

CLEAVER OF SIN

#Chapter 111: Solaris - Read CLEAVER OF SIN Chapter 111: Solaris

Chapter 111: Solaris

In another location, thousands of kilometers away from the battlefield where Malrik and Orvak had fought, Wuthenya could be seen dashing forward, her form crossing great distances in the blink of an eye as she exceeded Mach Seven through sheer physical speed.

The wind screamed, numerous times in fact, as she tore through the air like a silver comet. Her face was cold and unreadable. At this moment, she was overwhelmed with frustration.

She hadn't been able to keep up with the battle between her brother and the Sinvaira. One moment, they had been in the forest. The next, the entire forest had been cleaved in half, and both combatants had vanished.

Now, she was heading toward the location where her brother had been fighting, though she didn't know the precise place. Every Wargrave, however, was marked by a unique identifier, allowing them to track one another across vast distances, just like how Asher had been marked during the True Awakening.

Wuthenya's thoughts swirled in a storm of uncertainty. Her mind was already preparing for the worst. Could her brother defeat such a being? She knew Malrik was immensely powerful, far beyond most. But could a man who was barely thirty years old truly overcome a monster that might have existed since ancient times?

Her heartbeat quickened. Lunar energy pulsed from her body, and silver rays bloomed into existence, bending light and distorting the air. She no longer cared about conserving her energy. With a detonating boom that shattered the sound barrier, she shot forward in a streak of silver light.

She wanted to call their father, Azeron, for help, but she knew Malrik wouldn't approve. But just as she prepared herself for the worst, a voice echoed in her ears, smooth and teasing.

"Hey sis, what's got you so worked up? Your eyes could freeze the entire Empire."

A man with windswept blue hair and piercing blue eyes appeared beside her in a blur of golden-orange light, effortlessly matching her speed through pure physical force.

It was Malrik.

Hearing his voice, Wuthenya's speed immediately dropped. Her feet skidded to a thundering halt, causing a ripple of force to explode around her. Her lunar energy dissipated in an instant as her black eyes locked on her brother's form.

She let out a long, relieved sigh.

He was standing there, without so much as a scratch on him. Not a speck of blood, not a tear in his garments. He looked far too perfect for someone who had just fought an abomination.

"What happened? You and the Sinvaira just... vanished," Wuthenya asked, her voice still tinged with disbelief. "I've been running for ages to catch up."

Malrik simply shook his head and smiled. "You already know what happened, sis. Your brother saved the day, again."

"Did the Sinvaira run away?" she asked quickly, her voice hopeful but cautious.

"No prey has ever escaped my katana, sis. And you know this," Malrik replied calmly. Solaris, hanging securely at his waist, hummed in agreement, as if to say, "And that's a fact."

Wuthenya stood stunned.

Yes, she knew it was true. Everyone who had ever crossed blades with Malrik had ended up dead. There were no survivors. No stories. No begging. No escape. Nothing. But this situation was different. It felt different, more absurd.

She remembered her brief, humiliating encounter with Orvak. Their fight hadn't even lasted five minutes. She had survived for only a few moments because Orvak had allowed her to fight, merely for his own amusement.

She had failed to entertain him, and so, without hesitation, he had decided to end her.

Her fists clenched at the memory. She had always taken pride in her strength, in her hard-earned abilities. Among her peers, few could compare. In fact, almost none could. But against Orvak, she had been utterly powerless.

Malrik, standing beside her, could sense her emotions. He could read her thoughts like an open book, written across her face. But he said nothing. No words of comfort, no encouragement.

And that was intentional.

With what she had just experienced, such crushing hopelessness, he knew she would stop wasting time on that idiotic boyfriend of hers and instead devote more effort to her training.

Remembering Wuthenya's boyfriend, Malrik nearly rolled his eyes. He still felt like breaking the guy's legs. In Malrik's mind, that fool was the reason Wuthenya hadn't reached the Radiant Voidstar Life Rank by now.

But he would hold back, for now. Wuthenya would be upset if he did anything rash.

Wuthenya cleared her throat, brushing aside her thoughts. She had already concluded that the Sinvaira was dead. She didn't need confirmation. Though it would have been useful to capture it for interrogation or research, the risk had been far too great.

"So... you were watching the entire time, right?" Wuthenya asked, recalling Malrik's words when he had saved her, about allowing her have her fun before he intervened.

Malrik simply nodded, beginning to walk with unhurried, confident steps. Wuthenya fell into stride beside him.

"How did you even get here?" she asked after a moment. "You appeared right beside me like you teleported."

She had always wondered about that ability. She knew her brother could somehow teleport, he'd demonstrated it more than once, but no matter how she thought about it, she couldn't figure out how it worked.

She had even asked their father once, but Azeron had flat-out refused to tell her anything.

"I'll tell you," Malrik said with a knowing smile, "when you reach my level."

"Tch. I knew you'd say that," Wuthenya muttered, clicking her tongue.

Malrik merely shrugged as they walked. But his gaze shifted briefly to Solaris, which hung obediently at his waist.

Unlike most Wargraves, whose soul-bound weapons typically awakened offensive, defensive, movement, or support type abilities, Solaris had awakened something very different.

Because of Malrik's obsession with protecting his family since he was a child, Solaris had developed with that exact trait in mind.

Whenever any of Malrik's loved ones, whether siblings, uncles, aunts, his parents, even loyal servants, were about to be placed in danger, Solaris would immediately alert him. It didn't matter where they were in the world.

However, the ability was precise. It only responded to events that carried fatal consequences or the potential for permanent harm. It even provided the location, timing, and limited information about the enemy or the orchestrator of the incident.

In simple terms, before Wuthenya had even left the Wargrave estate, Malrik had already known what would happen. He had been waiting for the right moment.

As for the teleportation Wuthenya had questioned, it wasn't teleportation in the conventional sense. Solaris possessed a second unique ability: it allowed Malrik to instantly travel to the location of those he cared about.

After all, what's the point of knowing his loved ones were in danger if he couldn't get there in time?

That was how he had appeared beside her earlier, even as she raced at top speed.

His overwhelming need to protect had manifested not only in his actions but in the soul of his weapon itself, granting it these two rare abilities.

And as long as Solaris remained at his side, Malrik would always be there for the ones he loved, before death could ever claim them.

Chapter 112: Boasting

Wuthenya and Malrik continued walking with calm, unhurried steps. They conversed as they moved, their discussion centered on Orvak and the intense battle that had just concluded.

"How do you feel after going all out for the first time in a long while?" Wuthenya asked, her voice light, but curious.

"Who said I went all out? Sinvaira or not, hardly anyone is worthy of witnessing the full power of Solaris and me," Malrik replied with a faint smile dancing on his lips.

"You're just boasting," Wuthenya snorted, refusing to believe a single word her brother uttered. After all, Orvak wasn't just any ordinary being, how could Malrik claim he hadn't used his full strength?

Malrik said nothing more. He simply shook his head, unwilling to argue the point. "Anyway, you handled yourself quite well during the battle with Orvak. With this experience, you must have learned a thing or two," Malrik said with casual praise in his tone.

