

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 381: I Change My Mind - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 381: I Change My Mind

Chapter 381: I Change My Mind

Old man York frowned.

"What do you—"

"Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, but I must disturb you," a young man's voice cut off the old man's voice transmission.

"I am Alexi Xadian, the young master of the Xadian family, one of the great noble families of the Atria Empire." As he introduced himself, he glanced slightly at Sylphia.

When he heard that a group of people was looking for a traitor, most likely from the church, he wasted no time and brought his knights to greet them. He had his own role in this matter and did not think too much about it. However, upon hearing that an elf was among the group, he became spirited.

The Atria Empire is located on the western side of the continent. Due to its distance, elves rarely visit. If they do, it is usually as envoys from certain noble families who require something from this region.

For Alexi, his encounters with elves could be counted on one hand. He also rarely traveled to the eastern side of the continent, so it was reasonable that he seldom met them.

Now, with the appearance of a beautiful elf in this place, he would not waste the opportunity. Although he was already a Duke-stage cultivator, as a man and a noble, he also had desires. As a noble, he lacked nothing, and whatever he desired, he always obtained. But one thing he had longed for yet could never attain was an elf as his woman.

He never lacked women, and he had a preference for exotic ones. An elf had been his most desired dream for a long time. Seeing an elf alone among an unfamiliar group—one that was most likely sent by the main church—only fueled his desire. He did not believe this group was directly affiliated with the church. Instead, he suspected the church had used a third party, such as the Adventurers' Guild, to search for the traitor in this empire.

The church could not recklessly enter this territory in the current situation, after all. Why did he think the church was using the third party? Because of the elf's presence. Her appearance made him doubt that this group was directly under the main church. Elves did not directly worship the heavens, after all—or so he believed.

"If something happens to them, the backlash will be minimal, right?" he thought. After all, they were within his territory.

However, seeing that the elf seemed indifferent and showed no sign of being impressed, he felt slightly annoyed. Even so, he maintained a smile.

"I, as the one responsible for the security of this area, have received many reports about suspicious activities from your group. I must ensure that you are not a threat to the city's safety, so please follow me for verification before we can allow you to proceed," he said.

Aldrian smiled at his words.

"Is that so? But to think you went to such lengths just to greet us—don't you think that's a bit excessive? Seven Duke-stage cultivators, five Grand Duke-stage cultivators, and another five Grand Duke-stage assassins lurking in the shadows."

Hearing Aldrian's words, Alexi's group was stunned—everything he said was correct! They had indeed brought an assassin squad in case things went south.

Alexi frowned. Those assassins were their best, and even he doubted that anyone in this city could detect them. So how?

The old man was also shocked, but then he narrowed his eyes at Alexi.

"Young master, they are my customers for today, and they have just arrived here. I hope for your understanding," he said while exuding the aura of a peak Grand Duke cultivator.

Old man York was actually a Grand Duke cultivator, which did not surprise Aldrian. He had recognized it instantly when he first laid eyes on the old man. Although York tried to conceal his cultivation by suppressing his aura and energy, it was impossible to hide from Aldrian's Eyes of the Heaven.

Alexi frowned at old man York.

"Don't think we let you keep your restaurant open and left you alone because we fear you, old man. We left you alone because dealing with you would be troublesome, not because we see you as a threat."

The old man gritted his teeth, releasing even more of his aura and pressure. However, the knights behind Alexi responded in kind, unleashing their own auras to counter him.

Alexi merely snorted and turned his gaze back to Aldrian.

"I don't care if you know about my hidden assassins, but you still have to obey our rules here. This city is under martial law by order of His Majesty, and you'd better choose your actions wisely. We don't have to harm anyone here," he said. However, behind his back, he signaled his knights to prepare for a surprise attack on Aldrian's group. At the same time, he gave a silent command to the assassins to be ready to strike.

Even though he didn't know how Aldrian had sensed the assassins, he still dismissed him as insignificant. Aldrian was only at the low Duke stage, and the strongest in his group seemed to be the man wearing a conical hat, who had remained silent until now, displaying peak Duke-stage cultivation. It was natural for Alexi to think this way since Xin Haotian had concealed his true power and was only revealing the aura of a high Duke-stage cultivator.

"I see, but I think you've misunderstood something," Aldrian said as he stood up.

"Now!"

Suddenly, the knights leaped toward Aldrian, but before they could reach him with their swords, they abruptly stopped in place. They sheathed their weapons and stood motionless as if frozen.

On the ceiling, the five assassins also remained in their positions, but they all shared one eerie similarity—their eyes were blank, as if they were under the influence of an illusion.

Seeing this, Alexi was stunned. He immediately shouted at his knights.

"What are you doing?! Attack him! Hey!"

However, they remained motionless. As Alexi watched Aldrian slowly walk toward him, he instinctively took a step back.

It was only then that he realized something was terribly wrong with his men.

Aldrian must have done something to them!

His survival instincts kicked in, and he decided to escape and call for reinforcements.

However, before he could step out of the restaurant, he collided with an invisible wall and slipped to the ground. Though pain shot through him from the impact, he still turned his head to look at Aldrian, who continued walking toward him with a steady, unhurried pace.

For the first time, fear gripped him. He stared into Aldrian's expressionless blue eyes—eyes that seemed to pull him into a deep abyss. A suffocating terror crept into his heart, making it hard to breathe. In that moment, he forgot that he was a Duke-stage cultivator, someone considered strong on the continent.

"S-Stop," he stammered, trembling. But Aldrian did not stop. He walked past the motionless knights, who stood frozen like statues.

"Don't come any closer!" Alexi cried out.

Aldrian kept walking, his gaze never leaving Alexi.

Alexi tried to crawl backward, but his back collided with the invisible wall which was actually a spatial barrier Aldrian had created to prevent his escape.

The moment Aldrian stood before him, Alexi's body suddenly rose against his will. Panic surged through him as he struggled to resist, but it was futile. Aldrian was forcing him to stand using spatial manipulation.

Alexi felt his mental fortitude crumbling. The realization that he was completely powerless sent waves of despair through him. Worse yet, he was unable to avert his gaze, forced to lock eyes with Aldrian.

"You think you're something great here, huh? A little king?" Aldrian's voice echoed in his ears, calm yet chilling.

"You know, at first, I thought I could play along for a bit. Maybe we wouldn't have to do anything... painful."

Aldrian then leaned in, his piercing blue eyes drawing even closer.

"However, I change my mind."

"I don't care if you are the young master of a noble family. Even if you were a prince, I still wouldn't care. How dare you look at my woman with such a lustful gaze?" Aldrian said, his voice flat and devoid of emotion, sending a wave of dread through Alexi. At that moment, he had never felt regret as deeply as he did now.

"I... I'm sorry."

"Too late."

Alexi's eyes suddenly turned blank before his body stiffened, standing motionless like his underlings. Aldrian, his face still expressionless, stared at Alexi that now fully trapped in his illusion. He let out a quiet sigh before turning to Sylphia and the others with a small smile.

"Can you guys wait here for a bit? I'll be back after I take care of this."

The others knew that he was about to do something best left unseen. That was why he wanted to act alone right now. They could even sense that his mood was not good.

"Go ahead, do your thing. I'll guard this place," Xin Haotian said, waving his hand. He knew this wasn't the time for jokes.

Aldrian nodded before turning to old man York. "I'll be back before the food gets cold."

The old man, still in shock from what had just happened, was momentarily stunned by Aldrian's words.

"Ah... alright," he answered unconsciously. He had thought today would be the day he'd have to close his restaurant forever, but it seemed he was wrong. This young man was unbelievably strong—so strong that even he couldn't fathom his true power. Was he hiding his real cultivation?

Aldrian gave a small nod and smiled before shifting his gaze back to Alexi.

"Bring me to your main base."

Chapter 382: A Glass of Wine Question

In the desolate streets of Caritas City, a group of people walked toward the mayor's mansion. Some residents peeked out from inside their homes, but the moment they recognized the group, they quickly hid.

What they saw was Young Master Alexi and his knights, seemingly escorting a young man in custody. As they watched, they could only lament the young man's fate—catching the young master's attention surely meant he was done for.

However, what these people did not realize was that the young master and his knights seemed like puppets, their blank stares revealing that they were guiding Aldrian while under hypnosis.

After walking for about thirty minutes, they finally arrived at the vast mansion. When the guards at the gate saw the approaching group, they immediately opened the gate to let them in. The guards watched as the group entered before they disappeared inside the mansion.

"What a poor bastard. Looks like the young master or even Lord Parus got bored and decided to catch someone for entertainment," one of the guards said to his colleague.

"Yeah. No matter how many times I see it, I still can't fathom how they can do something like that. One time, I happened to pass by one of the rooms and saw Lord

Parus torturing someone—skinning him alive." The other guard trembled as he recalled that day.

Hearing this, the first guard also felt a chill run down his spine and silently vowed never to end up on their lord's bad side.

Inside the mansion, Aldrian was guided in one direction, where he could sense many presences.

On the way there, he passed by numerous rooms, his senses allowing him to perceive their interiors. Some rooms were covered in bloodstains and bore signs of intense combat. He deduced that a battle had broken out when the Second Prince's forces stormed the mansion.

Other rooms were filled with horrifying remnants of torture. Once elegant and luxurious chambers had been transformed into torture chambers, some still occupied by the living. Some victims hung from the ceiling by their hands, their bodies bloodied and broken. Others had severed limbs yet were kept alive, their suffering prolonged.

