

~ Day 68 ~

The atmosphere was tense with awkwardness as the glaring gaze of Lily bore down on me. We were sitting in one of the ten large wagons that harbored most of the resources, materials, and other miscellaneous items that the tribe brought with us for our migration into the wastelands.

Each of the ten wagons was very large, even easily able to fit three- or four horses on them if you wanted. I was still simply awed by the hobgoblins' craftsmanship and their handiwork. While three wagons had already been in the works before I even announced that we were going to migrate, they still fixed up seven more in just less than three days' time.

But with the influx of new, and much more experienced hobgoblin craftsmen, they made quick work of it all. It also helped with the fact that there were hundreds of taking part in building them, each possessing strength much greater than normals humans.

Flanking the wagons, were hundreds of armed hobgoblins and the occasional smatter of orcs. Guarding the entourage as we made our way through the landscape. While none of the wheeled-contraptions bore any individuals, a single one was occupied with, Bob, Mia, Lily, and myself.

I had wanted to walk instead though, fatigue and such not really being a problem anymore to an abnormally enhanced body such as mine. Even flying a bit could've been pleasant, seeing as the wind hitting my body truly did feel like freedom in its purest form. But with the adamant refusal from Lily to let me avoid her anymore, I could only comply.

The fact that I really didn't want to confront the charming woman was the primary reason for the glare directed at me. Ever since we returned from the borders of the Mordrian territory, I had been off-putting our long-awaited talk in favor of just savoring a few more unstressful and calm days with both Mia and Bob.

Lily, during this time, had basically been locked up in one of the empty wooden shacks. Not because we were holding her prisoner, but simply because she didn't want to mingle with all the greenskins going about their work, and every time she came to talk, I would simply leave her hanging with a promise for another time.

She definitely had a fountain of information that I would love to dig into, however, over recent times, I had been accumulating a lot of stress. From the Mistress to the sudden meeting with some cosmic being, the pressure was weighing down on my mind. But Bob's friendly spars and Mia's company had been perfect remedies for my weathered state, the reason I wished to stay like that for just a few more days.

On the wagon, leaning against my side, Mia relaxedly combed her long locks of silver hair with a comb that I had made her. At the end head of the wagon, Bob was casually laying with his feet up. His large frame looked almost comical as he spent his time carving small wooden figurines with a knife.

It was apparently a hobby he had picked up to deal with his own worries when I had been gone, or so I was told by Mia. Surprisingly enough, he wasn't half bad, and the small figures he made definitely didn't look like something an ogre-sized champion would be able to make. Feeling the slight caress of something wiry on my arm, I looked to the side and shook my head good-heartedly.

A small green tendril with a reddish-tinged was poking and prodding my forearm almost as if wanting to get my attention. The tendril emerged from a large sack filled with dirt, and on top, a small sapling could be seen. It was the Jubokko seedling -or well, sapling now. I had ended up bringing it along since I was reluctant to part with it.

Instead, I had somebody dig the small living blood-drinking tree up and put it in a sack of fertile dirt from the feasting grounds. To my surprise, with the small help of a few drops of my blood every day, the sapling had grown massively. Its root extending deep into the soil, while also having grown to an actual sapling. By now, the bond had deepened so much between the two of us, that it actively tried to interact and communicate with me.

Since I had taken the jubokko with me, I ventured back out into the Dusk Swamps to acquire a new seed to plant within the old tribe. It wasn't too hard to find another seed, but there were seemingly only four such jubokko trees out there. Although I was originally hesitant to leave a potentially dangerous blood-sucking creature there, I trusted in the bond that formed from feeding my blood to them after witnessing how the first one turned out.

As an insurance, I feed the seed a plentiful amount of my blood, but not enough to overfeed a literally kill the seed; knowing that my blood's potency was very well high enough to do so. Making a large urn from my blood, I also filled it and gave it to the most trusted of those who stayed behind in the old tribe. They were to feed the tree a few drops every now and then while also giving it their own blood willingly. That way, I believed that there should be no problems leaving it behind.

Making a few drops of blood drip onto the sapling to my side, I looked on with bemusement as the various small green roots greedily sucked up the potent blood, only to do what looked like a wiggly dance of glee; each of its plant tendrils dancing with happiness. Drawing my gaze from the surprisingly but amusing, sentient plant as a snort of incredulity invaded my thoughts, I was met with the curious and stern gaze of Lily who sat opposite me.

Coughing awkwardly, I spoke.

"So... What do you want to talk about?" - Me

"How?" - Lily

She tersely said.

"How - what?" - Me

"How does a weak little monster like you become so strong in a month?" - Lily

"I killed stuff. A lot of stuff." - Me

I said, trying to be nonchalant as there were rather things I didn't want to explain.

