

# **The Shining Star Above The Heaven**

## **#Chapter 281: Imperial Family's Proposal - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 281: Imperial Family's Proposal**

### *Chapter 281: Imperial Family's Proposal*

Earlier, the Sloth Devil was stunned by the sudden disturbance from one of her undead. She immediately recognized it as a deadly karmic attack! Without hesitation, she severed her connection to the undead, causing damage to her soul due to the forceful disconnection. Though she had no idea who the attacker was, she knew they were undoubtedly an expert in karmic techniques.

From the nature of the attack, she could discern its type—a curse, and a powerful one at that. She felt fortunate to have detected it in time; otherwise, the curse would have struck her soul directly. She had no desire to discover its effects, her sense of danger warned her that a direct hit to her soul would spell her end.

Sweat rolled down her forehead; it had been a long time since she had felt so close to death. Once she calmed herself, she lay back down. After checking her connections to her many undead, she finally identified which one she had lost. Letting out a sigh, she closed her eyes, appearing tired and drowsy.

Although she had just lost one of her pawns, she seemed unfazed. She had already succeeded in accomplishing what the Devil Lord wanted. Following the incident in the Doria Empire and the complete failure of their plan in that region, the devils had decided to proceed with their backup plan. Even if someone discovered her undead, it wouldn't change the outcome now—the news had already spread. She couldn't imagine how the Flamecrest family could salvage their reputation, especially with the opportunistic noble snakes ready to exploit the situation.

This time, the Devil Lord's plan was to activate all their sleeper agents. After their failure in the Doria Empire, the Devil Lord decided to have the traitors within the empires stir up chaos. She and the other devils would serve only as support, watching as the factions within the empires tore each other apart.

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Back at Aldrian's location, he removed his hand from the forehead of Commander Marcus's corpse. He had just given the caster of the necromancy technique a taste of his newly created technique. Since this type of necromancy was deeply tied to karma and possessed karmic properties, a karmic attack was the most fitting response.

Building on his comprehension of the curse from the Envy Devil, Aldrian developed his own curse technique and refined his concept of curses. The result was a new curse he intended to use against the Sloth Devil. It was a powerful curse—by his standards—that inflicted excruciating pain within the victim's soul. The victim would endure a slow and agonizing death over the course of several days, depending on their ability to resist the curse's effects.

Since it was a type of curse, it couldn't be healed with pills or ordinary healing techniques. The simplest solution was to seek help from cultivators who possessed holy energy to dispel the curse. However, for devils, that option was out of reach. To them, a curse attack of this kind was particularly devastating. The only way to break the curse was to overpower it.

Once a powerful curse attaches to a devil, it becomes a battle of attrition. Either the curse eventually triumphs, or the devil manages to destroy it by sheer force.

Curse laws are a type of law that leans toward yin or negative energy, making devils particularly sensitive to them. This sensitivity allows devils to easily recognize a curse for what it is. Situations like Emperor Durand's, where he couldn't distinguish between a curse and an illness, are exceedingly rare among devils.

But as expected from one of the Seven Deadly Sins, he could sense that the Sloth Devil had instantly severed her connection with Commander Marcus's body. She must have realized that a karmic based attack was exploiting the karmic connection between her and her undead. He felt it was a pity, but he wasn't surprised. If she had been defeated so easily by his curse, he would have been disappointed by her lack of sense.

*"Let's clean up this place."* With the karmic connection severed from the Sloth Devil, Commander Marcus's corpse returned to normal corpse, no longer an undead that could be exploited.

Aldrian then erased his presence from the memories of the unconscious witnesses before vanishing, leaving no trace behind.

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Near the main mansion, Aldrian appeared without a sound. He then looked at the large mansion beside him. To be honest, he was still weighing whether to meet his father at this time. Given the situation with the devil, his father was likely the most affected, as Commander Marcus had been one of his trusted people, and many knew of the close relationship between them.

Commander Marcus had been like a guardian knight, always by his father's side. When Aldrian saw the corpse's face, he was stunned. He recognized it instantly, as he had already seen Commander Marcus's face when his father visited the Forgeheart Kingdom with the envoy from the Flamecrest family.

After a moment of thought, Aldrian decided to check on his father's condition. He wanted to make sure everything was still okay for him.

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While Aldrian had decided to meet his father, the mentioned person was inside Grand Duke Flamecrest's study. The symbol of the fire dragon proudly adorned the top of the room, visible to anyone who entered. In the center of the room were a table and sofas, arranged to receive guests personally invited by the Grand Duke.

At this time, Aldrey and Grand Duke Flamecrest sat face to face, and from Aldrey's expression, it was clear that their conversation was about something unpleasant to him. Grand Duke Flamecrest sighed tiredly as he looked at his son.

"I know this is our last option, but the proposal from the imperial family should be considered seriously if we want to get out of this trouble," he said to Aldrey.

"But father, our long-standing stance will change once I accept the imperial family's proposal. Once I accept it, we won't be able to focus on the border as we always have," Aldrey said with an exasperated expression.

"Also, the way they've put forward this proposal amidst this situation feels like they're taking advantage of our misfortune, not genuinely intending to help us. I can already imagine that they know we'll be in a pinch and forced to approach them because of this event."

Grand Duke Flamecrest sighed again, knowing the consequences if Aldrey or their family accepted the imperial family's proposal. The proposal from the imperial family offered direct help, but such help came with a price: marriage.

The imperial family seemed to be suggesting that the Flamecrest name could be cleared if they had a marriage connection to the imperial family. It made sense, as most people believed the imperial family would never accept a family or individual affiliated with the devils. By building a relationship through marriage, their two families could instantly resolve most of the problems.

However, there would be downsides. The Flamecrest family's stance in the political landscape of the Vindas Empire would shift. They would become more active in the empire's political schemes, which is not ideal for a family that guards the border. Much like the Rivas family, the Flamecrests have their own principle regarding their position in the empire: neutrality.

However, if they were to marry into the imperial family, it would automatically change their stance and drag the Flamecrest family into everything the imperial family does. Even if they wanted to distance themselves, they couldn't, due to their marital

connection and the debt the Flamecrests would owe the imperial family for helping clear their name.

These are the cons of accepting the imperial family's proposal. But what if they reject it?

There is no doubt that the imperial family's help would only be half-hearted. Even Grand Duke Flamecrest would not be shocked if the imperial family themselves began to pressure the Flamecrest family over the devil incident.

The only bargaining chip the Flamecrest family has is their powerful strength and strategic position as the border guardians. However, that is not absolute. If many nobles, and even the imperial family, were to unite against them, they would have no choice but to make concessions to the nobles and the imperial family.

The setback would be much worse if they rejected the imperial family's proposal. However, neither Grand Duke Flamecrest nor Aldrey is willing to give up, which is why they only consider the imperial family's proposal as a last resort. The key factor is that all of this could happen *only if* they cannot find proof that the Flamecrest family is also a victim in this situation.

If they can find solid proof that the devil incident was solely the act of Commander Marcus, the Flamecrest family could escape this troublesome situation. This would be the best outcome for them—no setbacks and no one would be able to control them.

Aldrey sighed for the umpteenth time. At that moment, he truly missed Irene and Aldrian—his little family and the main reason he had to reject the imperial family's marriage proposal.

*"I really want to meet them now."* He leaned his head back on the sofa and closed his eyes. However, suddenly he opened his eyes and looked toward the window.

*Chapter 282: The Truth About Princess Loraine*

Aldrey looked out the window and narrowed his eyes.

"What is it?" Grand Duke Flamecrest asked.

Aldrey didn't answer immediately. He spoke only after a few seconds.

"Nothing. I thought I sensed something outside the window earlier, so I looked."

Grand Duke Flamecrest narrowed his eyes and glanced outside.

"But I haven't sensed anything this whole time," he said

Aldrey sighed at this.

"Maybe I'm too tired from dealing with all of this problem, and I'm becoming overly sensitive to everything. If even Father doesn't sense it, then it must be my imagination," he said.

Grand Duke Flamecrest stood up and placed a hand on Aldrey's shoulder.

"All right, let's end it here for today. It's not good to keep overthinking it. Let's wait until tomorrow and see if we find something to help us."

Aldrey nodded and gave a slight bow before leaving the room. Grand Duke Flamecrest watched his son's retreating back, which seemed burdened with a heavy weight, and couldn't help but feel pity for him. Although this was the entire family's problem, in the end, Aldrey was the one who had to bear the full weight of it. The proposed marriage and Commander Marcus—everything was connected to him.

Grand Duke Flamecrest looked out the window once more. He walked toward it and stood there, gazing at the beautiful moon hanging in the night sky. The silence was profound, with not even the faintest sound from nocturnal creatures to break it. Little did he know, despite the stillness, someone stood not far from the window, concealed in the shadows of the night, silently watching his every move.

*"So that's Grand Duke Flamecrest,"* Aldrian thought. He had finally met his grandfather from his father's family. Aldrian had arrived earlier, positioning himself near the window and overhearing part of their conversation. However, when his father suddenly glanced in his direction, he vanished in an instant, ensuring his presence went unnoticed.

Aldrian smiled bitterly. His father had sensed his presence outside—something even an Emperor-stage cultivator shouldn't have been able to detect. Was it his father's intuition? Or was it something else?

He also wondered what they were talking about. He didn't understand anything from their conversation, but it seemed to involve the imperial family. Aldrian had already covered the entire mansion with his domain and sensed the presence of some individuals who didn't seem like they were from the Flamecrest family. He thought that they were members of the imperial family and thinking it would be better to check the imperial family first.

