

H. Academy 571

Chapter 571 126.8 - Evergreen

"That's how my family came to be here, in the Human Domain. We were given land, a place to exist quietly, out of the Elven Kingdom's sight."

'A deal with Valerion,' I thought, piecing it all together. Aelion had not only secured his family's safety but had also influenced the balance of power during a critical moment in history. This was no ordinary love story—it was a turning point hidden beneath layers of secrecy.

As Maya's words hung in the air, I began to piece the story together with more clarity. Aelion Verdantweave, the Crown Prince of the Elves, had not simply fled to the Human Domain in an act of love. No, this was much bigger than that.

At that time, humanity was desperate—on the brink of collapse as the other races pressed their advantage after the Nexus Convergence. Valerion, the rising hero, was doing everything he could to unify humanity, but they lacked strength. They needed allies, powerful ones, to stand against the overwhelming forces threatening their existence.

That's where Aelion came in.

Being a member of the Verdantweave royal family, Aelion wasn't just anyone. He was regarded as the next King of the Elves, a crown prince with immense strength. His power wasn't a simple matter of inheritance or title—it was earned. From what Maya said, he was almost on par with his father, the reigning Elven King. For an Elf, the title "young" meant something different. Elves lived long lives, and their concept of youth didn't equate to mere decades. Aelion was likely far older than a mere twenty or thirty years, and in that time, he had grown into a powerhouse.

If Aelion had made a deal with Valerion, he wouldn't just be offering a token gesture of support. No, he would have been a formidable force in his own right, capable of influencing battles, perhaps even entire wars. With his mastery of elemental magic and his status as Crown Prince, Aelion's strength would have shifted the balance. His decision to support humanity in exchange for a sanctuary for his family wasn't just a desperate move—it was a calculated one.

Aelion wasn't merely trying to protect his lover or his child; he was creating a stronghold, a future for his family. By making that deal, he secured their survival. He wasn't running from his

responsibilities as a royal—he was carving out a space where he could protect the one he loved and their forbidden child away from the prying eyes of the Elven King.

And Valerion, seeing the advantage in having an ally of Aelion's caliber, must have agreed to the terms, giving Aelion's family land in the Human Domain. It was a calculated decision on both sides, one that shaped the history of the world without anyone knowing.

Maya continued, her voice steady but laden with the weight of history. "Valerion's ambition was to unite humanity, to gather all the fractured kingdoms under a single banner, and with Aelion's help, he succeeded. The creation of the Federation was the culmination of that dream, with every remaining human kingdom gathered under his rule. Aelion's support, his power, played a crucial role in turning the tide."

Her eyes flickered with a distant intensity as she recounted the events. "But when the time came to fulfill the other side of the deal, Aelion knew he needed to protect his family's identity. That's when he changed our family name—he cast off the Verdantweave legacy and became Aelion Evergreen. It was in that moment that the Evergreen family was born."

A slight pause followed, allowing the gravity of the revelation to settle. "We were granted the southern lands, a vast region, far from the Elven Domain. There was a reason for this. Valerion knew that using Aelion directly against his own people would be risky. The Elves knew their kin's strengths and weaknesses too well. Instead, Valerion sent Aelion and his followers south, to battle against the Orcs who had overrun the desert regions."

Maya's expression darkened slightly as she added, "The Orcs were powerful, but they knew nothing of Aelion's abilities. They were unprepared, and that was where the Evergreens truly made their mark. We were given a huge expanse of land for this deal, but the details were kept top secret."

I understood the implications immediately. "You mean... to hide Aelion's involvement from the Elves?"

Maya nodded, a faint smile playing on her lips. "Yes. Aelion crafted a scene to make it appear as if his child had died. To the Elven King, he had suffered a great loss. The Elves believed it, and thus, they never suspected his involvement in humanity's rise. And while the Elves mourned the loss of their Crown Prince's child, Aelion quietly built his new life in the southern lands."

Maya took a slow breath, her voice softening as she delved into the details of her family's history. "At that moment, the Evergreen family was born. The child, born from the union of an Elf and a

human, became a mixed blood—a blend of two worlds. That child carried both legacies, but it wasn't an easy path."

I looked into her eyes, my thoughts piecing together everything she had revealed. "That must be where your affinity with all elements comes from," I said quietly. "And why you're so skilled at controlling mana... it makes sense now. You're a genius not just because of talent, but because of your heritage."

Maya's lips curled into a faint smile as she nodded. "Yes, Junior. My control over mana, my affinity with the elements... it all stems from my bloodline. The blood of Elven royalty flows through my veins. But it's not merely because of that. It's deeper, more complicated than just inheriting power."

Her expression turned more serious as she continued. "While it's possible for an Elf and a human to have a child, the success rate is incredibly low. And for High Elves—those of royal blood like my ancestor—it's even rarer. In fact, it's difficult for High Elves to even have children amongst themselves, let alone with a human. When an interracial union like that happens, the chances of a successful birth are slim. The blood of Elven royalty is powerful, but it can also be overwhelming."

I listened carefully, sensing that there was more to this than just the story of lineage.

Maya's voice lowered slightly as she explained further. "For a child to be born from such a union, the human must be strong enough, capable of withstanding the intensity of Elven royal blood. Otherwise, the child would die before it could even be born. That's why my ancestor's human lover wasn't just anyone. She had to be talented, resilient, with enough strength to endure the merging of their bloodlines."

Maya continued, her voice carrying the weight of her family's legacy. "My ancestor's human lover, Isolde, was more than just a slave. She was a princess from a fallen human kingdom, and later, it was discovered that she possessed a rare talent for sensing mana. She was strong, resilient, and became a powerful mage in her own right."

I listened intently, understanding the depth of the bond between Aelion and Isolde. They weren't just two individuals caught in a forbidden love—they were powerful figures in their own domains, united by more than just affection. It was a meeting of talents, a rare convergence that allowed their child to be born despite the overwhelming odds.

"Their lineage continued from there," Maya went on. "Though over time, as my family copulated more with humans, we began to lose our outward Elven traits—like the pointed ears and some of

the physical characteristics. But the talent remained. The powerful affinity with mana, the connection to the elements... it persisted, even as we became more human in appearance."

Her gaze softened slightly. "That's why, even though I look mostly human, the blood of Elven royalty flows through me. It's why I'm able to control mana so easily, why I can sense the world around me differently than others."

Maya's gaze shifted toward the walls of the mansion, her expression thoughtful. "This place, the mansion... it was built by Aelion. He created it not just as a home but as a sanctuary for our family. He knew that we would need a place where we could live safely, far from the prying eyes of the Elves and the humans who might seek to uncover our secrets."

I glanced around, now seeing the mansion with a new understanding. It wasn't just a residence—it was a carefully constructed fortress of magic and protection.

Maya continued, "The formation that surrounds this territory, the one that seamlessly blends with the mana of the land? Aelion created that as well. It's designed to shield us, enhance the mana within the estate, and protect our family from external threats. It's been in place for generations, passed down and maintained, but its power still holds strong."

She smiled faintly, a hint of pride in her voice. "That's why this place feels so different from the outside world. The mana here isn't just stronger—it's more refined, more complete. Aelion made sure that our family would always have this safe haven, even as the world around us changed."

With every word Maya spoke, I noticed a subtle shift in her expression—relief. She had revealed her family's deepest secrets, things that had been carefully guarded for generations, yet now she entrusted them to me. It wasn't just the words she had spoken; it was the weight behind them, the centuries of history, of struggle and secrecy. And the fact that she had chosen to share this with me wasn't lost on me.

'It must have taken a lot,' I thought. For her to reveal all this, to trust me with the knowledge that could be detrimental to her and her family... showed just how much faith she placed in me. She had lowered the barriers that protected not just her past but her very identity.

And I knew how difficult that was. Trusting someone with such dangerous knowledge wasn't something done lightly, especially when that knowledge could change the way people viewed you or your family.

"That is all Junior.....This is the history of my family."

And I could see how she was tense waiting for my response.

'This....'

For the long time in a while, I did not know how to answer.

Chapter 572 127.1 - Answer

As Maya finished speaking, she felt an overwhelming sense of release, as though a weight she had carried for far too long had finally been lifted from her chest. The secret, the burden of her family's legacy, had been something she'd always known she needed to keep hidden. Yet, now that it was out in the open, she didn't feel regret—only relief.

Her pink eyes softened as she gazed at Astron, watching for any sign of his reaction. There was a deep vulnerability in the moment, more so than she had anticipated. Revealing her family's hidden past wasn't just about sharing information—it was about trust, about giving him a piece of herself that she had never shared with anyone else.

'He deserved to know,' she thought, her heart calming now that the truth was out. 'He's always been by my side. Always helped me....'

And even if there was risk involved, even if her family wouldn't approve of her being so open, it didn't matter to her. Astron wasn't just any person to her. He was her Junior, someone who had been there when no one else had, someone who had always seen her beyond the titles and legacies, someone who never treated her like she was something fragile.

Her mind briefly wandered to how long she had carried this secret alone. Despite the powerful name of her family and the quiet influence they wielded, it wasn't easy being an Evergreen. There were always expectations, the pressure of maintaining secrecy, and the loneliness that came with hiding parts of who she was.

But not with Astron. With him, she didn't need to hide anymore.

'He deserves to know everything.'

The silence stretched between them, and Maya could feel her heart rate increasing again, this time not out of nervousness but anticipation. Astron's purple eyes were fixed on her, not betraying much, but she could sense that he was processing everything she had said. There was a depth to his expression, a seriousness that told her he was truly listening and understanding the gravity of what she had shared.

'Will he accept me?' she wondered, though part of her already knew the answer. She had seen the sincerity in his eyes before—Astron was not the type to judge her based on her lineage. Still, the lingering fear gnawed at her, the insecurities that came with years of guarding her family's secret.

'But even if he didn't...' she mused quietly to herself, 'I wouldn't regret telling him.'

She leaned back slightly, allowing herself to relax as the weight lifted. Her gaze remained locked with his, and for the first time in a while, she felt a genuine sense of peace.

"So... that is why," Astron began, his voice calm yet filled with understanding. He let the words hang for a moment before continuing, his eyes locked onto hers. "It must have been hard, telling me everything. It takes a lot of courage and trust to reveal something like this."

Maya nodded slowly, her heart pounding, though the tension in her body was beginning to ease. She had shared her deepest secret, and instead of pulling away, Astron was meeting her with the same steady warmth he always had. It gave her a sense of security she hadn't realized she needed.

"That's right," Maya replied softly, her voice carrying the weight of what she had just revealed. She reached for her cup of tea, her hand steady, but even as she took a sip, it did little to quench the thirst she felt growing inside her. The familiar taste of the tea should have soothed her, but now, her body craved something different. Her lips felt dry, and the subtle pressure of her vampiric urges began to stir within her.

'Not now,' she silently reprimanded herself, feeling the gnawing hunger starting to creep forward now that she had let her guard down. Her fangs pressed against the inside of her lips, a reminder of what she was struggling to suppress.

Astron finally raised his head, his deep purple eyes meeting hers with an intensity that both calmed and unsettled her. His gaze seemed to search her soul, and Maya felt her breath catch as she waited for him to speak.

"Do you remember the first time we met?" Astron's voice was steady, a softness in it that made her heart skip.