Wuthenya nodded in acknowledgment. Even within such a brief exchange of combat, she had gleaned valuable insights. Although these insights wouldn't immediately elevate her to a higher sub-Life Rank, they would certainly enhance her control over certain abilities, especially her Astra manipulation.

This was precisely why she always chose to observe battles of this caliber, after all, entities at this level didn't clash every day. Every moment was a lesson, a rare opportunity to learn and grow.

"Are you coming back with me to the estate, or are you heading back into your boyfriend's arms?" Malrik asked, his tone neutral but laced with subtle teasing.

"Hmph. I know you always feel like punching him whenever you lay eyes on him. You'd better keep your hands to yourself, or you'll have me to deal with," Wuthenya replied with a dismissive snort.

"I just don't want to see you return heartbroken, that's all. And I really don't feel like cleaning up the mess. But if he causes you even a sliver of emotional pain, I'll happily hunt him down," Malrik said with the same soft smile that masked his seriousness.

Wuthenya sighed. Her brother had always been this way. Back in their Academy days, no one dared approach her, Malrik always challenged anyone who so much as hinted at affection. And after those spars, they often left the arena battered, bloodied, and barely able to stand.

"Whatever," she muttered. "Just be quick and ask Father to step down from his position so you can become Primarch already."

Malrik glanced sideways at her before responding. "So you want to use me to bypass tradition, erase our family customs, so you can become Mother?" he asked with amused certainty.

Wuthenya didn't offer a verbal response. She simply gave him a knowing smirk, not even bothering to deny it.

"Why don't you become the Primarch yourself? Wouldn't that be better than making me the enemy of the entire family?" Malrik asked again, curious about her reasoning.

"Too much paperwork and pointless noble meetings. I'd rather spend that time doing something far more fulfilling," Wuthenya answered with a shrug.

"Then you're not serious about becoming a mother," Malrik said, shaking his head. Though he loved his siblings dearly, he couldn't see himself upending a long-standing family tradition, not even if he did one day accept the title of Primarch. Not that he planned to, like Wuthenya had pointed out, it was just too much hassle.

Unless it involved swinging his katana or protecting those he held dear, Malrik had little interest in anything else.

"So what about you?" Wuthenya asked, her tone now mischievous. "Any girls yet?"

"Of course I have girls. Do you really need to ask?" Malrik replied with a smug tone, as though the answer was obvious.

"I don't mean that flock of pigeons always fluttering around your waist. I mean a real woman, someone you genuinely love," she clarified, folding her arms.

Malrik paused briefly as though considering her words. "Hmm... Everyone just seems to love me for my influence and power. Until I find someone sincere, I'll continue staying with my pigeons," he said thoughtfully.

Wuthenya nodded without further comment. Some of those women only wanted to get pregnant to trap Malrik, but little did they know that Solaris wouldn't hesitate to wipe them out of existence for even trying.

Malrik was aware of this too, yet it never bothered him. After all, he was what some boldly referred to as the "Pull-Out King."

A quiet silence settled between them as they continued their walk. Neither of them was in a rush to return home. Moments like these, shared conversations, peaceful strolls, were rare, given that they lived in different parts of the Empire. Even during the Youngest's True Awakening, they hadn't truly taken time to speak like this.

"Do you think another Sinvaira will come?" Wuthenya finally asked, breaking the silence.

Malrik didn't respond immediately. Only the sound of their footsteps echoed in the open space as he considered the question. Finally, after a few moments, he said, "I'm not entirely sure. But if I were to guess, I'd say there's about a thirty percent chance that they will."

Wuthenya nodded. "Why do you say so?"

"Well," Malrik began, his voice steady and reflective, "the Sinvaira, as powerful and sentient as they are, experience emotions like fear and happiness, but I'm not entirely convinced they understand love. Perhaps there's a sense of camaraderie among them since they've known each other for centuries, but I doubt they'd rush for revenge. After all, not one of them had ever fallen in battle before. And now, one has."

"But," he continued, "it's equally possible that they won't even bother trying to avenge Orvak."

Wuthenya remained quiet, considering his reasoning. It was logical. Still, they couldn't afford to be complacent. Preparations had to be made in case that thirty percent probability became a terrifying reality. The truth was, they didn't possess enough information about the Sinvaira to predict their behavior or abilities with any real accuracy.

"If they do attack," she said, her voice low, "who do you think they'd target?"

She already had her suspicions but wanted to hear Malrik's thoughts.

Malrik smiled subtly as he walked. Then, that smile twisted into a confident smirk.

"Me or Father," he said calmly.

Chapter 113: Prey

Wuthenya had guessed the exact same thing, it would either be Malrik or their father; Azeron. After all, the two of them were widely acknowledged as the strongest members of the Wargrave Ducal Household.

The Sinvairas wouldn't bother targeting someone weak like her, nor would they waste their efforts on some Elders or even the Great Elders. If they were to strike, they would aim to make it hurt, to carve a deep, unforgettable wound into the Wargrave name. They would seek out those whose loss would shake the very foundation of the household.

But before Wuthenya could voice her thoughts, Malrik continued speaking. "Or we could both be attacked simultaneously, crippling the power of the Wargrave in a single day."

His words made Wuthenya's thoughts pause. That scenario... she hadn't considered it before. When had anyone ever said that the Sinvaira would only target one person? There was no established pattern to their behavior.

In fact, no one even knew their precise number, only that there were at least five of them. Three had murdered her grandfather, the former Primarch, and two others had been sighted sporadically across various regions and eras over the past few decades.

With that many, they could easily split their strength and strike down the two greatest threats in a single coordinated assault. Then they would leave the remnants of the Wargrave clan to be slaughtered by the humans.

After all, there was no reality where the Emperor, the Dukes, and the major Empires wouldn't pounce the moment the Wargrave's strongest were gone. The opportunity to seize Wargrave resources, territories, and secrets would be too tempting to pass up. The losses would be immense, and the betrayal inevitable.

"At the end of the day, it's all speculation," Malrik said, cutting through the silence once more. "We don't truly know their course of action. For all we know, they might retreat and never show their faces again, not until we die on some random battlefield."

Yet deep down, Malrik didn't believe any plan the Sinvairas made would succeed. He cherished every member of his family, siblings, aunts, uncles, great-aunts, and great-uncles. Each one of them fell under the category of his loved ones. And Solaris, the being bound to him, made it impossible for threats to sneak past his awareness.

Once the Sinvairas made a plan, Malrik would already know about it long before they even carried it out. Such was the nature of Solaris' abilities. Unlike others who relied on information networks, formations, or spy rings, Malrik needed no such tools.

Yet even as he trusted Solaris, Malrik acknowledged what he considered a strange loophole, or rather, an oddity in Solaris' abilities. It wasn't a flaw. It was almost like Solaris could see the future, in its own way.

Wuthenya had been ambushed many times throughout her life. And every time, Solaris only informed Malrik if the danger would result in her death or irreversible injury. It never bothered to warn him about attacks she could survive or recover from.

