

Undead 361

Chapter 361: Vague Recollections Lead To A Name Drop

Skullius remained still as he held the card that was in his armoured hands. His sockets had dimmed from the flames that always burned incessantly within them, the size having dwindled to resemble that of little dots.

To see the Limitless Body Null Demon Hound turn its eyes and twirl its tail was one thing.

To see the name Ferex, which was ridiculously familiar, written on the ground was another thing.

But, to see this card that held a face he had seen quite a lot lately, even with the differences in relation to what he recalled seeing it as when Doom Factor 2 closed in on him time and time again, was too much for his mind to merely cast it aside as a familiar joke.

This...

"... Ca...mi...la..." Skullius said instinctively as the face with a slight smile, as well as the blurry figure of something darting away brought Skullius to recall.

This girl.

That smile.

This was different from when he had seen her with the background of that cold scape, as if they were on a high mountain.

That rage that he always felt towards her...

Was it all fake then?

Who was he to this girl and who had she been to him?

Skullius' thoughts rewound back to the time when he was prompted to heal Ginie, the little girl in the Harem's Guild.

Was that as a result of this strange development?

Was it possible that this girl he had thought had been an enemy to him in his past life or whatever was actually... someone he cared for instead?

BZZT!

Like an electric shock springing from the very depths of Skullius' soul, a burst of pain pounded against his mind, the Penetrator being forced to clutch his head.

This unforgiving pain!

Doom Factor 2 did not allow for him to simply recall all his memories without claiming back all of his soul.

The memories that he had tried to draw on remained stagnant and distant even when within the mind of Skullius, flashing images of a girl laughing heartily while holding a small dog that clearly expressed its joy, zoomed past.

The Penetrator grunted as he stumbled to lie flat on the ground.

The Limitless Body Null Demon Hound hurriedly rushed up to Skullius and laid its paw on his back, trying to comfort him.

It didn't know whether what it had done had prompted more harm than good or the other way around.

By using [Amorphous Sampling], it had managed to create a detailed image of what it had been seeing so that it could show Skullius in hopes of jogging his memories for some much needed closure.

Creating shapes and colour with the Unliving Thread was not an issue for it after all.

"I'm fine..."

Skullius said as he rose.

His socket flames burned bright again and he sat without any other mounds of discomfort, as if nothing had happened.

The Hound knew its master couldn't have simply recovered so easily but it could not bring itself to continue dwelling on the matter.

Skullius looked down at where the Hound had written down the word, or rather the name Ferex. He turned to the Hound that towered over him as he sat and asked, "This is a name, right?"

The Hound paused for a second while locking eyes with Skullius, and then nodding.

"I see... I remember it means something to me. At least a little. Do you want it?"

Skullius had not given his second Apostle a name yet because of the simple reason that he did not have the ability to provide cool names.

For his first Apostle, he had initially thought the name Red Rage was cool, but with his progress as a Discount Human while getting more or more in touch with society, with basic norms, he had discovered that the name, was not as good as he had initially thought.

He had delegated the names of the skills [Perfect Night Domain] and [Bead of Malevolence] to Oliviana solely because he had recognised his inability to give proper names.

With such an opportunity before him, he wondered if the Hound would want this name, as besides from its mission in his soul, it was clear that this name was written down for some other reason.

The Limitless Body Null Demon Hound nodded eagerly at Skullius' question which amused the Penetrator.

He was right after all.

At this moment, this Apostle knew more about him than himself.

He could only trust it with this decision.

"Alright then. From today onwards, your name is Ferex."

[Congratulations, you have named your second Apostle!]

[Apostle 'Ferex' approves your decision. +50 favourability]

"Looks like it won't be long till you reach 100 favourability at this point. At that time we'll be able to combine some of your skills," Skullius said as he patted the head of the Hound which had been lowered to his height for that very purpose.

The Penetrator wiped his mind clear and stood, facing the large mountain in the distance.

The short but dangerous looking height that oozed of tremendous power.

"Well, we got this done quicker than I thought. Might as well get started with some other aspects of my power."

The Penetrator and the Hound descended from the mountain and reached the foot of their target.

Bellow it where barely any green and barely any soil could be found except for rock which were continuously being ground to bits of smaller particles, one could barely withstand the currents of mana and wind.

Above this fact, the air was saturated with elements that Skullius wasn't exactly familiar with, at least in the logical sense.

Spatial waves blasted against his armour, some of the sensation seeping through the adornment that he wore.

[Elevated Mana Manipulation] helped the Penetrator have a better sense of this energy that constantly struck against his body.

Mana that was mingling with spatial properties, the result of which could conjure the skill from the Elimparidis Staff, [Jolt Ray].

To get a better appreciation of this, he had to climb higher up the mountain and see for himself what conditions created the Legendary staff had been made in.

This was also the perfect time to bring the Nullmancer exclusive skill [Epiphany] to good use.

Chapter 362: Epiphany (1)

Penetrator and Hound scaled up the mountain which roared with immense waves of power that almost seemed intent on washing down the two.

The search for a boost in power and understanding of this mini world and the more powerful applications of mana could not be quelled however, as Skullius and Ferex continued to push through.

The lumps and humps they had to go around or climb over seemed infinitely larger as simply talking steps as they ascended became a massively inconvenient chore.

'Jeez... I can't even see the top even though this mountain is shorter than the others...' Skullius thought as he looked ahead where billows of whitish clouds that were actually created from the compounding of mana were swirling, their visibility diminishing with the steep ascent.

Ferex decided to take action to make the journey easier.

His body tripled in size as he grew to tower over his master.

The Vehement waves that blew from above were instantly depowered for its bulk and numerous Unliving Threads swiggled from its body and pulled Skullius, setting him on the large creature's back.

"Nice bro!" Skullius gave his Apostle some praise.

The Hound dug its pass into the ground and pushed forward with all its collective might.

It clawed forward, resisting the waves of ever growing power that thrummed, Skullius holding on to the Unliving Thread on the creature's back tight as he could easily be flung away if he wasn't careful.

The journey didn't take long after this as soon, the duo seamlessly pierced through the veil of white clouds, an expansive space different from the peak they erred expecting emerging in their vision.

A large, flat hound could be seen, the ferocious waves of mana that were here being a lot more tame but extraordinarily thick as they evidently melded themselves into the environment – air, ground and sparse vegetation made up of lightly glowing tufts of grasses.

Even gravity seemed to be affected as upon reaching this place, Skullius and Ferex found taking firm steps in any direction phenomenally difficult.

'The mana here is even thicker than in the water...' Skullius thought as he passed his hand through the light winds that howled with the white energy.

Aesthetically, this place looked like some tourists attraction.

Remnants of massive rocks that had existed here, in the form of massive, tall pillars that rose into the sky could be seen with shattered and broken edges.

Crumbs and chunks of burnt rock littered three-time ground for the entirety of the more than 600 meter stretch.

On top this, lightning crackled from the air from time to time, some of it shattering the rocks before fizzling out.

BZZZT!

Skullius saw from the roiling mana that surged in the air a bolt of grey-ish lightning sparking and propelling itself towards one of the rising remnants of old blocks in the blink of an eye!

At the moment of impact, where the lightning struck did not shudder with a impactful explosion as the element would usually do.

No.

The bolt actually...

ZWUUUP!

It devoured a chunk of the pillar, the construction being left with a circular curve!

Skullius was intrigued as his expectations had been betrayed.

What kind of lightning was this?

Was it some kind of special element like his Silentburn Levin?

The answer did not evade Skullius for long as soon...

BOOF!

In the next instant, Skullius turned, attracted by the sound of something falling a few meters behind him.

'What?'

Two chunks of rock with a circular shape appeared out of thin air and fell to the ground near each other!

While they were separate, one look was enough to affirm that both could be brought together to fit into a whole!

It didn't take Skullius two seconds to connect what had just happened here.

'That lightning... Did it just...?'

Even though he asked himself this, he knew full well that it was as he thought.

