

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 261: The Story of the ‘Snake’ - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 261: The Story of the ‘Snake’

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After ensuring that all members of the imperial family were ready to listen, Aldrian turned to face Emperor Durand.

"Your Majesty, now that His Highness is in good condition, I wish to tell you about the hidden danger within the imperial family," Aldrian said.

Emperor Durand was silent for a moment before nodding. To be honest, he felt tense, hoping it wasn't someone he trusted again. Ever since the incident with Cook Frans, he had been feeling exhausted. He was tired of all these problems and could only sigh.

"It seems I've grown too old and have become more sentimental," he thought.

Aldrian looked at the other members of the imperial family and addressed them.

"Your Majesties, Your Highnesses, I wish to tell you a story about the snake within the imperial family—the one who wears a beautiful mask to hide his true nature, so no one would ever suspect that he is, in fact, a snake."

The others frowned at Aldrian's words. A snake? They did not understand why Aldrian suddenly brought up this topic, but they decided to listen to what he had to say.

Lewis felt a growing sense of unease as Aldrian brought up the parable of the snake. He already suspected that this had something to do with him, but he knew he couldn't flee now. If he did, his entire family would immediately turn their suspicions toward him.

"This story begins with a devil who planned to spread their influence across the entire empire, however, they wanted to act cautiously and intelligently, avoiding the need to expend excessive energy or rely on brute force to achieve their goals."

"They eventually found the most effective way to exploit the empire's situation and play their cards right—by using our own people. They understood that many within the empire would be tempted by their offers, knowing full well that some would inevitably succumb to their allure."

"They chose to rely on what they excel at, something fundamental to their very nature—the essence of their existence. That is the negative traits of living beings, the dark

feelings buried deep within the hearts of people. In this regard, devils are unparalleled in their mastery."

"However, not everyone in the empire can be tempted by them. Not all will succumb to their desires or negative traits. So, they ultimately decided to choose the most useful individuals—those who could serve as their pawns, their 'representatives' within the empire, to ensure their future plans proceed more smoothly."

"They began selecting influential individuals who could be manipulated. With their keen sensitivity to negative energy and emotions, identifying targets harboring strong negative feelings was easy. In short, many nobles and high-ranking cultivators have already fallen under their control."

"One of them has already succumbed to the devils, even though he possess imperial blood. This individual makes it much easier for the devils to operate within the palace. In essence, the imperial family has unknowingly become the devils' backyard."

"That alone is enough for them. The gate to the empire's domination has already been opened, and it's only a matter of time before they succeed," Aldrian said, pausing for a moment. He observed the expressions of everyone present. Each of them seemed to sense that this story was directed at their family.

They weren't foolish, especially given what had just happened to their family and the turmoil within the capital. There had to be an insider who opened the gate for the devils, allowing them to create the chaos here.

Empress Claudia's eyes trembled, while Emperor Durand frowned deeply. In that moment, he felt a tightness in his chest—one he never wanted to feel again. He glanced at each of his family members' faces. Was Aldrian suggesting that one of them was an accomplice of the devils? He clenched his fist, unwilling to believe it, but unable to dismiss the possibility. If one of his family members truly sided with the devils, everything that had been happening inside the palace would make much more sense.

Lewis, at the back, had a strong hunch that Aldrian already knew about his cooperation with the devils and was about to reveal it to his family in this manner. As he looked at the faces of his family members, it seemed they were all trying to figure out who Aldrian was referring to.

His nervousness began to show in his posture. Aldrian smiled, briefly glancing at Lewis before continuing.

"At that time, the Envy Devil, tasked by the Devil Lord to execute this plan, used his specialty in the negative energy of envy. He selected several individuals within the empire who exuded this powerful energy, and one of them was a member of the imperial family. On the night twenty years ago, when he isolated himself in his chamber,

consumed by self-doubt, self-hate, and, especially, a raging jealousy—an envy that began to consume him—the Envy Devil came to him."

Aldrian then turned his gaze toward one person in the room—Lewis. Everyone was stunned when Aldrian suddenly focused his attention on him.

"The Envy Devil offered him the power to change himself. He, already filled with self-doubt and consumed by envy of others' talents, finally accepted the devil's offer. He emerged from his shell and shackles, only to bury himself deeper with the devils. He abandoned his morals as the price for power, and in the end, he became the devil himself."

Aldrian walked toward Lewis with slow, deliberate steps.

With each step Aldrian took closer, Lewis instinctively stepped back, feeling like he was in the gaze of a predator.

"What do you think of this story, Your Highness, the Third Prince, Lewis Doria?" Aldrian was almost standing in front of Lewis when suddenly someone blocked his way. Imperial Consort Veronica stood before him, her eyes trembling.

"Are you saying that my son has betrayed the empire? That the Envy Devil came to him?"

Aldrian did not answer immediately. He looked at Imperial Consort Veronica for a moment before speaking.

"Your Majesty, I apologize for my insolence, but I'm afraid I have enough proof to show that Prince Lewis is not as he appears to you and the others. If I may, why don't you ask him yourself?" Aldrian said, bowing his head slightly.

He actually felt pity for Imperial Consort Veronica. She was the only one caught in this mess from the Gouvard family who had not been involved in her family's plan. It seemed that Grand Duke Gouvard had not informed Imperial Consort Veronica about his plans or any of his collaboration with the devils. He had essentially only viewed his little sister as a tool to establish a connection to the imperial family.

Once she had served her purpose, he considered her role complete and chose not to inform her of his plan. When she was asked to support her unreliable son in the succession race, she believed it was her duty as a mother to support him as best as she could, not realizing that she had been used by both her son and her elder brother.

She was too kind to be from the Gouvard family. Even now, it seemed she still didn't know about her elder brother's treacherous actions.

"No, no way! There's no way my son is a traitor! What proof do you have to say that my son is a traitor?! I want to see it with my own eyes!" Imperial Consort Veronica shouted at Aldrian, her face contorted with anger.

"I have an easy solution, Your Majesty. Just ask him to swallow any holy property pill, and we'll see if he has any reaction. I believe the imperial family has such pills stored away," Aldrian said with a calm expression. He understood Imperial Consort Veronica's reaction, but he knew he had to tell the truth.

As for the holy property pill, as Aldrian mentioned, it is any pill that contains holy energy. To create these pills, alchemists typically seek the help of someone with holy energy to imbue it into the pill during the concoction process. Holy property pills can serve various purposes, one of which is to protect cultivators from thick negative energy.

In an environment where they must protect themselves from the harsh conditions where negative energy congregates, holy property pills are invaluable for a limited time. These pills protect both the body and soul of cultivators from the influence of negative energy after consumption. This is inseparable from the fact that holy energy is the bane of negative energy, it is the energy that can purify it.

With Aldrian suggesting that Lewis consume a pill with holy properties, it would provide the simplest proof of whether Lewis is truly become the devil. If he wasn't cultivating a devils cultivation manual, there would be no reaction whatsoever. But if he had truly become a devil...

Imperial Consort Veronica bit her lip before turning to look at Lewis. As she thought about it, she realized her son had never really been required to swallow such a pill, as there had been no reason or opportunity. But now...

"Lewis, take one of the Holy Protection Pills and prove to us that you are not the devil!" Imperial Consort Veronica commanded.

Lewis looked at the faces of everyone in the room, desperately trying to think of a way out. In the end, he saw no escape. He facepalmed as his body began to tremble. A few moments later, he finally lost it.

"Hahahaha..."

Chapter 262: Consumed by His Own Negative Feelings

"Hahahaha."

Everyone there was stunned by the sudden laughter and the swift change in character. They had never seen Lewis laugh like that—no, they had never seen him laugh at all.

"Lewis?" Imperial Consort Veronica wanted to ask what had happened, but she felt cold as she looked into Lewis's eyes, which were fixed on Aldrian. It was a gaze filled with killing intent. She had never seen such an expression on Lewis before.

"I see, all of this is because of you. You are the one causing this mess—our years of effort have gone down the drain because of you!" said Lewis.

Hearing Lewis's words, everyone present knew that what Aldrian had said was indeed true. Emperor Durand's face darkened as he looked at his son, his own burning rage barely contained. Empress Claudia frowned, staring at the change in Lewis. Was this the same Lewis they had known for so long? Hector and Alderia could only look on in shock, unable to believe their eyes. This was their timid, weak little brother.

"Already taken off your mask, I see. So, are you finally confessing your guilt?" Aldrian said.

"Well, what can I do? It seems there's no way out of this situation. Sooner or later, I would have been found out anyway," Lewis replied with a laid-back expression. There was none of the nervousness he had shown earlier.

"Why?" came the small voice of Imperial Consort Veronica from the side.

"Why, Lewis?! Why did you choose this path?! Knowing it will lead to your own destruction—you can't turn back from this! Why would you do this?!" she shouted in desperation. At that moment, she felt a sense of betrayal unlike anything she had ever experienced. Her heart felt torn apart, and she struggled to breathe, a tightness gripping her chest. Tears had already begun to fall from her eyes before she even realized it.

Lewis's face contorted at his mother's sudden outburst.

"Why? Why do you ask? Since I was a child, I've always been different from my brothers! Many people treat them like treasures, but me?! I'm nothing but mud—I have no worth! I have no talent! No potential! Even though many people wear polite smiles in front of me, behind my back, they mock me! They never thought I deserved to be here! They never acknowledged me!"

Lewis shouted, stunning Imperial Consort Veronica. She wanted to retort, but Lewis wasn't done.

