***Hope***

How did it come to this?

I want to say it was all a dream. A nightmare fueled by Mountain Dew, perhaps? But, even though the sky is bleeding green, I feel awake. Even more alive than I would have ever thought possible, but how is this possible?

“You…are you here to kill me?”

I turn around in shock and see a half-elf with pale green eyes. When I took a step forward, she would take a step back. Eventually, I stopped when her back was against a tree. Her face flushed with anger and frustration.

“Hey…”I held up my hands carefully “I don’t even know you. Why do you think I’m out to get you in the first place?”

“Then why are you following me in the first place?” Her cheeks had a fierce blush as she stared back, defiant and proud to the bitter end.

“I…” For a moment, I’m speechless. Why didn’t I just walk in the opposite direction? From this half-elf who clearly stared at me just like everyone else besides Kat and Josh? “Because I can.”

She stuck her tongue out “No you can’t!”

Well, then that solves everything.

“Look…I’m just as confused as you are.” Pointing up to the dark green sky, I sigh “Come on, don’t tell me you think this is right. I was sleeping in my bed peacefully before waking up in this forest.”

Her shoulders relaxed a bit more as the half-elf replied “So was I.”

“My name is Tobias.”

“Yoi.” She looked to the side “Yoi Mono, a half-elf from Troplain.”

“Yoi…” I can’t help but smile as her name slips off of my tongue “Yoi.”

She tilted her head to the side and her long green hair lightly fell over her shoulders. A slight crinkle appeared in the middle of her forehead, but finally a tiny smile appeared on her lips.

“You really are…” But before she could finish her sentence, I hear a loud trumpet in the background. We turn and see a tall man with a very thick mustache, his sunglasses glinting proudly in the background.

“Who are you?” I ask, but I hear Yoi sigh heavily.

“Not him again.”

“Yup, Chief Editor. God of this universe, as well as all around rock star.”

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“This has to be a dream.” Both Yoi and I said in unison, but the Chief Editor only smiled even wider.

“Not the kind of dream you normally are having Toby, old pal. Completely dry and packed full of PG-13 action.”

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“I know, it’s tough being in the presence of greatness. Now we’ve had a dilemma for some time. How to win over otome fangirls without becoming complete trash. So, it’s crossover week. Hunger games style.”

Wait, what?

“Hidden in this forest is several level up cards that give you a class and attack.” Chief Editor laughed “You two are the lucky characters that need to hunt down two ‘beloved’ otome characters: the glasses guy and the athletic boy.”

“Err…they don’t even have a name?” I ask and an incredulous look came over the Chief Editor’s face.

“You think the fan girls care about important details like that?”

Hmm…fair enough.

“But, killing these guys seems a bit…” But before I could finish, the Chief Editor interrupted me again and pointed out incredibly chilling words:

“Brace yourself, they keep multiplying.”

With those last words, the Chief Editor left and Yoi and I stared at each other with incredulous expressions.

“Huh.” I look around and stare at a puzzled half-elf. “Does he always talk like this?”

She pauses and looks back at me “You’d have to ask Anton. But, he knows his stuff. As much as I hate to say this, it seems like we need to partner up.”

“You can’t be serious.” I point back in the direction that the Chief left “I mean, he dropped us in the middle of nowhere and expects us to blithely murder two complete strangers? Not to mention, the best clue we’re given is the fact that one of the two wears glasses. How do we even know there are only two other people here besides us?”

“Logic in anything near an otome game?” I can hear the Chief’s voice shout nearby “You *can’t* appy any sort of logic or thinking in that sense. Heck, the entire premise is really a horror story in the making when you think about it. Stalking the poor guy day and night, pestering his friends about his life story, and then rubbing it in his face until his ears and eyes bleed blood.”

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“Anton never mentioned his exceptional hearing.” Yoi laughed as I stared back at her face.

“He…isn’t subject to this world’s rules, is he?” I pause and hear the Chief’s boisterous laughter in response.

“Clever, Tobias gets the title of *Alert Wanderer with a Kick-A## Sword*. Gah! D#Xm the profanity filters!”

As the Chief spoke these words, I felt my body envelop in a golden glow and saw the title appear in purple above my forehead.

“Hey…” Yoi smiled and gently tapped my forehead “Pretty cool.”

“Um…I’m guessing you’re the Game Master then?”

“Exactly. Plus 10 Experience points for catching on quickly, Tobias.”

I felt a rush of warmth fill my body and couldn’t help but give a tiny smirk to Yoi. That smirk quickly faded once she struck me on the head with a nearby branch. Face planting on the ground with a yelp of surprise, I quickly jump up and yell “What was that for?”

“Aw, I missed.” From above, I saw a shower of sparkles surround an effeminate boy with shining glasses. “That was smart of the half-elf, a sore forehead is better than one with a rather large hole.”

