

The Witch 211

Chapter 211: I've Found Him!

"Are you alright, Headmaster Astoria? What happened? Why did your reaction suddenly become so slow?" Ember asked out of concern and doubt.

"I'm alright, Marquis Ember. A superficial wound like this is nothing to worry about," Astoria calmly replied as she distanced herself from Fallen Witch Elvira. "I was just a little surprised by the name Van Helsing."

"That again?" Ember gave Astoria a helpless glance and said, "You're too fixated on Vaan Raphna and anything related to or reminded you of him—"

"Do you think you have the luxury of being distracted when you are facing me?!"

Ember's words were cut short as she was forced to hurriedly receive Fallen Witch Elvira's incoming black water spell with a shield of condensed flames.

Boom!

Ember was sent flying away by the impact of two spells colliding, followed by an explosion, which blasted her away even faster.

Bam!

Her body slammed into a towering support pillar in the distance. Still, the damage was minimized thanks to the shrouded flames protecting her body.

On the other hand, cracks appeared on the scorched surface of the towering support pillar.

Nevertheless, Fallen Witch Elvira didn't intend to give Ember a chance to recover as she quickly followed up with another water spell.

However, she was quickly interrupted by Astoria's incoming one-handed sword strike.

At the same time, Astoria's shoulder wound quickly healed at a visible rate. The darkness attribute in Fallen Witch Elvira's black water spell was purified by light-attribute magic, and water was expelled as the wound healed.

Although Astoria's sword strike came swiftly, Fallen Witch Elvira easily stopped her attack with a condensed black water sphere that had outer layers of black water revolving around it at ultra-high speed.

"Did you think this level of attack could hurt me?" Fallen Witch Elvira casually said before she flicked away Astoria's greatsword with her black water sphere and sent a powerful kick to her stomach.

Peng!

Astoria's light barrier was struck by a powerful physical force that sent her body flying back a few dozen yards.

When she saw the crack on the surface of her protective light barrier, Astoria was surprised.

"Kekeke, why the look of surprise? Did you think you were the only one who could train your physical body to a high level?" Fallen Witch Elvira chuckled sinisterly with a smug look before she added, "Well, I admit I achieve this much strength through physical enhancement magic."

"Physical enhancement magic? That's not your Specialize Magic... How are you not affected by the Curse of the Purple Umbala?" Ember uttered with surprise.

Fallen Witch Elvira immediately glanced at Ember with contempt.

"I've spent many years living within the region affected by the Curse of the Purple Umbala and performed body transmutation research on various creatures. You look down on me too much if you think I would still be affected by this mere curse!" Fallen Witch Elvira snickered.

"As expected, it wasn't goblins... You even fused with a piece of the Plant-type Abomination to build immunity to its curse! No wonder you look so fucking ugly. Truly disgusting and repulsive," Ember insulted.

However, Fallen Witch Elvira wasn't affected by her provocative words in the slightest.

"Some sacrifice must be made in the grand scheme of things. Beauty is but a small price for longevity and power," Fallen Witch Elvira coolly said.

Shortly after, she continued to fight Ember and Astoria, overwhelming them with her superior power and mana capacity.

As the battle dragged on, Ember felt the increasing difficulty in blocking the Fallen Witch's casual black water spells.

"How are you still getting stronger?" Ember uttered with a grave look.

She realized that even with the united effort of two Early-stage High Witches, they weren't enough to exhaust a Mid-stage High Witch.

The gap between the early and middle stages was far greater than she could imagine.

'No wonder it was so difficult for Early-stage High Witches to advance. But how did Elvira achieve it? What did she do?' Ember silently wondered.

"I'm getting stronger? Kekeke, you got it all wrong. I'm not getting stronger at all. You're simply getting weaker," Fallen Witch Elvira corrected with an amused look.

"After so many years, this is all you can amount to. You've stagnated for too long, Ember Killian. What's wrong? If you don't try harder, those people who came with you will all die to my goblins first."

Fallen Witch Elvira instigated Ember and Astoria to use everything they had.

While she had no problem beating Ember and Astoria, she couldn't finish them immediately. Thus, it would be a big problem if she let them flee and come back with a stronger force to eliminate her.

Only when they decide to use everything they had to defeat her could she eliminate their chances of escaping.

Nevertheless, Ember saw through Fallen Witch Elvira's intentions.

"Headmaster Astoria, we have underestimated the strength of our enemy. A Mid-stage High Witch has proven to be too much for us to handle alone. Even if we have to abandon everyone else, we must make it back alive and inform Her Majesty."

Ember's reasonable suggestion made Fallen Witch Elvira's pupils shrank into slits with heavy killing intent.

However, Astoria's response surprised both of them.

"No, we cannot retreat!" Astoria firmly replied as her eyes glowed brighter by the moment, causing Ember to be both stunned and puzzled at the same time.

"What? Why! You know we cannot defeat her! Now is not the time for foolishness, Headmaster Astoria! If no one makes it back alive, no one will know about Fallen Witch Elvira!" Ember shouted.

"Foolishness? I couldn't be clearer, Marquis Ember. You may retreat if you wish," Astoria permitted before firmly stating, "However, I will stay and fight!"

"You'll die without me! Why are you acting like this at this crucial moment, Headmaster Astoria?" Ember shouted as she helped Astoria block a water attack spell—only to be blasted far away.

"I've found him, Marquis Ember! He was alive all along! He is here with us!" Astoria's eyes beamed as she became increasingly certain of her guess.

"He had been hiding in plain sight! I should have known from the start. Only a man of his intelligence could possess such arrogance!"

"I don't understand what you're saying at all!"

Chapter 212: Drastic Turn of Events

After Ember shouted with frustration, she felt a violent urge to cough before she spat out some blood.

Evidently, the last hit from Fallen Witch Elvira had wounded her internally.

She quickly took out an expensive Rank 3 Healing Potion from her Magic Domain and drank it before she started to feel better in the next moment.

At the same time, Astoria replied to her, "Vaan Raphna... Vahn Cadieux... and Van Helsing! Don't you see, Marquis Ember? They are all the same person!"

Her sixth sense strongly told her so.

It was natural for someone young yet blessed with peerless intelligence like Teacher Raphna to become a little arrogant.

No, even if he became very arrogant, it was still understandable because he had the right to be!

Although she couldn't understand how Teacher Raphna survived a punctured chest and ruptured heart without any immediate medical treatment, she was beginning to guess his thoughts when he chose to use such close-sounding first names as his aliases.

It was as if she could hear him saying, "Even if I use these names, no one would think they are the same person."

After all, a normal person wouldn't match someone who was already dead and possibly had his body reduced to ashes in the monthly wasteyard incineration to someone still alive, just because their first names were a little similar.

Furthermore, most fugitives would use a different name. No one would consider using a name that hit close to home. It was the same as announcing themselves.

However, it was precisely this kind of train of thought that also made the alias a great cover. It was a power move that involved reverse psychology.

