

Few Wives 241

Chapter 241: Nice punch...

In room zero...

"Who do you think is going to win?" Mrs C asked Raya curiously.

"Hhm, I say that dog. The other guy looks like he's about to die on his own" A voice replied from behind Raya before she could reply.

Although she thought the same thing. There was no way she would have said it in front of Mrs C. Anyone with half a brain would know what a bad idea that was.

Her head snapped back instantly. Not just because of the extra being in the room. Or their words. But also because of how familiar the voice sounded.

"What the hell are you doing in here?! And she didn't ask you!" Raya exclaimed in anger.

It turned out that the speaker really was her most hated foe. It was Fake Raya! Well, the ghost of Fake Raya to be precise. Some way, somehow, she had followed her to room zero.

"Hehe. You didn't expect me to be here, did you? Well, deal with it. I am here. I told you that I'll haunt you forever, right? Well, at the very least. As long as you're in here, you're mine. And she didn't specifically say she was asking you. Why do all lucky winners become prideful in the end?" Fake Raya replied. She didn't forget to add a little retort at the end.

"Tsk" Raya made a clicking sound and closed her mouth. She was in no mood to argue with Fake Raya.

And since Mrs C wasn't saying anything. She had probably asked the question randomly. She was not even paying attention to them. All her focus was on the scream.

And since Raya also didn't want to miss it. She refocused on it as well.

Even if she didn't think Muku had any chance of winning. She still hoped he would. He was her partner after all.

Maybe that weird energy he was using will help him win. Though from what she had seen so far, as someone who arrived late, she didn't have much faith in it.

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In the trial ground...

{F*ck! So if I fail this time I'm dead, huh? Sigh. Why am I so unlucky? I just came from a big battle. A lot happened at home. My teammates, especially Chloe need me the most right now. Tsk, being weak sucks! Well, whatever, let's get this done. If I'm lucky I really might be able to pull this off}.

Unlike the crazy and confident look on his face, Muku was actually nowhere near as confident as he seemed. How could he be? He was barely keeping himself from fainting with his willpower alone.

And while the CSK was also heavily injured internally. It was still doing a lot better than him. So, the odds were stacked against. By more than one layer even.

However, he perfectly hid all his uncertainty. His eyes were laser-focused on his opponent. Its eyes were also focused on his.

As if by fate... Or Mrs C's interference. A leaf flew in-between them from somewhere. Without speaking with each other, they agreed to move the moment the leaf reaches the ground.

The leaf didn't disappoint. It slowly but surely landed on the ground. Which happened to be directly between them. At the centre. Then...

BOOOM!

BOOOM!

Two loud booms rang out. This time it wasn't just the CSK which rushed forward. Muku also exploded forward. He was done with being passive in such situations. It was time to meet the CSK in the middle.

It was also a way of showing respect for its efforts. They might be enemies who hated each other to death. However, like they said before. They really respected the hell out of each other.

And so, for their final clash. They both gave their all. A slight smile appeared on Muku's face. The madness and worries were gone. Whatever the result was. He was going to be okay with it. After all, it was the greatest battle he had ever had.

A battle that might never be topped even by stronger enemies in the future...

The CSK also had a happy glint in its eyes. All its anger and frustration were gone. I almost didn't mind having been caught now. After all, who knew if it would have met such a satisfying opponent in the outside world? A human opponent no less.

The very creature it thought was a waste of space. It chuckled a little from the thought. Then...

BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The two parties finally clashed. An explosion louder than any that had occurred before went off.

A dust-filled shockwave rose from the impact and spread around. Some of the rubble from the school building was blown away. The roofs of other buildings like the gym hall were blown off.

If people from before the apocalypse saw the scene. They would probably think that the area had been hit by a missile. That's just how destructive the clash between Muku and the CSK was.

The whole area was buried in a brown cloud of dust. After a few moments, the dust slowly began to settle.

Everything was quiet. It was almost like the whole world was holding its breath. Waiting to see what result the receding dust will show.

Will it be Muku who wins and defies all reason? Or will it be the CSK, the obvious choice for the winner in any objective analysis?

Well, whoever won. The battle will definitely go down in history as one of the winner's greatest fights. A battle they will never forget...

Fortunately, the wait didn't last long. The dust started clearing faster than it was supposed to. Yup... Mrs C got involved again. She was ruining the mystical mood! What an impatient old lady!

Anyway, soon the figures of Muku and the CSK were reviewed. They both stood still in place. Their eyes focused on the others'. From just looking at their serious expressions. It wasn't clear who won.

That's when...

"Cough! Blargh!" Muku suddenly coughed and spat out a mouthful of blood for like the hundredth time that day. At that point, he was so pale he was no different from a corpse. It was quite surprising that he was still alive.

"Rejoice human. You managed to bring me to my limits. However, your strength just wasn't enough to win" The CSK spoke in a rough and tired voice.

Its eyes reflected its large hand which had stabbed into Muku's gut with its claws. The claws had completely sunk into Muku's body.

There was no way thirty-centimetre-long nails would get buried into a person's body and not cause a fatal injury. Even if that person was a R3 Evolver.

So, yeah. Muku was injured. Not just injured. He was gravely injured. His vision had gotten so hazy that he could barely see the CSK's outline. Only its crimson eyes stood out to his hazy vision. They were glowing like they were the eyes of the Grim Reaper himself who had come to claim his soul.

"Cough! Cough! Cough! Do-n't... be... so... qu-ick to judge" Muku spoke slowly and weakly after coughing crazily for a bit.

His hazy eyes then shifted their focus. He looked down towards the CSK's abdomen. The CSK looked down as well in confusion.

Then it noticed his hand. It had thought that he failed to reach it before given how it was positioned. Which was an open palm that was slightly touching its body with just the fingertips.

It thought that maybe he wanted to dig into its skin with his hand or something. Which was a crazy thought, considering its defence. But it thought Muku could probably pull it off if given a chance.

So, it made sure that he could only touch it slightly. Which was a final tease from it to him before he died. However, now, it seemed it might have guessed wrong.

Was everything part of his plan? The more it thought about it while looking at his palm, the more confused it got. Then a random memory from before suddenly appeared in its mind.

Its eyes widened instantly. Its fur also rose due to the sudden dangerous thought it had.

It immediately tried to back away from Muku. However, Muku made his move before it could do so. With a little smile on his face which said "it's too late", he thought...

{One inch... Punch!} It would have been cooler to say it. However, he could no longer speak.

His hand instantly folded into a fist and hit the CSK's abdomen. Then...

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

An explosion louder than the previous one rang out. Blood and guts flew everywhere.

Yet Muku and the CSK didn't move from their positions. They kept standing like before.

"Nice punch. Great use of force" The CSK suddenly spoke after a few moments of silence.

A torrent of blood began coming out of its mouth immediately after. Not long after that, it fell to the ground. Which caused its hand to get dislodged from Muku's gut.

Muku remained standing with blank eyes as he looked into the nothingness. His vision was gone. He couldn't even see the result of his work.

All his remaining strength and willpower were focused on keeping him standing.

On the ground of yet another big hole the two had created. The CSK lay unmoving.

A huge hole had replaced its guts. The ground had been dyed red with its blood.

Muku had won!

Chapter 242: Scar

Room Zero...

"Hehe. Good job son. I knew you could do it" Mrs C spoke softly as she looked at the screen.

"Cool"×2 Both Raya and Fake Raya's ghost spoke at the same time. They couldn't believe he held on until the end and even won.

Their eyes were also focused on the screen. They couldn't look away. The sight was just too magnificent.

Muku was shown standing still with his hair covering his face. He was breathing very slowly. His eyes were covered behind the hair. His body looked horrific from all the injuries. And... He had lost consciousness.

That's right, he has lost consciousness while standing on his feet. And even after which, he refused to fall to the ground.

As for why Mrs C didn't immediately get involved. Well... Muku looked quite cool at the moment. She, his biggest fan, wanted to take in the sight as much as she could before it passed.

Fortunately for Muku, she snapped out of her daze before he died. That would have been quite the tragic end. And he would definitely come back as a vengeful spirit and complain.

With a snap of Mrs C's fingers. Muku who was shown on the screen, visibly began recovering.

Interestingly enough, it seemed like his body's time was getting turned back. All the blood that he had lost was coming back to him. Whether it had been destroyed by all the action. It all reformed and re-entered his body with no impurities at all. Even his clothes were restored.

It was quite a mystical sight. Though Raya was long past the point of getting surprised by anything that Mrs C does. In fact, she would be surprised if Mrs C says that there's something she can't do.

Such was the all-powerful image Mrs C had created in her mind...

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Trial ground...

Muku's closed eyes suddenly snapped open. He then squinted them to an almost closed point. The sudden exposure to light caught him off guard. After all, he had been mostly blind towards the end of the battle.

Soon enough his eyes readjusted to the light and he opened them completely. He was immediately met by the sight of the fallen CSK which lay in a pool of its own blood. His eyes immediately focused on the big hole which went through its body.

"Oh my!. What a scary sight... Nonetheless, thank you for the battle" Muku was startled by his own destructive force.

After all, he knew better than anyone how tough the CSK's hide was. So for him to have caused such damage, the attack had to be even stronger than what was reflected. It was probably strong enough to completely destroy any other opponent. If they were just a random beast, of course.

