

Extras 381

Chapter 381 Hearing From Esme

After some more minutes—nearly spanning an hour—of discourse concerning the company, its assets, and a bunch of other technical things kept brief, the official handing down was over.

Of course, this was just the official state of things.

Rey still appointed Rebal as the CEO, and Kara as the Deputy. Asher's role, as well as the other staff's responsibilities, would be decided by the two heads of the company.

Even though he was the true Head of The Reaper Group, he didn't have to do anything.

'I guess being Ralyks is enough for them...' Rey mused, considering how they readily agreed with no caveats.

Just as he expected, this must have been what they were after all along.

'I don't even really mind that they're using me. I'll be using them plenty in the future...'

The people of the Reaper Group knew that he could kill them at any time, so they wouldn't dare scheming against him. He was also sure he had shown a fair amount of intelligence to accompany his power, so they wouldn't consider him to be dumb.

'If I was all muscle and no brain, they could have manipulated me and used me for my strength while offering nothing of real value in return.'

But that wasn't what happened.

The KariBlanc Group, now Reaper Group, knew what he was capable of... and they probably suspected him of even more feats.

'I'm sure they won't betray me.'

"A-ah... Sir Ralyks, I apologize for not remembering until now. Lady Esme informed me that she would like to see you now."

Rey's eyes nearly bulged the moment he heard those words.

'He knows her name?! Did Esme tell him?' That seemed to be the only explanation, all things considered.

"Did she tell you that personally...?" Rey asked, his tone as calm as possible despite feeling all sorts of turbulence within.

"Well, no. She told the maid attending to her. But, we spoke after I was informed of that for a brief moment."

"What did you speak about?"

"She just wanted to know when next you would be coming, and I told her that I didn't know. Then she asked a few questions about you, and your relationship with our Group."

"S-she did that? What did she... ah, hold on..."

Rey told himself to calm down, as his excitement and shock was breaking his Ralyks persona. If he wasn't careful, he would completely ruin what he had been trying to build up for so long.

'I can't allow that!'

Still, this was quite the development!

'Esme didn't speak to anyone because they were Evil in her eyes. Even back then, when she informed them that she didn't want to see me, she did it by way of a letter.'

The only time she spoke to Rebal, and Kara was due to the circumstances surrounding the Dark Gathering—nothing more, nothing less.

'Yet, she's having conversations and revealing her name? What is going on here?' Rey's heart began to pound as he considered the possibilities.

'In any case, it seems like she wants to see me. I can just ask when I see her!'

It had been over two weeks since he last laid eyes on Esme. In the past, he hadn't really considered her to be a big deal, and even up until this very moment, she hadn't really played an important role in his life.

Rey didn't think he was particularly close to her either.

'And yet we know so much about each other...' His thoughts trailed as he narrowed his eyes.

Perhaps that was why he felt so attached to her despite their interactions being brief and on few occasions at best.

There was also the fact that he saw her naked, but Rey didn't want to think about it.

"Very well. We shall conclude our discussions here." Rey said, now regaining his respectable aura of calmness.

"I'll go and see how she is doing."

As soon as he rose to his feet, everyone followed suit and nodded in understanding.

It seemed they still thought something special was going on between the two of them despite that not being the case. Rey didn't feel the need to correct them, though.

He didn't know why, but he felt strangely pleased that he was being paired with someone like Esme.

'As long she and I know it's not true, there's no need to ruin the whole thing...'

Besides, him denying a relationship with her would only raise further questions, and he didn't want any new issue centered around misplaced romance.

'Welp... this is farewell for now.' He stared at all three of the people before him, wondering if he should give any words of encouragement or admonition.

After a while of internal deliberation, Rey decided against it.

'Make tons of money for me!' Was what he shouted in his head before he teleported away.

~VWUSH!~

Rey appeared in front of Esme's room in an instant, and while he stood in front of it, he remembered what happened just two weeks earlier.

He recollected her pain, and the more time passed after then, he could understand how deep her despair ran.

'For the first few days, I was tempted to go back and see her. Maybe even knock the door over if that was what it took...'

Rey thanked Ater for stopping him during those moments. His Familiar talked some sense to him every time, allowing him to calmly assess the matter.

After the first week passed, he became a lot more stable and decided to give Esme her space.

That didn't mean that he didn't miss or think of her at times. However, he just reached the point where he understood her intentions and was willing to truly respect her wishes.

'I still can't believe she spoke to a maid, and even Asher, before me, though...'

Rey didn't want to admit it, but he didn't feel the best of emotions after learning that Asher spoke to her.

'I still want to know what they talked about, but...' He took a deep breath as he stepped forward.

'... Seeing how she's doing comes first.'

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Chapter 382 Esme's Decision

Once Rey took a step forward, a voice emerged from beyond the door that stood before him.

It had been a little over two weeks since he heard that voice.

The moment it came forth, Rey felt something shift in his heart. The melodious tune danced in his ears, and he felt his body grow lighter.

At that instant, the tension in his body vanished.

Rey felt relief.

"Is that you, Rey? Please come in."

Those words propelled him to take more steps forward as he twisted the doorknob and finally gained access to the sanctuary beyond.

'Ahhh...'

The first thing that occupied him was the lovely aroma that was swept out the instant he opened the door. It overwhelmed his senses, causing him to close his eyes as the entire ambiance embraced him.

It felt like nature had come to visit him, granting him the gift of countless flowers with the best flavors to please his nose.

It was ecstatic, just standing at the entrance.

"What are you standing there for? Come in."

Rey snapped out of his reverie, and perhaps it was muscle memory, but his legs began to move on their own despite his mind still not recovered from the pleasant breeze and amazing scent he recieved.

He closed the door behind him, and once again, the wonders of Esme's room made him gleam with delight.

It was cool and spectacular, just like the Elf who sat on her bed... waiting for him to come to her.

Her long white hair felt like clear clouds, spilling over her shoulders to the point where they nearly reached her knees. She currently donned an oversized shirt, with shorts and was barefoot—the usual casual wear that Esme preferred.

Everything about the experience felt like the very first time he entered her room. He didn't know why, but that was the vibe he felt.

Her clear blue eyes shone like gems the moment she stared at him, and soon as their eyes met, she beamed.

