

Ch032-The Pathetic

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Three weeks had passed since Sylver's return. Hunting down Nautis had proved to be a bigger challenge than he was originally expecting. Given that the man was an expert in teleporting away, and that the monsters in the dark forest didn't allow the small team to split up, made it so they were perpetually chasing after him.

Because of this, Sylver had already missed the next full moon, and the next one was 17 days away. Which was good in the sense that Sylver was now going to be getting a *minimum* of 8700 gold, but bad in the sense that they only had enough food to last for just a little 3 months.

Novva and his group handled organizing everyone, and making sure that everyone stayed in line. A few of the more violent and overconfident prisoners, had to be made an example of, but there was no permanent damage.

Sylver ended up creating a compass-like device using small pieces of Nautis's ear so that he wasn't slowing the group down anymore. As advanced as his magic may be, there was still a limit to how much he could use, and how fast he could go. Flying around on Will was completely pointless, since catching Nautis off guard was the only way to get him.

So instead he and Melo spent their time trying to find a way to cancel out the anti teleportation magic, so that they could-

"He surrendered," Novva said, interrupting Sylver's latest attempt at canceling more than a few cubic meters of the magic.

Both Sylver and Melo stopped what they were doing and just stared at the giant.

"Nautis?" Sylver asked, putting the staff down.

"Yes. He's currently got the highest purity collar we could find on him, and

sitting inside the dungeon.” Novva said calmly. “He said he wants to talk to you.”

“To me? Why?” Sylver asked, gesturing at himself.

“He wouldn’t say. But he described you as the bald kid who bit his ear off.” Novva explained, still standing in the doorway.

Sylver looked around the room that’s been slowly turned into his workshop and found what he was looking for. He dropped it to the floor for Fen to pick up and assimilate, and followed Novva down the stairs.

The ‘dungeon’ was just the area they kept nobles when they first arrived. They would get dressed, walk past the corpses, and by the time they got to the main area were already understanding that this wasn’t a joke of any kind and completely serious.

A bit of a stupid and unnecessary way to do things, but then again a lot of everything here has been like that.

The two-level 80 guards they had watching him opened the door for Sylver and Novva, and closed it as they stepped inside.

Inside sat Nautis. His hands were cuffed to the table, a giant shining grey collar around his neck, and a blistering and withering wound where his ear used to be. Tiny black lines stretched out of it to half of his face, and his entire left shoulder was completely soaked in dried up blood.

“I bet you feel-”

Nautis screamed so loud the guards almost ripped the door off its hinges to get inside, before seeing Novva telling them to stay back. Their eyes were fixated on the large hammer in Sylver’s hand, and the mangled mess on the table that used to be Nautis’s right hand.

“Let me guess. You’ve got a gate connected to a monster den, or the bottom of the ocean, or something of that nature.” Sylver said, walking around the table and standing on Nautis’s right side. He held his hand over the bleeding stump, and it turned darker and started to spread a disgustingly sweet smell around the room.

Sylver walked to the left side, and held Nautis's wrist down.

"No. No. No please, I-"

Nautis screamed even louder than before, as the left hand exploded all over the place and one of the fingers even hit one of the guards. Sylver once again held his hand over the broken hand, and used a few drops of mana to further damage the thing.

Sylver walked around again and sat down opposite Nautis as the guards silently closed the door and went back to standing on the other side.

"You wanted to talk, let's talk," Sylver said, staring at the crying man.

"Do you have any idea what you just did!" Nautis half screamed, half sobbed, as he pulled against the shackles holding his rotten stubs to the table.

"Enlighten us," Sylver answered.

"You've doomed us all!" Nautis screamed, causing Novva to look at Sylver with a horrified expression.

"Because you're not the one who made the anti teleportation field, and without your special skill or perk or trait, no one will ever be able to get around it," Sylver explained, spinning the hammer around, and making the blood spread out on the table.

Nautis momentarily stopped his crying and looked at Sylver with a completely unreadable expression.