Maya blinked, slightly caught off guard by the question. Her mind wandered back to that day. Of course, she remembered. "Of course," she replied, her voice warmer now. "You came to apply for the club at the academy. I remember it well."

Astron nodded. "And do you remember what happened after?"

Maya tilted her head slightly, her mind drifting to that memory. "I... gave you some chips, even though you didn't really want any," she said, the words making her smile softly. She let out a small laugh, almost involuntarily. "You looked so serious and lonely back then. I remember feeling uncomfortable seeing you like that."

"I didn't want the chips, but you didn't care. You just... handed them to me anyway," he said, his voice softer now, as though he were sharing an inside joke between them.

Maya chuckled, the memory brightening the tension that had hung over them. "You looked so stiff, Junior. I couldn't just sit there and watch you look that out of place. I thought maybe it'd help."

Astron shook his head slightly, a small smile still playing at his lips. "Every time I came to the club, you always tried to talk to me," he said, his voice tinged with amusement. "Even when I made it pretty obvious I wasn't comfortable with it."

Maya couldn't help but feel a flush of embarrassment at his words. She remembered how persistent she had been back then, always trying to break through his walls, even when he clearly wasn't ready for it. "Well," she began, rubbing the back of her neck, "I didn't want you to feel like an outsider. You had that aura of... distance around you."

Astron nodded, his eyes softening as if recalling those early days. "You were persistent, Senior," he said, a hint of teasing in his voice. "But I appreciate it now. More than I realized at the time."

Maya looked down for a moment, her heart warming at his words. The embarrassment slowly shifted to something more tender. She had always known there was something about him, something that made her want to reach out, even when he resisted.

"Do you remember," Astron continued, "the time you offered to help me with my mana?"

Maya's eyes lit up at the memory, and she couldn't help the smile that spread across her face. "How could I forget? One of the best decisions I ever made," she said, her voice soft but full of conviction.

Astron tilted his head, his expression curious. "Really?"

"Yes," Maya said, her gaze drifting as she recalled that day. "It was in the Training Grounds. You looked like you were struggling with how to use mana, even though you were going against the PhantomGlide Dummy. And I knew you had the potential... but you were just being held back."

Astron didn't interrupt.

"So, I offered to teach you how to sense and control your mana," Maya continued. "I remember you hesitated at first, but I could tell you were intrigued."

Astron tilted his head slightly, his expression shifting as though he was contemplating something. "Did you have anything to gain from that back then?" he asked, his voice quiet but probing. "You had the blood of Elven Royalty flowing in your veins and belonged to one of the strongest families in the Human Domain. Did you really need someone like me?"

Maya fell silent at his question. He was right in a way—she didn't need to help him, didn't have anything to gain from it. The truth was simple: she liked helping people. And when she saw Astron struggling, alone and distant from everyone else, she couldn't just stand by. She wanted to see him succeed, to see him grow into the person she knew he could become. That was all there was to it.

She thought about that first day, the way he had hesitated before accepting her help. The way he had been so guarded, yet still willing to let her in, just a little.

'...Helping people, isn't that good?' Maya's gaze drifted towards him again, and this time, when their eyes met, she saw something she hadn't seen before.

'Huh?' It was faint, but it was unmistakable—a smile. A smile so pure, free of the usual mask he wore. There was no coldness, no calculation in it. It was just... honest. A gentle, quiet expression that softened his usual composed demeanor.

THUMP!

Maya's heart skipped a beat. Then it started to race. The smile, so genuine and unexpected, hit her harder than anything else. Her chest tightened, and she felt a sudden rush, her heart pounding so fiercely that it seemed ready to leap out of her chest.

'What is this...?' she thought, feeling a warmth bloom inside her. Her hand instinctively reached up, pressing against her chest as if to calm the thudding. She tried to maintain her composure, but the intensity of the moment was undeniable.

That smile—it was unlike anything she had seen from Astron before.

Maya couldn't tear her eyes away from him. The smile lingered on his face, and with each passing second, the rapid beating of her heart grew more intense. She tried to steady herself, to push the overwhelming feeling back, but the warmth in her chest only expanded. Her desires, the ones she usually kept locked away, started to surface, and the urge to reach out, to touch him, became nearly unbearable.

'Calm down,' she told herself, her fingers trembling as they hovered by her side. But it was futile. The closer she felt to him, the more her resolve wavered. The thought of wrapping her arms around him, pulling him close—it seemed like the only way to calm the storm inside her. Her body ached to act on the emotions she had kept hidden for so long.

And then Astron's eyes met hers once again, that same gentle smile still on his lips. "You were the first," he said softly, his voice cutting through the tension building between them.

Maya blinked, momentarily stunned by his words.

"The first person to reach out to me," Astron continued, his eyes unwavering as he spoke. "When I was drowning myself in the darkness.....you held out a light." His expression remained calm, but there was a depth in his gaze, something that went beyond the words themselves. "That might've been something you did for everyone, just part of who you are. But to me not many had done that."

Maya felt her breath catch in her throat. The sincerity of his words, combined with that smile, made her heart thud painfully in her chest.

"T-that..." Maya stammered, her voice barely above a whisper as she tried to respond. But the words seemed to slip away, lost in the flurry of emotions building inside her. Her heart raced, her

pulse thrumming in her ears as she struggled to form a coherent sentence. It wasn't just his words—it was the sincerity behind them, the depth of his gaze, that left her completely unguarded.

Astron, noticing her struggle, continued speaking softly. "After that day, I always held onto that moment. It may not have seemed like much to you, but it meant something to me. I swore to myself that one day, I'd pay you back for what you did... for reaching out to me when no one else did."

Maya's breath caught again as she listened, the intensity of his words pressing down on her. She wanted to say something, but she was overwhelmed by the warmth spreading through her chest.

"The opportunity came when you were kidnapped by the vampire," Astron said, his voice growing quieter, almost as if recalling the memory was difficult for him. "There was no way I was going to leave you there, no matter the cost. I did everything I could to bring you back."

His eyes locked with hers again, the calmness of his expression betraying the weight of what he was saying. "And that... it brought us here, to this moment. Right now."

Maya could barely breathe as the significance of his words sank in. The pounding in her chest was unbearable, the emotions swirling inside her threatening to burst free.

She wanted to reach out to him, to say something that would match the gravity of what he was sharing, but all she could do was stare, her heart beating faster with every second.

"Do you understand now, Senior?" Astron asked, his smile soft and calm, a contrast to the intensity of the moment.

Before Maya could respond, her eyes widened as she watched his hand slowly reach toward his collar. With deliberate movements, he loosened the fabric, revealing the pale skin of his neck. His actions were steady, and as he opened his collar further, he lifted his gaze to meet hers once more, the warmth of his smile deepening.

"This," he said, his voice quiet but resolute, "this is my answer to your words."

Chapter 573 127.2 - Answer

As I loosened the collar of my shirt, revealing the pale skin of my neck, I couldn't help but feel the weight of this moment pressing down on me. The vulnerability in Maya's eyes mirrored the storm

swirling inside me. And yet, as I watched her struggle to suppress her desires, I realized something had been gnawing at me for a while.

Something that had taken root deep in my heart, quietly growing until I could no longer ignore it.

Maya... she reminded me of her. Of Estelle.

Ever since we started spending time together, I found myself seeing Estelle's traits in Maya more and more. It wasn't just her kindness or her unrelenting desire to help people, though that certainly played a part. There was something more—a deeper connection I couldn't fully comprehend until now.

'Is that why I feel this way?'

Just like Maya, Estelle had always put others first, even when it came at her own expense. She had this unshakable will to support those around her, lifting them up when they were at their lowest. Maya carried the same spirit, always offering me a light when I was trapped in darkness. I couldn't shake the thought that every time she reached out to help me, it felt like Estelle was still watching over me, guiding me through her.

And then there were those moments, the ones where Maya's mischievous expressions broke through her usual calm demeanor. It was uncanny. The way her eyes would sparkle when she was about to tease me or when she'd poke fun at my seriousness. Estelle had always been the same—able to break through my defenses with just a look, a playful smirk that made me forget, even if only for a moment, about the burden of responsibility.

'Estelle, you... would've liked her,' I thought, a strange ache forming in my chest. Would you have been proud of me for finding someone like her? For some reason, I could imagine Estelle watching us, her gaze warm, approving, even though I knew she wasn't there. But Maya's presence felt like a link to the past, a bridge between the person I had been and the person I was becoming.

I was scared. Scared of how much Maya reminded me of her.

Scared of the emotions stirring inside me, emotions I hadn't allowed myself to feel in a long time.

Estelle had been everything to me, and her loss had forced me to close off parts of my heart to shut away the pain that came with attachment. I had conditioned myself to live without those emotions, to focus only on survival and the mission ahead.

But now... now there was something more. Maya wasn't Estelle, and yet she was becoming just as important, just as irreplaceable.

I had always told myself I'd repay the kindness Maya had shown me, that I'd find a way to balance the scales. But deep down, I knew it wasn't just about repaying her. It was about the fear. The fear that if I allowed myself to care again, I might lose her too. That maybe, if I let her into my heart, I'd be setting myself up for the same kind of pain I'd experienced before.

But that was the utter disrespect that I could have towards someone.

This was what I realized after the talk I had with Dakota not long ago, one that had struck a chord deep within me.

How she was seeing someone in me.

I had been doing exactly that—seeing Estelle in Maya, instead of seeing Maya for who she truly was. And that wasn't fair. Not to Maya, and not to Estelle's memory.

Maya cared about me. I wasn't blind. She made it clear with every gesture, every time she stood by my side, even when I pushed her away. She didn't deserve to be seen as a replacement for someone else. She had her own story, her own struggles, and she had made a place for herself in my life, carving out a space that was hers alone.

If it had been me before, before everything that happened with Estelle... there was a good chance I would have taken advantage of her vulnerability. I would have let her fill that empty space in my heart, selfishly allowing myself to lean on her without offering anything in return.

But things were different now. I had changed.

In one way or another, Maya had already become a part of my life, someone irreplaceable, and I couldn't let myself disrespect that. I couldn't treat her like someone who existed just to fix the broken parts of me.

Her trust in me, the way she had opened up about her family's deepest secrets—it wasn't something I could take lightly. The amount of faith she was putting into me, the way she laid bare her vulnerabilities, made everything that much harder. Because I knew, eventually, I'd have to respond to those feelings. I couldn't keep taking without giving something in return.

Maya deserved more than that. She deserved honesty. She deserved someone who could see her for who she was, not someone haunted by the past. And if I wasn't careful, if I kept holding back, I'd be doing exactly what I feared the most—hurting someone I cared about.

That was the reason why I was doing this.

'I won't disrespect you. I won't take advantage of your trust or your vulnerability. You've given me too much for me to do that.'

If I were such a person, I would become a disgrace to the person I wanted to avenge.

As I looked into Maya's eyes, I could see something more than the emotions she was trying to suppress. With the improvements to my eyes, the mana flows became more vivid, more defined.

Her aura was swirling with conflicting energies, clashing in a battle she was waging within herself. On one side, I saw the soft green mana, familiar and gentle—her human side, the side she had fought so hard to maintain.

But on the other side, a dark red force raged against it—her vampiric urges, powerful and unrelenting.