Rey felt a wave of energy, mixed with emotions rush towards him.

'She looks the same. Yet... something has changed about her.'

Perhaps it was because she looked more elf-like now, thanks to her pointy ears. Maybe it was because this would be the first time he saw her smile in her room while donning her white hair.

No... just the mere fact that he was seeing her for the first time in two weeks made him leak out a smile.

'I guess I missed her more than I thought.' Rey thought to himself.

He steadied his pace and took his seat right next to her, right under the watch of her azure eyes. The moment he did so, however, he found his entire body plopping on the incredibly soft mattress.

"Ahh... this is really comfortable. I should ask Rebal where he got it!" He found himself speaking first as he faced the ceiling.

Inhaling deeply and closing his eyes, he whispered.

"I've missed this."

"What? The bed?" Esme's voice proceeded naturally, almost as if they had been talking for a while now.

"You." He responded almost instantly. "I've missed this... with you."

The moment he said this, he saw her smile a bit more, drawing her hand to his mask forehead to poke it.

Then—

~TUT~

—She did exactly that.

"What was that for?" Rey answered, returning to his seated posture.

Her actions didn't hurt him at all, but he worried that she might have done something to the mask.

"Nothing. Just wondering when you learned to talk like that." She said, very smoothly too.

"Talk like what? How am I talking?"

"I don't know. You tell me." She giggled, much to Rey's pleasant surprise.

Her soft laughter was even more amazing than her mere smile. Rey wanted to make her laugh even more, but he was still confused about what he said that was so funny.

"In any case, I'm happy you're here, Rey. I missed you too."

Almost as soon as she said that, her laughter vanished, and only a somewhat sad smile remained.

She still looked incredible, but Rey knew that she had a lot to get off her chest. He just wanted to hear her out.

"I'm sorry about the other day. There was a lot on my mind. A lot of things that I had to process... you know?" As she said this, she looked away.

"Yeah. I get it."

For a moment, there was silence.

Rey was tempted to speak, but he stopped himself every time his lips were about to part. This was Esme's time, and he had to respect it.

Even if she didn't say anything, he would just sit there in silence.

That was what he decided.

"I thought about it a lot, Rey. I questioned my beliefs, ideology, everything. After seeing everything crumble before my eyes, and seeing myself committing the very atrocities I condemned... I had to ask myself the difficult questions."

Once again, Rey waited patiently.

Esme turned to look at him, her face now completely serious.

"I used to think that all life is precious. I didn't want to hurt anyone or anything... even if they hurt me back." She said.

As her soft voice flowed, so did the tears from her moist eyes.

"Ah, excuse me."

"N-no, its fi—"

"One second..." Esme raised her hand and reached out for a nearby linen of white.

She cleaned her tears and even blew her nose—all right in front of Rey. He could only watch in silence as she did all of this.

Once she was done, she sighed and turned in his direction once again.

"Where was I? Ah, yes... I no longer think any of that, Rey." Esme's words took a somewhat dark tone.

Her tone was still calm and soft, but there was a certain bluntness about them that Rey couldn't quite explain.

"Rey, I want to punish those who bring about evil and cause suffering. As long as my actions will bring about better good than suffering..." Everything about her words and demeanor rang of resolve.

"... I am more than willing to do whatever it takes."

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Chapter 383 Discourse On Morality

"Whatever it takes...?"

Rey found himself blurting out the very words he heard Esme say.

'What does she mean by that?'

"I mean what I said, Rey." The Half Elf answered him with a stern face. "I will do whatever I can to achieve more good than suffering around me."

For a moment, an eerie silence took over. Rey watched as Esme's lips moved to show the extent to which she was willing to go.

"... Even if it means taking the lives that I once thought was precious."

In that instant, Rey recognized just how prepared Esme was to fulfil her new disposition.

Many people often spouted off ideals, but they lacked the resolve to do anything to bring them to reality. Even back on Earth, Rey's original world, there were people who wanted radical changes to the world, or warned against certain catastrophes that would befall mankind if certain steps weren't taken.

Some of them were for objectively good causes, and they were right in their ideals.

However, most people did not follow-up these ideals with action. They didn't have the resolve—the unbreakable will—to do what had to be done.

Just like on Earth, this was a dog eat dog world.

Many people—like the Esme of the past—wished for peace and harmony. They shunned evil and clung to good. However, they really didn't have enough willpower to take the extra step to ensure their wishes became manifest in the canvas of reality.

But now... Rey saw a different person in front of him.

Esme had changed!

"What is good, Rey? What is evil?"

For a moment, no one said a word. Rey merely watched in astonishment, processing everything he was hearing.

"Come on... answer."

"A-ahh, about that..." Rey stuttered, his face falling as he thought a little deeply about the subject matter.

"I don't think there's such a thing as objective good or objective evil. Killing is bad, until you have to kill for the reasons. Stealing is wrong, unless those goods are stolen from a hoarder to feed your

dying child. It's a messy spectrum, but such an arbitrary disposition can also mean anything goes if someone has a right reason. It ultimately leads to chaos."

He paused for a moment, introspecting on what he really felt.

"What do you mean by chaos?"

"Well..." Rey sought for the best way to explain his position. "For the most basic examples, my position works just about well. If there is no objective good or evil, then people simply need to operate on their perceptions of morality. But... that never ends well."

In the end, people are warped.

One man's definition of morals often differ from the other, and while there is usually a general consensus by society on what ethics ought to be, there were certain grey areas that couldn't be resolved no matter how Rey thought about it.

"If a man's daughter is captured by an unknown third party, and he has to kill another man's daughter to save his own... what happens then?"

"..." Esme was silent.

"Is the first man justified in committing such a sin? Perhaps. But what of the second man who has to defend his daughter, whose life means the death of the first man's daughter?"

"..." Yet another moment of silence.

"Who is right? Who is wrong? Ultimately, the third party is the truly evil one, but sometimes life presents us with equally problematic situations. What then?"

Perhaps life in itself is evil, but since everyone is living in the world, it remains an abstract entity.

For Rey, he couldn't get over this moral dilemma.

Perhaps that was why [Dead Calm] seemed more appealing to him these days.

"I justify my murder of humans by saying they're nothing more than monsters, or perhaps they're even worse." That was his way of escaping the moral dilemma.

