

Strongest 61

Chapter 61: Arwen's Long Awaited Letter

The cry of a crane echoed in the distance and Arwen hurriedly ran towards the balcony of her room.

Her gaze locked on the black speck on the horizon that was slowly becoming bigger and bigger. As a High-Elf, Arwen was a very patient person due to her long lifespan. However, for some reason, she was feeling impatient. She wanted time to speed up a little faster, so that Skyla could arrive in front of her right this instant!

The long and excruciating wait had ended when the crane finally landed on the balcony. Instead of greeting the crane, Arwen immediately untied the cylinder that was tied to her leg.

Skyla started to peck Arwen's head in dissatisfaction because her friend didn't even greet her and just focused on the package that she had painstakingly brought with her from the Southern Continent!

"Ouch! Skyla, Stop! I apologize for ignoring you. Please, stop pecking me!" Arwen hurriedly apologized and did her best to pacify the disgruntled crane who had traveled a long distance to deliver her message and bring back her beloved son's reply to her letter.

"Krooooo!" (After I delivered your letter for you, this is how you repay me?!)

"Sorry! It won't happen again!"

"Krooooo!" (It better not happen again or else, I won't deliver your letter next time!)

"Skyla is the best! As expected of a Royal Silvermoon Crane who is prided for their elegance, beauty, and kind heart."

"Krooooo!" (Fool! Your flattery won't get you anywhere!)

After ten minutes of coaxing and a gracious serving of silvermoon milk fish, Skyla finally quieted down and closed her eyes to rest. Although traveling across continents wasn't difficult for her, a roundtrip from the Silvermoon Continent and Southern Continent was still an exhausting journey to say the least.

Seeing that her best friend had finally calmed down, Arwen heaved a sigh of relief and sat on a chair to read her son's letter.

To be honest, she was afraid to read William's reply. What if he wrote that he hated her? What if he wrote a letter of complaint for abandoning him? As these negative thoughts passed through her head, Arwen felt that the cylindrical package she was holding in her hands suddenly became heavy.

Arwen took deep breaths in order to calm her restless heart. No matter what, she had to know what William thought of her.

As she opened the cylinder, a folded scroll and a ring fell into her hand.

Arwen took another round of deep breaths before she unhurriedly unrolled the scroll to read William's reply.

To my beloved mother who thinks of me every single day,

Hello, and good day to you, Mother.

To be perfectly honest, it took me more than fifteen minutes to write that single sentence because I have no idea on how I should start my letter.

I didn't know that writing a reply letter was going to be this hard.

Arwen lightly giggled as she read her son's first sentences. She could understand that feeling because she had experienced the same when she decided to write a letter to him. Her eyes wandered across William's handwriting.

Although it wasn't as elegant as hers, she still fell in love with the firm and bright strokes that showed his determination to reply to her letter.

Let me formally introduce myself first. My name is William Von Ainsworth, the most handsome boy in the Southern Continent. Grandpa James said that I look just like you, Mother, so that means that you are definitely the most beautiful lady in the Silvermoon Continent.

I was surprised when I saw Big Sister Skyla appear in Lont carrying your letter. I've never seen a white crane as big and as smart as her. She was very gentle and kind enough to tell me stories about you, my grandparents, the Holy City of Nytfe Aethel, and the Silvermoon Continent.

Big Sister Skyla also said that although my mother is beautiful, she is also the biggest crybaby in the Holy City of Nytfe Aethel.

Arwen's lips twitched when she read the part of her being a crybaby. She glared at the sleeping Skyla at the side.

'You traitor!' Arwen thought. 'How dare you tell my son that I'm a crybaby? I'm not!'

As if sensing her glare, Skyla opened her eyes and gave her the "What? You have a problem with me?" side-long glance which made Arwen immediately avert her gaze.

Between Skyla and Arwen, the crane had always been the more aggressive of the two. She had been Arwen's protector for years and had treated the High-Elf as if she were her own little sister. This was why Arwen couldn't go against Skyla, even if she was made to drink two jars of courage.

With a defeated heart, Arwen returned to reading William's letter.

Don't worry, Mother. Even if you are really a crybaby as Big Sister Skyla said, that won't change the fact that you are my mother, and I care for you.

It is quite regretful that I didn't get the opportunity to see your face when I was still a baby. If possible, can you please send me a drawing of you, so that I may know what my beautiful mother looks like?

My Mama Ella also wants to see you.

Ah, before I forget. Mama Ella is the one who took care of me since I was a baby. She's an Angorian Goat and I grew up drinking her milk everyday. In my heart, she is my second mother who is just as irreplaceable as you.

I hope there comes a day when you can meet each other. I love her very much.

"I wish to meet her too," Arwen muttered. She wanted to meet William's second mother who had been with him since he was a baby. Arwen also felt envious, and jealous, of Ella because she had witnessed William's growth in her place.

She could feel, based on William's handwriting, that her son really loved Ella. She even felt worried that William loved Ella more than he loved her.

Although she could understand William's feelings for Ella because the two of them had been together for many years, she still felt bitter in her heart. Arwen, too, wished that she could have stayed by William's side and see his growth from a baby who could barely crawl, to a young boy who was as narcissistic as his Grandfathers.

Yes. James and Theoden were both narcissistic individuals. It seemed that both of their genes had been passed down to William.

Mother, Lont may be the crudest place in the Southern Continent, but this small town--where I grew up--is very warm. The people here are lively and full of life. Uncle Mordred, Aunt Anna, Aunt Helen, Cousin Matthew, and Grandpa are very warm and loving people.

I think of myself as a very fortunate person because everyday is filled with love and happiness. That is why, Mother, you don't have to worry about my well-being. I am very happy right now, and I feel like I'm the luckiest boy in the world to be part of this loving family.

There are many more things that I'd like to say, but I'm afraid that my tears will start to fall if I continue to put it into words. Perhaps, I also received some crybaby genes from you, Mother.

Rest assured, although I can't put the rest of my thoughts into words. I will make up for it in the gifts that I will enclose along with this letter. I managed to pester Grandpa James and he agreed to open the storage house, so that I can send you some of the specialties of Lont.

I also added a few more gifts for my Grandparents who I want to meet someday in Nytfæ Aethel. I don't know if these gifts will be to their liking, but I hope that they will not turn them away.

Lastly, Mother, even though this is the first time we've communicated with each other, know that I don't hate you. Although, I'm sad that we have to part from each other, I know that you did it for my sake.

Words can't express how much I want to see you, so please, if possible, send me a painting of you. I will also ask Grandpa to have me painted as well, so that you will be able to see how handsome and amazing your son is.

I pray that our fated reunion will come a day sooner.

Thinking of you from the Southern Continent,

William Von Ainsworth.

Arwen's eyes blurred as she pressed the letter to her chest. She felt relieved, and happy that William didn't hate her. However, she also felt bitter because her feelings of love were overflowing, but she couldn't give them to him.

Arwen's tears streamed down the sides of her beautiful face, but she made no attempts to stop them.

Skyla, who was resting at the side, opened her eyes for a brief moment, before closing them again. Contrary to what Skyla had told William, Arwen was not a crybaby. As the Saintess of the World Tree, it was impossible for her to show her emotional side to the public.

Only when she was alone, and thinking of her departed husband, and their far away son, does she allow the tears to fall from her eyes. She had to remain strong for both of their sakes, and Skyla understood this well.

It was also for this reason that she was willing to undertake the long and dangerous journey to travel between continents to deliver Arwen's letter. If this was the only way to make her "little Arwen" happy then Skyla would even face off against a Dragon if it meant that she could bring William's message back to his loving mother's arms.

That night, Arwen dreamed a happy dream. A dream where her beloved son was nestled inside her loving embrace, and no one in the world would separate the two of them ever again.

Chapter 62: Time To Go To The Temple

When William returned to Celine's house, the beautiful lady was lying on the couch and taking a nap.

Since she had accepted William as her disciple, it also meant that the boy would be staying in her house for the time being. This was how apprenticeship was done in their world.

Gaining a disciple was similar to adopting a child. As a Master, it was their responsibility to take care of their disciple till their apprenticeship was over.

William and James had also discussed during lunch that a goat pen and goat shed should be built outside of Celine's house. the red-headed boy needed to take care of his herd as well, so bringing them to Celine's place was the ideal thing to do.

Five days later, a brand new goat pen and shed were constructed on the property of the Dark Sorceress. James paid for the labor and materials, and also made sure that the new goat shed would be comfortable enough for William and the rest of the goats to stay in.

He knew that this was going to be William's secret base when he was going to head inside the Ring of Conquest. With that in mind, James asked the carpenters to make it relatively secure so that no one would be able to get in, unless they entered through the front entrance.

After two weeks of torture, William and Ella had started to develop some resistance to the Berserk Curse. Although they suffered, they had also gained a lot through the experience. Even though they had entered the berserked state, there were times where they were able to retain their state of mind to a certain extent.

