

Ascension of the Sylvan Cosmos.

Chapter 56. Cinderielle and Liu Shu.

Ariel's face changed a bit at Flor's offer. Regardless of whether she was sincere, they didn't need to guess. Flor had shown a willingness to kill over just suspicions. Now, she was giving them an offer based on their professions. While Ariel had never intended to work for monsters, she could see that these ones were different on a very fundamental level.

Flor had shown certain intelligence that you could only see in sapient creatures. While many beasts could think, act, and form small groups, they would never go beyond certain limits.

Ariel knew of this, so her eyes, while looking at Flor, who wished for something like a Caravan, changed from seeing her as an intelligent monster to an intelligent peer. After pondering for a while, she finally spoke. "I admit the offer is really tempting. However, Chief of the Rose Fairies, do you even have goods that can be traded that our caravan could have?"

She had dismissed it a few moments ago, but now that she learned that the monster was really trying to negotiate and not throwing words to confuse and tempt her, Ariel put forth her doubts.

Flor got thoughtful for a few moments and finally threw one <Basic Phoe Berry>, <Basic Aether Mana Berry>, and <Basic Energy Berry> at her.

The red, blue, and yellow fruits were easily caught by Ariel and the others. Then, they analyzed them and saw their effects. Ariel's eyebrows raised. "Not bad at all."

Flor smirked. "Those are just the basic ones. As the World Tree grows, she will naturally bear better fruits." Flor gestured with her not-burned arm. "Not only that, the World Tree has shown plenty of willingness to nurture her surroundings. She has fought alongside our group several times and protected us actively."

Ariel lifted her eyebrows. "That's rare. Usually, World Trees are of a non-interference mind."

Flor shrugged. "Well, she perhaps did so because she was attacked. However, I can tell you that she is not as indifferent as other World Trees. Her willingness to stop me from continuing to fight that woman should tell you something about her."

Ariel looked at the nearly seven-meter-tall tree with a profound expression. Robert looked at her with a severe expression and asked. "Ariel, are you thinking..."

She looked at him with a smirk and asked. "Wanna bet your lives? If we win, I think we'll become quite influential. If we fail, sadly, we might perish."

Robert sighed and crossed his arms. He was of an advanced age, so he did not have a strong adventurer's heart like he did in the past. Doles and Maley were much more interested in this, so they both swung an arm above Ariel's shoulders and smirked. "Let's do it!"

Ariel rolled her eyes and shrugged them off. Both brothers sniggered, and the three of them looked at the muscular man. Robert sighed and nodded. "Well, brats. It seems that I'll have the rust in my bones worn off while walking with you."

With a snort, Ariel answered. "If your bones are rusted, then mine are rotten!" Then, between the laughter of the other three, she looked at Flor and nodded. "Sure. I accept."

Flor relaxed and leaned on Liu Shu with a lazy body. "Finally, you accept. Sigh, all this work... I hate it."

Ariel didn't expect Flor to become a sloth-like creature suddenly, and her lips started twitching. 'I-is it really a good idea? What's with this change in attitude!?'

Cinderielle looked between Flor and Liu Shu a few times, making both the tree and the Rose Fairy Queen look on with confusion. Flor asked. "What's wrong?"

Cinderielle coughed and asked shyly. "C- Can I approach?"

Flor wanted to say no. After all, Cinderielle's eyes glowed strangely each time she looked at Liu Shu. Still, she decided to ask the tree. "What do you think, Liu Shu?"

Liu Shu looked at Cinderielle with a pondering gaze. 'Strange, I should be scared of her doing something bad with her flames, right? Why am I so accepting of her?'

Liu Shu looked at her own skills and asked herself. 'Hm... Does she have a skill like <Charm of the Seedling>? That skill helps me give a better impression to others.'

Ariel looked between Flor and Cinderielle and asked. "Um, why did you stop talking so suddenly?"

Flor blinked and stopped looking at the sky. She pointed behind her with her thumb and commented. "She is thinking."

Ariel's lips twitched. "H-How long does she usually take?"

The Rose Fairy Queen shrugged. "Who knows? There was a time when she took half a day to answer. Other times, she answers right away. We just need to wait patiently."

The humans looked at everyone who accepted this situation as normal with incredulous expressions. Ariel coughed and approached slowly. "Um, I'm not that dangerous, right? So, can I approach to speak about more details of the caravan?"

Flor looked at her for a few seconds, making Ariel uncomfortable, and finally spoke. "Amapola, you do it."

Amapola acquiesced. "Yes, Queen."

Cinderielle blinked. "Queen?"

Amapola, who had approached, looked at her and nodded. "Our leader evolved to a Rose Fairy Queen not long ago."

Cinderielle's eyes opened in realization. "No wonder she can fight me back while I'm transformed."

Although Flor wanted to tell her that she would also fight her back before her transformation, she actually knew that those words were just bravado. If Cinderielle had appeared before she transformed, she would've lost without a shred of doubt. Cinderielle's stats, while transformed, were just too high.

Meanwhile, Liu Shu finally decided to allow Cinderielle to approach, so she sent an affirmative pulse of energy. Not only Flor, but everyone else felt it as Liu Shu was not bothering hiding or targeting it.

The strange feeling of being struck in the head by an affirmative feeling made the human's completely stunned. "S-She can communicate?"

Amapola, who had been speaking with them, asked with a confused expression. "Why wouldn't she?"

Ariel tripped over her own words as she spoke. "N-No, but a tree! She, well, she is a World Tree, but! Don't those need like an interpreter or like a priest or something?"

The wild Rose Fairies were clueless about what they were talking about, so they just looked at Ariel blankly, making the human woman turn toward her companions. "Am I the only one who finds this crazy!?"

Maley shook his head. "It's honestly quite a surprise. However, you are certainly overreacting. Look, Cinder didn't even flinch as if it were a matter of course."

