

Chapter 429 - Fate's Whimsy

Mouth dry, Kai drew back his gaze and slowly reread the scroll window from the top: Fortune Reader, Calamity Premonition, Wanderer's Instinct, Luck's Favorite and... *Fate's Whimsy*. A fifth evolution path.

Huh. The name sure fits.

Had the Wandering Moon's blessing unlocked it? Or was it an indirect effect of the 14 Favor he'd gained? His seventh attribute had shot right through the 100-points threshold. Such a large boost was—

"Did you see something interesting?" The young woman tilted her head with innocent curiosity. Moonlight spilled over her cascading hair; the lilac sheen wove through the pale strands. The same soft radiance danced across the folds of her silken gown, lending her an ethereal grace. "Mat, do close your mouth or you'll swallow a bug." She glanced at Mr. Thistle nestled in her lap, as if hoping he would clear her puzzlement.

The fluffy bunny twitched his nose, occupied with munching on the hem of her dress, though that hardly seemed to deter her.

"Mm-hmm... Yes..." She nodded sagely, scratching between his floppy ears. "I thought so too." She looked back at Kai. The starry speckles in her amethyst gaze gleamed with mirth, vanishing too quickly to know for sure. "Well...? Did you get something good?"

"I... yes, I'd say so..." Kai dipped his head in thanks, still feeling lost. "My Luck skill gained another path to advance to Green."

"Ohh!" The goddess clapped her hands in delight. "How exciting! Your first Green one too. Is it good? I bet it is! Do not let me distract you." She waved him on with a wink. Her slender arm looked like alabaster, exuding its own light under the moons. "Go on. It's an important moment. Pretend I'm not here."

Kai stared ahead, even more unsure of what to say, so he decided to follow her advice. His attention returned to the translucent window and his new evolution path.

- ❖ **Fate's Whimsy (lv1)** — Listen to the whispers and currents of Fate. Significant crossroads and choices ripple into omens and fleeting impressions of the future that may guide your actions to desirable outcomes. Strong emotional bonds, personal stakes, and imminent danger may sharpen the clarity of the revelations. [Skill Slot Requirement: 1]

Okay... it sounds quite good too.

The description shared many similarities with Fortune Reader. Both revolved around recognizing the crossroads of Fate and glimpsing what lay ahead. Yet, their opening sentence revealed a key distinction. Fortune Reader let pivotal encounters passively call out to him, while Fate's Whimsy gave him the power to listen.

A small difference in wording that separated an ability from a passive to an active skill.

With all the headaches Luck skills cause, I must take control where I can.

If he was reading correctly, Fortune Reader *required* pivotal moments to trigger it; Fate's Whimsy would likely work better around them too, but their presence wasn't strictly necessary.

I guess the scrying will be weaker, but it's a lot less restrictive. Out of all the evolutions, it looks like the least specialized one too. And the most similar to Hallowed Intuition.

Not that specializing was a bad thing. If you built around it properly, it could grant exceptional power. And therein lay the problem. The academy had no record of Hallowed Intuition's evolutions—at least, none that he could access. Descriptions could only explain so much. Especially when dealing with obscure abilities that might shape the rest of his life, he wanted the flexibility to adapt the changes to his needs.

Fate's Whimsy would maintain nearly everything he valued about Hallowed Intuition with a few tweaks. That alone placed it ahead of the other evolutions too. And, well... His eyes drifted to the final line.

[Skill Slot Requirement: 1]

Admittedly, that was the first thing that caught his attention. Each skill slot was priceless. Still, he pushed down a giddy smile and forced himself to consider each aspect. This evolution would accompany him the rest of his life. Basing his choice solely on the slot requirement would be stupid too. Luckily, the fifth evolution also matched his needs.

Little point delaying now.

Kai let his gaze linger on the evolutions he'd miss out on: Wanderer's Instinct and Luck's Favorite both promised fascinating and powerful abilities. Just imagining the potential applications he'd never experience made his heart ache.

But alas...

Hallowed Intuition was the skill he relied on and trusted most to keep himself alive. If an evolution couldn't reliably do that, it wasn't a real option.

Ding

Are you sure you want to evolve **Hallowed Intuition (lv100) into **Fate's Whimsy (lv1)** [Skill Slot Requirement: 1]? Be aware, this choice is irreversible.**

Yup. Just get it over with!

The notification dissolved.

For a heartbeat, the world held its breath. The Guide's formless touch brushed his channels, settling lightly atop his head as if it were giving him a pat. Just the barest tingle. Something shifted and expanded. The faint whispers that always lingered at the edge of his awareness rearranged into a more deliberate rhythm. Quieter and deeper. Almost orderly.