Even she couldn't have guessed—if not for the fact that she was so fixated on him that everything that remotely reminds her of him made her suspicious.

'It has to be him! No, it must be him!' Astoria continued to convince herself.

From the bottom of her heart, she strongly wanted the person to be alive.

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Nevertheless, Ember and Astoria's verbal exchange across such a large distance was easily heard by every wolf-man on the other battlefield nearby.

As Silver Hawk continued to pursue Lord Helia, his expression abruptly changed along with several other wolf-men.

"Van Helsing, is Vaan Raphna? What? That same fucking Vaan Raphna, who is the very reason why the Battle Maiden was hunting us down like we were her archenemies?!" Silver Hawk exclaimed loudly.

He abruptly paused his pursuit of Lord Helia and scanned the area for the person that the Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster called Van Helsing.

Before long, his eyes locked onto Vaan's figure in another part of the battlefield, being chased by Lethal Dagger.

In the same instance, Vaan had also seemingly glanced back at Silver Hawk with a half smirk, half rueful smile.

Silver Hawk's anger immediately spiked.

"All members of the Assembly of Silent Night, listen up! I want you all to forget your current opponents and hunt down that mother fucking Van Helsing! That bastard is the sole reason for our present predicament!" Silver Hawk barked.

"Kill that fucking bastard! He is a black star, the scourge of all our misfortunate!"

"Kill him!"

Silver Hawk's voice resounded far and wide, reaching every wolf-men scattered across the battlefield.

Everyone's fury quickly ignited as they directed all their hatred towards Vaan.

"Well, shit," Vaan smiled ruefully.

Shortly after seeing all the wolf-men rushing over from every direction, he immediately fled the area to reposition himself and avoid a complete encirclement.

At the same time, Astoria's expression paled, realizing she had screwed up and put the man she was looking for in danger.

"No!" Astoria cried.

She immediately turned around to rush over to Vaan's side and protect him. But that left a big opening for Fallen Witch Elvira.

'A chance!' Fallen Witch Elvira's brightened.

The moment she saw the opportunity, she immediately took it as she fired an especially powerful and large black water lance at Astoria's back.

'Danger!'

Astoria immediately sensed the danger.

However, it was too late for her to evade the attack. All she could do was block the incoming black water lance to the best ability.

She raised the defense of her light barrier to her limit.

Puchi!

Alas, the black water lance still broke through her light barrier and struck her back armor.

Even Astoria's silver armor made of Rank 3 alloy did not stand a chance against Fallen Witch Elvira's water spell, which was much stronger than her previous attacks.

The black water lance continued to shatter the back armor and reached Astoria's back.

Astoria concentrated all her mana and tightened her back muscles to the limit to prevent the attack from penetrating straight through her.

Although she barely succeeded, the impact sent her flying forward in the direction she headed like a comet, crashing into the ground not far from Vaan.

Numerous bone-crunching sounds were heard as Astoria's body dragged and rolled along the ground.

After such a heavy crash, most people would have been completely paralyzed with such a broken body.

However, Astoria still stood up, albeit with much difficulty.

Her body shook like a fragile stalk of grass swaying in the wind as she struggled to her feet, putting most of her weight on her greatsword.

Cracks, scratches, and dirt filled her armor, and blood dripped down her face, body, and loose strands of messy hair.

In a single attack, Astoria transformed from an elegant blonde beauty in shining armor into a bloodied and broken mess.

Nevertheless, she still forced her back straight and raised the greatsword above her head.

"Leave now, Marquis Ember!" Astoria roared with bloodshot eyes.

Great Heaven Decimating Earth!

She immediately swung down at the incoming wolf-men rushing over from one direction, causing more blood to spurt out from multiple points of her body as it wasn't in a state to endure the recoil of her attack.

Boom!

The ground quickly shattered under her powerful attack, nonetheless.

At the same time, Ember overheard Headmaster Astoria's cry from a distance and bit her lips. She knew the situation had taken a major turn for the worse when Headmaster Astoria took such a big hit.

After a brief hesitation, she immediately turned around and fled toward the exit.

"Oh no, you don't!" Fallen Witch Elvira furiously roared.

She was forced to chase after Ember and stop her from fleeing, even though she wanted to finish off Astoria.

Chapter 213: I Wanted to Meet You

"I will definitely avenge you, Headmaster Astoria!"

Ember's voice echoed from a distance as she took flight and fled for the exit at the southern end of the pocket realm.

With her body draped in flames, she flew with great speed.

However, Fallen Witch Elvira was even faster! But even if she was faster, it didn't necessarily mean she could stop another High Witch from fleeing.

After all, there were more factors to consider than just speed.

As Fallen Witch Elvira thrust forward with enormous burst speed with her water magic like powerful water jets, Ember shot fire arrows at her, slowing her down.

Boom! Boom!

Small clouds of steam exploded midair as Fallen Witch Elvira offset the fire arrows with water bullets.

Shortly after her body shot through the clouds of steam, her eyes quickly locked onto Ember's fleeing figure in the distance.

"No one can leave here alive!" Fallen Witch Elvira roared.

Shortly after, she fired volleys of black water lances at the towering support pillars ahead of Ember. While she could move quickly, she could never move as fast as her attacks.

The volleys of black water lances easily overtook Ember and struck the four towering support pillars ahead. Another volley of black water lances aimed for the ceiling above them.

At first, Ember did not bother blocking the water lances as they completely missed; she wasn't the target.

However, she realized it too late after they struck the pillars.

Rumble...!

As the ceiling in the distance lost its support pillars and quickly destabilized under the barrage of attacks, everything in the area collapsed.

"No—!" Ember cried.

She was forced to stop and watch the gigantic masses of rocks crumble and descend to the ground, completely sealing the exit ahead.

Even for her, a High Witch, she wouldn't dare take her chances fleeing through the exit tunnel before the giant rocks dropped on her.

The immense weight of the earth would crush her to death.

Nevertheless, Fallen Witch Elvira underestimated the extent of the damage she had caused.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

As huge chunks of rocks and boulders dropped to the ground with thunderous noises and tremors, multiple sturdier pieces didn't shatter upon impact with the ground.

No, they started to roll down the slope, picking great speed.

Some were launched back into the air before shattered on their secondary impacts with the ground. Others smashed into the other supporting pillars further inside the pocket realm, collapsing them along with their crumbling ceilings.

The ceilings couldn't hold their weight without their support pillars.

"Shit!" Ember cursed.

She was forced to flee in a different direction to avoid getting crushed to death by the falling ceiling.

Of her options, she chose to run west to her left. Alternatively, she could have also chosen east on her right.

Only the northern direction wasn't an option as it would bring her back to the Fallen Witch.

Nevertheless, Fallen Witch Elvira was also forced to flee.

The collapsing ceiling caused a chain reaction.

