

The Witch 241

Chapter 241: Mother & Daughter (2)

Aeliana never hated her mother for sparing her life and making her suffer hell for three years. In fact, she loved her dearly.

Nevertheless, the accumulated resentment in her heart kept her from expressing her true feelings.

Such feelings made her soft, weak, and vulnerable – something she didn't need if she wanted to stay strong and endure the hellish torment brought by her Abomination form.

She thought she had discarded those feelings, but they came back like rushing water after the floodgates opened.

Aeliana wasn't sure if her present state was also part of her Lord's arrangement, but she was grateful to him.

Without her Lord's instruction, she wouldn't have visited her mother and awakened her sealed emotions.

At the same time, she realized she missed her mother very much.

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After Solana and the others regained control of their powers, their bodies greedily absorbed the mana around them like dry plants receiving their first drop of water in years.

Before long, Solana recovered both her magic and physical strength.

Nevertheless, she didn't care for any of that. The only thing on her mind was her daughter.

She used every ounce of her strength to unearth the collapsed region in hopes of reaching her daughter, who may have been buried underneath.

"No, no, no! Allie!" Solana tearfully cried.

She quickly separated the ground with Earth Magic, but Earth Magic was never her specialty. Her mana quickly ran out before she resorted to using her hands again.

Dirt accumulated under her nails, and sharp fragments in the ground chipped them, cutting her fingers and causing them to bleed.

Despite the self-mutilation of her hands, Solana didn't stop digging.

Aeliana couldn't bear to keep watching.

She eventually stepped out of the tree and approached the dig site, revealing herself to her mother and the other three people.

"Mother..." Aeliana uttered, feeling choked on her emotions.

Her voice wasn't very clear and audible in the heavy rain, but it made its way right into her mother's ears.

Solana's body froze as she recognized her daughter's familiar voice at that instant.

In the next instance, Solana quickly climbed out of the deep pit she had dug, and there, she found her daughter standing by the edge of the pit, staring back at her.

She looked the same as she did three years ago, prior to the Abomination incident.

"Allie...?"

Solana hurriedly scurried over to Aeliana's side and carefully studied her appearance, fearing she was only her daughter's lookalike.

However, there was no mistaking it; it was truly her daughter, back to her original appearance.

"You're alright... Thank the heavens. I don't know what I would do if you were gone from this world. I'm sorry for being a selfish mother. You must have suffered a lot."

Solana rejoiced from the bottom of her heart, but her tears wouldn't stop running down her cheeks.

Aeliana was affected by her mother's emotions, and her tears also overflowed.

Over the past three years, her mother had aged considerably, as seen by her present appearance. Her mother was no longer young and beautiful like most witches.

Instead, she looked like a normal middle-aged woman due to the lack of mana nourishment.

"I'm sorry for everything, Mother," Aeliana apologized, recognizing her fault for everything that had happened to them.

They could have avoided the tragedy if she hadn't been too impatient to prove herself.

Nevertheless, Solana shook her head.

"Your mistakes... the fault lies with me. I am not a good mother. I shouldn't have made you shoulder so much responsibility while you are still young, and I should have been more prudent about other people's ill intentions," Solana stated.

Although Aeliana wanted to argue otherwise, the Senior Witch and two Aura Grandmasters interrupted as they forced themselves in between her and her mother.

"Be careful, Lady Solana. Don't be fooled by this person's appearance," the Senior Witch, Maria, warned before she mentioned, "There's no way Lord Aeliana would look like this. She had turned into an Abomination, remember?"

"That's right, Lady Solana. This person must have altered her appearance with magic to look like Lord Aeliana in order to trick you for some ulterior motives," one of the two Aura Grandmasters added.

In that instance, Aeliana's eyes flashed with heavy malevolence and killing intent, shocking the Senior Witch and two Aura Grandmasters.

At the same time, her malicious aura further strengthened their suspicion.

"S-Such dense killing intent and malevolence! She must be a shape-shifting demon!" Maria blindly accused Aeliana before she added, "There's no way Lord Aeliana would possess such malevolence!"

"You don't understand what I've been through," Aeliana spat in a low tone.

Their interruption already angered her, and the Senior Witch's false accusation only further fueled her fury.

She was completely infuriated and considered whether to slaughter Senior Witch for her ignorance and insolence.

But before either side could take further action, Solana thundered, "How dare you, Maria! Do you think I'm incapable of recognizing my child?! The person before you is, without a doubt, my daughter!"

"But... I've never heard of anyone recovering after turning into an Abomination..." Maria uttered while standing her ground.

"Just because it hasn't happened before doesn't mean it's impossible!" Solana firmly stated as she strongly suspected Vaan had played a major role in her daughter's recovery.

"But..."

Maria and the other two Aura Grandmasters stubbornly stood their ground to protect Solana from Aeliana until they could confirm her identity.

However, Aeliana's patience grew thin.

With a wave of her hand, the tree roots underneath them rose and slapped each of them out of the way.

It was a casual move, but its force was enough to shatter their bones and leave them half dead.

"I understand your suspicions, but I won't tolerate such insolence again. Understand that I was lenient this time because you have all suffered due to my past actions. If you point your blades at me again, I will kill you where you stand," Aeliana said imperiously.

Despite the three people having spoiled her mood, she suppressed her fury and only delivered them a light punishment.

Meanwhile, Maria and the two Aura Grandmasters coughed up blood after they were struck flying by the powerful tree roots.

Still, they couldn't hide the shock they felt at how helpless they were to resist Aeliana's attack.

"You've tamed the power from your Abomination state, Allie?" Solana uttered, pleasantly surprised by her daughter's masterful control over the wood elements.

Chapter 242: I Mean No Trouble

After Aeliana used the power of her Dryad Transformation, her partially-transformed appearance was revealed to everyone.

It wasn't just Solana who had realized she had complete control of it; the other three people also grasped the situation.

The doubts in their hearts were dispelled, and they accepted their punishment without a complaint.

After Aeliana removed the obstruction, she strolled over to her mother, who had been hesitant to embrace her due to her dirty state.

Nevertheless, Solana was freed of dirt and wounds after Aeliana cast some simple healing and cleansing spells on her body.

Shortly after, the two embraced each other intimately, but Aeliana's previous emotional state was no longer present.

Only calmness or indifference could be found on her face, masked by the rain.

"Do you blame me, Allie?" Solana softly asked.

She wouldn't be surprised if her daughter resented her for letting her live and suffer over the past three years.

The malevolent aura her daughter had previously revealed only gave her a glimpse of how much she had suffered.

Nevertheless, Solana didn't care what had become of her daughter; she was very content with Aeliana returning to her, alive and well.

It was more than she could ask for.

Although Aeliana did blame her mother at one point, such feelings of resentment disappeared after she reunited with her mother.

In the end, she was still her mother's child.

She would rather be the one to endure all the misery and torment than to see her mother suffer. But, of course, the same applied to her Lord.

"I don't blame you, Mother," Aeliana replied.

"That's good, that's good..." Solana's heart felt unburdened before she urged, "Come, let's head back to Sunpeak Town. There's much for us to talk about once we return."

"Yes, Mother," Aeliana obediently nodded.

However, after a short pause, she suddenly glanced at the other three injured people with a stern and fierce look.

"My recovery is to be kept secret for the time being. If I hear a word of it spreading in Sunpeak Town, I will hunt down every one of you," Aeliana warned before she sought their confirmation, "Is that understood?"

