

Chapter 25: Marienne's fetish

Once out of Regina and Valentina's piercing gaze, Ethan breathed a deep sigh. The dreamnight fruit made Regina conscious, even more lively than usual. But Alyssia said it would all fade away as the life force of the fruit slips out of her.

She was safe until he ran out of these fruits.

'Alyssia, does the dreamnight fruit rot?'

"Master, how do you know its name?"

Oops. Ethan rubbed his temples, pondering whether to lie about his Mythic-ranked skill.

I know I can trust her...

'I have a Mythic-ranked skill.'

"Mythic-ranked... Master, are you pulling my leg?"

'No, it's the ability to scan any item and people under the Iron-rank.'

"That's... I never heard of a skill like this... Master truly is once in a lifetime miracle..."

Her awed voice made his spine tingle for some reason. He grabbed the seat outside the ward.

"Answering your previous question, dreamnight fruits don't rot for at least a few years. The excessive life force it absorbs from the earth is no joke. In my time, there used to be lots of trees bearing this fruit but they seemed to have become a rare thing."

'Good to hear. How's the new quest doing?'

"Still sleeping. Master, should I order your subjects to collect every dreamnight fruit. Sneaking around is their hobby after all."

'Subjects? As in the servant?'

"That's how they want me to be addressed. Want to know what they call you?"

Alyssia's mischievous voice caught him off guard. It must be something extreme that managed to get a laugh out of the little squirrel.

'Tell me.'

"These little rabbits call you 'His Highness'."

'What?'

Alyssia's giggled echoed in his head for a good few minutes.

Ethan rubbed his forehead. The only way to get an answer was to perform with Lulu and that required him to reach Level 10.

I need to go on a rampage.

He leaned back and imagined new ways to assassinate the Spirit Beasts. Before he thought much, his eyes grew heavy and the sweet sleep pulled him in her embrace.

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Ethan woke up to Mio frowning at him.

Celia tapped his shoulder. "You haven't gotten enough sleep?"

He stretched his arms and yawned, feeling his joints popping. The effect of level up finally faded.

"I am good now. Let's go home."

Mio glanced at the door. "You don't wanna say goodbye to Regina?"

This marked the first time Mio asked him to talk to another girl. Ethan couldn't be any more proud of his sister's growth.

"Another time."

The silver-haired woman's sharp eyes were different from the last time he met here. Looking into them brought out a strange feeling inside him.

"You do you," Celia said and fixed his glasses. "Just bear until we find a better solution."

He returned a nod. "I can do that."

Outside the hospital, the sun had already set below the horizon.

Celia drove her car while Ethan accompanied her in the front seat. Mio, on the back seat, puffed her cheeks. She still uttered no rejection.

Grrrrr... Ethan's stomach growled.

Should have grabbed something from the hospital.

Celia suddenly kicked the gear up, speeding past the red light. "Darling, we will stop by to eat something. Just hold on."

"Don't stop bitch," Mio cursed. "Onii-sama will only eat my cooking."

Celia's intense expression faded and the car slowed down. "Kay, Mio."

Mio had thoroughly tamed Celia, or was it the other way around? He couldn't understand this relationship. The way he and Celia got together was so bizarre in the first place. A modern girl like Celia sharing her partner with another girl—the thought felt alien outside of fictional books.

There is more to her than she shows.

Ethan cooked different theories in his mind until he reached his home. Mio darted into the home and prepared dinner—simple noodles. Even then it tasted so much better.

Ethan rubbed his stomach stuffed to the brim.

Mio's cooking could be Mythic-ranked...

He returned to his room and fired up the RPG on his console. Celia and Mio joined him on their respective handhelds.

Sleep wasn't an option tonight.

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Marianne stepped out of her *low-profile* car. The moonlight greeted her with gentle passion.

Her secretary, a blonde woman in a tight business suit, closed the car's door and trailed Marianne through the apartment's door.