"My fate was sealed the moment I was born with a premature dantian. But I wanted to be powerful. I wanted the glory of strength! I wanted to show those bastards that I, too, could crush them with my power. That's when the devils came to offer me power, and I accepted it! They were the ones who gave me hope! They were the ones who understood my feelings and desires! What have the people here given me all this time? Nothing but mockery and pitiful, contemptuous glares. If I hadn't taken the devils' offer

then, maybe I'd already be dead from the weight of my desperation!" Lewis said furiously.

His anger was clear for all to see, and it made everyone understand just how much rage he had been holding in all this time. Imperial Consort Veronica couldn't retort. She remained silent, tears flowing freely. She wanted to hug her son, to calm him, but his words pierced her heart deeply as his mother. She knew that being born into the imperial family with a defective dantian meant he was fated to experience such pain.

Even if she protected Lewis and kept him away from others, he would still face countless opinions. His talented elder brothers didn't help his situation either, as they were constantly compared to him. She could only lament the pitiful fate of her son, born into the imperial family with an imperfect dantian.

Aldrian's calm face remained unchanged after the outburst. He closed his eyes, sighed, and shook his head.

"That's why you were taken advantage of by the devils. To be honest, although your reasons sound pitiful and have some points, the devils are not the answer. You may gain great power, but you'll lose something far more important. You've focused too much on empty words and the opinions of others, instead of on your own family who tried to protect you. You've paid more attention to their negative comments than to your family's patience and affection toward you," Aldrian said, his eyes turning sharp.

"If your father, your mother, your brothers shared the same opinion as those nobodies and didn't love you, they would have already shunned you and been done with it. They wouldn't have given you countless pills to support your cultivation, and they wouldn't have looked for a way to fix your condition." Aldrian knew the effort of the imperial family through his conversations with the three grandmasters of the Alchemist Association.

After hearing about the third prince from Hector, Aldrian became curious about his condition and asked about it when he visited the Alchemist Association earlier. The imperial family had already tasked the association with finding a way to fix Lewis's problem. Lewis's condition was a special case, and while the imperial family had already tried several methods to resolve it, none had been successful so far.

"You are too obsessed with your own negativity, unable to see the positive side that is close to you. You said you wanted power to crush those who underestimate you? Too bad, you won't achieve anything. The way of fate is not something someone like you can predict. The moment you stepped onto the devils' path and met me, your fate was sealed."

Aldrian said while exuding his pressure throughout the room. Emperor Durand and the others could feel Aldrian's pressure, weighing down on their bodies while making their souls feel a sense of worship. However, it suddenly vanished.

"That's usually how it goes when I meet with the devils. However, lucky for you, you have someone with greater authority to judge you. They are the ones who have already done everything for you, so it's only right that they decide how you should be treated from here on."

Emperor Durand sighed in relief upon hearing Aldrian's words. He had felt Aldrian's intimidating aura for the first time, and he had to admit that things would have turned ugly if Aldrian had decided to end things his way.

Imperial Consort Veronica also felt a sense of relief, though she seemed lost, unsure of what to do next. She didn't know how to treat her son or how to decide his fate. The betrayal he committed was not only against their family but also considered a betrayal to the empire, and even to the entire continent.

As for Empress Claudia, she also felt betrayed by Lewis. But on the other hand, Lewis might be the main suspect in Hector's poisoning assassination. She could only remain silent and watch what would happen next.

Hector and Alderia didn't know what to do anymore. They felt pity for their little brother, but that was all. They had never mocked him or shunned him—they considered him close family, after all. Yet, they also felt the weight of his betrayal, and even more so for Hector, who had almost died not long ago.

Lewis, hearing Aldrian's speech, did not change his expression, but inwardly, he felt terrible from the pressure that had concentrated on his body. His soul was shaken, and the blue eyes of Aldrian, which seemed to know everything about him, irritated him greatly. But he calmed his mind, deciding to end all of this.

"Well, since I don't have any choice, then I will—"

"Do you want to depend on those explosive powders you buried in many parts of the palace?"

Hearing Aldrian, the others were shocked.

"How did you know?" Lewis asked in astonishment. He had buried the explosives carefully without telling anyone. It was his failsafe, prepared long ago in case he ever needed it under certain circumstances like this.

"LEWIS, how low have you degraded?!" Emperor Durand shouted, his aura blasting through the entire palace. His roar and the overwhelming aura made the very space tremble, yet Lewis, feeling the pressure, only grinned.

"Well, father, I don't want to do this either, but I have to if I want to survive. So you must choose: all those lives you can save, or letting me leave from here?"

The explosive powders he had placed in many parts of the imperial palace were enough to destroy some of the structures within the palace, along with the cultivators inside. Not everyone within the palace was a strong cultivator; many were still below the Baron stage, so the explosions could easily kill them if they were caught in the blast.

The expression on Emperor Durand's face could be described as one of pure fury, as if he wanted to swallow Lewis whole. The others, too, were in disbelief, unable to fathom that Lewis could do something like this.

Seeing a glimmer of hope for survival, Lewis grinned in victory. He knew that these people—especially his father—would have no heart to abandon their own people, so he was confident he could escape from this situation. He then looked at Aldrian, but was stunned to find that Aldrian's expression was not one of panic or frustration, but instead...

Disappointment.

Aldrian shook his head with a sigh and looked at Lewis.

"Are you stupid?"

Chapter 263: Trapped

Lewis was stunned, but he still grinned, though it was a little rigid now. He couldn't shake the bad feeling he got every time he saw Aldrian's laid-back behavior. It felt as if Aldrian didn't consider Lewis a threat at all. Maintaining his confident posture, Lewis asked Aldrian.

"What are you talking about? I'm completely serious. I can blow up the imperial palace and kill countless innocents with just a flick of my finger," Lewis declared. He wasn't bluffing—he only needed to activate the talisman hidden in his pocket. With a simple touch of energy, the talisman would ignite, triggering the explosion.

"Well, I know you'd do it; I have no doubt about that. But have you ever considered whether the explosive powder will even work? If I know about your explosive powder, don't you think I might have already secured it, keeping it out of your reach? That's why I said you're stupid," Aldrian said with a sigh.

"Young—" Emperor Durand wanted to say something, but he stopped when Aldrian gave him a confident smile. Seeing that smile, Emperor Durand, though still harboring some doubts, finally decided to trust Aldrian. It seemed Aldrian had already taken care of the issue, leaving no reason to worry about the explosive powder.

Lewis widened his eyes. Did Aldrian just say that the explosive powder he had buried in various parts of the imperial palace had already been secured?! Impossible! Even if Aldrian somehow knew he had buried the powder, there was no way he could know the

exact locations. No one knew except him, and he was certain no one had seen him during the act. It had to be a bluff! That's what Lewis thought.

With a cruel expression, he activated the talisman hidden in his pocket.

A split second later...

BOOM!!!

The palace shook violently as the deafening explosion reverberated through its walls. Screams of pain echoed, and a river of blood painted the palace grounds.

Lewis, stunned that his plan had worked, broke into a wicked smile before laughing in satisfaction. He glanced at the others, their faces frozen in shock. But when his eyes fell on Aldrian, he was met with nothing but a serene expression.

He felt confused. Did this man truly not value the lives that had just been lost?

Lewis could sense that at least a thousand people had become his victims, yet Aldrian seemed utterly indifferent. How could he remain so calm? Did he not care at all?

But it didn't matter. He had already used his last bargaining chip and had nothing left to hold them back from killing him, so he had resigned himself to his death.

Yet suddenly, something felt wrong. He looked at his father's expression and felt an overwhelming sense of *déjà vu*. It was as though he had already experienced this moment before. He could feel the talisman in his pocket, and when he touched it, he was shocked to find that it had returned to its original state, as though it had never been activated.

He glanced at Aldrian again, whose expression was still irritatingly serene. Without thinking too much, Lewis activated the talisman once more. The loud explosion reverberated throughout the palace, followed by the screams of agony from the victims.

He felt a twisted satisfaction at the sound of those death cries, but suddenly, once again, he was struck by that same feeling of *déjà vu*.

He looked around and saw the same expression on his father's face, as well as on all of his family, the same expressions they had shown just a few seconds ago. A frown creased his brow as he couldn't understand the unsettling feeling creeping over him.

However, when he felt his pocket, he could still sense the talisman was intact.

Taking a step back, he dropped to the ground, horrified. He tried to calm his mind, closing his eyes in an attempt to regain control.

"Yes, this must be an illusion! It's just an illusion! As long as I can break it, I'll escape from this place!"

He tried to circulate his devil cultivation manual, and with a shout and a surge of blaring devil energy, he released it all at once. His intent was to throw the surrounding energy into chaos, hoping to break the illusion.

"BREAK!"

After that, he dashed toward the exit of the room, desperate to escape the palace. As he moved toward the entrance, he didn't see anyone, but he didn't care—he just wanted to get away. Finally, he reached the imperial palace's entrance and quickly broke through it.

However, just when he thought he was about to see the city's scenery, he was shocked to find himself back in Hector's room.

He felt like he was going crazy. He was standing in the exact same position as when he had been about to activate the talisman. His body trembled as he couldn't sense any anomaly in his body or surroundings, yet he kept returning to this moment, trapped in a loop of events.

Emperor Durand and the others looked at Lewis with confused expressions. They remained cautious about the explosive powder he had tried to detonate, but suddenly his gaze became unfocused, losing its light. He fell silent, his hand still in his pocket, and his other hand hanging at his side.

They didn't know if this was another of Lewis's tricks, but after a few seconds of him not making any move, they finally realized what had happened to him.

"He's under an illusion!" they thought.

Emperor Durand glanced at Aldrian, who had maintained his serene expression since earlier. Aldrian must be the one who put Lewis under the illusion. He sighed and placed a hand on Aldrian's shoulder.

