

The Herb King

The Herb King #Chapter 171 – 180

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171 Hugo's Execution

It was the day of the execution and Hugo Ward whose hands were tied by chains was being pulled by the executioner to the guillotine. His head was covered by a black hood so nobody could see his face.

Hugo could hear the angry crowd jeering at him, but this didn't faze him. He knew that the only way for his Ward Household to survive was for him to die as the only sinner.

"Kill him!"

"Die, traitor!"

The executioner raised his hand as a signal for the crowd to remain silent. When everyone quieted down, the executioner opened his mouth. "Everyone, this man is Hugo Ward. He conspired with the Northern Viper Group to cause harm to our Leone Empire! Because of his dealings with those bandits, many of our soldiers died!"

Among the crowd, Alec Ward and the others from the Ward Household stared at their family head with mixed feelings. Some were happy, while others were sad.

"Father..." Alec clenched his hands while looking at his father in remorse.

The executioner turned his gaze at Hugo. "Do you have any last words?" He asked coldly.

Hugo Ward remained silent. No one could see his expression since it was covered by a hood.

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The executioner dragged Hugo to the guillotine and positioned the man's neck directly beneath the blade.

"Kill him!"

"Kill!"

The crowd yelled out.

The executioner removed the hood on Hugo's head. A few people gasped out loud upon seeing him.

His hair was disheveled, and blood covered his face. His eyes looked wild, and his lips were twisted into a cruel smile.

The crowd grew angrier upon seeing this. Their loud cursing and jeering intensified.

The executioner felt disgusted by his expression. He then pulled the lever, which then released the blade that swiftly and forcefully decapitated the head of Hugo Ward.

Hugo's head rolled on the platform. The cruel expression on his face was still there.

The executioner grabbed the decapitated head and raised it higher in the air, making the crowd erupt into cheers.

"Father!" Alec kneeled with his hands against the ground.

The executioner placed Hugo's head inside a sack before putting it inside a chest. He then glanced at the crowd and said. "His Majesty will give a chance to the Ward Household. The members of their household will be on the frontlines in the war against the Northern Viper Group!"

Under the spiteful gazes of the crowd, the members of the Ward Household could only lower their heads. They were lucky that the emperor has given them the chance to redeem themselves.

Meanwhile, among the crowd, Albert shook his head. "His Majesty is merely using them as cannon fodder. I don't think they will survive the clash against the Northern Viper Group." He muttered.

Rendell who was standing beside him sighed upon hearing this.

Some members of the Ward Household were innocent, but they would be punished along with the other members. It was the result of betraying the Leone Empire.

Soon, the crowd thinned down as the execution was concluded. Only some members of the noble household remained to chat with their acquaintances.

"Oh, aren't you guys from the Lassiter Household?" It was Samira who came with her family.

Harold Reynolds and Julius Reynolds stared at Albert in surprise. They could sense that this man was a Level 4 Esper! It wasn't even long before they had last seen each other and this guy had already entered the elite circle.

Rendell lightly bowed his head upon seeing Samira and the others, while Albert cupped his fists.

"Sir Aethelwolf sent us here to represent the Lassiter Household." Albert said in a calm voice. He was no longer cautious when speaking with Level 4 Espers, but he still spoke to them in a respectful manner because they were Aethelwolf's friends. "I am Albert Nicholas, the commander of the Lassiter Household's army." He introduced himself. He then pointed at Rendell and said. "This man is Rendell, a trusted aide of Sir Aethelwolf."

Albert and Rendell conversed with Samira's family. Their two households were allies so they quickly befriended each other.

Soon, other people also came to chat with them.

Inside the mansion of the Lassiter Household.

"When you are speaking with an older person, you must speak to them politely, okay?" Aethelwolf was teaching Olivia how to be a good child. She was a magical beast so she needed to learn the basic etiquette of the humans.

Olivia nodded her head while biting on her biscuit. "Okay."

Nom. Nom. Nom.

"Alright. Let me check if you are really listening to what I told you." He paused and asked. "If a stranger comes to you and offers you a piece of candy, what will you do?"

Olivia tilted her head and replied with a bashful smile. "Take the candy and say 'thank you'."

Aethelwolf's mouth twitched. "Wrong."

Olivia stared at him in confusion.

"You should not take anything from a stranger. What if the candy they give is poisoned? You should ignore them or just politely decline, okay?" Aethelwolf rubbed her head gently. This girl lived in the jungle all her life so she knows nothing about this.

"Okay." She nodded her head. She then looked at him and said. "I want to play with Kerrin and Alba."

Aethelwolf wanted to reject her, but when he saw her big puppy eyes, he could only helplessly nod his head. "Alright, but you must listen to what I say later. You have to promise me."

"Promise." Olivia smiled widely before she excitedly jumped from the balcony.

The little girl was now accustomed to her human body and she was now as agile as a monkey. She landed on the open field and searched for Alba and Kerrin.

Aethelwolf chuckled at the sight of this. There were a lot of guards in the vicinity so he wasn't worried about her. Besides, her body was even stronger than those on the same level as her. It was the advantage of being a magical beast with Phoenix Bloodline.

While looking at the little girl who was running around carefreely, he took out a cigar and lit it up. "Hugo should be dead by now..." He muttered.

Two days later, Aethelwolf headed to the academy with Olivia and Albert. There was a meeting with the faculty members and apparently, there would be a discussion about the future development of the academy. Aethelwolf was already briefed by the second prince so he already knew what was going to happen.

