

The Herb King

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Confession

151 Confession

Hugo sighed inwardly. This was the result of his greed. He willingly became the Northern Viper Group's dog in exchange for more power. He got addicted to the feeling of being at the top that he had forgotten that the Ward Household was still nothing to the Imperial Family's might.

With a look of resolve, Hugo stood up as he faced the furious Aethelwolf. "I apologize for this matter, Sir Aethelwolf. I will make everything right. I just hope that everyone forgives my Ward Household. They have nothing to do with this." He muttered in a low voice. He decided to confess his sins. He knew that it was already late, but this was the only thing he could do to save his son.

Everyone revealed confused expressions when they heard his words.

"What do you mean?" Aethelwolf asked in a cold tone.

Hugo stared at him with a calm look as he replied. "I will explain everything after the battle event is settled." He then turned his gaze to the second prince and said. "Your Highness, please announce that Alec will forfeit the match."

Prince Calvin furrowed his eyebrows when he heard this. He then looked at his father to see his opinion.

Emperor Ragnar nodded his head.

After seeing his signal, Prince Calvin excused himself and stepped out of the room.

The prince jumped to the stage and landed in between Janrose and Alec. "Stop!" He shouted.

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Janrose halted her steps in surprise. Why was the prince here?

Alec felt a sense of foreboding when the second prince interfered in their fight. Was he discovered? Was his identity already exposed?

The crowd was also shocked by the sudden appearance of the second prince and they wondered why he had interrupted the fight.

“The Ward Household has forfeited the match. Follow me.” Prince Calvin said while looking coldly at Alec. He then moved his gaze to the referee and said. “Announce Miss Janrose’s victory.”

The referee had a lot of questions, but he refrained from asking when he saw how serious the second prince was. “Yes, Your Highness!”

Prince Calvin grabbed the stunned Alec by the shoulder and dragged him to the VIP room.

“What’s happening? Why did His Highness bring Alec away?”

“Is there something going on?”

The referee quickly announced in a loud voice. “Due to certain circumstances, the Ward Household has forfeited the match. The champion for this battle event is Janrose Yanez! The awarding ceremony will be held in ten minutes.”

It was a questionable victory, and those who placed their bets on Alec were discontented by the results. However, no one dared to protest since it was the second prince who took Alec away from the stage.

Soon, Janrose’s supporters cheered joyously after the announcement and they all jumped from their seats while waving their hands victoriously.

Janrose sheathed her sword and left the stage with a perplexed look on her face.

Meanwhile, Prince Calvin brought Alec to the VIP room and he was shocked when he saw the people inside. All of them were the family heads of noble households and merchant families. Alec also saw his father among them, but his face was difficult to describe.

Emperor Ragnar who was sitting expressionlessly on his seat suddenly said. “Hugo, explain everything properly to everyone.”

Hugo bowed his head at the emperor. “Yes, Your Majesty.” He then looked at his son and when he saw that he had no injuries, he forced out a smile.

‘What is happening here?’ Alec looked at his father in confusion.

Under the shocked gazes of everyone inside the room, Hugo fell to his knees and confessed. “It was me. I ordered Alec to kill Janrose. It was the command of Gustavo, the Leader of the Northern Viper Group. Alec and the Ward Household have no idea

that I have been secretly meeting with the bandit group. I'm prepared for any punishments, Your Majesty. I just hope that you spare my Ward Household. They are clueless about this matter."

The eyes of everyone present turned wide when they heard his words.

Duke Baron couldn't hide his agitation and he furiously lifted Hugo by the collar as he bellowed. "You goddamn traitor! Those people killed many of our people and you even dared to work with them?! You must be fucking tired of living!" He then punched Hugo's face, sending him flying to the corner of the room.

Bang!

Hugo wiped the blood at the corner of his mouth and remained silent.

Some family heads who had also lost their soldiers against the Northern Viper Group joined Duke Baron in beating up Hugo.

Pah! Pah! Pah!

"Father!" Alec wanted to help his father, but Prince Calvin prevented him from stepping any further. His father was shouldering the sin of their entire family and it made him feel remorseful.

"Enough!" Emperor Ragnar shouted after a long time. He was also furious by the betrayal of Hugo, but the confession sounded suspicious to him. He then stood up from his seat and walked towards Hugo who now looked unrecognizable with all the bruises on his face. "Hugo, you have betrayed the empire for your own benefit! This is a crime punishable by death! I, Ragnar Leone, emperor of the Leone Empire, sentence you to death by beheading!"

Emperor Ragnar turned his head to Baron and commanded in a cold voice. "The execution will be done three days from now and your task is to investigate this. The Ward Household is also a prime suspect so they can't escape punishment. I will tell you what to do with them after the execution. For now, focus on investigating this matter first."

Duke Baron nodded his head solemnly. "Yes, Your Majesty." He then grabbed Hugo by the neck and before he left, he handcuffed Alec. He then dragged both father and son out of the room.

"Proceed with the awarding ceremony." Emperor Ragnar muttered to the second prince.

"Yes, Your Majesty." The prince immediately left the room.

Emperor Ragnar faced the family heads with a grave look. "The betrayal of the Ward Household is a very controversial matter. It will cause panic among our citizens so I hope that everyone will not disclose what happened inside this room to the public."

Aethelwolf's eyes narrowed as he watched the whole scene unfold. The war is close by. He could sense it.

152 Lessons

The awarding ceremony was wrapped up in a hurry and the other participants were not even able to use their right to challenge, but when they learned that Alec Ward has been disqualified from the rankings, they immediately shut up. They weren't foolish people and they immediately thought that something fishy must have happened for the battle event to end in such a manner. It became more confusing since their family heads refused to tell them anything.

To pacify the dissatisfaction of the participants, they were compensated by the Imperial Family. The compensation was more than what was promised to them and this made the participants happy. They also chose to remain silent about the strange ending of the battle event.

On their way back to the mansion, Aethelwolf sat inside his carriage with Janrose and the others. He wore a distant look on his face.

"Aethelwolf, do you know what happened? Why did they suddenly disqualify Alec Ward?" Samira asked. She asked her father and grandfather, but the both of them didn't say anything to her. Everyone perked up their ears as they looked at Aethelwolf, but he only gave them a vague reply. "You guys will know everything three days from now. Just wait for the Imperial Family's announcement." He didn't want to tell them about it. Besides, the Imperial Family will make an official announcement for that matter.