"Don't worry about us. If there's no insect buzzing around and getting in my way, I'm certain I can bypass it in a matter of days. Why, I already did. If it wasn't for said insect fucking with me." Sylver explained, picking up the hammer again but remaining seated.

"What was all this for?" Novva asked, during the following silence as Nautis just stared at them both.

He continued to remain silent. Sylver stood up from his chair and walked around to the man, and grabbed him by the hair, and hit him with the

hammer right on his chin.

The bone broke instantly and splintered and pierced the flesh, as Nautis screamed incoherently and struggled against the shackles, slipping his right arm out of them.

“Oh no. Better put that back in, or I’ll have to rip the entire arm off to be safe,” Sylver suggested, laying the hammer down on his right shoulder. Nautis continued to cry and wail, but forced his bleeding stump back into the shackle.

“Have you ever had to fix your core Nautis after someone messed with your spell and turned it inside out? It feels a little bit like what you’re experiencing right now. Except about 50 times more painful. And a lot easier to die from too, I mean all you’ve got to be careful of is not to bleed to death, but when it’s a core suffering from magical backlash, one small misstep and you’re dead, or worse crippled.” Sylver explained, leaving the hammer next to Nautis and walked back to his seat.

“And while I am not a cruel man, I’m honest enough with myself to say I’m a vengeful one. And I’m very well versed in holding a grudge. So, please. For both our sakes. Answers my good friend Novva’s questions, so I can reason myself into not gouging out your eyes, peeling your skin off, and ultimately having one of the healers fix you back up, so I can do it all over again.” Sylver said calmly, without a single drop of malice in his voice.

He felt a shiver go down his spine as he sounded far too close to mister Dake for his liking. But considering how Nautis’s soul was gradually losing its confident and controlled aura, he was doing something right. The fact that he can’t see his face because of the mask might be helping a little.

“What was all this for?” Novva asked calmly, and quietly.

Nautis continued to rock in the chair and whimper. Sylver stood up and the level 120 dimensional mage, jumped and started muttering something too quietly and too quickly for either of them to understand.

“Take a deep breath. And speak up! I can’t hear a damn thing!” Sylver shouted.

Nautis took the suggestions to heart, and tried to breathe in deeply, each one too shallow for him to properly catch his breath. He finally managed to do it and spoke through his mangled jaw.

“I came here to negotiate with you animals!” Nautis said, slurring his words as one might with a broken jaw.

“No, you didn’t. You surrendered. As in you stopped resisting us, and surrendered to our authority. Negotiation is something you can do before a surrender, not after. And it is usually done when both sides are evenly matched, and would lose more from fighting, then from reaching an understanding. So pray tell, what exactly would we be losing out on, if we were to just kill you?” Novva asked, interlocking his fingers and leaning forward on his elbows.

“I can get everyone out of here,” Nautis suggested, attempting a smile.

“Right. And that involves trusting you to not just teleport us to a monster's den, or the middle of the ocean, or up a tall mountain to freeze and starve to death. So that’s a no on that, what else?” Novva countered.

“Money! I’ve got piles upon piles of gold, I’ll give it all to you.” Nautis offered.

“Oh wow. Gold. I’m a duke, in case you forgot. And again, that would mean trusting you.” Novva countered.

Nautis looked down at the two congealed stumps that used to be his hands.

“Look. I know we haven’t exactly started off on the right foot-”

“Can’t go any more wrong than kidnapping a man and keeping him separated from his family for 20 years.” Novva interrupted.

“But I-”

“Shut the fuck up. Why did you bring everyone here? Last chance before I leave you alone with him and go for a several hour-long walk.” Novva interrupted, slamming his fist on the table and crumpling it slightly.

Sylver remained silent and motionless and simply stared at Nautis.

“I didn’t want to!” Nautis shouted, flinching, and making himself as small as possible.

“You didn’t want to? So you’ve been kidnapping people, left and right, demanding ransoms, bringing in guards, taking out crystals, against your will?” Novva asked, his voice completely deadpan.