As more enormous masses of the earth collapsed, more rogue rocks and boulders rolled down the slope and smashed into subsequent support pillars, triggering the next collapse.

At its rate and direction of collapse, it headed straight for the battlefield between expedition group, wolf-men, and goblin horde.

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Right after Astoria used her Great Heaven Decimating Earth skill on a small portion of the incoming wolf-men, more blood spurted out from her mouth.

Even so, she refused to fall.

She tightened her grip on the sword handle and swung her greatsword at the other incoming wolf-men.

Grand Sword Wave!

"Dodge it!" Silver Hawk cried.

All the Peak B-rank hunters from the Assembly of Silent Night quickly dived for cover as the large horizontal slash swept out with its sharp sword wave.

Countless goblins were caught in the sword slash and had their bodies split into two parts.

At the same time, more blood spurted out from Astoria's open wounds, and a stronger sense of weakness made her drop to one knee.

Nevertheless, several wolf-men still charged toward Vaan from a different direction.

Astoria forcefully raised her trembling hands toward them before swiping downward.

Judgment Call!

An enormous hammer made of solidified light appeared in the sky above the wolf-men before descending on them with great force.

The Peak B-rank hunters in the area immediately had abrupt changes in expressions as they felt the pressure of the enormous light hammer descending on them.

"Run!"

Their instincts immediately screamed danger.

Boom!

Several wolf-men failed to escape in time and got pulverized into blood messes along with hundreds of goblins and hobgoblins.

The enormous hammer was only made of concentrated light, but its sheer weight and power made it no different from a steel hammer of equivalent size.

Astoria rarely used pure magic to attack, but when she did, it was shocking.

Silver Hawk and the remaining wolf-men dared not approach Vaan again, not with Astoria protecting him.

While it looked like Astoria could collapse at any moment, her body quickly recovered from her wounds through her passive healing light magic.

"Why are you protecting me? Given your skills and experience, you could have barely deflected that Fallen Witch's attack," Vaan asked with knitted brows.

"If I didn't take it head on, the spell would have headed for you," Astoria weakly replied with her back to him. Her vigilant gaze remained on the wolf-men in the area.

Naturally, Vaan knew about the trajectory of the Fallen Witch's water spell.

However, that wasn't the meaning behind his question.

"I mean, why are you going so far for me? So far that you are willing to risk everything?"

"Because your life is priceless compared to everyone else here. And I've been looking for you. I really wanted to meet you."

Astoria glanced back at Vaan with a soft smile.

Although she had bloodstained lips, a dirty face, and messy hair, Vaan found her smile to be especially beautiful at that moment.

"Are you really Vahn Cadieux?" Helia shortly approached him with doubt.

"I—"

But just as Vaan opened his mouth, the collapsing ceiling in the distance headed towards them, causing everyone from both sides to be alarmed.

"Everyone, run!" a Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster shouted.

Chapter 214: Great Collapse

In that instance of impending doom, the battle came to a quick halt.

Whether they were part of the punitive expedition group, Assembly of Silent Night, or the goblin horde, everyone dropped their fight and fled in multiple directions.

However, Vaan's sharp gaze couldn't find an opening.

The collapsing ceiling wasn't heading towards them in a straight line; it came in a huge spread formation that covered even the left and right sides.

It wasn't farfetched to say that the entire sky of the pocket realm was collapsing on them.

There was nowhere to run.

Had they been near the start of the collapse, there would have been some safe zones for them to reach.

However, they were too far from the start of the great collapse.

"We need to leave right away!" Astoria urged.

She quickly moved toward Vaan with the intent of carrying him to safety, but her legs failed to respond well. Her weakened body dropped to the ground.

At the same time, Helia remained nearby, seemingly without the intention of fleeing.

"There's nowhere to run. We can only hide in the ground if we want to survive!" Helia stated with a grave look.

Shortly after, she used Earth Magic to start burrowing a big hole in the ground for everyone to hide away from the falling debris.

"That's suicide!" Astoria quickly objected and said, "The immense weight will immediately close any gap in the ground in an instant, crushing everyone inside!"

"I didn't say it was a good idea! But it's the only option we have!" Helia argued without stopping her work's progress.

However, besides a few Senior Witches and Aura Grandmasters, who stayed and helped Helia burrow deeper into the earth, the rest had fled elsewhere in search of their own chances of survival.

That said, their chances were almost non-existent.

Even if they made it to the edges of the pocket realm and carved out a small cave for them to hide in, the collapse would have snuffed out most of the air from the region.

They would eventually suffocate to death before they could dig their way back to the surface.

"Lord Helia is right. Seeking cover underground is our best option. Pardon the offense, Headmaster Astoria," Vaan said.

He picked Astoria up and handed her over to another person to take her through the burrowed path with the others.

At the same time, he summoned Topaz.

"Kyu!"

"Make a solid pocket space for everyone to take shelter."

Vaan gave Topaz his instruction, much to everyone's surprise and astonishment.

Shortly after, he dashed to Aeliana's side with his quickest speed to fetch her before returning with another burst of speed.

"Where are you going—"

Helia and Astoria panicked as Vaan left. But their questions were quickly cut short as they saw him returning with Aeliana in the next instance.

Nevertheless, in the few short breaths that he was away, Topaz had made a greater contribution to the underground shelter than the combined effort of Helia and the other Senior Witches.

There was only one Mid-stage Senior Witch among them with the earth-attribute specialty. But even her ability paled to a High-rank earth spirit.

The pocket space shelter located fifty feet deeper ground was already completed by the time Vaan returned with Aeliana.

Right after he entered the underground shelter with Aeliana, he sealed the path to reach it with Topaz, closing up all the excess gaps in the ground.

"If you don't want to die, reinforce the ceiling with everything you have!" Helia shouted.

In that instance, Helia and the four Senior Witches used Earth Magic to the best of their knowledge to reinforce the underground shelter.

At the same time, the three Rank 3 Aura Grandmasters held up the ceiling with their hands, while Astoria used Light Fortification to add another layer of reinforcement to the shelter.

Finally, Vaan and Topaz used their Earth Manipulation to compress the earth, increasing the sturdiness of the walls and ceilings to the limit.

The distant tremor could be felt drawing closer at an alarming speed. The four Senior Witches and three Aura Grandmasters all closed their eyes as it approached, silently praying for their safety.

Rumble...!

The powerful tremor eventually hit them, shaking the entire underground shelter like an earthquake.

Cracks appeared on the ceiling one after another, and dust repeatedly fell out of them.

Everyone endured the barrage of giant rocks and debris impacting the earth above them, stacking on top of each other.

Eventually, the tremor died down before people started to open their eyes.

"Haha... We're still alive!" a Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster exclaimed joyfully.

The other Aura Grandmasters and Senior Witches all had their eyes brightened in celebration of their survival.

They had made the right call in sticking with Lord Helia and Headmaster Astoria.