The collision of the two forces was violent, and it became clearer to me just how much effort she was putting into holding herself back. Her muscles were tight, her hands trembling as she tried to control the impulses that threatened to overwhelm her.

I could see how hard she was clenching her jaw, how her body was straining under the weight of that internal struggle. The symptoms of withdrawal were undeniable. The fact that she was standing here, in front of me, still able to hold on, made me respect her even more.

Maya's entire body seemed locked in a state of tension, like a tightly coiled spring ready to snap. Yet, despite the clear pain she was in, she was fighting. Fighting to maintain control, fighting not to give in. I could see it all.

That was why this person deserved all the respect.

Even now, just to adorn the promise that she had made, she is doing this.

"Senior," I said softly, watching as Maya's entire body trembled with the effort to hold herself back. "It's okay. You can come."

Her reaction was immediate—her shoulders shook, and I could see the battle in her eyes. She took in a sharp breath, her hands curling into fists at her sides. "I don't... I don't want to be a slave to this," she whispered, her voice laced with desperation. "I don't want to give in, Junior... I can't."

I smiled faintly, the gesture soft, understanding. "Nothing in this world works that way, Senior. You've done more than enough already. No one can reach the skies from where they are in just one step." Her gaze locked with mine, her pink eyes filled with the weight of her internal struggle. I could see the doubt in her expression, the fear of what might happen if she let herself go. But behind that fear, there was also exhaustion, the kind that comes from fighting too long without reprieve.

A single tear slipped down her cheek, catching the soft light of the room as it fell. She took one hesitant step forward, her voice trembling. "Is it really... okay?"

"It is," I replied, my tone calm and steady. "Contrary to before, I'm a lot stronger now. You can drink freely, as much as you need."

Her lips quivered at my words, but I could see the hesitation slowly fading from her eyes. She took another step toward me, her movements careful, as if still afraid to lose control. But I didn't move back. I didn't flinch. I stayed exactly where I was, meeting her gaze with the same calm, unwavering resolve I'd shown her since the beginning.

"You may come, Senior," I said softly. "It is really fine."

Maya closed the final distance between us, her trembling hand reaching up to rest against my chest, just over my heart. The thudding of my pulse echoed in my ears, but I stayed steady. For her. I wouldn't let her fall into the abyss alone.

Her tears kept falling, but I saw the relief beginning to break through the fear. She leaned into me, and as her fangs grazed the skin of my neck, I could feel her struggle easing, the weight finally lifting off her shoulders.

The moment her fangs pierced my skin, I braced myself for the familiar sting, the sharp pain I had grown accustomed to each time she fed. But this time... it was different.

Instead of pain, a strange warmth spread through my neck. It was almost... pleasant. The sensation was foreign but not unpleasant. As she drank from me, I felt a wave of calm wash over me, like a gentle tide easing the tension in my muscles. It didn't hurt. In fact, it felt good—almost too good.

I could feel my blood being drawn into her, each gulp slow and deliberate, her hunger evident. But instead of feeling drained or weak as I usually did, something was changing inside me. My body was responding in ways I didn't expect.

'What is this?' I wondered, my mind sharpening as I focused inward.

I felt a strange surge—my mana shifting, flowing toward the source of the bite. I realized what was happening: my body was adapting. The [Everchanging Glyph] had activated, working in real-time to optimize the situation. My mana began to pump more vigorously, flooding my veins with energy as it counterbalanced the blood loss.

Maya drank deeply, her breaths ragged as she finally allowed herself to give in. Her body pressed closer against mine, the tension in her limbs slowly melting away. The desperation I had sensed before was fading, replaced by something more primal, more instinctual.

And yet, even as she fed, I wasn't growing weaker. My mana surged to fill the gap, ensuring that no matter how much blood she took, my body would keep up. It was strange, almost surreal—the sensation of my life force being drained while my power only seemed to increase in response.

I could feel the subtle pull of the [Everchanging Glyph], the way it drew upon the latent energy within me, adapting and compensating for every drop of blood Maya took. It was as though my body had been designed for this, engineered to handle even the most draining of situations.

My vision flickered for a moment, a brief haze overtaking my senses before everything sharpened again. Maya's grip on me tightened, her nails digging into my chest as she continued to drink, but I could sense her calming down, her breathing becoming less frantic. The red and green forces inside her were still battling, but now, they seemed to be finding a balance. My blood—no, my mana—was helping her.

'Really...'

Her eyes were closed as she fed, her lips pressed firmly against my neck, but I could feel her relief in the way she held onto me. She wasn't fighting anymore. She was letting herself heal, letting go of the struggle she had carried for so long.

'Is it the time?'

Now that she had revealed her origins to me, wouldn't it be fair if I were to do the same.

Chapter 574 172.3 - Answer

"This...this is my answer to your words."

As Maya approached Astron, her heart pounded so fiercely she was certain he could hear it. The weight of her confession, the release of her family's most guarded secret, still hung heavy in the air between them. It was out now—no taking it back.

Yet, instead of the fear she had anticipated, a strange calm had settled within her. She had finally told him. And now, as she stood there, trembling with the effort to suppress the hunger gnawing at her core, she realized just how deeply she had come to rely on Astron.

Her pink eyes flicked up to meet his, searching his expression for any hint of judgment or rejection. But what she found instead was something that startled her—a softness, an understanding that reached deeper than words.

Astron had always been composed, distant in a way that made it hard to decipher his true emotions. But now, as she stood on the precipice of losing control, his gaze seemed to ground her.

The familiar pull of her vampiric urges had been growing, intensifying ever since she had opened up to him. It was as if, in revealing her family's secret, the walls she had built to keep her hunger at bay had crumbled. Her fangs pressed painfully against her lips, a constant reminder of what she was—of what she could never fully escape.

The thirst was becoming unbearable, and the more she tried to suppress it, the harder it fought back.

'Why does he still stand there, calm as ever, even after all I've told him?'

A single tear slid down her cheek, unbidden, as she fought against her instincts. She had told herself she wouldn't give in, that she wouldn't become a slave to the cravings that threatened to consume her. But standing here, so close to him, it was all she could do to hold back.

She didn't want to hurt him, didn't want to give in to the part of herself that she had always feared. But Astron, his voice as calm and steady as ever, had seen through her resolve.

"Senior, it's okay. You can come."

The words sent a shock through her, breaking whatever fragile barrier she had managed to hold in place. Her shoulders shook, her breath catching as the weight of her hunger collided with the truth she had confessed. How could he say that? How could he offer himself so willingly, knowing what she was, what she could do to him?

Her hand trembled as she reached out, fingers brushing lightly against his chest. The warmth of his skin beneath her touch was both comforting and terrifying. She didn't want to give in, didn't want to lose control, but Astron's steady presence was unraveling her resistance. The urge to feed was too strong, too overwhelming to ignore any longer.

"I don't... I don't want to be a slave to this," she whispered, her voice barely audible over the pounding in her ears. "I don't want to give in, Junior... I can't."

But even as she said the words, she knew she was losing the battle. The hunger was all-consuming, and no matter how hard she tried to fight it, she was losing control. The darkness inside her was winning.

And then, Astron's voice broke through her spiraling thoughts, steady and unwavering. "Nothing in this world works that way, Senior. You've done more than enough already. No one can reach the

skies from where they are in just one step." Her heart clenched at his words. Could it really be okay? Could she really trust herself, trust him, to allow this? She had fought so hard to maintain her humanity, to resist the pull of her vampiric instincts. But standing here, with Astron in front of her, his calm acceptance washing over her, the resistance she had held onto for so long was crumbling.

A tear slipped down her cheek as she took another step toward him, her body trembling. "Is it really... okay?" she asked, her voice cracking with the weight of her desperation.

"It is," he replied, his voice gentle but firm. "Contrary to before, I'm a lot stronger now. You can drink freely, as much as you need."

His words sank into her, slowly easing the fear that had been constricting her chest. Her hand, still trembling, reached up to his neck, her fingers brushing lightly against his collar.

The fabric loosened easily under her touch, revealing the pale skin of his neck. She could feel his pulse beneath her fingers, steady and calm, unlike the storm raging inside her.

Her lips quivered, her fangs aching as they grazed his skin. She could hear his heartbeat, steady and reassuring, as if telling her it was all right to let go.

The thirst was unbearable now, her body screaming for relief, but still, she hesitated. She really didn't want to hurt him. She really didn't want to lose control.

But Astron didn't flinch. He stood firm, his eyes locked on hers, offering her a calm she desperately needed. "You may come, Senior," he whispered his voice like a lifeline pulling her back from the edge. "It is really fine."

His eyes, which were normally empty and cold, now looked more tranquil and more dependable.

More than ever, she could see the calmness of the stars among them as if she was looking into the cosmos itself.

'Why?'

Even if she wanted to ask, she knew one thing.

That this was all she needed.

With one final, trembling breath, Maya leaned in. Her fangs pierced his skin, and the taste of his blood filled her senses. The warmth of it washed over her like a balm, soothing the burning hunger that had been clawing at her insides.

'Just....'

Maya's fangs sank deeper, and immediately, the rush of warmth spread through her like a fire in the dead of winter. She hadn't realized how much she'd needed this until the first drop of his blood hit her tongue. It had been a month since she last fed like this, and yet, it felt like an eternity. The blood from the bags couldn't compare—not even close.

'Ah... Really...'

Her mind spiraled as the taste overwhelmed her senses. It was richer and more potent than ever before. She could feel the power in every drop as if Astron's strength had infused his very essence into his blood. It was intoxicating, far beyond anything she had ever experienced.

'What... what is this?'

Her thoughts were hazy, but she knew something was different. She had tasted his blood before, but never like this. The flavor had changed—grown stronger, more vibrant as if it carried a new depth of power she hadn't noticed before. Was it his strength that had evolved? Or was there something else... something she couldn't yet place?

As she drank more, the taste only seemed to get better, an ecstasy blooming inside her that dulled the edges of her restraint. Each gulp was a release, a surge of relief that washed away the tension she had been holding onto for too long. It wasn't just physical—it was as if her very soul was finding peace.

'Too long... It's been too long...'

Her mind echoed the thought, the months of restraint and struggle dissolving in the face of this moment. She felt her body easing, the tightness in her muscles unwinding as the familiar warmth

spread through her limbs. The hunger that had gnawed at her, the ever-present need that she had fought to suppress, was finally being sated.

And the more she took, the better it tasted.

Her heart raced, pounding in time with his as she drank deeply, letting herself fall into the sensation. She knew she shouldn't be enjoying it this much, but it was impossible to stop. His blood was like nothing else she'd ever tasted—an elixir that filled the void inside her, made her feel alive in a way she hadn't felt in so long.

'Why does it taste like this?'

She didn't understand it. The blood from the bags was always enough to keep her from losing control, but this... This was different. It was richer, purer, and it flowed through her like a current of life. Was it because he had grown stronger? Had his power infused his blood with something new, something more potent?

Or was it something deeper?

Her hand gripped his shoulder, nails digging in lightly as she continued to drink, her body trembling from the sensation of it all. The ecstasy of the moment was almost too much to bear.

She felt that these feelings in her heart were growing stronger, a bond that went beyond the physical act of feeding.

It was as if, with each drop, she was losing more and more.

'This is... this is dangerous...'

She knew it was.

