

Supreme M 611

Chapter 611 Arrangements Part 2

"Well, it is different. The academy is surrounded by a luscious forest, so the air is bound to be much fresher and fragrant than a city's. I'm sure that Kamila will gladly take you out for a walk, both before and after the procedure." Lith said.

"If she finds the time, I suppose she could." Zinya sighed. She had rarely been in a park, let alone a forest. She would give anything just to sniff a few of its flowers.

"In the meantime, you can talk to her with this." Lith gave Zinya a communication amulet with only two runes: his own and Kamila's. He explained both how to imprint and use it before he left.

Lith invited Quylla and Anathor for a double date so that they had the opportunity to meet outside their medical practice.

"Kamila is a lucky woman." Quylla sighed.

"First the Camelia, then the procedure, and now even a free communication amulet. I wish I had someone who spoiled me like that."

"You have two wonderful parents that do nothing but spoil you!" Lith said.

"I meant as a significant other, my father doesn't count."

"No offense, Quylla, but what can a boyfriend do that your parents can't? When I was with Phloria, finding a present for her was a nightmare. You have to set the bar a little lower, or any sane man will run away in desperation."

His words make her half laugh and half worry. Not only were her parents scary, but also being the Ernas one of the most powerful families of the Kingdom, there wasn't much that she couldn't acquire with just a snap of her fingers.

Quylla walked Lith to the academy's Gate and from there he went back to Lutia. Lith spent the time before lunch with his parents, returning to the tower only after they consumed the meal together.

He had used no mana in the morning and the time with Quylla and his parents had relaxed his mind, allowing Lith to be at the top of his game.

"Solus, we are going to take a second attempt at the Orichalcum Skinwalker. If I have enough energy left, I'd like to work on your personal cloaking ring." Lith said.

"Necro Forge again?" Solus asked while preparing everything they needed on the Mana Forge.

"Yes. If it fails again, I'll use the remaining two chainmail sets to experiment with Bloom Forge. If even lowering the output to 50% doesn't work, I'll have no other choice left."

Lith went to the Forgemastering lab, taking out the chainmail set, the ingredients, and the blue mana crystals. First, he performed the Bonding spell, to give the Orichalcum armor a mana circulatory system capable of harnessing the power of the powerful magic he would imbue it with.

Then, he refined the Thunderbird's feather, the Magma flower's petals, and the Skinwalker's skin into as many pseudo cores. This, time Lith refined them one by one.

Since he was forced to use a low energy output, he also had the opportunity to focus on the cores' smallest details rather than on raw power. The four pseudo cores were so puny that Lith sighed, considering the experiment worthless already.

He merged them with the help of the slime goop and only then did the real Forgemastering begin. Solus used the energy from the mana geyser to empower both the magic circle surrounding the Lith's obsidian Forge and the Necro Hammer.

The Forgemastering energies made the armor and the merged cores orbit around each other. They kept getting closer until their auras clashed so strongly that they bounced back to their initial position.

Lith kept the charged hammer still while he studied the unknown interaction between the Orichalcum and the Thunderbird's feather. Soon the merged cores started to pulse and grow.

The Orichalcum's artificial mana flow was drawn by the feather's energy field. Somehow, the feather was able to amplify the incoming mana, using part of it to feed the merged cores before returning the rest to the Orichalcum, making its mana flow also grow stronger.

The exchange of energies lasted a while until some kind of symbiotic equilibrium was established. At that point, the merged cores were almost as big as those Lith had prepared during the last experiment.

"Incredible! No wonder our first attempt was an utter fiasco. Not only did I have to keep the pseudo cores merged and fix any imperfection that appeared, but also due to the amplification effect on both magical items I had to fight against an increasingly strong rejection between five different kinds of mana!"

"No duh, Sherlock! I told you that 50% was an excellent starting point." Solus gloated.

"Alright stop. Hammer time." He said making her laugh so hard that she almost lost her focus.

The Necro Hammer struck the condensed mana circle, channeling Lith's mana and willpower through it so that when the two items collided, they started to merge. Lith rhythmically struck at the circle, releasing each time a blue blast of energy.

He would switch between using the accumulated mana to continue the merging process and fixing the deformities that arose due to the clashing forces at work.

'I'm so glad that I put the lab in the basement, otherwise the light this new type of Forgemastering produces would be seen for miles.' Solus thought.

After more than an hour of unrelenting focus that pushed Lith's blue core and mind to their limits, the first prototype of Orichalcum Skinwalker Armor was complete.x

"That was intense." Lith said while wheezing. "I wouldn't have managed to succeed without your help and the hammer. I wonder if fake mages can use Orichalcum like I just did.

"Jirni's armor wasn't much different from my old one, whereas the Awakened assassin's was a masterpiece with a lot of powerful enchantments."

"Oh, yeah. I almost forgot. Why didn't you try to add to the new armor Full Guard as well?" Solus asked. She knew how power hungry Lith was.

"Because without the cloaking field it would turn me into a neon lamp. That means adding not one, but two new pseudo cores to the mix plus using an alloy of gold and Orichalcum. Too many variables for someone that had yet to succeed once."

Lith imprinted the new armor with his mana and gave it a test run. In its chainmail form it was ugly and uncomfortable to wear. The rough edges of the Orichalcum rings scratched and prickled even his enhanced skin.

The moment he stored one of his suits inside the armor's dimensional space, the metal turned into a silvery liquid resembling quicksilver, which spread all over Lith's body until the mimicking process was complete.

"It shapeshifted faster than the old armor. The fabric of the clothes feels identical to the original as well. Let's test its defensive properties." Lith took an enchanted dagger out of his pocket dimension and handed it to Solus.

She struck at Lith's chest who blocked the dagger with his open palm. Thanks to an invisible energy field enveloping Lith's body, not a single drop of blood was spilled. Solus draw the dagger back and struck again, but this time Lith stood still.

When the clothes and the blade collided, neither Lith nor the armor sustained any damage.

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"It's a success! The old Skinwalker armor would have been pierced and its barrier wasn't strong enough to protect my exposed limbs from the dagger's enchanted edge. If only both the armor and hammer weren't just a prototype!" Lith moaned.

He had used cyan mana crystals to make both hammers instead of blue ones, which meant that not only was the Skinwalker ugly to look at, but it also wasn't as powerful as it could have been.

"Yeah, right. Quit moaning and rejoice. Or at least take a break before working on Blood Forging another Skinwalker. There's a reason they are called experiments. We don't know if the blue crystal hammer will add new complications." Solus said.

"Also, I refuse to keep using WellMert hammers as their design."

Lith checked at his pocket watch. They still had a lot of time before going back to Belius. He took a quick shower and ate a ham sandwich to recover the lost strength. After half an hour, he was almost back to his peak condition, but used Invigoration nonetheless.

"It's the first time I use Bloom Forge, so everything must be perfect. I can't predict what will happen, but at least by being both mentally and physically at the top of my game, I can rule out tiredness as possible source of mistakes." Lith said.

The initial phase of the experiment was identical to Necro Forge. Bonding the chainmail to the mana crystal was easy, whereas what followed quickly turned into a nightmare.

Lith had to refine the ingredients one by one, creating from each one a small pseudo core. Condensing so much energy in such a small form required a lot of his focus, but he easily succeeded.

