

## **Few Wives 251**

Chapter 251: Still not going to talk?

Somewhere else in the forest that was once a city...

"Are you still not going to talk to me?" Emily asked the figure hiding in the trees in front of her.

It had been three months since she had seen Jade last. As if that wasn't bad enough, she could always feel Jade's gaze on her back whenever she went out. It wouldn't happen every day, but when it did, it was apparent.

She would call out to Jade. Asking her to appear, or say something at the very least. Yet, no reply ever came back. In fact, the feeling of being watched would disappear immediately after.

Which left her confused as to whether she imagined it or Jade had left. Either way, Jade was being a real jerk. So what if her state was unstable or whatever? She didn't care, all she wanted was to have a talk with her friend after what seemed to have been an aeon since they last spoke.

Muku being gone was already painful enough. Yet Jade had to make it worse. Her unwillingness to interact with the others made it seem like she was gone as well. Which Emily hated a lot.

And she had reached her breaking point. So, she started coming up with ways of tracking Jade.

At first, it seemed impossible. Until one day when she was cooking for the group. She got lost in thought while staring at the grill Muku had created. It had turned red from her fire... Her fire's heat.

The idea instantly formed in her mind after that keyword, "heat". She was a fire mage, humans emitted heat. It wasn't overwhelming heat, but it was apparent enough. And she, as a fire mage, should be able to see that heat right?

With such thoughts in her mind, she quickly finished preparing the meat. After which, she left the rest to whoever was on duty that day. She went to her room instead.

Her objective was clear. It was to create a spell which allowed her to see heat. That way, even if Jade hides behind tree leaves and such, she would still be visible to her. Then she'll see how she gets away from her.

The spell was a lot harder to create than she expected. It actually took her more than a month to create it. And even worse, Jade hadn't appeared around her for weeks. It was almost like she knew that Emily had prepared something. Maybe her Beast instincts warned her or something.

But Emily didn't falter, she patiently waited. And her patience finally paid off. On a normal day like any other, which was that day. She went out hunting, and after a long time, the familiar feeling of being watched appeared.

Her eyes instantly turned red from golden yellow. She had activated the spell which she termed "heat vision". And the final result actually surprised her, in a good way...

Anyway, the moment she cast the spell. She looked directly at Jade who was hiding behind some dense tree leaves. She immediately asked Jade if she was ready to talk.

Everything happened so suddenly that Jade was caught off guard. It took her a second to react. The first thing that came to her mind after catching up while looking at Emily's burning red eyes full of anger was, "run!"

And so, she did. At least she tried too. She turned around about to jump away. Then out of nowhere she lost her balance and plunged to the ground.

And before she did, she heard a weird sound. It was almost like a beam had been fired her way. However, she had already fallen before she could make sense of the sound.

"Domain: Sea of Flames!" Before Jade even reached the ground. Emily deployed her domain. It was a compact version which only covered twenty or so meters.

What it lacked in size, it made up for in concentrated energy. Energy that was all ready to strike down at Jade if she made the wrong move. Emily was really serious this time.

"I said, are you still not going to talk to me?" Emily spoke slowly and calmly as she walked toward the entrapped Jade. All that was left in the domain were the two of them and her flames. Everything else had been burned away already. The trees, the grass, and even the ground would have turned to lava if Emily hadn't held herself back.

"You know Em, it's kind of hypocritical that you used to talk about the importance of trees and such before the apocalypse. Yet, here you are, destroying them all without a care in the world" Jade who had landed on her feet finally spoke to Emily.

"Even old deserts are probably covered with countless trees by now. So who cares if a few trees get destroyed? And is that all you have to say after what you've done?" Emily replied coldly then steered the conversation back on track.

"Sigh, where has my cute best friend gone? And what do you mean by that? What have I done?" Jade replied to Emily who was now standing just a few metres away from her.

The way she spoke was so relaxed and casual that one might think that she really didn't know anything. And it made Emily's anger burn even more furiously.

"You left" Emily spoke coldly again. Her eyes still glowed red like she was a dangerous beast that would pounce at any moment.

"Can we not do this, please?" Jade spoke. Her voice was slightly more emotional this time. It almost seemed like she was begging.

"Did you talk to me when I asked you to? When I begged you to? No! You just looked on quietly and left! So why should I listen to you and do what you want?" Emily replied. Her voice was getting louder and louder with each word she spoke.

It was clear to see that she had been trying to suppress her emotions. However, she was failing dismally. The emotions were just too strong for her to contain. After all, she was never good at containing her emotions in the first place.

"..." Jade remained quiet. She probably didn't know what to say.

"What? Am I not worthy of even a fake excuse? If you think you can quietly let this pass. Then you're solely mistaken. You're not going anywhere until you've given me a satisfying explanation" Emily spoke as she took a step closer to Jade.

It seemed she was ready to literally beat an explanation out of Jade. Seeing the rarely seen violent side of Emily quickly taking over, Jade couldn't help but take a step back. It was really hard to reason with Emily when she was like this...

Suddenly a random thought formed in her head. Maybe a person's nature affected their abilities? After all, the current Emily looked quite fiery. Her element fit her the most when she was like this... Well, whatever, it wasn't the time to think about such things. She had to find a way to calm Emily down or she might really get burned to a crisp.

"Emily, please calm d..." Jade was speaking when she was cut off.

"Shut up! Don't tell me to calm down. You know, Iris said that we should let you be because your state of mind is unstable due to your bloodline or something. Well, I don't buy it. You don't seem unstable to me. I know you're in control. You're completely aware of what you're doing. You're hurting us on purpose, you're hurting me on purpose. Wait, is that the instability? Do you like hurting me now? Yes, that has to be it. The Jade I know wouldn't do that. My best friend wouldn't do that to me" Emily spoke, shouting even. Tears were streaming down her cheeks at the end of it.

Tears gathered in Jade's eyes as she looked on. She could clearly see that Emily was hurt. In fact, Emily was hurt by Muku's departure. Her own actions were pretty much no different to stabbing an open wound with a rough-edged knife.

She knew it, she didn't want to do it but...

"You see this? This is why I left. Emily, I love you. I love you like the sister I never had. I love everyone as well. I want to be with you all. But I can't. I need to be stronger. A lot stronger. However, I can't do that with you all around. I'd relax. I'd put in less effort than I should. I would lose my drive. And I can't do that. I refuse to do that. If I do that, I will lose him again. We will lose him again. I won't let that happen! So please Emily, understand me. Let me go!" Jade replied, The more she spoke, the louder her voice sounded. She was exposing more and more of what was in her heart with every word.

The tears that had only gathered in her eyes before had begun falling somewhere along the lines.

"Oh? So that's your reason? That's your reason for leaving? You think we make you weaker? You think you're the only one who misses him a lot? You think only you want to get a lot stronger so that you never lose him again? Haha... Hahaha. Don't bullshit me! You left because you're weak! You couldn't face his memories which have seeped into every corner of that mansion. You couldn't take passing by his door every day knowing that he wasn't there! But I could! We could! You Jade, you're just too weak! Pathetic! Using us as excuses for your own shortcomings" Emily called out, insulted and cursed Jade. Most of which she had never done before.

"...." Jade was left speechless again. She really didn't know what to say.

"Okay, so you say your path was the only way to gain strength, huh? Well, prove it" Emily spoke after a moment of silence.

Before Jade could even react, Emily's eyes glowed even more intensely. Then...

Pew!

Chapter 252: Emily Vs Jade rematch!

The sound of a laser was heard!

The same sound Jade heard before. And this time she clearly saw the source. It was Emily's eyes. The girl could actually shoot laser beams out of her eyes now!

As for how, since when and why. Jade didn't know. All she knew was that a laser beam was headed her way. And it was upon her before she could react.

Boom! Bang!

The beam hit Jade directly in the gut. A strong force knocked her off her feet and threw her to the ground a distance away.

"You know, I could have burned a hole through your stomach if I wanted to. So now tell me, where is the strength you left us for?" Emily spoke while walking closer to Jade. Her eyes were still glowing red. It seemed that she wasn't done with Jade just yet.

"Cough! Cough! Come on Emily. We both know that was a cheap shot. It doesn't prove anything. It was a cool move though. I'm quite envious actually. However, it's going to take more than that to change my mind. Especially after all the hurtful words you said" Jade spoke as she got up off the ground.

She acknowledged Emily's move though. Even if it was a cheap shot as she pointed out. It still managed to knock the wind out of her body before she could react. Which was an impressive achievement considering the reflexes and senses she had.

Maybe it was because Emily attacked without killing intent that she was caught off guard. Well, whatever, she wasn't going to be cheap-shotted again. And that's all that mattered. She was also not going to back down from her stance. She had chosen her path and she was going to stick to it.

"It's good that you aren't backing down yet. I won't get to beat you up if you did after all" Emily replied. She was already getting to shoot out another laser.

Jade didn't wait for her to act. She jumped out of the way before the laser was sent out. And so, she successfully avoided it. However...

Bang!

"Argh!" Jade screamed in pain as her body fell into the distance.

"Come on now. Don't tell me you forgot that you were in my domain? What a rookie mistake" Emily spoke as she stood in the distance.

There was no need to pretend to walk toward Jade anymore. After all, everything had been exposed.

