

## Chapter 100 - Home Sweet Home

By the end of his stay in Sylspring, the atmosphere in the house had lost most of its awkwardness and tension. Alana's meals were back to normal proportions—for her standards at least—and her laughs didn't last three seconds too long.

Despite the front he put forth, Kai was still conflicted. It would take some time to get used to Moui's new role in his life. Thankfully his mother stopped treating him with the same care of a ticking time bomb.

*Fake it till you make it—or till I manage to get rid of Moui, whatever happens first.*

"Are you sure you can't say another day?" Alana asked for the hundredth time. "It's only been a week."

It was dark outside, and Kai was busy packing for the journey. "Mom, I told you I can't delay. Elijah puts a lot of importance on punctuality."

Alana paced in front of his bed, "That man is too strict. You should be able to take some time off, you're still a child."

"They were clear from the start, it was an all-or-nothing deal. I can't walk back on that after all the help they gave me," Kai repeated again.

His mother huffed, annoyed, but didn't refuse his words.

Kai stopped putting his alchemy tools inside the expanded space of his bag and grabbed her hand. "I'll be back before you know it."

"You promise?" Alana's gaze weighed on him.

"Yes, Mom, I promise. I'm sure I can convince them to give me some time off."

"You should spend at least three months with us."

"I'll see what I can do," Kai answered noncommittally. Elijah was unlikely to grant him that long.

*We might reach a compromise, if I promise to continue my training in Sylspring.*

Alana crossed her arms, a furrow on her brow. "I expect to hear news from you soon or I'll come to the estate myself."

"I'll talk to them and send you a letter next time the boat stops by the estate." Even if he took care of many of the errands, Virya still ordered the bulk of the supplies to be delivered by sea.

Satisfied, Alana left free to go back to packing. "I'll go prepare you something for the journey."

Life at the estate was hard but simple. He knew how to face those challenges, dealing with his family was... *complicated*. He couldn't deny there was some relief to the idea of going back and guilt immediately followed.

*I've already missed so much being away. Elijah will understand.*

With everything ready, Kai went downstairs to help Alana cook and make sure she didn't go overboard. Tonight it was only them, his sisters were both out hunting at sea or in the jungle with his Moui. Kai insisted they shouldn't change their plans for him. They could say their goodbyes in the morning.

"It's just one day, mom. I don't need to bring a three-course meal."

"Don't be silly. The journey is long, you'll need a lot of energy."

Their argument was stopped by the metallic click of their door opening. "I'm back," Ele's voice greeted.

"How did it go?" Kai asked.

"The low tide wasn't long. I mostly scouted some promising locations for the next big tide," Ele made her way to the kitchen. "Are you leaving in the morning?"

*Spirits, not you too!*

"Yes," Alana answered in his stead.

Kai cleared her throat, "I'll go for a walk." Better to cut and run. If they allied against him, it would be the end.

An hour after dusk, numerous lights still filled the streets of Sylspring. People were not infrequent and the bustle of numerous voices resounded from poshtown.

It wasn't the peaceful moonwalk he imagined, but Kai found he enjoyed it all the same. The sounds of life and people having fun carried their own charm. Well-lit pubs, peddlers and groups strolling the streets. All those people were individuals with their own stories and desires.

His stay at the estate had muddied the waters. Coming back made him fully realize this was his world and his life. The distance he felt since he was reborn was entirely gone. He wasn't a spectator watching the world from the outside. He was part of it. Earth felt more dreamlike and foreign than Elydes.

Kai roamed among the nightlife of Sylspring, silently observing the passersby. There was no denying he was different from them. But that had little to do with his reincarnation. Any eleven-year-old who spent half his life grinding skills would stick out in a crowd.

Confusing feelings and ideas crowded the edge of his mind. Going against his common impulses, Kai didn't jump down the rabbit hole and left them alone. There would be time to examine and analyze them in the future.

He was about to head back home when someone called his name. "Wait! Kai."

A figure stumbled in his direction. Flynn stopped a few feet from him, swaying slightly.

"Are you drunk?" Kai asked. His beauty sleep waited and dealing with a drunk teenager wasn't in his plans.