The first real problem arose when merging the first two pseudo cores. The mana pathways weren't strong enough to contain them both, so Lith had to expand the pathways while keeping the cores fused and fighting against the rejection effect.

With each core he added, the situation became more complicated. He had to strengthen the mana pathways, fix the deformities that appeared when the armor and the cores collided plus those which occurred during the pseudo cores' merging process.

To merge all four cores, it took him over an hour and much more slime goop than he had predicted since he had to consume some for each new pseudo core. Then, he was forced to stop, focusing only on stabilizing the mana pathways while the resonance between the Orichalcum and the cores made the latter grow.

'Dammit! If I miss their rhythm by a beat everything will go down the gutter. To make things worse, I also have to be careful that the cores don't get deformed beyond recognition. Bloom Forging a Skinwalker is a mammoth task straight from the beginning!' Lith thought.

Since they had no need for the hammer yet, Solus was free to help him to give the cores the right shape. Then, the Forgemastering turned from a nightmare into a Lovecraft novel.

Despair, helplessness, and madness seemed its only possible ending.

Growing and fixing four pseudo cores at once, all the while adapting the mana pathways made Lith almost puke blood. Unlike what it happened when he crafted the Bloom Hammer, a small increase in the pseudo cores' size meant a fourfold increase in the pressure they exerted on the mana pathways.

The process was even slower than Lith had predicted, taking a further toll on his mind and mana. On top of that, every time the merged cores grew bigger, the Thunderbird's plume and the Orichalcum would interact again.

Soon Lith was forced to stop the Forgemastering, making it a failure and a success at the same time. A success because the Bloom Skinwalker was complete. A failure because Lith had been forced to halt the process before the pseudo core could become as big as the one of the Necro Skinwalker.

"What time is it?" Lith asked.

"Almost late. How do you feel?"

"Terrible. I never used Invigoration so many times in a row. It has almost no effect anymore." Lith said.

"I need some rest as well. Do you mind if I stay in Lutia? The mana geyser will help me recover quickly and I don't want to be your fifth wheel again." Solus asked.

"Are you sure? You know that I'm not planning for any lovey dovey stuff, right? Even if I wanted to, I'm too tired." Lith had got used to being separated from Solus, but he still hated the void that her absence left inside of his soul.

"Right. Just like yesterday and the day before." Solus's voice oozed sarcasm.

"I'm a healthy young man in a healthy relationship and it's been weeks since I spent a bit of time with Kamila. How could I turn her down?"

"You couldn't and you shouldn't, but that doesn't make it any easier on the fifth wheel. Me. I'll see if I get the girls to come visiting me, otherwise I'd rather spend some alone time working on Bloom Forge.

"We have one last chainmail suit. If we fail again, it means that our first estimate is correct and that at our level Bloom Forge isn't suitable for crafting so many pseudo cores at once."

Lith reluctantly accepted her decision. Solus was her own person and just like him, she deserved her own space.

When Kamila arrived home, Lith had just finished showering. He looked like someone who had just ended a double shift in a mine. His breath was short and his shoulders slouching from the fatigue.

"Hello, handsome. How was your day?" Kamila pretended not to notice, throwing her arms around his neck. She brimmed with joy.

"Safe but tiring."

"Are you ready to get out for dinner?"

"Won't you prefer to stay at home for some cuddles? You seem a bit- tired." She said.

"That's a nice way of saying that I look like crap, and yes, I would rather stay at home, but I can't afford to lose the reservation. I'll bring you to a family restaurant, so there's no need for fancy clothes."

Kamila wore a light blue shirt over a knee length black pencil skirt. Her long black hair was down. That together with her black eyeliner and light red lipstick emphasized her pale skin.

"Aren't those the same clothes you wore during our first date? It's not our anniversary, yet." Lith asked.

"I know, but now I consider them my lucky clothes, and I'm feeling pretty lucky recently." She said before giving him a passionate kiss. She was flattered that Lith remembered both the clothes and the date they had met.

Kamila was surprised when he brought her to Belius's Warp Gate. Lith wasn't the type to get too far for a meal. Her surprise became even bigger when the Gate led them to a private office in what looked like an ancient castle.

"Headmaster Marth, this is Kamila, my girlfriend. Kamila, this is Headmaster Marth, a man that I have the honor to call a friend."

Duke Marth had more grey hair than the last time Lith had seen him and seemed even more tired than Lith was.

"Nice to meet you, miss Kamila. Follow my advice and never get too high in life, or the paperwork will burn your wings and bury you alive!" A wave of his hand opened a Warp Steps that Lith forced her to cross before she could even understand where they were.

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"Surprise!" He said to both Kamila and Zinya. Zinya had been accommodated in a single room as big as a small apartment. The furniture was simple but tasteful, giving her all that she needed to make herself at home and even have guests.

There were big windows from which entered plenty of sunlight and lots of different flowers decorated the room.

"Zin?" Between the tonics, Vastor's treatments, and the safe environment, Kamila almost couldn't recognize her sister. Her knees buckled, forcing Lith to sweep her off her feet to prevent her from falling.

"Kami? How did you get here? Visiting hours are over." Her knees buckled too, but she was in bed, so no one noticed.

"Hey, I may not work here anymore, but I still got friends. Visiting hours is whenever you want for you two." Lith said bringing Kamila near the bed before putting her down on a chair.

The two sisters started chatting and crying out of joy while Lith used his old Professor ring to order dinner for the three of them. He was feeling better by the minute. His blue core was thriving by being so near to the abundant mana source that the academy was.

The two women talked a lot, giving Lith a taste of an evening in Solus's shoes, but to him it didn't feel so bad. He was satisfied with seeing Kamila being so happy. She never stopped smiling, like it hadn't happened ever since her first visit at the Sarta household.

'If Solus feels like this the whole time, she's a saint.' Lith thought. He was already getting bored not having any part in the conversation.

"Can I show her your gift now?" Zinya asked, finally remembering about Lith.

"Yes, of course."

Kamila remained flabbergasted seeing the communication amulet.

"Thanks, but we cannot accept it. It's too expensive." She said.

"I knew you would say that, and that's why I had her imprint it already" Lith laughed.

"You can only suck it up and accept that your sister can now call you whenever she wants and vice versa."

Kamila was lost for words, incapable of expressing the feelings that were taking her by storm.

"Thanks." Was all she managed to say. She spent the rest of the evening chatting with Zinya, reminiscing together the happy moments of their shared past and planning the future ones, once the procedure was over.

Lith half listened and half slept, making the two women giggle when his snoring reached new heights.

"Lith is indeed a bit scary, but he's a keeper. Don't let him get away." Zinya said.

"I know, but how can I possibly repay him for all of this? We're so different that sometimes it feels like our relationship is one way only, and I'm always on the receiving end. What do I have to offer to him?"

"Your love and trust. Those are too rare commodities, especially for someone who's coveted for their power. Just be honest with him and don't overthink. You are a wonderful person and he knows it." Zinya took Kamila's hands between hers.

"Has he ever asked you for something?"

"No." Kamila replied.

"Then it's you he's interested in, not in what you have. As long as you feel the same, then you've nothing to worry about."