Cinderielle looked over and spoke. "World Trees with high levels of intelligence can vaguely communicate. Of course, if the tree has a high-level communication skill, they might even be able to send words or more complex thoughts." Cinderielle looked at Liu Shu and sighed. "I just don't know if she has it or not."

Doley asked, confused. "Aren't you able to discern a few skills as a Sylvan, there is nothing there?"

Cinderielle shook her head. "World Trees have incredibly sturdy defenses to being analyzed. Beyond their Level, Ternary Essences, or skills they have targeted you with, discerning anything else needs for the Sylvan to be overwhelmingly stronger than the World Tree."

As they spoke, the Rose Fairy Queen had been keeping one eye open and constantly monitoring the Flame Aether Sylvan. She had clearly seen Cinderielle's face twist with glee when the "yes" arrived. However, since she somewhat knew what the Sylvan's intentions were, she didn't stop her from approaching. 'Hehehe, Liu Shu is quite popular. I wonder how things will develop when Verdantia appears as well. Will those two kill each other?'

Flor smirked, thinking of that situation. 'I hope so, one less annoyance in the World.'

Cinderielle looked at the majestic infant World Tree, her orange eyes glowing with profound light. "So pretty..."

Liu Shu was naturally paying attention to her, so she heard her loud and clear, making her giggle. 'Thanks, thanks~, you are pretty too~.'

Her thoughts were expressed as a thankful "good," making Cinderielle laugh. "You are called Liu Shu, right?"

Liu Shu answered proudly. 'Of course, my name is the bestest of all! Tianlian Liu Shu!'

Although Liu Shu was quite expressive, her thoughts were translated in a simple manner because of her immaturity in controlling such auras. Her answer, since the name she thought of was different from the one Cinderielle said, was actually communicated as a "not entirely."

Flor was "listening" to Liu Shu with her eyes closed, so she said aloud. "Tianlian Liu Shu. That's her full name. I just call her Liu Shu because it is shorter."

Cinderielle listened and then felt the tree answering with a cheerful affirmative aura. 'Why is she so cute? Ahhh! Although I can't tell what she is saying, I feel that it must be something cute~.'

It was true that Liu Shu had the SSS skill, which clearly aided in these matters. However, Liu Shu still didn't realize how to squeeze even a little bit of her most high-ranked skill. She had trouble controlling E-Rank skills, not to mention SSS rank ones. For now, she could just let them run passively and utilize the advantages they gave.

SSS skills were not something a creature of Liu Shu's level should even see, not to mention own. The grand majority of the World didn't even know they existed.

For the average person, rank "A+" was the limit of legends that any creature could reach. Anything beyond that was considered fraudulent or a theme that was used commonly in fantasy literature in their World.

Book authors writing about a hero that becomes stronger than the limits imposed was something that would never be out of date. Using the different races as the basis of a prohibited romance was as popular, if not more.

Cinderielle, a few steps away from the World Tree, felt her entire body react. Her blood was rushing, her breathing was quickening, and her face was heating up. She could also smell the World Tree's unique fragrance, which got stronger as she approached. 'What is this scent, so good, so fresh, so tender~.' The red-haired woman took a deep breath and giggled. 'Ah~, I might get addicted.'

The scent was addictive for Cinderielle, as each deep breath she took filled her lungs and brain with euphoria. With her body getting closer, Cinderielle trembled in anticipation. 'Ah~, I'm finally going to touch her.'

Liu Shu observed all these reactions with a clueless expression. She just found them funny, but something inside of her was telling her that there was a strange danger behind her smile.

Still, she ignored it because Cinderielle was smiling so happily that Liu Shu couldn't even start to guess why it felt somewhat dangerous.

Cinderielle asked, stopping just four steps away from the World Tree. "Liu Shu, can I call you Tiantian? It sounds cute, right?"

Liu Shu was confused as to why she wanted to call her like that, so she expressed her confusion. Cinderielle smiled deeply when Liu Shu didn't outright reject her. "Well, I want to have a special way to call you, Liu Shu. Can I?"

The World Tree felt that she didn't have anything to lose, so after thinking about it for about ten minutes, she answered affirmatively.

As a Sylvan, her patience was deep, so Cinderielle stood four steps away from Liu Shu while looking at her without moving an inch. When she received the affirmative answer, Cinderielle's smile deepened as her eyes looked at Liu Shu with increasingly profound feelings. "I see, thank you... Tiantian~."

Chapter 57. Cinderielle's first contact with Liu Shu.

When Cinderielle, the red-haired Sylvan, crossed the distance, she didn't even hold back her intentions as she hugged the tree. Her arms wound around the thick trunk as she buried her face in the somewhat rugged surface. Because Liu Shu's body was close to seven meters tall, counting the canopy, Cinderielle reached around the waist area of the faint humanoid figure.

As a World Tree, her trunk was thicker than a typical tree of her height would have, making it thicker than what her arms could surround. However, Cinderielle couldn't care less right in this instant.

The second she hugged Liu Shu, her entire existence seemed to have become complete. Something deep inside her that had, for the first time since forever, felt satiated.

The powerful sensation entrapped her mind, body, and soul, making Cinderielle's eyes gain a deeper-than-usual tone that reflected her inner feelings of growing obsession.

Yet, even as this powerful feeling grew inside of her, there was something that Cinderielle couldn't or didn't understand deeply. While there was a desire for a monopoly, there was a strange feeling looking at Flor and the Rose Fairies, not wanting to make them go away.

In Cinderielle's mind, she knew what was happening. Her instincts as a Sylvan wanted to court this World Tree and make it hers. However, at the same time, she wanted the World Tree to grow and become stronger.

'However, from the way Flor has been treating Liu Shu, it seems that she is still quite childish mentally. What to do~?' Cinderielle separated from the tree when she felt the energy inside of it become strangely relaxed. 'I can... make her accustomed to my presence? Perhaps I can become an essential part of her and slowly enter her mind.'