He also sensed that some of the rooms were filled with naked women, all of whom seemed to be drugged with an aphrodisiac. These rooms had been turned into makeshift brothels, where some men were currently indulging in carnal pleasure.

Aldrian kept walking until he finally arrived at a room where he could sense many presences inside. He closed his eyes as the door opened, revealing the interior.

Inside was a banquet table with several people seated around it. The strongest among them was a middle-aged man sitting at the head of the table—the leader's seat.

Dressed in noble attire, he had black hair like Alexi and held a glass of wine in his hand. However, what stood out most was the powerful aura he exuded, revealing him to be at the Middle King Stage of cultivation.

When the door opened, the man was momentarily stunned, but his expression quickly darkened into a frown as he looked at Alexi.

"What are you doing with your knights? Why are you disturbing us in the middle of our feast? Didn't I already order you to take care of that group?" the man demanded.

However, Alexi did not reply. Instead, he stepped aside, revealing Aldrian behind him.

Aldrian opened his eyes, stepped forward, and took a clear look at the people seated at the table. They appeared to be in the middle of a feast, indulging in a variety of food and

drink. His gaze then shifted to the strongest man in the center, who was frowning in confusion as he looked at him.

"Parus Xadian... is he this guy's father?" Aldrian wondered.

"Whatever."

Without hesitation, he released his hypnosis on Alexi and his knights. Their eyes regained clarity, but Alexi was immediately stunned to find that his surroundings had changed into the mayor's mansion.

Looking around, he realized he was now inside the dining room and was utterly shocked. When his eyes fell on Aldrian's side profile, he staggered and slipped, unable to process what had just happened.

He had no idea how he had ended up here, but the last thing he remembered was feeling terrified by Aldrian's overwhelming intimidation.

Finally, he looked at his father, hoping for salvation, but before he could say anything, Aldrian's voice echoed through the room.

"Do you know where the traitor is?" Aldrian asked Parus Xadian, though his gaze also swept across the other people seated at the table. He didn't recognize any of them, but one name caught his interest when he read his information before he deliberately chose to ignore it.

Parus frowned even deeper but then suddenly smiled at Aldrian.

"It seems Alexi is under some kind of hypnotic technique," he thought. Aldrian was more capable than he had expected—no wonder he seemed so laid-back, unconcerned with his status or power.

"Ah, so you're the one looking for a traitor. Are you from the Church?" he asked, studying Aldrian.

"Do you know where the traitor is?" Aldrian ignored Parus's question and asked again.

However, Parus remained smiling, seemingly unoffended. Instead, he stood up and set down his glass of wine. The other people at the table sneered at Aldrian's brazenness—they all knew how terrifying Lord Parus could be when dealing with people like him.

"I see, so it has come to this," Parus said before suddenly vanishing and reappearing right in front of Aldrian, his hand reaching out to choke Aldrian with astonishing speed.

But just before his fingers could touch Aldrian's neck, his hand stopped in midair. Parus's eyes widened in shock. His hand trembled as he tried to push forward, but it wouldn't budge. He attempted to jump back, but his body wouldn't move.

It was as if his hand was trapped inside an invisible wall.

Everyone in the room was finally alarmed and sprang to their feet when they saw what was happening. All of them were far weaker than Parus in terms of cultivation, and seeing something was wrong with him put them on high alert.

But then, they felt their bodies freeze.

A wave of horror washed over them as they realized they couldn't move—not even an inch. They struggled to break free, but it was useless. Even their mouths wouldn't open. It was as if their bodies were trapped inside an invisible, solid mold.

Alexi and his knights experienced the same paralysis, their eyes filled with terror as they stared at Aldrian.

"Open your mouth. Ahhh."

Aldrian's voice echoed through the room as he looked at Parus, gesturing like a physician examining a patient's throat. He motioned for Parus to open his mouth.

But how could Parus comply when he couldn't even move a muscle?

Yet, to his horror, he felt his mouth being forced open against his will—an invisible force pried it apart as if unseen hands were gripping his jaw.

As his mouth opened fully, Parus saw a glass of wine suddenly appear in Aldrian's hand. He instantly recognized it—it was his own glass of wine.

"You want it?" Aldrian asked, his tone calm yet ominous.

Terror crept into Parus's heart. He wanted to respond, but he couldn't. He couldn't even make a sound.

Aldrian swirled the wine in the glass for a moment, as if admiring its color. Then, without warning, he shoved the entire glass into Parus's mouth.

The glass shattered instantly inside Parus's mouth, breaking several of his teeth and slicing into his tongue. Blood mixed with wine gushed from his mouth as jagged shards pierced his flesh.

"Nhhggghhhh!" A muffled scream escaped him as he writhed in agony, want to clutch his mouth and stop the pain. But he couldn't move.

The others watched in sheer terror, their bodies trembling with the desperate urge to flee. But escape was impossible, Aldrian had locked them in place with a spatial lock, rendering them completely immobile. Moving was out of the question, let alone running away.

At this moment, the entire mansion was Aldrian's domain. He was its absolute ruler.

Aldrian's expressionless face looked demonic as he gazed at the shattered glass inside Parus's mouth before shifting his eyes to meet Parus's eyes.

"Do you know where the traitor is?" Aldrian asked again, finally releasing the spatial lock on Parus's mouth.

"Aghh... aghh..." Pained groans escaped Parus's lips, but before he could make another sound, Aldrian swiftly covered his mouth with his left hand.

"No sound from you unless it's the answer to my question. Not even a whimper of pain. If you make another sound besides the answer, I'll make sure you no longer have a jaw to speak with."

A chilling sensation crawled down Parus's spine. Fear gripped him as he forced himself to suppress the unbearable pain in his mouth.

When Aldrian finally removed his hand, Parus struggled to speak.

"I... wwon't kno..." he muttered, his voice distorted by the wounds inside his mouth.

But Aldrian understood his meaning.

"You don't know? You were expecting a group from the church, yet you claim you don't know about the traitor? I suppose I'll have to give you another glass of wine."

"N... noo... I... realngly don't... knknow... I junst... got ornder frokh high maghesti that... igh a grlroup frokhm the church appeargh, I hangve tokh takkehn cakhre of themkh and putkh the blamekh okh ghe reberkh."

(No, I really don't know. I just got orders from His Majesty that if a group from the church appears, I have to take care of them and put the blame on the rebels.)

Aldrian could tell that Parus wasn't lying and gave a slight nod. It seemed that the person who truly knew about Cardinal Carsius was the second prince—the one these people already referred to as *His Majesty*.

Aldrian looked at Parus for a moment before grabbing his head. Closing his eyes, he delved into Parus's memories. After a few moments, he reopened them and suddenly smiled, tapping Parus's cheek lightly a few times.

"Good work. That's how it should be. I ask a question, and you answer." Aldrian said.

Hearing the change in Aldrian's tone, Parus wanted to sigh in relief but before he could, Aldrian suddenly grabbed his jaw.

"However, I think you don't need this anymore."

Parus's eyes widened in horror before he felt something tear from his jaw.

Rip!

Chapter 383: A Warning

Rip!

The others watched as Aldrian cruelly tore Parus's jaw apart with his bare hands and threw it to Alexi. Seeing his father's severed jaw in front of him, Alexi wanted to scream in panic, but the spatial lock still rendered him unable to do anything.

"Oaaahghnn!"

As for Parus, he screamed in agony. He wanted to writhe, but he couldn't move his body except for slight tremors. His tongue dangled freely now that his jaw was gone. Blood flowed from the wound, and tears streamed down his face as he experienced excruciating pain for the first time in thousands of years.

Aldrian walked past him and picked up a napkin from the table behind him. He wiped his hand as if cleaning off something disgusting, then turned his gaze toward the others who had seated at the dining table earlier.

When they saw Aldrian shift his focus to them, they wanted to scream and beg for mercy. Although they were all cultivators with thousands of years of experience, in the face of death's terror, they couldn't help but desperately cling to the slightest chance of survival.

As Aldrian walked toward them, a chilling fear gripped their hearts. Unknowingly, tears began to fall from their eyes, and their breathing grew unsteady. One of them felt as if his very soul was about to leave his body when Aldrian suddenly stopped in front of him and locked eyes with him.

Aldrian tilted his head slightly, and in an instant, the spatial lock that had sealed the man's mouth was released.

"Please, have mercy! Please, have mercy! I only accepted Lord Parus's invitation to come here, I swear!" He began to plead, but Aldrian ignored him and asked instead,

"Are you from Golden Swan Commerce?"

The man was stunned but quickly answered,

"Yes! Yes, I am from Golden Swan Commerce. I am the branch head of the Golden Swan Commerce in this city. My lord, I can offer you wealth if that is what you desire, and if not, I will do my best to assist you in any way possible."

When Aldrian saw the surname *Harris* on the man, he immediately thought of the main family that had shaped Golden Swan Commerce, the very family that currently led the organization. He knew that the headquarters of Golden Swan Commerce was located in this empire, but he hadn't expected their paths to cross again after so many years.

The last news he had heard from Arson Vuran, the leader of the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion, was that Golden Swan Commerce was experiencing internal conflict among three families. Ever since the incident in the Demon Territory, this organization had been in steady decline. The day their suspicious activities with the devils were exposed to the public.

Throughout his journey, he had learned that this commerce was destined to be ostracized. In every place they established a branch, they had a hand in the devils' infiltration. For example, in the Doria and Vindas Empires, after he helped uncover the devils' network in their territories, the name *Golden Swan Commerce* inevitably appeared.