It was so dangerous that she knew at this point she was on the brink of insanity.

She couldn't stop herself now, even if she wanted to. The hunger, the ecstasy—it was all too much, and she had already crossed the point of no return. Every drop of his blood bound her closer to him,

filling her with something more than just satisfaction. It was as if a piece of her was being exchanged for every moment she indulged.

She was losing herself.

'I can't... I can't go back now.'

That thought echoed in her mind, sinking deeper with each passing second. The bond they shared, it wasn't just a physical connection. No, this was something far more dangerous, something that went beyond hunger or survival. She could feel it—her heart, her soul, craving not just his blood but him. The very essence of who he was had become essential to her, a part of her being that she could no longer ignore.

The blood in the bags? They were nothing compared to this. Nothing in this world could compare. No matter what she tried, nothing else would satisfy her like this.

Unless she was with him.

Maya's grip on Astron's shoulder tightened, her nails digging deeper into his flesh, the tremors in her body growing more pronounced as the overwhelming emotions consumed her. There was no escaping it now. He had become her anchor, her lifeline, and without him, she would be lost.

'I'm already... too far gone.'

Her eyes fluttered shut, but her other senses remained sharp. She could smell it—the faint, familiar scent of lavender that always surrounded him. It had always comforted her, a subtle reminder of his presence, but now, it only intensified the connection she felt. The scent mingled with the taste of his blood, creating a heady mix that drove her even deeper into the abyss of desire.

For a brief moment, Maya allowed herself to sink into the sensation, her body trembling with every pull of his blood, every beat of his heart echoing in her ears. She could hear the rhythm of it, steady and unyielding, guiding her further into this dangerous territory. Her lips pressed tighter against his neck, savoring the warmth that spread through her veins.

But then... she opened her eyes, just slightly.

Her gaze fell upon his pale skin, still pulsing with life beneath her lips. She could see it—his skin moving faintly with each heartbeat, the blood flowing just beneath the surface. The sight sent a shiver through her, a reminder of how close she was to the edge.

Her lips trembled as she realized the gravity of her actions. She wasn't just feeding. She was consuming something far deeper than blood. Something that, once taken, could never be given back.

'This is dangerous,' she thought again, her mind racing even as her body refused to stop. But no matter how much she tried to pull herself back, it was already too late. She had passed the point of return.

Without him... without this connection... there would be no peace for her. No relief. Nothing else could fill the emptiness inside her heart.

Nothing but 'Him'.

Chapter 575 127.4 - Answer

As Maya continued to drink, the overwhelming sensation flooded every part of her. The taste, the warmth, the steady pulse of life under her lips—it all blurred together in a haze of need. Each pull of his blood soothed the burning hunger inside her, but it was more than just sustenance. It was a connection, an intimacy that she had never felt with anyone else.

She wanted more.

With every heartbeat, her body trembled, the primal urges threatening to consume her completely. But slowly, as the rush of adrenaline coursed through her, the intensity began to soften. She could feel herself growing more satisfied, the gnawing hunger inside her easing just enough for her mind to clear. The tension in her muscles loosened, her grip on his shoulder lightening as the all-consuming need finally began to subside.

It wasn't complete—there was still a part of her that craved more, that would always crave more. But for now, she had taken enough. The wild storm of her instincts faded, leaving only the quiet hum of satisfaction.

And then... reality hit her.

Her lungs burned. She had been so lost in the sensation, in the taste, that she hadn't realized how long she had gone without breathing. Her body, now recovering from the intense rush, protested violently, her chest tightening in response.

'Breathe, Maya! Breathe!'

With a sharp gasp, she pulled her teeth from Astron's neck, her lips trembling as the cool air hit them.

"Haaaaah.....Haaaaah....."

Her fangs retracted as she stumbled backward, her body doubling over as she sucked in ragged, desperate breaths.

It felt like she had been underwater, drowning in that ecstasy, and now—finally—her lungs were screaming for air. She clutched her chest, each breath more labored than the last, as if her body was struggling to catch up with what had just happened.

Her throat ached, her entire body shivering as the weight of everything came crashing down on her.

'How long was I...?'

She forced herself to raise her head, still gasping for air, and her eyes locked onto Astron. Her breath hitched as she took in the sight of him—calm, composed, and utterly unfazed. His neck still bore the faint marks where her fangs had pierced his skin, but beyond that, he looked completely undisturbed.

And then she saw it—the faintest smile on his lips. A hint of amusement in his deep purple eyes, as if what had just transpired was nothing more than a casual occurrence. It was almost as though he hadn't felt a thing, as though her feeding on him had been nothing more than an inconvenience.

A mix of embarrassment and confusion washed over her. She had been so consumed, so lost in the moment, yet here he was, standing perfectly still, offering her that slight smile as if it had been nothing at all.

"You could've just taken a breather," Astron said, his voice calm, laced with the same faint amusement that his expression carried.

Maya blinked, her breath still ragged, trying to grasp what he was saying. For a moment, she could only stare at him, her mind reeling from the absurdity of the situation.

A breather?

She had been on the brink of losing herself entirely, drowning in the depths of her vampiric instincts, and he was telling her to just take a breather?

Without thinking, Maya pushed her head into his chest, her hands gripping his shoulders for support. The embarrassment of the moment washed over her, the absurdity of his words only adding to the swirl of emotions. Her face was flushed, her heart pounding not just from the feeding but from the realization of how out of control she had become.

His chest was solid beneath her cheek, the steady rhythm of his heartbeat grounding her in a way she desperately needed. She let her breathing slow, the rise and fall of his chest syncing with her own ragged breaths as she slowly began to calm down. The world felt smaller here, tucked into the quiet space between them.

But then she felt it—something soft yet firm, warm but with a strange, chilling sensation that sent a sudden shiver racing down her spine.

'His hand....'

It rested gently on her back, the warmth of his touch contrasting with the coolness of the room around them. His fingers were steady and reassuring, but the chill that ran through her body wasn't just from the touch. It was the way his hand felt as though it belonged there, the way his presence seemed to anchor her, keeping her from spiraling further.

Maya's breath hitched, her grip on his shoulders tightening as her body reacted instinctively. She didn't move, though. She stayed there, her face buried in his chest, her mind swirling with confusion, relief, and something else she couldn't quite name.

The shiver that coursed through her only intensified as his hand remained on her back, offering silent support.

Astron's voice broke through the quiet, calm and steady as always. "Is it better now? Are you feeling more comfortable?"

Maya felt the flush in her cheeks deepen. He always had this way of making her feel like a child after moments like these—vulnerable and dependent. As though her need for his blood turned her into someone fragile, someone needing constant reassurance. Her chest tightened with a mix of embarrassment and frustration.

She buried her face deeper into his chest, hiding from his gaze, but the warmth from his touch and the sound of his heartbeat were unavoidable. The steady rhythm reminded her that he was still there, unaffected, as if the entire ordeal had been nothing more than a routine occurrence. Meanwhile, she was left grappling with the whirlwind of emotions that followed every time she gave in to her vampiric urges.

'Why does he always have to ask that?' she thought, her fingers clutching his shirt. 'Like I'm some child who can't handle herself.'

It wasn't that she didn't appreciate his concern, but each time they went through this, the aftermath always felt the same—humiliating.

Once the haze of hunger cleared, she was left with the stark reality of what had happened. The intimacy of the moment, the way she had lost control, the way he remained unaffected... it all came crashing down on her.

Every time, she remembered how she had clung to him, how she had let her instincts take over. And every time, she wished she could handle it better, that she could suppress those feelings, those urges. But she couldn't, not with him.

"Y-yeah," she finally mumbled, her voice muffled against his chest. "I'm fine now..."

But the truth was, even though the hunger had subsided, the embarrassment lingered. It was always like this—the calm after the storm, where she found herself feeling exposed, raw, and more than a little ashamed.

'I hate this,' she thought, her fingers still gripping his shirt. 'I hate how I feel afterward... like I've lost all control.'

Maya's fingers unconsciously began to move, trailing along the fabric of Astron's shirt, tracing the lines of his slender frame. His body was firm yet smooth beneath her touch, the warmth radiating through her fingertips as she let her hands explore the curve of his chest, the subtle definition of his muscles.

She didn't know why she was doing it, why her hands had a mind of their own in that moment, but something about the closeness, the lingering sensation of his blood still thrumming through her, made it hard to stop.

"Senior?" Astron's voice came, breaking through her thoughts, though there was something different in his tone. It wasn't the usual calm. It was softer, almost uncertain.

Maya froze for a moment, her fingers resting just above his heart. Slowly, she lifted her head, peering up at him through her lashes. He was looking down at her, his expression still composed but... there was a slight shift. A faint reaction, almost imperceptible, but she could see it in his eyes, the way they held something deeper—something honest.

It wasn't a smile exactly, not the kind he usually wore, but there was a gentleness in his gaze that made her heart skip a beat.

'What is this?' she wondered, her own emotions swirling in confusion.

Her hands, however, didn't stop. They moved again, softly tracing the outline of his torso. "It's... lean," she whispered, her voice barely audible, as if she were speaking more to herself than to him. Her fingers brushed against the smooth skin beneath his shirt, feeling the subtle strength hidden beneath his calm exterior.

Astron's breath hitched slightly, though he didn't pull away.

'So this is what a male body feels like,' Maya thought to herself, her fingers moving instinctively over the lean muscles of Astron's chest. Her touch was light, almost tentative, but she could feel the warmth radiating from him, feel the steady beat of his heart beneath her hand.

It was strange—her own heart was racing, her body feeling suddenly hot, as if the very air between them had thickened.

"It's... weird," she mumbled softly, her voice barely audible.

Her mind was a whirl of confusion. Why was her heart pounding so fast? Why did her body feel like it was on fire?

She wondered if he felt the same. Was his heart racing, too? Did he feel the strange tension between them, the same heat that seemed to coil tighter with every second?

SHIVER! As her hand wandered lower, she felt Astron shiver slightly beneath her touch, a subtle reaction that sent a jolt of realization through her. He was feeling it. Her fingers had brushed a sensitive spot, and his body had reacted instinctively.

"Gulp...."

She hesitated for a moment, her breath catching in her throat. Slowly, she raised her head, her gaze locking with his. Those deep purple eyes, usually so calm and composed, now seemed to hold something else—something more vulnerable, more honest.

Her eyes traced the sharp lines of his chiseled face, the smooth curve of his chin. His skin, pale as the moon, seemed to glow in the soft light, and his lips...

Her heart skipped a beat. His lips were red, almost like roses, and as she stared at them, an unfamiliar desire stirred inside her. It wasn't the thirst for blood, the hunger that usually consumed her around him. No, this was something else. Something more... primal.

She wanted to bite them but not to feed them. She wanted to taste them for an entirely different reason.

Her body grew even hotter, the fire spreading through her veins, and she felt her breath hitch in her chest. Her eyes never left his lips, and before she could stop herself, a word slipped from her mouth, a whisper that sounded so foreign it took her by surprise.

"Junior...~"

Her voice, sultry and soft, felt strange in her own ears like it didn't belong to her.

His head approached, her body moving on its own. She felt uncertain yet firm as if she was possessed.

"..."

He did not answer, but he also did not move.

And that alone gave her the answer.