What happened was, when Jade avoided the laser beam, a fist made from flames appeared just in front of her. And before she could react, it punched her hard in the gut. It all happened pretty much within an instant. And that was all thanks to Emily's domain. She just had to think up and attack and it would appear.

There was no need to gather power or say the spell out loud to help with visualisation. The domain took care of everything. All Emily needed to do was think up ways to punish Jade.

"I didn't think you'd actually turn into a dirty fighter in just three months" Jade said as she got up again. Her hand was grabbing her stomach. She was surely in pain after taking two strong hits.

However, her eyes showed no pain. They were focused on Emily. Ready to spot her next attack. She had been through worse pain in the past three months after all. Her current fight with Emily was just a spar for her. After all, there wasn't even the faintest hint of killing intent coming from her opponent.

And she had long learned that one can't fully display their capabilities without killing intent...

"I'll do whatever it takes to beat sense into you" Emily replied. There was no shame in her words. She wasn't ashamed of what she was doing so why would she be ashamed?

"Well, it's my turn now. I still need to get you back for that defeat from before after all..." Jade replied. And Beast Aura began leaking out of her body as she did.

"Tsk" Emily clicked her tongue as she looked on. She already knew that her domain probably wouldn't be able to completely suppress Jade.

Everyone in their group didn't conform to common logic after all. Which was really odd since even they couldn't suppress each other completely.

"Roooooar!" Jade finished her transformation while Emily was stuck in thought.

It was almost instantaneous, so Emily didn't have much time to interrupt. She wasn't expecting it anyway. It had been too long since Jade used it.

That form... A giant tiger, even bigger than it was last time. It now stood around seven metres tall. The stripes were still black, however, the rest of it was red for obvious reasons. It was made out of Jade's BA after all. Since it was now red, then it would also be red.

Its eyes were still as green as ever though. Long and sharp fangs coupled with sharp claws. It looked way more solid and intimidating than last time too.

"How are you able to do that under my domain's suppression?" Emily asked. She was really surprised. She was expecting Jade to be able to use her abilities to some extent. But she didn't expect her to use them as if her domain didn't exist.

"I already told you..." Jade replied.

Her reply was hinting at her departure from the team. Which Emily understood very well. And honestly, at that point, she was starting to accept that Jade might be right.

Maybe Jade really needed to go away from them to be able to get stronger. However, so what if it was true? She refused to acknowledge it.

And she won't have to as long as she can beat Jade in the fight. She was going to throw everything she had at Jade until she admitted defeat. She was going to burn away Jade's Beast Aura until there was nothing left.

Just like she did last time. She was going to prove to Jade that solitude wasn't the answer. That she didn't have to leave them to get stronger. They could get stronger together. Just like they had always done up to that point.

"We'll see if that's true" Emily said as she got ready to unleash everything she had at Jade.

With just a thought, the golden sky was covered by multiple huge fireballs. The heat radiating from them was so intense that even normal people would be able to see the waves from a distance away. Let alone Jade.

Seeing them, she couldn't help but gulp down some saliva in nervousness. She watched the multiple huge balls slowly descend. She was ready to dodge them when they reached her.

So what if they covered the whole sky above her? She would just jump above them when they reached the ground. Emily probably forgot that she could fly now, huh?

With such thoughts, Jade smirked inside her beast tiger form. To her, Emily was still naive as ever. She might have improved a bit, but she was still naive nonetheless...

"Oh n..." Jade exclaimed. But before she could finish...

BOOOOOOM!

A loud explosion which was the result of multiple big fireballs exploding went off. The worst part was that she was the centre of the explosion.

She had been tricked by Emily again. She expected an explosion from above. But that didn't happen. The balls actually disappeared in front of her eyes. And within the same moment, they were upon her from every direction.

They sandwiched her. Or boxed her even. Then collided and exploded. Of course, there was no escape from such a scenario. Who cared if she could fly when there was nowhere to fly to?

Emily waved her hand with a calm expression. Everything cleared up instantly. It was her domain after all.

Jade's figure was reviewed again. Yes, Jade's figure. Not Beast Jade's figure. The tiger had been burned away for a second time. This time it didn't even get to move despite looking stronger, cooler and all that.

"Are you ready to come back home now? Or should I burn your clothes away as well?" Emily spoke. Her voice was a lot calmer than before. She had vented all the emotions she had been holding back for three months after all.

"I'm not gonna lie. You really have gotten stronger. Maybe you're right. Being together with the others might not translate to weakness. You're clearly proof of that. However, I'm still not changing my mind. You've chosen your path and I've chosen mine" Jade spoke calmly.

The first part of her statement made Emily smile. She felt that she had successfully achieved her goal.

That's when Jade's tone changed along with her words. And the smile on Emily's face instantly vanished.

"You..." Emily was about to shout at Jade for being hard-headed but something happened which made her stop midway.

The air around Jade changed. It all happened the moment Jade closed her eyes.

Emily couldn't put a finger on what changed. But she was certain that something was different.

The Jade standing in front of her was different from the Jade she had been a few minutes before. That's what her instincts were telling her.

That's when Jade slowly opened her eyes... One was still green. But the other, it had changed colour. It had turned red.

Not a fiery and violet red like Emily's eyes. But a calm red instead. The moment the two different coloured eyes landed on her. Emily felt her body freeze. Then...

Bang!

Jade's figure flickered. Before Emily could react, Jade was standing next to her with her fist buried in her gut... (Not that she punched a hole through Emily, obviously)

"I hope this proves to you that my decision is the right one also..."

Those were the last words Emily heard before she lost consciousness...

Chapter 253: Fool

Emily's domain broke apart as soon as she lost consciousness.

The outside world was reviewed again. Jade held Emily in her arms as she looked around the place. Her eyes widened at what she saw.

Ten dead LR3s were lying around the domain. Eerily enough, none of them showed any signs of injuries. Yet, there they were dead.

However, Jade's expression soon relaxed instead of turning graver from the weird scene.

"Sigh. I wish you two had fought longer. And I also wish she had won." Hope spoke as she sat on top of one of the dead beasts.

It was only after seeing her that Jade had calmed down. Otherwise, she would have long run away from the place with Emily.

"What? Are you not going to reply? Oh, right. Don't worry. I've already dispelled the spell. There's no need to hold your breath. I'm not the one trying to drag you back after all" Hope spoke again.

"Thank you for taking care of them" Jade finally spoke. She really thought that Hope's spell was still in effect.

While she wasn't worried about her life. She worried Hope would knock her out and drag her back home.

It was really something quite easy for Hope with her undetectable poison, after all. In fact, she was the only one Jade was wary of when it came to having the capabilities of defeating the current her.

This was because not only did Hope have tricky spells. She was also the one closest to her in terms of strength.

The truth was that Jade had long reached MR3. She was even close to PR3 actually. That's why she was able to easily defeat the LR3 Emily.

"It's cool. I got some KP too. Now I'm probably slightly behind you in rank" Hope replied with a smile on her face.

That's right, just like Jade. Hope had also long reached MR3. It was actually really easy for her with her poison to rank up. She just had to find a group of R3s and cast her "Whisperless death" and they would all die after a while. She didn't even need to use her domain.

If she had Jade's physical capabilities, she would have long reached the peak. The only thing holding her back was her limited mobility range. She couldn't go too far from the mansion since it would likely mean she wouldn't be able to return before nightfall.

Being outside at night was a big no-no for mage types. They'd easily get ambushed and killed off before they could react. After all, it wasn't like they had infinite mana and could keep their abilities deployed.

So, Hope could only circle around the area waiting for unlucky beasts to come to her. Which, fortunately, wasn't rare after the second evolution. R3s were quite numerous now.

"Can you heal her for me?" Jade asked.

"Only if you can get me all the beast cores in these beasts. Digging them out is quite tedious. Not to mention I don't know which ones have cores. I also don't want to waste mana by destroying them to expose the cores" Hope gave her condition.

Her words highlighted how much the ground was struggling without Jade. She was the only one who could tell of beast bodies had cores without even touching them after all.

"Sure. But do it after I'm done with removing the cores and have left" Jade replied as she put Emily down. She then walked toward the closest beast.

"Deal. And I have to say. You're really a great friend. You actually let her beat you up so that she can vent her emotions. I'm quite jealous of your friendship actually" Hope spoke as she walked toward Emily.

"..." Jade didn't reply. She just focused on her task. Her beast hand was already deep in the chest of one beast corpse.

"Tsk, I don't like this version of you. It's too quiet. I'm sure big brother is going to tease you about it when I tell him when he returns" Hope took a jab at Jade. Her voice got slightly softer and a little smile appeared on her face as she mentioned Muku.

Melancholy flashed passed her eyes soon after. However, she quickly suppressed it as she continued to examine Emily's condition.

"Don.. don't?" Jade wanted to strongly reject Hope's idea of wanting to tell Muku about her personality change. However, she suddenly felt dizzy. This made her stutter even though she didn't want to.

"Oh yeah, I forgot to say. You should rest for a while. Don't get into any more fights today... You do know that Emily could have won the battle if she really wanted to, right? Of course you don't. You see, her domain has a special ability. It can steal the heat from an enemy's body if she wants to be so. She can do it slowly or at once. Obviously, doing it all at once could have killed you right there and then. So, she decided to do it slowly. It would have caused muscle stiffness, confusion and quite a few other fun things if she had taken enough. However, she held back. I'm not saying she was stronger or anything. In fact, if you had been serious from the start she wouldn't have had the chance. Either way, the situation is quite fun. Both of you held out for each other. And technically you only won because you stopped holding back first" Hope began chatting on and on.

