

## The Witch 231

### Chapter 231: Heavy Pummeling

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Shortly after Vaan reached the library, he noticed the doors were locked. But even without a key, he easily unlocked the door with Earth Manipulation and entered.

At that moment, Dahlia had already retired to her back office.

However, she was neither asleep nor resting. As it was only slightly past dinner time, she was sitting at her desk reading a book on wind applications through her spectacles.

Nevertheless, her gaze suddenly sharpened with alarm when she heard the office door open. But when she recognized Vaan's familiar face, she quickly expressed her joy with a brilliant smile.

"Vahn!"

Dahlia dropped her book, climbed onto the desk, and pounced toward his chest like a cat.

Then, with her arms stretched out, her fingers quickly interlocked behind his neck, and her body swung around, seemingly weightless.

"Aren't you too excited to see me?" Vaan calmly smiled.

"I missed you!" Dahlia said.

"You already missed me? Even though it hasn't been that long?"

"It was too long for me."

It had only been a day since he was gone, yet Dahlia already missed him. Clearly, she had become heavily dependent on him as she was completely infatuated with him.

Although he didn't share the same feelings and only got close to her for his own motives, she was still one of his women; one of his people.

As such, he owed her some responsibility—for as long as she remained one of his people and the cost of taking care of her didn't affect his main goals.

"Your eyes have gone bad again. Let me give you some eye therapy," Vaan said as he slowly took off her glasses and sat her down on the bed to start his massage. "Why didn't you find someone else to perform the massage when I wasn't around?"

"I've grown used to wearing glasses, so it's fine with or without them," Dahia replied before she added in a low mumbled, "Besides, I don't want anyone touching me unless it's you..."

"Then how do you want to be touched by me?" Vaan teased as his hands started to become naughty, reaching down for her supple peaks.

"Ah..." Dahlia softly gasped.

Vaan's slight touch quickly excited her body as if it had just been switched on with a simple flick, putting her in the mood for some steamy sessions with him.

She gazed at him alluringly.

However, before they could proceed further after the eye massage, the main academy building shook.

Rumble...!

"What was that? It felt like the main building just got hit by something," Dahlia uttered with surprise.

"It came from the headmaster's office," Vaan furrowed his brows before he said, "I will go and check."

"I'm coming too," Dahlia said with a solemn look.

She was no longer in the mood for dual practice—not when something serious might have happened in the academy.

Vaan faintly guessed something had happened between Headmaster Tabitha and Headmaster Astoria.

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The headmaster's office wall blew apart as a figure flew out with flying rubbles and shattered glasses.

Shortly after Tabitha landed on the training field, she stared back at the damage blankly for a moment before anger filled her eyes.

At the same time, Astoria flew out of the hole in the headmaster's office wall right after and landed in the training field with Tabitha.

When she saw Tabitha's glare, she glanced back at the hole and said, "I'll pay for it."

"Hmph!" Tabitha snorted, feeling a little better. "Let's make this quick. I don't want too many people to watch us spar."

"Why? You don't want your precious students and instructors to see their esteemed headmaster get pummeled into a miserable state by me?" Astoria taunted with a smile.

"You might be among the top three strongest High Witches in the kingdom, but when it comes to Light Magic, I am stronger!" Tabitha shouted.

In that instant, she fired a scorching-hot Light Bullet made of condensed solar power at Astoria.

However, Astoria remained unflinching and took on the full brunt of the attack with her new black armor, enhanced by Light Solidification.

The black armor quickly lit up with a bright outline similar to the event horizon of a black hole.

Peng!

The Light Bullet struck her on the chest, and the force of an Early-stage High Witch pushed her backward.

But Astoria only retreated with a single strong step, which negated most of the force.

"Comparing offensive Light Magic to defensive Light Magic? Can you really say your Light Magic is stronger if you can't even break my defense, Headmaster Tabitha?" Astoria casually criticized and asked, "And was that supposed to be an imitation of the Mana Bullet spell in the Book of Solomon Raphna?"

"You were much more respectful to me when you were receiving the book. Now that you have the book, it's okay not to be respectful to me? Did the book make you arrogant? Do you think you can beat me now?" Astoria continued.

"I guess we will find out in a short while, won't we, Headmaster Astoria?" Tabitha replied with a confident look, but she was slightly unnerved in her heart.

Astoria had endured her attack so effortlessly.

Nevertheless, a single block wasn't enough to break her fighting spirit. After all, the Light Bullet wasn't her strongest attack.

Shortly after, Tabitha fired another Light Bullet that spun at high speed, increasing its penetrative power.

Peng!

The attack was blocked again but by Astoria's gauntlet this time.

She was forced back by another step before she took three steps forward.

Peng! Peng! Peng!

Tabitha fired her spells, one after the other with increasing quicker succession. Each time, the light-attribute spell was also stronger than the last.

However, Astoria blocked them all with her light-enhanced Rank 4 Black Armor.

"I gave you many chances to attack. Now, it's my turn," Astoria stated.

With a strong stomp, she dashed forward with a burst of speed, closing the distance between them.

Tabitha's expression quickly changed as she retreated, not letting Astoria get closer to her.

At the same time, she no longer held back and decided to go all out to beat Astoria. Otherwise, given Astoria's expression, she will end up beaten instead!

'Small attacks won't work. I have to use big and powerful ones,' Tabitha concluded.

A towering pillar of light-attribute mana erupted from her body in the next moment before they condensed into a long light spear.

Lance of Longinus!

The spear of light contained the majority of her remaining light-attribute mana. It was super condensed and wasn't inferior to a Rank 4 weapon.

Against a close-combat battle maniac like Astoria, it was her best move to use in their spar.

Minor spells only wasted her mana.

On the other hand, while most of her light-attribute mana was poured into the Lance of Longinus, it was a way to conserve her mana, maximize her combat potential, and prolong her battle.

Alas, all that meant nothing when Tabitha remotely controlled the Lance of Longinus to clash with Astoria's Rank 4 Black Greatsword from a distance.

Not only did the Rank 4 Black Greatsword shatter her Lance of Longinus, but it also absorbed the compressed light-attribute mana contained within it.

"What!" Tabitha exclaimed with shock.

Nevertheless, she didn't have time to think about how her spear of light shattered so easily against Astoria's new greatsword.

She quickly retreated as she tried to recollect the scattered light-attribute mana fragments of her Lance of Longinus to conjure a defensive light spell against Astoria's follow-up attack.

Headmaster Tabitha never stood a chance.

After Astoria closed the distance between them, she swung down on Tabitha's Light Barrier.

Just like the instance with Tabitha's Lance of Longinus, she quickly shattered the Light Barrier and absorbed some of its light-attribute mana.

Boom!

The Rank 4 Black Greatsword continued on its path and smacked Tabitha into the ground with its flat side.

Even so, the heavy impact broke Tabitha's bones as she slammed against the ground, creating a small crater in the training field.

As Astoria's heavy attack instantly immobilized her, what followed after was Tabitha's tragic fate of getting pummeled.

Astoria tossed aside her Rank 4 Black Greatsword and hopped on top of Tabitha's body before she bashed her face in with a relentless onslaught of punches.

"W-wait!"