“It just got out of hand! I got the perk from my master! For every person I take out, I need to bring 2 in. Including myself. At first, I started with bandits and cheap slaves, but then people started noticing they disappeared without a trace. I got offered money to make other people disappear, and I accepted. Then the next thing I know, I’m working with the Grey Mane and one thing led to another and I’m kidnapping nobles and ransoming them, and if I stop they’ll kill me.” Nautis shouted, crying as he spoke.

“Bullshit!” Novva said, “That’s a fucking lie!” He shouted.

“He’s telling the truth,” Sylver said, almost under his breath.

“No! I refuse to believe it!” Novva said, walking around the table to grab Nautis by the collar. “Are you telling me that I’ve missed all my children's birthdays, all their weddings, missed the birth of my granddaughter, all because ‘It just got out of hand’?” Nova shouted, picking up Nautis, along with the chair, and throwing him against the wall.

“You said your master gave you the perk? Where is he?” Sylver asked calmly, as Novva paced around the small cell pulling at his hair.

“She died!” Nautis shouted, the blood from his broken nose making everything sound gargled.

“How deep underground are we?” Sylver asked, as Novva kicked the wall and splintered the thick stone.

“I don’t know! I don’t even know where ‘here’ is. She brought me here, gave me the perk, and that’s it! I’ve been-” Novva kicked Nautis in the stomach and he threw up blood on himself.

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After letting Novva beat Nautis to roughly 10% of his health, Sylver asked to speak to him in private. Nautis was beyond banged up, and only the fact that Novva had avoided his head allowed him to speak. His legs were shattered, possibly beyond repair, his arms were most definitely never going to cast again, and at one point Novva took Sylver's hammer and broke Nautis's spine in several places.

"So you don't know where this is, you don't know where the buildings or the mine came from, you don't know what the crystals are, only that a man whose name and face you don't know, buys them from you in exchange for gold, and you're so incompetent and cowardly, that whenever anything went wrong, you went on a vacation, and kept your fingers crossed everything would solve itself while you were away?" Sylver summarized, now maskless and looking Nautis directly in the eye. Due to the fact that Novva had literally pulled one of his eyes out, and he only had the one.

"I'm sorry! Please! I'm so sorry! Just-Just-Just don't fucking kill me!" Nautis said, sobbing and blowing bubbles of snot.

"Why would I kill you? If anything I'm the least deserving to kill you. I've only been here, what? 2 months almost? Something like that. They'll probably go with public execution. You know, burn you alive, or just cut your head off. Hanging is also a popular option in situations like this, so people can watch you twitch and swing, and maybe throw things at you. But if they let you decide, don't pick hanging, it's the worst. Unless your neck snaps instantly, it's so fucking slow you wouldn't believe it. I'd go with beheading if I were in your shoes," Sylver explained, leaning back on his chair.

Nautis just sat there crying, and weeping and mumbling something to himself.

"Out of curiosity, what was your plan when you came here?" Sylver asked after running out of more important questions.

Nautis continued to sob for another couple of seconds, before taking in a shuddering breath and speaking. "I was certain whoever was messing with the field had died, and I was going to offer you a way out." He said weakly.

"Ah. Well, you came close. Nearly made a kid who just lost his virginity die.

But if he died it would have been a setback, not a complete disaster. I'd be mighty annoying to have to teach another mage what I taught him, but not impossible. I'll be honest, I'm not too thrilled with all of this. I half expected some grand master plan or something. You're just... Well, just a kid really. An old kid, mind you. Too old for any excuses for your choices. But this is a good example of why everything is going to go to shit eventually. You got all this mana and power behind you, even while being so weak and stupid. Can you imagine what would have happened, if you were weak, stupid, and lucky?" Sylver asked.

Nautis didn't say a word, but he had at least calmed down and stopped crying. Which was surprising, given his current state and situation.

"We're going to let a healer heal you up, but your hands won't heal. My magic leaves a very special kind of curse and the healers we have here aren't anywhere near strong enough to break it." Sylver explained, getting up from his chair and putting it back against the wall.

