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Story by Paul Michaels

I Got Isekai'd! Well Shyt!

Chapter 161 It's the Prince's Job to Lead

Wina and the Knights watched Quinus disappear into the labyrinth and once he was out of sight, everyone started making camp like the three other groups of guards who escorted the young nobles. While the Mayor left everyone alone as he walked back to his home.

Wina was just standing around watching her husband order his men around. When all of a sudden Rolf was standing next to her without alerting her.

"What the-"

"Hmm? You never took the trials, have you... Interesting..."

"You are very quiet for how old you are," Wina replied.

"Hehe! Well, I was born this way," Rolf responded.

Wina turned to face the Keeper of the Trials.

"What is your purpose for talking to me, Eternal?" Wina asked.

"I mean you no harm... It's just you have a stronger mana vein than others and I wish to give you the reward everyone gets after they pass the trials. It's tradition."

"But I'm too old to do the trials, no?"

"You are already an adult and have proven yourself as a skilled fighter and you're loyal to the crown. So why not take the rewards?"

"But you're supposed to give that to the Prince."

"That's why I'm doing it now. The other young adults will be back in a few days. They'll get theirs after."

Wina just looked into his white eyes. She was trying to sense if he had any ill intent. But he wasn't showing any.

"Will this harm me?" Wina asked.

"No."

"Alright... Let's get it over with."

Rolf stretched his wrinkled hand out, and Wina gave him her right hand.

"Ah... Yes. YES!... You have unshackled yourself from your cruel fate. But that was only a small victory. If you wish to be truly free from the shackles that wish to rebind you. Then you will need to defeat those who have trained you. May you find your path," Rolf recited.

Once Rolf released her hand. Wina could feel that her mana was more stable.

'He strengthened my mana... Hold on? Did he mean that I needed to defeat the Assassin's Society to become free? No. That can't be right. That's a suicide mission,' Wina thought.

Rolf spoke up once more, "It's hard by yourself. But with the aid of the one that loves you most, only then you will be able to find the strength to defeat the shackles."

Wina looked at him with suspicion and curiosity.

"Who are you?"

"Oh? I go by the name Rolf... Now, if you will excuse me. I have some earth to eat."

Wina watched the Keeper of the Labyrinth walk away. He was scanning the ground for something. She wasn't sure if he gave her a blessing or a curse. But she knew one thing was certain, she was going to survive no matter what.

"What a weird man," Wina said.

She thought about what he said but then just shook her head.

'Whatever. I just hope Nelumbo made it in time.'

After a half-hour the camp was finished and a female knight came walking up from the village.

Sir George was the first to notice her.

"Hey? Is that Lady Nelumbo? What is she doing here?"

Sir Mathew turned around, "Huh? What are you doing here? I thought you were training my son?"

Nelumbo walked toward them, "I was training your son. But the Queen wished for me to join you. Right after you all left. I believe you all had a half-day head start on me."

Mathew wasn't convinced but he had no way to refute it. He just nodded his head.

"Well, we could use the help. And I'm sure my wife will be happy to have another lady around," Mathew said.

Nelumbo looked around and saw all the Royal Knights and the other three parties. All of them were men with the exception being Wina. The bodyguards from the sons of Minor Nobles were wearing the crests of their respective houses.

Two of the groups had only two guards each while the third group had five guards.

The prince's escorts had seven in total, not counting herself at the moment.

"Is there anything you need me to do, Sir Mathew? Or should I just set up my tent?" Nelumbo asked.

"Why don't you keep Wina company? We already got a tent set up for the group."

"Alright." Nelumbo nodded as she walked up to Wina who was standing on the higher ground overlooking the camp.

Once she got next to her, Wina asked in a quiet voice, "Did everything go according to plan?"

"He's been trained well, Lady Wina. He's been in since last night. Right before House Bluewood's son arrived," Nelumbo replied.

Wina gave a nod, "Well, I trained him to be the Prince's shadow. Hopefully, he doesn't have to kill anyone."

Nelumbo turned to face the hidden assassin.