Cinderielle smiled as she separated. And to her expectations, she saw her branches extend but stop midway. This action made Cinderielle's smile deepen.

Meanwhile, Liu Shu was confused. 'Why is she hugging me? But...' Cinderielle might've been a person with Fire affinity, something that most flora didn't like. However, she was not any being but a Sylvan who had an affinity toward plants. '...It feels warm.'

The innate heat and aura emanating from her relaxed and made the World Tree feel comfortable as if her branches were being warmed up by the Sun after a cold winter. The heat from Cinderielle's aura seeped inside her and made her own energy feel attracted to it.

Liu Shu looked at Cinderielle and thought. 'It would be nice to be smaller and fit in her arms...' It was the first time Liu Shu wished to become smaller. Her entire life, even before she became a World Tree, was all about getting bigger and bigger.

Of course, this fleeting desire wouldn't even minimally affect her efforts to get bigger. Her primary and biggest desire was to become bigger and stronger; her entire existence, desires, skills, and will pushed her in that direction.

While Liu Shu comfortably relished in Cinderielle's presence, she suddenly felt the source of such warmth slowly getting away, making her relaxed mind become alert as the <World Tree Eye> fixed on Cinderielle.

Seeing her smile as she moved away, Liu Shu's branches extended unconsciously to grab onto her, but she stopped herself. 'Why did I reach out?'

Flor asked from above, interrupting Liu Shu's pondering. "Did you have enough?"

The Sylvan looked upward and smiled, her face much more relaxed when facing Flor. Flor blinked, surprised at her adaptability. Usually, after being almost killed, a creature would remain cautious and even flinch.

Of course, while Cinderielle remained cautious inside her heart, somewhat having been able to get so close to Liu Shu made it so that Flor, who was acting like a protector, looked much more pleasing to the eyes.

The fact that she almost got killed by her still remained fresh in her mind. Yet, the fear she felt from that time had calmed down a lot after hugging Liu Shu. The aura emanated from her made all her other worries seem insignificant as she finally, after so many years, found the creature that the leaf belonged to.

Cinderielle had been honestly doubting her own mind at some point. How could a single leaf have her so utterly captivated? However, now she understood.

After seeing Liu Shu, feeling her aura, and interacting with her, even if it had been just an instant, Cinderielle understood that other than this World Tree, there was no one in this world that could fit her more perfectly.

Cinderielle answered Flor's question. "I actually didn't, but I don't want to bother Tiantian too much in our first meeting."

Flor snorted. "You've adapted quite quickly, haven't you? Adding a nickname and all to Liu Shu already."

Cinderielle smiled. "She likes it, so there is nothing wrong with it."

Flor looked at her for a few seconds, making the surroundings become tense, but after a while, the Rose Fairy Queen closed her eyes. "Whatever. When are you going to leave? I want to recover from my wounds to deal with the people that are coming here."

Cinderielle was about to answer that soon, but Flor's words changed her mind. "What happened?"

Flor didn't mind explaining. "Territorial battles escalated, and now there is a group with hundreds of beasts coming our way to eliminate us. It seems that not only the race we were fighting but many others in the surroundings felt a threat when I gained too much strength. Moreover, Liu Shu's existence is not a complete secret, as some of those people know about her."

Flor added. "They are not as dangerous because they couldn't recognize Liu Shu as a World Tree thanks to their lack of knowledge. Yet, if they are contacted by the correct people, things can escalate very quickly." Flor sighed, looking toward the blue sky through Liu Shu's canopy. "Fighting you was something I wanted to avoid, but it was impossible."

Cinderielle commented with a twitch of her lips. "I told you I'm not dangerous."

Flor gave her a side-eye filled with disdain. "If you saw a <Lurther> looking at you in the eyes and smiling while saying they are not dangerous, would you believe them?"

Cinderielle and the humans almost fell over while the Sylvan spluttered. "A <Lurther>!? What does a C- class creature have anything to do with this!?"

Flor shrugged. "For me, at that time, your existence and the existence of one felt equally threatening. If I let you go without confirming that you would indeed not spread information about Liu Shu, I would only be inviting over a bunch of high-level people who want to kill us all."

Ariel and the rest wanted to refute it, but they couldn't because it was actually true. Most powers that had a World Tree as their core were at odds with others similar. Very rarely would these people join hands for anything. Moreover, for older powers with more history, indoctrination often taught that their own World Tree was the only "true" World Tree while the rest were fakes that were to be purged.

Not many were fooled by this propaganda, but those who were became almost impossible to convince otherwise. Physiological beliefs were a formidable weapon for those ignorant. They could reach the point of defining a person's personality, and therefore, making the "believer" of those teachings that anything that goes against it, regardless of how good arguments or facts were, was nothing but gibberish.

While Flor was unaware of many of these facts, that didn't diminish the correctness of her decisions. Although she jumped to conclusions, who could be cautious and patient in a jungle zone that was about to become a warzone?

Cinderielle changed the subject. "Anyway, can we..." Cinderielle looked at the humans for a brief moment and continued. "Can I participate in the defense? I will even listen to your orders. However, I will probably ignore any order that goes against Tiantian's safety."

Ariel approached. "Hey, I've bet a large part of my future here. Since you are talking about that, you might as well include the <Sunflower Caravan>'s sub-leader!"

Cinderielle looked over with surprise. "And you wanted me to help you? Don't you have enough influence to manage and ask for powerful Explorers?" Cinderielle rationalized. "While the <Sunflower Caravan> is really not a powerful group, you can always ask for top personnel as long as you are close enough to the top people."

Ariel shook her head. "Internal problems are quite deep. Anyways, what's wrong, Rose Fairy Queen?"

Flor smiled. "Changing the title now?"

Ariel laughed. "Now that we are close, we can finally analyze you and see your race and ternary essences. Quite a powerful creature."