However, the greatest surprise was undoubtedly Vaan and his earth spirit. Everyone's attention turned to them, including Helia and Astoria.

"You're a Spirit Contractor... and possibly a high-ranking one at that, Van Helsing—No, Vahn Cadieux? Or should I call you Vaan Raphna? I have many things I want to say. But for now, I want to thank you," Helia expressed her gratitude.

Vaan's contracted earth spirit had played a large part in their successful survival.

Even when they were already fifty feet into the earth, they still felt so much force from the great collapse above them.

The power of nature was not to be underestimated.

Fortunately, they all made it through the first hurdle in the end. That said, it was hard to say what the situation was like for everyone else outside.

Helia did not have much hope for them surviving.

"I apologize for tricking you, Lord Helia," Vaan replied with a wry smile.

At the same time, his response was a silent admission of his identity—just like they suspected. Though, he didn't seem to have any intention of removing his mask.

"I don't mind it, Sir Vaan," Helia shook her head.

"I have no intention of punishing you for tricking me, nor do I plan to destroy the friendly relationship we've established. I was partly to blame for jumping to conclusions."

"Besides, I wouldn't dare harm someone who has a High Witch's favor," Helia added, wryly glancing at Astoria, who stared at her carefully, like daggers stabbing into her back.

"Ahem," Astoria weakly coughed before objectively stating, "We should quickly return to the surface before we suffocate down here."

Chapter 215: Returning to the Surface

"Returning to the surface is a must, but I'm not too concerned, not with an Earth Spirit Contractor around," Helia replied.

Death by suffocation would have been a big concern.

However, Vaan's contracted earth spirit changed everything. Even if they were buried under several hundred feet of the earth, they should be able to make it out in time.

"Can you clear the way for us?"

"Kyu!"

After receiving Vaan's request, Topaz answered affirmatively before she quickly got to work, drilling a path back to the surface.

Meanwhile, Helia had been receiving the silent stare of another person in the underground shelter.

"Don't you have anything to say to me, Lord Helia?" Aeliana glared without any intention of hiding her hostilities.

Helia had avoided Aeliana.

But after the question was raised, Helia had no choice but to respond to her.

"You're right, Lord Aeliana. I do have a lot to say to you." Helia nodded and said, "Although I don't know how you managed to recover from your berserk state, allow me to congratulate you on making it back. It must have been hell."

"You're right. It was definitely hell. And during that hell, there were several people I wanted to tear apart with my own hands!" Aeliana stated.

Her eyes glinted dangerously with intense bloodlust and killing intent that wasn't inferior to a killer of ten thousand humans.

Helia was surprised Aeliana could emit such intense bloodlust and killing intent.

After all, she knew Aeliana couldn't have killed so many humans, whether it was prior to the berserk transformation or after it.

'How did she accumulate such a powerful bloodlust and killing intent without actual killing? Is this a side effect of being an Abomination for three years?' Helia briefly wondered.

Nevertheless, she furrowed her brows in the next moment.

"If you are blaming me for what happened to you, then you are being unreasonable, Lord Aeliana. You won the magic flower fair and square, and what happened after wasn't something anyone could have guessed."

"But the magic flower was made by your elder sister, Elvira Ashenborn, the Fallen Witch who tortured me for the past three years! I want nothing more than to erase your entire bloodline! Maybe that will prevent the birth of another Fallen Witch from your household!"

After Aeliana blamed her entire bloodline, Helia frowned with growing anger. Even so, she forcefully held it in. She didn't want to deal with Aeliana's issue in their present situation.

"Rein in your feelings, Aeliana. Now is not the time to settle your vendettas."

"If that is your command, my Lord."

Vaan's words dispelled Aeliana's surging bloodlust and killing intent in an instant as she replied to him with a happy smile.

The sharp change in emotion amazed Helia and Astoria for various reasons.

Nevertheless, Astoria's eyes brightened with adoration and reverence in the next moment as if her doubts had been verified.

'Lord Aeliana's recovery had something to do with Teacher Raphna!' Astoria determined.

At the same time, the three Aura Grandmasters and four Senior Witches erupted with their private gossip.

"I can't believe it. I did think she looked somewhat familiar, but it turned out to actually be Lady Aeliana, the Lord of Sunpeak Town."

"Lord Aeliana turned into a Plant-type Abomination three years ago, but here she stands before us, back in her former self. This is a ground-breaking discovery!"

"Right? Lord Aeliana's recovery gives hope to all the Abominations out there, as well as future Abominations! It's possible to recover from the berserk transformation!"

As the Aura Grandmasters and Senior Witches quietly chatted, they followed the upward path created by Vaan's contracted earth spirit.

Vaan supported both Aeliana and Astoria on their way up the slope.

Sometime later, everyone saw the sunlight as they made it back to the surface and saw the devastation all around them.

An entire side of the mountain and several areas connected at the foot of it had collapsed like an enormous sinkhole of seismic proportions.

Not a single tree could be found standing within the collapsed region.

"Such destruction to the land... The others are unlikely to have survived the collapse," Helia stared at the devastation with a blank look.

So many good aura users and witches had died on this punitive expedition.

"Even the camp had been swallowed... Wait, the people at the camp have a much higher chance of survival. There could be some survivors over there!" Helia quickly guessed.

As their location wasn't too far from the camp, she quickly made her way over to search the area. The Aura Grandmasters and Senior Witches followed after her.

Vaan also helped Aeliana and Astoria head over as he held them up, one in each arm.

"How is your body's condition, Headmaster Astoria?" Vaan inquired.

"I'm doing better now, but I still need more time for a full recovery. Some of my bones are still broken," Astoria calmly replied.

However, Vaan could see that her cheeks were slightly red.

'Blushing, perhaps...?'

"Lord Aeliana, allow me to assist you," an Aura Grandmaster turned back and offered.

He thought it was a good idea to build a good impression and earn the Lord of Sunpeak Town's favor now that she was back.

However, Aeliana immediately snapped at the Aura Grandmaster as he reached his hand out toward her with a smile.

"Keep your filthy hands to yourself, mongrel! I did not give you permission to touch me!" Aeliana glared at the Aura Grandmaster with a sudden spike in her bloodlust and killing intent.

The Aura Grandmaster immediately froze before he retracted his hand awkwardly. At the same time, he glanced at Vaan with a wry smile.

Evidently, Aeliana's goodwill exclusively extended to Vaan and Vaan only.

"I apologize if I had offended you, Lord Aeliana," the Aura Grandmaster expressed before excusing himself to rejoin the others.

As they searched the area, they found a small group of aura users and witches helping others escape from piles of rubbles, logs, and broken tree parts.

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"Lord Helia, you're alive!"

Multiple Aura Masters and Senior Witches in the buried camp area rejoiced with pleasant surprises when they spotted Helia approaching.

Nevertheless, Helia replied with furrowed brows, "Are you cursing me to an early grave?"

"N-not at all, Lord Helia!"