After checking the imperial envoy, Aldrian found what he had been looking for and appeared outside, not far from Princess Loraine's room. He stood on top of a branch, where he could see inside the room. There, he saw someone sitting in a meditative position atop a cultivation mattress.

She was a beautiful blonde-haired woman wearing a night robe that accentuated her curves. Immersed in her own cultivation, she remained completely still, unaware that Aldrian was watching her. From her information, Aldrian knew that this must be Princess

Loraine, the princess of the Vindas empire and the one leading the imperial family's envoy here.

There was nothing unusual about Princess Loraine; she seemed like a normal princess with a noble aura. However, after watching her for a few seconds, Aldrian sensed a feeling he was already familiar with when encountering certain people.

*"This irked feeling again,"* he thought.

That was a significant sign and clue for him that Princess Loraine was somehow connected to the devils. Aldrian smiled, finally finding another clue that seemed likely tied to the devil incident this time. If his guess was correct, it appeared he could solve the Flamecrest family's problem much faster than he had predicted.

He then concentrated and created formations to cover the entire princess's room, ensuring that nothing from inside could leak out. Whatever happened inside the room would remain undetected from the outside.

After he was done, he teleported right beside her body but didn't do anything to her. Even though he was only a few centimeters away, she still couldn't detect his presence. As he neared her, the irked feeling grew more intense. He truly couldn't sense anything ominous about this princess. Her beautiful face was mesmerizing to anyone who saw her, and her aura felt so pure that no one would ever believe she had any connection to the devils.

However, Aldrian knew he couldn't ignore his feelings and intuition, so he firmly decided to make a move and look for evidence from her.

After a few seconds, he decided to make his presence detectable to her. As he had predicted, the princess instantly opened her eyes and launched a palm strike covered in blue flames. However, Aldrian simply grabbed her wrist, and her attack came to an abrupt halt.

She widened her eyes as she realized she couldn't move her hand. Aldrian's grip was so strong that she couldn't budge it even the slightest bit. She had tried to strike Aldrian with her power of her Middle Duke stage, but he easily grabbed and held her hand.

Unfortunately for her, the power of the Duke stage was no longer threatening to Aldrian since his breakthrough to the Marquess stage. Even if he were outside his domain—let alone now, with him being inside it.

Aldrian wanted to make it quick and clean, leaving no traces of his presence. After successfully grabbing her wrist, he touched her forehead and sent a jolt of lightning directly to her soul. Everything happened so fast that the princess had no time to react. Even if she had, she wouldn't have been able to overpower Aldrian, so her struggles were futile.

The princess's eyes instantly rolled back from the shock to her soul, and she fainted. Aldrian didn't waste any more time and immediately delved into her memories, eager to confirm some of his suspicions.

After a few minutes, he was finally done and released his hand from the princess's forehead. He looked at the fainted princess with an expressionless face, but inwardly, he thought to himself,

*"As I thought, the technique the princess possesses, along with the blue flame she just used, is the same as the one I encountered when I faced that guy."*

'That' guy Aldrian mentioned was the same person who forced his mother to flee for her life before he eventually came to her rescue—

The Lust Devil.

To think that this princess has a seemingly ordinary relationship with that dead man! He had not yet seen the Lust Devil's memories about her at that time because the Devil Lord killed him before he could access those memories.

Their relationship is not just any ordinary relationship—this princess is actually considered one of the Lust Devil's harem. No wonder the Lust Devil could use the same technique that Princess Loraine had used.

Aldrian still remembered how the Lust Devil had desperately tried to block his *Pillar of Heaven's Judgment*. One of the techniques he used was this blue flame, and the information from his Eyes of Heaven also confirmed that it was the same technique, with the same name, as the princess's.

Another thing is, the princess consciously chose the Lust Devil and willingly made herself a pawn of the devil within the Vindas Empire. All of this was driven by her own feelings—the feelings that could blind any being, despite the danger.

The feeling of love.

Princess Loraine had actually fallen in love with the Lust Devil. When they first met, the princess didn't know that he was the devil, as the Lust Devil had disguised himself. Over time, the Lust Devil worked his way into her heart, making the princess fall deeply in love with him to the point where she had slept with him.

From that moment, the princess was brought to the devil's side, her body and heart already in the Lust Devil's grasp.

To be honest, although the Lust Devil is nothing more than a scumbag who uses every woman he meets, that son of a bitch knows how to treat them in a way that makes them fall in love with him. Well, Aldrian's mother is the rare exception.

The Lust Devil never hurt the hearts of his harem, at least not in front of them. He always did things to make those women remain loyal to him—besides, of course, using his hypnotic techniques.

Aldrian suddenly grinned wickedly. Besides that, he also found that the princess's presence here was indeed part of the devil's plan. This was all a grand scheme to plunge the empire into chaos. The Flamecrest family was merely a part of the devil's plan, not the end point.

From her memories, it seems she still doesn't know that the Lust Devil is already dead. That fact has been exploited by the devils to bring her here, using the name of the Lust Devil. Her true purpose here is not to help the Flamecrest family with their current problem.

Her purpose here is to further tarnish the Flamecrest family, ensuring they can never lift their heads again. The fall of the Flamecrest family will be the first step in plunging the entire Vindas Empire into chaos.

Also, Aldrian finally grasped the imperial family's proposal toward the Flamecrest family that his father and Grand Duke Flamecrest had discussed. After learning all of this, he was determined to ensure that the imperial family would never have a chance to shove that proposal down his father's throat. He would not allow any disruption to his father's and mother's harmony!

#### *Chapter 283: Can I Sleep in Your Room?*

After rearranging his thoughts and deciding on his next course of action, he glanced at the princess for a moment. To be honest, he would have liked to make this princess his slave using the Everlasting Demonic Follower, but after giving it much thought, he decided to refrain. She was the princess of this empire, and if something happened to her, it could cause significant trouble.

After seeing her memories, he realized her love for the Lust Devil was profoundly deep—so much so that she would willingly sacrifice herself for that bastard. It wasn't surprising, considering the Lust Devil had given her more attention than others and had already slept with her many times. With the Lust Devil's techniques and the affection she received, she would rather face death, even if it meant being reduced to a retard due to the pain within her soul.

Aldrian never underestimated the power of a woman in love, especially when it came to blind devotion. He decided to let Princess Loraine go without taking any drastic action.

However, given how the princess seemed to obey any order as long as the Lust Devil's name was invoked, he knew he could take full advantage of it. There was no need to use the Everlasting Demonic Follower to bind Princess Loraine—he could simply use the name of the Lust Devil to control her.

Not long after, Aldrian disappeared from her room and reappeared on the mansion's rooftop. He sat there, scanning the entire mansion to see if anything caught his attention. He also checked on his father once more, and after ensuring there was nothing unusual, he withdrew his senses.

His gaze shifted to the full moon glowing brightly in the night sky. His calm, expressionless face hinted at unspoken thoughts. He seemed to simply be enjoying the cool night breeze and the serene silence of the evening.

Not long after, he disappeared from the mansion. No one, except for those he visited in the dungeon and Kroz, knew that he had been to the Flamecrest mansion complex.

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He reappeared inside his room at the inn and stretched his body. Tonight had been quite fruitful, and he was satisfied with it. He considered sitting down to meditate but he sensed someone outside his door. A warm smile spread across his face as he recognized who it was, and he opened the door.

Standing there was Sylphia, wrapped in a black robe. Her flushed face and nervous demeanor suggested she was both shy as though she wanted something from him. He guessed that Sylphia must have been waiting for him for quite some time.

After waiting for some time, Sylphia still didn't speak and instead lowered her head. Aldrian smiled in amusement at the sight but eventually decided to nudge her.

"What is it? Do you have something to tell me?" he asked gently.

She didn't respond immediately, but after a few moments, she finally spoke.

"Can... can I sleep in your room?" she said softly, her voice so low that even a passerby wouldn't hear it—yet he heard her clearly.

Aldrian was stunned, not expecting Sylphia to make such a request. He stared speechlessly at the beautiful elf, who seemed to have gathered all her courage to say those words. Though he found Sylphia adorable with her shy yet determined intent, his heart skipped a beat. This was the first time she had been like this. Did their kiss make her bolder? Did it make her more confident?

"Sure, I hope you know what you're asking for." Despite Aldrian saying it like this, his face also flushed with redness. He understood his own feelings, and now that Sylphia wanted to sleep in the same room as him, it gave him a completely different sensation.

After Sylphia entered, Aldrian closed the door and turned to look at her. He watched as she dropped her robe, revealing an elegant nightgown that accentuated her curves. The gown highlighted her beautiful legs and gracefully complemented her ample bosom and

tall, proportional figure, providing Aldrian with a visual feast. He had seen Sylphia in this nightgown before, when they talked in the night at Forgeheart Kingdom. However, now that he had confirmed her feelings and his own emotions made this situation feel entirely different.

Aldrian's face turned redder as he rubbed his nose with his finger to ease his nervousness. He glanced around the room and said something to break the awkwardness.

"Uhhh, you can sleep on the bed. I'll sleep here—" Aldrian said, turning toward the sofa near the bed. But suddenly, he felt a tug on his sleeve. He looked at Sylphia, who had already grabbed his sleeve, her head lowered.

"You don't have to sleep on the sofa. Just sleep on the bed with me. We've slept on the same bed before, right?" Sylphia said.