"Young Aldrian, thank you again. Because of you, we've avoided a much bigger disaster. We've also uncovered the hidden dangers within my family. I—no, we, the imperial family, truly owe you more than we can repay. You've always been helping us, but I have yet to offer anything in return. I feel ashamed."

Aldrian finally smiled and looked at Emperor Durand.

"No worries, Your Majesty. I'm doing this because it aligns with my interests as well. With the stability of the empire, my work in the future will be much easier."

Emperor Durand smiled upon hearing Aldrian's answer.

"Still, you've already given my family and this empire something we can't simply ignore. Because of you, I'm still alive, and my family has been saved from the hidden dangers within, which turned out to be so close to us. So you don't need to be so humble. Even if you try to deny it, I will still acknowledge everything you've done for me."

"It's my honor, Your Majesty."

Imperial Consort Veronica had already placed her son on her lap, gently stroking his forehead. Lewis's gaze remained unfocused, as though he were under immense stress in his mind. In this moment, Lewis was in his most vulnerable state; if anyone wanted to harm him, he would be powerless to stop it.

Emperor Durand walked over to Imperial Consort Veronica, his eyes coldly fixed on Lewis.

"Veronica, I will punish Lewis according to the imperial laws for traitors, and not even you can save him from it. Do you understand?" Emperor Durand said, his voice cold, devoid of any affection. He didn't just feel betrayed; he was consumed with anger and sadness. Of all the people, his own son had turned out to be one of the traitors.

He also didn't know how to deal with Veronica right now. He wasn't sure if his wife was aware of all the madness their son and her blood family had caused outside. Emperor Durand thought this way, considering everything he had just experienced. All the recent chaos seemed to be connected to Imperial Consort Veronica.

Imperial Consort Veronica remained silent, continuing to stroke Lewis's forehead. She knew she couldn't save her son after everything Lewis had done. She also understood that her position would be shaken in the eyes of Emperor Durand. Although she hadn't known about Lewis's actions, they were still affecting her.

Aldrian looked at Imperial Consort Veronica with pity, already seeing the difficult path ahead of her. Her blood family and son had plotted a coup, even working with the devils. In the end, all decisions rested with Emperor Durand, and perhaps the rest of the family.

Aldrian glanced at the rest of the imperial family, who remained silent. They seemed unwilling to think about it for now, still uncertain whether Imperial Consort Veronica was involved in any way.

He could only provide Emperor Durand with the information as the basis for his judgment, ensuring that no wrong decisions were made, decisions that would lead to regret later.

Once Aldrian felt that his role here was complete for now, he turned to the people present and spoke.

"Your Majesties, Your Highness, I think I will excuse myself for now. I will return to the imperial palace later to assist with the investigation and the aftermath cleanup. I want to check on my mansion first, as I didn't have time earlier. I need to make sure there's no issue with my friends," Aldrian said, slightly bowing his head.

Emperor Durand nodded with a smile, and the others also smiled. But then Hector spoke to Aldrian.

"Sir Aldrian, thank you for saving my life. I truly owe you one."

Aldrian smiled at Hector.

"It's my pleasure to be of help."

With that, he disappeared, leaving the imperial family in awe, as they marveled at the Aldrian's mysterious methods.

Chapter 264: Sudden 'Attack'

Aldrian reappeared on the rooftop of his mansion, his gaze fixed on the front garden that had been left in ruins by the fierce clash between the envy devil and Xin Haotian.

Turning his attention to his companions, he noticed the ladies had managed to stabilize themselves, recovering from the lingering effects of the envy devil's domain. Without hesitation, Aldrian teleported to Eleine, who was seated in quiet meditation, seemingly working to expel the remaining effects of the curse domain.

The curse domain seemed to leave some aftereffects for her and others, as they directly affected their souls.

However, the lingering effects of the curse domain made it difficult for her to fully meditate, as she seemed to struggle with concentration. From time to time, a frown crossed her face, and beads of sweat rolled down her forehead.

Seeing this, Aldrian placed his hand gently on her back and began transferring his golden energy to help expel the remaining effects. A warm sensation surged through her body, and her expression gradually softened, her tension easing.

After a few moments, Eleine finally sighed in relief and slowly opened her eyes. She saw that Aldrian had already returned and smiled at him. She hadn't been able to sense his arrival when the envy devil released its domain, as she had been fully occupied defending herself from the domain's powerful effects.

"Have you done your business already?" she asked.

Aldrian nodded, smiling.

"Yes."

After that, he excused himself to visit Baek Ji-Min, who was in a situation similar to Eleine's, though slightly worse. Her lower cultivation level made her more vulnerable, and the lingering negative feelings had begun to stir an inner demon she had already defeated in the past with the help of Aldrian's golden energy.

Not wasting any more time, Aldrian did the same for Baek Ji-Min, and she was finally able to calm down. Once he finished with her, Aldrian moved toward Sylphia.

Her condition was the worst of the three. With her cultivation still at the peak Viscount stage, she was the most vulnerable. Though her progress had been impressive since Aldrian first saw her three years ago, her current cultivation was still too low to withstand the effects of powerful adversaries like the envy devil. The curse domain was simply too much for her.

She seemed to feel the negative emotions trying to swallow her, and she struggled to resist them with her own will. Unable to meditate at all, she could only lie on her bed, hugging her body for comfort. It was as though she were in the midst of an internal battle, so intense that she couldn't even sense Aldrian had already arrived beside her.

Aldrian realized that if she couldn't hold on, she might be consumed by her inner demon.

Aldrian felt a sharp ache in his heart as he looked at her in this state. Without hesitation, he reached out and gently touched her hand from the bedside. Channeling his golden energy into her body, he watched as the frown on Sylphia's face slowly receded. Her stiff body began to relax, the tension gradually easing.

After a few moments, a serene expression finally returned to Sylphia's beautiful face. She looked like a sleeping beauty, free from any worries in the world. Aldrian smiled, relieved that Sylphia was no longer in pain and could finally sleep peacefully. He was about to stand up when he noticed Sylphia's eyes tremble and slowly open, revealing her stunning blue eyes, almost identical to Aldrian's.

The first thing Sylphia saw was Aldrian's smiling face, and it warmed her heart. Without hesitation, she hugged him tightly, burying herself in his sturdy body. She inhaled his scent, as if it were the only thing that could calm her restless mind.

Aldrian, caught off guard by the sudden hug, widened his eyes. He looked at Sylphia, surprised by her boldness. Since the first time he had known her, she had never shown this kind of bold behavior. While their relationship had grown closer over time, and their actions had become more intimate, they had never hugged each other before.

Sylphia's soft body pressed against him, sending a new, unfamiliar sensation through Aldrian. The warmth of her body was undeniable, but he could also sense the longing and anxiety that lingered within her. A warm smile spread across his face as he gently embraced her in return. For the first time, he could truly feel the fullness of her body in his arms, and he allowed himself to savor the moment.

After a few minutes of serene silence, Sylphia finally released her hug and moved her head away from his chest. Aldrian smiled gently as he looked at her, but he couldn't see her face since she had lowered her head. However, he could tell that she was flustered, her cheeks flushed with a deep blush as she tried to calm herself.

"How do you feel? Is there any problem with your body or any discomfort?" Aldrian asked, his voice soft and reassuring, making Sylphia's heart relax. She didn't answer him, keeping her head lowered. Sensing her hesitation, Aldrian gently lowered his head to try to see her face.

Suddenly, Aldrian's eyes widened in shock as Sylphia moved her head quickly. Their faces were so close that her sudden movement left him no time to react. In an instant, Sylphia raised her head and, with a swift motion, pressed her lips to his. The only thing Aldrian could feel was the unexpected softness of Sylphia's lips against his.

He was so shocked that he froze, unable to move when Sylphia's lips touched his. For several seconds, he remained still. Sylphia closed her eyes, her beautiful face so close to his that it felt like the closest they had ever been since he met her. Only after three seconds did Sylphia finally pull away, opening her eyes. As if she had just realized what she had done, her face turned bright red, and she quickly covered herself with the blanket.

Aldrian also flushed, as this was his first time kissing someone—and it was Sylphia, someone he had known for years and whose presence had slowly made him develop feelings beyond friendship. He couldn't deny that his feelings for her had evolved, and slowly he saw her not just as a friend, but as a woman.

He found himself enjoying the feeling, and the sudden kiss lingered in his memory as he lightly touched his lips with his fingers, savoring the sensation. He glanced at Sylphia's cute reaction, a smile forming on his face. Gently, he reached out and touched the blanket where she had hidden herself.

"Sylphia?" he said softly.

But there was only silence, no answer. Aldrian fell quiet as well, lifting his hand from the blanket. He then masked his presence completely, making sure she couldn't sense even the faintest trace of his breath.

After a minute or so, Sylphia finally braced herself, thinking that Aldrian had already left. She peeked from the edge of the blanket, only to be shocked to see Aldrian still beside her, smiling warmly at her. She couldn't detect any sign of his presence, even though he was right in front of her. Instantly, she tried to cover herself again, but Aldrian was faster this time. He gently but firmly grabbed her hand, just enough to prevent her from hiding herself.

Sylphia tried to resist with all her might, determined to cover herself again and hide her shy face from Aldrian. However, Aldrian's strength was far beyond what she could resist. Finally, she gave up, but she still lowered her head, trying to hide her face.

Seeing her avoid his gaze only made her seem even cuter to Aldrian. With a soft smile, he lifted his hand and gently touched her cheek.

"Sylphia, look at me," he said in a soft tone.

After a few moments, Sylphia finally raised her head and met his gaze. Her face, still flushed with embarrassment, only added to her cuteness in Aldrian's eyes. He stroked her cheek gently and asked,

"What happened to you, to suddenly 'attack' me, hmm?" His voice carried a playful, joking tone.

