

The night before had been interesting to say the least. I fought my first true battle. A battle I could have died in. I still remember it clearly, the massive direrat, my idiotic decision to fight it instead of running away, and then the calm afterwards.

It probably hadn't been a long fight, less than a minute for sure, but I had felt powerful during it. Like I could fight anyone and anything.

And then I had killed the direrat by casting a spell inside the monster's body.

The events after that are a bit of a blur. I vaguely remember waking up in pain, being unable to move, and Brock seemingly being in the same situation as me.

And then everything happened fast. We exited the dungeon, only to find that the [Archpriest] Bernard was waiting outside with an entire contingent of [Paladins]. He was frowning at first, but when he saw me he looked relieved. After a quick explanation of what happened, the specifics of which I cannot seem to remember, Bernard healed our wounds and sent us home. Upon arrival back at the palace, I immediately passed out on my bed

Now, I am sore, awake, and inside a room that is clearly not the one I fell asleep in. Nor is it any other I have ever seen before. The walls and ceiling are comprised of wood, a nice reddish brown oak species. But unlike what one would normally expect, the wood doesn't seem to have been cut into planks and placed together. Instead it looks as though the wood had grown into the shape of a room.

In all honesty, the idea of making wood grow like that had confused me for a good ten seconds, before I remembered that magic is a thing in this world.

Shuffling up, I notice that the bed seems to be comprised of a bunch of small soft leaves growing out of the floor. The covers are, at least, made of cloth.

Throwing them to the side, I sit up, noticing that my clothes have been changed to something that resembles a nightgown.

Looking around, I find a single window. It is a circular window with a huge transparent leaf hanging from the top.

*This is weird... how long was I out? Was I transported somewhere? Kidnapped?*

My thoughts were quickly interrupted by a cooing sound behind me, originating from the other side of the bed.

I turn around to look, finding a body half draped over the bed, the upper body covered by my sheets that I had thrown to the side, while the bottom half appears to be sitting on a...log.

“Um, hello?”

At my words, the figure shakes before moving the sheets aside. She straightens her body, opens her eyes and looks towards me. When I meet her gaze her eyes widen in surprise.. I speak first.

“Sarena, what is happ-”

She stands up abruptly, the dress she was wearing snags on a branch on the bed, ripping it up and giving me a view of her panties. She notices this, and for the first time ever, I notice the elven [Mage]’s expression change to something other than her usual cold demeanor. Her eyes are wide, mouth agape, and her usually white complexion changes to a very noticeable red.

Not a moment passes before she runs out of the room. The leaf door of the room seems to fold in on itself, allowing her to pass through the doorway. A moment later, I hear a thump, followed by a very unladylike curse, before the sounds of bare feet striking wood becomes inaudible.

A smile grazes my lips.

*If this is some kind of kidnapping, it doesn't seem like it is a dangerous one.*

I look around, gazing towards the leaf window once again.

Whoever took me will probably be here to see me soon. I better stay in this room for now, but that doesn't mean I can't figure out some stuff before then.

Standing up, frowning at the fact that I am wearing a nightgown. I move to the window, my eyes widening as the leaf moves out of the way similar to how an automatic door would.

I look out of the window, finding a sprawling elven city several dozens of meters off the ground. Massive hallowed trees serf as buildings, and large branches between them serf as pathways to connect the buildings to each other. The branches have large leaves growing on both sides, creating a sort of railing which prevents people from easily falling off. It is the most elaborate treehouse city I had ever seen.

Hundreds of elves are moving about, talking, walking, entering and exiting buildings. My position is much higher compared to the rest of the city, providing me with an extensive view. Focusing my eyes, I look into the distance, towards an area comprised of a cluster of branches. There I see elven children practicing combat techniques, some of them are swinging weapons, others are shooting arrows, and finally there are those practicing magic, all under the watchful gaze of a thin elven man. As I focus my gaze on him, his head turns in my direction, his eyes seemingly meeting my own. Then he smiles and waves at me.

I wave back, surprised that he noticed me at such a far distance.

“Well, it seems you are already getting acquainted with our city.”

I jump in fright before I swerve around, my eyes landing on the person who had just spoken.

