

~ Day 130 ~

Eyeing the different powerful monster nobles making their way through the ostentatious courtyard of black and purplish marble with a wary gaze, Bob, Mia, and I followed in tow with the confident and regal-looking mother-daughter pair leading.

I was quite astonished to be honest, feeling the air about them that gave off an unquestionable sensation of dignity and reality. Everything from the power of their tightly regulated aura to their appearance, nobody would be able to mistake their status as one of the most influential houses in Ebongrave.

Directing my gaze down at the beautifully dressed Mia who had linked her arm in mine, I smiled as she looked at her surroundings with the glint of excitement and nervousness in her ruby eyes. Giving her a slight squeeze, she smiled up at me, sharing some of that nervousness with her.

She was obviously worried about jumping into the unknown like this, but more so excited for experiencing something like this grandiose party for the first time in her life.

Catching the glancing eye of Lady Eryanne, she simply chuckled mirthfully, turning her gaze back towards the massive arch that worked as the entrance to the palace halls whose doors were already wide open, revealing a colorful and brightly lit room just beyond.

We were slightly late, but there were still quite a few individuals and groups arriving first now too, and many of those were the recognizable faces of those we had faced off against in the tournament. I even caught the eye of Kairenn Gorefist, a lumbering high orc who had placed just behind me at 4th-place.

Unexpectedly he shot me a toothy grin, the nod of his head a show of acknowledgment. Sending a similar nod back, I was glad that the finalists in the tournament weren't all stuck-up nobles. It was good to know that I had apparently gained the approval of this powerful individual. But then again, it wasn't surprising considering how greenskin culture worked.

"I should probably see if I can strike up some conversation with him later tonight..." I thought to myself earnestly, new pep in my step as we walked along the marbled courtyard.

Making our way from where we had set off from the carriage in the courtyard to the archway and deeper into a lavishly decorated corridor actually took a few minutes as this palace was positively gargantuan, and after a bit of strolling and taking in the beautiful artwork decorating the interior of the palace, we finally made our way to a smaller but still very large archway.

From where we were, we could already hear the boisterous sounds of conversation and music spilling out into the corridor.

Following Lady Eryanne and Ilia to stop right before the entrance to the banquet hall, I watched on as the group of monsters just before us was announced to everyone of the hall.

"Sir Doria of Zarkoth Merchant Emporium." The stout butler-ish figure by the entrance announced with a booming voice belying his diminutive figure.

From what I could see, the announcement did draw a few eyes from the crowds of conversing monsters beyond the entrance to the banquet, but no reaction enough to strike me as impressive. It wasn't surprising, however, seeing as this individual wasn't any one of a noble line, only the amount of money in his pocket allowing him to attend this celebration.

Catching Eryanne's gaze, I gave her an awkward, if not slightly uncomfortable, smile.

It was the point of no return I supposed.

"Of the prestigious household Menethil; Lady Menethil and Miss Ilia Menethil!" The flustered announcer shouted out, clearly much louder than just before. "Accompanying; Xavier Tal'chor, Mia Tal'chor, and... uh- Bob..."

The words cut practically cut through all the noise of the hall like a knife, both conversation and music dying to a halt. The change was instantaneous, and every single eye present cast their gaze up towards the entrance situated high above a flight of stairs, pinning them to us with a mix of awe, fear, and curiosity.

I had allowed Eryanne to reveal my last name after a lengthy discussion and no small amount of encouragement. Up until just yesterday, I barely knew just what the true magnitude of what having a last name truly meant for a monster, and it had given me even more pause for revealing it to anyone.

A monster's last name, also known as a **[True Name]** by the system, is something awarded through special circumstances. Although what specific prerequisites are needed to be awarded one was something rather vague and unknown, it is widely considered something extremely rare and hard to achieve.

Even Eryanne, the matriarch of Menethil, didn't know much more than the public regarding this. And the only reason why there are quite a few noble houses in Ebongrave with a last name, that was because some far, far gone ancestor of theirs had managed to achieve one, the nobles simply being the remnants of that one impressive individual.

Basically, a **[True Name]** was the gift of heritage and lineage. It would be passed down to one's offspring and mates, like how Mia had also gained it for being my wife literally witnessed by the system itself. Although I haven't really seen any effects from having this apparent boon, I quickly learned that it does indeed have a significant impact on any who bears it.