Later, when they were returning home, Kamila pondered all the way back on Zinya's words, even asking Lith for a walk to have more time to think. With winter close to its end, there was no snow covering Belius.

The chilly air of the night and the late hour made the city silent, very few people were still walking around. Kamila looked at the big black buildings that comprised every single city block, thinking for the first time in years if that was the place that she wanted to call home for the rest of her life.

Her mind started to wonder, reminiscing the party at the Ernas house. It was so big and flashy that it almost scared her. Then, Lith's house in Lutia came to her mind, with the entire family around the fire, with the kids playing together or watching a movie with the rest of the family.

That image warmed her heart. When they arrived at her apartment, Kamila felt the need to let Lith know how important he was for her and how deep her affection was. Just Like Solus had predicted, tired or not, Lith was more than happy to spend the third night in a row doing anything but sleeping.

Earlier that night, inside Solus's Tower

Thanks to the tower Warp coupled with the Warping Mirror on the first floor, which greatly enhanced the range of her Warp Steps, it didn't take Solus much time to pick up her friends.

"I still can't believe how easily we just crossed hundreds of kilometers at once. Lith is really lucky to have you." Tista said. She had been moving around the Distar Marquisate, collecting all the information she needed for her travels once spring finally arrived.

"Yeah. It makes our sleepovers so easy to arrange. To what do we owe the pleasure this time?" Nyka asked. Kalla's daughter was no normal girl, but a vampire, so she could only move after sunset.

Nyka looked like a young woman in her mid twenties, around 1.7 meters (5'7") tall with raven black hair and emerald green eyes both emphasized by her rosy skin. A vampire was pale only when unable to properly feed and that wasn't her case.

She wasn't a stunning beauty, but undeath gave her smooth, delicate features and kept her body toned without a shred of body fat. Every one of her movements was graceful and sensual, even when she wasn't attempting to flirt.

"I need help." Solus said. She was wearing a work shirt and pants. Leather gloves covered her hands, leaving the natural glow of her humanoid form radiate only from her head.

"Do you need another pep talk or advice about lil bro?" Tista asked.

"Neither. I mean help with a Forgemastering experiment." Solus told her about the last memory she had recovered and what had triggered it.

"This is huge, sister." Nyka was adamant considering Solus a fellow vampire due to her bond with Lith's life force.

"Why you didn't tell your spouse? One secret is okay, but two... The more secrets you keep, the more you'll grow apart."

"For the last time, he isn't my spouse. Lith isn't even my boyfriend. He's with Kamila now." Sometimes Nyka's single minded approach on life exasperated Solus.

"You share one body, one mind, and one life. If that's not a spouse, what is it?" Nyka said, always striking the iron no matter if it was hot or not.

"I'm with Nyka, for once." Tista stepped in before the two could start bickering.

"What if something happens and you two fuse again? If Lith discovers how many things you've kept from him, it will hurt him. I could understand if this was just about not wanting to mess with his relationship, but now it has become about your life.

"Maybe he could help you recover your memories. Like you always say, just give him a chance." She said.

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"You are right and I know it." Solus said. "That's the reason I brought you here. Every time we Forgemaster a magical item, I can feel something scratching at the back of my head. Lith's the only one who performs magic, though.

"I want to Forgemaster something myself, but with a weak ass core like mine, I can't do it alone. I need your help to keep the mana circle filled with energy and I'll do the rest. If I'm right, I'll regain another chunk of my memories.

"If that happens, I'll have no choice but to come clean with Lith. If I'm wrong, nothing will happen and we would have just wasted an hour of our time. Are you with me or not?"

"I'm with you, sister. No matter what." Solus was special for Nyka. She was an 'immortal vampire', just like her, and was also the first friend she had ever had.

"Let's do this. I always wanted to learn true Forgemastery." Tista said.

"What are we going to make?"

"A cloaking ring. Without it, Lith and I can't ever go separate ways without risking that someone spots my life force. If that happens, our lives would be in constant danger.

"To make one, I need only basic ingredients. An alloy of gold and silver would suffice, but I'll go with Orichalcum instead of silver to achieve a stronger pseudo core than Orion's.

"It's a very simple pseudo core, so even with a deep green mana core like mine I should be able to make it. Even if I fail, it's no big deal. The materials for one ring are negligible. Except for the mana crystal." Solus whispered that last part, but everyone heard it distinctly.

Tista knew how stingy her brother was and she doubted he would miss the disappearance. As for Nyka, she couldn't care less. Her mother provided her for everything, so she had no concept of expensive or cheap.

Solus took the Bloom Hammer out of her pocket dimension. Both hammers had the same properties, but since she was going to use Bloom Forge for the ring, it seemed the proper choice to her.

Solus melted in a crucible a nugget of gold together with one of purified Orichalcum and then she poured the liquid into a mold, giving the ring its shape. She cooled it with water magic, taking the still white hot metal with tongs and placing it on the Adamant Forge instead of the usual Obsidian one.

'In all of my memories I work with a silvery hammer, using a silvery Forge to enchant something. My guess is that it was all made of adamant, but since I don't have any, Orichalcum will have to do.' Solus thought.

Another thing that bothered her was the runes of power engraved on all the enchanted items that appeared in her memories. Fake Forgemastery used them to create and stabilize the mana pathways, but they would disappear forever once the process was over.

The true Forgemastery Lith and Solus employed didn't use runes at all, only pure mana. She was certain that master Menadion wouldn't have all of her creations engraved with runes just to make them look cool.

The problem was that even if Solus was right and runes could help to step up their creations, she had no idea what they did nor how to engrave it.

'Carving random runes is bound to make a big boom. Let's hope to regain some memories of them. It would be a wonderful anniversary present for Lith.' Soon would it be the anniversary of Solus's awakening from her slumber.

Lith considered it like her birthday, but for Solus its significance went beyond that. It was the day when she had gained her family, her best friend, and maybe even more. It was the day when their bond had evolved from the pact between an artifact and its master into a partnership.

She wanted both the secret of the runes and the ring to be her fist gift to Lith. To return something after only having taken from him for so long. Also, it would give her the courage she needed to reveal him her humanoid form.

Unlike Orion, she had no purple crystal. Solus could only Bond the ring with a small blue mana stone. Then, she created the magic circle and let the girls fill it. Solus had to take care of both the hammer and the pseudo core, there was a limit to what her focus could do on her own.

Gold proved to be incredibly resistant to mana, both during the Bonding spell and the Forgemastering process. Solus had chosen to use Bloom Forge because she lacked the raw power necessary to overcome the combined rejection effect of the gold and the mana circulatory system.

Finesse was her only route to success and Bloom Forge was the perfect means to her end. First, she created a small pseudo core and mana pathways, only using the hammer to increase their size once she was certain that she had shaped them to perfection.

Each strike produced a deep green burst of light, yet no memory emerged.

'This is odd. In my memories I was striking directly at the item, not at the magic circle. What significance could it possibly have?' Solus thought.

It took the girls almost two hours to complete the ring and by the time they were done, they were completely exhausted.

"You and my brother are two peas in a pod, Solus. If this is your concept of fun, remind me to take a rain check the next time you invite me." Tista was covered in sweat, her body aching like it was going to break.

