

Strongest 71

Chapter 71: Reaching A Compromise

Isaac and Ian used their short swords to cut the vegetation to create a path. They were paying extra attention to their surroundings as they moved with caution.

Est had a frown on his face as he walked in the rear of their formation. They had already been walking for an hour, and they still hadn't encountered a living beast within the Dark Forest. He couldn't even hear the sounds of birds or the buzzing of the insects.

The forest seemed to be devoid of life, but it only made him more wary.

Suddenly, he heard some snapping noises around them. Isaac and Ian immediately rushed to his side and formed a protective perimeter.

It was at that moment when something sprouted out of the ground and grabbed hold of Isaac's ankle. The boy immediately looked down and saw a hand made up of bones holding his ankle in a firm grip.

Ian immediately stomped on the hand, crushing it to pieces and freeing his twin in the process. To his dismay, more hands sprang up from the ground and latched unto them.

"Hah!" Est, Ian, and Isaac released a shout and a powerful shockwave blew the skeleton arms off their bodies.

"Climb the tree, hurry!" Est ordered.

The three children hurriedly ran towards the nearest tree and climbed as high as they could. Not long after their climb, the ground started to shake.

"An earthquake?" Isaac asked.

"No," Est replied. "This is not an earthquake."

"It's something worse," Ian's face paled as he watched hundreds of skeleton warriors rise up from the ground. Some of them were wearing light armors and carrying steel weapons in their hands.

The sounds of bones snapping reverberated in the forest as more Skeletons rose up from the ground. The forest that was once devoid of life was now teeming with the undead.

William clicked his tongue as he watched the event that appeared in front of his eyes. He was currently on top of a tree and watching the three children from afar. Due to his skill Eagle Eyes and Vulture Eyes, he was able to see up to 1,100 meters in front of him.

Eagles Eyes (5 / 5)

(Passive)

-- Able to see farther than regular eyesight.

-- Increase Vision +100 Meters

-- Dexterity +10

Vulture Eyes (5 / 5)

(10 Mana Points)

-- Lock on to your target from a great distance.

-- Increase vision +1000 meters.

-- Skill Duration: 20 minutes.

He could clearly see over a thousand skeletons encircling the tree where the three children were perched. The bad news was that the number of skeletons was still rising at an alarming rate.

'Should I help them?' William thought. Although he couldn't fight off the skeletons, he could easily help Est and the twins to break free from the encirclement.

While William was still pondering on what to do, Est and the twins had already made their move.

'Um? Why are they... oh fck! The bastards are headed in my direction!' William cursed internally. 'Oh sh*t! The skeletons are also headed in my direction!'

William's eyes widened in shock when he saw the sudden turn of events. His eyes unconsciously darted to Ian's no-good face. The red-head boy could see the devilish smirk plastered on the hateful boy's face which made his liver itch.

'I'm itching to beat the crap out of this bastard,' William gnashed his teeth as he watched the three children jump from tree to tree while heading in his direction.

Their movements were quite fast and, within a minute, they landed on the tree opposite of William's.

William ignored the three children and focused his attention on the skeleton army. He gauged that it would still take the skeleton army fifteen minutes to arrive at their location. That was more than enough time to have a chat.

"Fancy meeting you here," Ian said with a sneer. "What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?"

"Fancy meeting you here," William replied with contempt. "What's the matter? Did you come here to beg this Sir to help you?"

Ian's face darkened, but he couldn't find any words to refute William's claim. Earlier, he had sneakily used his ability to mark William by using his anger as a medium. As long as his anger for the boy remained, he would be able to locate him wherever he was.

This was an ability he had awakened a few years ago. It was an ability meant to track his enemies, giving them no place to escape his pursuit. Never in his wildest dreams did he think that he would have to use his ability to seek the help of the person whom he hated the most.

William leaned against the tree bark in a carefree manner. He was the one who had the advantage in this negotiation and he would be a fool to not use it to his advantage.

An internal struggle was currently happening inside Est's mind. Although they did manage to escape the skeleton's pursuit, it was only a matter of time before they caught up to them. The burst of power they had displayed a while ago had a time limit and they couldn't keep their Sword Aura active for very long.

Even now, they only had five more minutes before it lost its effect. Est knew that with every minute that passed, the danger they would face would grow exponentially.

With a sigh of resignation, he looked at the carefree shepherd in front of him and admitted defeat. If he wanted to succeed then he had no choice but to compromise. It was at that moment when he remembered the Goddess' words back in the temple.

"I only look at the results, Est. not the process."

For the first time in his life, Est was forced to take a step back and swallow his pride. He even had to compromise and lower his head to someone who was not his equal. Since he had made his decision, he no longer hesitated and took the initiative to ask for William's help.

"I agree with your condition," Est said. "Please, lend us your strength. I need to clear this quest no matter what. The Fate of the entire..."

A hand covered Est's lips as Isaac stood beside him.

"I'm sorry, Young Master," Isaac whispered. "Please forgive me for my transgression, but we can't let anyone know about our mission. This was the warning that the oracle gave us before we left the capital."

Est's eyes widened in shock as he realized that he almost told William the reason for undergoing the trial. The sudden attack of the skeletons had clouded his mind and made him lose a bit of his composure.

After taking a few deep breaths to compose himself, he tapped Isaac's hands to assure him that he was now in control of his emotions.

Isaac removed his hand from Est's lips and bowed his head in apology.

"You are not at fault," Est said as he addressed Isaac. "I promise that I will be more careful in the future."

"As long as the Young Master understands, this servant is willing to be punished."

"There will be no punishment. Just focus on the task at hand."

"Yes, Young Master!"

William watched the exchange with an amused expression. He didn't really want to pry, and he was really not interested in knowing more about their mission. All he cared about was the completion of the trial so his own mission would be completed.

"Let's go," William ordered as he jumped towards another tree.

The three children followed behind him and they returned to the outskirts of the forest where Ella and the rest of the goats were waiting for them.

It might have taken some time, but William had finally accomplished his goal to take command of this party. Even the annoying Ian kept his mouth shut and simply followed behind him.

Half an hour later, a herd of goats darted across the forest floor. The skeleton army had been long left behind in their dust. William kept his attention on the map as he gave minute orders to the goats.

Est, Isaac, and Ian were currently riding Aslan, Chronos, and Echo. After careful consideration, William decided to conserve the three children's fighting strength. This would help them deal with any unexpected surprises that they might meet along the way.

"Stop!" William ordered and the goats immediately stopped in their tracks.

They were only two thousand meters away from the golden blinking dot on the map, but they couldn't advance any further.

Regardless of what path they chose, they would be forced to fight with one of the five purple dots guarding each of the five entrances that led to their destination. William had already used his ability to look ahead of them and found no other way forward, except for a direct confrontation.

Chapter 72: Challenge Of Courage [Part 1]

A giant purple orb of light blocked the only path leading to the center of the forest.

William had tried to find other routes, but a powerful barrier blocked their way. After repeated tries, it dawned on them that the only way to advance was to confront the purple orb that was blocking their path.

"Prepare for battle," William ordered as he raised his staff.

Immediately after his announcement, a notification appeared in front of his eyes.

< Ding! >

< Are you going to participate in the Challenge of Courage? >

< Yes / No >

William took a deep breath before choosing Yes.

After choosing his answer, the giant purple orb in front of them expanded. It engulfed William, Ella, Est, Ian, and Isaac along with the rest of the goats. A few seconds later, they found themselves on what seemed to be an open plain.

Nothing could be seen for miles, except for the vast grassland. However, instead of calming the children, it only made them raise their guards even more. As they eyed their surroundings, William noticed that his herd was feeling restless.

The ears of the goats would perk up every now and then as if they were picking up sounds that the humans couldn't hear.

Suddenly, Ella broke away from the formation and charged at something. Since William was mounted on her back, he had no choice but to be dragged along with her.

"Meeeeeeh!" Ella bleated. "Meeeeeeh!"

"Something is in front of us?" William asked.

"Meeeeeeh!" Ella answered. "Meeeeeeh!"

"Monsters? And there is more than one of them?" William looked around anxiously, but he couldn't see anything.

"Meeeeeeeh!" Ella stomped her front hooves on the ground and delivered a powerful kick behind her.

A loud shriek was heard as something that resembled a lizard, flew several meters off the ground due to Ella's powerful kick.

William observed the monster in front of him as it angrily hissed at Ella after standing up.

The monster, that looked like a cross between a chameleon and a monitor lizard, was at least six meters long. Its body was covered in dark green scales, and its blood-red eyes were currently looking at Ella with hatred. Its webbed-feet had four razor sharp claws and they glinted in the sunlight like a sharp blade.

The red-head boy had no idea what it was, so he immediately used his appraisal skill to get a better understanding of an enemy that he was seeing for the first time in his life.

< Gasmirage >

-- Chameleon Type Beast

-- Threat Level C

-- Known as the hidden killer of the grasslands. This chameleon, who lives in the Eastern Plains of the Southern Continent, is known for its lethal ambushes.