"Yes, Lord Aeliana—!" Maria and the two Aura Grandmasters loudly replied before violently coughing due to their internal injuries.

After Solana recovered some mana, she helped them recover for the return trip with Light Magic.

Although Aeliana's attack had been heavy, Maria and the two Aura Grandmasters did not blame her for punishing them. They deserved it.

In fact, they had gotten off lightly.

After all, Aeliana was legally still the Lord of Sunpeak Town, the Lady they serve after Lady Solana.

If Aeliana wanted to execute them for pointing their weapons at her and falsely accusing her of being a demon, it would have been well within her authority.

"I still find it hard to believe... How did Lord Aeliana return from the Abomination state? I thought it was an impossible feat."

"I also thought the same, but we can't deny what we've seen with our eyes. And as curious as I am right now, we won't know how Lord Aeliana recovered until Lord Aeliana decides to divulge the information to us."

...

Sometime later, Solana and Aeliana returned to Sunpeak Town during the night with over a dozen other people after encountering them along the way.

Nevertheless, Solana immediately noticed the rare festive atmosphere in town.

However, there was one problem – the townspeople in the central district weren't celebrating their recovery from the curse that had been lifted.

Instead, they were rejoicing over the sales of their properties as they loaded their carts with their belongings.

At the same time, Solana and Aeliana found a row of people lining up to sell their property deed to a Senior Witch. The person was buying out all their properties for less than thirty low-rank mana stones.

Those who offered lower prices had priorities over others.

As such, a few central district property owners even offered to sell their homes for as low as fifteen low-rank mana stones.

"What on earth is going on here...?"

Solana expressed her surprise along with the people that returned with her, except for Aeliana, who retained a calm look.

Nevertheless, they eventually grasped the situation after she listened to the folks talk with joy.

After being freed from the curse of the inability to use magic and aura, the witches and aura users were free to leave Sunpeak Town and travel to other cities.

It was great timing that a wealthy Senior Witch came to buy out their properties with low-rank mana stones. They could use the mana stones to fund their travels and help them settle in other, more prosperous cities.

Solana didn't blame the townspeople for leaving. However, she didn't like the wealthy Senior Witch exploiting them.

She wasn't stupid.

With the curse lifted, Sunpeak Town was bound to rise again. If the townspeople had just waited for a period of time, they would have sold their properties and land for much better prices.

"Hmph!" Solana snorted with displeasure.

She quickly strolled to the front of the line, which was located right outside an old inn, ready to give the wealthy Senior Witch an earful and kick her out of her town.

Her townspeople had suffered a lot alongside her. Even if they wanted to leave, she couldn't allow them to settle for piss-poor changes.

But before Solana could open her mouth to spew a bunch of words, Dahlia, with her quick wits, spoke first after sensing the incoming trouble.

"Wait a moment. You must be Lady Solana," Dahlia hurriedly stood up from behind her counter to welcome her with a friendly smile. "And before you say anything, I want to let you know that Sir Vahn sent me here."

She had quickly deducted Solana's identity with a short glance.

"He also anticipated that you might make things difficult for me, so he instructed me to hand you this letter. I mean no trouble, Lady Solana."

Dahlia didn't hesitate to pass Vaan's letter over to Solana.

In that instance, the words Solana wanted to say were immediately stuck in her throat like a fishbone.

"You... Uh, Sir Vaan did?" Solana stuttered, caught off-guard by Dahlia's preparedness.

At the same time, she did not notice the subtle difference in pronunciation between Vaan and Vahn when Dahlia mentioned the person.

Nevertheless, Aeliana silently and promptly informed her about Vaan and Vahn.

Chapter 243: Aeliana's Opinion

After Solana learned about Vaan Raphna and Vahn Cadieux, her lips twitched when she looked back at Dahlia.

'You're exploiting my people, and you dare say you mean no trouble? Are you kidding me?' Solana silently thought with furrowed brows.

Nevertheless, she decided to take a look at the contents of the letter first. It was at least worth a look since it came from Vaan.

Furthermore, Vaan's letter piqued her interest.

She was curious how a single letter could convince her to permit Dahlia to continue her business at the cost of her own people's interests.

When Solana opened the letter and gazed at the content, she was immediately intrigued by the complex building blueprint.

It had an exquisite building design, unlike any she had seen before; it was unique and awe-inspiring, as if it was a work of art.

Alas, it was just a building blueprint; it would be even more impressive if such a towering structure could be realized.

According to the precise calculations and measurements, such a tall building did seem possible to make.

However, the blueprint was incomplete.

Some critical information was purposely withheld, making the building blueprint flawed and dangerous to proceed without.

'If I want the complete blueprint of this marvel building design, I can't make things difficult for your people in my town, huh? Is that your intention, Vaan?' Solana silently mused with narrowed eyes.

Nevertheless, it was an enticement she could not refuse.

It wasn't difficult to erect a tall structure with many floors in the present world using strong building materials and magic.

But structures were limited to around thirty to fifty floors before their structural integrity was called into question.

And while taller structures are more impressive and imposing, there was no point in creating such skyscrapers if they were easily and utterly destroyed with a single attack.

However, Vaan's design implied that it was possible to reach a hundred floors and over with the structural integrity being affected purely based on precise calculations and without the reliance on magic reinforcements.

Thus, if magic reinforcements were added on top of it, the structure would be incredibly stable and firm.

'If the complete building design could be erected, it would become a historic achievement and Sunpeak Town's main attraction,' Solana's eyes flickered brightly.

In other words, the skyscraper would attract a lot of traffic and speed up the revitalization of Sunpeak Town, allowing it to become a prosperous town quickly.

After Solana folded up the blueprint and stored it in her Magic Domain, she returned her attention to Dahlia.

"I have received Vaan's message, so I won't make things difficult for you. I won't stop you from conducting business here, nor will I force you to sell back the lands and properties you have bought," Solana solemnly stated.

"However, I will not allow you to exploit my people as you please. I will inform them of what they are potentially losing by selling their properties to you. Whether they still decide to sell their properties to you cheaply after that, I won't interfere."

"Do you have a problem with that?" Solana asked.

"Not at all, Lady Solana," Dahlia calmly smiled.

She had successfully purchased over twenty properties for less than five hundred low-rank mana stones.

Such a deal was a big win, in her opinion.

"Can I have a word, Mother?" Aeliana suddenly asked, prompting Solana to turn to her.

"Of course," Solana warmly replied with a smile. "What is it, Allie?"

"In my opinion, there's no need to inform the townspeople. If they want to sell their property, it implies that they have decided to move out of Sunpeak Town. In that case, there's no need to care about them," Aeliana coolly stated.

"If the townspeople want to leave, there's no use trying to keep them, nor should we care. Only the people that remain in our town are considered our people."

"Those are the people we should care about," Aeliana added.

After finding out her Lord had sent Dahlia to Sunpeak Town to invest in real estate, she didn't want her mother's decisions to affect his plans.

"Hmm..."

Solana thoughtfully hummed with knitted brows, contemplating between reason and compassion. But after a moment, her brows relaxed.

"Officially, you are still the Lord of Sunpeak Town. If you think I shouldn't inform the townspeople, then I won't. To begin with, these matters should be left to you. I should just go back to managing my inn," Solana said.

Although Solana spoke with a warm smile, Aeliana could tell her mother had made a hard decision to give up on the people that intended to leave Sunpeak Town.

Nevertheless, it was in the town's best interest.

"Thank you, Mother," Aeliana slightly bowed to her mother for her understanding before she said, "I will catch up with you after I am done here."

