

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

Chapter 6 - Rivas Family

6 months later

Located in the northeastern part of the continent, today in one of the territories of the Doria Empire, more precisely in the northwestern part of the empire in the grand duchy of Rivas, the streets were unusually packed with people. Crowds lined both sides of the street from the city entrance to a huge luxury manor at the corner of the city.

Many were cheering and shouting, welcoming the occupants of a luxurious carriage pulled by four horses with horns like goats. The carriage was escorted by hundreds of soldiers in a parade formation, most of them at the viscount stage and some at the earl stage, indicating the significant importance of the person inside.

Almost everyone in the city was talking about the excitement of the day.

"Why is there a parade today? Is there some kind of ceremony." a person asked the person beside him.

"Don't you know? The daughter of the grand duke Rivas is come back after she is missing for almost 12 years!"

"What? One of the 'Five Shields of Doria'? The youngest member in history? Didn't they say she was lost in the Everlasting Silent Forest because of the devils' traps?"

"That's why it's a miracle that she's come back alive."

"Well it looks like something has changed in the Everlasting Silent Forest, because a few months ago some people who had been missing for a long time returned."

"Seriously?"

"No wonder the grand duke is making such a big deal of this celebration."

Conversations like this could be heard all over the city—in taverns, houses, and restaurants. No one, absolutely no one, was unaware of the event.

In one of the dark alleys far from the hustle and bustle of the streets, three hooded figures gathered, their faces obscured and their auras completely hidden. One of them spoke to the other two.

"The news are true, the Blizzard witch survived back then." said one of them.

"It's really unfortunate, we even lost many members of the 'The Hunters' at that time" said the second figure, from the soft voice which it indicate that this person is female.

"Fret not. Even if she has returned, it doesn't change anything. The plan will still carry on. When darkness covers the world, that will be the time our God will come."

"Our God will come!" shouted the other two.

Just like that silence returned to the dark, narrow alley, leaving no evidence that anyone had been there.

The three-story manor, with its grandeur decoration evident from the front gate and fence are asking admiration from the passerby, the fountain with the statue in front of the manor adding it's elegant that give a prove about the status of the inhabitants.

The manor of the Grand Duke Rivas stood as one of the symbol of the power of the Doria Empire, its territory bordering the Vindas Empire and Devil territory, acting as the empire's spearhead in the northwest with many formidable cultivators. Among them was the current patriarch of the Rivas family and one of the Grand Dukes of the Doria Empire, Giovan Rivas.

A man who appeared middle-aged stood in front of the manor's door at this moment. His short black hair had a few strands of white, showing the effects of time. His blue eyes seemed to have witnessed many tough experiences in life. He wore noble attire that accentuated his tall and gallant stature.

Beside him stood an elegant blonde-haired woman, her youthful appearance and slender body captivating to those who looked at her for too long. She was the wife of the Grand Duke, Elene Rivas. The two of them had been in good spirits since a few months ago when they heard their daughter had suddenly reappeared after more than eleven years of being lost in that forbidden land. As the entourage of the carriage finally came into view, they could not hide their happiness that their daughter was coming home.

When the carriage entered the manor grounds and stopped in front of them, the door opened to reveal the person inside. A long leg stepped out of the carriage, revealing a beautiful face and black hair.

"Irene, my daughter!" Elene rushed to touch and hug her daughter, finally releasing the emotions she had endured for so long. Tears rolled down her cheeks, and even her husband's eyes seemed to hold back tears. Irene smiled upon seeing them once more. To her, it hadn't felt like too long because the time she spent in the secret realm with Aldrey and Aldrian was so precious and beautiful that she had enjoyed every moment.

"I'm home, mother," she said, returning her mother's hug and looking at her father. What she saw was quite different from the last time she had seen him: more wrinkles on his face and strands of white hair mingled with the black. She wondered what had happened while she was gone, but now was not the time for questions. Instead, she allowed herself to indulge in the happy moment of their reunion.

"I'm glad you are back and safe." Giovan said with a heartfelt smile.

"Yes father, It's nice to be home again."

"Let's go child the food had already been served, you must be miss the food here."

After exchanging words of comfort, they entered the manor and headed to the dining room. They ate with delight, their conversation filled with something like "How is family? Are you okay? Were you hurt somewhere? Did you this and that, are you this or that." These questions formed the backdrop of their reunion.

When they finished their meal and gathered in Giovan's workspace, the Grand Duke began to ask more serious questions.

