

New Eden 881

Chapter 881 Negotiating A Deal

All along this incident, the Oracle made sure one camera was left intact, so that it could record the entire incident, and broadcast it live, for everyone to see.

They also made sure the camera pivoted to every message, to capture them, for the entire viewership to read, as well.

Alex was on his sofa, looking at the chaos that had ensued before he burst into laughter.

His phone vibrated in his ear, and he picked up the call, putting it on speaker.

"Where were we?" Katherine's voice came over the speaker.

"Katherine, you are insane! Ahahahahaha! That was amazing! Oh man, the look on her face! I would pay to see this again," Alex hollered, holding his stomach as he laughed.

"I've got the footage if you have the money. But that isn't why I called you back," Katherine said, a tinge of pride in her voice.

Kary looked at Alex and thought he was overreacting. But she was also glad that Constantine Levesque got her just deserts.

"Then why did you call?" she asked, as Alex was still laughing his ass off.

Katherine audibly sighed as she heard Alexander laugh like a maniac in the background.

"Can you get him to stay quiet for half a second? Or should I start the sprinklers in your home to cool him off?"

Alex heard the threat, and his face instantly went serious.

"I'm good. What did you want?"

"Finally," Katherine sighed.

"I was flagged from a conversation you had this morning. And I believe I have an answer for you."

Alex frowned for a second.

"What conversation?"

Kary was already going pale.

"Don't play coy, young man. You know which conversation. Do you want my answer or not?"

"Did you bug my phone? No, that's impossible... Those conversations were private..." Alex complained.

"Tch! Nothing is private from me, Mr. Leduc. Listen, I don't know as much as you do about the situation going on around the world, but I have enough pieces here and there to come to my own conclusions.

"Now, I'm sure my husband will say no if you ask for his help, especially since you want to bring Violette. But I will be honest: I've seen videos and heard audio recordings of things that terrify me and haunt my dreams at night.

"I don't think saying no to you benefits anyone. And I know this makes me a terrible mother, but Violette will be allowed to come with you. On the condition you assure me she never is in a life-threatening situation."

Alex interrupted her there.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Bellemare. I... I can't promise that. If she comes along, her life will be just as much at stake as ours. The best I can promise you is that she will never be directly in the line of fire..."

There was a pause before Katherine sighed heavily.

"Fine. That'll be enough. But, I'll add another condition."

Alex frowned.

"Don't give me that face, young man," Katherine reacted, making Alex nervous.

'Where is she seeing me from?'

"I can see the wheels spinning in your head. It doesn't matter how I see you. Stay on topic."

Alex clicked his tongue. He hated having his privacy violated like this.

But he was well aware of how good of a hacker Katherine was. There was nothing he could hide from her if she chose to look into his life.

"Fine. What condition?"

"I'll be your eyes and ears. I don't need to be with you physically, but I will be in control of which hell hole you drop yourselves and my daughter in. And if I find one too dangerous, I won't let you go. Understood?"

Alex wasn't liking that someone else would be in control of who they helped. This felt like another hoop he would have to jump through.

But could he really say no to her? Would he be able to rope Richard on board if he said no to her?

Or would Jack be able to offer what she was offering?

It was a tough decision, and one he wasn't willing to make on his own.

"I would have t—" he started saying.

"Alright. That sounds reasonable," Kary cut him.

"Smart woman," Katherine said, her tone mocking.

Alex looked at Kary with a 'What the hell?' face. But Kary ignored his look.

"But I would like to add a condition of my own."

There was another pause.

"And that would be?"

"I agree that Violette shouldn't be put in danger against her will. That would be horrible of us. And I agree that certain situations would be better to ignore or let locals handle. But I want you to consider our input on them."

"I'm sure you understand the advantage we have on our side if you listened to that conversation. Some situations will require us to act, regardless of the danger it puts us in. And I know you want Violette to stay safe. But I want you to let her decide for herself whether she follows us on those crawls."

The following pause was heavy, and the atmosphere shifted.

"You want me to listen to the whims of a nearly ten-year-old girl? Do you think what you just asked makes any sense?" Katherine said, her tone shaking with anger.

But Kary knew her anger stemmed from worry.

"You underestimate your daughter, Mrs. Bellemare. Violette has proved to many people, both in and out of New Eden, that she is a force to be reckoned with. She is far stronger than her age lets on. Let her choose whether she should help or not."

Alex could feel the conversation was slipping down a slippery slope. So he decided to butt in.

"Katherine. How about we prove you Violette can take care of herself? Would that allow her the freedom to pick her battles? Your daughter is strong. Much stronger than many people. And she can make a difference if you let her."

Ten seconds passed, with not but a peep, until a loud sigh was heard.

"Fine. You have twenty-four hours to come up with a way to prove that she is strong enough to be trusted with her own safety. We'll talk then."

Alex wanted to thank her, but the line abruptly cut.

"Hey, at least she's giving her a chance..." Alex said, trying to cheer himself up.

Chapter 882 I'm Not Mad, I'm Disappointed

They now had to find a way to make Violette prove to her mother that she was powerful enough to take care of herself.

Usually, it would be an easy task, as Violette was pretty strong. But this was her mother, judging.

Would she even consider anything strong enough? That much, he was having trouble figuring out.

"How do you want to go about this?" Kary asked him, since he had proposed this solution.

"Uh... I was hoping you could think of something, heh heh..."

Kary glared at him.

Then she sighed, rubbing her eyes.

"I'll think of something. For now, even if we don't get the Bellemares' help, we would still need to assemble a team. We should start calling our contacts and see who is available to help us. I don't think we should limit it to those near us, either."

Alex nodded. He agreed that this would require a lot more people than what they could muster up near here.

"I'll start making calls. But I feel like the first person we should call is Jack. I don't think he'll be happy that we break our deal to go cruise around the world for problems when there are plenty over here..."

Kary paused. She hadn't thought about this.

"You're right. Should I break the news to him? Or will you?" she asked.

Alex sighed.

"I'll do it. I don't know how much he'll scream, but I feel like it's better if he screams at me instead of you..."

Kary nodded, heading into the kitchen so they wouldn't be talking over each other during their calls.

She stopped next to Alex on her way and kissed him on the cheek.

"You look stressed. We'll pull through. Stop worrying about everyone and focus on yourself for once."

Alex stayed mum, smiling at her weakly.

'If only it were that simple...'

He sat back down, going through his contact list, and called directly Jack's cell phone. It was new that he had this number, as he always went through Mr. Gu, before.

But this was a matter for him and Alex to discuss.

The phone rang a couple of times before Jack picked up.

"I was wondering when you'd call me, son. Especially with what just happened at the EG headquarters. Did Katherine call you, too?"

Alex chuckled.

"Hello to you too, Jack. Yes, Katherine called me. Sorry if it took so long for me to call you; I've been swamped with calls ever since the servers went down. But I was going to call you eventually. We have to talk."

Alex almost heard the skin on Jack's forehead crease when he said that.

"What stupid idea did you come up with this time?" he asked, worried it would pull more people into their tight circle.

"It's not a stupid idea, or at least I don't feel like it is. But it is an idea. One that you might not like hearing about..."

There was a pause before Jack impatiently replied, "Well? Spit it out already."

Alex decided it was better to come clean and told Jack all about the plan he, Kary, and David had come up with. It was better if he knew everything than if he was left in the dark and started prying.

After explaining what had happened inside in the last moments of the game, and hearing what Jack had to say about it as well, he covered the entire plan, in the most minute of details, and even explained that Katherine Bellemare had already offered her help.

It took a dozen of minutes to go over everything, and a few more for Jack to wrap his head around it all.

"So you won't be staying here and taking care of the troubles in your garden... That's quite an oversight from you," Jack said, sounding disappointed.

"Listen, Jack. I know this isn't ideal for your plans. But the world is larger than just Montreal. If we want to survive in the long term, shouldn't we help everywhere we can?"

"Not ideal? You mean you are throwing the mother of all wrenches into my plans, son. But I get it. I'm not mad. I'm just disappointed that everything I carefully planned for is going out the window."

Alex could hear the disappointment in his tone, and it bothered him.