Seeing that the training was quite effective, William pleaded with Celine to add Chronos, Aslan, and the rest of the goats in their training. Celine didn't particularly mind and even found the notion interesting.

Oliver was still the one in charge of the training, so adding a few more goats into the mix wouldn't be a big deal.

After two months of extensive training, William and his herd managed to clear the Fourteenth Floor with flying colors. On their first few tries, the Goblin Shaman was able to neutralize their party with Blind and Berserk spells. Although William, and Ella had raised their immunity, the Hobgoblin Shaman was a master in Dark Magic.

Aside from curses, it was also able to wield the power of darkness up to the Fourth Circle. What did that mean? It meant that William and Ella had to deal with a bonafide elemental mage, which was a very dangerous foe to face.

A Hobgoblin Shaman was equivalent to William in terms of firepower. Even Ella in her War Ibex Form couldn't afford to take a direct hit from its elemental attacks. Fortunately, it only took two months before the group managed to overcome this obstacle.

William, Ella, and the goats advanced steadily as they made their way towards the lower floors. The Fifteenth Floor was quite challenging because every group of Hobgoblins had one Hobgoblin Leader and Hobgoblin Shaman in their ranks.

Of course, after the goats had developed an immunity to certain spells, the battle didn't go as badly as before. William's battle style had also greatly improved and he had now become a Pseudo-Battle Mage.

Although he still hadn't polished his close combat skills, he was not helpless when fighting enemies at close quarters.

Another month passed, and William managed to conquer the Goblin Crypt up to the Seventeenth Floor. He could still advance their exploration, but he decided to put it on hold, at least for the time being.

The reason why he decided to stop their advance was because of the pending quest that he hadn't finished--to go to a temple in order to talk to Gavin.

Since the remnants of the Beast Tide had mostly been eradicated, it was now safe again to travel in the Western Region. All he needed to do was to gain permission from his Master and his Grandpa to leave Lont and finish his pending mission.

"Alright, I will approve of your request to visit the temple," Celine said in a lazy voice. "However, you must bring me a souvenir when you get back."

"Thank you, Master," William replied. "What kind of souvenir do you want?"

"Any kind as long as it's good."

"Understood."

After getting his Master's approval, William sought out his Grandfather next.

"Visit the temple?" James played with his beard for a while as he weighed the pros and cons of sending William outside of Lont.

"Isn't it fine?" William insisted. "The Beast Tide is already dealt with and the roaming monsters are being hunted down. Besides, I am not going alone. Mama Ella and the other goats will accompany me in the journey."

"Well, I guess you can go," James relented after his grandson's constant pleading. "But, you must promise me one thing. If you face a monster that is impossible to beat, you must escape as fast as you can. Do I make myself clear?"

"I promise." William nodded his head like a hen pecking rice. "Thank you, Grandpa. I will be careful!"

"Go and find Helen," James ordered. "She will help you prepare the things that you will need for your journey. According to my estimation, you will be able to reach the Temple in four to six days. Tell her to give you enough supplies for ten days."

"Okay!" William hurriedly left and went to look for his Aunt Helen. He was afraid that James would change his mind and prevent him from leaving Lont.

The old man watched the young boy go with a chuckle.

"Ezio," James said softly.

A shadow appeared inside the room and a man wearing a black robe appeared in front of James.

"Sir." Ezio bowed his head.

"Watch my grandson from the shadows and ensure his safety."

"I hear and obey, My Liege."

Ezio disappeared from the room. James looked outside the window and stared in the direction of the Holy Temple. He hoped that his grandson wouldn't encounter any mishaps on his first journey outside the borders of Lont.

"Make sure to pay attention to your surroundings," Celine said as she stood at the North Gate of Lont to bid William goodbye. "Also, if you encounter bandits along the way, just kill them. Killing them will ensure that the innocent don't have to suffer."

"Um, Master, are you seriously asking a ten-year-old kid to kill people?" William asked with a pout.

"I killed my first bandit when I was eight," Celine glared at him. "Are you a man? Why are you such a p*ssy?!"

"I killed my first bandit when I was nine," James commented. "As my grandson, you should do your best to kill these bastards at the first opportunity!"

'H-How barbaric!' William thought. 'Are the people of this world really this indifferent to killing?'

William came from Earth so his mindset, when it came to killing people, was very different from the views of the inhabitants of Hestia. If possible, he didn't want to end the life of a human being. Killing monsters was fine, because for him, they were not human.

(A/N: Hestia is the name of William's current world.)

However, he knew that if he was pushed into a corner, he would also steel himself to commit the deed even if he didn't want to.

"Little William, look after yourself," Helen said as she helped him wear a traveling cloak. "I have packed you enough food and clothes for ten days. Make sure to eat on time and rest on time, okay?"

"Thank you, Aunt Helen." William smiled and nodded his head. "I'll come back as soon as I can."

"Good. I will be waiting."

"Un!"

William waved goodbye before mounting Ella's back. "Master, Grandfather, take care!"

"Come back early," Celine said as she waved back.

"Feel free to pick up a girl to bring home as a wife when you return," James shouted. "It doesn't matter how many you bring back. We'll take them all!"

William almost fell off Ella's back when he heard his grandfather's shameless words. The old man still hadn't given up on the notion of playing matchmaker for William. He was even insisting that the more wives he had, the better.

Did he think that beautiful girls grow in the wild like cabbages?!

As the town of Lont disappeared behind his back, William felt a sense of anticipation. It was his first time going on an adventure away from home and it was making him excited and anxious at the same time.

What he didn't know was that during this trip towards the Holy Temple, he would meet someone that would play an important role in his life in the not so distant future.

Chapter 63: Traveling Together [Part 1]

"Est, can you accomplish this task?"

"I can."

"Good." A woman who seemed to be in her early thirties nodded her head. "Your father is expecting great things from you. Don't let him down."

"I will do my best, Mother," the boy looked up at his mother with a serious gaze. "I will not let you and father down."

The woman sighed and pulled the boy in her embrace. She then brushed his head affectionately for a time before letting him go.

"Nana, Herman, I leave Est in your care." The woman looked at her two loyal retainers. "Make sure that he returns safe and sound from his mission."

"Yes, My Lady."

"By your will, My Lady."

Ten minutes later, a wooden carriage made its way outside of the city walls and traveled into the darkness of the night. Their destination was the Holy Temple. The young boy looked outside the carriage window as they left the glorious city behind.

'Don't worry, Father, Mother, I will complete my mission,' Est vowed as he looked at the stars in the distance. 'You Excellency, Lady Astrid, please, watch over me.'

"Brrrr! The water is so cold!" William shivered as he washed his face using the water in the river. He just woke up a few minutes ago, and decided to wash his face in order to remove the last dregs of sleep in his system.

Ella walked beside him and gave her morning greeting.

"Meeeeeeeh."

"Good morning, Mama Ella."

"Meeeeeeeh."

After their daily greeting, William took out a wooden bowl from his storage ring and milked his Mama Ella. Although he was already ten-years-old he still drank her milk everyday. Why? Because Ella's milk is delicious.

Also, Ella would nag at him if he didn't drink her milk on a daily basis. William could drink it directly from the source, but he decided to use a cup instead. Ella didn't seem to mind this change in her baby's routine. The only thing she cared about was whether or not William drank her milk.

< Daily Quest: Drink Milk has been completed! >

< Rewards: 6 Exp Points. >

'I still don't understand why this quest still works up to this day,' William mused as he looked at his notification window.

Back when he was still a baby, he depended on this daily quest in order to gain some exp. Now, this notification reminded him of the time when he was still a weak and feeble baby that could only stay still and wait to be fed on a daily basis.

A nostalgic smile appeared on William's face as he remembered the shenanigans he and Ella had during his childhood. He was about to go into a daze when he felt a wet sensation on his cheeks.

"Meeeeeeeh."

"Sorry, Mama Ella," William apologized as he caressed Ella's Neck. "I was reminiscing about the past."

"Meeeeeh?"

"Un, the time when I was still a baby."

"Meeeeeh."

"Time flies so fast. Everything that happened was like yesterday," William closed his eyes as he hugged Ella's neck. "I'm very lucky to have you, Mama."

"Meeeeeh." Ella closed her eyes and pressed the side of her face on William's cheeks. The mother and son pair stayed like this for a few minutes. They only stopped when they felt the other goats starting to stir from their slumber.

William prepared a small fire where he warmed his breakfast and Ella's milk. Ella and the other goats drank from the river and munched on the grasses until they had their fill.

After eating their breakfast, William, Ella, and the goats continued their journey.

It had been three days since they left the town of Lont. So far, they hadn't encountered any bandits or any roaming monsters along the way. However, they did see several ruins as they journeyed towards the Holy Temple. These ruins belonged to towns and villages that used to thrive in the Western Region of the Hellan Kingdom.

When William passed these villages and towns, the young boy would spend a few minutes offering a silent prayer to the people who had died in the incident. As someone who had memories of his reincarnation, he knew that these people would also be given another opportunity to live their lives all over again.