But that raised the question, how did Solaris know? How could it distinguish between wounds that were temporary and those that were fatal? Could it really see the future? Could it analyze cause and effect so deeply that it could predict outcome on its own accord?

Malrik didn't know. He couldn't explain it. But he wasn't too concerned. In time, he believed he would understand it all.

'They could still come after me again. I need to get stronger, and I need to do it faster,' Wuthenya thought as she walked beside her brother, her face calm but her mind racing.

'I can't keep relying on him. He's already saved me three times, and I haven't saved him even once.'

Malrik had indeed saved her twice, and though she was grateful, she wasn't fond of feeling like a helpless princess awaiting rescue from a noble knight. It wasn't her style. But she wasn't stupid enough to tell Malrik to stop either.

'One day, I'll be the one to save Malrik,' Wuthenya vowed silently. She didn't know when that day would come, but she believed it would. She believed she could.

She found herself imagining Malrik's expression the day she finally saved him. That ridiculous smile he always wore, that smug grin that seemed to scream; "I'm the best at everything I do", maybe it would vanish, even for a moment. Maybe she'd get to see it replaced with real shock, maybe even awe.

The thought made her smile without realizing it.

"Why are you smiling? Are you looking forward to being attacked again?" Malrik asked, narrowing his eyes as he noticed her expression.

"You'll understand in the future," Wuthenya answered cryptically, refusing to share her thoughts.

"Oh, using my own tactics against me, huh?" Malrik replied with a raised eyebrow.

Then suddenly, his head snapped to the side as though he'd sensed something.

Wuthenya immediately raised her guard, her stance shifting subtly as her body prepared to strike without hesitation. She couldn't sense whatever it was Malrik had noticed, but if her brother was reacting, then she needed to be ready.

"No need to be so tense," Malrik muttered. "It's your stupid boyfriend racing here."

Wuthenya rolled her eyes but remained on alert.

"You should break up with him," Malrik added coldly. "If I hadn't been here, you'd be dead. He'd just be arriving now to rescue your corpse, assuming he could even fight Orvak for it."

Suddenly, a sonic boom shattered the sound barrier as a streak of forceful motion tore through the air. A figure moved with lethal speed, his steps shaking the very earth beneath him.

Within seconds, the man reached the ruined remains of the forest, its broken trees and scorched terrain now silent witnesses to the recent carnage. His face was stone-cold, like he could freeze the entire Crymora with a single glance. Then, he turned sharply as he sensed the one presence he was here for. With no hesitation, he blurred forward.

There she was, Wuthenya.

He moved to embrace her, but his sprint halted abruptly. His body froze mid-motion, just a few meters away from her, as though some invisible force had taken hold of him.

His gaze shifted instantly to the other figure standing beside Wuthenya.

He didn't need to be told who it was.

It was her brother.

The man who had sworn to make his life a living hell should he ever cause Wuthenya pain.

'What is this freak doing here? the man wondered as he stayed frozen.

"It's been a while, Stravos," Malrik's voice echoed, calm but pointed, his smile tight and unreadable.

Yet that smile was not the warm one he wore for his siblings. It wasn't the smirk of camaraderie or affection.

No, it was the kind of smile a predator wore when it finally caught up to its prey.

Chapter 114: Stravos

Stravos couldn't speak. His entire body was frozen in place, restrained not by chains or force, but by Malrik's sheer aura alone.

Standing at six feet seven inches, Stravos had a lean, agile build, yet that didn't mean he relied solely on speed. No, his muscles were finely compacted, layered with strength that belied his frame. Every inch of his physique was honed for power and movement.

He had white hair that shimmered beneath the sunlight, and his eyes were a stark contrast, deep black, like polished obsidian. Hanging at his waist was his weapon of choice: a sabre, its hilt engraved with faint runic etchings.

Just like Wuthenya, his girlfriend, Stravos was also at the Voidstar Life Rank. He and Wuthenya had been dating for over three years now. But, throughout all that time, Malrik had never once approved of their relationship.

He wouldn't actively sabotage it, of course, but he wouldn't support it either. Instead, he lingered like a disapproving guardian, observing from a distance like a brooding 'father rooster.'

"Brother, stop bullying him," Wuthenya said from the side, her voice laced with exasperation and fondness.

Malrik shook his head slightly, then withdrew his aura. Stravos exhaled involuntarily, his body relaxing as if a weight had been lifted from his very bones. He turned toward Malrik briefly, then immediately wrapped Wuthenya in a firm embrace.

"What happened? Your maid told me you were in danger, I got here as fast as I could," Stravos said, holding her hands tightly in his.

Malrik simply stood off to the side, wordless and relaxed, fading from the central figure of the moment to an idle observer, as if he had never been involved.

Stravos didn't have all the details. Wuthenya's personal maid had been ordered to flee immediately when danger struck, she had no idea what was truly going on. So, when she relayed the message to Stravos, it came with no useful context.

Wuthenya sighed and finally spoke. "I encountered a Rank 10 Emovira."

Her words sent a chill down Stravos' spine. Rank 10. That wasn't something he could even dream of handling at his current level. Though he was strong and talented in his own right, a Rank 10 being was far beyond him. Even some Crownstar Rank warriors would struggle.

But Wuthenya had lied, well, not completely. It was technically the truth. By the world's standard classification, it was a Rank 10 being. But it wasn't a typical Emovira. It was something far worse: a Sinvaira.

The Sinvairas were top-tier secrets, known only to a few within the upper echelons of the world. Although Wuthenya would have loved to share everything with Stravos, some truths were better left untold, for his sake and hers.

"I fought it for about two minutes before I lost completely... the gap was immense," Wuthenya continued, her voice tinged with frustration and reflection.

Stravos was stunned. He couldn't believe she'd even dared to fight something of that caliber. If he had been in her position, he would've fled without hesitation.

Not because he was a coward, far from it, but because he understood reality. There was simply no chance of winning against a Rank 10 Emovira. His odds of survival were better if he ran and hid faraway.

But Wuthenya had done the opposite. She had stood her ground, knowing there was no escape. She had chosen to fight, even when death loomed.

"I don't know whether to call you brave... or stupid. Don't you know you should have just run?" Stravos asked, shaking his head.

"It wouldn't have mattered. Can I even outrun something like that?" Wuthenya replied, her sigh heavy with resignation.

"My brother was the one who saved me and killed it. If he hadn't arrived when he did, I would've died," she added quietly.

Stravos turned to Malrik, who still stood silently off to the side, expression unreadable.

'He killed a Rank 10 Emovira,' Stravos thought in disbelief. He had always known that Malrik was powerful, possibly even at the Radiant Soulstar Life Rank, but he had never dared believe Malrik might have already surpassed Azeron.

'Tsk... just how strong is this guy? Not even a single scratch. Not even a torn hem on his clothes,' Stravos thought, his eyes narrowing as he clicked his tongue.

Though he never voiced it aloud, deep down, Stravos admired Malrik immensely. The man was talented, extremely smart, protective, and renowned. He was practically living the ideal life that Stravos worked tirelessly toward every single day.

