

It had been only a few weeks now since Keenan had obtained the mysterious leaf from Claret, having kept it on his body ever since. Because he did so, however, he was currently in a more wounded state than he had ever found himself in a battle. Claw marks covered one of his arms, blood leaking from the wound as he grit his teeth.

In the past, Keenan had always relied on his unreasonable luck to such a degree that he had never been ambushed, nor had he been in a hopeless situation. This was the first time he had truly seen his own blood since he even came to the Great Forest Sanctuary.

*Jace isn't here...* Keenan thought to himself as he eyed the massive serpent before him. He wasn't so much lamenting the absence of his friend as he was confirming his own thoughts. *If he could save me, there's no way Jace wouldn't be here with his luck, even if it were coincidence.*

With that line of reasoning, Keenan confirmed that the enemy that he was fighting this time was likely far too strong for himself. Even so, he was not one to obediently lie down and accept the fate of becoming this monster's meal.

In an effort to find a new home within the forest, Keenan had wandered aimlessly, exploring territory that he had never been to before. In doing so, he had found the lair of one of the 'bosses' of the Great Forest Sanctuary. Or rather, the boss had found him.

This great serpent had a body over a hundred meters long, with six arms protruding from its side, each tipped with a deadly arrangement of claws. Due to its ability to fly, it had managed to quickly attack Keenan before he was properly aware of the situation. Had it not been for the warning of the dungeon core that he kept on his person, the first attack would have likely been fatal.

Keenan looked down at his mangled arm, his brows furrowed together. There was no way that he would be able to wield his bow in his current state, leaving him only the power of his 'Chaos Ki' that he had originally used to fight. As such, Keenan took a deep breath, a black layer of energy wrapping itself over his body.

His right arm flexed, vicious claws forming atop his fingers as he prepared himself. Given the boss monster's strength and speed, he knew that there would only be a single exchange, two if he got lucky. His eyes quickly scanned the surroundings to look for anything that could be used to his advantage.

The boss's body was large and bulky, which should have meant that it was less agile in a twisting space. However, he had seen for himself that the creature was able to navigate between the trees almost like a ghost. *If it's that agile, its flight ability should make it practically weightless.* He thought to himself, quickly working out how the opponent's ability likely functioned. His only hope was that the serpent did not have any additional powers that had yet to be shown.

As he was thinking this, the boss monster lunged forward, Keenan himself moving forward in response. The two charged towards one another, Keenan unwilling to change his path until the last moment. When the body of the creature was just about to reach him, its jaws twisting to the side and opening in preparation to consume him, he ducked forward into a roll.

His body narrowly avoided the serpent's jaw, and his hand came up at the end of his roll to claw at the scales of the creature. Reinforced with the power of his ki, there had never been a creature that could totally ignore his attack.

At least, not until now. Keenan felt a dull impact as his claws met the scales, unable to penetrate their armored surface. His eyes widened in shock while the body of the creature flew by in an instant. When he turned to see it again, there was not a mark on its body, and it stared at him as if preparing to attack once more.

*Maybe... from the inside..?* Keenan now knew that his attacks were unable to damage the creature's hard outer layer. But maybe, just maybe, if he allowed himself to be eaten whole, there would be some small hope of survival? It was just a matter of if he could take advantage of it before the creature crushed his body inside of its. Unfortunately, it was the only move he had left.

The creature once again lunged at him, and Keenan ran forward again, grasping this last, thin thread of hope. If he controlled the moment he was swallowed, it was less likely that he would be bitten in half by its massive jaws. That was the only thing he could think of, the only way to possibly turn this situation around. Thus, he gathered the rest of his power into his legs and lunged forward.

"Quick, help him!" A young, feminine voice called out, startling Keenan as he witnessed the jaws of the monster opening once again, welcoming him into its mouth. There was a rush of wind, six arrows piercing the creature's hard scales and carrying enough force to throw it entirely off course. The arrows themselves seemed to glow with silver energy, forming chains between them that pinned the body of the massive serpent to six different trees.

With the target of his jump suddenly gone, Keenan's body fell to the ground, tumbling for a few moments. When he pushed himself to his feet, he looked around in utter confusion. That was obviously not Jace's voice, so who had helped him? Who would be that desperate to help him?

Looking in the direction of the cry, Keenan saw a young girl running towards him, looking as if she had just gotten out of school. She wore a clean flower-patterned shirt and pink pants, with red hair flowing down past her shoulders. Her expression looked as if she were about to cry, and she pulled Keenan into a tight hug as soon as she arrived before him.

Given his incredulity, Keenan didn't even have the awareness to move out of her way, entirely too shocked by what was happening. This human girl seemed no more than ten years old, so what was she doing in this forest dungeon? And why was she crying into his shoulder like this?