-- It's main weapon is its long tongue that extends up to 30 meters and can easily shatter a boulder in one strike.

-- During battle, it coats its claws with poison that is potent enough to kill a man within five minutes.

-- It's special ability is Stealth

(A/N: The rankings for the threat levels are E, D, C, B, A, S, SS, SSR, and Calamity. Centennial Beasts are Rank S, Millennial Beasts are rank SS, and Myriad Beasts are ranked as SSR. Calamity classes are those beasts who are half-a-step away or have already stepped on the ranks of Demigods.)

As William absorbed the information in his head, he noticed that the Gasmirage's front right-leg was bent at an unnatural angle. It seemed that it was the part of its body that received the full brunt of Ella's kick.

The monster hissed and its long tongue shot out towards William and Ella like a deadly whip.

Ella evaded the attack with ease. However, a six-meter long gash, that was a meter deep, appeared in the ground that they were standing at just a few seconds ago. It showed William just how powerful the attack was and it made him very wary of the Gasmirage's battle prowess.

Seeing that it failed to kill its targets, the pissed-off Gasmirage's tongue lashed out a barrage of attacks in rapid succession.

Even with Ella's agility, she was having trouble dodging the consecutive blows of the tongue that seemed to have a life of its own.

"Behind you!"

William heard Est's warning, and immediately turned his head to look at his back. There he saw four more lethal tongues that were currently heading in their direction.

"Ice Wall!"

Four layers of Ice Wall appeared behind William's back as he attempted to shield himself and Ella from the unexpected sneak attack. The four tongues that were powerful enough to break boulders shattered three layers of the Ice Wall before stopping at the fourth one.

"Mama!"

"Meeeeeh!"

Ella quickly took that opportunity to make her escape and return to where Est and the others were. Surprisingly, the monsters didn't make any follow up attacks on William and Ella as they retreated towards their group.

The injured Gasmirage flicked its tongue before using its stealth ability. It was not in a hurry to have its revenge because its comrades were slowly forming a tight encirclement in order to trap their prey.

Also, their leader was already headed in their direction. Once it arrived, their enemy's chances of winning was nil.

"What are we going to do?" Est asked as he warily looked around their surroundings. "We can't fight what we can't see."

"What kind of monster was it?" Isaac asked. "I've never heard or seen something like this before."

"It's name is Gasmirage. Threat Level C," William explained. "It's main weapon is its tongue that extends up to thirty meters. Ah, its claws also contain poison that can paralyze its prey. Make sure to avoid it at all costs."

"Do you know their weakness?" Ian asked. "Also, how did you know about this creature?"

"My master is a walking monster encyclopedia," William lied with a straight face. "I heard her talking about this monster in passing. This monster thrives within the Eastern Plains of the Southern Continent. As for their weakness, they don't have any."

"Monster Encyclopedia?" Est asked. "What's that?"

"... In short, she knows a lot about monsters," William answered in an awkward manner.

"I see." Est nodded his head. Although he had a feeling that William wasn't telling him the truth, he knew that now was not the time to ask such questions. "Do you have a plan in mind?"

Since he had already recognized him as the leader of the party, he decided to observe whether he really had the capabilities to lead them.

"There is a way, but..." William looked at the three children with reluctance. "You might not like it."

"What do you mean that we might not like it?" Ian asked in a challenging tone.

William didn't answer Ian's question. Instead, he glanced at the grasslands around them. If possible, he didn't want to use this ability because his Master had repeatedly warned him not to use it in public.

"Remember this, William," Celine said with a serious expression. "No matter how good or noble your intentions are, human prejudice is something that you must consider when using this power. Only use it as a last resort."

While he was still having an internal debate whether he should use his power or not, the ground started to shake. A hulking giant that was at least forty-meters tall appeared in their vision. It had red skin and a single horn jutted out of its head. In its hand was a giant black steel hammer that was as dark as the night.

The most notable feature of this monster was its single, large, red-eye that seemed to pierce through their souls.

The hairs on William's neck stood on end as he gazed upon the towering threat in front of him. The feeling that the monster gave him was similar to the Strathmore Thunder Horned Wolf and Golden-Scaled Crocodile that he had faced many months ago.

It was a presence that William could never hope to defeat with his current level of power.

Chapter 73: Challenge Of Courage [Part 2]

< Terrorhand >

-- Giant Race

-- Threat Level SS (Millennial Beast)

-- Long ago, it was said that a race of Cyclops broke free from the control of the Gods and started to slaughter everything in existence. They had incredible strength that was able to overpower most of the other giant races, which allowed them to roam unhindered for many years.

-- The single eye on their head is able to shoot out a concentrated beam of light that is able to destroy fortress walls.

-- They are able to control the Metal Element to a certain extent, which gives them the ability to make their bodies as hard as steel.

-- They are weak against the Holy Element

Instead of hope, William found despair as he read the information of Terrorhand. Although it had a weakness, he didn't have any Job Classes in his possession with the Holy Element.

His only hope was his companions so he decided to ask if any of them could wield the power to slay the Millennial Beast in front of them.

"The name of this monster is Terrorhand," William said as he tried to suppress the despair in his voice. "It is a Millennial Beast and its only weakness is the Holy Element. Do any of you possess the Holy Element?"

Isaac and Ian shook their heads before looking at their Young Master.

Est bit his lip before reluctantly nodding his head, "I don't have the power to use Holy Spells, but I do have a weapon that is imbued by the Holy Element."

The handsome boy waved his hand and a sword appeared in front of him. The plain-looking sword didn't look special. In fact, it looked so normal that William was finding it hard to believe that it was imbued with the Holy Element.

Because of his doubts, he decided to use his appraisal skill on the sword.

< Rhapsody - the Sword of Eternal Glory >

-- The sword that was wielded by the Hero Altera who protected the humans during the War of the Darkness.

-- Its power will depend upon the belief of its user. The stronger their belief, the more powerful the sword becomes.

-- Imbued with the Holy Element.

-- This sword is indestructible.

-- Can only be wielded by the devout followers of the Goddess Astrid.

William had a complicated look on his face as he read the information of the sword. Although the word "indestructible" and "imbued with the Holy Element" caught his eye, he was not feeling optimistic about their chances.

Aside from Terrorhand, there were six Gasmirages that were currently hiding using their stealth ability. William's map had been disabled, so he couldn't detect their locations. With a Millennial Beast and six invisible threats, William felt that this challenge was simply impossible to clear.

'I guess I have no choice,' William thought as he clenched his fist. This was a battle of life and death, so he couldn't be choosy with the method that was available to him.

Since it was impossible for him to beat the Terrorhand, he would devote himself to the supporting role to ensure that Est would be able to deliver the finishing blow to the Millennial Beast.

"Est, do you have the confidence to beat that thing?" William asked.

"No." Est shook his head. "Beating it is impossible."

He was feeling fainthearted, as he gripped the sword in his hand. When the Goddess mentioned that the trial would be hard, he thought that he would still be able to clear it using the sacred sword that the Goddess had passed unto him.

Est realized how naive he was.

Would a challenge that affected the Fate of a Kingdom be easy?

Of course not.

He was starting to despair. Fear was slowly gripping his heart and it was making it hard for him to breathe. Est felt his hand becoming clammy as cold sweat streamed down the side of his face.

As he was about to lose all hope, a pair of rough hands pressed down on his shoulders. Est raised his head and saw a pair of bright green eyes looking straight at him.

"No matter how strong the enemy is, a hero can't choose their opponent," William said in a firm manner. "This is why they are called Heroes."

"B-But, I'm not a hero," Est replied. "I was not born a hero."

"Heroes are not born, they are made," William stated. "A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles."

His confident voice pierced through Est's heart, warding off the fear that had almost rendered him paralyzed. Est could also feel warmth spreading from the palms of William's hands that were currently pressing on his shoulders.

"Pep talk is over," William said as he gazed at the adversary that he had to face. His fearless gaze awed Isaac and even Ian, who was always skeptical about William, had to admit that the boy's current expression looked cool.

"Bestow!"

"Ice Armor!"

"Leader of the Herd!"

William buffed his herd and applied Ice Armor to everyone including Est and the twins. He then asked the system to switch his sub class from the Ice Wizard to Dark Mage. right now, his Ice Magic could make little difference against their enemies, so he decided to get serious.

"William, the mithril collar that I gave you is special," Celine said as he patted the boy's head. "It has a special function that you can use once every five years. The price of using it is very steep.

However, if you have to choose between paying the price and dying, you should just pay the price and use it. After all, only when you are alive will you be able to accomplish your goals in life. The passcode to activate the collar's ability is..."

William touched the mithril collar on his neck and said...

"Rule Breaker..."

The collar glowed radiant blue as William felt a surge of power washing over his body. This was a forbidden spell that Celine had taught him to preserve his life before he left the village to visit the Holy Temple.