Aldrian was silent for a moment before he finally answered her.

"Alright."

With that, Aldrian and Sylphia took their positions on the bed and lay down. Aldrian's intent to meditate, which he had already decided on, already thrown in the trash bin of his mind after Sylphia's request. How could he just meditate when Sylphia had asked to sleep on the bed with him?

After they lay down on the bed, an awkward silence filled the air, and their positions would look quite funny if someone were to observe them from the ceiling.

Sylphia took the left side of the bed, and Aldrian took the right, neither of them touching each other, as if there were an invisible wall between them. They lay still, like statues, and even when they moved, their movements were stiff, like those of a golem.

They knew they looked ridiculous, but it couldn't be helped. After what had happened between them, all of their interactions and this kind of act couldn't be ignored as merely the actions of friends. They had already realized their own feelings, and it could lead to something "more" intimate when they were lying side by side on the same bed.

After a few minutes of awkward silence, Aldrian decided to start a conversation.

"How are you today? Did you enjoy the city?" He knew that Sylphia, with her curiosity, had taken a walk around the city with Baek Ji-Min, that neither of them had visited before.

"I'm good. This city is quite unique, I must say. With Flamecrest as its sovereign and its own special environment, this is quite a new experience for me," she answered. It was also the first time she had seen so many people with red hair congregating in one city.

"What about you? Did you find what you were looking for?" It was Sylphia's turn to ask.

"Yes, I already found what I'm looking for, and what I gained is significant. I think we can solve my father's problem much faster than I initially thought," Aldrian said with a smile.

"Did you meet with your father?"

"No. After thinking it through, I believe it's better if I don't meet him tonight. My appearance inside my father's mansion at this timing isn't right yet." He knew it wasn't the same as when he was with his mother, where they could spend much time together and talk about many things. In his father's case, they would be surrounded by many people in the mansion.

"Anyway, what I found is truly interesting and will surprise you. Do you want to hear what I discovered?" Aldrian asked, turning his head to the side to look at Sylphia's profile.

"I'd gladly hear it," Sylphia answered, her head turning to meet his eyes. After that, Aldrian shared what he found during his infiltration and investigation of the devil case inside the Flamecrest family mansion. Sylphia listened attentively, her face showing various expressions as she absorbed Aldrian's story.

She was truly shocked by what Aldrian had discovered, and she couldn't help but feel that it was similar to the situation in the Doria Empire, where the imperial family had been unknowingly compromised by devils for a long time. To think that the princess of such a large empire had a relationship with a devil, and one of the seven deadly sins at that.

Aldrian didn't know when it happened, but Sylphia's hand had already grabbed the sleeve of his left arm, and she had positioned herself much closer to him, her body leaning toward him as she faced him directly.

After Aldrian finished telling his story, there was a brief silence before he turned his face toward Sylphia. She was now so close that, with a slight movement, he could kiss her forehead.

"Sylphia, what do you feel for me? Is it just like, or is it a love that's already embedded in your heart?" he asked.

Hearing the sudden, unexpected question from him, which sounded serious, she turned to look into Aldrian's beautiful blue eyes. His eyes always mesmerized her, eyes that always watched her with kindness and warmth. Those eyes that never showed any negative emotion in front of her, eyes that seemed to know the truth about all things.

Without any wavering, she continued to look at Aldrian as her mouth moved.

"Since the experience I had when I was trapped inside the Envy Devil's domain, I've come to realize that I underestimated my own feelings for you. Though this is the first time I've felt this way, I now understand that my feelings for you have already run deep without me even knowing. The terrible feeling of envy that almost consumed me left me shaken with fear. I've been afraid of many things, but what I fear most is losing myself, disappointing you, and making you hate me," Sylphia said as she hugged Aldrian's left arm, continuing.

"I fear that you will never pay attention to me again, that you'll abandon me, and that I'll never see you look at me with those kind eyes again," Sylphia continued, her voice trembling.

"However, when you came with your golden light that gave me a sense of protection, I finally found my peace."

"With you, I can feel at peace."

"With you, I feel complete."

"With you, I feel like I have somewhere to belong, even though I'm far from home."

"You are my sanctuary, you are my beacon, you are my second home."

"I don't want to imagine what it would be like if you were gone from my side."

"So, Aldrian Aster, I am absolutely confident and without any doubt in my heart that I, Sylphia Evergreen, have fallen in love with you."

#### *Chapter 284: The Last Step*

Aldrian's gaze met Sylphia's unwavering eyes, filled with conviction. There was no hesitation, not even the slightest doubt, in those beautiful blue eyes that resembled calm seawater. Without needing to delve into her thoughts or intentions, Aldrian knew that Sylphia's words reflected her true feelings, with no hint of exaggeration.

His heart beat faster yet grew warmer at the same time. What could he say? This woman had already spoken everything with her courage. The woman he had known for years—the first to make his heart flutter as it did now—had spoken words so wonderful they melted his heart. If he still harbored doubt or hesitation about moving forward to shape his destiny with her, it would be no different from tormenting both their hearts.

He knew her heart, and she had already poured hers out to him. Now, he would do the same—to make her understand that he felt the same way she did.

He gently touched her cheek and leaned closer, his lips moving toward hers. Sylphia seemed to sense what was coming and closed her eyes just before she felt the soft

touch of his lips. When their lips finally met, her heart felt as though it might burst from the overwhelming happiness. Warmth spread through her body, and with each passing moment, she could feel Aldrian's lips pressing more firmly against hers.

She knew this kiss was different from their earlier one, which had been a simple touch without any excessive movement. This time, Aldrian kissed her with his own initiative, and it was more passionate. With each passing second, she could feel his movements growing bolder, and soon, he even began to use his tongue.

Sylphia, fully immersed in the kiss, followed his lead, opening her mouth and meeting his tongue with her own. What followed was a passionate dance of their tongues, each seeking the other's warmth. By this time, Aldrian had already grasped the back of Sylphia's head, pulling her closer to him as he greedily sucked on her lips and tongue.

Sylphia, yearning for his love, allowed him to devour her lips and even tried to synchronize her movements with his to make him feel more at ease. Her hands wrapped gently around his neck, holding him in a position that felt natural and comfortable.

The sound of their kisses reflected the depth of their feelings for each other. However, the soft smooching noises gradually shifted the atmosphere from romantic to sensual.

After a few minutes of enjoying and savoring each other's lips, they parted and gazed into each other's eyes. Their faces were flushed with shy expressions, yet they continued to look at one another without blinking. What they saw in each other's eyes was pure affection and love.

Sylphia smiled with contentment and, in a clear and confident voice, said once more,

"I love you."

Aldrian smiled warmly, gently stroking her cheek with tenderness. His face couldn't hide the emotions he felt at this moment. Hearing words filled with love from someone you also loved brought an indescribable sweetness to his heart.

Although the depth of his feelings for Sylphia wasn't as intense as hers for him—at least not yet—he knew he had to say it, to affirm that he felt the same way she did.

"I love you too," he said, his voice full of tenderness, a tone that could melt the heart of any woman who heard him.

Hearing those words come out of Aldrian's mouth, Sylphia's smile grew brighter, but then her eyes began to water. Aldrian, seeing this, gently rubbed away the tears with his thumb. With each tear that fell from her eyes, he continued to wipe it away. He pressed his forehead against hers and said to her softly.

"Let's end it here," Aldrian said softly. "I'm afraid I won't be able to hold myself back if this continues, and I know you're ready to give everything to me tonight. But considering your condition right now, I think it's better if I wait until you're truly ready to take that last step—the one that will change your entire life."

"Be ready to take that step because it's truly what you want, , not because you're rushing, affected by fear from the Envy Devil's domain. I want you to calm your mind after tonight and not let the fear from then influence you. If, after that, you still want to take that step with me, I will gladly embrace you with all my heart. But know this: after that, you will be tied to me—forever."

Aldrian could feel it himself, and his instincts told him so. If they took the final step in their relationship, with the most intimate physical connection between a couple, it would bind them together for a long, long time—possibly forever. He thought it had to do with his origin and karma. That last step would be what it took to tie their karmas so strongly that it could never be broken.

He wanted Sylphia to be sure, one last time, and not because she was afraid of the aftereffects of the negative emotions from the Envy Devil's domain. Once she was truly ready, that would be the moment he would "devour" her completely and make her his—completely. From that time on, she could never leave his life, and he would never let her go.

That was also one of his traits, once he built a relationship with someone romantically, he didn't want to let her go. Once they committed to each other, he would ensure their relationship lasted to the end. His woman couldn't leave him, and he would never let her go.

Sylphia, still on cloud nine after their kiss, understood what Aldrian meant and agreed with him. Although there was disappointment in her heart, she knew she had to make sure, one last time, that she truly wanted it and not because of the aftereffects of the Envy Devil.

She was thankful to Aldrian for always thinking about the well-being of those close to him—this was a perfect example of that. He didn't want her to feel regret, but she was confident that even if they took the last step, she would not regret it.

She had already committed to him and was unwavering to the end because it was what her heart told her. However, she decided to follow Aldrian's suggestion.

"Uhm." She nodded her head.

He kept his smile and instantly moved his right hand to hug her slim waist, drawing her body close to his. Sylphia's head rested on Aldrian's left hand, and her head also touched his chest, where she could finally hear his heartbeat. Although he had said all

of that, she could hear his heartbeat erratically, showing that he too was hiding his nervousness, shyness and happiness.

