

Last System 378

Chapter 378 Trail Of Blood

We traveled through the forest for quite a long time. Yet, with the treetops hiding most of the sun rays away from us and our vision breaking past the area where one needed light to see at all... It was hard to actually tell how long did we march.

Hours turned into minutes while seconds extended into entire weeks. And after an uncountable amount of time, we finally reached the end of the woodlands.

"Woah..." I muttered when the constant brown barrier of the woods gave way to the massive open area of the field. It was all basked in the warm rays of the sun.

The patches of open land that appeared within the borderland forest simply couldn't compare.

"We are here," I whispered, stunned by the sight.

It wasn't my first time seeing such an open space. In fact, it wasn't even that long since I last saw it. And yet, looking down the horizon only to see it merge with plains in the distance...

It just felt different.

"This is where our journey starts, to be fair," Mia said while taking a few steps to stand right by my side. She then snuck her hand towards mine before coiling our fingers together.

For but a moment, we simply stood in place, awed by what was before our eyes.

An open land. A free land. A land of opportunity... And a land where there was nowhere to hide from any potential danger.

"Shall we?" Mia asked in a small voice while leaning her head to look at my face.

Gulp.

I could feel the saliva moving down my throat as I gathered the courage to take just a single step forward. And then, with the warmth of Mia's hand at the forefront of my mind...

I stepped forth.

"Aah...." I released a long sigh to empty out my lungs before taking a deep breath.

The air of the open field simply felt different than the one we were breathing for quite some time already.

But it wasn't just the air that was different. The spiritual energy in it was now devoid of the very factor that constantly reminded me of how the world changed.

Sure, the descent of all those anti-mana monsters into this world was bound to shift the natural borders and habitats... but it was still way too early for that to happen.

And although it was only a momentary relief, this was still the world that I was reborn to. A world that I grew used to. A world where I met Mia, had my first time with her, learned what it means to work hard, how it is to be powerful...

A world... that soon would no longer be.

"Let's go," I said after we took some time to get ourselves used to what used to be our natural habitat.

"Mkay," Mia mused, only to press herself closer to my side before following in my steps.

'Should we just fly east?' I thought about the possibility. Now that I knew a lot more about the effects overusing pure mana had on the world, I could pretty much traverse the entire continent at my own leisure.

'No,' I then thought, shaking my head as I ended up shedding those naive thoughts of mine and facing the reality. 'Flying around would feel nice but would make us miss all the marks that could point us out in the right direction.'

Thinking rationally, there was a limit to how far off the main paths we were. Even though we moved around quite a lot, we never really covered that much distance in a single direction.

Or in other words, while we were out in the open with nothing familiar anywhere near right now, there was a limit to how far we were from the lands we were familiar with.

"What are you thinking about?" Mia asked while letting go of my hand and running up a few steps only to turn around on her heel and smile at me while walking backward.

"Just trying to figure out the best way for us to look for some familiar lands," I replied, revealing what was on my mind for some time already.

"How about we just go north, along the borderlands?" the girl suggested while jumping around and nearly dancing out in the open as if she was some sort of a fairy or a flower elf.

Seeing those gentle, light moves of hers, I couldn't help but smile.

"We might as well..." I replied, turning my eyes in the direction the girl suggested.

On its own, it was a valid plan. From the maps that I could recall, going North would mean we would either end up in the places we already were or end up reaching the shores of some sort of a massive sea. Contrary to that, there were hardly any natural barriers that would make themselves known were we to travel south.

And yet, it wasn't the unintended genius of Mia's suggestion that made me freeze and cut my words short.

It was the fact that I noticed something... I was actually familiar with it.

"Come with me," I said shortly, rushing forward in the very direction Mia suggested we go. With every step I continued to accelerate, only holding myself back enough to let the girl keep up.

The path leading out of the forest and out into the distance. The small clearing just behind the line of the trees. And a small, abandoned shack only a short walk away from the barrier of the woods.

I knew this place. And I held it closer to my heart than most of the places in this world.

Because unless it just happened to look exactly the same as the land I visited when breaking past the borderlands for the first time in my life... It could only be the pathfinder's shack.

I rushed forward, eager to reunite with the man. And yet, the closer I got, the slower my steps became all the way to the point of a complete stall when I stood right by the entrance to the crude and demolished building.

"...ty..."

"...rty..."

"Arty!" Mia's voice finally reached my ears when she coupled her shouts with a strong shake of my shoulders. "Arty, come back to me!"

I could hear her plea. I could even hear the extreme worry in her voice.

And yet, I stood still as if I turned into a tree.

All because of a single element that led to the now half-destroyed shack.

A trail of blood leading right inside that I couldn't remember being there when I left for my hunting grounds.