Sylphia, still shyly gazing at his face, slightly lowered her head again. After a moment, she adjusted her sit position, leaning against the headboard, though she kept her head lowered. Finally, her voice resounded softly.

"I just experienced something terrible. It felt like I wasn't myself... the negative thoughts started to influence me, especially envy. I suddenly felt envy for no reason, envy for things I shouldn't have felt envy for. It's really hard to explain, but I felt like I was falling into my own negative feelings."

"At the time, I was so scared... scared that I would lose myself, and in the end, lose you. I was afraid of not feeling your presence anymore, not feeling your touch anymore. It was horrible, and then came a feeling of regret. I regretted not moving closer to you, not feeling more of your touch, not experiencing more of you. I feel deeply regretful." Her voice grew smaller and smaller as she spoke, clearly overwhelmed by shyness.

However, as she remembered what she had just felt, it gave her the courage to explain it all to Aldrian. She truly meant everything she said and didn't regret expressing it to

him now. She lowered her head, trying to hide her expression, but suddenly, she was shocked to find her upper body leaning to the side, resting against Aldrian's shoulder.

She was stunned to realize that Aldrian had already moved to her right side on the bed and was sitting relaxed with his back against the headboard. It was as if he had teleported there from her left side. His hand gently touched her head, guiding her to lean against his shoulder.

"You don't want to feel any regret, right? Then I'll make sure you won't feel that way anymore in the future."

Chapter 265: The Reasons

Sylphia felt her heart flutter. His voice, so full of assurance, made her smile. The gentle touch of his hand on her head drew her to close her eyes and savor the moment. Though a trace of shyness lingered, she didn't pull away. Instead, she remained still, her head resting lightly on his shoulder, saying nothing.

Aldrian, too, was caught in the same quiet emotion. His gaze softened as he looked at Sylphia, a warm contentment spreading through him. In this moment, his heart felt at peace—so serene he could drift off to sleep. Neither moved, both simply enjoying each other's presence as time seemed to stand still.

After a while, Aldrian finally noticed that Sylphia had fallen asleep. A faint smile lingered on her face even in her slumber, prompting Aldrian to smile warmly in return. It was a relief to see her resting peacefully after the nightmare she had endured.

He paused for a moment, deep in thought, before his face flushed slightly. Leaning forward, he placed a gentle kiss on the top of her head. If anyone had seen him at that moment, they would have been utterly shocked. This wasn't the composed and controlled Aldrian they knew. The sight of his flushed face, so uncharacteristic of him, was something no one could have ever imagined.

After kissing Sylphia's head, Aldrian carefully began to shift his body, trying to move away without disturbing her. He moved with utmost care, even wrapping her gently in his golden energy like a blanket. Every movement was measured, ensuring he didn't jostle her or disrupt her peaceful sleep. His energy radiated warmth and comfort, cocooning her so she wouldn't wake from his absence.

After finally managing to stand up from the bed, Aldrian looked at Sylphia one last time, a warm smile gracing his lips. Then, without a sound, he disappeared. Moments later, small points of light began to shimmer around the bed, each glowing softly in a different position. Aldrian had created a formation—a protective barrier designed to ensure Sylphia could sleep even more peacefully.

His body reappeared in his own room. Today had truly been a remarkable day for him. His purpose in the Doria Empire could be considered fulfilled, and he had gained much during his time here. From mastering new techniques and deepening his comprehension to forming valuable connections—and, most importantly, reuniting with his mother—it had been an eventful journey. Though his time in this place was brief, he had accomplished so much.

However, he had also become deeply aware of the vast extent of the devils' influence within the empire. Their plans ran far deeper than anyone could have imagined, with their presence infiltrating every corner of the empire. They had eyes and ears embedded in all its organizations, and their operations were intricately interconnected.

For instance, the master of the Alchemist Association, Master Dan, had been working to sow discord between Hector and Alderia by pretending to support Alderia. His true goal was to entice Alderia into joining the succession race. Yet, in reality, Master Dan's support was with Lewis, as they were aligned within the same faction.

Aldrian had initially thought that traitors like Master Dan would flee after the war, but he was wrong. Instead, they remained because the devils needed them to stay in place, continuing to serve as valuable assets within the empire. It was a truly bold move by the devils, but Aldrian understood why they dared to leave their operatives in place despite the growing suspicions about them within the empire.

With key positions under their influence, the devils were likely to succeed in their plans. Emperor Durand, in his weakened condition, was on the brink of death if he didn't meet Aldrian. The Doria Empire could descend into civil war, and in the end, it would likely fall completely into the devils' grasp.

Aldrian sighed at this. The devils truly knew how to manipulate people's negative emotions to turn them into accomplices. For example, the reason someone of Master Dan's caliber could betray his own conscience and morals to align with the devils was tied to his alchemist abilities, which had stagnated for so long. It might sound simple, but it fueled an envious feeling toward the other three grandmasters of the association, whose talents were already renowned across the continent.

The envy devil took advantage of this, much like he had with Lewis, the third prince. He constantly enticed Master Dan, whispering like a devil's temptation. In the end, Master Dan became yet another tool in the devils' hands within the empire.

Aldrian touched his chin, deep in thought as he considered how the devils recruited their accomplices. Unlike the greed devil, who used the horror of "that thing" to break the will of his targets and force them into submission, the envy devil played on a much subtler, more insidious emotion.

The envy devil used people's negative emotions to make them betray their kin. As for the lust devil, Aldrian recalled some memories he had read before the lord devil killed

him. All of the lust devil's accomplices were women, who obeyed him through dual cultivation.

Each devil had their own methods to "force" their targets into becoming allies of the devils or even turning into the devils themselves. While Aldrian couldn't capture all of the devils' accomplices in the empire, he had already removed the most troublesome ones. The small fry will have no effect on the devils' plans in the future.

Now, a question arose in Aldrian's mind: if the devils' ultimate plan was to summon that 'thing' upon the continent, why all of this hassle? Why create so much chaos and conspiracy? Couldn't they just summon that 'thing' without causing upheaval? Could they not do so within their own territory without disturbing the others, so no one would suspect that they were planning something?

This line of thinking emerged after he reviewed everything he had done in the empire. Even after delving into all those memories, Aldrian still couldn't find an answer. The war seemed to have no clear objective, only causing chaos before the devils retreated. The only thing he learned from the memories was that the devil lord had instructed all devils to spread chaos across the continent in preparation for the incoming prophecy and the arrival of that 'thing'.

"From the looks of it, this is the devil lord's plan with the specifics only known to him," Aldrian muttered.

Aldrian had already killed some of the devil's strongest followers, causing the devils to lose a significant portion of their power. Yet, he still felt something was wrong with the devil lord. The devil lord's actions so far suggested that he didn't truly care about Aldrian eliminating his powerful subordinates, including the seven deadly sins and their successors.

Aldrian had already killed three members of the seven deadly sins. As for the envy devil's successor, he finally learned that one of the devils he battled in the underground base, alongside Grand Duke Gouvard and Master Dan, was actually the envy devil's successor after reading his memory.

"What is he trying to accomplish with all of this chaos? Does he simply want chaos on the continent? Wouldn't it be better to preserve his forces for the prophecy? What am I missing?"

Aldrian tried to deduce the devil lord's plan, but in the end, he sighed, unable to find a definitive answer. The only things that came to mind were possibilities, still unclear and ambiguous.

"I'll just have to wait and see what the devil lord's next move is," Aldrian thought.

Aldrian then meditated to organize his thoughts and reflect on his gains. All of his new insights made him eager to create a new technique, especially the curse laws. The envy devil had provided him with a profound understanding of curse laws, sparking his desire to develop his own curse laws.

The envy devil's curse technique was actually the development of his own karma laws and Buddhist runes. He could alter the Buddhist runes and combine them with his karma laws, creating a powerful form of curse law that even affected the victim's soul. This demonstrated the envy devil's genius, for he had managed to twist something holy into something devious.

Aldrian could only lament the fate of a genius like the envy devil. Despite coming from a Buddhist sect, in the end, he couldn't prevent himself from being consumed by his own negative feelings. The envy devil had once been a Buddhist monk who ventured outside to spread the Buddha's enlightenment. His upright personality and firm commitment to justice and righteousness had once been his defining traits.

However, as time passed, he personally witnessed the darkness of the world. Unlike in the Buddhist sect's territory, where such sights were minimal, the outside world was filled with countless ugly aspects that he couldn't fix. Slowly, he began to feel envious of those who weren't burdened by the ideals of justice and righteousness. His heart grew heavy and tired, and he longed to escape his own principles. His dao heart shook and eventually collapsed, leading him to decide to join the devils and cultivate the energy of envy.

Suddenly, Aldrian remembered the message from the monk he met in the Forgeheart Kingdom, and he understood why the monk had said that to him.

"However, not every being's heart can hold righteousness, and even if they have a righteous heart, not all of them can bear the weight of that righteousness."

Chapter 266: The Leftover Clean Up

While Aldrian meditating inside his room, ignoring all the commotion in the capital, the situation in the northeast region is in disarray. Most of the families inside of the grand duke Gouvard's faction is in this region and many of their higher up follow infiltrating the capital. They are lost contact with the capital for some time before they finally received a news that make them terrified.

The coup plan has been compromised, and the imperial family is in the midst of purging traitors. These families know it's only a matter of time before the imperial family passes judgment on them. Their only choices are to surrender or to fight against the imperial family. However, despite their large numbers, with most of their higher-ups apprehended by the imperial family in the capital, they are like foam in the ocean.

