ‘-Konda’s district,’ written above. Multiple stalls laid on the left-side with merchants while the right side held small shops with electronics and snacks. The students were gathered at the intersection.

“Come one come all, we’re recruiting for the Winter Festival. Beat our chef in a cooking battle and earn 100 Exa.” Two stalls were pitted against one another with one freed for a challenger. The chef in charge

was broad with knives in both hands. “The public will be the judge, does no one want to fight?” a chalkboard showed 99 – 0. That big a winning streak was a show of the chef’s prowess.

“Excuse me,”

“Yes, boy with the cycle, can I help you with something?” asked the man in a colorful shirt.

“What happens if one beats the chef?”

“You win 100 Exa and have the option of working at Ota’s eatery.”

‘The crowd here sure is impressive,’ the students soon parted, “-I’d like to participate.”

“A challenger has come,” murmurs turned to annoying bickering.

“Boy, do you have the courage to fight me one on one?” voiced the chef with braided hair, “-do you?”

“Yeah,” said he casually resting the bike against a table, “-don’t mind if I do.”

The crowd only grew, few students made the connection to Medusa’s prodigy.

“The rules are simple – cook for everyone here. They’ll eat and announce their pick by placing the bowl into either stall.”

The cook-off began instantly. The chef stood menacingly and prepared food at a rapid pace. He served a classic of Hidros’s street food. The scent alone forced the crowd to shift to his side.

‘He has the advantage. Street-food needs to be quick and effective. The ingredients here aren’t enough to please so many people.’ The announcer and chef smirked; ‘-this is a scam. I’ll have to pay 100 Exa if they win.’

“What’s happening over there?” wondered a boy with white hair.

“Don’t know, let’s check,” returned a girl with black hair ending in brown. A pink teddy in her arms gave cause for questions by the passersby.

‘If I don’t come up with something, they’ll win without me having a chance. I’ve got fish...’ an idea flashed, ‘-nuggets.’ The limited options didn’t give room for much improvement, yet, the stall soon fired. ‘-I can make it better with this,’ the sleeves rolled. *Chop, chop, chop,* the sound of a knife against the wooden board had people curious. ‘-ready,’ it dropped into boiling oil, ‘-make sure it doesn’t burn,’ prepping with one hand and stirring with the other, the showmanship grew into anticipation.

“Isn’t that Medusa’s prodigy?” voiced one.

“Yeah, that’s the guy from the video,” more than half of the crowd grew to his side.

“Order is up,” the dishes flew out the stall without stop.

“Can I have two plates?” asked a girl holding a teddy.

“Sure,” he handed to then focus onto the others.

“Sister, please don’t tell me you’re going to eat a peasant’s food,” argued the boy.

“Shut up,” a singular bite had the interior melt, “-I want more.”

“Huh?” startled, “-sister, I remember you saying bad food isn’t worth our time. Why more?”

“I don’t know,” she shrugged, “-i-it just melted, I ate it without realizing.” The fanatic behind the stall didn’t stop. He made a dipping sauce on the fly, the plates soon stacked in his favor. Hard as he tried, the opposing stall couldn’t compare to the explosion of Igna’s corner. ‘Scammers get scammed.’

Chapter 470: The Viper

“Where is he?” slammed the car.

“A worker reported him wandering the town-square, my lady,” said the driver sweating at her angered expression.

“Thanks, keep me informed,” she sat in a small but fast car. It toggled to a lion-like roar, the entourage could but shudder at the sound and very much palpable vibrations.

‘I’m going to win this cook-off,’ with a smile, the ingredients ran low, the plates stacked, and the customers increased. Nothing could hold them from the smell as it sufficed to warm the body.

“Done,” he served every guest, ‘-glad I was minimalistic in the usage,’ breathing a sigh of relief, the opposing chef began ranting to the announcer.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” with a reclusive frown, “-the winner of today’s cook-off is none other than the challenger.” Applause echoed to gather more crowd; publicity for Ota’s eatery made the owner happy.

The stalls were cleared by workers to allow for the prize-giving ceremony. An older man came with a walking stick and long beard, “-you’re welcome to work at Ota’s eatery, young man.”

.....

“Thank you, sir,” he graciously accepted the money. “About working for the eatery,” just as the lips formed to say ‘-I accept,’ a refined work of engineering halted the crowd with sound alone. A very handsomely dressed lady came to grab the winner’s hand.

“I’m sorry, the competition is over,” said she peering over her sunglasses.

“What do you mean?” voiced Igna trying to fight back.

“Lady Yuki, why are you here?” asked the owner with a look of despair.