This lightning didn't destroy, rather it manipulated space, exhibiting teleportation effects to boot!

That said however, the effect wasn't something one would use for mobility as there seemed to be something extremely wrong - the two-way effect that would make it easier to move from one place to another was distorted somehow. It broke things in two!

"If that's really the case, this place is extremely dangerous. I should move faster before—"

BZZZT!

A streak of lightning shot directly at Skullius while he was muttering his plan to himself!

With a dark ripple that caused an animated wiggle around the surroundings, the Penetrator vanished from his position!

...

"What the hell happened?"

Skullius asked himself.

He could see nothing but a darkness dabbled with hints of grey gradient.

It was all around, devouring his sight.

All he could see was his armoured body and nothing else while at the same time, he felt restricted in his movements.

"Where am I? Gah! I cant move! What is this?!"

['Epiphany' detects high level concept, Stagnant Space. Would you like to invest and learn?]

"Stagnant Space? Hmmm. Wait, I think I've heard that before."

Surely, Skullius could attest to the fact that he had seen this term before, albeit not knowing what the flesh it meant.

He had seen it on something he had used after appraising it with the guidance field.

He sank into thought, thinking about this and how perhaps, he would be let out at any moment.

But unfortunately, it seemed that wasn't the case.

For him it was difficult to perceive the time but a full minute passed without any changes.

"How long is this going to tak-"

VWUUUP!

Once again, Skullius was cut off as suddenly, he felt himself spinning, colour returning to the world around him!

His body smashed against the ridiculously hard ground with a noisy impact that alarmed Ferex!

Skullius' armour cracked , his bones reverberating from the immense force.

"Wow. That was unexpected. A high level concept huh? I should probably see how much it costs. Hmm? Why do I feel so different?"

Wait! Bro! Where is the rest of me?!"

To Skullius' surprise, in a clean, diagonal blitz from his right shoulder to his left side, everything below was missing...

Chapter 363: Epiphany (2)

Cleanly split.

This was the best way to explain the way the Penetrator looked at this moment. The seamless slice that ran diagonally across his severed body was immaculate and clearly powerful as simply being able to cut through the armour he wore as well as the hard dark, blue body he had was a feat upon itself.

"How did this happen?!" Skullius questioned himself while looking at his other half that was eight meters away.

He wasn't exactly fazed as unlike his Discount Human body, the Penetrator body had a unique way of regenerating.

And no, [Luminous Healing] wasn't one of them.

Ferex rushed over to Skullius, dragging the other half of his body to him.

The Penetrator didn't integrate with himself just yet as he was trying to put together how that dark space, apparently called Stagnant Space, was related to the teleportation effect that he had experienced.

How long had really been stuck in that dark space anyway?

Time was hard to perceive in the dark.

This question, he decided to pose to his Apostle.

"Huh? I just disappeared and reappeared?!" Skullius exclaimed in shock as he received an answer.

Seriously?

His time confined in that space was more than just barely any time at all, as Ferex detailed.

"Is it like a place where time doesn't pass?" Skullius asked himself while wondering but ultimately, the answer was beyond him. "Let me fix myself first."

The Penetrator drew on his mana as he activated a skill he hasn't used before.

[Silent Revelation of the Bright King]!

With its activation, a massive, pitch black cloud appeared mysteriously over the Penetrator, its thickness being obscenely obvious with how each lump of its existence almost seemed tangible.

Tinges of blue sparked within it as twelve sky blue, star shaped lights with an intense sparkle began to drop silently in slow motion, their radiance being almost holy.

These star shaped lights surrounded Skullius and began brimming with energy, their glow greatly intensifying as they then shot bursts of Silentburn Levin towards Skullius without a sound!

The collective release of the shocking power in the forms of thick bolts created a magnificent spectacle that was nothing short of appealing and magisterial!

Skullius' two pieces rose under the hold of the blaring bolts that rippled their might over the figure of the Penetrator like water waves, the Null Devil's Aegis of Damnation falling off the Null lifeform's bone body.

Shortly after the steady rise of the body, the two pieces meshed together while the Levin brightened and melded where the damage had been done!

This scene was actually reminiscent of how the Penetrator had regenerated his arm during his evolution into this form for the first time.

~~~

[Silent Revelation of the Bright King | Lv. 2]

Using a conjured storm cloud, the Fulgorant Bone Penetrator can continuously replenish and mend his body while at the same time super charging it, which grants a 100% increase in damage and 70% Serenity Damage. The ability to seamlessly meld Silentburn Levin also becomes as easy as blinking socket flames.

Mana Requirements: 2500 Mana

Duration: 5 minutes

Cooldown: 10 minutes

~~~

This skill was very offensive in nature but its usage right now was only to heal Skullius as he wanted to continue forging ahead until he found a suitable place to use his [Epiphany] for maximum benefits.

Skullius stood while being bathed in the storm of Levin, his figure that already generated small sparks emitting a brilliant luminosity with streaks of the power splitting off his visage.

"That's better," he said but as his socket flames settled on the Null Devil's Aegis of Damnation, he felt a bit sullen.

The armour had been split in two and on top of this, many marks of where it had been dinged up were visible, spelling out how much it had been through despite its little usage when compared to some of Skullius' other's equipment.

The Chains of the Damnation weakly rose, as if reaching for Skullius who extended his hands for them to come to him.

The chains hurriedly leapt and wrapped around his torso desperately, firmly settling over the Penetrator's body.

"I guess it was time for a change anyway. At least for my human form is covered," Skullius said he set his sights ahead. "Come on, Ferex bro. We still have to go further."

The cloud over Skullius remained while the stars around him continued to release the streams of energy towards him that made him feel like he was invincible.

The Penetrator and Hound trudged on, their journey around the many pillars and clustered rocks being slowed by the threat of the grey lightning which smashed into both of them multiple times.

Skullius healed with the [Silent Revelation of the Bright King] while the Hound which also experienced the 'splitting' recovered with [Lanterns of the Pure].

Crossing a distance of sixty meters took over five minutes, rendering Skullius defenceless but he finally saw a semblance of what he needed amidst the continuously growing turbulent atmospheric conditions.

With his advanced sight, he saw shorter stone pillars in the distance but the firing bolts of lightning grew thicker while the winds blew in a spherical arc that cordoned off the way to what lied ahead, the barrier like construct that was created being very much capable of shredding both the Hound and Penetrator into dust.

Within this space, Skullius saw six staves made of different coloured stone, roughly carved with different designs. They floated in the air while below them, black and white stones the size of fists could be seen lying around with a pristine glows!

...!

'Those are... Could all of them be like the Elimparidis Staff? And those stones...'

Around the perimeter of these objects, Skullius also saw small spheres with a dark and grey hue appearing at random only to disappear along with whatever they touched!

The Penetrator's sockets flared with excitement. This was definitely Stagnant Space popping up at random!

'The atmosphere here is saturated with this chaotic mana. Getting closer to that barrier thing will get me killed so I might as well take the slower road.'

With the raging waves of spatially corrupted mana all around, it was probably possible to learn.

'Let's do it,' Skullius thought as he used the active effects of [Epiphany]!

Chapter 364: Epiphany (3)

[Epiphany | Lv.1]

The very core of a Vehement Bone Nullmancer. The user gains boosts to his current capabilities and channels to learn concepts with ease.

<Passive>

- +90% to all skill proficiency and power

- Constantly analyses concepts around the user with a chance of generating lesser fundamental knowledge on said concepts.

<Active>

Allows the user to learn the fundamentals of any mana-related concept using specified quantities of Null Life Essence.