To keep the circle powered up, she had been forced to use Invigoration non stop.

"I'm starving." Nyka said while trying to not look at Tista like she was a giant cheeseburger. She had no sweat but no Invigoration either. To do her part, she had gone dangerously close to a feeding frenzy.

"I'm sorry, girls. I never realized how hard is to do what I do with the mana geyser." Solus gave Nyka a jug filled with Lith's blood that she kept in her pocket dimension for her undead friend.

Nyka smelled the delicacy, drinking it in small sips, using the Refine meditation technique in-between gulps. Vampires would get stronger over time by feeding. The stronger the source of blood, the more nutrients they would obtain.

Normal vampires would just drink blood that would be partially processed by their blood core, making it slowly grow in power each time they fed. Even though they were not Awakened ones, some vampires had discovered a technique to refine all the blood they ingested instead of just a small part.

They had shared their knowledge with Kalla and she in turn had passed it onto his daughter. Thanks to Refine, Nyka was able to assimilate most of the mana and light energy inside Lith's blood, allowing her core to grow at a faster rate than normal.

Unlike mana cores, the power of a blood core was determined by how much black energy they still held. The more powerful a blood core was, the less black streaks it had.

According to legends, a perfectly red blood core granted a vampire the ability to turn back into a red cored human at will, overcoming all the limitations of their undead status at the price of all their magic powers as long as they maintained such form.

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"Since you have no troubles with other women sleeping with your spouse, can I borrow him from time to time? He's beyond delicious and Mom has taught me how I can feed on a man while we both experience the same amount of pleasure." Nyka asked.

Blood was the most abundant source of life force, but it was not the only one a vampire could draw sustenance from.

"He is not my spouse and like heck I'm fine with it!" Solus blurted out.

"I'm jealous, okay? I admit it! Are you happy now?"

"Actually, yes." Nyka said while giving the flabbergasted Solus a big hug.

"I would never touch your man, I just wanted you to express your feelings out loud."

Nyka was usually tactless and so direct when she wanted something that she bordered on being rude. Solus had completely fallen for her act and so did Tista, who had become beet red at the image the Nyka's words had painted in her head.

"What about your memory?" Tista asked, eager to change the topic.

"I did everything I could like it happens in my visions, but nothing. The cloaking ring is a masterpiece, but the attempt to retrieve my memories was a failure. It seems I can afford to keep my secret for a bit longer before..."

Solus choked on her words as she noticed that Tista was deadly pale.

The prolonged effort had triggered the body refinement process. Tista was soon in spasms as her body expelled the accumulated impurities by turning her inside out like a sock. Tista's bones cracked and reformed, causing her such an intense pain that Solus had to use her Immortal Body array to ensure her survival.

"Worst girl's night ever." Tista said once the process was over, right before losing consciousness.

In the days before the procedure, Kamila used all of her free time to stay with her sister while Lith alternated between experimenting on Forgemastering and on Origin Flames. Even his second attempt at crafting a Bloom Skinwalker Armor ended up in failure.

Its pseudo core was too complex and the amount of mana it required too big for Lith's current abilities, even with Solus's help. In the meantime, Zekell had finished smelting the first two batches of Orichalcum into metal ingots.

He was working on a way to make chausses, hauberks, and coifs with a decent shape since Lith had yet to send him the blueprint for the hammers. After thinking about it for a while, Lith gave him two different images for two different hammers.

One was shaped like a proper blacksmith tool, consisting of a shaft and a head with two hammers. The second was more similar to an ice ax, featuring on its head a hammer and a small pick.

"Why two hammers? No matter the Forgemastering technique we use, they'll have the exact same properties. It's a waste of Orichalcum and mana crystals!" Solus couldn't understand Lith's decision.

For someone as stingy as he was, such a thing was like throwing money in the gutter.

"I have my reasons." Was the only reply he would give her.

Lith and Solus Forgemastered both hammers and then practiced with the amount of extra mana the Forgemastering tools could hold before attempting to craft a Skinwalker Armor again. Also, they learned a few new things about Origin Flames.

Even though there was a huge difference between how they interacted with physical materials and magical energy, they could burn them both. Things like stone or metal would seemingly be destroyed and reformed several times.

It would cause them to change their shape and physical properties. Both the quality and the quantity of Origin Flames employed influenced the outcome. A little amount would act almost as if it was a common flame, too much would destroy anything.

"During our first attempt, we didn't really purify the Adamant. More like we incinerated everything else. Adamant is incredibly resistant, even to Origin Flames. It's the only reason it survived the blast" Lith pondered.

Magic, instead, would be simply consumed by the flames, but the process had a limit. Origin Flames could only destroy an amount of mana equivalent to the world energy they held.

It meant that a delicate structure like an ongoing spell or a temporary array could be easily affected, whereas a permanent array or a magical artifact required much more effort.

Lith tried using them on some of his oldest works, who had now become too weak to be useful, to put to the test his theory about Origin Flames being capable of breaking the imprint of the owner on a magical item.

He obtained conflicting results. The flames would eat at the magical aura, forcing the item's pseudo core to consume its energy to survive. After a certain point, however, the pseudo core would rather break than bend.

Lith even tried using the Clean Slate spell on a weakened pseudo core, but the only result was making the item crumble.

"So far Origin Flames act more like some kind of anti matter for magic rather than a fine controlled tool. They can attack the structure of a spell, but not its energy signature." Lith said while one of his old daggers turned into a puff of smoke.

"I'm not so sure of it. Maybe the problem lies in your hybrid form." Solus said.

"After all, if we compare it with the complete one you assumed in the past, you still have a long way to go. Another possibility is that just like true magic, they might be affected by your will."

"I don't use mana to create her, only a tiny spark of life force." Lith objected. "I have no idea how to imbue my will inside my own life force. Even if I did, how the heck can I command it to burn something and ignore the rest?"

Solus had no answers as well, so their days passed quickly. Between family, friends, and experiments, Lith resumed sleeping only when strictly necessary, like the day before Zinya's procedure.

Kamila had managed to obtain a sick leave for medical reasons. She was Zinya closest of kin, making her optic nerve the closest thing to a compatible blueprint. Without her Lith couldn't operate.

After a whole week of proper feeding, safety, and constant care, Zinya had flourished to the point of being almost unrecognizable. Yet that day she was pale again, twitching at the smallest noise.

"How do you feel today?" Lith asked.

"Scared to death." Both sisters replied.

"Are you sure you want to proceed with the treatment?" It was an obligatory question before a Body Sculpting procedure.

Zinya held Kamila's hand tightly before replying:

"Yes, please. I can't wait for this to be over."

Unlike normal magical treatments, for tier five healing spells, the patient's head and limbs had to be strapped to their bed.

"Is this really necessary?" Zinya asked.

"Yes. It could be painful, or it could affect your personality. You might even become violent. If that happens while I'm growing the optic nerve inside your head and you move abruptly, it could result in a fatal hemorrhage." Lith replied.

"Now I really wish I didn't ask you any explanation." She was now even more nervous.

Lith, Quylla, and Vastor all double cast their Scanner spell on both sisters, to check their conditions. Lith and Vastor also activated the Chisel spell. Lith needed it to perform the procedure, whereas Vastor would keep it at the ready in case his intervention was required.