"If those three other boys know what's best for them, then they will stay clear of the Prince," Nelumbo said.

"We'll see..." Wina said as she stared at the entrance of the labyrinth.

"So... How are things between you and Mathew?"

Wina gave her a glance.

"He's a good husband. But he insists on having another child."

"Really? What's the holdup?"

"The Duke... I can't trust him not to make a move on me while we're busy. Once I know there are no more major threats aimed at me or my family. Then I'll have another baby," Wina answered.

"Well, I can't imagine having a kid. Not being able to train or drink wine for nine months doesn't sound appealing."

"I would have thought the same thing... But it wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it would be. If you get the chance, go for it."

Nelumbo wasn't expecting that answer and just shrugged.

"Well, I need to find the right guy. If he isn't a high-ranked warrior then he's not worth the time."

"Really? Then why do you have a eye for Mr. Mitchell? All he does is write for Lord Brice."

Nelumbo blushed slightly.

"Well, he's a high-ranked scribe. Nothing more."

Wina smirked.

"So, you have a thing for men with big brains, huh? Interesting."

"What's that supposed to mean? I'll have you know that I detest a man who needs rescue from a woman. He needs to be able to save me too."

"Well, maybe he can save you with his pen instead of a sword. I think you would be good with him," Wina said.

Nelumbo blushed a bit harder as she looked away.

"I'll consider it."

Wina looked away.

'She's still a maiden at heart... I bet if he writes her a love poem, then she'll fall for him. I wonder how good he is at poetry. I'll have to ask him later.'

Wina and Nelumbo stayed silent until it was nightfall when they had dinner with the rest of their group.

Inside the labyrinth it seemed more like a cave at the start. The walls and the floors were covered in stalagmites and stalactites. It would have been pitch black in there if it wasn't for the strange lights coming from the ceiling. The light source was coming from these things that looked like roots growing out from the top of the ceiling and gave off a nice blue glow. The three boys could hear the wind whistling throughout the cave.

"You need to relax a bit, John," Geralt said.

"You don't understand. Count Marcus told me that the prince needs to fail the trials," John replied.

"Yeah. He's been a prick lately... He is obsessed with the crown prince... What's so special about him?" Thomas said out loud.

"He's a prince. And Marcus will make my life harder if I don't get rid of him." John said with frustration.

Geralt rolled his eyes, "What's he going to do? Prevent you from getting into Mage's Academy? Or take your title away? You're a water mage... In no way is he going to take that away from you."

"You're an idiot if you think that he can't. Listen, I was given a plan to deal with him. So don't get in the way," Johnathan responded.

"How will I know if I'm getting in the way? If you don't tell me what your plans are?"

"You don't need to know..."

While Geralt and Johnathan were talking. Thomas felt a presence to the right of him and looked down the dark corridor. He thought he saw someone or something hiding in the shadows.

"Hmm? What's wrong?" John asked as he noticed Thomas was looking off somewhere.

"I think I saw something in the shadows. Do you guys feel like we are being watched?" Thomas replied.

"Not really... Maybe it's just some rats," Geralt answered.

John turned his gaze toward the shadows. Right where Thomas was staring at. He couldn't see anything out of the ordinary. But he would rather be safe than sorry.

"Step aside," he told Thomas.

John stepped in front of his friend and waved his hand.

A mist began to form into a ball of water in front of him.

"Cannonball Shot," John whispered.

The mist began to spin and became a ball of water the size of a head. John pointed at the corridor.

"RAH!"

The ball of water shot out towards the darkness.

Boom! SPLASH!

The force of the water ball cracked the stones and caused a loud crunching sound. As well as sending mist everywhere. Once the mist settled down, John and the others were hoping to see something but they didn't see anything not even a dead animal.

"Nothing? But I could have sworn I sensed something," Thomas said as he still was staring down the dark corridor.

"I didn't see anything. We're in a labyrinth, Thomas. Of course, things will seem off," Geralt said.

Thomas still wasn't convinced but didn't argue.

"Yeah, I didn't hear anything. You probably were just spooked. Like you usually are."