Mana Requirements: None

Duration: None

Cooldown: ---

~~~

While being exposed to the chaotic conditions, Skullius applied the active effects of [Epiphany] which immediately called for the response of the guidance field which gave a proper evaluation of how much Null Life Essence Skullius would need.

[High level concept detected. 'Distorted Gravity'. To learn the lesser fundamentals, an investment of 15,100 Null Life Essence is required]

[High level concept detected. 'Spatial Lightning'. To learn the lesser fundamentals, an investment 24,900 Null Life Essence is required].

[High level concept detected. 'Stagnant Space. To learn the lesser fundamentals, an investment of 31,700 Null Life Essence is required]

"Hmmm...I see... I don't expect anything less from such concepts I guess. I did expect the lightning to be more expensive than the Stagnant Space thing though..." Skullius thought.

He didn't gripe about the high costs that currently exceeded his maximum individual storage of Null Life Essence as he knew that with time, he would be able to learn any skill he wanted, as long as it was mana-related.

This skill was exclusive to his Null Life Class, the Vehement Bone Nullmancer, and with how it worked, Skullius had speculated that it was like an advanced version of the nameless trait of his – extracting skills from weapons.

After having extracted an aspect of the Elimparidis Stone Staff, this skill had emerged and while it didn't offer as much skill proficiency and power as it originally did in the Staff, Skullius was happy with all it had to offer.

The Penetrator cautiously took a few steps forward while feeling the passive effect of the skill draw in the chaotic waves of power that contained so many concepts.

His end goal to eventually penetrate the spherical barrier that housed the floating staves and the gems as he knew that all these concepts that had been identified were thickest there.

For now though...

Skullius sat down and focused on the ground which was reinforced by mana.

"I feel it. Even though it's very vague, [Epiphany] is pulling on the mana in the air. This passive effect must be really slow but I'm sure it will help in some way," he said. "Now... I might as well increase the levels of my skills while I wait. Let's continue with this one."

Skullius raised his bony hand as he pushed out enough mana for a rather hot skill, [Revenant Flames of Ecstasy]!

With the cast of the skill this time however, the mana saturated space sizzled and roared, a burst of strange steam blowing into the air as a flame with a golden-orange hue shot out in the form of a large orb over Skullius' hand!

It quivered while exerting an immense weight that made Skullius' seated body dig a meter deep into the ground!

"Wooo.... Almost forgot about that," Skullius said as he struggled to carry the weight of the flame that seemed to burn even mana itself!

This vaguely reminded him of Terian and his flame shark which could detain people and their abilities.

Ah. Old times.

The Penetrator had actually gotten used to this skill's effect over the past few days as during the evening, he would transform and get to see it affect every skill he used.

"Now, where should I throw this?" Skullius asked himself as his sockets flashed around the area.

The entire space was hardened by the dense mana making casual blows of force less likely to do any damage to the ground.

Any place seemed fine to chuck the mass of scorching fire as the damage wouldn't be as bad.

Probably.

Skullius threw the large fireball up and away, its huge mass causing the thick air to produce an intense vibration which resounded over all things in the area as it flew the distance!

The fireball dropped and upon touching the ground, a golden flare burst into Skullius' vision with archaic visual violence!

The flare rose up in a beautiful light and stretched across the distance parallel to the ground with a light thrum and then....

A much expected explosion of golden-orange erupted with a force akin to that of a volcano!

The entire mountain top shook as the power from the skill cascaded beyond and buried Skullius and his Apostle before a second could pass!

The Penetrator was awed even though this was not his first time seeing this!

'It's pretty powerful with the effect of [Epiphany]. I wonder how much more powerful it will be when I evolve it,' Skullius thought as billows of dust rose in the shape of glowing mushroom.

He was unaffected by the skill's power as always and so was Ferex who still stood before Skullius protectively despite knowing this.

When the intense heat and dust cleared, Skullius found an astounding result.

"Jeez..."

Aside from the superheated air that created exaggerated mirages in the air, everything else here was barely affected by the flame!

The small pillars, the ground and especially the spherical barrier that housed the items that he wanted so badly.

Nothing at all.

"Well... this just makes it the perfect place for me to level this skill up!" Skullius said with enthusiasm.

\*\*\*

Next day.

The morning light that was always partly shielded by the clouds and cold barely announced that morning had come.

Still, everyone's biological clocks told them which time of day it was.

With a quick blur that barely had any effects to it, Skullius reappeared in the shade.

He donned a jacket as usual with his human face depicting a genuine smile.

"Now, for my part-time job. Wait. What does that mean? Gah, flesh it!"

The Discount Human took the Elimparidis Staff from where he had hidden it 'securely' and stored it in his ring.

Ferex sat atop his head in a miniaturised form, hidden within the locks of light auburn hair.

His preferred hiding place.

Skullius made sure that he looked presentable before he wore a wide smile that tried to give the feeling of care while hiding his true intent.

He swung the door open and found dozens of people, some who were shivering in the snow as they sat near the shed, clearly awaiting his return.

Skullius had sensed this the moment he came out of the mini world in the staff. Frankly, he was hoping for it. Many pawns for his use.

Unlike his [Revenant Flames of Ecstasy] which was now at level 12, eight short of an evolution, [Luminous Healing] was at level 9 and thus he was eager for the final push that would lead him into the next evolved state of the skill.

Upon seeing the face of the man who had been said to be capable of healing people already inside the shed, the people were astonished and awed.

They had been here all night and hadn't seen him go in!

"Good morning. Please make an orderly line and I'll help you all one by one," Skullius said with a soothing voice.

The people outside immediately responded with action as soon after they had done as they were told, the person in the front walked into the shed.

Skullius sat opposite the person and smiled warmly.

It was a middle aged man whose most notable feature was his imperial style beard and mismatched hair length.

He looked to be about to break into tears as he looked firmly at Skullius.

"S-sir, can you help me? M-my foot. I haven't be able to move it for the past week. I thought the cold in this region was something I could easily handle... but I was wrong. Please, please help me.

I will leave this town immediately afterwards!"

'No crap. Are you one of those bros who don't know that there's a hot bath in the town?!' Skullius thought while on the outside, he retained his smile as he nodded, his hands reaching for the man's own.

'Oh well. As long as I get m—'

...!

The Discount Human suddenly turned his head, a strange sensation that ran along his skin causing him to become alert!

His [Elevated Mana Manipulation] stormed towards his left past the walls of the shed!

Even Ferex who laid on his head turned in this direction!

Something...

Someone... was watching!

Chapter 365: The Desired Place

What was that?!

Skullius frowned.

An intense sensation had suddenly coursed through him, making him feel uncomfortable. This was a perk of his new cosmetic body that heightened his sensitivity to his surroundings and right now, it was warning him of hidden eyes paying attention to the shed.

Skullius' [Elevated Mana Manipulation] caught nothing as by the time he had activated it, the sensation had already disappeared.

'What was that? Have I already attracted attention?'

Skullius wasn't oblivious to the fact that his actions would undoubtedly cause suspicion.

This was a lesson he had learnt the hard way from the incident he caused at the College of the Esteemed. City authorities paid attention to stuff like this.

"Is something the matter?" the man before Skullius asked with a concerned look.

Skullius reforged his fake smile and reassured the man.

"Not at all. Let's begin," he said as he activated [Luminous Healing].

'I just need to tend to a few more of these people and then I'll stop. Two or three should be enough,' he thought.

In the spirit of taking more risks, Skullius was willing to entertain this for a little longer. He had means of escape if it got too hairy after all.

And yes. Flesh Sila's request if need be.

The healing skill washed over the man who felt the invigorating energy swamp his being, almost immediately after, his leg which he hadn't felt in what seemed like ages, regaining sensation!

"Ah..." the man stammered as he hurriedly stood up, seeing as the effect had done its magic.

Sob.

Finally!

It was back!

The sense of feeling in his leg!

"You really did it! Thank you so much sir! Thank you very much! I can't believe I can move without any problems again!"

"You're welcome, haha," Skullius said in classic human fashion, while the real him wanted this man gone for another customer hurriedly, even though he wouldn't be able to heal them immediately.

The man leapt a few times before shaking Skullius' hand vigorously and once again, before he could say he wanted to help the Discount Human he was stopped in his tracks.

The fake human wanted nothing else from him after all.

After a happy round, the man surprisingly sat back down again.

'Bro, leave!' Skullius thought begrudgingly while even his face was showing confusion.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

The middle aged man looked nervous as he scratched the back of his neck with a sheepish look.

"No-nothing. Actually there's something. You see... I was wondering if you could help me...us... with another issue," the man said with a small voice that showed how embarrassed he was to be asking another favour from the man who had just healed him for free.

"What's that?" Skullius asked with a tone that slightly leaked his impatience.

"You see... there's been a lot of incidents lately. Incidents of concern. People like me who haven't been in the city for long... migrants from their hometowns.... we are being hunted.

Many of us are just vanishing little by little, in particular those with illness or injuries. We've had to bunch up to protect ourselves but even then... I'm sure you have heard this sir and... I wanted to ask if you could help us."

"This again?" Skullius thought.

Yesterday at the Hot Swan he had heard something about this.

Was this something to do with internal affairs or something else entirely?

Depending on what it was, he wasn't willing to have any part in it.

"Yes. I have heard of this. Hmm..." Skullius said while deliberating on what to tell this man. "I'll have to think about it. Now please, there are other people waiting in line."

"Alright sir! I'll be here waiting for your answer. Thank you again!" the man said with vigour before he rushed out the shed.

Skullius sighed.

He did not think he wanted to get tangled in this.

'Could that someone who was watching me be one of the people taking away these guys? Well, I just arrived into the town so I may be a target. Hmm. Which is it, I wonder?'

After the man left, Skullius invited another person and waited for the cooldown of the skill while asking and pretending to care about their backstory.

When the cooldown timed out, Skullius healed this person and then the next... along with an additional one.

Only then did he see the notification that he was yearning for.

['Luminous Healing' has reached LV10. Would you like to evolve it into its next form?]

"Flesh yeah!" Skullius responded.

['Luminous Healing' has evolved into 'Great Saint's Invigoration']