An elf stands near the entrance, her amber eyes gazing into mine. She is wearing a plain light blue dress. I look at her, noticing her very aged features and her pure white hair. I also notice the staff in her hand, it is made from an ebony black wood which has been crafted into the shape of a hand grasping the crystal multi-shade ball at the top of the staff.

Before I can ask or do anything, she waves her free hand, causing my [Mana Sense] to go off as a table and two chairs seem to grow out of the floor.

“My name is Silva Grandforest, and I am sure you have many questions,” she says as she seems to glide over the floor towards one of the chairs. She sits down on it and gestures to the other chair.

“I... do,” I say before moving and taking a seat. I look to her, my eyes are drawn to her own.

“You kidnapped me. Why?”

She nods.

“A good first question, and the proper answer to that would be to say it was for your own protection.”

“From the gods,” I blurted out, thinking of what Quasi had said when he had warned me. More often than not, the gods cannot be trusted, as they will always look to manipulate you.

The elf Silva chuckles, her laughter sounding very crisp and clear,” Oh my, it seems you are far from the ignorant [Heroes] of old. I can only imagine how long it would have taken for them to kill you in your sleep.”

I gulp.

“I thought the gods need me?” I ask, confused. Bernard had explained that [Heroes] are a precious and powerful existence, able to combat the horrors and evils of the world with ease.

Silva shakes her head,” The gods need a servant, a tool, someone they can manipulate to further their goals. They cannot force a [Hero] to do what they want, The [Hero] class does not

allow it, they can only manipulate them. And if they cannot, then they will take action to make sure that said [Hero] never gets in their way.”

*That is... disconcerting. Though I do not understand her motive for kidnapping me. She can't possibly be doing this out of the kindness of her. There must be some hidden motive.*

“So you captured the [Heroes] to pro-”

She shakes her head left and right before pointing towards me,” Only you. You are the only one that we have taken.”

*What?*

“Why only me?”

Silva leans back, her smile unwavering ever since it had formed on her lips.

“Tell me Franky, did you know that not all [Heroes] are created equal? Did you know that very few of them are able to tap into the true potential of the [Hero] class?”

She leans her staff on the side of the table before clasping her hands together.

“Throughout the history of this world, hundreds of [Heroes] have lived, but only four of them have ever truly mastered the class.”

She unclasps her hands, raising four fingers, “Gilgamesh, Hercules, Beowulf, and Odysseus.”

My mind stops as I process those names, recognising each one as a mythological hero from Earth's history.

“Each of those four were true [Heroes], beings who saved lives, protected the people from the gods. Every human, dwarf, and elf will know those four above all the others, as they should.”

*This is... getting confusing.*

I rub my temples as I do my best to digest this new information,” That still doesn't explain why you kidnapped me. Heck, I still don't know how you did it. Last I remember, I was in one of the most heavily guarded areas on the continent.”

Silva moves her head, turning to the door,” I will get to that part, but first, I do feel a bit parched.”

I move my eyes to the door, finding it opening on its own, Sarena enters with a tray filled with various fruits and drinks. She is wearing a new dress, this time a bright green one, and seems to be desperately avoiding any and all eye contact with me.

She places the tray on the table and turns to Silva, "Is there anything else I can do for you Grand Elder?"

Silva rolls her eyes, "Sarena, at least call me Grandma like you did when you were a child. Grand Elder makes me sound much too old. I'm barely over four thousand years!"

A smile cracks on my lips as I watch Silva make one of the best puppy dog eyes I have ever seen.

"Yes Grandma."

Silva immediately brightens, reaching out and pulling her granddaughter into her lap to Sarena's utter horror.

"Grandma! Stop, we have company!"

"Oh hush girl, he already saw you with a torn dress, this is nothing compared to that."

And like before, I watch as Sarena's face goes a horrid pink, though this time it seems she is unable to run away.

"It ripped!"

"Aha, that's a rather interesting excuse you're making there."

Sarena stops struggling, instead preferring to fold her arms and stare downward, away from me... while sitting on Silva's lap, her skin a burning red now.