"Alright. You can find me at Golden Peacock Inn, Allie."

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Shortly after Solana left, Aeliana turned her attention to Dahlia.

"Tell me more about Lord Vahn's plan," Aeliana sought further information about Vaan's plan for Sunpeak Town from her. But seeing her hesitation, she added, "You can trust me. I am one of Lord Vahn's people."

"Alright," Dahlia eventually nodded.

Considering Aeliana was saved by Vahn and went as far as to call him a Lord, it showed how much she respected him.

As such, Dahlia determined that she could trust her.

Sometime later, Aeliana grasped the situation from Dahlia and understood her Lord's plan.

Her Lord wasn't just investing in the real estate business of Sunpeak Town; he intended to make it their base.

After she figured out her Lord's intention, she realized returning to her Lord's side earlier was impossible.

She had to stay and assist Dahlia's operations in Sunpeak Town, protecting her from potential threats and ensuring everything proceeded smoothly over the next two days.

Aeliana softly sighed.

"Alright. Dahlia, was it? Continue what you need to do. I will ensure you can operate in Sunpeak Town smoothly over the next two days. That includes eliminating anyone that greedily eyes your wealth or threatens your safety."

"Then, I will thank Lord Aeliana in advance."

Sometime later, Aeliana left to see her mother.

When she did, Dahlia's calmness deflated like a balloon as she fell back on her chair with relief. Dealing with higher-ranking witches was taxing on her mind.

"I will make sure to do my job well," Dahlia softly muttered to herself.

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Chapter 244: Two Days Later

Redpine City

In the blink of an eye, two days passed by.

During this period, Vaan spent his time at Helia's Castle like an animal in heat as he dual-practiced with Hester day and night.

Outside of dual-practice with Hester, he also discussed business with Helia over meals and tutored Cyrena on potioneering.

Specifically, he taught a few potion recipes for her to practice in Sunpeak Town and put on the market for attraction.

But like the Pore Stimulation Potion, they weren't anything particularly outstanding or unique; they were just improved versions of existing potions.

Besides that, he also gave her a lot of homework to keep her busy once he departed for the Thousand Fog Mountains.

Creak...

The door to Vaan's room slowly opened before Hester limped out like an old woman with a hunchback as she used a walking stick for support; her legs felt so weak that she couldn't walk without it.

Despite being a Peak-stage Senior Witch, she had accumulated so much pure mana over the past two days that even her Magic Domain had been filled.

However, that wasn't all.

After her Magic Domain and two magic circles were completely saturated with mana, she subconsciously diverted the excess pure mana to her mana veins to avoid wasting the pure mana her body had absorbed.

Thanks to that, her power had slightly risen despite still being a Peak-stage Senior Witch.

"Rest well, Hester. We'll continue again tonight," Vaan's voice found its way into Hester's ears as she was leaving.

Her body subconsciously trembled.

Hester could only smile bitterly and helplessly in response before she continued to limp her way back to her room.

After all, she had offered to be Vaan's dual-practice partner during his stay at Helia's Castle. Furthermore, she had also boldly claimed she was experienced enough to handle him alone.

In reality, Vaan was too much for her.

If she had not relied on potions to increase her stamina and mental recovery to keep up with Vaan, she would still be lying in bed, too sore to get up.

Nevertheless, it didn't stop her from having dark bags under her eyes like a sleep-deprived person.

Hester wondered if Vaan was the reincarnation of some starving stallion god. His stamina and vigor seemed endless.

Thinking back, she didn't remember if his impressive tool had ever gone soft after so many rounds.

"Oh, yes. I will also be counting on you for dual-practice when we journey to Thousand Fog Mountains together, Hester," Vaan's voice was heard from inside the guestroom again.

After Hester heard that, she staggered and almost fell to the ground.

She remembered she had agreed to accompany him on his journey to Thousand Fog Mountains after he convinced her.

At the same time, she figured she could find the opportunity to ascend to the ranks of High Witches inside Thousand Fog Mountains.

It was definitely safer to travel with Headmaster Astoria in their party.

"Of course, Sir Vahn... You can count on me," Hester replied with some reluctance in her tone, as if she was starting to regret her life choices.

After Hester left, Vaan checked his status while he washed up.

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«Physical Attributes»

[257 → 306 Defense (↑49)] [Low-level Rank 3] [100 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 406 (Mid-level Rank 3)]

[201 → 217 Strength (↑16)] [High-level Rank 2] [100 Aura Power] [Total Strength: 317 (Low-level Rank 3)]

[213 → 215 Speed (↑2)] [Mid-level Rank 2 → High-level Rank 2] [100 Aura Power] [Total Speed: 315 (Low-level Rank 3)]

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«Lycan State»

[Total Defense: 406 → 559 (↑153) (Mid-level Rank 3 → Low-level Rank 4)]

[Total Strength: 317 → 425 (↑108) (Low-level Rank 3 → Mid-level Rank 3)]

[Total Speed: 315 → 422 (↑107) (Low-level Rank 3 → Mid-level Rank 3)]

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<<Elemental Affinity>>

[Earth: 51 → 53%]

[Wind: 13%]

[Lightning: 10 → 12%]

[Light: 5%]

[Wood: 5%]

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«Specialized Magic Understandings»

[Earth Reinforcement: 89% Completion]

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'These past two days of dual-practicing with Hester have been quite fruitful. The defense in my Lycan Transformation state has reached the threshold of Rank 4 beings, and my earth affinity had slightly increased,' Vaan mused.

With the increased earth affinity, the earth-attribute blessings of his Earth Spirt Body also increased a bit.

More importantly, he was not far from acquiring Hester's Specialized Magic.

'It should be completed after tonight or on our way to Thousand Fog Mountains. I'm not really in a hurry to acquire Hester's Earth Reinforcement,' Vaan thought.

It was just a matter of time before he acquired her Specialized Magic.

More importantly, Peak-stage Senior Witches could easily die in the Thousand Fog Mountains. While his defense was quite high, his strength and speed were quite behind.

That said, he had the means to improve them quickly.

'I should raise my aura cultivation with the mana stones I have accumulated,' Vaan decided to spend his morning on aura cultivation.

Over the past two days, Tenacious Soul Potion and Furious Soul Potion had entered Redpine City's market and took it by storm.

The crazy sales had filled up Linetta's account at the Witch Union Bank with another good sum of mana stones.

Before departing for Thousand Fog Mountains, he would definitely visit the bank to make another withdrawal.

There was no need to visit Witch Union Bank now. After all, he still had over a thousand low-rank mana stones on him.

After Vaan scanned the area with Omni-Sense, he took out the low-rank mana stones in his Heaven-Swallowing Space.

As he devoured the pure mana of several dozen low-rank mana stones at a time and converted them into aura power, his aura cultivation swiftly rose.

In a short few minutes, he burned over 700 low-rank mana stones.

Ding!

<You have successfully produced a moderate amount of aura>

<Your status has been updated>

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«Cultivation»

Aura Cultivation Method: The Way of the White Tiger (Mid-rank)

Cultivation Level: Early Rank 2 Aura Master → Late Rank 2 Aura Master

Aura Power: 100 → 215 (↑115)

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After seeing his improvement was still short of his target, Vaan burned another 400 low-rank mana stones.

Ding!