~~~

[Great Saint's Invigoration | Lv.1]

<Passive>

All limbs will instantly regenerate, the rate of regeneration depending on the length of the limb lost.

<Active>

The user can fuse mana and other forms of energy to heal ALL kinds of ailments and minor curses. Even critical injuries can be healed with an appropriate amount of mana or other forms of energy.

Mana Requirements: ---

Duration: ---

Cooldown: ---

~~~

"Wow... this one is ridiculous. It doesn't qualify to be a Special skill?" Skullius remarked, clearly shocked by its effects. Furthermore, its name had changed in a direction he wasn't expecting.

The individual that he healed had left which gave him the freedom to speak his mind.

"This will be handy still. Now, I have to get out of here."

The Discount Human rose from his seat. He looked outside at the people who were eagerly waiting for him to call out another person in.

Their faces carried hope and respect, both genuine and otherwise.

Unfortunately for them however, Skullius couldn't care less.

He summoned his staff and immediately activated [Jump], his face showing nothing but a blank expression that was unaffected by the pitiful look on everyone's faces.

All these people saw was the figure inside the shed vanishing as if he didn't exist in the first place, their hopes bashed against a stone instantly.

Skullius appeared right where he had been standing yesterday before he teleported into the shed and sped away.

Using [Jump] to appear within the crowded streets of the town would be a bad idea after all.

The Discount Human walked randomly within the town for a while in order to determine if he was being followed but after a few minutes, it didn't appear that this was the case.

"Maybe I'm safe for now but I can't count on it. I should find what I was here for in the first place and leave," Skullius said before thinking about something for a short while. "He gave me directions, there's probably no need to let him loose, right?"

The Discount Human clearly did not enjoy Sila's company.

Skullius' agenda right now was to fulfill Sila's request.

According to the piece of soul, the place he was supposed to look for was pretty easy to find, or so Sila thought.

The man was not sure himself if the place still existed but he proudly claimed that at the very least, it would be preserved as a treasure.

The directions unfortunately did not detail where this place was in the city, but possible means to find it.

"A tall building that should be covered in dreadfully cold ice, is it?" Skullius mumbled to himself as he looked up and started walking around the town.

Frankly, he doubted that he could have missed something like this but perhaps there was more to it.

He walked for some time, treading through the cold streets that were crowded with esteemed figures passing with luxurious carriages along with the locals who went about their business.

The Knights who walked within the streets keeping the order in this tourist attraction of a city seemed different to those Skullius had seen.

The reason was that they were not free Knights of the Capital Service but hired Knights whose specific duties were keeping the many people from different places that congested in the town in line.

The large amounts of coin that Harifrast made allowed for such a feat.

Skullius' every didn't lead him anywhere close to what he wanted but soon, after discarding Sila's instructions and simply following the stuck up, fancily dressed individuals to the various spots they wanted to visit, Skullius finally found.

Near the edge, on the other side of town was a large field cleared of any residential or commercial structures.

A short, wooden fence was erected around the entire place in the snow, as if to give the feeling of both claimed territory and sacred ground.

A crowd of wealthy people stood behind the fence while listening to a finely dressed man who described the remnants of the magnificent, yet scattered structure behind him.

Skullius who stood a distance away from this group finally let Sila loose from his lonely place in his soul.

Surprisingly, the man didn't say or better yet shout anything foul as he normally would which surprised the Discount Human who had prepared for it.

"Sila?" Skullius questioned, almost beginning to doubt that he ever had a voice screaming in his head to begin with.

"...Quiet, tomato flinger..." Sila responded with a chillingly calm voice, his attention being on the objects ahead.

Before the two, a grand introduction was underway as the man who led the tour announced, "...With that said, ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce you to this town's greatest relic from tens of thousands of years ago. The Grim Tower!"

Chapter 366: Legends

Millenia ago.

...

Before a grand man-made mark that rose from the ground, a legion of powerful warriors stood at attention while gazing solemnly at a man with a tall frame standing in front of them.

He oozed of so much power that the weather was beginning to change just by him standing somewhere outside the chamber that he was supposed to reside in before the coming clash.

The clouds were swirling directly above, the snow flying around to swat against the faces of everyone present.

A heavy downpour began, unjustly moisturising the legion below, a strange transition from the relatively silent skies and calm weather that had prevailed just seconds ago.

The army of powerful warriors did not mind all this however. They retained their cool as they awaited what was about to be announced.

After a full minute, the man before them finally opened his mouth to speak.

"Men of war. Men of vigour. Men of great power. Today, is not a day for celebration. The completion of our tower is but a tragic marker in time. It is meant for us to sink our minds into the reality of who and what we are.

We are murderers. Killers of our own kind. Nothing can justify the way we draw extensions of ourselves in violence. For this very purpose, this mountain, this obstacle, this fortress has been built up! For them! For us!"

"All those fiends that disgrace the glory of the Deities shall fall here! Regardless of their humanity! Regardless of their lack of it! Let the shadow cast by this fortress be a reminder to you all that this place, is where blood shall fall and stain the thick of the world for generations! Not for the love of war! Not for vain victory!

But for hatred and ideal!"

The soldiers felt the voice of this man as he spat words after word ripple through them.

These words were meaningful.

They were cruel but real.

The man's image as he stood before the fifty meter tall and thirty meter wide tower complemented this image greatly.

"Let these words be etched into your very soul, as you may very well lose it following what you're about to see and experience!"

Gulp!

The dread inflicted was nothing to scoff at.

"I shall appoint one of you as Master of the fortress, as General of the Grim Tower. Look at this man as you do me and listen to his words without stutter or stagger."

BA-DUM!

BA-DUM!

"Sila Oinhold! Rise and take the helm to your legion!" the man said with authority, prompting someone within the rows of perfectly organised stationed warriors to shoot forward with his gaze showing both trepidation and zeal!

\*\*\*

A five meter tall structure lay on the ground, its torn and jagged edges digging into the snow and then further into the ground while the whole thing leaned on its side.

Its thirty meter girth gave it a grand appearance despite its cracked visage which was smothered by a thick layer of ice that hid the reddish blocks used to make it.

The white and colourless portions on the surface of the tower, the different appearances of ice, released a chilling steam that was undoubtedly mixed in with thick bursts of mana.

Atop this tower was a cone-shaped roof whose construction was nothing short of legendary and immaculate, giving the piece an expensive visage while a torn flag erected on the pole above it gave a glimpse of past glory.

The image displayed on the pale flag could no longer be seen but one individual among those around could remember every detail and clearly express what each meant.

The piece of soul that lay moulded into Skullius' own could only see through the Discount Human's eyes.

The Grim Tower.

It was once a formidable fortress build to withstand a heavy charge of powerful experts.

It had been equipped with the finest runes.

It had been equipped with the most powerful arrays in Pelian.

It had housed the most powerful warriors in that war.

But now, it was one tenth of its size, frozen by the frost gathered over tens of thousands of years.

The rest of it was there behind the wooden fence as blocks that were scattered around haphazardly, giving it a visage like that of old junk.

'<Sigh>...' Sila's voice echoed in Skullius' mind. For a moment, he felt the deep frustration in Sila's voice as the man no longer irrationally blurted everything on his mind.

For once, he didn't sound like a madman.

Bits of his memories surged as Sila recalled the blood that stained the Grim Tower back then.

The battle that lasted 146 days...