His eyes finally scanned the battlefield around them. What remained of the forest was in utter ruin, trees felled like wheat beneath a scythe, sword marks gouged deep into the earth, splitting the terrain into jagged fissures. Trenches and ravines tore open across the land, and sinkholes yawned like hungry mouths.

'Can even a Rank 10 cause this kind of destruction?' Stravos wondered. He'd always heard that Rank 10 beings could raze Empires, but seeing the aftermath firsthand, especially if it had been mostly a physical battle, was astonishing.

'I need to spar with him again,' Stravos thought to himself. Malrik had often challenged him to spars, and always defeated him. But Stravos never minded. To him, it was an invaluable chance to learn the way of the sword from someone undeniably superior.

He wielded a sabre, while Malrik wielded a katana, different styles, but the principles of mastery transcended the weapon. And as a commoner, few had been willing to train Stravos unless he swore loyalty. So, to him, getting tossed around in a spar was a fair price for true experience.

Stravos shook off the lingering thoughts and lifted his hand. With a simple snap of his fingers, the air around them cooled, and the temperature dropped significantly.

The sun was high overhead, its rays casting down intense heat, but Stravos wasn't about to endure it without reason, not when he could just adjust the temperature with a thought.

This was his ability, Ice Manipulation.

"Thank you," Wuthenya said with a soft smile.

Although the heat barely affected her due to her Life Rank, she still appreciated small, thoughtful gestures like this.

'I can do that too,' Malrik thought as he stood off to the side, watching Wuthenya smile so affectionately just because Stravos had cooled the temperature.

He could manipulate the sun and solar energy itself. With zero effort, he could lower the intensity of sunlight in his immediate vicinity and produce the same, if not better, cooling effect.

"Let's go home," Stravos said, preparing to lift her in a princess carry and race toward Wuthenya's estate at top speed.

But then Malrik's voice echoed from the side. "We have to report to Father, Wuthenya. You can return to your boyfriend later."

Stravos froze in place once more, halted not by aura this time, but by Malrik's words.

"That's true. I'll meet you later, alright? See you soon," Wuthenya said, turning to Stravos with a smile before planting a light kiss on his cheek.

"See you later, then," Stravos said, nodding as he smiled and stepped back.

Wuthenya walked over to stand beside her brother.

Malrik glanced at Stravos one last time before speaking with a dry smile, "See you never again, kid."

With that, he placed his hand gently on Wuthenya's left shoulder, and the two of them vanished in a streak of golden-orange light.

Chapter 115: Heap

Asher could be seen fast asleep, his body sprawled peacefully across the vast, plush bed. Sun rays filtered into his room gently, their golden light colliding with the thick curtains that refused to grant them full access.

His chest rose and fell in a steady rhythm, his breathing calm and composed as he slept like a newborn, uncaring, unbothered, and completely free from the burden of unpaid bills or the horrors the world had to offer.

After a bit of tossing and turning beneath the soft covers, he rose into a seated position, his posture slouched and his eyelids drooping heavily. His vision was still blurred with sleep as he sat there, groggy and half-lost in a haze between dreams and wakefulness.

Slowly, he rubbed his eyes with his fingers and released a soft yawn before stretching his body fully, enjoying every second of the relief that came with the stretch.

Following that satisfying stretch, he collapsed back onto the bed with a soft grunt. He had already made up his mind to take things slowly for a day or two. Today was meant to be the final day of his short-lived rest before his rigorous training would resume the next morning.

Although he initially told himself that he would rest for just a day, he had given in to the temptation of comfort and extended it to two. Who knew? Two days might even become a week if he wasn't careful or disciplined enough.

He lay motionless on the bed, doing absolutely nothing, completely still. This was his designated rest day. There was no reason to get up from bed, no pressing need to bathe early, and certainly no urgent matters demanding his attention.

Though Asher could have simply turned to the wall clock that hung across the room to ascertain the time, he instead chose to rely on his system.

'System, what's the time?' he asked internally.

[It is 9:07 a.m. Host]

'The feeling of waking up whenever one wants is indeed the ultimate jackpot in life,' Asher mused to himself contentedly.

In his past life, he had never been a fan of the infamous 9-to-5 jobs. Those jobs required one to wake early, sleep late, and sacrifice most of their personal freedom. It was exhausting, and he had never found any of it to be enjoyable.

Being a laid-back, self-employed man or woman was, in his opinion, one of the greatest freedoms a person could experience.

"Urgh, my mouth tastes horrible. My morning breath must be absolutely odorous," Asher murmured to himself with a frown.

Although he didn't want to get out of bed, he had little choice in the matter. Pushing the sheets off, he took the first reluctant step toward the bathroom. Once inside, he brushed his teeth swiftly and washed his face with cold water, jolting himself more fully into consciousness.

'This new room is even more spacious than the last one, and it practically screams extreme nobility,' Asher thought, looking around in appreciation.

The bathroom alone was the size of the living room in his past life. The contrast between wealth and rich was glaring, and sometimes, almost ridiculous.

Shaking his head with a quiet chuckle, he decided to stop thinking about money for now. After all, he was extremely wealthy at the moment, and that fact alone brought some comfort.

He stepped out of the bathroom with a small towel draped over his head, gently patting his face and hair dry. As he made his way back to the bed, a soft knock echoed from outside the room.

It was his personal maid, Lyra.

Asher had sensed her presence before she had even knocked.

"Come in," Asher said casually.

With a gentle push, the door opened, and Lyra stepped into the room. Her movements were elegant, every step a picture of grace. Her posture was calm and composed as she offered a courteous greeting.

"Good morning, Young Master," she said with a small bow.

"Morning, Lyra," Asher responded simply as he continued drying his hair with the white towel.

"Breakfast is ready, Young Master," Lyra informed him with her usual quiet tone.

That was one of Lyra's most common lines after greeting him, always reminding him to eat, whether it was morning, afternoon, or evening.

Not that Asher minded. Unlike the fictional characters in the novels he had read, who could go months or even years without food, that sort of absurdity wasn't a reality in this world. Even legendary figures like Azeroth and Malrik still ate regularly.

They were human, after all. Though they could go for a few weeks without sustenance, Astra did not substitute biological needs in any irrational or permanent way.

Moreover, as a young boy who was still growing and training rigorously every single day, Asher required an outrageous amount of food. His body needed every ounce of nutrients it could get.

Within minutes, breakfast was served, and Asher ate with the same silent speed and efficiency as always. After finishing, Lyra cleared the table and stood quietly outside the room once more, waiting for any further instructions.

As Asher sat on the bed, quietly reminiscing about his old friends from his previous life, a thought suddenly occurred to him.

He had money, twenty thousand platinum coins, but he hadn't given anything to Lyra.

He didn't know how wealthy Lyra truly was, but even the richest individuals in the world continued to wake up every day to work for more wealth. The hunger for resources and status never really disappeared.

In the six months he had spent in Crymora, Asher noticed that there was no alternative form of currency. In the novels he had read, beings of high power often used rare crystals or unique materials as their own form of private currency, things that symbolized their superiority and separated cultivators from mere mortals.

But that didn't seem to be the case here. Even those who stood at the pinnacle of strength and authority still used coins, though mostly platinum or gold at the very least.