"Is it that serious?" Samira was surprised that he didn't disclose the matter to them. That means what happened earlier should be something huge!

Aethelwolf nodded his head and remained silent after that short conversation.

No one bothered him when they saw that he was in deep thought.

'Even Lion City is no longer safe and danger lurks everywhere. There might be some hidden enemies in the banquet tomorrow. I should prepare for that. Rendell wouldn't be able to ensure my safety on his own. Tsk! What a bad timing!' Aethelwolf frowned. There were still two days left before his 'weakened status' would be removed. Luckily, he would be back to his full strength before the execution three days from now. By then, he would be able to start making what he had promised to Olivia. She is a Level 3 magical beast and she would be of great help to him if she can freely go with him

anywhere. For that to happen, he had to create an item that could turn her into a human...

When they arrived in the mansion, Aethelwolf commanded Rendell to summon the four Level 3 Espers.

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With his father walking beside him, Aethelwolf stared at the four Level 3 Espers brought by Rendell. They were the strongest hunters sent by the Hunter Association to work for him. Their loyalty was still questionable, but he didn't have the time to worry about that now. "You guys must be confused why you have been summoned at this hour." He muttered solemnly as he scanned the four veteran hunters.

"Brian Linaza, the leader of the Merchant Association, will host a banquet tomorrow. I can only bring five people with me inside the banquet hall, but no one said that I am not allowed to station you guys outside the area. That's right. The four of you will go with us tomorrow and your task is to protect us. The situation in Lion City is very unpredictable and many things could happen. Are you guys willing?" Aethelwolf looked into their eyes.

"Sir Aethelwolf, we have already pledged our loyalty to you! We are willing to do anything you say!" The four hunters answered.

Hearing this, Aethelwolf smiled and nodded his head. He was satisfied by their answer. "Good! Rest well tonight and prepare for our trip tomorrow!"

"Yes, Sir Aethelwolf!"

"You guys can leave now." Aethelwolf dismissed them. He still had the pills that can increase their levels, but he didn't want to give the pills to them yet. It wasn't the right time. Those four still have to pass his loyalty test.

Anton glanced to his left and right. After seeing that no one was near them, he whispered. "Aethelwolf, do you think that there will be spies from the Northern Viper Group that will be present at the banquet?"

Aethelwolf shook his head. "I'm not completely certain. You will be coming with me tomorrow as the head of the Lassiter Household."

Anton nodded his head. "Alright. I also want to see the leader of the Merchant Association in person." He said.

Aethelwolf patted Anton's shoulder before he went inside the mansion.

He saw that Samira was waiting for him at the main door of the mansion.

“Do we have lessons in Alchemy tonight?” She asked while looking at him.

Aethelwolf nodded his head. “Bring the others to my room. We will begin our lessons soon.”

Samira nodded her head. “Alright. We will be there in a minute.”

Aethelwolf rubbed his aching temples as he walked inside his room. He thought that he would be living a carefree life in this world, but he was so wrong. He was so busy that he almost had no time to rest.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

“I brought them here.” Samira’s voice came from outside the room.

“Come inside.” He said as he took out some notes that he had prepared beforehand. Written on the notes are detailed information about how to summon a pill fire.

Samira entered the room with Janrose, Anna, and his clone.

“Take your seats.” Aethelwolf gestured for them to sit down. He then passed them the notes he had prepared for them. “The notes contain information on how to summon a pill fire. I also included my experience and some explanations in there.” He said while handing the notes to them one by one.

Samira and Anna were visibly excited when they heard this and they carefully took the notes.

“Written on the notes isn’t just about how to summon a Red Pill Fire, but I also added information about Orange Pill Fire, Yellow Pill Fire, and Gold Pill Fire.” He then handed out extra notes to Anna. “Give this to your grandfather. He will need it during my lessons with him.”

Anna nodded her head eagerly as she took the notes from his hands. “Yes, Sir Aethelwolf. I’ll give this to him later.”

“Let’s begin our lessons.” Aethelwolf adjusted his sitting posture and started his lessons.

“Leric, Janrose, although you two have already summoned your Pill Fires, you should still listen carefully.”

“Yes, Sir Aethelwolf.”

“Yes, teacher.”

“There are a lot of ways to summon our Pill Fire. One example is by controlling our world essence to form a cluster of energy...”

153 Ramiel

Aethelwolf changed into a formal style of clothing. He decided to dress up according to the occasion since there are a lot of important people that would be present at the banquet.

After changing into his new clothes, he went out of his room and spotted his mother talking with Samira and some of the employees in his clinic.

“I see that you are all getting along well.” Aethelwolf said as he walked up to them with a smile on his face. He noticed that his mother was no longer distant to them and they seemed to be getting closer.

“You said that I will be working as a Doctor and Manager of your clinic, so I have a lot to learn from Samira and the other sisters since they have been working there for quite some time now.” Melissa smiled gently. Although she didn’t have the talent to become an Esper, she was a very skilled Doctor even by modern standards. Aethelwolf believed that she would manage the clinic well.

“Madam Melissa is so knowledgeable in medicine and we have a lot to learn from her. I think she would be a great Alchemist if she can control world essence. It’s a pity that Madam Melissa’s Hegel is inactive.” Samira muttered regretfully as she kept on blinking at Aethelwolf.

How could Aethelwolf not notice her signal? He knew that Samira was hinting him to give an Awakening Pellet to his mother. He also wanted to give some of his pills to his parents. He just didn’t have the time to give it to them because of his busy schedule. “Samira is right. Are you interested in becoming an Alchemist, mot- ehem, Melissa?”

Melissa smiled sadly and shook her head. “Even if I want to become an Alchemist, how could I become one when my Hegel is inactive?”

Hearing this, smile blossomed on the faces of Samira and the other ladies.

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“Madam Melissa, Aethelwolf has a pill than can awaken an inactive Hegel and it will directly catapult you to become a Level 1 Esper!” Samira held Melissa’s hands excitedly.

“Miss Samira is right. It is a pill called Awakening Pellet and we also sell this pill in the clinic in small amounts.” Janeth added with a smile. She had recovered a youthful body

after using the high-grade soaps given to them. She was no longer the haggard commoner that she was before, but a beautiful woman with a mature vibe.