The final bout where he tried to coordinate with his Grand Commander to beat the waves of enemies.

Enemies of the Deities under one man who had begun on the path to Divinity.

'My honour... This is what became of it after all these years?' Sila said in a deep voice, a melancholic breeze brushing past the Grim Tower to match the feeling of emptiness he felt. 'Pathetic...'

Skullius squinted his eyes.

Come to think of it, he hadn't really thought about Sila beyond their cooperative relationship. He hadn't even considered where the man came from, his story.

All he knew was what he required at the moment, that Sila was a well of knowledge.

Skullius was about to appraise the tower when...

"This Tower existed in its peak state tens of millenia in the past during the Second Grand War. Many legends surround this construct and these remnants prove some of them. For instance, the interior and exterior of the Grim Tower is coated with thousands of defensive and offensive runes that are still functional even until now, which is why the Tower is largely unexplored and untouched.

Even moving it physically or through spatial means is impossible and studying the runes that make it so dangerous is beyond the knowledge of everyone who has ever tried," the guide explained with a voice that demanded attention.

The rich men and women who listened to his words nodded and took down notes with sophisticated cursive while others discussed in low voices among themselves.

"Grand Commander Jusfic Doeson along with an unnamed General who was supposedly the Tower Master are said to have led the charge against one of the Unions of Fulgardt the Immoral but unfortunately, they were outmatched. Apparently, when victory seemed so close, one of Fulgardt's Chosen Four appeared on the battlefield and changed the entire course of the battle."

Skullius felt a tremor of emotion that ran through his soul.

Sila's soul burned with fury, but only for a few moments.

'Unnamed General, is it? Hmmm. It was not enough that my woman was lost... but my pride too? Pathetic,' he said in a broken voice that disallowed Skullius from interrupting with any remark.

'PATHETIC!!!!'

Skullius was startled by Sila's anguished shout.

He could feel that the man was buried in tumultuous emotion.

'Tomato flinger. I have seen enough. Walk away...!' Sila said in a commanding voice that made Skullius hesitate only for little bit before he turned around.

He took one last look at the remnants of the tower and walked away.

When they were a sufficient distance away, Skullius was about to ask Sila the hundreds of questions he had but then...

...!

The Discount Human felt it again!

Someone was watching him!

Unlike last time, he didn't release a burst of mana to scour the area as that could be bad for him if he was to stumble upon an irritable powerhouse in the city.

Instead he quickly turned his gaze to where he felt the piercing gaze from and...

...!

'Tomato flinger... that man is bad news. You better run,' Sila said in a voice that wasn't as loud but dank in cautionary warning.

In Skullius' eyes was reflected a man who stood atop the roof of a building – an inn presumably from the homey decor that invited all to come and dine.

The man was quite a distance away but Skullius could see his figure clearly, especially the shiny thing on his shoulder.

Indeed, this man seemed dangerous.

Skullius didn't take any more time to think.

He activated [Great Rush I] and burst down the corner at incredible speed!

'Shit! I better get out of the city first! I'll figure out how to deal with him then!'

The Discount Human zoomed past the streets and leapt over people and small buildings alike, exhibiting a shocking level of flexibility with his manoeuvres!

He zig zapped through the town as he headed for the entrance to the town, covering a vast distance within a few seconds!

At this point, Skullius activated [Elevated Mana Manipulation] to try and scout whether or not he was being pursued.

His sense didn't pick up anyone who was running at a quick speed which baffled him greatly.

'I have a really bad feeling about this...' Skullius thought as he turned down the corner into another street.

"Stop."

Skullius' entire body shook, a tremendous force staggering not only his body but his soul as well as right after, the Discount Human found himself unable to move!

...!

Along with the sudden voice, the pain that came with hearing it and the image of a man who stood before him, a guidance field notification popped up in Skullius' vision.

[An external force assaults your soul. Doom Factor 2 takes advantage. 41%]

Chapter 367: He Is One of Them

...!

'I can't move!' Skullius thought as his eyes bulged, almost threatening to spill from his sockets.

He turned to look at the figure before him in shock.

This man's single word had caused him to stop immediately!

Furthermore, he had experienced a 1% in Doom Factor 2!

This guy's speech had caused that much damage?!

Why was his body listening to the man's words?!

And how in the world did he get here so fast?! Did he teleport?!

What did he want?!

Skullius' mind was jumbled with all these questions and he looked at the figure before him with barely veiled hate and apprehension.

Yet, at the back of his mind, he was caught by a strange thought.

This sensation. It was really familiar.

He had felt it before!

"Hmmm. Your soul just cracked quite a bit. It's especially fragile... and torn horribly. I wouldn't have had to be so rough if you didn't take off running," the figure before Skullius said.

It was a middle-aged man.

He looked at Skullius with his chestnut brown eyes that, despite their colour, seemed lifeless and dull with a hint of apathy vivid within them.

The sunken cheeks as well as unkempt and dirty anchor beard at the base of his heart-shaped face did not make his appearance look any livelier as his dark hair that clearly showed his clean scalp hairline through the buzz cut made things all the more worse.

The man wore casual clothes – a long sleeved black shirt and a pair of brown leather pants – the only feature on his body that seemed out of place being the silver pauldron that covered his shoulder, its appearance bearing a slight sheen with a mark crudely carved into it that looked like two crooked strokes meeting at one point.

Skullius couldn't quite comprehend what this man meant.

From his words, it didn't seem like he was trying to be hostile.

But then again, when had things ever been that simple?

Also...

At this point, he was done pointing out every instance that was conjured from his unfavourable luck.

"The hell? What does he mean my soul just cracked? How did he know?" Skullius thought, his apprehension growing with every second.

Atop his head, it seemed that the Demon Hound was not caught up in his paralysis but it did not simply lunge at this opponent as it seemed to have sensed something different about him.

Something beyond just raw power.

And thus, it laid in wait while keeping its presence imperceptible.

In this state, even Skullius couldn't perceive it and thus after seeing the opponent before him remain in one piece, he could only assume that his Hound noticed something he didn't.

Slowly, Skullius felt his ability to move return but the man before him didn't seem to want to make a follow up.

The Discount Human dashed backwards, keeping his vision on the enemy.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"That's a pretty idiotic thing to ask first. If I were you, I'd ask what I want with you before asking such," the man said as he stroked his beard while looking around. "Besides, this isn't a good place to chat."

All around, in Skullius' peripheral vision, he could see the crowds looking at the two curiously.

The sudden idiot who had come rushing into the street only to be stopped by a figure who suddenly appeared before him with speed that bordered on teleportation...

This somewhat drew people's attention.

Before Skullius could offer up a reply to the rude response he had gotten, he felt a tight grip on his jacket and then...

VWOOSH!

With a skittering of feet of that barely lasted for two seconds, Skullius felt his vision become a mash of colour with a harsh breeze blaring against his body then...

PCH!

The Discount Human found himself in a different location.

He dazedly stood over thickets of snow that were layered before a wide frozen lake with strange trees growing from it to rise high up with lanky branches.

'What the...'

Skullius looked around only to find a familiar town a mile's distance away from where he stood with people converging towards it in different directions through various means.

They had... left Harifrast... just like that?

That was....fast.

Beside Skullius, the man with a pauldron over his shoulder stood beside him looking at the six trees that grew from the frozen lake, their branches bearing purple leaves that had blackish ends.

Several people were also standing or sitting around the lake while admiring the purple reflections on the lake's surface and yet they didn't seem to notice the unnatural appearance of Skullius and this man.

Or rather, some just ignored it.

"Sit."