The choice was clear for the members of these families in their home bases: to surrender to the imperial family. There was no need to escalate the situation into an unnecessary civil war or fight a losing battle. As a result, they confined themselves to their own territories, hoping to avoid any misunderstanding with the imperial family. They intended to keep their families quiet and compliant, behaving like obedient dogs.

Inside the Lucard family's grand mansion, Danius Lucard, the young master of the Lucard family, sat in his seat in the meeting room. He was positioned near the right side of the central seat, which was traditionally reserved for the patriarch. However, in the patriarch's absence, the family's grand elder occupied the seat as the interim leader.

Inside the room, there were five other elders alongside the grand elder of the Lucard family. They appeared to have just concluded their discussion regarding the coup attempt.

"So, we have decided to hold our forces as the conclusion of this meeting," the grand elder declared.

He was Zakal Lucard, a middle-aged man with a brown mustache and short, sleek brown hair.

After he announced his decision, the others in the room could only sigh, their frustration evident on their faces. In truth, they had never been optimistic about the patriarch's reckless plan to join forces with other families in the same faction to stage a coup. They couldn't understand why their patriarch had acted so irrationally, but the only person in the room who knew the reason could only sigh in defeat.

Grand Elder Zakal was the only one in the room who knew about their cooperation with the devils and how the plan was supposed to unfold. However, he was still in the dark about what had happened in the capital that caused the situation to suddenly flip. His gaze shifted to the young master, Danius, who sat with an expressionless face. He was the only one present who remained unaware of the coup plan, completely in the dark about everything.

The patriarch had a good reason for not telling Danius about the plan. He didn't want his son to accidentally leak their intentions to outsiders. Knowing Danius's personality, the patriarch understood that his son often boasted about his status and freely spoke his mind. Grand Elder Zakal thought to himself that Danius must be shaken by the current situation facing the family.

However, unbeknownst to Grand Elder Zakal, Danius was indeed shocked, but for a different reason. Upon hearing that his family had actually planned a coup with other families, his mind was reeling, and he couldn't help but think of Aldrian. He understood now why Aldrian had made him the spy inside his own family. While the coup attempt

itself had taken him by surprise, it was Aldrian's involvement that truly occupied Danius's thoughts.

Did Aldrian already know about his family's coup attempt? Had Aldrian made him the spy to monitor his family's movements? Was he one of the reasons his family was now in this predicament? What if he hadn't become a spy—could his family have succeeded in the coup and dethroned the emperor? Many "what if" scenarios flooded his mind, but unfortunately for Danius, he didn't know the truth about Aldrian.

Poor Danius doesn't know that all of this was just a coincidence. Aldrian had no knowledge of the coup attempt when he made Danius his slave. His main goal was simply to monitor the families in opposition to the Rivas family. By keeping Danius close, he could learn everything about the Lucard family's actions, as well as movements from the Grand Duke Gouvard faction. It was, in essence, killing two birds with one stone.

Inside his mind, Danius already believed that the reason for their failed operation was because he had told Aldrian about his family's movements. He didn't care about the betrayal of his family towards the emperor, nor did he care about anyone else. All he could think about was his own betrayal, the one that had made a mess of everything, throwing their situation and plans into chaos.

He felt angry at himself and began to blame Aldrian in his mind. However, as soon as those negative thoughts about Aldrian appeared, a sharp pain began to rise from his soul. Danius, knowing what was about to happen, immediately tried to stop his mind from thinking of Aldrian. Clenching his fists in frustration, he couldn't even think badly about the young man who had put him in this predicament.

"Young master, you must be prepared for any situation in the future," Grand Elder Zakal said to Danius. "Our family may face severe punishment, but I believe the imperial family won't push so far as to exterminate us. They can't afford to eradicate an entire faction, our faction controls the northeast territory of the empire, and our faction's territory borders the devils, and they will need us here."

Danius nodded in understanding. At least this was a bit of good news. Even if his family lost its status, the imperial family would still need them to maintain control over the territory. The idea of the imperial family choosing another family to manage the northeastern region, seemed unlikely—at least that was what Grand Elder Zakal believed.

After the meeting concluded, all the members of the Lucard family left the room, leaving Grand Elder Zakal alone. His face was etched with a frown. Although he had reassured the others that the imperial family would not push too hard, he knew deep down that they would investigate the matter thoroughly. He was the only one in the family who knew about Duke Lucard's and the other grand elder's cooperation with the devils.

Now that Duke Lucard and the other grand elders were caught in the capital, Grand Elder Zakal had already resigned himself to the fact that the imperial family likely knew about the cooperation between the Grand Duke Gouvard and the devils. The imperial family would surely investigate all the families in this faction, and that included him, in order to uproot the devils' influence. It was only a matter of time before they sniffed him out.

"I have to escape from here; there is no place for me here anymore,"

Grand Elder Zakal thought, his mind racing with plans for his next move.

He stood up, preparing for his escape plan, but suddenly he felt a presence behind him. He tried to dodge, but before he could move, he felt something pierce his chest from his back. He didn't understand why it happened or who was behind him. He wanted to unleash his attack, but his body wouldn't move as the dagger, which had pierced his chest, was laced with deadly poison!

His energy flow and body were filled with extreme pain as the dagger pierced his chest, just beside his heart. If he hadn't moved slightly when he sensed the attacker, the dagger would have already pierced his heart.

He wanted to shout to alert the people still nearby, but before he could, another attack came to his head. The last thing Grand Elder Zakal saw was his own lifeless body before he plunged into darkness.

Looking at the lifeless body, the assassin did not wait any longer and instantly disappeared, leaving the dead body as the only witness.

"Target eliminated. Mission successful," the Second Finger reported to Aldrian.

Aldrian, still meditating with his eyes closed, responded to the Second Finger.

"Good. Now return to base. Your mission in this empire is done for now." The communication was then cut off.

Aldrian opened his eyes. He had been meditating for four hours, and after the Second Finger's report, he decided to end his session. Though he couldn't catch everyone connected to the devils, he had eliminated those within his reach, including those under the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion's surveillance.

He knew that some individuals from various noble families were the only ones aware of their cooperation with the devils. After reading the memories of Grand Duke Gouvard, he learned who else was involved. He then ordered the assassins of the Thunderous

Shadow Pavilion to shift from surveillance to assassination, targeting the individuals he had mentioned.

Now that Aldrian felt his purpose in the empire was complete, he recalled the assassins, leaving behind many corpses in various locations. He stood up and looked outside. The sky had already darkened again, and the situation in the capital was largely under control after hours of purging by the imperial family. However, Aldrian could still see some of the imperial soldiers patrolling the streets.

Rising from his meditative stance, Aldrian decided to assist the imperial family in handling a few remaining matters.

Chapter 267: Emperor Durand's Curiosity

The next day, the imperial family announced the coup attempt by Grand Duke Gouvard's faction. At the same time, they revealed that the devils have collaborators within the empire, labeling them as traitors. However, the imperial family withheld some names to prevent chaos and avoid causing widespread distrust among the people.

Names like Master Dan, Grand Duke Gouvard, and even the Third Prince Lewis are not revealed. However, some nobles from Grand Duke Gouvard's faction are named publicly. The imperial family understands that announcing individuals like Master Dan or a grand duke as collaborators with the devils would cause the people to lose all faith in the empire's leadership.

Such an action would become a ticking time bomb in the long run, and the imperial family is determined to avoid that. They aim to minimize the impact as much as possible.

The announcement caused an uproar across the Doria Empire, with people scrambling to uncover information about the unfolding events. Why did the grand duke suddenly attempt a coup? What will happen next? While the situation among the populace remains relatively peaceful, opinions are deeply divided. This diversity of perspectives is, in fact, the ideal outcome for the imperial family. At least there is no chaos in the territories of the nobles.

At this time, the capital also saw the arrival of high-ranking nobles. The remaining grand dukes arrived in the capital this morning to report to the imperial family. They wish to face the emperor and demonstrate that they are not involved in the coup. This act also serves as a show of support for the imperial family, helping to avoid any misunderstandings.

Inside the throne hall, Grand Duke Rivas, Grand Duke Lumeria, and Grand Duke Herlion stood before Emperor Durand. They appeared to be discussing the recent events in the empire. Grand Duke Rivas also informed Emperor Durand about his

findings concerning Wei Zhi and the betrayal by some individuals within his grand duchy and those under his command.

"Grand Duke Rivas, you are truly fortunate to have someone help you uproot the hidden snake within your family. Do you already know this person's identity? From the looks of it, the one who warned you about the traitors and the one who killed Wei Zhi seem to be the same individual," said a middle-aged man with blonde hair and a small beard under his chin. He was Grand Duke Herlion.

"That is what I thought as well, but so far, I haven't been able to find solid proof that this man is the same person who warned me. They left behind very few traces. However, I did come across a small clue, there are traces of assassins, but I'm still unsure which group they belong to," Grand Duke Rivas replied.

"Assassins? Could there be any connection to the news we just heard from the northeast? Many high-ranking members of noble families were assassinated there—could it be the same group?" Grand Duke Lumeria asked.

"Maybe, maybe not. It's still too early to draw conclusions," Grand Duke Rivas replied. "However, in my opinion, they are likely the same group. If we could examine the corpses of their victims, we might be able to determine which group they belong to."

Emperor Durand listened to the grand dukes' discussion, but he was also deep in thought. He looked at Grand Duke Rivas with a neutral expression, though his mind was preoccupied. Last night, when Aldrian came to the palace and provided him with information about the betrayals of Grand Duke Gouvard and Master Dan, Aldrian had also given him several artifacts from the noble families of the Doria Empire, which had been stolen by the Greed Devil.