He could kill Monsters because they weren't a member of his species, just as humans killed animals. He would kill Dragons because they were going to wipe out humanity otherwise.

And as for people... they were no longer humans in his eyes.

"I get stronger by these killings, so it's an additional incentive for me." Rey confessed.

He never claimed to be morally correct in all instances, which was why he was of the firm opinion that people couldn't be completely good or evil.

He sometimes did evil things for what he considered good reasons.

"I know I'm a hypocrite in a sense. After all, I sided with the KariBanc Group and aided a criminal organization, instead of wiping them out along with the rest."

A true saint would have done that.

"I spared them because of my past relationship with them, and for the additional benefits I could gain from them."

Rebal and the rest were his allies, so he sided with them.

If they had been his enemies, he would have killed them without mercy.

'The same thing will happen if they turn on me at any given moment.' Rey had already made that resolve within him.

He simply didn't think it was a 'Good' action. Still, he didn't think he was evil either.

"I just—"

"Want to know what I think?" Esme's voice interrupted his silent whisper.

Rey broke out of his slump and looked at the Half Elf in front of him. She had a calm look, not appearing bothered by the moral conflicts at all.

It made him curious.

"What... do you think?"

"I think you're overcomplicating the issue." Rey found his eyes widening the moment he heard this from Esme.

"What do you mean?"

"You already said it yourself. Good and Evil are relative." She answered with a sigh. "There is no true good and evil in this world. There never was, and I fear there never will be..."

Despite making such a despairing statement, Esme leaked out a smile.

"Still, I want to make the world as good as it possibly can be."

"H-how...?" Rey asked.

No matter what one did, they would still end up in the same moral dilemma.

Unless—

"I will follow my own definition of morality and execute justice... the way I deem fit."

That, ultimately, was the path Esme chose for herself.

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Chapter 384 Right Or Wrong

Is it right to take a life?

NO.

Is it right to take a life you believe to be wrong?

MAYBE.

Is it wrong to allow a life you believe to be wrong take another life?

YES.

In the endless spectrum of results, Esme chose the simplest path to arrive at her definition of morality.

"I will eliminate anyone who threatens the wellbeing of myself, those I care about, and those I consider to be worth keeping alive."

And so, when it came to the question of the two men and their daughters, Esme had her answer.

"If killing a man's daughter will save my daughter, I'll kill the daughter. If killing a man will save my daughter, I'll kill the man. And if I can kill the third party who started the twisted game, then that is what I will do."

There was no need for a moral dilemma or overcomplicating an issue that would appear simple to anyone living in a certain point of view.

"Why is that your answer?" Rey asked Esme.

"Because I can't save everyone. I have a life, and I am limited by my experiences. It's useless taking my opponent's perspective and experience into account. I am not them, and they are not me."

Rey slowly nodded.

"If I choose not to kill someone's daughter to save my own, am I so certain that the person would do the same if they were in my shoes? No... I don't think so."

In the end, humans only did things based on their perception of things.

"We don't see the world as it is, but from a contaminated lens of the self... eh?" Rey smiled as he looked at Esme.

She wasn't wrong in her analysis.

'We share the same perspective on how we would handle the situation...' His thoughts trailed.

Rey never expected to switch to his perspective so easily, but after seeing the ugliness of the world, it seemed she too had come to the same conclusion as him.

"But doing that doesn't make you good, does it?" He added, a bit playfully.

"Huh? Why doesn't it make me good?"

"Hmm?" Rey was surprised by her question.

Wasn't it a given that doing bad deeds already made you a bad person, unless one looked at it from the spectrum of moral relativism—which was what both Rey and Esme currently held to be the correct path.

In that vein, there wasn't any real hero or villain—no truly good or bad person. People could do good things for bad reasons and bad things for good reasons.

Hence, Rey was simply saying Esme wasn't fully good. If she was willing to kill another man's daughter to save her own, or commit atrocities to achieve what she perceived to be a better outcome.

Then she wasn't truly good, neither was she truly evil.

Of course, Rey explained this to her, but Esme shook her head while she listened.

"I don't accept that." She responded.

Her tone was once again serious, and her eyes gleamed with nothing short of resolve.

"I am a good person. I choose to follow the path that I consider good and generate the best outcome for everyone."

Of course, it was what SHE considered the best outcome, but still...

"If I do all of that, then I AM good. Because the other side is what I would call EVIL." That was Esme's conclusion.

Upon hearing this, Rey said nothing more.

'Ahh... I understand now.' His crimson eyes shone brightly as he observed her Status Window.

He instantly understood why her current perspective was the way it was.

'She's Chaotic Good... just like Billy.'

That meant they followed their own path and philosophy of good... to the letter.

'We're not the same at all!'

The one big difference between Esme and Rey lay in the nature of their convictions.

Rey would do the exact same thing that Esme would, but he did so from a neutral perspective—considering himself neither objectively right or wrong.

But she was different.

Esme was right in her own convictions! That made her the most dangerous kind of Good person.

'It looks like she indeed sorted out her trauma...' Rey's thoughts trailed as he looked at Esme's bright smile.

'It just wasn't in the way I expected.'

"So... do you have an objective plan on how you'll go about this new ideal of yours?"

Rey's question echoed in the room after several minutes of silence from both parties.

He was initially willing to give her time to say whatever she had to say, but after waiting for a while, Rey suspected that Esme was done with what she had to say.

And so, he asked the question.

"I want to play an active role in defeating the Dragons. To do that, though... I'll need to get a lot stronger than I am at the moment."

Rey nodded and smiled the moment he heard this.

'That's the spirit!'

It was nice to see her so fired-up. Her Stats were fine, in all honesty, but that was by human standards. The fact that she could get even stronger made it all the more pertinent to do so.

"I'm happy you said that, Esme. I was also thinking of how I can

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"No, Rey..." Esme cut him short before he finished his statement. "I can't burden you any longer."

The moment Rey heard this, he flinched.

"You've done a lot for me, and I appreciate it. But my conscience can't allow me to keep burdening you like this when there's an easier alternative."

"You mean... the Elves?" He asked, though his tone was near silent.

Esme nodded and widened her smile a little. "If it's not too much trouble, can you help me reunite with them? I would like to fight alongside them."