<You have successfully produced a moderate amount of aura>

<Your status has been updated>

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Cultivation Level: Late Rank 2 Aura Master → Early Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster

Aura Power: 215 → 250 (↑35)

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Chapter 245: Early Return

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«Physical Attributes»

[306 Defense] [Low-level Rank 3] [100 → 250 Aura Power (↑150)] [Total Defense: 556 (Mid-level Rank 3 → Low-level Rank 4)]

[217 Strength] [High-level Rank 2] [100 → 250 Aura Power (↑150)] [Total Strength: 467 (Low-level Rank 3 → High-level Rank 3)]

[215 Speed] [High-level Rank 2] [100 → 250 Aura Power (↑150)] [Total Speed: 465 (Low-level Rank 3 → High-level Rank 3)]

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«Lycan State»

[Total Defense: 556 → 709 (↑153) (Low-level Rank 4)]

[Total Strength: 467 → 575 (↑108) (High-level Rank 3 → Low-level Rank 4)]

[Total Speed: 465 → 572 (↑107) (High-level Rank 3 → Low-level Rank 4)]

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Ding!

<The human power system has been updated>

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«Power System (Human)»

[Rank 0 Ordinary Human: 0 – 24 Power] [5-Low, 10-Mid, 15-High, 20-Peak] [Normal Witch]
[Aura User]

[Rank 1 Special Human: 25 – 99 Power] [25-Low, 50-Mid, 75-High, 90-Peak] [Apprentice Witch]
[Aura Warrior]

[Rank 2 Super Human: 100 – 249 Power] [100-Low, 150-Mid, 200-High, 225-Peak] [True Witch]
[Aura Master]

[Rank 3 Ascended Human: 250 – 550 Power] [250-Low, 350-Mid, 450-High, 500-Peak] [Senior
Witch] [Aura Grandmaster]

[Rank 4 Extraordinary Human: 550 – ???? Power] [550-Low, 750-Mid (?)] [High Witch] [Aura
Lord]

[Rank 5 Transcendent Human: ???? – ???? Power] [Transcendent Witch] [Aura King]

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Shortly after Vaan raised his aura cultivation to the Early Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster, all his physical attributes had finally reached the threshold of Rank 4 in his Lycan Transformation state.

'I've finally reached a satisfactory level of power required to venture into the depths of the Thousand Fog Mountains,' Vaan thought.

Given his various abilities and quality equipment, if he encountered another Mid-stage High Witch like Fallen Witch Elvira, he had confidence in defeating the person by himself.

Of course, that only applied to normal Mid-stage High Witches.

If the Mid-stage High Witch was advanced in multiple power paths like him, her combat prowess would be above her cultivation level.

Knock, knock...

The door to Vaan's guestroom was suddenly knocked before a maidservant on the other side informed him, "Lord Helia wishes to see you in the Great Hall, Sir Vahn."

"Understood," Vaan calmly replied.

Shortly after he was dressed, he exited the room and went to join Helia in the Great Hall for breakfast.

'I'm practically a freeloader at this point,' Vaan wryly thought.

He recalled the numerous occasions he had joined Helia in the Great Hall for quality meals since he had arrived in Redpine City.

Nevertheless, Helia didn't seem to care about it, so neither should he.

"I heard you wanted to see me, Lord Helia," Vaan mentioned upon his arrival before he asked with a subtle glint, "It looks like you have something to ask of me?"

"That's right, Sir Vahn," Helia nodded before she gestured for him to take a seat at the dining table. Shortly after he did, she continued, "I have a favor to ask of you."

"What do you want from me?" Vaan calmly asked, figuring it was most likely related to Sunpeak Town.

And as it turned out, he was not wrong.

"It's about Sunpeak Town," Helia openly confessed as she vaguely suspected Vaan had been waiting for her to bring up the matter.

"As you probably already know, Sunpeak Town was prosperous and great for trades before it declined. But now that Lord Aeliana recovered and returned to her territory, the curse over that region is bound to be lifted by her."

"When it does, Sunpeak Town, without a doubt, will rise again. Now is the best time to invest in real estate over there. However, I don't have any luck in entering the market," Helia mentioned.

"So you want me to act as an intermediary to help you enter the real estate market over there?" Vaan gave a slight smile that was neither cold nor warm.

"Of course not," Helia shook her head and said, "I know better than to ask that of you. I would only be making things difficult for you. After all, my relationship with Sunpeak Town is not good."

In truth, the thought did cross her mind.

But after she read Vaan's expression, she quickly changed her mind. It was impossible for her to enter the real estate business in Sunpeak Town, not with all its townspeople bearing grudges against her.

After all, she did impose sanctions on the town after the curse outbreak, barring its people from leaving for other cities.

As such, she could only settle for her next best option.

"I was hoping you could set up a general potion store, and I supply you the potions to sell. If we expand our potion business to Sunpeak Town, our sales will increase substantially in the foreseeable future," Helia stated.

"That won't be necessary, Lord Helia," Vaan smiled and said, "I've already made prior arrangements. You just need to send the potions to Dahlia in Sunpeak Town and discuss the details with her."

"Oh?" Helia uttered with surprise before she wryly said, "It seems you have been waiting for this, Sir Vahn."

"I don't know what you are talking about, Lord Helia. It was just a coincidence," Vaan feigned ignorance with a smile.

As they chatted over breakfast, Vaan shifted the topic, "I haven't seen any of your six other daughters lately."

"And you won't be seeing them again any time soon. I've sent them to the royal magic academy in Blackthorn City to study," Helia stated.

"I see," Vaan thoughtfully uttered.

Although Helia's decision seemed harsh on her daughters, they'll be humbled after they interact with many other young witches of superior standing compared to them.

It could save their lives one day.

After all, the experience of dealing with the real world would lower their chance of blindly offending powerful people and courting death like typical young masters.

Sometime later, the droning noise of a magic airship grew louder as it approached the city, or to be more exact, Helia's Castle.

"That must be Headmaster Astoria returning," Helia guessed before she stood up from her seat with a suggestion, "Let us head out and welcome her."

"Of course, Lord Helia," Vaan candidly agreed.

He had expected Astoria to return around nighttime, but she had evidently finished her business early. Furthermore, she came back with Aeliana.

In other words, they were ready to set out on their journey to the Thousand Fog Mountains together.

He didn't mind leaving earlier as he had settled everything in Redpine City.

That said, there was still one other matter...

Chapter 246: Treatment Price

A few moments after the magic airship landed in the spacious courtyard, Helia strode forward to welcome Headmaster Astoria and Aeliana.

"Welcome to Redpine City, Headmaster Astoria, and Lord Aeliana. I trust you had a pleasant trip on the way?"

"It's only been two days since we last met, Lord Helia. There's no need for such formal reception every time I visit."

"Haha, even if you find it bothersome, it is still proper noble etiquette, Headmaster Astoria," Helia softly chuckled before she wryly added in a half-joking manner, "Besides, as a fellow lord, Lord Aeliana might find faults with me."

Looking at Aeliana, she did look like she was ready to start some trouble with Helia if there was a chance.

Astoria recalled the friction between the two parties and simply responded to Helia's words with a slight smile before she turned to Vaan.

"Everything done?" Vaan asked.

Astoria nodded.

"Actually, I could have returned much sooner. But I decided to settle the paperwork that had been piling up on my desk during my absence," Astoria informed him before she added, "I came as soon as I finished clearing them."

"I pity the crew that had to operate the magic airship at such an ungodly hour to bring you back," Vaan joked.

Although his abundant mental energy allowed him to have little rest, he did remember how much he disliked getting up in the early morning when he was still an average person.

As such, he could sympathize with the airship crew that didn't get to sleep.