Chapter 216: Power of Dryad Transformation

"What's the situation? How many people were in the camp? How many are still missing?"

"Reporting to Lord Helia, roughly eighty of us were in the camp before the ground suddenly collapsed. Now there are only twenty-four of us. Approximately fifty-six people are still missing."

A Mid-stage Senior Witch reported after Helia asked.

"Fifty-six missing..." Helia muttered with a heavy expression.

Even if they managed to rescue everyone missing in the camp, they would still have less than a hundred people from the original four hundred fifty.

"Continue the rescue operation," Helia instructed authoritatively before adding, "The missing could very well be still alive and in need of desperate medical attention."

"Yes, Lord Helia!" the Senior Witch answered.

Although the Senior Witch wanted to ask what happened and why the ground collapsed, she didn't find the right timing to bring it up.

"Currently, our biggest issue is clearing out the obstacles. We've located a few missing people. However, getting them out is tricky. The trees and rubbles are too heavy to move manually, and there's a chance that we could end up crushing them in the removal process."

"We have Aura Grandmasters and a Wood-attribute Senior here. They should be able to do something about it together."

Shortly after Helia talked to the survivors from the buried camp, she returned to Astoria's side.

"We've lost many people, and some may still be some survivors buried under the rubbles and trees. However, the biggest issue is the Fallen Witch," Helia mentioned seriously.

"Right," Astoria weakly nodded with acknowledgment.

"Considering how easily the entire pocket realm collapsed, it must have been designed that way. There's no way Fallen Witch Elvira hadn't planned a safe escape route for it."

"That said, if Fallen Witch Elvira survived, Marquis Ember must be alive too. Try searching the surroundings from the sky. See if the magic airships are still in the area," Astoria suggested.

"Alright," Helia nodded.

Shortly after she took off with flight magic, she soared into the sky for a good vantage of the surrounding regions outside the collapsed area.

As that happened, Vaan turned to Aeliana.

"Try using Dryad Transformation to help the others clear out the trees."

"...Yes, my Lord."

Aeliana briefly hesitated due to her trauma, but she eventually agreed as it was an order from Vaan.

"There's nothing to fear. If you lose control and become an Abomination again, I'll bring you back," Vaan reassured.

"Dryad Transformation is part of your power now. Instead of fearing it, you should embrace it. I have a feeling it will be much more powerful than your first Specialized Magic."

"I understand, my Lord!"

Shortly after, Aeliana wobbled away from Vaan as she tried to walk on her own.

When she created enough distance between them, her gaze quickly glinted with sharpness before she faced her fear head-on.

Specialized Magic came naturally to her like breathing, as knowledge of its most basic usage was imprinted in her memory.

Dryad Transformation!

The broken branches, leaves, logs, and tree roots, everything with plant attributes in her immediate surroundings, suddenly lost their rigidness and moved toward her feet like slithering snakes.

Upon contact, they started to merge with her, allowing her body to adopt the properties of the forest.

Nevertheless, her transformation was uniform as her skin turned wood-like. They didn't stretch and tear with new plants growing out of her body like her previous Plant-type Abomination form.

Within moments, Aeliana transformed into a dryad and looked nothing like a Plant-type Abomination.

As such, even though the others were surprised when they saw her transformation, they weren't alarmed by it.

Nevertheless, Aeliana grew as more broken trees merged with her main body, becoming larger and larger like a new tree undergoing accelerated growth.

Before long, Aeliana's main body could no longer be seen. She was hidden inside the new tree that continued to grow seemingly without limits.

All the broken tree parts in the collapsed region reconnected with each other and became a part of the new tree.

Some became tree roots of varying sizes, and others became budding trees that sprouted on top of them.

A new forest was quickly forming with a supertree at its center.

At the same time, distant antimagic spores scattered across the Red Goblin Mountains began to gather towards the crown of the supertree that had already grown over three hundred feet with no sign of stopping soon.

As Aeliana was a part of the new forest, her consciousness spread wherever it extended, allowing her to find all the missing people in the buried camp.

Moments later, the tree roots in the area moved into action like snakes. They assimilated broken tree parts, slithered under the rubbles, and lifted them, revealing the missing people underneath.

"I've found some people over here!" an Aura Master hollered with surprise.

Shortly after, the Aura Master quickly hopped down into the exposed gap to retrieve one of the missing people, who had his legs and one of his arms crushed under the rubbles.

"I need some help over here! There's still two more down there!" the Aura Master alerted after he hopped out with the person with three crushed limbs.

Similar situations happened across the area as everyone jumped into action, retrieving the wounded survivors from underneath the exposed rubbles.

"This is the power of Dryad Transformation? Isn't this power a little too strong? No... How is Lord Aeliana using wood-attribute magic to this extent? She should be a light-attribute witch like me," Astoria uttered with doubt and awe.

Even an Early-stage High Witch with wood-attribute specialty might not have control over such a large area of influence.

"Aeliana awakened a second Specialized Magic and wood affinity after recovering from her berserk transformation. Or rather, she had awakened them during her Abomination state," Vaan casually stated while looking up at the supertree.

Seeing how Aeliana collected her spores so quickly in her dryad-transformed state, it was just a matter of time before she fully recovered her strength.

If she had used it sooner, the battle in the pocket realm might not have led to such a desperate situation.

At the same time, the countless treasures in the pocket realm wouldn't have been buried.

Alas, it was too late to think about the what-ifs.

"Anyway, enough about Aeliana. Let's talk about us, Headmaster Astoria. Now that you've found me, what do you plan to do with me?" Vaan calmly asked.

Chapter 217: Truth Behind Istana's Madness

Although Astoria was very intrigued and curious to learn how Vaan recovered Aeliana from her Abomination state, she missed her chance to ask.

In fact, there were many things she wanted to ask him; he was a walking library brimming with profound knowledge.

For example, she also wanted to learn how he became a Spirit Contractor.

"Kyu~!"

Topaz flew back to Vaan and rubbed her cheeks against his, unintentionally passing all the dirt on her face to him.

Shortly after, she settled on his head and demanded praises for her good work.

"She's so adorable. It's the first time I've actually seen an earth spirit. I've only heard about them until now." Astoria glanced at Topaz.

She wanted to poke her soft cheeks.

However, she refrained from doing so when she saw Topaz staring at her vigilantly. Furthermore, her hands were stained with dirt and blood.

After shaking her head, she went straight to the main point of their discussion.

"Anyway, it's not so much as what I plan to do with you but what I wish to do with you, Teacher Raphna. I want to bring you back to Blackmoon Academy and consult you regarding magic," Astoria stated.

"...However, it seems like you have other plans."

"You're not wrong, Headmaster Astoria. I have other plans," Vaan's eyes flickered before he calmly asked, "More importantly, you don't plan to punish me for Isa-bitch—Ahem, I mean Isabelle's death?"

"Not at all, Teacher Raphna," Astoria shook her head.