Chapter 576 127.5 - Answer

"Junior...~"

Maya's hand pressed firmly against his chest, feeling the solid warmth of his body beneath her fingers as she slowly began to rise.

Each movement felt deliberate, or perhaps time itself had slowed, stretching the moment between them. Her heart raced in her chest, the sound of her own pulse echoing in her ears, but she couldn't stop now. She was drawn to him, to the heat, to the closeness.

Her eyes remained locked on his, watching every flicker of emotion in those deep purple depths. Astron still hadn't moved, but he wasn't pulling away either. His breath, steady and soft, brushed against her face, a gentle reminder of how little distance was left between them.

'Is this really happening?' she thought, a part of her still in disbelief. But the fire inside her burned too fiercely now, guiding her toward him, filling her with a need she didn't fully understand but couldn't deny.

Her breath hitched as the space between them grew smaller, his lips now just a whisper away. She could feel his warmth, could see the faint rise and fall of his chest beneath her palm, and with every passing second, the world seemed to shrink around them, leaving only the two of them, suspended in this strange, intoxicating moment.

She hesitated, just for a heartbeat, her body trembling as uncertainty flickered through her mind. But that hesitation quickly faded as her gaze dropped to his lips once more, the desire bubbling up inside her too strong to resist.

'Just a little closer...'

Her body moved on its own, closing the final gap. She could feel his breath mingling with hers now, warm and steady. Her fingers curled slightly against his chest, seeking some kind of anchor as she inched closer, her lips finally hovering over his, the temptation overwhelming her every thought.

This wasn't about blood. This was about him.

Maya's heart pounded in her chest, her fingers curling tighter against his shirt as she finally closed the distance. Her lips pressed against his, and for a moment, time seemed to stop. The sensation was unlike anything she had ever felt before—a mix of familiar and foreign, soft and smooth, yet filled with an intensity that made her entire body tingle.

The warmth of his lips against hers sent a surge of electricity through her, the touch both gentle and firm, and she couldn't help but melt into the sensation. It was delicate at first, a hesitant meeting, but as the seconds stretched on, she realized just how much she had longed for this, how much she had needed this.

Her mind swirled, lost in the overwhelming flood of emotions and sensations. It wasn't just the physical connection; it was the emotional weight of everything between them—the trust, the unspoken bond, the desire she had been holding back for so long.

She had thought this would be different from the usual hunger, but now she realized it was deeper, far more consuming than she had anticipated. The softness of his lips, the way they felt against hers, made her heart race even faster, her body instinctively leaning closer, wanting more.

'This feeling... I love it,' she thought, the realization hitting her as she kissed him again, this time with more certainty, her lips moving gently but with increasing urgency.

There was something different about the way his lips felt beneath hers—smooth, yes, but also full of life in a way that sent a shiver of excitement through her. It was as if she could feel the pulse of his energy flowing through the connection, the warmth of his being infusing every moment they shared.

With each movement, each gentle press of her lips, her desires surged higher. His taste was unlike anything she had ever experienced—rich, almost intoxicating. It was as if his very essence had

seeped into the kiss, filling her with a sense of vitality that only heightened her longing. The feeling was beyond anything she could compare it to; it was more than just physical attraction. It was the culmination of everything they had been through together, the unspoken bond they had shared, now expressed in this one intimate act.

Her body responded instinctively, the heat rising within her as the kiss deepened, her fingers gripping his shirt tighter as if to hold onto the moment. Every touch of their lips sent another wave of desire crashing over her, the craving intensifying with every second.

"Why does it feel like this?" she wondered, a part of her mind barely able to grasp how something so simple could evoke such a powerful reaction.

The more she tasted him, the more she wanted. It was almost too much to bear, the intensity of it overwhelming her senses. She could feel her heart racing, the heat in her body building, pushing her closer and closer to the edge of her restraint. The kiss became a lifeline, a way to express all the feelings she had kept locked away for so long.

Her breath quickened, her body leaning further into his as her lips moved with increasing urgency, the need for him growing stronger with every passing second.

Maya pulled her lips away, gasping for breath as the intensity of the moment left her breathless. Her body trembled with the surge of emotions and desires swirling within her, and she instinctively looped her arms around Astron's neck, holding onto him for support. Her heart pounded against her chest, her breathing erratic as she locked eyes with him.

"Junior... Junior... Junior..." she whispered, her voice a mix of longing and desperation. The words tumbled out of her lips, almost like a chant, as if she were lost in the haze of her own emotions, unable to stop. Her eyes searched his for any sign of rejection, but there was none. He remained still, watching her with that same calmness he always carried. Yet, there was something different—a quiet understanding, a silent acceptance that fueled her even more.

The fact that he wasn't pulling away, that he wasn't stopping her, made something inside her flutter. She liked it. She liked that he wasn't rejecting her, that he was allowing her to act on the desires she had kept hidden for so long.

"Haaah.....I really....."

Without thinking, without hesitation, she pressed her lips against his again, but this time, there was no gentleness.

SMOOCH!

"Hmm.....~"

Her lips moved instinctively, driven by an overwhelming need she didn't fully understand. She kissed him harder, her hands pulling him closer as her body responded to the fire burning inside her.

Her mouth found his lower lip, and she sucked on it, savoring the taste of him. There was a hint of the tea they had just shared, a familiar flavor that mixed with something more—something uniquely him. It was intoxicating, filling her senses with more than just the taste. There were layers to it, layers of him that she hadn't expected to find. It was as if she could feel his essence, his strength, his calm, all wrapped up in that simple act.

The kiss deepened as her movements became more frantic, her body moving on pure instinct. She had never kissed anyone before, never even seen how it was supposed to be done, but none of that mattered now. She was driven by something primal, something far beyond reason.

Her lips traveled across his, tasting every inch, her breaths ragged and uneven. She wanted more—no, she needed more. Her heart pounded in her ears as she kissed him again and again, each movement filled with the raw intensity of her desire.

Maya moaned softly against his lips, her voice muffled as the words "more, more, more" escaped her in breathless whispers. Each kiss, each taste of him, only seemed to intensify the fire within her. She felt lost, her body moving entirely on instinct, guided by nothing but the overwhelming need that had taken control.

And then she felt it—his hand on her back, pulling her closer.

At first, it seemed like a gentle gesture, a way to support her from losing her balance as her body leaned heavily into him. But the moment his hand pressed against her back, something changed. A surge of sensitivity rushed through her body, her nerves alive and sparking at the simple touch.

Her body reacted instantly, a soft gasp escaping her lips as she squirmed slightly against him. She wasn't sure why, but the sensation of his hand, warm and firm against her back, sent shivers through

her. It wasn't just the kiss anymore. His touch, the way he held her so close, was igniting something deeper, something more primal than she had anticipated.

Her breath hitched, her body betraying her as she pressed closer to him, her skin tingling with every movement. The steady pressure of his hand only seemed to heighten the sensitivity coursing through her, making it harder for her to keep control. She couldn't stop the way her body responded, couldn't stop the heat pooling in her core.

"A-Astron..." she moaned softly, the sound barely audible, but filled with a mix of confusion and desire.

She squirmed again, her body pressing against his, her hands clutching onto him for dear life as the intensity of the moment continued to build. She had never felt anything like this before—this aching, all-consuming need that left her trembling in his arms.

"Senior?" Astron's voice came, a note of surprise slipping into his usually composed tone. His reaction was unexpected, as if he hadn't anticipated her response, and the sound of his voice caused Maya to pause for the briefest of moments.

But that hesitation quickly evaporated as her body continued to pulse with desire, her skin still tingling from his touch. She didn't want to stop. She couldn't. Not now. Not when she had already crossed so many boundaries she didn't know existed within herself.

"Please... don't stop," she whispered, her voice trembling, pleading. She didn't care how Astron's surprised gaze lingered on her or how his expression seemed caught between confusion and something else. In that moment, nothing else mattered except the overwhelming need coursing through her.

Her breath quickened as she gathered her strength, her body moving before her mind could fully process the action. With a sudden burst of energy, she pushed him backward, forcing him down onto the ground.

Astron's body hit the floor with a dull thud, but the fall was nothing for someone like him. For both of them, superhumans in all but name, the impact was barely noticeable. Yet the movement itself carried with it a heavy weight, as if something inside her had snapped, and now there was no turning back.

She straddled him, her breathing uneven as she stared down at him.

"Haaaah.....Junior, it is all your fault."

Her heart was racing, her hands pressed against his chest for support as her gazes seemed to turn red.

Her expression, her ragged breath.

"It is all your fault."

Chapter 577 127.6 - Answer

"It is all your fault."

Maya whispered again, her breath ragged as she leaned over Astron. Her hands pressed firmly against his chest, her body trembling with the emotions she could no longer contain. Her eyes, wild with desire, bore into his, her face flushed as she fought to make sense of everything she was feeling. "You... you always do this."

Astron's gaze remained locked on hers, still holding that flicker of surprise, but there was something else there, too—something she couldn't place. But it didn't matter. Not now.

"You don't even know, do you?" she continued, her voice low and strained. "How you always make my heart race. Every little thing you do—every gesture, every word—" Her fingers curled into his shirt as she leaned closer, her body nearly trembling with the force of her emotions. "Even when you don't mean to, you make me feel this way... You make my heart flutter."

Maya's breath hitched again, her body trembling as she pressed even closer to Astron. Her fingers gripped his shirt tighter, her eyes dark with the whirlwind of emotions swirling inside her.

"And I know," she whispered, her voice barely audible, yet it carried the weight of her thoughts. "I'm probably not the only one you do this to, am I?"

Astron's expression shifted slightly, but he still remained silent, his gaze unwavering, yet his silence spoke volumes.

"Like that Emberheart girl..." Maya continued, her tone filled with a mixture of frustration and vulnerability. "I'm not stupid, Junior. I may not always show it, but I see things. I notice the way people react to you." She paused, her fingers digging into his chest slightly, her heart racing faster with every word she spoke. "Especially her."

The name felt heavy on her tongue, like a bitter truth she had been avoiding.

Maya's instincts were rarely wrong. She wasn't oblivious to the subtle tensions between people, and she could feel the way Irina Emberheart looked at Astron. That wasn't just casual interest—it was something deeper, something more complicated.

"I saw the way she looked at you," Maya said, her voice trembling now as if her emotions were threatening to spill over. "The way she reacted. I know there's something between you two. Maybe it's from before we met, or maybe... it's something growing now. But I'm not blind."

She closed her eyes for a brief moment, trying to steady herself, but the vulnerability and the intensity of the moment made it impossible. "You probably don't even realize it yourself, do you? How you pull people in without even trying. How you make people feel this way..."

Her words trailed off, her heart aching. Despite the heat of her desire, the overwhelming need, there was a part of her that felt unsure. She didn't want to be just another person caught in his orbit, lost to the same gravitational pull that seemed to surround him.

Maya's heart pounded in her chest, each beat reverberating through her entire body as her gaze locked onto his. Her fingers trembled slightly, but her resolve didn't waver. She wasn't like the others. She couldn't be.

'I'm different,' she thought, her eyes searching his face for any sign that he understood. 'I'm the one you belong to. You're mine.'

The thought settled deep in her mind, cementing itself with each passing second. No matter what happened, no matter who came into his life—he could only belong to her. There was no turning back now, not for her. She had already crossed a line that no one else could follow, and there was no escape for either of them. Not now.