Bam!

"I give—!"

Bam! Bam!

"You win, Headmaster—!"

Bam! Bam! Bam!

"I'm sorry—!" Tabitha cried as her face was beaten to a pulp, bloodied with broken teeth, nose, and black panda eyes.

She was beaten ruthlessly and looked very miserable.

Even so, they were still superficial wounds at best for light-attribute High Witches like her and Astoria.

They could quickly heal back without a scar.

Nevertheless, when Astoria heard Tabitha's apology, she briefly paused her fist-pounding to ask, "What are you sorry for?"

"I shouldn't have pried for information from you! Please forgive me, big sister!" Tabitha stated with a pitiful look.

However, Astoria didn't fall for it and pounded her face another two times before she was satisfied.

"If you know that you shouldn't, then why did you still pry if not to ask for a beating?" Astoria snorted as she got off Tabitha.

"I didn't think I would be beaten this badly... Who knew your equipment and weapon would be this outrageous?" Tabitha stifled her cry and healed herself with Light Magic.

"No one was telling me anything about the details on the punitive expedition, so I couldn't help but be curious..."

"Furthermore, you came back and spent your time with Vahn Cadieux... Anyone with a bit of brain would find that strange," Tabitha softly added.

At that moment, a crowd had already gathered in the vicinity as they came to watch the spar between the two headmasters, including Vaan and Dahlia.

Or rather, it was just a one-sided beating.

Chapter 232: Truth Spell

"No way... Was there such a big power difference between High Witches? How did Headmaster Tabitha lose so one-sidedly?"

"Why were they even fighting? What's going on? Are we supposed to do something about this?"

"What can we do exactly? Besides, it looks like the two headmasters have made up. Maybe they were just sparring."

"Sparring? With that level of injury? It looked more like Headmaster Tabitha was beaten into submission instead!"



The Apprentice Witches in the vicinity quietly chatted among themselves with blind speculations.

Meanwhile, the Senior Witch-level instructors and True Witch-level students had a better understanding of the power difference between the two headmasters.

While Headmaster Tabitha and Headmaster Astoria were both High Witches, Headmaster Astoria also had Aura Lord-level physical prowess.

As such, she was naturally stronger than Headmaster Tabitha, who had no other distinctive strengths to her name.

Even so, they didn't understand why the two headmasters fought either.

As Vaan watched from the sidelines with Dahlia, he also pondered on the matter before his eyes flickered.

'Could it be...?'

Vaan faintly guessed it was something related to him.

It was just a brief glance, but he remembered seeing an entire new row of books, the Book of Solomon Raphna, in the library when he went to see Dahlia.

In that case, there was a high chance that Headmaster Tabitha received a copy of the book from Headmaster Astoria earlier and learned about her search for him, or Vaan Raphna, to be exact.

Thus, when Headmaster Tabitha saw Headmaster Astoria close to him while he was still under the alias Vahn Cadieux, she must have figured something out.

'So they fought because Headmaster Tabitha found out about me?' Vaan furrowed his brows.

Evidently, Headmaster Tabitha was also a sharp woman. The sharp sense of a High Witch couldn't be underestimated.

That said, he didn't know who else knew about Headmaster Astoria's search for him. It would be troublesome if more people learned about him.

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After the two headmasters' fight ended, they dispersed the crowd and had the instructors restore the training field.

Afterward, they returned to the office for a more private talk.

Vaan sent Dahlia back to the library before he quickly joined them, causing Tabitha to frown when she heard the door being opened.

However, her brows slowly relaxed when she noticed it was Vaan.

"Oh my, the guest of honor came of his own accord. What business does he have here, I wonder?" Tabitha uttered with a side glance as she fixed her face in front of the mirror.

"Why did you come here, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria also asked.

The way she addressed Vaan in front of Headmaster Tabitha immediately allowed him to confirm his prior suspicions.

"I came to see what was going on, seeing how the two headmasters were sparring. That said, I presume it was about me, Headmaster Astoria?" Vaan calmly replied.

At the same time, he walked over to the hole in the wall and casually glanced down, scanning the area with his Omni-Sense.

"I suppose nothing escapes your notice, Teacher Raphna," Astoria wryly smiled before she nodded. "That's right. Headmaster Tabitha figured out your identity, Teacher Raphna."

"I am to blame for this," Astoria added with guilt.

She had accidentally exposed his identity in front of others before. And now, she had done it again.

"Don't worry about it," Vaan casually smiled as he used Earth Manipulation to repair the hole in the wall as if time had been reversed.

All the scattered rubbles and shattered glasses were put back together before he used Earth Transmutation to fix them in place.

It was as if the hole had never existed.

Shortly after, he turned to Tabitha and said, "More importantly, what does Headmaster Tabitha intend to do?"

"Well, aren't you full of surprises, Sir Vaan?" Tabitha ruefully smiled after her initial surprise and said, "I would love to keep a man of your caliber to myself, but I don't want to get beaten up again."

"Anyway, you don't need to worry about me. I wouldn't turn you in for something like killing a sinner who made Wise Scholar Eniwise become an Abomination. You have far too much value to witches to be put to death for something like that."

"That said, I can't promise that I wouldn't report about you to Her Majesty unless you agree to be put under a truth spell and answer one of my questions," Tabitha stated.

Shortly after she spoke, she immediately felt a threatening gaze from Astoria.

"Don't worry. I won't pry into his secrets. I just want to know whether he is on the side of witches or not," Tabitha quickly assured with a rueful smile.

She was aware that Vaan Raphna's knowledge could help a lot of witches. However, that doesn't necessarily mean he would help them; he might even harm them.

Thus, she had to know where he stood.

"Sure, I'll accept the truth spell for one question," Vaan agreed with a calm smile.

Fortunately, Headmaster Tabitha was a person who leaned towards academics and didn't discriminate against gender like the witch supremacists from the capital.

It was also likely that all academy headmasters were like this, but he couldn't be sure unless he met them personally.

Nevertheless, he could be certain that Headmaster Tabitha would keep her word.

Even if she didn't, he still had Headmaster Astoria on the side. She would definitely protect him if things turned out differently from what was said.

"Great! Then, please forgive me if I offend you," Tabitha said before she cast a mental spell on Vaan to make him answer her question truthfully.

However, Vaan's mind remained unaffected.

The mental spell's mana went straight into his Heaven-Swallowing Space and got devoured by it, which wasn't all that surprising.

Given the vastness of his mental energy, he was most likely immune to most mental spells cast by anyone below the Transcendent rank.

Nevertheless, Tabitha didn't notice her spell had failed and believed Vaan was under the effect of the truth spell.

"Do you think men should reign over witches or the other way around?" Tabitha asked.

Vaan thought of several ways she could have asked her question to find out whether he sided with witches or not. And yet, it turned out to be this one.

"I don't care about any of that," Vaan replied.

Chapter 233: Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon

Although Vaan's reply was calm, he was inwardly smiling.

He could have chosen to lie since he wasn't under the effect of the truth spell, but he ended up answering honestly anyway.

However, it was an answer that was not quite vague but still open for interpretation.

"You don't care about any of that?" Tabitha repeated after she cast a mental dispel spell on him.