Flor sighed ruefully. "I'm still behind to that thing when she transforms."

Cinderielle snorted. "Hey, be more respectful. Who are you calling a thing?"

Flor rolled her eyes. "I'll be respectful when you don't annoy me."

Then, she finally answered the question. "As I said, a tide of beasts is coming our way. We need to defend it, and while we are a bit short on personnel, Liu Shu honestly counts as a small army. As long as she has Aether Mana and Anima energy to help us, victory is not that hare.... Or so I thought if you all didn't appear and make this..." She looked at her burnt skin and sighed.

Cinderielle wanted to retort, but she couldn't. "Don't worry, we'll help."

Flor smiled. "That would be quite nice. Also..." She looked at the merchants and asked. "Any book around there related to communicating with World Trees? There are some things I've failed to understand lately, so I'm a bit eager to get something like that."

The four of them looked at each other and shook their heads. "Those kinds of books are usually in libraries, not in our hands, where they can easily be broken by our fights."

Flor nodded. "A library is a place to store books, right?"

The others confirmed it, and Flor asked out of curiosity: "Is it possible to take them out permanently?"

"A place like that is not usually where you can buy books. Of course, they have their prices, and they will be sold even more expensive than the original for being unique many times."

Flor thought of Verdantia and pondered. 'How did that woman deal with the fact that she have lost those three important books?'

Placing those thoughts aside, Flor told one Rose Fairy to go get Ignatia while she explained a bit about the Thornstrides and other races they've spotted.

Ariel asked, curious. "We could use some kind of building, but do you have any?"

Flor snorted. "Of course I don't, why would-."

Suddenly, several pulses of energy burst from the tree with the meaning of "Yes!"

The six people looked at the World Tree with many different expressions. Some wondered how she did that, something they hadn't been accustomed to even after all this time; others were looking with a strange glint in her eyes while Flor knew what was coming and prepared herself. 'I'll need to be an interpreter again, it seems. I wonder when Liu Shu will be able to talk with us.'

Chapter 58. Plans.

Liu Shu had been quietly listening to their conversation. She had learned that another World Tree was nearby and that World Trees didn't like each other much from the looks of it. Liu Shu didn't find it strange. After all, her reaction when other trees entered her territory was to uproot them and destroy them. 'If another World Tree tries to enter my domain, hmph hmph. Don't blame me for being ruthless! Even if we are the same, you mess with me, then... um... I'll uproot you! Yeah!'

So, as they spoke, Liu Shu learned a few interesting facts, some of which she didn't care about, like the caravan thing, and some that she found interesting.

And then, the human woman suddenly spoke about needing buildings or something. Liu Shu became ecstatic. 'I can finally ask about construction things! Flor will surely understand what I want to explain now!'

Her trust in the Rose Fairy Queen deciphering her babblings had already reached incredible levels. So, without losing a single second and reacting almost as fast as she

did when fighting, Liu Shu jumped into the conversation with a loud. 'I want buildings too!'

And that aura vigorously washed all over them with the feeling of affirmation. Looking over, the five people looked confused as they looked at the tree. Flor, on the other hand, asked. "Do you want something, Liu Shu?"

Liu Shu responded with noticeable enthusiasm. 'Yes!'

Her enthusiasm was felt, quite literally. Ariel spoke with a stutter. "Her aura is quite strong. What level is she, 9? 10?"

Flor looked at her and asked. "What, you haven't analyzed her?"

She scratched her cheek. "As humans, it is complicated to see the stats of plant beings. Of course, usually there are no problems. However, when we speak about World Trees... I would need to be a lot stronger than her to see."

Flor hummed with interest. "I see." Then, she turned around without answering her question and directed her voice toward Liu Shu. "Is the thing you want of something we spoke about?"

Liu Shu giggled in her mind at Flor's usual sharpness and sent another affirmation. Flor nodded and got thoughtful. She asked. "What were we speaking about?"

Robert commented. "Defensive tactics?"

Flor tilted her head, not feeling that Liu Shu was trying to interject about that. Her lack of response was also easy to interpret as a negative to that topic. 'Hm... The other time was about making weapons, right? Then... What did we speak about that... Oh.'

Flor muttered. "Buildings."

Liu Shu would've leaped in joy if she had legs, but she still bombarded her trusty guardian with plenty of cheerful messages. 'Yes, yes! Wow, Flor! Amazing! Flor always knows what I want~.'

The people around became flabbergasted as Flor began holding her forehead while several energy auras hit her one after another. It was clear that her mutter was the correct answer.

At the side Cinderielle observed and took notes. 'I need to become good at understanding her.'

Ariel couldn't help but look at Flor with her lips twitching. "How often do you have to deal with this?"

Flor flew toward Liu Shu to pat her trunk and calm her down as she responded. "Not that often. After all, Liu Shu sometimes goes to sleep for long periods of time. But when she wants something..." Flor laughed with a pampering and helpless expression. "...Liu Shu always makes sure to pester me until she gets it."

The tone was clearly affectionate but not in a romantic way. They could feel the care of an elder toward someone younger. Usually, World Trees were treated as sacred and untouchable beings, so even if they were young, the people around them acted carefully and respectfully.

The probability of those living around them developing some sort of religion for them was nearly 100%, as most civilizations knew that World Trees were different from the rest, so they treated them as such.

A being born to be an overlord and a creature that was equipped with most things to deal with trouble since birth was naturally revered by common creatures.

Now that Flor knew what she was talking about, her chance to speak about resources increased, as she was lacking all the F+ rank materials and many of the rest. 'Hmmm... How to tell her...'

Flor looked at Ariel and asked. "Can you get those books about construction when you go back? We don't need them to be about high-level construction. Basic but accurate construction books can work."

Cinderielle spoke. "I can enter the library of my Academy. There are plenty of books about any subject. Getting a few of them and carrying them here is not hard."