"You killed - stuff? That's seriously the answer you're going to give? Do you even have the faintest clue what I had to go through simply to get the strength and power that I wield now? Monsters generally grow a lot faster than humans, however, your growth is simply unfathomable. What exactly are you hiding?" - Lily

"What - aren't you allowed to keep secrets anymore?" - Me

"I've saved your life twice, and you can't even say this much?" - Lily

"Twice?" - Me

"Yes, twice. Once when I spared your little monster ass, and second, when I stopped you for killing that bitch." - Lily

"How exactly do you stopping me from killing that woman, save my life? I kind of won this non-aggression pact and all, didn't I?" - Me

"In most other circumstances, no. However, you were rather unfortunate that this girl was the sole daughter to Modria's commander, niece to the Justicar, and one of the military's generals. Those three are three of the country's eight greatest warriors. They're all much stronger than her uncle that you killed. And non-aggression pact be damned, those Ardents would turn the country upside down for that girl. Especially her father, the second strongest in the entire country." - Lily

"I had been meaning to ask about that. How come this woman, didn't break the pact as she attacked me? She definitely seemed to be one of military status and authority, not mentioning her background." - Me

"She's a colonel of the Mordrian military. Not an extremely high-ranking officer, but still within a place of power. But she didn't actually mobilize her army against you, and that her actions were justified through a blood-feud that you created by slaying her uncle, the system didn't determine it as a violation of the pact." - Lily

"And what stops those -mm, Ardents, from taking revenge anyway? Didn't I kill their brother?" - Me

"They hold too much influence and power within the kingdom. Them acting would undoubtedly not be tolerated by the system, as such breaking the pact. But even so, while they hold a lot of importance for each of their family members, they're all prepared to lose them in the dangers that is their work. It is basically just the girl that they would go to those lengths for. However, don't go wandering into Mordria anymore. They would kill you in an instant, and since you'd be in their territory without consent, they would not be considered to breaking the pact." - Lily

"Okay... huh. So, this non-aggression pact. What exactly would happen if the benefactory party were to suffer the consequences of breaking the pact?" - Me

"The effects and results seemed to be varied from what I hear. Mordria itself hasn't had any such incident of breaking a system-governed agreement well-within the last few centuries. But from I know of other countries is that it could mean anything from decades of decline to complete dissolution of the country." - Lily

"Wow, that seems harsh and extreme." - Me

"The system is the single entity that you never cross."

"But how could a general even issue such an agreement?" - Me

"Power is everything. Mordria is divided into three governing bodies. The military, the royals, and the guild. The guild takes an off-hand approach to anything political since they're an entity far beyond that of just our country. But the military and the royals who are really running the show." - Lily

"There's a very thin balance between the military and the aristocracy; the glue holding them together being the king. The strongest man in Modria. But in general, those who hold power hold authority. The general you killed was one of the eight strongest in the country, and that was why he could engage in a system-sanctioned battle." - Lily

Mulling over the bountiful amount of information, I was about to pose a new one, but I was cut off by an imperious finger just I was about to voice it.

"It's my turn to ask questions now." - Lily

Sighing, I simply shrugged.

"There are many things I can't answer, but with that in mind, ask away." - Me

It was obvious that she was dissatisfied that I wasn't going to be as forthcoming with my secrets, but she really wasn't in any position to demand that I had to divulge anything.

"How did you become this strong?"

Sighing, I thought over my answer.

"During the time I've been her- since I've been born, I've been met with a lot of fortune and opportunities. But I've also been met with an increasing amount of hardships and misfortune. They've shaped and refined me, and while I definitely have some large... *advantages* over others, I've been balancing on a knife's edge to gain the power I now wield." - Me

I sure as hell wasn't going to tell her that I was some human from another world or existence and that I had blessings that literally defied the nature of the system itself, but if I grew to trust her more, then maybe. As for now, however, I still had to be vigilant with this mysterious woman.

She definitely wasn't pleased with the vague answer but seemed to take what she could. Taking a deep breath, her eyes suddenly turned stern and she looked me directly in the eyes. Whatever she was about to ask, I instinctively knew that hit held a huge amount of weight and hope behind it.

"Then - what is your goal?" - Lily

A bit stunned by the hidden meaning and intent behind the question, I tried to scour her eyes for any answers to whatever it was that she was fishing for. But I couldn't find anything in her eyes. It was obvious that she was very adept in shielding her emotions and intent, and it now worked overdrive to elude me from whatever she wanted to hear.

"I wish for power. Power to shape my own destiny, to share with those I want to accompany me. I strive for purpose, and this - is my purpose." - Me

Looking at Mia and Bob, I smiled before looking back at Lily. The stern light in her eyes faded and she didn't respond; not giving any clues to what she thought about what I had just said. But the slight, almost imperceptible, relaxation of her shoulders, was still caught by my sharp gaze. It was like hidden tension flooded away, replaced relief and hope.

I wasn't sure what to make of it, but I could only leave it be and continue this conversation at a later time.