Anyway, Muku crouched down and placed his hand on the CSK's head after the initial shock. He then thanked it for the battle. Which was his final show of respect to the worthy opponent.

"Wait... You stubborn bastard! I guess you didn't want to go out with just that controlled battle huh? Okay, I'll help you. ... Mom..." Muku immediately realised that the CSK was alive when he felt its faint breathing after touching its head.

It was even more amazing than he was. To be able to stay alive with your whole gut missing and having lost so much blood... It really was the beast he thought it was!

He immediately asked Mrs C to help it without saying much. It was obvious that he wanted something from the way he addressed her. He would never call her mom otherwise.

"Tsk. Fine. And can't you call me mom without attaching strings to it?" Mrs C's voice rang out in the room.

She healed the CSK as she complained. Just like what happened with Muku. Its body's time was reversed. Soon it was back to peak condition.

It got off the ground and faced Muku again. Both parties looked at each other quietly for a moment. The atmosphere seemed tense. Yet there was no longer any hostility in the air.

"Why am I still alive?" The CSK broke the silence with its rough voice.

"Isn't it obvious? I refuse for such a controlled battle to be our last. So, I pulled some strings and you'll get your freedom back. Then we'll have our round two the next time we meet. Then I can beat you up completely, and at your peak too. Which won't leave a bad taste in my mouth like now" Muku replied arrogantly.

"... Human, you're quite arrogant. Especially when we both know that you won due to luck. However, I quite like your style. And I accept your challenge. Though don't think you'll get as lucky as you were this time. I will hit you with everything I have from the very beginning when the time comes" The CSK replied. From the glint in its eyes and its tone. It probably would have been smiling if it could smile.

Muku really interested it a lot. It couldn't help but wonder if all humans were just as interesting... No, that can't be the case. The human in front of it was something special. It, as something special in its own right could tell. Real recognises real after all.

"Well, not to seem too proud but... If I had all my abilities. You probably wouldn't have lasted a minute against me if we were the same Rank. Well, whatever time will tell. And I have a request for when I beat you" Muku spoke confidently.

"Okay. What is it? I'll humour you by hearing what you have to say. After all, if you wait until you win. You won't get to say anything" The CSK responded.

"Oh? Is that so? Well, I know I will win so, no. I won't say anything. Just be ready to hear me out then" Muku refused to say anything.

"Well, suit yourself... Oh? It seems my ride is here" The CSK gave up on persuading him. It wouldn't lose anything from not knowing anyway.

It then noticed a familiar square portal appear behind Muku. It was the same portal which had gotten it to that damned place where it stayed for who knows how long.

"Well, see you later then... Wait, what's your name?" Muku asked just as the CSK was about to step through the portal.

"Scar... You?" the CSK paused its steps and replied. It also wanted to know Muku's name.

"Scar, huh? What a fitting name. Anyway, I'm Muku. Remember my name. For it is the name of the human who will beta you for a second time the next time we meet" Muku replied.

"Okay, Muku. Don't keep me waiting too long" The CSK didn't argue.

It preferred to let their next battle do all the talking. It disappeared into the portal immediately after replying. It suspected that Muku would keep on chatting away if it didn't go...

"I wonder when that will be... Anyway, it's finally over. I can finally go to my room and sle... Oh, right, two years... Sigh," Mimi spoke to himself.

He went through quite a few emotions with just those few words. He first felt anticipation, then relief, then happiness, then sadness which evolved to depression the more he thought about it.

He had been so busy fighting that he forgot he couldn't go back to the girls for two years. The moment he realised that, all the happiness was drained out of him.

"There's no need to feel so sad. I'm sure time will pass by quicker than you expect. Especially if you keep yourself busy with other things. For example, it has already been three weeks since you came here" Just when Muku was sinking deeper and deeper into his depression. Mrs C's soothing voice pulled him out.

"Three weeks?! Isn't that too much? I feel like it has been five days at most?" Muku was so surprised that his depression was erased on the spot.

"Well, I guess if we count the time you were awake only. Then yeah, you've only been here for five days. However, if we count the time you slept in between battles which stretched for days in most cases. It has been three weeks" Mrs C replied.

"Oh... What! I slept for days?!... Well, I did feel really refreshed after the "naps". Oh, so that's why" Muku finally accepted that it had been three weeks.

A smile instantly appeared on his face as a crazy idea formed in his mind. Just when he was about to speak, Mrs C spoke first.

"Don't bother saying it. I know what you're thinking. You want to repeat the floor over and over again or go to the next floor right? Well, unfortunately for you. The rules don't permit such a thing. You can't go to the next floor without conquering the previous one with no outside help. Which I obviously offered when I healed you. And you failed the floor when you gave up before anyway. You can't repeat until at least a year later. Not to mention that you'd die instantly if I send you to the next floor with your current capabilities" Mrs C who had appeared out of nowhere popped Muku's bubble before he could even blow it.

"Sigh, couldn't you at least let me say it? And didn't I say you should stay out of my mind?!" Muku spoke while rolling his eyes.

His plan was to spam the trial ground until the whole two years were up. That way, it would seem like time is passing by quickly. And he won't have time to be depressed either. Unfortunately, she invaded his privacy and shut him down.

He wasn't even mad at that point. It was already the norm that she would do whatever she pleased. She was the very definition of a mother who didn't know how to respect her child's boundaries. Hell, she took it a step further by reading his mind.

"Hehe, don't sweat the small stuff. Wouldn't you rather focus on knowing what your reward for winning is?" Mrs C brushed his complaint off as always. She was clearly not going to stop reading his mind.

"Yeah, invading my privacy by reading my mind... Which is like the worst way to invade anyone's privacy is definitely not important. Well, whatever, let's move on to the reward then" Muku replied tiredly.

Mrs C went silent for a moment. She didn't know what to say after that.

It seemed her shamelessness fell short for once...

Chapter 243: Reward

"Cough! Cough! Ye-yeah, let's do that" Mrs C collected herself with a fake cough. Obviously, it was fake, there was probably nothing that could make such a being cough for real.

Anyway, she then snapped her fingers and the duo disappeared from the pocket dimension. She didn't have to do that, it was just a heads-up for Muku.

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Room Zero...

"Are you really going to ignore me, you murderer?" Fake Raya spoke while floating in front of Raya's eyes.

"..." Raya silently sat there she didn't even blink.

"Tsk. That's how you want to play it, huh? Okay, I'll show y... Lucky brat!" Fake Raya was about to do something when Mrs C and Muku appeared. So, she cancelled her plans.

Raya didn't say anything. Though she was kinda curious to know what Fake Raya wanted to do. However, she didn't ask or show it on her face. She had made up her mind to ignore the ghost no matter what.

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"Son. You remember how I told you that the reward you'll get after receiving my help won't be as good as the original, right?" Mrs C spoke.

She waited before they took their seats before speaking. They were sitting on a giant table full of food platters. It was clear to see that they were going to have a meal after the talk. And Muku couldn't wait.

"Yes, I'm fine with that" Muku as someone who had just been reminded of his hunger by the platters in front of him. Spoke quickly. In his mind, the sooner they finished the talk...The sooner he had a meal.

"Well, it seems someone is in a rush. Anyway, I won't delay any longer. Your reward for beating that dog is some information on your bloodline..." Mrs C spoke.

She trailed off at the end, hoping to get a certain reaction from Muku. And he didn't disappoint her. The moment she mentioned his bloodline, all his impatience and hungry look disappeared. A serious expression appeared on his face instead.

He had always been curious about his bloodline. While it was supposedly a reward for being the first ever Rank One Evolver on The Blue Planet. He always felt there was more to it than that. Being the first Evolver shouldn't warrant such an overpowered cheat, right?. It seemed way too unfair despite him having barely scratched its surface. Hell, it was because he had barely scratched the surface that he thought it was too much.

He could literally gaze people out of existence with the little he had, after all. And the thought of that being the entry ability of his bloodline was absurd.

Quite frankly his bloodline scared him. It reeked of conspiracies and an unnecessarily tough life he didn't want.

And there was also the question as to why it would ditch him at the worst moments possible. Other than at the last possible moment when he dealt with the Green Monarch, it hadn't been available before that. And it was even worse when Ares' was involved, it never worked from start to finish.

So, yeah, some information on it would be greatly appreciated. His hunger could be ignored for the moment. The information he was about to receive was more important.

"Hehe, that's the expression I wanted. Anyway, as you suspected, your bloodline wasn't actually a reward for being the first Evolver or whatever. It was yours from the start. I won't tell you how or by whom, but The Messenger was manipulated to make it seem like it was a reward. That way, it won't be rejected by The Heavens. After all, it's strength that's not linked to Ranks. Such a thing isn't allowed to exist in a world weaker than Level 10. If The Messenger wasn't manipulated, you would have been struck down by heavenly lightning when you made it to Rank One and died on the spot" Mrs C paused for a moment as she let the words sink in.

Muku couldn't help but feel a cold chill go down his spine. To think he could have possibly died a long time ago. And he was certain there was no way for him to resist back then. Even the present him would probably be easily wiped out of existence by The Heavens. He had witnessed the Heavenly Lightning first-hand during Raya's trial, after all. It was a force he would never want to face if he had a choice in the matter.

