

S vs Rebirth 121

Chapter 121 Mending Their Relationship

"Still, why do you want to emphasize that you want them to be good to others?" Noel asked.

After the mining was over, they immediately headed back to the village. On the way, Noel couldn't help but recall the argument between Roel and Rick.

"That? I basically learned it from my late wife. She was good to others like paying their wages above other merchant groups, treating them like comrades, and so on... That action paid off. Her comrades are loyal and good to her. They don't hesitate to lay down their lives for her, knowing that their families would be fine even if they die here.

"I don't want someone to backstab them, so I ask them to be good to people. And she often did some community service by spending a portion of her income to feed people or do something good. Eventually, the people love her.

"She once escaped an assassination attempt because someone in the slum snitched on them because he thought she was too good to die." Roel explained.

"Have you ever told your children about it?" Noel asked.

"I did, but I couldn't explain the reason because..." Roel let out a long sigh.

"They ran away?"

"Yes, we always got into an argument because the merchant group couldn't expand that way." Roel nodded, feeling troubled as well. "That's certainly the truth, since my wife is not that big of a merchant as well."

"Hmm..." Noel fell silent. His family was also a merchant family, so he could understand why his wife did it. At the same time, the siblings' perspective was also correct since they couldn't grow their business without money if they spent a huge portion in it.

"What's wrong?"

"Ah, no. My family was a merchant as well, so I could understand you. But I never took part on it, so I can't really give you any advice."

"Really?" Roel was surprised that Noel started to open to him as well.

"Well, Merchant is all about give and take, right? You have money, I have something to sell."

"Give and take..." Roel looked down, falling into deep thought. It seemed he had realized something.

It was proven when Roel suddenly patted Noel's back two minutes later. "Hahahaha! So, that's how it is. It seems that I am too indebted to you now!"

"No, no. I just like what you taught me earlier, so why not?" Noel humbly refused.

But that humble personality made Roel like Noel even more.

In the end, Noel accepted to stay for the night because Roel insisted. They even had a dinner together, which was appreciated by Rick and Rica.

However, to give some time for Roel, Noel immediately escaped to his room, leaving the family alone.

The atmosphere became heavy as soon as Noel left since they all remembered the argument they had earlier.

Rick and Roel looked at each other as if they wanted to blow up again while Rica didn't know how to stop them.

Unexpectedly, the first thing that came out of their mouth was, "Sorry."

"Huh?" Even the two who said it were dumbfounded.

Rick immediately explained himself. "I'm sorry that I shouldn't have talked to you that way. I know that you were concerned about us, so..."

"No, it was my fault. I should have talked to you better to avoid any misunderstanding." Roel sighed. "Anyway, if you don't mind, I want to say something about your merchant group. I hope that you can remain calm until I finish. If you want to rebuke my claims afterward, I'll listen to you."

Rick and Rica opened their mouths in shock. This was the first time their father actually approached them this way as if they were talking as equals, not a father and his children.

Even Rick couldn't help but turn serious. "I understand. I won't comment or argue with you before you finish."

"Thanks." Roel smiled and hurriedly explained. "You don't need to spend much on your escort anymore."

Rick obviously wanted to rebuke this statement because of how wrong it was. If they didn't spend much on their protection, they would die in their journey.

He was clenching his fists and his breathing became rougher, but because he had promised him, he tried his hardest to remain calm.

And Roel's next statement was really something that changed his perspective of his father.

"I'll be helping you with your escort by providing them with good quality equipment. You can think of it as a loan. They'll work for you for a period of time to pay for this equipment. You don't need to repay me or anything... You can take it as me buying people to protect you. I'd promised your mother."

Rick and Rica finally realized that their father always cared for them, but he never had a chance to explain himself because they always ended up in an argument from the first sentence.

After listening to it, Rick said, "Actually, it's plausible but not very effective. You are a Master Blacksmith, so the equipment is extremely valuable. In our merchant group, there is a contribution system. You basically do tasks for our merchant group to get this contribution points and exchange it with something valuable later. This way, we can spend less money on it. At the same time, when they're racking up points, we can gain their trust and loyalty slowly but surely."

Roel got an idea after listening to him as well. "There are many excess weapons in this place. They are from Apprentice or Veteran Blacksmith, so how about making some sort of levels with my equipment being the highest?"

"Yes, that's certainly going to work. By the time they receive this kind of weapon, they'll be loyal to us. And if possible, I can send them to your place to get the weapon. If we're the one bringing that weapon, many people will look at us and try to steal it."

p "That'll be dangerous." Roel nodded in agreement. "Then, you can give them a letter of recommendation. I'll also make something to prove that you are my children so that they believe you."

"Yes!" Rick was excited because for the first time in his life, he could finally see eye to eye with his father. But he soon rose from his seat and lowered his head. "Father... I'm sorry for always arguing with you. I should always keep my calm..."

"I was just too overbearing. It's not your fault." Roel smiled.

Those three continued their discussion for a whole night at that time. But it could be said that their relationship became as good as it could.

Chapter 122 Unexpected Encounter

The next morning, it was the time for Noel to leave. Roel had promised him that the armor would be ready in three months, so there was no need for him to remain in this place. He also got some tricks in his control over Spiritual Energy, making the trip bountiful.

After packing his luggage, he walked out through the back door with Roel and his two children waiting for him.

"You've been waiting for me?" Noel was surprised that they were waiting for him, considering those three didn't sleep for the whole night to discuss their family matters.

"The discussion we had lasted long enough that we didn't need to sleep to see you off." Roel laughed and patted Noel's shoulder. "Still, thank you. I'm glad that you're here."

"No need to thank me, I don't help you that much." Noel shook his head, humbly replying to his thanks.

"Facilitating the discussion between us is already a huge help. Thank you." Rick also stepped forward, thanking him.

Before Noel could reply, Rica approached him and bowed. "What you did was bigger than you thought, so please accept our thanks."

"Alright, I understand." Noel smiled. Little did Noel know, the small help he extended created a great bond between him and the Master Blacksmith.

"Also from me..." Rica smiled and approached Noel to give a small kiss on his cheek. It would be a surprising 'thanks' even for Rick and Roel, albeit it turned comedic when she realized she kissed his palm instead of cheek.