The sensation faded as quickly as it had come.

Then, it was done.

Ding

Congratulations, **Hallowed Intuition (lv100) has successfully evolved into **Fate's Whimsy (lv1)**!**

Kai rubbed his left eye.

That was about the same as usual, probably because the evolution only took one slot.

Barely a moment later, the jingle of a new notification cheered him on. The blinking light reminded him he still hadn't read the second message he received after the Wandering Moon's blessing.

Two more to go. Whelp, I won't complain. Let's go in order.

Ding

New Feat: Favored Son - Some people are born Lucky; then there is *you*. For accumulating 100 or more Favor to your natural attributes, you are awarded: *The Eyes of the Realm Open to You*.

A faint shiver crawled down his spine. For the briefest instant, the hairs on the back of his neck prickled as if he was being watched. Then the sensation vanished, leaving only a vague sense of foreboding.

Huh? Where's my bonus Favor? What does that reward even mean? Hey? Mr. Guide? I'm filing a complaint for poor customer service! At least give me an explanation!

A predictable silence ensued.

Kai let out a slow breath, staring at the luminous night sky. Well, there was, in fact, someone he could ask. Dismissing the scroll window, he put on his most respectful face and cleared his throat. "Ehm... excuse me. Could I ask you a ques—"

He blinked.

The root beside the mirror pool stood empty. The young woman with jeweled eyes was gone. So was Mr. Thistle. No ripple in the water. No footprints across the silvery grass or other signs of passage. Only the moonflowers swaying in the nighttime breeze.

Without the goddess's presence, the plants and water in the grove looked a little less perfect, the wind a little colder, the woods a little more eerie, as if divine perfection had slipped back into dreary mortality.

She vanished without a word. Figures...

Kai stood there, feeling like waking from a dream. Like waking from a pleasant dream. All the aches in his mana channels and exhaustion in his body suddenly weighed him down. The pale violet moon shimmered on the mirror pool, its reflection undisturbed by the water lapping gently against the ancient roots.

He briefly considered shaking a fist at the sky. Instead, he settled for a quiet huff. What else could he expect from the goddess of Fate and whimsy?

The wind carried a distant, tinkling laughter from beyond the trees, gone before he could ascertain if he had only imagined it. But he knew better now.

At least it's better than Zervathi's tantrums. I've still got one more notification.

Kai rolled his sore shoulders.

The last notification didn't disappoint.

Ding

New Feat: For evolving a Yellow skill to Green through your own efforts, you are awarded: +5 Favor!

Yeah, now we're talking!

Green skills got Green rewards. He'd known about the feat, but it was still satisfying to receive the maximum reward for it.

He'd gotten such a substantial increase since slaying the basilisk and freeing Zervathi inside the Hidden Sanctuary. This one was even larger. And it came with less divine headache.

A grin tugged at his lips. He just caught himself before summoning his status to savor the new numbers, together with his first Green skill.

Let's get out of these damned woods first.

Such milestones were better enjoyed in a less spooky setting, perhaps with some food and company. He couldn't truly relax until he knew that his friends had all made it out safely.

As if sensing his intent, a single trail led out of the grove. It wound between the ancient oaks, right in the direction where the ambient mana grew thinner.

With one last glance at the reflected Moon, Kai adjusted the straps of his satchel and headed for the foggy woods. The Shards he carried clinked softly, their shapes standing out against his bulging pack, more than enough to pass the Trials.

Within three steps, the swirling mists swallowed him in their familiar haze; within seven, the hidden grove vanished entirely. Milky trees with slender branches stretched over bushy purple ferns and moss-covered rocks.

The whispers felt... *different*. Almost like peering at the murky water from a pier. He could only see so much standing above the water. The depths called to him with promises and answers, if he just took a step and dove in.

No, not now.

He'd held back from testing his newly evolved skill, unsure of what might accidentally strain it or invite unwanted distractions. Whether it was lingering sleep deprivation, his increased Favor, or Fate's Whimsy settling into place, he had the certainty he'd know if he ran into danger. And that was enough for now.

Hopefully, they're all doing alright. I need to get out of here and into a real bed.

According to his pocketwatch, he had twenty-six hours before the dawn of the fifth day, and no intention of resting until he left the Veiled Wood. Any other theorizing, shady conspiracies, and unanswered questions regarding the Trials could wait till then.

I'm definitely filing a complaint.

Two days later, Kai leaned into his dorm's comfy armchair, one leg stretched on the coffee table, the other draped on the armrest. Afternoon sunlight bathed the living room with warm

golden rays. Dust motes drifted lazily through the air, replacing the silver mist that had haunted him for days.