"Anyway, that's not really important right now. All that matters is that you have your bloodline and are alive. And with time and practice, you'll be able to gain more access to its capabilities. However, never try to tap into more of it than your body can handle. I'm sure you know how disastrous that could be already. Fortunately, for you, there's like a built-in limiter that's always capped at the maximum bloodline energy you can manipulate. So, you'll always know your limits. Hmm, I think that's all I can say for now. If you want to know the origin of the bloodline. You'll have to look into that yourself. Now, do you have any questions?. I'll answer any that I can" Mrs C concluded her explanation by asking Muku if he had questions.

"...Umm, I don't have many. I'm not planning to specifically hunt down information about my bloodline after all. I'll let it happen naturally like it did now. If I'm meant to know, I'll know. All I care about is the safety of my group. For that reason, I ask, why does my bloodline ability sometimes not work? And are there other people with a similar bloodline out there?" Muku spoke after collecting himself for a moment. He asked only two questions.

Two questions that were linked to the safety of his girls. Firstly, he needed to know why his bloodline ability is sometimes cut off. That way, he would know when to trust it and when not to trust it in his safe imposed quest to keep the girls safe.

As for why he wanted to know if there were others like him. Well, he could find ways to deal with people who had normal abilities. Abilities within reason. However, even he, as the user of the erasing gaze didn't know how to protect himself from it.

Of course, avoiding it with quick speed is the obvious answer. However, not everyone in his team was a speedster. So, that wasn't an option. As for shielding themselves with their abilities... That didn't seem safe. What if they are erased together with their abilities?!

Anyway, it has always been a secret worry of his. So, Mrs C's reply can either lift the weight off his shoulders or make it heavier. It was a really nerve-wracking situation for him. However, he had to know.

"You know, your practicality really angers me sometimes. I was looking forward to you fervently searching for information on your bloodline. Getting frustrated when your leads lead to nothing. And you end up making enemies at every turn due to it. Anyway, I guess a stable and priority-driven personality isn't too bad either. At least your life won't be unnecessarily complicated" Mrs C expressed her disappointment in his mature decision.

Muku rolled his eyes at her words. What mother would wish for her son to go all over the place making reckless decisions just for information? Especially when it's not affecting his life too much?

He didn't care about his mysterious background or whatever. Even if she was trying to lead him into wondering about it. He wouldn't bite. He had all he wanted already. All that mattered was his and the girls' happiness. Which they had as long as they were together.

"Can you please just answer my questions? I won't change my mind no matter what you say. Even if it disappoints you" Muku spoke after noticing that Mrs C was delaying matters unnecessarily.

"Fine. The reason why your bloodline cuts off sometimes is that it cannot be exposed to Monarchs or your life will be in danger. At the very least, your bloodline shouldn't be spotted by them before you reach Rank Ten. Though, even then it would be cutting it a bit too close. To be safe, don't expose it until you're as strong as they are. As for why I'm saying this. It's because the auto-protect function will expire when you reach Rank Seven. You'll have to be mindful of your actions which involve your bloodline from then on" Mrs C answered one of Muku's questions.

She didn't immediately answer the other one as she let the information sink in. It was quite a lot after all.

"Oh... So that's it, huh? I did think it was weird that it only stopped working when Monarchs were involved. Well, I guess I'm grateful. Even though I don't know what would happen if I'm discovered..."

"Oh that, that's simple. If you're discovered. They'd break the treaty and invade the world with their real bodies at once. Which reminds me, be extra careful in the Beast World. In fact, don't use your bloodline power at all" Mrs C replied to Muku's question. Though he hadn't exactly asked it.

"What?!" Muku exclaimed in shock.

The thought of multiple Monarchs breaking into his world to kill him was quite scary to say the very least.

Chapter 244: Questions and answers

"No need to be so shocked. Like I said, you're guaranteed safety from such a situation until you're Rank Seven" Mrs C spoke while rolling her eyes.

She felt that Muku was overreacting. The worst-case scenario was being hunted down by modern-day Monarchs. They weren't anything special.

"That doesn't make me feel any better though! Well, whatever, let's move on. I'll think about it some other time. Can you answer the other question for me please?". Muku put the matter aside for the moment.

Like Mrs C said, it wasn't an urgent matter anyway. The answer to the other question was more urgent anyway. If there were more people like him, he'll start coming up with solutions. Which would be thinking of ways to counter their abilities by studying his.

If there aren't any, he won't have to waste time thinking about it. It would be one less thing to worry about. A very significant thing as well.

"Sigh, fine. Anyway, the answer to your question is yes and no. Yes in the sense that there are other people with bloodlines which give them special abilities. And no in the sense that no one else has your bloodline. In fact, no other bloodline is even close to being as strong as yours. Though that means it will be harder for you to learn how to control it. Or even gain the qualification to do so actually. I'm not gonna get into that, I already answered both your questions, after all," Mrs C replied uninterestedly.

"Oh, so it's like that, huh? Well, at the very least the pressure is significantly reduced..." Muku spoke in a relieved tone.

"I wouldn't worry about bloodlines for the time being if I were you. Even though other people will have an easier time gaining control of their bloodlines than you will. It will still take them quite some time before they can do that. Maybe when they reach Rank 6 or 7. As for now, your main priority should be your other powers. Especially your Mithril, that will take you far. Trust me on that" Mrs C gave Muku some advice.

"Oh? Thank you. I'll do just as you say" Muku thanked her. He was very grateful. There was no way he would take her advice lightly. Even though she was rather unreliable.

"It's nothing much" Mrs C said while waving her hand.

"I have a couple of other questions if you don't mind. They suddenly popped up in my mind" Muku spoke, feeling slightly embarrassed. After all, he had confidently said he would only ask two questions.

"Sure, go ahead and ask. Like I said, I'll answer anything as long as it's something I can answer" Mrs C replied graciously.

After his earlier remark of only asking two questions, she could have chosen to be petty and refuse. However, she was willing to answer. Which Muku appreciated.

"Ri-right... Umm, what would have been the reward had I been able to beat the whole floor without getting your help?" Muku asked something he had been curious about ever since he got his information reward.

"Hmm, good question. I'm not sure myself. I've thought of many things it could be I can't decide. The choices ranged from helping you with your bloodline, to upgrading your rank, there was also giving you rare materials. Among other things. Well, it doesn't matter now anyway. Oh, there was also taking out that golden ape that keeps on bothering you. What was its name again? Ares? Yes, that's right, Ares." Mrs C replied casually as usual.

It was almost like she wasn't speaking about heaven-defying rewards. Like, she literally said his bloodline is mostly off limits to the current him. So, her being able to help him despite that was rather amazing.

Then there was helping to upgrade his Rank. That didn't need to be explained. Everyone knows how hard it is to upgrade their rank. And it keeps on getting harder the stronger one gets. Yet there she was saying that she could pretty much snap her finger to make his rank increase. Hell, she might not even need to snap her finger.

And lastly, but not least in any way, hell it was probably the most absurd thing she said. She literally just casually said she'd take out Ares, a legit Monarch for him. And unlike the husk of a Monarch he defeated

just a while back. Ares was a complete Monarch with all his power intact. One of the rulers of the Beast World!

It was quite a shocking thought. Not because he thought she couldn't do it. Actually, he thought she could probably do it very easily. The problem was that it wasn't even an option. Wouldn't that be too generous?? Ares was basically his greatest foe and problem in the apocalypse. If he was taken care of, Muku's life would be better by countless times.

Unfortunately, that wasn't going to happen now. He couldn't help but feel a little resentful of Mrs C. If she had told him about how such a thing was a possibility. Maybe he would have fought harder and cleared the whole floor without her help.

The resentfulness didn't last long though. Which was because Scar's image appeared in his mind. There was no way he would have been able to beat him. Especially in the state he was in after clearing the school building.

"Oh, okay. The next question is, what's the story behind FORCE?" Muku asked his next question. It wasn't worth his time to dwell on something that could have been.

After all, Ares was his problem anyway. Even if he can't deal with him at the moment or any other moment in the foreseeable future. He should be able to manage without outside help. Besides, it's the threat and pressure he gets from Ares which motivates him to get stronger.

"Force, huh? It's just a little technique from the past made by a weak person who desired strength. Its story isn't important. It won't be useful after Rank Six anyway. So don't waste too much time on it. Mana will always be superior to it. Trust me" Mrs C replied. Her eyes flashed with emotion for a split second when she did.

However, Muku didn't ask anything. Even though he could see that there was a story behind the technique. He chose not to overstep his boundaries. Even if Mrs C treated him well, she was still not someone he could be too casual or familiar with. He was happy enough receiving her favour to such an extent.

"Oh, okay. Well, whatever the case. I'm very thankful for it. I was dead for sure if it wasn't for it. I'll always treasure it" Muku replied.

He didn't just say empty words. He meant them. He really appreciated the technique. And from her words, it will be useful until he reaches R6. Which was a rank he couldn't even fathom yet as a mere LR3 Evolver.

So, it was definitely going to be useful for a long time to come. It can be like a trump card after using all his mana and the enemy thinks he's vulnerable.