"Anyway, since you are both back, we can depart in the afternoon," Vaan stated.

"Why not now?" Astoria asked before she added, "Unless you still have unfinished business in Redpine City, T-Sir Vahn?"

"I don't, but Lady Aeliana does," Vaan said.

As he turned his attention to Aeliana, she was taken aback by his words. She furrowed her brows with confusion and asked, "What unfinished business do I have, Lord—Uh, Sir Vahn?"

Vaan silently responded by turning to Helia.

After Helia received the signal, she nodded and suggested that they return to her Great Hall, where they could talk in private.

Once they entered the Great Hall, Aeliana shot a cold gaze at Helia.

"What do you want?" she asked.

Helia softly sighed before she candidly voiced her intention as she removed her gloves, "I was hoping you could put aside your grudge and treat my hands, Lord Aeliana."

Aeliana glanced at Helia's hands before she mockingly smiled with amusement at the discovery of Helia's plight.

"And why should I? Your hands can be crippled for all I care. Though, it won't be enough to wash away the sins your family has committed against mine," Aeliana coolly stated.

After Sunpeak Town declined, Redpine City enjoyed all the traffic and reached a new height of prosperity.

Even if Fallen Witch Elvira was the mastermind behind her berserk transformation, she didn't believe Helia was innocent.

Her stance was clear; she wouldn't treat Helia's hands.

It was apparent to Helia, which she didn't find surprising in the least. She had anticipated it. Thus, she could only turn to Vaan for help.

Vaan had previously agreed to help in return for borrowing Hester.

"Lady Aeliana, would you be willing to give me face and treat Lord Helia's hands?" Vaan calmly asked before he added, "Lord Helia is an important business partner of mine."

Of course, he did not need to request anything of Aeliana as she was absolutely loyal to him.

However, he did not want to reveal his absolute authority over Aeliana.

"If that is what you want, then I will reluctantly agree, Sir Vahn," Aeliana replied.

Even if she was against Vaan's decision, she didn't feel dislike towards him. Instead, it only fueled hate toward Helia and her family.

"But, of course, I am not asking you to do it for free. You can give her the conditions for treatment and see if she agrees," Vaan mentioned.

"For example, you could ask for a sky-high sum of mana stones, or you can take this chance to learn the truth about her hands. You should have already realized that the anti-magic spores in her hands did not originate from you."

"Furthermore, treating Lord Helia's hands is beneficial for you," Vaan added.

Lord Helia's hand had received all kinds of medicine and elixirs in Helia's attempt to treat her own hands.

As such, her hands were full of wood-attribute nourishment for Aeliana.

Nevertheless, the reason he made such a suggestion to Aeliana was partly due to his curiosity regarding the origin of the anti-magic spores that Helia contracted.

As he said earlier, Helia's anti-magic spores didn't originate from Aeliana.

Helia had contracted the anti-magic spores before Aeliana even became a Plant-type Abomination and spread her anti-magic spores everywhere.

He strongly believed Helia was hiding a big secret.

"Let's go with that," Aeliana agreed to follow his suggestion with a nod.

At the same time, Helia revealed a stunned expression. She did not expect Vaan to give Aeliana such a suggestion.

"Sir Vahn, you..." Helia looked at him with a sense of betrayal.

However, he faced her calmly and said, "This is the only way, Lord Helia. You know best the kind of attitude Lady Aeliana has toward you and your family."

"I may have saved Lady Aeliana and earned her respect, but I am her benefactor, not her master. I can't order her to do something she is vehemently against doing. Thus, you have to be prepared for big losses to receive her treatment," Vaan lied as naturally as he breathed.

He did promise to convince Aeliana to treat Helia's hand. However, Helia never specified how he should convince her.

Thus, strictly speaking, he didn't break his promise to her.

At the same time, Helia felt Vaan's words were very reasonable.

After all, in the end, he was still a man, not Her Majesty herself. It would be difficult for Vaan to order a witch lord like Lord Aeliana—or so she thought.

"My apologies, Sir Vahn. I was expecting the impossible," Helia reflected before she said with a helpless sigh, "You've earned me a chance to receive treatment from Lord Aeliana. I thank you for that."

"I only hope Lord Aeliana doesn't ask for too much," she added.

"We can work on the price later," Aeliana coolly said before she expressed her interest, "I'm more curious about the origins of your curse, Lord Helia."

"Well? Are you going to start talking honestly of your own accord, or should I cast a Truth Spell on you?" she added impatiently.

Chapter 247: Treatment Price (2)

After Aeliana urged her, Helia sighed before she took a moment to collect her thoughts and arrange her words.

"I caught the curse from a Wood Spirit," she uttered a few moments later.

"From a Wood Spirit?" Aeliana's eyes narrowed before she said, "Elemental Spirits rarely interact with humans and remain isolated in their own world. Even if we encounter them, they are generally timid and try to avoid us, not aggressive or hostile by nature."

"What exactly did you do to get spored by one?" Aeliana asked with a sharp look.

After a moment of silence, Helia replied with evasive eyes, "Herbal experimentations."

"Herbal experimentations?" Aeliana frowned.

"That's right," Helia affirmed with a nod before she continued, "Half a century ago, I managed to encounter the Wood Spirit in the Sunset Forest and lured it into following me back to Redpine City —"

"You? A water-attribute witch could lure the Wood Spirit into following you back to Redpine City? I don't believe it," Aeliana retorted with a sneer.

"Okay, fine. I captured it with a special magic tool and brought it back to study," Helia admitted with an exasperated look. "The Wood Spirit was a type of Dryad species with the ability to recreate any plant it had seen before."

"As such, I sought to use the Wood Spirit to recreate the herbal ingredients required to cut some of the expense on my potion business. However—"

"However, you didn't expect the Wood Spirit to retaliate and infect you with spores that could restrict your usage of magic." Aeliana finished Helia's sentence before she asked, "What happened after? Did you kill it?"

"Of course not," Helia shook her head before she replied, "How could I? Wood Spirits—or rather, spirits, in general, are so rare. How could I bear to kill such a precious being?"

"After its curse infected me, I looked for various methods to treat myself, but to no avail. Thus, after I failed to exploit it, I spent the following years trying to appease the angry Wood Spirit and earn its forgiveness."

"However, as you can guess, it didn't work," Helia stated with a sigh.

When Vaan heard that, he rubbed his chin with a thoughtful look.

Evidently, it had taken much longer for the anti-magic spores to advance to such a stage than Helia implied when he found out about the state of her hands.

Furthermore, the Wood Spirit was a Dryad, while Aeliana's second Specialized Magic was Dryad Transformation.

This was, by no means, a coincidence.

"I suppose your elder sister Elvira didn't disappear because she went out to look for an opportunity to advance to the High Witch rank, right? Rather, she stole your Wood Spirit and ran away with it," Vaan speculated.

Furthermore, he guessed that Helia and Elvira must have fought over the Wood Spirit, which resorted to Elvira stealing and running away with it.

"That's right," Helia admitted with a sad look.

"Prior to that, we had an argument over the Wood Spirit. At that time, my elder sister's lifespan was running out. When she learned about the Wood Spirit in my possession, she sought to acquire its longevity through experimentation."

"However, her experiments would have killed the Wood Spirit. Thus, I disagreed. That's when she decided to steal and run away with it when I wasn't paying attention," Helia explained.

"It seemed like she achieved some success in what she aimed to do with the Wood Spirit during the three decades since her disappearance, but it wasn't perfect. She must have encountered a problem in the process," Vaan determined.