They couldn't wash their hands of it, nor could they hide it anymore. It had grown too large to be concealed. No matter what damage control they attempted, they would never regain their reputation.

"What is your relationship with that man over there?" Aldrian asked, gesturing toward Parus.

"The Golden Swan Commerce belongs to the same faction as the second prince, and as the branch manager of this city, I am merely an extension of the headquarters' will."

"So, the Golden Swan Commerce fully supports the second prince? What about the other families within the organization? I heard your commerce has been experiencing internal struggles."

"Yes, our organization faced internal strife at that time—our commerce was nearly split because of it. However, the second prince, who supported my family, the Harris family, gave us his direct backing. With his help, we regained control of the commerce and suppressed the other families."

Aldrian nodded. It seemed that the internal conflict had also been resolved with the second prince's intervention. However, his impression of the second prince grew even

worse. He had already witnessed how members of the prince's faction treated the innocent people. That alone had left a negative impression, but now, knowing that the Golden Swan Commerce—an organization entangled with the devils—was part of this faction, he had no doubt.

The second prince's faction was the bad guy.

There was no way someone who willingly worked alongside an organization with ties to the devils could be considered a good person.

Even if the second prince didn't know about Golden Swan Commerce's ties to the devils, he must have at least heard the rumors and news of them being ostracized by other empires—and the reasons behind it. There was no way he could just brush that off, especially when it involved the devils.

If the second prince had decided to work with Golden Swan Commerce, then Aldrian could only conclude one thing—either the prince didn't care whether they had ties to the devils or he himself was involved with them. Aldrian did not dismiss these possibilities.

He then placed his hand on the man's head. The man panicked the moment he felt Aldrian's touch.

"Wait, wait! No! If I die here, the main force from headquarters will come after you! You don't have to do this!"

Aldrian ignored him as he read his memories. The man's eyes rolled back as Aldrian, without any care, roughly tore through his mind.

After a few moments, he finally released his hand and looked at the man. The contrast between the memories he had just seen and the man now desperately pleading for his life was stark. This man was truly corrupt—someone who abused his authority without hesitation.

He had played a role in the downfall of this city. As one of the branch head of the largest commerce organization in the empire, with countless connections, he had actively supplied intelligence to the second prince's faction.

Caritas City had once maintained a good relationship with the Golden Swan Commerce before the civil war. After all, it was impossible for city officials to completely avoid dealings with the empire's most influential commerce organization.

"Your family's main force will come for me, huh? I'll be waiting. I already don't have a good relationship with your family anyway."

"Wait—"

Before he could say another word, Aldrian had already slashed his neck with a finger covered in sword intent. Blood flowed from the wound, and his eyes rolled upward. If not for the spatial lock, his head would have already fallen to the ground. Although the man had not personally done anything detrimental to Aldrian, he felt the need to eliminate this snake.

Aldrian then shifted his gaze to another man and walked toward him.

"Who are you, and what's your relationship with that guy?" Aldrian asked after he stand in front of him, gesturing toward Parus—the same question he had asked the man he just killed.

"I'm only an envoy from the second prince, here to visit Lord Parus. I came to deliver his reward for taking this city under control," the man answered immediately as soon as Aldrian released the spatial lock on his mouth.

He had initially wanted to threaten Aldrian using the second prince's name, but after thinking it over, he decided against it. This man had barged in without hesitation, tortured Lord Parus—one of the second prince's people—and even killed the branch head of the Golden Swan Commerce. There was no way someone like him would be intimidated just by hearing the prince's status.

This young man clearly didn't care whether he offended the prince or not.

If he foolishly threw out the prince's name in an attempt to threaten him, he would be dead before he even had the chance to regret it.

"Oh? You're an envoy from the prince? That makes things easier," Aldrian said with a smile.

"Tell him this—bring that traitorous Cardinal Carsius to me. Any attempt to hide that traitor will be met with my actions that will be detrimental to him in the course of this civil war. And believe me, he won't like it. Understood?" Aldrian added.

The envoy frantically nodded. "Yes, yes! I will convey it to him!"

"Good." Aldrian smiled. "What happened in this city is my warning to him. Now, off you go."

With that, Aldrian teleported the envoy outside the mansion.

The moment he realized what had happened, the envoy was shocked to find himself already outside. He turned to look back at the mansion for a brief moment before sprinting away with all his might, his Duke-stage aura flaring to propel him toward the teleportation station.

He looked at the remaining men in the room—the pitiful Lord Parus, Alexi, and his knights. Without a word, Aldrian glanced at the knights and teleported them outside before sealing the room shut.

Turning his gaze back to Parus and Alexi, he smile.

"Now, gentlemen, I apologize, but I need to hurry before my food gets cold. I'll have to be quick with this... so please, enjoy what's left of your lives while you can."

Chapter 384: Swift Before the Food Gets Cold

At this time, the entire mayor's mansion was in a panic as a strange phenomenon occurred. In front of the dining room, a dozen of Young Master Alexi's knights stood frozen like statues. Everyone who saw them tried to free them, but all their efforts were futile—none of the knights could move even an inch.

The dining room where their lord was located also could not be opened, no matter how hard they tried to break in. It was as if a protective formation prevented anyone from entering.

"Once more!" one of the guards attempting to break the door shouted. Three guards then unleashed their sword techniques against the door, but it did not budge.

"It's futile. The door seems to be protected by a formation that can withstand even a Grand Duke-stage attack," another guard said.

"What the hell really happened? Who would dare attack us so brazenly? Is it the rebels?"

"I don't think so. We've already crushed their resistance in this city, and their last base in this region is Weilmars, which is far from here. Didn't we also confirm that no one suspicious entered the mansion?"

While the guards were discussing what had happened and how it occurred, Alexi's knights, who were trapped in a spatial lock by Aldrian, desperately wanted to shout at them.

"Nnnngggg."

"Nnnngggg."

"*Escape! That monster is inside! Escape!*"—this was what some of the knights were trying to scream, but the guards attempting to break the door misunderstood their intentions.

"Be patient. We'll free you once we find a way. Fortunately, you're not in any immediate danger—you just can't move. Our priority is breaking this door to check on our lord before we try to solve your problem," one of the guards said to the knights, who could only produce muffled sounds.

"You fool!" a knight screamed in his mind.

Unfortunately, they couldn't convey their warning—until suddenly, the door to the dining room finally opened, revealing the scene inside.

The guards who had been trying to break it down froze in shock when they saw a young man standing there alone. Their lord and young master were nowhere to be seen.

The guards frowned in confusion, but before they could react, the knights—who had been unable to move just moments ago—suddenly regained control of their bodies. And the first thing they did was—

"RUN!" they shouted, warning the others.

The guards were bewildered, but before they could process the situation, they turned to look at the young man—who was now smiling at them.

To the knights who had witnessed what Aldrian had done to their lord and the branch head of the Golden Swan Commerce, that smile looked like the very face of a devil.

Before they could realize what was happening or react, all the knights and guards, numbering in the dozens suddenly collapsed to the ground, their bodies convulsing as blood poured from their orifices. Their expressions twisted in horror.

Moments later, their very souls shattered, unable to withstand the terror that had invaded their minds.

Aldrian simply walked past them, having slaughtered them all with nothing but his illusion. There were no screams of pain—only the sheer terror etched onto their faces told the story of the nightmare they had endured before death claimed them.

He did not hesitate. In his eyes, they simply deserved it.

From the memories he had read from Alexi and Parus, Aldrian knew that these people were not innocent either. They had also enjoyed the benefits of Alexi and Parus's deranged acts. To him, they were unworthy of mercy—perfect targets to vent some of his frustration after everything he had witnessed on his way to and inside the mansion.

The moment Alexi harbored vile thoughts toward Sylphia, Aldrian had already wanted to kill him and the others to vent his anger. However, after reading Alexi's memories, witnessing the state of the city, seeing the actions of some soldiers from the Second

Prince's faction against its citizens, and reading Parus's memories as well, his mood had plummeted to its lowest. He felt the need for a purge.

After killing them, he felt some of the fury inside him dissipate, making him feel slightly calmer. He walked toward the rooms that had been turned into a brothel, entering them one by one.

Each time he stepped inside, he was greeted by an erotic scene—a reminder that these men had also indulged in the benefits of being Parus's underlings.

Without hesitation, Aldrian grabbed each man's head and crushed it using only his raw physical strength. These men, who were at most at the Marquess stage, stood no chance against his sheer power. Their heads popped like melons, brain matter splattering across the room as he ended them one by one.

However, despite the horrific killings, the women inside did not seem disturbed. Instead, their eyes remained fixed on Aldrian.

They didn't care about the killings—all they could think about was their raging libido. At this moment, they only wanted to satisfy their lust, regardless of who the man in front of them was.

Aldrian watched as they tried to entice him with their naked bodies, but he only sighed. The scene before him was enough to make any ordinary man lose himself in desire, yet he felt nothing but pity.

Their behavior wasn't of their own free will—it was the effect of the potent aphrodisiac scent filling the room. Even he could feel its influence, though his golden energy constantly purified any poison before it could fully affect him.

Before they could make another move, Aldrian destroyed the aphrodisiac incense burning in the rooms and purified the air with his golden energy.

After clearing the air, he made the women faint with a controlled electric shock, at the very least, this would keep the aphrodisiac from further affecting their bodies while they were unconscious.