The only difference was that they would no longer remember anything about their past lives.

"I pray that all of you find happiness in your next life," William prayed as he knelt on the ground. "May your days be beautiful and bright."

The goats stood still by his side as they looked at the ruins. They didn't make any noise and waited for William to finish his prayer.

It was then when he heard the sound of a carriage being pulled from behind him. William didn't move and continued to pray. He didn't feel any malice coming from the carriage, so he decided to continue his prayer.

The boy thought that they were just travelers who were passing by, so he just ignored their presence.

When William finally finished his prayer, he was surprised to find out that the carriage had stopped a few meters away from him. The boy frowned and looked at the goats. For a moment, he thought that the goats were blocking the way so that the carriage was forced to come to a stop.

Seeing that his herd was standing in a neat row and away from the main road, the worry in William's mind disappeared. The boy looked at the carriage and noticed a middle-aged man seated on the coachman's seat smiling at him.

"Lad, are you familiar with this place?" a middle-aged man with graying hair asked.

"Sorry, but I'm not a local of this area," William replied. "I am just passing through and saw these ruins."

"I see." The man nodded his head in understanding. "Then, can you tell us where the Holy Temple is located?"

"You're also on your way to the Holy Temple?" William smiled. "What a coincidence. I am, also, headed towards the Holy Temple."

"Oh? Have you been there before, lad?"

"No. This is the first time I traveled outside of my hometown, but I have a map with me."

"Can I have a look at your map, kiddo? I just want to know the general direction of the temple."

"Of course."

William walked towards the carriage while pulling out the map from his storage ring. He handed the map to the middle-aged man in a very friendly manner.

"Kid, you shouldn't trust others too much," the middle-aged man said with a serious expression. "What if I'm a bad person? I might just snatch this map and leave you behind."

"My goats are a good judge of character," William replied. "Since they're not making any ruckus then that means that you are not a bad person."

"You trust your goats that much?"

"I trust them with my life."

The middle-aged man didn't know if he should laugh or cry at the little boy's naivety, but William's carefree attitude left a good impression on him. The middle-aged man nodded his head a few times as he examined the map.

It had been many years since he had been to the Western Region and the recent calamity had drastically changed the scenery. The landmarks he remembered were no longer there, so he was having a hard time finding the road that would lead him to the temple.

Fortunately, he sensed William from afar and decided to head in his direction. His gamble paid off and he was rewarded with a map that would lead him to their destination.

"Thank you," the man said as he returned William's map. "You said that you are also traveling towards the Holy Temple, why don't we travel together?"

"Fate has brought us together," William commented. "I will accept your offer to travel together. The more the merrier."

"Hahaha! You are an interesting kid."

"Not only interesting, but handsome as well."

"Guahahahaha! What a chap, I like!" the middle-aged man gave William a thumbs up.

William grinned and mounted his Mama Ella. The middle-aged man was a very social person and he kept on chatting with William as the carriage and the herd of goats traveled side by side.

William listened to the old man's stories about his adventures and the cities he had visited during his younger years.

"Mr. Herman, do you know anything about the Central Continent?" William inquired.

"The Central continent? I've stayed there for a few years," Herman replied. "That place is where the elites of the various continents gather. Why? Are you interested in going there, William?"

"I don't know." William shook his head. "However, there is a possibility that my Master will ask me to go there once I grow older."

"Your Master..." Herman narrowed his eyes as he glanced at the collar on William's neck. He already noticed the slave collar on the young boy, but he didn't say anything about it.

Although the Hellan Kingdom is not supportive of the Slave Trade, it didn't make any moves to abolish it completely. Even in the capital, slaves were being sold as well. Herman just found it a pity that a boy like William had become someone's property.

"Ah, this?" William touched the collar on his neck. "This is just an accessory. My Master gave it to me as a present."

"I see..." Herman felt complicated. He wanted to curse William's master for tricking a child to become their slave. From what he could see, William didn't resent his Master. In fact, Herman could tell that the boy genuinely respected him.

"Lad, what is your master like?"

"Master? She's the crazy kind of craz-- I mean, a very amazing person. She treats me very well."

A snort was heard from inside the carriage. Suddenly, the voice of a woman reached William's ears. It was filled with disdain and made William think that she was currently having her period.

"I bet your Master enslaved you because you are a Half-Elf," the woman inside the carriage said in disdain. "Perhaps she will make you her boy toy once you grow up. A good looking boy like you will definitely sell for a high price at the black market."

"It is true that I am very good looking," William replied with a smile. "Thank you for your praise, My Lady."

"I'm not praising you!" the woman snapped. "I'm telling you that you are stupid for being enslaved!"

William scratched the side of his face while feeling helpless. He also didn't want to be a slave, but the circumstances were special. As for becoming his Master's boy toy...

William gulped at the notion of Celine stepping on his back with her slender foot...

'Ah Pei! What am I thinking?! I'm not a masochist!' William swatted the perverted images on his head.

"Nana, please, don't be rude," a voice that seemed to belong to a young boy reprimanded the woman. "Please, forgive her outburst. She's not a big fan of slavery."

"I don't mind," William replied. "I'm, also, not a big fan of slavery."

These were the last words they exchanged with each other as they continued their journey. The awkward silence along the way made Herman sigh internally. He still wanted to continue to talk to William, but he was embarrassed by his colleagues' earlier outburst.

"Meeeeeeeh!" Ella bleated as she told William her thoughts.

"Oh? There's a clearing up ahead, Mama?" William asked.

"Meeeeeeeh."

"Mr. Herman, there is a clearing up ahead," William said with a smile. "It is a good place to take a rest. How about we stay there for lunch?"

"Sounds like a plan." Herman nodded his head.

Half a minute later, they came to a clearing where a river flowed at the side. The goats happily trotted towards it to have a drink of water. William followed behind them and refilled his waterskin

He wasn't aware that a pair of clear, light-brown, eyes were watching his every move from inside the carriage.

"He's an interesting boy," Est said as he closed the partition on the carriage. "You're too hard on him, Nana."

"I'm sorry, Young Master," Nana apologized. "I'm just annoyed because those slave traders are getting out of hand. Even enslaving a child as young as him!"

"Do you really think that is the case?" Est asked.

"Young Master?"

"The collar on his neck was made of Mithril. Don't you think that using pure Mithril to make a slave collar is a waste?"

"Now that you mention it..." Nana had to admit that having a mithril collar was too luxurious for a slave. Even though William was a very good looking Half-Elf, having a collar of that caliber was unheard of.

In fact, this was the first time Nana had seen a collar made from pure Mithril.

The twin boys, Isaac, and Ian, who were seated by Est's side looked at him in confusion.

"Young Master, is there something unique about that slave collar?"

"Young Master, does a slave collar made from Mithril have special characteristics?"

"I don't know if the collar is special or not." Est shook his head. "All I know is that William's Master may not be a simple person. This is the first time I've seen a slave collar made from Mithril, and I can tell at a glance that it is of very high quality."

Nana and the twins quieted down and observed William from the carriage's window. Herman had also gone to the river and was currently catching fish with his spear.

"The old fool took a liking to the boy." Nana snorted. "He's really weak when dealing with kids that are the same age as his grandson."

"So you say, but haven't you taken a liking to him as well?" Est smirked. "William is a good person. Even I feel attracted to him."

"Well, as long as he doesn't hinder us on our journey, I don't mind if he travels with us." Nana closed her eyes. She pretended that she didn't hear Est's question.

Suddenly, the carriage started to shake.

"An earthquake?!" Nana snapped her eyes open. "Isaac, Ian, don't leave the Young Master's side!"

The twins nodded their head and unsheathed their daggers. Nana stepped out of the carriage in order to get a better idea of what was going on.

Herman stood guard outside the carriage and gripped the spear in his hand firmly. The moment he felt the surroundings shake, he immediately ran towards the carriage in order to protect his Young Master.

William, Ella, and the rest of the goats took a battle formation with William at its center. The young boy sat calmly on Ella's back as he focused his attention to his surroundings.

It was then when two mountain trolls, the size of a small hill appeared in the clearing. They were carrying tree trunks in their hands and brandishing them like weapons.

"Trolls," Nana narrowed her eyes. "I'll take one, you deal with the other."

"Understood," Herman replied.

Nana unsheathed her sword and charged towards one of the mountain trolls. Herman ran alongside her as both of them engaged the trolls to ensure that they stayed away from the carriage.

The two Mountain Trolls were considered to be on the upper tier of Level B threats, and they were very hard to kill. Their skin was as hard as rocks and their incredible strength makes them very lethal juggernauts. Also, these particular Mountain Trolls also have an annoying regeneration ability that made fighting them a headache for most people.

Also, Nana and Herman were getting headaches because they wouldn't be able to kill the trolls unless they use fire or acid. The only thing they could do was to hurt them until the monsters thought that fighting them was not worth it.