"Shut up! I'm not the one that gets spooked by a rat," Thomas fired back.

"Well, I didn't sense anything so I have no clue if there was something or maybe the darkness is getting to you. And we've only been in the Labyrinth for a couple of hours. I don't know how long we'll be here. But I rather not waste my energy or spells if you get spooked every few minutes," Johnathan said.

Thomas clenched his fists as he was trying his best to calm down.

"I wasn't spooked by a rat."

"You sure? Cause you were about to piss yourself last time you saw one," Geralt snickered.

Thomas looked down the hall again and still didn't see anything. It was then they heard footsteps coming from behind them. They quickly turned around and saw the Prince walking towards them.

Quinus stopped and looked at them with suspicion.

'What the hell are these three doing? Well, I better intimidate them.' Quinus thought as he mentally prepared himself.

"What... Are you three waiting to jump me? Well, you'll have to get in line."

Quinus walked past them and continued forward. The trio was confused. But they just followed after him. Out of the four of them, Quinus was the tallest and physically stronger. He almost looked like a fifteen-year-old as he was starting to look more like a man. While the three of them were more or less the same height and looked younger than him.

"Hey... Why are you following me? Don't you have a map or something? Plus, wouldn't my cousin punish you for being this close to me?" Quinus asked.

"We are just honoring you, my Lord. You are supposed to lead our people and us right? So lead us," John said with a glare.

"Plus, the labyrinth changes its mazes and traps every week. So there's no way for us to get a map, your Highness," Geralt added.

Quinus raised his eyebrows and gave a smile.

'So, they want to play? Very well. I can use this... But they have to know that I'm not scared of them.'

"You know you didn't answer my question, Johnathan."

"Yes. Marcus wouldn't like the fact that I'm working with you. But what he doesn't know won't hurt him and I just want to get out of this crappy trial as soon as possible."

'Hmm? Well, he's blunt. But I can't take his words at face value. He's from a noble family that is allied with my uncle. They will always lie or twist the truth if they can benefit from it,' Quinus thought.

"Is that so? Then why did all of you cut me off when speaking to the Eternal? If you really were following me, then wouldn't you have let me speak first?"

Geralt and Thomas became nervous while John was trying his best to not show any reaction.

"Ahh... Well, I thought you wanted to speak to the Eternal for much longer than us, your Highness. We were surprised to have run into you in the first place. We are sorry if we offended you. Is there anything we can do to make it up to you, your Highness?"

Quinus could see through his act but didn't say anything.

'He's just a ten-year-old that has no clue what's going on. I should let him off easy. But I'll have to keep my guard up if they do decide to betray me.'

"Alright, Johnathan. Let's keep going forward."

Quinus walked ahead of them and they followed behind. After a few more hours of walking, they found the stone stairs that led to the second floor.

"Huh? We found the stairs already?" Geralt asked in disbelief.

"Yeah, Luckily there aren't that many portal traps on the first floor. But that's going to change from here on out," Quinus said.

"Is it going to take a week just to pass this stupid trial? I feel like we've been walking for a whole day," Thomas complained.

"We've been walking for almost five hours, Thomas. You're too soft," John replied.

"Johnathan... Back off of him. I know he's been complaining this entire time, about something following us. But you taking cheap shots at him isn't going to speed up the process," Quinus said.

"Pfft! He's not a child. He shouldn't be so easily frightened," John answered.

"Well, he's right to be uneasy, because I felt it too. But all I can say is it doesn't seem to have any malice towards us," Quinus said.

"Huh? So you are saying there was something in the shadows?" Geralt asked.

"Yes. I can't be sure what it is... But I'll tell you if that changes," Quinus answered.

Thomas felt relieved that the Prince believed him and was keeping an eye out for him. He gave the Prince a bow.

"Thank you, your Highness. I thought I was going insane."

"Don't mention it."

Quinus led the group down the stairs and found themselves on the second floor.

'Hmm? This place looks a lot bigger and open. But the walls look smooth. And the ceilings are at least ten feet tall.' Quinus thought.