She smiled and hugged his body tightly, as if he were the most comfortable pillow. She liked hearing his heartbeat; it was like music to her ears, calming her mind. His fragrance also made her feel like she was home, in the place where she truly belonged.

Aldrian also hugged her with tenderness, kissing her forehead and inhaling her flower-like fragrance, exhaling as if releasing all the negative energy inside him. Her fragrance was refreshing and calming, making him feel as though he wanted to sleep. He closed his eyes to rest, and Sylphia followed suit. They both finally drifted into slumber, their noses inhaling each other's fragrance as they hugged, seeking each other's warmth.

Sylphia didn't know since when, but she suddenly found herself in a vast, beautiful grassland, filled with many kinds of flowers. She sighed, recognizing this as her recurring dream, one that appeared at unclear intervals. The first time she had this dream was not long after Aldrian arrived in the Ivory Empire. She didn't understand its meaning, and there was nothing to offer a clue about what kind of dream this was.

Inside her dream, she always stood in the same spot, in the middle of the vast grassland, surrounded by many kinds of beautiful flowers. Their fragrance touched her nostrils, making it feel as real as the outside world. Due to its repetition, she had come to know everything about this place. Even if she walked toward the horizon, the vast grassland seemed to stretch endlessly, an unbroken expanse.

As was her habit, she looked around to see if anything caught her attention. However, when she turned her head to look behind her, she was astonished to see something that wasn't usually there.

There was a giant tree, so tall that its top was out of sight, giving the impression that the tree itself was piercing the heavens. The massive trunk stretched across the horizon, and she could feel that the tree was far away from her.

She was utterly shocked by the appearance of the tree, as it was the first time she had seen something like this in the dream. She looked upwards, trying to catch sight of the top, but it was impossible to see. When she looked back down, she was stunned to find someone standing not far from her.

She couldn't detect the person's presence, or perhaps she was just too shocked by the appearance of the tree to notice. The figure stood with her back to Sylphia, facing the tree. Sylphia could tell that the person was a woman with beautiful long hair and pointed ears, characteristic of elves.

Sylphia walked slowly toward her. Not knowing who this woman was, she approached cautiously. When she was quite close, Sylphia finally mustered the courage to ask.

"Excuse me, who are you?"

There was no response from the woman for a few seconds, but then the woman turned her head, facing Sylphia directly.

Sylphia was stunned as their eyes finally met, unable to look away from the woman's face.

#### *Chapter 285: New Morning for the Lovebirds*

If Sylphia were to describe the woman standing before her, she would say that this woman was the very manifestation of ultimate beauty. Everything about her exuded elegance and grace. Her face was so stunning that Sylphia had never seen a woman more beautiful—even she felt envy toward the woman's beauty and could only wish to have a face as captivating.

Her striking blue eyes, delicate nose, and flawless skin made her a vision of perfection—there was nothing unpleasant about the woman. With her well-proportioned body, tall figure, and motherly aura, she seemed like a goddess descended from the heavens.

At this moment, the woman smiled slightly at her—a smile so enchanting that it made Sylphia's heart flutter, even as a woman herself. It only highlighted how breathtakingly beautiful the woman before her truly was. Though the woman did not answer Sylphia's question, Sylphia heard her say in a soft voice.

"The karma with him truly never breaks. Even now, you are always with him," her soft voice resounded.

Her calming and soothing voice carried a deep meaning, but Sylphia couldn't grasp its significance. *Who is he? Is it Aldrian? Always with him?* Sylphia wanted to ask what it all meant, but suddenly, her vision blurred and turned to darkness. Moments later, she found herself witnessing strange and unfamiliar scenes, their origins completely unknown to her.

She couldn't understand the visions, yet they felt strangely familiar, as if she were the one experiencing them. She saw a woman with a blurry face, but an inexplicable feeling told her that the woman was herself. It was a surreal experience, but she kept trying to make sense of this unfamiliar situation.

As for Aldrian, he didn't experience anything unusual like visions or strange sensations. However, without realizing it, his karmic thread connecting him to Sylphia turned a bright red. Alongside it, something more intangible and abstract began to manifest. Gradually, it took shape—a thread so transparent and delicate that it seemed almost imperceptible.

Even if Aldrian were to wake up at this moment and begin cultivating his karma laws, he would not realize that this phenomenon had taken shape right above the red karmic thread. The thread was transparent and colorless, visible only for a few seconds before it once again became intangible.

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In the morning, as the sun rose over the eastern horizon, the princess inside Flamecrest Mansion awoke from her laying position. She touched her temple, feeling a slight headache that soon faded. As she looked around, she realized she was still in her room within the Flamecrest Mansion. However, what confused her was why she had suddenly fallen asleep and why she had just woken up now.

She couldn't remember how she had fallen asleep or how she ended up in her current position. The last thing she recalled from the previous night was being in the middle of her cultivation, but then everything after that became a blur. The situation felt bizarre, yet she sensed that there was nothing wrong with her.

She then stood up to stretch her body and looked at the window, still covered by curtains. The sunlight had already seeped through the gap in the curtains, so she knew the sun had been up for quite some time.

She then opened the curtains to let the sunlight illuminate her room. Looking outside, she saw that many members of the Flamecrest family were already engaged in their morning activities. Maids and gardeners were tending to their duties, the Flamecrest soldiers were undergoing their morning training, and a few elders were observing them.

She observed all of this without expression before turning and heading toward the shower. However, just as she was about to step into the shower room, a knock echoed from the door of her room. After opening it, she found her guardian knight standing before her.

"Your Highness, my apologies for disturbing you, but I bring news," the knight said with a respectful bow.

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In another place, Aldrian and Sylphia remained in the same position. Sylphia was still snuggled in Aldrian's embrace, seemingly not intending to wake up. Although Aldrian had woken up earlier, he chose not to move, enjoying the sight of Sylphia's smiling sleeping face. He relished the serenity of the moment, when he didn't have to worry about the troublesome problems outside this room and could simply enjoy the peace he had right now.

He liked the fragrance of her that made him feel refreshed as he gently touched her skin and smooth golden hair.

*"Well, it looks like I've found a new hobby,"* he thought.

After a few moments, Sylphia's eyelids fluttered, and she slowly opened her eyes. The first thing she saw was Aldrian's smiling face, with sunlight streaming in behind him, illuminating the room through the gap between the curtains.

She smiled brightly in response, also aware that Aldrian's hand was still resting on her waist, stroking it gently as if she were the most precious porcelain.

"Good morning. How did you sleep?" Aldrian asked.

Sylphia snuggled her head against his chest, inhaling his scent before answering.

"This is the best sleep of my life. What else could I expect? I get to sleep, embraced by the person I love."

Aldrian lovingly stroked Sylphia's hair.

"What are you doing today? Do you want to continue investigating the devil case?" she asked.

"No, there's nothing specific for today. I'll wait for information from the Flamecrest family, and once that comes, I'll move. At the moment, the imperial family—no, Princess Loraine—she's the pawn I can use to solve this problem. I want to see what kind of trick she'll pull before I strike against the devils' plan," he replied. As if he knew what was on her mind with that question, he smiled and asked her,

"Do you want to go for a walk with me? It would be a shame not to spend my free time enjoying it," Aldrian said.

Sylphia's expression brightened, and she instantly nodded. They both got up from the bed. Sylphia went to the shower to prepare while Aldrian walked to the balcony and looked outside. The morning seemed different to him; it felt more colorful and beautiful.

*"Is this how it feels when someone is in love?"* He thought.

Not long after, Aldrian and Sylphia finished their preparations and walked out of the inn. Just like they had in the Doria Empire, they explored every interesting place in the city, enjoying the sights. However, the difference this time was that they walked hand in hand, like a couple in love experiencing their springtime together.

Aldrian was enjoying his time with Sylphia, and whenever she wanted something, he made sure to fulfill it. However, amidst their free time together, he also heard some news about the Flamecrest family. It seemed the imperial family had found something inside the mansion, and Princess Loraine would announce the results of the investigation later that afternoon.

Aldrian narrowed his eyes. *"They're moving that fast? The princess is really in a rush to do her job, huh."*

He looked at his lover, who seemed to be enjoying her beverage. They were in a luxurious tavern located beside one of the main roads in the city. Not wanting to disturb her, he closed his eyes and focused on his domain at the Flamecrest family's mansion. He saw that nothing seemed out of the ordinary. The atmosphere was the same as yesterday, and there was no unusual movement coming from the dungeon.

He looked at his father and Grand Duke Flamecrest, who were in the middle of a conversation with the princess inside the Grand Duke's workroom—the same room he had watched them in last night. He then used his technique to eavesdrop on their conversation, using the same technique he had used to listen in on the devils inside the Golden Swan Commerce branch in Balin city a few years ago.

"Your Highness, I believe I have already made my decision clear to you regarding the proposal. Furthermore, I trust that Your Highness can judge for yourself that there is nothing that proves our connection with the devils, and I am confident you will clear my family's name," Aldrey said to Princess Loraine.

"This decision was also agreed upon by my father after much consideration, so we hope that Your Highness can understand," Aldrey said.

Princess Loraine looked at Aldrey and Grand Duke Flamecrest for a moment before replying, "Is that so? Then I will deliver this to His Majesty after I announce the results of our investigation this afternoon. We don't want the masses to remain in the dark, and we certainly don't want false rumors to spread." She said this with a smile.