"Nope. I only drank one cup," his speech slurred. "And the bartender said it was fruit juice."

"You didn't think it tasted funny?"

"Thought it had gone bad. It was a cheap pub."

Kai sighed. "Why did you drink it then?"

Flynn shrugged, staring at his feet downcast.

"I told you my sister would not be interested." As expected, Ele had friendzoned him to oblivion. After a day, Kai had thought he would be over his crush.

*Was Ele really that savage with the rejection? I wish I could have been there.*

Flynn mumbled something under his breath.

"What...?"

"Your sister. She said I was *cute*." His unfocused eyes looked up. "But not cute-handsome, more like a puppy wagging its tail cute."

"She said that?" Kai suppressed the grin that threatened to show on his lips. Flynn already looked like a beaten dog.

*Way to go sis!*

"That's what she meant. Her tone was clear. I'm good at those things, you know."

"You should have listened to me."

"Yes... I'm sorry, Kai. When your sister said she was glad you had a friend. I—I've not been a very good friend."

"It's fine. I've not been that great either."

"No, you have! You didn't turn me away even if I nag you."

*Damn boy, your standards are low.*

"Even after I said I would pursue your sister to annoy you."

"You did what!?" Kai stepped forward threateningly, making Flynn stumbled back and fall on his butt.

*Why the broken heart then?*

He raised his hands meekly, "I thought she looked very pretty and had a nice smile. Then we talked a few times, and she was also so kind and smart..." Flynn stared at the ground empty.

"Come on, why don't you go home," Kai offered his hand.

Flynn took his hand to get to his feet. Unfortunately, it meant he couldn't dodge him when he went for the hug. "I'm sorry," he mumbled again.

*Spirits grant me strength.*

"It's fine," Kai patted him on the back, having to wait long painful seconds before he finally let him go.

"You are my best friend."

*Spirits, I hope that's a lie. Otherwise, it's just sad.*

"Where is your house?"

Following Flynn's confused directions, they wandered in circles for a while before stopping in front of the right house. It was about what Kai expected, small, old and the walls leaning against its neighbor to keep standing. Not the worst he had seen. There were worse neighborhoods, but not many.

*Maybe I should have paid him more...*

"Is this it?"

Flynn nodded. "It's better if you go now." He walked him forward in a mostly straight line.

"I brought you till here. I might as well meet your family."

Flynn halted his steps, "I don't think that would be a good idea."

“Why not? You’ve met my family.” Kai was about to knock on the door, but Flynn took his hand.

“Please,” He whispered, suddenly looking worried. “I don’t want them to see you.”

“Fine, but you owe me one. Stay out of trouble.”

Flynn slipped inside and closed the door behind him. Kai considered snooping around, but he was too tired to care. With a wide yawn, he turned back looking for his way home. Tomorrow he had a long journey ahead and he needed all the sleep he could get.

*What a weird guy. Something is definitely up.*

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Kai woke up feeling rested. Reaching the second stage of Orange had reduced his need for sleep. The majority of benefits were granted during the advancement between one color and the next, while enhancement inside a grade only had a minor effect.

Skipping his meditation, Kai walked downstairs backpack on his shoulder. Alana and Moui were already up, and his sisters soon joined him. Ele with a smile, Kea with disheveled hair and surly expression. She looked at him like a cat after he stepped on its tail.

“Goodbye Kai. I really *really* hope you come back,” Kea said. “Can I go back to sleep now? It’s dawn.”

“We should at least have breakfast together,” Alana stopped her.

Kea growled silently and stomped her feet to the table. Sitting down without ever stopping her glares at him.

*Don’t look at me. I don’t want this any more than you do.*

Ignoring the grumpy cat, Alana set the table. They had a quiet conversation and a brief goodbye. Kea ran back to her room after stuffing her mouth with enough food to make their mother happy.

“Moui can accompany you,” Alana said after crushing him in a hug.

The hunter opened his mouth to say something but immediately closed it, “I’ll see you off and make sure nothing happens.”

Yay!

Alana waved them goodbye. “I’ll wait to hear from you soon.”

“I will.”

The walk through town with the hunter at his was silent. They both tried to avoid each other's gaze.