But like the truth spell, his Heaven-Swallowing Space also absorbed its mana after it touched his mind.

Nevertheless, Vaan simply responded with a calm smile.

"I see..." Tabitha furrowed her brows contemplatively before she muttered, "In other words, you don't mind either side ruling..."

Although Vaan's answer wasn't ideal, it wasn't bad either. At the very least, she understood that he was neutral and not the witches' enemy.

"Alright, I won't make any report to Her Majesty," Tabitha promised before she turned to Astoria. "It's fine now, right?"

Shortly after she asked, Astoria stopped making her feel threatened.

"Would you have killed me if you thought I was going to report Sir Vaan to Her Majesty?" Tabitha asked further with curiosity.

"No," Astoria shook her head.

But before Tabitha could feel some relief, Astoria added, "I would just beat you up again, break your limbs, immobilize you, and hide you somewhere for a few weeks, months, or even years until it is the right time to release you."

"Holy... That's a bit too harsh, no? I mean, I understand you would do that to protect Sir Vaan, but... We've known each other for years, Headmaster Astoria. How could you treat me like that?" Tabitha smiled ruefully.

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After they talked for some time, Tabitha learned about the details of the punitive expedition and the return of Aeliana Leclair.

When she found out Vaan treated Aeliana, her opinion of him was raised even higher. He was an irreplaceable asset to the Black Rose Kingdom—No, to all witches.

"I knew Sir Vaan was important, but who knew it would be to this degree? He is practically irreplaceable," Tabitha mentioned before she solemnly stated, "The supremacists must not know that he is alive."

"Yeah, that's what we've been trying to avoid. Nothing good will come about them learning about Teacher Raphna," Astoria stated.

"Have you been trying, though?" Tabitha glanced at her and said, "You're too well known. Everywhere you go, people will recognize you and scrutinize not only you but everyone around you."

"Anyone who knew you were looking for Vaan Raphna would be able to connect the dots if they see you traveling with Sir Vaan. An alias like Vahn Cadieux could have worked fine, but not when you two are together," Tabitha added.

"It's fine," Vaan casually said.

"We won't be appearing in public in a few days' time. And it is unclear how long we will be disappearing for, but no one will see us during that period."

"What do you mean, Sir Vaan? Where are you going?" Tabitha furrowed her brows with doubt.

"Thousand Fog Mountains. Wise Scholar Eniwse headed that direction. Thus, we will be heading there to rescue her," Astoria answered for Vaan.

"What? Tabitha exclaimed with a startled look before she said, "Thousand Fog Mountains? That place is too dangerous. I suggest that you do not go there with Sir Vaan."

"Of course, we know the Thousand Fog Mountains are dangerous. After all, it's a Dark Zone. However, it'll be fine with me protecting Teacher Raphna," Astoria assured before she mentioned, "You have already seen how powerful my new equipment and weapon are."

"As I thought, this new black armor and greatsword of yours are Rank 4 quality, huh?" Tabitha muttered.

"Furthermore, they have a special ability to absorb light. If I could, I would also like some equipment and weapons like these. However, that's not important here. What's important is that even for you, Headmaster Astoria, Thousand Fog Mountains is too dangerous."

"Don't you know about the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon?" Tabitha mentioned it shortly after.

"The mythical yet illusory creature that cannot be killed, a being that is impervious to all physical and magical damage, that Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon? Yeah, I know about it," Astoria coolly stated before she uttered, "But, so what?"

"What? What do you mean so what? It can't be killed! How do you plan to defeat something like that if you encounter it?" Tabitha asked with a big frown.

"If I can't beat it, I can still run, no? Why stay and fight something that can't be killed?" Astoria casually replied before she added, "That said, I always wanted to try fighting one. I've only heard about it until now."

"Furthermore, I am also a little in doubt that real creatures can be impervious to both magic and physical damage. At most, it has high defense and magic resistance," Astoria continued before she said, "If not, it can only be a real illusion."

"Yeah, an illusion that can kill people. Just because it's an illusionary dragon, it doesn't make it any less dangerous than the real thing," Tabitha stated seriously in hopes that her words could make them reconsider their decision to enter the Thousand Fog Mountains.

However, it only made Astoria and Vaan more curious.

"You sound like you've experienced the dangers of the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon personally, Headmaster Tabitha," Vaan rubbed his chin with a thoughtful look.

Nevertheless, Tabitha never intended to hide the truth.

"That's right," Tabitha admitted with a nod.

"I've been to the Thousand Fog Mountains before and nearly gotten myself killed by one when I tried exploring the depths of the mountains for opportunities."

"So, don't think that just because the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon had only killed Peak-stage Senior Witches in the records, it can't kill High Witches too," Tabitha stated.

"Why don't you tell us more about your experiences in the Thousand Fog Mountains and the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon, Headmaster Tabitha? We can use all the information we can get," Vaan calmly said.

Tabitha looked stunned before she asked, "You still want to go to Thousand Fog Mountains after everything I said?"

"Yes, of course," Vaan confirmed with a serious look.

#### Chapter 234: Sixth Sense

Although Tabitha didn't want Vaan to go to the Thousand Fog Mountains, she realized nothing she said could change his mind.

Tabitha helplessly sighed before she agreed, "Alright, if that is what you wish, Sir Vaan."

The knowledge inside the Book of Solomon Raphna was fixed, but the origin of said knowledge was still alive. Undoubtedly, Vaan possessed far more knowledge than what the book recorded.

And if she wanted to learn many things beyond what the book could offer, she couldn't get on Vaan's bad side.



Of course, it didn't matter if she was on his good side if he died in the Thousand Fog Mountains either.

"I hope that with my knowledge, you will sufficiently prepare for the Thousand Fog Mountains, Sir Vaan. It had been labeled a Dark Zone for a reason. Please don't underestimate it," Tabitha sincerely wished.

"Of course, I wouldn't, Headmaster Tabitha," Vaan assured before he said, "That's why I wish to learn everything you know about the Thousand Fog Mountains since you seemed to have experience in that place."

"Before that, how much do you know about the Thousand Fog Mountains, Sir Vaan?" Tabitha asked.

At the same time, she summoned two Victorian-style white armchairs for Vaan and Astoria to sit and a tea table before she prepared tea for them with magic as she assumed it would be a long talk between them.

"According to the records, the Thousand Fog Mountains used to be called the Starry Cloud Peaks before the arrival of Gehenna. It was said to have several of the tallest mountain peaks on the continent," Vaan mentioned.

"However, such a grand sight could no longer be seen due to the thick fog that occupied the entire region. Rumors said a tribe of dragons fled from Gehenna during the initial outbreak and settled there. And the fog we see today results from a grand spell they used to conceal themselves in the mountain peaks for protection."

"That said, no one has been able to prove the existence of such mythical creatures. Only their illusions have been seen by those who attempted to explore the Thousand Fog Mountains and lived to tell the tale," Vaan said.

Like many wild regions in the kingdom, and perhaps all of the seven witch kingdoms, the Thousand Fog Mountains were purposely left uncleared by the Transcendent Witches.

It was a land of opportunities for those who sought to hone their skills and gain epiphany amid the dangers to overcome their bottlenecks and advance their power.