As she looked at him, her breath caught in her throat, her eyes trailing slowly over him. From his intense, unreadable gaze, down to his chiseled jaw, and finally to his lips—those smooth, slightly parted lips.

A new desire stirred in her chest, a need far more intense than anything she had felt before. It wasn't just the desire to kiss him again or to feel his warmth against her skin. No, this was something deeper. Primal.

She wanted to mark him. To leave a trace on him that no one else could. Something that would show the world—and him—that he belonged to her. That no one could take him away.

'Mine... only mine.'

The words echoed in her mind, and before she could stop herself, she leaned down, her breath grazing his lips. Her heart raced as the temptation grew stronger, her fingers curling into his shirt as if to anchor herself to him. She could feel the overwhelming need surging inside her, demanding that she claim him in a way that would leave no doubt.

Her lips hovered just above his, but instead of kissing him, she shifted her head slightly, her gaze locked on his neck. A part of her knew it was irrational, that this feeling was consuming her too quickly, but she didn't care. She couldn't stop herself.

Maya's lips brushed against the skin of his neck, her fangs itching to bite, but this time... this time it wasn't for blood. This time, it was to leave a mark, a symbol of possession. She pressed her lips softly against his skin, leaving the faintest trace of warmth. The desire to bite, to leave something more permanent, surged again, but she held back, her control just barely hanging on.

"You're mine," she whispered, her voice breathy, trembling with the intensity of her emotions. "No one can take you away from me... no one."

Maya's breath quickened as her lips hovered over his neck, her body trembling with the intensity of her emotions. She needed more—needed confirmation of everything she was feeling, everything she had already decided. Her instincts screamed at her, urging her to claim him, to make him hers in every way.

Without fully realizing it, her fangs pressed into his skin, gently at first, but then deeper as her mana surged, uncontrolled. A strange sensation rippled through her as her red-colored mana flared, pouring into her fangs and sinking into his skin. She didn't understand it, didn't question it—she only followed the instinct that demanded her to continue.

Her lips sealed over the bite, and she sucked in a small portion of his blood, the taste once again rich and intoxicating. But this time, something was different. The moment the blood touched her tongue, a wave of unfamiliar energy coursed through her, jolting her senses. It was as if her mana had reacted to his, intertwining in a way that felt both exhilarating and terrifying.

As the strange sensation settled, Astron's body tensed beneath her. He shook slightly, his chest rising as he took in a deep breath, his hand coming up to rest on the back of her head. The gesture was gentle, almost comforting, yet it sent shivers down her spine.

Before she could make sense of what had just happened, Astron's voice broke through the haze, his words calm but filled with something deeper. "Senior... do you know why I came to this academy?"

Maya froze, her fangs still lightly embedded in his skin. The question was unexpected, like a cold splash of water in the midst of the heat that had consumed her. She blinked, her mind struggling to process the sudden shift in the atmosphere. Slowly, she withdrew her fangs, her lips parting from his neck as she stared at him in confusion.

His purple eyes gazed at her, calm but intense, as if he was about to reveal something important—something that had been hidden beneath the surface all along. The rush of desire she had felt moments ago was still there, lingering just beneath the surface, but now, it was mingled with curiosity.

'He.....' Maya's thoughts swirled, her breath still shallow as the remnants of her earlier desire clung to her. But Astron's question pulled her back to reality, grounding her in a way she hadn't expected. She knew, deep down, that he wasn't like the other students at the academy. Even before their bond had grown this close, she had sensed something different about him—something inherent, something that set him apart from the rest.

She had always known there was more to him than what he let others see. His magic, his mana—it wasn't like anyone else's. The way it moved, the way it felt in the air around him, it was... otherworldly. Even if his raw power wasn't the greatest, his potential, his control—it was undeniable. There was something within him that made him more than just a student, just as she wasn't a normal one either.

And though she had always been curious—endlessly curious—she had never pressed him for answers. She trusted him. Trusted that one day, when he was ready, he would reveal everything to her. That's why she had been patient, holding back her questions, even though the mystery surrounding him had gnawed at her for as long as she could remember.

"....."

She stayed silent as she knew that this was his moment to speak. She did not want to interrupt him since she knew it was not easy to reveal things like this.

Astron remained still beneath Maya's trembling form, his eyes steady and unreadable as he carefully considered his words. The weight of what he was about to reveal hung heavy in the air, thick with tension and anticipation.

Maya's breath, still shallow and ragged from her earlier outburst, slowly began to steady as she sensed the shift in his demeanor. Her fangs had barely retracted from his neck, the faint sting of her bite lingering, but now the atmosphere between them had changed. It was no longer charged with the intensity of desire, but something deeper. Something much darker.

After a few beats of silence, Astron finally spoke, his voice calm, yet filled with a cold resolve that sent a chill through Maya's spine. "Senior... the reason I came to the academy wasn't just to learn or to improve my skills. It wasn't for some noble purpose, or to protect anyone."

He paused, his purple eyes boring into hers, unreadable and distant, as if he was letting her into a part of his world that had been locked away until now. "I came to this academy for revenge."

Maya's breath caught in her throat. Her earlier heat of emotions cooled instantly as those words sank in, the revelation hitting her like a bucket of ice water. Revenge? Her mind reeled, trying to grasp the full meaning of his confession. It wasn't what she expected—not by a long shot.

"For as long as I can remember," Astron continued, his gaze distant, "there's been something driving me. A goal, a purpose that I couldn't let go of, no matter how much I tried to live normally. It's like a flame that's been burning inside of me, a fire that never goes out. Even here, at the academy, that fire burns, reminding me every day of why I can't stop. Why I won't stop."

His hand, still resting on the back of her head, gently pushed her away, creating a small space between them, enough for Maya to sit back slightly. He needed her to hear this clearly, to understand the truth that had been haunting him all this time.

"When I was young, I lost someone," Astron said, his voice lowering, his eyes flickering with a brief flash of emotion.

Maya's eyes widened slightly. The emotions that were contained in those eyes were so profound that she could not even speak.

"She was taken from me," Astron continued, his voice growing colder, his words cutting like shards of ice. "By demons. Creatures that should never have existed in this world. They came in the night without warning, slaughtering everything in their path. I was powerless to stop it. Powerless to protect her." His fists clenched at his sides, the faint tremor in his hands betraying the otherwise calm exterior he maintained.

"I swore that night," Astron said, his eyes hardening with determination. "I swore that I would find the ones responsible. I would track them down, no matter how long it took. And when I did, I would make them pay for what they did. That's why I came to this academy. To grow stronger. To learn. To gather information about the ones who took her from me."

Astron's words hung in the air, heavy and filled with the weight of his past. Maya could feel her heartbeat slow, the intensity of the moment shifting into something more profound, more somber. His confession explained so much—why he always seemed distant, why there was always a shadow in his eyes that she couldn't quite place. He wasn't just a student, wasn't just here to learn. He was here to take back what had been stolen from him, to exact revenge for a loss that had shaped him.

His purple eyes locked onto hers, and for the first time, she saw something raw, something that went beyond the calm and control he always exuded. It was vulnerability—a side of him she had never seen before. And that vulnerability was a test. A challenge.

"I live for this, Senior," he said, his voice low but steady, a quiet storm brewing beneath his words. "Every decision I've made has been for one purpose. I can't stop until I achieve my revenge, until I make those demons pay for what they've done."

He paused, his gaze piercing through her, as if searching for something deep within her soul. "Knowing all of this... can you still stay by my side?"

Chapter 578 127.7 - Answer

"Knowing all of this... can you still stay by my side?"

Those words sounded like they came from his very soul as if he was laying everything before her naked.

No types of false pretenses, no types of deceiving. He was showing pure emotions to her. That was all.

The question hit her like a hammer, knocking the wind from her lungs. Maya's mind raced as the pieces of the puzzle fell into place. Everything about him—his distance, his focus, the way he never seemed to fully let anyone in—now made sense. He had been carrying this burden, this pain, all alone. And she hadn't even realized how deep it ran.

The weight of his question settled on her, heavy and unshakable. Could she really stay with him, knowing that his entire life was driven by a single, all-consuming goal? Could she handle being with someone whose heart was set on a path so dangerous, so dark?

But in that moment, as she looked into his eyes, she realized the answer had already been decided. She had known for a long time that there was something special about him, something that had drawn her in from the very beginning. She had chosen to trust him, to be by his side, long before she ever knew the full truth.

'If he's been living with this pain... then there's no way I can leave him now,' she thought, her chest tightening as the depth of her own feelings hit her all at once.

The world seemed to quiet around her as her mind began to replay every moment they had shared. Every gesture, every word, every time he had been there for her without question, without hesitation. The memories rushed through her—how he had always been by her side, offering his silent support, helping her control her vampiric urges, and never asking for anything in return.

'He's always been there for me,' she thought, her chest tightening as she remembered the countless times he had stayed by her side when others would have left. She could see the moments clearly now, like pieces of a puzzle falling into place—how he had accepted her vampiric nature without judgment, how he had offered her his blood even when it put him at risk, how he had never once flinched when she revealed the truth about her family's dark legacy.

He hadn't cared about her family's influence, their power, or the burdens she carried. He had simply accepted her for who she was. And that... that was something she couldn't take for granted. It wasn't just that he had accepted her secret—it was that he had done so without question, without fear, even knowing the consequences of her family's actions. She knew, deep down, that her family wouldn't leave him alone easily. They wouldn't look kindly on her closeness to him. And still, he had stood by her.

'I did this to protect him,' she reminded herself, thinking of the reason she had revealed her family's secrets in the first place. She had thought she was protecting him from the inevitable attention her family would give him, but now... now she realized that he had revealed his truth to her with no such selfish motive. He had bared his soul to her not out of fear or obligation, but because he trusted her. And that trust meant everything.

How could she even think of turning away from him now?

'That is right.' 'That's right,' Maya thought, a sudden clarity washing over her as she realized how much easier everything felt now. All the weight she had been carrying, all the doubts and fears—none of it mattered anymore. He had revealed his purpose to her, his darkest truth, and instead of feeling any sort of repulsion or fear, all she felt was peace. Acceptance.

Whether he lived for revenge or not, did that even matter? No, it didn't. All she wanted, all she needed, was him. His presence beside her. Wasn't that enough? Did she need to complicate things by overthinking? The answer was simple—she didn't.

'I just want him,' she realized, her heart settling into a calm rhythm. 'That's all.'

Her gaze softened as she looked at him, the intensity of her earlier emotions melting away. There was no longer a need to question anything, no longer a need to hesitate. She had made her choice long before this moment, and now, with his truth laid bare before her, she knew without a doubt that it was the right one.

Slowly, she reached out, her fingers brushing against his hand. She was hesitant at first but grew more confident with each passing second. She intertwined her fingers with his, feeling the warmth of his palm against hers. The connection between them felt different now—stronger, more certain. As if all the walls they had built around themselves had finally crumbled away, leaving only the truth of what they meant to each other.

With a soft pull, she urged him to stand while she sat on his lap. His

Astron's upper body shifted as he sat upright, his gaze never leaving hers. Maya, still on his lap, felt the steady rise and fall of his chest as they faced each other, the intensity between them only growing stronger. Slowly, she reached for his other hand, guiding it toward her chest, pressing his palm gently against her heart.