Melissa's eyes widened upon hearing this. She then remembered the pill that her husband ate to become a Level 3 Esper. It was also something given by Aethelwolf. "There's actually such a pill?" She asked with a look of disbelief.

Everyone nodded their heads eagerly.

Aethelwolf chuckled while looking at them. He then took out an Awakening Pellet from his storage space and handed it to his mother. "Before you guys go to the clinic, eat this pill." He then turned his head at Janeth and said. "Samira will also go to the banquet so you have to take care of the madam, okay?"

"Yes, Sir Aethelwolf." Janeth nodded her head.

Melissa was still looking at the pill in her hands with a dumbfounded look. Such a precious pill was casually given to her. 'He is truly treating us like his family...'

Aethelwolf smiled at them. He then beckoned to Rendell and whispered to him. "Bring a few Level 2 guards with you to the clinic. Don't allow anyone to harm our people, especially the madam."

"I understand, Sir Aethelwolf. I will bring the best guards with me to the clinic. You can rest assured." Rendell patted his chest confidently.

"Good."

Aethelwolf went out of the mansion with Hyacinth, Janrose, Samira, Albert, and Anton.

"Aethelwolf, I will go to the banquet with my family so you guys can head there first." Samira said as he looked at Aethelwolf.

"It's fine. We can go there together. Let's wait for your family to arrive." Aethelwolf replied. He then stared at the four guards who will be coming with them to the banquet. They were already dressed in formal clothes that were prepared for them, but they still looked intimidating because of the weapons strapped behind their backs.

He could bring five people with him inside the banquet hall and the five people who will be going with him are Anton, Hyacinth, Albert, and Janrose. He still hasn't chosen the last person, but it was someone among the four guards.

Aethelwolf's gaze stopped at a tall middle-aged man with a tiger-like physique. He sported a buzz cut and stubbled beard. This man was the strongest among the four Level 3 guards with power measuring at the late stage of Level 3. He didn't know how such a strong person ended up becoming a hunter of the Hunter Association, but he

knew that it wasn't his place to ask about such a private matter. "What was your name again?" He asked the man.

The man bowed his head lightly as he answered in a deep baritone voice. "Sir Aethelwolf, this one is called Ramiel Sigurd."

"Ramiel, is it? From now on, you will be Albert's deputy and I promote you as the Vice Leader of the Lassiter Household's guards." Aethelwolf's words made Ramiel shock, but he hurriedly lowered his head as he said. "Thank you for giving me your trust, Sir Aethelwolf. I won't disappoint you."

Aethelwolf nodded his head calmly. "You will be the fifth person who will come with us to the banquet hall." He then looked at the three guards. "Don't be discouraged. The three of you will also hold important posts in the near future. Just wait for it."

"Yes, Sir Aethelwolf!" The eyes of the three guards lit up with joy when they heard this.

Suddenly, the sounds of a carriage moving entered their ears.

"Aethelwolf, they are here!" Samira shouted at him.

Aethelwolf stared at the carriage of the Reynolds Household and said. "Prepare our carriage. It is time to go."

154 Brian Linaza

Before they left, Aethelwolf stroked the feathers of the anxious Olivia. "Don't worry. I'll recover my full strength tomorrow and by then, I will start making the item that can turn you into a human. Stay here obediently and don't peck the guards again, okay?"

Olivia made a grumbling sound, but she still nodded her large bird head.

Seeing this, Aethelwolf smiled. He then stared at the others and said. "Let's go."

Aethelwolf's group followed the Reynolds Household's carriage on the way to the mansion of the Linaza Household which was located outside of Dominion District. Along the way, they also encountered the entourage of many noble households who were moving in the same direction as them. It was a good thing that the streets of Lion City are wide enough to prevent heavy traffic.

Soon, they arrived at the mansion of the Linaza Household and they noticed that there are already a lot of guests at the entrance. Everyone here were nobles or influential people from their respective fields.

Aethelwolf could not help but feel a sense of nostalgia. Although he lived alone in his past life, he would sometimes go out during events to show off the results of his

experiments. It was only during those times that he would go out of his basement to meet people.

“Please show your invitation card.” The guards stopped their carriage from entering and stared at them with cold expressions.

Aethelwolf handed the golden invitation card to Albert who was driving the carriage.

“Here’s our invitation card.” Albert handed it to the guards.

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When the guards saw that it was a golden invitation card, they were surprised and they immediately verified the name of the guest.

Aethelwolf

Their eyes widened after reading the name and they carefully handed the invitation card back to Albert. “Welcome!” They became more respectful after knowing the identity of the person inside the carriage.

“Thanks.” Albert muttered before urging the horses to move forward.

“Sir Aethelwolf, it looks like you are already quite famous in Lion City. The attitude of those guards change when they saw your name.” Janrose whispered to Aethelwolf with a cheeky look.

Aethelwolf squeezed her cheeks and muttered. “Who do you think your teacher is?”

Ow! Ow! Ow!

After entering the gates, Albert parked the carriage in the open field.

“The three of you will stand guard here. You can move around and get to know the guests here, but you have to keep an eye on those two horses. They are quite unruly and they might attack the other mounts.” Aethelwolf said while pointing at Kerrin and Alba. The both of them were King-Grade Equuses and just their presence alone was already making the other mounts nervous.

“Yes, Sir Aethelwolf!” The three guards saluted.

“Sir Aethelwolf, let’s go inside together.” An aged voice echoed ahead of them. It was Julius Reynolds.

“Sure.”

“It seems like Brian Linaza thinks highly of Sir Aethelwolf. He even gave you a golden invitation card. You see, that guy only sent us a silver invitation card so I was only able to bring three people with me. Perhaps that guy has some business with you.” Julius chuckled as he showed his silver invitation card to him.

Aethelwolf agreed with his words. Brian Linaza is the Leader of the Merchant Association. He is a calculating man who wouldn't do something without getting anything in return.

“Eh? Sir Aethelwolf, Julius! Wait for us!” Aethelwolf and Julius turned their heads when they heard the familiar voice. It was Johann who came with his granddaughter, Anna. They left the mansion last night after his lessons in Alchemy.

Johann scanned the people behind Aethelwolf. He already know four of them, but the remaining person who looked like a tall mountain was an unfamiliar face. He also noticed that the man was a late stage Level 3 Esper. ‘Aethelwolf has a subordinate like this? I didn't see him in the mansion last night...’