"I'm not saying we'll never come back here, Jack. But we will go where our help is most needed first. Humanity is at stake. Not just our home..."

"I know..." Jack replied, sighing heavily.

"Look. I don't like that you accepted Katherine's help before asking me what I could do for you, but I can't deny that her deal was a sweet one. But let me help. Let me get my name in that pot, too.

"Katherine may have eyes and ears everywhere and access to stuff I don't. But I have something that Katherine and her husband don't. I'm filthy fucking rich. More money than I could ever spend in ten lifetimes. And David made sure of that with his little insider trade trick.

"Let me be the one that makes sure you never go wanting for anything. Money to hire help. Money to buy food, fuel, weapons, ammo, you name it. I'll be your bank. But I expect this to become a trade relationship.

"I'll be your payroll, but I want you to spread my name across the globe. Promise me that, and I will open my bank accounts to you."

Alex had his breath punched out of his lungs momentarily. He knew Jack was rich.

Hell, he'd seen his face on top of those fancy one-percenter magazines more times than he could count. But what he was promising was not just a wealth in money.

It was a guarantee that they would never be caught short-handed. This was more than he would have ever asked of him.

More than he would have ever expected him to offer, too.

"As simple as spreading your name? What's the catch?" Alex asked, wary.

"No catch. Just tell the people you save where you're from, and who's making this possible. That'll be plenty. You have no idea how saving lives affects a wallet. I'll get a return on investment a hundredfold. I don't need to ask for more."

"Deal," Alex said, with no hesitation.

'With this, our plan is as solid as it can get.'

Chapter 883 A Night Out Of New Eden

After settling things with Jack, Alex started calling other people whom he knew he could trust. Some of them he'd met before; others were just friends online.

However, putting your life at stake with someone backing you up, even if it was in a game, often gave you all the information you needed about someone.

The following eight hours blew past them, and they only realized what time it was when their stomachs started rumbling, and they saw it was dark outside.

"Yikes. I barely saw today pass..." Kary said, looking at the clock.

"Yeah, same. I guess now we know what to expect when shit hits the fan for real. There will be days when we don't have time to stop. This might very well become our everyday lifestyle in the near future..." Alex said, his eyes fading out of focus.

Kary punched him in the arm.

"That is not the kind of thought we need to be entertaining right now. Let's just go out to eat, and we can relax when we come back home. It'll be the first night in a long time that we don't head into our pods after dinner. Let's enjoy that fact."

Alex nodded, realizing she had a point.

"It'll also be the first night in a long time that we spend just the two of us. Without the chance of someone interrupting us. Maybe we should make it special?" Alex said, smiling warmly at her.

"Oh? What did you have in mind?" she asked, grinning suggestively.

"I thought, maybe grab a bottle of wine, fire up the jacuzzi, and let ourselves marinate slowly until we are all relaxed. And then, we can use our warmed-up muscles for the rest of the night. What do you think?" Alex asked, grabbing her and kissing her neck.

Kary practically purred in his arms before biting his neck sensually.

"How about we order in instead of going out?" she whispered in his ear.

Sliding his tongue up her neck to her earlobe, Alex whispered back, "Sounds like a plan."

He grabbed her and shot her over his shoulder, slowly heading toward the stairs, as Kary started ordering food from a nearby Thai place and a bottle of wine from the liquor store.

Almost everything could be delivered by drone nowadays, and they wouldn't need to get back out of the tub if they wanted to. They could have it delivered directly to them.

Most of the drone delivery systems were run by programs, and had no human supervision, unless an incident report was made, so it was safe to pick up stuff from a drone, buck naked, if you wanted to.

Once the food was ordered, Kary slipped out of her shirt, throwing it over her shoulder and onto Alex's head, who chuckled as he pulled it off and threw it to the ground.

He flipped her forward, grabbing under her ass as he kept walking, and he now had her breasts in his face. He started kissing them gently as Kary moaned and pulled his hair lightly.

"I don't think we'll make it to after the jacuzzi, darling. I think I might take you before we reach the bathroom," she said, scratching his shoulders with her nails.

Alex groaned in pleasure and lowered her a bit.

"That sounds like a tempting offer, my love. How about we only indulge slightly, at least until the food is there? Then, I can eat right off your body before we enjoy that tub for a few hours, and start over again late into the night?"

Kary liked the sound of that, and no complaints were uttered as he brought her to the bedroom and slid her into the bed, taking off her pants slowly as he kissed her thighs and licked her calves.

The drone dropped off the food on the second-floor balcony, directly in front of their room's patio door, and Alex grabbed it only a few minutes later, as he had been busy. But the night was still so young.

Out in the cosmos, as the hours since New Eden kicked every non-native out passed, another pair of male and female were also still going at each other.

But the scene was a lot less erotic and significantly bloodier.

Gaius, who had taunted Psyche into attacking him, saying she could never even dream of scratching him, realized he had to take her seriously.

He was covered in minor cuts, as the woman before him had vastly changed since he brought her here. She now had a long set of elk horns on her head, and her eyes had gone from silvery mirrors to golden slits.

"How have you gained this power?! Gods can't change their domains, Psyche! What kind of sinful act did you commit?!" Gaius yelled at her, realizing they were almost evenly matched at the moment.

"I didn't commit anything heretical, Gaius. When you sealed me away, you sealed my essence, as well. And I had to overcome that so that you couldn't find me. I'm no longer Psyche, Goddess of Souls. I am Nemus, Goddess of Life itself! And you have to pay for all the lives you took!"

She lunged at him; her shape morphing into a large elk and her horns gleaming in the light of their power.

Gaius was slower than she was in this form. But her power was still lacking.

Which was why he hadn't fallen yet. Nemus was fighting on borrowed power, and she knew it. This wasn't a power she could call out so easily, either.

Nemus was burning through her life essence just to fight on equal footing with Gaius.

But there was one thing she had misconstrued about him. In her mind, Gaius would never burn his essence to fight.

He was too cocky. Too confident to lower to that level.

But the Gaius before her was not the one from ten millennia ago. He was rabid, and his only goal was to kill her.

Kill the one who had constantly been a thorn in his side. The one that had never thought he was good enough.

And for that, he would do anything.

Reaching him, Nemus thought it strange that Gaius hadn't yet moved away from the attack.

So, she mentally scoffed when he grabbed her horns to stop her, as he had tried a few times already.

But a cold sensation in her chest followed her scoff, and the feeling of her strength fading away.

Looking down, she saw two more arms, and in their hands, a dagger, with a blue flame engraved in the hilt.

"A god killing weapon... How did you..."

Gaius twisted the blade, cutting her words short, and stared into her eyes as the life slipped away from them.

"The day I imprisoned you, I plotted for your death, were you ever to escape. I have been keeping this dagger with me for millennia. Hoping I would never have to use it. I loved you, Psyche. We were a pair. But you never loved me back. So, today, you finally die..."⁸⁸³ A Night Out Of New Eden

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Chapter 884 The World's Memories

There was no fanfare, storm, or announcement about the death of a god. No one would know she was dead, aside from the ones who knew she was alive at all.

But Gaius wept.

Even if he initially hated her with all his godly being, this stemmed from his unfathomable love for her.

And now that he had taken her life away, it hit him like a meteor slamming into a planet. Gaius forgot everything about the seven individuals he had captured as he left with Psyche, and wandered the stars, thinking about how he could have done things differently.

This gave more than enough time to the Progenitors of magic to escape their darned prison, and leave behind a little gift to the god for capturing them.

They wouldn't stick around to find out if he liked it or not, though.

And when they reached back into their realm, the seven of them quickly boosted the power of the veil between the mortal and god realms. An incident like this shouldn't happen ever again.

Especially considering the casualty count Edith found out about when she teleported back to her mage tower and found nothing but a crater. Her heart squeezed a little, thinking about the lives lost.

But there was nothing to be done about it now.

If she had been there at the moment of the event, maybe she could have done something and brought their souls back. But it was too late now.

'They have rejoined the wheels of fate. May their souls find respite in their next coming,' Edith prayed, clasping her hands together.

She walked into the crater's center, searching for any remnant of her mage tower which she could use to replant it. Although it would take centuries before it grew back to what it had been, at least she would have a home again.