Skullius' body shuddered and he found himself dropping to the ground and sitting down with a heavy thud.

This time however, a notification presenting him with a higher figure in Doom Factor 2 didn't show up.

"You should thank me. I was gentler this time," the man said.

Skullius woke himself from the shock of his body just casually obeying what this man said and shot a response to his sentence.

"And I should thank you for that?"

"You should. I could easily report an unlicensed Healer taking advantage of refugees for own benefit. Would you like that?" the man said, his dead eyes giving Skullius a chill.

'Damn it! He's definitely the one who was watching me before. How is he able to do this? My body is just giving in to his words as soon I hear him speak. This feels like...' Skullius thought, forcing his mind to recall what this sensation felt like.

It didn't take long for him to remember however as he narrowed his eyes.

'Ah... that's right...'

Dezrael.

The winged bastard trapped in the Labyrinth of the Yoke.

The man had been able to just say something and Skullius' body had obliged.

The same had happened with Sause who seemed to have done something similar with Benzard and Reon back then.

Was this the same thing?

What even was it?

"I thought so," the man said with an indifferent look on his face. "For you to be that much of a fool to conduct healing in the town so casually, you must be a complete moron or just confident in your strength. I sincerely hope it's the latter," the man said.

Skullius had much to say to this man but he couldn't help but ask what the man said would be a better question.

"What do you want with me?" Skullius asked.

The man chortled lightly before sitting down beside Skullius, keeping his gaze over the trees.

"Finally, a less foolish question..." the man said.

'You just said it was the better question to ask bro,' Skullius grumbled inside.

'Tomato flinger. If you let your guard down, we'll both die. Don't take him lightly...' Sila suddenly spoke from Skullius' mind.

The Discount Human in this moment realised that he hadn't packed away his baggage and to some degree he wasn't quite happy with himself about it.

'Bro, if this guy wanted to kill us, he would have done so. He obviously wants something from me. If I hadn't run like you said, I probably wouldn't have suffered another 1% in Doom Factor 2!'

'What in the world are you talking about, tomato flinger?! What is Dum Fuckta 2?'

'Nevermind!' Skullius thought as he rolled his eyes internally.

'I am serious, tomato flinger. Be careful. He's not just a simple combatant. I felt it when he spoke. He's one of them...'

'One of who?'

'A Spirit Warden.'

Chapter 368: In Exchange...

A Spirit Warden?

This was the first time Skullius had heard such a thing.

In fact, for Sila to divulge information like this, it meant that he generally felt threatened and what he was saying was true.

Thus, Skullius stacked up extra caution against the man before him.

The man gave a short pause before giving the true response that Skullius desired.

"First off, let's start with some common courtesy. Even an idiot like you would require trust before we exchange demands, right?" the man said as he turned to Skullius.

'Bro, what's with all these insults? And weren't you the one who said asking who you are was a stupid question?!' Skullius griped internally, but even on his face, a contortion could be seen which the man beside him actively ignored.

"My name is Bek Dworth. A former Capital Order Knight. I suppose you could use the more astute term to refer to me. A Stray Knight," the man whose name was Bek said. "What's yours?"

Skullius felt his body tremble at the question Bek had posed, his mouth opening to reveal an answer without his permission.

"My name is Festos Dawn..."

"Festos. Hmm really exotic," Bek said with interest. "Pardon my reflex. I tend to not trust people with the truth."

Skullius felt the oppressive energy leave him and he was left to act freely again.

Yep.

This guy was dangerous.

If he got even a little more curious of Skullius, he could probably just ask him to spill everything and the Discount Human didn't know if there would be anything to guard him from that.

He only grumbled for a short second though, before asking.

"What's a Capital Order Knight?"

The man raised a brow and looked at Skullius as if he was an absolute fool.

'Here it comes...'

"For an Energy Former you sure are stupid. I was wondering why a Healer would choose to look for coin from the poor in a town like Harifrast. Are you some kind of retarded backwater Healer?" Bek asked genuinely.

"I'm not stupid!" Skullius spat.

"Hmmm..." Bek hummed. "Well, I might as well oblige. Capital Order Knights are Knights selected as outstanding from the vast pool of Capital Knights. They are esteemed elites in power and intelligence. They only rank below the Highest ranks of Capital Service, the Honoured Knights and Mages."

"If you are from small cities and towns I'm sure you have never met any Capital Order level personnel let alone Honoured level ones. Of course a town such as Harifrast which has denounced both the Capital Service because of the Royal Family as well as the Guilds Association because of their greed, opting to hire Capital Knights for certain intervals instead wouldn't have higher level units.

Perhaps that's why you're so ignorant."

Skullius listened to Bek while also trying to pinpoint what he wanted as the man hadn't given even a semblance of what he wanted in wording.

But, the information he had gotten so far was crucial.

It seemed there were levels to Knights, something he hadn't considered given the fact that all the Knights he had seen were all just the same.

"Are you now going to tell me what you want or not?" Skullius asked with impatience.

"Right. I shall oblige," Bek said. "I've been looking for an Energy Former around the area. Someone adept at discerning energies. I can handle the perception of ethereal beings but even with all my Class Branching, I'm still a swordsman, I cannot reach the same level as that of an Energy Former."

"Wait," Skullius narrowed his eyes. "Ethereal beings?"

"That's what I just said you brain empty idiot."

Skullius swallowed his comeback, which mostly had to do with him admitting that in fact, he didn't have a brain but that wasn't important.

Skullius linked what this man had just said to what Sila had said before.

"So... are you a Spirit Warden?"

Bek's dulled eyes showed a spark of interest as he gave Skullius more attention.

"You know what I am?" he asked.

"Uh... yes. Yes, I do," Skullius sloppily lied.

Bek sized Skullius up before losing his interest and looking back at the large trees.

"That's a lie even a moron wouldn't tell, especially when they know they are before someone like me. I know you're not alone in that body. Your own damaged soul is tangled with another aged piece of soul within you. I assume you have a somewhat non-hostile arrangement?"

...!

Skullius' HEART almost jumped from his chest as he heard this!

The hell?!

This man...?

Skullius looked himself up and down, then at Bek who shook his head.

Could this guy see his soul or something?!

"How..." Skullius stammered with a hard expression.

"So I was right. You wouldn't be questioning what I am if you knew yourself. Frankly, I don't fully understand myself either, nor do I know which name to describe myself. I've heard of so many. Soulspoken, Spirit Warden, Soulritter... but all of it doesn't matter.

I only care for my continued duty, which brings us to why I need you..."

Skullius gulped.

Within him, he felt Sila turn tense.

Ferex grew more anxious, but he couldn't attack

Not yet.

Bek pointed forward towards the large trees with his index, his thumb sticking out as it pointed towards the sky, a gesture he had grown much too used to.

"Many newcomers to Harifrast have been vanishing, disappearing without a trace. This has slowly begun to cause the brewing of conflict, giving the locals a reason to fight the newcomers and drive them out while those coming into the city demand the permission to stay as the town is under the Capital Service."

Skullius' eyes brightened.

Again.

This matter.

It somehow found its way into his day didn't it?

"While most think that the locals have suddenly gained the balls to kidnap and or kill the newcomers, this is a foolish conclusion. I know who is behind this..."

This man knew?

Who was it then?

"Who is it?" Skullius asked, feeling that Bek wanted him to ask, as that could potentially be the better question to ask.

"Another ridiculous question. If I were you, I'd ask the reason why first?" Bek said much to Skullius' frustration.

'That doesn't even make any sense!'

Skullius gritted his teeth and just went along with the flow.

"Fine. Why?"

"Good question. Sadly, I don't have the answer to it. I've only been tracking them for a few weeks and they are extremely slippery," Bek remarked as he sighed helplessly.

Skullius' eye involuntarily twitched as he pressed all his anger down..

'This bastard...!'

"So what do you need me for?" Skullius asked.