Flor looked at her and shrugged. "As long as you don't bring trouble for us. Sure." Then, she looked at the World Tree and asked. "Can you build a defensive structure or something similar?"

Liu Shu looked at her options and was a bit frustrated. While she could make several meters of wall, it was not nearly enough to create a good perimeter. Building something was not much of a problem. Still, the problem was about building it correctly.

The skill Liu Shu needed to create these was <Woodworking>, a skill she had with plenty of proficiency. There were materials in these structures that weren't related to wood. However, woodworking was not just the art of shaping wood; it also involved creating things out of wood and other materials.

Taking into account that wood would make up around ninety percent of the house, Liu Shu was qualified for it as long as she knew how the inner workings of houses worked. Without her being a humanoid, she couldn't even start guessing the essential layout of rooms or even the shape of the buildings. It was something she had never seen, after all.

After observing her material reserves and current abilities, she was quite sure that whatever she built wouldn't be a "House" or anything similar.

After thinking for about one and a half hours, she gave a negative signal with a bit of hesitation. Liu Shu looked over and saw that they were doing other things, so they didn't catch her first signal. 'What are they doing?' she asked. 'Also, when did Ignatia arrive?'

Listening to their conversation, she heard Ignatia speak. "Look. I'm willing to lend a few of my children. However, I really don't want to participate in this. It will be a slaughter, and probably, of those I send, many will die. I'll also come in person, but the rest, I'd rather leave them taking care of the nest."

Flor agreed. "It will be difficult with just 100 of your ants, though. My people that are combat ready are not many more than 150. Meanwhile, we would be in a two-to-one situation since you are willing to send around 100 children, as you would like to call them."

Ignatia commented. "However, our top combatants have plenty of strength, right? Your Rose Fairies have plenty of them, and taking you into account, it is like having several Level 10s."

Flor commented. "What about the rest?"

Ignatia shrugged. "They are strong but not as strong as you. Of course..." Ignatia looked at Cinderielle with curious eyes. "Who is she?"

Flor laughed. "Someone stronger than you. Ignore her from now on and continue."

Cinderielle's lips twitched. "Oy."

Ignatia lifted her eyebrow. "Stronger than me?"

Flor smirked. "She is. What? You don't believe me?"

Ignatia smirked back. "Should I believe you?"

The Rose Fairy Queen snorted and then laughed. "Well, you can do as you please. Still, hold back from fighting with each other. We have more pressing matters to attend."

Ignatia rolled her antennae and continued. "The 100 children I'll send are not that weak. They are not the strongest since they take a bit of time to nurture, and if they died, it would be quite problematic, but the ones I'm sending are far from the 'average'."

Cinderielle joined the conversation. "My transformation doesn't last much, so you should use it wisely."

Flor asked with inquisitive eyes and a smile. "Is it that short?"

Cinderielle refrained from answering and snorted.

Liu Shu saw a chance that they were about to stop the conversation and interjected herself. 'No! I can't build anything at all~! So... Good luck! Hehe.'

Hearing her answer, their conversation went on for a while longer.

Meanwhile, quite far from there, Froorar was walking with a flat expression. His reptilian feet stomped on the ground with hidden anger, and his aura was leaking, causing the lower-level beasts marching with him to have trembling bodies.

'They dared to kill her? To kill all those people?'

Froorar learned about the wipe-out not long ago. The first thing that came to mind was to charge straight at the weakened tree and see how it went.

However, he changed his mind. While his most likely heir was dead, and the legitimate one was missing and nowhere to be found, probably dead as well, Froorar felt like their race would decline if she continued sitting back.

So, to compensate for his seemingly weaker chances against the bigger and faster Rose Fairy Queen, he chooses to gather beasts all around into a battle. The way to do this was by telling them to kill the powerful Tree in the middle of the grove.

There were many ups and downs, but now, the army was rolling and getting stronger for each group they visited. Froorar had been shot down several times and beaten up a couple of times. Moreover, both those times were when he was clueless about why he was beaten down.

However, besides those slightly embarrassing moments, everything was rolling. He didn't notice that as they moved, their group mentality was getting at them.

As a group of several different races with different values, even between beasts, it was not uncommon for fights to break out during rest time.

While Froorar managed to have something similar to a [Beast Tide], it was not one. In a [Beast Tide], every creature is in a frenzy and out of control, running in one direction until it cools down or dies because of any of thousands of ways a beast had died in one.

A chief from a serpentine race approached and asked with a hiss. Humanoid monsters were almost as rare as they could get, so even when the boss spoke, the creatures around him dealt the damage.

"When are we arriving to fight that powerful tree? Will we see it from far away?"

Froorar looked at the hissing and talkative young snake and rubbed his forehead. "She is young, so it is natural for it not to be stronger than us or big enough to see from far away." Froorar snorted. "Should've snapped it like a branch so that we didn't have to do this."

The snake shook his head. "Did you have a chance?"

Froorar nodded. "I had. I just wanted to check on it before I snapped it because he did give resources to the Rose Fairies. This made me intrigued, so I wanted to snatch that place." Froorar sighed. "I regret it. I should've just killed her when I had the chance."

Chapter 59. Froorar Arrives.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Forest, the ominous sound of approaching beasts grew louder. Despite the difficulty of hearing in the air, Liu Shu could sense their presence through the vibrations of their heavy steps, transmitted to her through her roots.

Liu Shu understood the meaning of these vibrations mainly because she was accustomed to hearing the forest's sounds through her roots. Remember that while Liu Shu used <World Tree Eye> to look at the nearby world around her, her other senses were as proficient at detecting, but they focused on different types of senses and information to rely on Liu Shu on what was happening around her.

Her mind, speaking of normal intelligence, was very immature. However, as a tree, her ability to multitask, absorb, and process several sources of information was unmatched.