When Aeliana heard that, her eyes flashed with realization before she glared at Helia.

"The magic flower, you knew what it was when we acquired it together. That's why you let me win during our duel, didn't you? You wanted to ruin me," Aeliana accused her.

"Not at all," Helia denied before she reminded Aeliana, "My hands were already like this. I couldn't exert my full power in our duel. You won fair and square."

"Don't give me that bullshit," Aeliana didn't buy into Helia's lie. "You were already a Peak-stage Senior Witch while I was only a Mid-stage Senior Witch at the time."

"Furthermore, I have seen you fought in the pocket realm. Your hands don't really affect your magic usage," Aeliana firmly stated before she said, "I have given you a chance to confess honestly. Now, I can't believe anything you say unless you're under the effect of the Truth Spell."

"Then use the Truth Spell," Helia permitted with a resolute look.

"However, you can only ask me related questions. I trust Sir Vahn and Headmaster Astoria will keep Lord Aeliana in check and prevent her from digging up all my secrets."

"You have my word, Lord Helia," Astoria nodded.

...

Nevertheless, after Aeliana used the Truth Spell on Helia and interrogated her, she found that Helia had primarily been telling the truth.

It was only in those two instances that she decided to lie.

After Aeliana interrogated Helia further, she found that she did not exactly know what the magic flower was; she only had vague suspicions it contained the remains of the Wood Spirit.

Nevertheless, the truth brought out a more startling discovery.

"It's possible to induce berserk transformation through wicked potions and plants, but is it possible to even control the Abomination form?" Aeliana wondered with a frown.

Out of the list of possibilities, she specifically transformed into a Plant-type Abomination that resembled the Dryad.

"If that is true, that makes Fallen Witch Elvira even more dangerous. And right now, she is still out there on the loose. It's hard to imagine the chaos she could spread if she decided to create any more of such magic flowers," Astoria frowned.

"If she inherited the Dryad's ability, that does seem possible for her," Vaan agreed.

After he listened to Helia's confession, he had a general grasp of the situation.

It was likely that Fallen Witch Elvira used body transmutation magic on the Wood Spirit but was infected by its anti-magic spores in the process of acquiring its abilities and longevity.

And while looking for a solution, she determined that another Dryad was needed.

But since it was too difficult to find another Dryad, she decided to create another one artificially by producing a magic flower that could induce berserk transformation.

However, Fallen Witch Elvira didn't just choose any random witch as the target for her berserk transformation-inducing magic flower.

It had to be a fairly strong witch that was compatible with her.

Thus, the magic flower was most likely intended for Helia, her blood sister. However, it ultimately ended up in Aeliana's hand, which also worked to her advantage either way.

Both light and water attributes complimented wood elements.

Furthermore, the loss of a witch lord and the spread of anti-magic spores would cause either of the two prosperous cities to decline, reducing travelers in the regions and thereby lowering the number of people venturing into the Red Goblin Mountains.

It was all part of Fallen Witch Elvira's deeply calculated scheme.

Not only was Fallen Witch Elvira calculative and scheming, but she also had the talent of creating the berserk transformation-inducing magic flowers to back her up.

That made her all the more dangerous.

'The truth should be something like this,' Vaan silently determined.

Nevertheless, shortly after Aeliana ended her interrogation, Helia's eyes regained clarity, breaking free from the effect of the Truth Spell.

Helia was completely aware and overheard everything while she was under the Truth Spell's effects.

The Truth Spell only forces her to speak the truth when asked a question; it doesn't render her incapable of making other decisions.

"My elder sister—Well, the Fallen Witch may not pose too much of a problem to the world," Helia mentioned.

"She had fled south on the magic airship. And to the south of Black Rose Kingdom lies the Holy Knight Empire, a very light-attribute-oriented super country. They won't tolerate beings of the darkness and shadow attributes."

"If she makes big waves in that place, even if she is a Mid-stage High Witch, she would still be hunted down by their powerhouses. I hate to admit it, but even though we have Her Majesty, the Holy Knight Empire has more experts," Helia stated.

"Is that something I should hear?" Vaan casually asked with amusement.

Helia paused for a moment before she replied with an awkward smile, "Just don't tell people you heard it from me, Sir Vahn—No, don't let people know that you know in general."

"Understood," Vaan casually acknowledged.

Nevertheless, he didn't find it surprising to learn that another country outside of the seven witch kingdoms was more developed.

After all, a feudal and matriarchal-oriented kingdom like the Black Rose Kingdom had too many restrictions on men.

A country that only granted half its population access to learning resources wouldn't be as developed as a country that permitted everyone to learn.

That said, Vaan wasn't too sure if the Holy Knight Empire mentioned by Helia was a country like that. There could have been other unaccounted factors that made it a powerful and developed country.

Even so, no matter how powerful the Holy Knight Empire was, it was still no match for the Black Rose Kingdom, and that was because of a single person, the Transcendent Witch, Henrietta Rosegarden.

"Enough about Fallen Witch Elvira. I will settle our debt one day—If she is still alive at that time," Aeliana coolly said before she mentioned, "We aren't finished yet. It's time to decide the price to receive my treatment."

Although she was infuriated that Helia knowingly allowed her to fall for Elvira's scheme, her Lord had already expressed his will.

She had to treat Helia's hand.

However, she will definitely make it so that it would cost Helia an arm and a leg to pay for the treatment.

Helia's heart slightly tightened when she looked into Aeliana's eye, but she forced herself to remain steadfast and strong.

"Very well," Helia nodded and said, "State your conditions, Lord Aeliana."

"First of all, I won't fault you for Elvira's crimes. However, your intentional negligence has caused my territory's decline, and I suffered three terrible years, Lord Helia."

"And for that, I apologize, Lord Aeliana."

"Save your sorry for yourself. I don't need it. If you want your hands treated by me, you have to fund all of Sunpeak Town's development plans for the following three years. That is the only way you can receive my treatment, Lord Helia."

"T-Three years of development funding?!" Helia sucked in a deep breath with a grave expression.

Sunpeak Town was bound to rise with Aeliana's return and the curse lifted.

If Aeliana had big development plans for Sunpeak Town, her coffers wouldn't just bleed; she might even have to sell her own city to acquire enough funds!

In other words, she would definitely go broke if she accepted Aeliana's condition.

Helia found it very difficult to accept.

Chapter 248: Aeliana's Jealousy

Helia considered whether it was better to give up her hands or to let everything she had built fall to ruin.

But given the state of her hands, it was no different from being infected with Zeller's Curse; it was a type of magic cancer.

She could cut off her hands and stop them from spreading further, but she wouldn't be able to regrow her hands through regular regrowth magic or miracle potions.

In other words, she would lose her hands for good if she wanted to preserve her wealthy status.

However, even though Helia wanted to refuse, she still struggled to voice it.

After all, Vaan had given her this chance to get her hands treated. Furthermore, wealth could be restored with time, but her hands could not.

"Fine, I accept your condition. You have my word."

Shortly after Helia voiced her acceptance with a sigh, she seemed to have aged a fair bit and lost all her strength.

Nevertheless, Vaan and Astoria didn't say anything.

As they have some relationship with both sides, they remained neutral in the matter and didn't pick a side; it wasn't their business.

Grievance between Helia and Aeliana could only be resolved by the two of them, no one else.

Aeliana had already demonstrated great restraint by not seeking her life.