'I could always go back to Themisca... The Ley lines there were strong enough for me to perform the injection. But... Do I want to go back to what attached me to the mortal realm?' she mused, as she walked through the crater, letting her senses wander about.

But something caught her attention, and her mind snapped back to reality.

"Teleportation remnants?" she muttered, noticing a flutter of mana, about twenty feet above the ground, where the main room would have been.

She floated up and touched the remnants, trying to see if she could guess who had left them, and saw the face of an ash elf with white hair and icy-blue eyes.

"The court mage? The trace is so faint... Did he manage to escape?" she kept muttering.

There was only one way to find out.

With a swift movement, Edith pulled out something she seldom used.

An item that had more power in its twelve inches of length than most mortals had in their entire bodies. An item that should have become the embodiment of her power had she ascended to godhood.

The Quill of Origin. The artifact that represented her domain.

Glowing in a powerful golden halo, this quill, made from the feather of the first Phoenix and imbued with her very own domain through decades of pouring Aether into it, radiated in enough power to alert every being even slightly mana-sensitive in a thousand-mile-radius.

The other Progenitors, although farther than this from her, also felt the spike in power coming from her location.

"What caught her attention so much that she would use that?" Aravelle wondered, back in Bastion City.

But Edith's entire focus was already on her task.

She weaved her quill in the air, runes of power inscribing themselves upon the world itself as they took shape before her.

"Show me what happened here, oh world mother. I offer thee my essence for a glimpse inside your sacred memory," Edith chanted, scribbling more and more runes into the air.

And with a flash of Aether, coming directly from the ground where the Ley lines connected, the world mother responded.

The runes started taking shapes, bodies, furniture, a room. It was like the mage tower rebuilt itself around her, and she saw a re-enactment of what had happened after Gaius had appeared.

She saw the lettering copies almost all fall to their knees or explode as the power of Gaius pushed into their souls and killed them, and she could guess who these were.

But she saw people who weren't immediately crushed by his powerful presence.

Amongst them, herself and Nemus, of course. But there were also a few people who were still moving amongst the mage tower.

One of these was a copy of the court mage, with an evident tether between him and the prince, Nalafein. A barrier could be seen around him, and Edith understood that the court mage had protected him from the presence as he tried to get him away from there.

But he wasn't the only one.

She quickly found another room where someone was moving, trying to get to some other figures who were getting crushed by the mighty aura.

Touching the runes, Edith focused and tried to see through the world's eyes. She gave up more of her Aether in hopes the world would agree to her request and wasn't left hanging for long.

Her eyes started glowing in the same golden hue as her runes, and before long, it was like she was back in time, observing the situation through a bird's-eye view.

But this time, she could see the faces and hear the words.

"Prince Nalafein! We must go! With this kind of pressure, if his presence alone doesn't kill us, I can tell that the god will not leave without retribution! We must go!"

"No! Gelum'vire! Think about the people! We may have only started rebuilding, but I cannot abandon them! Not again! Save them! Save as many as you can!"

Gelum'vire wanted to refuse his prince's orders. But the vow he had made prohibited him.

Teleporting away from the room, he went to save those who were loyal to the prince. He couldn't save the Abnormals, as most of them had already erupted into dust, but there were still plenty of surviving allies he could save.

Appearing in the garrison room, where Kloud and his soldiers often rested, in between patrols, he found a few of them struggling to crawl to each other.

"Kloud! Come with me! We have to leave this place, Prince's orders!" Gelum'vire shouted, trying to grab onto the general of their future force.

But Kloud dipped under his hand, trying to grab hold of his friends.

"Save them, court mage! I'll manage on my own!" Kloud shouted back, trying to reach Korin.

But Korin shouted back, "No! Obey the prince's orders! Save what remains of the Ash Elves' power!"

Gelum'vire took this as his queue and grabbed onto Kloud, teleporting away as he went to another spot in the tree.

There were many more he wanted to save, after all.

If he couldn't save the prince, then he would save as many of his loyal followers as he could.

Edith focused on other parts of the mage tower, trying to find something else. The world was egging her toward something she couldn't see.

And soon enough, she found what it was.

A pair of Ash Elves, both crouched over a smaller life force. One that was quickly fading.

Edith focused on the memory, trying to understand why the world was pointing her toward this, and the colours and sounds rushed at her.

"Please, Aj'axx. You know your strength won't be enough to protect both me and the baby. Save just the child. Save our son. I implore you!"

"No, Serene! I can't let you die! Who'll take care of our child if we are both dead?! I refuse! I will protect both your lives!"

Edith felt the soul of the man spike in power as his essence suddenly started covering both the woman and child, leaving his body at a rapid pace.

But something happened that surprised Edith just as much as the man, Aj'axx.

The woman, either out of desperation or motherly instinct, could tell this would never be enough to protect them both, and Edith could see that she was right, grabbed a dagger hidden in her cloth garments, and stabbed herself through the heart.

Her life ended in seconds, as her mate, who was already weakening faster than he could manage, was powerless to react.

The essence covering her immediately drifted toward the child, and a solid blue cocoon formed around him as the man's last words slipped out of his mouth.

"Ultimate Defence: Life Shell. Live, my son..."

Edith snapped out of the world's memories.

Her gaze refocused on the surrounding reality, and she rapidly scanned her surroundings.

"That shell would have held. Where is the child?!"

She rushed to the ground, looking for traces of mana that came from after the blast.

Expanding her senses over the crater but focusing on detection power, Edith quickly found a trace of that man's essence. But it was fleeting, and there was no life within it.

She dashed to the area where she felt it and frantically dug into the ground, using her bare hands.

"Please be alive. Please be alive. The world would never forgive such a young life to vanish!"

Chapter 885 A Revelation Long Overdue

Meanwhile, outside New Eden, an entire night had gone by, and Alex and Kary had been busy. But after a few hours of rest, they had gotten to work on figuring out how to convince Katherine about Violette's power.

If they failed to do so, they would lose a crucial ally in some of their moments of need, and this was subpar, at best.

"I was thinking maybe a fight with someone Katherine considers a good match, but I'm afraid she'll ask her to fight me. And then, either I lose on purpose, and she knows, or I hurt Violette, and she says no..." Alex sighed.

"Yeah, a fight wouldn't be the best way in any situation. Her mother is too protective," Kary said, shaking her head.

"I was thinking of a show of force—something that doesn't require fighting but is convincing enough that she can't say Violette is defenceless. But I haven't quite figured out what yet."

She was racking her brain as much as she could. But finding ways to prove her power without putting Violette in a situation where Katherine would outright deny her her chance was not easy.

"It would help if I knew how strong she has gotten," Alex said with a chuckle.

Since he'd been gone for a month, he had no idea of anyone's progress, which was a handicap.

Kary giggled as she realized what he meant.

"She's progressed a lot. I think she has progressed the most out of everyone. A few weeks back, she told me that her control over water had gotten almost to the level of inside New Eden.

"I found it hard to believe at first, but she showed me, and I don't doubt her. Her only weakness now is on the volume and time she can control it. All this requires an insane amount of mana, and with how mana just got scarce in our world, I don't know how she would fare..."

Alex scratched his chin, wondering what he could do with this information. Then, an idea popped into his head.

"What if I could get her the mana she needs for large-scale manipulation? Would that work to impress her mother?" he asked, his eyes filling with hope.

"I guess?" Kary replied, frowning.

"What did you have in mind? Because I doubt pouring our mana into her would work. Either it wouldn't be compatible, or her mother would find out."

Alex grinned

"We won't need to. I have a way to make her pull mana out of herself instead of the air. I intended to try this on you first, but the situation obliges that I do it on her."

Kary's face wrinkled up.

"What are you talking about? Do what?" she asked, now worried.

"I have a way to make her form her mana lobe." That phrase sent Kary into shock. She lay there, still in their bed, looking at him wide-eyed.

"What?" Alex asked when he realized how she was looking at him.

"Can you repeat what you said? I think I heard it wrong..."

"Uh... sure? I have a way to make her form a mana lobe..." Alex repeated, looking at her weirdly.

Kary remained silent momentarily before getting up, grabbing her phone and slipping it into her ear.

