

## Supreme M 511

### Chapter 511 The Day After Part 2

"I'm so sorry you had to go through that." Kamila stuttered between hiccups.

"Through that what?" Lith's mind was still numb, her words made no sense to him.

"You know my personal file by heart. I've killed people, beasts, monsters, and even younglings in the past. I've faced much stronger opponents and seen worse bloodshed. What happened during this mission is far from being a novelty.

"I can't understand why you are making a big deal of it, even though I must admit that this time everything felt... wrong." Lith was the first one being baffled by his own reaction.

"Of course it did!" She could tell from his expression that Lith was struggling to put his thoughts into words.

"It's because I know your personal file that I know you have never killed someone who was fighting to protect their family, no matter their race."

Lith pondered her words before realizing that she was right. In the past, all of his opponents had been people who either had tried to kill him, or those whose interests clashed with his own.

"Let's be honest, even if those wargs were actually capable of overcoming their violent urges, they had to be put down. What made them human also made them dangerous beyond reason." Kamila said as Lith nodded for her to continue.

"They were an Abomination's breeding ground, and even if they weren't, they couldn't coexist with us. With their spawn rate, the amount of food they need grows exponentially. In the long run, either them or us would've been forced to starve.

"Yet all of our reasoning doesn't change that, in a way, they were innocents. There was no malice behind their actions, only the will to provide their beloved ones a better future, which is exactly what you do from a tender age.

"It doesn't matter if you did it out of duty or because this Tezka forced your hand, either way, you have been forced to kill yourself over and over."

Lith remained dumbstruck at the realization. The act of killing the wargs was nothing but a drop in the ocean for him. Even the farmer's death wouldn't have left such a strong impression if not for the man's tragic past being so similar to his own.

Lith didn't feel bad for them, he felt bad because he had walked more than one mile in their shoes. He knew how hard it was to fight against impossible odds, just to fail miserably because of an unavoidable fate, like it happened with Carl.

"Are you saying I'm feeling bad for myself?" Lith said with a flat tone, the numbness still paralyzing his feelings.

"Yes! And you have every right to. Because you did the wrong thing for the right reasons and because this job just took away a piece of your heart."

She angrily slammed her fist on the table, yet her tears never stopped.

"Why are you crying? Why are you so angry?" Lith asked.

"I'm angry because of what the army made you do. They can call it collateral damage, or with any fancy word they want, but it's still murder. I'm crying because you can't." She said while placing her hand above his heart.

"You don't have to cry in my stead." He replied.

"I want to. Someone has to. Otherwise you'll just shrug everything off like it's nothing and add another scar in here." Kamila placed her hand above his heart.

"Believe me, I know that there are wounds that never heal. They can get better, but the pain is always there." She remembered the pain of living her early life feeling nothing but a tool in her parents' hands.

How difficult it had been to leave everything behind, even her beloved sister Zinya, to have at least a chance at happiness. After Kamila joined the army, her father had disowned her, breaking her heart.

He later revoked it when she became a Lieutenant, but he only did it with the aim of exploiting her authority. She had hoped that time and distance would help her parents to understand how much they loved her.

It worked. Unfortunately, their love amounted to nothing. The realization hurt her deeply, but at the same time, it set her free. At that point, it was Kamila's turn to disown her family and change her last name.

Family had become a four letter word for her, and it was one of the reasons why she had yet to marry.

"I know how hard it must be even talking about this. There is no escape from such ugly events, but you don't have to bottle them up, nor to face them alone. Do you have plans for tonight?" She asked.

Lith shook his head. He was way ahead of schedule for his rounds. Unless an emergency happened, he had at least two free weeks.

"Then it's a date. I'd love to leave early, but my supervisor would skin me. We are currently understaffed." She said while wiping off her tears.

"These are the spare keys for my apartment. Wait for me there, I'll come back as soon as I can." She took the recording device and left before Lith could reply. Even in his confused state, he realized how big of a step it was for her.

Giving him free access to her apartment meant she was willing to further deepen their relationship.

'I doubt she usually brings along spare keys, unless she had been considering to give them to me for a while.' He thought.

'Agreed.' Solus sighed. 'She is completely right. The mission with the wargs pushed all of our wrong buttons. I feel like crap too and I'm not in the mood of remaining alone either. I can't stand being the third wheel, not today.'

'Can you please bring me to Lutia and call Tista? I could really use a friend.'

'Of course I can.' Lith replied as he left the army's headquarters for the local branch of the Mage Association. Solus didn't understand why he took that detour instead of using the army's Warp Gate until he bought another communication amulet.

'I know how bad you feel and how insensitive I can be, especially when I'm neck deep into my own shit. You shouldn't spend the night holed up in the ring while I have fun. You deserve so much more and I'm sorry I can't give it to you.' He thought.

'The least I can do is to give you as much independence as I can.' He had Solus imprint her own amulet before sharing with her his rune, Kalla's and Tista's. Solus was deeply moved by his gesture.