Ramiel also noticed the old man's scrutinizing gaze, but he remained unperturbed.

Some servants led them inside the banquet hall where they encountered more acquaintances.

“Sir Aethelwolf!”

“Oh, old bastard Julius, you are finally here!”

“It has been a long time, Johann!”

Aethelwolf and the others also greeted the people who spoke to them.

Suddenly, a handsome middle-aged man with long black hair walked up to them. His presence attracted everyone's attention and they immediately gasped when they identified who he was.

“Sir Brian!”

It was Brian Linaza, the host of this banquet. He was quite tall for a merchant, standing at 190 centimeters.

Aethelwolf furrowed his eyebrows as he looked at Brian. He heard from the others that this guy was not an Esper, but it seems like the rumors were all wrong. When he checked his [Virtual Map], he noticed that this guy was emitting the power of a late stage Level 4 Esper! As for how he was able to hide his aura, Aethelwolf believed that the man has a rune in his possession that can hide one's power!

“Sir Aethelwolf, it is an honor to have you here. Let me introduce my humble self to you. I am Brian Linaza, a simple merchant.” Brian smiled at Aethelwolf as he extended his hand to him.

“Oh? I never thought that Sir Brian is actually so tall in person! I almost thought that you are an Esper because of your strong image.” Aethelwolf grabbed the man’s hand and shook it gently.

Brian’s eyes flashed with a strange glint for a brief moment when he heard his words. “You must be joking, Sir Aethelwolf. I’m just a normal person with some skills as a merchant.” He grinned. “Excuse me, I still have to prepare a few things. I hope you guys enjoy the banquet.” He left and went to greet the other guests.

Aethelwolf stared at Brian’s broad back with a thoughtful look. He wondered why the man was hiding his real abilities from the public.

“Sir Julius, is Sir Brian really just a normal person?” He asked in a whispering voice.

Julius nodded his head as he answered. “Yeah. That guy is so talented in business, but it is a pity that he is not an Esper. With the amount of money and resources he has accumulated all these years, he could have reached Level 4 even if he has a lacking talent.”

Aethelwolf squinted his eyes when he heard this. ‘What is this guy hiding?’

155 Soul Jade

“Sir Aethelwolf, I’ve been looking for you everywhere.” Henry walked up to Aethelwolf eagerly.

“Oh, Henry! I was so busy in the last few days. I barely even slept.” Aethelwolf forced out a smile while saying this.

Henry chuckled when he heard his words. He then moved closer to him and said. “Sir Aethelwolf, the construction of your clothing shop is finally completed. You can send someone to check it later and just tell me if you want to add something to the shop.”

Aethelwolf was pleased by his efficiency. “Not bad! I’ll send Hyacinth later to check the shop. By the way, Henry. Do you know someone who sells an item called Soul Jade? I need it to craft something.”

Soul Jade is a very rare magical stone that can only be extracted in the deepest parts of the world’s crust. It is an item that is mainly used to seal souls. Aethelwolf needed it as the core material for making the item that can turn Olivia into a human.

Henry's eyes squinted as soon as the topic shifted to business. "Soul Jade, do you mean the precious magical stone that can seal souls?" He could not help but ask. It was a very precious mineral with a value that was comparable to a Unique-Rated item!

Aethelwolf nodded his head. "That's right."

Henry pondered for a moment before he said. "I know one person that possesses a Soul Jade, but you have to keep in mind that this item is very expensive. The last time it was auctioned for 100,000,000 gold coins. The man who bought it was Sir Brian Linaza. I don't know if he still has the Soul Jade, but I can ask him for you."

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"Thanks. I owe you one, Henry." Aethelwolf said while patting Henry's shoulder.

Henry smiled widely and replied. "No problem! Anything for you, Sir Aethelwolf!" He could finally repay Aethelwolf for giving him the Awakening Pellet. "Just wait for my good news." Henry said before he walked away.

Aethelwolf led the others to sit down in an inconspicuous corner of the banquet hall.

"Sir Aethelwolf, do you know why Sir Brian hosted a banquet?" Janrose asked in a low voice.

Aethelwolf glanced at her and replied with a smile. "Henry said that it's an annual banquet. Perhaps this is Sir Brian's way of maintaining his place as the top merchant of the Leone Empire. All the people he invited here are elites and befriending them would be beneficial to the Merchant Association. Everyone also knows this, but they willingly came here since it is a win-win situation for them."

Janrose revealed a confused look and when Aethelwolf saw this, he rubbed her head gently and chuckled as he said. "Just stick to Alchemy..."

Hyacinth and Anton laughed when they heard the exchange between the two, while Albert and Ramiel remained stoic.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Hm?

Aethelwolf turned his head when he heard some people moving towards them.

"Eh? Grace?" Janrose exclaimed in surprise when she spotted Grace.

Aethelwolf scanned the three people. They were Grace, Julie, and an old man he never met before.

“Aethelwolf, we would like to speak with you privately. By the way, this is our father, Raven Urgel.” Julie looked at Aethelwolf, her expression was hidden behind her veil.

Raven Urgel?

Aethelwolf stood up and smiled at them. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Sir Raven.” He shook hands with the old man.

“So young and accomplished. You are a perfect match for my daughter! Hahaha! This girl has been talking a lot about you in the last few days.” Raven looked like a gentle neighborhood grandpa with his long white hair and a pair of murky eyes.

Julie’s eyes twitched when she heard this and she immediately pulled the shameless old man to prevent him from embarrassing her further.

Aethelwolf could only awkwardly chuckle.

“Since this spot is quiet, I believe it’s fine if we chat here.” Julie sat in his opposite direction. “You told me that there are five steps of winemaking. I want to hear more about it. In exchange for your information, we will give you ten percent of the shares from the total profit of our wine shops. What do you think?”

Raven smirked and silently took a seat beside Julie. His daughter was so smart that she was already managing the entire business of their Urgel Household. Her strength was also about to reach his level, but her growth made him feel a bit alarmed. It would be difficult for her to find the right husband candidate because of her overwhelming talent. However, when he heard his daughter talking about a man for the first time, it made him excited. He investigated Aethelwolf and the more he learned about the young man, the more satisfied he was. Aethelwolf was the only man perfect for his daughter!