"Who are you calling at this time of the night?" Alex asked her, frowning.

Kary ignored him as she paced at the foot of their bed.

"Hey, David," she finally said, stopping her pacing.

"Remember that issue we talked about the other day? A bit before Alex came back. I think this dolt of mine found a way to fix it and hadn't told us."

"..."

"Yeah, I know. I'm just as stumped as you."

"..."

Listen, I don't know since when. He just told me."

"..."

Kary pressed the phone on her ear and looked at Alex.

"Alright, you're on speaker."

"Alex? Can you hear me?" David's voice came from the speaker.

"Uh... Yes?"

A long sigh echoed before Alex heard David breathe in deep.

"Are you FUCKING STUPID?! HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD YOUR MANA LOBE, AND WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US?!" David shouted, almost bursting Kary's eardrum.

Even Alex winced at the shouting, as his hearing was still highly acute.

"Hey, pipe down, dude. There is no need to shout. What would it have changed if I had told you? It's not like you could have formed one on your own," Alex rebuked, holding his ear.

"No use shouting? NO USE SHOUTING?! YOU ARE DEFINITELY STUPID! ALEX! THIS COULD HAVE CHANGED THE OUTCOME OF OUR BATTLE AGAINST THE RAIJŪ AND POSSIBLY EVERY OTHER CONFRONTATION SINCE!

"DO YOU REALIZE THE IMPLICATIONS OF A MANA LOBE IN OUR WORLD?! IT'S A STEP WE ONLY REACHED ONCE THE DUNGEONS STARTED BREAKING LAST TIME! HAVING IT NOW WOULD MAKE OUR CHANCES OF FIGHTING BACK INFINITELY BETTER!"

David had to take a moment and cough from all his screaming, and Kary almost threw the phone away from her head, as her mind started pounding.

But she looked at Alex with blame instead of her device.

"Why are you both acting like I murdered your puppy... It wasn't relevant at the moment I discovered it, since it took me all my efforts to get it. Plus, there was no guarantee I could reproduce the phenomenon."

David sighed loudly again.

"How long have you had it, Alex?"

Alex took a moment to think about the exact timing.

"The night before our trip to fight the Raijū. That's why I'm saying it wouldn't have mattered."

"So that's what you were doing the night before. You never told me, in the end..." Kary said, her eyes widening with realization.

"Yeah, the time to talk about it never came up. But it's the reason Violette is still alive. And me, to be honest..." Alex said, scratching the back of his head.

He heard David click his tongue.

"You could have told us before the fight. Many things would have played out differently had I known about it, Alex," David said, seemingly calmer.

"The first one is that no one would have been close to dying. A mana lobe changes the kind of things you can do. The amount of power you can channel is exponential. It's a boon that would have been wasted on you if you couldn't realize that when we needed you to..."

"Hey, don't start giving me that crap, David. You and I both know that those enemies were stronger than what we had ever seen before on this side. I couldn't just start using all my strength and then have nothing to defend myself with."

Kary jumped in to stop their bickering.

"Alright, enough, you cocks. That's not why I called you, David. Alex says he can replicate the feat on Violette. Try to form her mana lobe and use that extra power to convince her mother to let Violette pick her own battles. Do you think it could work?"

David clicked his tongue again.

"It could work, but only if he pulls through. I don't think you realize how difficult it will be to form her mana lobe, Alexander. There is no more mana well for you to draw from."

Alex's eyes widened.

"How did you know I pulled into the mana well? Were you spying on me?"

David scoffed.

"No, you dumbass. We had to do the same thing when we got mana lobes last time. It's almost impossible to form it without an abundance of mana and a touch of something purer. This isn't the mana-rich world of New Eden. Earth wasn't meant for this power."

Alex frowned.

"Yeah, well, I think I can still pull it off. But it'll be tiresome, to say the least. It'll probably knock me on my ass for a few days. Should I do it or not?"

There was a pause in their conversation.

"We don't have anything planned in the immediate future. But doing this is crucial for later. I think he should do it," Kary said, breaking the silence.

"I agree. But we'll have to be sure Alex stays in a safe environment until then. I don't think the Zhong Kui is done with him, and having him weakened would be the perfect moment for them to jump in and assassinate him," David declared.

"Which reminds me, I still have to go up there and ring some bells. But, with all that's happening, I don't know if the moment could be worse..."

"I doubt the Zhong Kui can do anything to me, even if I'm weakened," Alex said, scoffing.

"Don't underestimate them, Alex. They may be weaker than in their prime, but they are still dangerous. Their strongest members could give us a run for our money. But that doesn't change what has to be done. Kary. Set up whatever he needs to form Violette's mana lobe. I'll make calls to assure he's safe afterwards."

Kary groaned.

"I don't appreciate you giving me orders."

"Tough. We need to get shit moving, and this discussion is over," David said, before hanging up.

"Hmph! One day, I'll kick him in his balls for talking to me like this!" Kary growled.

"Don't bother. I don't even think he feels anything down there anymore," Alex joked.

"In any case, he isn't wrong. Let's get things prepped. There are only so many hours left before our twenty-four-hour limit. Let's get this ball rolling."

Chapter 886 Preparing For The Test

Calling Jack, Alex figured out how to have enough mana to kickstart the process of forming Violette's mana lobe.

He was going to use the monster cores that the dire wolves had dropped and the remaining ones from the rat incident. This should give them enough mana to start, but it still wouldn't be enough.

Alexander knew it had taken a massive amount of mana, aside from the Aether. If their bodies had been born into a world with mana, it might have required a lot less.

But this wasn't New Eden. They would have to cheat the rules of their world.

"What's next?" Kary asked.

"Next, we call all our awakened friends, and we make them assemble at a place of our choice."

Kary tilted her head curiously.

"Why do we need them?"

"Because the monster cores won't contain enough mana. The amount we need is much higher than that. And I can't be the only one giving her mana, or else I won't be able also to create the Aether particle we need to create her mana lobe.

"So we need as many of our mana-capable friends as we can get."

Kary found this to be truly troublesome, but she started making calls again. If that were what it took to have Violette's freedom of choice, then she would call the entire world if she needed to.

Preparing everything they needed took them around an hour, and they started stressing as they saw the time.

"Is this process going to take long? We only have six hours left. If Violette isn't up for her test once it happens, we automatically fail, even after all this effort," Kary said, biting at her nails.

"Well... When I did it, I passed out. But I think it's because of all the mana I consumed, forcing the mana into me, and generating Luna and the mana lobe. If we can aid Violette as much as I think we can, then she shouldn't pass out. I think..."

Kary clicked her tongue.

"You think? Alex... That isn't good enough. She needs to be able to perform her show of force."

Alex grabbed Kary by the shoulders and embraced her.

"Hey, calm down now. She'll be alright. Violette is strong, and so are we. We can make this work. Have some faith."

Kary grumbled while in his arms, but stopped stressing.

"In any case, we should get going, too. Jack gave us access to the Olympic pools, and I ensured everyone would be there in time. But we still need to start before the end of our time."

Kary nodded as they got ready to leave.

They had to call a driver since neither of them had transportation, but they weren't left waiting for too long.

"Mister Leduc and Madam Leduc! How grateful I am that you called me again! It is always a pleasure to serve your transportation needs. Please hop in. Tell me where you need to go, and I'll bring you there in a heartbeat!" Gilbert happily greeted them.

Alex was about to tell the man they weren't married and didn't share the same surname, but Kary pinched his arm, so he instead yelped in surprise.

"Are you alright, mister Leduc?" Gilbert asked, his brows furrowing.

"Yes, yes. I'm fine. I just got stung by a bug. There's nothing to concern yourself about," Alex lied, as Kary glared at him.

Once they were in the back of the limo, Alex looked at her and whispered, "What was that for?"

She smiled at him, replying in a whisper as well, "I kind of like that he called us mister and madam Leduc. Don't burst that bubble just yet."

Gilbert climbed into his seat at that moment and leaned into the window to ask about their destination.

"So! Where to, my lovely patrons?"

"We are going to the Olympic pools. We need to get there promptly, so if you know some shortcuts, please take them," Alex replied, smiling at the man.