"Aww, is that so? Okay then. I'm glad you like it so much. I'll allow you to teach it to those girls of yours. Oh, and don't bother teaching it to anyone else but them, it won't work... And there's no need to be so reserved with me. The reason I'm not telling you about its origin is that it serves no purpose in any way" Mrs C replied to Muku's words emotionally.

She also addressed his inner turmoil when it came to the way he should treat her. He silently nodded to her words. What else could he do?

Anyway, it seemed it had become a norm for her to read his mind. Fortunately, he never had any improper thoughts or who knows what would have happened...

"Now that that's all taken care of. Why don't we have our meal? This food is getting col... No, it's not, but you know what I mean" Mrs C finally mentioned the food.

Muku's hunger which he had curbed came back with a vengeance. He was ready to dig in. He'll continue thinking about things afterwards.

Mrs C didn't make him wait long, the food covers all disappeared and everything was reviewed. Mrs C gestured for him to start eating with her hand.

However, he didn't start eating right away. Not because he had manners or something like that. He didn't do it because of how the food looked. It actually looked like a standard Blue Planet buffet.

There was even a roasted pig and everything. Tears formed in his eyes. Other than meat and rice, the rest were stuff he hadn't seen for quite a while. Let alone have the chance to eat.

He clasped his hands together as a way of thanking Mrs C and began eating right after. Mrs C gave him a weird look.

"To think of all the things I've done in front of you so far. This is what impressed you the most. Now I feel like I have been trying too hard" Mrs C spoke with a wry smile on her face.

She immediately noticed that Muku wasn't paying attention to anything other than the food in front of him.

He probably didn't even hear her. Her wry smile got even more so. She didn't speak anymore and joined Muku as she also began eating. So what if she didn't have to do it and couldn't remember the last time she ate?

Sharing a meal with her beloved son was reason enough for her to eat...

Chapter 245: Final matters...

Sometime later...

"What a great meal!" Muku exclaimed happily while rubbing his exaggeratedly big stomach. He has eaten so much that he got a beer belly without drinking an ounce of alcohol.

Mrs C just looked on with a smile on her face. She was just enjoying his company. A flash of sadness appeared in her eyes for a moment before disappearing. Fortunately for her, no one noticed it. Otherwise, some questions she didn't want to appear might have appeared in Muku's mind.

"Ahem! Now that we've all eaten and are satisfied. It's time we take care of the remaining two matters" Mrs C announced after grabbing Muku's attention.

"Two matters?" Muku asked in confusion. He had no idea what she was talking about. As far as he was concerned, everything was taken care of already.

"Yes. Two matters. We'll deal with them one after the other. The first one is Raya's matter. That's right Little One, I didn't forget you. Here is your reward..." Mrs C didn't wait for anyone to say anything as she immediately took action.

A little drop of blood appeared in front of Raya. The weird thing about the drop of blood was that it was white in colour. Hell, Muku and Raya weren't even sure why they were so certain that it was blood.

After all, neither had ever seen white blood before. They just choked it up as one of Mrs C's mysteries.

Anyway, the white drop of blood flew directly at Raya's face. It disappeared into her head from in-between her eyes before she could react.

She instinctively closed her eyes and braced for pain. After all, such things always led to a painful experience, right?

However, even a few seconds later... Nothing happened. She didn't feel anything. No pain, numbness, pleasure or anything. It was almost as if nothing about her had changed.

She then opened her eyes in confusion. Her eyes looked at Mrs C inquisitively. Mrs C looked back at her for a moment without saying anything. There was a playful look in her eyes.

"Why are you looking at me like that? Did you really think I'd just throw you into a painful experience without a warning? Do I seem that unreasonable to you?... Don't answer that, I already got my answer. From both of you. Sigh, to think even my own son thinks I'm unreasonable... Anyway, that drop of blood will only take effect during your next bloodline awakening ritual. I'm sure you'll find the effect to your liking" Mrs C did her usual thing.

She asked a question and read the answer from everyone present's heads then moved on.

The duo had gotten so used to it that they didn't even bother to say anything from the start.

"Thank you" Raya expressed her gratitude. She didn't know what exactly would happen when the drop of blood activates. However, she was certain that it would be something great. After all, it was Mrs C who had given it out.

"You're welcome Little One. Go out into the world and make me proud, okay?" Mrs C spoke in a motherly voice as she patted the now horse-sized Raya.

A strange flash of light passed through Fake Raya's eyes as she saw this scene. Her eyes were focused on Raya as she floated beside her.

Speaking of which, it seemed Muku couldn't see her. And since Mrs C hadn't actually acknowledged Fake Raya's ghost' presence from the start. Raya was wondering if she was imagining her.

Maybe she was going crazy or something. Well, whatever, she'll just keep ignoring the ghost until it goes away. That's probably what Mrs C was doing...

...

"Now, let's move on to the final matter. I'm sure you're both going to like this one" Mrs C moved on to the final matter.

Muku and Raya couldn't help but raise their expectations from how she was hyping the matter up.

"So, you both remember how I reset physical capabilities for your trials right? Well, there was a reason for that. And it's something that's only possible in the trial ground. I'm not going to get into the boring details with you. Just know that in a few seconds, your sealed strength will be unsealed. And you will receive a pleasant surprise..." Mrs C spoke.

As soon as her last word fell, Muku and Raya heard a weird sound go off in their heads. It was like a locked door had been unlocked.

Before either could make sense of what was going on. Their bodies were flooded by energy. It was raging, violent yet familiar. That's right, it was their locked energy. Which included their physical strength, mental prowess which also had been nerfed, bloodlines and most importantly their mana!

The moment they felt their mana circle around their bodies for the first time. Both couldn't help but let out weird and embarrassing moans. Especially for Muku, a manly man who never makes such sounds. Unfortunately, his willpower wasn't strong enough to stop him from doing it. The feeling was just that good.

Muku felt that it was almost as good as sex. And since it was unexpected, his reaction was way more exaggerated.

Anyway, both their bodies turned red during the process. It was no different from the time Muku ate the healing fruit she gave him before.

Fortunately, there was no pain this time. They just felt rather hot. And it didn't last as long as last time.

Soon they were fine again. A similar emotion could be seen sparkling in their eyes. And that emotion was... Joy!

Their physical strength had actually improved again. The strength they got in the trial ground wasn't overwritten. It was actually added to their existing strength.

It was simply magical. One had to know that a person's or a Beast's physical strength wasn't something that could be easily increased. For most, the strength they got directly from their class, class level and rank was all the strength they would ever have. Even intense training couldn't improve that. It was just how things were.

Which was why Jade and Audrey were always miles ahead of the others in terms of strength. It was because their classes were not only high-level, but they were also quite physical. So, they had a really high strength feedback upon each rank-up.

Even someone like Muku wouldn't have been able to catch up without cheats like his soul link to Raya and the fruit from before. Now, his and Raya's strength had improved again!

Instead of two times stronger, like they had become after the fruit. They were now three times stronger. Which in Muku's case, who was as strong as Jade when he arrived. He was now three times stronger than her!

That was the reason Muku and Raya were so emotional. Mrs C had really given them something miraculous. Now they will always be three times stronger than they should have been.

And now, Muku was faced with a dilemma. The initial two times would probably give Jade a heart attack when she finds out. Now, he was worried that she was guaranteed to have a heart attack when she learns of the recent development.

After all, her physical prowess was the one thing Jade was most proud of in the team. Even more so than her versatile and unique Beast Aura. After all, for the longest time, she had been the strongest physically in the team. Of course, there was Audrey, but Jade didn't see her as competition. She just accepted that Audrey was just as strong.

However, Audrey wasn't a show-off and never tried to compete with Jade in physical feats. So, Jade was free to act as the absolute strongest. And best of all, Muku couldn't compete at all.

As for Chloe, while she was faster than Jade, it wasn't because of her physical strength. And for that reason, Jade didn't see her as competition at all. Which was rather odd since Chloe was beating her at speed despite being physically weaker and yet she didn't mind. Maybe she just cared about being better than Muku. Everything else could be discussed apparently.

And then came Raya. The hateful dragon who made Muku, Jade's equal. Jade hated it a lot. However, since she wasn't left behind, she could stomach it to some extent.

Now though... Muku was certain he was in for one hell of a ride when Jade found out...

"Thank you, Mother" Muku thanked Mrs C sincerely. For the first time, he actually meant it when he called her mother.

He felt that he would be scum if he couldn't do at least that after all she had given him. While he wasn't sure what the lady's initial motives were for doing what she did. He was certain that she had been genuine in her actions after that. Even with the unreliability and frequent privacy breaches.

He kinda wished that she was his real mother. After all, she looked the part. Maybe she... Nuh! There's no way. It was probably just a coincidence...

"My son!" Mrs C called out as she rushed forward emotionally and hugged Muku tightly. Muku hugged her back. He let her hug him for as long as she wanted. Which turned out to be ten whole minutes. And he was certain that he could hear muffled crying from her. However, he didn't pursue the matter.

"Although we've only been together for a little while, it was the best time of my life. Please come back and see me before you go back. Remember, you're eligible to return after a year. I'll be waiting" Mrs C spoke in a low voice while still hugging Muku.

He and Raya disappeared from the room before either could say anything.

"Are you okay?" A voice sounded from behind Mrs C who was crying silently.

"Are you?" Mrs C asked a question in return as she turned back.