Emperor Durand's heart shuddered when he saw those artifacts. With those artifacts in Aldrian's possession, it could only mean one thing: the Greed Devil was dead. True to his suspicions, Aldrian had told him the truth. The fact that Aldrian had already killed three of the Seven Deadly Sins only highlighted his effectiveness and strength. To think that one person could achieve all of this without the continent knowing—truly mysterious!

With those artifacts, the imperial family now had bargaining chips, or leverage, over some of the nobles, including Grand Duke Gouvard's faction.

Thinking back, Emperor Durand recalled a small detail about Aldrian's movements in the empire: his involvement with the Rivas Grand Duchy. The first report of Aldrian's appearance was in the Rivas Grand Duchy, where he immediately joined the war, making a significant impact on the battlefield.

He also heard that Aldrian even struck deep into devil territory to save people at Sazim Fortress, ultimately rescuing Irene Rivas, the young miss of the Rivas family. Then,

Aldrian uncovered the betrayal of the guild master of the Information Guild, the guild was under the Rivas family's influence, forcing them to mobilize the Iron Fist Order knights.

All of this seemed like a coincidence, but Emperor Durand could sense that it wasn't that simple. Hector had also told him about the strangeness of Irene and how she described him. Given Aldrian's youthful appearance, he seemed too young to be Irene's lover or anything like that. But that was just his instinct, so he couldn't confirm it. He was also certain that the Rivas family didn't have any member like Aldrian, which led him to consider another possibility.

Although it felt quite far-fetched, it was still a possibility. What if Aldrian somehow had a closer relationship with Irene or the Rivas family? Like...

Emperor Durand stopped his pondering when he noticed that the three grand dukes seemed to have finished their discussion and were now looking at him. Emperor Durand then spoke to them.

"I've already heard about it, and I share the same thoughts as Grand Duke Rivas. Although the possibility that this person or group is the same is high, we still don't have solid proof, so we'll leave it for the future. We need to wait for more information about them. But based on all their actions, they are still on our side, so I'll leave it at that," Emperor Durand said, although he knew who had killed Wei Zhi.

"Now, Grand Duke Rivas, where is your daughter? I'd like to see her."

"She is at our mansion in the capital, Your Majesty. I'll call for her right now."

Emperor Durand had made a request to Grand Duke Rivas: to bring Irene to the capital. He wanted to see her himself, to make sure of Aldrian's connection to the Rivas family, especially his relationship with Irene.

The other grand dukes wondered why the emperor wanted to see the young miss of the Rivas family. Did he intend to pair her with one of the princes? They were aware of Grand Duke Rivas's stance on such matters, and forcing him into such a situation would not be good for the emperor.

However, they didn't know for sure why the emperor wanted to see her, so they didn't dwell too deeply on it. After that, Grand Duke Lumeria and Grand Duke Herlion left the throne hall, leaving only Grand Duke Rivas with Emperor Durand.

Not long after, Irene entered the throne hall. Yesterday, her father had told her that the emperor wanted to see her. Irene, wondering why the emperor wanted to meet with her, now stood before him in her graceful noble attire.

"Greetings, Your Majesty. I have come to answer your summons," Irene said with a slight bow.

Emperor Durand nodded with a smile before speaking to her.

"Truly a gem of the Rivas family. I can see why you are so popular among the nobles. Not only do you grow more beautiful with each passing year, but your talent never wanes—in fact, it only grows stronger. The Rivas family is surely lucky to have you."

"I'm flattered, Your Majesty. All of this has been made possible with the support of my parents," Irene replied.

Emperor Durand nodded in satisfaction before turning his gaze to Grand Duke Rivas.

"You are truly fortunate to have such a filial daughter. I must admit, I'm envious of you."

"Thank you for the compliment, Your Majesty, but my daughter is still quite lacking when compared to the First Prince and the Second Prince. She needs more time to catch up," Grand Duke Rivas replied with a slight bow.

Emperor Durand then looked at the father and daughter, remaining silent for a moment before asking,

"Do you know the person named Aldrian?"

This was a rhetorical question from Emperor Durand, as both Grand Duke Rivas and Irene must have at least heard of Aldrian. However, what Emperor Durand truly wanted to know was not just their awareness of the name.

When Grand Duke Rivas and Irene heard the sudden question about Aldrian, they both showed expressions of shock. However, Emperor Durand soon noticed the difference in their reactions. Irene, in particular, seemed to have a more intense emotional response to the name, while Grand Duke Rivas appeared confused after his initial shock.

"This subject truly doesn't know much about him, Your Majesty. He seems like a ghost, but not quite. We tried to track him, but lost his trail in the capital. Has Your Majesty perhaps already met Aldrian? He seems to be in the capital," Grand Duke Rivas asked.

However, Emperor Durand could sense something off in the tone Grand Duke Rivas used when asking about Aldrian.

As for Irene, the emperor could see a hint of nervousness in her eyes. Her body also showed subtle signs of unease, something she hadn't displayed earlier when in his presence.

"Well, I have met him, but I can't provide much information. I only want to know what kind of person Aldrian is. What do you think, Miss Irene?"

Chapter 268: Emperor Durand Found Out About Their Relationship?

Irene tried to suppress her nervousness as Emperor Durand looked at her with a smile. He was waiting for her answer, but her mind was occupied with the sudden topic of Aldrian. It seemed he had already met the emperor, and the emperor appeared to be interested in her son. She wasn't sure what Emperor Durand's opinion of Aldrian was, but she still decided to answer.

"I really don't know much about him, Your Majesty. After he saved me and talked a bit, he continued his journey, and I don't know where his destination was."

She kept her composure in check, determined to ensure that the emperor wouldn't notice anything unusual about her explanation—or her lie. However, the emperor's persistent smile made her feel increasingly uneasy, as he seemed to be trying to read her. Unfortunately for Irene, Emperor Durand had already noticed several signs that she was, indeed, lying.

"She's lying, and that nervous heartbeat is so obvious to me. She's trying to reveal as little as possible about Aldrian. Interesting," Emperor Durand thought, intent on uncovering more about their relationship.

"Is that so? What a pity. Although, he did seem to talk about you and knows who you are," Emperor Durand said, his smile unwavering. Of course, he was lying.

Irene's eyes widened, while Grand Duke Rivas frowned at the emperor's statement. The stark contrast between the father and daughter's reactions amused Emperor Durand, as it allowed him to infer how these two regarded Aldrian.

"Grand Duke Rivas doesn't seem particularly fond of Aldrian, but his daughter appears to have a special relationship with him—enough to try and conceal it. I see, so the key here is Irene Rivas, not the Rivas family," Emperor Durand thought.

"No, I—" Irene began to respond, but Grand Duke Rivas interrupted her.

"Your Majesty, may I ask where this Aldrian is? I wish to see him myself, to look at him and determine what kind of man he is."

"Well, I can't give you his location unless he wants to meet you himself. However, perhaps your daughter can help you arrange a meeting with him," Emperor Durand replied, his gaze shifting to Irene.

"Young Irene, I know you're already an adult and capable of pursuing a relationship, so I think it's perfectly fine to have a man that—"

"No, Your Majesty! It's not something like that!" Irene shouted, her tone rising slightly as she interrupted the emperor. A second later, she realized her outburst and quickly bowed her head.

"My apologies, Your Majesty, but my relationship with Aldrian is not like that. There is no lie in my words."

Emperor Durand and Grand Duke Rivas looked at Irene with differing expressions. For the emperor, he had finally confirmed his guess.

"Yes, she wasn't lying about this. Aldrian isn't her lover or anything of the sort," he thought.

As for Grand Duke Rivas, he seemed to relax, loosening his fist that had been tightly clenched since Emperor Durand first questioned Irene about her relationship with Aldrian. He glanced at his daughter again. It seemed she truly had a complicated connection with this Aldrian.

"It looks like I'll need to have a talk with her after we return home," he thought. He was determined to uncover who Aldrian was to Irene.

Emperor Durand then shifted his gaze to Grand Duke Rivas.

"Grand Duke Rivas, would you mind stepping outside the hall for a moment? There is something I wish to tell your daughter, something I would prefer only she hears."

Grand Duke Rivas hesitated for a moment before sighing, bowing to Emperor Durand, and turning to leave the hall. Once he was outside and the giant doors had closed, leaving only the emperor and Irene, Emperor Durand turned his gaze to Irene. His expression shifted to one of coldness, and then he said something that sent a sudden chill through Irene's heart.

"Actually, I want to kill Aldrian because he did something unforgivable to me." Emperor Durand released a bit of his killing intent, causing even Irene to feel a surge of fear. She didn't understand the sudden shift in the emperor's mood, but she gritted her teeth and met his gaze. Her expression remained steady and resolute.

"Your Majesty, I don't know what he did to you, but please pardon him. Instead, you can punish me as a substitute for him," she said, bowing.

"I thought you said you didn't have a deep relationship with him, but it seems you care about him more than it appears. Are you lying to me, Miss Irene?" Emperor Durand seemed to exude even more pressure and killing intent. Despite all of this, Irene refused to back down. She stood her ground, unwavering, without dropping to the floor.

"Your Majesty can think whatever you want about me, but please don't punish Aldrian. I will gladly give you my life, as long as Aldrian has not been harmed," she said, her voice steady and her expression resolute as she looked at Emperor Durand again.

Emperor Durand gazed into her eyes—eyes that held no fear, no hesitation, only full conviction and resoluteness. He was impressed. With a sigh, he withdrew his pressure and killing intent, finally concluding his test.

His expression changed instantly, returning to a smile. Irene, still trembling from the emperor's killing intent, held herself together. She thought the emperor had agreed to release Aldrian in exchange for her, and she felt a sense of relief. She didn't know what kind of trouble Aldrian had caused, but she was glad to have redirected Emperor Durand's anger onto herself.