So whatever resources could be acquired didn't require special items. Just coins.

With that thought in mind, he called out, "Lyra, come."

Hearing her name, Lyra stepped back into the room. "You called for me, Young Master?"

Asher nodded but remained silent for a moment. He didn't know how to begin the conversation. He couldn't just toss a bunch of coins at her. Nor could he outright ask how much she wanted. That would come off as awkward and stupid.

Although Lyra received rewards and payments from the family she served, Asher saw no reason why he couldn't be generous on his own. With enough resources, Lyra could enhance her strength and perhaps even increase her Life Rank.

After a few seconds of contemplation, Asher decided not to overthink things. He would keep it straightforward and simple.

Rising from the bed, he walked toward the table at the side of the room. With a thought, he commanded the system to bring out ten thousand platinum coins.

With a casual wave of his hand, a heap of shimmering platinum coins materialized on the table, clattering softly as they settled. The light from the window struck their surfaces, causing a silver-black gleam to reflect across the room.

Platinum coins were distinct, black, round, and marked with the emblem of the Empire imprinted firmly on their surface.

Chapter 116: Pickpocket

Lyra's usually calm expression finally cracked as she stared in complete shock at the ridiculous amount of money laid out on the table before her. Had she ever seen such an absurdly large amount of money in her life? Most definitely not.

Before she could find the words to speak, Asher's calm voice beat her to it.

"This is ten thousand platinum coins. You can consider it the first payment for staying by my side until now," Asher stated with composed clarity.

After all, Lyra had been with him from the very beginning. Though one might argue that her presence was merely the result of an assignment given to her by the Primarch at the time of Asher's birth, which was, in fact, true, Lyra could have chosen to leave when Asher awakened during his third and final chance.

After all, those who awakened at the third attempt were known to be far less talented than their peers. No one in their right mind would want to waste their time or devote their life to serving such an individual. Not when nine other monsters, more talented and more promising, existed.

Lyra hadn't known he was a genius. She had no idea what he would become. She had committed to being his personal maid long before his system even booted, long before it granted him the Absolute Physique.

Asher wasn't stingy, not by nature. If he had the means to provide for those who mattered to him, he would do so without hesitation, as long as it didn't come at a significant detriment to himself.

Besides, what exactly was he going to do with twenty thousand platinum coins? He lived in an estate where food was always available, his housing was fully taken care of, and he received a monthly stipend from the family. Though he could, of course, save up, Asher had no doubt in his mind that he could get rich again if necessary.

This was a fantasy world, after all. There were plenty of bandits to rob should he ever find himself lacking money.

So yes, Asher had handed over half of his entire reward to Lyra without so much as blinking.

Lyra's mind felt like it was about to explode when she processed the amount.

'Ten thousand platinum coins.' Her breath hitched slightly. Even minor nobles, like Barons, wouldn't possess that kind of money without selling off some of their possessions or unlocking their family vaults filled with old savings.

"Thank you, Young Master," Lyra said softly, a warm smile gracing her lips. She had no intention of rejecting the gesture, nor did she utter the usual cliché words like "It's too much" or "I don't need it."

If her Young Master gave it to her, then he must certainly have more to spare. With that, she waved her hand gently, and the coins vanished into her personal spatial ring in an instant.

Just as she was about to bow again and offer a second round of thanks, Asher raised a hand casually, halting her in motion.

"No need. Thank me by getting stronger, and fulfilling your duty more efficiently," Asher said flatly but not unkindly.

Hearing his words, Lyra simply nodded with a slight smile. She then bowed properly and exited the room, happiness evident in her calm steps.

'I just hope she doesn't blow it all on women's makeup and stuff like that,' Asher thought to himself with a faint smirk.

He didn't actually believe Lyra would waste the money like that, she was far too disciplined and focused, but women were the same across every world. Their appearance was often their top priority.

Still, Lyra was already in her mid-forties and had only reached the Firmstar Rank. Asher was confident she would use the funds wisely and push her Life Rank to a new level.

Asher smiled faintly. Sometimes, he forgot that Lyra was a woman well into her forties because of how close and familiar they were. Their daily interactions had blurred that line.

Shaking his head, he walked over to the window. With a smooth motion, he opened it and then effortlessly climbed over the sill, sitting down on the window stool. He gazed out into the world beyond the estate, feeling the gentle wind brush against his skin.

His purple hair swayed to the rhythm of the breeze. He had no thoughts of falling or dying by mistake. If this had been his past life, he wouldn't even have dared to attempt something like sitting on a window ledge. The risks would have been too great.

But here? Even if he slipped and fell, he would land perfectly fine as though nothing had happened. He could even use Astra to stand on the vertical surface of the wall, or better still, simply teleport back into his room. After all, he had placed a teleportation mark here and already removed the one from his previous room.

As he continued gazing outward, a curious thought crossed his mind. He realized that he had never actually explored the Wargrave Duchy's territory. Sure, he had left the main Wargrave family home and headed to the estate, but he had never explored the domain that his familiar lorded over.

'Since I've got nothing else to do today, maybe I should take a walk and explore it a bit,' Asher thought.

This time, he wouldn't move in a carriage or with guards. He would move on foot. After all, no one had ever truly seen his face, aside from a handful of nobles and a few merchants who were present during the Royal Party.

As for the commoners living within the Duchy, they wouldn't recognize him. They might stare at him for a while due to his handsome face, but that was the most he expected.

'Maybe I should also visit the slums and see how things truly are, not just on the surface,' he considered.

Even if Asher saw children lying around starving in the slums, he wouldn't suddenly turn into a saint and begin rescuing them. That wasn't his nature. He didn't see himself as a savior. He simply wanted to observe the situation for himself, something he had read about multiple times in various books.

'I'll even allow some children to pickpocket me. I wonder what their reaction will be when they check their loot and find a platinum coin,' he mused with a quiet laugh.

If anyone managed to steal a platinum coin, they'd probably collapse from sheer panic. After all, only the wealthy and deeply connected possessed such wealth.

Asher smiled at the thought, then rose from his spot on the window. With smooth, practiced movement, he turned and dropped down into his room, his feet making a soft sound as they met the polished floor.

He was ready. Today, he would explore the Wargrave Duchy, not as a noble, not as a young master, but simply as Asher, moving unseen among the people.

Just for today.

Chapter 117: Bar

With the idea of exploring the Wargrave territory, Asher called out Lyra's name, "Lyra."

Lyra, who heard her name, entered the room gently. The smile on her face remained; she was still delighted by the coins Asher had given her earlier.

"What do you need, Young Master?" she asked cheerfully, her voice laced with warmth.

"Nothing much. I've decided to explore the Wargrave territory today," Asher stated calmly, revealing his plans for the day.

Lyra simply nodded, not suggesting or questioning anything, as was her custom. "I will get the carriage ready, Young Master," she said politely, about to bow and leave to make the necessary preparations.

Asher raised a hand and shook his head. "No need. We will be going on foot today," he stated firmly. After all, how could he truly enjoy exploring the territory if all he did was sit in a carriage and stare out the window?