"Huh?" Rica widened her eyes and stepped back, looking at Noel with a dumbfounded expression.

"Ah!" Noel just realized what he had done. "Sorry, it was my reflex."

Noel actually blocked that kiss with his hand as if he was sensing danger. He subconsciously thought that Anna would use this kind of move to bewitch him, so he was already put on his guard in that area, not noticing that this reflex actually blocked all advances from other women as well.

Roel and Rick were stunned as well. Either it was Rica's attempt in thanking Noel with a kiss or Noel's block, they truly never expected this kind of development.

"Uh..." Rica looked down as her face flushed red. She was ready to cry out of her embarrassment.

To avoid making her cry, Noel immediately raised his hand and dashed off. "Thank you for taking care of me. Goodbye!"

He looked like he was embarrassed as well so that people didn't think much about the previous incident. This way, Rica could also keep some dignity in front of her brother and father.

Rick couldn't help but shake his head helplessly. "Well, Rica... you got a good taste. Father approves."

"Father!" Rica shouted in embarrassment as she just wanted to escape from the teasing.

But she stopped for a while, looking at Noel's back. She bowed to him once more to show her thanks.

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After leaving the village, Noel returned on the road that led back to the fort. On the way, he was thinking about their next schedule, considering they still had three Individual and Group Missions.

"We are only two months in and have made this kind of progress. And in three months, I need to return to this place... but then again, they also want to send it to my place personally... I guess I'll be waiting for them during that time since Rick and Rica will most likely come to visit to give me the armor.

"Then, in six months, I need to go on a trip to the sword saint's tomb with Anna. Well, I think I can finish all the missions within that time if I truly want, but I need some time to get stronger as well.

"That's right. Should I use this time to go to Aclain Kingdom as well to visit the temple." Noel kept thinking about his schedules since he wanted to make it as smooth as possible.

But on the third day, he had an unexpected encounter. With the size of the kingdom, the timing, and even the road they took, it was impossible to meet unless it was fated.

"Oh! Hello!" A woman greeted him while running. There was only one insane person that would be running in this situation. She was none other than Anna Stargaze.

After getting influenced by Noel's insanity, Anna continued running to increase her own stamina during the whole trip. But still, they were going in a different mission, and a different route, and they somehow met each other on the way, it was beyond his understanding.

"Hello." Noel purposely made his voice a bit deeper than his usual voice. The mask could hide his identity, but not his voice, so he needed to be careful, especially around her.

"So, you've finished your mission, Noel?" Anna asked with a smile.

Noel's heart skipped a beat because she saw him through that easily. Still, there was no way he was going to admit it .

"Noel? Who's that? By the way, who are you?" Noel asked, playing dumb.

"Right? I know that you're in disguise but who's in their right mind to run across this plain? Normally people will go with their group even if they want to run or just use a carriage. Only Noel who will do something like this. If you don't want to reveal your identity, how about you take that glove off? There should be a Spirit Seal." Anna smirked.

She added inwardly, 'Don't think you can fool me. Even in this life, you haven't changed. A masquerade, blond hair, blue eyes, and white sword... It seems that you still chose the same disguise. Do you think I don't know you? The Noel I knew could use two different elements, Fire and Ice, so don't think you can fool me.'

"I don't understand what you're saying Miss? You are mistaking me with someone else. I was separated with my group because I was too slow, so I'm planning to catch up to them." Noel continued to play dumb since he couldn't afford to have his own disguise to be known to Anna. He even screamed

inwardly, complaining, 'Of all people, why do I need to meet this witch? Of all time, why does it need to be now? Of all places, why did we need to meet in this kind of place?'

Chapter 123 Misunderstanding

"Well, it seems that I've mistaken you with someone else." Anna smiled, apologizing to him. "You looked so much like him, you know. In his brain, there is only training, training, and training.

"I do admit that he's smarter than me, but I know him more than himself. I believe he is the first person to have a spirit with two different elements, Ice and Fire.

"He is so handful. Seriously! I have many complaints about him." Anna harrumphed.

Each of her statement felt like a stab in his heart. But he didn't know how Anna could know that he had Ice and Fire Elements, considering he only utilized this element when she wasn't with him.

'Huh? There is something wrong. How in the world Anna knows something like this? Even the commander doesn't know it. Is it her family? But if it's her family, this situation will become extremely dangerous.

'They might know that I have two spirits in my body. Am I being targeted by them?' Noel had so many questions in his mind. After all, there shouldn't be anyone to know about these two spirits.

It would be troublesome if he didn't know anything about it, so he decided to pry for the information. "I don't know about this friend of yours, but it seems that he is a splendid person."

"Of course." Anna smiled, answering that question from the bottom of his heart. "I may have the strength, but my blade always kills people. But he is different... His sword is sharp, sharper than mine. Yet, he uses it to protect the people. All I can do is to ruin things, but he's building it. I'm envious of him."

Noel was stunned because this was the first time he heard this kind of opinion from Anna. It even gave him a wild thought.

'Huh? She has this high opinion on me? But she was supposed to be the one to order the execution of my parents. Or was it just a fabrication? She was the one who actually wanted to protect me from her parents who actually wanted to wipe Ardagan's bloodline out?

'Because of her, I could actually live? Is that the reason why she came to the Demon Banner Army? But then again, she's bullying me the whole time... Though I can say that she's very cooperative at the same time.

'What if... Let's say what if... what if her family sent a spy to watch over us? The only reason she bullied me because she needed to keep a facade to make them think she wanted me dead, but her original intention was to protect me from her family?'

Noel had the first wildest thought in his mind because it could change his perspective of Anna.

She thought Anna was fabricated as the murder of his family when the real culprit was the marquis himself.

And Anna dropped another bomb that reinforced his misunderstanding.

"Still, that guy is so infuriating. Does he not know that I learned how to cook because of him? Does he know that I'm this strong because of him?" Anna let out a long sigh.

'Huh? She learned how to cook because of me? She got stronger because of me?' Noel was surprised to know it. Never in his wildest dream that he would think Anna learned things because of him.