"Although the way she died was questionable, Isabelle's death was well deserved. I was informed of her unruly behavior, blatant disregard and disrespect for the academic hierarchy, and the events that led to Wise Scholar Eniwse's berserk transformation."

"If you come back to Blackmoon Academy, an incident like Isabelle's will never happen again. You have my complete protection, Teacher Raphna. And if you are concerned about Lord Istana, you need not worry. Her Majesty had executed her," Astoria informed.

"Lord Istana was executed by Her Majesty personally? Even if she committed a crime against the people, a death sentence is too heavy, no?" Vaan uttered with surprise.

"Not at all, Teacher Raphna," Astoria shook her head.

"Lord—No, Istana Gleriath was nearing the end of her lifespan and was in the corruption process of becoming a Fallen Witch. Therefore, her execution was well-deserved."

"Nearing the end of her lifespan... Corruption process... No wonder Isabelle's death triggered such madness from her. It all makes sense now," Vaan slowly nodded with understanding.

"What did you figure out, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria was intrigued by his reaction.

At the same time, she did find it a bit strange regarding Istana Gleriath's reaction to her daughter's death.

Soul corruption could explain why she didn't undergo a berserk transformation, but it was never revealed why her emotion was so extreme despite living so many years.

Furthermore, Istana Gleriath seemed like she treasured her life more than her daughter's.

So...

Astoria's eyes gradually widened in realization.

"Considering Lord Istana was nearing the end of her lifespan and was willing to corrupt her soul, she must have developed a method that required sacrificing her daughter to extend her lifespan," Vaan guessed.

"And if we also consider the fact that she was taking her time, she must have been waiting for her daughter to reach a specific age or level of power. In this case, my best bet would be that she was waiting for Isabelle to awaken her Specialized Magic and become a True Witch."

"Soul Transfer!" Astoria stated conclusively after listening to Vaan.

"Right, Soul Transfer. Waiting for Isabelle to slightly mature and using her body as a new vessel for her soul seems like the most plausible method for Lord Istana to extend her lifespan," Vaan said.

Istana Gleriath was nearing the end of her lifespan. She didn't have enough time or vitality to nurture a new daughter.

Thus, killing Isabelle was equivalent to cutting off her path to life.

Of course, Istana Gleriath would become crazy.

Nevertheless, Astoria wasn't too interested in Istana Gleriath's matter. After all, the person was already dead.

"Can you tell me more about your plan, Teacher Raphna? Since you won't be coming back to Blackmoon Academy, I wonder if I could travel with you? As I mentioned, I wish to consult you about things related to magic," Astoria mentioned.

Vaan paused for a moment as he considered her request.

Having a powerful High Witch like Headmaster Astoria at his side would definitely provide an extra layer of protection for where he intended to venture.

Furthermore, Headmaster Astoria appeared to have a high opinion of him; it was borderline obsession and adoration—not that he couldn't understand why.

With his perfect memory, he never needed notes.

His research notes were part of his plan to court Headmaster Astoria; it was something for her to see.

And seeing how she referred to him as Teacher Raphna, it was clear that his notes had reached her.

"You've seen how Aeliana recovered from her Abomination state. Thus, I plan to find Eniwse and bring her back the same way I did with Aeliana," Vaan stated.

"This..." Astoria hesitated for a moment before she shook it off and resolved herself with a firm look.

"Last I checked, Eniwse headed to Thousand Fog Mountains, a Dark Zone. My strength will be of use to you in that place if you don't plan on changing your mind, Teacher Raphna."

"I don't," Vaan stated resolutely before adding, "As such, you are more than welcome to join me, Headmaster Astoria."

"It would be my honor, Teacher Raphna," Headmaster Astoria smiled brilliantly.

She felt her heart flutter as she looked forward to adventuring with him.

Swoosh!

Suddenly, Helia descended from the sky after she had finished her search.

"I've scouted the surrounding areas. Two of the three magic airships are missing. Marquis Ember most likely took one and fled towards the capital, while my sis—I mean, Fallen Witch Elvira stole the other and escaped south away from the seven witch kingdoms," Helia reported.

Shortly after, she glanced around with surprise and asked, "Anyway, what happened here? Where did this new forest come from?"

"I was almost lost on my way back," Helia added jokingly.

Chapter 218: Claudette De Vile

Even as Helia returned, the new forest continued to grow as it assimilated all the broken trees in the collapsed region.

Eventually, the forest reached the edges and extended its roots to connect with the trees outside the collapsed region.

In that instance, Aeliana's shared consciousness with the forest expanded rapidly, reaching far and wide and covering all of the Red Goblin Mountains.

Shortly after, Aeliana pulled herself out of the supertree and ended her Dryad Transformation, changing back to her former appearance.

However, her aura was different compared to before she used Dryad Transformation.

She approached Vaan without any difficulties in walking and gave him a pleasant smile that also radiated confidence and power.

"Lord Aeliana can perfectly control the power of her Plant-type Abomination form?" Helia uttered with surprise.

"According to Teacher Raphna, Lord Aeliana underwent a second awakening during her berserk transformation and acquired Dryad Transformation as her second Specialized Magic," Astoria explained.

After listening to Astoria's explanation, Helia's eyes widened even further with astonishment.

"That's the right reaction to expect from this sort of news. Lord Aeliana's case is unprecedented and a groundbreaking discovery for witches," Astoria smiled.

Aeliana's second awakening painted a bright future ahead for all witches.

If every witch could also undergo a second awakening, the collective strength of witches would be raised by a level.

Astoria had seen the power of Dryad Transformation; whether it was range or utility, it was already comparable to High Witches.

Suddenly, her eyes sparkled.

She wondered if a second awakening was the requirement for High Witches to advance beyond the early stage.

Astoria glanced at Vaan, wanting to share her thoughts with him.

But at that moment, Aeliana reached him first.

"Of the fifty-six missing people in the camp, thirty-seven survived. Unfortunately, the rest didn't make it; they were already dead when I found them. I've also done a quick sweep over the Red Goblin Mountains. The Fallen Witch and Grand Inquisitor are nowhere to be found," Aeliana reported.

"Marquis Ember most likely fled to the capital on one of the magic airships, and the Fallen Witch fled south as Lord Helia speculated. Even if we take the last magic airship, we won't catch up to either of them," Astoria determined.

"That said, we don't have the strength to stop Fallen Witch Elvira even if we chase after her."

"Furthermore, our kingdom doesn't have an amicable relationship with the neighboring powers beyond our borders. Even if Her Majesty is informed about the Fallen Witch, there's nothing she can do since Fallen Witch Elvira would have already fled the kingdom."

"Her Majesty wouldn't leave the Black Rose Kingdom just to hunt down the Fallen Witch. It would cause an international dispute," Astoria added.

"In other words, the Fallen Witch's matter is out of hands now," Helia calmly stated.