"Tsk! So, this is the hedge maze part of the dungeon. I thought it was supposed to be a standard cave for the second floor. How did we get the special maze floor?" John said with annoyance.

"The dungeon core must have been bored or something. That's the only reason why I can think of why we have this floor. The normal mazes should only take us a couple of hours or less if we don't hit too many dead ends," Quinus replied.

"Well, somebody's optimistic? Lead the way, my Prince." John said as he stretched out his arm and hand telling Quinus to take the lead.

"John. Why are you being such an ass? Stop it," Thomas said as he glared at his friend.

"Whatever..."

John was just playing his part as Marcus got him a map of the new layout of the labyrinth from one of the adventurers who cleared out the dungeon earlier in the week. Luckily the dungeon hadn't changed its layout before Johnathan started his trial. Marcus also was able to pay this one adventurer to lie about clearing all the monsters on the fourth floor. Leaving one of the portal traps with a monster inside it.

Quinus just shook his head as he began to walk down the maze.

The group had walked a mile and a half until they ran into the first trap.

"Hold it... There's a portal... It's hard to tell but I can see where it's located," Quinus said as he squatted down and studied the ground.

"I don't see anything? Where is the damn thing?" Geralt asked.

Quinus pointed to a clear area, "Do you see how there's no dust or dirt in this circle area?"

Geralt and Thomas followed the Prince's finger and noticed that there was no dust on the floor in a perfectly circle area. It wasn't obvious at first, but once the prince pointed it out they couldn't unsee it.

"Really? You are just seeing things, Quinus," John said.

"Then why don't you go ahead of me and walk right through it and prove to me that it isn't a portal, Johnathan... Go on... I'll wait here," Quinus replied with an annoyed tone.

Johnathan knew the Prince was speaking the truth. But he had to keep up the charade.

"It's the Prince's job to prove he's worth his title. Not mine."

"Well, I'll avoid it. And I leave it up to you all if you think I'm wrong or not," Quinus said as he stood up and walked tightly against the wall to avoid stepping in the portal.

Geralt and Thomas shrugged their shoulders and did the same thing.

"Umm? What happens if you step in the portal trap again?" Thomas asked as he was halfway there.

"You get teleported, you idiot. That's the purpose of the portal trap. I swear if we survive this trial, then I'll give you an education about dungeon traps and monsters," John answered.

"That's not what I mean, you ass! I mean where do the traps teleport people to?"

"You'll get teleported to another random spot on the floor. It's why I'm avoiding it. I would prefer not getting turned around in this place," Quinus answered.

"Yeah... I'm glad you brought chalk, my Lord. I never thought to bring some with me. I was taught how to navigate a cave but not a maze," Geralt said as he made it past the trap. John followed after them as the group continued for another hour. They occasionally took a few wrong turns and avoided a few more traps before they found the stairway down to the next floor.

"The stairs? Oh thank the Goddess," Thomas said.

"Yeah... That wasn't as bad as I thought it would be," Geralt replied.

Quinus was silent.

"Is something wrong, your Highness?" Thomas asked.

"Huh? Oh, it's nothing. I wasn't sure if we should continue or if we should set up camp for the night."

"Oh, we should just camp and call it a day. It's not like you'll find another stairway before we get too tired," Geralt suggested.

"Yeah, I think we should rest for the night," Thomas added.

"What? Are you both insane? If we take the stairs now, we can reach the next floor. It'll save us an extra day," John argued.

"We aren't stopping you, Johnathan. If you want to go. By all means, go ahead," Quinus said.

Johnathan was about to argue but held back his words. He almost forgot his plan and he needed to stay by Quinus.

"Fine, if you all want to stay a day longer in this forsaken place, then I can too."

Quinus ignored him and went into his bag to take out his blankets and lay down on the ground.

'Of all the magical crap in this world. And all I have to sleep on is a wool blanket. And it's a thin one at that... I need to figure out a way to manufacture sleeping pads. Because this isn't going to cut it,' Quinus thought.