Jade had long stopped listening. She was now looking at Emily again. Her best friend. Her sister from another mother...

"Fool" She only said one word then returned to digging out the beast cores.

After a while, she was done. It took more time than she would have liked. However, it couldn't be helped. She was fighting dizziness throughout the whole process, after all.

"Can't you heal me?" Jade asked Hope as she handed over the beast cores. Out of ten beasts. Eight had cores. The drop rate was quite generous. Even if R3s generally had a higher drop rate compared to the lower ranks.

"Yes and no. Yes in the sense that I can heal your injuries from the battle. No, in the sense that I can't get rid of the dizziness. That's not from being injured. It's from losing heat. Your body should be able to fix that within a few hours" Hope explained her answer.

And before Jade could respond. She held her hand out. A familiar healing glow appeared on her hand and within a couple of seconds. Jade was completely healed. Despite everything, she hadn't actually suffered serious damage. Both due to her steadiness and Emily's holding back.

"Thank you. I'll go rest now. You can heal Emily now" Jade thanked Hope then turned around to leave.

"Bye", Hope said then began healing Emily.

She didn't try to stop Jade and make her stay. While she didn't think the same way as Jade did. She was also not against it. She just thought that everyone was free to choose whatever path they wanted.

It was all for her brother, after all. And it will all be properly taken care of when he returns too. So, there was no need to worry too much.

"Brother... I miss you. I miss you a lot." Hope softly spoke to herself as she continued healing Emily.

The last punch Jade threw was quite strong after all. It was the type of punch that would have easily broken a normal person's bones and turned their internal organs into mush. While it wasn't that serious for Emily, it was serious enough.

It was only after a minute that Emily began steering. She opened her eyes soon after. The first thing she did was look for Jade. Who was long gone by then. Which she confirmed with her heat vision.

This time though, she wasn't angry. How could she be angry after what happened? Jade had proven to her that her path wasn't wrong. So, why would she still oppose something which has shown clear results?

She just wanted to say goodbye. Unfortunately Jade didn't wait for that. She could only wait until the next time they met.

With that said and done. She and Hope left for the mansion. Each holding four beast cores in their hands. They hated their elements at that moment. If they had solid elements like ice or metal. They could create a container for the cores. Even Jade's Beast Aura was better. After all, it could turn solid. Unfortunately, that wasn't an option for them.

"So, what's your current power level? It seems everyone stopped telling each other their strength after he left..." Emily asked Hope.

"Can't I keep it a secret?" Hope replied with a pout.

"Nope. Not after you killed ten LR3s without getting noticed. Who knows if you've already reached R4?" Emily refused to let it go. She was really curious.

"You think too highly of me. I'm just a lowly MR3. Nothing special" Hope relented.

She didn't mind telling the others after all. It's just that no one ever asked. And it wasn't like she could just randomly say "I'm now a MR3 Evolver!" During dinner.

That's something she'd only do if Muku were around. It was only when he was around that her face was thick enough for such things. She was still thin-faced like she had always been every other time.

"Woah! Congrats. I wish we could switch elements. Yours is clearly better" Emily congratulated her.

She was well aware how much KP was needed to reach MR3 after all. Especially when your primary prey is LR3 beasts. She wasn't faking it. She was really happy for Hope.

## Chapter 254: Suspicious individuals

By the time Emily and Hope arrived. It was almost time for dinner...

So, Emily freshened up and headed to the kitchen to cook. With Jade gone, cooking duty was hers and only hers again. She swore that when Jade moves back in. She will leave cooking duty to her for an amount of time equal to the time she was gone.

While it didn't hurt or anything like that. It got boring quickly. So, doing it every day sucked. Unfortunately only she and Jade had fire. So, either she cooked or they didn't eat...

Anyway, the meal was done soon enough. Everything was set up and everyone came for dinner.

The group did what they always did. Eat mostly in silence with little small talk here and there.

"I spotted a group of people today..." Layla suddenly spoke.

"Yes?" Audrey replied questioningly.

They all spotted other people from time to time. So, it wasn't something any of them would mention unless there was something different about the people. Which Audrey and the others assumed was the case with the people Layla spotted.

"They were snooping around the NL Base ruins. They all had the same weird uniform. A blue jumpsuit. I'm not sure what they wanted. But they might come snooping around here too. So, I suggest we don't all leave the mansion at the same time like before. We should take shifts guarding it. At least until they leave." Layla explained.

"Hmm, I support that. I'll take first watch tomorrow. I had a close encounter today, so I'm not too eager to go out again for a while" Audrey agreed with Layla's words. She even volunteered to take first watch.

"Okay", Layla replied. She was still taciturn, after all. Since she felt her part was done. She no longer felt like speaking. The others didn't say anything since they were already used to her being like that.

"I think tomorrow someone should go check the Base ruins out. Maybe there's something we missed. Or maybe they are still there and we might find out what they want" Chloe spoke up. It was obvious that she wanted to be the one.

"I suppose you want to go?" Audrey asked.

"Yes", Chloe replied instantly. Intense emotions swirled around in her eyes for a bit before disappearing.

"Are you sure?" It was Layla who asked this time.

"Yes, I am. I think it's somewhere I have to go anyway. That's the only way I can completely move forward. I might as well hit two birds with one stone, right?" Chloe replied.

Her answer made Layla look at her for a while without saying anything. She was wondering if she should agree to let her go or not. She didn't want her new sister to break again...

"I'll go with her" Hope spoke before Layla could say anything.

"... Okay" Layla moved her gaze from Chloe and looked at Hope for a moment then agreed.

She hadn't forgotten that Chloe and Hope were great friends. Their relationship might have gotten a bit distant lately due to them dealing with their own problems. However, they could still count on each other when it truly mattered.

Which was all Layla cared about. She was okay with it as long as someone was with Chloe when she went there. If Hope hadn't intervened, she had been planning to accompany Chloe herself.

To think she'd turned into an overprotective big sister in such a little time. It must be a world record!

Anyway, with that taken care of. The ground continued their meal. They'd say a few words to each other from time to time as they ate. It was okay, but it wasn't anywhere close to how they'd act when Muku was around.

...

The next morning...

"I thought only me and Hope were going?" Chloe asked Layla who was quietly walking them toward the ruins.

"That was the plan. However, I realised that I'm free today. So, I might as well join you, right? Or is it that you don't want me around?" Layla replied matter-of-factly. She even made an awkward pouting expression at the end.

Chloe was speechless and Hope just smiled wryly to the side. She felt like a third wheel in their weird sister romance. And it honestly just made her miss Muku more... Then again, even looking at the clouds or breathing made her miss him. So, maybe they weren't their problem...

With that, the trio made their way through the forest. They'd let Chloe kill whatever LR3 they came across and avoid anything stronger.

This was because Chloe had started hunting later than the rest. So, she was a bit behind them.

As for why they avoided stronger beasts. It was because they only came across either LR3s or PR3s.

This made Hope pout. She had never come across even a single MR3 beast ever since reaching the level. It was almost like they were avoiding her. So, she could only make progress by bullying the weak LR3s. Which wasn't fun at all.

She had tried poisoning a PR3 once. However, it almost cost her her life. The reason was their strength difference. It seems that if a beast is significantly stronger than her, it could sense her poison.

Fortunately for her Jade had been closed by. And she carried Hope away before the girl was beast food.

Anyway, from that day on. Hope didn't dare pick fights with PR3s. She won't dare do such a thing until she has a way of escaping if things get dangerous. At the very least she needed to have decent physical capabilities. That way she could run and hide.

Unfortunately, with her current capabilities. She could only run and get tired. The longest she could run was maybe 30 kilometres. Which was practically nothing for PR3 beasts.

Hell, Jade could easily clock 150+km without breaking a sweat. So yeah, Hope should stick to bullying the weak and those of equal strength.

.....

A while later...

The trio finally reached their destination...

They could clearly see the ruins from a distance away. Of course, they wouldn't immediately go there. They had to watch first and see what was going on.

What they saw made all their eyes widen. The people Layla described were there, yes. However, their state and the figure who was standing in front of them were what really mattered.

The ground of five who were actually supposed to be ten was tied up with a red rope. And their faces were extremely swollen. They had clearly been beaten up, badly too.

There were also ten dead beast bodies lying randomly around the area. Some had their heads crushed in. Others had their limbs ripped off. It was clear to see that they had died horribly.

And the supposed perpetrator? Why it was their very own Jade of course. She was currently sitting on top of a dead beast's head. In her hand was a piece of meat. She was clearly enjoying her meal when suddenly her head turned. She looked directly at them.

"Are you guys going to keep on watching or are you going to come?" She called out. It seemed she was more willing to interact with the others after her fight with Emily the previous day. Which was a good thing even if she wasn't going to return anytime soon...

Hearing her voice, the group of five who were tied up a distance away from her trembled in fear. It seemed that they didn't only look like they had gone through hell, they had definitely gone through it...