He'd already gotten everything he wanted out of him. From all the skills and perks and traits that he had and knew about, to all the requirements to meet the effects he had or knew about. There were 3 that Sylver thought would be useful to him.

All three either increased mana capacity or production, but had a minimum level requirement of 50. So that was still a way away.

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4 tries. It took Sylver 4 tries, without Nautis interfering, for him to get it right. Normally messing with dimension magic like this was a completely binary experience. Either you got it right, or you died.

But in Sylver's case, he could stomach whatever the failure threw at him, since he knew how to make it shut down before everything really went to shit. And after a few hours of throwing up boiling hot blood, and siphoning some of Novva's health, he was good as new.

But on the 4th try, they finally got it right. A very small gate, just big enough for a person's head to go through, and it was completely stable. Opened at an absurdly high altitude, just to be safe, and pointed directly at the next full moon.

It was enough to satisfy Katia's skill, thankfully, so all that was left was to sit and wait.

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They did find Nautis's stash of gold at some point. But by the time Novva and Sylver got there, most of it had disappeared. No one was all that concerned, truth be told. But Sylver did have to take his gem-encrusted dagger back from one of the men who found the stash.

Although it was a little upsetting Tom never got his chance to shine, Sylver was just glad to get him back. He missed having him in his shadow a little, but at the same time, it was nice knowing there was always someone out there, in case his shades were somehow killed off or something.

And outside man, on the inside, so to speak.

Completely pointless as it turned out. But emergency preparations didn't always get used. Sometimes everything just goes well, and that's that.

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"We can't just tell them it was all for nothing. An idiot's attempt at making money." Novva repeated, his shoulders slumped and his pacing getting on Sylver's nerves.

"Then let's not tell them. I can shut most of his brain down, and we tell people we found him like that. It will remain a giant mystery and people can make up their own reasons." Sylver suggested, again, as he had the last 10 times Novva had found him and wanted to discuss it with him.

"But it just doesn't make sense!" Novva repeated, possibly for the 50th time, Sylver had lost count after 20.

"It does. I can tell when someone is lying, and he's both telling the truth, and

far too terrified to even give half-truths a chance. Look. Sometimes, there really is a giant plan, a conspiracy, or a plot. And sometimes, things just happen, coincidences pile on, and something that's too grand to be an accident, accidentally gets created. Life is awfully random sometimes." Sylver explained, as he had done the last several times Novva had brought up the subject.

After seeing a child of earth stumble ass-backward into becoming one of the most powerful demon kings to ever live, Sylver had little trouble believing some apprentice sorcerer could accidentally stumble his way into kidnapping noblemen for profit and getting exploited by an underground organization.

And with the fact that you no longer seemed to need to be smart to use magic, he felt like he was going to be seeing a lot of this in the future too. If it's just a matter of killing shit, any dipshit could do it.

"How about. He's a demon worshiper. And the crystals are used to summon a demon. And the reason he was so hands-off on everything, was because it had to be done by human hands? Crystals that were gathered by humans, of their own free will?" Sylver suggested, leaning back and looking up at the ceiling.

Novva glared at him.

"Fine. He has an incredibly unique class, and this was all necessary to meet its requirements? So he could one day overthrow the high king and bring the entire continent into chaos?" Sylver suggested shrugging his shoulders.

Novva's expression softened a little at this.

"Oh! And his unique class made everyone turn savage and aggressive. So whatever happened inside the prisons, can't be blamed on the people inside? Everyone comes out thinking they're better people than they really are? And blame whatever awfulness they did on Nautis?" Sylver said, looking at Novva and seeing his face thinking it over.

"We can throw in a prophecy or two if you want. Call this 'the cave of no return'. Give the whole thing a nice and mystical background." Sylver said,

spreading his arms out as he spoke.

“Too much. If you do that brain thing, can you fix it later?” Novva asked, walking over.