She came face to face with Fake Raya's ghost which was soon enveloped by a white light and turned into... A white haired lady?!...

Chapter 246: Raya's theory...

Somewhere in the Beast Forest...

"Woooah! Oh!" Muku suddenly appeared in the sky and began falling down.

The obvious reaction was to scream, right? And scream he did. That is until he realised he had gotten back all his powers.

He immediately stopped his descent. A smile appeared on his face as he performed the action he missed most. However, the smile disappeared as soon as it appeared. And that was because...

"Oh, come on!" Muku exclaimed in frustration.

The reason?... The creepy armour from before had encased his body again. With all that had happened, he had long forgotten about it. And he kinda thought that Mrs C had done him a silent favour by taking it off.

Unfortunately, he had thought too much. Then again, it wasn't surprising. He had already figured out what kind of person his new mother was after all. She was the kind of person who wouldn't permanently remove the armour for him despite being capable of it. It was literally effortless for her.

Well, whatever, it didn't really matter anyway. She had done more than enough for him anyway. The weird armour was his problem to deal with anyway. He'll deal with it eventually.

So, with the annoying constant stab to his mental state from the armour, Muku went his way.

Raya had retreated into his mindscape as soon as they appeared. She hadn't said a word ever since.

So, Muku could only float around aimlessly not knowing where to go. He wasn't too afraid of the surroundings since he didn't feel any intense gravitational pull. From Raya's words in the past, as long as the gravity wasn't beyond something he could handle. It meant he was on the outskirts of the Beast Forest.

Though the trees around him were quite huge. So, he wasn't certain what was going on. Those were supposed to only be available in the middle areas and above. Then again, there were always exceptions.

Another issue was... He couldn't find any beasts around him like in the trial ground. He was starting to wonder if she had just tossed him back into it.

{Umm, Muku} Just when he was about to ask for Raya's input. She spoke first.

{Yes?} Muku replied.

{I think we're in the middle zone of the Beast Forest} Raya continued.

The moment she did, Muku felt a chill go down his spine. How could he not? After all. The weakest beasts in the middle zone were R5s! And there were supposedly a lot of them.

That was a scary thought. He had never even encountered a Rank Four before. What was he supposed to do in a place infested with R5s and above?

The first thought which came to his mind was that Mrs C wanted to kill him off. However, he quickly got rid of that thought. She didn't need to go through so much effort to accomplish that.

And despite Raya's words. Nothing had happened to make him believe that she was speaking the truth. Of course, from their soul link, he could tell that she was being truthful.

However, just because we perceive something as being the truth doesn't make it so.

So, maybe Raya was mistaken. It was entirely possible, after all. He didn't rush to discredit her claim though. He quietly waited for her to continue. There was no way she would stop at that, right? Such information needed backing.

{I couldn't handle the gravity. I didn't say anything because I wanted to make sense of the situation first. After all, if I couldn't handle it. You should be the same, right? But there you are, doing just fine. Just like that time before. And I think I've finally figured out what's going on. The reason you're able to handle gravity levels you shouldn't be able to is probably because of that weird and ominous armour you're wearing} As Muku suspected, Raya didn't stop after the initial statement.

The pause was probably due to her trying to organise what she was going to say next. And her words went off like a bomb in his head.

Instead of being happy because of her discovery. Muku was anything but. This was because it meant that they were in grave danger. And unlike Raya who could hide in his mindscape. He was screwed for real. There was nowhere to hide.

But still, one question stood... Why couldn't he see any beasts? Shouldn't they be fighting to claim the easy delicacy or something? After all, humans shouldn't be common in the Beast Forest.

{So, why am I not being attacked?} Muku asked Raya uneasily. He began feeling numerous gazes focused on his body the moment Raya said that he was in the middle zone.

As for whether those gazes were real or just his imagination. He didn't know. Either way, he had to get out of the area.

So, he immediately began following the mana flow. Speaking of which, he hadn't noticed its density due to the trial ground. The place was saturated with mana. It was so dense it should have been visible. It was probably only invisible due to something Mrs C did.

Anyway, due to that. The outside mana which was significantly dense didn't stand out to him. After all, it was nothing compared to the place he had been. He suspected that even the Central Zone's mana wasn't as dense as the mana in the trial ground.

{I have a theory about that too} Raya replied soon after. She didn't say everything at once. Maybe she was coping Mrs C or something.

{I think it's because of your armour and another factor. As you know, from R3 onwards. Most beasts start making significant intellectual progress. Their intelligence keeps on improving with their ranks. So, R5s and higher ranks are quite smart. Most are smarter than average humans by Rank Five. Anyway, I noticed something about your weird armour before. It completely masks your presence. Like, not even a little bit of your strength leaks through. I couldn't even smell your scent. Maybe, just maybe, even R5s and such can't breach the concealment. Which makes them hesitate} Raya explained to Muku what she thought was happening.

{Really? They are staying away from me because they can't see through my strength? That makes sense. However, that shouldn't be reason enough to not even prob my strength, right? They could at least

block my path or toss a random attack my way. This reaction of hiding away is way too much} Muku replied.

He felt that her explanation was way too far-fetched. After all, there were always a few who sought death everywhere they went when things weren't certain.

{Yeah you're right. However, I said there are two reasons, right? So, let me finish first. Anyway, the other thing is how we appeared. It was through a portal. And from what I know, portals are something only the highest ranks of beasts have. I'm not even sure what rank. Especially such stable portals. Maybe that's why Mrs C sent us through it when she could have just teleported us here. And before you ask. Teleportation and Portal travelling are different. They might both use the space element. But the way they operate is different. Do you want me to tell you about it?} Raya continued.

The more she spoke, the more Muku believed her. A little smile appeared on his face behind the creepy helmet. He was thinking that Raya's dependable side had made an appearance again. Hopefully, it lasts longer than last time.

{Yeah, sure. Explain it to me. You've made me quite curious} Muku accepted her offer to explain to him the difference between Teleportation and Portal travelling. He really was interested.

{Okay, sure. I won't give a deep explanation though. Anyway, it's like this. Teleportation is pretty much your body getting broken down into countless little pieces and getting transported through space to your next location. This happens so quickly that your body won't register that it was actually dead for a bit. And...} Raya began by explaining Teleportation. She was about to proceed to Portals however she was interrupted.

{What?! You're telling me I was dying before when I was using Teleportation?!} Muku exclaimed in shock.

So what if there were no negative effects and he was still okay? The thought of having died a few times was still freaking scary!

{Oh come on. There's no need for such an exaggerated reaction. Like you humans say. All is well that ends well, right? Who cares if you died a few times? I died with you, but do you hear me complaining?

Now, do you want to hear about Portals or not?) Raya replied nonchalantly. It seemed she didn't care too much about having died a few times.

{Tsk, fine. Continue, please.} Muku spoke after calming down a bit. He felt his reaction was pretty normal. After all, he was human. And most humans fear death.

{Good. Now, on portals, they are a different matter...} Raya proceeded to tell Muku about how Portals work.

Of course, Muku was flying towards the outskirts during the talk. In fact, the talk was also a way of distracting himself.

And it was working. This was because Raya's analysis was correct. Many beasts were eyeing him from their hidden positions...

Chapter 247: I miss him already...

Beast Forest: Middle Zone

Muku flew forward quietly. Aware and yet unaware of the danger around him...

{So, portals do not mess with the person. They mess with space instead? Whole Teleportation moves you from point A to B. Portals fold space and put point A and B next to each other ignoring distance. Which means one just has to step through? And also Teleportation is limited by dimensions while Portals aren't. One can only teleport within a dimension. However, they can portal to other dimensions? And the reason why there was a corridor in between the two portal points when I was dragged here was because it was the link between two dimensions? Hmm, okay, I like portals more. Not only are they OP, but also won't die during the process} Muku repeated what Raya told him while adding his own comments.

{Yeah, I like portals too. However, I don't see us making them ourselves for a very long time. We might as well forget them for now. We should get used to dying. It's not the ability we want, but the ability we have} Raya replied. She was making fun of the situation a little bit. It seems she was a fan of dark humour.

{... Yeah. But how do you know so much? From what I know about you. You're not even five years old. On top of that, you were loner. Also, why do you seem so informed about human subjects?!} Muku asked a couple of questions that confused him.

From Raya's position, she shouldn't have been privy to either. Whether it be information on space travel or her reference to human-related things.

{Hehe, I'm amazing aren't I?. Well, firstly, on the matter of space travel. Unlike some other person's bloodline which only knows how to destroy. My bloodline is quite useful. It also comes with information on Space Element-related subjects. After all, it's a space-related blood...} Raya explained why she was so informed. She even took a jab at Muku's bloodline while she was at it.

Muku couldn't help but sigh. It seems reliable Raya was gone. She never stayed for long...

{Tsk, whatever. What about the other matter?} Muku asked. He chose to ignore the jab.

{Oh that? It's pretty simple actually. I sometimes get a sneak peek into your mind when you're unstable in some way. So, I'm fairly knowledgeable when it comes to human subjects. Which brings up the question, why does it seem like you're mentally fighting something?} Raya explained and asked a question that has been bothering her for a while.

