

Endless 331

Chapter 331: The Perfect Wife

'I wonder where Dim Dim went,' Alex thought, glancing at the storage ring filled with stacks of talismans. 'Well, I'm sure he'll be fine since he is inside the academy.'

Nessia was nearly finished with the third batch of talismans he had asked of her to imbue with rune magic. The young lady glared at him, making him shudder. It was as if she was telling Alex that if he didn't compensate her well and give her a vacation after all that hard work, she would skin him alive.

He'd just returned to the clock tower after finishing his business at the Exchange Centre.

'Well, I guess she deserves a vacation,' Alex thought. 'We can go to a hot spring resort after the Dungeon Expedition ends, or some other scenic places that the members will like.'

There were many amazing places in the Kingdom of Avalon, which made him wonder where they should go for a vacation.

By the time he got back to their club room, the sun had almost set.

Since everyone was busy preparing for the expedition, he had asked Princess Xenia if Mary could cook everyone dinner.

The Princess agreed. Vaan also assisted with the preparations.

Lavinia also volunteered to help.

According to Lotte, the young lady from the Clawford Tribe had suddenly developed an interest in cooking, which was why she decided to help in preparing their dinner.

Aside from Renard, all the club members were busy.

In private, Alex also shared his hunch with Princess Xenia regarding the Headmaster's destination for the First Years.

After that, he asked the princess to make her preparations. He reminded her to be subtle so no one would learn about their secret.

By the time Alex returned, the round table was already covered with various dishes.

Nessia ate like she had not eaten for days. Even the always sleeping Latifa was seated at the table.

"Welcome, Sir Alex." Mary bowed respectfully. "Please eat while the food is still warm."

"Thank you, Mary," Alex replied and sat down in his usual seat before placing some dishes on his plate.

"Here, Alex. Try the sweet and sour pork," Vaan said as he personally put a few pieces of meat on Alex's plate. "I'm the one who cooked it."

"... You didn't put anything weird in it, right?" Alex eyed the normal-looking pieces of meat on his plate with some suspicion.

Vaan gave Lavinia and Latifa a side-long glance before smiling sweetly. "I placed a special ingredient in it."

"And that ingredient is?" Alex arched an eyebrow.

"Love."

"... You silly goose."

Alex sighed, knowing Vaan was just joking around again.

However, he suddenly sensed some kind of pressure behind him as Lavinia arrived and placed a small bowl of chicken soup beside him.

“Here you go. I made it, so I would appreciate it if you tell me if it’s good or not,” Lavinia stated before glancing at Vaan, who only smiled back at her.

Just as Alex was about to take a taste, Latifa placed a small plate with two fried chicken drumsticks on him.

Alex blinked because he didn’t expect that Latifa would also give him food. “Did you cook this?”

“No,” Latifa replied. “But Lotte did. Since that’s the case, this food is ‘technically’ cooked by me as well.”

Nessia smirked at Alex, who had unknowingly entered a battlefield.

Even Charles and Princess Xenia had faint smiles on their faces as they looked at Alex, who was wondering if he should try the chicken soup or the two drumsticks first.

In the end, he decided to go for the chicken soup.

“This chicken soup has a very rich flavor.” Alex nodded in satisfaction. “Well done, Lavinia.”

Lavinia felt happy. She had initially felt anxious, worried that Alex might not like her cooking. Fortunately, Lotte had patiently taught her what to do. As such, even though Lavinia was a beginner, her chicken broth was very tasty indeed.

Of course, Alex took a bite of the drumsticks next.

“Crispy on the outside and juicy inside. It’s good, Lotte,” Alex praised Latifa’s second Alter.

But for some reason, it was Latifa who looked very proud, as if she was the one who had cooked the dish herself.

Finally, Alex ate Vaan's sweet and sour pork.

After taking a single bite, the young man's eyes widened in shock due to how delicious it was.

"This is..." Alex muttered. He took another bite, then another, almost forgetting the tension of the silent battlefield of gazes around the table. "Vaan, this is restaurant-level cooking. I didn't know you had this kind of skill."

Vaan chuckled, clearly pleased. "Well, I do have to keep surprising you every now and then, don't I?"

Lavinia narrowed her eyes but remained composed, sipping her soup.

Latifa, meanwhile, leaned back smugly as if her contribution had already been validated.

Nessia, who had been watching everything with a smirk, stabbed a small piece of roasted duck with her fork and took a bite. The interesting tea added a nice kick to the meal too.

She was really tired, but the food made up for all of her trouble.

At that moment, Chuck and Dim Dim appeared in the club room, both looking very satisfied as if they had done something very fulfilling.

"Finally, something good to eat," Chuck exclaimed as he sat down on his chair and added a few dishes to his plate.

Mary noticed that Chuck mostly took the food she had cooked.

"Wow, this roasted duck is great!" Chuck declared. "Here. Have a bite, Dim Dim."

Chuck took a piece and handed the little bun, who had just removed its gangster sunglasses.

“Mmm!” Dim Dim chewed happily because the food was really delicious.

A small smile, barely visible, appeared on Mary’s face. Seeing Chuck and Dim Dim enjoy her cooking made her feel a sense of gratification that she didn’t expect to feel.

“The one who cooked this roasted duck will make the perfect wife,” Chuck commented as he happily took another bite.

At Chuck’s remark, the maid lowered her head, a faint trace of red on her cheeks.

Princess Xenia, who noticed Mary’s flustered expression, covered her mouth with a fan-like gesture, hiding her knowing smile.

Lavinia, Nessia, and even Latifa glanced at Chuck before shifting their gaze to Mary, who busied herself with pouring a glass of water for Princess Xenia.

“Perfect wife, huh?” Nessia repeated with a teasing tone, resting her chin on her palm. “That’s quite the bold statement, Chuck.”

“What? It’s true!” Chuck replied with complete sincerity, not noticing Mary’s reaction at all. “Food this good can conquer empires. Just imagine coming home after a long battle and being greeted by this roasted duck—instant happiness.”

Dim Dim nodded in agreement. “Dim!”

Alex couldn’t help but chuckle at the scene, but he quickly noticed Mary fidgeting with her apron, as if trying to calm her racing heart.

To avoid attracting the spotlight to her, she busied herself with pouring tea for others.

The atmosphere around the table warmed even further. Laughter and the clatter of plates and utensils mixed together as everyone began eating in earnest.

For a moment, it was easy to forget the looming expedition and simply enjoy good food and company inside the Endless Horizon Club Room.

Chapter 332: Limitations He Wished To Break

“By the way, the two of you seem to be in a good mood,” Alex commented. “Did you and Dim Dim do something together?”

Chuck and Dim Dim exchanged a glance at each other before smirking at the same time.

“Well, we did do something together. Isn’t that right, Dim Dim?”

“Dim!”

“And you’re not telling what it is?” Alex raised an eyebrow.

“Nope,” Chuck answered. “But I’ll give you a hint. It’s about a girl.”

Little did Alex know, Chuck had already dealt with the Mini Boss he was very wary of. In addition, Chuck had also placed her under his control!

Truth be told, Alex had enough reason to be apprehensive. In the game, Eleanora was a very difficult opponent to deal with.

Unfortunately, she had made the mistake of targeting Chuck. This mistake had ensured that her plan of enslaving Chuck and Alex would never be realized.

Now, she served a different Master.

A Master who made her understand that she couldn't defy his will no matter what.

At the mention of a girl, Mary's hand that was holding the teapot trembled a bit. Princess Xenia's gaze sharpened just a little, but her expression remained composed.

Alex noticed this change right away and decided to steer the topic away for his roommate's safety.

"By the way, Vaan, has Prince Garen been troubling you lately?" Alex inquired.

"No." Vaan shook his head. "He's very polite and respectful toward me. Also, he no longer makes any advances. But he has mentioned that he doesn't plan on giving up. Alex, he might challenge you again in the future."

Alex sighed. 'Maybe I should tell him in private that Vaan is actually a boy, so he will stop pestering him.'

However, since this was Vaan's secret, and the Prince seemed to be behaving himself, Alex thought he should just let it be for the time being.