However, Anna didn't lie either. If not for the threat called Noel Ardagan in her previous life, she wouldn't be able to get stronger fast. After all, if she couldn't keep up with Noel's strength, she would be killed by him.

If not for him dropping her to the middle of nowhere, she wouldn't have learned how to cook. That was why the reasons she became like this was Noel, albeit in his previous life.

"It seems that the guy doesn't appreciate you. You are beautiful and seem to be able to do everything," Noel replied, trying to see what she was planning to brag again.

"Right?" Anna pouted, refusing to give more information. Hence, Noel tried to pry for more. "It seems you like him, miss."

"I like him."

"!!!" Noel was shocked. His mind became crazy. However, it seemed that he could escape from this situation and when he saw the junction not far from them.

"I see. He's fortunate to have you. But I need to take the turn. Are you going there too, Miss?" Noel asked since if it was a statement, it would look like he knew where she was planning to go.

Anna thought for a moment. If she continued to pester him, Noel would be pissed. And she also had said a lot of things too, enough to occupy Noel's mind for a while.

She replied with a smile. "No, I need to go straight."

"In that case, this will be where we go separate ways. It's a pleasure to know a beautiful lady like you. I hope that your relationship can work out." Noel smiled as he took the turn simply because he wanted to wait for a while until Anna disappeared before going back to the fort.

When he was already far enough, Noel fell on his butt while clutching his head. He thought, 'What the heck? Did she seriously know that I'm Noel? But she even knows that I have Heisk and Ardagan... It seems she doesn't confuse me with someone else.

'But then again, what does she mean by she likes me? Does she say that just to confuse me? Or is her family the culprit this whole time and she's just protecting me? I don't understand.

'No, she must have seen through my disguise and said all that to confuse me. However, I can't make another disguise since she will recognize this masquerade even if I change my hair and eye color. Does the commander have another item that can be used to disguise my appearance?

'Still, which one is the actual Anna?' Noel scratched his head, frustrated because he couldn't see which one was the truth.

Meanwhile, Anna was smiling from ear to ear as she finally managed to say all that.

,m Of course, she didn't lie earlier. Noel was truly the cause of her action, but in her previous life.

At the same time, Anna threw the last statement partially.

"Well, I do like him and respect him because I've seen all the things he did. Strong determination, unyielding tenacity, and the kindness to help people... How can someone not like him as a human being?" Anna smiled. "I aspire to be like him."

Chapter 124 Report

After mulling over the talk they had earlier, Noel finally got his back to his feet. As much as he wanted to continue thinking about this matter, he realized that no answer would come before he began his investigation.

Whether it was his family, the Marquis Stargaze Family, and the royal family, he would know the truth as long as he investigated them. For the time being, he should focus on getting stronger first.

The trip took around two more days before Noel reached the fort. Instead of going to the training ground, he went to his room first to avoid any suspicion, especially with Anna returning not far from him.

He also made sure that he hid the masquerade as well as his equipment so that Anna wouldn't find any of these to figure out his identity.

Noel wrote a letter and retired for the night since he thought Anna would immediately report what she found during the mission.

However, it seemed he had predicted wrongly again. To his surprise, when he was about to report to Shale before their morning routine started, Anna was also there, waiting for him.

"Oh?! We met again, Noel." Anna smirked, teasing him.

"Yes, it's been weeks." Noel nodded calmly.

"..." Anna rolled her eyes as if she knew that Noel was the one with the masquerade. In her past life, Noel had been bothering her with both identities, so she knew it was Noel. "Whatever. It seems that you have finished your mission."

"Yes, you too." Noel nodded in agreement, not replying to her words that much.

Eventually, Shale arrived in front of them and asked, "So, you two have returned and it seems that you returned at the same time... Is this fate or something?"

"That's certainly not. Well, whatever... I just want to hand in the proof of completions." Noel handed the proof of completions for both individual mission and group mission.

Anna also gave the proof of completion but only the individual mission.

"Alright. I have received them." Shale took a peek at the letter first, confirming the proof. But before he said anything, Shale walked away. "Wait a minute here. I have something to show you."

Shale went inside for a few minutes before coming back with a few letters directed to them.

"It seems that you two are loved."

"Hmm?" Noel tilted his head in confusion and opened the letter.

"Thank you very much, Sir Noble. If not for your encouragement, I won't live to this day. The work is hard for a simple woman like me, but I'll continue working hard. I hope that I can repay your kindness in the future." - Xena.

"The girls have been working so hard. It's true that our bodies hurt so much, but we seem to have found the meaning to our lives. From now on, we will make a group that can do everything and become the best group that consists of only women. We will learn everything here, so that we can work in Sir Noble's territory in the future." - Melinda.

"The villagers have been working hard and would like to say thank you for your help. You are truly the best knight we could ever get, Sir Knight."

"I hope that I can send some vegetables for you in the future, Sir Knight. Not that I can farm anymore though, but if in the future, there's an excess harvest, I'll do my best to send the best crops to you, Sir Knight."

Noel couldn't help but smile when he read all these messages. The first two letters were from the women he encouraged. It was good to know that they were living a good life this time and Noel hoped that they could continue to be that bright for the rest of their lives.

The last two letters came from the village chief and the farmer he met in the individual missions.

The message was simple, but it gave a lot of emotion. Noel had decided that he would treasure these letters.

Meanwhile, Anna had been glancing back and forth between her letter and Noel. She realized that she only had one letter, thanking her for the money. But she didn't receive any letters from anyone else.

She had done her best in the individual mission, but it seemed she was still nowhere near Noel. She felt a bit envious to see those four letters.

"It seems that you have done a splendid job this time." Shale even praised Noel while nodding as if he approved of Noel's conduct.

"Thank you." Noel smiled and took out his own letter. "By the way, can you give this to the commander?"

"Hmm?" Shale hesitated for a moment since the commander wasn't someone they could see easily. But Noel's relationship with the commander was good since the latter asked him to look after Noel personally. Hence, he received the letter. "Alright. I have no promise, but I'll certainly give this letter to him."

"Thanks." Noel then raised his finger. "That's right. We encountered a bandit group that utilized demons when they attacked."