{Oh, okay. As for why it seems like I'm fighting something. That's because I am. It's this damned armour. It keeps on attacking my mind. I thought I told you about it...} Muku replied.

{You did? Maybe I forgot or you only thought you did. Well, whatever. It seems you can handle it. And most importantly, it's protecting us from getting killed off. So, I'm not against it. I say it's a fair trade} Raya replied.

{Yeah, of course you'd say that. After all, it's not you who keeps on getting stabbed. While it doesn't hurt, it's freaking annoying. And I'm pretty sure if I slip up, something bad will happen. I really need to find a way to remove this thing as soon as we reach safety. Who cares about the protection?... Anyway, when are we going to make it out of the Middle Zone?!} Muku still wasn't impressed by the armour despite Raya's positive outlook.

He then asked a more important question. He had been flying for quite a while at a decent speed. And yet he still couldn't see anything other than big trees.

There was a little change though. He could finally see a few humanoid figures in the distance. It seems they stopped hiding completely after seeing that the "expert" wasn't there to kill them off.

Maybe they felt that continuing to hide when the "expert" already knew where they were was disrespectful. So, they got out of their hiding places but kept a respectful distance from Muku.

They even took it upon themselves to spread the word so that no beast attacks him. After all, what if he got angry from being attacked by an ant and killed them all off? They weren't willing to take that chance.

So, unknowingly, the many R5s and R6s insured Muku's safety as he travelled through the forest. One can't help but wonder what they would do if they found out that he was just a LR3 human brat.

{Hmm, from what I see. It shouldn't be long before we make it out. These types of trees are usually found at the barrier between the Middle Range and the Outskirts. So, I'm assuming that's where we are. Judging from your speed, we should be able to make it out in... One month, give or take} Raya gave Muku her estimate.

{One month! What the hell?! And how do you know?!} Muku almost fell from the sky due to shock.

One had to know that he was travelling at a speed multiple times faster than any plane or jet. Yet it would still take him a month?! That's absurd!

{Actually, that's only if we don't stop. Which I highly suggest. Stopping might make them antsy. Which would be dangerous for us. As for how I know. I once travelled deep into this forest when I was younger. It actually gave me trauma which I only recently managed to get rid of. Don't be fooled by their docile appearances. Those creatures are ruthless beasts. The only reason I made it out was because I was too weak for them to waste their time with me. Hell, I was too weak to even play with. I wasn't equal to even an ant in their eyes. So, successfully got out after realising the dangerous situation I was in. And I witnessed some horrific things on my way out. Anyway, just trust my estimate. In fact, we're actually lucky. I'll have you know, just the outskirts of the Beast Forest are bigger than your whole world by a few times. If we had been thrown deeper into the forest. I doubt we would have gotten out even if we travelled nonstop for two years" Raya replied. Her voice cracked a little as she recalled past events.

{Oh okay. Speaking of your trial. How was it? I only figured that you had one when you received a reward but I don't know anything about it. What did you do? Was it like mine?... Speaking of which, I think Mrs C forgot to give me those fruits she promised} Muku asked about Raya's trial as a way to change the topics.

It seems remembering her past in the forest was still quite triggering for her. Despite her claim to have gotten over her trauma. Though, he really was curious about what she did.

{Oh yeah, you're so noob I went after you and still finished before you. Anyway, my trial was pretty much the same as yours. Fighting familiar foes in a familiar environment with our abilities locked. The only difference was our final opponents. I actually fought myself if you can believe that. It got really weird after I won. Fortunately that damned ghost didn't follow me. Oh, and the ten fruits she promised are in here. There's a timer on them. It seems they'll only come out after we leave this world. I thought you knew about it. Which is why I said nothing} Raya replied.

{Oh, okay... She really thought of everything, huh?} That's all Muku said. The latter part of what Raya said about her trial made no sense to him. However, he didn't ask anymore. She didn't seem to want to say anymore about it.

He then indirectly complimented Mrs C. If she hadn't done what she did, he would have had to go around with the fruits in his hands for two years. Which would have probably led to some trouble.

With that, Muku and Raya went silent for a bit. Muku chose to solely focus on leaving the Middle Range. It was too dangerous. Who knows when the beasts will decide to prob him. So, the sooner he left the better...

Whoosh!

With a speed that would have broken his world's old speed barrier a few times. He flew forward. He put everything he had into flying...

.....

Room Zero...

Mrs C and the white haired lady from before could be seen sitting on chairs while looking at the screen from before.

Surprisingly enough, the screen didn't just show things in the trial ground. It was actually showing Muku who was flying through the Beast Forest.

"You didn't answer me" The white-haired lady said. Another thing which stood out about her other than her hair was her eyes. They were flaming yellow with slits at their centre. Just like Raya's, if not deeper and more profound.

"Neither did you" Mrs C retorted.

"Tsk, be that way. Cowered" The White-haired lady spoke.

"At least I didn't pretend to be my child's ghost" Mrs C retorted again.

Her expression aura was different from what they were when Muku was around. She had become a lot colder. Just like she had been at the start when Muku saw her. It seems she was only goofy because he was around.

"Like forcing your way into being his adoptive mother is any better. Shameless" The white-haired lady threw her own retort.

"Do you want to be turned into a real ghost?" Mrs C threatened coldly. She thought that the white-haired lady was getting too comfortable. Did she get the wrong idea after seeing her interaction with her son and think she had become soft? If that was the case, she might as well kill her off to prove her wrong.

"Please don't. I'm sorry. If you'll excuse me. I have something to do" The white-haired lady immediately backed off and apologised. She disappeared from her seat soon after. She ran away...

"Sigh... I miss him already..." Mrs C spoke to herself while looking at the screen. Her eyes didn't move away from Muku even when she was arguing with the white-haired lady...

Chapter 248: Audrey vs. the Flaming Cheetah!

Back on The Blue Planet: Three Months Later...

Boom!

Bang!

"Cough! Cough! Argh. This hurts so bad. However, I won't stop now. I promised myself that I will be a lot stronger when he comes back after all. And that means I'll have to take your life" Audrey spoke to herself as she dislodged herself from the tree she had smashed into.

Her resolute eyes were locked onto a five-metre-tall beast. It looked a lot like a cheetah besides its crimson body with red flames burning on its back. Its spots were still black like a normal cheetah's. Its eyes were a glowing red in colour.

From its build, it was easy to figure out that it was a speed-type beast. A speedy one too... Which it was. It left trails of fire wherever it passed. Despite its size, it could blitz all over the place.

Then again, consider its rank. It actually wasn't that big at all. After all, it was a LR3 beast. Such beasts were usually ten-plus metres tall. It seems that even as a beast, cheetahs will always have a smaller body than most. Such was the sacrifice they had to make for their speed...

Anyway, as a Rank Three. Its strength was equal to Audrey's. Which was both a blessing and a curse for her.

This was because their domains cancelled each other out. So, neither could use their cheat skills which only worked in their domains.

The battle became more physical than magical due to that. Which was because both could easily dodge normal spells cast by the other outside domains.

In normal cases, Audrey would be happy in a situation. A situation where her's and the opponent's domain cancelled each other out. After all, she was quite fast. Unfortunately, for obvious reasons, she didn't have the speed advantage in the current situation.

That solely belonged to the cheetah in their current exchange. Her beat-up condition was proof of that. The cheetah had landed at least five times the amount of hits she had landed on it, on her.

She would have long been killed off if it weren't for her blood armour. Though that wouldn't save her for much longer. After all, some of the blood would get burned away every time the two parties clashed.

At present, she was only left with enough blood to cover the vital parts. Her legs and arms were completely exposed. There were already some scratch marks and burn marks on her arms.

She was seeing the shortcoming of not being able to create her element out of thin air like the others. It really sucked and felt unfair. Sure, she could do a lot more things than most, but still...

Only if she could use her domain. She could create blood in there after all...

"Tsk, you could at least roar or something. Am I so easily dismissible to you? Whatever, you can die in silence then..." Audrey who had become a lot more irritable in the past few months spoke again.

While she still behaved normally around the girls, she would completely switch personalities when outside. She'd completely let herself go and just vent. Yet, no matter how much she vented. She never felt any better. Maybe she'll only feel better once Muku is standing in front of her again...

Anyway, she rushed forward the moment she finished speaking. The beast, she had decided to call Flaming Cheetah just looked on as she approached.

There was a playful look in her eyes. Audrey's struggle was all a game to it. Who cared that their domains were equal in strength? That didn't affect the battle at all. After all, even without its domain, it could end the human whenever it felt like it.

The difference in their natural abilities was just that big. So, it decided to play around with its food a bit before ending it. It was bored and had nothing better to do afterwards anyway.

"Roooooar!" The cheetah roared just when Audrey was about to reach it. Flaming arrows appeared around it and shot at Audrey.

This of course forced the lady to prematurely end her charge and dodge instead.

Glee appeared in the Flaming Cheetah's eyes as it saw this. It quite liked seeing her jump all over the place as she dodged its fire arrows. In its head, it was probably singing "dance monkey, dance"

"How dare you play around with me?! I'll show you!" Audrey angrily shouted.

She made a crimson shield with some of the blood she had left. She began charging forward again. This time she blocked the attacks with the shield instead of dodging them.

She didn't care that each time the shield was hit, some of the blood got burned away. All she cared about was reaching the arrogant beast.