With the women's situation handled, Aldrian moved on to the torture rooms. He teleported from room to room, using his golden energy to stabilize those who were still breathing, ensuring they were no longer in immediate danger.

He carried out everything swiftly and efficiently, wasting no more time, his food was already done, after all.

He also killed every single guard in the mansion area, and his next step was to claim the entire city as his domain. Standing in the mayor's mansion, the very place where

this city's faith and authority converged, it would be a waste not to establish his domain here.

After finishing everything, he instantly disappeared from the mansion and reappeared outside the Old York restaurant.

He sighed, taking a moment to adjust his bearing and aura to something more serene. What he had just done at the mansion had left him filled with killing intent and a deathly aura, something that wouldn't be appropriate to show others. It would only ruin the mood, after all.

Once he had calmed his mind, he stepped into the restaurant. Just as he expected, his food had already been served, and his group had even started their feast.

"Ah, you're back! You have to try this, dear—it's so delicious," Sylphia said the moment she saw him. The others also turned their heads to look at him.

Aldrian finally smiled sincerely, his expression full of warmth and love, before nodding. Just then, Old York emerged from the kitchen, his face filled with astonishment.

"Are you okay, young man? Did they do anything to you?" the old man asked.

"What could possibly happen to me? They didn't do anything to me—in fact, they even helped me instead," Aldrian replied as he took his seat and looked at the food in front of him.

The others only glanced at him, thinking to themselves,

"Of course they didn't do anything to you—you're the one who did something to them!"

Old York, though confused, sighed in relief. It seemed those bastards still had some restraint to some extent, as he had never seen them let a targeted victim go. Although Aldrian was undoubtedly powerful, he was still alone, while the Second Prince's faction had thousands of men here, many with strong cultivation.

Aldrian kept his focus to the food before him. Fortunately, it was still steaming slightly—a sign that it was still hot. He had ordered grilled wild beast meat with the restaurant's special sauce and spices.

The moment he took a bite, his eyebrows rose in surprise at how delicious it was.

"It's truly good, Sir York," he complimented.

"Isn't it? I've perfected both the sauce and the grilling technique to bring out the best flavors, and this is the result," Old York said with pride.

Aldrian continued his meal, but amidst his feast, he glanced at Old York curiously.

"Sir York, are you part of an organization or a noble family? I can sense that your Grand Duke-stage cultivation is quite solid and strong, so I wonder—why open a restaurant despite being such a powerful cultivator?"

Old York fell silent for a moment before letting out a sigh.

"Actually, I used to be part of a noble family. They recruited me as a cook and provided me with a cultivation technique that happened to be highly compatible with me. That's how I became this strong," he admitted.

"A noble family, huh? They must have been quite generous to even help their cook cultivate," Aldrian commented before taking another bite.

"Yes, they were very good to me. That's why, even to this day, I still regard the Rosalind family as my own," Old York said with a nostalgic expression.

Aldrian's hand froze mid-movement, his knife hovering over the meat. His gaze shifted to Old York.

"Rosalind family?"

Chapter 385: Old Man York's Past

This was the name Aldrian did not expect to hear from Old Man York. However, he suddenly felt like laughing at himself—was this really fate? To unexpectedly come across someone connected to the family he had planned to visit?

The Rosalind family was the lineage that Elena, one of the ten great swordmasters of the continent, came from. He had already planned to visit them while in this empire, yet here he was, simply stopping by a restaurant to enjoy the local cuisine since it was the only restaurant open in this city—only to meet a cook with a past connection to the Rosalind family.

If this wasn't fate, then what was?

Aldrian wanted to connect himself to the heavens, but Old Man York's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Yes, the Rosalind family, a barony in the southern part of the empire near the border with Buddhist sect territory. Although they are not as large as other noble families and are quite distant from everywhere, they are still a force to be reckoned with due to their individual strength. The Rosalind family is famous for producing many talented cultivators."

"They are one of the peculiar noble families, unlike others, despite having the power to rise in rank, they choose to remain in the corner of the empire and have retained their barony status to this day. Even past emperors, including the current one, have shown them a certain level of respect, refraining from interfering with their affairs."

Aldrian and the others listened as Old Man York explained the history of the Rosalind family while they ate their food.

"The Rosalind family is also unique in how they treat their family members. They provide each one with resources and cultivation techniques to develop their own strength. No matter if you are just a gardener or a sweeper, you will still receive cultivation resources. Of course, the amount depends on one's position or status, but even so, that is something normally unheard of for ordinary people in a typical noble family."

"Maybe it's because their family isn't too large, or perhaps it's due to their compassion—I don't know. But in the end, because of this, everyone who joins the Rosalind family develops deep loyalty to them."

Aldrian took another bite of meat before looking at Old Man York in confusion.

"If they treat you so well, then why did you leave? Isn't it better than running a restaurant here?"

Old Man York sighed as he recalled a moment from the past.

"At that time, the Rosalind family held a banquet to celebrate the birth of the young miss. Lord Raz and Madam Angie, who had been without a child for so long, were finally blessed with one. They rarely hosted banquets, but overwhelmed with joy at the birth of their first child, they decided to hold one. Many noble families were invited to the main mansion for the occasion."

Old Man York's expression suddenly turned to one of fury.

"However, during the banquet, many guests were suddenly poisoned after eating the food I had prepared. Because of this, people began to condemn the Rosalind family, accusing them of harming the very guests they had invited. As the head cook at the time, I was certain I had checked the food multiple times before the banquet and found nothing wrong. Even Lord Raz himself inspected it and came to the same conclusion."

"But then, out of nowhere, poison was found in the food after the poisoning incident, which left me utterly confused. How could this have happened? Long story short, the Rosalind family's name was tarnished because of that incident, and several noble families demanded that we take responsibility for something we had no way of explaining."

"In the end, to prevent further enmity that could lead to war— something Lord Raz wanted to avoid at all costs, the Rosalind family was forced to pay tribute to some of the noble families."

Old Man York gritted his teeth.

"The humiliation our family suffered that day, for something we did not do, was truly infuriating. As the head cook, I decided to resign from my position and exile myself from the Rosalind family. I felt unworthy of remaining with them after that incident. Even though it wasn't my fault, this was my way of taking responsibility for allowing others to harm people through my food."

"Although there was no strong evidence, at that time we were certain that the real culprit behind the poisoning incident was one of the noble families we had invited—or perhaps even a collaboration between several of them."

"They must have seen the Rosalind family as a threat that needed to be crippled, despite our efforts to remain distant from the empire's political strife. A few suspects came to mind, all of them noble families with strained relations with ours. And, coincidentally, all of them belonged to the second prince's faction."

Finally, Aldrian could see the full picture of Old Man York's past. He could guess that, driven by his passion for cooking, the old man had decided to open a restaurant here—far away from the Rosalind family. Caritas City was located in the eastern part of the Atria Empire, while the Rosalind family resided in the south.

His story was quite pitiful, but it was already in the , so there was nothing Aldrian could do about it. However, Aldrian could sense that something still weighed on Old Man York's heart.

"I see. That is quite unfortunate. And with this civil war, I suppose the Rosalind family isn't in a good position?" Aldrian asked.

Old Man York's expression turned to one of worry as he nodded.

"You could say so. The Rosalind family has joined the alliance opposing the second prince, and those noble families already at odds with us saw their chance to strike. The last news I heard was that the Rosalind family had already lost part of its territory due to the combined forces of those families. I couldn't get more detailed information since my sources were travelers from the Rosalind barony, and communication has been cut off for the past month."

Aldrian nodded and took another bite.

"Actually, Sir York, I have business with the Rosalind family and plan to visit them in the near future. That's why I was especially interested when I heard you mention their name earlier. My apologies if I reminded you of a bitter past," he said.

Old Man York widened his eyes.

"You're planning to go there? How? Access to that place has already been cut off by the second prince. Right now, the Rosalind family is under blockade from all sides. It's impossible to get there without being noticed by his faction, and anyone who visits the Rosalind family will be seen as an enemy."

"No need to worry. Even if the second prince's faction wants to stop me, nothing can stand in my way. I won't let the Rosalind family fall—they're the ones who invited me, and besides they have something that interests me."

Old Man York looked at Aldrian's confidence and decided to believe him. But just then, he suddenly heard a commotion outside the restaurant. The clanking of armor echoed through the streets as soldiers ran past. There were multiple groups, as the sound didn't stop even after a few seconds, making Old Man York curious about what was going on.

Aldrian, however, didn't seem to care and continued eating his meat. Seeing his indifference, Sylphia and the others also remained unfazed.

Old Man York looked outside and saw soldiers running in one direction—toward the east side of the city. Wondering what had happened, he leaped onto the rooftop of his restaurant to get a better view. His gaze fixed on the distance, right at the top of the damaged city wall.

His eyes widened in shock as he focused on the scene before him—it was truly horrifying.

Two bodies hung from the city walls, facing inward toward the city. Their bodies were covered in blood, and their faces were unrecognizable, drenched in crimson. Their eyes and noses were missing, leaving behind a grotesque sight.

The other man had his jaw completely torn off, while the second had his genitals mutilated—a sight that left Old Man York utterly horrified. He knew that these men had been brutally tortured before being hanged. Judging by the fresh blood still dripping down the city walls, it hadn't been long since they were left there.

But what shocked him the most was their identity.

Though their faces were unrecognizable due to the extent of their injuries, he could still recognize their attire. These were no ordinary men—they were Alexi Xadian, the young master of the Xadian family, and Marquess Parus Xadian, the patriarch of the Xadian family!