"Huh? Bandits using demons? Do you know what you're talking about? You need a good soldier to be able to handle a demon and you're saying that the bandits..." Shale's expression darkened, not believing what Noel said.

But Noel added, "I witnessed everything. And if you go to the village in our group mission and visit the women there. They will tell you the same thing."

Listening to this statement, Shale hesitated, thinking what Noel said might be true.

"I can testify it as well. I mean, the mission description alone is already telling you the same thing, but is it that hard to believe such a case?" Anna supported Noel's report.

"Yeah. The mission description is basically the people's perception and we don't know whether it's true or not. But if you have seen it with your eyes, I have no choice but to believe it." Shale scratched the back of his head. He also arrived at the same conclusion as Noel. "If the bandits could use the demons, they could make the villages look like they were under the demons' attack, not them before stealing everything after that. No one will know about it."

Chapter 125 Suspicion

"That's what I believe as well. This is the reason I tell you about it. I am sure that the letter about the message has arrived, right?"

"Yes. I still can't believe it, but I have made an investigation team. They're already heading there, so I guess we can confirm it." Shale nodded with a serious expression.

Even though Shale couldn't believe it, he still acted according to the procedure. He made sure that the investigation team was formed and sent them on this mission.

"I have reported it to the commander as well, but he wants me to take care of it." Shale let out a long sigh.

"I believe this matter is bigger than you think." Anna added. She knew how much the destruction this matter would cause, so she couldn't afford to let the same thing happen again. She said, "You need to have the commander act on this matter personally. I'm afraid that it's going to be a big problem for the Demon Banner Army because we'll be finding this kind of mission appearing sooner or later."

Anna wanted to prevent it by using the commander's authority, but Shale shook his head and asked, "Do you have any proof that can back up your words?"

"I... don't." Anna clicked her tongue as she didn't know how to convince Shale.

But this time, Noel was the one that supported her. "I do."

"Noel?" Anna widened her eyes, never expecting Noel to help her here. She thought that her words previously had worked on him.

Noel ignored her reaction and said, "I have a proof. I encountered another bandit group with that kind of situation. When I was about to interrogate their leader, someone killed him. At that time, I immediately fled the scene because I couldn't sense the killer. If I continued investigating this matter, I was afraid I would die, so I chose to report to you instead of risking my life since this way, my life would be more useful."

"!!!" Shale was surprised but his expression darkened as he asked again to confirm it. "You are not lying?"

Noel extended his right hand and said, "If you don't believe it, we can do it this way."

Looking at the Spirit Seal on the back of Noel's right palm meant he wanted him to use the Spirit Oath to make sure that he didn't falsify the information.

Due to this determination, Shale paused for a moment and said, "I understand. I'll bring this matter to the commander right away. Is there anything else that you want to report?"

"If you still don't have enough information, you can go to the Master Blacksmith called Roel. The people I saved from that bandit group was his children," Noel explained.

"Master Blacksmith?" Shale pinched the bridge of his nose before saying, "Alright. Do you have anything else? Like where did you find them?"

Shale took out a map around the fort and pointed at the location of their first group mission, which turned out to be the southeast of the fort. "This was the place of your group mission. Where did you encounter the bandit group?"

"North to them, near Astary Town. Around one day from that town, I think?"

Shale pointed at the rough location which was located on the east of the fort. But he soon realized something as he fell into deep thought. "This is..."

"Is there something wrong?" Noel asked.

Shale took out the mission catalog and opened it, finding another mission that seemed to be similar to their group mission. But the location was at the opposite direction. "This is the similar mission. And the place is in the west..."

"It's not possible to cover that kind of huge area unless..." Noel also understood why Shale had suspicion.

"Yeah. There are more people involved in this and most likely an organization. And if that's the case, there's no way they'll choose these spots unless they have a connection to each other." Shale pointed at

the map and circled it. "What if from this place, they continue to the south and eventually reach the west? Or they can go around the north..."

"What if they're doing both?" Noel asked, dropping the bomb.

"!!!" Shale sucked a cold breath as he couldn't refute that claim either. But if they did both ways, it meant that the fort would be surrounded with this problem. "Don't tell me... Encirclement?!"

"But what's their aim? The demons they can use is Low Level Demon. It's true that the bandits seemed to be invisible to the demons since the moment they released the demons, they weren't attacked. But do they think the Demon Banner Army will lose to this kind of threat?" Noel asked.

"Huh? They were invisible?"

"Yes. I didn't understand what was going on back then, but the demons immediately attacked other demons, ignoring them. Even when they were carried by them, they didn't go rampage." Noel nodded.

"That's it!" Shale pointed at Noel. "They want to create chaos. By using this kind of encirclement, there's no point in going to the fort anymore because they'll be attacked by those bandits.

"Merchants won't be around here and the villages will be attacked by them. It means there won't be any food or economic activity around here until we suppress them. But at that time, the damage will be catastrophic."

"Ah!" Anna suddenly came to a realization. She thought, 'So, that's how it is. I remembered that the fort had faced a famine due to this attack...'

Noel glanced at her while furrowing his eyebrows before saying, "This is just a guess, but I think the Supreme Devil Organization is behind this."

He told him the information that Anna provided at the time. Since it would be too suspicious for Anna to say it, he stepped up and informed Shale.

"Your reason?" Shale asked.

"The Supreme Devil Organization is worshiping the demons, right? Then we're their biggest threat." Noel explained.

"I see. That can be a reason too." Shale fell into deep thought. After a few minutes, he finally stood up and walked away. "Alright. I'll tell the commander about this and alert the fort. You two can go on a date somewhere... I mean, training! Bye!"

Chapter 126 Date Battle

Hearing what Shale said earlier, Anna couldn't help but make a playful smirk as she turned to Noel and asked, "Should we go on a date then? I mean, training."

If this was the normal Noel, he would certainly correct her again, implying that they were just going to train.

However, Noel actually answered her with a calm tone. "Sure."

"Huh?" Anna wasn't prepared for this kind of answer. She subconsciously took a step back, looking at Noel dumbfoundedly.