"By the way, where's Renard?" Alex asked after noticing that Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues was not in the club room.

"He said he was going to do something important today," Mary replied.

"Ah, he might be meeting Lady Celestria again," Lotte commented. "While I was wandering around the academy, I saw them talking in one of the gazebos in the academy's garden."

After hearing Lotte's comment, a devilish smile appeared on Alex's face.

'So it has finally begun,' Alex thought. 'She will try to poach Renard and persuade him to transfer to Solara Academy.'

This happened in the game as well, and it was not a minor event. It was actually one of the turning points in Renard's life.

There were advantages and disadvantages in transferring to Solara Academy.

In other words, Renard had a fifty-fifty chance of accepting Lady Celestria's proposal.

Depending on his favorability rating of the academy, Renard might seriously consider transferring, especially since the Saintess would surely offer excellent conditions when trying to persuade him

Although Alex would feel regret if Renard did indeed choose to transfer to a different academy, he reminded himself that this was no longer a game.

Renard and the other Heroes and Heroines could decide what course they wished to take in life.

Alex was merely there to deal with situations that they would not be able to handle with their current strength.

Of course, he had no intention of holding their hand or eliminating their problems for them.

If the Heroes and Heroines didn't face adversity, none of them would grow. That would become a major problem when the Third and Fourth Arc of the Story came along.

Alex then glanced at Nessia, the only Heroine part of his club.

After she had discovered the hidden room in the clock tower, she had gained access to the Codex of Eternal Weave, which contained the secrets of Ancient Runes that were no longer in use in the current era.

Perhaps this was also the reason why Alex relied on her so much. He wanted her to become more proficient in Rune Magic by letting her get as much first-hand experience as possible.

Although she might feel like she was being treated as a Rune Slave Worker right now, all her hard work would benefit her in the future.

In short, Alex was only speeding up the process since Nessia was the only Heroine he could easily interact with.

Renard wasn't really a team player and liked to do things solo.

But as long as he was part of Endless Horizon, there would be plenty of opportunities to let him understand that working together as a team would be more beneficial than facing the world on his own.

While Alex mulled over Renard's role in the grand scheme of things, a scene elsewhere in the academy was unfolding exactly as he had predicted.

Under the soft glow of moonlight, Renard stood at a gazebo in the academy's garden.

His arms were crossed and his sharp eyes were fixed on the elegant young woman before him. Lady Celestria, the Saintess of Solara Academy, wore a serene smile as if she had all the time in the world.

"Renard," Lady Celestria began gently, her voice carrying the weight of both confidence and kindness. "You don't belong here. Frieden Academy is... respectable, but it will never give you what you truly desire."

Renard narrowed his eyes. "And you think Solara Academy will?"

"Yes." Lady Celestria's expression softened, but her words were sharp. "You want certainty, control, and power. The only things you let yourself rely on. At Solara Academy, you won't have to fight with your back against the wall. You won't have to waste your brilliance babysitting others."

Her words were deliberate, piercing through Renard's insecurities and discontent.

“You will be free to act as you wish. Free of constraints. Free of... leaders who hide things from you.” Lady Celestria’s gaze lingered, as if she already knew about Alex and his secrets.

Renard’s lips thinned. He hated how accurate her words felt.

Truth be told, he felt confused about what he should be doing in the academy.

He was learning at a rapid rate and he enjoyed the challenges that he was facing. However, being part of Endless Horizon made him feel that Alex was indeed hiding things from him.

And not just from but from the other members as well.

The president of his club seemed to always know things before they even happened.

The Battle Royale in Mistral Weave Forest and their adventure in the Heracle Mountain were just two examples. Based on Alex’s instructions, it seemed like he knew what the upcoming Dungeon Expedition would be like as well.

There were times when Renard wished he could talk to Alex in private, but his pride wouldn’t allow him to make the first move.

The feeling of being led by the nose made him feel uneasy. Even if Alex appeared to have made the right call again and again, Renard disliked being told what to do without knowing why.

He wanted to be free, do things his way, and rely on his own strength to break through any obstacle before him.

“You don’t have to give me an answer right now,” Lady Celestria said. “You can tell me your answer after the dungeon expedition or before we return to Solara Academy. Either way, I hope that you will consider my offer seriously.”

Renard reluctantly nodded. “I’ll think about it.”

If he were honest, he would be able to admit that he had already found his answer. But he was still hesitating.

A part of him wished to return to being a lone wolf.

But after spending some time with his club members, he had slowly started to open up to the possibility of trusting a handful of people.

He sincerely believed that he couldn't trust anyone but himself.

However, because of everything he had experienced during the Scholarship Trial of the Academy, he had become painfully aware of his limitations.

Limitations that he wished to break so that he could reach his goal for revenge.

Chapter 333: VIPs Of El Hazzard [Part 1]

In the city of Harmonia, Alex and Dim Dim entered a high-class bar located near the city center.

Upon their entry, the young man and the little bun perched on top of his head attracted the curious gazes of most of the patrons, who found them novel.

Unperturbed by the attention, Alex sat on a seat in front of the counter, facing the bartender.

"Master, give me the usual," Alex said. "On the rocks."

Dim Dim jumped off Alex's head, landed perfectly on the counter, and raised its little stubby hand.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim stated. "Rock!"

The Bartender eyed the young man and the little bun with an appraising gaze before nodding his head.

He then brought out two glasses and placed them on top of the counter. He then took two blocks of ice, the size of an adult's fist, and used a sharp knife to cut their sides, transforming them into a diamond shape.

With a skill honed for years, he placed the two diamonds on the two glasses and made them spin, reflecting the lights above their head.

While this was happening, the bartender took out two bottles and poured their contents into the glasses.

The ice kept spinning even though the liquid was poured right on top of them.

The amazing part was that the liquid didn't spill from the glass, creating an interesting visual that couldn't be replicated so easily.

For the finishing touch, he placed a straw on each glass, and the diamond ice cube finally stopped spinning, settling in place.

Alex nodded in satisfaction and drank his orange juice, while Dim Dim happily drank its milk.

As the two were enjoying the refreshing drink, a sharp-eyed man with a scar on his right cheek sat beside Alex.

"The tavern's ale tastes like horse piss," the man said in a volume that only Alex could hear.

"Then you've been drinking it right," Alex replied.

The man smiled faintly and placed his hand on the counter.

When he removed it, a black card with the letters VIP engraved in gold letters appeared on the counter.

If one were to look closely, the words El Hazzard could be seen on the bottom left corner of the card. But it would only appear when enough light shone on the card's surface.

"This card will also be your account in El Hazzard," the man explained. "As per our agreement, I have deposited a hundred thousand gold coins inside of it in exchange for a million academy points. Please check the amount to confirm this transaction."

Alex placed his hand over the card and extended his senses, similar to how you check items inside a storage ring.

After seeing that there were ten platinum coins inside of it, equivalent to a hundred thousand gold coins, he gave the man a nod of approval.

"So, the transaction is finished?" Alex inquired.

"Yes."

"Thank you."

Alex had already transferred the one million academy points at the agreed location where they would process his VIP Card two days ago.

In truth, he got lucky. After all, it was nearly impossible to get a VIP Card from the Underworld Organization, El Hazzard, a few months after enrolling at Frieden Academy.

Usually, a student could only meet the conditions for becoming a VIP member after reaching Second or Third Year.

One requirement was to exchange a million academy points for a hundred thousand gold coins in one of their branches.

Only the presidents of the Crest Clubs of the Academy could amass that amount of academy points and afford to sell them in the black market.

Students of the Academy who were desperate for academy points would purchase it from the merchants of El Hazzard, so they could purchase exclusive items that could only be acquired from the academy's Exchange Center.

Simply put, one of their most profitable business involved selling academy points, so they naturally welcomed the idea of making Alex one of their VIP members with open arms.

"Before I forget, there will be a 'Big Sale' tonight," the man stated. "Should I prepare a room?"

"Yes," Alex replied. "What time?"

"When the Chariot charges at the battlefield," the man replied before taking his leave.

Alex then picked up the card and stored it immediately inside his storage ring.