"Simple. These people have unconventional means of escape, mainly related to tempering with natural rules of the world. They mess with energies quite a bit. For that, I need someone with good senses to said energies. Regardless of how popular Harifrast is, Energy Formers don't usually stroll in to waste time sightseeing. To my good fortune, you just happened to come here and start fooling around."

Skullius sucked in a deep breath.

This was quite the enraging conversation.

This was a demand on top of it all, wasn't it?

"Hmmm... I see. There's only one problem though. Why should I care about this? Will you force me to do something I don't want to do?" Skullius asked in rebellion.

He didn't want to help or to get in on any part of this.

All those people could be killed for all he cared.

He just wanted to get to his goal before time ran out.

"You're right and predictably wrong. I won't allow you to refuse but I can give you compensation for your help. That's as much as the remains of honour in me will go," Bek said before standing up.

"And what's that?" Skullius asked with a frown.

"I can purge that aged soul that's tangled within you. Or better yet, sever it and allow you to use it separately as you see fit."

...!

'TOMATO FLINGER! YOU WOULDN'T DARE!'

Sila boomed within Skullius' soul.

"I must have struck quite the cord," Bek said with a lifeless smile while gazing at Skullius intently.

The Discount Human's eyes brightened!

Another fortunate encounter had dropped out of nowhere for his sake!

Maybe.

He didn't trust in simple good fortune at all bit this... seemed legit.

This fateful encounter with this man that seemed strangely sudden and out of place...

Perhaps it was exactly what he needed... or otherwise.

"Hmm... that's a nice offer," Skullius said, much to Sila's continued raging.

"It is, isn't it? Besides, you won't need to do any fighting," Bek said while pointing up with his index finger for absolutely no reason. "Having only yourself and a loved one behind you is better than to rely on a retard for strength."

The Discount Human fumed intensely but Bek ignored and chuckled while continuing to gaze deep into Skullius.

"Having your soul tethered to someone else... I've grown numb to such..."

Chapter 369: BekStory (1)

A slender finger poked at the thick skin of a man who had just slumped into his seat, evidently very tired.

A man with a sweaty but bright visage smeared with two chestnut brown eyes and full cheeks that showed good health turned his head, his dark locks of hair that covered his forehead in messy bangs turning along with his noggin to look at the figure of a thin woman who kept poking his arms.

"Quit it, you overgrown weasel," the man said with a low voice that had a hint of annoyance.

To this, the woman stopped but leapt up only to land on her butt right onto the man's chest!

The man barely reacted as he was much stronger than the average human, but he shook his head helplessly.

The woman giggled, her subtly pretty face that revealed its uniqueness when she smiled, dimples emerging from her cheeks brightening up as she turned to poking his face now.

"Your vile tongue won't hurt me anymore. You're all bark and no bite. When it comes to me at least," the woman said as she leaned in, her face being a shallow breath away from that the man she loved.

Once again, she poked at him.

This one gesture was something that had annoyed Bek in the beginning of their relationship but with time he had grown to accept it.

According to the woman, for every rude word he spoke, she would poke him as revenge. And sometimes, she would just do it for fun.

"...I guess you're right," the man said.

The small but well furnished house they were in felt like home to both. It wasn't much but a wise man once said, 'Love does not conform to material on its own.'

Here in Okenden, a smaller town than Harifrast but equally as cold, these two had been born and bred.

Bek had been born with the desire to become a Knight and had succeeded after giving it his all, the status of Capital Knight being one he received at the age of 29. He was quite skilled and managed to land a few hires in Harifrast over his normal duties.

He had even been to the esteemed Genhuis City but the costs of living there had led him to return back home. While the Capital Service took care of their own, luxuries and upgrades in standards depended on one's own effort.

Therefore, Bek had firmly settled in Okenden before meeting a girl that lit a fire in his soul.

Sera.

The pure soul with a taste for realism and no tolerance for pretense.

As Bek looked at her now, he found the fire he had for her dissipate, something he had never thought could happen.

Could love just be washed away by the seas of time?

Was his desire for growth leading him to aim higher in terms of women?

Did THAT finally start to bother him?

On the face of Bek's beloved, her face that was lightly dotted with pimples still brightly pronounced her beauty, but her eyes...

No.

Rather, her right eye which was blind, slightly discoloured to a paleness in contrast to her other one which was a nice shade of satin grey, tended to draw pity when taken with the woman's overall thin body that was quite curvaceous but lacking in what most men fantasised about their ideal women looking like.

Bek couldn't help but try to avert his gaze.

Was he no longer feeling love but... pity?

No.

It couldn't be?

That was what Sera hated the most.

The feeling of being seen as weak because of it.

Being treated like an egg.

She hated such.

That was not why she loved Bek. It was the opposite.

Bek stroked the woman's brown hair which reached up to her shoulder, Sera's eyes closing as she sank into the mesmerising hold of his touch with a delighted smile.

Yet, Bek felt nothing.

He was supposed to marry this woman soon but...

Bek held Sera's head from the back and pulled her towards himself, a slightly desperate huff being detectable in his breath.

He shared a passionate kiss with Sera who slung her arms around him, her body which was covered by a light blue silk dress sliding closer to Bek's own and rubbing against it.

Yet...

Bek felt nothing.

It was no different from kissing a warm meat.

Why?

What was this weird sensation?

To feel care for someone but to not feel fulfilled when you caressed them and affectionately locked lips with them.

What cruelty was this?

Sera drew back from the kiss and her eyes stared at Bek with subtle concern.

"You're... colder today," she said. "Your words and your body... they are, stiff."

"No. I'm just tired. I'm close to getting a promotion so I have been overexerting myself. Don't start getting weird thoughts."

Sera nodded, but she could feel it.

An odd sensation that had begun growing from Bek since a month ago.

It was like he was growing distant.

Bek had always had this rude way of speech which was cultivated as he grew, raised in a family where mannerisms weren't taken all that seriously.

His mother and father didn't mind such. Apparently, they had lived in a secluded village way down south before moving to Okenden.

That was as far as she knew, but still, she learned to tolerate the way Bek talked.

But now, she could notice the subtle hints and undertones in his naturally vile speech, something only she could understand and pick up on.

The inferiority that she had felt because of her eye started to regrow with the insecurity she felt now.

"Are you sure?" she asked Bek for clarification while softly poking her finger against his lips.

Bek smiled and nodded.

"We're about to get married for Listafelle's sake," he said, his cheek rippling with the flare of anger he had just suppressed from being asked such a question.

This doubt that Sera propounded didn't help at all.

The woman on top of him felt this subtle emotion with her finger which was on his lip, her apprehension rising.

"Alright. I trust you..." Sera said but this was the beginning of a decline in their relationship.

Slowly, Bek began sinking too deep in his training for the promotion.

He would clear his mind of everything and even neglect to go home for days on end.

His dream called and he answered, ferociously working to build up the brightest blue core he could and breaking into the Master Stage after fourteen months of uninterrupted focus.

With this level of power came not just a promotion to the level of a Capital Order Knight but many prospective contracts for hire from many local and external rich establishments and nobles.

Such a glorious fate it was. Such a beautiful reward.

Yet..

Sera who was left home, slowly withdrew into her shell.

She had always been treated differently because she was blind in her right eye.

The pity, the false kindness, the special treatment...

It had sickened her.

It proliferated her self-consciousness, causing her to become more insecure instead.

People noticed it and showed fake smiles or in the worst of cases refused to interact with her, at least when she was younger.

Children were usually that simple-minded.

In adults lay all the falsehoods in expression and distasteful pretense and that was the most vile a human could ever be to her.

This had remained the case until she met Bek, whose words were like thorns, but actions and intent being nothing born of pity or falsehood.