"Sir Aethelwolf, we are here." Albert said after stopping the carriage at the entrance of the academy.

Aethelwolf lifted Olivia and alighted the carriage. He then put her down and held her hand.

"It looks decent." He muttered as he glanced at the buildings ahead of them. The land occupied by the academy was many times larger than the land owned by the colleges and schools in his past life. Although the building design looked lackluster in comparison to the futuristic architecture of those in his memories, it wasn't that bad. Furthermore, he noticed that there were runes inscribed all over the walls that surrounded the academy buildings. 'Level 4 Defense Runes? It looks like the Imperial Family emptied their coffers to build this place. They even hired a Level 4 Engraver to make those runes...'

He wondered how they managed to hire the services of a Level 4 Engraver.

"Sir Aethelwolf!" A voice suddenly interrupted his train of thought.

Aethelwolf turned his gaze at the person who had just called him. It was an average-looking woman who was dressed formally. She looked to be in her early thirties with long black hair.

The woman walked up to them and introduced herself. "Headmaster Aethelwolf, I am Madilyn Urgel and I'm one of the teachers of the academy. It's a pleasure to meet you."

It was Julie Irish Urgel who told her to wait for Aethelwolf and get on his good side. Madilyn knew what her family head was thinking so she did as she was told.

He was still not used to this new title, but he had to be accustomed to it.

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Aethelwolf nodded his head at Madilyn. "Bring me to the meeting room." He said to her.

"Yes, Headmaster Aethelwolf." Madilyn lightly bowed her head and led the way for them. She kept on stealing glances at the little girl by his side. According to the rumors, Aethelwolf has an adopted daughter.

Olivia's legs were short so she had to walk faster to keep up with Aethelwolf. She curiously looked around the buildings while munching on her homemade cookies.

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Soon, they arrived at the meeting room.

Aethelwolf noticed that there were already a lot of people. He stared at his wristwatch and coughed dryly after looking at the time. 'It seems like I am a bit late...' He thought to himself.

"Miss Madilyn, thank you for bringing me here. Please take your seat." Aethelwolf smiled at Madilyn.

Madilyn bowed her head and walked towards an empty seat.

He sat on the head seat and said. "Hello, everyone. I believe you've already been notified about the agenda of this meeting." He paused and scanned the people inside the room. They nodded their heads at his words.

Aethelwolf adjusted his posture and continued. "The academy will take in students below the age of twenty and train them in various courses that they will choose from. Espers, Alchemists, Blacksmiths, Engravers, and many other professions will be taught inside the academy. All of you are experts in these fields and I believe that everyone here will become great teachers. However, we need to ensure..."

Aethelwolf began his long speech. It was tiring, but it was necessary since he was now the headmaster of the academy.

Aethelwolf paused in the middle of his speech and gave a signal to Albert with his eyes.

Albert stood up and handed folders to everyone inside the meeting room.

“In the last two days, I’ve prepared a lot of things. I wrote the rules and regulations that everyone must follow while they are inside the academy. The rules must be followed with no exception!”

“I also designed the uniforms for our students and teachers. You may check it in the files in your hands and give me your opinions.”

“Now, let’s discuss the open positions in the academy.”

Everyone’s eyes suddenly turned sharp when the discussion reached this point. All of them were eager to get the best positions in the academy. The higher the authority they earn, the higher the benefits they would receive.

Aethelwolf tapped on the table with his fingertips. He scanned the people one by one and he noticed the look of greed in their eyes. The corners of his mouth rose upwards upon seeing this.

“The academy will need one Superintendent, one Supervisor for each course, one Guidance Counselor, one...” Aethelwolf listed all open positions.

Suddenly, someone raised his hand.

“Speak.” Aethelwolf stared at the man calmly.

“Headmaster Aethelwolf, do you have any plans on who would be getting the positions?” The man asked.

Everyone silently stared at Aethelwolf. They wanted to know how he would handle this situation. If he would just randomly give those positions to the people close to him, many would be dissatisfied and they would certainly file a complaint to the emperor. Some of them were just waiting for him to make a mistake so that they will have a chance to rob the headmaster position from him.

Aethelwolf smiled at the man. “Don’t worry. I don’t plan to give the open positions at this moment. They will remain vacant for the time being.”

Everyone furrowed their eyebrows when they heard this.

“I will watch every one of you in the first opening month of the academy and based on your performance, I will give you the positions that you deserve.” Aethelwolf’s words made them silent. He was already establishing his authority as the headmaster!

“And if I found out that someone is slacking from their jobs, I won’t hesitate to kick them out of the academy!” He warned while looking at them with a piercing gaze.

“Do you guys still have any questions?”

No one dared to ask him again.

“One last thing before we end this meeting. Our academy is still unnamed now and His Majesty told me to give it a name. Check the last page of your files. That will be the name of our academy... That would be all...” Aethelwolf grabbed Olivia’s hand and walked out of the meeting room with her.

Meanwhile, everyone flipped to the last page of their files.

Mystic Arcana Institute of Magic

It was a name that would soon be known to the whole of the Leone Empire.

“Let’s go back to the mansion.” Aethelwolf said to Albert.

“Yes, Sir Aethelwolf.”

“Oh wait.” Aethelwolf revealed a thoughtful look as he smiled. “Let’s go to the nearest restaurant of the Urgel Household.” He wanted to check whether Julie Irish has already implemented the ideas inside the book that he gave to her. Only a few days passed by since she got the book from him, but it should be enough time for her to integrate those ideas into the restaurants and wine stores they own.