He then finished up his orange juice and placed two silver coins on top of the counter to pay for his and Dim Dim's drinks.

The organization, El Hazzard was also known as the biggest underworld gang in the Kingdom of Avalon.

The roster of their services included information gathering, item procurement, commissions, and gambling, just to name a few.

This organization was so large and influential that even the Knights, as well as the Law Enforcers of the Kingdom, didn't dare to clash with them indiscriminately.

In the end, the King of Avalon and the President of El Hazzard had agreed to a non-aggression pact, setting up certain conditions that both should fulfill at the bare minimum.

Because of this, no major incidents had happened in the kingdom of Avalon. With their agreement, the President of El Hazzard himself dealt with his members who went out of line.

If something major did happen, El Hazzard was usually not the one at fault, but other organizations who wished to challenge the status quo.

The VIP Card Alex got from the man was proof that he was now one of the VIP Members of El Hazzard, which would allow him access to special establishments under their umbrella.

'It looks like I don't have time to return to the academy,' Alex thought.

It was currently five in the afternoon, and there were only two hours before seven o'clock, the time when the special auction of El Hazzard would take place.

The Auction would be held at the Velvet Auction House, which was the biggest auction house in the city.

The president of El Hazzard had a special relationship with the auction house's owner, so they collaborated on many business dealings, including special auctions where items from El Hazzard were going to be sold.

Since he had no other place to go, Alex headed straight to the auction house.

As soon as he presented his VIP Card at the counter, he was immediately led to a VIP Room.

The Auction of El Hazzard was quite special because there was a guaranteed chance that a Unique or even a Legendary Items would appear every time they announced that an auction would take place.

Alex wanted to get these items if possible, which was the reason he exchanged his academy points to get a hundred thousand gold coins. With this fund, he planned to bid for the items that would catch his fancy.

Chapter 334: VIPs Of El Hazzard [Part 2]

"If there is something you need, don't hesitate to ask your attendant," the Manager of the Auction house said with a smile. "Her name is Serena."

"Thank you," Alex replied before sitting down on the comfortable chair.

Dim Dim jumped on top of the small table in front of Alex, where a platter of fruits was laid out.

The little bun started to eat the grapes, while Alex asked the pretty Wolfkin lady beside him for some fish and chips.

"Understood." The pretty Wolfkin placed her hand on top of a crystal ball at the corner of the room and informed the kitchen about Alex's order.

A glance was enough to tell Alex that Serena was also a warrior. Anyone with trained eyes would notice it from the way she moved and from the aura of confidence that exuded from her body.

'At least Rank 4,' Alex thought. 'Their attendants are already at this high level. It seems that they provide their VIP guests with their own bodyguards.'

Serena had long, flowing silver hair that cascaded down her back like moonlight, shimmering faintly under the glow of the enchanted lamps inside the room.

Her silver eyes, sharp yet calm, carried both the watchfulness of a guardian and the serenity of one who had seen countless battles.

She looked like she was in her early twenties, and her wolf ears were twitching slightly as if picking up sounds that normal humans would miss. Her tail, neatly groomed, swayed lazily behind her, betraying a hint of playfulness that contrasted with her otherwise professional demeanor.

The pretty lady wore a tailored black-and-white uniform that accentuated her tall, athletic frame, but the way she carried herself left no doubt that beneath the refined exterior was the body of a seasoned fighter.

A faint scar peeked out from her collarbone, quickly hidden again by the high-necked cut of her attire—an unspoken reminder that her beauty was tempered with steel.

Alex could feel the restrained pressure in her aura, steady and controlled, like a blade kept sheathed but ready to strike at a moment's notice.

Serena wasn't just a servant. She was a Rank 4 Magic Swordsman, trained to fight and protect the guests of El Hazzard's establishments.

Her presence alone made it clear that this was no ordinary auction.

"Your order will arrive shortly, Sir Alex," Serena said in a composed voice, bowing slightly before returning to her post at his side.

"Thank you, Serena," Alex asked. "By the way, I only became a VIP Member of El Hazzard recently. If I remember correctly, they also offer protection services for the right price, right?"

"Yes, Sir," Serena replied.

"Then, if I were to hire you as my bodyguard, how much would it be?"

"It depends on how many days I'll need to protect you, as well as your situation. I must also know if you're expecting assassination attempts or if you need to venture to a dangerous location, which was why you needed to commission an escort like me."

"I expected to be paid at the bare minimum of five gold coins a day and a maximum of twenty gold coins depending on the commission's difficulty."

Alex nodded in understanding. She was a very expensive bodyguard, but her skill was the real deal, so this amount was fair in his eyes.

In ELO, you could also hire mercenaries and other NPCs to become a party member.

If you manage to raise that person's affection or familiarity level, they might become a permanent member of your party, or you would receive a discount when hiring them on missions.

'Maybe I should hire a dozen warriors of Serena's Rank during the Walpurgis Night,' Alex thought. 'If I have a team of Rank 4 Fighters, I don't have to worry about dealing with the small fries during that event.'

The Walpurgis Night was an event where Eleanora and a few members of the Demon Worshipers would clash with the members of the Student Council during the academy's first field trip.

This would happen two months after the delegation from the Solara and Faclarun Academies returned to their respective kingdoms.

While Alex was thinking about this matter, a familiar beauty, whom Alex had seen in the past, climbed up the stage to start the auction.

She had long blonde hair and blue eyes, and the moment she appeared, many people in the stands cheered happily.

She was none other than the most popular host of the Auction House, Anya.

"Good evening, everyone," Anya greeted. "Today is a very special day. I hope that all of you will loosen your pockets, so I can get a good cut from today's auction!"

Cheers and laughter spread in the surroundings.

Even Alex was impressed with how Anya easily set the mood of the auction, allowing everyone to have a good time.

The items auctioned by El Hazzard were a must-see for all players because the chance of a Unique Item or even a Legendary Item appearing within the auction was guaranteed.

However, whether you could identify these items or not depended on your ability.

Fortunately, there was a Wiki for the items that could only be bought in the Auction held by El Hazzard.

Alex had memorized the important ones, so he was confident that he would be able to identify them right away as soon as he saw them.

Suddenly, someone knocked on Alex's room, which prompted Serena to walk toward the door.

However, the young lady frowned because it wasn't the room service that arrived, but a beautiful elf girl accompanied by an Elven Attendant, which was of the same rank as Serena.

"I'm sorry, but this room is already occupied," Serena said.

"I know," the elf lady answered. "The one inside this room is my acquaintance. I would like to share this room with him if possible."

Serena hesitated for a bit before glancing at the Elven Attendant, who only nodded in her direction.

"Please give me a moment. I will ask him first," Serena replied. "Can you tell me your name or your alias?"

"Aeris," Aeris said with a smile. "Tell him it's Aeris."

"One moment, please." Serena nodded before closing the door gently, so he could relay the message to Alex.

A moment later, the door once again opened, but instead of Serena, the one who opened it was none other than Alex.

“Come in, Ms. Aeris.” Alex opened the door wider and stepped aside.

He wasn’t too surprised to see the President of the Obsidian Club in the Auction House of El Hazzard. Just like him, she also had the qualifications to be here.

“You don’t look too surprised to see me,” Aeris commented as she entered the room.

“If I am here, why can’t you be here?” Alex answered as if this was simply common sense.

Aeris arched an eyebrow, but she didn’t say anything else and sat on the couch as if she had done it multiple times in the past.

Alex sat on the same couch, but he made sure to sit a meter away from her.

Dim Dim, who saw that they had a new guest, offered a piece of grape to Aeris, which the latter politely rejected.

Serena and the Elven Bodyguard stood behind their respective clients with their hands behind their backs.

These types of situations were not uncommon in the Auction House, and there was no problem as long as both sides agreed to share a room.

“I’m surprised to see you here,” Aeris said as she looked at the item that was being brought towards the stage. “Not many First Years can be present inside one of El Hazzard’s Auction.”

“Well, I just got lucky,” Alex replied.

He didn’t want to say that the main reason why he was there was because he used the academy points that he had blackmailed from the presidents of the Crest Clubs.