The trio didn't delay after being called out. They had no reason to hide from Jade, after all. She was the one who was always hiding from them...

"Good morning..." Hope was the first to speak after they arrived. She was so natural that it surprised Layla and Chloe.

They didn't know that she and Jade had been meeting quite frequently. So, obviously, unlike them, Hope wouldn't feel estranged from Jade.

"Sup!. Hello Frosty and Chloe" Jade replied and greeted the other two.

Her words earned snickers from Hope and Chloe. However, Layla's eyes narrowed a bit. She didn't like being called Frosty... Sure, she understood why she was called that and also knew who started it. But still... Was she really that cold-looking?

"Hello, Beastie" Layla took a jab of her own.

"... So, what are three doing at my humble he so early in the morning? Your presence is so unexpected that I don't have any food to offer you. But I'm sure you've already eaten. So, it's all good, right?" Jade was taken aback by Layla's response.

After all, when she left, Layla was still the cold silent type who didn't open her mouth unless she needed to. It seems some things had changed in her absence... Anyway, she chose to ignore her retort and asked them why they were there.

"Wait... You live here?" Hope asked in surprise. Although she and Jade met a lot. It didn't mean that Jade was open about what she was doing.

In fact, most of the time Jade showed up around her. It was to get healed. She'd pay with beast cores even though Hope said that it was unnecessary. However, Jade insisted until Hope could only accept.

And she was pretty sure Jade was just using the "payment" as a way of sending stuff back home. But she didn't call her out.

"Why yes, you didn't know?" Jade replied in a surprised tone as if she had ever told Hope such information.

The reply made everyone roll their eyes. They could all tell that it was fake...

Chapter 255: Tactoa, huh?

"... Sigh. Anyway, we're here for them. Care to tell us what's going on?" Hope asked.

She chose not to play along with Jade's game. It was really hard to keep up with red-haired Jade's mood. One day she was serious, and the next she was playful. So, the best way to deal with her was to ignore her antics.

"Tsk... You're no fun. Anyway, I don't know who they are. I found these idiots snooping around my place yesterday..." Jade expressed her dissatisfaction with how Hope didn't play along.

However, she didn't linger on it too long. She answered what she was asked immediately after. She explained to them how it happened...

....

The previous day: A while after Jade left Chloe and Hope.

She staggered back home. The dizziness had gotten worse. Fortunately, it didn't get to the point of taking her out of action. She could still make her way back home safely enough. Normally, she'd bulldoze her way through. Killing any beast in her way. As long as it was LR3 or MR3 of course.

She had her Beast Suppression ability. Which also helped her suppress some PR3s. Which she had tried to use to kill one such beast before. Unfortunately, the beast was hell-bent on running away. And she couldn't keep up.

The situation left her cursing on her way home. She was frustrated about the strong yet useless ability. So what if it made them scared of her when they could still run away?

So, from then on, she pretty much gave up on trying to fight stronger beasts...

Anyway, due to her dizziness. It would be quite hard to fight. So, she chose to avoid any trouble.

Which she hated since she came across quite a few MR3s. While ten LR3s made 1%, it only took five MR3s to get that. And she came across five which she painfully had to go. Which meant she had to give up on a whole %.

Her heart bled as she staggered home. The walk felt extra long. However, she soon made it...

Speaking of which, she has decided to move in after close to a month of sleeping in trees. It wasn't intentional, but something that came up when she passed by the place.

She figured that since there were a few decent rooms left after the destruction. She might as well take base there. The barrier was just an added advantage.

Though she was still pissed off when Freya came and took the barrier core. In fact, the "residents" The Messenger mentioned were just the lonely Jade. It had nothing to do with the old residents who had long disappeared into nothingness after the Monarch was defeated.

The only reason Jade didn't come out of her hiding place was because she understood that she wasn't actually losing out. After all, it was going to be used at their mansion. So, she gave up on it.

She didn't particularly need it after all. Her beast repellent ability was enough to keep her safe from anything that hadn't reached R4. And R4s were huge and rare...

Anyway, when Jade who was still angry saw ten figures in weird suits snooping around her home. Her anger exploded out.

And so, she chose to do what she always does. This was obviously attacking first then asking questions later.

She managed to knock out five of the intruders before the others noticed. If she has been in peak state. She would have easily knocked them all out without any even reacting.

The fact that Emily's ability managed to do such significant damage to her while being held back... It really impressed Jade. So much so, she wasn't certain who would win if she was still in her normal state and the two of them were equal in strength...

Anyway, the remaining five took out weird-looking guns and fired at her. At first she wanted to tank the attacks. After all, guns can't possibly break through the defence of a MR3 Evolver, right?

Hell, just a Half-step R2 could probably ward off gun attacks. So, she shouldn't have anything to worry about.

However, what was shot out of the gun weren't bullets but black laser beams. Her instincts warned her to evade the beams. And so she did.

Boom!×5

Mini explosions went off when the beams hit the surrounding solid objects. With three being trees and two being piles of rubble.

And that wasn't all. The black energy actually disintegrated everything they came in contact with on the spot. Anything the explosion touched was erased.

Jade felt a chill go down her spine. She was certain that she would have also been disintegrated if she had been hit. At the very least. She would have lost a body part.

She then gave a serious look at the assailants for the first time. They all turned out to just be PR1s! To think she almost died at the hands of such ants!

"Where did ants like you get those guns?" Jade asked without filtering her words.

"You, you dare call us ants?! Do you know who we are? Do you know where we come from?!" One of the people replied.

He was pretty much breathing fire at that point. Even the quiet ones were extremely angered. It seemed that being called ants really hit a soft spot.

"I don't care who you are. Or where you come from" Jade replied.

"You arrogant brat! Well, we don't care that you don't care. We're gonna tell you anyway! We're from TACTOA! You better remember that name. For its the name you're going to give to the lord of hell after we send you there!" The angry assailant spoke angrily. He pretty much forced his group's name down Jade's throat.

He and the other four then shot at Jade again.

"Tactoa, huh?... Wait, does that stand for "The Author Couldn't Think Of Anything"?" Jade asked with a deadpan expression on her face after dodging the laser shots.

"What? No! Of course not. Tactoa is Tactoa. It's not an abbreviation! Especially if something so crude. In fact, die" The man was pissed off by Jade's guess. Which was totally untrue by the way.

He took out a whistle and blew on it immediately. It was time to call for backup. Clearly, they couldn't defeat Jade on their own.

Jade could have stopped him from blowing the whistle if she wanted. However, she wanted to see what was going to happen.

She wanted to vent. Unfortunately, the group in front of her wasn't enough to even fill the gap in-between her teeth. She needed more. And more she got...

Ten LR3 beasts suddenly made an appearance. Their appearance actually surprised Jade. After all, it didn't seem like they had been far away. Yet, she hasn't been able to sense them.

It was only after they appeared that she began sensing their presence. Honestly, the group was really starting to creep her out.

They wore weird clothes, took out weird guns and now they called ten beasts out of nowhere. What made it weirder was how the beasts seemed to have been tamed.

They had saddles strapped onto their backs and everything. As for how the R1 noobs had R3 mounts... Only they knew. It was a really weird situation.

Maybe this Tactoa wasn't a joke as she thought, after all. A normal person would think twice about continuing to antagonise the group...

However, Jade wasn't scared. In fact, a happy smile appeared on her...

"Hehe. Finally. At the very least, they are worthy of being my punching bags. And I'll get to make up for the lost KP from before..." Jade spoke to herself.

A familiar crazy smile immediately replaced the happy one. The next second... She was gone.

At the very least. That's what it looked like to the group of five. But what really happened was that Jade had rushed forward. Her speed was so fast that they couldn't even see her shadow. The gap in strength was just too much, after all.

Even the ten LR3s were barely able to see her. And that was all they could do. They couldn't react or deploy their domains. Jade has quietly sealed off the place with a thin layer of Beast Aura.

She could have used her domain. However, she felt that her current opponents weren't really worth it. It would be like using a nuclear bomb to kill an ant. Even she wasn't that wasteful...

Rip! Bang! Boom!....

Different sounds rang out in quick succession. The group of five were confused as to what was happening.

Rooooar!×10

It was only after ten roars of pain that they realised what had happened. They quickly looked at their beast mounts. The sight sent a chill down all their spines.

Out of ten beasts, five were dead and the remaining five were rolling on the ground in pain.

One, which was a huge gorilla-like beast had its arm ripped off from its shoulder. Another beast which looked like a lizard was barely clinging onto life as it was missing its lower body. The remaining three also had serious injuries to some part of their body. In fact, only the gorilla had a relatively minor injury. That's right, a ripped-off arm was actually minor in the situation.

Then came the dead beasts. One which looked like a huge bear had its head punched in. Its head literally got pushed into its body.

Then another beast had its head ripped off its body. And the other three were also killed gruesomely.

Jade really let her cruel and vicious side loose when she attacked.

"Tsk. It seems I missed a few. Damned Emily, if it wasn't because of this dizziness. They'd all be dead" Jade spoke in her sweet and youthful voice just like before.

However, that's not what the group of five heard this time. All they heard was the voice of the devil dancing in their ears threatening to take their lives away at any moment.

They were all scared stiff. None dared move. One guy even peed his pants...