Albert nodded his head. “Alright.”

“Are we going to eat?” Olivia stared at him with a shining gaze. Aethelwolf noticed that her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

The only thing that could make her this excited was food. This little girl was a big foodie and she had already tried many dishes. He even had to cook for her sometimes just to placate her desire for food.

Aethelwolf rubbed her head. “Yes. Do you remember the elder sister who wears a veil?”

Olivia nodded her head eagerly. “Mn.”

Aethelwolf smiled as he said. “We will be visiting one of the restaurants she owns.”

“That elder sister was strange. I couldn’t sense her aura.” Olivia mumbled before biting on her cookies.

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Aethelwolf squinted his eyes when he heard this. The little girl is a magical beast so she was sensitive to the aura of living creatures, but even a Level 3 magical beast like her couldn't perceive the power of Julie Irish.

Not long later, their carriage stopped in front of a two-story building.

Olivia excitedly jumped out of the carriage. She then inhaled the lingering smell of food in the air.

"Smells good!" She giggled. She quickly grabbed Aethelwolf's hands and pulled him inside the building.

Aethelwolf turned his head at Albert and said. "Come. Let's eat together."

Albert smiled at his words. His boss was treating him like family and it made him feel warm.

A waitress greeted them. "Welcome, guests. Do you want a private room?" She noticed that they were nobles so she offered them a private room. Most nobles didn't want to dine in the public seats.

"No need. Just lead us to an empty table." Aethelwolf said to the waitress.

"Alright. Please follow me."

Aethelwolf noticed that this restaurant was a lot bigger than the one he previously went to.

"Please check the menu. Just tell me which food you like and I'll bring them for you." The waitress handed them the menu.

Olivia's eyes glistened with excitement as soon as she saw the food on their table. "Food!" A line of drool trickled down her lips. The smell of the dishes made her stomach grumble.

Aethelwolf grabbed a clean towel and wiped her drool with it. The little girl was already showing her inner magical beast trait...

Olivia then stared at him with big puppy eyes. "I want to taste every dish on this table!" She said eagerly.

Aethelwolf chuckled at her words. "Sure, but you have to use the spoon and fork like how I taught you and don't use the knife. I'll cut those meat for you." He said while rubbing her head gently.

Olivia nodded her head obediently. "Okay."

“Alright. Let’s dig in.” Aethelwolf said as he looked at Olivia and Abert.

Olivia smiled widely and she immediately grabbed her spoon and fork.

She was still not proficient in using the spoon and fork when eating so she made a whole lot of mess.

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Aethelwolf tied a cloth around Olivia’s neck to prevent her from dirtying her clothes.

Albert watched the two with a warm smile on his face. His boss truly loves the little girl so much. ‘If only she has a mother, they would have been a perfect family...’ He thought to himself.

Meanwhile, on the second floor of the restaurant, Julie Irish had just tested their newly improved dishes and wines. There was a light smile beneath her veil. She was satisfied by the recent improvement in the taste of their dishes and wines. “Good job!” She said to the manager of the restaurant.

“Thank you, Miss Julie. The changes to the ingredients made this possible. We are just following the recipe you provided.” The manager laughed happily. The earnings of their restaurant tripled after the recent changes in their menu.

“Keep up the good work.” Julie Irish said. The ideas inside the book given by Aethelwolf increased the sales in their stores. Although he only added a few things about food, it still managed to improve their dishes by a great margin. Furthermore, the newly improved wines were proving to be extremely profitable.

“Miss Julie, I just want to ask when those high-quality wines would be ready. The low-end wines that you brought were already delicious, I bet those high-grade ones would be even more impressive!” The manager grinned.

Julie Irish stood up and replied. “The preparation for those high-grade wines takes a long time so they won’t be ready in the next few months. I’ll send you the information once they are ready.”

“Thank you so much, Miss Julie. Are you leaving already?” The manager asked.

“Yes. I still have to check the other stores.”

“Alright. I’ll send you out.” The manager offered.

The two went downstairs and just as they were about to get out of the restaurant, Julie paused in her tracks and looked at the public dining area. "Aethelwolf?" She muttered in surprise.

"Miss Julie?" The manager turned his head at Julie.

"You may attend to the other customers. I'll leave by myself later." Julie Irish said to the manager before walking towards Aethelwolf. She noticed that he was eating with his daughter and his guard commander. She already knew who Albert was since the guy recently became famous after everyone learned that he had become a Level 4 Esper.

"Sir Aethelwolf." Julie Irish smiled as he called out to him.

"Eh? Miss Julie, you're here?" Aethelwolf stared at her in surprise.

"I am inspecting our restaurants. I didn't know you were here. I thought you have a meeting with the faculty members of the academy today." She said.

"Please take your seat first." Aethelwolf offered.

Julie Irish took a seat on the chair beside Aethelwolf. "Thanks."

"We just came out of the academy. I decided to check if you had already implemented the ideas in the book. It looks like you've already done it." Aethelwolf smiled as he looked at her.

"After reading your book, I rushed the managers of our store to implement the new recipes. We have also made some sample wines based on the information you provided and our signature wines will be ready in a few months." She then noticed that there was a pair of eyes that was looking at her unblinkingly. She turned her head at the red-haired little girl whose face was covered in sauce and grease.