Suddenly, his thoughts shifted to Aldrian, who had returned without a care in the world, calmly eating as if nothing had happened. That young man had just gone to the mayor's mansion with Young Master Alexi, where Marquess Parus had been residing after occupying this city—and now, their bodies were hanging on the city walls?

He hadn't expected that beneath that handsome face lurked such a sadistic side!

However, a smile crept onto Old Man York's face. If Aldrian truly didn't care about offending the second prince by killing his people, then he must have been truly strong.

"No wonder he could so arrogantly say that nothing can stand in his way."

Maybe... he could help with the Rosalind family's situation!

Chapter 386: The Second Prince of Atria Empire

In the capital of the Atria Empire, Losaris City, the situation is much calmer than in the rest of the empire. This was the first place shaken by the sudden coup led by the second prince and the first to fall under his control. Although the atmosphere remains somewhat tense, the city's residents have already returned to their normal activities, as they have already come to terms with the situation.

Fortunately, the second prince has not implemented any policies detrimental to the common folk. As a result, despite the capital being under his control, the people have not felt much change.

At the imperial palace, the man in question was in the middle of a meeting with many individuals inside the throne hall. Each of them carried a strong presence and aura that could make ordinary people cower.

A young-looking man with blonde hair, dressed in the emperor's attire, sat on the imperial throne while dozens of people looked at him solemnly. One of them then stepped forward.

"Your Majesty, I am pleased to report that our army's movement in the north has not been obstructed. The rebels in that region put up little resistance and were quickly subdued. As for the western side, we are still trying to break through Duke Marle's defenses at Guvad City."

Another man stepped forward.

"Your Majesty, on the eastern front, we have continued pushing the rebel forces back until they are now trapped in the northeast, at Weimar City. At this moment, we are maintaining a blockade on their escape and supply routes. As for the southern front, only Grand Duke Arim's and Baron Rosalind's forces remain, but we can continue pressing them."

Hearing the reports, the second prince, Wilmar Losaris, showed a satisfied smile. As the one who had successfully usurped the throne and made himself the current emperor, he still could not rest easy until the rebel forces were completely decimated. To secure his position and uphold his absolute rule, he had to eliminate anyone who opposed him.

"Good, keep up this good work. In the next report, I want to hear that the rebels have been wiped out—all of them. I will give generous rewards to everyone once this is over."

The people in the hall displayed ecstatic expressions as they shouted in unison.

"All hail Your Majesty! All hail Emperor Wilmar! Long live the ultimate ruler of the empire!"

Their voices echoed throughout the entire hall. Wilmar smiled, savoring the moment as if basking in glory, his name and title ringing in his ears.

"Yes, this is how it should be. I am the one who should be enjoying this," he thought.

"After I am done with this empire, I will continue to spread my glorious empire's name across the entire continent. When the prophesized time comes, I will have my own power and no longer depend on those devils."

He smirked as he thought about the future, already mapping out his grand plans to expand his influence across the continent. In his mind, these turbulent times were the perfect opportunity, which was why he had staged the coup.

While he was still in a good mood from hearing the favorable reports and envisioning his glorious future, he suddenly noticed a man rushing toward him. The moment he saw him, he instantly recognized him as the envoy he had sent to Caritas City to deliver the reward to Marquess Parus's forces for successfully capturing the city after a hard-fought battle.

However, he wondered why the envoy seemed nervous, his expression filled with unease and sweat beading down his face. The others in the hall also turned to look at the envoy with curiosity, unaware of what had happened.

The envoy immediately fell to his knees, still gasping for breath as if he had exhausted every bit of energy to reach this place as quickly as possible.

"Your Majesty, I bring urgent news... bad news," the envoy said, struggling to catch his breath.

Wilmar frowned slightly upon hearing this, and the others in the hall turned their attention toward the envoy, eager to hear what he had to say.

"What is it?" Wilmar asked.

"Someone... someone attacked Marquess Parus and killing people without any regard for your name or authority—"

The envoy then recounted his harrowing experience, how Aldrian had barged into the dining hall and rendered them all helpless, how he had tortured Marquess Parus, and how he had even executed the branch head of the Golden Swan Commerce.

Gasps of astonishment filled the hall as those present widened their eyes in shock. From the envoy's description, the assailant seemed to be a formidable cultivator with sadistic tendencies. Yet, what shocked them most was his sheer audacity—he had acted without the slightest concern for His Majesty's rule, as if Marquess Parus was nothing more than a disposable pawn.

"—and he said that he wanted me to convey this to Your Majesty: 'Bring that traitorous Cardinal Carsius to me. Any attempt to hide that traitor will result in actions that will be detrimental to Your Majesty in the course of this civil war. And trust me, Your Majesty won't like it.' What happened in Caritas City is a warning to Your Majesty."

Upon hearing the arrogant warning from this unknown individual, the people in the hall instantly erupted in fury.

"How dare he! To think someone would have the gall to say such words to His Majesty! Even if he is from the church, we must take action against his insolence."

"Who is this man? I will personally kill him and gladly offer his head to His Majesty, church or not!"

"Your Majesty, please send me to Caritas City! I will make sure to bring his head back to you!"

"Your Majesty—"

Many voices rose in anger, but Wilmar only frowned slightly and allowed their shouts to echo through the hall.

The news that the church was searching for its traitor, Cardinal Carsius, had already spread across the continent. When Wilmar first heard of it, he paid little attention—not only had the church not sent a formal request for assistance, but the so-called traitor had also come to him personally, seeking protection. And now, that man was under his protection.

After a few moments of contemplation, he finally raised a hand, signaling for silence before turning to the envoy.

"Is he from the church?"

The envoy bowed slightly before responding. "Your Majesty, he did not state where he came from, nor did he release any energy for me to discern whether he was from the church. However, as far as I know, this man can wield sword intent and manipulate space laws—he can teleport himself or anything near him."

Gasps of astonishment spread through the hall.

"He's a swordmaster who has comprehended space laws! This is the first time I've heard of such a combination. No wonder he's so arrogant. For him to be able to teleport, his comprehension must be at a high level!"

"We need a plan to deal with him, or we'll suffer great losses."

"I agree, we need—"

The voices that had been filled with arrogance and eager volunteers just moments ago now grew more cautious upon learning that their enemy was not just a swordmaster but one who had comprehended space laws. A swordmaster alone was already powerful enough to take on multiple opponents at once. The same applied to space-element cultivators, given how strong and complex space laws were.

But a swordmaster who had mastered space laws? Many in the hall now realized that this person's techniques would be unpredictable and dangerous even for them. If he had subdued Marquess Parus so effortlessly, his cultivation must be above that of the marquess Parus.

Even if that person were at the High King stage, with his power, he could fight against a Peak King stage opponent—or perhaps even match a Low Emperor stage! If they attacked him recklessly without a proper plan, they feared they would be the ones to regret it.

Wilmar's frown deepened as he processed the information. The man's identity was not necessarily tied to the church, and the envoy's report contained no clear evidence linking him to it. If this person truly was from the church, then Wilmar would have some words with the pope—after all, the church would be meddling in the internal affairs of another territory.

If the church had intruded upon his empire without requesting his permission or even consulting him, that would be a blatant sign of disrespect toward him as its ruler. Such an act was unacceptable and could escalate tensions between the church and the territories. The church was not a force that normally acted in such a way. However, Wilmar also had a fair idea of what the pope might be thinking at this moment.

Because of the civil war, the pope refused to reach a conclusion and he was unwilling to acknowledge Wilmar Losaris as the true ruler of the Atria Empire just yet. That was why the pope had not sent an envoy or made any official contact with him, even though

Wilmar now sat on the emperor's throne. The same cautious mindset applied to other powers, they were still waiting and observing the situation.

If this unknown person was not from the church, then dealing with him would be much easier.

But then, Wilmar suddenly smiled.

It didn't matter whether that man was from the church or not. He had already dared to challenge his authority, and for that, this person would face the consequences. Hand over Cardinal Carsius? Not a chance. The cardinal was still useful to him—and more than that, he was his partner in crime.

"I see. But whether he is from the church or not, to think that someone like him exists... Although he may be strong, he has already stepped onto our home turf and dared to act arrogantly in our territory," Wilmar said, then turned his gaze toward those of lower standing before him.

"Duke Alikin, I order you to bring that man here. If he resists, eliminate him and present his head to me."

The chosen Duke Alikin wore a serious expression as he knelt.

"I will not disappoint you, Your Majesty!"

Chapter 387: Arrogant!

Not long after Wilmar gave the order, the people began to disperse once he was done with them. However, Wilmar asked one person to stay.

This person held great influence within the Atria Empire and knew about Aldrian. In fact, he had even attempted to kill him by hiring assassins from the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion.

He was Carlson Harris, the head of the Harris family and the leader of the Golden Swan Commerce.

Wilmar looked at the man and said,

"I regret that one of your family members was killed by that man, but do not worry. As my subject, you will have justice. In the end, that man will face judgment."

"I thank you, Your Majesty, for your support. I will also do my best to support Your Majesty in his endeavor toward a glorious victory," Carlson replied while bowing.

Wilmar nodded in satisfaction, but then, suddenly, he created an invisible soundproof barrier around them. Carlson could sense it. At that moment, he knew their conversation could not be leaked.

"How is the preparation with the devils? Is there any news from them?" Wilmar asked.

"No, Your Majesty. I have also been unable to contact them, and their usual hidden meeting place appears abandoned. It's as if they are trying to cut off all ties with us."