Geralt and Thomas set up their blankets and laid down. John sat up and stared at the dark ceiling.

"We probably should go on shifts. Just to make sure nothing sneaks up on us," Quinus said.

"Who's going to take the first shift? Cause I'll gladly sleep," Geralt said.

"Well, since Thomas and I are the only ones that can sense whatever that thing is. One of us will have to stay awake. So, I'll take the first shift with someone," Quinus answered.

John stood up and turned to them, "I'll take the first watch. I won't be able to sleep tonight anyway."

"Alright, Geralt. Thomas. You guys go and rest. We'll wake you up in four hours. I'll start the portable fire pit," Quinus said as he pulled out a strange-looking rectangular box from his bag. It had a lid and a small metal handle sticking out.

He opened the lid and inside was a yellowish rock that almost looked like a piece of sulfur. It was sitting in the middle of the box. It was no bigger than a baseball. And when Quinus added his mana into it, it ignited the rock and the box lit up.

"Wow, that's a nice magical bonfire. Where did you get that one from," Geralt asked in amazement.

"This one is one of my designs. I thought the ones that adventurers and knights use were a bit underpowered. Like you get a good amount of light from them but they don't give off enough heat to cook with. I'm planning on selling these later on." Quinus replied.

Geralt and Thomas became impressed by the prince. They never really got the chance to visit the capital and never got to see the prince during his fifth or tenth birthday parties. So they only got second-hand accounts about him through gossip. And the biggest source came from Marcus.

"I didn't know you knew how to make things? I thought that was a commoner's thing," Geralt commented.

"Yeah, that's what my father says. But I like creating things and I know I wouldn't be able to do that once I get the throne. So I want to make a few things while I still have the time," Quinus answered as he placed the box down.

Thomas was staring at the strange fire. He wanted to ask the prince more questions but he was tired. So he laid back down and drifted off.

"Alright. I'll let you take the first watch with John. I'll take the second shift with Thomas," Geralt said as he lay down and closed his eyes.

Quinus sat down and watched the fire for a moment before he heard the sounds of water splashing around. That's when he noticed Johnathan sitting against a wall playing with a water ball no bigger than a golf ball. He was spinning it around and bouncing it off his fingers as if he was playing with a coin.

"You're pretty talented... Which academy are you going to when we get back home?" Quinus asked.

"Like you care," Johnathan muttered to himself. But Quinus heard him and he wasn't happy.

"I need you to give me a straight answer, Johnathan. Are we going to have a problem? Because if we are, then I'm not afraid of killing you to ensure my survival," Quinus said as his golden eyes glowed with anger.

Johnathan had a shocked look on his face and his water ball fell onto the floor.

"N-No... We don't have any problem. I-I was just joking."

Quinus glared at him while Johnathan felt sweat forming on his forehead. He's never seen anyone glare at him before with such intensity and anger. Not even Marcus glared at him with such anger.

'This brat... He's been giving all of us an attitude this entire time. He can't be trusted,' Quinus thought. 'But at least he's scared of me. That means he's smarter than most and not a total idiot.'

"Just remember, Johnathan. This is supposed to be a simple trial... And we can't afford to get lost in here. If you betray us. I'll end you," Quinus said as his voice got colder and deadlier.

Johnathan gulped as he was shaking in fear.

"That's fine with me, your Highness."

"Good. Tell me if you notice anything out of the ordinary," Quinus said as he turned his attention back to the bonfire.

Johnathan was trying his best not to let his fear show. He was cursing Marcus for forcing him to deal with the prince. Sure, he had an edge on him since he was a Mage, and Quinus was a Maja with no weapon. But if he killed the prince with his water spells. Then he would be tried for the murder of a Royal member. And he didn't trust Marcus to help him out if he got caught. So he needs to push Quinus into the marked portal that has a monster in it. But his impatience got the better of him, and now the prince is suspicious of him. So now he needs to be on his best behavior until he needs to act.

"This is going to be a long night," Johnathan whispered to himself.

And that's how the rest of their shift went until they woke Thomas and Geralt up for their turn.