The reason for Liu Shu's delayed responses was not her inability to answer quickly. It was because her body, which was gradually transforming into a massive creature, was consuming most of her information-processing capacity.

If a human mind were placed in Liu Shu, it would be overwhelmed by the amount of information coursing through its entire body, leading to the tree wilting and the mind dying with it.

Sensing their approach, Liu Shu looked around the Rose Fairies and saw they were clueless. Most of them were still doing their daily actions, while three of them were flying around her while trimming her branches and cleaning her bark.

Liu Shu felt extremely comfortable, but she couldn't help but worry. 'Hm? They don't know. Should I tell them?'

Liu Shu slowly pondered and finally decided to do so after she saw Flor getting up from a nap. It had been almost one and a half days since Cinderielle arrived. Speaking of the attack, Flor was confused as to why the River Beavers didn't attack with the rest.

If what they wanted was to kill Liu Shu, it would be a very suicidal action, as it proved to be to go alone against her. Even without taking into account Liu Shu's surprising strength, Flor's presence should've been enough of a warning.

However, they still came. The Rose Fairy Queen had discussed this with the new guests, and their best guess was that Liu Shu was such a precious resource for them that they chose to separate and try to take everything before the others arrived.

With a Level 10 in the mix, their ability to trample almost any group in the Golden Sap Forest might've swelled the beast's ego, making them more willing to take risks.

Sadly, those poor creatures met a mighty World Tree.

Flor, who was thinking about these things, suddenly felt an energy pulse of danger coming from Liu Shu. She quickly sat up and flew upward, looking around with sharp eyes. Sadly, the lush forest prevented her from seeing anything that caught her attention. However, this didn't relax her; on the contrary, it made her even more cautious.

After two days of resting and eating Liu Shu's regular fruits, she managed to recover the remaining Phoer Body Shards and most of her Aether Mana Shards. Flor's regeneration allowed her to recover around 300 Phoer Body Shards daily and nearly 1100 Aether Mana daily; adding the 100 extra from 10 berries of each ternary essence, Flor recovered enough Phoer Body Shards to heal and enough Aether Mana Shards to regain more than eighty percent of her Aether Mana.

When she flew down with her regained agility, Flor shouted. "Prepare for combat!"

All Rose Fairies moved into action immediately while Cinderielle and the four humans looked around with confusion. Robert asked. "What's wrong, Fairy Queen?"

During these last two days, they'd become much closer and could talk with each other on a much more casual level. This didn't mean that formalities were thrown out of the window, but at least it was progressing in the right direction.

Flor spoke with a grave tone. "Liu Shu told me there is danger. It must be because the beasts are approaching."

Ariel was surprised. "Does she always inform your people of danger?"

Flor shook her head. "I guess she does it for the times she is also in danger."

Doles frowned. "That sounds a bit ungrateful, no?"

Maley elbowed his side while speaking between his teeth. "You asshole brother, apologize. That a World Tree we are speaking about!"

Doles realized that he had been treating Liu Shu as any other creature, and he realized his mistake. While it was true that Liu Shu's actions feel inconsiderate, she was a creature who, firstly, couldn't move and allowed the Rose Fairies to live together. Secondly, a being whose thinking modus operandi worked much differently. Thirdly and most importantly, a strong being that was acting as a protector, regardless of the reasons behind it.

When taken into account, the fact that Liu Shu even cared to communicate was already an achievement the Rose Fairies had accomplished through time to gain the World Tree's trust.

Flor looked at Doles with a colder-than-usual look, but she didn't bother answering. Much more pressing situations called for her attention right that they were about to be attacked by the numerous creatures.

Flor spoke flatly. "It's time to fulfill your promise. You will fight alongside the Rose Fairies to repel this beast tide. I'll go call Ignatia as well."

They all nodded, so Flor didn't bother anymore and went to prepare. Cinderielle sighed as she looked at Doles. "I know it is difficult, but please try to avoid commenting about how we, creatures with floral ancestry, treat World Trees."

Ariel scratched her head and looked at him. "Say, couldn't you stay silent?"

Doles coughed and apologized, looking awkward. "Sorry, I just felt like it was as such and commented about it."

After that minor hiccup, one hour went by while Flor and the rest moved around and prepared for battle. While they were ready to fight since minute one, because the enemy wasn't appearing, they took their time to create a proper alerting system.

While the humans didn't want to doubt, how could the world tree tell from that far away? They didn't understand how a Tree's perception or vision worked, but being able to sense from that far away was honestly terrifying. 'Aren't ambushes just worthless with a World Tree around? How many more secrets does a World Tree hold?'

After waiting for around 40 minutes longer, they could finally spot in the distance the cloud created by them. So many beasts moving at once was not something that could go unnoticed.

Just their steps would lift a dust cloud, like what the Rose Fairies and the rest were looking at. Then, inside those groups, there were very motivated beasts who would groan from time to time, creating small echoes.

In short, stealth was not their forte. However, because it was like an avalanche, regardless of how strong or weak it was, a person would not try to stop it by pure will.

Flor flew forward and advanced through the forest with a determined face. After moving far enough that being followed even by higher levels would give her a chance to escape, Flor looked at the approaching group of beasts with a calculating expression. 'Are there 600? No... perhaps more?'

At the helm of the group, she could see the group that probably started this. She couldn't help but get angry. 'You attack us, try to kill Liu Shu, and then blame it on us and do this!'

"FROORAR!"

On the beast's side, Froorar looked at Flor and spoke. "I know you can escape and probably send your younger ones to feel as well." Then, Froorar sneered. "However, I know why you won't. That tree.... It is special for you. Enough that you will die defending it."

Flor didn't deny it, and Froorar continued. "If it weren't for that tree, I would've never bothered creating this. After all, you can just fly away."

Flor snorted. "I'm here to tell you to back away."