Aethelwolf narrowed his eyes when he heard the offer. It was very tempting since Julie was only asking for information related to the wine-making process. He would need a lot of money for his future plans so this was a great opportunity for him. However, he knew the true value of the information he has and it was definitely more than what Julie has offered.

Thinking about this, he put on a nonchalant smile as he leaned on his chair. “I think you don’t know the value of the information I have, Miss Julie. With this knowledge, I can create my own wine shop chain and I’m confident that my wines would be more popular than what you currently sell in your stores. The ten percent you offered is just spare change compared to the true value of this information.” He said while pointing at his head.

Everyone silently stared at the face-off between Aethelwolf and Julie.

Julie furrowed her eyebrows and asked hesitantly. "Then, to what price are you willing to sell that information?"

Aethelwolf interlocked his fingers as he looked at Julie with a smile. "51% of your wine shops' total profit. That is my price."

Julie gritted her teeth in anger and she almost slammed the table when she heard the absurd offer. She glared at Aethelwolf as she took a deep breath before muttering coldly. "You have a big appetite, Sir Aethelwolf. Although, the information you have is very valuable, our Urgel Household will not agree to this. You might have a more sophisticated method of making wine, but our Urgel Household has already been in the wine market for many decades and we have nurtured a lot of talents who are tirelessly researching methods to improve the flavor of our wine. I believe that we would soon discover the secret that you possess. I only came to you in hopes that we can learn the method earlier." She really wanted to punch Aethelwolf's face, but she held back her fury. The man was probably testing her limits and if she shows any weakness, he would use it to his advantage. The number one rule when dealing with merchants was to never display weakness.

Aethelwolf chuckled in his heart. The girl was by no means a pushover. He thought that she only became the family head of the Urgel Household because of her power, but it seems like she also possesses the wisdom of a true merchant. "Miss Julie, do you know of a few things that make a wine more delicious?" He asked as he nonchalantly stared at the veiled young lady. He could use his skill to see through her face behind the veil, but he refrained from doing so. It was because his skill [Danger Perception] was giving him a signal not to do it. Perhaps she possesses an item that can block visual techniques from seeing the face behind her veil.

Julie furrowed her eyebrows when she heard the question. She knew of two things that can enhance the flavor of a wine, but she felt hesitant to speak about them since it was a business secret.

Her eyes were not hidden by her veil so Aethelwolf immediately saw her hesitation. He chuckled as grabbed a bottle of wine that was on the table and poured some into a cup. "One factor that can enhance the flavor of a wine is its container. If one uses a normal pot to hold wine, the wine will spoil after many decades. However, there is a type of wood with the ability to preserve objects. It is normally used to make coffins, but this wood can be used to make pots for storing wine. I noticed that the wine bottle you use to store your wines is made from this wood so I believe you already know about this. Other than containers, I know of more than five things that can enhance the flavor of a wine."

Julie stared at him with a look of surprise. This man seems to have a lot of knowledge about wine.

Aethelwolf didn't stop and continued. "I don't want to make things difficult for you. The Urgel Household has already established a brand when it comes to wine, so just your name alone is already precious. How about this? Give me 30% ownership of your wine shops and I'll give you all the information I have about wine. To tell you the truth, I have already compiled all the knowledge I have about wine in a book." He took out a book from his storage space and showed it to her.

It was a purple book with golden edges with a simple title, 'Art of Wine'.

Julie could no longer hide her agitation when he took out the book. If what Aethelwolf said was all true, the value of their wines would increase along with the improvement of their taste.

If Aethelwolf gains 30% ownership of their wine shops, they would still be the true boss and he would be only a major shareholder.

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After careful deliberation, Julie stared at Aethelwolf with unblinking eyes as she said. "In that case, I will accept your offer, Sir Aethelwolf!" There wasn't even a look of hesitation in her eyes.

'Oh? This girl is quite decisive.' Aethelwolf smiled and extended his hand to her. "It's a pleasure to work with you, Miss Julie Irish."

Julie shook his hand and said. "We will send someone to your mansion soon once we have prepared the documents. Can you tell me when will you have time for a meeting? We might have to discuss this matter thoroughly in the coming days." She couldn't wait to seal the deal with him.

Hearing this, Aethelwolf slowly released her hand and handed the book to her. "I will be very busy in the coming days so I will send Hyacinth to discuss with you. She is my personal assistant so there is nothing to worry about." He said while patting Hyacinth's shoulder.

Hyacinth felt warm in her heart. She was the newest member of the Lassiter Household, but Aethelwolf didn't seem to mind it.

Julie stared at Hyacinth and then at Aethelwolf. The man didn't even hesitate to give the job to her. Perhaps she was one of his most trusted subordinates. It doesn't matter to her as long as the deal would go through. "Alright. I'll send my people to your mansion soon. Just give me a day to prepare the documents." Julie said as he kept the book inside her storage ring. She wanted to read it at this moment, but she might look impatient if she does that.

“Read the book first. Who knows? Maybe I lied to you earlier.” Aethelwolf laughed gently before taking a sip of wine. It tasted bland, but he maintained a calm image.

Julie nodded her head. “We will take our leave first.” She then stood up from her seat and walked away decisively without even turning back. Grace immediately followed her sister.

Raven Urgel who had remained quiet all this time suddenly slapped his thigh as he laughed joyfully. “Now, I know why she talks a lot about you. This is the first time I’ve seen her lose in a verbal discussion. I’m now more interested in you...” The old man was guffawed as he walked away.

“Sister, why did you agree to his demands? The main source of income of our Urgel Household comes from those wine shops. Now, that he has gained control of a third of it, our annual profits might decrease.” Grace tugged her sister’s sleeves and looked at her worriedly. Although she was still young, her sister taught her a lot of things about their business.

Julie stopped in her tracks and shook her head as she replied. “You’re wrong, Grace. Aethelwolf might have gained ownership of one-third of our wine shops, but the profits we will gain because of this book will be beyond what we currently earn. He wasn’t exaggerating when he said that he can make a wine shop chain of his own with the information he has. If that happened, our Urgel Household would have been forced to close down our wine shops.” She knew that Aethelwolf was capable of doing it. The man already possesses the wealth to establish his own wine shops and he would only need some time to integrate into the wine market.

Grace stared at her sister in shock. “Then why did he give the book to us?” She asked in confusion. If Aethelwolf has the power to force their business to close down, why did he give up on it?