Silva tightens her hold, wrapping her hands around Sarena's stomach, "Franky, it was actually thanks to Sarena here that I decided to bring you here."

I look to Sarena, but fail to read any emotion other than embarrassed on her face.

"When a young elf becomes at least thirty years old and exceeds level fifty in a class, we allow them to leave the city of **Alfheim**. We allow them to travel the world, meet different species, new people, learn about governments, different classes, the gods."

*Wait, Sarena is older than me? I guess it would make sense, Brock did explain to me that elves live much longer than humans. I guess that would mean that they age slower too.*

“Sarena here was one of our young that chose to go out to see the world ten years ago. She is also someone who had listened to me gush about the four heroes,” Silva moves her head next to Sarena, turning to look at the blushing girl on her lap, “and it seems she remembered some of the facts I shared about them.”

I lift an eyebrow, “Like?”

Silva turns away, her eyes looking to me, focusing, “Like the fact that you have the skill [A Hero’s Moment].”

*Shit, I think I told Brock about the skill. Sarena must have heard from him that I had it.*

“I am still not sure what that skill even does.”

Silva nods before opening her arms, allowing Sarena to stand up, “Sarena, be a dear and fetch me the Hero Compendium and an affinity orb.”

“Yes Grand elder,” Sarena quickly exclaims before speedwalking out of the room, not even deigning to look at the frowning Silva.

Silva sighs and shakes her head before grabbing a gourd and drinking its contents.

“She will probably take her sweet time, but on to the matter of that skill. [A Hero’s Moment] is one of the most diverse skills I have ever seen, and that is saying quite a bit. [A Hero’s Moment] activates only when the [Hero] in question is attempting to save someone. The skill will react to the situation, increasing the [Hero]s stats based on what they are attempting to accomplish. An example would be to gain greatly increased physical stats, as well as other various temporary positive boons,” she explains, placing the gourd down and licking her lips.

I stare at the gourd in front of me, debating if I should try the drink. Unfortunately, I dislike sweets early in the morning. They make me feel much too jittery.

“But the skill has a cost, one which is paid after the skill ends. Usually it comes in the form of extreme exhaustion, either mental or physical, sometimes both. But, if a challenge is extremely difficult, you may obtain a permanent physical disability. For example, Hercules lost the ability to use his right arm after a deadly encounter against a [Demon General]. He triumphed, but it came at a cost.”

*So that's what happened. When I first activated the skill, my Charisma was increased drastically, but it made me extremely mentally exhausted afterward. While during the fight against the Direrat, I was physically stronger, but it meant I couldn't even move my body after.*

"I see. But why do I have this skill while the other [Heroes] do not?"

She leans forward, her smile radiant, "Because, they merely have the class, but you live the class. You are the type of person who would risk life and limb to save others, even at the cost of your own life and safety. You are a person who cannot stand torture or injustice. You are a person who looks to help others. You, Franky, are a man destined to change this world."

She closes her eyes for a moment, "and that is enough for me to offer you sanctuary at this city," her eyes open, glowing a powerful spring green.

I open my mouth several times, wanting to refute what she said, but each time I remember Quasi. How he would give me his annoyingly cocky smile before telling me that I have the qualities of a true hero. He would tell me that at least once a week. And so far, thinking about the past weeks here on this world, I can't say he has ever been wrong.

I shake my head and rub my eyes. Various thoughts are racing through my head.

*I don't want to be a hero... but that is probably what a freaking hero would say.*

I lean back into my chair, annoyed.

"Since you saved me, doesn't that mean you angered the church? Won't they come get me?" I ask, trying to change the subject. Thinking about this now will change little, best to focus on the matter at hand.

Silva chuckles before grabbing her staff and placing it on the table.

"I am very sure they will be quite angry at me for taking you, but there is little they can do about it, especially in this city," Silva leans back, resting on the chair, leaving the staff on the table."I believe Sarena mentioned to me that you have the [Analyze] skill. Please go ahead and use it on me, and you will understand."

I already figured she is strong, but to not fear the church... Hmmm

"[Analyze]"

Silva Grandforest, **The Emerald Mistress**.