Although Princess Loraine said as much, Aldrey and Grand Duke Flamecrest couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong with the entire situation. Suddenly, the princess had completed her investigation here, even though she had only just arrived a few days ago. It felt too fast, and they doubted that the envoys had discovered anything in just these two or three days.

The princess also brought up the imperial family's proposal again, which they had decided to turn down after much consideration. In the end, they still believed they could solve this problem without the imperial family's help. This conviction was strengthened by new information they had obtained: something had been wrong with Commander Marcus that night.

They learned this after the interrogation with one of the witnesses earlier this morning. This new clue gave their family renewed hope, and they believed it was a good sign.

However, Aldrian, that also heard the princess and knew the truth about her, felt that today would be the day that could change the fate of the Flamecrest family if he did

nothing. He knew that the announcement by the princess would bring bad news for the Flamecrest family!

#### *Chapter 286: Preventing an Escalating Problem*

Aldrian opened his eyes, only to see Sylphia looking at him with a curious expression.

"Is everything fine?" she asked.

Aldrian smiled at her and nodded.

"Don't worry. Everything is fine, just a minor problem that needs my attention."

Sylphia narrowed her eyes. She knew that anything requiring Aldrian's attention was never a "minor problem." She was already accustomed to Aldrian's scale of problems. Every time Aldrian took action, it would lead to chaotic situations affecting many people.

She wanted to know what he planned to do but didn't want to appear like an annoying woman with her nagging and curiosity. She decided to wait for Aldrian to tell his story as he usually did.

"Do you want to take a stroll to the city plaza? That's one of the places you haven't visited yet, right?" Aldrian suddenly asked her.

Sylphia tilted her head in wonder but nodded. She would follow Aldrian wherever he decided to go.

The city plaza was located not far from the Flamecrest mansion. It was a gathering spot where many people enjoyed the vast open space, unobstructed by buildings. The only structure in the plaza was a grand, beautiful mountain adorned with a dragon statue at its center.

This plaza also served as the venue where the Flamecrest family made announcements to the public. It was the most effective and fastest way to address the crowd.

When Aldrian and Sylphia arrived, they saw many people engaged in various activities. Despite the crowd, the plaza felt spacious due to its vast size, spanning over 1,000 square meters. After finding a spot to sit, Aldrian gestured for Sylphia to take a seat. He then turned his gaze toward the Flamecrest family's mansion, visible from where they were, before shifting his attention back to Sylphia.

"Sylphia, can you stay here for a moment? I won't be gone long; there's something I need to do. I'll explain it to you afterward," Aldrian said.

Sylphia smiled and nodded. "Just be careful," she replied.

Aldrian nodded in return before disappearing from the plaza. After he left, Sylphia glanced around and noticed a stall selling cotton candy, which made her eyes light up. She walked over to the stall and bought one for herself to enjoy. She loved sweet treats like this.

Waiting for Aldrian to finish his business while savoring the cotton candy made the moment perfect for her.

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Aldrian appeared on the rooftop of the mansion and extended his senses across the entire building. He eventually detected the presence of the princess in her room, accompanied by her guardian knight at the moment. He knew that her guardian knight, a Middle King-stage cultivator, was one of her most trusted men and privy to her connection with the Lust Devil.

The princess could not evade the watchful eyes surrounding her without the assistance of this loyal knight.

Not wanting to miss the chance to learn more, Aldrian used his technique to eavesdrop on their conversation.

"How is it, Sir Klain? Have you already placed 'those' in the locations I specified?" Princess Loraine asked her guardian knight.

"Yes, Your Highness. I've placed 'those' in the designated spots. They will activate immediately upon your signal," Sir Klain replied.

"Good. Then all that remains is for me to announce it to the masses," she said with a satisfied tone.

Hearing their conversation, Aldrian frowned. From what he had seen in the princess's memories, the devils' plan was to further tarnish the Flamecrest family's reputation and even attempt to bring about their collapse. However, he hadn't uncovered any concrete details about how she intended to execute the plan. Now, hearing them speak as if something had already been set in motion, only one conclusion came to his mind.

*"The plan must have arrived not long ago. They're communicating with someone from the devils' side, even while staying within the Flamecrest mansion."*

Hearing that they had placed something inside the mansion, Aldrian extended his senses across the entire property to search for any anomalies or anything out of the ordinary. After half a minute, he finally detected something that didn't belong in the mansion, something that hadn't been there the night before. The objects were hidden in inconspicuous parts of the mansion, cleverly placed and small enough to avoid attracting attention.

*"Teleportation artifacts! To think they would use devil teleportation artifacts."*

Aldrian knew that this would escalate the problem beyond what it should be. From the conversation he had overheard, he had a good idea of what they intended to do. He then focusing his senses on all the teleportation artifacts, and with a flick of his will, all the artifacts vanished from their original locations and reappeared in front of him. There are a dozen of them, each circular in shape and about a meter in diameter.

This was the same type of teleportation artifact that the devils had used to infiltrate many places across the continent. It was one of the forbidden items, prohibited from entering any territory on the continent—except, of course, in the devils' domain. If the princess had gotten her hands on one, the only way it could have been smuggled into the empire was through a special channels. Fortunately, he knew such channel that most likely involved in this operation, a channel tied to the organization he had neglected for some time—the Golden Swan Commerce.

They were the ones cooperating with the devils to distribute these artifacts throughout the continent. Although the last news he had heard from Arson Vuran, the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion master, indicated that the organization was in the midst of an internal conflict, it seemed that their branch in this city was still actively involved in the devils' activities.

After gathering all the teleportation artifacts, Aldrian placed them in his storage ring and teleported directly in front of the princess and her guardian knight. The sudden appearance of Aldrian startled them, leaving them unable to react as he grabbed Sir Klain by the head and Princess Loraine by the abdomen. Aldrian sent a jolt of lightning toward Sir Klain, a shock so intense it rattled his very soul, causing him to instantly faint. As for Princess Loraine, Aldrian sent his energy into her dantian, sealing her cultivation. She couldn't do anything—or rather, she didn't have time to. Everything happened so quickly that all she could do was realize that her energy could no longer flow through her dantian or meridians.

"Who are—mmph!" She tried to shout, but Aldrian grabbed her mouth and lifted her.

"This place is already under my control. No matter how much you shout, your voice won't reach outside, and I hope you don't do anything stupid once I release my hand from your mouth, Your Highness. I have no desire to stain my hands with imperial blood."

"I already know who you are, what you've done, and what you're planning to do here. You'd better give up on that idea, because if you continue down this path, I can't say what will happen to your lover, Rodwin Romano."

Hearing the true name of the Lust Devil from Aldrian's mouth, Princess Loraine's eyes trembled. She wanted to say something, but couldn't, as Aldrian's hand was still

covering her mouth. Watching her struggle, he finally released his hand, causing her to slump to the floor.

She gasped, feeling the weakness that coursed through her body, but she still stared at Aldrian with trembling eyes.

"What do you mean? What happened to Rodwin?" she asked. She didn't know who this man was or why he seemed to know about her lover—or anything about her plan. The only thing on her mind was the way he had threatened her with the name of her lover, a name known to very few. Did this young man somehow have a connection with the devils?

Aldrian looked at her with an expressionless face.

"Rodwin is already in a precarious situation. Unfortunately, he messed with the wrong person, and now his life is in my grasp. If you don't want anything to happen to him, then you better give up your plan for the Flamecrest family today. If you stubbornly continue with it, then say goodbye to your lover."

Princess Loraine's body trembled at Aldrian's threat, but then she stopped, forcing a rigid smile.

"You're lying. There's no way my dear could be in your hands. He's someone with many—"

Before she could finish her sentence, her eyes widened in shock as Aldrian took something out of his storage ring.

*"Chain of the Underworld's Guardian! Does that mean what he said is true?"*

What Aldrian had taken out was the Lust Devil's artifact. The lingering aura and energy unmistakably emanated from the Lust Devil, leaving no doubt in her mind that this artifact is not a fake.

Seeing the princess begin to waver, Aldrian felt fortunate that he had taken the Lust Devil's artifact after the devil's death. He hadn't expected it to be so useful in this moment. As he had anticipated, once he mentioned the Lust Devil and threatened her with it, the princess's mind immediately clouded with doubt and fear. She started to believe what he had said.

Aldrian was about to continue speaking to the princess when he sensed someone approaching her room, seemingly intending to visit her.

## Chapter 287: Catching Rats

Aldrian sensed someone approaching the room and instantly recognized it was his father! He felt his father's presence right in front of the closed door, followed by a knock.

Aldrian glanced at Princess Loraine. Although his face remained expressionless, she understood the unspoken warning. She knew better than to try anything foolish, as the consequences would be severe. A sense of foreboding gripped her—offending this man, who seemed to hold the Lust Devil's life in his hands, was not something she dared to risk.

"Excuse me, Your Highness, may we speak for a moment?" Aldrey's voice resonated.

Princess Loraine, fully aware of what she needed to do, responded promptly. Aldrian had already deactivated the soundproof formation that had been shielding the room.

"I'm sorry, Young Master Aldrey, but this is an inconvenient time for me to have a conversation. I'm in the middle of changing my clothes. We can speak after I'm finished," she said.

Aldrey heard her response and sighed.

"My apologies, Your Highness. I will speak to you later," he said before walking away.

Aldrian continued to track his father's movements, and once Aldrey was far enough, he turned back to look at Princess Loraine.