Chapter 256: Merciless Jade

"Ew. Disgusting" Jade expressed her disgust as she noticed the guy who peed his pants.

One had to know that her sense of smell was super acute. Countless times better than any animal on the Blue Planet. So, she immediately caught the scent. Then...

"Die"

Boom!

The guy exploded into a bloody mist. The horror in the eyes of the remaining four got even more intense. Even the leader who was very chatty before dared not say anything.

"You dared to try and kill me then defile my nose? Death is the only end for you" Jade who was still standing a distance away spoke in disdain.

She was completely unshaken by the human life she just took. To her, anyone who dares to try and kill her doesn't deserve mercy or a shred of emotion from her. And her "unstable" state made her completely unshaken.

In her normal state, she seemed completely unshaken when she killed. And she mostly was. However, there were still some ripples in her heart. Those didn't exist in the current Jade...

As for the way she killed him. It wasn't actually an attack. She just exposed a little of her domain around him. And he exploded.

That's right. He was too weak to even exist in the domain. It was something Jade discovered when she deployed her domain around R1 snakes when she was about to fight their R3 mother. The babies all exploded into a bloody mist.

It was then she realised why the snake looked so anxious when her domain descended. She had managed to deploy hers before it could deploy its own.

And what followed was a battle between Jade and a grieving mother. The snake's strong emotions of hatred surprisingly allowed it to resist Jade's Beast Suppression ability. What followed was a battle closer than Jade would have liked.

She has to go see Hope immediately after. Which was quite shocking since she had been slightly stronger than the mother snake.

From the encounter, Jade learned that one should never mess with a mother, no matter what form she came in...

Anyway, Jade disappeared again. And the remaining beasts were finished off. She reappeared in front of the group again. This time she was just a few metres away from them.

There was a little smirk on her face. It was almost like she was daring them to shoot her.

However, none of the remaining four people had such balls. One was even a woman so... Anyway, they all dropped their guns to the ground and raised their hands up in the air. It was the most obvious sign of surrender they could think of.

It was rather interesting how they all did it at the same time though. They weren't even looking at each other had they were so in sync. Maybe they had all unlocked Ultra-surrender-instinct at the same time.

On a serious note. The group of four were really scared. They were all regretting agreeing to the seemingly easy mission.

It was supposed to be a reckon mission. They just had to find out what was going on at the base that hadn't reported in so many months.

The presumed occurrence was that the base's higher-ups had gotten big heads after gaining a bit of power. For that reason, they no longer wanted to be under anyone else.

So, the ground of ten was sent there to confirm if that was really what happened. After all, even their spy Abel wasn't reporting back.

Needless to say, the presumed occurrence wasn't what they encountered, they were met with a ruined base with its barrier missing instead.

Their first thought was "run". However, they'd have definitely been killed off at the headquarters if they did such a thing.

Soon they figured that whatever destroyed the base was long gone. After all, from appearance, the place had been destroyed a long time ago. There were already some plants growing in some parts of the rubble.

So, the group began their investigation after properly hiding their beasts with a special device they got from the base. Their beasts were their trump card, after all.

In fact, it was also a tactic to lure in anyone who came across them. After all, they were just a group of R1s. Easy prey in the current world. Anyone with slightly bad intentions would attack them.

Then they would turn the tables and interrogate the would-be attacker.

Unfortunately, they were out of luck that day. Their attacker was just way too strong. There was nothing they could do to win. So, they might as well give up, right?

So what if they got killed later on if they return? Dying later was always better than dying sooner... Unless maybe you were constantly in pain or something.

Anyway, the leader who had been quite suddenly began begging to be spared. His group mates joined soon after. They loudly begged for their lives until Jade raised her hand. Which was a signal for them to stop talking.

And of course they did. There was no way they would go against her after what they had seen.

The smile on Jade's face had long vanished the moment they dropped their guns. She silently let them beg until she couldn't take it anymore.

She then gave them a hard look. The group was so scared they felt as if her eyes were actually burning the part of their bodies they were looking at... Of course, that was an illusion. Only Emily could literally burn holes through you by just looking...

"After digging your grave. The least you could do is lie in it with grace. There's no way you're making it out of this alive, after all. I never spare anyone who tries to kill me. That's what I learned from... Die" Jade made them explode just like the guy from before after speaking a bit.

After killing them off. She quietly walked over to one of the beast bodies. She then ripped off a chunk of meat, which she took to the top of another beast and began roasting it in her hand with her green flames.

After it was properly cooked she quietly began eating. She closed her eyes she savoured the taste. She was also reflecting on the eventful day she had.

Her thoughts were mostly related to her encounter with Emily then Hope. As for the Tactoa group. They were nothing but a little drop in the dam that was her day.

Despite the blood mist floating around and the beast bodies lying all over the place. She had pretty much already forgotten about them. That's how insignificant they were to her.

She soon finished her meal and began dozing off on top of the beast body. Completely unbothered by the outside world.

She didn't even bother to pick up and check the guns that could hurt her. Or at least tie up the remaining Tactoa members she had knocked out.

If Muku were around. She would have definitely gotten a serious scolding and maybe even a spanking. She was just way too careless. It was a miracle that she hadn't already gotten herself killed.

It was then, when Jade had just stepped into Dreamland that something pulled her out. One of the knocked-out Tactoa members woke up. He then groggily looked around.

What met him were the unconscious figures of four of his teammates and the corpses of their R3 beasts.

At first, he was confused. Then... He screamed in terror after his mind caught up. Which was a natural response really.

Unfortunately, he had chosen a terrible day to respond naturally...

His scream not only woke up the remaining four who were about to wake up anyway... But it also woke up Jade.

With her extra good hearing. The scream really resonated in her ears.

She was so caught off guard that she instantly turned cat. Her fangs and claws were out as she stood on all fours hissing in the direction of the scream.

She had literally acted like a freaked-out cat. The others would have definitely laughed their asses off had they seen it.

It wasn't actually that the scream scared her. It was the proximity it was to her. She thought she was being attacked by a strong beast that had sneaked up on her or something.

So, one could imagine the look on her face when she realised that it was just some side characters she had forgotten about...

And so, without delay. The five side charac... Cough... Tactoa members were thoroughly beaten up. And tied up with a fine made from Beast Aura.

She had managed to get a rare beast core from a plant beast. The first plant beast core she had ever come across. Which was probably due to the rarity of plant beasts.

Anyway, the reason she didn't kill them was because they hadn't tried to kill her. And after glancing at "him" in Dreamland for a bit before she was ruthlessly pulled back... She decided to ask them a few questions instead.

Not because that's what Muku would do. But because he would do the opposite. That guy really didn't like stepping into muddy waters. So, out of spite, she chose to jump right in.

Unfortunately, she couldn't do it at that time. The group had been knocked out again. She could only do it the following day when they woke up.

Then the next day came. Hope, Chloe and Layla showed up just before she started...

Chapter 257: Jade loses it...

"And that's how it went" Jade finished telling the others about her encounter with the Tactoa members.

Whoosh!

"Hey! What was that for?!" Jade complained as she evaded an ice spear which suddenly flew her way.

"That's for being careless" Layla who had thrown the ice spear spoke.

She could tell from what Jade said that she had no sense of danger at all throughout the whole ordeal.

Not even after all the weird stuff that happened. From weird guns, weird clothes to weird beast companions.

"What do you mean I was careless? I took care of everything perfectly! I was even about to torture them on their origins and everything!" Jade exclaimed with an angry expression on her face.

Her MR3 aura was even leaking out a little bit. This surprised Chloe and frightened the captives.

"Okay. Then, where did you put the obviously dangerous guns you collected after dealing with them?" Layla asked calmly. She was completely unfazed by Jade's aura.

She wasn't even surprised by how strong she had become. Which made one wonder...

"Okay, I'll admit it. There was a slight oversight. However, that's no reason to try to stab me. If you want to fight Frosty, go ahead and say it. I have always wanted to wipe that stoic expression off your face anyway" Jade replied. She quickly switched from admitting her mistake to seeking a fight.

It seems red-haired Jade didn't need much to be pissed off. Old her would have complained a little but wouldn't seek a fight...

"It's not a slight oversight. What if there's some timer on the guns? Maybe there'll explode after a certain period. And from what you said, you'd die on the spot if the blast catches you off guard. As for asking them about where they come from... We normally don't bother with such things. However, this is clearly not a normal group. So, that was a good move on your part. As for seeking a fight, no thanks. I was just doing what someone would have done. But, if you want one. I don't mind giving it to you..." Layla replied as calmly as always.

She was completely unmoved by Jade calling her Frosty for the second time. She probably only reacted before because she was caught off guard.

However, if Jade wanted to fight. She didn't mind getting into it. Her aura also leaked out a little bit at the end. And everyone was surprised. That's because it wasn't any weaker than Jade's at all.

"Impossible!" Jade exclaimed. Her reaction was worse than the others.

Other than Jade herself, Hope was the only one who knew why. The reason Jade's reaction was so exaggerated was that Layla just casually proved that her whole approach to getting stronger was pointless.

As everyone knows, Jade cut everyone off because she thought that they held her back. And up to that point she had been certain she had made the right decision. After all, she had always been stronger than the other girls. At least stronger than the ones she met.

So, for Layla who hadn't abandoned everyone to have strength equal to hers... It was like a slap to her face.