The two then focused their attention back to the auction, so they wouldn't miss the chance to bid for the items that they deemed would be useful for them.

Chapter 335: Hit And Miss! [Part 1]

Alex and Aeris casually bid on some items the auction introduced.

These items were useful, though nothing they'd fight tooth and nail for.

They simply bid for the sake of bidding and stopped when they deemed that it had gone beyond their budget for that particular item.

As the bidding continued, the two chatted amiably in between breaks. After a bit of prying, Alex discovered that the academy's other Club Presidents were also present in the auction house.

"Usually, we're informed three days beforehand whenever El Hazzard sponsors an auction," Aeris explained. "I'm sure they are here somewhere, so if you bump into them, make sure not to cause a scene."

"Lady Aeris, do I look like a troublemaker to you?" Alex asked while batting his eyelashes innocently.

"Yes. Very much so."

"Tsk!"

The corner of the young lady's lips curved slightly, but it was not enough for Alex to notice that she was actually smiling.

His gaze was focused on the beautiful host of the auction, Anya, and the item she was about to reveal.

"And now, it's your favorite time once more!" Anya shouted, hyping everyone up. "It's the 'Hit and Miss!' portion of the auction. If you're already a regular at the Velvet Vault, you already know what to expect!"

Luckily for the uninitiated, Anya soon explained what this portion was like.

“The next item up for auction is an item even our staff cannot appraise! Meaning, no one knows if it’s actually useful or not. It can turn out to be something rather ordinary or something incredibly rare!

“However, it might also be a cursed item. If that is the case, do remember that the Auction will not be responsible for it! As the name of this portion suggests, this tests your luck! Bid at your own risk! So, let’s no longer delay the show and prepare your pockets!”

The beautiful lady giggled as she accepted the red card given to her by the staff, listing the description of the item brought onto the stage, covered by a red cloth.

“... What the f*ck is this?” Anya muttered, completely forgetting that her microphone was near her mouth.

The audience gasped. This was their first time hearing Anya say profane words.

However, their surprise didn’t last long. After all, the young lady was a professional and managed to snap out of it in just a few seconds.

“I’m sorry for going out of line!” Anya chuckled. “It’s just that the next item looks very interesting! If I were not the host of today’s auction, I would have definitely joined everyone in bidding for this item!”

Anya had seen many bogus items in her auctioning career and managed to sell them all at a high price.

So, even though she was momentarily taken aback and wished she could slap whoever allowed this item to be added to the auction, she still smiled sweetly as if it were a priceless item!

“Well then, the item for our Hit and Miss! is a set of Underwea—errr, Lingerie!” Anya declared as the covered item beside her was uncovered.

Inside a glass case was a set of purple lingerie, which immediately stole the attention of the entire auction hall.

Both items were crafted from a silky violet fabric that shimmered faintly under the glow of the enchanted lights above. It was as if fine threads of moonlight had been woven into its lace.

Elegant black embroidery traced along the edges, curling into motifs of roses and crescent moons that lent an aura of mystery.

Alex's eyes widened in shock. Although this was the first time he was seeing this item, he already knew what it was.

Since the Auctions of El Hazzard were quite popular in the game, the players had made a list of items that were included in the 'Hit and Miss!' portion.

And the item currently on display was actually a Legendary Item. It was a set known as the "Lucky Rose".

So what kind of item was it?

It was an item that doubled a person's luck.

In ELO, luck was a very hard stat to raise.

It wasn't possible to add Stat Points to it, and only a few items could make this stat parameter go up.

Upon encountering the Lucky Rose, Alex immediately knew the perfect candidate who could use it to its fullest potential—who else but Astrea?

She had the highest Luck Stat in the game, with the symbol of "eternity" appearing on her Luck Parameter.

Simply put, she was the most OP character when it came to luck.

For example, when going to a dungeon, you would have a chance of encountering a treasure chest.

These treasure chests also come in different grades.

A common chest which would give you Common and Uncommon Items.

A Bronze Chest which would always have a rare item.

A Silver Chest which would give you a Super Rare Item.

And a Gold Chest which would give you a Unique or a Legendary Item.

Astrea affected the drop rates of these chests. In short, if the Boss dropped a bronze chest, it would automatically become a Silver Chest instead.

If it was silver, then it would become Gold.

Whenever she got randomly lost, she'd often stumble upon treasures as she tried to find her way, making her one of the most preferred permanent characters in a party.

However, if she was equipped with the Lucky Rose, her already high Luck would get the [EX] Rating.

What did this mean?

It meant that if she opened a Bronze Chest, she would get a Super Rare item instead of a Rare Item.

If she opened a silver chest, she would also be more likely to gain a Unique Item instead of a Super Rare Item.

If she opened a Gold Chest, it would be a guaranteed Legendary Item!

But that wasn't all! Opening a Gold Chest would also give her a twenty percent chance of acquiring a Divine Item!

Alex almost stood up after seeing the Lucky Rose, but he managed to hold himself back and assess the situation.

Just like what Anya had stated earlier, no one really knew what the lingerie set could do. Of course, the members of El Hazzard had asked for it to be properly appraised. One of its people had even worn the Lucky Rose to test its effects.

However, nothing had happened.

In itself, it was simply a set of lingerie that had no special characteristics.

Why? Because its true power would only manifest once worn by someone who had a Luck Stat of 999 or above!

That sole condition was very hard to meet.

In fact, only Astrea could wear such an item and activate its true powers!

Clearly, Alex must get it no matter what. However, Aeris was with him inside his VIP Room.

If he were to bid on such an item, wouldn't Aeris think of him as some kind of pervert?

Deep inside, he regretted his decision to allow her to be in the same room with him.

Had he been alone, he could have bid for this item without worry. But now, he had to take into consideration what she would think of him if he were to really try to bid for a set of lingerie!

“Since this set of lingerie cannot be appraised, we don’t really know what kind of item it is,” Anya stated. “However, since this came from a golden chest inside a Dungeon, we believe it has some value. So, just like always, there will be no starting bid for this item!

“All subsequent bids must increase in increments of one hundred gold coins. Let the bidding start!”

Alex took a deep breath and lightly tapped Dim Dim’s head with his finger.

In order to save himself the embarrassment, he planned to let Dim Dim bid for the item, so Aeris wouldn’t think that he was some kind of degenerate!

Chapter 336: Hit And Miss! [Part 2]

Dim Dim blinked as Alex gave it the “Dim Dim, please bid for me!” gaze, which the latter understood.

The little bun glanced at the glass case where the Lucky Rose was being displayed, then glanced back at Alex.

A few seconds later, the little bun picked up another grape and chewed on it, pretending it couldn’t understand the desperation behind Alex’s eyes!

‘You little traitor!’ Alex had a strong urge to squeeze the little bun’s cheek to oblivion, but a part of him thought that Dim Dim might have misunderstood his gaze, which made him calm down.

‘That’s right. I’m sure Dim Dim just didn’t understand what I was trying to say.’ Alex crossed his arms over his chest, thinking of a way to bid for the item without eliciting a look of utter disgust from the Elven Princess seated beside him.

Suddenly, an idea popped into his head.

“Serena, if it were up to you, would you bid for that item?” Alex asked. “Even if it does not look too impressive, it did come from a gold chest. Wouldn’t you want to examine the item and see what it could do?”

Serena thought for a bit before giving her honest opinion. “Frankly, I am also curious about it. But aside from its Auto-Fit function—very common for magical clothing—it doesn’t have any known effects according to our appraisers.”

“Oh, so you already knew about this item beforehand?” Alex inquired.

“We’re all informed about the special items that will be on display in auctions, just in case our VIP Guests ask us about them,” Serena answered.

“I see.” Alex pondered before steeling himself to tap the small crystal on top of the table. This would automatically inform Anya that someone from the VIP Room they were in was bidding for the item.

“Ten gold coins from VIP Room Number 13!” Anya announced. “Is there anyone else who wishes to bid for this item?”

Since each bid must be at least a hundred gold coins more than the one before, Alex decided to be the first to bid for the item. This gave him a certain advantage in exchange for his dignity!

Ten gold for a set of underwear was already quite expensive. At most, even the fanciest underwear on the market would only cost a gold coin per piece.