"Good. Now, let's get back to business. I want you to abandon all the plans the devils assigned to you. Don't even think about tarnishing or framing the Flamecrest family's name. Additionally, if the devils ask you for any information, I want you to feed them false details. Whatever you say, do not give them the truth. Confuse them at every turn, leaving them unable to grasp the situation in this empire."

Princess Loraine seemed lost, unsure of what to do. She couldn't think straight and wanted to ask what was happening, as everything felt oddly out of place. She continued to receive updates about her lover from the devils, instructing her that the Lust Devil needed her to do this or that. Since she knew the Lust Devil rarely had time to communicate with her directly, she didn't find it strange and simply carried on as she always had.

However, the young man in front of her claimed that the Lust Devil's life was in danger and that he was holding him hostage. He also possessed the *Chain of the Underworld's Guardian*, which convinced her that this man was genuine. Did this mean the devils had hidden the truth and were merely using the Lust Devil's name to manipulate her into acting according to their plans?

"Let me speak with Rodwin first. I want to make sure he's okay," she insisted, still determined to confirm whether Rodwin was truly in this young man's captivity. Canceling the plan would mean the devils' scheme would collapse instantly—especially since this man wanted her to provide them with false information.

If there was a chance that this young man's words were false, then she would be the one responsible for putting the Lust Devil in danger. After all, she had been told that this plan was the Lust Devil's own.

"Do you want me to bring Rodwin's limbs instead?" Aldrian suddenly asked, his tone calm yet chilling.

"Wait, no! Please, I just want to hear his voice first, just to make sure he's okay," she replied frantically, her voice trembling.

"I see. Perhaps I'll bring his limbs next time—or maybe his head?" Aldrian said with an indifferent expression before disappearing from sight.

Princess Loraine stood frozen for a moment, stunned, before frantically looking around.

"Wait! No! I'll do it! I'll do it! Please, just don't hurt him," she cried desperately.

Her thoughts were in chaos. If this man was serious, then the Lust Devil was indeed in danger. She had no choice but to pick what she believed was the safest option for now.

Aldrian reappeared, gazing at the princess lost in her blind love. She was so madly devoted to the Lust Devil that she couldn't think clearly whenever his name was mentioned. This was incredibly convenient—no different from having a pawn that required little effort to control.

It was now certain that the princess didn't care about the devils' plans or schemes. To her, nothing else mattered but the Lust Devil; her loyalty was solely his.

"I hope you keep your word later. Don't add to Rodwin's pain," Aldrian said, gripping her guardian knight's forehead and erasing his memories of him.

The princess bit her lip, remaining silent. It was the only thing she could do.

Not long after, Aldrian vanished from sight. She realized he was gone and wouldn't be returning for now.

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Aldrian reappeared in the city plaza, not far from Sylphia. He watched her, enjoying her cotton candy, and couldn't help but smile. He walked closer from behind, and even

when he stood right behind her, she didn't sense his presence. He didn't seem to mind, though, content to simply observe his woman's behavior.

He gazed at the remnants of the cotton candy on the stick in her hand for a moment. With a swift motion, he bit into it while grabbing her shoulder. Sylphia, startled by the sudden move, attempted to pull away but froze when she recognized the familiar scent and sensation.

She looked to her side and saw Aldrian's smiling face. Sylphia smiled too, but then pouted when she realized her cotton candy was almost finished. He just smiled and sat beside her, leaning in to kiss her adorable, pouty face.

Unable to keep her composure, Sylphia smiled shyly and leaned her head on his shoulder.

"Done?" she asked, to which Aldrian responded with another kiss on the top of her head.

"Done. After this, the Flamecrest will have the burden on their shoulders pretty much relieved. Even if there are still some opinions against them, they will be greatly reduced. Maybe we can catch a few rats while we're at it," he said.

Sylphia lifted her head and looked at Aldrian. "Rats?"

Aldrian continued smiling. "Yes, rats. Do you want to catch them?"

Sylphia knew that Aldrian was playing with words. If the "rats" he referred to were the bad people, she would gladly help him catch them. This could also serve as her training, as it had been a long time since she had been involved in a fight.

Aldrian already had a plan in mind before the princess's announcement. He was certain that there would be someone from the devils in the crowd when she revealed the imperial family's investigation. He suspected that they were infiltrators or sleeper agents, observing the operations or even communicating with the princess or anyone connected to the devils.

If his conclusion was correct, he could flush out their network inside Flamecrest City, or even across the Vindas Empire.

"Of course, I'll help you catch the rats. I don't like rats anyway," Sylphia said.

Aldrian simply smiled and enjoyed his time with Sylphia. The time for the announcement wasn't far off, so he figured he could wait here. After about two hours, a commotion suddenly erupted from the direction of the Flamecrest family's mansion. Aldrian and Sylphia then saw a group of people approaching, and Aldrian recognized that his father was among them.

There was also, of course, Princess Loraine and her guardian knight, Sir Klain. Her guardian knight had already woken up, and from the outside, he appeared to be fine.

"Let's go approach them. We can't miss their announcement," Aldrian said to Sylphia. They then walked closer to the platform, which had just been erected using some kind of artifact.

Princess Loraine acted as she usually did, with graceful movements and a warm smile that made everyone present admire her. Her beauty was striking, making her incredibly popular among the populace, even in this city.

For a long time, the people of Flamecrest City had considered the princess to be the woman worthy of Young Master Aldrey. They knew how genius and great Aldrey, the 'Fire Apostle,' was. There was no woman worthy of him except someone of Princess Loraine's caliber.

Princess Loraine waved her hand, showing her smile to the masses, but then she accidentally glanced at Aldrian's figure. She only looked at him for a split second, seeing his slight smile—one full of deep meaning. She quickly redirected her gaze to the others. Was he still here, watching to see if she kept her word?

She felt frustrated and nervous, but she didn't show it outwardly. The people didn't notice anything strange about the princess, so they continued cheering for her. She maintained her composure so that no one would detect her unease and finally stepped onto the platform.

Aldrian also looked at her with a smiling face, just like the others here, so nothing seemed strange. However, no one knew that the entire plaza was already covered by his domain. His senses spread, searching for certain people who appeared suspicious. The hunt for the rats had already begun!

#### *Chapter 288: Doesn't Want to Become His Weakness*

Princess Loraine stood on top of the platform, while her guardian knight stood below to keep watch. Aldrey also stood nearby, slightly behind her, to give her space for her speech. The princess glanced at Aldrian once more for a split second before begun. She used her energy to amplify her voice so it could be heard by everyone in the plaza.

"People of Flamecrest City, over the past few days, we have faced unfortunate events that make us question the integrity of the higher-ups in our empire. Moments like these are truly disheartening for us, the orthodox cultivators who uphold upright morals in everything we do."

"For the past few days, many rumors and pieces of news have been circulating throughout the empire, spiraling into something that threatens our unity. As a

representative of the imperial family, I do not want to see this empire fall into chaos because of news that might be exaggerated or untrue."

The people silently listening to Princess Loraine felt as though her speech resonated with their hearts, and they seemed to understand the subtle message behind her words.

"The imperial family will not allow unconfirmed news or malicious rumors to tarnish the name of the nobles of our empire. We are here to uncover the truth. I know many of you have been waiting for this moment. Is the news from the past few days true? Are the rumors true? Fret not—all of these will be answered now."

"After conducting several days of investigation within the Flamecrest family, the imperial family has finally concluded their findings. Based on what we have gathered, the Flamecrest family is innocent in the recent events—they are also victims of these unfortunate circumstances. Our investigation revealed that the devil accident that dragged the Flamecrest family is not as simple as it seems."

"We suspect this to be part of a larger plot by the devils to make us distrust one another and sow discord among us, allowing them to take advantage for their own benefit."

Murmurs spread among the crowd as people reacted to the announcement. However, a few individuals displayed different expressions, clearly displeased—some even wore darkened faces. Unbeknownst to them, one person had noticed their peculiar behavior, and they had already caught his attention.

"*Got you,*" Aldrian thought as his senses picked up a few people in the crowd displaying expressions and emotions that contrasted with the others. Aldrian then looked at them one by one, and true to his guess, they were the real devils!

Aldrian then looked at Princess Loraine again. He was impressed by her performance and quite satisfied with it. With this announcement, the attention of the people would be redirected to the devils. This was not about the Flamecrest family harboring devils or betraying the people of the empire; instead, they would consider it merely a ploy by the devils.

"As for the details, let young master Aldrey explain them to you. Please listen to him, for it is also important to hear the Flamecrest perspective." Princess Loraine said before she stepped back to give Aldrey room to speak.

Once he was in front of the princess, he swept his gaze across the crowd, but then it stopped at one spot. For some reason, his attention was drawn to a young man standing beside an elf—a handsome young man with black hair and blue eyes.

Aldrian, noticing his father's gaze directed toward him, was inwardly stunned.

*"He doesn't recognize me, does he?"* Aldrian thought, making sure not to exude any aura or energy. To prevent something like his meeting with his mother from happening again, he had ensured to suppress everything from his body. However, his father's gaze, so intently fixed on him, made him uneasy. Was all of this still not enough to make him unrecognizable to his father?

Sylphia, standing beside Aldrian, smiled in amusement as she noticed Aldrey looking at Aldrian intently. However, she soon saw Aldrey's gaze shift to someone else, making Aldrian release a relieved sigh.

*"I think your father's instincts kicked in, and his gaze on you isn't a coincidence,"* Sylphia communicated to Aldrian through voice transmission.

*"Truly, a parent's instinct is terrifying. I can feel that he's curious about me,"* Aldrian replied.