William didn't know that Celine had a premonition that William would encounter extreme danger during his journey. Because of this, she decided to impart the collar's secret in order to give him a chance of survival.

Tendrils of darkness snaked around William's body as the mithril collar executed its special function.

"T-This is Dark Magic?" Isaac gasped.

Ian's eyes widened in surprise before his face contorted to an expression of scorn.

Est stared at the red-head boy who was slowly being enveloped by darkness. To his surprise, he didn't feel any negative feelings towards William. In fact, Est was feeling a sense of peace and security coming from him.

Est understood that William was taking a risk by showing them this side of himself.

The sword in his hand pulsed with power and the words of the Goddess whispered in his ears.

"I only look at the results, Est. not the process."

'Lady Astrid, I think I now understand what you are trying to tell me,' Est thought as he firmly gripped the sword in his hand. 'Since you chose him to be my companion in this trial, I will also put my trust in him.'

< Ding! >

< The special function of the Collar of Wisteria had successfully activated! >

< Dark Mage Job Class have been forcefully upgraded to a Prestige Class >

< Acquired Prestige Class: Prince of Darkness >

< This Job Class is temporary and will only last for 2 hours. >

William sighed as the power inside his body stabilized. This was the first time he felt so powerful. Even so, he understood that he wouldn't be able to beat the Millennial Beast with his current strength.

However, beating a Centennial Beast poses no problem at all.

"Ethereal Vision!"

The corner of William's lips curled up into a smirk as the color of his eyes changed into a golden color. The hiding Gasmirages were laid bare before his eyes and he decided to deal with them first before fighting off against the Millennial Beast.

"Glorious Darkness, my redeemer, I need you now in my time of need. Guide my hand so I might conquer your foes. Punish the fools who have forgotten your name, and doom them all to eternal darkness!"

"Darkness Breaker!"

Over a dozen dark beams shot out from the sky and criss crossed across the plains. The hiding monsters let out a shriek as their world descended into darkness. Dark mists oozed out of their eyes as their bodies rolled on the ground in pain.

"Mama Ella, I'll leave the small fries to you," William ordered. "Est, and your two sidekicks, we are going to deal with the Terrorhand. I'm going to say this now, but none of you are allowed to die. Do I make myself clear?"

""Meeeeeeh!""

"Understood." Est nodded his head.

"Okay," Isaac replied with a determined expression.

"I'll follow you just this once." Ian decided to focus on the task at hand for the time being. Even though he disliked William, there was no way he would allow his Young Master to face the Cyclops on his own.

Chapter 74: Someone Who Was Favored By The Gods

With a mighty roar, the battle officially began. Terrorhand was indeed a very formidable opponent. None of the children's attacks were dealing any damage to its body.

Even Est's sword, Rhapsody, could at most open superficial wounds that would regenerate in an instant.

"Est! Jump back!" William ordered.

Este didn't think twice and immediately obeyed William's order. A black whip made up of dark magic wrapped up around his waist. With a tug of William's hand, Est was pulled away from his location just in time to evade the red beam of light that shot out from the Cyclop's eye.

The ground exploded sending burning rocks in all directions. Isaac and Ian, who were near the area of explosion, distanced themselves while evading the dangerous projectiles that were flying all around them.

"We can't continue like this," William said as Est landed beside him. "We need to end him in one strike."

"But how?" Est asked. Suddenly, a realization struck him. "Don't tell me..."

"Yes." William raised his head and looked at the Cyclops' only eye that was looking at them in disdain. "We need to attack its eye."

Saying it was one thing, but actually doing the deed was another. The Cyclops towered above them. Fighting it at close range was very risky as well because it specialized in close combat. If not for their fast mobility, and William playing the supporting role, all of them would have already died by now.

The ground trembled as the Cyclops used its hammer to smash Isaac and Ian who were distracting it with their long range magic attacks.

Isaac's Earth's Magic and Ian's Water Magic worked hand in hand to fire projectiles at the Cyclops's eye. These attacks didn't deal any damage to the eye itself, but it annoyed the giant to the point that it was focusing its attacks on them.

Ian jumped in the air and William's black whip pulled him out of the Cyclops' attack range. They were using hit and run tactics against the cyclops because it was very dangerous to fight it head on.

< Gained Exp Points: 10,000 >

William looked at the notification with a grim expression. He was buying enough time for Ella and his herd to kill the Gasmirages so that they could help them deal with the cyclops.

'Two more small fries remain,' William thought as he glanced at the pitiful Gasmirages who were currently being ganged up on by Ella and the goats. 'At most it will be over in two minutes.'

Two minutes might seem like a short time, but when fighting against a Millennial Beast, every second counted. William also knew that even if Ella and the rest of the goats were to complete their mission, the help they could offer against the Cyclops was very limited.

Aside from Ella, the other Angorian goats would not be able to do anything. William was not foolish enough to order them to engage against a Millennial Beast. That would be just like throwing eggs on a boulder.

He had already fired over a dozen < Void Arrow > at the Cyclops, but it remained indifferent to his dark magic. It seemed that the Cyclops race was immune to any type of magic that disabled their eyesight.

An angry roar reverberated in the plains as the Cyclops went on a rampage. It swung its hammer and hurled it towards William's and Est's location.

"Levitation," William said as he held Est's waist. He then flew up towards the sky to evade the incoming attack. Even though the attack missed, a powerful shockwave pushed the two children away as a dust cloud appeared on the area where the giant hammer fell.

"This is really hopeless," Est sighed as William and him landed on the ground. "We won't be able to kill it."

"Of course we can't kill it," William said with irritation. "But, we can beat it. Do not forget that the power of the sword is dependent on your belief. If your belief wavers then its power will also be affected."

"I know!" Est said through gritted teeth. He knows, but what of it? No matter how much he tried to hold unto his belief, he felt that he was an ant facing off against an elephant. For him to be able to remain standing was already a feat in itself, but the more he fought against the Cyclops, the more he realized that this trial was impossible to clear.

"This trial is called the Trial of Courage," William reminded him. He could tell that Est was getting frustrated and it would do him no good if he lost heart at this critical moment. "It means that this trial will measure our courage. Perhaps, killing the Cyclops is not the goal of this trial."

"Then what is the goal of this trial?"

"It is just a hunch, but I think that the goal is to have the courage to face off against an opponent that is impossible to defeat."

William had encountered similar scenarios like this in games. There were bosses and characters who were "invincible" and you will have to fight them in order to continue the story line. When the protagonist was about to be defeated, something would happen that would make the "invincible boss" run away or end the battle immediately.

'We just need to find out what the requirement is to trigger that event,' William thought as he racked his brains for any clues to tip the scales in their favor.

"The courage to face off against an opponent that you can't defeat," Est muttered. "Perhaps you're right. Maybe we just need to keep on fighting and show our bravery?"

"Yes," William replied. 'Gavin gave me this trial so there must be a way to clear it. He couldn't possibly have given me a trial that was impossible to clear in the first place, right?"

"Gavin, is there really a way for William to beat that cyclops?" Issei asked as he looked at the projection in front of him. "Isn't this trial too hard?"

"Exactly! Are you trying to bully William?" Lily scoffed. "He still hasn't used my divinity and you're already planning to get him killed? Are you out of your mind?"

Gavin cleared his throat as he looked at the struggling red-head boy in the projection. "Actually, this was not the trial I intended for William. Astrid came to look for me earlier and asked if my follower could help her own devout believer clear a trial she prepared for him."

"So this is all that tomboy's doing?" Lily pursed her lips. "Since it's her believer's problem, why must she drag others into it?"

"Because, this is the only way for my believer to complete this mission."

A beautiful lady wearing knight's armor appeared out of thin air. Her long black hair was tied in a ponytail and her eyes, that held unwavering determination, stared at the projection. She could tell that Est was on the verge of giving up.

Only the words of the red-headed boy beside him was preventing him from losing all hope.

"My believer is still too young and inexperienced," Astrid said in a clear and crisp tone. "It just so happened that I sensed someone with very strong divinity in his surroundings. After an in depth investigation, I found out that he was one of Gavin's followers."

Astrid paused and gave Lily and Issei a side-long glance. "I didn't expect to find out that the boy carried not only one, but three divinities in his body. This is the first time I've seen something like this, I'm very curious, why did the two of you favor another God's follower? I wonder what will happen when the other Gods learn about this secret?"

"That's none of your business!" Lily angrily placed her hands on her waist. "You think you can blackmail us? We're not breaking any rules!"

"Are you threatening us?" Issei narrowed his eyes. "I doubt that a righteous knight like you likes to gossip, but if you ever do, I'll make sure that all of your believers will become part of my followers' harem. I'm not afraid of you, nor any of the Gods. Mess with my Brother and I'll make sure that all of your believers would become my men's s*x slaves."

Astrid raised an eyebrow, but she didn't argue with Issei. Among the New Generation Gods, the Harem God was someone who held absolute power. All of his believers were very influential people in the worlds they resided in.