They were almost at the gates when Moui spoke. “Kai, I just want you to know I never—”

“It's fine, *Uncle*. ”

They reached the farmland. “Are you sure? If there is anything I can—”

“I said we're fine.”

The treeline was approaching quickly. After that, he would not see him again for a while.

*Oh, Damn.*

Kai stopped in his tracks. He took a deep breath before speaking without a pause. “It's weird having you lumbering around the house. And I would have liked to have been warned in advance, but it's fine. You make mom happy and I'm glad you're there to take care of them.”

Without giving Moui the chance to reply, Kai speedily headed towards the green wall of trees like a man stranded in the desert towards an oasis.

*I can't believe I said that.*

Unfortunately, he was no match for the hunter, who easily walked beside him. Kai watched straight ahead to avoid seeing whatever look Moui had on his face.

“Thank you, Kai, that was very kind.”

“Shut up.” His ears were already burning. Even without looking, Kai could feel the smile radiating from the hunter's face. Just a little longer and he would step into the Veeryd jungle.

“I promise to look after them and keep them safe.”

Kai risked a look back, Moui looked stoic like he meant every word.

“You better.”

Catching sight of the path, Kai jumped into the green sea with a burst of Empower. There had been enough hugs for a day. In his Mana Sense Moui stood at the edge of the forest.

There was nothing better than pushing his body to the limit to clear his head. Kai focused on the path ahead. He didn't have a running skill anymore, but his attributes had grown to compensate and his legs were longer. He would need to use Empower with precision and monitor his mana reserves.

He had gotten far better at pacing himself, but making it to the estate before midnight would be a challenge. Kai took control of the skill, he needed finesse, not power. Empower could strengthen each part of his body separately. In this case, he needed to focus mainly on his legs, but it wasn't that easy.

The human body wasn't made of separate compartments. It was all interconnected, and running involved most of his body to different degrees. If he only strengthened his legs, his other muscles might not keep up and get injured. This was especially important since he needed to keep this up for an entire day. Muscles and ligaments he could usually ignore would get strained over time.

Kai meticulously controlled the skill. Flooding his entire body with mana was so much easier but not efficient. All other times, he had needed a potion to push through the last stretch

The difficulty of the task helped pass the time. He didn't have enough brainpower to get bored. And not getting stranded in the jungle was a powerful motivator to keep his focus.

Hours flew by, Kai stopped to eat lunch when he saw the tree that signaled the first third of his journey. That had been one of his best ideas, leaving marks on the bark of the trees helped a ton to keep a consistent pace and his sanity. He still remembered how horrible it was to run without knowing how far he still had to go.

Stuffing his mouth with his mother's food and downing a bottle of water, Kai got back on march. Adding an enhancement to endurance to Empower had been another brilliant idea. It allowed both to reduce the backlash when he overloaded the skill and to push his body for longer.

The light dimmed and the sun set, Kai took out a crystal cored in lines of runes. Not his prettiest creation, but it did its job. A white glow illuminated his way when he pressed the rune on the top.

Lighting runes were easy, the hard part had been the switch button and the ability to store mana for later use.

Noticing the tree marking the last tenth of the journey, Kai slightly increased his pace. Finally, behind the jungle opened up to reveal the familiar buildings. His smile widened when he noticed he gained another level in Empower.

*Home sweet home.*

"You made a good time without potions," Elijah appeared beside him.

"Huh, thanks."

The man nodded, walking down the paved path.

Kai hurried after him. "My mother asked if it would be possible for me to spend some time in Sylspring."

Maybe it would have been better to wait before making his request, but Elijah seemed in a good mood and he had promised Alana.

"Naturally, I would continue my training there," Kai added.

"Yes, it would do you good to spend time in a town," Elijah said.

*Did he agree, just like that?*

"Thank you, master."

"You should rest. We'll have a full day tomorrow." The butler melded back into the shadows and disappeared.

Kai was puzzled, they had found an understanding over the years, but Elijah was rarely this nice to him.

*Maybe he missed me?*

Now that mana had stopped flowing through his body, Kai had a hard time keeping his eyes open. He barely managed to shower himself before flopping on his bed.

*I'll figure it out in the morning.*