"Then I will get you there in record time, my good sir!" Gilbert exclaimed, turning around and stepping on the gas.

Alex chuckled to himself, knowing that he could have gotten there faster through flight or teleportation, but he didn't say so. If they could keep a sense of normality for however long, then it was better to do so.

In the meantime, Kary started verifying with everyone that they were en route. As all her confirmations came in, she relaxed completely.

Now, it would rest on whether the operation succeeded, and Violette resisted the urge to take a power nap.

Gilbert delivered on his promise, getting them there in the quickest fashion a motored vehicle could. Kary was impressed that she had never felt traffic slow down once.

At this time of day, people going to work usually slow every street in Montreal to a crawl.

"We have arrived. Do I need to wait for you here? Or shall I go wait a little further?" Gilbert asked, leaning into the window separating them again.

"If you could wait for us here, it would be great. But please don't stop yourself from going to take a bite. It might take a few hours," Alex said, smiling at the man and handing him a hundred-dollar bill tip.

Gilbert happily plucked the bill from his hand and grinned.

"I will be right around the corner. There is this great bagel place, which I highly recommend. I will be a text message away when you need a ride back home."

Alex and Kary exited the limousine and watched it drive off before looking toward the sports center that housed the Olympic pools.

"I hope everything goes as planned..." Kary sighed.

Alex slid his hand up her back, trying to comfort her.

"Relax. We'll make this work. When haven't we? Come on, we have people waiting inside."

Kary steeled her resolve, nodding to herself, and they entered the premises.

Once inside, it was easy to see where to go, with all the directional panels and maps, and they quickly found their way to the massive indoor pools, where a dozen people awaited them.

Katherine was the first one to speak when she saw the pair enter.

"Mr. Leduc, Ms. Deveille, I hope you have a good reason to bring me and my daughter to this massive reminder of my loneliness. And why are there all these people here as well?" she asked, her tone slightly angry.

Alex stepped forward, raising his hands in a motion of peace.

"Mrs. Bellemare, I assure you, we called you here for a good reason. Plus, these people are crucial to what is about to happen. Hello, Violette," Alex said before leaning toward the little girl.

He hadn't seen her since the incident up north, and she looked at him with tear-filled eyes. As soon as he greeted her, she launched away from her mother and jumped into his arms.

"I thought you were dead!" she cried, hugging him tightly.

"There, there. I'm fine. I'm just glad nothing happened to you. I wouldn't have lived with myself if you had died. You know I'm a lot tougher than I look, right? A little thunderbolt cannot take me away from this world."

Violette cried for a few more minutes, with Alex comforting her like he would a little sister, and Katherine piped down from her anger.

She knew her daughter still had nightmares of what had happened in those woods, and it was why she was reticent about allowing her to follow Alex anywhere. He seemed to have a knack for attracting trouble and the risk of death.

But she also knew if she denied this chance to her daughter, Violette would resent her forever. Alex might not be blood, but they had developed a bond that was just as strong.

"Well, let's get this done with Mr. Leduc. I am a busy woman," Katherine said, once her daughter had stopped crying.

"Ah, yes. Sorry for the delay. Well, the first step is irrelevant to her test and is just there to ensure she is strong enough to pull off the test. But you can watch all you want, Mrs. Bellemare," Alex said, standing up and motioning to the others present.

He looked down at Violette, who became confused, and smiled at her.

"We are going to help you form your mana lobe, Violette. Do you still remember how you did it in New Eden?"

Violette nodded her head, but still looked confused.

"I already tried it. It didn't work. The mana just won't stay condensed."

Alex chuckled.

"Yeah. I thought the same thing when I did mine. We are missing a crucial ingredient on this side of the veil. I'll be there this time, to provide it. And these people will be there to provide a part of the mana, aside from the monster cores you will pull from. Are you up to the task?"

Violette looked at everyone and the briefcase that one of them held, who was the same size as her, and nodded.

"I'm ready. I can do it."

Chapter 887 A Complication

Alexander had Violette sit down in an open area before having all the monster cores placed around her, as close to each other as possible, and then he asked everyone to surround the crystals, forming a last ring.

"All right, Violette. I'll have you focus on the monster cores first. Once you have all that mana inside you, start pushing it toward the mana lobe area, and compressing it. We'll inject mana into you, as well, so the supply doesn't run short.

"Once you have a solid core, tell me. I'll have to focus on forming an Aether particle, which will take most of my concentration, but I'll hear you. And that Aether particle is what will solidify the mana lobe.

"Are you ready?" he asked, after finishing his explanation.

Violette looked a bit out of place, surrounded by crystals of varying sizes, and a ring of people, also varying in sizes, but she nodded toward him.

"I am. We can begin."

Alex nodded, and looked at everyone, before he felt the mana leaving their bodies and the crystals.

Katherine herself felt the change in pressure in the air and frowned.

She looked at Alex, who was the only one outside the ring of people, whose eyes were already closed, and asked, "What is this feeling? It's like something is pushing on my shoulders..."

Alex smirked before replying.

"It's mana. It's heavy when you aren't used to it. But Violette is handling it like a champion. Wait until Aether arrives. This is nothing."

Katherine's frown deepened before she took a step back. She could tell that whatever Alexander was doing, the surrounding pressure was growing at an exponential rate.

Violette had soon consumed all the mana from the monster cores, and they turned to dust in front of everyone's eyes. And a few moments later, she called out to Alex.

"I've formed a basic core. The mana from the others is already channelling into it, but there doesn't seem to be any solidification. It's like there is not enough mana."

Alex didn't even open his eyes to respond, as he pulsed his mana outward toward her, to get a beat on the situation.

Once his mana brushed on Violette's mind, he saw what she meant. The girl must have been constantly trying to form a mana lobe on her own already, because he could see traces of her mana lobe's shell.

Like an echo of something that was yet to be.

"Don't worry about it. Keep pushing all the mana they give you into it. Once you feel like you can't amass anymore, then I'll push Aether into it. It'll hurt, though. I have to warn you..."

Violette didn't respond to that, most likely already aware that it wouldn't be pleasant. Their process continued for almost half an hour, with some of the awakened people already dropping out, as they ran out of mana to help.

But Alex and Violette didn't give up. Even with a reduced flow, Violette was keeping a tight grasp on every mana particle she had received up to now.

And with Alex's heightened senses, he felt the moment where Violette reached saturation before she even did. He started compressing his own mana even faster, fine tuning every particle manually, to remove any impurities he could find.

On the side of the pool, the water was already reacting to their pressure, as two sets of waves could be seen undulating on the surface of the water, with clear origin points. There was no wind, or actual vibration, coming from Alex or Violette.

But the elements themselves were reacting to the primal call of power.

"I think I reached my limit, Alex. What now?"

Alex was almost done compressing his mana into Aether, as he didn't want to summon Luna for this. If he could do this himself, he would save an enormous amount of resources and time.

Plus, this was great practice for mana control.

"I'm almost done on my end. Just hold the mana in place."

Violette's face was starting to show signs of discomfort, and her mother was getting worried. She was holding herself back from stepping in, not knowing if interrupting the process they were doing would cause harm.

That was the last thing she wanted. To hurt her daughter by trying to help with something she didn't understand.

Once the mana finally shifted into Aether, the pressure on everyone suddenly went up ten times, and Katherine fainted without knowing what was happening.

Most of these people had never witnessed the power of Aether, even within New Eden, and were shocked to see the difference it made.

Kary was the least affected, with in second place, Violette, whose focus was already all taken by holding the mana that had started searing at her mind.

"Alright. Once you absorb the Aether, your mind will feel like molten lava. Push through the pain. Condense and push as much as you can," Alex said, walking toward Violette with the now-visible Aether particle.

It was like the particle was in fusion, shedding light in every direction like a high-power LED node.

And once he got near Violette, the Aether particle reacted on its own, flying into Violette's head, who started screaming in pain. But even through the shouts and cries, Alex could tell she never stopped focusing.

When Jonathan tried jumping in to help her, Alex held him back.

"Stop. She has to do this on her own. She is ok. The screams are to get the pain out of her mind."