Her efforts fruit as she reached the cheetah. Even though she reached it, it was still as nonchalant as ever. After all, it had burnt away most of her blood. And it knew that she couldn't simply create more like it did with its flames.

So, it was curious to see what she wanted to do. It also wanted to see her expression after it foils whatever she was planning. It was smart enough to find joy in the enemy's despair, after all. Hell, it quite enjoyed it. Just like it had enjoyed the meat of a few humans before...

Stab!

Audrey created a spear with her remaining blood. She held it above her head with her left hand and stabbed towards the Cheetah's face. She was obviously targeting its eyes.

The plan was so obvious that the cheetah saw through it instantly. It then raised its paw and slapped the blood spear away.

Swipe!

Slash!

It immediately wanted to give Audrey a smug look. However, before it could do that it felt something familiar. Something it hadn't felt for a long time... It felt pain. And it hurt a lot!

It instantly looked at the place where the pain was coming from. Its eyes widened to the max from what it saw. Or what it didn't see, to be exact... It's leg, the very leg it had used to smack Audrey's spear was missing.

Blood was gushing out of the wound like crazy. The sight perplexed it for a bit. It couldn't understand what the hell was going on. When and how did it lose its leg?!

There was only one answer... Audrey! The moment it realised that, anger unlike any other it had ever felt before rose from inside it.

Its eyes immediately began looking for Audrey. It didn't take long for them to land on her.

She was standing more than ten meters away from it. It seemed she had made her retreat immediately after making her move.

However, its eyes didn't focus on her for long. They focused on what she was holding. In her left hand, there it was... Its missing leg!

The worst part was how she had sunk her fangs deep into it. She was drinking its blood from the leg. It didn't take long for the leg to wilt. Audrey threw it to the ground soon after.

"Argh! This tastes horrible. I guess normal blood just doesn't do it for me after tasting his blood. I miss him even more now... This is all your fault, you and your trash blood. Well, at the very least, it seems your blood has some use despite the horrible taste" Audrey cursed the cheetah out. All the injuries were quickly closing up as she did so.

She wasn't able to completely heal herself. However, all the serious injuries from before were now minor, and the minor ones were gone. She could pretty much fight to the best of her abilities again. After all, she no longer had serious injuries which held her back from moving too much.

The flaming cheetah looked on as she did her thing. The look in its eyes was getting darker and darker as it did so. How could it not be angrier when it just watched its food eat its body part?

However, it didn't let its anger consume it. It had to figure out how it lost its leg after all. And it didn't take long for it to figure that out.

Its eyes focused on Audrey's right hand. No, not her right hand, but the hand's nails. The hand's more than a metre long, sharp and metallic silver-looking nails... It instantly realised how it had lost its leg. Audrey had cut it off with those nails. To think she had a card she was hiding all this time she was getting beaten. How hateful! Such a human thing to do!

"Hehe, how do you like my cute nails? You should be honoured you know. I don't normally use them. I don't need to. So you should feel proud for pushing me this far. As a reward, I'll kill you as painlessly as I can" Audrey who still had her fangs out and a bloody mouth spoke.

Her eyes weren't silver anymore. They had turned red like the blood she controls and drinks. She had a creepy smile on her face as she did so. Quite frankly she looked so creepy that the cheetah was freaked out a bit.

However, it quickly shook that feeling off. There was no need to fear someone who only succeeded in landing a serious attack through cunningness and luck.

Its anger instantly rose again after that realisation. It was time to finish the fight. Its wound which it had been slowly burning shut with its flames was also taken care of.

So, what if it couldn't use its speed to kill Audrey anymore? It could still burn her to a crisp!...

Chapter 249: You're already dead

"Roooooar!" Without a warning, the Flaming Cheetah let out a breath attack.

It spewed flames all over the place like a flamethrower.

Boom!

The move was so unexpected that Audrey was forced to jump up into the sky to dodge. It was the only option left. There was no time to run back. And unlike the concentrated breath attacks she had come across before. The one from the Flaming Cheetah covered a wider area the further it went from the beast. Audrey who was just ten meters away from it was in its reach, which she estimated was around twenty meters. This was based on the distance the flames covered.

Anyway, the cheetah didn't stop spewing out flames when she jumped up. It actually saw it as a great chance to burn her away. After all, she couldn't get away in the air no, could she?

Bang!

Just as the cheetah was adjusting its head's position so that it could roast Audrey. Something hit the side of its head hard. This forced its head to go the other way.

It not only missed Audrey with its attack but its breath attack was also ended. Audrey took this time to land on the ground and retreat further back.

As soon as she reached around twenty meters away from the cheetah. A large crimson fist speedily flew her way and stopped just a few centimetres away from her.

It was the same object which hit the cheetah. She had turned the spear from before into a fist at the very last moment. She would have been a goner if not for it.

"Woah! That was way too close for comfort. You really have guts for trying to do such a thing. You'd definitely not have lived past one year and nine months if you had killed me. Well, that would have been better than dying now I guess. Unfortunately for you, you missed your chance. You're already dead..." Audrey continued taunting the beast from a distance.

It was a really weird thing to do. Taunting a silent enemy. Maybe it was just another way she vented.

Anyway, the moment she said "you're already dead". The flaming Cheetah's eyes widened. It immediately looked down at its severed leg.

It suddenly felt a weird tingling from the sealed-off wound. The tingling kept on rising higher and higher until all of its body felt tingly.

Snap!

Suddenly it heard a snap. It looked at Audrey in the distance. Before it could make sense of why she had snapped her fingers...

Boom!

Its leg stump exploded!

Boom! BOOM! BOOOOM!

The explosions didn't stop there. Its remaining three legs exploded soon after. Then its legless body exploded into a bloody mess before it even reached the ground. Flesh flew all over the place. Eerily enough, all the flesh was bone dry. There was no blood on it at all!

All the blood stayed in the place where the cheetah stood before. It has turned into a blood mist, but it soon gathered into a liquid blob. The blob then flew towards Audrey.

It merged with the fist from before after reaching her...

"Well, after burning away so much of my blood. The least you could do was give me yours, right?... Though I have to say, what a gruesome way to die. Oh, look at that, you even left me a gift!" Audrey spoke to herself as she walked in a certain direction.

She had noticed a crimson beast core. It was without a doubt the Flaming Cheetah's beast core. She could leave the meat, but she could never leave the core...

As for why the cheetah had suddenly exploded like that? It was pretty obvious actually. Audrey had sent some of her mana into the cheetah's body when she cut off its leg before. And as we all know, never let Audrey's mana come into contact with your blood otherwise you're dead!

That's because it only takes a little of Audrey's mana for her to gain control of all the blood in your body. And frighteningly enough, the whole process takes less than a minute. Even worse was how one won't be able to notice it until the very last moment. That is unless they were closely monitoring their own body from the start. But who would randomly monitor their body during a battle when they have no reason to?

After all, it's not like they'd know that Audrey can control their blood as well. Especially when it's still in their body.

"Sigh, why did I have to cut off its leg? It would have made a perfect puppet and hunting partner for a few days if it had all its body parts" Audrey regretfully spoke as she walked toward the beast core.

She would have definitely made the cheetah into one of her corrupted beings if she had a choice. Unfortunately for her, the situation had been dire...

She soon reached the beast core. As she crouched down to pick it up. She sensed some movement.

Whoosh!

Before she could react, a flaming cheetah slightly smaller than the one she dealt with was upon her. Its mouth was wide open. And in less than a second it would definitely bite down on her head. Which will kill her off instantly.

The worst part was... There was nothing she could do about it.

The cheetah was too fast. She didn't have enough time to react. After all, in her unstable state, she had made the mistake of completely letting her guard down in an unsafe area.

And it seems that the blunder was going to cost her her life. It was going to be her last and biggest regret.

There was nothing she could do but stare death in the eyes as her life was claimed by it. Then...

Crackle! BOOOOM!

"I will not lose anymore loved ones" A voice was heard from within some white smoke.

"You say that, but... Look at what you did!" Audrey replied to the voice. She shouted at the end. How could she not when she was hanging from a tree upside down?

Her face and outfit were blackened. Even her hair was giving off a burnt smell. To think she had avoided getting burnt by the Flaming Cheetah only to get burnt by an ally.

Crackle!

"Oops! Sorry about that. I had to act rashly so I couldn't properly control the lightning" The voice was heard again. This time the owner was beside Audrey on the tree. The owner, who was obviously Chloe was helping Audrey up from her position.

"No, it's fine. I was just saying. I don't mind. In fact, I'm glad you did. After all, you saved my life. If you hadn't been there I would have definitely been on my way to heav... Maybe hell. I can't tell anyone. Anyway, thanks" Audrey thanked Chloe as they got down from the tree.

"No, it's okay. I was just passing by" Chloe replied while shaking her hands in front of her.

Audrey just smiled and nodded. She didn't expose the fact that she had sensed Chloe's presence around her many times in the past month.

She hadn't sensed her on that day though. It seemed Chloe had gotten better at hiding. That or she had been too focused on her battle to notice her.

The duo quietly walked toward the explosion point. The smoke had cleared up. Now, there wasn't just a beast core there. There was also a headless body of the Flaming Cheetah which ambushed Audrey.