“I can. He’ll look like he’s in a coma, because that’s almost exactly what he will be. Are you thinking of using him to trade with the Cord?” Sylver asked, his tone completely neutral.

“I am. I mean, at this point no one has a choice really. It’s not like we have a way to get out without them. But this may help at the very least lower the price.” Novva said, pacing again.

“I know it’s not my place, but if I were you I would focus more on the fact that I’ll get to see my family again, then whatever material wealth the Cord may demand. After all, it’s just money.” Sylver said, with the wisdom of a person who still wasn’t all that used to not having a near-infinite budget at his disposal.

“Are you sure about making Melo the hero? I get wanting to stay anonymous and all, but it seems like such a missed opportunity.” Novva asked, as he always did.

“I’m sure. Since he’ll be under your care, it’s the safest he could ever be. Plus if they keep at it the way they have, Sherry will be pregnant by the time everyone’s home. You’ll get to be known as the family who’s employing the hero of whatever this incident will be called, and Melo gets protection from the Grey Mane, until they are all hunted down and killed.” Sylver explained, as he always did.

“It would help jumpstart everything. My grandkids must be starting to read by now. I wonder what classes my son chose?” Novva said, changing the subject, as he always did.

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“We’re in the middle of the Sinis ocean,” Katia said with wide eyes.

It was somewhat amusing to watch her dance and sing around a tiny moonbeam, but Sylver was much happier that everything had worked out.

“How far away are they?” Sylver asked, pulling up a chair.

“2 days. They’re sending a portal specialist, he’ll open a gate right in the middle of the prison, and that’s all I’ve been told. He’s got a way to get around the interference, and if not he’ll at least be able to bring other people over to help.” Katia said, her whole body glowing white from using the skill.

“I see... Could you ask them to tell him to let me out on top of wherever we are? I want to see if there’s a way inside here from the outside.” Sylver asked.

Katia closed her eyes for a few minutes, and hummed a soft song every now and then.

“They said your pay stops the day you’re outside.” She answered.

“Fine by me.”

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It was amazing how smoothly the Cord operated. Or at least how smoothly the portal specialist operated. Sylver was actually impressed with how well the man controlled his mana. A level 241 mage, called Tolga, who was extremely polite to him. Even offered him a basket of food when Sylver had come out.

Tolga had set himself up on a floating wooden platform, and Sylver spent a few minutes there, exchanging information, as well as getting to know the man. Sylver almost agreed to meet with him for drinks at some point, but quickly remembered he was still maintaining anonymity.

Tolga even went as far as to say he barely felt the interference, using the magical equivalent of brute force to overcome it. Which is a completely valid, and respectable method, in Sylver's book at least.

The sun's started to come up, one by one, and Sylver had honestly forgotten how unbelievably beautiful they were. After living for so long in darkness, 89 days to be precise, it was more than breathtaking.

After Tolga did a few tests, and confirmed that everything was fine, Sylver went back inside for a bit.

There were no tears shed, or any long-winded speeches, because he had every intention of seeing Novva and Katia again, just at a far later date. Melo was the only one who cried, which was understandable given that he owed Sylver twice. Once for forcing him to talk to Sherry, and again for saving his life the first time the spell had failed.

And although Sylver was technically at fault for him being put in danger, he accepted the life debt anyway.

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Will proved to be a very capable flyer. He didn't exactly 'soar' through the sky, it was more akin to faster than normal gliding. Still, given the fact that Sylver had all but forgotten how nice it was to fly, he forgave the giant shadow's slow speed and poor maneuverability.

But his joy lasted mere minutes. As he circled around the underground cave, and ultimately saw it for what it really was.

It wasn't a cave.

And it wasn't even underground.

In fact, he recognized it. The symbols were almost all rubbed away by time, several magnitudes larger than he remembered them being, but exactly as they were when he last saw them.

When he came to her for help, as a 9th tier arch-necromancer.

One of the last of her kind, even back then.

Tuli. One of the youngest ascended demi-god level beings he knew.

Tuli. The unfathomably large turtle.