

Last System 106

Chapter 106 - Path In The Forest

My process of regaining consciousness was a painful one. It was filled with nightmares and pains of a purely physical nature; it could only be compared to a road through thorns.

It made poetic sense. After failing hard at the sect, I had to go on a side-quest in order to wake up. Only by taking the events through this warped perspective could I somehow come to terms with what happened.

I opened my eyes.

My attempt at rapidly standing up to assess my situation failed before it could even begin. Not a single one of my limbs, not even a single muscle, responded to my call to arms.

I was exhausted beyond any measure. It felt as if every breath was a challenge, a recurring quest that I couldn't fail.

Breathe in, breathe out. It was that simple. Yet, at the same time, it wasn't.

'Where I am?' A question appeared in my mind. 'What happened? What is this place? What's going on?' a flood of other questions soon took over my sanity, rocking at the doors of my consciousness over and over.

I attempted to move up once again.

"Stay still," a foreign voice ordered me.

It came from above my head, slightly ahead. Or rather, that's what my confused senses told me.

My attempt at moving up was futile, just like my attempt at raising my head. Right now, I was stuck with observing the changing imagery of the stuff above me.

It took me another while to realize that I was actually lying on some sort of contraption. From how my vision would shake now and then, it was a vehicle, one traveling through a rather uneven road.

"Where am I?" I asked, hoping to get some answers from the owner of that voice from before.

But I didn't receive any answer.

"Where am I? Who are you?" I tried once again. Then again. Then once more. Yet, no matter how many times I posed the questions, not a single answer reached my ears.

Stuck with a mute guy for the guide, I was left with nothing but the sights above me to kill my boredom.

In my current situation, I had it hard to remain sane.

After a long while, I finally started to notice the changes to the world above me. The previously lush greens of the tree-tops turned towards a more yellowish, unhealthy color. Even though that was the limit of what I could see, I couldn't help but get a bad feeling about it.

The color of the tree's leaves above me meant that this place wasn't a good land. That's what I would think back on earth. In this world, the reality of this place was likely far more grave.

Yet, as the world changed, so did the air. I felt as if the air turned somewhat heavier. Instead of feeling the burden of being pressed down by heavier air, though, I could feel my mana finally starting to fill up my limbs.

Soon, I should be able to move around and about.

'Wait, what?' Once enough of my mana filled my mind to sharpen my senses, I thought.

The person that pulled the carriage was at a level of strength that I had never encountered.

In front of this man, whose gender I assumed solely because of the tone of his voice, not even the entire Skyladder sect would dare to speak lightly. Or, in other words, he could easily eradicate every last person of the Skyladder sect if that was his desire!

"Where I am? Where are you taking me?" I opened my mouth away, unable to just ignore those important questions. But there was something else that I had to know the answer for first. "What happened to Mia?"

I was aware of the blunder I committed back at the sect. Even though it was an automatic reaction of mine, the crystallization of what I thought about myself at that moment, this reasoning hardly offered any escape from the guilt I felt.

Not only did I hurt Mia with my words, but so I did it directly, breaking her hand.

It wasn't a light injury. I was no medic, but I could see that point. And for a cultivator like Mia, having her hand possibly cripple for the rest of her days... something like this was akin to a death sentence.

Sadly, even after asking about Mia, I received no answer whatsoever. It felt as if this man received specific orders not to tell me anything about any person or any event that took place and led me to this specific information.

Stuck with only my own voice, my mind returned to the events at the sect.

Once again, I relived all the events that happened. From the poor decision to trust in Vaner and take the drink, through the disgusting experience, all the way to the bloodbath and the abrupt end to my memories.

I dived back into that experience, hoping to find some answers. Hoping to find some explanation. But outside of allowing all the pain of those events to twist my soul again, I achieved nothing.

"We rest," my companion spoke for the second time when the light of the day was about to completely die out. He stopped his march, and so did he stop pulling on the vehicle.

The movement, the only thing that warded my boredom off a bit, ceased.

"Can you answer my questions now?" I asked, hoping that since we were going to stop, something might change about the man's approach to talking.