From the lowest commoners to the highest Kings and Emperors. His power couldn't be challenged and all the Gods were wary of him.

No one would want their devout followers to become mindless slaves who would wantonly fall into depravity.

"Be at peace," Astrid replied in a firm voice. "I have no intention of telling this to anyone."

Lily snorted and was about to nag the uptight tomboy when she saw Gavin shaking his head. She had no choice but to bottle up her retort inside her chest and return her attention to the ongoing battle at the plains.

"Well, so how will they be able to clear this mission?" David asked as he played with his beard. "Is this really just a trial of courage? How come I don't see any chances of winning?"

"This trial wasn't supposed to be cleared in the first place," Astrid admitted.

"Huh?! What did you say?!" Lily glared at the Goddess of Knights.

"Frankly, I don't want to honor the promise I made to the Hellan Kingdom." Astrid looked at her devout follower with a gentle gaze. "It's just that Est had made an oath to offer her everything to me in exchange for a chance. When I told her that I would give her a chance if she lived her life as a man forever, she didn't even bat an eye and said Yes.

"I thought that she was just joking, but when I really turned her, and the two girls serving under her into boys, it was then that I realized that she was serious. Since that was the case then I should at least give her a winning chance."

"But you said that this trial couldn't be cleared in the first place," Issei interjected. "Doesn't this mean that you lied to your believer?"

"It is true that Est wouldn't be able to clear the trial if she was alone," Astrid answered. "That is why I asked Gavin for help."

Astrid focused her attention on William who was currently holding Est in the air. A flicker of expectation could be seen in her eyes. "Perhaps, someone who was favored by three Gods..."

"Four," David cut in. "Not three but four."

The corner of Astrid's lips twitched as she looked at the Shepherd God who was peacefully drinking his tea at the side. "You're in on this, too, David?"

"Why not?" David answered. "William is a very interesting boy. He reminds me of when I was just born in this world. Since he is as handsome as me, he will definitely be able to find a way."

"Ah, that reminds me, there is a famous saying on his home planet that goes something along the lines of... 'If there's a Will there's a Way'. Astrid, if Will can really complete this mission, you are going to owe him a favor."

The four gods looked at David in disdain. As handsome as you? Have you seen your reflection in the mirror? Pitui!

"I'll consider it," Astrid replied as she tried her best to keep the calm expression on her face. "But first, he must show me what he can do. I really want to see if a boy that is favored by Four Gods can do the impossible."

Gavin, Issei, Lily, and David looked at the struggling William in the projection. Although they favored him, they still couldn't think of a way for the boy to overcome the obstacle he was currently facing.

"Listen, I can't stay in this form forever," William explained as he used his dark magic to pull Est, Isaac, and Ian along with him as he evaded the attacks of the Cyclops.

Since they were fighting on a plain, it gave him plenty of space to dodge its attacks. Although the Cyclops' attacks were powerful, as long as they didn't hit then they would be safe.

"I'm using a forbidden spell that allows me to become strong for a short period of time," William said with a serious expression. "Once this magic runs out, I will not be able to use magic for five years."

"What?!" Est asked in surprise "You will not be able to use magic for five years?"

"Yes," William replied. "Not being able to use magic for five years is still better than dying here. Don't you agree?"

"B-But still..."

"Don't worry. I didn't do this only for you. This is part of my trial as well, so we are in the same boat."

Isaac looked at William with admiration. Ian, on the other hand, had a rare look of pity on his face. Although both of them had different expressions, they still understood the weight of William's sacrifice. They never expected that the red-head boy would go this far in order to help their Young Master clear the Trial of Courage.

"We can't afford to fail this Trial," William stated. "Since I decided to go all out, none of you are allowed to pull my leg. I have a plan, but it is risky, are you all willing to put your life on the line and trust me?"

"Yes," Est replied with a determined look. He then gripped the sword in his hand tightly. "If it will help us clear this mission then I'm in."

Isaac and Ian exchanged a glance at each other before firmly nodding their heads. This time, both of them would not question William's orders and give him their full cooperation.

"We only have one chance to do this, so let's make it count." William then started to explain the plan he had in mind.

Est's and the twin's expressions became very serious as they listened to his instructions.

"Any of you can still choose to back down," William sighed. "However, after the time limit of my magic ends, we will just be waiting for our deaths."

"Since we don't have a choice then let's just do it," Ian said as he looked at the Cyclops in the distance.

"I agree," Isaac voiced out his opinion.

Est nodded his head in agreement.

"Very well, since all of you agreed then we are all in this together," William said with a smile. "Hold him off for two minutes. I need to make my preparations."

""Okay!""

William landed on the ground, but he kept the dark whips tied on the children's waists. That way, he could pull them away from danger if they were unable to evade the Cyclops' attacks.

< Gained Exp Points: 10,000 >

'Good job, Mama Ella,' William thought. 'Just one more.'

Est, Ian, and Isaac charged toward the Cyclops from different directions. The twins were using their ranged magic attacks to get its attention.

William made a few hand seals as he prepared the spell that would aid them toward their victory. A black dagger appeared in front of him and stabbed the tip of his finger, allowing blood to spray from his fingertip.

As the blood was absorbed by the ground, A red-magic circle appeared under William's feet. As soon as the magic circle had fully formed, William immediately began his chant.

"Darkness that is darker than black,

Blood that burns with the life of the living.

I pledge myself to overcome the obstacles that lay before my eyes.

Bestow your power upon my unworthy hands,

And let the Fools who stand on my way be destroyed by your unending might!"

"Clones of Darkness!"

William, Est, Isaac, and Ian suddenly multiplied as William's spell took effect. The Clones of Darkness was able to create a dozen clones for each of William's targets. These clones were not ordinary clones because they were able to manifest fifty percent of their original's power.

It was not only the children that had gained this wondrous effect, but Ella and the other goats as well.

Because of this, the hundreds of goats easily overpowered the last Gasmirage and sent it to the afterlife.

< Gained Exp Points: 10,000 >

""MEEEEEEH!"

The goats made a full powered charge towards the Cyclops. Of course, the original goats aside from Ella were ordered by William not to join the battle. Even though they were unwilling, they still followed their Shepherd's orders and remained a safe distance away from the Cyclops.

As the clones converged on their target, an all out battle Royale Began with the Cyclops at the center.

Est's clones wielded their swords and started to inflict wounds on the Cyclops' ankles and legs. Due to William's current circumstance, Est finally threw caution to the wind and resolved himself to beat the Cyclops.

This sudden change in his attitude made the power of his sword slowly increase with each passing second.

William's clones darted across the battlefield and used the dark whips in order to help his allies evade and attack the blindspots of the towering giant.

The Cyclops became annoyed and wildly swung its hammer left and right. It even fired beams of light from its eye in the hope that it would be able to destroy the insects that were currently ganging up on him.

Unfortunately, William's clones had dedicated themselves to the supporting role. All of his clones were flying in the air and took control of the situation.

The original William who was on the ground, raised his bloody finger and aimed it at the Cyclops' eye like a gun.

"Lirowasniel aerriien tireir  rieth, merrieth, telendyn, talar  jnial. Ararasnal trylinbradies, mar  jniel,     eririlbras, elowen, Thriasrilriel rinilol, triloren, morelalyn. Nielinbrnil aeraenas, merlenian..."

An eerie red glow appeared on the tip of William's finger as he took aim. This spell only had a 1% chance of instantly killing a Millennial Beast and Celine had used it on the Golden-Scaled Crocodile back in Lont.

William decided to take a gamble and use this spell to end the life of the Millennial Beast in front of him.

"Finger of Death!" William roared as a red lightning bolt shot out from his finger.

The Cyclops felt the deadly threat of William's attack and immediately countered it with its own beam of light. The red beam and the red lightning bolt clashed against each other, which caused everyone's heart to tremble.

William's feet skidded across the ground as he faced the Cyclops' counter-attack head-on.

Blood seeped from the corner of his lips, but he didn't relent his attack. He was pouring every strand of his magic power in this offensive spell because this was their only chance to beat the Terrorhand.

A powerful explosion sent shockwaves in the air as the two attacks canceled each other out. William fell powerlessly on the ground as the last vestige of magic power left his body.

"Est!" one of William's clones shouted as it held the wooden staff in his hand like a baseball bat.

Est didn't hesitate and leaped into the air. He landed on the wooden staff as he prepared his body to strike.

"Go!" William's clone shouted as he swung the wooden staff. "Magnum Burst!"

Est flew in the air like a cannonball. The Cyclops' reaction was a bit slow because it had also exhausted itself in countering William's full powered death blow.

The young boy fearlessly pulled back the sword in his hand as he prepared for his strongest move.

"Light that shines upon the world, bathe us all in your Eternal Glory!" Est shouted. He then stabbed the sword forward with all of his might. "Grand Cross!"

A radiant light enveloped the holy sword as it pierced the center of the Cyclops' eye.

