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Chapter 347 What Does The Outside Hold

"It's been a while," Mia commented as soon as we stepped outside.

Yet, rather than running out into the open, she simply stood in place. The slow movements of her chest showcased that my beloved was simply enjoying the taste of the air outside.

'It really does taste differently,' I thought after taking a whiff myself. And soon, rather than scouting the area, we simply stood down and enjoyed the warmth of the sun on our skin for the first time in a long while.

"Arty..." Mia suddenly muttered, right as I realized what was the thing that made breathing just so enjoyable for the two cultivators like us to lose ourselves in it in an instant.

"Yeah, I just noticed it too," I replied weakly as I raised my hand and moved it through the air, seemingly mixing it up a bit. "Either this place always had this insane amount of energy in the air, or it's just that the underground town has none of it," I elaborated on my findings.

The feeling of mana in the air was pretty similar to the feeling of heat. If one stood in a room of a certain temperature, one wouldn't be able to perceive the heat. Yet, if they were to move to a room hotter or colder than the one they were in, they would be perfectly capable of feeling the difference.

'Still, I wonder what does that mean in regards to the city,' I thought while turning my eyes to the back, to where the gate could lead us right back inside.

"Another piece for your puzzle, isn't it?" Mia commented as she placed her hands on her hips and stretched her chest out.

"That's right," I replied, nodding my head. I then moved my eyes to the girl and adored Mia's figure for a moment.

No matter what awaited us in this open world, as long as I could protect Mia, I would be happy. Because ultimately, all my efforts and wishes to gather people and improve our strength were aimed at further securing Mia's place in this world.

"Well then, how about we move?" Mia suggested, a faint smile appearing on her lips.

"Sure thing," I agreed, pushing the gate to fully close it and lock the one entrance to the city we knew about it.

"Don't you need to mark this place?" Mia asked, leaning her head to the side as she watched me walk away from the entrance. "It would be a massive pain if we couldn't find it later," she added.

"There is no need." I shook my head. I then raised my arm and pointed it at the structure of the underground city that could be noticed in the land ahead. "The entrance is in two-thirds of the thinner branch."

The ruins are made out of a shape of a capital letter sigma. And as similar as it was to a number three or the letter 'E,' it still had some distinctive differences.

One of them was that the lower half of the middle of the letter was thinner than its upper counterpart.

Thanks to the mark left by the ruins being asymmetric, there was no risk of confusion once we wished to return.

"Good," Nadia nodded her head before decisively putting her eyes ahead. "Then, let's go!"

At first, I enjoyed the trip quite a whole lot.

It was fun to just walk through the meadows and enjoy the sunbath while sniffing the fresh, floral scent all over. Coupled with the abundance of magical energy filling the air, I actually felt better outside than I ever felt while within that underground city.

"Humans naturally do dwell on the surface, after all," I muttered, voicing out the loose meaning behind my thoughts.

"Huh?" Mia turned her head over her shoulder, sending a quick glance at me. "Did you say something?"

"Don't worry about it." I shook my head. "I'm just mumbling to myself," I added before immersing myself in my own thoughts.

Besides how pleasurable it was, this trip also helped me to realize an important thing. And the further we went into the open meadows of the world outside, the more obvious that point became.

'If we wish to train someone, we won't be able to do it inside the city,' I thought.

Sure, I could set up some grand formation. I could prepare a project many times bigger and more complex than anything I had ever crafted before...

But would it be up to par with whatever magical formations were already in place within the underground city?

'Just from the fact that I can summon things with mana, it's obvious that this place is rigged with sustainable mana machines,' I thought.

As much as I wanted to do it for convenience's sake, I dared not to call the technology of the underground city per formations. My level of knowledge was so pathetic that I only managed to discover a single formation in the entire city so far, yet it already was on a whole different level than anything I was capable of creating.

"Arthur!" Mia's shout forced me out of the technical state of my mind, where I had already drawn blueprints of outposts that we would need to set up around the city.

"What?" I asked, slightly too coldly for my own liking. "I'm sorry," I quickly apologized for the small mistake. "What's wrong?" I asked, now in a tone, I could accept.

"I can see several of those monsters," Mia informed before reaching out and pointing in the distance with her hand. "Out there, down by the ridge," she instructed, helping me to locate the enemy.

The monsters... didn't change much from the time I last fought them. Just like before, they were nothing more but clouds of dense, materialized energy that constantly changed shape.

But while others might see those monsters as a source of threat and something to avoid, for the two of us...

"Do you think about the same thing that I'm thinking?" I asked while a small smile crept upon my lips.

"Unless you think about where the hell the others went, then I do not," Mia replied, rolling her eyes over my overexcited reaction.

"Huh?" I shrugged in surprise. "Didn't you want more people?" I asked before pointing my hands towards the monsters in the distance. "Isn't defeating them the easiest way to bolster our numbers?" I asked. "Isn't it the most obvious thing to do?"

"Ah," Mia twitched a little only to then shake her head sideways. "That's right, I completely forgot that there are people inside of them," she said, only to look towards the monsters and squint her eyes.

Yet, after only a few moments of thought, Mia turned her eyes back toward me.

"But what if they won't be cooperative?" she asked.

And it was a pretty valid question.

The people of this world, we could rescue without much worry. Because if someone appeared to be stranded in the current outside world, they would be way below what Mia or I would ever consider a threat.

That's why, rather than worrying about their potential loyalty, we could leverage the safety of the town we discovered to gain their following.

On the other hand, the people stuck as the cores of those violet monsters...

Not only they didn't really know what happened and were new to this world, but they were likely to be all right on the border of what I could easily fight off and what I could not!

In other words, even if we were to save them, they would still be a possible threat.

"Should we avoid them, then?" I asked, ultimately opting to leave the decision in Mia's hands.

In the end, it didn't really matter much whether we would do something about those monsters or not. As much as I wanted to develop this city and find ways to use it to make the two of us even stronger...

It wasn't something that couldn't wait for an opportune moment!

"Let's leave them for now," Mia came to her decision before slightly changing the angle of her march. "We can deal with them if they dare to approach... But I don't think we should waste time on them now," she elaborated a little.

"That's a reasonable decision." I nodded my head. "Just make sure we won't end up with monsters to all sides," I added a small bit of advice. "I might be stronger than one or two of them, but three and more would be pretty problematic," I warned.

"Don't worry," Mia laughed out cheerfully, only to then start jumping on the grass instead of walking. "I'm not that careless!" she added, only to laugh even more as she playfully jumped around.

'Like a bird set free from a cage,' I thought, a pain taking over my chest.

I wanted us to live in that city because it appeared like the safest and most convenient place around. But could I still endorse the idea of living there... if it went against Mia's nature?

Yet, before I could seriously think about this topic, my body suddenly stopped as my head turned sideways to a small noise I noticed.

'Huh?' I thought, sharpening my ears for a little, only for my head to freeze as well.

And then, although very tiny, I managed to hear someone's voice.

'Help...'

How could someone survive in the outside world during an apocalypse? And within a forest that most of the people around would rather die than step inside?

"Did you hear it?" I asked, turning my eyes towards the girl.

"Yeah," Mia replied, leaning her body forward as she rested her weight on her leg in the back. "And I'm not going to ignore it!" Mia announced, only to leap forward, rushing in the direction the voice came from.