"You are the elder sister who has no aura. You smell dangerous." Olivia muttered.

"Hm?" Julie Irish stared at her in surprise after hearing her words.

Aethelwolf immediately covered the little girl's mouth with the cloth. He then wiped off the grease and sauce stuck to her face.

Julie Irish squinted her eyes as she looked at Aethelwolf and the little girl. 'Does he know about my power?' It was impossible for a little girl to know about her power so the most plausible explanation was that Aethelwolf somehow discovered her power and he might have said it to his adopted daughter. 'How did he sense my level? I have an Aura Concealing Rune so how did he do it?'

Aethelwolf turned his head at Julie Irish. He noticed that she was now looking at him with a serious gaze. It seems like Olivia's words made her suspicious of him.

He sighed inwardly. 'It seems like I have no choice but to come clean with her.' He muttered to himself. He then gave a signal to Julie Irish to come closer to him.

Julie Irish furrowed her eyebrows, but she still moved closer to his side. "What do you know about me?" She whispered coldly.

"Relax. I have no ill intentions. I only know that you are Level 4 Esper and the veil you are wearing is an artifact that has an Aura Concealing Rune." Aethelwolf whispered to her ears.

Julie Irish frowned at his words. "What else do you know?"

Aethelwolf stared into her eyes and replied. "That's all I know. I swear."

Meanwhile, Albert who seemed to have become a background character stared at the three of them with a strange gaze. "They look like a family." He muttered silently.

From Albert's perspective, it looked like Julie Irish was kissing Aethelwolf and this made him feel suspicious about the relationship between the two of them. 'What's going on here?'

Julie Irish adjusted her posture and moved away from Aethelwolf. She then noticed that Albert was looking at her and Aethelwolf with a questioning gaze. She frowned at him.

Ehem!

Albert coughed dryly as he looked away. He decided to focus his attention on his food.

"Does anyone else know?" Julie Irish asked.

Aethelwolf shook his head lightly. "Other than me, only Olivia knows it." He replied.

Julie Irish heaved a sigh of relief when she heard his words. "How did the meeting go?" She switched the topic to lighten the atmosphere. Aethelwolf was an important business partner so she didn't want their relationship to turn sour.

Aethelwolf glanced at her and shrugged. "We just discussed how the academy would operate. I also decided to leave the upper positions in the academy vacant for now. I don't want the faculty members to think that I'm favoring other people."

Julie Irish nodded her head. "That was a good move."

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Aethelwolf smiled at her words. "By the way, I met one of your relatives. She is a smart woman. If she does her job well, I would consider giving her a nice position." He said.

"You mean Madilyn? She is my cousin. When the academy was still under construction, I was the one who recommended her to become a teacher. She is a Level 2 Engraver, but because she was born out of wedlock so her position in the household is quite awkward. Becoming a teacher in the academy would give her a higher status in our household." Julie Irish said.

"Why are you telling me this?" Aethelwolf stared at her in confusion. Why was she discussing their family matters with him?

"I just want to tell you that she is a pitiful woman so you have to take care of her well."

"Don't worry. Since she will now be working for me, I won't mistreat her." Aethelwolf casually replied.

Olivia pulled his sleeves and said. "Papa, I'm done."

"Alright. Let me wipe your face first. Come here." Aethelwolf carried her and placed her on his lap. He then wiped her face with a towel.

Olivia smiled as she looked at his face.

Seeing her adorable face, Aethelwolf pinched her cheeks. "How is the food here? Did you like it?" He asked.

Olivia nodded her head. "The food here tastes good, but your cooking is still better." She replied with a smile.

Aethelwolf chuckled at her words.

"His cooking tastes better? Does your papa know how to cook?" Julie Irish asked as he looked at Aethelwolf in surprise.

Olivia stared at her and nodded her head. "His food is the best!"

"Oh? So the renowned Sir Aethelwolf is actually a talented chef. How about you invite me to your home for a meal? I'd like to try your food..." Julie Irish wanted to check if Aethelwolf knows more about her.

Aethelwolf glanced at her speechlessly. "I thought you just had your meal here?"

"I did. I can stay at your place and I will have my dinner there." Julie smirked beneath her veil.

Aethelwolf's eyes twitched when he heard this. "I think that won't be possible. I will be refining pills later so I won't have the time to cook for you." He said.

"Papa, didn't you say that you will teach me etiquette later-" Aethelwolf immediately covered Olivia's mouth to prevent her from speaking.

"Hmph! You just don't want me to go to your mansion! Are you not confident in your cooking?" Julie Irish snorted.

Aethelwolf sighed in defeat. "Fine. You can come with us. We are about to go home anyway." He then stood up and held Olivia's hand.

They all went out of the restaurant and boarded the carriage.

"Let's go back to the mansion." Aethelwolf said.

"Yes, Sir Aethelwolf."

Soon, they arrived at the Lassiter Household's mansion.

"Did you buy the land around your mansion?" Julie Irish noticed that the buildings around the mansion were being demolished.

Aethelwolf nodded his head. "Yes. We hired a lot of people so we needed more space. I plan to build houses for our servants." He didn't plan to keep it a secret so there was no harm in telling her.

Julie Irish stared at the guards of the mansion. They were dressed in sleek silver-colored armor. Each of them has a sword and a diamond-shaped shield tied behind their backs. 'These people are no ordinary guards. All of them are Espers!' She exclaimed in her heart. The weaker guards were mostly armed with Rare-Rated pieces of equipment, while the stronger ones possessed Refined-Rated pieces of equipment.