Chapter 616 End of a Struggle Part 1

The first part of the operation required to make space for the new nervous tissue without harming the patient. Lith had no experience in the field and the brain was too sensitive an organ for a rookie.

Vastor took the lead, removing what he could and using Body Sculpting to slightly alter Zinya's skull to create more room whenever he had no other choice. The changes were so subtle that only a detailed diagnostic spell like Scanner could detect them.

When he was done, he stepped out and made space for Lith.

"Remember, the best approach is always to go from easy to hard. Start by creating the optic nerve from the eye end and leave the connection with the thalamus for last. That way, we can immediately check if the brain receives the right stimuli.

"If we worked the other way around and make even just a few mistakes, the sudden massive flow of wrong inputs might cause permanent damage. Plus, we would need to destroy all the connections and redo everything from scratch, since we would have no idea what went wrong." Vastor said.

Lith did as instructed and created the optic nerve, the chiasma, and the optic tract. Then, he used his Probe spell to create small tendrils of semi solid mana that stimulated Zinya's visual cortex following Kamila's optic nerve pattern.

The tendrils would carry the electrical impulses that light generated by hitting Zinya's eyes and allow Lith to check how the brain processed the acquired information. That way Lith could make sure that the impulses would travel through the right pathway before making a physical connection.

"Zinya, I need you to keep talking during the entire procedure. I don't care what you say, I just need to check your cognitive functions and your mood. If you feel anything weird, just tell me. Don't hold anything." Lith said.

Zinya nodded and started to recount whatever she remembered from her youth. As long as everything was okay after testing with Probe, Lith would grow the optic nerve, yet more than once he was forced to stop and backtrack.

Sometimes the electrical impulses would cause her small spasms. Other times fits of pain or uncontrollable mood changes. Every time that happened, Lith had to quickly disconnect the tendrils and search for another point of access to her brain.

Luckily, the more the procedure progressed on the right track, the more Zinya regained her sight. It gave Lith a clear indicator of his progress and gave Zinya something useful to talk about.

At the beginning she could only see a white light, but every time Lith found a proper pathway she would start to see small dots of colors appear.

"Dammit, Lith. Your Probe spell is amazing. It saved us a lot of mana and the patient a lot of pain." Vastor said. Even with his expertise, he would have missed the right connection more than once.

Yet his help proved to be invaluable for Lith. Whenever he had no idea how to proceed, it would take the Professor just a couple of tries to find the right pathway among hundreds of seemingly identical alternatives.

"You are doing great, son. I'm really proud of you."

Lith nodded, not having the luxury of wasting his focus to reply. What Vastor had no idea of, was that to be able to carry a physical stimulus, Probe required a great expenditure of mana.

It was one of the reasons Lith couldn't hold it for long back when he had used Probe for the first time on Zinya. Such a huge amount of energy would have burned her brain and left him weakened in a matter of minutes.

Now, however, he was only creating the extremities of the optical nerve with Probe, lessening the burden on both Zinya and himself. The procedure took a few hours, forcing Lith to take some rest.

Vastor or Quylla stepped in to check on the progress, keeping the patient's conditions stable while Lith consumed a tonic and used Invigoration to regain his mental focus.

Mana wasn't an issue, but he could feel his concentration declining. For a normal Healer, it would have taken several minutes for a tonic to give them back their focus, but Invigoration had no such problem.

By the time everything was over, Zinya could see better than most.

"Is it over?" She asked when she felt the straps being removed.

"Yes. Can you touch my hand?" Lith offered her his right hand, keeping it low and on the right. Zinya had no problem with depth nor distance perception. She managed to grab Lith's hand easily no matter where he placed it within her field of view.

"Thank you so much. I know it isn't worth much coming from a blind person, but you all are the most gorgeous people I have ever met." Zinya embraced and kissed the entire medical staff and the nurses that had taken care of her until that day.

Kamila and Zinya hugged in joy while Lith and Vastor planned together her physiotherapy. Zinya still needed to learn how to move normally, read, write, and even to associate a name to common objects.

"One more thing." Vastor cleared his throat to get everyone's attention.

"We can keep Zinya here for a couple more days to make sure that there are no post-op complications, but then she has to leave. We need the room for the next patient."

"How much do I owe you?" Kamila asked.

"I'm sorry your sister isn't part of your family register, otherwise the army would cover part of the expenses." Vastor handed her the invoice.

Kamila owed the White Griffon much less than she had feared. Two gold coins for Vastor's consultation and Body Sculpting, 30 silver coins for Quylla's research job, and 70 silver coins for Zinya's stay at the White Griffon, for a total of three gold coins.

It was still a huge amount of money considering that Kamila was paid two silvers per week. Body Sculpting was the most difficult technique, after all. Most people would more easily afford a magical item to compensate for their handicap rather than having it treated.

"That's it? I expected at least ten gold coins." It was how much the cheapest and less competent Healer would have asked, the same price of two communication amulets.

Kamila wouldn't have been able to afford her own if the army hadn't gifted it to her when she had been promoted to First Lieutenant.

"You would be right if the lead Healer had charged you with something, but he didn't." Vastor pointed at Lith. He knew how Kamila hated to feel indebted, so he didn't ask for favors to Vastor nor the academy.

Otherwise the whole procedure would have been free of charge.

'I respect Kamila's desire to save her sister and I can't take it away from her. If I stepped in and solved everything by myself, she would feel useless. All of her struggles and fears would be for nothing.

'This way, she can still feel like she has done her part because she did. Even without me, Zinya would still have got her sight, it would have just been more expensive.' Lith thought.

"How much do I owe you?" Kamila turned to Lith repeating her question.

"I'll cut the workmanship and charge you only at cost price. So, it's 50 silver coins for the amulet and dinner for the procedure."

Chapter 617 End of a Struggle Part 2

"What?" Kamila was flabbergasted.

"The mana crystal is small but powerful and I bought the silver ingot at market price. The healing only took me some mana, so dinner will suffice." Lith explained.

"It's too little money! I can't accept that." She said.

"Sorry, miss. Healers make their own fares." Vastor and Quylla nodded at those words.

"Besides, you should worry more about Zinya's accommodation. Your apartment is good for two people but cramped for three. Also, we're both often away for work and your sister needs guidance." Lith said.

Kamila bit her lower lip in stress. Zinya could indeed move into her home, but there was only one bedroom, so either she had to take a break from their relationship or they would be forced to go to a hotel every time.

Changing the apartment wasn't possible. With a debt on her shoulders, Kamila couldn't afford a new one with just her savings. The one she lived in was provided by the army for a reduced fee, but

they wouldn't help her pay for a bigger house since she was officially single and without any family member.

To make matters worse, Belius was a horrible city for someone as inexperienced as Zinya was. Public transportation required to be able to read, there was almost no green area, and people were paranoid of newcomers.

To not leave Zinya alone all day, Kamila would need to hire a caregiver to keep her company and teach her everything she might need.

"Don't worry, Kami. You've already done too much. I can't let you give up on your life for my sake. I'm still Fallmug's wife, I have a home and duties to attend to. Maybe now that I'm not blind anymore, he might change his ways.