Jonathan looked worriedly at her, wondering how much of Alex's statement was a lie, but he stopped pulling on his arm.

Kary pursed her lips, looking toward Katherine, wondering how she was holding up, and that's when she saw her passed out on the ground.

'It's a good thing she doesn't see this, I guess. I want to jump in and help her. I can't imagine how she would have reacted,' she thought.

But the screams and cries didn't last long. Soon enough, Violette's mouth shut, and she started convulsing on the ground.

"Alex, what's happening?" Kary asked in panic.

"It's her body. It's trying to reject the mana lobe," Alex said, his eyes narrowing.

This hadn't happened to him, at least not that he was aware of. He had no idea why it did.

The mana lobe was clearly forming, but it was like Violette's mind was pushing against it, trying to get it out of her head. If nothing was done, this could hurt her.

Alex jumped to her side, his eyes turning golden, and he started healing her, but it changed nothing to her convulsions.

So he did the only thing he could think of.

'Sangis, help me seal the lobe away temporarily.'

If her body couldn't accept the new organ, then he would seal it away, until it could.

The strange, modulated voice of Sangis Oxym echoed in his mind.

'Yes, Master.'

Soon after, letters flowed out of his hands, visible to everyone, and entered Violette's head. The convulsions slowed down until they halted completely, and Alex sighed in relief.

Kary looked at him and saw his eyes, making her frown.

"What the hell happened to your eyes?"

Alex lifted his head toward her, clueless of what she meant.

"Huh?"

"Your eyes. I've never seen them like this... Did you call on a new demon?"

Alex hadn't used Sangis yet, so he had no idea what his body would look like if he melded with him. But he knew what the thing's eyes looked like.

But, as he blinked, they turned back to normal.

"Something like that. I had to seal her mana lobe away temporarily. I think the lack of mana in the air was making her body reject it. Once she's back awake, I can fix this. Until then, we'll have to wait," Alex said, brushing the subject aside.

Kary still frowned at him, but said nothing.

It took a moment before Violette's eyes began to flutter open, and when she saw the ceiling up above, she groaned.

"What happened?"

Alex picked her up, smiling.

"You managed to form your mana lobe. But there was little set back. Nothing I can't fix, fortunately, but you passed out from pain. Are you feeling ok?"

Violette grabbed the sides of her head, focusing on her mind, but she couldn't feel her mana lobe.

"I can't feel it, Alex. Are you sure I succeeded?" she asked, worried.

"Yes, you did great. I had to seal it away for now. The lack of mana was playing against us. But I can unseal it, after pouring mana into you. But I needed you conscious to do this. When you feel up to it, we can do that."

Violette nodded, caressing her temples, her mind still feeling like a hot mess.

She wondered if she would be able to do anything with how weakened she felt right now.

Would she be able to prove to her mother she was strong enough to make her own decisions in this state?

Thinking about her mother, she looked around, trying to find her.

But she couldn't spot her.

"Where is my mom?" she asked, her voice panicky.

"She passed out from the pressure. I asked some of the guys to carry her outside, so the fresh air would wake her up. She should be back any moment now," Alex said.

And right on queue.

"Violette! Are you alright?!"

Chapter 888 A Display Of Power

Katherine ran to her daughter when she saw she was on the ground in Alex's arms.

Alex was not one to get in the way, so as soon as her mother grabbed her, he let her go.

"What happened? Why is she sprawled on the ground, Alexander?" Katherine growled.

Alex raised his hands, trying to pacify her.

"It's normal. I passed out too, when I formed mine. It's called mana exhaustion. Forming the mana lobe ate up all her mana, and she fainted. Much like if she had worked too hard. It's nothing dangerous. I was about to help her recover."

Katherine glared at him, hardly believing his words, but Violette nodded at her, confirming his words, and Katherine backed down.

"Then get to it. My daughter should never be on the ground like this."

Alex held back a chuckle as he understood the double meaning of her words.

"Alright. Violette. I'll be pushing mana into your body. I want you to focus on circulating it. Don't send it to your mana lobe just yet. Just circulate it for now. I'll tell you when to send it to your mana lobe, okay?"

Violette nodded, closing her eyes.

Alex took this as his go signal, and he started slowly trickling his mana into her, making sure he went slowly, so she could circulate every particle through her body. After a couple of rotations, he felt the sealed mana lobe quiver, and he knew he was on the right path.

He kept injecting mana into her, until her skin took on a more healthy hue, and her cheeks flushed red from the stimulation.

Once he was certain this was stimulating the mana lobe, he slowly undid the seal before pushing a larger chunk of his mana into her.

Kary could tell Alex had unsealed the mana lobe, because Violette instantly clenched her fists, her jaw tensing from pain.

"Alright, Violette. Push the mana into the lobe, but don't store it yet. Circulate some more, with the mana lobe as your point of start and finish. When the discomfort fades, then you can start storing the mana there."

Violette whimpered lightly, making Katherine glare at him again.

"Hey, don't blame me. She knew it was a painful process. Your daughter is strong, Mrs. Bellemare. Have some faith in her."

Katherine clicked her tongue in distaste, but kept her mouth otherwise shut.

After a few minutes of circulating the mana inside her body and through the freshly formed mana lobe, Violette's discomfort finally receded, and she breathed in relief.

Alex stopped injecting her with mana as her mana lobe kicked in and began producing its own.

The process was complete.

Violette opened her eyes, a new sheen shining in them, and she smiled.

"Finally. Much better. I almost feel normal, now that I have a mana lobe again," Violette commented, which elicited a grimace from her mother.

"You were normal before it, sweetie... This is all but normal."

"Mrs. Bellemare... This will be the future normal. You have got to understand this, at this point. Especially if you've been tapping into our calls..." Kary said, her traits stretching.

Violette's eyes went wide, and her head snapped toward her mother with a look of disappointment.

"You spied on them? Mom! I told you to leave them alone!"

Violette was well aware of what her mother did for a living. After all, she had grown up with her mother often at home and her computer running all these lines of coding. She was bound to find out someday, and that day had come early.

Both she and her brother were extremely smart when Tommy was still alive, and they had searched the meaning of those codes on the internet, getting the likely answer from a forum about hackers.

Of course, this had caused issues for Katherine, who had to erase all traces of their questions over the net, so no one would trace her identity. But they had known from then on, and she had stopped hiding it from them, making them swear to keep it a secret.

"I never promised to leave them alone, sweetie! Why would I? I barely knew them? It's a mother's right to worry about her daughter's friends, is it not?" Katherine defended herself.

Violette immediately started pouting, to which Alex chuckled.

"It's okay, Violette. I had expected as much when I found out what her work entails. I was just disappointed that she wasn't trusting me enough to say it to my face before yesterday. But it's irrelevant to the future. We can forget it happened. What do you say?"

Violette looked at him, still pouting, before sighing like a tired old man.

"Fine. So, are we going to get this test started? I'm tired," Violette said, pulling her face downward.

Alex, Kary, and Katherine laughed at her antics, and almost everyone else started filtering out of the sports center. The rest of the test didn't concern them, and they also weren't interested in seeing what the little girl could do.

Most of them had seen her fight in New Eden, and if she were half that strong outside of New Eden, witnessing it would bruise their egos. They could pass on that shame.

"I'm ready when you are," Katherine said, thinking the sooner they did this, the less time her daughter had to recover, and the less likely she was to be impressed.

But Violette already had something planned in her mind. She was ready to pull out the heavy guns.

She got up, brushing the wrinkles from her short dress away with her hands, before taking in a big breath.

Stepping to the side of the pool, Violette's eyes focused.

When she lifted her foot over the pool, her mother almost jumped up to catch her, but Alex held her back.

"Have faith," he said.

Truth was, Alex had already activated his mana vision, and what he was seeing was reassuring him about this whole idea. Violette, with and without her mana lobe, were two different people.

The control she had was insane, and as Aberon had once told her, if she had been born to their world, the mage's guild would have torn her away from her parents, to make her a disciple. And she would have most likely ended up under a Progenitor.

This was what Alex was seeing right now. Absolute control over her mana. Not a single particle was going against her will, as they flowed by her side like the coming and going tides of the sea.