"Now, how did you manage in that place? How did you escape?" Giovan asked, his eyes full of concern.

"After the Devils trapped me in Buran village, I managed to escape and ran towards the Everlasting Silent Forest because that was the only direction I could go. I ran for days until I found a crack in space within a hidden cave. After I entered it, the crack closed itself. When I looked around, I realized it was a secret realm with a small village in it." Irene explained.

"Fucking devils bastards! Wait, a secret realm? Already inhabited?"

"Yes, Father. I lived there because the entrance had closed and didn't open again until a few years ago. I noticed fluctuations from the crack and knew the entrance would open soon. Finally, six months ago, the entrance opened again." Irene answered truthfully, though not revealing everything.

"Who are the inhabitants? I heard that a few months ago, some people who had gone missing returned from that forbidden zone."

"They said their ancestors were also trapped there. Most of them are mortals, and a few have reached the disciple stage. Even though the heaven and earth energy is rich there, they never learned proper cultivation techniques."

"Is that why the ones who entered the deeper part of the forest never returned? Were they trapped in some secret realm?"

"I believed that is the case father." Irene replied.

"By the way, did you happen to meet that bastard from the Flamecrest family? He disappeared around the same time as you and I heard he also came back from there." his father asked.

Hearing her father bring up the topic she most wanted to avoid, Irene nearly screamed in frustration. She took a deep breath and delivered the answer she had prepared in advance.

"No Father, I didn't see him." she answered sweetly, trying to mask her panic, Giovan looked at his daughter for a moment and said.

"It's better if he doesn't return. It would save us some trouble with the Vindas Empire."

Irene forced the best smile she could muster, though her thoughts were something else.

"I'm sorry, Father. I already did the deed with him and even gave birth to your grandson!" she thought.

She decided it was best to reveal this to her parents when the time was right. If her father knew what she had done, he would undoubtedly wage war against the Flamecrest family, potentially sparking a full-scale conflict between the empires.

While her father could be deceived, her mother was another story. Elene's suspicious gaze bore into Irene, sensing that something had changed in her daughter. Irene felt her back grow damp with sweat and knew she needed to escape before things went south.

"Father, Mother, I'd like to return to my room. I'm tired after the long journey and need to rest." she said quickly.

"Oh, go ahead, dear. Take a full rest." Giovan replied, granting his permission.

With that, Irene rushed to her room without looking back, feeling her mother's scrutinizing gaze following her.

Chapter 7 - Flamecrest Family

The uproar in the east also happened in the west. The events that shook the entire continent a few months ago have not receded; instead, they have developed into new stories and rumors, adding spice to the tales about the forbidden zone. On the northwestern side of the Doria Empire, bordering the Grand Duchy of Rivas, is the Vindas Empire.

In that region, the territory is under the Grand Duchy of Flamecrest. This area is known for the 'Blue Inferno' mountain range, a series of volcanic mountains along the northern

border with the Devil Territory. The mountains earn their name from the sulfuric gases that combust under high pressure and temperature, producing an intense blue flame that lights up the range.

1,500 kilometers south of the mountain range lies the capital of the Grand Duchy of Flamecrest, Flamecrest City. With more than 60 million inhabitants, the city bustles with business, much like the capital of the Grand Duchy of Rivas. A distinctive feature of the city is the presence of people with red hair, a trademark of the Flamecrest family, even before they saw the fire dragon symbol on their attire identifies them. Their red hair signifies their compatibility with the fire element, a source of pride for the Flamecrest family.

As night falls in the Grand Duchy, the manor of the Grand Duke is boisterous with elegantly dressed guests adorned with expensive artifacts. Grand Duke Carlos Flamecrest is hosting a banquet to celebrate the return of his son from the forbidden land after being lost for almost 12 years. The atmosphere is lively, with many local nobles and even some from across the Vindas Empire attending the banquet, eager to form connections.

At this moment, the Grand Duke stood in his regal attire on the balcony of the ballroom, ready to give his opening speech. His fiery red hair and usually fierce face now showed a visible happiness that everyone could see.

"Thank you all for coming, no matter where you traveled from. Today is a great day for me and for our family as my son, who was lost for almost 12 years has come back." He raised the glass in his hand, prompting a wave of applause.

"Without further ado, let's welcome our star tonight, my son, Aldrey Flamecrest!"

As the Grand Duke finished his speech, the entire ballroom turned their attention to the stairs beside the balcony. Descending the staircase was a handsome red-haired man in noble attire. His striking face made the ladies swoon at first sight, and his red irises carried a fiery gaze, like a dragon surveying its surroundings.