The other bidders were completely silent, with some of them chatting leisurely with each other.

Clearly, they were not too keen on bidding for the lingerie currently up for auction.

Their reasoning was simple.

This portion was called Hit and Miss!’ for a reason. The majority believed that the item was a Miss.

Sure, they were curious about it. But being un-appraisable itself was a significant problem.

If it were some kind of cursed item that could potentially harm the lady wearing it, wouldn't that be a tragic thing?

So, despite their curiosity, all of them held back and didn't make any effort to bid for the item.

"No one?" Anya asked. "I'm sure that this will be a wonderful gift for your lover!"

But no matter how much hype she tried to generate, no one else made a bid, making her sigh internally.

Despite her true thoughts, the smile on her face never disappeared, even when she was finally announcing the winner.

"Ten gold coins!" Anya shouted. "Going once.... Going twice... Sold to our VIP Guest in Room Number 13!"

Alex wanted to do a fist pump, but he held himself back and only smiled excitedly.

However, after he won the item, Aeris suddenly moved a little farther away from him on the couch. Even Serena took a step back from where she had stood earlier.

Clearly, the two ladies were distancing themselves from Alex due to his actions.

None of them said anything, but the young man believed they were already thinking that he was some kind of scum or had interesting hobbies. Even worse, they might be thinking that he was an evil man who intended to curse a lover by presenting her with such a gift!

Fortunately, Anya decided to move quickly to the next round of bidding, preventing any loss in momentum.

After fourteen items had been taken out and auctioned off, everyone's gaze finally became serious. The highlight for today was finally about to be revealed to everyone inside the Auction House.

Even Aeris looked determined to win the bid, for it was that very item that had prompted her to come to today's auction.

"And now, for our grand finale, let me introduce a Pseudo-Legendary Weapon personally crafted by the great Dwarven Master Blacksmith, Lord Alviss Stoneproud!"

With a wave of her hand, the cloth covering the display glass was removed.

To everyone's surprise, instead of a weapon, all they saw was a silver orb the size of a human's fist.

Golden runes shone within the orb, as if holding back a power ready to make its presence known to the world.

"Behold, the name of this weapon is Enigma!" Anya declared. "As you can see, it has no form right now. However, the moment someone resonates with this silver orb, it will transform into a weapon that will perfectly fit that person's fighting style.

"If you are a swordsman, this silver orb will transform into a sword. If you specialize in spears, it will become a spear!" Anya's voice spread across the entire auction house. "And if you are a mage, it will transform into a staff or a wand, depending on your preference.

"No one knows what the design will be like once the weapon transforms, perfectly matching its name, Enigma! The bidding will start at a thousand gold coins, and the increment for each bid will be a hundred gold coins! Bidding starts now!"

As soon as the signal was given, everyone started making their bids.

In the span of a minute, the bid for Enigma was already at six thousand gold coins.

To put matters into perspective, Alex's Unique Warhammer, Sacrament, had cost him four thousand gold coins.

Unique Weapons usually fetched around four to six thousand gold coins, while Legendary Weapons could cost anywhere between twenty thousand and fifty thousand gold coins.

However, since Enigma was only a Pseudo-Legendary Weapon, many bidders did not want to pay as much as they would for a Legendary Item.

However, there were exceptions to this rule.

"Ten Thousand Gold Coins," Aeris declared as she tapped the crystal orb in front of her, which amplified her voice, reaching everyone in the auction house.

"Ten thousand gold coins!" Anya shouted. "As expected of a masterpiece created by Lord Alviss! Any other takers?!"

Truth be told, Alex also wanted to bid for Enigma, but he was wondering if it was worthwhile to clash with Aeris over an item.

Since he already had Sacrament, getting a new weapon wasn't really his priority.

But the allure of a Pseudo-Legendary Weapon was still there, and he genuinely pondered whether taking the risk was worth it.

Even if he were not the one to use the weapon, he could give it to one of his Club Members as a form of investment, boosting the fighting prowess of his team.

The auction hall buzzed with excitement after Aeris' bold declaration. Many of the bidders who were hesitating earlier were now forced to reconsider. The price was now higher than ever, but clearly the Elven Princess believed that the item was worth so much.

Her determination meant that this was no ordinary item to her. And if she thought it was so important...

“Eleven thousand gold coins!” shouted another VIP guest, unwilling to give up so easily.

“Eleven thousand! Do I hear twelve?!” Anya’s melodic voice was filled with encouragement, fanning the flames of competition.

“Thirteen thousand.” Another nobleman raised the stakes without hesitation.

“Fifteen thousand!” Aeris’ clear, unwavering voice cut through the noise like a blade.

Her calm demeanor contrasted with the restless shifting of those inside the other VIP rooms. Many bidders frowned, realizing that the Elven Princess wasn’t going to stop until she won.

Meanwhile, Alex was still struggling.

His fingers drummed restlessly on the table. He could feel Sacrament resting quietly in his inventory, as if silently reminding him of its presence.

‘Do I need it?’ Alex thought. ‘Or... do I just want it?’

His eyes locked on the silver orb floating gracefully within its case. The golden runes pulsed faintly, like a heartbeat that echoed in his chest. There was no doubt in his mind—it was calling to him.

“Seventeen thousand!” shouted a burly merchant, his voice laced with greed.

The bid caused murmurs to ripple across the room as the price dangerously rose close to that of a true Legendary weapon!

“Twenty thousand.”

Aeris’ calm declaration shocked the hall. Her beautiful eyes gleamed with a quiet strength, and there was no hesitation in her tone.

Gasps echoed everywhere. Even Alex couldn’t help but stare at her. Twenty thousand? It seemed that her resolve—and her family’s financial situation—was that solid.

Anya placed her hand over her chest dramatically. “Twenty thousand gold coins. Does anyone dare to go higher?!”

For a moment, no one spoke.

Alex clenched his fist.

He could bid.

He had the funds.

Enigma could greatly help him or his Club.

But... he glanced sideways at Aeris. Her eyes were sharp and steady. This wasn’t just a casual bid for her. It might even be something personal.

In the end, Alex took a deep breath and decided to let go.

‘She’s one of the Heroines. If she gets a good weapon, she will definitely be far more powerful than ever before,’ Alex thought.

The grade of Aeris’ current weapon was similar to Alex’s Sacrament.

It was a Unique-Grade Bow, given to her by her parents on her sixteenth birthday.

She had been using it for a few years, making her one of the top three strongest students in the academy.

“Twenty thousand!” Anya shouted. “Going once... Going twice... Sold to the VIP Guest of Room Number 13!”

A round of applause reverberated across the auction house as all the bidders congratulated the brave lady who bought Enigma for the price of a Legendary Weapon.

Dim Dim tossed the last grape inside its mouth and joined everyone in clapping, then congratulated the Elven Princess for winning the bid.

Aeris remained seated, but a satisfied smile could be seen on her face, making even Alex feel that she truly deserved to become one of the Main Heroines of ELO due to how decisive she could be whenever she wanted to achieve her goal.

Chapter 337: To Accept Is To Be Reborn [Part 1]

“... He bid for what again?!” Latifa asked, while looking at her Alter, Lumi, in disbelief.

It was already ten in the evening. The ladies of Endless Horizon, including Vaan, were at the clock tower for a sleep over.

They were all seated on the carpeted floor, with the exception of Nessia, who was inscribing runes at the round table.

However, the young lady was also paying close attention to the discussion, curious about Alex’s latest escapade.

Lumi had arrived a while ago, and started her tale, which had caught her interest. As someone who prided herself over her power of observation, Nessia understood that subtle relationship between her club members.

“He bid for lingerie in the Auction House,” Lumi said in a solemn tone. “A very sexy one at that.”

Latifa’s Third Alter had developed a habit of observing Alex on her free days, when Lotte was assigned to guard Latifa.

She had followed Alex all the way to the Velvet Vault Auction House, paying close attention to him every step of the way.

“Let me get this straight.” Lavinia crossed her arms over her chest. “Alex went to the Velvet Vault. Then, he met Lady Aeris when she went to his VIP Room on her own, correct?”