The Cyclops didn't even get a chance to let out a scream as a cross made of Holy Light split its body into two halves.

A black whip of darkness wrapped around Est's waist and pulled him away to safety. Not long after, the hulking giant fell on the ground with a resounding crash. Everyone in the battlefield looked at the Giant's remains as William's clone gently landed on the ground, carrying Est in a princess carry.

"Good job," The clone said as he helped the handsome boy stand on his feet.

"Did we win?" Est asked. He was still half in doubt if they had really won against a Millennial Beast.

"Yes," William's clone replied with a smile before vanishing into particles of light.

For some reason, Est felt his heart skip a beat when he saw the smile of approval on the clone's face. A feeling that he had never felt before started to bloom inside his innocent heart. Surprisingly, he didn't dislike this feeling.

Chapter 76: Unpleasant To The Eyes

When William opened his eyes, he found himself in an unfamiliar room.

'Where am I?' William thought as he tried to move his body. To his surprise, no matter how much he tried to move his body, it was not responding. Heck, he couldn't even move his finger. 'What's this? Sleep paralysis?'

William had encountered this sensation when he was still back on Earth. This feeling was truly scary because you were clearly wide awake, and yet, you were unable to move and even speak.

The red-head boy tried to calm his panicking heart as he recalled the events that happened during the battle against the Cyclops.

'The last thing that I remember, is using the Finger of Death. After that I lost consciousness,' William sighed internally. Suddenly, his heart was gripped by a scary thought. 'Wait! Don't tell me we actually lost? No way! Did I die again?! Is this the afterlife?!'

As William was really starting to panic for real, the door of the room opened and a familiar handsome boy appeared in his line of sight.

"William? Are you awake?" Est asked as he looked at the boy who was lying on the bed. He could see that his eyes were open and, for some reason, they were staring straight at him.

Seeing that the red-head boy wasn't doing anything, Est sat beside the bed and frowned. "What's wrong?"

'There's something wrong with my body, but how can I tell you?!' William glared at Est out of frustration.

"Young Master, is he awake?" Isaac inquired as he walked to the room with his twin, Ian.

"Oi, if you're already awake you should get up," Ian snorted. "Are you a pig? Do you like to lie down so much? You've already been sleeping for two days."

'T-Two days?!' William gasped internally. 'Wait. Did we all die together? Damn! I can't confirm since I can't move or say anything.'

"Hey, are you really awake?" Est asked as he poked William's cheek. "You're clearly awake, but why aren't you moving?"

Ian smirked and joined Est in poking William's face. The two children found that doing this was amusing, so they continued to poke him all over.

'If I can move, I would have already kicked the two of you!' William was feeling frustrated. 'Just because I can't move you think you can bully me?!'

He was trying to use his annoyance to forcefully break through his paralysis, but it was to no avail. He could only glare helplessly at the two bullies and promised that he would beat them up as soon as his paralysis wore off.

"I think something is wrong with him," Isaac said as he sat on the bed. "Is he perhaps suffering from sleep paralysis or a stroke?"

"Ian, call the Head Priestess immediately!" Est ordered.

Ian left the room begrudgingly as he went to look for the High Priestess. For some reason, he found William's current state to be quite amusing. It made him want to bully the defenseless shepherd and irritate him to oblivion.

"Don't worry, William," Est assured him. "Help is on the way."

William winked at Est once before closing his eyes. Since help was already on the way, he decided to check the blinking notifications in his status screen.

< Ding! >

< Gained Exp: 1,200,000 >

< Congratulations! You have slayed a Millennial Beast! >

< Special Monster First Kill Bonus Exp: 500,000 >

< You have acquired Giant Slayer Title! >

< You have acquired Millennial-Grade Beast Core! >

< Dark Mage Job Class had reached its Max Level! >

< Would you like to Advance to the next Job Class? Yes / No >

'Um? I got the rewards even though Est was the one who killed the Cyclops?' William felt happy upon seeing the notifications. He would definitely not reject the system's rewards for his hard work.

< Giant Slayer >

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall!"

-- Increase attack against Giant Race by 30%

-- Increase attack against monsters that are over 5 meters tall by 30%

-- Strength +5

'Giant Slayer... not bad. This is one good title.' William looked at the new title with approval. He had been dealing with big monsters as of late, so having this title would definitely make his life easier.

'Now time to look at my status page...'

Hit Points: 725 / 725

Mana: < Disabled >

Job Class: Shepherd Level 30

Sub Class: Dark Mage Level 40 (Max)

< Strength: 25 (+2) >

< Agility: 35 (+3) >

< Vitality: 25 (+2) >

< Intelligence: 60 (+2)>

< Dexterity: 16 (+20) >

Current Exp: 0 / 154392

< Dark Mage Max >

Job Exp: 146,283 / 146,283

After checking his stats, he noticed that his Mana was disabled for some reason. He immediately called the system to inquire what was happening to his status page.

'System, can you tell me why my Mana is disabled?''

< Host, this is the consequence for using the power of the Collar of Wisteria. You will be unable to use your mana for five years. >

"What?! I thought the effect of the collar would only prevent me from using the Mage Type Job Classes, it also includes any skill that uses mana?"

< Yes. Any skill that relies on Mana will no longer be usable for the next five years. >

"Okay, let me get this straight," William was hoping that there was still a loophole that he could use in order to activate the skills he normally used in battle. "You mean, I can't even use Bestow, or First Aid?"

< Host will be unable to use ANY skills that rely on Mana. >

"Fck!" William cursed. "Master, the last resort you gave me is too brutal..."

The happiness that William felt after getting the rewards of the trial was replaced by depression. He initially thought that his other Job Classes, that didn't rely on magic powers, would be unaffected by the backlash of the Collar of Wisteria.

Never in his wildest dreams did he anticipate that the backlash would cripple him to this extent. Without the buffs, Ella's and the other goats' battle prowess would be reduced drastically.

While William was feeling broken hearted, the High Priestess Finally arrived at the room. She placed her hand over William's head and used a diagnostic spell to check his condition.

"Full Heal," The High Priestess chanted and a layer of green light enveloped William's body.

"How are you feeling?" Est asked with concern.

"Depressed and brokenhearted," William answered as he voiced his thoughts out loud. "...and maybe a little hungry."

"Don't be depressed young man," The High Priestess commented with a smile. "You're still young, why are you feeling depressed? As for hunger, although we don't have much, we can let you have your fill of bread, cheese, and milk."

"Thank you, Head Priestess," William replied. "I'll take you up on your offer."

"Very well, I'll ask one of my attendants to bring you food," The Head Priestess caressed the side of William's cheek before standing up. "Your name is William, right? Make sure to visit your goats after you eat. They are feeling restless because they are unable to enter the temple to see you."

"That's right! My goats!" William sprang up from the bed and hurriedly left the room. He had completely forgotten about his depression and immediately ran towards the stable to see them.

Est, the High Priestess, and the twins watched him go with dumbfounded faces.

Wasn't he just depressed a while ago? Why was he running away like his pants were on fire?

"Meeeeeeeh!"

"Sorry, Mama Ella," William said as he hugged her Mama's head. "I made you worry."

"Meeeeeh."

"Mmm, I'm fine," William replied. "How about you?"

"Meeeeeeeh."

"Don't worry everyone, I'm fine. Sorry for making all of you worry."

""Meeeeeeeh!""

This was the scene that Est and the twins saw when they arrived at the stable. The other goats circled around William and pressed their heads on his body. With just a glance, one could easily tell how much the goats cared about William.

"He sure is loved by his herd," Ian commented with a smirk.

"Ian, be more kind to William from now on," Est ordered. "He is our benefactor and he sacrificed a lot for us."

"... I understand," Ian replied. "I'll try not to be too mean when I talk to him."

"Why are you being mean to him in the first place?" Est asked. This was the thing he had wanted to ask for quite some time. Ever since Ian saw William, the other had always treated the shepherd in a rude manner.

"I don't know," Ian answered. "I just feel irritated when I see him."

"Don't tell me you fell in love with him at first sight?" Isaac teased his twin. "They say that when someone wants to be noticed by their crush, they do things to get their attention."

"Me? Have a crush on him?" Ian scoffed. "Even if he was the last boy in the world, I would never have a crush on him."

Ian looked at the red-headed boy who was surrounded by his goats. It was true that, whenever he saw William, he felt irritated for some reason. He was, also, unsure why he was feeling that way against a boy whom he had only interacted with for a short while.

As Ian pondered in silence, his gaze landed on Est. His Young Master was looking at William with a tender gaze. It made Ian doubt his own eyes, but Est continued to gaze at William in this manner.

As if the last puzzle on the board fell in place, Ian finally understood why he didn't like William.

He then looked at the shepherd, who was surrounded by his beloved goats, as a feeling of irritation blossomed inside his heart.

Although he wasn't certain, he had a feeling that William would take something very important from him, and that was the reason why Ian felt that William was very unpleasant to his eyes.

Chapter 77: Are We Now Friends?

