

Oracle 575

Chapter 575 - First Drop

" How much longer are you going to keep me tied up? " A girly voice slightly annoyed and totally unconcerned with the lion's injuries muffled Mufasa's growls of pain.

Kyle stiffened at the familiar voice and an excruciating pang in his heart squeezed his chest, momentarily cutting off his breathing. Turning slowly, a contrite grimace covered his face as he met his sister's jaded gaze. Good actress or not, he could still detect in her eyes the distress she was vainly trying to hide.

"Maeve, you know very well why I can't untie you."

It cost him to say this, but he had no other choice. For, hours earlier, his sister had tried to kill him. His physical wounds had long since healed, but those in his heart were still burning.

When they had set foot in that giant forest, they had waited for Maeve to come to her senses before setting out. Mufasa had volunteered to carry her on his back and ensure her protection, and Kyle had gladly accepted. The veiled woman had not batted an eyelid and everything seemed to be going well given the strength of their group.

Mufasa's strength spoke for itself, while the veiled woman's strength remained a mystery, but she was still a Sixth-Ordeal Evolver or perhaps even stronger. His own strength wasn't too bad and even if Maeve was a normal human, it was more than enough with the three of them to provide protection.

Except Kyle hadn't anticipated just how black-hearted Bhuzkoc could be. Long before they separated, the Nawai chief had taken precautions. If the young woman were to join up with her brother in any way, she had orders to kill him no matter what.

If that's all it was, it wasn't a big deal because Kyle knew it wasn't her fault. But Bhuzkoc had done much worse. Ever since he had learned of the existence of her older brother and how he had lost to Jake, he had also ordered her to hate them.

The Slave Contract could not directly brainwash or lobotomize a person. A direct command like "get stupid or smart" would obviously not work. Instead, the person had to try to act and think that way. In the long run, it might just work.

In other words, ever since Maeve had joined her brother, she hadn't been able to help but feel a visceral hatred for him at the mere sight of him. Combined with the kill order she had received, resisting was nearly impossible. Her only mitigating factor was that Bhuzkoc was not near her at the moment. The Slave Contract's influence had waned a bit, but not enough to make a difference.

At the first opportunity, she had shot Kyle in the back of the head with the gun he had given her for self-protection. She had waited for the first ambush of the Goblin Digestors to act, and that sneaky shot had been a success.

If Kyle hadn't gained experience and a considerable advantage in stats, he would be dead. At the last moment, he had contorted his neck to accompany the bullet's trajectory, but his silky golden hair had been deeply scalped, while his skull had been chipped.

This wound, though benign, had hurt like hell, but it was his sister's face disfigured by hatred that had really broken his heart. Since then, she had been bound with thick chains and her gun had been taken away.

"Maeve, you really can't resist this order? I'm your brother! Not your enemy..." Kyle repeated for the umpteenth time as he saw her give him a scathing look as if he were a repulsive cockroach.

His sister's response was no different than the previous one. The chains constricting her tightened as she tried to lunge at him, but they held firm, keeping her securely in place. Unable to press on, she used the only means at her disposal to convey her hatred.

"Peh!" Maeve brazenly spat in his face.

Kyle dodged with a slight head movement, then sighed with misery.

"Goddamn it! Bhuzkoc, I swear I'll kill you next time. Enjoy your last moments!"

His sister wasn't that weak mentally. If that ogre bastard hadn't subjected her to all kinds of abuse and atrocities how could she have obeyed those orders without even resisting. It was as if a seed of reverential fear towards Bhuzkoc had sprouted in her, nestled deep in her heart. Without resorting to an Aether or Soul Spell, it would take a long psychotherapy to help her recover from her traumas.

'At least she's not crying.' Kyle consoled himself, his forehead creased as if to better convince himself.

If he knew that most PTSD patients behaved the same way, he probably wouldn't have been as optimistic.

Kyle was surprised at the silence of Mufasa, who had been mediating between the two siblings until now, defusing most of the squabbles. His predatory presence was enough most of the time to override the mental imprint left by Bhuzkoc on the young woman's soul.

When he looked for him, he found the feline not far from the Digestor Taotie's corpse that he had just defeated. Besides the usual Aether filaments floating on its surface, something else had rolled to the ground near its head.

A crystal.

It was a smooth, spherical white crystal about the size of a basketball. Its appearance was reminiscent of the Aether Crystals used to store various kinds of Aether, but there were also two major differences.

The first was that this crystal was far too big and its hue tended to the silvery one that was customary among Digestors. The only type of Aether that Jake knew of that was remotely comparable was his Grey Aether, but he had never tried to store it in a crystal.

The second was that inside a complex Aether Symbol consisting of thousands, perhaps millions or billions of Aether Runes, bathed within, confined to the interior of the sphere. The color of this Aether Symbol was not silver, but more of a neon green.

"What the hell is that?" Kyle shouted with curiosity mixed with distrust.

As he was about to pick up the thing, someone beat him to it and it was only when his hand closed on empty space that he blinked stupidly as he realized what had just happened. When he turned his head, he found the crystalline sphere in the arms of the veiled woman, who was apparently studying it with the highest concentration.

"Hey, it doesn't belong to you." Kyle scolded her gruffly. After his sister had tried to kill him, his mood had deteriorated and he was in dire need of an outlet.

The veiled woman ignored him as usual, continuing to stare at the object with keen interest. This only fueled the anger of the playboy. Fortunately, this time he had Mufasa on his side.

"Kyle's right. I killed this monster." The lion interjected as he stepped heavily towards the veiled woman. "That shiny stone is rightfully mine."

She ignored him as well, but as Mufasa was about to pop her head off with a thunderous clawed slap, she tossed him the trinket and said neutrally,

"You can have it. I was just looking."

Kyle let Mufasa study the crystal as well, but clearly the lion was not good with this kind of thing. He seemed more interested in the shine of the object than the Aether Symbol inside.

"Can I take a look?" He asked the feline politely.

Starting to get bored, Mufasa nodded and let him grab the sphere. When he held it in his hands nothing happened, but upon scanning it, he received the following report:

[Aether Skill: Devour: Your mouth can generate a powerful attraction force capable of siphoning off the environment within a 5 meter radius. Each additional level doubles the range and pull of the technique.]

Kyle immediately understood how valuable this crystal was, but at the same time he got a sense of why the veiled woman had lost interest in it so quickly. For them, this Aether Skill was basically useless.

They lacked the highly efficient digestive system of the Taotie Digestor to make good use of this skill as well as the ability to compress matter that this monster used to ingest objects more massive than itself. If Kyle tried to use it in the middle of a fight, he might just bust his teeth trying to swallow a slightly larger rock.

Given what he knew about the lion, Mufasa was a much better candidate than he was, but the feline also lacked other crucial skills to fully leverage its potential.

"Let's keep it for now." Kyle decided as he stored the crystal in the Faction Vault.

Mufasa and the veiled woman did not object. The lion stored the giant corpse in his Space Storage and Kyle filled his canteens with Digestor blood for the battles to come.

The group then set out again, looking for more prey. Kyle decided to stick around to level up his Aether stats. The Taotie Digestor that Mufasa had defeated with great difficulty had made it clear to him that it would be dangerous to go on from there.

The lion had not yet fully healed and wanted to face other Digestors of this type before deciding whether the risk was manageable or not. Thanks to the corpse of the mutant Taotie, the group had enough to eat for a long time and high quality Digester blood to hydrate and regenerate their wounds.

This Digester was probably a kind of mini-boss to drop an Aether Skill Crystal.. They didn't know what the drop rate was, but they intended to find out for sure.