He was like a poem that she had to unravel as she found that below the layers of indifferent speech and faces, he was quite caring.

Someone like him who made her break out of her shell and smile genuinely...

For someone like this who did not hide his feelings, she learnt what he meant despite what he said and greedily absorbed everything there was to know about him.

To Bek who was often misunderstood, this was a first as even his family was incapable of reading him so well.

The more he interacted with Sera, the more he felt himself being open despite hiding under his words.

This was the foundation of the twos relationship.

Sera devoted her all, shaping herself in such a way that she would always make what Bek built as beautiful as possible.

The house he built for them.

The clothes he bought for her.

His heart which he eventually gave her.

All of it.

Yet now...

She felt it.

His words were growing false.

He was distancing himself.

He started to feel cold... like everyone else.

He started to become a lie... like everyone else.

She felt his pity when he came back from his work, kissing her only to delay having to talk to her.

Such vileness.

The anxiety that had been dead in Sera for years tore down her hopes.

Nomatter how much she fought, a voice that sounded much like hers would always tell her what she didn't want to hear.

'It's dead! The beauty he had is dead!'

'He was just like everyone else and only tolerated you when he was a small time Knight! Now that he is growing, he will never look back!'

'They will laugh at you when he leaves you and they won't pity you anymore!'

'He doesn't love you anymore!'

Such thoughts brought tears to stroll down Sera's eyes.

Day after day, Sera wrestled with them and yet...

She could only fight so much.

On one fateful day, Bek returned home after a three day absence, his mind and heart joyous as all he had wanted and more was constantly knocking on his door.

Unfortunately, upon reaching his house which he intended to leave behind for a bigger one, an unsettling sight showed itself before him...

Chapter 370: BekStory (2)

Ah...

Something was dangling a few paces in front of Bek in mid-air.

It swung with limb motion, swaying with a serene yet sorrowful pattern that oozed of a heavy and intense presence.

Sera was dead.

She had hung herself with a rope from the tie beam on the ceiling, her face with her eyes open that stared at the doorway with a sort of guilt-inducing look that immediately struck Bek, relieving him of all his joy.

The pale face of Sera as she swung made Bek feel, a little numb in the senses and for a moment, the scene before him overcame his sense of reason.

He emitted a sound somewhere between a chuckle and a sharp breath.

Yet...

He felt nothing.

Nothing pricked at his heart, no thick sensation like vomit attempted to rise from the pits of his stomach, from depths of his heart, to emerge as a shower of tears and great pain.

Nothing.

Bek merely stood there and breathed out a sigh.

In this very moment, he realised that love was fickle and it could die.

And when it died, it took something away.

...

Three years later...

Bek had moved from Okenden and started a new life in Genhuis City as a Capital Order Knight.

He led his own charge of Capital Knights that were loyal and submissive, the bond between him and them being woven over two years.

There was an abundance of Capital missions and assignments that he and his crew had to complete, which gave Bek a sense of fulfilment, the memory of Sera having been buried in the prospects of his successful life.

Since that day, he had never turned back, moving forward with what he wanted without stopping to reminisce about incidents that would only bring him a shallow sense of guilt and bog down his lively days.

With that strategy, he had lived to his fullest and intended for more.

That was until...

He died.

Or rather, he was thought to be dead.

During an assignment that involved chasing down a certain band of thieves that had stolen an important treasure from Genhuis City, Bek and his Knights had not expected the leader of the bastards to be someone at the Master Stage!

The man had overpowered them with both his technique and high grade weaponry, blasting through Bek's Knights as if they were nothing before he ultimately pierced Bek's heart after a brutal fight!

The other thieves had long gone after their leader bought them quite a lot of time, making the assignment a failure even before Bek had been stabbed.

The leader of the thieves who was exhausted after the fight with the Capital Order Knight, fled as soon as he landed a fatal blow on Bek, fearing having to deal with reinforcements.

The Capital Order Knight laid down while convulsing before he felt his life flash before his eyes and when he inevitably saw the dwindling of his sight into black, drawing a close to the chapters of his life, he felt himself drawn somewhere.

Somewhere windy.

Somewhere cold, but different from the usual drop in temperature.

When Bek opened his eyes, he was shocked and terrified by the vast world before him.

Unlike the mana-filled environment of Aigas, this place had a thick and heavy type of energy that felt dank and rancid.

One that was not a simple flowing power that rested in the world.

This energy immediately started to invade his body.

Instinctively, Bek had tried to guard against it with mana, but alas, he had no core.

He was simply a powerless man with a hazy form here and nothing he could do could stop the invading energy which caused him so much pain that he collapsed and screamed at the top of his lungs.

As he lamented while lying down, the image of a green and black sun far up in the dark blue matted sky was imprinted in his mind.

It looked to be made of luminous clouds of the aforementioned colours as its image danced constantly, almost mesmerising Bek who was in agony.

This state of immense pain did not stop but Bek slowly started to get used to it with time.

Enough to stand and walk around that was.

The sky that housed nothing but the green and black sun which did nothing to colour the surroundings afforded no means to tell the time and it almost drove Bek crazy.

What held off his descent into madness however, was his first sighting of a terrifying creature within this world.

Its appearance had been so horrific and enormous that Bek had frozen stiff from seeing it.

Unfortunately for him, it wasn't the only one that dwelled in this place.

An innumerable number of creatures populated this world with hideous or beautiful images, but they didn't seem to mind his presence.

In fact, they ignored him.

Bek went from awed to getting used to seeing these monstrosities while walking without end.

He never tired.

He never hungered.

But the pain was something that became a part of him.

His once conscious and aware mind slowly eroded as he moved through the place endlessly, its infinite horizons continuing to cascade in his vision and slowly drive him to insanity.

It was so for what could be considered 91 years in the human world, the living man becoming an empty husk that walked for eternity.

Such was man when pitted against the grander design of the world.

A husk that could barely handle it all, in the process receding to a comfortable shell.

And yet, it was not over for Bek.

The third fateful day of Bek's lifetime arrived.

As he moved, he picked up on a voice that hummed.

A voice that he was much too familiar with.

This voice swimming into his mind from somewhere jolted him back into awareness as Bek's eyes immediately turned to the image a short distance away from him.

As bizarre as it was, his mind that was already accustomed to this strange place accepted and interpreted it.

A hazy figure that stood at thrice his size, its right side having a hideous and pale visage while its left, a light green and pretty form that was enticing to the eyes floated above ground while holding hands with a massive, bulky and atrociously revolting figure whose mass was nothing short of terror-inducing.

Even with all his years here, Bek had never seen something so ugly.

The two seemed to be dancing, as even on the obscure face of the hulking mass was a smile, the same being true for this half hideous half beautiful floating existence.

What drew Bek here, was the voice still.

Whatever this thing with a split body was, it emitted a voice that he knew all too well.

The voice of Sera.

Only the Deities knew how much turmoil the thought of this brought to Bek.

The emotion that he lacked when he saw Sera's dead body back then, quickly arrived this time.

The grief.

The anguish.

The pain.

Bek opened his mouth and called her name from his distance while stumbling towards the creature.

"Sera!"

With a slight delay, the tall figure that was dancing with the enormous mass swiftly turned and looked to Bek who burst into tears as he knelt down, his eyes not leaving the visage of this creature.

For a moment, nothing showed in the creature's eyes but then, both halves of its face contorted in rage and it screeched in a loud voice that caused the area for thousands of miles to rumble!

"LIARRRRR!"