“I came to take my apprentice; the boy is too free-spirited for my liking.” The confident man of the stove was pulled by a monster of a persona. Her iron-clad ire was unlike anything witnessed before, the change in her speech, face, and eyes rendered the mind empty.

“Wait,” he broke free upon reaching the pavement.

“What now?” her ice-cold glare froze over those not involved as well.

“My bicycle,” the tired figure quietly walked with slumped shoulders to carry the gift. The crowd all but felt pity, talent was a double-edged sword.

“Come on sister, this farse has lasted long enough,” the peculiar siblings disappeared over yonder.

Parked at a well-established building, the duo walked inside the reclusive café. The décor inside as well as out was of rich and privilege. The bartender immediate after the doorway was young and charming. Ladies in very expensive attired sat mauling over their drinks and passing lude comments onto the man. The latter smiled and kindly refused their approaches. Still, giving up wasn’t an option. It comes a time when alcohol overtakes the limitation of the rationale. By that point, the bartender would change or they’d stop serving. Opposite the bar rested the main seating area with tall wooden partitions separating each table. The privacy given was of utmost grace and elegance.

“Lady Lordon, it’s a pleasure to have such a renown person visit our establishment,” came the manager rubbing his palms, “-how can I help?” a very ‘generic’ face smiled out of duty.

“I’d like 04.”

Friendly to shady, “-I understand,” he gestured to a waiter standing beside the kitchen. “Please, he shall lead the way forth.” Cutting across the main area, they arrived at a well-hidden staircase with warm lighting and artificial plants.

“04 is readied to be used, please carry on.”

“...” no response came from the lady. The expression was reserved and distant – her gaze held a hint of melancholy.

‘What’s with her sudden change?’

“Can you explain why you ran off earlier?” they sat in a private dining area with a view over the empty alley, “-Igna, I need an answer right away.”

novelusb.com

“I heard from Madia that I was free to find a part-time job. Loron doesn’t open until the night service and lady Yuki is more than preoccupied with her duties. I thought finding knowledge on my own and gathering experience was part of the training. Did I assume wrong?”

“YES, YOU DID,” her voice raised, “-experience from what, a local eatery?” I’m trying to forge a diamond and yet you persistently try to find another way to muddy my efforts. Experience isn’t good enough; once one grows familiar with low-level cooking then there’s no going back. Mediocrity, I’ll have none of it!”

“I have no rights to argue, do I,” his tone turned to gentle and apologetic, “-I suppose lady Yuki did take me away from my mentor in hopes of making me a better chef. Having ideas and want of learning isn’t enough. What thee seeks is a puppet to use as thee see fit. From the first day, you left me on the airfield. I complied and made my way to Onela. There again, you came to start the cook-off. I’m confused, what is it you want? A puppet or someone willing to learn, tell me right away.”

SLAP, “-don’t you dare,” said she with boiling hot cheeks, “-a lowly orphan has no right in speaking to me that way.”

“Lowly orphan,” softly touching his cheeks, “-my lady,” the head lifted with sympathy, “-I’m sorry I’m nothing but a burden. A lowly boy can’t fathom the pressures of working for the well-established

Medusa of Cooking. I was a fool to think you would understand. I'll take my leave, ma'am, I don't have the right to breathe the same air as you. As for the bicycle, it's yours, I don't have the right to anything, I'm naught but lowly and pitiable," the door closed without a sound made. Igna walked out with hands in pocket and a scratching feeling of disappointment within. 'I'm an idiot,' thought he breathing to the empty street, '-what's the point of coming to the capital?' the sunny sky changed to an abrupt greyness. Mild showers had the few pedestrians run inwards for cover. He pulled over the hood and walked without knowing where to head.

Knock, knock, "-Lady Lordon, is there perhaps something I might do?" inquired the manager. Naught returned but a vague whimpering. "Lady Lordon?" the whimpering turned to sob, he peeked through the slightly ajar door. 'She's crying?' her head rested horizontally on the table with mild punches to the table, tears flowed without stop. 'This is bad,' he dashed for the phone.

The rainfall grew torrential, puddles gathered to the edges of the roads. A line of black cars sped to drive over the gathered water, *splash,* it landed against a lonesome figure stood. 'Warm,' thought he unbothered by their actions.

'Isn't that?' he caught a glimpse of someone familiar, '-yeah, never mind. I'll head for Aria, there's no point staying here. I'm glad I took my backpack, 50,100 Exa should be enough to get a weapon and start a new life.'

"Manager," the army of cars stopped at the café, "-where's she?" asked Lord Lordon in full ire.

"At room 04," replied he scared at the presence of armed guards.

"Thanks," replied he strongly to stomp up the stairs and barge the door.