Julie was silent for a moment before she responded with a sigh. “He must be planning to expand his business and this is his gift to our Urgel Household. Perhaps he wants our Urgel Household to pave the way for him and we wouldn’t even be able to decline when that time comes.” However, she knew that Aethelwolf was looking for allies! He must have predicted that something would happen soon so he decided to gain the support of the Urgel Household.

“Why not?”

Julie’s eyes narrowed as she answered. “Because he can take back what he gave to us any time he wants. That man is dangerous.”

Suddenly, a playful voice butted in. “Then, how about you marry him? Wouldn’t that solve your worries?” It was their father, Raven Urgel. He wore a mischievous look on his face as he stared at Julie.

Julie didn't even spare him a glance and just flicked her sleeves and walked away while pulling Grace with her.

Seeing this, Raven hummed joyfully and followed them.

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Meanwhile, Henry jogged to where Aethelwolf's group was seated.

"Sir Aethelwolf, I have been looking for you." Henry sat down beside Aethelwolf. He then wiped off the sweat on his forehead as he continued. "I spoke with Sir Brian and he told me to bring you to his room. He wants to discuss the matter about the Soul Jade with you in private."

Aethelwolf glanced at Henry and smiled. "Is that so? Then please take me to him."

"Sure. Just let me drink some water first." He then poured water into an empty glass and after drinking it, he complained. "Aiyoo! My bones are hurting a bit from all the running..."

Aethelwolf chuckled and handed him one Recovery Pellet. "This will help you recover."

Henry immediately took the pill from his hand and kept it inside his storage ring. "Let's go, Sir Aethelwolf. Let's not make Sir Brian wait for long."

"Eh? How about your knees?"

"They're not hurting anymore." Henry shamelessly answered.

"Stay here and wait for me." Aethelwolf said to Anton and the others before he followed behind Henry.

Soon, the two arrived in front of Brian's room.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Henry knocked on the door. "Sir Brian, I've brought Sir Aethelwolf here."

"Let him in." A calm voice echoed inside the room.

Henry pushed the door open and told Aethelwolf to go in. "You two can talk. I'll stay here."

Aethelwolf nodded his head and entered the room.

Brian was seated behind his study, holding a piece of gem-like stone. When he heard someone's footsteps, he raised his head and looked at Aethelwolf with a smile. "Come. Take your seat." He said.

Aethelwolf grabbed a chair and sat down.

"I heard from Henry that you are looking for this." Brian opened his palm and showed him an egg-shaped gem. It was the Soul Jade that Aethelwolf was looking for.

Aethelwolf stared at the Soul Jade and muttered calmly. "You indeed have it. Are you willing to sell it to me?" He was prepared to be sucked dry this time since this item was very expensive and some would even go beyond 100,000,000 gold coins!

Brian put down the Soul Jade and smiled at him. "I don't lack money, but there is something I need and you might be able to make it." He then took out a piece of parchment made from magical beast skin. "This is an ancient recipe for a pill called 'Soul Eclipse'. Can you refine it?"

Aethelwolf furrowed his eyebrows as he studied the recipe written on the parchment. The ingredients were all high-level herbs with value reaching tens of millions. 'This is a 4th-Grade Pill that can strengthen the soul and cleanse the mind! Does he plan to use this pill to reach the peak stage of Level 4?'

"This is a 4th-Grade Pill. I can refine this." Aethelwolf nodded his head as he put down the parchment.

"Really?" Brian was a bit surprised by his confidence. When he showed the recipe to Karman Leone, the old man didn't guarantee that he could refine the pill successfully. He didn't want to risk it since he only has one set of ingredients. He needed someone who could refine the pill with certainty.

Aethelwolf stared at him calmly and answered. "I'm a Level 4 Alchemist. I can refine any 4th-Grade Pill as long as I have the recipe. If you give me the ingredients now, I can refine the pill here. The recipe is quite sophisticated so it might take me about thirty minutes to refine the pill."

Brian stared at him in shock when he heard this. Thirty minutes? When he asked Karman Leone how long it would take him to refine the pill, the old man said that it would take him several hours! "I only have one set of ingredients. If you make a mistake-

Aethelwolf cut him off. "I'm a hundred percent confident that I can refine it. If I fail, I'll compensate you ten times the amount you used to purchase the ingredients."

Hearing this, Brian's eyes narrowed into slits.

“Ten times the value of the ingredients?” Brian stared at Aethelwolf with a smile. He didn’t know where he got his confidence from, but according to the information he has about Aethelwolf, he is the kind of man who doesn’t speak empty words.

Aethelwolf nodded his head. “If you are worried, you can watch the refining process. The banquet will take a few hours so it wouldn’t matter if the host is gone for thirty minutes.” If he managed to convince Brian, he would gain the recipe of Soul Eclipse for free and he would even get the Soul Jade if the refinement process is successful.

Brian chuckled at his words. He then took out the ingredients for the Soul Eclipse and said. “I trust you, Sir Aethelwolf. Truthfully, I planned to meet with you after the banquet to have you check this ancient recipe, but I heard that you urgently need a Soul Jade, so I took my chance.” After taking out all the ingredients, he stared at Aethelwolf and muttered. “I will wait for your good news in the banquet hall. Just send Henry if you are done refining the pill.”

Aethelwolf nodded his head. “Sure. Just leave it to me.”

Brian smiled and left the room.

Aethelwolf took out the Moonlight Frost Cauldron and sorted the ingredients. He then studied the ancient recipe with furrowed eyebrows. “Oh? The person who made this recipe has some skills. These ingredients require delicate extraction and one simple mistake could bring a negative impact on the resulting pill. It might even lead to failure. Only the most skilled Level 4 Alchemist can refine this pill.” He mumbled to himself as he cleaned his cauldron. This was a habit that he had in his past life as a doctor. He would feel uncomfortable if the items he uses are not clean or improperly sterilized.

“I should use my Black Pill Fire to make this pill.” He muttered as he started to extract the nutrients in the ingredients.

In the past few days, he noticed that the refinement process is a lot smoother if he uses his Black Pill Fire. Furthermore, the resulting pills are also of high quality.

If he use a Golden Pill Fire to refine the Soul Eclipse, he would only be able to produce one pill since the quality of the ingredients was not great. However, if he uses his Black Pill Fire, he was confident that he could make two pills!