"Acknowledged," Aeliana indifferently nodded before she informed her, "Then, I will begin the treatment, Lord Helia."

Right after she approached Helia, she grabbed both her hands and extracted the advanced stage of anti-magic spores from them after she entered Dryad Transformation.

Helia's assimilated hand was reversed as the infused plant-type substances separated from her flesh and bones, returning to their former spore-like forms.

At the same time, Helia's hands were left unscathed from the extraction.

She only felt like hot glue was peeled off her skin.

The process was swift and simple—so much so that Helia felt complicated in her heart. Such a difficult problem was easily resolved by Aeliana.

It was as easy as turning over one's hand for Aeliana, but it cost her a fortune.

"It's done," Aeliana uttered indifferently.

At the same time, she quietly assimilated the rich anti-magic spores she extracted from Helia and absorbed their nutrients.

They merged with her mutated mana veins and strengthened them to a greater degree, thereby improving the power of her Specialized Magic.

Her Lord did not lie to her; the advanced anti-magic spores benefitted her. They contained some essence of the original Wood Spirit.

Helia sighed and said, "Hopefully, all the grievances between us are written off with this."

When she decided to accept Aeliana's condition, Vaan was the biggest factor in making her choice. There were plenty of benefits as long as she maintained a good relationship with him.

"Of course, until you decide to add new grievances," Aeliana coolly said.

"You can count on that not happening, Lord Aeliana," Helia said with a forced smile. "I do not want to be your enemy."

"Then, you better start funding Sunpeak Town's development plans; it has already started," Aeliana stated.

"Of course, Lord Aeliana..." Helia did her best to remain cordial.

She meant everything she said; she did not want to be Aeliana's enemy.

Aeliana wasn't just as powerful as High Witches; her abilities were even more terrifying than theirs.

If she wanted Redpine City to decline like Sunpeak Town, she could spread her anti-magic spores throughout the region.

Nevertheless, after Helia's matters were settled, Aeliana turned her attention to Vaan with bright eyes and wanted to report her task completion.

However, Vaan subtly cautioned her to report to him later.

Aeliana silently expressed her acknowledgment.

"With that out of the way, we can finally prepare to leave. Do you think we could use the magic airship to save us some travel time to the Thousand Fog Mountains, Headmaster Astoria?" Vaan inquired.

Astoria paused for a moment before she replied, "The magic airship hasn't departed for the capital yet. If I put in a good word, the crew shouldn't mind taking a detour for us."

"Then, can you inform the airship crew and have them ready for take-off soon, Headmaster Astoria?"

"Of course, Sir Vahn."

Shortly after Astoria left, Vaan informed Helia about sending Cyrena to Sunpeak Town for work experience as a Potioneer.

Helia naturally had no complaint with his arrangement. Furthermore, she intended to escort her daughter to Sunpeak Town personally.

After all, she also needed to pay a visit to Sunpeak Town and discuss the development funds with Lady Solana.

"Be careful on your journey, Sir Vahn. The Thousand Fog Mountains are unkind to humans," Helia reminded him.

"Don't worry, Lord Helia. I will," Vaan reassured her before he suddenly recalled, "Oh, right. If you can do me one more favor, I hope you can have someone send these letters to Redpine Academy according to the recipients they are addressed to,"

"A small matter. Consider it done, Sir Vahn," Helia accepted Vaan's letters.

Shortly after, they bid farewell.

After Vaan and Aeliana left the Great Hall, they dropped by Hester's room to pick her up and head over to the magic airship together.

"Why is this old hag traveling with us, Lord Vahn? Looking at her current state, I don't think she will be of any help on our journey," Aeliana whispered while staring at Hester.

At that moment, Hester had barely rested, had dark bags under her eyes, and required a walking stick to support herself.

Nevertheless, she overheard Aeliana, and her face contorted with exasperation.

"W-Who are you calling an old hag?!" Hester screeched, feeling offended by Aeliana's rude remark that targeted her age. "I'm not like this because of old age, alright?"

"Oh?" Aeliana was mildly taken aback before she asked, "Then why are you like that?"

"Try dual-practicing with Sir Vahn for two days straight and see for yourself!" Hester snickered before she added, "He is simply a monster in human skin. No one can outlast him."

After Aeliana heard that, she was immediately filled with jealousy.

While she was busy with matters in Sunpeak Town, another woman actually enjoyed all of her Lord's affection!

"Lucky bitch," Aeliana muttered inaudibly.

"What was that?"

"Nothing."

Chapter 249: Quiet Misty Leaf Town

Shortly after Vaan and the two ladies boarded the magic airship outside the castle, Astoria greeted them.

"We ready to set off?" she inquired.

Vaan nodded.

After Astoria received Vaan's confirmation, she notified the crewmates with their destination in mind.

Before long, the engine roared with loud noises as it powered up. Its propellers spun, and its levitation spell activated, lifting the magic airship into the sky.

Vroom!

Within moments, the magic airship shot off into the distance with a burst of speed that continued to increase at a steady rate, quickly leaving Redpine City behind them.

But although the magic airship traveled quickly, not a single person on the deck felt the powerful wind pressure blasting against them.

A protective barrier shielded the magic airship, preventing the wind from lifting people off the magic airship.

Hester marveled at the ingenuity of the magic airship's design as it was her first time onboard such a revolutionary tool of transport.

She felt like she had stepped into the upper-class society.

It would cost a fortune to own one such magic airship. A person of her standing could only dream of boarding it in the past.

The sheer number of magic tools and devices constructed together to create the magic airship and all of its functions was staggering.

Vaan also shared a similar interest in the magic airship; it was a symbol of wealth.

Furthermore, it was a great travel tool, especially if one wanted to enjoy the scenery flashing by as one journeyed on it.

'It would be quite convenient if I had a magic airship of my own,' Vaan thought.

As he casually scanned the magic airship with Omni-Sense, he accidentally learned its structure in its entirety.

With a team of skilled artificers at his beck and call and the resources to splurge, he could reproduce a magic airship of the same model.

If the Rank 4 Artificer Maestros knew Vaan had learned the core secret to creating their magic airship in the blink of an eye, they would be outraged.

It had taken a few dozen years of research and improvement to reach their present modeled magic airship.

Naturally, they would be upset if an outsider learned how to recreate it so easily; it was the same as stealing the fruit of their labor.

Nevertheless, that wasn't Vaan's problem.

As the magic airship sailed northwest through the sky above Sunset Forest, Vaan stood on the deck with his hands behind his back and observed the fast-changing scenery.

Aeliana silently stared at him with desire on the side, hoping to be rewarded with some of his affection for her task completion.

However, Vaan postponed for a better time.

"Everything in Sunpeak Town is in order, my Lord. The anti-magic spores have been removed from the region, and I have seen my mother."

"Did you two make up?"

"Thanks to you, my Lord. I wouldn't have met my mother if you had not instructed me to. And for that, I am further indebted to you."

"Don't mention it."

Vaan glanced at Aeliana from the corner of his vision and noticed her eyes were slightly clearer. They weren't clouded by heavy malevolence and killing intent like before.

Nevertheless, he didn't doubt that her heavy malevolence and killing intent would surface in surging waves if someone angered her.

He suddenly paused in thought before he instructed her, "Direct your full killing intent at me, Aeliana?"

!!!

"My Lord???" Aeliana revealed her shock as if she had just heard something outrageous. "I cannot do such a thing, my Lord. You are my sky, the reason for my living. I would rather die than bear any hostility toward you."