“Right.” Lumi nodded.

“So, they didn’t plan to meet at the auction house?”

“Based on Alex’s reaction, plus the way he handled the situation, I am sure it was a coincidence that both of them were at the auction house. However, I believe Lady Aeris might’ve known that Alex was there beforehand.”

Lotte glanced at Latifa before asking Lumi a question.

“Did Alex say what he was going to do with the lingerie?” Lotte asked.

Lumi paused before giving Vaan a side-long glance.

“Actually, Lady Aeris also asked him that question,” Lumi answered. “Alex didn’t answer right away. He looked really flustered at that time. But after she pressed him for answers, Alex said that he planned to gift it to Vaan.”

Suddenly, they heard a sound that was somewhere between choking and coughing.

At the table, Nessia was doubled over, as if in pain.

The young lady coughed a couple of times more. Her eyes were red and moist with tears that were threatening to fall down her cheeks.

They weren't tears of sadness, but tears of amusement. Out of some lingering respect for her president, she was doing her best to hold back those tears and laughter.

After realizing that Nessia was in no real danger except dying of laughter, the ladies turned their attention to Vaan, who was just sitting there in his white pajamas and looking like a delicate and innocent maiden.

Vaan blinked once then twice before a devilish smile appeared on his face.

He looked at his friends smugly, as if he felt that he was superior to them all, prompting them to click their tongues in annoyance.

""Tsk!""

Perhaps not wanting to worsen things, Nessia finally spoke up to defend Alex... At least, that was what everyone thought.

"Wait," Nessia said in a tone that made her sound like the voice of reason. "I think Alex lied when he said that he planned to give the lingerie to Vaan." She knew that Vaan was actually a boy in secret, which meant that the underwear set couldn't be for him.

"What do you mean?" Lumi frowned. "I didn't lie. Alex really said that he was planning to give it to Vaan."

"I'm not saying that you lied," Nessia replied calmly. "What I'm saying is that the situation forced him to come up with a name. Look, given the nature of his purchase, it is very obvious that he intended to give it away as a gift."

“Although he said that it was for Vaan, it was clearly a lie to stop Lady Aeris from pestering him for answers.”

The girls thought that this was a possibility, so they pressed Nessia for answers.

“Then, who is the intended recipient?” Latifa inquired.

Nessia fixed her glasses, making herself look like some kind of detective who had managed to find the piece of evidence needed to crack an unsolvable case.

“The answer is really simple. Who among us will have their birthday soon?” Nessia asked.

As one who handled some of the affairs of their club room, Nessia knew the birthdates of all of their members.

At that moment, a gasp escaped Lotte’s lips.

“Tomorrow is Lapiz’s birthday,” Lotte said in a serious tone. “Wait, don’t tell me...”

“Right.” Nessia nodded. “That item should be his gift for Lapiz.”

“”What?!””

The ladies couldn’t believe what they were hearing. Of course, since Alex bought lingerie, he had to give it to someone. There was (hopefully) no way that he would wear such an item, so all of them believed that it was a gift for a girl.

But, after realizing who he wanted to give it to, Latifa, Lavinia, Lotte, and Lumi, all stared at Nessia. Their complicated expression revealed that they were all wondering if they should shoot the messenger.

“Think about it,” Nessia said with a smile, unbothered by the killing intent that seemed to have saturated the club room. “Alex couldn’t possibly tell Lady Aeris that he planned to gift that item to her sister, right? If he had done that, I doubt our president would still be among the living now.

“I won’t be surprised if she would do everything she could to force Lapiz to leave our club and prevent her from ever seeing Alex again. Since that’s the case, he couldn’t have answered truthfully.”

Naturally, Nessia also had no idea what Alex planned to do with the lingerie set.

She was simply fanning the flames because she wanted to see the world burn!

This was her revenge for all that overtime he made her do!

Alex better give her an entertaining show in exchange for all the runes she had to transcribe on talismans, magic stones, and all sorts of artifacts he procured “just in case” they were needed one day!

Nessia might be mature and reliable, but that didn’t mean she was going to pass up on the chance to get back at Alex.

Just as she expected, Latifa, Lavinia, Lumi, and Lotte, looked like they were ready to crucify the young man and whip him until he confessed his crimes.

Vaan, on the other hand, covered his lips to hide his smile. Like Nessia, he had to resist the urge to burst out laughing.

Their eyes met briefly. A little smirk appeared on Nessia’s face, lasting just long enough for Vaan to see it.

Whether their guesses were accurate or not, Alex would find himself in deep waters for the next few days...

The next day...

“Happy birthday, sister!” Prince Kaelen exclaimed as he handed Lapis a storage ring. “This is a gift from me, father, and mother. Both of them wish to celebrate your birthday with you, but since they can’t leave the Kingdom, they have asked me to give this to you in their stead.”

“Thank you, Kaelen,” Lapis replied, holding the ring with tenderness and pressing it close to her chest. “I’ll treasure it.”

“And, this is my gift to you.” Aeris summoned a silver orb from her storage ring, which was pulsating with golden runes at its center. “Happy birthday, Lapis.”

“Thank you, sister,” Lapis accepted the silver orb, wondering what it was. “Sister, what is this?”

“It’s a Pseudo-Legendary Weapon,” Aeris answered. “Its name is Enigma, and it will transform into a weapon that best suits its wielder. A droplet of your blood is needed in order to activate it, and it will transform into a weapon. Go ahead, try it.”

“A Pseudo-Legendary Weapon?” Lapis’s eyes widened in shock. “Sister, this must be very expensive.”

“It’s not that expensive,” Aeris answered. “I bought it at a discounted price.”

Aeris had no intention of letting Lapis know how much she had really paid for Enigma. If Lapis knew that it cost twenty thousand gold coins, she might not accept it as a birthday gift!

Yes, Aeris bought Enigma as a gift for her sister, who had just turned eighteen years old.

This was also the reason why she had made such aggressive bids at the Velvet Vault. She believed that Lapis would need this weapon in the upcoming Dungeon Expedition and there was no way she would allow her sister to be underprepared.

Chapter 338: To Accept Is To Be Reborn [Part 2]

Lapis’s original weapon was a Super Rare bow, which had decent stats.

But Aeris wanted a better weapon for her, something that would perfectly suit her fighting style.

Although Lapis used a bow in battle, Aeris knew that her sister was also very proficient in dual wielding short swords and other light weapons like rapiers.

This was why she wanted to see what kind of weapon Enigma would transform into. That would allow her to check if her assumptions were correct.

Since Enigma would transform into the weapon that perfectly matched its wielder, Lapis would be able to increase her fighting prowess in anticipation of the dungeon expedition.

After sending her request to the Student Council, Lapis had been given special permission to temporarily join the delegation from the Kingdom of Faelarun and become part of Prince Kaelen's team during the dungeon competition.

"Go on, sister. Give it a try." Prince Kaelen also wanted to see what kind of weapon Enigma would transform to.

"Understood." Lapis smiled faintly and lightly pricked her finger with the tip of a dagger.

She then let her blood fall on top of the floating silver orb, which immediately glowed brighter after receiving her blood.

"Now, hold it and use your magic to activate its transformation," Aeris reminded.

Lapis took a deep breath before placing her palm on the warm surface of the silver orb.

She channeled her magic into it. Immediately, the golden runes blazed brightly like miniature suns.

The orb trembled in her hand before elongating. It stretched outward as metallic rings unfolded and collapsed into each other, reshaping into something entirely new.

Aeris and Prince Kaelen leaned forward, their eyes wide with curiosity.

However, when the weapon finally took form, both of them gasped in shock because this was a weapon that they weren't expecting to see.

"This..." Prince Kaelen frowned before shifting his gaze to Aeris. "Sister, are you sure that this item is legit?"

"I... I don't know." Aeris looked at the weapon in Lapis's hands, thinking that there might be some kind of mistake. "Lapis, give me back that item. I am going to the Velvet Vault to complain."

To her surprise, Lapis shook her head and smiled.

"There's no need for that, sister," Lapis said as her hands gripped the handle of her weapon firmly. "I'm also surprised, but for some reason, I think that Enigma didn't make a mistake."