And among the wild regions, the labeled Dark Zones were places where the danger level could not be fully determined.

Nevertheless, after many Peak-stage Senior Witches died exploring the Thousand Fog Mountains over the past three hundred years, the danger level was graded at Rank 4 or higher.

The Thousand Fog Mountains were divided into three main regions; the lower, middle, and upper regions.

The foot of the outer mountains and the surrounding fields extending all the way to the edge of the fog were all part of the lower region.

All the inner mountains and up to the halfway point were all part of the middle region.

And everything else beyond the halfway point was part of the upper region.

The danger level in the lower region was relatively low, consisting of Rank 2 beasts or weaker.

In the middle region, the danger level was a level higher. Mostly Rank 3 beasts and monsters dwelled there.

And if one tried to enter the upper region beyond the halfway point up the mountains, they would encounter the Rank 4 Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon that stopped many from climbing further.

When Vaan spoke up to that point, he suspected the Black Rose Transcendent Witch, Henrietta Rosegarden, had explored the upper regions before.

Considering the high level of threat posed by the unknown in that place, it was hard to believe if the powerful Henrietta Rosegarden had not gone to assess it at least once.

That said, even if she did, no one would know except her if she had chosen to keep the information to herself.

"That's about all I know about the Thousand Fog Mountains. Anything about the midway point and above is unknown to me," Vaan stated before he asked, "What did you experience up there, Headmaster Tabitha?"

"You've really done your research, Sir Vaan," Tabitha wryly smiled, not expecting him to have such a complete understanding of the Thousand Fog Mountains.

It was hard to imagine all that knowledge came from books alone. Even if all that knowledge came from books, it was also difficult to remember everything clearly.

Besides the terrain of the Thousand Fog Mountains, Vaan had also listed the type of beasts, monsters, and even herbs that were commonly found in the lower and middle regions.

A normal person wouldn't have such attention to detail. But then again, Vaan wasn't a normal person.

Furthermore, a normal person wouldn't have been able to write something like the Book of Solomon Raphna.

That said, it left her with little to talk about the Thousand Fog Mountains.

"I don't have much to say, actually. You have covered most of it, Sir Vaan," Tabitha wryly smiled before she said, "But if you really want to know about what's it like up there, I can tell you that it's very different from the lower and middle regions."

"The fog is less dense up there, and the terrain isn't much different. But stepping up there was like stepping into a different world; something about it didn't feel the same. Of course, the same goes for the danger."

"The moment I arrived there, my body instinctively screamed danger. I was forced to flee when the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon was formed from the fog. It was just an illusion, but I felt fear from the bottom of my heart. It was as if a real powerful and ancient dragon was gazing into my soul."

Tabitha recalled the event with trepidation as her life hung by a thread during that moment.

But after listening to her, Vaan frowned.

"In other words, Headmaster Tabitha wasn't attacked by the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon? You only fled when you 'sensed' the life-threatening danger?" Vaan asked.

"You shouldn't underestimate a High Witch's sixth sense, Sir Vaan," Tabitha coolly said before she added, "Even if we have no explanation behind it, it can be very accurate at crucial moments."

#### Chapter 235: The Gardener

'A High Witch's sixth sense, huh? Did Astoria also rely on this ability to figure out my identity?' Vaan wondered.

He knew little about the High Witches' sixth senses. In fact, it might as well be his first time hearing about it.

But judging by how Tabitha talked about it, it was likely that even High Witches knew little about their sixth senses.

That said, Vaan thought about the difficulty that High Witches faced when they attempted to advance beyond the early stage.

In order to pull it off, they would need a lot of mental strength to force the link of the fourth magic circle in the human world.

'Perhaps the development of their sixth senses is the result of their high mental strength? Or the High Witch rank is where they begin to experience the advancement of the soul, which lead to the development of their sixth senses?' Vaan mused.

With that in mind, he figured there might be a difference in a High Witch's power depending on the path chosen to advance to the middle stage.

For instance, an Early-stage High Witch that cultivated her mental strength and advanced to Mid-stage High Witch in the human world was likely stronger than one that reached the same rank in Gehenna without the effort.

Nevertheless, it hadn't been proven to be easier to advance magic in Gehenna. Thus, further deliberations were pointless.

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Sometime later, Vaan and Astoria left Headmaster Tabitha's office after finishing their discussion.

Not long after they did, Tabitha also left to find Sacha in her workshop to learn more about the Rank 4 Black Metal used in Astoria's armor and greatsword.

Vaan had freely told her about it after learning a few details about the Thousand Fog Mountains from her.

Considering his identity was steadily being known by more people, he believed he had to keep his friends close and his enemies closer.

If he provided sufficient benefits to those on his side, he would guarantee they would have his back, or at the very least, not betray him.

As Vaan and Astoria walked down the academy's main building corridor on the top floor, he turned his head to face her.

"I'll be heading back to spend the night with Lady Dahlia, Headmaster Astoria," Vaan honestly informed before he asked with a smile, "You won't be following me to watch us, right?"

Astoria's casual expression suddenly stiffened before she coldly replied, "No. I will retire to my room in Lord Helia's castle for the night."

"Ayo, is that jealousy I sense?" Vaan smiled and teased, "If you don't want me to go, you can try to convince me to spend the night elsewhere, Headmaster Astoria."

Astoria did not miss the hidden implication in Vaan's words.

"It's fine. I won't interfere with your business," Astoria coolly replied before she added, "I'll see you in the morning, Teacher Raphna."

Shortly after Astoria said that, she stormed off on her own, making her way out of the main building to head back to Helia's Castle.

As Vaan watched her departing back in the distance, he rubbed his chin with a thoughtful look.

He was quite confident that Astoria had some feelings for him. But despite his advances, she kept him at arm's length.

Something was holding her back.

'She respects my knowledge and treats me with utmost importance, to the point that she is willing to trade her life for mine. However, she avoids entering a romantic relationship with me...' Vaan mused.

'Is it because something is preventing her from having a romantic relationship? Or is she not interested in having a romantic relationship with me this way? Is she the type that believes in pure love?'

'One thing is certain; her heart is guarded. It won't be easy to have it,' Vaan concluded.

If he wanted to make significant progress in winning over Astoria's heart, he could only look for opportunities during their trip to the Thousand Fog Mountains.

Cheap tricks and flirting won't cut it.

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Shortly after Vaan returned to the library, he went straight to the back office to Dahlia.

He quickly found her leaning against her desk idly with a blank look while she waited for him to return.

The moment she heard the door click open and saw his figure, she quickly stood up to welcome him back.

"You're back, Vaan."

"Sorry for leaving you earlier, Dahli. I've taken care of my business with the headmasters now," Vaan informed with an apology before he asked with a charming smile, "Shall we continue where we left off?"

"Mm..."

Dahlia's cheeks quickly turned red from shyness. She nodded with her head lowering and leaned into Vaan's chest.

At the same time, Vaan pulled the lace on her black and white renaissance dress before he slid her dress off her shoulders, causing them to drop entirely and revealing her bare body to him.

Dahlia felt even more embarrassed after being stripped bare. She quickly covered her chest with her arms.

Nevertheless, Vaan picked her up and carried her over to the mattress on the side of the office before he lay her down gently.