"Ahhh, that is Master Aldrey, still as handsome as ever."

"Look, I think he is much stronger than when we last saw him."

"I want to marry him."

"Just look at his aura. It seems like he has grown even stronger. The Flamecrest family is truly blessed with one of the most outstanding heirs in their history."

"Indeed, he deserves to be nicknamed 'Fire Apostle.'"

Many praises reached Aldrey's ears, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Aish, I really don't like this kind of event. Sigh, I really miss Irene and Aldrian."

He walked towards the center of the ballroom and stopped there, trying to mask his longing with a composed expression.

"I'm deeply thankful for you all coming tonight. Even though I was gone for more than 11 years and endured many hardships, I am still full of spirit, especially when it comes to eradicating those devils who caused my misfortune." His words were met with enthusiastic applause.

*"Well, I must thank those bastards because due to them, I lived with Irene in the secret realm and brought Aldrian into this world."*he thought.

He smiled and began mingling with the crowd, but then a herald's voice echoed through the room:

"The second princess of the Vindas Empire, Her Highness Loraine Avandi, has arrived!"

The ballroom fell silent, all eyes turning to the entrance. Moments later, a stunning woman with long blonde hair entered. Her sharp eyes and rose-red lips captivated the onlookers, and her slender body and long legs were elegantly draped in a beautiful dress. She walked gracefully towards the center of the ballroom and stopped in front of Aldrey.

"It's nice to see you again, Master Aldrey."

"You are as beautiful as ever, Your Highness. I'm sorry I couldn't greet you properly," Aldrey said, bowing his head slightly.

"It's okay. I'm just glad you are safe and sound."

Their conversation sparked speculation among the guests about the nature of their relationship. It wasn't surprising, as many knew Aldrey and Loraine had been close since their time at the 'Heavenly Path' Academy, the most prestigious institution in the Vindas Empire that produced many powerful cultivators throughout history.

"Thank you for your concern, Your Highness. Also please send my regards to His Majesty."

"I will."

Seeing their interaction, Grand Duke Carlos felt a wave of satisfaction, envisioning the possibility of having a princess as his daughter-in-law. He walked over to Loraine to show his respect and politeness.

"It's good to see you, Your Highness. It must be tiring to travel all the way from the capital," Carlos said warmly.

"It's nothing, Grand Duke Carlos. Aldrey is my friend, and of course, I had to come." She answered with a sweet smile.

"Hahaha, that's wonderful. Now, I don't want to disturb you two. Excuse me." Carlos then left them.

"Your father is still the same Aldrey, still full of vigor. What age is he now? If I remember correctly, it's 497 years, right? Stil young for his stage of cultivation"

"Hahaha, correct, Your Highness."

"I want to be alone!" Aldrey screamed inside his head, "Ah well whatever."

"Excuse me, Your Highness, I have to go somewhere." He then secluded himself from the ballroom. Loraine watched his figure with a natural expression, her thoughts unreadable.

Aldrey walked outside the manor to the backyard and let out a long breath.

"That is tiring and bothersome, but—" He looked back towards the manor.

"Why do I feel weird sensation when I am close to Loraine?"

He didn't know why, but he felt uncomfortable standing close to Loraine earlier. He pondered this seriously, as he never underestimated his instincts but eventually shook his head, setting aside his concerns.

He sat on a bench among the flowers in the garden, enjoying the beautiful moonlight. It was a full moon, shining in all its glory. Alone in a moment like this, he reminisced about his time with his little family of three. As he was lost in thought, he suddenly heard someone else approaching.

"Brother, why are you here alone?" asked a red-haired man who bore an almost identical face to Aldrey. He was much shorter than Aldrey, and a perpetual smile pestered his face.

"Nothing. I just want to be alone. Why did you come here, my beloved little brother Luis? You should be mingling with your noble friends," Aldrey replied.

"Can you stop that? It gives me goosebumps," Luis Flamecrest facepalmed at his older brother's way of speaking.

"Their faces that trying to suck up to me, disgust me." Luis also said.

"Well, I know how you feel, but you know it's all about connections. You'll need some of them when circumstances arise."

"I know, I know. Damn, I really hate politics like that. But isn't it the same for you? You should be talking to them right now."

"Hmmm? Why would I? I'm the one they need. Even if I let them be for a long time, they will still pester me to fulfill their agendas," Aldrey answered with a smile, raising his head to the sky. Sometimes, Luis really wanted to punch his older brother's arrogant face, but he only sighed and sat beside him.