The value of the equipment added altogether was enormous and only a business mogul could support the purchase and their maintenance.

"Welcome back, Sir Aethelwolf and Young Miss Olivia." Hyacinth greeted them. "Hello, Miss Julie Irish Urgel." She smiled at Julie who nodded at her in response.

"Hyacinth, please bring the wine that I have been keeping in the special storage of the cellar." Aethelwolf said.

Hyacinth stared at him in surprise. "Yes, Sir Aethelwolf." Her boss didn't even take it out to serve the second prince and the other nobles who visited them. What was special about Julie Irish? She thought suspiciously.

“Follow me upstairs first. I have to change Olivia’s clothes.” Aethelwolf said to Julie.

Julie Irish glanced at the little girl’s clothes and noticed that there were some food stains so she nodded her head. “Alright.”

Aethelwolf brought her inside his room and let her wait for him in the study. “Please wait here.” He then lifted Olivia and put her down on the bed.

Julie Irish stared at them silently. Aethelwolf seemed to show a lot of care to this child even though she was only his adopted daughter. ‘Could she be his true daughter? If not, why is he so good to her? I can’t understand this man sometimes...’ She thought to herself.

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After changing Olivia’s clothes, Aethelwolf held her hand and brought her to the study. Julie Irish was sitting there while looking at them in silence.

“Alright. Just tell me why you want to come here. I don’t believe you are just here to eat my food.” Aethelwolf said as he looked at Julie Irish.

Julie Irish glanced at him with a serious look on her face. “You know Enrique Maynard, right?” She asked.

Aethelwolf furrowed his eyebrows and sat down. “Yes, he is my friend. What about him?”

“He is dead.” Julie Irish muttered.

Aethelwolf’s eyes widened upon hearing this.

Enrique Maynard was one of the four family head candidates of the Maynard Household. He has the highest chance of becoming the next family head among the four of them. It was only a matter of time before he would inherit the position.

“Who did it?” Aethelwolf’s eyes turned cold. Enrique Maynard wasn’t that close to him, but he still treated the man as his friend. He even got a peak Refined-Rated sword from him as a gift.

Julie Irish shook her head as she answered. “I still have no clue. My informant is still investigating this matter so it would take a few days to find out what happened. However, I’m sure that the culprit is one of the family head candidates.”

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Aethelwolf frowned upon hearing this. "Why didn't he ask for my help?" He muttered silently.

Olivia looked at him worriedly and held his hands. She could sense the anger and regret in his eyes.

"The Maynard Household has kept this matter a secret and they even killed off a few of servants to ensure that this information won't be spread. What do you want to do about this?" Julie Irish asked as he looked at him. She knew that Aethelwolf was a man who values friendship. He wouldn't sit idly by after knowing this.

Aethelwolf looked at her as he muttered in a cold voice. "I'll investigate this matter on my own. You should stay out of it."

"What do you mean? You are an important business partner of our Urgel Household. I won't allow you to do something reckless on your own... I will help you." Julie Irish said.

Aethelwolf rubbed his temples. His heart slowly calmed down because of his skill [Demon Heart]. "Alright. I won't decline your help, Miss Julie."

"Papa, I will also help you!" Olivia said as she held his hands.

Aethelwolf's face eased up at her words. He smiled as he gently rubbed her head. "Thank you, Olivia."

Olivia eagerly nodded her head.

"Do you have any plans?" Julie Irish asked.

Aethelwolf shook his head. "Just keep an eye on the three suspects and tell me if you have a piece of new information. Once we learn who the culprit is, I will send someone to eliminate him!" He said.

"Alright. I will send more people to hasten the investigation." Julie Irish nodded her head. She thought that he would erupt into a rage, but the man was still clear-headed even after hearing the news. His self-control was remarkable.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

"Sir Aethelwolf, your wine is here. I also brought the young miss' shake." Hyacinth's voice echoed outside the room.

"Come inside." Aethelwolf said.

Hyacinth entered the room. She was pushing a cart with a bottle of wine and a small bottle of homemade shake placed on top of it. There were also two wine glasses together with the wine.

“Do you want me to pour the wine for you?” Hyacinth asked while looking at Aethelwolf.

“There’s no need for that. You may take your leave.” Aethelwolf said to her.

Hyacinth bowed after hearing his words. “Yes, Sir Aethelwolf.” She then left the room.

After Hyacinth left, Aethelwolf grabbed the wine bottle and pulled the stopper. “This wine is something I created on my own. Normally, it would have taken three years before it would be ready to be served, but I used some methods to expedite this lengthy process.” He said as he poured wine into the two wine glasses.

He handed one glass to Julie Irish. “Try it.” He said with a smile.

Julie Irish took the glass and swirled it gently. The rich wine aroma pervaded the air and entered her nostrils. She closed her eyes as soon as she smelled the fruity fragrance. “It smells great!” She said as she opened her eyes.

Aethelwolf merely smiled at her words. He then gestured for her to drink the wine.

Julie Irish took a small sip. The wine felt soft and smooth as it moved through her mouth. It tastes sweet and there was a hint of acidic aftertaste that made her salivate.

After that one small sip, she knew that there was still a long way to go before she could perfect their wine recipe.

She sighed as she looked at Aethelwolf. “Do you have one more bottle of this wine?” She asked.

“Maybe.” He answered as he chuckled softly.