After sweeping his gaze, Aldrey began his speech.

"The people of Flamecrest, I know that the news from the past few days has made you anxious, angry, sad, and filled with many other negative emotions directed towards my family, the Flamecrest. However, as the young master of the Flamecrest family, I am hurt even more by the fact that the devils have successfully carried out their plan within this city."

"We already know that some of the witnesses saw the devil that night, and it was one of the commanders in the Flamecrest family. He was one of my trusted people, one of our pride. I want to ask the people here: do you believe that someone like Commander Marcus really became a devil? With all of his achievements? Do you believe he would degrade to become a devil? Because, for me, the person who knows Commander Marcus, there is no way that man would have become a devil overnight," Aldrey shouted to the crowd.

Following that, some of the people started voicing their opinions.

"No, I still can't believe that he became a devil."

"Yes, me too. I don't believe Commander Marcus, the one we knew, could succumb to becoming a devil."

Many voices began to resound from the crowd, and this was the spark Aldrey had wanted to ignite. As one of his trusted men, he wanted to clear Marcus's name, and the new information he had received a few hours ago was proving helpful. Thanks to the princess's speech, which also touched on the devils' plan, all of this would be easier to explain to the crowd.

"I got information from our investigation team that—"

In the midst of his father's speech, Aldrian, still paying attention to the devils in the plaza, suddenly saw them separate from the crowd and head in different directions. Although they appeared to be going separately, they ultimately moved toward the same place, having chosen the same path. Aldrian then looked at Sylphia and grabbed her hand.

*"Sylphia, let's go. We'll catch some rats."*

Sylphia was stunned, but she still nodded and followed Aldrian. They walked normally, as Aldrian followed the same path the devils had taken.

Aldrey, still giving his speech, unconsciously glanced at Aldrian's figure moving in the opposite direction. He felt a strange pull, as his gaze kept returning to Aldrian, even though he had never seen that face or recognized him. He could only set aside the strange feeling for now and continue his speech, planning to resolve his questions later.

Aldrian and Sylphia, having already left the plaza area, arrived at a narrow alley between two rows of buildings. They remained undetected by the devils, watching as the group entered one of the buildings.

Once they reached the front door, Aldrian looked at Sylphia.

*"Do you want to experience battling someone with cultivation far stronger than yours?" he asked. "Although they're hiding their cultivation, I can sense that two of them are at the low to middle Marquess stage, and four are at the low to middle Earl stage."*

Sylphia was stunned. She looked at her lover and tilted her head.

*"That strong? There's no way I can catch all the rats of that caliber. Maybe I can handle some of the Earl stage ones, but the Marquess? No way I can face them."*

*"You don't have to worry. Just battle to your heart's content; I'll be beside you. This is also a chance for you to train yourself. After becoming my lover—no, after you become my wife, I'm afraid there will be situations where you'll have to face opponents like these guys without my presence."*

Sylphia blushed heavily upon hearing the word "wife," but what he said also made sense. Aldrian's enemies had always been stronger than him, yet he was able to battle all of them. There was a possibility that, in the future, his enemies might target her instead because they couldn't defeat Aldrian. She didn't want to become his weakness; she wanted to become one of his strengths.

Sylphia exhaled and put on a solemn expression, trying to hide her nervousness. This would be the first time she faced opponents much stronger than her—ones who were already beyond the scope of her strength.

Inside the Ivory Empire, she hadn't encountered many bad guys, and even when she did, most of them were small fries, not much stronger than her—or even weaker. It was rare for her to face someone beyond her abilities, and when she did, her family always took care of them.

Now, Aldrian wanted her to face these people—those she normally couldn't defeat alone with her current cultivation. It would be suicide for her to charge in by herself, but with Aldrian by her side, she felt confident that she could put on a worthy "show."

"Let's go, I'm ready," she said.

No data found.

### *Chapter 289: Her Fight*

Aldrian smiled and instantly opened the door. As he did, they found a group of devils gathered around a table, seemingly in the middle of a discussion, only to be interrupted by the sudden arrival.

*Clap!*

"Excuse me, gentlemen. It seems the show is over. I already know who you are, so please do your best to defend yourselves. However, before that—" Aldrian said, before suddenly making them all disappear from the room.

This place was still within his domain, which now had a diameter of five kilometers, allowing him to move them to a better location where Sylphia could battle them.

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In a forested area of an unknown location, Aldrian and the others suddenly appeared. The devils, still disoriented by the abrupt change in location, were left dumbfounded by the young man's ability. They didn't even have time to question his identity, though it was clear he already knew who they were.

Sylphia was also stunned. She looked around and realized they were no longer in the city. They were now in a dense forest that seemed untouched by humans or beasts. Aldrian turned to the devils with a smile and said to them.

"This is the territory of the Doria Empire, specifically within the Rivas Grand Duchy and near the border with the Flamecrest Grand Duchy. The rule is simple: you will have to fight for your lives. Perhaps some of you might survive to tell the tale tomorrow. You just need to—"

Before Aldrian could finish his explanation, two marquesses suddenly attacked him at the same time. They unleashed a fire technique, forming a giant fireball aimed at Aldrian.

Aldrian merely glanced at the fireball and blew a gust of wind from his mouth. Instantly, the fireball vanished, like a candle extinguished by the wind.

The marquess-stage cultivators widened their eyes in shock as their bodies suddenly became trapped in the space around them. They couldn't move, as if an invisible force was compressing the space around their bodies.

The devils were shocked. Marquess-stage attack seemed like a child's play to this young man. Their efforts appeared unworthy of his attention, as he barely made any effort to block the attack.

Panic finally spread across their faces. Though they could now sense that the young man was also at the marquess stage, his power far exceeded his cultivation level!

The rest of the devils at the earl stage were also unable to move, their faces frozen in horrified expressions.

"Listen," Aldrian said with an expressionless face, devoid of the smile he wore earlier. "Don't interrupt me while I'm in a good mood and giving you a chance to survive. If you do something foolish again, I'll make sure to torture you until you wish you'd never been born in this world."

Looking at Aldrian's face, the devils immediately understood that his threat was deadly serious. If they did something foolish, their lives would be instantly forfeited.

But then, Aldrian smiled again.

"Once again, I'm giving you a chance to survive. The rules are simple: you have to defeat my woman here. I won't attack you, so don't worry. If you manages to defeat her or fight her until she can't fight anymore, you are free to leave. Simple enough, right?" he said.

The devils were stunned and looked toward Sylphia. Did this man have a screw loose? They could sense that this woman was only at the peak viscount stage—yet he wanted them to fight her? Did he not care for his woman?

However, no matter the reason, they had been given a chance for survival, and they were determined to take it.

*"Give it your best shot. They won't hesitate to kill you with their motivation. Once again, you don't have to worry about anything else,"* Aldrian's voice resounded in Sylphia's mind.

Though Sylphia was actually quite nervous about this impossible task, she calmed herself. With Aldrian by her side, what was there to fear? He had even moved them here, to the forest, where she had the advantage of the

environment. The forest was the elves' natural habitat, and she held an advantage with her comprehension and laws here.

Sylphia looked at Aldrian and nodded with confidence. Aldrian smiled warmly at her before disappearing.

*"Good luck, my dear."*

Sylphia continued to smile, but her expression turned solemn as she looked at the devils, who had regained the ability to move. They gasped as they stared at her, their eyes now fixed on her like she was prey.

However, unbeknownst to Sylphia, the devils were also suspicious of her. After a moment of thought, they realized that this was more than just a simple chance for survival. They had to fight a woman who was only at the peak viscount stage. Any sane person would conclude that they would easily defeat her, like stomping on an ant.

But the young man had asked them to fight his woman—it didn't make any sense. Then, something clicked in their minds. This was a trick! The woman must have concealed her true cultivation. She was pretending to be weak when, in reality, she was strong.

They didn't immediately attack Sylphia. Instead, they tried to gauge how much stronger she was than them.

Sylphia, noticing their hesitation, seized the opportunity. She took out her artifact—a bow, a high-heaven-grade artifact bow—and shot several arrows at the two low earl stage devils. The devils, seeing the incoming arrows, were stunned by their power. They quickly activated their defense technique, using earth laws. The arrows struck the earth wall, but it still wasn't enough to fully block them.

The arrows pierced through the earth wall and were about to strike their foreheads when two other earl stage cultivators used their wind technique to divert the arrows. The arrows changed trajectory and pierced the trees behind them. Suddenly, they felt tremors under their feet. When they looked down, giant roots had emerged from the ground, striking them with their tips.

The devils jumped to evade the roots, but then they saw another arrow coming toward them. Still midair and unable to fully move to dodge, they relied on their tricks. Just before the arrows could pierce them, they shot hidden darts from under their sleeves. The darts collided with the arrows, but instead of stopping them, the arrows bounced the darts away.

They were shocked that the arrows still had such immense momentum. Unable to evade them while still midair, their foreheads were instantly pierced

by the arrows. The two low earl stage devils died instantly, the arrows piercing their heads with the tips emerging from the back of their skulls. They hadn't realized that Sylphia had imbued the arrows with her wind laws, making them much stronger and faster.

The other two middle earl stage devils couldn't help their comrades as they had before because they were forced to defend themselves from the roots that kept pursuing them. This was one of Sylphia's techniques of the wood element, Wooden Dragon. Although it wasn't the perfect form of the Wooden Dragon, it was strong enough to challenge earl stage cultivators. With her current cultivation, she could face low and middle earl stage cultivators without endangering her own life.