For example, that one powerful skill that the Sinlore lizardmen were using to transform their bodies and tap into a well of power was in fact a skill derived from their heritage, their **[True Name]** heritage. Using this unique skill of their household, they could call upon the strength of their ancestors.

What exact effects the heritage gave an individual widely varied from monster to monster, from skills to traits. Usually, the effects are very unique, and the potency is generally determined by the purity and strength of the blood in the individual's veins, tying them to their progenitor. The one who gained the **[True Name]**.

So while I might not see any real effects on myself, I should expect that my offspring would inherit some of my power down the line.

That thought... made me surprisingly happy.

Pulled out of my reverie as I felt Mia's pull on my arm, I followed Eryanne and Ilia down the stairs, feeling the prickling sensations of everybody's eyes in the hall still glued to us.

It was clear that most of the eyes were directed in our direction because of Eryanne's and Ilia's presences, but no small amount had also been fixated specifically on our figures; Bob, Mia, and I.

Mostly due to the fact that we had been one of the dark horses in the tournament, placing third place, but even more so due to the fact that I had suddenly been announced as a bearer of a [**True Name**]. Which no doubt had many's intrigues peaked.

Slowly, the music and hum of conversation picked up again as we walked into the hall decorated with lavish tapestries, carpets, chandeliers, and tables of delicious-looking food. Bob very much shared that last sentiment as he was already eyeing the plates of food with a ravenous glint in his eyes.

Sending him off to go eat his fill, both Mia and I found ourselves at a rather loss for what to do. We had never been in such a situation before, and I had a hard time figuring out exactly what to do and how to go about it. To our great relief though, Eryanne came to our rescue, starting by introducing us to a variety of different individuals.

It started out a bit rough, but the more we got used to the alien experience, the more animated we got in our conversations. So Eryanne left us to our devices, she and her daughter already having split off to do socialize elsewhere.

There were quite a few jackasses here and there, to be honest; some of the more conceited of guests not-so-subtly throwing verbal jabs at us.

I attempted to indulge in some verbal sparring myself to train my social muscle, but Mia less than tactful... much less; occasionally left conversations into shocked silence when she let some prick know exactly what she thought about them. Nonetheless, that precisely was what made the evening all the more bearable as I would amusedly watch on as she had at it.

But other than that, most were quite welcoming, no doubt because of how clearly both Mia and I were associated with Lady Eryanne.

"Bwa! You should join Warlord Shaar's banner, I can even put in a good word for you." Kairenn's deep voice rumbled boisterously. "Trust me, she's one of the most powerful Warlords and has more than enough territory to spare if you'd need it."

I shook my head mirthfully, glancing towards Mia was chatting up one of the female beastkin of Kairenn's party, genuinely seeming to enjoy herself.

"I appreciate the gesture, but I have no intention of aligning myself to a warlord, much less a warchief." I sighed. "While I understand I'm setting myself up for conflict, I'm also confident in my ability to stove it off."

Almost tumbling head over ass forward as Kairenn roughly clapped the back of my shoulder with that inane amount of physical strength in his body, I heard him guffawing.

"Good, good!" He laughed, revealing his teeth and more of his long thick tusks. "I like your spirit, can't wait to see where it'll bring you. But as I said, the door's open for you, just north of the lowlands."

I was about to thank him as I righted my posture back to normal, but the sudden deafening of the music and conversation stole my attention.

Looking towards the balcony lining the walls of the banquet hall, following all of the gazes pointed at a lone figure standing by the railing, I paused with a rush of different sensations hitting me all at once.

Curiosity.

Trepidation.

Fear.

And... unrestrained disgust.

The figure standing there was just about as tall as I was, outfitted in black, finely made modest attire. The air around this man was palpable, however, giving off a sensation of pure instinctive dread of someone many, many times more powerful than oneself. But for some reason, despite even that, his face made him seem approachable and amiable.

I would've pinned him as a Drow right out of the gate, considering his elongated ears and pale-gray skin, but that notion was thrown out of the window with the last sensation I felt that had me almost recoil in disgust from his mere presence in this room.

Very much like the feeling I got from when I laid eyes on the undead wight or the undead construct, however, this time it was magnified beyond just that deep sense of wrongness.

Almost to the point of... inexplicable hatred?

Steeling my nerves, I looked around at the other expectant and awe-filled faces of the guests all around, proven that I was in fact the only one feeling so off-put by his presence.

Although I couldn't pinpoint the exact explanation for all of this, I needed no one to tell me who this was.

Lord Nosferas, himself, had come out to greet his guests.