While the battle was taking place, another troll burst out towards the clearing while letting out a mighty roar. It ran towards the carriage carrying its giant wooden club with the intention of smashing it into pieces.

"NO! Young Master!"

"Young Master!"

Nana and Herman lured the trolls away earlier in an attempt to prevent them from attacking the carriage. What they didn't know was that the trolls had the same strategy as well. They sensed the presence of the two powerful warriors, so they decided to split up and lead them away from their prey.

The third Mountain Troll was only five meters away from its target, when the carriage door suddenly opened. Three figures jumped off the carriage and ran towards William.

Seeing its prey run away, the Mountain Troll decided to pursue. Its strides were larger, and faster than the children so it overtook them with ease. Est, and the twins could only watch in horror as the Monster slammed the giant wooden club towards them without any shred of mercy.

Nana and Herman wanted to go back to save their Young Master, but the two trolls blocked their way.

"Young Master!" Nana screamed. She felt regret and helplessness as the monster bore down on her Young Master. "I'm sorry, My Lady. I'm sorry!"

Herman gritted his teeth and roared in anger. Desperation could be seen on his face as he watched the tragedy that was about to unfold.

It was at that moment when a two meter-tall goat jumped over the three children. The large goat faced off against the giant club that was about to descend upon them. On her back was a boy with hair so red that it resembled a blazing fire. His wooden staff was poised to strike like a spearman riding his warhorse.

Est's beautiful brown eyes watched as the small boy, who was the same age as him, created a miracle right before his very eyes.

Chapter 65: When The Sky Falls Down

"Est, remember this, you were born to do great things."

"Great things?"

"Yes." the beautiful woman nodded her head as she lovingly brushed the young boy's hair. "That's why, you must become strong. Only by becoming strong will you be able to do great things."

"Then, what if I meet an enemy that is stronger than me?" Est asked. "What must I do then?"

"Run," the woman answered. "Run as fast as you can."

"Then, what if I can't outrun it? What then?"

"Then you just wait." The woman smiled as she stared at the young boy's face.

"Wait?" Est tilted his head. "Wait for what?"

"Wait for a miracle to happen."

"A miracle?"

"Yes. A miracle," the woman said with a smile. "Est, when the sky falls down. There will always be people who will step up and carry its weight on their shoulders."

"Will I be able to meet such a person?" Est asked. His face was half in doubt and half curious of the possibility of meeting someone who could create a miracle.

"Of course you will," the beautiful woman chuckled. "If it's you, you are destined to meet such a person. Just know that if he really appears in your life, you'd better..."

When the third Mountain Troll appeared, Isaac and Ian immediately grabbed Est and jumped out of the carriage. They were his retainers and their duty was to ensure his safety.

Originally, they thought that the troll would focus on the carriage, but they had underestimated its intelligence.

Not only did it ignore the carriage, it immediately pursued them without batting an eye.

'No good, we can't make it,' Est thought as he gazed at the hulking monster that had already caught up with them.

He could only watch helplessly as the Mountain Troll swung its giant wooden club with the intention to kill. Est knew that, the moment that wooden club hit its target, he, along with the twins, would be turned into meat paste.

Then it happened...

A two-meter tall Angorian War Ibex jumped over their heads. Its horns and hooves had a silver-blue color that shone like crystals. On its back was a young boy with flaming red hair, carrying a wooden staff.

Time seemed to move in slow motion as the Mountain Troll and the Goat carrying the young boy clashed.

William's confident and powerful voice reverberated in the air as he shouted...

"Magnum Burst!"

Est eyes widened as he saw the Mountain Troll get pushed back during the collision. The Mountain Troll had a confused look on its face as it looked at its weapon and the boy who was riding on top of the goat.

It seemed that it couldn't believe the fact that a boy could fend off its weapon with ease. If Est hadn't seen it first hand, he, too, wouldn't have believed it. However, the evidence was right in front of his eyes and it made his heart beat wildly inside his chest.

"Mama Ella, let's go," William commanded as he jumped off her back.

"Meeeeeeh!"

"Mass Ice Armor."

"Mass Bestow."

"Leader of the Herd."

The young boy knew that his Mama couldn't fight using her full power if he was to ride her into battle.

Ella was currently in her War Ibex Form and William's buffs made her powerful. However, she was still weaker compared to the Mountain Troll who was at the upper tier of Class B Monsters.

Even so, she wasn't afraid because she was not fighting alone. William and the rest of the herd had already formed their battle formation. Ella was in the lead, with William at the rear. They had already shared an understanding when it came to fighting stronger enemies, so they weren't worried even if the troll was bigger and stronger than them.

"Wild Charge!" William ordered.

"Meeeeeh!"

Ella charged like a raging bull to take the Mountain Troll head on. Aslan and Chronos led their teams in order to attack the troll from all sides creating a pincer attack.

William watched the battle with a serious expression as he supported his herd from the rear. Everytime the Mountain Troll attacked the goats, he would summon three layers of Ice Wall to block its attack.

Nana and Herman were relieved when they saw that their Young Master was safe from harm. They then vented their frustration on the two Mountain Trolls that were blocking their way. The two monsters suddenly felt extreme pressure as the two experts unleashed their powerful attacks without holding back.

"Mega Kick!"

"Meeeeeeh!"

Ella's kick connected and the Giant Troll was sent flying a few meters into the air.

"Glacial Lance!" William fired off the strongest attack in his Ice Mage Job Class. The Glacial Lance pierced the Mountain Troll's eye making it scream in pain.

Another Glacial Lance flew in the air and stabbed itself on the Mountain Troll's other eye blinding it completely.

Aslan, Chronos, and the rest of their team impaled the Mountain Troll's body with their horns. Ella, too, didn't miss the opportunity and delivered a Wild Charge at point blank range, piercing the Mountain Troll's chest.

The Mountain Troll could only swing its wooden club blindly in the air, hoping that it could hit something with its frenzied attacks.

Two minutes later, the Mountain Troll gave off a guttural roar and ran away in the opposite direction. Its powerful regeneration had allowed its eyes to recover enough vision to see its surroundings.

Seeing that it couldn't beat its prey, it decided to retreat. The two other mountain trolls followed behind their leader in haste. The two humans that they had fought were lunatics and they didn't want to engage them any longer.

William watched the Mountain Trolls run away with relief. Although they were able to fight it to a stalemate, it was still a Class B Beast. This made the Mountain Troll very hard to kill. He never thought for a moment that they would be able to defeat it.

The most they could do was to hurt it as much as possible so that it would call it quits.

Of course, the goats didn't think that way. Ella, Chronos, Aslan, and the rest were sure that they could beat the monster if it hadn't run away. After defeating the Hobgoblin Shaman, the goats had regained their confidence and were raring to fight strong opponents.

For them, the Mountain Troll was only an oversized goblin. As long as they could hit it, they could kill it!

"Good job everyone," William said as he motioned for the goats to gather. "Is anyone hurt? Come, let me heal you."

"Meeeeeeeh!"

"Aslan, what do you mean it doesn't hurt? Look, your leg is bleeding."

"Meeeeeh!"

"Just a scratch? I don't think so. Come here, let me heal you."

"Meeeeeh..."

"No buts, come here. First Aid! Ok, next!"

"Meeeeeeeh!"

"Echo, you are a girl, you should take better care of yourself."

"... Meeeeeh."

"First Aid. Ah! All of you are so stubborn! Fine, have it your way. Mass First Aid!"

William used Mass First Aid three times and healed the injuries of the goats. Although it was wasteful to use so much Mana, he had no choice but to do it. The goats were still under the effect of their Battle Lust and were being very stubborn.

Nana, Herman, Est, Isaac, and Ian, watched as William nagged his goats with a fed up expression. They found this scene quite funny, but none of them were laughing. They were still in a state of shock after witnessing William's unbelievable performance.

Chapter 66: The Price For Freedom

"Here you go, William," Herman said as he gave the young boy a grilled fish.

"Thank you, Uncle Herman," William replied as he gladly accepted the food that was offered to him.

After the three Mountain Trolls left the clearing, the group decided to have lunch by the riverside. Est kept sneaking glances at William as the boy happily ate the grilled fish with relish. His eyes would often dart to the mithril collar that hung on the boy's neck from time to time.

Naturally, William noticed his gaze, but he paid it no mind. Everyone in Lont had given him the same curious glances when they saw his slave collar for the first time. Contrary to William's expectations, no one made a big deal out of it in Lont.

They just looked at him with interest and thought that the collar on his neck looked cool. Even the adults who had realized that it was a slave collar felt that it was just a prank by Celine in order to tone down William's mischievousness.

Of course, this mentality was only restricted in the town of Lont. For people who were not in the know, they would just think that William was a pitiful Half-Elf that had been sold by slave traders.

"By the way, William, Thank you for saving us earlier," Est said with a serious expression. "I swear on my name that I will repay this favor."