Lyra paused for a second as she processed Asher's words, then nodded slowly before asking, "Do you need me to prepare anything, Young Master?"

"Just prepare some simple clothes and a cap for me," Asher responded with a small nod.

"As you wish, Young Master," Lyra replied, acknowledging his request.

He continued, "Also, just like in the Capital, you will wear normal clothes. But this time, you'll follow me from a distance. Prepare some Knights as well, specifically the ones I traveled to the Capital with. All of you will follow from afar while dressed in ordinary clothes."

Although he was now somewhat strong, Asher wasn't foolish enough to wander around without adequate security, unlike certain arrogant nobles. Since his family had Knights, it would be senseless not to use them.

Lyra nodded once more and stepped out. Within minutes, she returned with a simple white shirt, brown trousers, a brown cap, and black boots.

Asher nodded in approval and dressed himself. Lyra had already gathered the Knights, each of them now dressed in inconspicuous clothing, their weapons securely stored in their space rings.

With everything set, Asher stepped out of his room, his gait steady and purposeful, heading straight toward the Wargrave gates without pausing at any other location. As he walked, his keen senses picked up a familiar figure, it was the Ninth Sun, Thalric.

As the two approached one another, neither spoke. They simply exchanged neutral gazes and walked past each other in silence.

Thalric didn't utter a single word or give any indication of acknowledgment. He walked past Asher as though the young man didn't exist, and Asher did the same.

'The hate and anger in his eyes have suddenly vanished,' Asher thought as he walked by Thalric. The boy's demeanor had certainly changed.

Asher shook his head slightly and continued toward the gate. Along the way, maids and butlers bowed deeply, their bodies bent in perfect form, greeting him respectfully. However, Asher didn't return their greetings, nor did he speak a word to any of them.

Upon arriving at the gate, the Knights stationed there frowned when they saw the Tenth Sun in plain clothing. Their eyes drifted to the group behind him, his personal maid and several fellow Knights, all similarly dressed in casual attire. It didn't take long for them to understand what was going on. With a simple hand motion, the enormous steel gates groaned and creaked open inwardly.

'They should seriously consider adding a wicket gate,' Asher mused silently as he stepped out into the open.

His sharp purple eyes scanned the area beyond the Wargrave estate. The buildings directly outside the gates were elegant and immaculately maintained. Ornate carriages

moved intermittently through the streets, indicating that affluent individuals, likely merchants, resided in the vicinity.

Living near the Wargrave estate was considered a stroke of fortune. In the event of any major threat such as a monster invasion, those nearby would benefit from the estate's formidable defenses. Many of these merchants also made every effort to foster a favorable relationship with the Knights stationed at the Wargrave gate.

Asher could sense the presence of powerful individuals within some buildings, beings with immense but suppressed auras. It was evident that individuals of high Life Rank also chose to reside close to the Wargrave estate regardless of their strength.

He walked forward silently, his demeanor calm and composed. To passersby, he might have looked like a young man exploring Wargrave, but his tall stature, standing at 6'3", and the deliberate rhythm of his steps dissuaded any assumptions that he was lost.

As he delved deeper into the territory, the opulence and presence of designer carriages gradually waned. However, Asher noted that everyone he saw moved about freely and without complaint, each person engaged in their morning routine.

Some people were setting up their shops, preparing for the day's sales. Apparently, nobody opened their stalls at the break of dawn or as early as 6 or 7 a.m.

This time, Asher had no interest in buying clothes or sampling food at every stall. His intention was simply to observe how the common people carried out their daily lives.

Though he wore a cap and simple garments, they did little to hide the natural charm of his physique. He still drew the occasional glance, though nothing too intrusive.

Asher came to a stop in front of a building, his eyes settling on the sign mounted on the wall, it was a bar. Seeing it, Asher pushed open the door and stepped inside.

A wave of pungent ale stench assaulted his nostrils. With his heightened senses, the smell multiplied tenfold in intensity, but he made no outward reaction.

Immediately afterward, a flood of loud chatter overwhelmed his ears. The bar was filled with men of various sizes, all engaged in lively conversation. Each held a wooden cup filled with ale or some other form of alcohol, which they raised in toasts before downing with hearty laughter.

Scattered among the crowd were women, and a few men, carrying trays as they weaved between tables, serving ale as though it were an endless resource.

The interior was dimly lit, with wooden tables stained from years of spilled drink and reckless cheer. The atmosphere was chaotic yet strangely comforting. In this place, no

one cared who you were or where you came from. Everyone was simply here to drink, laugh, and forget the world outside.

Chapter 118: The Best

Asher was momentarily stunned by the sight before him. It was still only 11 a.m., yet these men were already gathered, drinking without a care in the world, as though they lived in a perpetual state of bliss.

Weapons could be seen resting on the tables, hanging at their waists, or strapped to their backs.

'It seems they've been here since last night,' Asher mused, glancing around at the shattered wooden cups strewn across the floor and a few left abandoned atop the tables.

'I wonder if they could outdrink dwarves,' he thought absently. But dwarves didn't exist in this world, so there was no way to truly know.

With that idle thought, he walked towards the counter with steady, composed steps. Behind it stood a bartender, wiping a wooden cup with a black towel in hand.

"Hoo... A new face. Where did such a young and handsome man emerge from?" the bartender asked with a smile. As the owner of the bar, one that attracted a steady stream of income and an endless flow of customers, he was familiar with nearly every commoner man in the Wargrave territory. Most had come in for a drink at least once or twice.

"I'm new. I'm considering relocating to the Wargrave Ducal territory. I came from a Barony territory far to the east. There were frequent monster invasions in the village I lived in, and the death count kept climbing each day. So I left, hoping to settle here... I don't want to die," Asher replied smoothly, crafting a backstory on the spot with such ease it felt second nature, almost as though lying was an instinct.

He moved and took a seat in front of the counter without asking for permission, not that he needed to.

"Hoo... Monster invasions are all too common these days, and deadly for nobles who lack guards to keep the threats at bay," the bartender said with a sigh, setting the cup down and picking up another to clean.

"But at least now you're in the Wargrave Ducal territory. No beast or monster would dare invade here. You can live your life in peace. Besides, one of the best perks of living here is the tax exemption," the bartender added with a proud smile.

Asher paused mid-thought. "Tax exemptions?" he asked, intrigued.

"Indeed. Although Duke Azeron pays annual taxes to the Emperor at the end of every year, he doesn't collect taxes from lower class commoners. Only the rich merchants and powerful warriors who live near their estate pay taxes," the bartender explained further, his tone almost as though he were tempting Asher to move in permanently.

Asher fell into brief contemplation. In both medieval history and the 21st century, his previous life, taxation had always been a significant source of revenue. And yet, his father had told the commoners they didn't have to pay.

'How much money would I have saved if I never paid taxes in my past life?' he wondered silently.

'Father probably collects taxes from the merchants and warriors since they're essentially using him as a protective wall,' Asher concluded.

He continued listening as the bartender talked on, although in truth, Asher hadn't asked many questions. The man was simply chatting non-stop, offering bits of information freely and cheerfully.