"Can you feel it?" she asked softly, her voice carrying the weight of her emotions. Her heart was beating fast, not out of fear or hesitation but out of a certainty that had settled deep within her. "This heart... it beats thanks to you."

His fingers rested against her chest, and she could see the slight shift in his expression as he felt the rapid thrum beneath his hand. The sensation was intimate, almost overwhelming, but Maya didn't pull away. Instead, she leaned closer, her free hand brushing gently against his lips as she whispered, "Is this enough of an answer for you... or do you need something more?"

Her breath was warm, her touch soft as her fingers traced the curve of his lips. The question hung in the air between them, filled with a vulnerability that Maya had never shown anyone before. There was no more hiding, no more pretending. She was offering him everything, and all she wanted in return was his understanding.

"Sigh...Really....."

A soft sigh escaped his lips as he tapped on her chest.

FLINCH!

She flinched as the place he was touching was kind of.....

"This is enough."

Astron lowered his head, resting his forehead against her shoulder, the soft warmth of his breath brushing against her skin. His voice, barely a whisper, carried the weight of exhaustion, both physical and emotional. "You guys... you really can't let me leave you alone, can you?" he mumbled, his tone a mixture of resignation and quiet acceptance.

Maya's heart clenched at his words, even though she didn't fully understand the depth of what he was referring to. She had seen how he distanced himself from others, always keeping people at arm's length. In the clubs, in their shared moments, he had always been somewhat distant, careful not to let anyone too close. It was as if he had built walls around himself, protecting something fragile inside. But now, he was here with her, letting those walls crumble, even if only a little.

Her hand moved instinctively, finding its way to his head, fingers slipping through the soft strands of his black hair. She gently ruffled it, her touch both soothing and tender. "I won't let you," she whispered, her voice filled with quiet determination.

"I can see that."

As they stayed in that quiet, intimate embrace, Maya's mind wandered back to why Astron had come here in the first place—the banquet. It had seemed like such a strange request from him, given his usual reluctance to attend events like that. And now, with everything he had revealed, the pieces started to fall into place.

She bit her lip, hesitating for a moment before asking, "Junior... is the reason you wanted to attend the banquet also related to your revenge?"

Astron shifted slightly, his forehead still resting against her shoulder, but she could feel the subtle change in his posture. After a pause, he nodded. "That's right," he said quietly, his voice laced with a seriousness that made her heart tighten. "There's a demon amongst the people attending."

Maya's entire body flinched as the weight of his words sank in. "What?" she whispered, her tone suddenly sharp, all traces of gentleness evaporating as the atmosphere between them shifted. "A demon? Are you sure?"

The softness that had filled the air was replaced with a tense seriousness, the gravity of the situation hitting her like a cold wave. She knew the danger of demons far too well. Unlike demonic humans or contractors, who, though dangerous, were still human in origin, a true demon was something else entirely—a creature of pure malevolence and chaos. Their presence was rare, but whenever they appeared, they brought devastation.

Astron finally pulled back slightly, enough to meet her gaze, his eyes filled with a cold, unyielding resolve. "I'm certain," he said. "I've been tracking them for a long time. One of them will be at the banquet. This is the best chance I'll have to get closer to them."

Maya's heart raced. "A real demon..." she repeated, her voice barely a whisper. The implications were terrifying. If Astron was right, then this banquet wasn't just some social event—it was a battlefield, and she had no idea how far he was willing to go for his revenge.

Her hand tightened in his hair, pulling him closer again as if trying to keep him grounded. "Junior.....Do you really...."

"I will kill him."

Maya's words trailed off as she looked into Astron's eyes, searching for any hint of doubt or hesitation. But all she saw was that same cold, unwavering resolve that he always carried when speaking of his goal. Her heart pounded in her chest, fear mixing with the overwhelming need to protect him.

"Junior... do you really think you're ready?" she asked, her voice trembling slightly. "A demon isn't like anything else you've faced. Even if you've dealt with a vampire before, that vampire was still recovering. This... this is different. They're—"

Before she could finish, Astron cut her off, his voice firm and unyielding. "I know exactly what I'm dealing with, Senior."

The sharpness in his tone made her freeze, her breath catching in her throat. He wasn't going to back down—not now, not ever. Maya's grip on his hair tightened as her heart twisted in her chest.

"But Junior...", she whispered, trying to find the words to make him see the danger. "Demons are—"

"I know what they are," he said, his voice lower now but filled with a quiet intensity. His gaze bore into hers, his expression pitch black. I've faced them before. And I've survived. I'm not going into this blind, Senior."

Maya blinked, her mind racing. He had faced demons before? But he had never mentioned it, never shown any signs of that kind of experience. And yet, as she looked into his eyes, she saw no doubt, no hesitation.

"This one won't be any different," Astron added, his voice resolute. "I will kill him, that's it."

Chapter 579 128.1 - Sugar Mommy (?)

"I will kill him, that's it." Maya stared at him for a long moment, her mind racing, but she knew that trying to dissuade him would be pointless. His resolve was ironclad, and she could feel it in every word, in the intensity of his gaze. There was no stopping him, no turning him away from the path he had chosen long ago.

She let out a slow breath, her grip on his hair loosening just slightly as her body relaxed. "If that's your wish... then so be it," she said softly, her voice carrying a weight of acceptance. It was all she could offer in the face of his determination. "But... how are you planning to do it, Junior?"

Her question hung in the air between them, a stark contrast to the tension that had filled the room moments before. Maya wasn't just asking out of curiosity—she needed to know. She needed to understand how he intended to face such a dangerous foe.

Astron's gaze didn't waver as he answered. "The banquet will be full of influential figures—politicians, nobles, and others. The demon is hiding among them using an identity."

Astron's expression remained calm as he continued, his tone measured. "The demon rarely shows his face in public, which is why this banquet is such an important opportunity. Among the influential figures attending, he'll be hidden in plain sight, using an identity that makes him almost impossible to spot. But that's when I'll mark him. After the banquet ends, I'll trace him and hunt him down."

Maya furrowed her brow, her mind already spinning with questions. "But... how do you plan to mark him? If he's as elusive as you say, he'll have ways to fend off any trace or mark you try to leave on him."

Astron nodded, acknowledging her concern. "You're right. He's not just any opponent. He'll have protections, methods to avoid being tracked or traced by conventional means. But not everything in this world is invincible." His eyes grew cold, his voice lowering as a quiet intensity seeped into his words. "There's always something that can be exploited. No matter how careful he is, there's a flaw."

There was a confidence in his voice that was almost unnerving, but Maya didn't doubt him. The way he spoke, the certainty in his words—it was as if he had already anticipated every countermeasure the demon might have. It made her uneasy, but at the same time, she trusted him. She knew he had spent years preparing for this moment, for this mission.

"If you say so," she murmured, though her concern still lingered. "But is there anything I can do to help?"

Astron looked at her, a thoughtful expression crossing his face. "When I planned on attending the banquet, I didn't anticipate your involvement. I wasn't fully aware of just how well-known your family is in the political world." He paused, his eyes narrowing slightly as he considered the implications. "Are they aware of your lineage? Does everyone at the banquet know who you are?"

Hearing Astron's question, Maya took a moment to gather her thoughts. "Not everyone in the capital or other parts of the Federation knows about my family, but here in the southern region... they'll know. My family's influence runs deep in these parts, and since I've already used my family's name to attend, I'll definitely be identified."

Astron's eyes flickered with something almost like calculation. "If that's the case, this could work to our advantage. There's a chance that Silas might approach you directly, or at the very least, take notice of your presence."

Maya's brow furrowed in confusion. "Silas? Who's Silas?"

"It's the human identity the demon is using," Astron explained, his voice cool and calm, as though he had anticipated her question. "He's managed to blend into human society using that name, hiding his true nature. Silas is well-connected, especially in political circles, which makes him all the more dangerous. If he knows who you are, there's a chance he might approach you."

"I see."

Being a heir of the noble family, Maya was also someone who had been educated about the political world and she herself was familiar with everything.

"If he approaches is, that will make things easier for you, is that what you are saying?"

"That is right." Astron nodded, his expression steady and focused. "There's even a chance that Silas—no, the demon—will be able to identify your strange condition."

Maya tilted her head, confusion flickering across her face. "You mean... my vampiric condition?"

"Yes," Astron confirmed. "Even though your situation is different from a full vampire's, you still bear the imprint of an incomplete evolution. Demons are incredibly sensitive to the presence of their own kind, even in those who are only partially transformed or influenced by dark energy. Their hierarchy is strict, with higher-ranked demons inherently suppressing lower ones."

Maya's eyes widened slightly as the implications set in. "So... you think he might notice something off about me?"

"Exactly," Astron said, his voice cold with determination. "If Silas senses your condition, he'll likely be intrigued. He may even try to approach or manipulate you because of it."

Maya's heart quickened as she processed it. "And that's when you'll mark him?"

Astron gave a firm nod. "That's right. The moment he shows interest or reveals any part of his true nature, I'll be ready. Once he's marked, I'll be able to trace him—hunt him down after the banquet ends."

Maya exhaled slowly, trying to steady herself. The idea of being used as bait to lure out a demon was unsettling, but if it meant helping Astron achieve his goal, she was willing to do it. "So, I'll be the distraction. And once he makes his move... you'll act."

"Partially," Astron said.

"Hmm...." Maya's eyes suddenly lit up, an idea forming in her mind. She straightened up slightly and met Astron's gaze with a determined look. "If that's the case, Junior... then I'm coming with you to hunt him down."

Astron immediately shook his head, his expression firm. "No. You can't do that. It's too dangerous."

Maya didn't even pause to consider his objection. "That can't do," she said, her voice steady but insistent. "If there's a chance the demon discovers my unique condition, that means there's also a chance he might figure out my Elven lineage."

Astron's brow furrowed, clearly not convinced. "That's a really low possibility. Demons typically aren't interested in such things. They're more focused on the darker energies."

"That may be true," Maya replied, refusing to back down, "but the possibility still exists, and I can't afford to leave that unchecked. If this demon learns who I really am—who my family is—then things could spiral out of control. He could use that against me. Against us."

Astron's gaze remained steady, but he said nothing, his mind clearly turning over her words.

Maya leaned closer, her voice softening but still resolute. "Junior, I know you want to protect me, but this is about more than just that. My family is already in a complicated position. If this demon finds out about my Elven heritage, it could lead to bigger problems. You need me there, not just as bait at the banquet, but afterward too."

Astron closed his eyes for a brief moment, as if weighing the risk against her argument. When he finally opened them again, they were filled with both understanding and frustration. "Senior, do you not trust me?"

Maya blinked, surprised by Astron's question. "Of course, I trust you," she responded immediately, her voice filled with conviction. But Astron's intense gaze didn't waver, and she could sense that there was more to his question.

He leaned forward slightly, his voice calm but pointed. "Then, Senior... do you think I'm smart?"

Maya paused, caught off guard by the sudden shift. Her mind quickly replayed all the times she'd seen Astron's sharp, calculating nature at work. He was always careful, always thinking three steps ahead. His mind worked faster than anyone she'd ever known, and he had a natural ability to assess situations with precision. She couldn't deny that.

"You're probably the smartest person I've ever met," she admitted, her eyes narrowing slightly as she began to understand where he was leading the conversation.