"..."

Just like before, no answer. There was a small difference between the before and now. With my mana slowly returning, I could now try to move a little.

Using all the energy that my body managed to regain, I twisted my head to the side. And for the first time since I regained my consciousness, my perspective changed.

Right now, we were in the middle of a narrow path, cut straight out of the thick forest vegetation. The state of the path suggested that although not intensively, it was still in more or less regular use.

This movement also allowed me to finally take a look at the person accompanying me.

He was the simplest, the least memorable man that I have seen in my entire life. It was as if he was born to be hard to remember but a perfect member to fit into the crowd.

He had the face of every random person you met while going out, making it nearly impossible to remember him or recognize him amidst the crowd.

The only thing that set him apart from others was the insane intensity of his magic. Even though I was quickly regaining my strength, even a single look at that man's power caused my entire self to shiver.

The man felt my look, moving his own eyes towards me. Then, a vile smile appeared on his lips.

"If you can move, you can walk," he spat, quickly approaching my place.

Before I could do or say anything... Well, given how weak I was, I had to use all my strength to change the angle of my neck, so I couldn't do much in the first place.

Yet, this man didn't care in the slightest. With a single kick, he sent whatever vehicle he was using to carry me away, instantly throwing me down to the ground.

"Ugh..." a moan of pain escaped from my lungs when my chest struck the ground hard.

This man had no fucking mercy for the wounded at all!

In the end, the day ended without any further events that were worthy of saving in my long-term memory. The man simply set up a rudimentary camp, set up a fire, and went to sleep right away.

"If you want to run, feel free," he said right as he turned his back to me.

For a moment, I considered this opportunity. Even though the path was meandering, I could tell that it wasn't all that hard. If I did it my best, I would likely be able to return to the sect on my own...

But the second I started seriously considering this possibility, an innate fear, a terror of an unknown source, suddenly appeared in my soul.

'Is this some kind of curse?' I thought, rapidly looking towards the sleeping man. 'Is that why he almost encouraged me to run?' I continued to guess when I suddenly heard it.

A low, guttural roar of a distant predator.

A roar that was so rich in energy that it could fuel the training of every last disciple in the Skyladder's sect for years to come.

A roar that had more energy in itself than the man sleeping right beside me!

That sound alone was enough for me to drop all the ideas of escaping.

Just like he warned me at the end of the first day of our journey, starting from the second one, I no longer had the luxury of just watching the sky.

From the moment I woke up, I had to walk after the man, following his broad back like a duck following its mother.

Soon, I got used to the eerie atmosphere of the man, always silent, always composed, never betraying any of his emotions. In a sense, as annoying as this kind of person was at the beginning, once I accepted the reality of who he was, my guide became a sort of safe harbor for me.

Around this man, I didn't need to think about the events of the past.

It happened during the third day, right as I thought we would be setting the camp.

My guide stopped and took a deep breath. He looked as if some kind of massive burden was lifted from his shoulders, finally allowing to let him to breathe freely.

"Finally home," he muttered lightly, raising his eyes to the sky. Then, he turned around and threw an amused look at my face.

"Welcome to the world past the first barrier," he said.

"Huh?" I could only moan in surprise. But when urged by the man to step forward, I reluctantly made two more paces ahead...

The mana rushed into me. The change was so great that it felt as if I jumped down and splashed into the pool of mana. As if the world one step behind was filled with air-type mana, while the part I just entered had its mana liquified.

In an instant, my entire body started to regrow its energy as the mana started to rapidly fill it up. Just like an air breaking into the vacuum, the mana forced its way into my body, set on getting rid of the unevenness!

'So this is what this barrier was all about,' I thought, looking back to the world we just left behind. It was hard to believe for someone born in a technical civilization like me that such a difference could occur... without any geographical landmarks!

It was a single step. Not marked by anything. Yet, it made such a massive difference.

"Where am I?" I asked, prompted by some strange feeling deep inside me. "Where are you taking me? Who are you?" I uttered the three questions that I considered the most important.

My guide smiled and opened his mouth.