"Give me one medium-sized cup of ale," Asher eventually requested, beginning to feel a touch of thirst.

"That'll be three copper coins," the bartender replied without missing a beat.

'I only have platinum coins...' Asher thought with a frown. He didn't carry lower denominations.

'System, can you help me out here?' Asher asked mentally.

[...]

As though exhaling mechanically, the system responded.

[One platinum coin has been converted into gold, silver, and copper coins]

'You're the best, system,' Asher thought with a small grin.

"No problem," he replied to the bartender aloud, placing three copper coins on the counter.

The bartender nodded in acknowledgement. Suddenly, the cups he had been cleaning floated into the air without him lifting a finger. They arranged themselves neatly on the shelf behind him. Then, another cup floated towards the barrel beside him. The faucet turned by itself, and ale began pouring into the cup.

Asher watched with mild awe. He hadn't encountered someone with telekinetic abilities before. Within seconds, the cup settled in front of him, filled to the brim with frothy ale.

"Nice ability," Asher commented, lifting the drink and taking a sip. While it wasn't a high-tier brew, he had no complaints.

"It is," the bartender said with a sigh. "Too bad I have many limitations. If not, I might've had the chance to become a warrior."

Asher offered a small smile but didn't probe further. The bartender had deliberately avoided revealing the nature of those limitations. After all, who would speak openly of their weaknesses to a stranger?

"What about you? What ability do you have?" the bartender asked curiously.

"I failed my awakening. Sadly, I'm just a normal person," Asher replied, letting out a sigh for effect.

The bartender simply nodded and returned to his duties.

Asher had lied, of course. In fantasy tales, bars like these were often hubs where information was traded, sometimes openly, other times subtly. He had noticed another compartment behind the shelf where the bartender had retrieved the cup earlier.

But he said nothing. It wasn't his concern.

Around him, the men and women drinking continued to chatter and drink freely. Soon, their conversation shifted, towards him.

They spoke of the Tenth Sun... of him.

They discussed his Awakening as though they had witnessed it firsthand. Some even claimed he had faced Emovirae, creatures Asher himself had never seen.

They described how he had returned uninjured after slaying every monster and Emovirae thrown his way.

Asher wasn't surprised these rumors were already circulating. The maids who saw him return from the True Awakening must have shared their stories with siblings, friends, or even strangers. And, as usual, details were likely exaggerated and embellished along the way.

Asher shook his head and rose from his seat. He placed four copper coins on the counter instead of three, the ale's listed cost.

"That's for the information," Asher said, his tone casual.

Though he was far too wealthy for a mere one copper tip, the identity he had fabricated portrayed him as a poor traveler in search of where to settle. The fact that he even tipped was, in itself, a miracle given that persona.

The bartender smiled, collecting the coins and sliding them into a compartment beneath the counter. "Next time, young man," he said warmly.

Asher nodded and stepped out of the bar, the door closing gently behind him. He had gathered a good amount of information about the Wargrave territory, all from one casual drink and a chat.

Chapter 119: Cultist

As Asher stepped out of the bar, another wave of noise slammed into him, loud and chaotic, filled with the sounds of life and activity. He simply turned in a random direction and began to walk. There was no particular destination in mind.

Behind him, he could feel the lingering gazes of his five guards and Lyra. Their presence was silent but unmistakably felt. They hadn't followed him into the bar, having sensed earlier that there wasn't anyone present who posed a threat significant enough to endanger the Tenth Sun.

Asher walked calmly through the bustling streets. By now, it was already midday, the sun blazing directly overhead in all its radiant glory.

Children ran around joyfully, laughter trailing behind them as though they had no responsibilities in the world, and indeed, they didn't.

'Isn't there a school these children are supposed to attend or something?' Asher thought as he moved forward, his eyes casually following their carefree movements.

Still, he didn't voice the question aloud. Even the original Asher hadn't attended any formal school at this stage of life, and he was a noble, son of a Duke, second only to the princess and prince. If someone of his standing hadn't stepped into a classroom, then how could mere commoners?

Choosing not to dwell on it, Asher continued onward. Up ahead, he noticed a towering black statue, imposing and monolithic, standing firmly in place with a long, dark spear clutched in its right hand.

He approached it and came to a halt, gazing up at the statue, pondering what such a structure was doing there. Oddly, the figure's face bore no definite distinct features, it was almost blank.

Just as Asher was about to turn away and continue walking, a voice suddenly echoed from behind.

"It seems someone came at the same time as me today," a female voice said softly.

Asher turned, his purple eyes landing on a woman who appeared to be in her forties. She was dressed in simple, worn-out clothing, a far cry from anything considered fashionable or noble. Beside her stood a small child, a girl who looked to be around four years old. The woman held the girl's hand protectively, clearly to keep her from getting lost or running into danger.

"Good afternoon," Asher greeted her plainly.

The woman walked closer and came to a stop beside him. Her deep black eyes met his vibrant purple ones as she spoke, "Such a handsome face should be familiar."

'Would everyone feel the need to comment on my face all the time?' Asher sighed inwardly, clearly growing weary of the attention.

"I just arrived at the Wargrave Ducal Territory," he replied, spinning the same lie he had told the bartender earlier.

The woman nodded in understanding, her tone calm and reflective. "About twenty years ago, I also came to the Wargrave Duchy, from a Barony."

Asher gave a simple nod of acknowledgment, then asked the question that had been on his mind since seeing the statue, "Whose statue is this?" Though he had a suspicion, he still needed confirmation.

"You asking that question truly shows you're not from around here," the woman replied, bending down to pick up her child into her arms.

"This is the Duke's statue. Duke Azeron Wargrave," she explained, a glint of genuine awe lighting up her eyes as she spoke the name.

Her words confirmed Asher's suspicions. After all, who else would dare erect a statue within the territory of a Duke unless it was for the Duke himself? Though, judging by its appearance, it could have easily been made in honor of the former Duke instead.

Still, something about the craftsmanship seemed... lacking. To Asher, it felt crude and unimpressive. It wasn't aesthetically pleasing, nor did it exude the grandeur expected of nobility. It lacked refinement, depth, elegance, everything. Besides, his father didn't strike him as the type of man who would go around putting statues of himself in public spaces.

With these thoughts swirling through his mind, Asher couldn't help but voice them.

"But isn't it a bit too crude for a Duke? With the amount of platinum coins he possesses, I'm sure he could have afforded something far more refined and beautiful," he remarked curiously.

"Indeed, it's a bit lacking, just as you've said," the woman replied with a small nod, not denying the obvious. "But it wasn't made by the Duke," she added.

"It wasn't?" Asher echoed in confusion, now even more curious as to who would have built it.

"It was us, the villagers," she said, adjusting the child in her arms. "We pooled our money together to build it. This was the best we could afford. It's been standing here for eighteen years now."

Her words stunned Asher. He struggled to comprehend the reasoning behind such an act. These were commoners, people barely scraping by, living in the lowest standards of the social hierarchy. People that nobles wouldn't even spare a glance for. Yet, they had gathered their hard-earned money to build a statue for the Duke.