"Brother, can you tell me what you experienced in that place? I'm curious about the details. All I know is what everyone else does—that the Devils suddenly appeared on the south border to trap you and a few others, including the 'Blizzard Witch'."

Aldrey smiled and began recounting his story, from the time he battled the devils to when he trapped in the secret realm. He carefully excluded any mention of his relationship with Irene and of course, Aldrian. Matters related to Irene and Aldrian were too delicate to be shared carelessly, even with his little brother.

The idea of revealing that the heirs of two families from two historically unharmonious empires had a child without their families consent was unthinkable. Given the high standing of both families in their respective empires, such a revelation could cause an uproar and significantly increase tensions among the noble families.

Aldrey knew that the Flamecrest family had many rivals and enemies both within and outside the empire. He was acutely aware that any sign of discord could be exploited, potentially creating a crisis that their adversaries would not hesitate to capitalize on. The potential consequences of the truth getting out weighed heavily on him, guiding his decision to keep it hidden for now.

The siblings continued their conversation under the beautiful moonlight. Despite the serene setting, Aldrey's mind remained vigilant, aware of the delicate balance he needed to maintain to protect those he loved and the future he hoped to secure.

Chapter 8 - The Unorthodox Cultivator And The Devils

Southeastern side of the continent,

Most of the population of the Barisan continent cultivate energy in a more 'safer' manner. Cultivating is like balancing yin and yang inside one's body, and usually the cultivation techniques they use lean towards yang in nature, warm and positive. But that is not the case with some people who choose a more 'extreme' way of cultivation in this part of the continent like the demon cultivator and devil cultivator.

The demon cultivator, also known as the unorthodox cultivator, use cultivation techniques that lean towards yin in nature—cold and negative. The way they cultivate is harsher and can sometimes harm or even kill the cultivator. It's no wonder the energy exuded from demonic cultivators is darker and more sinister than that of orthodox cultivators, though less so than that of devil cultivators.

The difference between devils and demonic cultivators lies in how they cultivate their negative energy. Demon cultivators manage their negative energy in a more controllable manner with the balance of yin and yang. Although this approach is more challenging, demon cultivators still experience positive human emotions. When they feel love, they cherish it to the extreme; when they like something, they do so to the extreme, and so on.

Because of these unique traits, demon cultivators are often shunned and antagonized by orthodox cultivators but are not hated as much as devil cultivators.

The hierarchy of the demon territory is composed of many sects with ironclad rules: if you want to be a leader, you have to prove your strength. This is why the Piercing Heaven Sect remains the top behemoth of the demon territory and is considered the strongest sect, effectively representing the demonic cultivators. It is said that the creator of the Piercing Heaven Sect is a descendant of the Heavenly Demon, whom demonic cultivators revere and worship.

The Piercing Heaven Sect occupies a vast land of 1000 km², featuring many beautiful towering mountains that pierce the clouds. The sect itself is located among these mountains. The serene and beautiful landscape contrasts sharply with the sinister image often associated with demonic cultivators.

In one of the large Chinese-style buildings, the sect leader of the Piercing Heaven Sect gathered with the elders to discuss recent issues.

"The change that happened in the Everlasting Silent Forest is truly astonishing. Does anyone know why it happened?" one of the grand elders said.

"We still don't know yet. The Sword Demon, who got lost in that forbidden place 500 years ago and also returned a few months ago, is difficult to contact. We still can't reach him." answered one of the elders.

"Forget that lunatic, If he wants to hide himself, it would be difficult even for the 'Bloodhounds' to track him. Are there any other demonic cultivators of the past who have returned? We could try to ask them."

"We're still trying to reach them. We should have results within a week."

A middle-aged man with a white robe, black hair and a short beard sat in the central chair, the seat of the sect leader. His handsome face, sharp eyes, and sturdy body radiated the charisma of a leader everyone must follow.

"Whatever it is, the change in the Everlasting Silent Forest might be an opportunity, we might find something interesting inside that unexplored land." the sect leader said, prompting the elders to fall silent and listen attentively.

"We can explore the land and assess the danger. Perhaps that land will lose its status as forbidden zone and can be claimed by those greedy orthodox cultivators or worse, the devils."

The elders agreed with the sect leader, but one of them voiced his doubts.

"Is there any connection between the change in the Everlasting Silent Forest and the phenomenon from 10 years ago?"