Odd to think this was one of the last days they'd spend here. When he returned next Fall, second-years would move into different accommodations.

He would miss his cramped little bedroom, the battered furniture, even the uneven bookshelves, and the scratched kitchen table from their alchemy adventures.

After everything that had happened, the journey out of the Veiled Woods had been largely uneventful. Aside from a few beasts, he encountered almost no resistance. The fog and trees simply thinned out until the forest ended.

The trails led up to a manned stand with several queued students. No one raised an eyebrow at his arrival. After registering his time, turning in his Shards, and receiving an in-depth medical checkup, they waved him toward a refreshment hall without a second look.

All's well, what ends well? Well... except for the students who died.

For the first time since entering the Moon Trials, nothing in his body hurt. No pounding headache from skill strain, no bruises or sore muscles protesting his movements. No pressure to constantly keep his guard high.

They relaxed in a comfortable silence.

Alden occupied one of the kitchen chairs, his recovering leg stretched out onto another chair. He browsed through a tome thick enough to qualify as a blunt weapon with effortless composure.

Sitting across from him, Rob was doodling on his old textbooks. His relaxed posture couldn't hide how he'd shadowed Alden's every movement since leaving the Trials.

Rain and Flynn were sprawled out on the couch, playing cards to decide who would have to stand and gather the scattered cushions and pillows in the aftermath of their wrestling.

Wise beyond his years, Hobbes had claimed the pillow that fell into a patch of sunlight by the balcony windows. His silver tail swished the air as he prodded their bond with increasing demands for treats.

I've told you, you just need to get here. Huh... How is it too far away? You can literally just blink over; you don't even have to walk!

Hobbes flicked his tail again, refusing to dignify him with a response.

Kai shook his head, too lazy to stand up himself.

Aside from a few bruises, Valela, Rowan, Lys, and Rena had made it safely out of the Trials as well.

The only reminder that something had gone wrong during the Moon Trials came from the directive limiting students to their dorms for most of the day, in the absence of a clear and necessary emergency. Even then, Flynn had already shown that the rules had room for *creative* interpretation.

It was... Peaceful.

Kai hadn't realized how much he'd needed that.

- Name: **Kai Tylenn** (*Matthew Reece Veernon*)
- Race: **Human** ★★ – 310,200 > 343,550 / 800,000 XP
- Profession: **Favored Mystic of the Isles** (lv7) – 6,529 > 18,032 / 30,000 XP

Body stats

- Strength: **45**
- Dexterity: **48**
- Constitution: **60 (48+12)**
- Mind: **78 (54+24)**
- Spirit: **85 (61+24)**
- Perception: **58 (46+12)**
- Favor: **96 > 115**

Profession Skills:

- **Spatial Shift** (lv47>50)
- **Nature Healing** (lv39>46)
- **Astral Pathway** (lv40>43)
- **Echoing Empath** (lv40>42)
- **Natural Prodigy** (lv35>38)
- **Water Cannon** (lv32>37)

General Skills:

- **Hallowed Intuition** (lv98>100) >> **Fate's Whimsy** (lv1)
- **Mana Observer** (lv67>70)
- **Hobbes** (lv60>61)
- **Mana Weaving** (lv59>61)
- **Body Augmentation** (lv58>61)
- **Split Mind** (lv57>60)
- **Water Magic – Advanced** (lv55>57)
- **Mana Analyst** (lv54>56)
- **Elemental Swordsman** (lv35>37)
- **Nature Magic – Advanced** (lv33>36)
- **Space Magic – Advanced** (lv29>32)
- **Mana Engraving** (lv29)
- **Runic Scholar** (lv25>26)

- **Arcane Enchanting (lv22)**
- **Herbalism (lv16)**
- **Herbal Alchemy (lv10)**
- **Shadow Magic - Advanced (lv4>7)**
- **Earth Magic - Advanced (lv2>3)**
- **Blessed Swimmer (lv86)**
- **Mnemonic Mastery (lv72>74)**
- **Swift Learner (lv64>69)**

115 points...

Seeing his Favor in the Triple digits still filled him with glee. And that was far from his sole gain. As usual, nothing could accelerate the skill growth of months into days quite like genuine danger. He'd taken another chunk toward his next race grade enhancement.

Spatial Shift had even hit the first milestone, though he chose to leave it pending until he could practice the skill in private.

Not to mention...

His gaze locked onto that lone line of green text. Fate's Whimsy (lv1). He still hadn't gotten tired of simply looking at it. After over fifteen years on Elydes, he finally possessed a Green skill. Hopefully, it was just the first of many.