Three days after William and Est cleared the trial, their group finally left the Holy Temple.

Although William was feeling down that he suddenly got nerfed, he decided to not think too much about it. The group was currently taking a short break by the river, before continuing their journey downstream.

'It's only five years,' William thought as he swam on the river. "Once those five years are over, I'll charge down the road in order to become the OP Protagonist!"

Perhaps it was due to his frustrations, but he said the last sentence out loud.

Ian who was cooling his feet by the riverside wasn't able to resist the urge to bring him down a peg.

"OP Protagonist? Do you think you're some kind of Hero in a fairy tale?" Ian said in disdain.

William angrily glared at his mortal enemy and swam in his direction.

"Hey, are you really a boy?" William asked. As he stood a few meters away from Ian. "How come you're acting like you're always having a period?"

Ian's face darkened when he heard William's words. A part of him wanted to refute him, and the other half suddenly became anxious.

'D-Did he notice?' Ian looked at William anxiously. 'No. it's impossible. Only a handful know about our secret!'

"What's the matter?" William was feeling smug. "Cat got your tongue?"

It was very rare for him to make Ian speechless. Seeing the annoying boy unable to make a comeback made William's frustration decrease by a good margin.

"Hmp! I will not argue with an idiot like you," Ian replied as he grumpily walked towards the carriage, leaving the smug looking William in his wake.

Est watched this exchange and helplessly shook his head. He had already told Ian not to be too mean to William, but the latter just couldn't resist quarelling with him every chance he got.

The handsome boy with light-brown hair and eyes, appraised the red-headed boy from where he was sitting. Like most boys, William's body was still developing. His wet red-hair glistened in the sunlight, and his pale white skin shimmered with water droplets.

As Est observed his body, he noticed a black rose tattoo on William's chest. It was as big as an adult's hand, and was quite eye-catching.

"William, did you always have that tattoo on your chest?" Est asked.

"Tattoo? What tattoo?" William asked back.

"That tattoo on your chest," Est said as he pointed at his own chest.

William lowered his head and looked at his chest. When he saw the black rose tattoo, a frown appeared on his face. He had a hunch where the tattoo came from, but he still asked the system for confirmation.

'System, do you know where this black rose tattoo on my chest came from?'

< To answer the Host's question, the black rose tattoo is a powerful seal that prevents you from using your magic power. >

'I knew it.'

William looked at the tattoo on his chest with a complicated expression. In the end, he sighed and answered Est's question.

"This is the first time I'm seeing this tattoo," William replied. "I guess this is the side-effect of using the forbidden power during the trial of courage."

"I see..." Est looked apologetic as he stared at William's face. "Sorry, it's because of--"

"Alright, you can stop right there." William shook his head. "I already told you and I'll say it again, I didn't do it just for you. You might not believe me, but I was also tasked with clearing the trial of courage. Maybe the reason why it became so difficult is because there are two people taking the trial at the same time.

"Besides, the one who killed the Cyclops was you and not me. I should be the one thanking you for successfully completing the mission."

Est knew that William would just keep downplaying the part he played during the Cyclops subjugation, so he decided to not pursue the topic any longer. Even if William denied it, he was still Est's benefactor and that wouldn't change no matter what the red-headed boy said.

Est wanted to know more about William. If possible, he wanted the two of them to become friends. Aside from Isaac and Ian, Est never had a peer of the same age. His days were spent inside their estate studying and practicing swordplay.

This was the first time he wanted to be close to another person. He wanted to know more about him. After making a decision, he decided to take the initiative to prolong their conversation.

"What are your future plans?" Est asked. "If you like, you can come with us to the capital. I still haven't rewarded you for saving my life."

"My only plan right now is to return to Lont and live a happy and peaceful life," William answered as he walked towards the side of the river. He was done swimming and it was time for him to put on some clothes. "As for the reward that you want to give me, I'll pass on that. Receiving a reward from a friend feels awkward."

"F-Friend?!" Est's eyes widened. "Are we now friends?"

"You don't want to be?"

"I want!"

William chuckled when he saw Est's reaction. He didn't mind being friends with someone who had fought side by side with him in a battle of life and death.

William walked towards Est with a refreshing smile. Water droplets were still falling from his hair as he extended a hand to the handsome boy in front of him. The latter also extended his own hand and held William's hand in a firm grip.

"Hello, my name is William Von Ainsworth, just call me Will."

"Est Wells Newmont. Just call me Est."

"Is that your real name?" William asked.

"For now," Est answered. "Sorry, I want to tell you my real name, but I am not at liberty to do so."

"It's fine. So how about your two sidekicks?" William inquired. "What are their real names?"

"T-That..." Est averted his gaze. "I am also not at liberty to answer that question."

"So they're just Isaac and Ian for now?"

"Yes."

"Understood." William nodded his head.

Everyone had their secrets and it would be wrong of him to pry. Since Est and him were now officially friends, he decided to ignore Ian's rudeness for the time being.

"Very well, I have decided!" Est looked at William with determination. "I will escort you back to Lont."

"Eh? Escort me back?" William tilted his head in confusion. "Why?"

"Because it will be dangerous for you to travel alone," Est replied. "Since you can't use your magic power, I will ensure your safety."

William could tell that Est was dead serious when he said that he wanted to escort him back to Lont. For a brief moment, he thought about rejecting his offer. However, the strong grip on his hand made him feel that Est wouldn't take no for an answer.

"Thank you," William said with a smile. "We don't have any fancy food in Lont. However, if you don't mind eating porridge, and drinking goat milk then I'll be more than happy to become your host for a few days."

"Deal." Est smiled.

The two handsome boys looked at each other with a smile.

"Hey, just how long are the two of you going to hold hands?" Ian asked in annoyance. "Also, red-head boy, are you an exhibitionist? Why are you still not wearing any clothes?"

Est's face reddened as he unconsciously looked on William's body. He wasn't thinking about anything earlier, but Ian's comment made him realize that William still hadn't put any clothes on.

William, on the other hand, just rolled his eyes as he walked towards his Mama Ella. 'I'm wearing pants okay? Who are you calling an exhibitionist?'

He wanted to say those words, but decided to just let it be.

'I wonder how Grandpa and the rest will treat my new friends?' William mused as he thought about the loving family that was waiting for him back in Lont.

Chapter 78: The Old Duke Of Griffith

"We're almost there," William said as he gazed at the familiar scenery in front of him.

"Meeeeeeeh!"

"Meeeeeeeh!"

"Meeeeeeeh!"

"Meeeeeeeh!"

The goats bleated in excitement as they saw the familiar town in the distance. They had lived in Lont for many years, and this was the first time that they had been away far from home. Some of them were already feeling homesick from their long travel.

Est, Ian, Isaac, Herman, and Nana froze in shock when they saw the Golden Ape (Oroubro) seated near the entrance of Lont. They could see some kids climbing its arms, while others were playing tag near its feet.

"I-Is that the Oroubro that was taken from the battlefield?" Est stuttered.

Although he had already heard from Nana that William's grandfather and his comrades managed to capture three Millennial Beasts from the battle on Windkeep Citadel, this was the first time he had seen something that was almost as big as the Cyclops that they had fought in the trial of courage.

"Yes," William answered. "He is the newly appointed guardian of Lont. His name is Lufie the Monkey."

"Lufie the Monkey..." Herman gulped. "Such a domineering name."

"I know, right?" William had raised his chin in an arrogant manner.

"Why are you acting like you're the one who owns it?" Ian scoffed. "What a pretentious brat you are."

"Mama Ella did you hear someone talk?" William asked.

Ella shook her head.

"It must be one of those ghosts known as attention seekers." William sighed in an exaggerated manner.

"Tsk, just because I am handsome they decided to haunt me? Well, I don't mind if that attention seeker is a beauty. However, if it's just a snot-nosed pansy then he could just roll over and suck an egg."

"Who are you calling a snot-nosed pansy?!" Ian asked.

William turned his head to look at the enraged boy sitting on the carriage. "Why are you reacting? Are you a snot-nosed pansy? Tsk, no wonder you're always irate. It must be nice having a period 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

"Y-You!" Ian was about to jump off the carriage and beat William to a pulp when Isaac held on to him with all the strength he could muster.

"Ian, behave yourself," Est ordered.

"Hmp!" Ian averted his gaze in anger.

As the group neared the entrance of Lont, some of the kids waved and called out to William.

"You sure are popular," Est said with a smile.

William nodded his head. "I don't want to brag, but I'm the most handsome boy in Lont. It's only natural that I became popular."

After traveling with William for a few days, the group had grown accustomed to his narcissism. They often wondered where he was getting his confidence from. Of course, they had to admit that William was indeed very handsome.

This was one of the advantages of being a Half-Elf. Although Half-Elves were shunned by the Elven Race for being not pure blooded, no one could deny that the Elven genes made the Half-Elves very pleasing to the eyes.