It made her remember what Emily said. It made her wonder if they were true. That she didn't leave because she wanted strength. She left because she was too weak. She couldn't bear to be surrounded by Muku's memories for two years without seeing him.

The more she thought about the words the more true they felt. Before she knew it, she was stuck in her head. Those words repeating over and over in her mind.

On the outside. Jade's eyes suddenly lost their glow. They turned lifeless. Then...

Boom!

Without a warning, her Beast Aura exploded out of her body and completely enveloped her. A huge claw made out of BA formed and swiped at Layla.

The situation was unexpected. But Layla who had been prepared to engage Jade in battle wasn't caught off guard. An ice pillar rose in front of her and blocked the huge claw.

Hope and Chloe who had finally caught up were about to intervene and help Layla subdue the out-of-control Jade. They were stopped by Layla who raised her hand.

"Don't intervene. I can take care of her myself. You two hang back and protect the captives" Layla gave orders to the two girls.

"But..." Chloe spoke before she was interrupted.

"No buts. If I had to guess. Something about my strength made her lose control. So, I will use my strength to bring her back to normal. So, this is what Iris meant by an unstable state? Maybe it's a good thing that she isn't around others..." Layla refused Chloe's help again. She then whispered to herself at the end.

She thought that Iris had been exaggerating before. After all, Jade seemed to be pretty normal other than the colour change.

What no one knew was that Layla had spied on Jade a few times. She did it with her shadow element. She would hide in tree shadows and observe Jade's battles sometimes. She never actually looked for Jade. She just happened to come across her a few times.

Unlike the constrained Hope and Emily, who couldn't go far due to their limited physical capabilities. She could actually travel quite far as long as the sky was cloudy. It was also one of the reasons she was as strong as Jade who went everywhere she wanted.

The other reason was that she would sometimes hunt at night. It was something she started doing after she created a night vision spell. It was something she began working on the moment she realised that she could see in the dark as long as she was in the Shadow Realm. So, she figured that she should be able to do it without entering the Shadow Realm as well. And after a while, she could finally do it.

Anyway, the reason why Jade never knew that she was getting spied on despite her keen senses was pretty simple. Layla never directly looked at Jade. At least not for too long. Her eyes would be focused on Jade's opponents. That way Jade would just be passing by in front of her eyes.

It was something she randomly tried the first time she came across Jade's fight. And surprisingly, it worked...

Anyway, Chloe didn't try to intervene anymore. She and Hope dragged the captives a distance away and protected them with their combined mana barrier. It was necessary since the two were a bit weaker than Layla and Jade.

Though Hope could probably do it alone. It was easier to do it with Chloe's help though.

Seeing that there were no longer any people close by. Layla who had been focusing on defence let out a breath of relief. She could finally get a bit serious.

"Shadow Domain: Shadow World" Layla deployed her slightly mastered domain.

It was the same dome from before. However, it was a lot darker and emitted a much denser energy compared to the first time she used it.

It wasn't just because of her improved strength, but also a result of her higher level of comprehension. She was on her way to completing one of the requirements needed for one to rank up to R4.

Unlike from Unranked to R3 where one only needed to kill beasts and complete one other requirement at most to rank up. It took a lot more to reach R4.

At least that's what Iris told the girls. She didn't tell them what the other requirements were though. She said that they will know when the time comes. Just like they've always known until that point. Since they didn't have a way to make her say more, they could only take her words as they were and suppress their curiosity. They'll know eventually anyway...

Anyway, the dome only covered Jade and Layla. The two were plunged into pitch black darkness.

However, Layla could clearly see everything. And Jade... Well, it didn't matter whether she saw anything or not. After all, she wasn't in control of herself. Her Beast Aura was the one in charge. And it didn't see in the first place. It tracked Layla from her aura and struck.

Unfortunately for it. Tracking Layla in her domain was impossible. Her aura was everywhere, after all.

It would have confused the BA if it were a person. However, it wasn't. So, without even the slightest pause. It stuck in every direction. At the very least, it tried to, but the countless claws didn't manage to go even a metre away from Jade.

Layla's domain was doing a great job of suppressing her. In fact, going a metre away instead of being completely locked inside Jade's body was already amazing enough.

"You've had your chance to attack. Now it's my turn" Layla spoke in the darkness. Her voice seemed to come from every direction.

It wasn't intentional, just an effect of the domain. It would definitely throw any lucid enemy off their game. Though it was pretty useless in the current setting.

Anyway, a big ice boxing glove appeared on her right hand. The ice was soon tainted by the darkness and turned pitch black.

A little smile appeared on Layla's face as she looked at the glove. In the next moment, she disappeared. Then...

Bang!

One display of "Omnipresence" later. Layla's fist was buried deep into Jade's gut.

Normally Jade's Beast Aura would have protected her from the gut punch. Unfortunately, one can't block a "Shadow Charged gut punch". Beast Aura could be regarded as defence, and everyone knows what Layla's Shadow Charged attacks do to defence... They ignore it. Completely!

"That's for calling me Frosty" Layla said softly.

"Argh! So it did faze you" Surprisingly, Jade responded after a cry of pain. She then fainted immediately after.

It seems the gut punch brought her back...

Chapter 258: Torture/interrogation.

"Of course it did..." Layla replied as she grabbed the following Jade.

Her Shadow Domain slowly faded away until they were exposed to the outside world.

Chloe sighed in relief after the domain came down. It seems she had worried too much. She thought they were going to witness an intense battle. A battle that would likely flatten the ruins of the NL Base.

But that wasn't the case. It seemed that a berserk Jade couldn't do anything to Layla. At the very least not when there was a domain involved. Especially Layla's broken domain which had the "Omnipresence" capability.

One would think everyone would have that skill when they deploy their domain, right? Unfortunately, no, the world was just unfair like that. Just like how only Emily can resurrect from the dead when they can all die as well as she can...

"Aww! I was expecting way more than that!" Hope's loud complaint forced Chloe out of her thoughts.

And before she knew it. Her hand moved on its own and smacked Hope lightly on the back of her head. She just couldn't help it. What was wrong with the little girl? When did she become so belligerent? Wasn't she like the sweetest child one they met??

"Hey! Do you want to go also?!... Wait. Forget I said anything" Hope shouted angrily after being hit suddenly. She was ready to fight it out on the spot.

However, she immediately remembered the time she almost died under Berserk Chloe's hand. She immediately backed out after that. If there was a person she never wanted to fight, it was Chloe.

Even though she was currently stronger than Chloe and would definitely win the fight. She was still psychologically afraid of Chloe. It was the first time she had brushed so close with death, after all.

"You still haven't gotten over that? You're literally the one who made me go crazy that time!" Chloe who immediately understood what Hope was thinking about spoke as she rolled her eyes.

She felt that it was unfair for Hope to be scared of her when everything that happened was her fault.

"Cough. Cough. Whatever do you mean? I'm going to help Layla with Jade" Hope replied in an embarrassed tone. She then ran toward Layla. She was too embarrassed to stand with Chloe who caught her red-handed.

Chloe just rolled her eyes again as she let her go. She remained to guard the captives...

....

A while later...

It didn't take long for Jade to wake up. She was a Rank Three, after all. And Layla's attack hadn't actually done that much damage. It was to be expected as Layla wasn't a physical-type Evolver.

"Thanks for that punch. I really needed it. To think I'd actually question myself like that..." Jade who had regained control of herself thanked Layla.

The ordeal wasn't actually a negative experience for her. It gave her clarity. That clarity was that just because her choice was best for her and optimised her growth. It didn't mean the others would be left behind. She needed to stop subconsciously viewing herself as superior to them now.

At the end of the day, their classes were all at the same level. No one was more special than the other. It was just that their abilities were suitable for different environments.

It's something she had just been too proud to see when Hope displayed her strength. She brushed it off as Hope having sneaky abilities.

But Layla opened her eyes.

Another thing she realised was that she shouldn't question her path. While what Emily said to her before was somewhat true, it didn't mean that Jade's decision was completely wrong. She had the strength to show for it, after all. Which was why Emily had given up on dragging her home.

"Ahn. Can we move on to the captives now?" Layla replied. She only made an acknowledging sound after Jade spoke then shifted her focus to the captives.

"... And again I'm reminded why we could never get close... Well, whatever. Let's do what you want then. So, who's going to torture them? Are we doing rock-paper-scissors?" Jade who was a lot more stable now. Didn't mind being brushed off by Layla.

She also focused on the captives. The more she spoke, the more excited she became. She really wanted to be the one to make them talk.

"Well, since you're so eager to do it. Go ahead. I'll go after you if you fail" Hope spoke.

Layla didn't feel like speaking anymore. And Chloe's mood seemed to be taking a plunge as she looked around. It seemed that she was finally starting to realise where she was. The situation had been so crazy since they came that she didn't have time to let the feeling of where she was sink in.

Old and painful memories were starting to resurface. Seeing her mother's preserved corpse. An image which she couldn't forget no matter what. She felt that it was better when she didn't remember her mother at all than remember only that.

Then there was the scene of her father's death. Another thing she couldn't forget.

Fortunately, she had recovered quite a bit. So, she wasn't completely consumed by grief like before. She could still hold on.