Dahlia strangely felt nervous, as if she was reliving the moments of her first time again.

But such feelings of uneasiness quickly disappeared after Vaan pressed his lips against hers and slowly pried open her mouth to slip his snake-like tongue inside.

"Mmm..."

Dahlia responded to his kiss, welcoming the slithering creature in as the familiarity and experience returned to her.

As they became heated in their passionate kiss, Vaan's hand slid down to season the main dish while his other hand snacked on the round buns.

"Ahhh~!" Dahlia cried with joy.

Her sensitive body quickly came to life, quivering with ecstasy from the stimulations of Vaan's touches and the influx of mana that started to pour into her body through her opened pores.

Sometime later, Dahlia's blissful cries resounded throughout the office room again as their warm bodies connected, becoming one.

Vaan, like a gardener, took extra care in tending to his flower, ensuring it grew strong and beautifully.

Because one day, it might just become the sword and shield that protects him from the winds and rains along with the rest of the flowers in his growing garden.

That said, given his rate of improvement, his flowers would only be needed to block the light sprinkles and soft breezes.

Chapter 236: A Chance to Make Big Money

Ding!

<Your wind affinity has increased>

<Friend of Wind (Low-rank) has upgraded to Good Friend of Wind (Mid-rank)>

<Your speed has improved>

...

=====

«Physical Attributes»

[257 Defense] [Low-level Rank 3] [100 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 357 (Mid-level Rank 3)]

[201 Strength] [High-level Rank 2] [100 Aura Power] [Total Strength: 301 (Low-level Rank 3)]



[185 → 213 Speed (↑28)] [Mid-level Rank 2 → High-level Rank 2] [100 Aura Power] [Total Speed: 313 (Low-level Rank 3)]

=====

«Elemental Affinity»

[Earth: 51%]

[Wind: 5 → 13% (↑8%)]

[Lightning: 10%]

[Light: 5%]

[Wood: 5%]

=====

Friend of Wind (Low-rank) → Good Friend of Wind (Mid-rank) (Upgradeable)

Overview: When you are within the wind domain, your movements will receive some blessing from the wind spirits.

Effect: Increase speed by 0.5% → 5% (↑4.5%)

Restriction: Only limited within a wind domain.

=====

After a night of dual-practice with Dahlia, Vaan raised his speed by a fair deal along with other benefits that came with her wind-attribute refined mana.

Speed was no longer his weakest physical attribute; it was strength.

Strength was necessary to defeat stronger opponents, but a strong weapon could also compensate for the lack of power in breaking an opponent's defense.

That said, he shouldn't ignore the improvement of his strength.

'So far, fire-attribute refined mana is the best sustenance for improving strength, earth-attribute refined mana for defense, wind-attribute refined mana for speed, lightning-attribute refined mana for cognitive abilities, and light-attribute and wood-attribute refined mana for healing abilities,' Vaan recalled.

But while fire-attribute refined mana was the best sustenance for improving strength, there was a surprising lack of quality fire-attribute refined mana for him to use and improve his strength.

Fire-attribute refined mana from True Witches doesn't improve his strength much, not to mention it didn't increase his fire affinity whatsoever.

He needed fire-attribute refined mana from Senior Witches at least.

Another thing Vaan needed to consider was whether his body could handle so many elemental affinities without repercussions. There wasn't any yet, but it might not be the same in the latter stages.

The body might be made up of the five elements of fire, water, earth, wind, and wood, but it didn't mean it could have a perfect affinity to all elements.

That said, it only applied to an average body.

'I have the Heaven-Swallowing Physique... The vast space of the universe can accommodate everything; the same may be applicable to my body,' Vaan mused.

By keeping the various powers in his body separate, they wouldn't clash and conflict.

However, Vaan considered the possibility of mixing various elements and abilities to create stronger powers.

It was a thought worth testing once he gathered more knowledge and brainstormed the idea.

"Mmm..."

A weak groan escaped Dahlia's lips as she shuffled her body into a more comfortable sleeping position.

She rubbed her cheeks on Vaan's chest like a cat and felt his warmth before she revealed a satisfied smile with her eyes closed.

Nevertheless, Vaan could tell she had already woken up from the movements.

"Rise and shine, Dahli."

"Five more minutes."

Dahlia grumbled as her arms tightened around his, hugging him like a bear that refused to let go.

"I will stay in Lord Helia's castle for the next two days and leave Redpine City afterward. I won't be coming back here for some time," Vaan dropped the news on her.

In that instant, Dahlia's body trembled before her eyes snapped wide open, staring at him in shock.

"Did I do something wrong, Vahn? Are you bored of me? Is it because my skills or talents are lacking?" Dahlia quickly thought.

She had experienced tremendous growth with every dual-practice session with Vaan, but that was mainly attributed to his pleasure skills making a world of difference.

Vaan may not receive as much benefit from her due to her lacking talent, which may be the reason he was leaving.

"You didn't do anything wrong, nor am I abandoning you." Vaan calmly shook his head and said, "I have something to do outside the city, which requires me to leave for a longer period. That said, it's a big world. I won't stay in Redpine City forever, nor should you."

"Do you plan on being an academy librarian for the rest of your life, Dahli?" Vaan asked her shortly after.

"I don't!" Dahlia vehemently shook her head before she helplessly asked, "But what else can I do? What do you want me to do? And where are you going?"

"I'll be heading to Sunnyside Town, which lies beyond the Sunset Forest to the west of the city, then making my further northwest," Vaan calmly replied before he suggested to her, "How about starting a business to earn more mana stones?"

"A business? What kind of business can I run that would earn more mana stones than my present job?" Dahlia asked with knitted brows.

Nevertheless, she was greatly relieved when Vaan assured her he wasn't abandoning her. For a moment, she felt like a lost lamb, not knowing what to do with her life.

"Are you willing to follow my arrangement if I have something you can do, Dahli?"

"Mm," Dahlia nodded and said, "If you think I can do it well."

"You don't have to worry about that; you'll do just fine," Vaan assured her before he said, "I want you to head to Sunpeak Town and start a business there. Tell Lady Solana I sent you; she will look after you there."

"Okay... But why Sunpeak Town? What kind of great business can I run in that abandoned place?" Dahlia furrowed his brows with doubts.

"It might be abandoned now, but it won't be for long. It's only a matter of time before Sunpeak Town prospers and rises with even greater momentum than it did in the past. People will pour into the town, and property and land values will soar," Vaan mentioned.

"But, before that happens, I want you to purchase all the land and property in the heart of Sunpeak Town you can get your hands on by negotiating with the owners. I will provide you the mana stones as funds for the undertaking."

"You won't find a better chance than now to do it when they mostly trade in metal coins. Mana stones will have inflated values there," Vaan confidently stated with a sharp glint.

Where there is big money to be made, there's no way that he would ignore it.

#### Chapter 237: Tension Between Two Ladies

"I can understand the logic behind buying land and properties for cheap and reselling them at a higher price, but... That's under the presumption that land and property values will soar," Dahlia stated before she asked, "How can you be so sure that things will change, Vahn?"