Her foot hit the water, and ice instantly formed under it, making a solid and stable footrest, before she stepped off the poolside. Violette walked her way toward the center of the Olympic pool, her eyes closed, feeling her way out in the dark from the ripples of water under her.

She knew exactly where she was.

When she reached the center, Violette stopped, as raised her arms parallel to the water. With every breath she took, Alex watched as her mana bade the water into her control.

Ripples formed over the pool, flowing in and out with the rhythm of her breathing.

Jonathan had stayed, curious to see what kind of difference a mana lobe would make, if he were to ask Alex to help him form one next, and his eyes were wide in shock.

He couldn't see mana, but he could feel it, like the air on his skin. And right now, he was feeling every breath she took like a light brush against his skin.

Yet, she was standing in the center of the water, almost thirty meters from him.

Once Violette felt that all the water under her would listen, she spun her left hand in a downward arc before raising it on her right.

The pool water practically cratered as the water under her mimicked the movement, emptying to her left and bursting up to her right.

With her right hand, Violette made a pulling motion, pulling a single column of water from the wall she'd just made, and extending it over her head, where it lay, suspended in midair.

She then made many other of these motions, her eyes still closed, forming something in the air that her mother instantly recognized. It was the logo of the Delphi Oracles.

A symbol Katherine's parents taught her to idolise. One she had taught Violette to always see as a symbol of hope; like a beacon for the future.

And as the symbol formed itself in water, Violette suddenly shot both her arms down, freezing the symbol in the air, before it dropped back into the pool. Violette was less proficient at controlling ice, and forming it was her limit on this side.

But she wasn't done.

Violette spread her arms out in a swift motion again, and the pool practically exploded outward, every drop of water inside it spreading to the limits of the room. The droplets stayed in suspended animation, Violette sweating, as Katherine was awestruck.

Violette pulled off one last power move, making the droplets form back together, making them into a spectacle of dolphins, which hopped around her mother, before heading back into the receptacle they came from.

And then she pushed herself to the ground before dropping to her knees, exhausted.

"So... *huff* Do I pass your test *huff* Mother?"

Chapter 889 A Scenic Ride Home

Katherine was still too stunned to speak, as she looked at her daughter, who had just bent the laws of physics to her will, like it was nothing.

She knew the awakened players were strong, and she was also painfully aware that her daughter could do things that defied all logic.

But this was far beyond her wildest expectations.

"I... I... What just happened?" she asked, shell-shocked.

Alex and Kary weren't sure whether to laugh or intervene in this case, so they waited.

Waited for Katherine to process in her mind what her eyes had just witnessed.

"Mom?" Violette asked, her face turning worried.

If her mother said she wasn't impressed, she would be lying. But she could also refute that what she saw was even real at this point.

"I... don't know what to say, Violette. If I say you failed, I'd be lying to myself, and you. But I don't want to admit that you succeeded... It means letting you head into danger... I can't stand the thought of it..." Katherine admitted, looking at her daughter with teary eyes.

"Mother..." Violette whispered, realizing what she had been asking of her.

Violette wanted nothing more than to fight by her friends' side for the safety of humanity and the people she cared for. She wanted to be the one protecting them.

But, in a sense, doing so meant depriving her mother of that same role toward her. She wouldn't be able to protect her when they faced a foe that could reap their lives.

By allowing her to choose her battles, her mother would be essentially abandoning her task of keeping her safe...

Of course, this was a hard decision to make. It was the hardest pill to swallow a mother could ever face.

The time to let your child go.

Violette was turning ten in December, which was right around the corner. Katherine was far from ready to let her daughter become independent.

Katherine kept her mouth closed, not wanting to utter the words that her mind was screaming at her. She was proud of her daughter.

And what mother wouldn't be when they realized their children were not only grown enough to make decisions for themselves but also prove they held the strength to fly on their own?

But saying those words meant letting her leave the nest.

Katherine opened her mouth to speak, but Violette slammed into her, hugging her tight and crying.

"Don't say it. You don't have to..." Violette cried.

Katherine's tears started flowing, and she hugged her daughter tight, not wanting to let her go.

Alex and Kary looked at the scene with smiles, but quickly understood they were no longer needed here.

Signalling to Jonathan that they should leave, the three of them left the mother and daughter weep in peace. This was a moment for them, and the three of them shouldn't be a part of it.

As they reached outside again, Alex turned to Jonathan.

"You look a bit better. You recovering from that defeat?"

Jonathan paused at the question.

"Not completely... But I'm getting there. At least I don't have nightmares anymore..."

Alex put a hand on top of his head.

"You know, although your grandfather is filthy rich, and he can get you the best shrinks in the world, I think you can get better help elsewhere."

Jonathan looked up at him, his eyes weary.

"And where would I get that better help?" he asked, almost mockingly.

Alex heard the tone and chuckled, and he lightly slapped the back of his head.

"In your friends, you little dickhead. Don't shut in on yourself. You'll turn out like David."

Jonathan chuckled.

"You mean super powerful and immune to fear?"

Alex sighed, and Kary giggled.

"No. He means sour and afraid of seeking help. Friends are not just there when you need allies. Friends are there in thick and thin, Jonathan. We can help you walk the darkness in your heart. Come to us if you need help," Kary said, lowering to his height and ruffling his hair.

Jonathan smiled, realizing he'd been shutting out everyone.

"I'm sorry. It's just... I thought I had to deal with this alone, to get stronger, you know?"

Alex noogied him before laughing loudly.

"Kid, if getting stronger was done alone, guilds wouldn't be a concept. Let your friends in. We can help. We are only ever a phone call away, you know?"

Jonathan held the top of his head, grimacing at Alexander.

"I know. Next time, I'll be sure to call when I feel alone. Thank you, guys..."

"That's all we ask," Kary said, smiling warmly at him.

"Do you need a ride home?" Alex asked him, as he texted their limo driver.

Smiling wide, Jonathan shook his head.

"No. I have a quicker way."

Closing his eyes to focus, Jonathan gathered his mana to his feet, where a gust of wind kicked up before lifting him off the ground in a miniature tornado.

"You aren't the only ones who can fly, now," he said, opening his eyes and smirking.

Alex chuckled.

"Alright, then, cocky little shit. See you around. And call us if you need us. Don't be a David."

Jonathan burst off, laughing as he did, and waved at them.

Of course, that was the moment the limo drove around the corner, making for a very weird sudden braking.

When Gilbert pulled out of his limo, he looked up, trying to see what he thought he had seen, but he couldn't see anything anymore.

He turned to Alex and Kary, about to ask them if they'd seen anything, but suddenly realized how crazy he would sound. So he went back to smiling.

"This took longer than I was expecting. But I hope I didn't keep you waiting. Are we ready to go home, or is there another place you would like to go?" he asked, keeping his professionalism.

Alex looked at Kary knowingly, but they didn't say anything.

"I think we are ready to return home, Gilbert. But we can take our time to head back. Take a scenic route."

Gilbert grinned at the words. This meant his mileage bonus would be bigger, and nothing was better than money.

"Of course, sir. How scenic are we talking?"

"As much as you see fit. Just don't stray off the island, maybe?" Alex chuckled.

There were a few hours left before noon, and even though Alex was starting to get hungry a bit, he could wait. And Kary didn't seem to mind either.

So who cared about burning a few dollars, if it meant relaxing a bit, as they enjoyed a little car trip?

Gilbert opened the door for them, smiling as wide as his face.

"Then off we go," he chimed.

Alex and Kary climbed aboard, and Gilbert practically ran to his seat before leaving the sports center in haste.

The drive took them around Westmount, allowing them to appreciate the lovely houses, some with modern looks, and others, much like the Bellemare residence they passed in front of, still held their older construction style.

Gilbert then took them to the Plateau Mont-Royal, where most of the mansions were, describing some of their histories as he went. Even though Alex and Kary didn't seem to pay much attention, it didn't deter him.

They were paying for a service, and he would happily oblige, even if they weren't his most avid listeners.

After the plateau, he took them around the largest park in Montreal, explaining how it used to be many smaller ones that the municipality eventually combined into one super park to compete with the famous Central Park in New York.

He explained how it had been the largest park in the country for a while, until British Columbia inaugurated an even larger one, in a suburb of their capital.