"Woah! One attack! Aren't you a little too strong?" Audrey exclaimed.

"Hehe. No, it was just a lucky shot" Chloe replied with an embarrassed expression on her face.

"Luck doesn't blow a Rank Three's head off but okay. Let's check and see if it also has a beast core..." Audrey chose not to argue with the modest girl.

She just patted her head and walked toward the flaming cheetah's(FC) body. She then sent her mana into it like the previous one. This time she didn't make it explode. She never liked doing such a gruesome thing if she could avoid it after all.

She would have used another method if it hadn't been the fastest and easiest way to kill the FC from before.

Anyway, she corrupted all the blood inside the body. Which put it under her control. She then made it all come out. Which left the body looking like a dried-up husk.

After that, she stepped back. Chloe then stepped forward. She held her hand up. Clouds began gathering above her. Then...

Crackle! BOOM!

A thick lightning bolt descended and consumed the dried-up corpse. More smoke rose from the impact. It also cleared up soon enough.

Chloe then picked up the core which was left in the hole her attack left. The body had been completely destroyed. She wasn't worried about destroying the core by mistake since it could only be destroyed by having its energy used up.

Interestingly, no matter how low-ranked a beast core was. It was indestructible when attacked. The only way to destroy a core was to expend its energy.

"Well, it seems someone is in a good mood today" Audrey spoke with a wry smile on her face. She didn't expect Chloe would use such an extreme and wasteful attack for such a small attack.

"I uh... Sorry," Chloe didn't know how to defend herself.

There was no way she would admit that she got excited after getting her patted. Which made her feel like showing off a bit. That was just too embarrassing.

"It's fine. Let's go back" Audrey said with a motherly smile.

Chloe nodded to her words and the two went on their way. They used a method of travelling they had gotten really acquainted with in recent history... Walking.

Life without Muku really sucked!...

Chapter 250: Barrier core and Chloe's recovery

Back at the mansion...

There was something different about it. It was still seated in the same place as before Muku left. It still looked the same. However, there was something new around it. And that was... A green barrier?!

That's right! The mansion now had the same barrier which was found on safe zones!

As for how that was possible, it was actually an interesting story. A month before, Freya who was out hunting found herself at the NL Base's ruins.

No one from the base had survived. So, it was completely abandoned. And there weren't any people around it who felt like moving in.

Of course, a few people had spotted it. However, none had the guts to move into a destroyed safe zone. Like, was it even still a safe zone when it had been destroyed with the barrier intact?!

Anyway, Freya figured that she might as well search for any useful appliances left over at the base after the destruction.

However, the moment she stepped through the barrier. A prompt rang out in her head. It went like...

[Barrier core found. Do you wish to harvest it? Warning: The base's residents will be notified of your actions. Caution is advised]

Of course, Freya didn't hesitate in making her decision. There was no reason to hesitate. She had been racking her brain on where she could find a barrier core and she had found it.

Who cares about the warning? Everyone was dead! Would the Messenger notify them in the afterlife or something? Will they haunt her afterwards?... Well, honestly, after thinking about it like that. She couldn't help but second-guess herself for a split second.

However, she still chose to take it. She realised how stupid her worry was. Despite everything that was going on. There was no proof that ghosts exist. So, there was no need to hesitate... Of course, she only thought like that because she didn't know about the Monarch's "ghostly state" before it was erased by Muku. And there was also Fake Raya's "ghost"

Then again, they weren't really ghosts in the traditional sense. So, it didn't really matter.

The moment Freya decided to harvest the barrier core, cracks began appearing all over the barrier.

The sound the cracks made when they appeared made it seem like it was made out of glass. This went on for a few seconds until the barrier finally broke apart.

And it sounded like the shattering of a mirror. The broken pieces fell to the ground. Which gave Freya a great scare. Fortunately, they disappeared into nothingness before reaching the ground. Which she was glad about.

She wasn't too keen on knowing whether they could injure her or not. She wasn't that adventurous.

Anyway, a glowing green stone which was shaped like a hand-sized rectangular prism emerged out of the group after all the shards disappeared.

It floated in front of Freya giving off a gentle glow. Oddly enough, Freya felt safer just from looking at it. Which made no sense since it wasn't providing her with a barrier at the moment.

She overlooked that weird feeling and reached out. She grabbed it with both her hands and immediately ran in a certain direction.

The core wasn't something she could casually carry around while hunting after all. She had to take it home immediately.

However, she didn't run long before two figures appeared in front of her. It was Emily and Elsa. The three of them had come out hunting together.

There was no way the ground would let Freya or Elsa go out alone in the current world after all. The two were still just R2s in a world where R3s were everywhere. Not to mention R4s.

Fortunately, R4s were always humongous and easy to spot. So, the ground would always see them from a distance away. The R3s were still the main problem...

Anyway, Freya told the sisters about what had happened. The trio then agreed to cut that day's hunting session short. The core was just that agent of a matter.

After some time the trio made it back. A meeting was held. And everyone agreed to try out the core immediately. It was much-needed protection in a situation where they couldn't just pick up their mansion and split like before.

And so, Freya immediately got to work. It didn't take much effort to install the core. There was already a slot for it after all. And from that day. The mansion had a barrier.

Their barrier was even more secure than the safe zone barriers. This was because Freya had the authority to decide who entered into it. Which was different from the safe zone barriers which let anyone in as long as they were human. That had caused problems for many safe zones in the past.

One of the bases which suffered from the vague protection system was the Stadium. Tom, Dom and many others lost their lives due to that after all. And even before that, they had been attacked by the punk gang which Muku took care of.

To avoid such problems... Even though there was probably no one who could do anything to them anyway. Freya made it so that only her teammates could pass through the barrier.

She considered pranking Jade by excluding her since she still hadn't shown up in two months. However, she quickly gave up on the idea. Who knows if Jade finds out and beats her up when she goes outside to hunt?

Such a thing was definitely not beyond Jade's means. Especially the new Jade. She had sensed her in the mansion a few times. The one time that she wanted to notify the others she felt an invisible force crash down on her. It didn't hurt her or anything, it just made her fall to her knees.

It was probably a warning from Jade to mind her own business. And from that day onwards. She dared not antagonise the girl.

Anyway, that's how the mansion got its barrier...

...

Audrey and Chloe entered the empty mansion. It wasn't yet late, so the others were probably still hunting outside or doing some other thing.

The ground has gotten used to mostly only seeing each other in the mornings and at night. And with the barrier, the mansion would get completely abandoned during the day.

Chloe immediately headed upstairs leaving Audrey behind. Maybe she was still too embarrassed about what she did. Or maybe she just felt awkward.

Well, whatever the reason was, Audrey quietly looked on. She just looked at Chloe's back as she left.

She was just happy that Chloe was finally healing. The first month was the worst. The girl wouldn't eat and would cry all day.

She literally went a whole month without food. Which was definitely bad for her. It was at that point that Layla decided to take matters into her own hands.

She went up to Chloe's room. Budged in and told Chloe that she would break a bone in her body for every day Chloe doesn't eat. And before Chloe could even react to the words, Layla grabbed her own finger and broke it in front of Chloe.

The sight freaked Chloe out so much that she screamed. It was an expected response to Layla's brutal means. Especially when she wasn't given time to react.

Chloe ran to Layla immediately and tried pulling her outside. Her goal was to go see Hope so that Layla could get healed. However, Layla refused to move until Chloe promised that she would start eating again.

Chloe promised on the spot. That's when Layla let herself get dragged away to Hope. After getting healed, she took Chloe to the kitchen where a meal was already prepared for her.

Chloe ate everything with tears in her eyes. It was obvious that she was forcing herself. Layla hated seeing the sight. She hated the method she used, however, she just couldn't watch anymore.

She had tried to let Chloe recover on her own time. However, it seemed Chloe had been too broken. She couldn't put herself back together. She needed a little push. A push Layla was happy to provide for her sworn sister no matter the cost.

After that, Layla moved into Chloe's room. Chloe tried to refuse. However, Layla refused to be pushed away. No matter where Chloe went, she was right behind her.

Things continued like that for a few days until Chloe finally gave up. She agreed to sleep in the same room as Layla. That night she felt a warmth she had never felt before. Or more precisely, she hadn't felt it for a long time. She had completely forgotten about it. It was the warmth of having another person next to you.

And for the first time in a while. Her heart felt at ease. Without knowing it, she had already reached out and hugged Layla who hugged her back.

She then heard Layla whisper, "You're not alone and you'll never be alone" in her ear.

Like a broken dam, tears flowed out of her eyes uncontrollably. She cried herself to sleep that night.

The next day she woke up feeling a lot better. She felt so much better that she joined Layla for a hunt.

From then on, the two sisters were inseparable for a while. It was around that time that Audrey came back into the picture. Of course, she had been supporting Layla in the background. Just like the others.

Anyway, she began giving Chloe the motherly love Layla couldn't. Layla could only give sisterly love after all.

For whatever reason, it didn't take long for Chloe to get attached to Audrey. She tried to hide it. But it was pretty obvious to everyone. Nobody said anything though...

It was around that time that she began secretly following Audrey around on hunts. Maybe she was afraid she would lose another parent?

Well, if that was the reason, then she was right to do so. Audrey might have died if she hadn't been around...