"Before Sunpeak Town declined, it was already prosperous due to its location being in the center of four cities. Therefore, if one wanted to reach any of the other cities from these four via the main road, they have to pass through Sunpeak Town, making it high in traffic for both travelers and merchants," Vaan explained.

"Once the Curse of the Purple Umbala is lifted, traffic will steadily return to Sunpeak Town. Of course, this will only return Sunpeak Town to its former glory, not exceed it. However, it will be a different story once everyone finds out about Lord Aeliana recovering from her Abomination state."

"Academics, healers, and people, in general, will flock over to learn about her recovery process, whether for research purposes or simply to confirm the truth with their own eyes," Vaan stated.

He had already sent Aeliana to clear the remnant anti-magic spores from the region and also instructed her not to stand out.

Thus, there was still some time For Dahlia to buy the lands and properties in Sunpeak Town before others knew about her recovery.

After Dahlia learned that Vaan was the one who treated Aeliana's Abomination status, she was even more amazed.

The more she learned about him, the more awe and respect she had for him.

"I see... No wonder you are so sure about Sunpeak Town's eventual rise," Dahlia uttered with amazement.

Shortly after, she began to think about the potential profits that could be made from investing in the land and properties of Sunpeak Town like Vaan had suggested.

"Sunpeak Town's lands and properties must have dropped extremely low over the past three years. If my estimations aren't wrong, purchasing a small plot of land or average single-unit property for thirty low-rank mana stones or lower should be possible..."

Dahlia couldn't help but shiver with goosebumps when she thought about the enormous profits to be made from selling the lands and properties at their saturated market values.

"Once people pour into Sunpeak Town, all the available plots of land and properties for sale would be quickly sold out. So the demand will be quite high at that point. And if we occupy all the prime plots of land and properties, people will be willing to pay above the market value for them... That would be the best time to sell them."

After Dahlia arrived at that conclusion, her eyes beamed as if she could see the enormous future profits.

She couldn't help but inwardly praise Vaan's foresight.

It was truly a golden business opportunity.

"Yes, it would be," Vaan nodded before he shook his head shortly after. "However, we still won't sell the prime spots at that point."

"Eh?" Dahlia was stunned before she quickly asked, "Why not?"

"I have a plan to increase their marketable value even further," Vaan calmly stated.

"Given Sunpeak Town's present situation, the existing properties are all in poor conditions. Thus, we will do some renovations to the properties first once the necessary funds are acquired before we sell them," Vaan stated.

"As such, once you buy out all the prime locations, I want you to hold on to them until I get back. Until then, I want you to run a general potion store to generate additional funds. However, you don't need to hire Potioneerings."

"I will send Cyrena to work with you. Can you do it, Dahli?" Vaan asked.

Given Dahlia's years of experience as a librarian, he knew she was good with organizing and numbers. He had also read her thesis.

Thus, he knew she would do an excellent job running a general potion store; she was equipped with the right skills.

"I will do it, Vahn. No, I want to do it!" Dahlia solemnly said with resolution.

She could tell that Vaan had high hopes for her. Thus, she wanted to do it and do it well to live up to his expectations.

"Great!" Vaan smiled.

"Then let's get ready to head into the city. We'll visit the Witch Union Bank, Potioneer Association, and Artificer Association to raise funds needed for the acquisition of the prime plots of land and properties in Sunpeak Town."

"Alright!"

Dahlia quickly felt excited as she looked forward to their trip to the city. It was like they were going on another date with Vaan.

Shortly after they washed, dressed, and readied, they put a self-service sign on the library door and left the academy.

However, along the way, Dahlia noticed they weren't quite heading to any of the three destinations Vaan listed.

"Weren't we heading to the Witch Union Bank, Potioneer Association, or Artificer Association?" Dahlia asked.

"We are," Vaan confirmed with a nod before he added, "However, we need to pick up someone who can help us first."

"Someone who can help us?" Dahlia was slightly taken aback before she asked, "Help us with what?"

"That's right. Someone who can help us guarantee fair prices for what I want to sell to the Potioneer Association and Artificer Association," Vaan stated with a smile.

After Dahlia heard that, she realized they were going to pick up an influential figure. Furthermore, that person was at Helia's Castle.

'Lord Helia?' Dahlia immediately thought.

However, she was startled to find out it was someone even more influential than Lord Helia when they arrived at the bridge to Helia's Castle.

Just as they arrived, Astoria was seen leaving the castle.

"Oh? You're here, Teach—Sir Vahn," Astoria uttered with surprise before she said, "I was just heading out to look for you."

"Well, we came to you first," Vaan smiled and asked, "Are you free to join us on a trip around the city today, Headmaster Astoria?"

"Headmaster Astoria is coming with us?" Dahlia uttered with shock.

At the same time, she was greatly disappointed that they were spending the day with another woman tagging along.

Furthermore, it was with one of the most beautiful and influential figures in the entire kingdom.



Dahlia immediately felt inferior.

That said, the moment she felt Astoria's subtly envious gaze on her, she was first surprised before she returned a smug look.

In that instant, Vaan felt a sudden tension between the two ladies.

#### Chapter 238: Giving a Letter for Insurance

Although Dahlia felt inferior to Headmaster Astoria, she also realized she had some advantages over her in regard to Vaan.

Nevertheless, she was surprised to find out that Headmaster Astoria was interested in Vaan. But when she recalled Vaan's impressiveness, she found it quite normal.

Any witch in the academic circle would be interested in him if they knew what he had achieved.

However, Astoria seemed a little more than just interested in Vaan; she was jealous of her relationship with him.

As such, she found it amusing to tease her over it.

Nevertheless, given Astoria's status and age, she wasn't going to fight with someone who was at least over two hundred eighty years younger than her.

Such a person was a child to her.

Astoria casually turned her gaze to Vaan before she asked, "What do you want to do in the city, Sir Vaan?"

"We are paying a visit to the Potioneer Association and Artificer Association to sell some stuff, then head over to the Witch Union Bank to withdraw some mana stones," Vaan briefly explained the plan to her.

After Astoria learned about it, she quickly agreed to accompany them.

Nevertheless, she couldn't help but wonder why he needed to raise so many mana stones. Evidently, it wasn't for a small matter.

After Astoria gave Vaan a furtive glance, she curiously asked, "What do you need so many mana stones for?"

"Property investment in Sunpeak Town," Vaan calmly confessed.

Given Astoria's intelligence, there was no point in keeping it a secret from her; she would have found out either way.

More importantly, there was no reason to keep it from her, especially when he was going to use her influence to raise money.

Without surprise, Astoria quickly understood the situation after hearing about property investment in Sunpeak Town from Vaan.

She was aware that many people would be interested in Aeliana once they learned about her recovery.

Furthermore, Sunpeak Town was a prime location for trading.

"Property investment in Sunpeak Town, huh? I would have overlooked it if you didn't mention it, Sir Vahn. But as expected, someone like you wouldn't miss this kind of golden opportunity to amass wealth," Astoria commented with a smile.

"It can't be helped," Vaan casually shrugged and smiled back before he said, "Whether it's men or witches, lots of resources are needed for swift growth."

"That I can't argue with," Astoria agreed with his point before she calmly asked, "I trust that you wouldn't want Lord Helia to learn about this either?"