However, she felt complicated in her heart. She was relieved that her elder sister managed to survive. But at the same time, she knew it was wrong to feel that way.

The person was no longer the elder sister she once knew.

After all, they didn't even exchange a single word despite seeing each other; she was treated as if she didn't exist.

"Let's head back to Redpine City to provide the wounded with better treatment and send a report of what happened here to Her Majesty. It would also let Marquis Ember know we are still alive," Helia suggested after a soft sigh.

"We'll find some people to excavate the rest of this land at a later date."

"Alright," Astoria nodded in agreement, but then she suddenly paused and turned to Vaan to seek his opinion. "What do you think, Teacher Raphna?"

"Sounds good. I still have some unfinished business in Redpine City," Vaan replied after some careful contemplation.

With Astoria's complete backing and Helia's goodwill, he shouldn't encounter any problems in the city.

"Great. I will fetch the magic airship. It will be more convenient to transport the wounded and save us some time getting back," Helia stated.

Shortly after, she flew off with Flight Magic.

Aeliana stared at Helia's distant back with a sharp glint in her eyes.

It was undetermined what she was thinking about. But one thing was certain; she was not happy with Fallen Witch Elvira getting away.

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Somewhere south of the Blackmoon Region, a magic airship sailed through the sky, heading further south with great speed.

Bodies of the crew members scattered across the deck with a single hole through their heads; fresh blood still dripped out of them.

The entire crew had been slaughtered.

Yet, even without anyone to manage the controls, the magic airship continued to soar through the clouds as it headed south at maximum speed.

Fallen Witch Elvira stood at the front of the deck, biting her black nails as she stared into the distance.

"Dammit! All that work for nothing," Fallen Witch Elvira gritted her teeth with burning hatred in her eyes.

She was forced to abandon everything.

Considering the magic airships flew at the same speed, she couldn't catch Marquis Ember even if she wanted to.

Stubbornly chasing after Marquis Ember would only lead to her death.

"Hm?"

Having sensed something behind her, Fallen Witch Elvira turned around to check with vigilance.

Her eyes immediately locked onto a whirlpool-like black spatial portal that suddenly appeared on the deck, just a few yards away from her.

Moments later, a seemingly young lady wearing a black dress stepped out from the spatial portal.

Strangely, Fallen Witch Elvira sensed a connection to the young lady in black as if they belonged to the same group of people.

However, the lady in black was very beautiful, unlike her.

"Who are you?" Fallen Witch Elvira interrogated with her guard up, ready to attack at a moment's notice.

"Claudette De Vile, a Fallen Witch like you," the young lady smiled without concern.

"My Queen has ordered me to come and fetch you. She told me you would be somewhere in this area. And as it appears, her judgment was impeccably accurate like always."

"Come with me. I will take you to our society of Fallen Witches, somewhere you can safely conduct your research without persecution by the nonconformists," Claudette stated.

Chapter 219: Black Witch Society

"Give me one good reason why I should believe and follow you, especially when you snuck up behind me?" Fallen Witch Elvira replied with distrust.

She could vaguely confirm that Claudette De Vile was a Fallen Witch, but that didn't mean everything she said was true.

Furthermore, just because they were both Fallen Witches, it didn't automatically make them friends either.

Fallen Witch Claudette slightly smiled before she coolly replied, "You don't have a choice."

"Are you threatening me?" Elvira narrowed her eyes dangerously.

However, Claudette shook her head with a smile and said, "Not at all. I am speaking with your best interest in mind. If you don't follow me back quickly, you will start feeling 'good' in a bit."

"What the hell are you talking about—Arghhh!"

When the magic airship flew out of a large group of clouds, exposing her to the setting sun's light, Elvira suddenly felt like her entire body was lit on fire.

The burning sensation reached her soul directly, causing her immeasurable pain. It was as if her soul itself was being burned.

"Ah... It seems like it has already started," Claudette nonchalantly uttered as she watched Elvira writhe in agony.

"Arghhh—! What the hell did you do to me!?" Elvira painfully cried as she glared at Claudette with hostilities.

However, Claudette remained indifferent to her threatening look.

"I didn't do anything," Claudette shrugged.

"What you are experiencing is something every Fallen Witch also has to deal with; Soul Burn. To be rejected by this world is the price of our inversion. Seeing how you don't know anything, it must be your first time being outside for a while."

"Swallow this directly. It will help you negate the world's rejection for some time," Claudette offered a red stone to Elvira.

"This is... a pure mana stone from Gehenna?" Elvira determined with some doubt.

Pure mana stones from Gehenna are red.

However, it shouldn't be possible for red mana stones to stay red outside of Gehenna; they should have turned blue.

Without specific manipulations, nothing from the Gehenna Realm could thrive in the human world. That said, the red mana stone didn't seem to be enchanted for it to stay red either.

Perhaps it had something to do with her being a Fallen Witch.

Nevertheless, Elvira swallowed the red mana stone as instructed before the mana supplemented her body and weakened the world's rejection power on her.

"What did you mean by inversion?" Elvira asked, becoming more approachable after she determined Claudette meant her well.

"You don't know about inversion despite being a Fallen Witch?" Claudette glanced at Elvira for a moment before she recalled, "Oh right. It's called soul corruption over here, wasn't it? Yeah, well, we call it an Inversion in our Black Witch Society."

"Look here; I'm sure you have a lot of questions to ask. However, I didn't come here to answer your questions. Someone else will do that when I bring you over. I am just the guide."

"Are you willing to follow me to our Black Witch Society now?" Claudette asked.

"Just one more question," Elvira insisted before she asked, "Where is your Black Witch Society located?"

"Inside of a pocket realm hidden in the Principality of Dainsleif that is a part of the Freedom Federation. My spatial portal will take us there directly," Claudette casually answered.

"Freedom Federation..."

Elvira muttered with furrowed brows before her eyes widened with astonishment and shock at Claudette.

The Freedom Federation was located further south of the Holy Knight Empire that neighboured the Black Rose Kingdom.

A normal carriage trip straight through the Holy Knight Empire would take at least a month—or so she had heard.

'To think this Fallen Witch has the power to cross such a large distance...' Elvira thought as she glanced at Claudette.

The young lady had the appearance of a sixteen-year-old girl but most likely hadn't even lived half a century. It was unbelievable that such a young witch was already so capable.

Elvira suspected Claudette was at least a Late-stage High Witch.

'I don't have anywhere else to go, and this Black Witch Society seems to have all the knowledge and answers I am looking for,' Elvira considered before nodding. "Alright, I'll go."

"Great. Step inside, and we'll be on our way," Claudette instructed.

Shortly after, the two Fallen Witches entered the spatial portal and disappeared, leaving behind the unmanned magic airship to continue on its flight path until it ran out of power.

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Within mere moments, Elvira and Claudette reached their destination on the other side of the spatial portal.

The familiar purple glow of glowworms, purple moss, and other Gehenna plants entered Elvira's vision, almost making her mistake it for the same pocket realm as hers.