Emperor Durand was about to speak when he froze, stunned, as someone suddenly appeared behind Irene. Irene also sensed the presence, as though this person had materialized out of nowhere.

"Your Majesty, you surely enjoy teasing, but please refrain from doing so in the future. It could be bad for our relationship," Aldrian's voice resonated.

Hearing the voice, Irene's eyes widened, and she quickly turned to look behind her. Aldrian stood there, staring at Emperor Durand with an expressionless face. Without hesitation, Irene jumped in front of him.

"What are you doing here?! What are you talking about? Don't be rude in front of His Majesty! Apologize to him!" she shouted at Aldrian.

However, Aldrian only smiled and gently touched her hand, which had grabbed his arm. Irene was in a panic. Emperor Durand seemed ready to harm Aldrian, and she was doing everything she could to protect her son.

She wanted to plead further with Emperor Durand, but she was stunned when she saw the emperor sigh and raise his hand in a surrendering gesture.

"My apologies, but this old man was simply curious about your relationship with her. I wanted to test her, but it seems I have offended you, so I apologize." Though he was shocked by how Aldrian had known what he did and appeared inside the throne hall without any warning, Emperor Durand didn't want to offend him. Therefore, he immediately offered his apology.

Irene's eyes widened in shock at what Emperor Durand had said. The emperor was apologizing to Aldrian? A test? What was he talking about? She looked back at Aldrian, seeking an explanation.

"Relax, His Majesty is only teasing you. He didn't intend to do anything to me. My relationship with his majesty is good," Aldrian said with a reassuring smile.

Irene then looked at the emperor again and saw him nod in agreement.

"Yes, my apologies, Miss Irene. I just wanted to test you about your relationship with young Aldrian. You don't have to worry anymore, I didn't intend to do anything to him. After all, he was our greatest benefactor," he said.

Irene widened her eyes as she heard Emperor Durand's words. The greatest benefactor? What had happened between them? She truly couldn't understand anything.

As for Aldrian, he knew what was on Emperor Durand's mind. It seemed the emperor had already learned something from his mother just now. With the emperor's sharp mind, he must have figured out a thing or two about her.

While training with his domain, Aldrian sensed a familiar presence and instantly saw his mother within the imperial palace that already covered by his domain. He looked at the emperor and heard him utter nonsense about wanting to kill him, but Aldrian could tell that the emperor didn't truly mean what he said. That's when Aldrian finally realized that this old man seemed to be testing his mother about him.

Truthfully, Aldrian didn't like Emperor Durand using that kind of test on his mother. However, he understood that, given the emperor's curiosity and sharp mind, he simply wanted to understand the true nature of their relationship.

"So, what did you gather from this conversation, Your Majesty?" Aldrian asked.

Emperor Durand fell silent. He looked at Aldrian, then at Irene, before finally turning back to Aldrian.

"Miss Irene seems to have known you for a long time, but you are not her lover, or anything of that sort. However, the moment I expressed my intent to harm you, she instantly pleaded for your pardon and offered to take your punishment instead. I also don't believe you are merely her friend, because some things don't add up if that were the case. There would be no reason for her to conceal your existence. As for Grand Duke Rivas, he doesn't seem to know you and certainly doesn't seem to like you, which means he only became aware of your existence recently."

"Those eyes of Miss Irene, when she pleaded to be punished instead of you, were full of conviction, with not a hint of hesitation. I recognize that kind of look—the one ready to sacrifice anything for the person she cares about. And those blue eyes..." Emperor Durand looked at both Aldrian and Irene before sighing.

"I see similarities between your eyes. With all that has transpired, I have come to a conclusion, but I want to ask one last question. If you don't want to answer, that's fine; I won't press further."

Aldrian nodded, having an idea of what Emperor Durand wanted to ask.

"Do you share a blood relation with Miss Irene?"

Chapter 269: Emperor Durand's Stance

Hearing the emperor's question, Irene felt so nervous that she feared someone like him might know about her true relationship with Aldrian. She didn't know what Emperor Durand would do if that became known, so she wanted to speak further to try to conceal her connection to Aldrian.

However, Aldrian simply grasped her hand, and smiled. He gave his mother a reassuring look before turning his gaze back to Emperor Durand. The look he gave her was one full of confidence, as if to say that nothing would happen as long as he was there. Irene's heart calmed down a little, though she remained very nervous.

Aldrian was silent for a moment before finally answering.

"Yes, we have."

Emperor Durand's heart shuddered. To think that his suspicion was correct—and if so, then the other thought lingering in his mind, might also be true.

"Are... are you her son?" Emperor Durand asked, his voice trembling.

"Yes," Aldrian replied, his answer unwavering.

Irene, who also heard it, grabbed Aldrian's arm and clutched it tightly. She looked at the emperor's shocked face, anxiously waiting for his judgment. But even after a minute, the emperor said nothing, his eyes darting back and forth between Aldrian and Irene. Only after another moment did he finally speak again.

"Truly unbelievable. How did this happen? Wait, let me think about it," Emperor Durand talked to himself. The news was truly shocking, and his mind seemed to short-circuit for a moment.

The man who had shaken the entire continent with his achievements and all those incredible feats was a descendant of his empire?

No wonder. No wonder he had come to the Rivas Grand Duchy to join the war. No wonder his actions seemed so closely tied to the Rivas family. All the missing pieces finally clicked into place in his mind.

"Since when did Miss Irene have Aldrian? If she was pregnant and Grand Duke Rivas never saw Aldrian, then she must have been away for a long time. The only time she was gone long enough for a pregnancy was when she was trapped inside the Everlasting Silent Forest. Ah, I see—it must have been there that Miss Irene had Aldrian."

But then he realized something absurd.

"If it was that time, doesn't that make young Aldrian's age now around 15 or 16? How is that possible? He's already so powerful at this age! I thought he was at least decades older, with a genius talent never seen before!" He looked at Aldrian as if he were staring at a monster.

"Truly a terrifying existence. I'm glad he's on our side."

But then, suddenly, he grinned. *"Wait, doesn't that mean our empire has a direct connection to Aldrian?"* He grinned even wider at the prospect of Aldrian helping them.

Looking at the various expressions of the emperor, Irene thought Emperor Durand had gone crazy after learning that Aldrian was her son. As for Aldrian, he simply waited for the emperor to calm himself. He more or less understood what kind of thoughts were running through Emperor Durand's mind.

After the emperor finally started to calm down, he looked at Irene and Aldrian again, but this time his gaze was noticeably warmer. His mood was elated after discovering Aldrian's origin. Though Aldrian wasn't of his family's bloodline, it felt as if he were part of his own family.

This time, the Doria Empire had truly hit the jackpot!

"I apologize for my unsightly behavior earlier. I was simply overwhelmed by this revelation—it's truly monumental news for our empire. I congratulate you, Miss Irene, on having someone like young Aldrian as your son. He is truly a hero of current generation and will undoubtedly leave his name in history," Emperor Durand said as he stood up.

Irene was stunned to hear the congratulatory words from Emperor Durand. He didn't see it negatively at all? She had expected backlash from the emperor, but it seemed she had overthought the situation. However, she was still a little nervous because of Aldrian's father's identity. Would Emperor Durand react the same way after learning that Aldrian's father was from a neighboring empire, and even from a noble family that rivaled her own?

Her worry deepened when Emperor Durand finally asked the question.

"Then, if I may ask, who is young Aldrian's father? Once again, I won't press you if you don't wish to tell me," Emperor Durand said, still wearing his warm smile.

"My father is Aldrey Flamecrest from the Flamecrest family."

Silence...

Emperor Durand's smile remained, but it grew awkward and rigid. After a few moments of uncomfortable silence, Emperor Durand finally spoke again.

"Sorry? Perhaps I heard that wrong. Could you say it again?"

"You're not hearing wrong, Your Majesty. My father is Aldrey Flamecrest."

"Which Flamecrest?"

"There is no other Flamecrest family than *that*

Flamecrest family, and there is no other Aldrey Flamecrest besides *that*," Aldrian answered with a calm expression.

A few minutes later, Emperor Durand slumped into his throne and covered his face.

"Rivas and Flamecrest? Truly unbelievable. How did this happen? Wait, no, I shouldn't ask that. What *did* happen—Rivas and Flamecrest?" Emperor Durand then looked at Irene and Aldrian again. Irene had already clutched Aldrian's arm so tightly, but despite the nervousness on her face, her gaze remained resolute, as though she was ready to protect Aldrian if things went south.

As for Aldrian, he simply looked back at Emperor Durand calmly. Aldrian knew that this could potentially cause a problem, but he had his own plan and was confident that the emperor would weigh his value more than the origins of his father. With all of his achievements and everything he had done for the imperial family and the Doria Empire, Emperor Durand would have to look at the bigger picture and swallow whatever displeasure he might have about Aldrian's father's origin.

Emperor Durand rubbed his face several times before finally looking at Irene and Aldrian.

"This would cause a huge ruckus in both our empires if it were made public. I assume Aldrey was also trapped in the same place as you, Miss Irene. To think that the two successors of rival families from two different empires could unite—how is that even possible? Miss Irene, you are truly bold. So, that's why you didn't tell Grand Duke Rivas about young Aldrian. If he knew his father's origin, the Grand Duke would flip and likely storm the Flamecrest family instead."

"After all, young Aldrian was born out of wedlock. Many will have negative opinions about you, Miss Irene. Many nobles—no, many people in this empire—will start to question your integrity. I'm not saying this because I have a negative opinion of you, but

this matter will blow up out of proportion if that old man in the Avandi imperial family and Grand Duke Flamecrest learn of it. We're talking about two rival families that have been at odds for generations," Emperor Durand said. He touched his temple, massaging it as he already predicted the problems that would arise if Aldrian's origin were to be made public.