,m "Why are you so surprised when you are inviting me?" Noel frowned.

"No...yes!" Anna's mind went blank.

Even though he accepted it, Noel's sole purpose was to confirm whether what Anna said was true or not. If they walked around together for a while, Anna should slip out sooner or later. Hence, he could confirm that everything was a facade.

'I'm not going to let you lead me by the nose anymore.' Noel was determined to prove her words.

"What's wrong? Since you're the one asking me out, you should be leading. Where should we go?"

"That's... That's..." Anna looked left and right, trying to get some help or some time to think.

But Noel pressed her harder by walking away. "If you don't want then, you shouldn't say something like that."

"Wh-what?" Anna bit her lips and hurriedly caught up to him. Even though, she didn't know what to do, she should accompany him right now. She could come up with something on the way.

'What should I do? Even in my past life, I never experienced something like this.' Anna panicked.

But a scene in the past flashed in her mind.

Back then, she was exhausted. She stabbed her sword to the ground just to support her body.

While panting, she looked at Noel who was standing on top of the cliff.

Noel had a sad smile, but it wasn't due to his body covered in wounds.

With his body darkening due to the orange sun being the backlighting, his appearance looked even sadder. Noel's gaze felt like he had lost something important.

That appearance of his couldn't be forgotten because he also said, "Anna. You don't know anything."

"Just give up, Noel. Your body is already wounded. Even I'm exhausted right now, my current condition is enough to kill you. Surrender!"

Noel shook his head. "Surrender, huh. Living is worse than death, so why do I want to surrender? Instead, I prefer dying... After all, dying in your hands might not be that bad."

"Huh?" Anna was taken aback by that last statement. She was supposed to be Noel's nemesis, yet, the latter said otherwise.

As if Noel tried to annoy her again, he stuck his tongue out and said, "Just kidding."

"You—" Anna wanted to get angry, but she was too late, Noel had jumped off the cliff.

"I'll see you many more times in the future." Noel smiled as he fell.

"What?" Anna tried to grab him, but he was already far away. However, she also found a river underneath the cliff and Noel fell onto the water.

Noel was an extraordinary Spirit User, so it was clear that he wouldn't be dying by falling into the water. But Noel's wounds would make him bedridden for a long time.

"Kh. I want to jump, but my Spiritual Energy is not enough to protect my whole body. Am I going to kill him even if it means a part of my body is crushed?" Anna gritted her teeth and stomped the ground in frustration, giving up on the pursuit.

However, that image of Noel's sad smile always lingered in her mind.

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Remembering that scene, Anna couldn't help but think, 'Now that I think about it, despite Noel showing such an extreme hatred, he truly had changed her life. And that last sentence of his... what does it truly mean?'

Unfortunately, her thought was broken because Noel asked her, "So, where are we going?"

"A-ah!" Anna was startled, but she immediately said, "The Demon Forest!"

"Huh? Why would we go to that place?"

"There's something I want to show you... though, around the sunset."

"Then, what will we do to pass the time?" Noel squinted his eyes, judging her.

"That's..." Anna was thinking hard before eventually a good idea flashed in her mind. "We just strolled around the forest. I mean, we've been to the forest a few times, but each time, we're fighting against time, making us rush many things."

"This time, how about we slowly walk around and just enjoy the scenery? Even though it's a forest filled with demons, it's still a forest. Not like the demon can do any harm to us as long as it's not an Advanced Level Demon."

Noel furrowed his eyebrows. "Are you sure you want to waste my time of training with this idea?"

"!!!" Anna's body trembled for a moment. Noel was a training maniac. Although he wasn't a muscle brain, he truly trained whenever he had the chance.

Still, Anna could come up with an excuse. "Resting itself is also a form of training. You need to properly rest your muscle and allow them to heal themselves so that they can grow stronger."

"..." Noel paused for a moment. "Fine."

"Great." She smiled.

With Noel's agreement, they proceeded to walk to the gate.

But as expected of Noel, he grabbed Anna's shoulder and stopped her from leaving the gate.

"What are you doing?" Anna wanted to complain, but Noel had already left her. "Huh?"

She soon found him standing in front of a stall selling bread and returned with a bag of them.

Because of her inexperience, Anna forgot the fact that they were still early in the morning and they hadn't had any breakfast. Even if they could skip the meal, Noel wanted to make sure that they had enough energy to move around and kill demons if they tried to attack them.

Noel gave her some and said, "Here you go. This should be good for breakfast. You should cook for lunch."

Anna received the bread with a dumbfounded expression and saw Noel starting to eat the bread as if she didn't care about her expression.

Little did he know, inside that nonchalant expression, Noel was thinking, 'Hehe. In addition to your unpreparedness, this action will make you feel challenged because you haven't done anything even though you're the one asking me out. You'll surely show your true nature.'

However, what Anna did was completely the exact opposite what Noel expected.

She lowered her head, looked at the bread for a while, before taking a small bite. The bread wasn't particularly delicious, so Noel couldn't understand why she would blush.

'Huh?!'

Chapter 127 Point Of View

'Huh?!' Noel was shocked inwardly. 'Why would your face redden? No, you should be ashamed, right? That's right, your face redden because you feel ashamed because of your unpreparedness, right?'

Noel tried his best to deny everything he had seen.

Anna's thought was completely the exact opposite of his thought.

Anna truly felt a huge contrast from Noel today. Usually, Noel would always complain or trick her, making her put up her guard the whole time. But this time, she could see the caring Noel.

Due to the fact that Noel only directed that care to other people, she never felt what it meant to be cared by Noel.

Despite his hatred, he never directed that hatred toward innocent people. That itself was already a good feat. And this time, her enemy showed his caring side like this. Even she would be taken out by surprise.

After taking one bite, Anna turned to him with a big genuine smile on her face. "Thank you, Noel."

Just like Anna, Noel hadn't prepared himself for this smile. This was the first time Anna was this happy, so he could feel the genuine emotion behind it. At the same time, Anna was a beautiful woman since she was known to be one of the most beautiful women in the kingdom. That smile of hers could melt anyone's heart.

In that instant, Noel realized that he had lost in this round.