"Just call me, Will," William replied with a smile. "Also, you don't need to repay me. I only did what I thought was right. I'm sure that if you were the one in my shoes, you would have, also, done the same."

"But."

"No buts. You don't need a reason to help someone in need."

Herman watched the two children's exchange and nodded his head in appreciation. He was very fond of William and felt regret that he didn't have a grandson like him.

Est could tell that William was firm in not accepting any kind of reward from saving his life, so he decided to just repay him in the future whether his savior liked it or not. For the time being, he wanted to know more about this shepherd who was giving him a mysterious, yet pleasant feeling.

"You said that you are heading towards the Holy Temple, right?" Est inquired. "What is your reason for going there?"

"I'm going to the Holy Temple to meet a God-- I mean, I want to pray to the Gods so that they will protect Lont and keep the townspeople safe from harm." William made up an excuse in order to cover up his earlier slip of the tongue.

"Lont?" Est glanced at Herman. His eyes were clearly asking "Do you know anything about Lont?"

Herman closed his eyes and pondered for a bit. "If I remember correctly... Lont is a small town located at the edge of the Western Region. Ah! Are you perhaps related to that old bastard James?"

William grinned and nodded his head. "My full name is William Von Ainsworth. However, just call me Will, Uncle Herman."

"Ainsworth," Nana curled her lips. "So, that shameless old man is your grandfather."

"Nana? Do you know William's grandfather?" Est asked.

"Of course." Nana nodded his head. "He is the shameless bastard who took advantage of the chaos during the battle of Windkeep Citadel. He and his companions were the ones who took down the Flood Dragon, Oroubro, and the Amphisbaena."

"That old man even had the nerve to announce to everyone on the battlefield that the combined forces of the Hellan Kingdom only won because he lured the Flood Dragon away and broke the Monster Army's chain of command.

"Right now, all the nobles in the capital are cursing his name. Even the King has a headache about how to best handle the aftermath of the battle because of his antics."

Herman chuckled as he gazed at William. "Your grandpa was a very sly fellow. When all the forces of the kingdom were dealing with the Monster Army, he lured away the three Big Bosses and managed to subdue them. Basically, he used the alliance as cannon fodders in order to reap the greatest profit in that battle. That grandfather of yours sure has guts!"

William had already heard the story from his grandfather because the old man really liked to brag about his heroics. Even so, William was still very impressed by how their small group was able to become the big winners of the war against the monster army.

Ian snorted when he heard Nana's and Herman's comments about William's grandfather.

"Although he managed to reap the most benefits in that battle, his grandson still became a slave," Ian sneered. "Isn't this what you call Karma?"

"Ian, don't be rude!" Est reprimanded his retainer. "William, I apologize for my retainer's words. He's just a straightforward person."

"It's fine." William sighed. "I guess, you can also call it Karma that this happened to me. My Grandfather went bonkers when he found out that I became a slave after he returned to Lont."

"Eh? He knows that you became a slave?" Isaac, Ian's twin, looked at William in surprise. Although no one was saying it out loud, they thought that William was one of those survivors of the Beast Tide Calamity and had been sold to become a slave.

Currently, there was an influx of slaves in the capital and most of them were survivors from the villages and towns that had been ravaged by the monster army. Initially, they thought that William was one of those survivors.

"Mmm." William nodded his head.

"Then why didn't he buy you back?" Est asked.

"He can't afford it."

"Eh?"

William caressed the mithril collar on his neck. "A Half-Elf that is as handsome and talented as me is worth an astronomical price. Even the gains that Grandpa acquired during his short expedition was not enough to buy me back my freedom."

"Surely, you're exaggerating?" Este challenged. "Just how much did your Grandpa need to pay in order to win back your freedom?"

"Let's just say that even if the Royal Family of the Hellan Kingdom emptied their entire treasury, they would still not be able to afford me," William replied with a smug expression. "Even an Emperor's ransom pales in comparison to my net worth."

Est, Nana, Herman, Isaac: "..."

"Can I punch your face?" Ian asked. "My hands are feeling very itchy right now."

The boy looked at William in contempt. Although Half-Elf slaves were expensive, they were worth ten to fifteen thousand gold coins at most. Even if you killed him, he wouldn't believe that the shepherd in front of him was worth an Emperor's ransom.

"Your hands are feeling itchy? You must be suffering from athlete's foot," William sneered. "My condolences."

"I said hands, not foot!"

"You're a fool? Congratulations! There's no cure for stupidity."

"Y-You!"

Isaac hurriedly grabbed his twin because the latter was about to have a go with William. Nana and Herman exchanged a glance and shook their heads helplessly.

William rolled his eyes at the pretty boy in front of him. He didn't lie when he said that an Emperor's Ransom paled in comparison to the ingredients that Celine had lost during her experiment. Some of the items she had lost couldn't be bought even if you had the money. That was how rare and precious those ingredients were.

He just didn't understand why the boy named Ian was targeting him out of the blue.

'Could it be that he is jealous because I am three times more handsome than him?' William thought.
'Hah~ Being handsome is really a sin.'

If Ian could only hear William's thoughts, he might have fought tooth and nail with his twin in order to get a chance to beat him up to a pulp.

"How about all of you? Why go this far to visit the Holy Temple?" William asked after he finished eating.
"Although your clothes don't look expensive, the designs are very different from the ones commonly worn in the Western Region. Did all of you perhaps come from the capital?"

Nana's, Herman's, Ian's, and Isaac's gazes landed on Est.

William noticed the subtle change in their expressions and looked expectantly at the delicate looking boy with light-brown hair and eyes.

"Our reasons for going to the temple are the same," Est answered. "I am also going there to pray and ask the Gods for their mercy."

William gave a nod of understanding. Everyone visits the temple to pray to the Gods, so Est's reason was not uncommon.

After that, the group started to talk about random things which made the atmosphere more lively. Half an hour later, they left the clearing and continued their journey towards the Holy Temple.

Chapter 67: Big Brother, Are You Happy With Your Current Life?

A day later, the group finally arrived at the Ellisfell Mountains where the Pantheon of Courage was located. They would need to travel for four more hours to arrive at the temple grounds that were located mid-way through the mountain.

William, who was riding on Ella's back, took the lead in order to check if there were any hidden dangers along their path. The goats walked behind him, forming two lines, while being vigilant of their surroundings.

"I've never seen Angorian Goats this disciplined in my life," Nana said with admiration. "If this was a week ago and someone were to tell me that Angorian Goats could fend off a Mountain Troll, I would definitely spit on their face."

"Are Angorian goats really this fierce?" Est inquired. After seeing William battle with his herd, he was very tempted to rear Angorian Goats back at their estate.

"Of course not," Nana answered firmly. "I have seen many Angorian Goats and all of them were as meek as sheep. The goats under William's care are quite abnormal, especially the one he calls Mama Ella."

"Strange." Est frowned. "During the battle, that goat named Ella took on a different form. She was much larger and more intimidating than her current look. Nana, did you recognize the form she changed into during the battle?"

"Yes." Nana nodded. "If I'm not mistaken, she took the form of an Angorian War Ibex. In the North of the Kingdom, there is a tribe of warriors that live in the mountain. They are very fierce warriors and the mounts they ride on are the Wild Angorian War Ibexes that live in the great mountains of Kyrintor."

"Those War Ibexes are more fierce, and more deadly than the Warhorses bred for war. Trying to conquer their lands by force will only lead to countless deaths. This is why the King decided to let the mountain tribe retain their autonomy in exchange for an alliance. You can't imagine how surprised I was when I saw an Angorian War Ibex in the Western Region."

"Is it perhaps an evolved creature?" Ian asked. "I heard that some creatures can change their appearance once they raise their rank."

"The possibility exists... No, I think this is the only possibility," Nana agreed. "From every angle, Ella looks like an ordinary Angorian Goat. it is very possible that..."

Nana's eyes widened when a realization struck her. She was not the only one. Est, too, thought of the same possibility and it made him look at Nana in disbelief.

"Don't tell me..." Est swallowed hard. "There's a possibility that those goats following William will also evolve into War Ibexes?"

Ian and Isaac exchanged a glance. The battle that happened a day ago was still fresh in their minds. They could still remember how Ella fought the mountain troll on even grounds while the other goats attacked from the sides.

The battle back then was a stalemate. However, if all of those goats were to evolve into War Ibexes then the Mountain Troll would have definitely perished then and there!

"Impossible," Ian immediately refuted. "Very few creatures can evolve and those goats are clearly domesticated animals. I've never heard of an Angorian Goat evolving into a War Ibex. Maybe Ella is a War Ibex that was taken from the North. Since William's Grandpa is a powerful person, getting one isn't out of the question."

Isaac nodded at his brother's conclusion. Even Nana found this explanation very logical. If Angorian Goats could easily evolve into War Ibexes then the Hellan Kingdom would have already had a legion of War Ibexes under its command.

"When we return to the estate, have someone visit Lont," Est ordered. "We need to learn more about this town that has survived the Beast Tide."