Rey understood everything.

'Why do I feel this way? Wasn't this the initial plan? Isn't this what I always wanted?'

Perhaps he just thought they would have more time together.

"I apologize for burdening you one last time, Rey..." As Esme spoke, Rey raised a hand and shook his head. He smiled sadly, though she couldn't see it thanks to his mask.

"I understand, Esme. I'll make sure you get to meet your people."

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Chapter 385 Meeting With The Elves

The truth of the matter was that Rey already had a discussion on the Elf issue with Rebal not too long ago.

It seemed the Elves were still around, and they were very much interested in the exchange.

Rey was personally going to see them and acquire more information about the Elves—as much as he possible could—while trying his best to form some kind of connection to them.

He would take things slow and easy until he knew enough before he suggested the idea to Esme.

'Who would have thought she would bring it up first...' He smiled wryly as he sat in his room.

Rey wasn't upset her decision. In fact, he understood it perfectly.

'Just the way I fight for humans, she probably wants to do the same with those she closely relates to the most.'

Besides, the Elves never hurt her like the humans had. They were also the more superior race, and they would be able to help her grow a lot faster than the humans.

'It's the most preferred option.' Rey sighed.

He plopped on his bed, instantly remembering Esme's.

The beds offered to the Otherworlders was by no means of shoddy quality. For all he knew, his could even be better than the Esme's.

And yet... he found himself missing that sensation.

"Haa... I'm so stupid." Rey muttered to himself, not even knowing why.

'The meeting with the Elves has already been arranged. It's happening tomorrow, and I'll be warping there with Esme.'

When he told her of the details, she beamed and excitedly accepted his offer to take her along with him.

Of course, the meeting was purely commercial, but Rey was sure Elves wouldn't reject one of their own seeking sanctuary with them.

At the very least, it was worth a shot.

"Welp..." He closed his eyes and nonchalantly raised both hands. He had to let go at some point, and now was the best time to do so.

'... It is what it is.'

[The Next Day]

~VWUUSH!~

Rey, Aldred and Esme proceeded out of a portal, all three of them in their respective disguises.
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Rey was in his usual Ralyks appearance, and as for Esme, she was dressed in an overall hood that covered most of her face from being seen.

Aldred wore an his all-black suit, with his handsome face exposed and his clear skin gleaming under the evening sky.

The meeting took place at the very eastern shores of the Western Continent. It was the first time Rey had come to such a place, so after teleporting to the nearest location, and flying for another long distance, he saw the meeting spot from afar and opened a portal there.

All of this was to achieve a grand entry, and he considered it successful by all standards.

The waves crashed upon the rocks present at the beach, and Rey could see water constantly creeping to sea shore from a short distance off.

It reminded him of the beach back home, though this place was deserted.

Well, almost deserted.

"You can undo your cloaking. I can clearly see you." Rey spoke up, looking in a particular direction to his far right.

Just as he said, there were about three Elves standing there—though there was a certain barrier that covered them from sight.

It was useless against his perception, though.

"You have good eyes." A voice echoed forth, and from the invisible layer that existed, three figures emerged.

Just as Rey expected... they were Elves.

All three were exquisitely beautiful, all dressed in attires that could only be described as gorgeous—albeit crude.

Their hair had neon-like colors, but the one that stood out to him was the hair of the Elf at the center. It was bluish green, and her attire matched it well—exuding an air of elegance he couldn't ignore.

Everything about the Elf at the center captivated him. She was incredibly beautiful—almost as beautiful as Esme.

She wielded a white wooden staff, and while her demeanor was stoic, slowly turning into a frown, she still looked incredible.

Other than looks, though...

'This smell... it's so good!'

It reminded him of Esme's room, though somehow it felt stronger than that. The aura that came from the lady at the center dominated all the rest, and so did her scent.

It was not as pleasant as Esme's, but it was more overpowering.

'Are all Elves like this?' He wondered, snapping himself back to his senses as he watched them approach.

"My name is Aurora El Slaviarai. My sisters with me are Lila and Lali." She introduced herself.

Rey nodded in acknowledgment and introduced himself as well.

"My name is Ralyks. With me are Aldred and Esme."

"Es... me?"

"Yes?" Rey asked, wondering if the name struck some kind of bell with Aurora.

It would make things a lot easier if they actually knew Esme in some way, or if she happened to be the long lost daughter of their queen or something.

Unfortunately, they had no such luck.

"That's a good name." Was all Auorora commented on.

It was disappointing, but not entirely so. Much to Rey's relief, the Elves were plenty courteous.

He didn't know if it was because they were desperate, or they were always like this, but it made the mood perfect for Esme's entire reveal.

Before that, though... business came first.

'I'm tempted to look at their Status Windows, but I can't do that now.'

If they had some sort of way to know that he used [Absolute Appraisal], he could risk offending them. Worst case scenario, the deal would be off..

'I don't know just how desperate they are, but it's probably not a good idea to test the waters yet.'

He still wanted to maintain good relations with the Elves after this, and there was the issue of Esme. Rey decided to wait until the deal was sealed and he was somewhat out of reach before he used [Absolute Appraisal].

That way, they couldn't be sure that it was him.

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Chapter 386 The Elf Encounter [Pt 1]

"Are you with the goods?"

The Elf called Aurora finally broke the silence with her question. Her eyes narrowed and her frown deepened.

Rey could see her strengthen her grip on the staff, and nothing about her demeanor spoke of friendliness.

Despite the Elves being courteous, it didn't automatically make them friendly.

'She's has her guard raised, huh? I can even sense ten other Elves that are hiding a far distance off. It's best I don't mention that, though...' His thoughts trailed.

The atmosphere was a little too tense for his liking, but it couldn't be helped.

Rey slightly glanced at Aldred, who slowly nodded at him. He took in a deep breath and calmed himself.

'I can't mess up. Let's get this over with.'

"Yes, I do. And do you have the promised payments?" Rey took a step closer as he brought a small sack from one of his pockets.

Within the pouch were quite a few Spatial Rings, which contained the Enchanted Items that the Elves requested.

'Over ten thousand in total. They really bought in bulk, huh?' Rey smiled to himself as he looked at Aurora.

"Of course we do. What do you take us for?" Aurora responded as she nodded at one of the Elves behind her.