However, her pocket realm was already gone; she destroyed it herself.

On the other hand, the pocket realm in front of her had countless structures, big and small, high and low, and mostly just black witch towers.

Hundreds of witches roamed about, tending to Gehenna plants in their gardens, consulting each other on magic theories and research, or entering rift portals leading to...

"Are those...?"

"Portals leading to the Gehenna Realm? Why yes, it is. As Fallen Witches with inverted souls, we are no longer considered denizens of the Human Realm. We mainly draw our powers from Gehenna and thrive off its products. So, it's natural for us to have some means to access the Gehenna Realm."

Claudette informed after tracing the trajectory of Elvira's gaze to the red spatial cracks in the distance.

"Incredible... If I hadn't seen it myself, I wouldn't have believed there were so many other Fallen Witches like me," Elvira commented.

"The seven witch kingdoms are holy lands for witches, thanks to the seven Transcendent Witches. As for outside of it? It's hell. We get several new members every week," Claudette replied.

At the same time, her eyes glinted with coldness as she recalled some unpleasant memories.

Nevertheless, she quickly shoved her thoughts aside.

"Come with me. I will take you to see our Queen, the one who created this haven from nothing and opened the rifts to Gehenna for us Fallen Witches."

"F-from nothing...?"

Elvira's heart shook with shock.

'Just how powerful was their Queen?' she wondered.

Chapter 220: Vaan's Arrangement

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Shortly after Vaan and the others used the magic airship to return to Redpine City, the wounded were sent to the infirmary for specialized treatment from healers.

At the same time, Helia invited Vaan, Astoria, and Aeliana to use her castle's bathing facilities to cleanse their bodies and adorn fresh clothes.

A maidservant quickly guided them to three adjacent guestrooms, as arranged by Helia.

"I'll take this room," Vaan chose the middle guestroom.

"Then, I'll take this room," Astoria picked the guestroom on the right of Vaan's as she grabbed the doorknob and briefly paused, glancing at Vaan. "I'll see you later, Teacher Raphna."

"Alright," Vaan nodded.

At that moment, Astoria had already recovered from most of her wounds. Only her movements were slightly rigid due to her broken bones taking a bit longer to mend.

Complete recovery was just a matter of time.

Nevertheless, Aeliana was left with the last guestroom on the left after Vaan and Astoria chose the other two.

However, after Vaan and Astoria entered their guestrooms, Aeliana cheekily snuck into Vaan's guestroom moments later.

That said, Vaan didn't appear surprised as he removed his fake face, revealing his true appearance to her.

Aeliana's eyes brightened instantly.

Whether Vaan was ugly or handsome, it wouldn't affect her loyalty. Even so, she definitely preferred the handsome Vaan over the ordinary one; his true appearance was more aesthetically pleasing to the eyes.

"Do you have a reason to be here, Aeliana?" Vaan casually asked as he undressed with his back to her.

Aeliana's gaze was immediately drawn to his lean muscles without excess mass, yet seemingly packed with power. Her heartbeat quickened, and her cheeks reddened.

Nevertheless, she couldn't keep her eyes off his body.

Gulp!

Some drool slipped out before she quickly swallowed it and wiped her mouth with a slightly embarrassed yet cheeky smile.

"Hehe, please let me wash your body with magic, my Lord. It should save you some time."

"Alright."

Aeliana quickly cast [Wash] and [Cleanse] on Vaan's body before he moved to the big, round, wooden bathtub of cool water and heated it with Kinetic Energy Manipulation.

Shortly after, he hopped inside the bathtub and soaked his body in hot water to relax.

Nevertheless, Aeliana did not leave after her service. Instead, she stood on the side obediently and watched him with a feverish gaze while seemingly holding herself back.

Vaan softly sighed.

"You should use [Wash] and [Cleanse] on yourself too. You can join me after; there's plenty of room in here for the two of us."

"Yes, my Lord!"

Aeliana's eyes beamed with excitement almost immediately.

She stripped off her black cloak in a heartbeat. Afterward, she used [Wash] and [Cleanse] on her pristine body before she approached Vaan's bathtub with an anticipated look.

"Hehe, pardon my intrusion, my Lord," Aeliana giggled foolishly.

After she slowly soaked into the wooden bathtub with Vaan, their skin quickly came in contact. In that instant, her body seemingly melted as she leaned back against his chest.

Vaan took that chance to study her body.

At first, he thought her body was just hypersensitive after it had reverted to her former human appearance.

However, it became clear to him that it was not the case. Instead, her hypersensitive body was a product of receiving something beyond the fifth-level pleasure.

Aeliana had become so sensitive to his touch that even the most casual touch would generate pleasure and make her body quiver with joy.

Nevertheless, he had yet to determine whether her body's reaction was limited to his touch or it could happen with anyone.

"The commotion in the Red Goblin Mountains must have reached Sunpeak Town and alerted your mother. She may have even gone to check what happened in the mountains. After this, you should go back and meet your mother, comfort her, and catch up. I'm sure you have much to say to each other."

"But..."

"Of course, I'm not just sending you to Sunpeak Town for your reunion. Sunpeak Town is the epicenter of your berserk transformation; your spores are concentrated in that place. I want you to retrieve them and treat the townspeople, including your mother. This is something that benefits you."

"I understand, my Lord. I will follow your will," Aeliana obeyed before she suddenly panicked the next moment. "You're not leaving me behind, right?"

"Of course not. I give you three days to settle your business in Sunpeak Town and make up with your mother. Her research had partly contributed to your successful recovery," Vaan calmly said before reassuring her, "Once you return, we will depart for Thousand Fog Mountains together. I won't leave without you."

"I understand, my Lord. I won't make you wait," Aeliana promised.

Nevertheless, knowing she won't be seeing Vaan for three days after they finished their bath time, she felt a little dispirited.

"My Lord, can I be greedy and ask for some of your affection now?" Aeliana requested while fiddling her fingers nervously yet hopeful.

"Thought you wouldn't ask," Vaan slightly smiled.

Shortly after, he turned her chin towards him with one hand and sealed her soft lips with a passionate kiss.

At the same time, his other hand slithered down her smooth chest and rubbed her honey cave.

"Mmm...!"

It only took a few breaths before Aeliana's body quivered uncontrollably, climaxing from his casual finger rub on her clit.

Nevertheless, she was far from satisfied and finished with a single orgasm. She wanted to be showered in his affection.

No words were needed for him to understand her desire; her eyes had already revealed everything.

After a bit more foreplay, he slightly raised her hips and slipped his erected rod into her warm honey cave.

Aeliana's pain was almost nonexistent as Vaan tore her hymen; she only felt the joy and sheer bliss of becoming one with him.

Even so, she didn't voice her body's delight.

As such, they enjoyed a surprisingly quiet yet lovely and intimate session in the hot bathtub together as Vaan drilled her from behind...