"Understood." Nana nodded her head. "Should I also dig into William's personal information?"

"Yes, but be discreet when doing so. Also, I want you to find out more about William's Master. The one whom he is bound to as a slave."

"Understood."

Four hours later, the carriage stopped before the gates of the Pantheon of Courage. The guardsmen guarding the gates told them to disembark because carriages were not allowed inside the temple grounds.

William was worried that the guardsmen wouldn't allow his herd to enter. Fortunately, the guardsmen didn't seem to mind and even told the boy that the current Head Priestess that resided within the Pantheon of Courage was very fond of animals, especially goats.

After doing some initial checks, the group was finally allowed to pass through the gates of the temple.

"It's bigger than I thought," William said as he gazed at the giant structure in front of him.

Although the temple's design couldn't possibly compare to the buildings in the modern world, it still gave William a surreal feeling that made him look at it with admiration.

Suddenly, the main entrance of the temple opened and several priestesses walked out to greet them.

"My name is Sarah and the High Priestess had asked me to welcome all of you, guests that came from afar," Sarah said with a smile. "All of you, except the goats, may follow me inside the temple."

Est, and his entourage, followed Sarah as she walked back inside the temple. Another priestess walked towards William and offered to guide him to the stables where the goats could rest and feed while they waited for his return.

"Thank you, Big Sister," William bowed respectfully. "I'll accept your offer."

"Such a cute child," the priestess smiled and lightly pinched William's cheeks. "Follow me."

When they arrived at the stables, William asked Ella to look after the goats while he went inside the temple. According to the priestess, that guided the red-head boy to the stables, William must follow protocol and perform a cleansing ritual before he would be allowed to go into the inner temple to converse with the Gods.

The priestess explained that it would take a whole day for the ritual to complete because it, also, involved a few hours of fasting.

"Mama Ella, take care of everyone for a day or two," William said as he hugged her neck. "Make sure that they don't cause troubles for the priestesses of the temple."

"Meeeeeeeh."

"All of you, make sure to behave, okay?"

"Meeeeeeeh."

"Meeeeeeeh."

"Meeeeeeeh."

"Meeeeeeeh."

After getting his herd's promise, William followed the priestess towards the temple. The priestess took him to a bathroom where he was supposed to properly clean his body. William took off his clothes and bathed properly.

When he was finished, the priestess gave him a set of clean white robes to wear and guided him to the inner temple where he would begin his fasting.

William sat on a prayer mat while looking at the marble statue of a beautiful knight holding a sword with both hands. Her long hair was tied in a ponytail, and her eyes were filled with mercy and compassion.

William had only just kneeled on the prayer mat for ten minutes when he suddenly felt very sleepy. He tried to fight off the drowsiness, but his eyes grew heavy with each passing second.

'I guess I'll take a nap first,' William thought as he sleepily laid on the prayer mat. A minute later, the red-head boy was sound asleep.

"Ufufufu. Big Brother, if you don't wake up soon Lily is going to kiss you~"

'Umm? Lily?' William's hazy thoughts slowly cleared up as the familiar voice woke him up from his slumber

"Big Brother, you can keep on sleeping. I promise that Lily will make you feel reaaaaaaaaaaaaaly good~"

William opened his eyes just in time to see Lily about to give him a smooch on his lips. If not for the fact that he had seen her true form, he would have gladly accepted the kiss and might have even kissed her back in return.

Unfortunately, what was seen couldn't be unseen and William hurriedly used his hands to block the loli's lips from touching his own.

"Lily, behave yourself," William said as he pushed the Loli Goddess' face away from him.

"Che~ Big Brother is so mean," Lily pouted.

"Wait. Lily?" William's eyes widened as he looked at the little Goddess in front of him. "What are you doing here? Where am I?"

William scanned his surroundings and found himself floating in space surrounded by countless stars.

"This is the place where Gods talk to their believers," Lily explained. "You can even say that this place is the boundary between life and death. I believe that you call this place 'Limbo' back on Earth."

"Um? A place where Gods talk to their believers?" William frowned. "If that is the case then why is Gavin not here?"

Lily's pout increased by a notch and her fingers moved at lightning speed to pinch William's waist.

William screamed like a little girl because Lily didn't hold back when she pinched him. It made the young boy realize that he wasn't dreaming and the loli in front of his eyes was real.

"Big Brother, you're so mean. Does this mean you don't want to see Lily?" Lily narrowed her gaze.

William could tell that if he gave her the wrong answer, another round of pinching would take place.

"O-Of course, I wanted to see you," William replied.

William wasn't lying when he answered this question. Although Lily's true form looked like an old midget, the Loli Goddess had treated him well during his stay at the Temple of Ten Thousand Gods. If William were to look past her appearance, Lily was someone whom he could get along with really well.

"Really? You wanted to see Lily?"

"Y-Yes."

"Yay!" The Loli Goddess jumped and hugged William's waist. She then looked up at William with upturned eyes looking all cute and loveable. "Gavin will be here shortly. He is just handling a few matters with Issei and David, so they asked me to come and meet you here first."

"I see." William sighed and steeled his heart. Deep inside, he wanted to accept Lily regardless of how she really looked.

He then took the initiative to pat the Loli Goddess' head which made her close her eyes like a satisfied kitten. William continued to brush her hair for two minutes. A few seconds later, he heard a sigh coming from the Loli Goddess.

"Big Brother, you are really kind," Lily muttered as she lightly pushed William away.

"Lily?"

"Let's sit down first and have a chat. I'm sure that Big Brother has a lot of questions to ask Lily."

As soon as she said those words, a dining table appeared in front of William. Several dishes were laid on top of the table and all of them looked delicious.

"Let's talk as we eat, Big Brother." Lily made a gesture for William to sit.

William obediently accepted her invitation and sat on the chair facing Lily.

"Aren't you going to eat?" Lily asked.

"Let's wait for the others to arrive," William replied. "It would be more fun if we eat as a group."

Lily gave William a sweet smile that made his heart skip a beat.

"Big Brother, Lily wants to ask you a question."

"Go ahead. As long as it's not Math I'm confident that I can give you the right answer."

Lily chuckled as she rested her chin on the back of her hand. She then looked at William with her adorable, bright, red eyes. She wanted to ask him the question that had been plaguing her mind ever since William had accidentally entered the red portal due to Truck-Kun's interference in the Cycle of Reincarnation.

"Big Brother, are you happy with your current life?"

Chapter 68: God Points

'Am I happy with my current life?'

William closed his eyes and looked back at the ten years that he had lived in the town of Lont. Everyday was filled with warmth and love that sometimes, he could feel his heart melting. His Mama Ella would always be by his side to ensure that he would not suffer from any harm.

His Aunt Anna would hum him songs while holding him in her loving embrace. His Uncle Mordred ensured that he was not lacking in food and clothes. His Aunt Helen would always find time to bake him desserts that he could bring to the valley while tending his goats.

His Big Brother, Matthew, who loved reading books, would find time to read him stories about the Southern Continent. And his Grandfather, James, always throws off his reminiscing and loved to brag about his adventures during his younger days.

Those ten years, made William realize that even though this world didn't have the conveniences of the modern world, even though it didn't have electricity, television, radio, and the internet, he didn't find it boring.

In fact, every night when he went to sleep, he would look forward to seeing the sun rise from the East. Because he knew... he knew that another day filled with warmth and happiness was waiting for him.

"I am very happy," William said softly. He then opened his eyes and looked at the adorable girl in front of him. "Although I don't know what kind of life I might have lived if I entered the Silver Portal back then, the life I have now is very precious. I'm glad I was born in the world I am living in."

"I see," Lily replied with a beautiful smile. She could tell that William was being sincere and he was indeed very happy with the life he had now. "That's good to hear."

"Mmm." William scratched his cheek in embarrassment.

"Well, I'm glad that you are living a happy life in that world, William," Gavin materialized out of thin air. He sat beside Lily, facing William.

"As expected of my sworn brother!" Issei appeared as well and sat beside Gavin.

"You're just like me when I was younger," David chuckled as he appeared beside Lily.

The four Gods who had formed a connection with William had all arrived. They were all looking at him with smiling faces as if they were up to no good!

William didn't feel that something was off and greeted them all with a smile.

"It's been a while, Gavin, Brother Issei, Sir David."

"Indeed. It has been a while William." Gavin nodded his head. "I'm glad you are doing well."

Issei and David also nodded their heads in acknowledgement.

"Since everyone is already here, why don't we all eat first?" Lily proposed. "This feast was prepared for your arrival, so it would be a waste if you don't have your fill."

"She's right," Issei commented. "Let's all eat!"

William nodded his head and everyone began to eat and drink. After the food had been cleared from the table, the Gods started to ask William questions about his current life, which the boy answered as honestly as he could.

"That Master of yours is not half bad," Issei said with a mischievous grin. "Will, having an older woman as your lover is not a bad thing. They are more mature and you can lean on them when things get tough. Also... your master had developed in all the right places. If you know what I mean."