"He hasn't always been a bad man." Zinya's smile trembled just as her whole body did. Despite all of her efforts, she was terrified at the idea of seeing her husband or even hearing his voice again.

"No way! It's too dangerous." Kamila, Lith, and Vastor said at once.

"Lady Sarta, according to my experience, things can only get worse now that you aren't helpless anymore." Vastor said. "On top of that, in your condition, a single blow to the head could ruin everything we did today. Your body needs time to heal and adapt."

"I have an idea." Lith said. "Zinya could stay in Lutia with my parents until the end of my leave. They have plenty of free space and could use a hand with the kids. I can Warp you there whenever you want and when I have to go back to work, she can move into your apartment."

Kamila couldn't decide what to do. Lutia was much better than Belius for her sister's recovery, but she felt like she was once again relying too much on Lith.

"Zinya has only experienced an abusive relationship. Maybe seeing how the marriage of my parents and sister work could help her to make up her mind about the divorce." Lith whispered in her ear.

"Lutia it's a perfect solution." She sighed. Her pride was a bit wounded, but Zinya's well-being came first.

Fallmug had just recently started to walk again after being unconscious for several days. Lith had been true to his word. Ever since Fallmug had woken up, Lith would kidnap him, blind him, and beat the crap out of him until his body collapsed.

Fallmug Sarta had been living in terror the whole time. There was no place he could hide where the demon wouldn't be able to find him. He used the unexpected respite Zinya's intervention had given him to run to the authorities and expose the evil mage.

The desk clerk of the Mage Association, listened to all he had to say, before dismissing everything for the ramblings of a madman.

"I'm sorry, sir Sarta, but your story is really hard to believe. If you did make an enemy of the strongest young mage of the Kingdom, how can you possibly be still alive? Also, you failed to mention why he would have a beef with you."

Even the clerk of a medium sized city like Xylita was sick and tired of all the lunatics blaming Ranger Verhen for everything. Pregnant girls claimed he was the father and demanded

compensation, nutjobs said to have been cursed by him or that he had taken credit for their achievements, like restoring Kaduria.

Fallmug realized to be in a pinch. He had been so anxious to get rid of his torturer to forget about making up a believable lie. He thought far and wide how to explain why someone like Lith was tormenting him, but unless Fallmug confessed the abuse on his wife, his story wouldn't make any sense.

Yet if he did, Lith would become the last of his problems. Despite his constant pain and suffering, Fallmug was still a respectable man with consistent income. If the truth about his home were to be exposed, he would go to jail, and Zinya would be entitled to everything just by asking for a divorce.

"He is after my wife!" His words made the clerk chuckle.

"Sorry, sir. I don't mean to disrespect you, but if I ask your wife, will she confirm your story?"

"Of course not! She's on his side."

"Enough wasting my time!" The clerk had run out of patience.

"If your wife wanted to be with him, she would just ask for a divorce. A Great Mage has plenty of money, she wouldn't need anything from you. What proof do you have of your claims?"

Fallmug was taken aback. Now he understood what Lith meant when he said that he would turn Fallmug into his wife. He was now alone and with no one who could help him. There was no witness of the aggressions nor proof of his injuries aside from his words.

Just like his wife until a few days ago, he was trapped in an inescapable cage.

"None? Well, then I hope you'll forgive me if I don't believe a word coming from a man accused by three Healers of repeatedly beating his wife." As the clerk was filing Fallmug's statement for the record, his name had triggered a flag.

"Not to mention that according to the army records, at the time of the alleged assaults, Ranger Verhen was still at his home. I don't know what your problem is, sir, but maybe a night in jail will help you clear your mind."

"What about Verhen?" Fallmug asked while the guards dragged him towards the dungeon.

"None of your business. In your place, I'd worry more about being charged with slander of a state mage and wasting the Association time, because those are two crimes I can testify about."

Lith's parents knew all about Zinya's situation, so they were glad to offer their help. In their eyes, she was the embodiment of what could have happened to Tista if Lith had never been born.

Zinya fell in love with Lutia, with the Trawn woods, and with the closest thing to a real family she had ever had. Learning how to read, write, and count together with Leria and Aran was embarrassing, but after a while she stopped worrying about it.

Elina also taught her how to cook and sew, so that once she moved back with Kamila, she could at least help her managing her home. The days passed, and soon Lith's leave was about to end.

Chapter 618 Travels Part 1

A few days before Lith had to once again leave to resume his duty as Ranger of the Kellar region, Zinya finally mustered enough courage to tell Kamila about her final decision.

"Kami, I could never thank you and Lith enough for what you did for me. The last week has been the happiest time of my life." She said.

"This is just the beginning, Zin. There are still so many things that we have yet to do together. I'll not be often home, but I'll try my best to not make you feel lonely. I've already found a caregiver for you." Kamila replied with a smile.

The daily expenses for the caregiver and Zinya would make it even harder for her to repay her debt, but she didn't mind at all. Kamila had planned everything and was ready to bear the consequences of her decision.

"Thank you, but I'd like to remain here." Zinya blurted it out.

"What? Why?"

"You have your personal life and your career to worry about, Kami. I'm not a child and you can't take care of me forever. I'd rather live here as a housemaid than burden you more than I already did. I already spoke with Elina about it.

"The Verhen are nice people. They accepted to give me food and accommodation in exchange for my job while they teach me everything I need to stand up for myself. They are even willing to pay me once I'm done learning.

"I've also decided to file for divorce. If I stay at your house, Fallmug might look for me there. He will never come looking for me here, instead. I don't know if I have the strength to face him yet, so this is the perfect solution."

Kamila tried to convince Zinya to reconsider, but she was adamant about it. Kamila was sad at the idea that meeting her sister without Lith's help would take her quite some time. The closest Gate was in Derios, and to reach Lutia from there it would take her over one and a half hours.

Yet seeing her so happy and determined, filled her heart with joy.

'I did all I could to give Zin her freedom, if I force her to come with me, she would just exchange one cage for another. Here she'll be surrounded by people who don't take care of her because it's their job but because they want to.

'Also, she will be safe from Fallmug, since attacking a mage's family is plain suicide.' She thought.

'Zinya and I have tried visiting her children, but Zinya's in-law didn't even let us in. According to the law, she is just a disabled, incompetent mother who has run away from her home.

'To be able to claim any right over her children, she first needs to get a divorce and have the means to take care of them. I don't want to burden Lith with this matter as well.' Kamila thought while preparing to say her goodbyes.

"I'm really sorry, I knew nothing about this. It wasn't an elaborate scheme I devised from the very beginning to keep you and your home all to myself." Lith said as a joke, yet for second Kamila almost fell for it.

"When will you be back?" She asked.

"I don't know. It could take weeks, maybe months. The silver lining is that now that you have exchanged your communication rune with Tista, she can help you reach Lutia whenever she is at home." Lith said.

"That's not what I asked you, you silly. I miss you already." She hugged him tightly. During those twenty days they had lived together and the idea of waking up alone hurt her more than she expected.

"Will you wait for me?" He asked returning her embrace.

"I promise."

Lith took her back home, where they kissed one last time before he had to resume his duty.