Rey raised his brow underneath his mask and felt a bit slighted.

'What's her deal? Didn't she ask me the same thing?' The way he saw things, the Elf before him had a serious attitude.

Even if she wasn't in a good mood, that didn't mean she could bring it into business.

One of the assisting Elves behind Aurora—Feyi or Feyu, Rey didn't quite remember the name—handed over a sack to Aurora seemingly out of nowhere.

Of course, for Rey who had already noticed the sak under several layers of concealment, it didn't look that way at all.

"Here, as promised. There are high-end minerals and Mana Crystals of the cumulative value of the items you are exchanging." Aurora raised the sack and gave Rey, and he also returned the favor and gave her the small pouch.

"You don't mind if I examine the goods, do you?"

Rey asked this the moment took the sack away from Aurora's hands. Naturally, the pouch that was previously with him now belonged to them.

'It feels considerably heavy. I should check, though...'

"Hmph! Do as you please." Aurora responded, and a certain glare of stifled hatred echoed from her eyes.

'Why does she look so mad? Rebal told me the Elves were pretty cooperative with him, though it was difficult making the deal with them. But he didn't say it was this bad!'

Rey felt like something had definitely happened to make them like this.

'Well, let's ignore that for now...'

Rey opened the large sack before him and noticed the goods. He utilized [Absolute Appraisal], on one hand to confirm the quality, and on the other hand to see if the Elves noticed him using the Skill at all.

At the very least, that would allow him to know if they were aware of the Skill and its effects.

'Oho! These are incredibly pure Mana Crystals! Far purer than anything we have here...' Rey looked at the shining gems before him.

It wasn't just Mana Crystals, though.

The Elves had Orichalcum, Mythril, and Adamantite—the three rarest metals in the world.

Well, according to the books he read.

The fact that the Elves had them in such phenomenal quality and quantity told Rey that perhaps they weren't as rare as he imagined.

'This is really...'

With these materials, and the Monster Core he obtained from slaying that S-Tier Monster, he could create a very potent Item.

Perhaps the first Grade 2 Item in the history of mankind.

'Grade 1 would be an item like the Divine Sword. I don't think anyone could make something like that...'

Rey felt his smile widen as he anticipated the future. In the meantime, it seemed the Elves were also done with their analysis, and so the leader spoke up promptly.

"They're all here. This concludes our deal."

Aurora's voice was stone cold, a lot less thrilled than Rey expected.

There was no way he could just watch the Elves go like that when they had access to such pure minerals—probably in high quantity. If the Alliance could exploit that, then maybe...

"Hold on, Lady Aurora. If you don't mind, I would like to discuss further business with you."

"I do mind, and there is nothing further to discuss." Aurora responded bluntly.

She made to leave, turning her sights from Rey. He clenched his teeth and sighed internally.

'I can't rush things. If I am too pushy, it'll just push them away even more. Besides, they'll eventually run out of those Items, so there's a chance we can do business again.'

There was also the possibility of the Elves finally winning the war on their end, so Rey wasn't completely sure which side of the pendulum his interests would fall on.

'There's the backup plan, but... I should at least try my hardest here, right?'

Rey opened his lips to call upon Aurora's attention, but before he could do so, a louder voice echoed from behind him.

"Lady Aurora, please spare me a moment of your time!" It came from Esme.

Rey swiftly turned to look at her, finding her hood down and her Elven face exposed.

'Ahh... I guess it has come to this already.' His thoughts were deflated. 'This isn't going in the order I expected it to.'

He made one more glance at Aldred, but the young man simply smiled and shrugged.

'Fair enough.' He smiled and kept quiet, turning his gaze back to Aurora, whose eyes were widened with shock.

"Why... Y-you...?" Her voice quaked as beads of tears began to fall from her moist eyes.

It seemed like just one look at Esme was enough to make the cold and angry Elf soften up and even cry. Rey's eyes glistened in relief.

'At the very least, I can say the Esme plan worked we—'

"Why do you look like her... you abominable half-breed?"

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Chapter 387 The Elf Encounter [Pt 2]

Rey's eyes were wide in shock.

'W-what...?' He struggled to process the words that Aurora had just spat out.

'Abominable half-breed...?'

He took another look at Aurora's face, and what he saw wasn't an emotion synonymous to pity, kindness, or sadness. It wasn't anything warm and fuzzy that was synonymous with a happy reunion.

This was the opposite.

Aurora's tears were not for Esme, but for herself and her people. The look she gave Esme was that of disgust and slowly growing rage.

"A Half Elf... that looks like Older Sister...? How repulsive!"

Esme was so stunned by the response that Aurora gave that she fell silent. All the resolve and confidence that she had accumulated for this moment fizzled out almost instantly.

She just stood there, like a statue, and watched as Aurora used words to tear her to pieces.

"Isn't that a bit too far?" Rey finally spoke up, his brows raised in annoyance.

He didn't want to speak up, since both parties were Elves, and it was only right for family to sort things out themselves. However, he quickly changed his mind once he saw how Aurora treated Esme.

And more importantly... he noticed how hurt Esme looked.

"This bitch clearly doesn't see Esme as the same kind as her.' For the first time since the start of the conversation, Rey frowned.

"You stay out of this, filthy human. Our deal is complete, so you may be on your way." Aurora waved her hand and dismissed Rey with that gesture.

"You will leave this Half Elf here, though. I have some questions for her that are not the business of humans."

'What the hell...?' Rey's frown deepened.

"I will have to tell you to excuse us now."

After listening to how Aurora spoke to him about Esme, and how she glared deeply at the object of attention, Rey felt a tinge of relief that the Elf had exposed her true feelings.

Even the two Elves behind Aurora expressed the same disgust as they stared at Esme, though there was still some level of shock in their demeanor.

'To think I wanted Esme to return to these assholes.'

On one hand, it seemed the Elves wore their hearts on their sleeves. That made them a lot easier to deal with than humans, who were experts at concealing their feelings.

If Aurora was an intelligent human, she would have pretended to get along with Esme until Rey and Aldred left. Perhaps they would have even gotten to the Eastern Continent before the ill treatment started.

Instead of doing things in such a calculated fashion, Aurora and her sisters spilled the beans so quickly.