William flashed Issei a knowing smile. The two perverts stared at each other as lewd grins appeared on their faces.

Lily clicked her tongue in annoyance, but didn't say anything else.

David played with his beard as he looked at William with admiration. "Although I gave you my staff, I didn't think that you would really use it so soon."

"Sir David, I am very thankful for the gift that you gave me. If it wasn't for your staff, I might have re-entered the cycle of reincarnation at the age of one years old."

"I guess you can call this Fate. When I first saw you, I was reminded of my younger days..."

"What younger days?" Lily sneered. "When you were born as a God, you were already old. How can you shamelessly say that William reminded you of your younger days?"

David pretended not to hear Lily's spiteful words and continued to play with his beard. "Your Mama Ella loves you a lot. Be sure to take good care of her."

"I will," William promised. "I consider her as my second mother. For me, Mama Ella is family."

David had a satisfied expression as he nodded his head. He was the God of Shepherds and William indirectly became one of his followers when he became a Shepherd in the world he was born in.

Naturally, he was also aware of Ella and the other goats whose Fates were now tied to William.

"Gavin, do you already know why I came to see you?" William asked.

"Of course I know," Gavin replied. "It's just that, I didn't expect you to see me this early. That Wolf Tide sure brought you a lot of benefits."

Gavin chuckled as he patted William's shoulder.

"Okay, let's now get down to business." Gavin's expression became serious as he crossed his arms over his chest. "In order for your experience limiter to ascend to the next level, you need to finish a quest."

"A quest?" William inquired. "What kind of quest? Like those quests in the games I played back on Earth?"

"Something like that." Gavin nodded his head. "Once you clear this quest, another special feature of the CPU Core will be unlocked."

"Special feature?"

"Yes. you will start receiving special quests that will give you points called God Points."

"God Points?" William tilted his head in confusion.

Lily coughed lightly as she continued Gavin's explanation. "God Points are points that you can use to purchase items in the God Shop. Our believers, who have received our blessings, are able to access this shop and buy items that can only be found in the God Realm."

"All items in the God Shop are made by the Gods themselves," Issei said with a smile. "Some of them are expensive, while others are VERY EXPENSIVE. By the way, I'll give you a 50% discount on the first three items that you buy from my shop."

"Big Brother, what kind of items do you sell in your shop?"

"Aphrodisiacs, candles, whips, bondage outfits, bunny costumes... and many more exciting items that will make your nightlife extra exciting!"

William swallowed hard as he held Issei's hands. "Do you also have sailor costumes?"

"You bet I do," Issei answered with a lewd grin. "We even have shrine maiden outfits."

The two perverts clasped their hands together which made the other gods look at them in contempt.

Gavin cleared his throat in order to catch William's attention to continue his explanation.

"Listen, William, I will now tell you the contents of your quest," Gavin said. "Right now, you are in the Pantheon of Courage. One of our colleagues has asked for assistance and it just so happens that you are also present in her temple.

"Because of this, I decided that your quest would be to help her follower clear a trial. You will find more information when your soul returns to your world. Do you have any other questions?"

"W-Will I be able to see you guys again?" William asked.

"When you reach your next bottleneck, you can come and find us again," Lily answered with a smile.

"Big Brother, even if you miss Lily, you shouldn't push yourself too hard. Take things one step at a time. We will have our reunion in good time."

"Don't worry, Brother," Issei commented. "We will also be watching over you from time to time. Even if you can't see us, we can definitely see you."

"That's right." David nodded his head. "Of course, we can't really interfere and help you when you encounter difficulties. Gods aren't allowed to interfere with the material world. However, we can offer you help in other ways."

"The important thing is for you to live a life worth living," Gavin said. "Although getting strong is a must, you must not ignore the world around you. Life is not a matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved."

"You will make a lot of choices in life. Some of them may not lead to the ending that you envisioned, but regardless of your choice, you must see them through to the end. The same can be said for the Special Quests that will give you God Points. If you feel that the quest is absurd, or goes against your morals, you don't have to do it."

"Eh? I can skip special quests?" William asked.

"Yes. Doing the special quests are not compulsory," Gavin answered while sneaking glances at Lily and Issei. "Only do the things that you think are worth doing."

"Understood." William nodded his head.

Issei and Lily both had mischievous smiles on their faces.

'Big Brother, let's see if you can resist the Special Quests that I will give you~'

'Don't worry, Brother. Your Big Brother will ensure that you interact with the ladies as often as possible.'

The Two Gods shared a knowing glance at each other before returning their attention to William. What William didn't know was that the ones who would be giving out the Special Quests were none other than the Gods themselves.

Chapter 69: May The Odds Be In Your Favor

"Est, my devout follower, are you prepared?" a strong and steady feminine voice asked.

"Yes, My Lady Astrid," Est replied as he knelt on one knee like a knight.

"This trial will be difficult, so I will allow you to bring a few helpers with you," Astrid, the Goddess of Female Knights, said with a gentle gaze. "Aside from your two retainers, another helper will be waiting for you on the trial grounds."

"Thank you for your magnanimity, My Lady."

The Goddess nodded her head as she raised the sword in her hand. She then lightly tapped Est's shoulders with the sword blade before returning it to its sheathe.

"Clear this trial, and I will fulfill the promise I made to your family many years before you were born," Astrid promised. "However, if you fail then the promise I made will become null and void. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, My Lady," Est answered. "I will not fail you."

"I only look at the results, Est. not the process."

"I understand."

"It's time for you to return," Astrid ordered. "May the odds be in your favor."

When Est opened his eyes, he found himself in the sacred room of the inner temple. This room was dedicated to the devout followers of the Goddess Astrid.

As Est shakily stood up from the prayer mat, the door of the sacred room opened and the High Priestess entered followed by two attendants.

"Have you received the word of her Excellency?" The High Priestess asked.

"Yes," Est replied.

"Good. Is there anything else that we can do to help you?"

"I need to go to the trial grounds. Can I ask for you to send someone to guide me?"

"It is but a trivial thing," the High Priestess answered. "My two attendants will take you there after you have your breakfast. Your retainers are already waiting for you in the dining area."

"Thank you."

"It is my duty. There is no need for thanks."

Est was led by the two attendants to the next room to change clothes. As he wore his clothes, the young boy thought about the discussion he had with the Goddess Astrid. The Goddess had explicitly told him that the trial was very hard.

He was supposed to clear it when he was a bit older, but circumstances didn't allow the Goddess to wait for him to grow up. The Beast Tide had thrown everything into disarray, and something must be done in order to re-establish the protection of the Kingdom.

For that, Est needed to clear the trial in order for the Goddess Astrid to bestow her blessing on the Hellan Kingdom. This was also why failure was not an option. His father, and mother, had given him this mission, and Est was duty bound to see it through.

'Father, Mother, I will do my best,' Est thought. 'No matter what it takes, I will succeed.'

"Young Master, are you sure that Mr. Herman and Ms. Nana cannot help us in clearing the trial?" Isaac asked.

"There is an age limit for the Trial Ground," Est replied. "Anyone above the age of fifteen will be barred from entry."

"You can count on us, Young Master," Ian pledged. "We will help you clear this trial with everything we have."

Est was ten years old, while Isaac and Ian were both eleven years old. The twins had been trained from a young age to become Est's retainers and help him unconditionally.

"Thank you," Est said with a smile. "I'm counting on both of you."

""Yes, Young Master!""

The three walked towards a cave that would lead them to the trial grounds. After ten minutes of walking, they exited the cave and found themselves in what seemed to be a garden filled with colorful flowers.

An imposing gate made of bronze stood a hundred meters away from them. It was over ten meters tall and several runes were etched on its surface.

Est's, Isaac's, and Ian's gazes landed on the herd of goats that was currently standing right in front of the Bronze Gate. All of them were looking up at it with determination. It was as if they were soldiers that were about to go to war for their motherland.

A familiar boy with red hair sat on the back of the biggest goat among the herd. He was carrying a wooden staff in his hand and a carefree smile hung on his face.

William waved at the three boys as he watched them walk in his direction.

"What are you doing here?" Ian snorted. "This place is off limits to those who are not affiliated with the Pantheon of Courage."

"Say, are you a girl?" William asked. "Why are you always irate? Are you perhaps having your period right now?"

"You're the one having a period!" Ian shot back with anger. His face was dyed a deep shade of red as he glared hatefully at William.

"I don't understand why you're always butting heads with me." William shrugged. "Wait, don't tell me you've fallen in love with me? Sorry, but I don't swing that way."

Black lines appeared on Ian's face as he stepped forward with the intention of bashing in William's smug expression.

Fortunately, Isaac and Est held him on both sides which prevented him from having a fight with the smug shepherd in front of him.

"William, what are you doing here?" Est inquired. Although he already knew the answer, he still decided to ask this question for confirmation.