Wilmar frowned at this. He had initiated the coup not only because he was confident in winning the civil war but also because he had received suggestion from the devils. Once the civil war was over, and with the neighboring Vindas Empire having just lost one of its Grand Dukes, the devils had claimed they would take advantage of the situation.

Wilmar found this to be a good development, as it aligned with his plans. He could finally begin spreading his influence beyond his own empire. The Grand Duchy of Larson, positioned right at the border, would be the perfect starting point for his expansionist ambitions now that it had fallen.

However, ever since he carried out the coup, the devils who had occasionally contacted him had strangely cut off all communication. Carlson, who had also been working with the devils, seemed to be experiencing the same thing.

Wilmar felt infuriated. It was clear that the devils had merely used him and then discarded him once they no longer needed him.

But he wasn't surprised. After all, he had made a deal with devils.

"I see," Wilmar said. "If the devils truly intend to run off on their own, then we must sever all ties with them as well. We don't really need them anyway. Without my permission, they will have no room to move within this empire. It's their loss."

"Alright, Your Majesty. This is exactly what I've been thinking as well. It seems they only sought to instigate us before disappearing. I have already done some cleaning, so there will be no evidence linking the Golden Swan Commerce headquarters to the devils."

"Good," Wilmar said with a nod. "Even if the devils have fled, we will continue with our own plan. We will proceed as intended."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"By the way, what about Carsius? What is he doing?" Wilmar asked.

"He is still in seclusion," Carlson replied. "It seems he is still refining some of the divine grade artifacts he stole from the main church."

Wilmar had given Carlson the task of hiding Cardinal Carsius. He couldn't entrust cardinal Carsius to anyone else because they were the only ones who knew about each other's connection to the devils. That was also the reason why Cardinal Carsius chose the Atria Empire as his escape route.

There was no way for Cardinal Carsius to flee to the Vindas Empire or the Doria Empire, as the devil networks in those empires had been completely dismantled by their respective imperial families. If he attempted to escape there, he would be caught immediately.

"He better hurry. He will be useful in our expansion," Wilmar said as he leaned back on his throne. With that, the soundproof barrier vanished.

"Alright, you may go now. Keep up your good work—I am satisfied with your efforts."

"Thank you, Your Majesty. I will do my best," Carlson said, bowing before excusing himself.

Once Wilmar was alone, he smiled and closed his eyes.

"Yes, this is how it should be. I will be the one to have the last laugh. Even when the prophesized time comes, I will still emerge as the winner. Not even the devils will hinder me," he muttered to himself.

After a satisfying meal, Aldrian finally stepped out of the restaurant with the others and decided to take a look at the situation. He told the old man, York, that he would meet him again in the future when he wanted to go to the Rosalind Barony territory. Aldrian thought it would be much better to bring someone familiar with the family and the land.

The city was still in chaos after the bodies of Marquess Parus and Young Master Alexi were discovered. With the top chain of command lost, the forces loyal to the second prince were essentially headless and directionless.

For now, they could only do their best to maintain order and continue their usual duties. However, they still had a few high-ranking cultivators above the Low Grand Duke stage stationed in the city, and they believed that would be sufficient for the time being.

Many soldiers also tried to enter the mayor's mansion, but they couldn't, as there seemed to be an invisible wall preventing them from going inside. Aldrian had already blocked off the entire mansion area so that no one could enter and disturb the people he had saved.

As for catching the killers? The garrison commander, now the strongest among them after Marquess Parus's death, felt that tracking them down would be difficult. Someone

capable of not only killing Marquess Parus but also torturing him beforehand had to be far stronger than him. If the culprit was an assassin, then capturing them would be nearly impossible. The only thing they could do now was maintain order until reinforcements arrived.

Aldrian could sense the chaos as he and the others walked toward the mayor's mansion. For now, he had decided to make this city his base within the empire. The second step in doing so was to clearing out all forces loyal to the second prince. The first step had already been completed when he claimed the entire city as his domain.

As for clearing out the second prince's forces, he had already devised the easiest way to accomplish it.

As he approached the mayor's mansion, he noticed a large congregation of soldiers still attempting to break through his spatial shield. He could only smile at their futile efforts—his shield was strong enough to withstand even a full-powered attack from an Emperor-stage cultivator.

The garrison commander also noticed Aldrian's group and couldn't help but frown. As a cultivator at the peak of the Grand Duke stage, he immediately stepped forward and shouted before Aldrian could get any closer.

"This is a restricted area! Unauthorized parties are forbidden from stepping inside!"

However, Aldrian simply looked at him with a calm expression before sweeping his gaze over the gathered soldiers.

"If you want to know who killed your lord, Parus, then here I am! I am the one who killed him! Anyone who wishes to come, come to the mayor's mansion!"

His voice was slightly raised, but he imbued it with energy, amplifying it so that it echoed throughout the entire city.

The garrison commander, who had just shouted at him, immediately grabbed his ears, feeling as if they were about to burst. The nearest soldiers fared even worse—many collapsed instantly, blood flowing from their ears as the overwhelming force of Aldrian's voice struck them down.

At this moment, the entire city finally realized that something must have happened to Marquess Parus. Many people began emerging from their homes and establishments, curious and unsettled. The forces loyal to the second prince were shaken upon hearing the declaration.

At the site where the bodies of Parus and his son were being transported to a secure location after being taken down from the city walls, the soldiers there made a decision—they would head to the mayor's mansion.

From various parts of the city, people could see many soldiers moving in the same direction—toward the mayor's mansion. The sight sent waves of fear through the citizens, as many believed a great battle was about to erupt within the city. In response, they hurried to find shelter.

However, not everyone hid. Some brave individuals dared to step outside, following the soldiers from a distance. These were the ones who still harbored rebellious hearts, eager to see it for themselves. Was that bastard Parus really dead?

Once they arrived at the scene, their eyes widened in shock. The entire force of the second prince's faction in the city had already surrounded a small group of five people. More than four thousand soldiers, varying in cultivation levels, stood ready with swords, spears, and bows aimed at the group—yet they hesitated to attack.

The leader of the group appeared to be a handsome young man, and many began to wonder—was he truly the one who had claimed responsibility for killing Marquess Parus?

Aldrian glanced around at the sea of soldiers brimming with hostility toward him and his group. Yet, with calm, he simply spoke.

"For those who manage to escape this place after today, spread the word—this city is already mine. Any party that tries to seize it by force will be considered a threat, and I will respond accordingly."

Upon hearing this, the onlookers widened their eyes in shock.

Arrogant—truly arrogant!

This was no different from declaring war against every faction in the empire! Who was this man who dared to speak with such audacity?

No data found.

Chapter 388: Burnt

Hearing Aldrian's arrogant warning, all the soldiers present felt fury, yet they hesitated to attack him. If he was truly the one who killed Marquess Parus, then he had to be at least a high king-stage cultivator. For a cultivator at the king stage, numbers meant nothing, as anyone below that level was merely an ant.

The garrison commander steadied himself, his ears still ringing as if they had nearly burst, and looked at Aldrian warily. What did he mean by *if they could survive this event*? Then, suddenly, he felt an intense heat radiating from the sky. When he looked up to see the source, his eyes widened in shock.

The people instinctively looked up as they, too, felt the sudden wave of heat. What they saw made their hearts tremble.

A massive spatial crack had appeared, opening like a gateway to the void. From within the darkness, a giant fireball emerged, radiating immense power. It slowly pushed its way out, as if preparing to descend upon the land.

The blazing sphere was visible from every corner of the city, drawing the attention of many people, who turned in shock and fear toward it.

"To those who manage to escape alive, consider it your fate. Spread the word of what I've told you all. Good luck."

Aldrian's voice echoed through the air before he and his group suddenly vanished.

Sweat rolled down the garrison commander's forehead as his heart sank into despair. He never took his eyes off the massive fireball, sensing its overwhelming power. This thing could obliterate most of them! Gritting his teeth, he scanned his surroundings.

"Everyone, escape! Run as far as possible!" he shouted before dashing away.

Thousands of soldiers followed, sprinting for their lives. However, after covering about a kilometer, they suddenly crashed into an invisible wall—just like the one that had surrounded the mansion.

"Why is this here too?! We didn't even sense when it was created!" one of the soldiers shouted in panic.

"Attack! Attack! Use our combined strength to break the barrier!"

The garrison commander felt the same desperation as he unleashed his elemental technique in an attempt to break the barrier. Countless elemental attacks struck the invisible wall from all directions, yet it did not budge.

From afar, bystanders watched the soldiers' frantic efforts, their gazes shifting between the futile attacks and the massive fireball in the sky. It had fully emerged from the spatial crack and was now plummeting toward the ground. As if its purpose had been fulfilled, the spatial crack closed behind it.

Even though the bystanders were some distance away, they could still feel the searing heat and immense power radiating from the descending fireball. It was like a miniature sun falling straight toward them.

The trapped soldiers grew even more desperate, their attacks on the barrier becoming increasingly frenzied as the fireball loomed closer.

"Break! I said break!"

"Break!"

Desperate voices rang out as soldiers continued to assault the spatial barrier Aldrian had created. But as the fireball descended, their panic only intensified, and their attacks became more reckless.

"Aaargghh!" The garrison commander screamed in utter desperation as the massive fireball finally reached the ground—

Boom!

The earth trembled violently as a massive explosion erupted, followed by an inferno that spread across the entire area. Thick smoke billowed into the sky, while waves of fire surged like a tidal wave, instantly engulfing countless soldiers in its path.