The elven princess was holding onto a Deathscythe, whose blade shone faintly like the moon in the darkest of nights.

The handle was streaked in silver and black, and its unconventional appearance seemed to be reminding everyone that it was a very deadly weapon that not many could use so easily.

For a brief moment, Aeris and Prince Kaelen saw a black silhouette appear behind Lapis.

It was not just the phantom of the scythe's power, but something deeper, an archetype carved into the flow of fate itself.

A tall figure cloaked in black stood behind her, its form skeletal yet regal, as if wearing invisible armor.

In one hand, it carried a great black banner adorned with a white rose, blooming eternal against the void. Behind it, a white horse pawed the ground, calm yet unyielding, a symbol of inevitability.

The horizon shimmered. Between two towers, a golden sun began to rise, or perhaps set. Its light was neither cruel nor kind, but inevitable. The air itself whispered a truth older than the dawn of the world.

From the depths of Lapis's eyes, the number "XIII" written in gold letters manifested for a few seconds.

They then heard a voice, both chilling and warm at the same time, inside of their heads.

"Not the end, but the turning of a page. To resist is sorrow. To accept is to be reborn."

The phantom dissolved as quickly as it appeared, leaving behind only the elegant deathscythe in Lapis's hands.

Lapis herself seemed to have fallen into a trance, as if she had been marked by something stirring within the very depths of her soul.

— — — —

Somewhere in the multiverse...

A young man with short black hair and green eyes, looked over the horizon.

"A Cannon Fodder has been marked," the young man said softly, his eyes narrowing as if someone had pricked his reverse scale, which could cause an entire continent to be destroyed if he so wished for it.

— — — —

Back in the Obsidian Fang's sacred grove...

"Lapis, are you alright?!" Aeris called out to her sister, afraid to touch her because it might trigger some backlash from the sudden enlightenment that she received.

Prince Kaelen was already standing, poised to react to anything unexpected.

He was deeply shaken because he could clearly sense that the power of some kind of divinity had entered his sister's body.

A few minutes later, clarity returned in Lapid's eyes, and a soft sigh escaped her lips.

It was as if she had just woken up from a very wonderful dream, which made her subconsciously lean her head on the handle of her deathscythe. Her weapon hummed as if to acknowledge its new Mistress.

"Sister, are you hurt?" Prince Kaelen asked as he lightly touched Lapid's shoulder, making sure that she was alright.

The moment she was touched, Lapid's eyes abruptly widened.

"Where... ah... right." Lapid, who seemed to be still half-asleep, pinched the bridge of her nose.

She squeezed her eyes shut and counted to three before opening them. She looked at her siblings, who had worry written all over their faces.

"What happened?" Lapid blinked. "Is there something wrong with my face?"

"No, there's nothing wrong with your pretty face, Lapid." Aeris approached her sister and gave her a hug. "We just... saw something that made us feel worried. Did you hear anything earlier?"

For a moment, Lapid hesitated. Then she nodded.

"Yes. I heard a voice," Lapid replied. "It said... It said, 'Not the end, but the turning of a page. To resist is sorrow. To accept is to be reborn.'"

The young lady then glanced at Enigma and asked it a question.

“Were you the one that talked to me, Enigma?” Lapid inquired.

The deathscythe hummed, as if telling Lapid that it didn’t do anything.

“Still... a deathscythe?” Prince Kaelen rubbed his chin. “I don’t know any elves who use this as a weapon.”

Aeris frowned slightly. “Neither do I. Elves are known for bows, swords, and spears... not scythes. This doesn’t make sense.”

But Lapid shook her head, her gaze fixed on the moonlit edge of the weapon.

“Perhaps it doesn’t have to.” Lapid smiled faintly. “Sister, thank you for the gift. I promise to take good care of Enigma.”

“Well, I’m happy that you feel that way,” Aeris replied, but there was still a tinge of worry in her tone. “However, if you feel that this weapon doesn’t suit you, don’t hesitate to talk to me so I can find you a replacement, okay?”

“Yes.” Lapid nodded.

Enigma then transformed back into a silver orb before merging with the back of Lapid’s right hand.

The symbol, XIII, appeared at the back of her hand for a brief moment, but no one, not even Lapid, was able to see it.

Chapter 339: Everyone Has Secrets [Part 1]

The next few weeks before the dungeon competition for the First Years and their special guests hadn’t been smooth for Alex.

For some reason, Latifa and Lavinia asked him to accompany them to some boutiques in the city.

At first, Alex didn't mind. Accompanying two ladies on their shopping trip sounded like a good way to pass the time.

Unfortunately, reality differed quite significantly from his imagination. The two ladies dragged him all the way to boutiques that specialized in selling lingerie. The young man couldn't help but wonder if it was some kind of punishment game or not.

Fortunately, they didn't ask him which ones suited them best. They simply browsed the stores, while Alex did his utmost to endure the odd looks the other shoppers kept shooting in his direction.

But on their latest shopping trip, Vaan asked to tag along. Alex agreed without thinking, not knowing he would soon regret it.

At one of the boutiques, Vaan picked up one set of purple lingerie after another. And he wouldn't stop asking Alex if they looked good on him.

"You know," Vaan said coyly, "I won't mind such a gift if it's from you."

If not for the fact that Alex raised his fist and threatened to smack him silly, Vaan would have continued teasing him.

In the end, Alex dragged Vaan into a quiet alley and demanded to know the real reason why he was messing with him.

Upon realizing that the details of his visit to the Velvet Vault had been revealed to all the ladies of their club, he finally understood why Latifa and Lavinia were bringing him to those boutiques on purpose.

"Lotte or Lumi, I don't care which one of you is here right now. Come out," Alex said after hearing everything from Vaan.

“You’re no fun, Vaan,” Lumi complained as she appeared at the entrance of the alley. There was no trace of remorse on her face. Instead, she looked very arrogant, her arms crossed over her chest.

Vaan only coughed lightly, but there was still a hint of mischief at the corner of his lips.

Clearly, he had tagged along so Alex would finally understand why Latifa and Lavinia had been forcing him to join these shopping trips.

“I don’t want to hear that from a stalker,” Alex said in a serious tone. “Why do you always follow me around? Are you after my body?”

“Huh? Why would I want your body?” Lumi asked back disdainfully. “Even if you were the last man in this world, I would not touch you with a twelve-foot stick!”

Alex crossed his arms over his chest and looked at Latifa’s Alter from head to toe.

There were two main hurdles to raising Latifa’s affection points to its limit.

The first one was to gain her Alters’ recognition because, technically, they were a part of her.

Each of them was the manifestation of her different characteristics, which she had hidden deep in her heart or in her subconscious mind.

And among Latifa’s Alters, Lumi was the ultimate Gatekeeper.

Only by getting her approval would the protagonist and Latifa have a romantic relationship that would lead to a happy ending.

Forcing Latifa to be a romantic partner without all her Alters’ recognition would lead to a bad ending.

Truth be told, Lumi’s words right now were the same as a dialogue scene in Latifa’s route.

The moment “Even if you were the last man in this world, I would not touch you with a twelve-foot stick!” left her mouth, a series of options would appear, allowing the players to decide how they wanted to reply to her declaration.

Although he wasn’t seeing them right now, Alex still remembered those choices very vividly since Latifa was one of his Four Queens in the game!

— — —

[Multiple Choice Options]

< Choice A: Defiant Response >

“Good. Because I don’t need approval from someone who hides behind Latifa instead of being honest with themselves.”

(+ Rebellion points / Risk of Bad Ending)

< Choice: B Playful Response >

“Twelve feet, huh? Then I’ll just get a thirteen-foot stick and poke you back until you admit I’m not that bad.”

(+ Humor points / Lumi’s Guard slightly lowered)

< Choice C: Sincere Response >

“Even if you hate me, I’ll keep proving myself. Because I’m not after Latifa alone. I’m after all of her, including you.”

(+Trust points / Lumi's Approval chance increases)

< Choice D: Dismissive Response >

"Whatever. I don't have time to deal with bratty Alters who can't decide what they want."