"Hm... Never mind then," Vaan dropped the matter after Aeliana looked like she was about to cry.

He was just wondering whether he could temper his mind by enduring her heavy killing intent or not.

However, it was apparent that Aeliana could not do anything that would contradict her absolute loyalty to him.

'Should I ask Astoria?' Vaan thought.

Just as he was thinking about Astoria, the person made her way over to his side from the helm area to discuss something with him.

"I've just had a talk with the helmswoman. She won't be taking us into Thousand Fog Mountains directly. At most, she will only drop us off at one of the nearby towns, Teacher Raphna," Astoria softly whispered.

"That's fine," Vaan acknowledged before he said, "We needed to stop by one of the local towns anyway. I'm sure they have some useful information about Thousand Fog Mountains that we could use."

No matter what he had read about Thousand Fog Mountains in the records and other books, the locals would certainly know more about it.

"Let's stop at Misty Leaf Town, Headmaster Astoria," Vaan suggested.

"Alright," Astoria nodded and said, "Then, I'll inform the helmswoman to drop us there."

...

Sometime later, the magic airship reached Misty Leaf Town, situated on the borders of Thousand Fog Mountains.

After Vaan, Aeliana, Astoria, and Hester disembarked, the magic airship promptly took off and returned to Blackthorn City without further words from the crew onboard.

"It's quite cold in this region. Allow me to keep you warm, Sir Vahn," Aeliana offered before she hugged Vaan's arm without warning.

Her soft rabbits were pressed against him but remained unfazed.

He casually glanced at her and said with some amusement, "Aren't you just using that as an excuse to take advantage of my body?"

"Ehe~! You figured out my intention," Aeliana made a silly and innocent expression after being called out.

A few moments later, she glanced at Astoria, who peeked at them from the corner of her eyes, seemingly bothered by their intimacy.

The corners of her lips curved into a mischievous smile as her sadistic tendencies surfaced. She wanted to provoke her.

Nevertheless, Vaan only had his attention on the Misty Leaf Town covered in the misty fog and partly obscured up ahead.

Although they had disembarked outside of the town, the loud magic airship should have attracted the attention of the townspeople.

However...

"Something's not right." Vaan frowned and said, "It's too quiet."

Chapter 250: Fog Beasts

"Too quiet?"

Shortly after Aeliana heard Vaan's words, her playful expression vanished, replaced by a solemn look. Hester's tired gaze also sharpened.

Only Astoria's frown remained unchanged.

Evidently, she had noticed the abnormality in the same instance as Vaan.

"Sir Vahn is right. It's too quiet," Hester agreed with Vaan's statement before she added, "Our arrival should have brought a few curious eyes over to investigate."

"Take a look at the gate. There aren't any guards either," Astoria pointed out.

Up ahead, the stone gate was opened.

The guards were nowhere to be seen, and neither were the sentries that were supposed to be stationed on the stone walls.

In fact, there wasn't a single soul in sight; the town appeared desolate and abandoned.

But unlike Sunpeak Town, which looked in poor condition, Misty Leaf Town was in good condition. Its stone walls were clean and without a crack—at least none were within sight around the southern gate.

The road still looked new, and the few visible Victorian-styled buildings behind the stone walls that were not obscured by the fog were undamaged.

Nevertheless, when Vaan and the others tried to peer further into the town from the outside, they couldn't see anything.

The fog had obscured everything else.

"This is strange. I don't remember there being this much fog in Misty Leaf Town when I last visited," Hester mentioned. "Misty Leaf Town was supposed to be situated just outside the fog domain."

"It's not fog season yet. Thus, for there to even be fog in Misty Leaf Town is abnormal," Vaan commented before he took out some Rank 4 black equipment. "Hester, Aeliana, these items are for you two."

"You two aren't close-combat fighters. Thus, too much equipment would only weigh you down. This much should be enough to offer you two some good protection."

After Vaan handed out the Rank 4 pieces of black equipment he had prepared beforehand, he also equipped himself lightly.

Only his upper body, wrists, and shins were covered.

"Do you think there will be danger in Misty Leaf Town, Sir Vahn?" Hester inquired.

"I'm not too sure." Vaan shook his head and said, "But since the fog has swallowed the town, we have to consider it a part of the fog's territory. Furthermore, a little bit of precaution never hurt anybody."

"Makes sense." Hester thought about it and nodded.

Meanwhile, Aeliana obediently equipped the bracelets she received and cherished them as if they were treasured gifts, no questions asked.

As for Astoria, she had always been geared and ready for battle.

Shortly after the group was equipped, they made their way through the southern gate and entered Misty Leaf Town.

Even after they entered, they couldn't sense any life in the town.

The streets were clean, and stores were opened with wares on display, but the owners of said stores were nowhere to be found.

It was as if all the people in Misty Leaf Town had vanished into thin air.

"This is so bizarre..." Aeliana frowned.

The more they explored the town and investigated it, the eerier it became; it was as if they were in the middle of a ghost town.

Astoria used her Light Fortification to push away the fog and increase the group's visibility of the surroundings.

As they advanced towards the town's center, the surrounding stalls on the streets appeared messier as if they had been knocked over in a hurry.

Vaan picked up the stench of blood in the area.

Furthermore, he also picked up tremors in the ground that came from further down the main street they were on.

"There are some movements up ahead," Vaan alerted.

"Let's check it out," Astoria quickly suggested with a sharp look after she also picked up the stench of blood.

Vaan and the other two ladies quickly agreed.

Shortly after they reached the town's center, the stench of blood in the area became especially pungent, as if the blood of hundreds had been spilled over the place.

Furthermore, Astoria and the others finally saw where all the townspeople had gone.

Just up ahead of them, a mountain of corpses was made from the bodies of the townspeople. Whether they were witches, aura users, or even ordinary men, all were part of the big pile.

However, the most alarming discovery was the four-legged beasts feeding on the townspeople's corpses.

It was one big feeding ground for the white four-legged beasts capable of blending in with the fog.

'Fog Beasts!' Astoria quickly determined the creatures with a sharp glint.

"What?! Fog Beasts?! Are you certain, Headmaster Astoria?" Hester was immediately shocked by Astoria's claim before she mentioned, "I thought Fog Beasts only appear in the middle region!"

"What the hell are they doing out here?! No, why are they even out here?!" Hester exclaimed, visibly startled and wide awake by the discovery.

"Why are you asking me? How would I know, Lady Hester?" Astoria replied, slightly taken aback by Hester's questions, before she suddenly notified everyone, "The Fog Beasts have noticed us."

Right at that instant, the Fog Beasts stopped their grand feast and turned their attention to Vaan's group with blood-glowing eyes in the fog.

"Awrooo—!" the four-legged Fog Beasts howled.

It was a signal to alert its kind.

In the next instant, the several four-legged Fog Beasts vanished into the fog like dispersing mist, making their bodies seem intangible and elusive like illusions.

But although the Fog Beasts disappeared, leaving the corpse mountain empty, Hester and others knew a battle was imminent.

"Stick close to me, Teacher Raphna. These Fog Beasts are the apex predators of the middle region. Normal Senior Witches and Aura Grandmasters are no match for them," Astoria advised him.

She quickly drew her greatsword and took a protective stance, ready to guard Vaan with her life.

However, Vaan wasn't so vulnerable that he needed her protection against such a level of threat as the four-legged Fog Beasts.

"You don't have to worry about me, Headmaster Astoria. I can handle myself well against these types of Fog Beasts," Vaan calmly said.

He knew about the Fog Beasts.