“How did you lower the acidity level of this wine? I noticed that the world essence contained in this wine is a lot so you must have used high-level ingredients to make it and these ingredients have a higher acidity.” She had so many questions after that one sip.

“The taste would have been better if it was naturally aged. It would have had a silky and velvety texture. Too bad.” Aethelwolf muttered regretfully.

Julie Irish couldn’t help but stare at him incredulously when she heard this. “That’s actually possible?”

Aethelwolf chuckled and nodded his head. "Of course. Just follow what I wrote in that book and you'll achieve that kind of taste. Just that, you would need to be patient for that."

Olivia stared at them in confusion. She didn't understand what they were talking about. 'What is silky and velvety?' She thought to herself as she opened the bottle of her homemade shake.

The smell of the shake made her smile. "This is still the best. Hehe." She muttered.

176 Attractive Offer

Dinner soon arrived and the members of the Lassiter Household gathered in the dining area. They kept on looking at the veiled beauty who was dining together with them.

"Miss Julie, why is Grace not with you? Where is she?" Janrose asked curiously. The two sisters were inseparable, but Grace was not with her this time.

Julie Irish glanced at her and replied. "She is preparing for the entrance exam of the academy. She is aiming to ace the test in the Esper Department."

"Is that so? Too bad. I won't allow her though." Janrose chuckled.

Pak!

Janeth smacked the back of her head. "You arrogant child! How could you say something like that to our guest?!" She scolded her daughter. She then turned her gaze to Julie Irish and smiled apologetically at her. "Please don't mind her, Miss Julie. She is just speaking nonsense."

"You also plan to enroll in the Esper Department?" Julie Irish stared at her in surprise. Janrose was a student of a Level 4 Alchemist and it was said that her talent in Alchemy was not beneath that of the crown prince.

Janrose rubbed the back of her head as she nodded. "Yes! I don't need to learn Alchemy in the academy since I already have Sir Aethelwolf. He will teach me Alchemy and I will learn how to fight in the academy." She said while smiling brightly.

Julie Irish sighed upon hearing this. Janrose was already a great talent. Now that he has Aethelwolf backing her up, she would soon become a central figure in the Leone Empire.

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“Sir Aethelwolf said that he will let Leric join the Alchemy Department to further his study. He is much more talented than me.” Janrose said while looking at the little boy who was sitting beside Melissa.

Hearing this, Julie Irish turned her head at Leric. From what she knew, this little guy was the son of Anton Lassiter and Melissa Lassiter. He is also Aethelwolf’s first student. Leric is only three years old, but he is already a Level 1 Esper and a Level 1 Alchemist! His talent was even more monstrous than Janrose’s!

“I will also study in the academy. Tee-hee!” Olivia giggled. “Papa said that he will let me enroll in the Esper Department.” She added.

“Eh? You too?” Julie Irish stared at the little girl suspiciously. She couldn’t sense any power from her and she was no different from a normal human. Why would Aethelwolf let her enroll in the Esper Department?

Olivia eagerly nodded her head. “Mn.”

“I figured that it would be a great opportunity for the kids to meet new friends. It would be better for them to go out and meet new people while they are still young.” Aethelwolf said as he rubbed Olivia’s head.

“But isn’t she just a normal human? How could she pass the entrance exam in the Esper Department? Don’t tell me that you plan to pull some strings...” Julie Irish stared at him speechlessly.

Aethelwolf chuckled at her words. “You underestimate her too much. I’ve been hiding it from everyone, but since you are that curious, I will tell you a secret.” He paused and scanned everyone. His gaze then rested on Olivia who was eating cookies. “My daughter is an Esper.” He said.

His words shocked everyone. No one knew that Olivia was an Esper.

“How come I can’t sense her power? The young miss is actually an Esper?” Albert stared at Olivia in utter disbelief. He was a Level 4 Esper, but he didn’t sense any world essence from Olivia’s body.

Aethelwolf smiled as he patted Olivia’s head. “Well, I gave her a gift that can conceal her power...”

Everyone became even more shocked when they heard this. An item that could hide under the detection of Level 4 Espers was at least a Level 4 rune or a Unique-Rated artifact! Aethelwolf actually gave such a precious gift to a child.

‘He is spoiling her too much!’ They all thought.

“Didn’t you want to taste my cooking? Try it.” Aethelwolf diverted the topic. He didn’t want them to ask more questions about the matter.

“Ah- okay.” Julie Irish muttered with a blank look. Even her father didn’t give her such a valuable gift when she was still a child, but this guy didn’t even hesitate to give one to his adopted daughter... ‘Perhaps Olivia is truly his real daughter. That must be it...’ this was the only explanation she could think of.

Suddenly, Julie’s body jolted when the food entered her mouth. The meat was tender and it almost felt like it was melting in her mouth. The creamy sauce blended perfectly with the taste of the meat, greatly enhancing its flavor. “This... What kind of meat is this?” She asked.

“Oh, that? It’s just a slice of meat from a Level 2 magical beast.” Aethelwolf casually said.

“Yummy, right? I told you that papa’s food is much better than the food in your store. Hehe.” Olivia giggled.

Julie Irish couldn’t even utter a single word of disagreement. Just one bite from the piece of meat was enough to make her believe that the food in their store was rubbish in comparison. It was like the difference between heaven and earth.

She remained silent as she ate the food on her plate. She vowed in her heart that she wouldn’t return home without asking Aethelwolf the secret of his food.