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Aethelwolf carefully extracted the nutrients from the ingredients. He didn’t even let a single drop go to waste. After extracting everything, he poured the liquefied nutrients inside the cauldron. He stirred the mixture with the help of his world essence. He made sure that the mixture was thoroughly combined.

He didn't follow all the steps in the recipe because he noticed that some parts could be simplified.

If Brian knew that he didn't even follow the steps in the ancient recipe, he would certainly smack Aethelwolf's head. No Alchemist would dare to casually change the steps of a pill recipe that they were unfamiliar with. However, Aethelwolf was defying all logic by doing that and there wasn't even a look of hesitation in his eyes. He even had the time to pause the refinement process and lit up a cigar for himself!

"The guy who made this recipe is a genius, but he needs more training. This part right here is unnecessary and it would consume too much world essence and time if I follow the steps he noted down." He clicked his tongue before blowing sweet-scented smoke into the air. He then flicked the spent ashes into an ashtray before putting the cigar in between his lips.

After the mixture was heated to a certain temperature, it slowly formed into two small spheres. Just as he had expected, he was able to form two pills.

Seeing this, he took another puff on his cigar as he controlled the temperature of his Black Pill Fire. He then slowly decreased the heat and adjusted the flow of world essence inside the Moonlight Frost Cauldron.

Soon, two silver pills in the shape of spheres could be seen inside the cauldron.

He let the pills rest for a minute before he took them out. "He only needs one pill, right? In that case, I'll take the other one." He chuckled as kept the pills inside his storage space.

Aethelwolf cleaned up his cauldron using a clean cloth. After everything was cleaned, he stepped out of the room and saw Henry standing outside. He looked bored out of his wits, but he immediately flashed a smile when he saw Aethelwolf coming out of the room. "Sir Aethelwolf, I heard from Sir Brian that you were refining pills. Is there anything I can help you with?" He asked.

Aethelwolf patted Henry's shoulder and replied with a beaming smile. "It's done."

"Eh? It's done? That fast? I thought that refining pills would take an hour at least. It's not even thirty minutes yet..." He stared at Aethelwolf in shock. He then composed himself and said. "In that case, I'll inform Sir Brian that you have already refined the pill."

Aethelwolf nodded his head. "Let's go together."

"Alright." Henry led him to the premiere seats where the most notable figures of the Leone Empire were seated.

Aethelwolf saw the second prince chatting with some people. He also saw Julie who was reading a book in silence. 'She's reading the book here?' He chuckled when he saw this. The girl must have been too eager to learn the information inside the book.

"Henry, go and inform Sir Brian that I have refined the pill. I have to greet His Highness first." Aethelwolf said to Henry before walking in the direction of the second prince.

"Your Highness." Aethelwolf cupped his fists at the second prince.

Prince Calvin immediately turned his head when he heard the familiar voice. "Sir Aethelwolf! I've been looking for you around the banquet hall!" The prince smiled and walked towards Aethelwolf.

Some people surrounded Aethelwolf as soon as he arrived in the premiere area. They wish to get to know this young Alchemist who was said to possess the same skill level as the Supreme Director of the Alchemy Tower.

"Where have you been, Sir Aethelwolf? I looked everywhere for you, but I only spotted Sir Anton and the others. They also didn't know where you are." Prince Calvin said.

"I had something to take care of." Aethelwolf chuckled.

"By the way, His Majesty told me that you should check the academy when you have the time. It is located in Maracas District. There would be a meeting for the faculty members of the academy and as the headmaster, you should be there, Sir Aethelwolf. His Majesty will also head there to observe the meeting. There would be an important discussion about the future of the academy. You have to prepare for it."

"Is that so? Tell His Majesty that I will be there. Please excuse me, Your Highness. I still have something to discuss with Sir Brian." Aethelwolf excused himself.

"Alright. Come here later. I still have a lot of things to speak with you about." Prince Calvin had been meaning to ask the matters regarding the Lassiter Household. Many people are curious why Aethelwolf gave the family head position to a low-ranking noble. They weren't even related by blood and their only connection was the little boy who was said to be his student.

Meanwhile, Julie who was reading the 'Art of Wine' was suddenly interrupted by her sister.

"Sister, it's that guy." Grace lightly tugged her sister's sleeve.

Julie lowered the book she was reading and turned her gaze toward Aethelwolf. She saw him chatting with the second prince. 'He seems to have a close relationship with the second prince...' She then moved her attention back to the Art of Wine. 'This is brilliant! How did he come up with these innovative ideas? He would need a team of

skilled researchers to gather all this information, but he had just recently arrived in the capital. He must have collected this information a long time ago. I don't believe that he came up with all this knowledge on his own.' She was fascinated by the information written in the book. Everything was detailed and explained meticulously.

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She raised her head again, but Aethelwolf was no longer in her sight. He must have gone elsewhere.

"Sir Aethelwolf, I heard from Henry that you have already refined the pill. Can you show it to me?" Brian tried to hide his agitation, but Aethelwolf saw through the ripples in his eyes. Even the most minute movements of his eyelashes didn't escape his sight.

Aethelwolf took out one Soul Eclipse and handed it to Brian. "My skills are lacking and I was only able to refine one pill with the ingredients you provided." He sighed regretfully. His acting was seamless and worthy of an award.

Brian received the pill with slightly trembling hands. He carefully inspected the pill and when he sensed the formidable energy contained inside, he laughed joyfully. Aethelwolf succeeded! "You really did it! Thank you so much, Sir Aethelwolf!" He could no longer control his happiness. With this pill, he would soon reach the peak stage of Level 4. When that time comes, he no longer needed to worry about threats from the Imperial Family or the noble households. They have been keeping a close eye on him because of his enormous wealth. They were afraid of the growing power of the Linaza Household.

Aethelwolf smiled as he looked at the joyful Brian. "That pill can strengthen the soul and the mind. It is extremely beneficial to Level 4 Espers. I'm just curious. Which person is lucky enough to consume it?"

Brian's smile immediately stiffened when he heard this. 'Did he sense my level? That shouldn't be possible. I have a Level 4 Aura Concealing Rune in my possession so it should be impossible for someone to sense my power. Is he testing me?' He stared at Aethelwolf and he noticed the man taking out an object that looked like a small stick from out of nowhere. He then lit it up and put it in between his lips.

"Oh, this? This is a cigar. It's a random creation of mine. It calms my nerves. Would you like to try one?"