Level 281 [Grand Biomancer]

Level 186 [Archdruid]

Level 112 [Grand Gardener]

Silva Grandforest is the current leader of the Elven people, as well as one of the most dangerous and powerful individuals on the planet. Silva gained the title of [Emerald Mistress] when she caused a forest to consume an entire invading army overnight.

I can't help but whistle at what I am reading. Compared to Calidi, it seems like Silva is at a completely different level. And considering she lives in what I can only guess is a massive forest, her capability is even higher.

I tap my lips in thought, "You are a named being, they would risk too much trying to reclaim me, correct?"

Silva nods.

"That still doesn't explain how you were able to kidnap me overnight and take me to your city, which I would think is immensely far from where I was staying."

Silva chuckles and pushes the staff to me, "I do not have the power to do such things myself, but I do have the mana to use this elven treasure."

Looking at the staff that she had pushed towards me, I find it to be engraved incredibly well. Every square centimetre of the wood has been engraved with different patterns, while the top opens up into a hand grasping a crystal ball.

I check my finger, finding that I am still wearing the Identify ring.

I reach forward, placing my hand on the staff.

"[Identify]"

Mana leaves my body and enters the ring, causing a blue screen to appear.

### **[DIVINE]**

*Staff of Bending Worlds.*

This staff was created by a [Demigod] utilizing the dead remains of the [Grand Archdemon] Crowley. This staff has absorbed Crowley's innate ability to move between locations instantaneously.

Ability: [Light Step] - The holder of this staff is able to transport themselves short distances instantaneously. Mana cost varies based on Frequency, Range, and Aura strength.



["Warp"]: Create a portal to a location anywhere on the planet for a short amount of time.  
(Cooldown: 179 days)

I reread the item's description several times, blinking quickly. [Teleport] is supposedly an immensely high level skill with an insane mana cost. At least that is how Matilda had explained it to me. Pre-created runes between neighbouring cities were the far more preferred method for moving instantaneously.

But this staff breaks that logic several folds.

"How? I have never even heard of [Divine] Quality. Is it better than [Legendary]?"

Silva leans forward and grabs the staff, placing it on the ground next to her.

"Indeed, [Divine] is currently the highest rank an item can have, as well as the rarest. Only seven [Divine] items exist, and all have been created by the [Demi-god] Mimir, the only god to choose mortality over divinity."

*Wait! A god can stop being a god? That is a possibility?*

"And does this Mimir still live or is he dead?"

Silva shrugs her shoulders, "Nobody seems to know for sure, we only know that he created these items."

I frown, "What are the other [Divine] items? Who owns them? Could they use theirs against you?"

Silva grabs a fruit from the pile, looking at it before taking a bite. She licks her lips.

"All of the [Divine] items have a powerful effect that, when activated, requires a great deal of time before they can be used again. No country could use these effects without risking an invasion."

I nod, understanding her reasoning. It's the equivalent of having one nuke. If you use it, then you yourself could be nuked by someone who still has one.

I scratch my head, "So... what. You [Teleported] to the city, grabbed me and just left. Just like that? They didn't try to stop you?"

Her smile slowly disappears, "Surprisingly, that is exactly what happened. For whatever reason, it seems those [Archpriests] never gave you any protectors. I would have thought that Odin's Shadowravens would have attempted to stop me, but it seems that something may have happened. My only fear is that they may have allowed you to be taken, but that scenario only creates more questions for me."

Silva shakes her head, taking another bite of her fruit, this time with a bit more force. I on the other hand look towards the entrance to the room, finding Sarena carrying an orb and a book.

Silva follows my gaze, her smile returning upon noticing Sarena's arrival.

"Perfect," she exclaims, turning back to me, "We can talk and think about whether it was a good idea to take you away later, for now, let's take a look at your soul, shall we?"

I watch as Silva takes the orb from Sarena and places it on the table in front of me. The orb is translucent and shiny, in a way similar to glass but in a perfect sphere.

"Put your hand on it and send your mana through it."

*Affinities. Bernard had told me that my highest affinity was [Light] and that I shouldn't focus on my other six, stating that they were too low. I wonder...*

I place my hand on the ball and send my mana into it. In response a bluescreen pops up in front of my face.

*He lied...*