'Is Father running a cult or something?' Asher couldn't help but wonder.

He wasn't even sure he could've done the same for any leader in his previous life, no matter how much admiration they commanded.

"I know what you're thinking," the woman said softly, interrupting his internal musings. "A lot of people thought the same thing, wondering why we wasted our money on something like this." Her voice remained calm, a gentle smile spreading across her face as she lifted her gaze to the almost featureless face of the statue.

"Remember I told you I moved here twenty years ago?" she continued.

Asher gave a silent nod, encouraging her to speak further.

"Well, after moving here, I lived peacefully for some time. Then came a monster invasion. Honestly, I thought it would end the same way it always had, deaths, destruction, despair. Just like what happened back in the Barony I used to live in. But the Duke was available that day. The knights didn't even need to intervene," she said, her voice growing more reverent, almost as if she were speaking of divine intervention.

"The Duke wiped everything out with a single wave of his hand, without even using his spear."

Asher said nothing. He simply listened.

"After that, he went on to eliminate high-tier monsters surrounding the territory but left the weaker ones alone, to serve as a source of income for us commoners," she continued, her tone sincere.

"So we built this statue. And for the past eighteen years, we haven't experienced a single monster invasion. Tell me, how many territories can truly boast of such peace and security?" she asked, her voice proud.

"When the Duke returned and saw the statue, he rewarded everyone who contributed with fifty gold coins each," she said, wrapping up her explanation.

"All in all, you can grow old and die here peacefully," she concluded. With that, the woman bowed slightly to the statue and turned, walking away with her daughter nestled safely in her arms.

Chapter 120: Batman

Asher simply stood there for a few minutes, staring up at the statue. For commoners to admire a noble, the noble must have done numerous things to win them over. In most cases, commoners in a territory didn't even like the nobles ruling over them... or so he had read.

'Well... if Father isn't a cultist, I guess he's just a good ruler,' Asher thought with mild amusement.

He didn't dwell much on the gold coins his father had distributed. The man was already absurdly rich. The only expenses within the Wargrave family were probably salaries paid to maids, workers, and the taxes owed to the Emperor, virtually nothing else.

After all, no one really lived permanently at the Wargrave estate, certainly not enough for them to splurge lavishly on meals or festivals.

Asher began to wonder how long a commoner would have to work just to earn fifty gold coins. Based on his estimation, it would likely take them several years, if not longer.

Shaking his head, he turned away from the statue and continued walking. Along the way, he noticed a few children bumping into him, seemingly by accident. But with his sharp perception, Asher could clearly see their small, nimble hands reaching deftly into his pockets.

Unfortunately for them, he hadn't stored any coins in his pockets, so these little thieves left empty-handed.

Asher simply smiled and shook his head at the behavior. He didn't speak a word. He had already anticipated something like this. Just because the commoners loved the Duke didn't suddenly make them all saints.

With a thought, Asher brought out a few copper and silver coins from his inventory and quietly transferred them into his pockets.

He knew full well that even if he stopped these children and scolded them, they would still go on stealing. Words of encouragement didn't feed empty stomachs or keep roofs over heads.

Besides, his Absolute Physique didn't come with some kind of Talk-no-Jutsu ability. Asher didn't bother lecturing any of them.

Instead, he simply kept refilling his pockets with small amounts of coin. Every time a child bumped into him and stole the money, he would replace it again, letting the cycle continue.

Asher wandered into several alleyways, trying to find children who might be orphaned or without guardians, those truly lost and alone. But after walking for quite a while, he found none.

Eventually, he discovered that the territory had two orphanages operating under the Wargrave estate. These institutions took in homeless children and housed them until they turned seventeen. At that point, they were sent back into the world. This explained why the alleys were free of strays, no children were sleeping in trash cans or filthy corners.

Just then, Asher's steps came to a sudden halt.

He spotted an injured child, no older than seven, walking with trembling legs toward an unfamiliar building. Blood stained the child's knee, and his clothes were slightly torn.

Asher watched quietly as the door closed behind the child.

He didn't move at first. But something about the situation felt... off. His instincts whispered that something wasn't right.

Curiosity piqued, Asher walked to the building.

With a light push of his feet, he propelled himself upward into the air, landing gracefully on the roof. From there, he spotted an open space in the roof tiles and slipped in quietly.

He stopped suppressing his Omni Perception and let it expand, encompassing the entire building in a heartbeat.

Silently, he moved across the wooden beams supporting the roof, like a shadow gliding from one to the other. Within two seconds, he came to a stop above five men, tattoos sprawled across their bodies, marking them as thugs or gangsters.

Below, the same child stood before them, trembling. He brought out a few copper coins and offered them to one of the men with shaky hands and a quivering voice.

"C...ca...can I have the herb...? My... mot...mother is really... si...sick," the boy stammered, tears already glistening in his eyes.

Suddenly, a loud smack echoed through the room as a vicious slap hurled the child sideways.

The boy slammed into a table with a crash, his body rolling off as he whimpered and began to sob uncontrollably.

"Traders sell that herb for a gold coin! I told you I'd give it to you for eighty silver, and yet you bring these meager copper coins every day," one of the men snarled after striking the child.

But the boy said nothing. He just sat on the floor, crying.

"For breaking the table, it's now ninety silver coins. Get out of here and don't come back until you have the money," the man growled, spitting on the ground beside him.

The child got up slowly, tears and snot covering his face like paint on a canvas. Silently, he turned and left, his sobs barely audible.

From above, Asher observed everything with icy clarity. He understood exactly what these men were doing. They were scamming the boy. That herb did cost a gold coin, but they were simply using the child to funnel money into their pockets. By demanding eighty silver, a sum just short of a full gold coin, they lured him into an endless quest for money he couldn't possibly acquire.

Asher dropped from the beam he'd been perched on, landing hard on the wooden floor with a resounding crash. He no longer bothered to hide his presence.

By now, his cap had vanished, revealing his full face to the room.

The men spun to face him, frowns etched across their rough features.

"And who the hell might this stupid kid be?" one of them barked.

"You can call me... Batman," Asher said casually.

Before anyone could react, he was already standing before the man who had slapped the child. Astra energy surged into his right index finger, and with a sharp motion, he swiped it across the man's throat.

A sickening sound followed, flesh tearing, blood spurting. The man's eyes were wide with shock as he dropped heavily to the floor, lifeless.

Without giving the others time to process what had just happened, Asher moved again.

With that same finger, he repeated the maneuver, swift, lethal, and efficient.

Blood splattered across the floor and wooden tables as the remaining men collapsed in pools of crimson. Some died instantly; others twitched for a moment before going still.

Asher didn't bother with any saint-like monologue. He hadn't come here to debate morals or offer second chances. He didn't hope for change by believing in humanity.

He simply ended them.

The stench of blood now lingered in the air.

Without turning, Asher spoke calmly, "One of the Knights should handle the cleanup. Lyra, ensure that child and his mother receive adequate care. I'll be heading back to the estate. Return once you're done."

With that, he activated Virelass' position marker ability. In the next instant, Asher vanished in a streak of silver light.