"No, I'm good. I would only embarrass myself. I don't even know how to use that." Brian chuckled to himself as he kept the Soul Eclipse inside his storage ring. He then took out the Soul Jade and handed it to Aethelwolf. "You earned this. I have no use for it and I

only kept it with me as a collectible. I have a hobby of collecting precious gems and minerals. If you need my help, just tell me and I'll try my best to help you." He said.

Aethelwolf's smile widened as he accepted the Soul Jade. He kept it inside his storage space and said as he handed a piece of paper to Brian. "Actually, I want to buy a few things, but they are precious so there might be no stock in the market. I need them tomorrow. Of course, I'll pay for them."

Brian read the listed items on the paper and furrowed his eyebrows. They were indeed precious with values in tens of millions. "It would be difficult to procure them, but I'll send them to your mansion tonight. I'll give you a 10% discount for all of them." The Linaza Household has a wide network and they were connected to many merchant families.

With a cigar in between his lips, Aethelwolf replied with a beaming look. "It is a pleasure to do business with you, Sir Brian." He extended his hand and shook Brian's outstretched hand.

"The pleasure is mine, Sir Aethelwolf. I hope that we can do more business in the future." Brian was satisfied by Aethelwolf. The man was difficult to read and also mysterious, but it was definitely a great idea to befriend him. His talent in Alchemy alone has already surpassed his expectations.

After his deal with Brian, Aethelwolf went back to where he spotted the second prince. When he arrived there, he noticed that there was a woman with bob-cut brown hair chatting with the prince. She looked dazzling in her tight white dress.

"Oh? Sir Aethelwolf! Come here! This is Madam Jade Kristine of the Singler Household. She is the aunt of Michael Singler, the participant who came second in the battle competition." Prince Calvin was overly enthusiastic for some reason and his eyes kept on darting towards Jade Kristine's beautiful face.

'Hm? Is there something going on here?' Aethelwolf revealed a look of interest when he saw this. He thought that Prince Calvin was interested in Samira, but it seems like the guy prefers mature women more.

"Nice to meet you, Sir Aethelwolf." Jade Kristine smiled at him.

'She would be useful in the future since she has a high position in the Alchemy Tower.' Aethelwolf put on a gentlemanly smile as he said. "You look lovely, Miss Jade Kristine. How have you been?"

Jade's smile deepened when she heard the compliment. "I'm doing great. Michael got the second place in the battle event so I'm in a good mood. Though he is still a long way ahead compared to your student, Janrose. By the way, where is she? Did you not bring her with you?" Jade looked around, searching for Janrose.

Aethelwolf chuckled upon hearing this. "She is here. Do you want me to bring her here?" He asked.

Jade shook her head gently. "There's no need to trouble you for that." She then turned her head to Michael who was standing behind her. "Go and look for Janrose."

Michael nodded his head and left.

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"Sir Aethelwolf, please sit here beside me. I have a lot of things to ask." Jade Kristine patted the seat next to her.

Prince Calvin felt a sense of jealousy when he heard this, but he didn't show it to his face. He sighed and chatted with the other people who were seated with them.

"Thank you." Aethelwolf said as he sat down. He then took a puff on his cigar and exhaled a breath of honey-scented smoke.

Jade stared at his side profile with narrowed eyes. 'This man is dangerously charming.' She thought.

"I heard that Janrose can already summon her Pill Fire. When are you planning to let her take the Alchemist exam?" Jade asked while pouring wine for herself and Aethelwolf.

"She can summon her Pill Fire, but she is still practicing how to make an herbal paste. I'll let her take the exam once she is confident in making a pill by herself. Besides, I also plan to let her take the exam together with her friends. You see, she's not the only student under my tutelage." Aethelwolf answered as he took the cup of wine that was handed to him.

Jade Kristine looked at him in surprise. "You're also teaching others?"

Aethelwolf nodded his head. "In fact, my first student isn't Janrose. She is my second student. Before her, I took a child as my student. You might haven't heard of him yet since he just came to Lion City. Other than him, there's Samira and Anna." He then took a small sip of wine after saying those words. He didn't tell her that he was teaching Johann because it might cause unnecessary trouble for him.

"Is that so?" She leaned closer to him and whispered. "Actually...I want to invite you to our mansion. You see, I'm practicing to refine a 4th-Grade Pill. I was hoping that you would give me some pointers."

"You can already refine 4th-Grade Pills? I thought you were only a Level 3 Alchemist?" Aethelwolf stared at her in surprise. He heard that she was only a little older than forty

years old, and now she's saying that she is practicing to refine 4th-Grade Pills. If what she said is true, then her talent in Alchemy might have surpassed the Supreme Director of the Alchemy Tower!

Jade Kristine moved her body closer to him and it almost looked like she was hugging him. She then muttered. "I'm still not confident that I can refine 4th-Grade Pills, but I can already summon a Golden Pill Fire. I don't want the others to know about this yet so I hope that you can keep it between us."

Aethelwolf stared at her in confusion. They weren't even friends before this conversation started, so why was this woman so trusting of him? Was it because of the handsome shell that he possess? However, she didn't seem like the type of woman who was gullible enough to fall for someone she just met.

Jade Kristine noticed the weird look he was giving her so she immediately explained herself. "Supreme Director Karman is planning to step down from his position so the Administrators are becoming restless about who will get his position. I want to become the new Supreme Director, but I don't want to expose myself for now. The other Administrators might do something once they get wind of this. You're the only person who can help me, Sir Aethelwolf." She looked at him with sincere eyes.

Aethelwolf let out a smile. "Oh?" He tapped his fingers on the table and remained silent as he looked at her. Helping Jade Kristine was beneficial to him, but he would also offend the other three Administrators if he openly supports her. "I guess the Supreme Director already has a suitable candidate in his mind..."

Jade Kristine's eyes widened when she heard this. "How did you know?"

Aethelwolf chuckled. "You wouldn't hide your prowess if he hasn't decided yet..." He added. "Alright. I'll help you, but my schedule is full within the next three days so I will visit your mansion after dealing with everything."

Jade Kristine's eyes lit up.

"Sir Aethelwolf, Aunt!" Michael's voice interrupted their conversation.

Aethelwolf and Jade turned their heads and saw Michael bring a group of people. They were Janrose and the others who came with Aethelwolf.

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