Layla and the other two chose to act like they didn't notice for the time being. It was a fight Chloe had to settle herself. They had already helped her enough. At the very least Layla and Hope did...

"Really? Great! And there won't be a need for you to go after I'm done with them" Jade excitedly walked over to the captives after the others agreed to let her interrogate them. Though for whatever reason, she always said "torture" instead of interrogate.

Maybe she misspoke... Nope. She really meant torture!

Under everyone's astonished eyes, she grabbed one guy and broke his fingers on the spot and began beating him up. He soon lost consciousness and she went to the next. In less than a minute all of them were beaten unconscious.

"Hmm, something seems wrong here..." Jade spoke to herself while holding her chin as she looked at the unconscious people.

"Of course something is wrong! You're supposed to ask them something first. If they refuse then you can at most beat them up a little or break a finger. Not beat them up until they are unconscious without even asking anything. A few of those guys even screamed they'd confess but you beat them up anyway! Are you crazy?!" The calm Layla surprisingly burst into an angry shout as she rebuked Jade.

Hope covered her face in embarrassment. That's right, she was embarrassed to even know Jade at the moment.

Even Chloe who was sulking had to put that aside for a bit. Her lip was twitching as she looked at the barely breathing group of five.

All three girls couldn't help but think that it really was for the best that Jade left. Who knew what mess she would have caused in her unstable state if she had stayed home? She might have long destroyed the mansion by then.

"... Ooooh! No wonder I felt that something was wrong. Sorry for that everyone. I got too excited. Hope, you can go. If you'll excuse me for a bit. I have to go powder my nose" Jade spoke in an embarrassed tone. She quickly left the scene after making an obviously fake excuse.

The others didn't say anything to her. They let her go. Who knew what she would do next if she stayed? Of course, they knew she wasn't going far. She would probably listen in from a little distance away.

"Hopefully your method is better than her's" Layla spoke tiredly as she looked at Hope.

She regretted coming along. Who knew she would meet Jade who seemed to be hell-bent on making her break character that day.

"Yeah. Don't worry" Hope gave a positive response then walked toward the unconscious ground.

She held her hand out. A healing glow immediately enveloped the group. She couldn't interrogate unconscious people, after all.

Soon, the group woke up. Three of them woke up screaming "Please don't kill me I'll tell you everything!" It was only after not seeing Jade that they all calmed down.

"Are you going to speak on your own or should we call her back?" Hope thought of an idea and tried it.

She had her own way of making them talk. However, she felt that there was no need to put in more effort if a simpler method was present.

"No! Please Ms! Don't call that demon back! We'll tell you everything!" One guy shouted hysterically. Jade's unreasonable actions made her seem like a demon to him.

"No! Josh! Don't you dare say anything! " One of the two who didn't break under Jade's beating screamed at his teammate to keep quiet.

"No, Andy! I refuse. We don't get paid enough for this! I don't care if you're our leader. You won't stop me today!" Josh shouted back in defiance.

He was resolute in spilling the beans it seemed.

"Then you leave me no choice..." Andy replied cruelly. He then formed a hard fist with his left hand five times. A sound which seemed to be from a button being pressed was heard each time he did it. Then...

BOOM!×4

Four explosions rang out at the same time. Josh and the other three people's heads had exploded into a bloody mess.

"Ah!" Hope who was close to the explosion screamed in surprise and horror...

Chapter 259: Hope's creepy spell

"Hehe. I'd like to see how you'll get anything from them now!" Andy spoke cruelly.

He looked especially evil with the blood and brain matter of his teammates splashed on his body. He didn't seem to mind though.

"You will regret the day you crossed Tactoa!" He exclaimed fanatically then bit something in his mouth.

His body immediately turned purple. This made it obvious that he had poisoned himself. He would be dead in a few seconds at most.

"Wait!" Hope who finally recovered exclaimed. The moment she did, Andy who was smugly dying froze.

That's right. The idiot actually felt smug about dying. In his defence, he was dying without exposing anything to people who clearly wanted to know. So, in some twisted way, maybe he should feel smug... Though he looked quite unsightly.

How could he not when he had a smug look but was clearly in pain? His expression was somewhere in between a smug smile and crying in pain. It was quite the sight.

Anyway, the moment Hope screamed. The pain he felt completely disappeared. She had released a bit of her healing domain when she shouted. And Andy was instantly healed and returned to peak condition. Hell, he felt even healthier than he had been before he came.

Once he realised that the poison had been purified his expression turned dark. His smug expression immediately disappeared. It was replaced by a scared one as he looked at Hope's smiling face.

While she was smiling, he could tell that there were zero happy emotions in her. How could she be happy when some of the brain matter splashed on her? Sure, it only splashed a little on her dress.

However, it was her favourite dress. The same one which she was wearing on the novel cover. So, of course, it was special to her. Not to mention that clothes and soap were especially hard to come by in the current world. So, there was a significant chance that she would have to give up on the dress unless she didn't mind the blood stain... Which she did obviously.

It hasn't been a battle situation. So, she didn't protect her clothes with mana like they all normally do. Which she regretted greatly.

And as to why the R1 Andy wasn't killed off immediately under her domain. It was because, unlike Jade's offensive domain, Hope's domain was a healing one. If she had deployed her poison domain. Then Andy would have definitely died off in a second.

In fact, if he had been exposed to the healing domain for too long. He might have gotten cancerous tumours and died on the spot too. Andy was just too weak for that level of healing power, after all. That's why it's said, "too much of anything is a bad thing". Fortunately, that didn't happen, otherwise who knows if Layla, Chloe and Jade who was spying from a distance would still dare receive healing from Hope after that. At the very least they'd be very hesitant.

"Hey, you jerk! Couldn't you explode their heads when I was still a distance away? Look what you did to my dress" Hope shouted at Andy angrily.

The smile on her face from before had long disappeared. She tried to keep it together but she couldn't. The more she looked at the stain, the angrier she got.

Andy's fearful expression soon faded. It was replaced by a confused one instead. A question immediately appeared in his head. He didn't dare ask it though.

"Wait. Hope... Did you only scream in horror before because he dirtied your dress?" Layla happened to ask the very question Andy was thinking. Even Chloe was thinking the very thing.

They had all thought that the sight of four heads exploding in front of her, scared her. Yet, it seems not to have been the case.

"Yes? Did you think I was scared or something? With everything that has happened to us do you think I'd react like that? I mean sure, it was disgusting and I kinda want to vomit. But that's all. I've seen way worse. On the other hand, this is my favourite dress..." Hope replied a bit confused at first.

She then explained herself after catching on to what the others were thinking. And she really meant what she said.

Like every strong Evolver. She was used to the sight of death. Sure, most of the deaths she saw belonged to beasts. But, beasts were exactly animals now, were they? Most were just as sentient as humans. So, killing them off wasn't so easily dismissible like killing a chicken.

Especially for someone like Hope who couldn't even kill a chicken before the apocalypse. To her, all life was precious. She just did what she had to. Just like when she killed Abel. She did it because she had to. At the very least, that's what she thought.

With all that happening, she has long hardened her heart to seeing such sights. It was just that she didn't show it to her teammates, so, they all thought that she was still a naive and untainted seventeen-year-old girl...

(A/N: Seventeen due to those complaints I mentioned before... And this is before Muku's return. She'll be nineteen then...)

"Well, okay..." Layla replied with a few words. She didn't know what to say after that.

"Yeah. Now, let's get back to business. We've delayed long enough. Let me show you that method I mentioned before..." Hope spoke as she put her hand on Andy's head.

A look of horror reappeared on Andy's face. He didn't know what was about to happen. But he was certain that it wouldn't be anything good for him.

Hope's hand was soon enveloped by a purple glow. It was clear that she was using her poison element. Which made the three observers wonder if she was just going to torture him like Jade did.

However, they didn't stop her. They wanted to see everything before judging. They knew that Hope wasn't nearly as brash as Jade. She probably had a plan which they didn't know yet...

The purple glow soon enveloped Andy's head. The look of horror on his face began receding immediately. In less than a minute, Andy was smiling like an idiot.

Seeing his expression, whether it be Layla, Chloe or Jade in the distance, they all felt a chill go down their spines.

In their heads, they were thinking, {What the hell did she do?!}

They were reminded again of how eerie Hope's powers were. They were happy that she was on their side. She was not any enemy any of them wanted to have.

They weren't sure what she had done to Andy. But from his expression. They knew that it wasn't anything they wanted to experience.

"Done! You can go ahead and ask him anything you want to know now... What's wrong?" Hope spoke as she turned around to look at Layla and Chloe. However, when she did, the two took a step back subconsciously. Which prompted her to ask what was up.

"Umm. Nothing, nothing at all. You said we can ask him anything?" Chloe was the one to reply this time. Layla was too slow. If they didn't say anything, Hope might catch on.

"Hhm? Yeah?" Hope felt like something was wrong but she just couldn't put her finger on it. She didn't dwell on it though. They had delayed enough already.

"Who are you and where are you from?" Layla who had finally caught up asked a question instantly.

"I'm Andy, a Rank F captain to one of Tactoa's F-Rank squads. I come from a branch of Tactoa which is located around five hundred kilometres from here" Andy replied immediately. The foolish smile didn't leave his face from start to finish.