“What, you missed?” Across the trees, I see a similar shiny individual with impossibly kept hair “I knew I should have taken the shot. I never miss a single free throw shot, even when there are crowds of screaming girls around.”

What is the rising urge to kill in me?

“We’re surrounded.” I hear Yoi whisper “Don’t move until I give the signal.”

“Hey, Princess!” The athletic boy leaned forward with a wide grin “Come on, I’ll give you a kiss if you turn him over to us.”

“Okay, forget the signal. Let’s kill them now.” I hear Yoi mutter under her breath and I had to hide my grin.

“You only have a stick and we have a ranged weapon. You can’t possibly expect to win.”

“If that was the case, why are you negotiating?” Yoi shot back “Seems like a bluff to let an enemy walk away.”

“What, a girl as my enemy?” The athletic boy took a dramatic pose and laughed “All girls are my…GAH!”

He fell forward with a loud thud as the branch that was formerly in Yoi’s hand now appeared lodged in his chest.

“Deven!” The glasses boy yelled.

“Matt, the world is growing dark.”

“Hold on, I’ve got bandages! They add +5 health!”

“I…feel cold.” Deven spat out some blood and smiled “If only my fan girls could see me now.”

“Don’t talk like that.” Matt jumped off the tree and took on a sad pose “They can see you now and they’re cheering you on.”

“I’m feeling ill. I’m feeling really ill.” I mutter next to Yoi as we watched an increasingly dramatic scene filled with sparkles.

“Matt…can you hear? The fan girls are crying….” As Deven spoke his last words, he disappeared in a cloud of sparks and rainbows. For a long moment, Matt stared in disbelief at his fallen comrade and soon he lifted his eyes, his glasses glinting dangerously in the night.

“You…” For a moment, I swore I saw flames appear behind him “…made a very bad mistake, young lady.”

“You know that I said about the signal?” Yoi asked me as I started to take a step back.

“Yeah?”

“This is it. RUN!”

We both turned and ran as a flurry of shots followed us. Perhaps the darkness saved us from his shots, but I’m more inclined to think that he couldn’t hit the broad side of a barn. It was ages before we both stopped running, but we were still stuck in the forest. The trees covered the skies and it was hard to see anything that wasn’t as dark as the night.

“Hey…wait a second.” Yoi stopped and I saw her enveloped in a shower of gold.

“LEVEL UP! Yoi Mono is now able to do an *Advanced Quick Attack*, which has higher speed and accuracy points” The Chief’s booming voice rang over the intercom.

“Huh. Guess you get a lot more EXP by killing the guy.” Looking around with a smile, I see a dazed expression cross Yoi’s face. “What’s wrong?”

“The way that tree branch is pointing…”She looked up to the sky “We aren’t alone.”

“If the world does spin out of control, it is because I will it.” The air grew colder and I looked up to see an angry glint in the darkness “This world belongs to my kind and you shall both disappear by my hands.”

“Yoi, use that skill you’ve just gotten.” I drew out my sword and took a step forward “But only when there’s an opening and it’s safe.”

With a leap forward, I sliced through the branches and felt our weapons collide. A shower of sparks ran down and I could see his dark eyes that held not a hint of a smile behind those shining glasses.

Back and forth, our weapons met and I could see Yoi darting after us in the background. A single slip and either one of us would be goners. I don’t even know how much time passed before we finally stopped and stared down each other, both of us knowing that this would be the last attack.

“In another world, we might have been friends.” Matt smirked as he raised his katana.

“No, we wouldn’t have.” I shot back and lunged forward, seeing a rush of green hair as Yoi made her move as well. He managed to dodge my attack, but not Yoi’s. As he fell to the ground in a midst of golden sparkles, a tiny crack appeared in his glasses.

“Must…” He gritted his teeth so hard that blood began to pour out “…maintain…perfect…image!”

After he disappeared, Yoi and I stared at each other.

“Huh…”

“Do you think we did the right thing?” Standing over the fallen pile of sparkles, I had to ask Yoi “I mean, we just took two lives. Two possibly innocent lives that did nothing against us.”

“I guess the real question is…is this world a better place without them?” The Chief walked up and patted me and Yoi on the back. “Even without getting your specific classes or power-ups, you two did what is impossible in the ordinary community. Take on the *powerhouse* characters and triumphed. You gave hope to legions of creators and viewers, hope that shall never die. Even if you get a few people who realize that, isn’t it worth it in the end? Do we really need more people who…sparkle?”

“But, they keep multiplying…right?” I look around the forest and point out “We are out-numbered here. Not to mention, killing off as many as we can really isn’t a way to win their fans, is it?”

A long pause, but then the Chief pointed out “This still feels like a happy ending.”

It was hard to argue with that logic.

“Hey, as a reward, can I have another wing?” As we began walking, I head the Chief snort through his nose and reply:

“Ehh…nah. At least, not until the next dream.”

**Characters ©IDHAS and the Chief**