Julie Irish moved closer to Aethelwolf and whispered. “Can you tell me how you did this?”

“Why should I tell you? You should be satisfied with the information in the book.” Aethelwolf answered.

“How about I let you see what I truly look like?” She whispered.

Aethelwolf’s eyes narrowed upon hearing this. “That is an attractive offer. I’m also curious about what you look like behind that veil, but are you sure about that?” He said as he looked at her.

Julie Irish shrugged. “You already know a lot of things about me. It wouldn’t harm me if you knew one more thing.”

Aethelwolf smiled at her.

“You seem to be confident about yourself. Unfortunately, I’m more interested in practical benefits.” Aethelwolf chuckled. ‘Did she think that I would fall for her charms?’

Julie Irish felt her cheeks reddening from embarrassment. “You!”

Aethelwolf adjusted his sitting posture and said. “How about this? You give me thirty percent ownership of your restaurants and I’ll give you the second half of the book I gave you.” There was a cunning look in his eyes. He had already planned this from the start.

Julie Irish gritted her teeth. The book she got from him was actually just the first half. ‘Dammit!’

“First was our wine shops and now you are even extending your hands into our restaurants. I have underestimated you, Aethelwolf!” She muttered through gritted teeth.

Aethelwolf could feel her anger, but he just nonchalantly glanced at her. This was the world of the merchants. You need to be more cunning than your counterparts if you want your business to flourish.

“Fine! I will give you thirty percent of our restaurants, but you’ll have to give us the right to use the brand of your clothing shop. I heard that it will be open for business in a few days.” Julie Irish didn’t want to lose out this time. This man always has the upper hand in their negotiations.

Aethelwolf narrowed his eyes. The intelligence gathering of the Urgel Household was superior to the Reynolds Household. She even knows a few things about his clothing shop.

“I can’t agree to that. The value of my clothing shop’s brand is a lot more than you think. Let’s do it like this instead. I will give you the manufacturing rights, but all the clothes you make according to our designs must be sold to us. I know that your Urgel Household is also in the clothing business, but believe me, you will lose more than half of your customers once we open our business. To tell you the truth, we can manufacture the clothes on our own. I’m only doing you this favor since we are allies.” He said with a sharp look.

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Julie Irish fell into silence upon hearing this. This was what she was afraid of. She tried to gather more information about his designs, but none of his seamstresses betrayed him. Aethelwolf must have given them favorable terms for them to remain loyal. It was already a mistake on her part to investigate her allies and if she forces him, Aethelwolf might not be amicable with them anymore.

In the end, Julie Irish sighed as she shook her head. She knew that she was defeated once again. "Alright. I agree with your offer. We will talk more about this after dinner." She muttered in a low voice.

Aethelwolf grinned as he nodded his head. "It's a pleasure to do business with you, Miss Julie."

Julie Irish snorted without looking at him.

Even though she was still angry, she couldn't deny that his food was amazing. She might not be able to eat the food of their servants anymore.

After dinner, Aethelwolf brought Olivia and Julie Irish to his study.

They discussed about the deal for over an hour. Julie Irish didn't even bother to bargain with him anymore. She was afraid that the man would exploit her weaknesses to gain more.

"I will let Hyacinth make the terms and conditions. We will send the documents to your mansion tomorrow. You should go back and prepare the transfer of ownership for your restaurants." Aethelwolf said.

Julie Irish stood up and said. "Alright. I'll take my leave now."

"Hold on. I think you have forgotten something." Aethelwolf stared at her with a smile.

"I thought you were only seeking for practical benefits. You don't need to send me off." She muttered coldly before storming out of his room.

"Papa, I think you made her angry." Olivia whispered to him.

Aethelwolf shrugged. "Just let her be." He said as he stroked her hair.

Olivia nodded her head. "Okay."

At the entrance hall, Albert saw Julie Irish heading out of the mansion. He immediately walked up to her and said. "Miss Julie, I'll take you to your mansion."

"There's no need." Julie answered coldly.

"Sir Aethelwolf might scold me if he finds out that I have neglected our guest. Please." Albert insisted.

"Fine." Julie relented when she saw his sincere expression.

Albert led her to the carriage. He wondered why she was so upset. 'I thought they were on good terms. Did the two of them fight earlier?' He didn't want to intrude into their private matter so he chose to remain silent.

Before the carriage could set off, Hyacinth jogged towards them.

"Wait!"

"Miss Hyacinth?" Albert stared at Hyacinth in surprise.

"Miss Julie, Sir Aethelwolf told me to give this to you. He wants to apologize for making you upset." Hyacinth took out two bottles of wine.

Julie Irish furrowed her eyebrows as she looked at the wine in her hands. It was the wine that was served to her earlier.

Julie's face softened as she took the wine bottles. "Tell him that I forgive him." She said with a light smile beneath her veil.

"I will send your message to him." Hyacinth nodded her head. "Please be careful along the road."

Julie nodded her head. "Thank you." She then said to Albert. "Let's go."

Inside the carriage, Julie stared at the wine bottles with a smile. "He really knows how to make an apology." She muttered.

Meanwhile, Aethelwolf stood on the balcony as he watched the carriage leave his estate.

Olivia sat on the railings of the balcony as she asked. "Papa, do you like that elder sister?"

Aethelwolf shook his head. "No. I'm just curious about that woman. Who knows, maybe she looks ugly behind that veil." He replied jokingly.

