

## 297 The Expedition [2]

Everyone finished cleaning their garments by the river. They were soaking wet, making them decide to completely change their clothes. And as Lucas's squad went to rest in the tent that he prepared, they went inside silently after noticing that Lucas was sleeping. 1

"Are you already good?" Lucas suddenly asked, making them look at him with their eyebrows raised.

"Ah... Yes." Everyone answered his question.

"Okay, that's good. The team leader announced earlier that we would continue the expedition by dawn, so be sure to have a good rest."

"Yes, thank you, leader."

Lucas nodded, then went back to sleep. Others then went to whisper to the people beside them.

"He is really mysterious. He didn't even change his clothes, but yet he didn't smell bad."

"It is just one of the mysteries he had. Maybe the reason he had such a bloody amount of killing intent was because of his harsh childhood. We don't know. Maybe he crawled to get to where he was now. Imagine all of the sufferings. He could have killed plenty of bandits that would

harm him. I can't even think that I can survive such a life."

"R-Really? If he suffered things like that, then it just proves that he was already extraordinary. The killing intent was one thing, but the harsh childhood life? I will put my hat down and show him more respect."

"Yes, we can say that everyone has their own different flow of life. It could be harsh or it could be lenient. But, for the leader to be this strong, he must have lived that harsh life."

"Oh my god... I can't imagine that the kid version of him had to kill bandits just to live."

"A kid killing a bandit... That is awesome, but the leader suffered more. He was just a kid; how could he survive that?"

"That is why we must respect him more. He is good to us, so why should we not be respectful toward him? It doesn't make sense, right? Then, it would just make sense if we respected him."

Their whispering could still be heard. On the other hand, Lucas was just smiling as he listened to the misunderstanding they created. They were curious about him, and to create answers, they had to speculate. However, they were stupid enough to believe their speculations. Even if it is plausible, speculation is only one of a

thousand possibilities in reality. It is not fixed, thus making them stupid if they believed it was the truth.

But, it could be an advantage for him. The more they try to understand and know him, the more advantageous misunderstandings could be created. Then, there would come the rumors that might eventually reach the higher-ups. There was no sureness in this, but it was possible to happen, and he could just believe in it as well while having other thoughts for another possible outcome.

Lucas fell asleep, and others as well. The silent night came and crickets started to sing. It was the time after the sun that everyone rested, ignoring the fact that the rest they were taking was a threat to their lives.

Everyone fell asleep, even those people who were guarding for the night, even those people next to the shift as well. They were in deep sleep as if they had just taken something for good sleep.

After an hour of everyone being asleep, Lucas woke up.

Lucas's eyes went in every direction, feeling their presence at rest. The intents of every person disappeared, making him conclude that all of them had fallen asleep. He sighed, then

took the initiative to cast a huge protective array formation for them to be protected.

"This must be the effect of the river. I didn't realize that the river has some kind of effect that makes people sleepy. As the water entered their skins, they were already affected by the effects of the river the second they left it."

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The next day came with a blink, and all the squad leaders were called by the team leader. And as they gathered at the tent of the team leader, everyone seemed to be tense. There was something that was bothering each of them, and what was obvious was the team leader's solemn face. He was serious, and that seriousness immediately spread inside the tent.

"Everyone must have noticed it, right? Last night, everyone fell asleep, even those who were in the shift to guard the tents."

"Yes."

"Then, this will be a threat to us. It might mean something or a cause, and we should not take it lightly. We must accelerate our progress and reach the summit by the next two sunrises. In that matter, we could lower the risk and also have fewer problems. We will reduce the resting time, and we will not drink any water coming

from this mountain. For everyone's sake, this mountain is cursed."

The seriousness didn't end, and the squad leaders nodded to the team leader's words. Each of them showed affirmation of the topic that he presented. Each of them shared their worries, which Lucas simply ignored. He didn't have any thoughts about them. To him, they were just idiots who had not noticed the whole cause of this.

"The river was a reason they fell asleep. But, it wasn't the main reason why they fell asleep. The nauseous smell before arriving at the river added to the effects of the river. It was already enough to make a person fall asleep just after an hour. Although I don't know the contents of those two reasons, and as mysterious as they are, I should not meddle with them. That was already past, and after this, I will not set foot again on this mountain."

The expedition team continued their journey. They became more careful, but fast until the next sunset arrived. Everyone was restless. However, they had no choice but to inject Qi into their limbs to not get easily tired. The combat squad was competent enough that they could defeat an approaching monster in an instant.

"Monsters!"

Just when they were about to set up their tents, another pack of monsters appeared. But unfortunately for them, they were still tired. They used most of their Qi, leaving half of them incompetent to fight.

"Leader, we don't have enough energy." A member of Lucas's squad said, being left behind as they went to attack the monsters.

Lucas shook his head. "Don't worry." He looked at his members, then assured them with a smile. "Just rest. I got this."

Lucas turned his back to them and started to grip tightly on the hilt of his sword. He took a breath, then his Qi started to cause fluctuations in his surroundings. This action caused others to notice him while he was moving, he seemed cultivating as well. Curious about what he would do, they watched him dash to one monster near him.

Lucas lifted his sword, then swung it downward. A white line appeared, powered by the wind that was gathered around the sword. And as the force of his swing killed the monster in an instant, it made others alive to see that Lucas was becoming a hope for them.

"Leader is really strong. I can't believe that after that long and tiring walk, he still had Qi to perform a sword technique."

Everyone knew that performing a sword technique needed a chunk of Qi. And as Lucas caught their attention by absorbing the surrounding Qi to power up his attack, they cheered for him. Their cheers reached his ears, which made him smile as well.

'Good... depend on me more...'

He sliced and slashed monsters. Even after the whole expedition team became tired and was unable to lift their swords, he was still fighting. And because of this, a hint of hope and respect for him flickered in their eyes. Lucas was flashing in their eyes so that their hearts couldn't stop but beat fast.

After a few moments, Lucas ended the clash with the monsters, which ended with him winning. Just as he stood before the last carcass of the monster, the team leader ran to him.

"Lucas, thank you for doing a great job."

The praise started flowing, which was the main reason why Lucas stepped forward and showed off. It was for the expedition team's recognition of him.

'Okay... Now, after this, I could just approach the overseer of the expedition team and try to talk with him.'

It was necessary. Even though he didn't plan for

this at first, it ended up being advantageous for him. The tales that could spread after the expedition team would be fun to listen to from normal people. But, there was still a small portion of him that wanted to do something else. And as the night arrived, Lucas slept before them with a smile on his face.

'The plan was going smoothly. Now, I should just step forward ahead of them. I must first learn the secrets of the pavilion and the cave before them. With that, I will learn the purpose of why the expedition team was created. That will be my basis on how I will approach the 11 Elders to create the deal.'