'Maybe it doesn't matter to them. If they can simply get rid of us and capture Esme either way, then there's no need to pretend...' Rey's mind flowed.

Either way, he was grateful to them for showing their true intentions.

"Esme is never returning to you." Rey took a step forward, swiftly throwing the sack of goods to Aldred.

The nimble man caught it instantly, holding it tightly whils Rey folded both hands and planted his heels on the ground.

"I believe I already told you to leave her and return to your vile settlement—wherever that is."

Aurora's frown deepened, and she gave Rey an intense glare.

Despite all of this, however, not an iota of her beauty was sullied. In fact, Rey thought she looked even prettier when she was in a terrible mood.

'Ahh... what am I thinking?' It was an inappropriate thought to consider at the moment, and he quickly chastized himself for it.

"Why don't you make me... bitch?" Rey responded with words of his own.

He was never very good at coming up with insults, so he merely spat out what came to his mind first. It felt good, letting out a tiny bit of his frustrations on the Elf, but he knew that it came at a cost.

'I guess it's too late to form a cordial relationship.' The flustered look on Aurora's face told him that much. 'We'll just have to go with Plan B.'

Rey didn't blame himself for speaking out, though. The Elves started it, and it was clear that they were not interested in any kind of mutual understanding in the slightest.

They were arrogant, rude, and extremely insensitive people—

though it seemed like they would be the exact opposite merely based on their appearance.

It annoyed Rey to the core.

'Forget an alliance with them. I don't even care.'

He simply stood his ground and waited for what Aurora would do in response to his words. freewebnovel.com

"You bald monkey with no proper cognitive function. You dare address an Elf with words that are meant only for lower creatures like your kind?"

Rey felt the insult seep into his soul, and it hurt him intensely.

"Imbeciles like you should know their place and do what they are told. I have been as kind to you as I possibly can, so leave now while I still offer you the grace of my understanding... fool."

Rey inhaled deeply, trying his hardest to exercise full control. Perhaps using [Dead Calm] would be perfect here, but Rey was also aware that he could kill the Elves simply based on the intense intent they were directing towards him.

Speaking of intent, Rey could feel immense bloodlust coming from behind him. He swiftly turned to Aldred and rapidly shook his head.

'Don't do anything, you idiot!'

Fortunately, Aldred saw this and took control of himself. It was a close call, all things considered.

"Why are you still here, fool?" Aurora asked, narrowing her gaze at Rey.

Any second now, and the Elf could attack him. He had to prepare for whatever they could dish out and ensure they made the first move so he was justified in his actions.

"Is it because of the the half-breed vermin?"

That's right. He had to patiently wait until they raised their powers against him...

"A freak of nature like that should not exist. She should not even have been born—"

~WHOOOSH!~

Before Aurora could conclude her words, Rey left his position and appeared right in front of her.

"Hey..." His voice came as a threatening whisper.

His eyes were wide open, and his clenched fist drew close to Aurora as he stared with nothing short of the intent to pummel her.

"... Shut up!"

*

Chapter 388 The Elf Encounter [Pt 3]

'T-this human...!'

Aurora was shocked by what currently stood in front of her, occupying the range of her sight.

The man in the black mask—Ralyks—had left his position and appeared before her before she could even react.

She had never met a human that fast.

'Even that wolf man was not this quick!' Her thoughts echoed, remembering Fenrir—leader of the Mercenary Gang.

At the very least, Fenrir seemed to be a leader. This man, in sharp contrast, was merely an errand boy of the KariBlanc Group.

This sort of power wasn't meant to be wielded by him.

'But so what...?' Aurora grinned to herself.

Her Ashen Staff's automatic barrier would protect her from all kinds of harm, so it wasn't like she was in any danger.

'He's only fast. There's no way he can—'

~KRRIIAAKAAA!~

Like glass, the invisible barrier around Aurora shattered.

'W-WHAT?!'

It broke apart right before Ralyks' fist even made impact, which meant this wasn't the result of mere brute strength.

It was the result of a Skill.

"I-impossi—!"

~BOOM!~

Before her lips could conjure up the last syllable, the man's fist was planted on her face.

The air around her seemed to part, and the two Elves behind her were instantly pushed back by the sheer pressure of the landed blow.

That wasn't all, though.

"Uguooh!" Aurora let out a loud grunt as she felt her body pushed backwards.

Blood flowed from her nose, and her head spun circles as everything in her body experienced instant confusion.

Elves were naturally peaceful people.

They were pacifists.

As a result, it was very rare for them to get the opportunity of experiencing pain.

Aurora, in all her life, had only ever experienced pain three times—two of those times being when she tripped and fell as a child.

Well, this sensation was nothing like tripping and falling.

It was far, far more painful.

~WHOOSH!~

Aurora's body flew a distance and landed on the ground, sliding through dirt for a meter or two before finally stopping.

"Lady Aurora!"

"Lady Aurora!"

Lila and Lali rushed to her side, like the kind sisters they were. Both of them had tears in their eyes as they observed the slightly swollen face of their beloved older sister.

It caused a true stain on her beauty.

"LADY AURORA!" Voices echoed from behind her, as the ten hidden Elves exposed their position and charged towards her in a crying frenzy.

'N-no! Stay back and hide!' Aurora wanted to yell, but her lips wouldn't move properly.

She was still recoiling from the attack, and so it was difficult to move her body talkless of forming coherent words.

All of this humiliation was thanks to one man...

"Y-YOOU..." Her glare rested on the imbecile who placed her in such a degrading state.

He stood a couple of meters from her, hands folded as he stared at her in his all-black attire. His mask prevented her from seeing his face, but more than anything, she wished to rip the thing off his face and pummel it until everything about him became a bloody mess.

'A-ah... calm yourself, Aurora.' She told herself, a bit surprised by her violent thoughts.

The Elves around her helped raise her back to her feet, and her staff supported her as she stood. Nothing but pure hatred radiated from her eyes as she glared at the impudent human—

Ralyks

"U-urgh..."

Pain still shot around her face, but it was subsiding. Her body slowly began to recover, and within a few more seconds, her appearance was good as new.

The blood and snot was gone, and the swelling had also vanished.

Aurora was as good as new; well, except for her gown, which was already stained thanks to her landing so disgracefully on the ground.