Astron nodded, a faint smile tugging at the corner of his lips. "If that's the case... why do you think I didn't ask for your help in dealing with the demon?"

Maya's breath caught in her throat. She hadn't considered that. Her initial reaction had been to offer her help, to protect him, but now... now it was clear that Astron had deliberately kept her out of his plans for a reason.

She frowned, her mind racing as she tried to figure out his logic. "You didn't ask because you thought... it would be too dangerous for me?" she ventured, though she wasn't entirely sure.

Astron shook his head slowly, his gaze unwavering. "That is not wrong but at the same time that is not the main reason. It's because I knew involving you would complicate things. Demons are incredibly perceptive, Senior. If I can avoid drawing attention to you, then I have a better chance of cornering him without him realizing he's being hunted."

Maya raised an eyebrow, still trying to process his words. "Really?" she asked, her tone filled with a mix of skepticism and concern.

Astron nodded, his expression remaining calm and resolute. "Yes. Senior, you're stronger than me. You don't need my protection. But strength isn't everything."

She felt a small pang of frustration at his words, but deep down, she knew he was right. Strength alone wasn't enough to navigate a situation as dangerous and intricate as this. Demons weren't like anything she had faced before, and their cunning was far more dangerous than raw power.

With a defeated sigh, she lowered her gaze, her fingers loosening their grip on his shirt. "I can't argue with that," she admitted, her voice quieter now. "But I still hate it, Junior. I hate feeling like I can't do anything to help you."

"Well, you have already putting yourself at risk, and that is enough."

Maya let out another sigh, but this time there was a faint hint of acceptance in her voice. "I understand," she said, though the frustration still lingered. "Just promise me... if anything goes wrong, if you need me, you'll call. I don't care what happens. You won't face this alone."

Astron gave a slight nod, the corner of his lips curling into a faint smile. "I promise, Senior. But remember—this is my fight. I won't drag you into it unless I have no other choice."

Maya couldn't help but roll her eyes slightly, but the tension between them had finally begun to ease. "Fine," she muttered, crossing her arms. "But you better not get yourself killed."

"...I won't...."

Chapter 580 128.2 - Sugar Mommy (?)

"But you better not get yourself killed."

"...I won't...."

As the weight of their conversation began to settle, the room fell into a brief silence. Astron glanced at Maya with an unreadable expression before his lips somehow seemed to curl slightly. "Senior... for how long were you planning to stay like this?"

Maya blinked, momentarily confused. And then, all at once, it hit her—she was still straddling his lap, their bodies pressed close together. The heat of his body against hers, the tension that had built between them earlier, all of it came rushing back. Her face flushed crimson as she suddenly became acutely aware of her position, the warmth pooling in her body, and the subtle wetness she could feel in certain places.

"Ah—!" Maya gasped, instinctively trying to pull back, her face burning with embarrassment. But the moment she shifted, the friction between them only intensified the sensations she was feeling, and it became even harder to ignore.

Her heart raced, and she bit her lip, trying to control the sudden rush of desire that surged through her again. 'How did I not realize... this whole time?'

She wanted to move, to do something to salvage her dignity, but the way their bodies were intertwined made it nearly impossible to disengage without making things even more awkward.

"I... uh... forgot," she mumbled, her voice barely audible as she glanced anywhere but at him.

Astron's expression remained calm, but the slight amusement in his eyes was unmistakable. "It's fine, Senior," he said, his voice as composed as ever, though there was a faint warmth in his tone that made Maya's embarrassment even worse.

Her face flushed a deeper shade of red, and she quickly shifted, trying to disentangle herself without drawing attention to her discomfort. But each movement only seemed to remind her of the situation, and the subtle friction between them sent an electric shiver through her body.

'Why now?' she thought, internally cursing herself for being so easily flustered.

She faked a cough, awkwardly trying to cover her embarrassment as she finally managed to slide off his lap. Standing up quickly, she smoothed down her clothes, desperately avoiding eye contact with Astron. Her mind raced for a distraction, anything to break the tension that had built up once again.

Clearing her throat, Maya turned toward the gazebo, taking a few steps away from him. "A-anyway," she began, her voice still a little shaky as she tried to regain some semblance of control, "we should get back to planning. There's a lot to prepare for the banquet... and we don't have much time."

She busied herself with straightening her clothes, avoiding his gaze, hoping the cool breeze from the gazebo would calm her racing heart and the heat still lingering in her body.

Astron leaned back slightly, his gaze settling on her with his usual calmness. "For the time being, we should wait, Senior. We've discussed a lot, and adding more details right now will only complicate things further." His voice was steady, as though the previous tension between them had never existed.

Maya nodded, slowly feeling the heat in her body dissipate as she regained her composure. His words were logical, and she knew he was right. But as the haze of the earlier moment cleared, a sudden realization hit her—she had completely forgotten her manners.

'Oh no...' she thought, her eyes widening slightly as she remembered that Astron had just arrived. He was still a guest in her home, and here she was, getting carried away by her emotions, completely neglecting her duties as a host. What kind of courtesy was that?

She straightened up quickly, her face still a little flushed, but her mind now focused on something else entirely. "Junior! I—I can't believe I forgot," she said, shaking her head at her own carelessness. "You just arrived, and I haven't even properly welcomed you. You must be tired from the journey, and here I am, making things difficult for you without even offering you a place to settle."

Maya hurried over to the small table nearby, setting her hands on her hips as she mentally scolded herself. "What kind of host am I?" she muttered. "Where are my manners?"

"Cough.....It is a little bit late for that, don't you think? And it is not like I am just a normal person. We are both Awakened, so I am not tired. Senior, don't worry."

Maya took a deep breath, forcing her mind to shift focus and clinging to Astron's words as an opportunity to escape the overwhelming embarrassment. "That won't do, Junior," she said with a playful but determined tone. "Awakened or not, I'm still your host, and I need to show some courtesy. Besides, I've decided—since you've never had the chance to see it, how about I give you a tour around the mansion? You don't often get the opportunity to see places like this."

She stood tall, brushing off the awkwardness as best she could, and a small smile tugged at her lips. The idea seemed perfect—not only would it give her a chance to shift the mood, but it could also give her some time to get closer to Astron. After all, Amelia had told her all about dates, and wasn't this the perfect opportunity to treat it like one?

'Yes,' she thought to herself, excitement bubbling up inside her. 'A tour around the mansion... that sounds like a date, doesn't it?'

Astron raised an eyebrow, clearly sensing her sudden shift in energy but not fully understanding what was going through her mind. "A tour?" he asked, his tone skeptical but not disinterested.

Maya's smile widened as she gave him a slight nod. "Yes, a tour! Come on, Junior. You don't get to see places like this often. I'll show you around."

Astron hesitated for a moment, not because he did not want to but because he thought that if he were to get more and more into the family, he would never be able to leave this place.

'It is a little bit late for that, isn't it?' But well, the ship was sailed at this point, and Astron was sure that things would no longer be the same. Once Maya decided to reveal her lineage to him, it meant that he could no longer avoid entangling himself with this matter.

Though seeing Maya's enthusiasm, he couldn't help but let out a small sigh of defeat. "Alright, Senior. Lead the way," he said, taking her hand and letting her pull him along.

Maya quickly removed the formation she had set up around the gazebo, the faint shimmering barrier dissolving into the air. It had been there to keep prying eyes away, ensuring that their conversation remained private. But now, with the more serious matters set aside, she felt it was no longer needed.

"Alright, let's go," she said, her voice light and eager. She tugged Astron's hand gently, leading him toward the grand entrance of the mansion.

As they were just about to step inside, the sound of footsteps interrupted them. Alfred, her family's trusted butler, approached with his usual calm demeanor. His eyes shifted between Maya and Astron, silently assessing the situation.

"Lady Maya," Alfred said with a slight bow. "I see you and your guest have concluded your discussion. Is everything in order?"

Maya smiled at Alfred, giving him a reassuring nod. "Yes, Alfred. Everything is fine. I'm just going to give Astron a tour of the mansion."

Alfred's expression softened, and he returned the nod. "Very well. Should you need anything, Lady Maya, do not hesitate to ask." His gaze shifted briefly to Astron, who remained composed and polite, though there was an air of careful distance in his posture.

"No, we're fine," Maya replied, her tone casual but polite. She waved Alfred off, turning back to Astron with renewed enthusiasm. "Come on, Junior. Let's start the tour."

Alfred took his leave, retreating into the mansion, while Maya led Astron through the grand entrance hall. The massive doors opened with a soft creak, revealing the splendor within—ornate decorations, tapestries, and elegant furniture that spoke of the Evergreen family's long-standing legacy. The atmosphere was regal, yet there was a sense of warmth to the place.

Maya practically bubbled with excitement as she led Astron through the grand hallways of the mansion, her voice animated as she began telling him stories from her childhood. "You know, I used to run through these halls pretending I was on some grand adventure," she said with a fond smile, her eyes gleaming as she recalled the memories. "Alfred would always catch me sneaking into places I wasn't supposed to be. I was a bit of a troublemaker back then."

Astron followed her closely, quietly observing the details of the mansion. The Evergreen family's legacy was etched into every corner—portraits of past generations, intricate carvings on the walls, and an unmistakable aura of wealth and power. Yet, there was also something homey and warm about the place, likely due to Maya's lively presence.

They passed through the grand library next, and Maya couldn't help but grin as she pushed open the heavy doors. The smell of parchment and old books filled the air, shelves stacked from floor to ceiling with ancient tomes, scrolls, and records. "This is where I spent most of my time growing up," she admitted. "I loved reading about the old cultivation arts, histories, and legends. My father used to joke that I'd get lost in here for days if he didn't drag me out."

Astron's eyes briefly scanned the titles, noting a few rare and ancient texts, though he stayed silent. The sheer magnitude of the library was impressive, but he remained composed, his expression unreadable as ever.

After the library, she led him through a series of rooms—guest chambers, dining halls, and even an armory. Each one had its own story, and Maya was more than happy to recount her escapades in each place. "This is the armory where I first learned how to wield a blade," she said proudly, gesturing to the impressive collection of weapons. "Though, well.....Let's say I was never good at it."

Considering the talent that she had shown as a mage and her control of all elements, Astron knew that achieving such control was not just a matter of being a genius.

She would need to put quite a lot of effort into that, and that would mean she would not be able to pay attention to other weapons.

Such talents often meant a lack of talents in other fields, which was normal.

They finally made their way to the airship hangar, a massive structure that stood outside the main building.

"You have already seen this place before, so there is not much to show."

They went past the hanger, and she led him to a large stretch of land where rows of plants grew in neat, cultivated patches.

Maya beamed, pointing at the lush fields. "And this is where we grow our daily fruits and herbs. We have everything here—fresh Starbloom Essence, Silverpetal Lotus, and even rare Everglow Root."

Astron's eyebrow twitched slightly at the casual mention of such high-quality herbs.

Starbloom Essence was incredibly valuable, and he knew from the fact that Maya spoke about them as if they were common household fruits that she was not normal.

But witnessing it once again, it was really hard to just causally brush it off.

"This is what I gave you back then."

"Yeah....You said it was like a daily use for you...I guess you really were telling the truth."

"Humph, Junior. When have you ever seen me lying?"

Astron was speechless.