There was no escape. They had no choice but to face it head-on.

The raging flames consumed everything, reducing lives to nothing more than blackened charcoal and ashes. Their suffering was brief, only a fleeting moment of pain before they were erased from existence, returning to the cycle of reincarnation.

A towering mushroom cloud rose high into the sky, visible from every corner of the city. The sight alone sent chills down the spines of the onlookers. The sheer devastation was undeniable, a single fireball had the power to wipe out an entire army!

The fiery wave finally stopped spreading as it reached the spatial barrier, revealing the full extent of its destruction. Thousands of soldiers had perished, and the surrounding landscape had been completely flattened by the scorching flames.

However, amidst the devastation, onlookers were shocked to see that there were survivors. A handful of soldiers had managed to withstand the blast but their condition was far from good.

Fewer than thirty remained, all of them gravely injured. Some had lost limbs, their flesh burned to charcoal. Others suffered severe burns covering most of their bodies. The luckiest among them had only burns on their hands and parts of their faces. Among this last group was the garrison commander.

Moments before the fireball struck the ground, he made a split-second decision to defend himself, abandoning any attempt to break the barrier. Summoning multiple layers of earth shields, he managed to preserve his life

but the sheer force of the flames shattered his entire defenses, burning his hands in the process.

The other survivors had made the same choice, relying on their own techniques to protect themselves.

All of them were at the peak of the duke stage or stronger. As for those below that level? Most had been completely incinerated, leaving behind no remains. A few corpses remained, but they were burned beyond recognition, reduced to blackened charcoal.

The garrison commander gasped, feeling incredibly lucky to have survived the devastating strike. He looked utterly exhausted, his eyes half-closed. One side of his face was burned, and his armor was cracked in several places, having endured the immense heat of the flames.

With trembling hands, he hastily took out a healing potion and swallowed it before collapsing onto the ground.

As the potion began to take effect, he finally let out a breath of relief. Surveying his surroundings, he could only sigh at the sheer death and destruction that had befallen them. Fires still raged across the landscape, though their intensity had lessened considerably.

Aldrian and his group were nowhere to be seen—but the garrison commander no longer cared. That young man was on an entirely different level.

"What a monster! For a brief moment, I sensed that he was only at the low duke stage... yet he could unleash power like this!" he thought.

He stood up with slight difficulty, glancing to his side as he attempted to pass through the invisible barrier. When he reached out to touch it, his hand met nothing but air.

Stunned, he let out a small bitter smile, mocking himself.

"He played us like ants. Trapped us here, and once he was done, he simply let us go."

There was no humiliation in his voice, only despair.

As a grand duke stage cultivator, he had never felt this helpless before. The experience reminded him of his past—back when he was just a low-level cultivator, gazing at the mighty duke and grand duke stage cultivators with both admiration and fear.

He sighed once again, glancing at the nearby survivors before approaching them. His first priority was his subordinates—some of them were barely clinging to life and would not survive without his aid.

After all, that young man had said that if they survived the attack, he would let them go.

"I have to report that monster's existence to the capital," he thought, as he handed out healing potions to his wounded men.

Aldrian and the others were already at the mansion, meeting with the people he had saved earlier. He decided to make this place his main base of operations until his business in this empire was complete.

When the fireball from the spatial crack struck the ground, they all felt the tremor but none of them paid it any mind as they continued inspecting the mansion.

Sylphia and the other ladies were already helping many naked women, some of whom had regained consciousness. Xin Haotian moved through the mansion, checking each part of the mansion while also assisting those in need.

As for Aldrian, he stood atop the roof, gazing out at his own "creation"—the fireball that had fallen from the sky, wiping out many lives.

He had created the fireball in another location before sending it to this place through a spatial crack. He had adjusted its strength so that some soldiers could survive and spread his warning.

Not all of the soldiers had managed to return, as dozens were still on their way to the mansion. However, upon seeing the giant fireball, they fled in the opposite direction. They, too, could spread the news, which was exactly his intention. He wanted every faction within this empire to understand that this place was now off-limits.

Truthfully, he was leaning toward the rebel forces, but he had his own business and interests here. Besides catching the traitor and visiting the Rosalind family, he had another objective—to stop the civil war.

After identifying who supported the second prince, he had already decided to bring him down. There was no way he would allow those associated with the devils to take control of this empire. It would only bring trouble for him in the future when the prophesied time came.

For him, the most effective way to stop the civil war was to make himself the central focus of all factions. Once news of his takeover of this city spread, many would redirect their attention here, assuming that another faction had entered the conflict.

Although the second prince knew his purpose here was to capture the traitor, he had no idea about his other objectives in this empire. And by the time he realized it, the second prince would already be in his grasp.

After observing the city for a moment, Aldrian connected his mind to someone. He remembered that this man's organization operated in one of the empire's regions.

"Arson, what are you doing right now?"

Chapter 389: The Rumour Spreads

"Master, to think that you finally contacted me! I tried to reach you a year ago but couldn't. Right now, I'm in seclusion at my hideout. Do you have any new orders, Master?" Arson replied after not replying for a few seconds.

"Yes, there will be a new order. I'm currently in Caritas City—I have business in this empire," Aldrian said.

"You're already in the Atria Empire? In a situation like this, you must have something important to do, Master. Others are trying to leave this empire, and Caritas City is already under the second prince's faction after the rebel group led by Baroness Weimar was pushed toward the capital of the barony."

"This city is no longer under the second prince. I've already taken over it."

Arson was stunned. *"What do you mean?"*

"I killed Marquess Parus and his son, along with almost all of his forces in this city. Anyway, you'll hear about it in the next few days."

"..." Arson was truly speechless. He had killed the head of a noble family—one of the second prince's important supporter like it was no big deal. If it were anyone else, Arson would think they were insane, but since it was his master...

Aldrian's voice resounded again. *"I heard from someone that you have a connection to the imperial family. Who is it?"*

He had learned this from Xin Haotian when they once discussed the rumors surrounding the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion.

"It's the second prince, Master. He sometimes uses our services. However, since I—well, became your underling—"

"Slave,"

Aldrian cut in.

"..." There was a slight pause from Arson before he continued. *"Yes, slave... Since I became your slave, Master, I've been distancing the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion from him. I'm afraid of a conflict of interest because, well, you know—we kill others regardless of their identity as long as we're paid."*

"Doesn't that make the second prince suspicious if something happens to you or your organization? I imagine he'd try to look for you, maybe even hunt you down, because of your group's dealings with him."

"Yes, Master. At first, he didn't suspect anything, but as time passed, he began to suspect that we were trying to cut off our connection to him. He seems to have misunderstood, thinking that we were influenced by the first prince to distance ourselves from him," Arson explained.

"The peak was when the coup finally broke out. The second prince considered us a threat that needed to be eliminated. So he tried to hunt us down, but luckily, since we had already reduced our operations outside, they still had difficulty finding us. Our hideout is only known to us, after all, and it's located in an area that few people are aware of."

Aldrian thought for a moment before replying.

"Then, have you basically joined the opposition faction against the second prince's faction now?"

"Well, that's not entirely true. From the rebels' perspective, we're still a force with ties to the second prince, and they would kill us on sight. We're stuck between a rock and a hard place. At this point, we've already suspended all operations because we're essentially being hunted by every faction."

"I see. Then you can come to Caritas. This place is off-limits to those factions. Moreover, I need manpower to manage many things here. I'll provide you with the necessary resources for that."

Arson's expression turned ecstatic. He had been hiding in the hideout for more than a year, spending most of his time in seclusion. He had also forbidden all assassins from leaving unless they needed to gather updates on the outside world, minimizing the risk of being caught by either the second prince's forces or the rebels. Their resources had been steadily depleting since their source of income had completely cut off.

Now that Aldrian had said they could come to the city and receive resources, there was nothing better than this. They could finally breathe fresh air while also working to obtain the resources needed for their cultivation.

"Thank you, Master. I will bring my men to Caritas as soon as possible. But it might take some time since we have to pass through many areas under the second prince's faction to reach Caritas."

"It's alright. I'll be staying here for a while anyway. Good luck on your journey."

With that, Aldrian cut off communication with Arson. He then turned his attention back to the garrison commander, who was tending to his men by giving them healing potions.

Spreading his senses across the city, he noticed that most of the residents had come out of their establishments, all looking in the direction of the "slaughter ground."

Seeing that most residents had finally gathered the courage to come out of their homes and were all focused in the same direction, Aldrian took advantage of the situation.

"To the people of Caritas City, this city has been liberated from the second prince's control. As the one who freed this place, I guarantee its security, and there will no longer be martial law. All citizens may resume your normal work without worrying too much about your safety," Aldrian's voice echoed throughout the city.

"However, for those who think they can do as they please—disturbing the security and order just because I have taken over and there are no soldiers patrolling, mark my words, you will regret your choice before you even have the chance to repent."

His voice carried a slight killing intent, sending a chill down the spines of those who heard it. However, the people of the city also felt relieved—after all, with such a warning in place, who would be crazy enough to take advantage of the situation? This was the voice of the man who had killed Marquess Parus; anyone attempting to stir trouble would essentially be committing suicide.

The remaining soldiers from the second prince's faction also felt the chilling pressure. The garrison commander hurried to treat his men, knowing they needed to leave as soon as possible. He feared that Aldrian might change his mind after granting them his mercy.