His gaze was still transfixed on his status when a muffled thump interrupted his musings. A white letter slid beneath the apartment door, swirling up until it rested on the kitchen counter.

"I've got it!" Flynn sprang over the couch backrest, throwing a pillow at Rob to snatch the letter. "Hear, hear, the official Trial—"

"You—"

"Be quiet, Bert. I'm trying to read." He thumped his chest and cleared his throat. "As I was saying: Hear, hear, the official Trial rankings!" He announced, cracking open the wax seal. His eyes darted through the pages, then widened dramatically. "Wow! Oh... these are *really* interesting—"

A pillow to the face interrupted his narration.

"That's yours, right?" Rob snarked. "Stop stalling and tell us already."

"I was just trying to build a little suspense. If you really want to know, I ranked above you."

"Let me see!"

Kai shared a long-suffering sigh with Alden while the bickering devolved into a kind of verbal sparring.

Well... Flynn kinda had a point with Bert. Spirits, he'll be so smug once he learns he is a spy.

Strolling over, Rain snatched the ranking from the duo with casual nonchalance. His pointed grin quirked into a smug line. "Hmm... looks like I got first this time!"

Right... Of course he did.

Listening to Rain and Flynn's stories from the Trials was enough to make Kai swear out loud. With a sigh, he sank into the cushions of the armchair and threw a salmon stick at Hobbes.

A couple minutes later, he dragged himself up to check the crumpled papers spread on the kitchen table.

MOON TRIALS: The Wandering Sister

1st year combined - 3377/3378 AL

1. Rain Ryuu – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 54)
2. Ambrose Willow – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 43)
3. Corvin Hallowell – Martial Studies (Moonlight Shards: 41)
4. Miraelle Verelune – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 40)
5. Edmund Greyvane – Artisan Studies (Moonlight Shards: 40)
6. Lydia Porter – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 39)
7. Maynard Hart – Martial Studies (Moonlight Shards: 38)
8. Rosalind Veyran – Martial Studies (Moonlight Shards: 38)
9. Matthew Reece-Veernon – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 37)
10. Sebastian Elcarin – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 36)

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67. Flynn Soveili – Martial Studies (Moonlight Shards: 32)

147. Valela Hightide – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 28)

160. Alden Blackwoods – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 28)

198. Robert Ashvale – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 26)

210. Rowan Whitmore – Martial Studies (Moonlight Shards: 25)

297. Calyssa Fairmont – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 23)

329. Renaria Drakmoore – Mana Studies (Moonlight Shards: 23)

Well... it's not bad all things considered.

After receiving the Wandering Moon's blessing and evolving Hallowed Intuition to Green, any other reward paled in comparison. Despite the rocky journey, he might have gotten even luckier than Rain. Honestly, he was surprised he'd gathered enough Shards to place in the top ten at all.

They piled up quickly once I stopped counting.

His other roommates had also done remarkably well, especially considering Rob had spent most of his Trials searching for Alden, who instead spent most of his running for his life.

Robbing those idiots helped too.

On the chair across from him, Alden closed the tome with a contented sigh and looked over. "I never thought my Trials would be quite this memorable. The upcoming respite will be most welcome. Do you have plans for the summer break?"

"Uh... not really." Kai set aside the ranking sheets. "We'll probably travel around the Hart province. I don't know many people on the mainland. And traveling back home is... *complicated*. What about you?"

"My family will be expecting me back at their estate. After that... I've been planning a journey to the Baquaire Archipelago." He stole a look at him. "If you have no plans of your own, you'd be welcome to join me. You'd be a great help to navigate and source the local herbs."

Kai arched an eyebrow. "Really, are you sure?"

"Yes, that is what I said." Alden folded his hands over the table; a smile tugged at his lips. He glanced over at Flynn and Rain. "You may bring those two as well, should they be interested."

"Wouldn't that be too much of a bother?"

Alden threw him a puzzled look. "Once I've set the schedule, a dozen people less or more hardly makes a difference. Space is no concern."

"I... see." Kai drummed his fingers on the table. "Can I think about it? I'd like to discuss it with the others too."

"Of course. Just warn me a day before we depart, so I can make arrangements."

"Will do." Kai nodded, his gaze lost outside the window.

They fell into a companionable silence.

Should he visit home? Seeing his family would be nice... though also slightly problematic.

Flynn can probably find an excuse to visit them along with me. Hmm, I should also ask him and Rain what he wants to do... we've got a few days to decide.

Kai sighed. He was somewhat eager to leave Raelion. Perhaps also figure out what the fuck went wrong with the Trials. He wasn't sure how many students actually died, but they couldn't keep brushing off all these deaths as accidents, could they?

What is the dean even doing...