Froorar looked at Flor for a few seconds in pure stupefaction, and then he burst into laughter. "You are not really saying that, are you? Do you think our group will just divide and go away?" Froorar snorted. "No. We won't! We'll continue forward and trample your ground and other creatures until we become too strong to be defended against."

Flor nodded. "Up to you." Then, she turned around and left. She didn't want to bother any other leader who led that army nor ask about the reason why they joined in the first place.

Froorar pointed forward and roared. "forward!"

In the group, there were a total of 654 creatures, some of those being higher-tiered. The numbers were divided like this: 254 Level 5 creatures, 184 Level 6 creatures, 106 Level 7 creatures, 78 Level 8 creatures, 24 Level 9 Creatures, and 5 Level 10, 2 Level 11 creatures, and 1 Level 12 creature.

Faced with such a group, the Rose Fairies had 1 Level 12, 1 Level 9, 5 Level 8s, 25 Level 7s, 65 Level 6s, and 98 Level 5s. They were utterly lacking.

Even when adding Ignatia's 100 extra ants, with 45 Level 5s, 25 Level 6s, 15 Level 7s, 10 Level 8s, and 5 Level 9s. Adding the five "guests" was a reasonable force when combining both of them.

Flor was not sure how much Liu Shu could inflict pain on their enemies. Like other times, they would stay within Liu Shu's range and let them come to them. If they want to attack the World Tree, they need to face the World Tree.

Ariel and company looked over with tense expressions. They had seen Beast Tides before, but from the security of the city walls, a city was being attacked. It was not that uncommon to see them for one reason or another.

The experience was impactful but never too terrifying. After all, you were protected behind thick walls as the soldiers fought for their live.

In actuality, if Liu Shu was unable to beat this beast tide, it could continue onwards by stealing all their deposits and using the experience to become something more substantial. Slowly building up momentum and eventually razing one or two cities wouldn't be that complicated.

Putting that aside, Froorar and the other Level 10s roared, sending their respective creatures to charge at Liu Shu.

On the side of the Rose Fairy Mixed Army, Flor also commanded her group to move. "Use what we've prepared!"

As the beasts approached, several wind blades shot outward in several different directions. These blades targeted vines hidden in the vegetation surrounding them, opening trap doors they dug while waiting.

The beat tide coming from behind didn't care, so while the first line stopped, the second and third lines smashed onto them without caring, pushing them down the holes.

This trap was prepared with Cinderielle's help, and flaming spikes awaited at the bottom of the pits. Cinderielle smiled. "It worked!"

However, Flor cut her enthusiasm short. "Don't get overconfident. Most of them are low-level, and they will fill out these traps. The ones behind will most likely use the corpses of the fallen ones as platforms."

Chapter 60. Wave of Beasts.

The traps, though effective, were not numerous. It wasn't due to a lack of time, as news of the invasion had reached them days ago. The challenging terrain was the culprit, making the construction of these tools a laborious task.

Even then, they managed to cut down the numbers a bit, killing around 40 creatures, a mix of low-level creatures. While it wasn't much, every point of Aether Mana counted in a battle of this scale.

Flor's voice boomed with urgency. "Prepare the spells! Remember the training and target each creature with precision! If you don't have Aether Mana, retreat and try to recover as much as possible with the berries and other items in the storage!"

Flor looked at Cinderielle and asked her. "Do a starting blow. When you transform, your Aether Mana recovery is incredibly high, right? You have leeway to waste a bit right now on low-level mobs."

Cinderielle didn't hesitate much. She lifted her staff and concentrated on the energy filling her body. Like a snake coiling upward, it gathered in the tip of her staff, and then she launched a concentrated sphere of Fire Aether Mana.

The sphere hurtled forward, its path marked by a trail of destruction, until it collided with the enemy a bit further than a hundred meters away, causing a terrifying explosion.

BOOM!

The explosive Aether Mana ignited a large area in an instant, getting Cinderielle's mind to ring with notifications. Of course, she quickly ignored them, like everyone was used to do during battle. Only on close one-against-one was it useful to follow the notifications closely to see where the enemy was weak and where they were strong.

Following the powerful attack, Flor shouted. "Attack!"

Ignatia at her side created a vibrating sound with her throat that sounded like the clicking of mandibles while her body spread pheromones around to command the 100 ants.

All of them came from her as their mother, so they had similar attack methods. The one hundred ants and the Rose Fairies charged their attack, creating a barrage of projectiles that quickly crossed the distance between both armies.

However, while doing so, Level 10s suddenly rushed forward and used their attacks against the barrage.

BOOM!

A large part of the attacks were blocked by the Level 10s, leaving behind several marks on their bodies that reduced their hp by a small part. Still, for the damage that it would've caused otherwise, it was a cheap price to pay.

Flor saw a few ants about to charge forward and shouted hurriedly. "Ignatia, hold! Let them get closer to Liu Shu!"

Ignatia quickly created more piercing clicking sounds and the 100 ants moved backward together with the Rose Fairies.

Flor's eyes focused on the level 10s at the helm and she muttered. "A little bit more, a little bit closer..."

Her senses sharpened, her body tensed, and the second she saw the Earth move slightly, her pupils constricted, and her voice boomed. "NOW!"

Right in that instant, the land below many creatures burst into a dirt explosion as powerful roots raised and impaled several creatures. One of the Level 10s, a snake-like being, managed to dodge the surprise attack. However, the roots were much more agile than they appeared to be and quickly coiled around its body.

The Level 10's body was sturdy, so the constricting strength of Liu Shu was clearly not enough. However, as he struggled, he felt his spine shuddering and quickly looked sideways, only to see a pair of red eyes looking at him with a terrifyingly cold expression. Moreover, these pair of murderous eyes were right by his side as a tender and slim petite hand reached out for his neck.

With incredible reflexes, he moved backward. However, as if the snake was Flor's hand and not himself, she managed to follow his dodging path and land her hand with a dry sound of skin colliding.