Olivia raised her head and stared at him. "I think that elder sister is very beautiful. I can feel it."

"You think so?" Aethelwolf smiled as he rubbed her head.

Olivia nodded. "Mn."

178 Karman Leone

Three days later, Johann and Jade Kristine came to his mansion.

“Sir Aethelwolf, we decided to visit you together. We have already read the learning material you provided.” Johann reported. During the last few days, he noticed that there was a big change to his Pill Fire. Although he was yet to summon his Golden Pill Fire, he was almost there. Without Aethelwolf’s support, it would have taken him several years to achieve this, but it had only taken him less than a week under his tutelage.

“That’s good to hear.” Aethelwolf turned his head to Jade Kristine and asked. “How is your success rate in refining 4th-Grade Pills?”

Jade Kristine gave him a bright smile as she answered. “I followed your teachings and I managed to improve my success rate. It shouldn’t be a problem for me to pass the Level 4 Alchemy exam.” She had learned a lot from the learning material that Aethelwolf wrote for her. It definitely played a huge factor in her recent growth.

Aethelwolf nodded his head. “Good job. You should practice some more. Don’t be hasty about the Level 4 Alchemy exam. You need to investigate the other candidates for the Supreme Director position, especially the person that Karman Leone is supporting.” He warned.

Jade Kristine nodded her head gravely. “Yes, Sir Aethelwolf. I have been monitoring their movements in secret.”

Suddenly, Aethelwolf’s eyes lit up as an idea crossed his mind. “Wait. I think you can actually take the exam now.”

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Hm?

Johann and Jade Kristine looked at him in surprise.

“Take the exam now? But what about the other candidates?” Jade Kristine was still worried. She would offend Karman Leone if she shows her ability. The Singler Household might be strong, but they were nothing compared to the Leone Imperial Family.

“Sir Aethelwolf, are you planning to openly support Miss Jade?” Johann exclaimed in shock.

If Aethelwolf openly supported Jade Kristine to become the next Supreme Director of the Alchemy Tower, even Karman Leone would have to show him some respect. After all, other than being a Level 4 Alchemist, Aethelwolf was now the headmaster of the Mystic Arcana Institute of Magic!

“That’s right. I have been laying low since I came to the capital, but I think it is time to use the authority I gained.” Aethelwolf muttered.

Jade Kristine's eyes lit up upon hearing this. If Aethelwolf supports her, there would be no need for her to hide her abilities. "Are we really doing it now?" She asked as she looked at him.

Aethelwolf nodded his head. "This is a great opportunity. The other three candidates haven't become Level 4 Alchemists yet so if you passed your Alchemy exam now, Supreme Director Karman Leone would be forced to give his position to you. Although it would offend the old man, he won't do anything to you."

Johann nodded his head in agreement. "I will also support you, Miss Jade. I believe that you are the most suitable candidate to become the next Supreme Director."

Jade Kristine became more determined after hearing their words. "Alright! Let's do it!" She said.

"Let's head to the Alchemy Tower." Aethelwolf smiled upon hearing this.

"Papa, can I go with you?" Olivia stared at him with big puppy eyes.

Aethelwolf almost caved in when he saw her adorable look, but he hardened his heart as he said. "I'm sorry, Olivia. You still need to study for the written exam so you can't go with us. If you read all the learning materials I wrote for you, I will bring you wherever you want."

Olivia pouted in dissatisfaction, but she still nodded her head reluctantly. "Okay, but you have to bring me with you after I'm done studying." She said.

Aethelwolf smiled as he stroked her hair. "I promise."

Olivia pointed at her cheeks and demanded. "I want a kiss."

Aethelwolf chuckled and kissed her cheeks. "Are we good now?"

"Tee-heel!" Olivia giggled as she nodded her head.

Johann and Jade Kristine smiled warmly as they looked at them.

After saying goodbye to Olivia, Aethelwolf brought Johann and Jade Kristine to the Alchemy Tower. It was a huge skyscraper with more than a hundred floors! It was also the tallest building in the Leone Empire.

The front gate of the Alchemy Tower was guarded by Espers, but they managed to get in after they showed their identification.

The servants warmly greeted them and they even escorted the trio to the examination area.

Meanwhile, on the topmost floor of the building, there was an old man with sparse hair sitting in his office. He was looking over some pieces of documents when he suddenly heard someone knocking on his door.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

“Come in.” The old man said, but his attention was still on the documents in his hands.

An Alchemist came inside his office and reported in an urgent tone. “Supreme Director, someone is taking the Level 4 Alchemy Exam!”

The old man’s hand stopped and he abruptly raised his head to look at the Alchemist. “What did you say?” He wanted to confirm whether he heard the words right.

The Alchemist cleared his throat and said. “Administrator Jade Kristine is taking the Level 4 Alchemy Exam. She is now waiting in the examination area for her written exam. You are the only one who has the authority to review her answers, Supreme Director Karman.”

Karman Leone frowned after hearing this. “Jade Kristine, is it? I have underestimated that girl.” There was a hint of discontent in his tone. He has been preparing for his resignation and he was already planning to pass his position to someone from the Leone Imperial Family.

The old man stood up and said in a cold voice. “Take me to the examination area.”

“Yes, Supreme Director!”

Karman Leone headed to the examination area to look for Jade Kristine, but he noticed that there was an unexpected visitor. “Aethelwolf?” He muttered in surprise. It was the first time he had seen Aethelwolf in person, but he had already seen his information so he knows what he looks like.