The hall fell silent. They were still in awe of the spectacular sight from that day—the power they felt and the aura of those dragons and phoenixes, plus the sky that seemed to be delivering a divine sign, were etched in their minds.

"Maybe yes, maybe no. Anyhow, we must take the initiative. Send our disciples to the Everlasting Silent Forest as soon as possible," ordered the sect leader.

"Yes, Sect Leader!"

The elders then dispersed, leaving the sect leader alone. Similar discussions were happening across the continent, with the Everlasting Silent Forest as the center of attention.

Somewhere on the northern side of the continent,

The Devils, is the cultivators who practiced a unique and sinister form of cultivation. The origin of their cultivation manual was unknown, but all devil cultivators followed the same path. They harnessed the accumulation of negative energy in the world, which made them more violent and difficult to control.

The accumulation negative energy, often referred to as devil energy is the energy that came from the negative energy of living being such as pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth. These energies were abundant throughout the universe, providing a vast reservoir for the devils to draw upon. In exchange for forsaking their virtues and embracing this malevolent power, devil cultivators gained extraordinary strength that was difficult to match within the same realm, except by certain exceptional individuals.

These cultivators, devoid of compassion, feelings, or mercy, became the embodiment of true villainy. Their loyalty lay solely with their devil god, whom they worshipped as the ultimate power.

This is one of the most dangerous place on the continent, not because it's classified as a forbidden zone though it might be for some, but because it is the territory of devil cultivators. Anyone who enters the devil territory is immediately engulfed by an eerie aura and atmosphere, saturated with negative energy, if outsiders are not strong enough and are exposed to this environment for too long, they risk losing their minds. This is a land without laws where the weak can be consumed by the strong and that can be meant literally.

In the center of the devil territory stands a castle shaped like a giant altar, surrounded symmetrically by six pointed structures. The sky above the castle region is a menacing red and dark hue, and the surrounding landscape is littered with the bones of both humans and beasts, adding to the eerie atmosphere. The scent of blood and rotting corpses pervades the area, making one wonder how any living being could survive in such an environment.

In the midst of this desolate landscape, a hooded figure walked casually towards the castle, stopping in front of its giant gate.

"I come to report to the devil lord." The hooded with man voice said.

The two gate guardians, with their disfigured faces, scrutinized the figure before making a hand movement that caused the gate to open on its own. The figure entered the castle, stepping into a hallway dimly lit by torches that lined the walls, their flickering light casting ominous shadows. The end of the hallway was obscured by darkness.

As he walked, the hooded figure passed numerous statues of goat-like beasts and he sometimes can heard a few people screaming from who knows somewhere inside the castle.

He kept walking until he reached a large dark room dimly lit by torches on the surrounding walls. Inside this room were four silhouetted figures. Three figures were sitting around a round table with seven chairs, while one figure sat on a throne at the end of the room. The man on the throne was accompanied by two naked women, each with a choke chain connected to the throne. They rested their heads on his legs, their expressions deadpan and bruises visible on some parts of their bodies, while the man leaned his head on his hand.

The hooded man then bowed to the one sitting on the throne, a burly man who held the highest authority in the devil territory—the devil lord.

"My lord, I bring news to you."

The devil lord lifted his head and looked at the figure with his red eyes.

"The 'Fire Apostle' and 'Blizzard Witch' came back from Everlasting Silent Forest. We also saw some of the devil cultivators from the past, but they were killed by the cultivators from Vindas Empire and Doria Empire." the man said, waiting for a response.

"With all those missing people returned, something has happened in the Everlasting Silent Forest. It looks like we have to adjust our plan, but even with the return of the 'Fire Apostle' and the 'Blizzard Witch,' it will not change anything." the devil lord said.

"Kekekeke, the lust devil will be very happy to hear that the Blizzard Witch has returned." said one of the silhouettes.

"Snort, I just hope he doesn't screw up our plan." said another silhouette with an arrogant face, his tone full of contempt.

The last silhouette remained silent, but one could see the woman's body with her arm on top of the table, her head tilted, leaning on one of her hands.

"Keep watching the Everlasting Silent Forest. We can't underestimate the hidden 'thing' inside that place, and we will not fail like our ancestors did 3 million years ago." the devil lord ordered.

"Yes, my lord!" answered the others, except for the woman.

The silhouette excused himself from the room, leaving the others to execute their lord's orders.

"The day of the prophecy will come, and the devil god will descend." the devil lord thought to himself. Silence returned to the dark room, leaving only the crackling sound of the fire torches.