Ever since Scarlett the Scorpicores had visited Leegaain, asking for his help to solve the issue of her inability to obtain a purple core and achieve new tribulations, she had remained within the Gorgon Empire.

Hundred of years had passed since the last time she had left the Griffon Kingdom, back when she was still a young Emperor Beast. Taking the mantle of the Lord of the Forest had given her great powers but also a great burden.

"Travelling allows me to learn about different magical philosophies, understand what the heck Mogar wants from me with its stupid tribulations, and to check about Abominations. Many birds with one stone." She said out loud, drawing attention on herself.

'Dammit, I'm not used to be disguised as a human. I keep making stupid mistakes that force me to move from a town to another as if I'm a wanted criminal. I keep forgetting that fake mages need to chant gibberish to use magic and that they can't break stone with their bare hands.' She thought while calling a waiter to get seconds.

Another thing she had a hard time with, was the small portions of food humans consumed. Even if her appearance was that of a woman, her body was still that of a Scorpicores and so was her stomach.

She looked like an adventurer in her thirties, about 1.67 meters (5'7") tall. Her shoulder length ashen gold hair had red shades and she wore a gold rimmed pince-nez on her nose.

The body Scarlett had shapeshifted into was pretty, but not gorgeous. She preferred to go unnoticed in human settlements rather than being forced to constantly deal with flocks of admirers.

Centuries ago, when she had taken a walk with Salaark, they had been forced to knock down the entire male population of a village just to be able to order a beer without someone hitting on them.

She was currently in the city of Tyrenar, to investigate the rumors about a mysterious monster that was slaughtering men and beasts alike for no apparent reason.

'If I'm right, I might have found one of those new Eldritch Abominations. Right after the monster outbreaks ended, the Council reported the appearance of several creatures of unparalleled power.

'According to my sources, they should still be within my league. If I manage to track one of them and defeat it, I could finally learn something more about this Master. I could even find out his location.' Scarlett thought as she took her communication amulet out of her pocket dimension for the first time in almost a year.

"Oh crap!" She blurted out, this time intentionally. She had so many missed calls that it took her quite some time just to take note of who she wanted to call back and who she would just ignore.

"Call me if you need anything else." The young waiter gave Scarlett a kind smile that she returned while wondering why the heck a Treantling was working in a restaurant. Treantlings were trees that after living for centuries in a zone rich with world energy had become Awakened.

They were the plant equivalent of a magical beast. His disguise was flawless, but Scarlett's enchanted pince-nez allowed her to not only see the mana core of her opponents, but also their life force.

The Eyes of Menadion were one of her most prized artifacts, which had allowed her to increase her knowledge about light magic by leaps and bounds ever since she had 'liberated' it from the paws of a mad Griffon.

Just like for any living creature, being born from a good natured parent didn't guarantee that they would inherit their heart or wisdom. Some of Leegaain's children were so infamous that the Council had put a bounty on their head even though they weren't even Awakened.

Chapter 619 Travels Part 2

The same had happened for the offspring of Salaark and Tyris. Since the Guardians' children were born capable of using all kinds of true magic and were gifted with a life that could span for almost a millennium, the Council considered them to be a threat of the highest level.

'Well, the silver lining is that plants are the chattiest among living beings. The disguised Treantling might be able to point me in the right direction.' Scarlett thought.

She handed several copper coins to pay for her meal to the waiter, enough to feed a small platoon, and almost as many as a tip.

"I'm flattered by your attentions, miss, but I'm strictly a waiter. You're not even my type, sorry." The young man said, yet he still pocketed all the money.

"Neither you're mine, smartass of a Treantling." Scarlett's voice was a low growl, her teeth shapeshifting for a second into fangs. She wanted to make sure the greenhorn would get her point.

"You're lucky I'm a carnivore, otherwise I would be glad to make a salad out of you as a token of my appreciation."

"How do you know who I am?" The waiter looked around, worried that someone might have noticed their exchange.

"You can call me Scarlett, little salad. Now if we are done playing, I'd like you to tell me everything you know about the creature that plagues this land." Scarlett said.

"I'm sorry, but I only know what everyone does. A few months ago, right after the monster outbreak, a creature started to raid the Gheluan forest. At first, it only attacked the magical beasts, so we didn't care.

"Then it killed even the Lord of the Forest and after that, everything went downhill. There's nothing alive there anymore, most wildlife and flora have been wiped out." The Treantling sighed.

"The Lord of the Forest is dead? Are you saying that thing killed Myshar the Unicorn too? How is it possible? She was young but quite powerful!"

"Why do you think I'm here? Every sane creature is running away from death. I've no idea what it is because no one who has seen it has survived the encounter. Allow me to give you a fair warning in exchange for the generous tip.

"Now that the Gheluan forest is nothing but an empty shell, the monster has started to attack nearby human settlements. It's only a matter of time before it arrives here too, so don't make yourself too comfortable." The waiter went back to serving the tavern clients, keeping an ear out for rumors about the monster.

The idea of an Emperor Beast dying so easily at the hands of an unknown creature made the ancient Scorpicoire worry. She returned to her hotel room and called Leegaain, hoping that the Guardian of the Gorgon Empire could help her.

Even though he had almost relinquished those lands, they were still his turf.

"What is it now? I'm kind of busy." Leegaain sounded annoyed, but him responding immediately eased Scarlett's fears.

"Why has no one taken care of the Gheluan Forest yet?" She asked.

"The Empire takes one good third of the Garlen continent, it's not something as puny as your old forest was. I'm hunting down one of those insanely strong Eldritch Abominations, so I've no time to waste.

"Milea is busy dealing with a lich who got bored with his research and wants to conquer her lands. She can't leave until she has destroyed him, but she has dispatched her troops already to take care of your problem.

"Unfortunately, the Gheluan forest is in the middle of nowhere. Do you have any idea how many crises Milea has to face on a daily basis? Cut her some slack. Over and out."

'Leegaain is having trouble tracking an Eldritch? Either it's a master at hiding their presence or the situation is even worse than I thought. I need to achieve a frigging purple core or soon my power will not be enough to survive against the new breeds of Abominations.

'Solving the Gheluan forest's problem might trigger the breakthrough I've been looking up until now. To further evolve, I need a real challenge. Plus, if I do him a favor, Leegaain will owe me. I can't pass on the opportunity to ask him for a reward.' Scarlett thought.

A wide grin appeared on her face. At her level and age, the real challenge to further her magical research was the lack of very powerful and rare ingredients. Adamant and Davross were the only metals she looked for, and Guardians usually had quite a stockpile of them.

Even if the threat turned out to be a minor one, she could always ask Leegaain for a bit of his blood or one of his scales. The power of such powerful ingredients would allow her to finally upgrade her equipment.

Scarlett left the hotel and spread her membranous wings. Air magic filled them with wind, boosting her flight speed to sub sonic levels. She had been to the Gheluan forest in the past, but her memory of the place was foggy.

She didn't remember enough to perform consecutive Warps and even if she did, the place was quite far.

Dimensional magic would make her travel shorter, yet at the same time, it would drain a lot of her mana, forcing Scarlett to use Invigoration more than once.

'If this monster is so strong, I need all of my trump cards to beat it. I can't risk being defeated just because I'm too tired to put out a decent fight.' She thought.