[-100]

The snake was confused. 'So weak-'

WHOOSH!

SLASH!

The head of the Level 10 flew high up, and Flor's Aether Mana plummeted by 1500 points, infused in a massively strong wind blade that shot ahead and killed three more creatures before it deviated, of course, into the sky.

The other Level 10s were stunned as they saw one of them die as soon as the battle started. Before, when protecting their army from the massive rain of attacks, not all of them had rushed forward—only three of them: one snake-like being, a bear-like creature, and a feline creature.

Wasting no time, those two rushed toward Flor with the intention of fighting them when they heard a loud roar. "FLOR! FIGHT ME!"

However, the Rose Fairy Queen ignored Froorar, who was charging toward her and retreated backward at the same speed she rushed forward.

The humans had not expected their strongest combatant to suddenly rush head-first into the middle of an army of enemy creatures and decapitate one of their strongest

combatants. However, that made a rush of adrenaline and excitement rush up their bodies. Not only them but also the rest of them were boosted in their morale as Flor perfectly took advantage of the opportunity created by Liu Shu's attack.

Right then, the battlefield was suddenly submerged in an ancient and heavy aura as the World Tree stopped hiding her nature.

Tianlian Liu Shu was angry. Extremely so. From her birth, while there have been people attacking her from time to time, she always knew that it was a coincidence to cross paths and, therefore, be attacked. While annoying, that was life. She wanted those people, and if they ignored her warning, she would kill them.

However, this was the first time that she was personally targeted. She could feel deep inside that they were targeting her.

The River beavers were as such, and Liu Shu slaughtered them all for that reason. This time, it wasn't just one race but a coalition of races guided by several leaders.

The significance of a single race being pushed by their leader and a group of creatures deciding that she was to be killed was different.

As a World Tree, a creature bound to be an overlord, the thing that she hated the most instinctually was when other creatures did not respect her existence.

World Trees, peaceful creatures for all but other aggressive flora in their domain, wished to spread their branches and evolve with the world around them. They wanted to become one with everything and overlook and guard their domains.

Her voice, cold and sounding much more mature than usual, uttered with terrifying coldness. 'You want to kill me so badly? Good. I'm going to inject fear into your veins.'

[Do you want to use 326 Experience Points to Increase <Willow Strike (F Rank Max Level)> to <Willow Strike (F+ Rank Level 1)>?]

'Yes.'

[Congratulations! You've successfully strengthened <Willow Strike>!]

<Willow Strike (F+ Rank level 1 [0/1200])>: The World Tree is from a willow family, with characteristic long but thin branches. She can use Aether Mana to move them and strike a target with tremendous force. Range from 25-->35 meters.

The creatures, who had already closed in enough to enter her increased attack range, didn't expect the tree's branches to come alive and extend the range suddenly.

However, the attacks weren't done entirely with her physical branch; an ethereal extension of her branch with the same hardness and strength as the actual branch was created with superb Aether Mana and Anima Energy control, extending far the range of whatever her branches should be able to hit.

BANG!

The Level 9 bear hit by the branch was instantly killed as its head shattered like a watermelon being hit by a metal bat.

However, that was just the beginning.

<Willow strike>!

BANG!

'Die and become my fertilizers.'

<Willow strike>!

BANG!

'Your attempts at killing me..'

<Willow strike>!

BANG!

'... will only make me grow.'

<Willow strike>!

BANG!

'Stronger.'

<Willow strike>!

BANG!

'Faster.'

<Willow strike>!

BANG!

'Taller.'

<Willow strike>!

BANG!

'Sturdier.'

Sacrifice after sacrifice, the Beast Tide closed the distance between them. At the same time, the high-level beings and the Level 9 humans fought together in another part of the field, not much further away than the place where the ants and rose fairies held off the Beast Tide inside Liu Shu's attack range.

Cinderielle, while transformed, fought off the two Level 11s, one of them being Froorar, while Flor exchanged blows with the enemy Level 12.

Froorar very much wanted to fight Flor and kill her, but Cinderielle was holding him off with her brutal firepower. He had a sizeable charred part on his chest because he had become distracted for a second, allowing Cinderielle a clean hit that sliced almost half of his Phoer Body Shards.

The remaining 4 Level 10s were fighting against the four Level 9 humans and Ignatia.

The Level 10s were much stronger at a raw level. However, Ignatia, Robert, and the others were ordinary humans; they had equipment. Even if it was low level and the stats weren't really enough to completely breach the distance, holding them back was not much of a problem. This gave Ignatia breathing room to whittle them down slowly.

While the Level 10s fought, Liu Shu aimed for all the Level 9s that entered her attack range, killing them all with one hit, one after another.

These creatures had no chance of retaliating as Liu Shu slaughtered them one after another. The death of the powerful enemies was a massive relief for the top-level Rose Fairies and ants.

Moreover, some beasts that managed to kill their ant enemies by pure number advantage managed to get much closer. However, getting closer to the World Tree was not as good of an idea as they thought.

Aether Mana and Anima Energy rushed along her body as she activated her every attack skill without caring about the consumption.

Pure anger was expelled outward in the shape of a storm of branch attacks and roots entangling left and right. Moreover, the World Tree was using its advantage of analyzing the enemies to aim for all the high levels.

Level 9s and Level 8s were slaughtered one after another as the branches wildly danced around Liu Shu's imposing body.

Inside Liu Shu's mind, only cold indifference remained as some creatures managed to reach her trunk and attack her.

What these beasts didn't know was that Liu Shu's body was even sturdier than the average Level 10. Her Physique stat might've not been as high, but her Physique Resistance was 42%. That meant that almost half of the attack's strength was virtually cut in half by her powerful bark as long as they weren't too high level.

Some Level 6s that attacked her even damaged themselves while attacking her, dealing more damage to themselves than they did to her.