"William! Oi! William!" Theo shouted as he ran towards his good friend. "You arrived at the right time! Your family has guests over and, from what I've heard, they came here to see you."

"Guests that came to see me?" William pondered. The images of his previous guests appeared in his mind. 'It couldn't possibly be them again, right?'

William remembered Agatha, the mother of his ex-fiance, Rebecca. If this was a week ago, William would definitely be thinking of finding a way to ask them to show him more rare weapons so he could unlock a few Job Classes.

It was quite unfortunate that he was not in the mood to acquire any more Job Classes because he was unable to use them at this point in time.

"Did you recognize them?" William asked. "Do they look like the guests that came to visit last time?"

"I didn't see their faces, but the carriage looks familiar."

"A carriage pulled by a Gryphon?"

"Yes! But, this time, there are three Gryphons!"

"Three?" William felt his liver start to itch. 'This time they called for reinforcements? Do these nobles think that I'm so easy to bully?'

William's expression clouded over. He was regretting the fact that he couldn't use his powers at this moment. If he still had his powers, he would definitely curse their guests until they ran away screaming to whence they came!

"Did we come in a bad time?" Est asked.

"No." William looked at Est and smiled. "All of you are guests. The ones that arrived are pests. Let me kick them out so I can give you a tour of Lont."

William and his entourage entered Lont and headed straight towards the Ainsworth Estate. Just like what Theo said, he saw three Gryphons loitering outside of his home.

"That is the crest of the Duke of Griffith," Herman said as he recognized the coat of arms on the carriage doors. 'Why is a bigshot here in this town of Lont?'

"Duke of Griffith, if I remember correctly, that is the house that gave birth to the genius girl who specializes in Ice Magic," Nana commented. "Is your family acquainted with them, William?"

"Well, that genius girl you spoke of, Lady Nana, is my Ex-Fiance," William replied in a casual manner.

"Fiance?!" Est's expression became serious when he heard that William had a fiance. He felt a pang of pain in his heart, but he doesn't understand why he was feeling this way.

Isaac's and Ian's eyes widened when they heard William's answer. They were trained to read the body language of people and they could tell that William wasn't lying.

"You said Ex-Fiance?" Herman asked. "Why? Are the two of you not betrothed to each other anymore?"

"I canceled the marriage agreement," William answered like it was not a big deal. "Although my Ex-Fiance, Rebecca, is very cute, her mother and her Master have the bloodline of Mandrakes."

"Mandrakes?" Est frowned.

The mandrake was a spiritual plant that was used in alchemy and medicine. However, these plants were quite annoying to get because, when you touch them, they will emit a scream that is strong enough to shatter a person's eardrums.

Herman, Nana, Isaac, and Ian immediately understood what William was hinting at. Just like ladies looking for juicy gossip, the peanut gallery was looking forward to seeing what kind of drama was going to unfold at the Ainsworth Residence.

After Herman parked the carriage at the stables, William ordered the goats--aside from Ella--to go to the goat pen. The goats happily bleated in reply and went to their old home with excitement. They were very tired from their journey and wanted to rest in a familiar place. William watched them go with a smile on his face before leading his guests towards the main entrance of their residence.

"My handsome and awesome Grandpa, I'm back!" William announced his arrival.

"Welcome back my handsome grandson," James welcomed William with open arms. "You've only been a way for a few days, but you've become more handsome. Tell me, what kind of sorcery is this?"

"It can't be helped," William raised his chin in arrogance. "I was fated to be handsome the day I was born with your bloodline."

"Hahaha!" James roared in laughter as he patted William's shoulder. "Being handsome is a sin. This is the sin that both of us carry."

"No matter how heavy this sin is, I, William, will carry it until I breathe my last breath!"

"Spoken like a true Ainsworth."

Isaac walked beside Est and whispered in his ear. "Young Master, Now we know where William inherited his narcissism."

Est nodded his head in agreement. This was the first time he saw an old man act like this in public.

"Oh? Is that the grandson that you've been bragging about as of late?" a booming voice asked from behind James. "Not bad. At least he is not lacking when it comes to good looks."

James smiled as he introduced his friend to his grandson.

"William, this old bastard is a close friend of mine," James introduced his friend with a smirk. "Lawrence Fox Griffith, the old Duke of the Duchy of Griffith."

Chapter 79: A Match Made In Heaven

Surprisingly, James didn't lead William and his guest to the living room. Instead, he guided them to the garden that was outside the residence.

Large tables laid out with delicious dishes had been placed all over the garden. William saw familiar faces, namely, Rebecca, Agatha, and Eleanor. There were also several children that were around his age loitering around Rebecca's table.

They were all wearing the same light blue clothes with an insignia of a snowflake embedded on its chest.

'I guess they are the kids from the Misty Sect and Rebecca's fellow disciples,' William thought.

Among the kids who were seated near his "Ex-Fiance", there was a certain boy that stood out. He had blonde hair, gray eyes, and a face that would make all the girls scream "Kyaah! Kyaah!" the moment they saw him. He was practically oozing with the 'I'm a pretty boy vibe'.

Unfortunately, William was more handsome than him. Even Rebecca's fellow female disciples looked at William with keen interest.

William ignored the gazes of the little lolis and focused his attention on the blondie that was seated beside his Ex-Fiance.

'This person might be that "dependable senior brother" that is too common in cultivation stories,' William eyed the first male antagonist he had encountered in his lifetime. 'According to the script in the novels, he would challenge me in order to formally break our marriage agreement. That way, he would be able to score some brownie points with Rebecca's mother and master.'

William sneered in his heart. If he hadn't temporarily lost his magic powers, he would have easily wiped the floor with the handsome boy's face. Sadly, he was now at his weakest point and couldn't use his trump cards.

James led William and his guests to another table that was also laid out with delicious dishes. Messengers had arrived at the residence beforehand to announce William's arrival. Because of this, the maids hurriedly added another table into the garden and prepared the food for their Young Master's arrival.

"So, your name is Est?" James asked. "You have good eyes."

"T-Thank you?" Est answered in confusion.

He didn't know why James said that "he had good eyes", but he could tell that William's grandpa didn't say it in a casual manner. Of course, he didn't understand what the old man was hinting at.

"Let's talk more later." James smiled. "I'm very interested in the friends that William has made during his trip to the Holy Temple."

Est smiled and nodded his head. He was also curious to know more about William's grandfather.

As soon as William and his guests sat on the chairs provided to them, the drama finally started.

"Old James, since your grandson is here it's time to get right down to business," Lawrence said with a smile on his face. He then faced William and told him the reason for his visit.

"Young man, I would like to apologize for the actions of my Daughter in law. She shouldn't have made things difficult for you and forced you to break the marriage agreement that your grandfather and I had agreed on," Lawrence stated. "The reason why I'm here right now is to mediate and fix this misunderstanding."

"Father!" Agatha shouted. "That boy is not worthy of your granddaughter! He is just a dirty shepherd!"

Est frowned when he heard the Duchess' rude remarks. Even Ian who, was always at odds with William, had the same reaction as Est. For some reason, he didn't like it when other people insulted William.

"Sir Griffith, I also believe that my disciple deserves someone better," Eleanor said from the side. "Rebecca is a genius. She only deserves the best that also goes for her future husband."

Surprisingly, James didn't say anything and just sipped his tea in peace. If this was in the past, he would have already raised a ruckus to defend his grandson's honor. He believed that his grandson would have no problems getting many beautiful wives even without his help.

Since that was the case, why would he bother with this petty marriage agreement?

Lawrence listened to Agatha's and Eleanor's words with a calm expression. He didn't rebuke them and allowed them to say their thoughts out loud. He was observing James' and William's expressions to understand their thoughts about the matter.

Seeing that both of them were not reacting to the "subtle insult" raised by the two women, Lawrence felt that something was wrong. He then decided to test the waters and asked the red-head boy a question.

"They say that you are not worthy of my granddaughter. How do you feel about that?" Lawrence asked.

William grinned as he answered Lawrence's question. "Sir Lawrence, do you think that someone as handsome as me would find it hard to find a beautiful wife as my companion?"

"No," Lawrence answered.

William nodded his head like a scholar. "I don't want to brag, but aside from my Grandfather, no one in the Southern Continent is more handsome than me. Since that is the case, why would I limit myself to marrying your granddaughter? Don't you think that this is being unfair to my handsome looks?"

"Bravo!" James clapped his hands. "As expected of my grandson."

Eleanor's and Agatha's face contorted in disgust. They had already experienced how shameless William was, but it seemed that he had become more arrogant since the last time they had met.

"So are you saying that my granddaughter is not good enough?" Lawrence asked. His voice was laced with amusement.

"You should ask her that question," William replied. "Is she good enough for me? Personally, I think not."

Rebecca, who was quietly listening from the side, raised an eyebrow at William's words. "What makes you think that you are good enough for me? If not for grandfather's insistence I wouldn't even bother coming here."