"However, mark my words, young Aldrian and Miss Irene, I, as the Emperor of the Doria Empire, will always stand by your side. You can depend on me to help you if you ever need it," Emperor Durand assured.

Aldrian nodded in understanding at Emperor Durand's words, as he had already anticipated this. That's why he would need support from the imperial family to minimize the potential backlash in the future. From his understanding of Emperor Durand, he knew the emperor would accept this news more openly.

Most likely, the emperor would choose to side with Aldrian and disregard matters like family rivalry, just as Aldrian had guessed.

Hearing Emperor Durand's reassuring words, Irene felt a sense of relief. She didn't care about others' opinions, but she wanted to avoid her own small family being viewed negatively by many. She looked at Aldrian, who stood beside her with his serene expression, unchanged as always.

"Thank you, Your Majesty. Your assurance is more than enough for me. As for the opinions of others regarding my parents, I will personally take care of it. I will make sure that neither my mother nor my father's name is humiliated or stained by anyone, no matter who it may be," Aldrian said, his voice firm as he exuded an aura of might that seemed to rival that of the heavens.

The people throughout the entire palace could sense this aura. Many believed a heavenly tribulation was about to descend. Some even collapsed to the ground, too afraid to look upwards.

Aldrian then retracted his aura, but its effect lingered in Emperor Durand's mind.

"Truly a terrifying existence. How can he exude the might of the heavens? How could those two have a son like Aldrian?" Emperor Durand thought, his expression solemn.

"I have to be careful not to attract trouble with him. That's the last thing I want, especially during these uncertain times because of the prophecy."

Emperor Durand inwardly nodded, then remembered something. He turned his gaze toward Aldrian and Irene.

"Ah, regarding the Flamecrest family... I think I've heard something quite unpleasant from there, I must say."

No data found.

Chapter 270: Something Beneath the Imperial Palace

Aldrian raised his eyebrows, while Irene frowned.

"What is it, Your Majesty?" Aldrian asked.

"I don't know the details, but it seems the Flamecrest family is in a predicament. Rumors have spread that they are harboring devils. We don't know who started the rumor, but it appears there is strong evidence suggesting devils exist within their ranks," Emperor Durand said, his expression contemplative.

Aldrian and Irene widened their eyes.

"Impossible! Even though our families are rivals and not on good terms, we hate the devils more than anything. For the Flamecrest family to have devils in their ranks? There's no way that could happen," Irene said with certainty.

"Yes, I share the same sentiment as Miss Irene. I know a fair bit about Grand Duke Flamecrest, but the evidence being spread is quite solid. The Flamecrest family cannot evade the accusation. I heard one of their commanders was discovered to be a devil—a rather high-ranking one. The Flamecrest family can't do much about it and is only trying to minimize the backlash," Emperor Durand said.

"When did this news spread, Your Majesty?" Aldrian suddenly asked.

"The day before yesterday, around noon," the Emperor replied.

"The day before yesterday? The day after I dispelled Emperor Durand's curse. Is it a coincidence? No, I think all of this is connected. Maybe dispelling the curse triggered something, and now the Devil Lord is trying to act," Aldrian thought.

"Who is the commander they claim is a devil? I know all of their high-ranking generals," Irene said.

"They're saying it's Commander Marcus," Emperor Durand replied. "But as I mentioned, I don't really know the details about why he was accused of being a devil, so I can't provide more information."

Irene covered her mouth with one hand when she heard the name.

"Commander Marcus? There's no way he's a devil. He's one of Aldrey's most trusted people and has been with him for a long time. Something must be wrong," Irene said firmly.

Aldrian gently touched his mother's back to calm her down. There were many strange aspects to this case, but he was fairly certain it was just another trick by the devils to sow discord among people.

"It seems I need to meet Father as soon as possible," Aldrian thought, glancing at his mother.

"Mother, I will go there to help solve this problem. I believe this is another trick by the devils, and we need to stop whatever they're planning," Aldrian said to Irene.

Irene and Emperor Durand looked at Aldrian. Irene, however, hesitated, her expression uncertain. But the confidence radiating from Aldrian's face always reassured her, giving her faith in her son's ability to solve any problem.

Emperor Durand wasn't surprised; he had expected this. Aldrian would go to help his father. However, he couldn't help but feel a sense of pity—Aldrian would have to leave for another place so soon. His arrival in the Doria Empire had been brief, not even a month since he came.

"And I haven't even given him anything worthy of his achievements," he thought. He wanted to ask Aldrian to stay longer, but it would be difficult with his family facing such a pressing issue, and Aldrian determined to resolve it. "Your Majesty, before I go, I'd like to ask you something. I hope you can satisfy my curiosity," Aldrian said suddenly to Emperor Durand.

"Please ask. I would gladly answer, as long as I know the answer."

"What is the thing 600 meters below this place?"

Hearing Aldrian, Emperor Durand was stunned, but then he frowned.

"You can sense something beneath this place?"

"Well, I can only say that I have a special ability that allows me to sense everything within my range, even if it's underground and there are obstacles. So, I sensed something unique beneath this place, and it makes me curious, Your Majesty," Aldrian replied.

Of course, this place was within his domain, and he could sense a secret underground area beneath the Imperial Palace.

He could sense that there was a secret chamber storing something interesting—something that had attracted the devils for a long time. He didn't want to attract trouble by simply teleporting there, so he decided to use this method to make Emperor Durand reveal the 'thing' inside the chamber to him.

Emperor Durand thought for a moment before standing up.

"Actually, I can't really tell you about it because it's our family's top secret. But if it's you, I will make an exception. Beneath this place is where our secret legacy treasure is stored," Emperor Durand said. "Well, if you want to know, why don't you see it for yourself? I'll bring you to take a look at it."

Emperor Durand said, walking toward Aldrian and Irene.

"You too, Miss Irene. You can look at our family—no, our empire's legacy treasure."

Irene blinked her beautiful eyes, not expecting to be invited to see this unknown legacy treasure. She had heard rumors for a long time that the imperial family had a secret treasure, but no one outside the core of the imperial family knew anything about it.

Emperor Durand smiled, but he had another intention in showing Irene, as well as Aldrian, his family's treasure. He wanted to show Aldrian his goodwill, to demonstrate that he also wished to grow closer to his family.

"Wait, Your Majesty, my father is still outside. Aldrian will be spotted by him the moment we step outside this room," Irene said, worriedly.

"Ah, right, I forgot that Grand Duke Rivas is still outside the hall. All the shocking matters made me forget about his presence," Emperor Durand said, then looked at Aldrian.

"How about you hide first? I'll make Grand Duke Rivas leave," he suggested.

However, they only saw Aldrian smile.

"Your Majesty, Mother, don't worry about me. Just walk past the door normally, and I'll follow you without anyone seeing me."

"Well, if you say so."

Emperor Durand then walked toward the hall's door and opened it, followed by Irene. Irene felt nervous as she glanced behind her to make sure, but she was stunned when she didn't see Aldrian. He seemed to have disappeared without a trace.

Once the door opened, Grand Duke Rivas seemed to already be standing in front of it with an anxious expression. He didn't know what had happened inside, but he had sensed a bit of killing intent from the outside, and not long after, he felt the presence of heavenly might descending upon the entire imperial palace. He thought something must have happened inside, but he couldn't do anything unless the Emperor permitted him to enter.

Seeing that the Emperor and his daughter seemed normal, Grand Duke Rivas sighed in relief. He had thought something bad had happened inside the throne hall.

Emperor Durand smiled as he looked at Grand Duke Rivas.

"Ah, excuse me, Grand Duke Rivas. I would like to show your daughter a place. It won't take long," he said.

Grand Duke Rivas wore a puzzled expression before he looked at his daughter. Irene simply nodded at her father. Though he didn't know what had really happened, Grand Duke Rivas sighed and gave a slight bow to Emperor Durand.

"Of course, Your Majesty. I was just startled by the sudden heavenly might that appeared just now."

"Oh, that? You don't have to worry, it's not something you need to be concerned about. Now, I'll go first. You may return, so you don't have to wait here. Don't worry about your daughter," Emperor Durand reassured him.

Hearing the Emperor's reassurance, Grand Duke Rivas finally stopped worrying. It wouldn't be polite for him to continue nagging after the Emperor had given his assurance. After Emperor Durand and Irene had walked quite a distance and Grand Duke Rivas seemed on his way back outside the palace. Suddenly, Aldrian appeared beside his mother.

"Aldrian, how did you do that? I couldn't feel any of your presence; it's like you just popped up out of nowhere," Irene said, puzzled.

"This is one of my specialties, Mother—hiding my presence from others," Aldrian replied with a joking tone.

They continued walking until they arrived at a secret path located in the Emperor's workrooms, where he usually did paperwork. The secret path wasn't like the usual narrow passages, it was more appropriate to call it a secret hallway. Irene was shocked to discover there was an entire secret hallway hidden behind the wall of the room.

The hallway spiraled downward, and on each side were numerous scriptures and statues.

"There are some traps here, but don't worry—I deactivated them before coming here. If the traps were to activate, they could even kill a Middle Emperor Stage cultivator," Emperor Durand said.

After walking for a while, they finally arrived at their destination. In front of them stood double doors, protected by numerous formations. To open them, they needed Emperor Durand's energy.

Once Emperor Durand injected his energy, the mechanism of the doors activated, and the double doors slowly opened, revealing the inside of the chamber.

The legacy treasure of the Doria Empire lay before them!