"Yuki!" the lady remained still, only tears would fall at intervals. Her expression was naught but regrettable, "-what happened to you?" he pulled her into a tight embrace. "Yuki, tell me, what happen, why are you sad?"

"I-Igna," said she, "-h-he's g-gone."

"That damned low-life. Everyone bring me him alive or dead, I don't care," he gritted.

"Father!" screamed Syndra, "-you're going too far!"

"No!" said he, "-anyone who brings tears to my lovely wife shall pay one way or the other." The army marched forth in search of the culprit. 'They've tracked his location using the phone, won't be long,' he sat trying to calm his woeful wife. She took no responsibility for the situation, rather, the lady remained quiet to grieve in self-pity.

'There's no way I'm letting you get away with this, father.'

Incoming call – Unknown, flashed across the droplet filled phone, '-who's calling?'

"Hello?"

"Hello, Igna is that you?"

"Yeah, who's this?"

“Syndra. Listen, father has sent an army after you. Run, get as far as you can!”

“A bit late for that,” replied he sensing multiple presences behind.

“Lyoko Igna, come with us right this moment,” they stared with guns at the ready. The shop behind had, ‘-antique weaponry for cheap,’ advertised on the window.

“Were you sent by the Lordon’s?”

“Yes, obey and no harm will come.”

“Heard that?” asked he, “-your family sure is powerful,” the call ended.

‘What’s he trying to do?’ asked she biting her nail.

“Who were you calling?” came Lord Lordon to hold her shoulders tightly, “-it better not be that boy.”

“Leave me alone,” she shrugged away, “-you never see that lady for who she truly is. I’ll never accept her as my mother.”

“Mind your tongue,” *Slap,* “-you better call her mother or else.”

“Grit all you want, father, I’ll do things my way, understand?”

The café was bought for the whole day, guests left without finishing their meals. Two strong guards stood at the door preventing the mistress from leaving. ‘What a pain,’ thought she at the window with intensifying rainfall. ‘-Medusa of cooking, what a joke. She probably felt guilty about playing with another person. Igna doesn’t hold back when speaking seriously, she couldn’t face the reality and chose to play the victim, hoping father will come as a knight. I hate her, a true snake.’

The darker outside flickered with the headlights of multiple cars. They came in full with a boy in tow.

“Igna, why are you here?”

“Syndra,” smiled he, “-I had nowhere to go. Guild Leader Haru must be curious about the present situation.”

“Enough talking,” they smack the back of his head with a gun, “-keep moving.”

“No need to get violent,” the nonchalant attitude remained true.

‘Guild Leader Haru?’ the words stuck to her mind, ‘-must be... is he serious?’ she dialed the Guild’s number and reported what happened. The response came in haste.

“Are you sure about this?” asked the leader herself.

“Yes, lady Haru, my mother is up to her conniving ways. I’m afraid Igna is in trouble.”

“Don’t worry,” said she, “-I’ll have a friend take care of his protection,” the phone call ended. ‘Yuki, you’ve done it now,’ thought she with a somber grin. “Hello, Lady Elvira, there’s someone I need you to protect. Can you have someone sent over at this address?”

“Haru, long time no see, and yes, send a photo.”

The tranquil room 04 barged with Igna fully restrained by the guards, “-master Lordon, we’ve brought him.”

“Yuki,” said he, “-I’ve brought the boy. Please, stop crying now, for my sake?”

She sniffled to a stop, “-honey, I love you.”

“I love you too,” he glared, “-what about him, should I punish him?”

“No, don’t,” she walked over with a cocky expression, “-did you think the Medusa of cooking would let you run away?”

“Lady Yuki,” he stared with the same sympathy, “-I feel sorry for you.”

“Shut it,” *slap,* “-stop looking at me as if I’m nothing!”

“Did you forget who I was?” he smiled, “-why would the eyes of a lowly boy have you flustered. Lady Yuki, I came to learn from the legend of cooking. Why is it did you get angry, was it because I joined a rigged cooking competition and won, was it because I sought to cook my way? Tell me, what about the promise of having my back, was it nothing more than a lie. I’m just entertainment for you, aren’t I? Chef Leko taught me plenty o’ things. I was content, yet, he entrusted my growth to you... why? Tell me why?”

“Enough!” an elbow to the stomach, “-don’t speak so casually to our master.”

Cough, “I’ll say what I want,” he rose despite the pain, “-lady Yuki, tell me, what’s the reason you picked me. Was there potential or an escape from the tediousness of being at the top? TELL ME.”

“I SAID SHUT UP,” an iron bat slammed across his head smearing blood onto her face as he fell.

“T-tell m-me,” he knelt with the throbbing sensation of pain partially blinding the room, “-what am I to you?”

“GIVE UP!” the next readied for another strike. *SMACK.*

.....