"Tsk." Noel clicked his tongue and looked away, frustrated. His movement was a bit stiff afterwards, but Noel shifted their attention to his words. "So, are we going to buy some spices?"

"Just the salt. I can do the rest with the herbs and meat." Anna explained. "That is if you don't mind eating on top of a leaf."

"Even if it's raw, I'll still eat it." Noel shrugged.

"Hehe, wait a bit then. I'll go to that shop to buy salt." Anna chuckled and pointed at the store next to the gate. It was an item store that was used to buy something they forgot to bring before leaving the gate. So, there was a wide variety of items.

Still, Anna only brought a small bag of salt for them to use it later.

"Let's go, shall we?" Anna smiled.

"Yeah." Noel took the time she was inside the store to calm his heart and finally returned to his nonchalant attitude.

When they walked out of the fort and arrived at the plain that separated them from the fort, Noel felt something different this time.

'Now that I think about it... this is my first time relaxing. I only used this plain to go to the Demon Forest, so I didn't realize it until now that...' Noel looked around. The slightly tall grasses that made the scenery look a bit cooler. The wind blowing the grasses soothed their mind. And the firm dirt road that had been slightly tilted to the inside due to many people and carriages passing over this area. This was the first time Noel saw everything a bit clearly and it felt, "...so beautiful."

Noel subconsciously muttered it out of his mind.

Anna's heart skipped a beat. She didn't know why but her body slightly warmed up.

'Did Noel just praise me?' Anna's heart was pumping like crazy as she glanced at Noel to check his expression.

However, Noel's eyes were locked on the environment. He never took his eyes off them, so that praise earlier was actually directed to the plain, not her.

Anna had her head low, disappointed. But soon she shook her head and thought, 'Why was I disappointed in the first place?'

,m Unfortunately for her, from that point on, Noel's eyes were locked to the scenery. Even when they entered the forest, Noel kept looking at the environment.

This was his first time seeing the world with such a relaxed emotion after all. His point of view had changed.

There were many things that the world could offer to him. But because in his mind, there was only training and revenge, he always looked at the front without caring about anything around him.

So, this was the first time he realized that the wind blowing the grasses could be so soothing, the tranquility of the forest could calm his heart, and the cool temperature of the forest made his body feel relaxed.

He learned so much things just by looking at the world from a different point of view.

Eventually, they stopped somewhere so that Anna could cook.

Since they couldn't move anywhere, Noel's mind had finally returned. He remembered his objective. By annoying Anna, he could see her reaction that would reflect her true nature.

Hence, the first thing Noel did when waiting for the food was to stare at her.

Stare!

"..." Anna could maintain her poker face for a while, but she felt slightly disturbed after a long time. "Can you direct your gaze elsewhere?"

"Why?" Noel smirked, showing his unwillingness.

Still, Anna was preparing food, so her ultimate weapon was still here. She replied, "If you don't look elsewhere, there's no food for you."

"I see. That's your intention. By asking me out here, you want to starve me out. I perfectly understand your intention now." Noel nodded in understanding as if he had seen her true nature. "At least, I know that I shouldn't trust you in the future.

Even Anna was speechless and corrected herself. "Wait, no! I don't mean it that way! You should know that I never let you starve whenever I cooked!"

Noel returned his gaze again with a smug as if showing that he had won.

Anna's eyebrows twitched, but she also had another comeback. She said calmly, "Though, you staring at me like this... doesn't it look like you're mesmerized by me? Like a husband watching his wife cook?"

But before she realized it, Noel had already turned his head around as if to prove that it wasn't the case.

"What the..." Anna subconsciously bit her lips, thinking, 'I don't know why but I'm more annoyed with this than the food... I somehow want to hit him right now.'

Chapter 128 Moon Blessing

After having food, they walked around the forest together. There were some demons coming to them, but they skillfully killed them. Those Low Level Demons didn't even last more than two rounds before they died.

Noel hadn't shown the result of his fight since he planned to take on Anna by surprise. At the same time, he started wondering whether to kill Anna right away.

On the one hand, he didn't have enough information to prove Anna was the one that ordered the killing of his parents. There was a possibility of her being framed by others to take the blame. On the other hand, he had to kill everyone involved in that execution. Whether it was the royal family or the Stargaze Marquis Family.

So, Noel hesitated to do it.

'Should I kill her or wait until the investigation? But I can't really investigate anything right now. Only after I become a full-fledged knight of the Demon Banner Army that I can start investigating this matter. But it'll only be one year later... Is there truly nothing I can do right now?' Noel contemplated for a moment.

Soon, a place flashed in his mind.

'That's right. There is that place in the neighboring kingdom. My father visited them every year, so their relationship should be quite good. They might know something about my father. Still, the journey will take at least a month, two months for the return trip.'

'We're currently two months in. And in the eighth month, I need to go to the Sword Saint Tomb... If that's the case...' Noel tried to get a good formula for his schedule, not wanting to waste too much time.

Noel finally opened his mouth. "Say, we're going to go to the ruin six months after this, right?"

"Yes. That's the best time to visit them."

"If that's the case, how about using the next four months to train ourselves?" Noel asked her opinions. Four months weren't a short amount of time. Even right now, they didn't have four months filled with training since there were missions from time to time. So, asking her for four months off was quite a challenging feat.

Anna fell silent and thought, 'Noel was going to the Sword Saint Tomb during that time, so I can't change it... Then, how about making a preparation for the Sword Saint Tomb? I once visited the Moon Temple after helping them.'

'I have promised that I won't take everything Noel had in the past for granted, so I think this is a perfect opportunity to repay it. If we go to the Moon Temple, we'll be blessed by the moon itself and gain the Spirit Technique that allows us to see through the dark. This will be extremely useful during the night or in the dark place.'

After some consideration, Anna opened her mouth. "Let's go to the Moon Temple in those four months."

"..." Noel narrowed his eyes because he didn't expect that Anna would come up with this idea. "Do you know what you're talking about? The Moon Temple is known to be a temple of sadness, you know?"

"Do you know the reason why the Moon Temple is known to be a temple of sadness?"

"No." Noel shook his head.

