

## Last System 164

Chapter 164 - Break Makes You Break

I ran away.

There is nothing shameful about that. I just did what my instinct told me and what I could reason to be the best thing for me to do.

I already encountered a powerful monster once. If not for some kind of mad luck, Lucius would pay with his life in an attempt to save me back then.

And I definitely wasn't going to track this monster all on my own!

As such, while moving as silently as I possibly could, I retreated into the depths of the forest, as far away from the monster's path as I could.

'I guess I should report it,' I thought, turning around as I judged I ran sufficiently far enough.

Right now, I was too distressed to even think about hunting. The few bones I managed to extract from my first hunt would have to suffice.

I reached the clearing relatively quickly. It was never far away; it was just that the road to access it was pretty complicated. And as I was unwilling to crawl through mud or climb steep hills, not to speak about entering areas with weak but extremely annoying monsters, I had to meander for quite a lot before arriving at the place.

'It's way too early,' I thought, placing a hand on my chest.

My heart was still beating fast, not because of the exhaustion, but because of the fear that the power of that monster inflicted upon my soul.

There was rarely any time for me in this world to fear something. Even when meeting people who could squash me with their thumb, I was generally calm.

In the end, I had too much experience of dealing with bullies to be worried about the same happening now.

I knew every possible way to make people like that lose interest in bullying me, a skill that I had to pay for with several visits to a therapist back on earth.

I ended up wasting quite a lot of time, just waiting for Lucius to appear. Even though I really hated to waste time like that, I couldn't really pull out a book and start reading it.

'Is this the first time when hiding the storage ring from Lucius is biting me back in the ass?' I asked myself before releasing a deep sigh.

"Huh?" Lucius appeared only a few minutes later, proving that not pulling out anything from the ring turned out to be a better option. "You are here already?" he asked, a strange look appearing on his face.

"I could ask the same," I muttered silently, taking a quick look at the sun.

Just as expected, it was still hidden behind the treetops. Not even standing in the middle of the clearing allowed me to spot its precise location.

A clear sigh that it was way too early for either of us to appear in this place.

"I found the tracks of a powerful monster," I said instead of inquiring for Lucius' reasons to come to this place so soon. "Just the residual ma... spiritual energy that it left on the path it went made nature refuse to return to its usual state," I added, describing what I saw back then.

"Spiritual Stifling," Lucius muttered under his nose in response, giving me quite a challenge to actually hear his words.

"Stifling?" I asked, unsure how to understand this strange name.

"It's a long story to explain," Lucius shook his head. "So you will have to just take my word for it," he added with a sigh as he rested his back against the tree. "Every plant in this forest has a small amount of spiritual energy in it. Or rather, every last thing in the continent does," he explained, only to yawn a second later. "And when faced with a spiritual energy that's condensed far more than their own, their own energy stifles, forcing it to stop right as it is," he explained.

"So we have reason to be worried, right?" I asked, recalling the images that I saw in my mind.

There was something uncanny about the vegetation stuck in an unnatural position, refusing to bend back to its natural shape. It was so weird; it made me shiver.

"Anyway," Lucius shook his head. "How did you do for now?" he asked, directing his eyes towards a small pouch hanging from my belt.

"I noticed it right after my first successful hunt," I explained. "I wasn't exactly in the mood to keep hunting when I noticed the trail," I added, only to realize that it sounded like an excuse a second too late.

"In other words, you didn't even get the daily quota yet," Lucius commented, his face darkening a little.

'Isn't he overly sensitive about this topic?' I suddenly found myself asking, baffled by my Overseer's reaction.

True, I had no intention of providing a single scrap of resource more than the bare minimum required for the biweekly quotas. It was far more convenient to just send the resources over via a storage ring instead.

And as I still kept the storage rings hidden from Lucius' attention, I had to appear as if I only hunted the bare minimum.

"I guess the money got to your head," Lucius sneered, openly hostile about the topic. "If you really want, you can buy out your quotas for a while... But it's gonna drain any fortune that you have or will make pretty quickly," he advised before shaking his head.

"What do you want to say by that?" I asked, unable to shake off the weird feeling that Lucius' unexpected attentiveness towards this topic gave me.

"Listen, I know it sounds stupid," he started, already making me wary about his following words, "but as contractors, it's our personal task to bring in as much as we can," he said.

"And why is that?" I asked, allowing my expression to darken.

Did he have some interest in me bringing more resources than I was bound by the contract? Or was there some other reason?

"What do you think the reason is for how we are treated?" Lucius pushed his back against the tree, bouncing forward as he asked. "It's simple," he replied before I could even say a word. "Because everyone in the sect sees us as slackers, poor bastards who can't bring more than the absolute minimum required," he explained, his lips twitching.

Lucius turned around and walked to the middle of the clearing. For a moment, he simply stood there with his back to my face.

"I know that there is no point in proving ourselves by bringing in more in the short term," he said, shaking his head. He then turned around and took a closer look at my face. "But this is what we need to do if we ever want to change how people look at people like us!"

It was the first for me to see Lucius so heated.

He did not react like that even back in the sect, where he learned that the opportunity to sleep with all the whores in the brothel for free slipped away from him.

For a moment, I was inclined to believe in his words.

But it was slightly too-far fetched for me.

Because what I took away from the situation at the sect was strikingly different from what Lucius likely expected me to learn about him.

I didn't care about his eagerness to fuck around in the brothel. He was just a man. It held even lesser significance in a world with morals about whoring being different from what I was used to on earth.

But there was one thing, one sentence that Lucius allowed to slip out.

One sentence allowed me to learn just why he ended up as an Overseer of a contractor instead of becoming an Inner disciple of the sect.

Just like the pathfinder explained, being a contractor was a punishment. A job as hated by its own wielders as it was by the outsiders.

In other words, Lucius ended up as my Overseer not because he took pride in this job but because he was a gambler.

And now he was trying to sell me some patriotic bullshit about improving the standing of the contractors?

"Anyway, I don't need to visit that place to understand the situation," Lucius said, most likely ignorant about the shifts in my soul about him. "From now on, that part of the forest is closed," he announced.

"Huh?" I slightly overreacted, my mouth turning agape. "But this is where that nest is!" I shouted.

A place that I found out before we left for the sect. A place that I kept in mind as a source to quickly fill our quotas.

And now we were supposed to just abandon it?

"Arthur, listen," Lucius shook his head. "Taking a break makes it easy for you to break," he said in some kind of philosophical code, only to sum it up with a smirk. "Or in normal words," he coughed. "Don't get too cocky," he said.

"How is my unwillingness to abandon that nest being cocky?" I asked, tightening my fists in a silent fit of anger.

"Do you recall when did that monster attack us the last time?" Lucius asked with a small, sour smile.

"Back when we... Oh," I suddenly realized.

This was a connection that had no proof behind it. It could be just a coincidence.

But the second I recalled the faint trace of mana in the trail...

All my aspirations to clear the nest from before vanished from my soul.