Hearing his reply, the trio who were listening in felt another chill. Although they had figured out that it would be something like this from everything they saw. But the fact that Hope could really make people speak the truth if she wanted to was really chilling.

Sure, they didn't have any dark secrets they didn't want her to know. But that didn't mean they'd be okay with her knowing everything about them if she wanted.

Fortunately, it was Hope who had the ability. If it were Jade, they wouldn't dare stay anywhere close to her. That one would probably make them confess everything about themselves the very day she gets the ability.

"What an interesting spell..." Layla commented.

"Thanks! It's just something I randomly thought of sometime back. I figured that, since I can mess with a person's emotions, I should be able to make them unable to lie as well right? I have other ideas I plan on trying later on" Hope happily took Layla's words as a compliment. Whether Layla meant them as a compliment. Only she knew.

"Your poison element is something else..." Chloe added a few words of her own.

And Hope's smile got even wider. Despite what others thought, she always felt like she was the weakest in the team. So, when others complimented her. It made her really happy.

Only if she knew that the others actually viewed her as the most dangerous. None of them could defend against her "Whisperless death" after all. It was something she could unleash at any time and they would all die without knowing how...

Anyway, the ground then continued asking Andy some more questions. He answered anything he could and didn't answer what he couldn't. As an obvious pawn. He didn't know too much.

However, what he revealed was still quite insightful...

Chapter 260: Lifeforce guns!

"Sigh, why are we so unlucky?" Hope lamented after hearing what Andy had to say.

"I guess you could say that..." Layla replied tiredly. She also thought the same as Hope.

"You guess? There's no doubt about it. It's a fact of life! We literally ran away from a Monarch and bumped into another Monarch soon after. After barely beating that one after painful sacrifices. We bumped into another one three months later. Who would have thought that Tactoa was actually an organisation formed before the apocalypse even began?? They have branches all over the country full of Rank Threes. And the best part, they are all led by a Monarch! Ah! I just wanted a calm life until Big Brother returns. Why does the world hate me so much?!" Hope was practically having a mental breakdown as she recounted her unfortunate life.

She really thought that they would only have to worry about getting stronger until Muku came back. Then they would surprise him with their strength. After that, everyone will love happily ever after.

Unfortunately, the world has a different plan. To think it only took a random group of weak individuals in weird clothes to ruin everything!

"Calm down Hope! Things aren't as bad as they seem. We haven't done anything significant to this Tactoa. In fact, only Jade did something. We can just leave right now and not look back. This is her probl" Layla grabbed Hope and shook her to calm her down.

Then she began telling her about her plan to shirk responsibility and dumb it all on Jade. However, a voice cut her off from a distance.

"Hey!" Jade screamed from a distance as she ran over. She was fuming.

"You damn Frosty! You finally showed your true colours today! How could you be so cold? Aren't we friends and companions? How could you even suggest using me as a scapegoat?! You Ice demon!" Jade shouted at Layla angrily while shaking Layla.

Layla let herself be shaken without resisting at all. She was so calm about the whole thing. Almost like she wasn't the one who had just suggested throwing Jade under the bus.

"It's good that you've finally decided to show up. Now we can think of a real plan. I wasn't really going to leave everything to you. After all, the group came here to investigate. Which is something that's directly linked to all of us. So, while it's you who antagonised them and killed a few. Which made the situation worse. It's still a situation we're all involved in..." Layla spoke after Jade vented and stopped shaking her.

"O...oh. Sorry about that. I always knew you were a good person. I totally didn't mean any of the things I said" Jade apologised with an embarrassed expression on her face.

"So I've been upgraded from Frosty to Ice Demon, huh?" Layla spoke expressionlessly.

"Cough. Cough. So, does anyone have a plan" Jade pretended not to have heard it by fake coughing. She then tried to change topics.

Chloe and Hope giggled as they watched the free show. Layla nodded to Jade's words. She didn't want to waste any more time.

"I have an idea. However, I'm not sure how we're going to carry it out. If any of you have a way to make it work, we'll do that. If not, we'll have to think of some other plan. Anyway, the plan is that we should leave the place as soon as possible. We should take the mansion and go. Unfortunately, I don't know how we can move it though. None of us has such abilities, after all," Layla spoke.

"Hmm. I like it. I think I have an idea we can try. I'll help you move it. However, I won't stay with you all after that" Jade replied seriously.

It was actually something she had thought of once. Not because she felt that they'd need to move one day. She just didn't have anything to do that day while spying on everyone from a distance away.

"Is that so? That's great. We'll talk about that after we're finished up here then" Layla replied.

She didn't know how reliable Jade's plan would be. But she currently couldn't think of anything and Jade seemed serious. So she might as well give her the benefit of the doubt.

"Finished here? What else is left?" Jade asked confusedly. To her, Andy had already said everything he could. So, there was no reason to stay there anymore.

"Don't tell me you forgot about the guns again" Layla replied with a deadpan expression on her face. She was already second-guessing her decision to trust that Jade had a good idea. After all, Jade was just way too unreliable.

"Oh, right those. I guess they are important" Jade replied.

Though from her tone. It was clear that she didn't really think too much of the guns.

In her head. The guns might have high attack power. But they were pretty useless when the user was fighting against a high-ranking Evolver. They'd be killed off before they could even blink if the Evolver is serious about killing them.

Layla rolled her eyes at Jade's noncommittal reply. She chose to ignore her for the moment.

"You. Tell us about the guns. How are they made and how do they work? Are they different from normal guns in other ways that aren't the energy they shoot?" Layla asked Andy about the guns.

She refused to touch them or let the others touch them before understanding them fully.

"The headquarters call them lifeforce guns. Only the one they are bound to can use them. And once one is bound to the gun. They will lose any and all Evolver capabilities they might have. In return, they will get firepower which can kill even the strongest R3s if they can catch them off guard. Many others and I felt that it was a good trade-off since we had useless Random Classes. For that reason, only R1s have these guns. And we were all offered R3 beasts as deal sweeteners. Nothing will happen if someone else touches another person's gun. It won't explode or work. Other than what has already been mentioned.

There are no other differences between it and any other gun. I can make mine explode if I want to though. It takes some time which is why I wasn't able to do it..." Andy spilled everything. He even added stuff he wasn't asked.

"...Well. Okay. I guess they are useless to us then. However, I wonder why they are called lifeforce guns? That seems quite random" Layla spoke out loud.

"We were told that the name comes from how we trade our lifeforce for every shot. It's said that the guns are somehow connected to the Monarch who leads us. And we gain access to his power through the guns. As long as we have lifeforce. We can use his power. The negative effect of the trade is that we age rapidly due to it. I'm actually twenty. However, we feel it's worth it to have power which has allowed us to kill R3 beasts despite being R1s. Even if it was by luck" The chatty Andy spilled everything again.

"What! You're twenty?! You look at least forty!" Jade suddenly exclaimed in shock as she looked at Andy.

The kid really looked like a middle-aged dude who had experienced quite a bit of life's struggles. Chloe and Hope who had been standing close to one of the guns took a step back.

They looked at it like they were looking at the most vile thing in the world. Lightning was even crackling on Chloe's body. She was ready to destroy it on the spot. Such a thing should never exist.

If Muku were present he would have rolled his eyes while thinking that they were overreacting. He didn't know how much girls value their youth and beauty, after all.

"Will anything happen if we try to destroy the guns?" Layla asked as she also gave the guns a look of disgust. Even if she didn't have her talent and was only a R1 Evolver with a Random Class. She would never use such a thing. She'd rather die. And the other girls would probably die with her...

Well, like they say, "One man's best case scenario is another's worst"

"I do not know. No one has ever tried to destroy them in my presence" Andy replied. A smile was still plastered on his face. His face was probably painful from smiling by that point. But he didn't stop. A testament to Hope's creepy methods.

"Okay... Let's just bury them. I don't see a need to risk it. He said only the bound user can make use of their gun, after all" Layla spoke to the others.

"I support that" Hope seconded her.

"Me too" Chloe followed.

"Well. If that's what you all want" Jade also agreed.

"What about him?" Chloe asked while pointing at the creepy-looking Andy.

"You can kill him if you want. Or just leave him to any beast that will pass by after we're gone. He can't do anything other than tell the truth and smile now" Hope replied.

"Umm. Let me put him out of his misery" Layla was the one who replied. She felt that it would be too much to leave him alive like that.

And so, with a wave of her hand, Andy was encased in a clear block of ice. She then snapped her finger after that and the ice shattered into countless micro particles which were carried away by the low breeze. With that, Andy was dead and gone without leaving any traces behind

"What OP ice!" Jade exclaimed as she came back from burying the ten guns.

The four then left the scene and headed in the direction of the mansion.

When they were around a kilometre away. Jade suddenly stopped.

"Why did you stop?" Hope asked.

"I'm curious" She gave a brief reply then she shot a Beast Aura fireball into the air. The ball flew in the direction of the base ruins. And soon it hit the place where she had buried the guns.

Then, the concentrated energy exploded. Just when the others were about to complain....

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

"Oh, shih!" Jade screamed then grabbed the other three girls with giant BA claws and flew up and away and her fastest speed.

Behind her, a dome of exploding pitch black energy had formed and it was close to catching up...

She regretted her decision. Why had she forgotten that curiosity already killed a cat before??