Flying would take longer, but it would consume an insignificant amount of her energy. Only humans with their short life span would Warp even to go to the bathroom. Half an hour later, Scarlett had almost reached her destination.

A small caravan moving from Gheluan drew her attention. It was composed of humans, plants, and beasts. The caravan was too an odd mix to be normal.

Despite it was still at several kilometers of distance from her, Scarlett could distinguish them clearly as if she was standing right beside them thanks to the Eyes of Menadion.

With just a flap of her wings, she reached their position and gracefully landed on the ground. The group was as heterogeneous as it was powerful.

There were Dryads, Thorns, who were creatures born from the Awakening of bushes whereas Dryads were born from flowers and Treantlings from trees, magical beasts of various species, and several human mages.

The weakest mana core among them was cyan, yet they were all on edge and armed to the teeth. As soon as they noticed Scarlett, they assumed a defensive formation.

"What the heck is going on here?" Scarlett retracted her wings, uncaring of their threat. They were too weak and their equipment was poor. She was quite surprised noticing that the humans weren't impressed seeing a winged woman.

"Don't worry, she's one of us." Said a big Ry, a wolf type magical beast, after sniffing the air for a second. A magical beast giving away so easily their ability to talk was also a bad sign.

"How can you be so sure this isn't just another trick? I lost my wife by trusting a stranger." Said a burly wizard who was holding a metal staff brimming with mana.

"Just as I lost my pack. Stop whining and keep moving, human!" The Ry growled and resumed his advance.

Chapter 620 Hybrid Part 1

The magical beasts started moving at a speed the humans could follow while keeping their spells at the ready.

Scarlett could feel that each one of them was grieving and was filled with hatred. Yet there was no bickering nor disrespect between the different races. It was enough to give her the creeps.

"We can't afford to stop. If you want answers, you'd better follow us." The Ry said.

"We are all that's left of the entire Gheluan forest. The others have either already escaped or died. To answer your earlier question, Mogar has turned against its children and none can escape its fury." His words made Scarlett sneer.

"Very dramatic. I never heard of a Ry with so much talent with words. Do you mind being a bit more specific?"

"It's hard to explain. One day the natural order was simply turned upside down. You could see a plant eat a deer, the deer hunt a wolf, and the wolf attack his own pack. Humans too were affected by the phenomenon, but them attacking their own or killing for sport is hardly a novelty. No offense." The Ry said.

"None taken." Replied a middle aged magician who was sitting on top of a Cingy, a boar type magical beast, to be able to cast the Life Sensing array from time to time. It had allowed them to identify the enemy hidden among the grass and escape from several ambushes.

"Whatever it is, it's capable of taking any form it wants. A flower, a Ry, a human, anything. Even its smell is almost identical to the original. I had to almost die twice to learn how to distinguish the anomaly it holds."

"What anomaly?" That word reminded Scarlett of Lith, making her fear that her decision to spare him all those years ago had finally backfired.

"It's a hybrid smell. Part beast, part Abomination, part undead." With each word the Ry spoke Scarlett's stomach churned stronger, at least until she heard the last part.

"Undead? Don't you mean human?" She asked.

"No, I'm sure of it. For once humans are innocent." The Ry shook his head.

"Ambush!" The Warden yelled one second before black sprouts emerged from the ground. They grew at an unbelievable speed, draining all life from their surroundings to sustain their existence and turning the grasslands into barren earth.

Like the group they were chasing, the creatures mimicked the appearance of members of different races. Their age and gender appeared to be random. There were even children and elderly among them.

The creatures were a pulsing mass made out of bones, of the Chaos energy typical of Abominations, and of black vines instead of flesh. The red light of undeath burning inside their eyes revealed a desperate hunger.

Yet as fast as they had appeared, their forms became indistinguishable from the living. Vines turned into flesh, and the red light was replaced by normal pupils as their skin or fur turned from pitch black to what it was supposed to be.

"Why did you abandon us, mom? We miss you. We promise to behave if you return." Said two little kids to the Warden. They had big watery eyes, like those of a child too naïve to understand what they have done to anger their beloved parents.

"You're not my real children! I've seen you die." Rage and grief boosted the power of her darkness magic spells. Two black bolts erupted from her hands turning the two kids into rotten mush among high-pitched screams of agony.

"Don't run away, my love." Said a female Ry to the leader of the group.

"I'm not dead and I mean you no harm. I just want to be reunited with you. If you pledge your alliance to the Great Mother, we could both happily live forever."

The male Ry hesitated. He had fought many of those creatures, but never before one of them had taken the semblance of his beloved Nia.

"Nice try, scum." Scarlett raised her pince-nez above her head, making it emit a pulse of light that brushed off the illusion and revealed the cruel reality underneath. No matter their gender, age, or race.

All the creatures had a single life force, a single smell, and were made of mud. The Vines that covered their bodies allowed them to move, while the Chaos energy covering them replaced their true semblance with a familiar face.

Once their secret was exposed, the creatures dropped the act like it was a live grenade and turned toward Scarlett.

"Long time no see, Scorpicores." They said in unison with a neutral voice. "You might just be what I need for my final breakthrough."

Scarlett ignored the ramblings and focused on the voice. She was certain to have heard it in the past. With the pince-nez back on her face, she studied the creatures' cores.

'Whoever is behind this it's not Lith. That is not his voice nor his ring's and these creatures have three cores each, whereas Lith had a single hybrid core with multiple properties.' She thought.

The hybrids extended their arms to attack, but the group of survivors wasn't willing to chat, so they attacked the moment the Eyes of Menadion stripped the creatures of their disguise.

Killing a pile of random stuff was much easier than murdering your loved ones over and over again. The undead nature of the creatures made them incredibly sturdy so that most spells had little to no effect on them.

Darkness magic was their bane, but it was also slow, and very few creatures could use it aside from humans. That was why the group had formed and how they had survived for so long.

The magical beasts would pin the enemies down to the ground, the humans would kill them with darkness magic, and the awakened plants would keep their allies alive without fail. Plants were the most gifted creatures in the rejuvenating arts. There was no injury they couldn't treat in a matter of seconds.

By harnessing Mogar's life force, they could almost regrow an entire body with no burden on their patient's stamina. Yet that was before Scarlett's arrival. Now that she was the creature's target, the mastermind was no longer interested in capturing the others alive.

Scarlett could see the Chaos magic assembling on the creatures' fingertips a second before they unleashed a barrage of black rays as fast as bullets. A wave of her hand enveloped the group of survivors in a dome of light that stopped the Chaos spells.

Chaos magic could destroy matter almost to the atomic level, but light magic was its fatal weakness. Chaos magic was nothing but darkness magic that had been forcefully stripped of its light counterpart.

It was the imbalance that made Chaos magic so powerful. The raw darkness magic was drawn by the light element residing inside its target, making it fast. Also, the darkness magic would drain the light element to return whole, amplifying darkness magic's destructive force several times.

A light magic energy construct would restore the balance, turning Chaos magic back into common darkness magic.

"Your version of Hollow Void is truly amateurish. It didn't put a dent in my Source Wall." Scarlett said. Her aim was to taunt her opponent into revealing their identity.

No matter how hard she racked her brain, she had met too many people to remember them all.