'Never again...' She growled as she stepped forward.

"What? You want to get beaten up more?" Ralyks asked in his impudent tone, and it infuriated her to the core.

'This... this VERMIN!'

Aurora was bursting with rage, and she indeed desired to rip him apart limb from limb, but she had to control herself.

'He was able to break the barrier cast by The Ashen Staff. He also moves faster than my eyes can keep up with.'

Clearly, this wasn't an ordinary enemy.

'I never imagined humans to be so powerful. He could definitely handle a Three Horned Dragon with that kind of power...'

To deal with someone so tricky and strong, Aurora had to rely on the perfect counter to strength.

"[Nature Magic: Sleepy Garden]."

A massive willow tree instantly emerged from the ground, taking its place behind Aurora. Flowers appeared all over the ground, creating a garden in a single moment.

Multiple colors filled the area, creating a landscape of beauty around the Elf.

'With this, no matter his strength or speed, he'll be disarmed.' She smiled as she looked at Ralyks, who was already trapped among the flowers.

'The other man doesn't seem like anything special, so if he tries to assist, he will also encounter the same fate.'

Then, Aurora's gaze went to the Half Elf who stood and watched like the fool that she was.

'I was initially upset at these people due to the potential of their cooperation with the Dragons...'

The fact that the KariBlanc Group was in possession of the Enchanted Items that should have been taken away by the Dragon meant there was a high chance that they were working for or with the Dragon.

The chances of them slaying the Dragon who stole the Enchanted Item was slim, and it was even slimmer to think that a Dragon would be working under them or as their partner.

That meant they were the ones working for the Dragon.

'I ignored all of that due to desperation, and since they are merely weak humans, I decided to forgive their transgressions and overlook things this one time.'

Yet... YET...!

'They had to further humiliate my kind by showing the vilest abomination of all; our greatest source of shame... a Half Elf!'

At this point, Aurora could ignore it no longer.

'You will all be captured! I won't let any of you leave!'

*

Chapter 389 Abomination Of The Absolute

Half Elves were an abomination to Elves.

Every Elf learned this from the day they were born, along with the fact that a pure Elf had immense value just for being birthed into the world.

Every Elf had to hold repulsion towards a Half Elf due to the disgusting event that would have led to their conception.

... An Elf was bred with another race.

It was too filthy to think about, so most Elves felt it was taboo to even talk about that act.

Elves were pure and unsullied—perfect beings crafted by nature to inherit the world and responsibly take care of life on it.

They were the chosen ones of the world—a higher life form.

It was filthy to breed with anyone who wasn't an Elf. It was no different from a man having intercourse with an animal.

Such an act of depravity was not only frowned upon by society, but was criminalized.

People should never have intercourse with beasts.

As such, any Half Elf that existed was proof that what shouldn't happen had occurred somehow.

But... the fault was not with the Elves. No sane Elf would even think of sleeping with a human; not when they couldn't stand their race.

For one, humans had a foul stench.

Elves secreted sweet-smelling aromas from their bodies, just from existing. They were servants of nature, so this was to be expected. The greater an Elf's potential, the sweeter the aroma, and the stronger an Elf was, the more intense it was.

But humans not only didn't have this sweet aroma, but theirs was somehow the inverse case for Elves who met them. A human's potential was incredibly low, so rather than having a sweet smell, they stank.

They stank so much!

Apart from their smell, they were ugly.

Compared to the incredibly beautiful people of the Elven Race, humans were not very attractive.

Even the most handsome human would only come across as passable to an Elf.

Adding to all of these factors, humans were also incredibly dubious and untrustworthy. They were selfish, greedy, backstabbers, and a bunch of other things.

They were brutes, and in short, completely unappealing to an Elf.

In essence, no Elf would ever desire a man. In the case of Half Elves, the opposite had to have happened.

Humans desired Elves so much that they forced themselves on them—hence, birthing the monstrosity that was a Half Elf.

Merely looking at a Half Elf could make any Elf vomit.

Some Half Elves took on more qualities from humans, while others resembled Elves, but one thing was for sure.

Any Elf could spot an Half Elf just by looking at them.

No one needed to tell them what it was, the same way no one had to tell a human that he was looking at feces.

They could just spot it and get naturally disgusted by it.

Elves couldn't help their gag reflexes, and they certainly couldn't help their dislike for the freaks of nature that was the Half Elves.

Halves weren't brethren to them. They shouldn't exist at all, and in order to restore nature to its proper path, the only just thing to do would be to erase them.

Yes... erase them entirely.

That way, Nature could be appeased and the world could return to its rightful state.

'This human... he doesn't stink.' Aurora looked at Ralyks.

No, it wasn't just him.

The other human also didn't stink, for some reason.

Yet, they both passed entirely as humans. How was that possible?

'Well, it doesn't matter.' Aurora leaked out a sigh as she looked ahead and narrowed her gaze on the masked man.

'I've captured him. We'll take all of them and investigate the origins of the abomination before putting her out of her misery.'

"What are you thinking about right now?" A voice suddenly emerged from behind the dark mask.

'H-huh...?'

It surprised Aurora, causing her to take a step back almost instinctively.

"Surely, you don't think this much will be enough to stop me, do you?" Aurora's eyes widened as she heard the words of Ralyks.

'H-how is this possible?!'

Her [Nature Magic] was S-Tier, and this particular Spell of hers was her go-to when it came to this Skill.

It had a wide area of influence, and none could resist it.

"How are you still standing?!" Aurora yelled, both in shock, and a slight hint of fear.

"What a foolish question, though I'm not surprised since it was asked by a foolish woman."

The response caused Aurora to feel a certain sting in her heart. Not just her body, but her pride, had been damaged by this man.

... This mere human!

"Your power is simply too weak."

"Keep quiet, vile human! Be silent and fall into slumber!" Aurora screamed, her Mana erupting so much that the air began to vibrate.

'If this much isn't enough, then...!'

The willow behind her began to extend its multiple branches as they prepared to attack.

'I'll just attack you with Nature!' Her wide grin betrayed the graceful expression that used to play on her face, but she didn't care.

Her younger sisters were safely behind her, so she could go all-out.