Alex thought at one point that Gilbert would have made an excellent tourism guide, and even wondered if he hadn't been one at a point in his life. The attention to detail and vivid descriptions he gave of the most mundane things were way too researched.

But it made their ride enjoyable, and both he and Kary eventually even listened to him, finding his commentary interesting.

But all good things have an end, and they were eventually back in front of the tower that housed their home. Alex gladly stretched out his smartwatch, giving the man a fat tip, aside from the payment that had already passed on his account.

"Thank you so much, sir!" Gilbert said, feigning tears as he accepted the stack of bills.

"Thanks for the ride and tour, Gilbert. If I need a ride, I'm sure to call you again," Alex said with a smile.

"You honour me, young man. I will gladly take your call anytime you wish, even in the middle of the night. Thank you a hundred times for your patronage!"

Alex laughed as he stepped out of the vehicle and stretched.

"Alright, let's go up and eat something. I'm starving."

Chapter 890 Potential Targets

The rest of the day was spent enjoying each other's company, which Alex and Kary hadn't had much time to do since Alex returned.

At least, that was until David decided to show up unannounced, as per his usual self.

Seeing him on the elevator cam, Alex sighed as he pressed the button to allow him up.

He walked back to the sofa, sitting down, and Kary didn't even need to ask him who it was. She could feel his presence all the way up in the penthouse.

"Would it kill him to call or text before showing up?" she asked, shaking her head in disappointment.

Alex chuckled.

"Sometimes, I wonder how he was raised. I mean, it's common courtesy to announce your arrival at a friend's place beforehand, isn't it?" he mocked.

The elevator dinged, and David walked in, not saying a word, like he owned the place. He walked over to the fridge, grabbed a cold apple, and went to sit with the other two.

"So, I was thinking about our situation, and I was wondering something. Since you can help form mana lobes, shouldn't you be helping us all over the next few days, making sure we are strong enough?" he asked, biting into the apple.

"Hello to you too, jerk. And don't just waltz in here like you live here, rummaging through my fridge. What are you, a raccoon? Ask for permission," Alex sighed.

David just shrugged as he chewed on the juicy fruit.

Kary pressed her hand to her forehead, feeling a headache sprouting.

"David, why are you here?" she asked.

He looked at her incredulously, his chewing slowing down.

"I 'ust 'old you?" he said, his mouth full of half-chewed apple.

"No, I mean, why are you really here? You only show up here for emergencies," she insisted.

David swallowed his bite before sighing.

"Am I that predictable? I guess I'll have to start showing up unannounced more often, for no reason. Shuffle things up. You won't mind, will you?"

Alex slapped his forehead while grumbling.

"What do you want, man? I know you didn't come here for a conversation that could have happened over text or a call."

David took another bite of the apple, the crisp crunching of it echoing in the large, open room.

"I'll tell you after I enjoy this fruit," he replied, turning his head toward the television, where a police show was running.

He ignored their annoyed stares for about five minutes, enjoying the show and his apple, taking pauses as he became captivated by the television.

Alex was half tempted to throw him out off the balcony, to bring his attention back. It wasn't like David would die from this fall, anyway.

But he kept himself in check.

After finishing the apple, core and all, David smiled at them.

"Aren't we having fun?" he asked jokingly.

But the silence he was answered with made him laugh.

"You two need to open up to more people. Staying isolated with just the two of you is very unhealthy, you know?"

Kary glared at him.

"Look who's talking..." Alex mumbled.

"Huh?"

"Nothing. You gonna tell us why you're here now?" Alex asked, annoyed.

"Ahh, yes. I came to ask you where you wanted to go first. I found a few spots we could check first once we are ready to start our world tour, and I wanted your opinion on where to stop first," he said, getting serious.

Alex looked at him, waiting for him to elaborate, but David stayed mum.

"I suppose you brought visual aid for us to choose from?" he sighed.

"Yes, I have," David said, smiling wide.

He threw a small plastic chip at him, and Alex recognized the data stick.

"Put that in your TV for me, will you?" David said, grinning.

"What are we, your servants?" Alex asked, annoyed.

"Servants don't ask questions," David mocked.

Kary's hair started brightening up as her anger flared up.

"Do you want to end up cremated, David? Because our balcony is a nice high place from which we could throw your ashes, you know?" she asked, in a growling tone.

David raised his hands in a sign of peace.

"Aww, come on. I'm just teasing you guys. Of course, you're not my servants. Assistants would be a more appropriate term," he laughed.

David had to jump back promptly over the sofa he was on, as a wisp of flames licked at his previous location.

"Hey, don't mess up the new furniture!" Alex exclaimed as he turned around from plugging the data stick into the TV and witnessed this.

"And David, you need to learn some fucking manners. I swear I'll hold you while she incinerates you, man. This is my house and hers. Show some damn respect."

David fake pouted, sitting back down.

"Party pooper," he mumbled.

"What was that?!" Kary asked, her hair flaring up.

"Nothing! I was just looking for the remote!" David said, putting on an innocent face.

He quickly faked to be looking for it before Alex tossed it to him, shaking his head disapprovingly.

"Heh he he..." David chuckled nervously.

He promptly switched the television's source to the data chip and opened up an unnamed file.

A set of image icons appeared, and David selected the first one.

"Alright. The first spot that I think is worth looking at is here, north of Florence. There were reports of strange sightings. Apparently, some vineyards of the area have reported birds the size of dogs eating their crops.

"Now, I know there are birds that size that exist. But Italy doesn't have birds that reach the size of dogs. So that lit up my curiosity."

Alex groaned.

"Are you sure you don't just want a vacation with a good wine tour?"

David snickered at his remark.

"Although I wouldn't say no to a little vineyard tour after our task is done, that is not the reason I spotted it, no. But let's keep this moving, shall we?"

Kary huffed, not believing a word he said.

"I spotted a second place where there was activity that reached paranormal levels."

He clicked the remote, and the image switched to a photo taken from the base of a cliff. In the photo, an apparent nest rested on an outcropping of the cliff.

What was strange about the nest was not only its apparent size, but also what hung from its side.

A pair of taloned legs.

"A tourist took this as they were sailing around Korea's Seongsan Ilchulbong. For the uneducated in the room, this is at the tip of Jeju Island, for the uneducated in the room," David said, while staring at Alexander.

Alex ignored his gaze as he looked at the image.

"How can we be sure this isn't just the legs of a naturally large bird from the region?" he asked, trying to stay logical.

David tapped the TV remote again, bringing up the following image.

And it was a gruesome sight to see.

"A walker took this photo three days after the first one in Seongsan Ilchulbong's crater area. An investigation revealed to the local police that this was the tourist who had taken the first picture.

"What happened to him is still a mystery, but apparently, he became intrigued by the picture he took and ventured into the area on his own after his tour. He went missing at night, and was only found like this two days later."

Looking at the picture, Alex could surmise that whatever had gotten to him had not only munched on the victim, but it had done so while it was alive. The look of terror imprinted on the person's eyes couldn't lie.

And by the varying sizes of the lacerations, it was done by more than one assailant, each with a different size.

"Alright, take that image off the TV. We just had lunch, for Christ's sake..." Kary complained, suddenly feeling nauseous.

The blood, the guts spilt everywhere, and the look of horror on this guy's face... It just wasn't cutting it.

Tapping the remote, David pulled up another strange photo.

"This one is closer to home. It's also in a less frequented part of the country, so maybe it's not as urgent. But it remains to be checked before whatever caused it happens again," he said, looking at the image with a sigh.

The image showed what looked like a brown bear leaning over another lump of fur the same colour. However, the image was a bit blurry, and it wasn't clear what they were looking at.

"What are we looking at here? A bear eating a cub?" Alex asked, his eyes narrowing as he tried to make out details.

David tapped the remote again, the image switching to two hunters standing next to an enormous brown bear.

Alex frowned.

"So they took it out? Why are you showing us these images?"

David sighed before tapping again.

"That wasn't the big one. It was the one that got eaten. That is an Alaskan Kodiak Brown Bear, the second largest species of bear on earth. And it looked tiny next to the other one..."

"Ohh..."