"Yes, I wouldn't," Vaan nodded and said, "Although Lord Helia is bound to learn about it eventually, it shouldn't come from us."

Lord Helia was a businesswoman.

Letting her know early was the same as increasing his business competitors in Sunpeak Town and lowering the chance of him obtaining most of the prime plots of land and properties.

Furthermore, the relationship between Sunpeak Town and Redpine City was not good.

As such, it was unlikely for Helia to purchase any land or property in Sunpeak Town directly; she would have to use more indirect means. Through an intermediary like him, for example.

The ideal situation was to buy everything up for himself first.

Then, he would offer to help her expand her potion business by getting her to supply the potions to their general potion store in Sunpeak Town. That way, they could sell potions without investing in production.

Although the general potion store wouldn't profit much from selling third-party goods, the bigger benefits would still go to him.

After all, he was a shareholder in the sales of Pore Stimulation Potions.

Sometime later, Vaan sold a few Gehenna plants and useable potions from his collection at the Potioneer Association for a fair price, thanks to Astoria's presence, and made 2200 low-rank mana stones.

Afterward, they visited the Artificer Association to sell a piece of Rank 4 Black Metal, which caught the attention of a few Rank 3 Grandmaster Artificers and the Association Leader.

In the end, the piece of Rank 4 Black Metal was sold to the Association Leader for a whopping 4000 low-rank mana stones.

Finally, they visited the Witch Union Bank, where Vaan withdrew another 400 low-rank mana stones from his card.

The overall process took less than three hours.

Without Headmaster Astoria to accompany them, it would have surely taken much longer to accomplish, not to mention the effort they would have to put into finding adequate buyers.

While they would have caught the Association Leader's attention at the Artificer Association for selling the piece of Rank 4 Black Metal anyway, they would not have received such a generous amount for it.

Astoria's influence was no joke.

No one dared to shortchange him in her presence; they all offered very fair prices for the items he sold to both associations.

Nevertheless, after Vaan raised 6600 low-rank mana stones, he kept 1200 mana stones for himself and handed the other 5400 low-rank mana stones to Dahlia for the property and land investment.

Dahlia had never held so many mana stones in her life and felt a little nervous and pressured by them.

That said, she quickly stored the bags of mana stones in her Magic Domain before she felt some relief.

"I suppose Lady Dahlia will be heading to Sunpeak Town now?" Astoria casually asked, but she was actually trying to get rid of her.

"I..." Dahlia wanted to have lunch with Vaan at least, but she ultimately replied with a nod, "Yeah."

"Since time is of the essence, I should reach Sunpeak Town and start buying out as many properties and plots of land in the prime locations as soon as possible."

"Then you're going to need a ride. I plan to borrow the magic airship and return to Blackmoon Academy to sort out some matters I just remembered I need to do. I can drop you off at Sunpeak Town along the way, Lady Dahlia," Astoria mentioned.

"This... Alright," Dahlia agreed after a brief moment of hesitation.

She had planned to fly to Sunpeak Town with her improved Flight Magic, but a magic airship would get her there much quicker without the effort.

"I'll see you again in two days, Sir Vahn," Astoria said to Vaan shortly after.

But before the two ladies could leave together, Vaan stopped Dahlia.

Then, he handed her a letter containing an incomplete building blueprint, which he had drawn during one of the short breaks between the meetings with their buyers at the Potioneer Association.

"What's this for, Vahn?" Dahlia curiously asked.

"Just some insurance," Vaan calmly replied before he instructed, "Hand it over to Lady Solana and tell her it's from me if she makes things difficult for you."

"I understand, Vahn," Dahlia affirmed with a nod.  
Chapter 239: Worshipping a Holy Tree  
Sunpeak Town

Aeliana hadn't much thought about her territory before she arrived at the town's eastern gate with her appearance hidden under a black hooded cloak.

But upon seeing the bleak situation within her town, her heart was slightly stirred by emotions.

Sunpeak Town used to be a prosperous town under her mother's rule.

Given its upward growth and rapid development, it could have turned into a major city of trade, becoming a reputable place in the kingdom's central region within a few years.

But before it could reach the peak of its prosperity, the town was ruined by her.

She was to blame for its current state.

The stone walls were filled with cracks and filthy goblin blood stains that had not been washed or maintained.

Overgrown weeds had obscured the footpaths.

The buildings looked aged and abandoned, covered in weeds, moss, wood decay, and even cracks. Only the doors and windows showed some maintenance.

'I thought I had abandoned everything behind and only have Lord Vaan as the sole purpose of my living, but it seems I still have some attachments to this town...' Aeliana thought.

As she toured the town with her appearance hidden, she was neither approached nor welcomed by anyone.

Everyone minded their own businesses like they were just performing the bare minimum to get by. They were neither lively nor expectant towards anything.

Surprisingly, it bothered her to see the people like that.

'I want to return the town to the way it was before,' such thoughts entered Aeliana's mind.

Nevertheless, her lord sent her to Sunpeak Town for a few tasks, and she had every intention to complete them without fail.

As her lord instructed, she should visit her mother.

However, she failed to find anyone at their old home, the Lord's Manor. That said, she vaguely recalled some memories from her spores that were spread out in the region.

Since the incident, her mother has worked at Golden Peacock Inn for the past three years.

Aeliana quickly dropped by the Golden Peacock Inn but discovered the place was temporarily closed. After she scanned the inn, she didn't find anyone within the property either.

Evidently, her mother, Solana Leclair, was away.

After Aeliana realized that, she didn't bother to look for her mother and went on to complete her next main task.

She went back out of town and connected with a tree with Dryad Transformation before she drew in the anti-magic spores scattered across the region.

Each anti-magic spore was filled with pure mana. But despite being a Peak-stage Senior Witch, the very peak of the Senior Witch rank, she easily absorbed all the pure mana into her body.

However, they weren't absorbed by her magic circles, which had already reached complete saturation, nor her Magic Domain, which was also full.

After the Magic Domain was filled to the brim, the excess pure mana was stored inside her mutated mana veins.

Large volumes of pure mana poured into her mana veins in unending streams. Yet, her mana veins swallowed everything with a bottomless appetite.

They had no sense of fullness; everything was devoured cleanly.

As that happened, Aeliana felt her mana veins becoming tougher. The pure mana inside her veins was constantly condensed and compacted to make room for more pure mana.

At the same time, she vaguely sensed her two Specialized Magic becoming more powerful.

According to the standard practice of witch cultivation, she was a Peak-stage Senior Witch. But the power of her Dryad Transformation alone was already at Early-stage High Witch.

And yet, that power was still rising.

'This is the true path of a witch,' Aeliana thought.

It was a path that witches had long abandoned due to its lack of versatility.

After all, no matter how much they strengthen their mana veins, only their Specialized Magic becomes stronger.

They couldn't use any other magic without mana rings, otherwise known as magic circles.

Even so, it shouldn't have been so easy for her to raise the power of her Specialized Magic.

Magic circles wouldn't be the mainstream practice if it were so easy to improve. At the very least, there should have been more witches that practiced both paths.

Her mutated mana veins were most likely the reason behind her improvement. It was as if its limiter had been removed.