'I'll crush your bones. I'll your body. I'll squish you till you become a bloody mess! As long as I leave you just barely breathing, you won't die!'

With her gleaming teeth exposed, she sent her bulky vines towards the target.

"A fool using a foolish power. You consider your power absolute, failing to realize that there exists something above it..." Ralyks spoke, but Aurora wasn't willing to listen.

"By the time I'm done with you, YOU'LL BE BEGGING FOR DEATH!"

The branches charged towards Ralyks at breakneck speed, easily piercing everything in its path as it neared the targer.

But, Ralyks wasn't done speaking.

"That which exists above the absolute... The Divine."

All of a sudden, almost as if the branches were frozen in time, they halted their charge.

Without exception, they stopped moving.

"W-what? N-no way...!" As Aurora muttered this, shocked by all respects by what she was seeing, the words of Ralyks came once more.

"[Divine Elemental Magic: Sleepy Garden]."

*

Chapter 390 Divine Spell

'D-divine...?'

Aurora could not deny what she was looking at. If there was any word to describe it, that would indeed be the word.

Divine!

A massive willow tree stood before Aurora, its height at least a thousand meters. Its leaves formed a canopy that completely blocked the evening sun, casting a shadow of inescapable darkness on her.

Compared to her willow tree that was barely fifty meters tall, the massive epitome of nature that stood before her quenched any vestige of defiance he had left.

'Ahh...'

All her sisters had slumped to the ground, instantly rendered unconscious, merely due to the presence of the Tree.

Her own Willow Tree shuddered, its branches shivering as they fell to the ground in defeat. It recognized the one before it as unquestionably superior.

Before her very eyes, the Willow Tree fell asleep.

Aurora found herself on her knees, viewing the flowers that painted the air, not just the ground with their amazing colors. The petals created a three-dimensional canvas of astonishing beauty.

A beauty she could not dream of replicating.

Then, she saw the man of darkness. He stood directly in front of her. She hadn't even noticed when he closed their distance.

As she gazed upon him, viewing his amazing work of nature in the background, she felt into a reverie.

'Who is he? A Divine Being? Im-Impossible!'

The Oracle was one who spoke on behalf of Nature, and they considered them divine. If this man was on the same level, then...

'No... THAT IS BLASPHEMY!'

But, it was impossible to think of him as anything else as she stood before his magnificent presence.

'It makes sense why he was able to break the defenses of The Ashen Staff and he wasn't affected by my [Sleepy Garden]... if he is indeed, but...'

Aurora felt her mind getting fried, just thinking about the man before her. She felt her body grow weak in his presence, and as she inhaled deeply, she smelled the sweetest, most potent aroma she had ever taken in.

She was... overwhelmed.

'T-This... IT'S TOO MUCH!'

She felt like she was going insane, just from processing the sweet and intense flavor that came from Ralyks.

Drool fell from her mouth, and snot dripped from her nose. Tears streamed down her face and she felt her vision grow dull.

Aurora was falling unconscious, and she knew it instantly.

'... O' Oracle... why did you not tell us of this being?' Her thoughts flowed as she closed her eyes and fell into the soft embrace of flowers.

She could not smell the aroma of the flowers, or anything else for that matter. Only the man's scent filled her senses.

It completely overrode her mind.

'I have transgressed... against a Divine One...'

Rey felt a little guilty as he stared down at Aurora's completely broken face.

'Did I go too far?' He wondered to himself. 'I only activated the Spell. I didn't even do anything yet.'

To think the mere manifestation of his Spell would cause everyone to fall asleep...

'I just wanted to flex a little. Now that they're unconscious, I can't just leave them like this.'

As much as he wanted to, he thought against it.

'They're all Lawful Good, so it would be irresponsible for me to do something like this to them.'

Rey didn't know why they had such a deep-rooted animosity towards Esme, and immense disregard for humans, but he knew that Aurora didn't attack him directly even though she could have.

'Those branches would have restrained me, and her [Sleepy Garden] Spell would have put me to sleep.'

In essence, they weren't going to harm him.

'It seems like their target was just Esme. Must be due to some Elf stuff that I can't understand.'

Even after thinking all of this, Rey still would have left them be. However, he saw something in their Status Window that made him second-guess his decision.

~... Help Them.~

'The System is telling me to help them. Just like Esme...'

Rey genuinely just wanted to take his prize and withdraw from the scene, but he didn't know what would happen if he ignored the System.

Plus, by choosing to help Esme, it brought some good things to him.

'I'm still expecting some kind of proper Side Quest Reward, but I don't know when it's going to come.'

After all, the System still told Rey to help Esme.

"Sigh... this is so annoying!" Rey mumbled to himself as he looked at Aurora.

He dispelled his Spell upon seeing that her own Spell had shriveled away and vanished.

"What is the issue, Sir Ralyks?" Aldred came close and asked with a confident smile on his face.

He joined Rey in looking at the fallen body of Aurora, reaching for her staff.

'You don't need to call me that now, you know?' Rey thought to himself as he watched Aldred reach for the Ashen Staff.

~BZZZTTZZ!~

As soon as he touched it, a pulse of energy shot from it, instantly repelling Aldred's hand.

"Ow... that stung." Aldred gazed at his burned hand, watching as smoke rose from its surface.

Despite saying this, there was no look of pain on his face. Instead, he was still smiling. Within a few seconds, he recovered from the injury, so his relaxed attitude made more sense.

"That's what you get for touching what's not yours." Rey shook his head and made a mock sigh.

"It wouldn't have been a problem if I—"

"Yeah, I know. In any case, can I leave you to handle the rest from here?" Rey asked, staring straight at Aldred.

For a moment, there was silence between them.

Aldred slowly looked in Esme's direction, and then noticed that Rey was already doing the same—perhaps a few seconds before he did.

"I understand." He bowed his head and smiled. "Leave the rest to me."

"Thanks." Rey smiled.

He was looking at Aldred's face, and Aldred's physique, but the one he addressed wasn't the Broker from the KariBlanc Group, neither was he the son of Rebal.

He was something else entirely.

"Till we meet again, Ater." Rey tapped the shoulder of the bowing man and softly stroked his hair before walking away.

"I expect to see good results."

The bowed head went even lower, and a deeper voice replaced the timid tone from earlier.

"I will not disappoint you... Master."