"I came here because my Patron God told me to help someone clear a trial," William answered. "Are you perhaps the one taking the trial?"

"Yes." Est nodded. "Are you really here to help me clear the trial?"

"Yes. However, since someone insulted me, I'm no longer in the mood to help," William replied.

"We don't need your help!" Ian interjected. "My sist- brother and I will be enough to help the Young Master clear this trial!"

"Is that so?" William raised an eyebrow. "I heard that this trial is very hard. If you really don't need my help then I won't force it. Besides, I don't want to be on the same team with a boy that is having his period."

Ian was about to reply to William's remark when he felt Est's gaze land on her. The gaze made him shudder and the words that he was about to say became stuck in his throat.

"Will, this trial is important to me," Est stated. "I would be very happy if you were to help me clear it. Will it be fine if I formally commission you to help me clear this quest? I will prepare sufficient payment once we successfully clear the trial."

"Sure." William readily agreed.

He wouldn't reject Est's offer because those were just freebies for him. Even though Ian was making things difficult for him, he had no intention of allowing Est to start the trial on his own. This trial was also important to him, because it was the quest that Gavin had given him in order to break through his bottleneck.

William was more than willing to turn a blind eye to the annoying Ian who seemed to be his mortal enemy in his past life.

"Is everyone ready?" William asked.

""Meeeeeeeh!"" the goats replied in unison.

"Wait, can the goats enter the trial grounds, too?" Est asked. He looked at the goats in a hopeful manner. During the battle, the goats showed amazing battle prowess and having them inside the trial would definitely raise their chances of success.

"There's only one way to find out," William grinned. He then tapped the bronze gate with his wooden staff. The door trembled for a few seconds before opening widely. A silver portal appeared at the center of the gate which reminded William of the Portals in the Cycle of Reincarnation.

"After you," William made a gesture for Est to enter first.

"I'll see you on the other side," Est said as he entered the portal.

Isaac and Ian entered the portal as well. The latter didn't forget to give William a hateful glare before passing through the portal.

"What's with him?" William frowned. He then shook his head helplessly as he lightly caressed his Mama Ella, urging her to enter the portal.

Soon William and the rest of his herd entered the portal. Deep inside, William was feeling excited. He was very curious about what kind of Trial he would be facing. He was also looking forward to the completion of the trial, so that he could check out the items in the God Shop.

According to Gavin, there were several items for sale in the shop that would allow him to acquire very rare Job Classes. With such an incentive, William was pumped up to finish the quest as fast as possible.

Little did he know that the Trial in the sacred grounds was not only prepared for Est, but for him as well.

Chapter 70: Parting Of Ways

They found themselves at the entrance of an eerie forest where Est and the twins were waiting for them. With just a glance, William could tell that the forest was bad news.

< Ding! >

< You have accepted the Quest "Trial of Courage" >

< Quest: Trial of Courage >

< Quest Objective: Escort Est to the Altar of Courage located at the center of the forest. >

< Secondary Objective: Est must survive >

< Quest will automatically fail once Est or the Host dies. >

< Quest Reward: Host's Second Transcendance Phase will be unlocked. >

'What an ominous sounding mission,' William sighed as he finished reading the contents of the quest.

He then returned his attention to the forest and observed it more closely.

The air smelled of decay and rot, while the towering trees blocked out the sunlight. There was not a path to follow. Meaning, they would have to traverse the forest without any form of navigation.

Of course, this doesn't apply to William because he had the system with him. Its mapping function sprang to life as it displayed William's current location on the map. According to his estimate, the forest extends for at least three miles in all directions.

Fortunately, William saw a blinking gold dot at the center of the map. The red-head boy assumed that this was the place where they needed to go in order to clear the trial. There were also several ominous purple dots that were moving on the map which gave William a sense of mortal danger.

'I guess these purple dots are off limits,' William thought. 'They are probably monsters belonging to the Centennial or Millennial Beast categories.'

Over thirty purple dots were scattered around the map and they were all encircling the gold dot which William labeled as their quest objective.

Est, Ian, and Isaac thought that William was still in a daze because he was looking at the space in front of him. Ian didn't want to approach him because he felt like beating him up, while Isaac didn't want to offend his brother, so he remained by his side.

As for Est, he was scanning the surroundings with a frown. He was quite sensitive to danger and he could feel the tell-tale signs that the eerie forest housed many strong entities that could potentially kill them.

"Est, come here for a moment," William said as he motioned for the Young Master to come closer.

"Yes?" Est replied as he stopped a meter away from William.

"Did you get any information about this place from the High Priestess?"

"No. But, something is calling out to me from inside the forest. I believe that it is the place I have to go."

"Can you tell me which direction that feeling is coming from?" William inquired.

Est closed his eyes and extended his senses outwards. He then pointed in the direction where the strong attraction was coming from.

William nodded his head because Est had just confirmed his suspicion. The direction he was pointing at was exactly the place where the blinking gold dot was located.

"Ok listen up, let's set some rules first before we enter the forest," William said with a serious expression. "I want to appoint myself as the leader of this expedition. Everyone must follow my order no matter how unreasonable it is."

"And why should we follow you?" Ian snorted. "We only obey the Young Master."

"T-That's right," Isaac supported his twin. "We only follow the Young Master's order."

William looked at Est and waited for his decision. He knew that Ian would definitely reject his proposal and he was also expecting that Isaac would support his brother. However, they were not the ones calling the shots on this mission.

As long as Est nodded his head then the twins had no choice but to follow his orders.

"William, since you accepted this commission that means that I am your employer," Est raised his head to look at the shepherd who was mounted on top of the Angorian Goat. "The employer has the right to order their subordinates during a mission."

Est was a proud person. He had gotten used to the fact that everyone obeyed his every word. He thought that since William had decided to become part of his group, the shepherd would follow his orders.

Who would have thought that the first thing that he would do was to take the role of the leader and ask them to follow his orders. This was something that Est wouldn't accept so easily.

"Is that so?" William answered in a casual manner. "Sorry, I didn't come here to play house with the three of you. If you want to do it your way then you can do it alone."

"Y-You! Are you disobeying me?" For the first time in his life, Est felt that his authority was being challenged.

"Disobeying you?" William snorted. "Don't treat me as one of your servants. I have only one master and it's not you."

Est gritted his teeth as he clenched his teeth in anger.

"So, you finally showed your true colors," Ian spat on the ground. "I knew that you were a superficial person the moment I saw you. I guess I was right."

William lazily laid down on Ella's back and propped his head on the palm of his hand. He then gave Ian a sidelong glance before giving a retort. "The first time I saw you, I knew that you were a little goblin in disguise. I guess I was right. Even your breath smells bad."

"Y-You!" Ian unsheathed his short sword and was about to charge at William when the Angorian Goats stepped forward and formed a battle formation. Their sharp and pointy horns were aimed outwards.

Clearly, they would not hesitate to attack Ian if he moved to hurt their Master, William. Even Ella changed her form into the Angorian War Ibex. Her intimidating aura pressed down on the young boy and made him stop in his tracks.

"Meeeeeeeh!" Ella bleated. The color of her horns and hooves changed to Mithril blue. Her gaze locked on Ian.

Est could easily tell that the War Ibex's gaze was not friendly. He immediately made a gesture for Ian to hold his ground and not provoke the goats any further.

The three children had to admit that even if they joined forces, they would not be a match against Ella and the Angorian goats by her side. Not to mention, William was also a magician. Although they didn't know why a magician, like him, was acting like a shepherd, they didn't doubt his fighting ability.

"There's no need to fight against each other," Est said after regaining his composure. "We are not enemies."

"My condition remains the same," William commented in a lazy tone. "Either I lead this group or we part ways here. There's no room for negotiations."

Est knew that William had already made his stance and wouldn't change his mind. Right now, he was in a dilemma. Either they carried out the trial with just the three of them or let William have his way.

If he chose to clear the trial with just the three of them, the difficulty would surely increase. Also, he didn't know what kind of dangers he would be facing inside the forest. There was safety in numbers and the goats held an advantage because of their teamwork.

However, he was still struggling deep inside because he didn't like someone forcefully taking over his authority. In the end, he made a decision as he made a gesture for Ian and Isaac to stand by his side.

"We will part our ways here." Est stated in a firm manner. "I will not forget that you have saved my life from the Mountain Troll. This favor, I will definitely repay in the future."

Without waiting for his reply, he turned around and walked into the forest. Isaac and Ian hurried to catch up behind him.

William watched the three go with a calm expression. However, deep within his heart, he was feeling anxious.

'Fine, let's see what the three of you can do,' William mused. 'I'd like to see how far the three of you can go without my help.'

William watched as the three green dots that represented Est and his lackeys entered the forest. He was very curious about what kind of abilities the three of them possessed. They weren't able to show it earlier when he was fighting against the Mountain Troll.

The red-head boy deemed that it was best to know the extent of their battle capabilities, so that he could make the right decisions if he was to work together with them.