The two middle earl stage devils, still evading the Wooden Dragon by jumping around, tried to slash at it with their swords. However, the roots' body was so hard that their strikes didn't even leave a dent on its surface. Realizing this, they decided to charge at Sylphia. If they couldn't destroy the technique, they would target the one who cast it!

Sylphia, watching the devils charge at her, didn't panic. She unleashed another technique. Stomping her right foot, earth spikes suddenly protruded from the ground. The devils' speed was immense, but with their agile movements, they dodged the attack. However, they felt something behind them and had only a split second to react as arrows came flying toward them from their blind spot.

"How—" The last thing they saw was the arrow piercing their heads before their sight turned to darkness. Their bodies slumped to the ground as the arrows drove straight through their brains.

Sylphia released a sigh of relief as she looked at the dead devils. The arrows that had struck them were actually the same ones she had used earlier, connected to her hands by a thin thread. She could pull the arrows and use them for a sneak attack, just as she had done. However, once the enemies became aware of this trick, it would be difficult to use it again.

The arrows she imbued with her wind laws also provided enough power to pierce through the devils, instantly killing them.

After eliminating the earl stage devils, Sylphia turned her gaze toward the marquess stage devils. The marquess stage devils looked at her in confusion because, from the battle they had just witnessed, Sylphia had only unleashed the power of a middle earl stage cultivator at most. While that was impressive and a clear sign of her genius on the continent, they still didn't consider her a real threat.

Although they had just lost their comrades, the two marquess stage devils didn't seem bothered. Initially, they wanted to watch and gauge Sylphia's power, but after observing her, their only conclusion was that she was indeed a genius—just not enough to pose a threat to them.

This left them confused. Did that young man really allow his woman, who only had this level of power, to face them? It seemed his arrogance knew no bounds. They didn't know if he would keep his word, but if this woman only had this much power, then they still had a chance to survive!

### *Chapter 290: The End of 'Training'*

The marquess-stage devils, who know just how strong Sylphia is, decide to end things quickly. Although they still worry about a sudden attack or change of mind from Aldrian, there is nothing they can do.

Sylphia also knows that to face them, she must give her all, and that is exactly what she intends to do. She uses her secret technique the *Blessing of the Forest* to boost her power and endurance. This technique is designed to enhance her abilities—or those of elves of the Evergreen imperial family's bloodline—providing a significant power boost to help them face stronger opponents. The only noticeable side effect of this technique is extreme fatigue after its use.

After using it, her body became lighter, and her senses sharpened. Her aura became much stronger to the point where she seemed on the verge of a breakthrough to the Earl stage. Her presence grew stronger and more intimidating, yet it still exuded a refreshing feeling.

But then, her pupils suddenly contracted as she sensed something and dodged to the side. Behind her, an entire row of trees collapsed like dominos, leaving a trail of destruction. She rolled to the ground and quickly took a stance, her gaze locking onto the low Marquess-stage devil who had just unleashed his technique. His attack, a wind blade, had obliterated everything in its path.

Sylphia felt sweat roll down her forehead as she realized she hadn't even seen the devil cast his technique. All she had noticed was him casually swinging his hand, as if it were a simple wave. She hadn't expected such a tremendous power to come from just that swing! This was the difference between the Viscount stage and the Marquess stage. Even though Sylphia had used her technique to boost her power, she was still, in the end, a Viscount-stage cultivator. While she could defeat Earl-stage cultivators, facing a Marquess stage was an entirely different matter and a whole other level.

The devils looked at Sylphia in surprise, amazed that she had managed to dodge the attack of a Marquess-stage cultivator. They then saw Sylphia fire arrows at them, but with a swift motion, she also summoned a Wooden Dragon to attack. However, the low Marquess-stage devil casually swept his hand again, instantly scattering the arrows with the wind and slicing the roots into pieces.

Sylphia didn't give up and used her movement technique to confuse her enemies. She maneuvered through her surroundings, weaving between trees and firing arrows imbued with her wind laws.

However, she was stunned when one of the devils suddenly disappeared. By the time she realized where he was, it was already too late.

"Don't blame me." She heard a man's voice behind her, and a feeling of defeat gripped her heart. But just as the man was about to deliver the fatal blow with his palm aimed at Sylphia's spine, his attack struck something hard even before it reached her body. It felt as if he had hit metal, though it was invisible.

He didn't know if it was a talisman or something else, but he tried to attack Sylphia again. Sylphia had only a split second to dodge and cast another technique. She saw the incoming attack, but she still couldn't avoid the second strike, which he delivered with his elbow. The movement of the middle Marquess-stage cultivator was still too fast for her, so she braced herself. She tried to cast her defensive technique, but it was too late, as his elbow was about to strike her ribs.

However, just as the attack almost hit her, the same thing happened: his strike seemed to hit an invisible metal plate on her body. There was no sound, only the sensation that his hand had struck something invisible.

Sylphia was also stunned because she was sure her defensive talisman hadn't activated when this man attacked her. From the strangeness of the situation, she concluded that it was Aldrian who had protected her, intervening when an attack reached her. She couldn't sense his presence here, but she knew he was watching her and protecting her.

*"So, that's why he said not to worry about anything and just fight to my heart's content."*

She then distanced herself from the man using her movement technique. However, the other devils also moved toward her and cast their techniques. Unable to do much against them, Sylphia decided to use another trick up her sleeve. She clasped her hands, and the surrounding energy suddenly gathered in the sky.

It shaped into clouds and turned into rain. The devils, still attempting to attack Sylphia but unable to due to the invisible shield protecting her, stopped their assault and looked up at the sky. The rain appeared ordinary, but they felt a pricking sensation on their bodies when the raindrops touched them. They looked at their clothes, which seemed to be burned, with signs of melting.

"Acid?" one of the devils thought, glancing at the sky. He then looked around, surprised to see that the acid rain seemed to affect only him and his comrade. Despite the rain touching everything, there was no visible destruction in the surroundings.

*"What incredible control over her technique... Wait, this technique— rain of acid by elves. Doesn't that mean this woman is from the Evergreen imperial family?"* the middle Marquess-stage devil thought.

The elves are famous for their mastery over woods, water, and all elements connected to the forest. However, there is one technique that the imperial family of the elves wields, a technique that seeks the destruction of vast areas. This technique is difficult to control because once it is cast and the caster cannot control it, it brings devastation to the surrounding environment, including the forests that the elves hold dear.

The Rain of Acid, even within the Evergreen imperial family, is not a technique that all members can comprehend or master. Although Sylphia's Rain of Acid only covers a small part of the area, allowing the devils here to escape with just their movement techniques, her control is quite impressive, targeting only them without affecting the environment.

The strength of the acid is also quite troublesome, as it leaves burn marks on their skin. If this technique were cast and touched Earl-stage cultivators or lower, they would witness a killing ground, with many victims having their bodies melted. It is truly a vicious technique, unbecoming of the peaceful nature of the elves.

The devils set aside their amazement and continued attacking Sylphia. When their physical attacks proved ineffective, they switched to using their elemental techniques. However, these attacks met the same fate as their physical ones, as they seemed to have no effect on her. The invisible shield blocked all forms of attack, even when they used their full strength without resorting to their devil forms.

Sylphia also tried to dodge and counter their attacks with her own techniques, all while controlling the Rain of Acid. However, as the fight dragged on, signs of exhaustion began to appear. She became much paler, and her control over her technique grew weaker. If it weren't for the invisible shield, she would have already died a thousand times.

The Marquess-stage devils were growing increasingly irritated, unable to defeat a mere Viscount-stage cultivator. Despite there being two of them, they couldn't even scratch Sylphia's body. The invisible shield was incredibly strong; after repeated attacks, they still couldn't break it. This only meant one thing: the invisible shield was capable of blocking the power of Marquess-stage cultivators.

Because of that, they decided to turn the fight into a battle of attrition. There was no way Sylphia could hold on if she depleted her energy first. The rule from that young man was to either defeat her or wear her down until she could no longer fight, so the latter was more suitable for this situation.

Sylphia also seemed to know what was on the minds of these devils, but she couldn't do anything about it. From the start, Marquess-stage cultivators were too much for her to face. There was no way she could even fight one, let alone two, at this moment. However, thanks to this battle, her experience and proficiency in fighting opponents stronger than her were increasing.

As everyone expected, after a few minutes of back-and-forth attacks, Sylphia was the first to collapse. The rain stopped, and she slumped to the ground, gasping for air as though she were out of breath. Her body was drenched in sweat, and her skin had turned pale. At this moment, she was in her most vulnerable state, and even cultivators much weaker than her could kill her with ease.

As for the devils, they were still in good condition, having held back and only sought to wear Sylphia down, though they had expended some of their energy. It seemed they hadn't really put much effort into the fight, as they still appeared fresh and not tired.

Suddenly, Aldrian appeared beside Sylphia, instantly lifting her and letting her lean against his body. He injected his energy into her as he smiled at her. Exhausted beyond measure, Sylphia weakly smiled back. His presence brought her a sense of relief and safety.

Aldrian then looked at the devils, who were watching him warily. With a simple gesture of his hand, he motioned for them to leave, and they immediately used their movement techniques to dash away from the area.

Sylphia watched the devils disappear before turning her gaze back to Aldrian.

"Are you really going to let them go? This isn't like you," she asked.

Aldrian smiled warmly at her.

"Let them go? Like I would do that."