Not long after, he and the rest of the survivors of the giant fireball departed, leaving behind many charred corpses or what little remained of them and a ground flattened by destruction.

A few days later, news that caused an uproar throughout the entire Atria Empire spread like wildfire. Many people talked about it, as this was an unexpected development. Who was the person bold enough to oppose both factions in this civil war? Was he from another territory or not? Rumors began to circulate about the one who had killed Marquess Parus.

Some claimed that he was as powerful as an Emperor-stage cultivator, capable of creating a miniature sun to obliterate thousands of soldiers. Others speculated that he was from the neighboring Vindas Empire, seeking to take

advantage of the civil war. There were also whispers that he was a ruthless man who did not hesitate to torture those who opposed him.

However, the people of Caritas spoke of him differently, saying the city was much safer under his rule.

All kinds of rumors caused the mysterious figure to rise in popularity. As the war raged on, many began to believe that Caritas could be a refuge—a place where they could stay safely without being dragged into the conflict. As a result, people started trying to enter the city.

Although the areas under the second prince's faction had already blocked the teleportation portals leading to Caritas, this did not deter others from seeking refuge there. And so, the city of Caritas suddenly became a destination for many within the Atria Empire.

In Weimar City, the situation was tense as the second prince's army could be seen from the city walls. They had set up tents surrounding the escape routes, ensuring that no one could enter or leave the city. The blockade had already lasted for more than a week. Though it was a relatively short time, its effects on the common folk were already apparent.

Food reserves were running low as supplies from other cities and hunting activities had been cut off. The economy had plummeted to its worst state, with trading activities nearly halted due to the blockade. Local merchants could only trade with the city's residents, who were also reluctant to spend much, trying to conserve their wealth.

In conclusion, the city was in a dire state, with its people facing the threat of famine and poverty. However, that was not their only concern—they also feared what fate awaited them in the days to come.

The people of the city lived in constant fear of what would happen if the second prince's army breached their walls. They had heard that the inhabitants of cities aligned with opposing factions had met grim fates.

They were caught in a true dilemma—if the second prince's army won the war, their future would be bleak, but if they continued like this without finding a solution, they would starve to death.

At this moment, atop the city walls, a beautiful woman stood gazing at the blockade. She had striking purple hair and sharp, determined eyes. Her brilliant blue eyes still burned with spirit, undiminished despite the unfavorable circumstances. That same resilience was reflected in the armor she wore—

battered and scarred with slashes and cracks, bearing the marks of countless battles she had fought without ever yielding.

A few moments later, a man clad in knight's armor approached her from behind and bowed slightly.

"Milady, we have news from Caritas City."

Chapter 390: The Caritas City That Draws Attention

The woman looked behind her toward the man. Although her beautifully mature face could captivate any man, the man before her gazed at her with deep reverence. This woman was a powerful cultivator, capable of withstanding an army under the second prince and facing two cultivators of the same level. She was the symbol of their spirit and a guiding light. She was Baroness Charoline Weilmarr.

"What is it?" she asked.

"We have reestablished a connection with the teleportation station inside Caritas, and we've received news that Caritas has already been liberated from the second prince's forces."

Baroness Weilmarr slightly widened her eyes.

"Liberated? By whom?"

"That is the question, milady. We do not know the true identity of the one who liberated the city, but it is said to be the work of a single person. He even killed Marquess Parus and his son and nearly annihilated all of the second prince's forces there," the man said. Then, as if recalling something, he added,

"Oh, and he also issued a warning to all factions in the empire. He declared that whoever tries to take Caritas from him will face the consequences."

She narrowed her eyes. If the liberator's identity was unknown, she couldn't be sure whether he was an ally or not. However, hearing his arrogant warning opened an opportunity for her. Perhaps she could establish a good relationship with this person first—he might even be able to help ease some of her burdens.

For her, the fact that this person had taken over Caritas was good news. She could already imagine that the second prince's forces would have to focus on reclaiming Caritas before they could launch an attack on this city. If they attempted an assault here without securing Caritas, they would be forced to fight without peace of mind, always wary of an attack from behind.

Another crucial factor was that, with their connection to Caritas restored, this city could finally breathe for a while. Now, they could receive food and other essential supplies from Caritas. With the second prince's forces driven out of Caritas, she could already envision Caritas regaining its vitality in no time, relieving some of the burden on Weimar City.

"I will visit Caritas for a while. I believe the second prince will not attack this city while Caritas remains under that person's control. There is no way his forces would risk launching an assault here while Caritas, right behind them, is held by someone else," she said.

The man nodded.

"I will prepare for your departure, milady," he said with a slight bow before excusing himself.

Once he was gone, Baroness Weimar turned her gaze back to the second prince's soldiers, who still blockaded Weimar City. She sighed, relieved that there was finally some good news amidst their dire situation. Her shoulders felt lighter, knowing that the city's denizens could finally breathe and would not have to starve—at least in the short term.

Although this was good news, she still doubted it would last forever. The second prince would undoubtedly want to reclaim Caritas, no matter the cost. If he decided to mobilize a large force, she doubted that person could hold Caritas alone.

But she did not dwell on it for now. At the very least, she would take advantage of the situation while the two cities remained connected.

She could establish a good relationship with this person and work together to support each other. Although Caritas was a city under her barony, and another unknown party had stepped in, she did not consider reclaiming it. Her priority was to gain an ally to help repel the second prince's forces. If that person wished to remain in Caritas, so be it.

If things went south here, she could evacuate the people to Caritas, and vice versa.

With that thought, she stepped down from the top of the city walls and prepared for her journey to Caritas.

At another location, an old man with a walking stick moved through the bustling town, blending in with the townspeople. He appeared no different from an ordinary mortal, his presence devoid of any cultivation aura.

Slowly, he walked toward a food stall and took a seat at a table where a middle-aged man was already sitting.

After settling in, the old man looked at the middle-aged man and asked in a low voice,

"How is it?"

"The security is quite tight, but we have a good chance of passing through without much trouble. I noticed some gaps in their defenses. We can continue our journey to Caritas tonight," the middle-aged man answered.

"Good."

"To think that Master would just barge into the Atria Empire and involve himself in this civil war... He truly doesn't care about anything. After making such an announcement, I doubt the second prince will take this insult lightly. He will likely launch a massive attack on Caritas," the middle-aged man said.

"That's why we must reach Caritas before the second prince's forces arrive. We can help him repel the attack," the old man replied.

The two men were, in fact, Arson Vuran and the First Finger in disguise. They had arrived in this town yesterday, along with others from the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion. This town was the closest civilized place to Caritas, though it was still a considerable distance away. Since traveling through the teleportation station was impossible, they had taken the only option available—making the journey on foot.

It had taken them three days to travel from their hideout to this town, and they estimated that they would need another two days to reach Caritas.

Arson then tapped the table a few times. To an ordinary observer, it was nothing more than the casual tapping of an old man's fingers, something meaningless and unremarkable.

However, this tapping was actually a coded signal used by the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion. Those who recognized it understood its meaning instantly. Unbeknownst to most, dozens of assassins from the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion were already scattered throughout the area. They heard the taps but continued going about their activities as if nothing had happened.

The message was clear: they would move again tonight.

After tapping the table, Arson stood up and walked away from the First Finger. No one in the town realized that the leader of one of the most feared assassin groups in the Atria Empire or even the entire continent was right among them.

At Caritas, the city had become much livelier. Since news spread of its liberation from the second prince's forces, many people had flocked in. The economy was beginning to recover, unhindered by excessive restrictions, as the new ruler had imposed only one rule: do not disturb the security and order of the city.

The people trusted that the new ruler would uphold his word—especially after seeing the consequences for those who had ignored his warning. After the city's liberation, some individuals had failed to take Aldrian's words seriously, causing trouble and preying on the weak. They believed that with the second prince's forces gone, they could act freely without the new ruler knowing, assuming he couldn't possibly oversee everything by himself.

Unfortunately for them, they were gravely mistaken. The entire city had already become Aldrian's domain, and if he so wished, he could know everything that happened within it.

When those criminals began extorting the people and enforcing their own rules without any regard for him, Aldrian rewarded them with swords falling from the sky. They had no time to regret their choices just as he had warned before their heads were pierced by blades that suddenly descended from above.

All Aldrian had to do was sit inside the mansion, focus on his targets, open a spatial crack in the sky above them, and throw ordinary swords through it. With this method, he could punish those who disrespected his warning without ever having to step outside.

Since that day, rumors spread that the new ruler of the city knew everything that happened within its walls. As more people arrived, there were always some who tried to take advantage of the situation. Just like the criminals before them, they foolishly ignored the warnings, and the result? Their corpses were left lying in the streets with swords embedded in their heads.

With repeated incidents like this, the people became certain: the new ruler could see everything within the city. His story was passed on to every newcomer as a warning—if they didn't want to die a foolish death, they must not break his rules.

Most had never seen the new ruler's face, yet they already revered him and placed their faith in his authority.

At this moment, the so-called ruler was seated across from a woman at a table in the mansion's garden. However, the woman was not Sylphia. Instead,

she had striking white hair and a beauty reminiscent of a falling snow—captivating yet cold.

As for Sylphia, she could be seen in the distance, strolling through the vast garden, her fingers grazing the flowers as if she were communicating with them.

Aldrian smiled at the sight before turning his gaze back to Baek Jimin.

"It's rare for just the two of us to sit together like this. When was the last time we spoke alone? Ah, yes—back in the Doria Empire. Anyway, how have you been?" he asked with a smile.