As Aeliana kept absorbing all the pure mana from her anti-magic spores, her mana veins continued to strengthen.

Sometime later, Aeliana recalled all her anti-magic spores, including the ones trapped inside of the townspeople's bodies.

By that point, she felt like the power of her Specialized Magic had already exceeded Early-stage High Witches.

At the same time, the enormous movement of mana did not go unnoticed. Many people were drawn to the tree that attracted all the mana.

It wasn't long before the town's witches realized they had regained their abilities.

"I feel like I can control mana again... Something was removed from my body... I can use magic again...!"

"You're right! I feel young and lively again. My body is receiving the nourishment of mana!"



Several middle-aged-looking witches realized with surprise before they became overjoyed.

It wasn't long before they started worshipping the tree outside the town, treating it like a holy tree for curing them of the curse that plagued them for the past three years.

"Thank you, Holy Tree! Thank you for blessing us! We've been given a second chance at life!" a sixty-year-old True Witch prostrated to the tree Aeliana was hidden within.

With people gathering around the tree, she found it hard to leave unnoticed. As such, she was forced to listen to the townspeople's ramblings.

Nevertheless, it wasn't just the witches in the town that were cured of the curse. Even the aura users regained control of their aura.

"Haiz, we should quickly go and find Lady Solana. She had left to investigate the commotion in the mountains the other day and still hasn't returned. I fear something has happened to her," a woman in her 70's uttered with concern.

"Don't speak like that. That's bad luck," an Aura Master in his 50's chided before he added, "What if something happens to Lady Solana because of what you said?"

Shortly after the man finished speaking, the sky rumbled with thunder.

Chapter 240: Mother & Daughter

Grey thunderclouds slowly blocked out the sun, causing the day to darken with a gloomy atmosphere.

The world welcomed the arrival of the sprinkling rain and cackling lightning strikes, but the strong winds had yet to come.

It was only the first sign of an incoming storm.

Nevertheless, the initial light sprinkles from the sky were enough to scatter the gathering crowd around Aeliana's tree. They quickly went back to town to seek shelter before the heavy downpour arrived.

Shortly after the crowd dispersed from the area, Aeliana exited the tree before she headed north into the mountains.

But not long after she left, a group of people returned with umbrellas and ventured into the mountains.

"Lady Solana didn't bring an umbrella when she left, and she hasn't been cured of the curse. She will get sick if she gets soaked in this cold rain."

"Right, right. We better be quick before it starts pouring hard."

"Agreed. Now that we have recovered our abilities, we can reach Lady Solana more quickly."

"You also forgot that we won't have to worry as much about bandits and goblins on the way."

The witches and aura users chatted after they properly equipped themselves to look for Lady Solana in the mountains.

...

Sometime later, at sunset, when the day was darkening from the sun disappearing over the horizon that could be barely seen due to the heavy grey clouds, Aeliana arrived at the collapsed region in the northern parts of the Red Goblin Mountains.

It wasn't hard for her to locate her mother.

Once she entered Dryad Transformation and connected with the forest in the area, her consciousness indifferently locked onto Solana's figure.

At that moment, the sky was pouring heavy rain, but Solana was found digging through the collapsed region with three other people that came with her.

Their clothes were all soaked by the rain and stained by the muddy soil, and their bodies felt cold due to the falling temperature.

With the sun leaving, the cold rain would only get worse.

"Lady Solana, we can't keep digging like this. We don't know what we are looking for here, and it will take us forever to get anywhere with the rate we are digging."

"That's right, Lady Solana. Take care of your health. We might catch a cold if we continue like this. Furthermore, Lord Helia from Redpine City might know more about what happened here."

"But even if Lord Helia knows what happened here, we have no means of learning anything from her. People afflicted with the Curse of the Purple Umbala are forbidden from entering Redpine City."

"True that. Furthermore, I doubt Lord Helia would help us excavate this region to find traces of Lady Aeliana."

The ex-Senior Witch and two ex-Aura Grandmasters that followed Solana were fully aware of why she was digging in the collapsed region.

She was looking for her daughter, Lord Aeliana of Sunpeak Town.

While many had blamed Aeliana for the curse that plagued their town and caused its decline, others like them remained loyal to Lady Solana and didn't blame her daughter.

If they did, they wouldn't be helping Lady Solana excavate the collapsed region to look for Lord Aeliana.

Nevertheless, they were slightly baffled by why there was a small forest within the collapsed region, which shouldn't have a single tree standing.

That said, they vaguely guessed it had something to do with Lord Aeliana's power after she turned into a Plant-type Abomination.

"Unless there's buried treasure underneath this land, it's unlikely for Lord Helia to mobilize her people to excavate this land," Lady Solana calmly spoke before adding, "We can only rely on ourselves."

"That said, you can all return if you feel the cold rain will make you sick. None of you need to stay and indulge in this selfish woman's desire," Solana added as she continued to dig up the soil with her sword.

Although she was worried about what may have happened to her daughter, she had some assurance that Aeliana was alright.

"How can we leave without you, Lady Solana?" an ex-Aura Grandmaster ruefully smiled before he said, "If you don't leave, I won't leave either."

"That's right, Lady Solana," the ex-Senior Witch agreed and said, "You can't get rid of us that easily. We'll stay and help you find Lord Aeliana, even if it takes us weeks or months to do so."

"Sorry for putting you all through this, everyone," Solana apologized while feeling grateful to them at the same time.

"The curse is the only thing letting us know about Allie's life status, but it's uncertain how long it will remain that way. Something big happened here, and if Allie is trapped down here, I have to save her."

"I won't feel assured until I see her," Solana firmly added.

When the ex-Senior Witch and two ex-Aura Grandmasters heard the resoluteness in Solana's voice, they wryly smiled and stopped trying to persuade her.

Shortly after, they wordlessly resumed their excavation.

...

When Aeliana arrived nearby, she silently observed them from a distance for some time.

A few moments later, she merged with a tree and used the abilities of her Dryad Transformation to draw out the anti-magic spores from their bodies.

At the same time, she gained complete awareness of the region.

"Hm? This... This is...! I've regained full control of the mana in my body! I don't feel any more obstruction!" the ex-Senior Witch exclaimed, pleasantly surprised by the discovery.

"You're right, Lady Maria! My aura is flowing smoothly as well! I think the curse has been lifted!" one of the ex-Aura Grandmasters rejoiced.

But in that same instant, Solana's face paled.

"No, no, no—! Allie! You can't leave! Don't leave Mother behind!" Solana sorrowfully cried as she tossed aside the sword and frantically dug up the ground with her bare hands. "I just wanted you to live!"

"Lord Aeliana... She..."

Solana's gut-wrenching cry immediately washed away the Senior Witch and two Aura Grandmasters' joy regarding their recovery.

At the same time, they felt guilty for celebrating.

Meanwhile, Aeliana impassively observed her mother's sorrowful and desperate actions under the assumption that she had passed away.

She blamed her mother for letting her live through hell for the past three years.

But as she watched her grieving mother's miserable state, she felt pained in her heart, and tears welled up in her eyes.

Her resentment was slowly washed away, overwhelmed by a different emotion; sadness.

"Mother..."