(Immediate – Affection / Lumi's hostility rises greatly)

— — —

If the goal was to raise Lumi's affection points, the answer was really simple.

But as with his decision to not use the in-game answer to start his relationship with Fran, Alex refused to treat Lumi as an object of conquest.

"Lumi, I would appreciate it if you respect my privacy," Alex said calmly. "What would you feel if someone were to stalk Latifa? Wouldn't you get angry if that was the case?"

Alex had many secrets, and one of them was his knowledge of the game.

If Lumi or Lotte continued following him in secret, there was a chance that they would get entangled in something that they shouldn't know for the time being.

Also, it would be annoying if he had to constantly worry about looking over his shoulder whenever he planned to do something in regards to the progression of the Story Arcs.

Lumi didn't answer right away because she knew that she was in the wrong. But, as she was Latifa's Alter, she inherited her stubbornness and strong will.

In truth, Alex didn't really hate her. In fact, he liked Lumi very much.

When it came to the rankings of Latifa's Alter, Lumi was actually second only to Lulu.

Unfortunately, Lulu would only appear after Latifa became a Rank 4 Celestial Walker.

Lumi's fiery personality was something that Alex loved and respected. But there were times when he had to stand his ground and not be overwhelmed by her momentum.

And this was one of those moments.

"Lumi, can we work this out?" Alex continued. "I don't want to have any friction between us, so let's get along, okay?"

"Hmph! Why would I get along with you?" Lumi clicked her tongue. "Just go ahead and gift Vaan that lingerie set you bid for!"

With a huff, the young lady vanished and returned to Latifa's side.

Alex sighed before glancing at Vaan, who didn't even bother to hide how much he was enjoying the show.

After Vaan pledged his life to him, Alex had formed some kind of connection with the pretty boy, allowing both of them to know where the other was.

Also, since Vaan was now an Apostle Candidate, Alex believed that things would become more troublesome in the future.

Chapter 340: Everyone Has Secrets [Part 2]

"Next time, inform me about these matters ahead of time," Alex said helplessly. "I was so shocked when Latifa and Lavinia brought me to the boutiques to shop for lingerie for the first time."

"I'll think about it." Vaan smirked. "I just pitied you today, so I decided to come clean and tell you everything."

“You rascal.”

“Well, I was also curious, you know?”

Alex arched an eyebrow. “Curious about what?”

“About that lingerie,” Vaan answered. “Who are you planning to give that to? Or are you telling me that you plan to wear it? Should I give you a letter of recommendation to the Crossplay Club?”

“Please, give me a break already.”

“Hahaha.”

Vaan’s laughter was really like that of a girl, which was more than enough to fool anyone.

Alex knew that the pretty boy had learned to create a switch that allowed him to instantly go on full Girl Mode whenever he was in public.

For a moment, none of them said anything. The noise of the distant marketplace drifted into the alley, mixing with the faint sound of carriages rolling down the street.

Then, Vaan tilted his head, studying Alex with those pretty eyes of his. “Still... I’ll give you credit. Not many people can stand firm against Lumi. Many would fold under her stubbornness.”

Alex smiled faintly. “That’s because most don’t know who she really is. But I do. And I know how important she is to Latifa.”

“But, Alex, who do you favor the most?” Vaan asked, his tone suddenly losing much of its lightness. “You already know how Lavinia feels about you. But you also seem interested in Latifa. Not just her. You seem to be making an effort to get close to Fran and Lapiz as well.”

Alex was caught off-guard, not expecting that someone was paying such close attention to his actions.

“Hey, where are you getting that kind of information?” Alex asked, clearly surprised.

“It’s called Vaan’s intuition.” Vaan gave Alex a playful wink. “It’s very accurate, you know? So, what are you playing at? Are you trying to row four boats at once?”

“Be careful now. You might drown if the river’s current suddenly becomes fast. Of course, I also have a solution for your problem if you care to hear it.”

Alex blinked. “A solution?”

“Yes,” Vaan replied cheekily. “Instead of worrying about other girls, why don’t you just pick me instead?”

Alex looked at Vaan for nearly half a minute before pinching the latter’s cheek. He didn’t let go until he heard pleas for mercy.

“Ladies hate brutes, you know?” Vaan said as he took out a healing potion, wetted his handkerchief with it, and dabbed his cheek. “You need to be more delicate and sensitive.”

“Don’t worry. I’m very gentle to ladies. On another note, Vaan, your cheek is softer than I thought,” Alex pointed out. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d really think you’re a girl.”

Instead of saying anything, Vaan only smirked, as daring Alex to find out if he was really a boy or a girl.

Perhaps understanding what Vaan had in mind, Alex lightly poked the pretty boy’s forehead with his finger.

“Is there anyone harassing you as of late?” Alex asked, trying to change the subject. “Does Prince Garen no longer bother you?”

“His Highness has been very kind and thoughtful, unlike someone I know,” Vaan grumbled. “He gives me gifts from time to time. Fortunately, they’re not too expensive, or I might really feel guilty.”

“He is also determined to win against you in the dungeon expedition. So, we better win, Alex. I don’t want him to challenge you again for the right to become my lover.”

“If he challenges me again, I will just concede,” Alex replied with pretend seriousness. “You two might be a good match together.”

“Hmph! You will only know how important something is when you have lost it.”

“Um? Did you say something?”

Just as Vaan was about to give a reply, Latifa, Lavinia, Lotte, and Lumi appeared before them.

“See?” Lumi puffed her chest proudly. “I told you those two are having an affair in this alley. We have caught them in the act.”

Vaan blinked before casually—and deliberately—wrapping his arms around Alex’s arm and resting his head on his shoulder.

“Oh nooo,” Vaan said, fanning the flames so that the entire world would burn. “We have been found out! This is a disaster! Whatever should we do?”

“Don’t be silly,” Lavinia replied as she held Alex’s hand and pulled him away from Vaan. “Let’s go. We still have other places to visit. Haven’t we all agreed to buy some items from the merchant shop for the expedition?”

Without another word, the Catkin dragged Alex away. Lotte, who was carrying Latifa in a princess carry, followed after them, leaving only Lumi and Vaan behind.

“Lumi, don’t be too hard on Alex,” Vaan said in a volume that only the Alter could hear. “What will you do if he stops liking you? Won’t you be the one at a loss if that happens?”

“I’m not interested in him,” Lumi answered without hesitation. “It’s only because of that damned Trial at the Heracle Mountain that Latifa started to show interest in him. But how about you?”

“When do you plan to tell him the truth? Or do you plan to just mess around like you always do?”

“Oh my! So you’ve been watching me too?” Vaan’s lips curved, but the smile never reached his eyes. “That’s very naughty of you, Lumi. Everyone has secrets. It’s not wise to dig into things you’re not meant to know. Tell me—did you share it with Latifa?”

Lumi’s shoulders stiffened. A chill raced down her spine as if an invisible blade had just brushed against her neck.

Vaan hadn’t moved much. Both of his hands were still clasped behind his back. But the air around him carried a pressure that made Lumi’s heart beat faster and faster.

“I didn’t tell anyone,” Lumi admitted quietly. “Latifa doesn’t know your secret.”

“Good.” Vaan’s smile softened, yet it carried a weight that felt heavier than any threat. “Keep it that way, and we can remain friends. Also, Alex needs his privacy, okay? Make sure to hold back your curiosity from time to time.”

With that, Vaan slipped his arm through Lumi’s as though nothing had happened. He walked alongside her like they were simply the best of friends.

No one would think that the delicate looking Vaan might be more dangerous than Renard, who preferred to obliterate anything that stood in front of him using brute force.

Lumi thought of Alex and wondered if he was able to act the way he did with Vaan because he knew his secret.

'No, I don't think Alex knows,' Lumi thought. 'Otherwise, he wouldn't be too touchy with Vaan.'

On that day, Lumi decided to stop following Vaan.

However, she still planned to follow Alex because she wanted to know his true character.

While she also planned to respect his privacy, her goal hadn't changed.

She simply wished to determine whether their club president was doing all that in order to get closer to Latifa, whom all of her Alters wished to protect with all of their hearts.