Marianne shooed her secretary and entered her room. She collapsed face first on her bed, tears huddling in the corner of her eyes.

Why does she hate me? I never forced her to do anything, only trying my best to keep her happy.

She rubbed her eyes with her sleeves and whipped out a box from the drawer. She flipped everything inside it on the bed. Pictures. Hundreds of pictures of her precious daughter, Celia, scattered on the bed.

"Is this how you want it to be?" A shrill male voice reached her ears. "You can take her back and be with your daughter forever. Just accept my offer."

The words of the demon sitting on her shoulder stabbed her consciousness. She had been hearing the voice from the time Celia shifted to Ethan's apartment. Did the trauma induce a demon out of her soul?

"Be it Avalon or this world, you mortals never fail to fascinate us with your desires."

'*Avalon?*' Marianne tilted her head.

"Let me tell you a tragic story. It was about a hundred, no, two hundred years—fuck, let's make it five hundred. There used to be a male elf. An elf

beautiful to the point people mistook him for a woman. He grew up to be a powerful hunter. Songs of his bravery traveled into each corner of the continent, from the Beast Man in the west to the Three Overlords in the south. Everyone respected him, worshipped him; every elven maiden took utmost honor in serving him. However, that modest elf never had eyes for any other girl except his childhood lover. Their marriage happened soon. Years later, they lived happily in an elven village. The girl conceived his child in her womb. Everything was fine but one day..."

"But? Tell me!" Marianne urged, enticed by the honey-coated words of the demon. The three bookshelves in her room had every popular tragic love story ever; her interest in them was immense.

"Finally got your interest, ehehe."

Marianne coughed and began collecting Celia's photos.

The demon's roar of laughter filled her ears. "Fine. I will continue. That's when a twisted entity entered his world. Let's call him an Evil God. His repulsive form made the elves' eyes bleed, their minds corrupted and contorted. Unable to bear the insanity, the elves ripped their hearts."

"The girl too?!"

"The pregnant woman held on for several minutes. The love for her child forced her to oppose the *beauty* of Evil God, waiting for her husband, who was away to attend an important meeting in the Elven Council."

"Did he make it?"

"Don't interrupt me, woman."

"S-Sorry."

"Her husband only arrived to witness his wife strangling herself. An expert of magic, the elf cast every healing magic knew. However, the Evil God's very presence denied every Aspect of the world even though it didn't have any impact on the elf. So the brave elf's efforts bore no fruit and he could only see life seeping out of his beloved wife. He howled with his wife in his arms."

"So tragic!"

Marianne was practically panting at this point, her face flushed as though she was drunk on something. The different imaginations burning in her mind *excited* her too much.

"Shut the hell up for me."

Marianne felt something crawling on her back. She sealed her lips and waited for the demon to continue.

"Hatred surged out of him. So much hatred. Even the Evil God flinched, his hundred eyes wide open. He absorbed the miasma flowing from the Evil God. You know how impossible it is to even contain a grain of that Evil God's strength? Yet, the elf consumed almost ten percent, forcing the Evil God to retreat to his world," the demon continued with a chuckle. "The broken elf blamed the elves and humans for inviting him to the meeting. With his dark powers, he went on to destroy kingdoms all on his own then met his demise at the hands of dragons."

His last words came out a little strange. Something in his voice provoked a pitiful look from Marianne.

"Who are you?" she couldn't stop herself from asking. He didn't seem like a separate personality developed from her loneliness. Maybe all of this was real? The absurd idea flashed in her head.

"Look in the mirror."

Marienne stood before the dressing mirror. The lamp flickered and died, leaving the room illuminated by the moonlight.

Marienne looked back to the mirror and her eyes snapped wide. A tiny figure sat above her head. A grin spread on its faceless figure as tendrils of black flesh jutted out and waved around in the air.

"What... are you?"

"The King of Dying Heart."

"What kind of shitty name—"

An oppressive air overtook her heart and robbed her consciousness.