"That's because they're always building their temple in a place where there's sadness... like famine, drought, or whatever. Whenever there's a place experiencing such an event that causes the people to lose hope, they'll always appear.

"That's why they're known to be the temple of sadness. It's because they take their sadness head-on and try to make things better. Some succeed, some fail..."

"Ah!" Noel instantly understood the meaning behind that sadness. "So, that's how it is."

"I am planning to go to the Moon Temple to help them and gain their blessing. The blessing of the moon... It is a kind of Spirit Technique that allows us to see through the dark. This will be extremely useful for our exploration, no?" Anna asked.

"That's true." Noel thought for a moment. "But how do we help them? Money?"

"Nope. Each temple has a different problem. If we help five temple in solving their problems, we can get the blessing." Anna paused and recalled the map. "How about going to the moon temple located in Excar City? That place should be under Baron Excar."

Suddenly, Noel got the notification from Ardagan.

[Mission: Help the Saintess of the Moon Temple in Argali Town]

[Description: The Saintess is facing a huge problem of her life. Go and save her within 75 days.]

[Reward: Moon Blessing and 21 SP]

[Penalty: Regret.]

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes in shock because this was the first time Ardagan gave him a mission with such reward.

On the one hand, he hesitated to accept it because the reward reflected the difficulty of the mission. On the other hand, the first reward came from the temple, not Ardagan. So, he thought the only reward was just the 21 SP, meaning the difficulty wasn't that high.

Noel thought for a moment and asked, "Say, if we help the Saintess herself, can we get the blessing in one go?"

"The Saintess?" Anna didn't expect that Noel would mention her. She explained, "Yes, we can. But the Saintess is always helping where she deems to be the hardest problem, so I don't think you want to go there."

'Saintess? You serious?' Anna added inwardly, 'The Saintess of the Moon Temple once defected from the Moon Temple because she was possessed by the demon. She was known to be the greatest Saintess of all time, so her falling to that path was a huge blow to the Moon Temple. The reason I could get the Moon Blessing in my previous life because I had to slay the Saintess... But that event should be two years later.'

'Does he have some information? Does the Demon possess her right now and because she's a good person with strength and mental fortitude that the demon has a hard time controlling her? That's why he wants us to go there to help the Saintess? Then, how in the world he has that information? Noel's secret is deeper than I imagine... Well, in his perspective, I'm the same I guess... Since I have the memory of what will happen in the future. I hope that I haven't changed so much history...'

"Alright. Let's go to Argali Town." Noel nodded with a serious expression. "We'll help the Saintess and get the Moon Blessing immediately."

Chapter 129 Lowering Their Pride

"Well, if you have made the decision, I don't have any objection, but I need to make sure that you're aware of the danger." Anna squinted her eyes, pressuring Noel to rethink about his decision. If he still agreed to this plan, she would follow his decision.

"Yes." Noel nodded without hesitation. "Either way, I'm dead. Getting killed by you or dying in a mission is basically the same."

"..." Anna fell silent because she recalled that moment when Noel thought that dying by her hand wasn't that bad at all. It was clearly different from what Noel thought right now.

'Did something happen to Noel at that time? It felt like he wanted to kill me but not wanted to kill me at the same time. And me killing him was a kind of relief to him...' Anna noticed why Noel always said she was ignorant. 'I see. It seems that I truly don't know anything. Not only Noel, but I should also investigate the incidents too. After all, it's weird that my father has agreed to the royal family to execute his parents but exile Noel alone. And there is the family heirloom which can be seen to be a good sharp sword.

'My own family is hiding something about Noel... Is he that important?' Anna's expression darkened.

"What's wrong? Do you not want it that much?" Noel narrowed his eyes. "If you don't, then I can go there alone."

"No, that's not what I mean..." Anna shook her head hurriedly. "I don't have any problem with your decision since you have thought it through. In that case, when are you planning to go?"

"Hmm, how far is Argali Town?" Noel asked.

"..." Anna's eyebrows twitched as she was screaming inwardly, 'You can call the town's name but don't know the location? Are you serious? How in the world you know the Saintess' location without even having any kind of information?'

Anna took a while to sort out her breath and said, "Argali Town is in Earldom... Who is it again? Earl Hawkins? Either way, the distance from this place to the Earldom is around two weeks... That is because you love running."

Noel was speechless and said, "We can go with horse for this one."

"Huh?" Anna was startled and looked at Noel dumbfoundedly as if someone was impersonating him.

"Why are you looking at me as if I am a fake?" Noel held back his anger and said, "Well, we'll be training for one month before going to that town..."

"Training?" Anna suddenly smirked and teased him. "Oh, can you ride a horse? You were a lazy person in the past, right? You shouldn't have learned how to ride a horse, right?"

"Is that a problem?" Noel narrowed his eyes, annoyed. "I'll learn it in one month, alright?"

"Fine, fine. I won't be teasing you. In fact, I can teach you. I mean, we both are still 15 years old, so our body should be able to sit on a saddle together. I can make you learn horse riding in a week." Anna smirked.

Noel was taken aback by this idea. On the one hand, it was truly the best way to practice horse riding. On the other hand, he hated it so much since he didn't want to be indebted to Anna.

The question would be whether he would lower his pride in order to get the best result or kept his pride but stopped his progress for a while.

After two minutes, Noel had come to a decision. Even Anna dropped her jaw to the ground when Noel suddenly lowered his head to her.

"Please teach me horse riding." Noel put down his pride for the first time. With so much hatred buried in his heart, this wasn't an easy thing to accomplish.

Anna froze because she had an idea how much Noel hated her. Even though that hatred had been diminished a little, it was still too much for him to bow. And she felt the heaviness of this action.

Anna's expression turned solemn and said, "I understand. I'll make sure you can ride a horse within a week."

After getting Anna's agreement, Noel finally raised his head.

Anna could see that Noel was clenching his fists so hard that his nails almost pierced his palms. This was Noel's resolve.

Anna felt a bit moved for his determination and decided to make him forget the embarrassment.

She grabbed his hands and said, "Follow me."

"Huh?" Noel couldn't understand what Anna was doing. He didn't realize that Anna took his confusion to gradually stop him from hurting himself and even held his hand to make sure that he couldn't bleed his palm.