"So, you're that bastard's kid too, huh?" Another voice spoke up, this one more mature. Looking towards its source, Keenan saw a woman who appeared in her thirties with long, red hair. There was a silver, misty bow in one of her hands, which faded away into nothing as she began walking over. "Never thought that he would have actually had another one. And you ended up here of all places? What the hell was your mother even thinking?"

Keenan's expression hardened at the mention of his mother, something that the other party didn't miss. It was not an expression of sorrow, but rather one of anger, bordering on disgust. "Who are you?" Keenan asked, doing his best to keep his voice calm.

The woman was taken aback by his expression, having never seen a kid who hated their parents that much. That alone had been enough to confirm to her that he had run away from home, though she didn't know the full story. There would be plenty of time for that later. "I'm... Sammy's mom. If I understand it right, you two have the same father."

"I don't have a sister..." Keenan said, though he himself was not entirely sure of his answer. After all, he had never met his father before. Who was he to say that his father might not have had other kids after him?

"Y-You do, I'm here." Sammy nodded her head, still crying and hugging Keenan.

"Given that you're in a place like this, and that energy on you, I'm guessing you're a Demigod, too." Her mother said, nodding her head at her own assumption. "Sammy's the Demigoddess of Family. Her trait lets her sense when a family member is in danger, and transport herself to them. The fact she sensed you proves that you're some kind of family to her."

Keenan wasn't sure if he should trust these two or not, though they did not seem to be directly lying. "Keenan." He said simply, not giving his family name. As far as he was concerned, he had discarded that ages ago.

"Alright, Keenan." The mother nodded again. "Let's get you somewhere safe, and get that arm looked at." Even through the protective layer of black energy, she could see the mangled appearance of his left arm. The fact that he wasn't crying now, after receiving an injury like that, surprised her even more than the look he had shown at the mention of his mother. *He didn't just run away from home on a whim... he's been out here a long time.*

Keenan hesitated at that, before Sammy nodded her head and pulled him up. She didn't seem to notice the damage of his arm, looking down to see what her mother was talking about. "Are you alright? Can you walk? I can try to piggyback you if not...?"

Her mother chuckled at that, shaking her head. "Sweetie, I doubt you could pick him up. He's already quite high level." When she said that, Sammy's eyes went wide. She let out a little gasp and looked at Keenan again.

"You're really strong?" She asked for confirmation, though Keenan readily denied it.

"Not strong enough." He told her, looking at the pinned body of the serpent. Even now, it continued to struggle against the six arrows pinning it against the tree. The arrows were clearly no more than two feet long, and yet they held down the body of the beast more than a meter thick?

"If I had some warning, I'd have grabbed my actual bow." The mother said, following Keenan's gaze. However, she also spotted the bow strapped to his back. "It looks like you're an archer, too. Guess that there are things we'll be able to talk about."

Keenan hesitated, but eventually allowed himself to stand and follow the two of them. At the very least, he knew that it was suicide for him to wander around alone in this region now. Additionally, he could contact Jace in the city. With Jace's luck, he'd easily be able to guess whether this Sammy and her mother were telling the truth about their circumstances.

Thankfully, the leaf on his chest was still safe, meaning that he wouldn't face any harsh consequences for entering the forest. While they were walking, he noticed that Sammy's mother kept looking at him, a thoughtful expression on his face. It was honestly starting to make him uncomfortable to be looked at like that, so he couldn't help but speak up. "What is it?"

"How old are you?" The woman asked him, causing Keenan to shake his head.

"Lost count. Fifteen? Sixteen? Maybe seventeen..." Keenan had long ago stopped counting the days as anything more than the passing of seasons. He hadn't been much older than Sammy was now when he left his home, and had been living by himself ever since.

Sammy, meanwhile, seemed lost in her own little world, smiling happily as she walked between them. "I have an older brother now..." She said, giggling.

Her mother, on the other hand, knew that something was amiss. "If you don't mind me asking, what is your aspect?" Her voice was soft, more caring than Keenan had heard from another person in a long time. It reminded him of how other people's mothers would talk to their children, though he hadn't heard such a tone from his own mother for a long time before he left.

"...Chaos." He reluctantly answered. He didn't want to explain more than that, knowing that the pair would leave as soon as he said the full story. He wasn't even sure if they could be trusted with all of the information or not yet, anyways.

Just that one word was enough, though. Sammy's mother gasped, her eyes going wide. She had learned a thing or two about demigods while raising her daughter. She knew that the aspects did not cover as much as a proper domain, but this was enough to let her piece some things together. *If he is the Demigod of Chaos, hating his mother as he does and living in the wild... does his aspect cause chaos around him? Or did he just have a horrible mother, and it is his Chaos power that has kept him safe in the wild all this time?*

Either way, she knew that she couldn't simply abandon Keenan, regardless of the answer. As a mother, the thought of leaving a young child alone in the wild, facing monsters on a regular basis... it was something that she could never condone.