At first, she was planning to stay out of this mess, but William's words annoyed her. She was the genius that was born once every two hundred years. Although she wasn't interested in William, this was the first time that someone told her that she wasn't good enough at something.

"Then why don't you go?" William casually waved his hand as if to shoo away a pest. "So what if you're a genius? Even geniuses need to poop, or are you going to tell me that you don't poop at all?"

Everyone that was currently eating at that moment glared at William. Even James who was drinking his tea spat it out on the ground.

"Such crude words!"

"Don't you have any sense of delicacy!"

"As expected of a country bumpkin, truly lacking in manners!"

The disciples of the Misty Sect berated William, but the red-headed boy paid them no mind. In his eyes, the sooner these pests left, the better.

Rebecca's face became beet red. There was no way that she could retort to William's question. Was there any human that didn't need to poop? If there was, could they still be considered human?

Lawrence frowned. From what he could see, William really had no interest in his granddaughter. A part of him wanted to spank the boy silly, while the other part of him looked at the boy in a new light.

'The bastard James is not reacting as well,' Lawrence thought. 'Are they hiding something from me?'

The one who initiated the matchmaking was James. Lawrence knew his personality so it was impossible for James to renege on something that he had started. Naturally, this mess happened because his daughter in law took the opportunity while he was away to cancel the marriage agreement.

Even so, he didn't believe that James would just sit idly by and let someone trample on the agreement that had been put in place because of his proposal.

Est who was watching from the side secretly felt happy. He didn't understand why he felt happy, but he was feeling giddy watching William's arrogant performance.

"You, peasant. How dare you tarnish the honor of my junior disciple?!" The handsome blondie stood up from his seat. "I will only ask you one question. Are you going to free Rebecca from the marriage agreement or not?"

"Hah? Did a donkey kick your head?" William asked in disdain. "Didn't I make it clear that I'm not interested in her? If you like, you can have her. I can tell from a glance that both of you are a perfect match for each other."

"Really?" The blondie asked. "Do you really think that we're a good match?"

The blondie gave Rebecca a side-long glance as he waited for William's answer.

"Definitely." William nodded his head. "A match made in heaven. May the two of you live a happy life together."

"Hmp! At least you know your place." The blondie accepted William's words as if it was the most natural thing to do. He then sat down in a good mood.

From the first time he saw Rebecca, he had already decided that she would be his lover. Not only was she beautiful, she was also a daughter of a Duke. With beauty, riches, and influence on her side, she was the ideal candidate to become his wife and raise his rank within his family.

Chapter 80: Duel After 7 Years

"Lawrence, it's not like I'm against your granddaughter marrying my grandson," James said after the quarrel had quieted down. "It's just that your daughter-in-law thinks too highly of herself. Even though we're dirt poor, we won't allow our dignities to be trampled upon by other people."

"So, you, also, want to cancel this agreement?" Lawrence asked. "Be honest, old man."

"Who doesn't want to have a genius daughter-in-law marrying into the family?" James answered. "It's just that your family thinks differently from you."

Lawrence sighed. He also thought that his son and daughter-in-law had become too pretentious after giving birth to Rebecca. After his granddaughter's talent was confirmed, Agatha acted like a queen and looked down on people a lot.

His son, on the other hand, saw this as a chance to form strong connections with his peers. He was even thinking about using Rebecca as a bargaining chip to foster powerful alliances with other Ducal families.

The handsome blondie was the third son of the neighboring Duchy of Rhodes. Agatha was thinking that he would be a good partner for her daughter. Of course, he was only one of the candidates in Agatha's mind.

As an ambitious woman, she was also interested in presenting Rebecca as a wife candidate to the crown prince of the Hellan Kingdom. Naturally, her options were, also, not restricted within the boundaries of the kingdom.

Marrying a prince from another kingdom was also one of the options that she had planned for her daughter.

Lawrence had a good look at William and felt that the boy was very pleasing to the eyes. The Old Duke of Griffith was a powerful Archmage. He had already subtly used a diagnostic scan on William's body to see if he was capable of using magic.

Unfortunately, the result he got was quite disappointing. Not only did the boy not have any magical affinities, he was also completely devoid of mana! What did this mean? It meant that William had no future in becoming a magician.

Magicians were highly regarded in the Southern Continent. One magician was born out of every five thousand children. However, not all magicians were born with High-Grade Talent. His granddaughter, Rebecca, was born with a Perfect-Grade Talent, so the Hellan Kingdom decided to cultivate her properly.

This meant that all available resources to help her advance her rank would be given to her unconditionally.

Lawrence wanted his granddaughter to be happy. He was also very worried about her future, so when his old friend, James, asked him to matchmake their grandkids, he immediately agreed.

He had known James for a long time. With that said, he approved of William's background. However, since it had already come to this, he could only think of a way to delay the dissolution of the marriage agreement.

"Rebecca, come here," Lawrence ordered.

Rebecca stood up from her chair and walked obediently towards her grandpa. In their family, Lawrence spoiled her the most and he was also an archmage. Naturally, Rebecca would listen to her grandfather more so than her own parents.

"William, please, come here as well," Lawrence made a gesture for William to stand beside Rebecca.

William frowned, but after seeing James's expression, he reluctantly stood up from the seat and stood beside his Ex-Fiance.

"Both of you are still young," Lawrence said with a smile. "No one knows what the future will hold. Although the two of you might not get along now, that might change in a few years."

Lawrence paused and glanced at her granddaughter.

"Rebecca, what are the qualities you like to see in your future husband?"

"Grandfather, I think It's too early for me to answer this question."

"Indeed, you are still too young. But, humor me. Tell me the qualities that you want your husband to have."

"Well," Rebecca gave William a sidelong glance, while the latter crossed his arms over his chest and raised his chin in an arrogant manner.

"First, he must be stronger than me," Rebecca stated.

"This is acceptable," Lawrence agreed. Naturally if he were to choose a partner for his granddaughter, it should be someone strong so that he could protect her.

"Second, he must be good looking."

"Right."

William casually flipped his hair to the side. Clearly, he was confident in his looks.

"Third, he must be someone with ambition. I don't like mediocrity." Rebecca added.

"Is that all?" James asked.

"There is one last condition," Rebecca said. "He must be in a position of power."

"Hmm..." Lawrence glanced at the red-headed boy who was currently looking at his fingernails. "How about you William? What are you looking for in a wife?"

James, Est, Ian, and Rebecca secretly perked up their ears to listen to William's answer.

"First, she must be Cup C," William stated in an arrogant manner. "I will not accept anything smaller than that."

"Second, she must have a good head on her shoulders."

"Third, she must be loyal."

"Lastly, she must be a beauty that can bring the downfall of a nation. Only this kind of lady is deserving of my love and affection."

Est and Ian looked down at their chests and grimaced. Both of them were currently boys, and it was impossible for them to meet William's first requirement. Est had a distraught look on his face, while Ian's was wondering why he was feeling that he needed to match William's requirement.

'It's not like I'm interested in him or anything,' Ian thought. 'Why am I feeling bothered like this?'

Lawrence lightly coughed as he gazed at his old friend who was chuckling by his side. James didn't say anything but gave two thumbs up to William in his heart. He was impressed by his grandson's "high requirements" and it put him at ease.

The old man was even looking forward to seeing William's children a few years from now.

"It's good to have ambition," Lawrence said after he cleared his throat. "Then how about this? Seven years from now, the two of you will have a duel. Until then, the talk about breaking this marriage agreement will be put on hold."

The winner can demand anything from the loser. Also, I will not take no for an answer. If you want to break up then break up after you have fought against each other!"

William looked at Lawrence with a dumbfounded expression. 'How barbaric! Why must we fight each other just to break this marriage agreement? Can't we just talk things out like civilized normal people?'

"It will be as you wish, grandfather," Rebecca answered. She then glanced at the boy standing next to her. "Seven years from now, we will have our battle at the Peak of the Misty Sect. Until then, do your best to become stronger."

Rebecca returned to her seat after voicing her opinion. William, also, returned to his seat. He had a complicated look on his face, which made Est and the rest wonder what he was thinking.

'This Lawrence is indeed an old fox,' William thought. 'Why is he persistent in matching his granddaughter with me? Is he after my good genes? I need to be more careful when dealing with this person.'

If Lawrence only knew what William was thinking he would have kicked his bum with all of his might.

There were two reasons why Lawrence imposed a duel between the two of them. The first one was to prevent others from approaching his granddaughter and using her as a political tool.

This was something that he didn't want to see. The second reason was to give pressure to Rebecca so that she wouldn't become lax in her training. He didn't really care whether William would become his son-in-law or not. What was important to him was to keep his connection with the Ainsworth family and not break their good relationship.

James also understood what Lawrence was scheming, but he wasn't too concerned about it. After all, he was the one who initiated this marriage agreement.

"I don't agree to this condition," the blondie stood up from his chair. "Why wait seven years? I, Kingsley Rhodes, challenge William Von Ainsworth to a duel. Do you dare to accept my challenge?"