After that, she smiled and ran, dragging him to another place. "I said follow me!"

"W-wai—!" Noel couldn't finish his sentence as he already started running because Anna had been dragging him.

They ran through the forest, avoided all the trees in the way, and kept running.

On the way, Noel looked at their hands together and realized that Anna's hand was actually smooth despite so much hard work she put in swinging her sword. It seemed that she had been taking care of her skin despite all that hard work. Yes, he realized that he wasn't the only one doing his hardest.

Eventually, they came out of the forest and reached a cliff. Noel panicked because he thought Anna planned to jump off the cliff, but before he could warn him, Anna stopped.

"Tsk. I want to show you this during the sunset but I guess this is fine too." Anna smiled and spread her hands while showing the scenery on top of the cliff.

Noel, for the first time, saw everything in the horizon. The land was covered by trees, the meandering rivers, the small lake where they always camped, and the sun that illuminated the forest. It felt so vast and beautiful.

Looking at them from on top of the cliff somehow made his heart beat rapidly from excitement as if the scenery was telling him that there were many things to explore in the world. That was right, the world had many different things that could be explored. Different kingdoms had different cultures and different ways of living, and if he couldn't solve a certain problem in his territory, other places might have the solution to that problem.

His heart was telling him to explore the world to know as much as he could so that he could know what to do when he regained his territory.

"This is..." Noel was entranced by the beauty of the nature. But Anna dropped another bomb because Anna finally bowed to him for the first time.

"Noel, I'm sorry."

Chapter 130 Dilemma

"Noel, I'm sorry."

"Eh?" Noel widened his eyes in shock.

This was what Anna had been wanting to say this whole time. Whenever she had the opportunity to say this, Noel would find an excuse to leave her or shut her up. But this time, Noel was too confused to do the usual action, allowing her to finally say this one word.

'Sorry.' After Anna changed for the better, she hadn't apologized for a single time to Noel. And this apology was directed to her past action.

Anna closed her eyes and explained, "Even though when I brought the topic to my father, I realized that my father and the royal family had decided on your family's outcome, there's no denying that I asked my father to have your entire family get executed.

"At first, I thought that you should be eliminated because your family might rise again and take revenge. Even I don't understand why my father and the royal family decided to spare your life, but..."

"After knowing you and observing you up close, I know that you didn't deserve any of that. Your light helped other people and will surely continue helping others...

"So, I owe you an apology." While still holding her head low, she took a deep breath and said with everything in her heart. "Noel, I'm sorry."

Noel froze. He was already aware that Anna had changed. So, he had been avoiding her to make sure that his determination to take revenge didn't falter. But to think that Anna took this opportunity to finally apologize to him, it gave complicated feelings to Noel's heart.

On the one hand, Noel thought to himself.

'If a murderer got caught and sentenced to twenty years in prison, how do people react to this man? What if the murderer has actually changed himself for the better and get prepared to turn over a new leaf? He has admitted his mistakes and wants to atone his sins for the rest of his life by becoming a good person.

'Will others accept him? Or will others stay away from him? If it's the former, can others actually put down their grudge to this person? Can they provide him with a job?

'What if they can't accept him back? He won't be able to get any job and even another person in his life? What does he needs to do if he wants to eat? Stealing? Then, the murderer will become a thief. Even though he wants to become a good person, the other forces him to become a bad guy once again.'

With this kind of thought, Noel hesitated to see whether he could forgive Anna or not.

Just like the murderer, Anna might truly want to become a genuinely good person that would help him in the future to atone her sins. If he couldn't put his grudge down and make her suffer, wouldn't it mean he was the one who forced her to fall into that path once again?

The vicious cycle would continue until one of them died.

On the other hand, Noel still couldn't accept this apology because the grudge in his heart was still too strong. What the Stargaze Family and the Royal Family had done were simply too much for him. There was no way he could forgive them... at least for a long time.

Noel bit his lips because he was in a dilemma. He was stressed because he couldn't decide.

Noel gritted his teeth and rushed to her, choking her neck.

"Kh." Anna didn't put any resistance. Her eyebrows were twitching because she was enduring the pain. Gritting her teeth, she only looked at Noel helplessly.

"If you have done something like that, why do you even need to apologize? Don't apologize!" Noel shouted as his hand started shaking. The grip became weaker as time passed. Noel added inwardly, 'If you don't apologize, it'll make my job easier. I know that I need to kill you. Why do you need to change?'

"I need to apologize to you. And I'll do it no matter what it takes." Anna answered. She was gasping for air.

"If you want to atone for your sins, then kill yourself!" Noel shouted back, not accepting that apology.

"I'm sorry, but I can't die here." Anna gritted her teeth. "I still have many things to do, including atoning that sin. By continuing to live, I can do much more to atone that sin."

Noel gritted his teeth. He knew that giving a person chance to atone that sin was more reasonable because that person could do much more by giving kindness to other people. And that kindness could give birth to another kindness.

'Why would you forgive the ones who killed your parents?'

'You should kill them like how they killed your parents and destroyed your family.'

'The only reason you are suffering like this is them!'

'You are a fool.'

The hatred kept crawling back into his heart. But Noel had changed in the past few months he was here. The kindness to other people had also grown to him, so those thoughts also flashed in his mind.

'If you don't give her the chance, how do you know she hasn't changed?'

'If you don't give her the chance to atone her sin, she won't be able to change.'

'You are a kind person.'

Noel's mind was in a mess because of all these thoughts. He tried to shake it off but to no avail.

Ultimately, Noel let her neck go and walked away without saying anything. It was clear that he had yet to be prepared to give the answer to her apology.

Anna could only look at his back while biting her lips.

Noel was walking through the forest as the good and evil thoughts kept ringing in his mind.

'You fool, you have to kill her, destroy her family, and make her fall into despair.'

'The world will change depending on how you see it. Do you want to live in a world where kindness and forgiveness are considered a weakness? You surely don't.'

Noel gasped for air as he used the tree next to him to support his body. He slammed his fist to the tree while gritting his teeth. "Damn it."