Even though she had never expressed it, Solus had long since desired to have a way to freely talk with her friends without going through Lith every time. It was the first present he had ever given her, and it was akin to freedom.

Solus didn't perceive it as distancing himself from her, quite the opposite. Lith was recognizing her as an individual, giving her some personal space and his trust. They shared an enormous pocket dimension, yet until that day it never contained anything of hers.

That communication amulet was her very first possession in over twelve years. She loved both Lith and the amulet beyond what words could express.

### Chapter 512 The Day After Part 3

As joy overwhelmed Solus, she couldn't help but wonder what would've happened if she had made her move before Kamila did.

Solus was hurt and so was Lith. Maybe it could have been the right time to reveal him her human form. Maybe, by sharing their weaknesses they could have grown closer and stronger.

Unfortunately, happiness was but a temporary respite before her wounds ached again. Their bond made them experience each other's suffering. The combined emotional pain was unbearable to her.

'I need some time to understand how much of what I'm feeling is because of him and how much it's because of me.' She thought as Lith brought her back to the mana geyser near Lutia.

In her tower form, Solus could remain separated from Lith for a prolonged time without any of her abilities being diminished. As soon as he left, Solus asked Tista to join her.

In the past, Scarlett had told them that Lith was corrupting Solus. Back then, she had given no importance to those words. After what had happened with the wargs, she needed time, distance, and a friend to make sure that they didn't hold any truth.

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House Ernas, Ernas Grand Duchy.

Jirni's birthday was nearing and the entire household was busy with the preparations. Usually she would keep things simple, making it a social event of small importance. Her job as a Royal Constable coupled with her personality didn't make her very amiable.

The events in Othre, however, had forced her hand. The Crown had decided to award Jirni for her services during the celebration, using her as an example for the other ancient noble households.

This made her guest list much longer than usual and not limited only to her closest friends and family members. It was the reason why she had recalled home all of her children and invited most of Lith's family.

Aside from her eldest son, Gunyin, who would inherit the title of Duke in case anything happened to his parents, everyone else hadn't attended to a real social event in years.

After finishing the academy, Quylla had been working in the light department of the White Griffon. After a couple of failed attempts as an adventurer, she was usually too busy with her research to take part in any non mandatory celebration.

Becoming a Professor without solid achievements was impossible. After realizing she wasn't a fighter material, Quylla was resigned to obtain that role by contributing to expand the magical knowledge of the Kingdom.

That kind of discoveries required time and effort. Quylla was also determined to having a family of her own, so between her research and her social life she didn't have much free time left.

Jirni missed her, but at the same time was really happy that Quylla had overcome her trauma and managed to live independently. Also, she seemed to have the most successful romantic life among her sisters.

"Are you finally going to introduce to me this boyfriend of yours?" Jirni asked while the butler served tea and pastries as the entire family was taking a break in the living room.

She already knew everything about him. She had performed a full background check the moment Quylla had mentioned him twice.

When she started to speak with Jirni about her boyfriends, it meant things were getting serious and so would Jirni. She feigned ignorance only to not make Quylla feel pressured or scare him away.

Most young men would quake in their boots just by hearing Jirni's name. Everyone had something to hide and even if they didn't, their families would.

"I hope so, mom." Quylla sighed. Time and her adoptive parents loving care had turned the skinny and child looking small girl into a pretty young woman. She was now 1.65 meters (5'5") tall with long brown hair with shades of silver which proved her affinity for light magic.

"I really like Anathor, but I'm starting to fear he doesn't feel the same. Either that or he has something to hide, which would be even worse. He's making too much of a fuss about meeting you and dad. It's suspicious."

'My thoughts exactly.' Jirni inwardly nodded.

"Don't worry, dear. Maybe he is just shy or he doesn't feel yet ready to marry." She actually said, not wanting to sound paranoid. Yet she was proud of her daughter not letting her feelings preventing her from using her brain.

"For a noble, meeting the parents is a big step forward."

"Yeah, or maybe he's just another jerk." Quylla grunted. Being a member of a very powerful family and a powerful mage, she had learned most of her lessons the hard way. Men would usually approach her and her sisters with a hidden agenda.

"Well, at least you have someone." Friya snarled while sipping her tea.

"I'm single for months and my last boyfriend lasted less than the effects of a potion."

After Nalear's attack, she had become wary of both men and women. Friya was a gorgeous girl, 1.67 meters (5'6") tall, with long black hair with shades of red held up in a ponytail.

Her soft curves and ample bosom usually brought her the wrong kind of attention. After leaving the White Griffon, she had founded her own mercenary group which had a remarkable turnover of its members.

Most of them would leave after making and failing a pass at their indomitable leader. Friya didn't join the army to not have to compete with Phloria again and she had learned from her time as Assistant Professor that she didn't enjoy teaching.

The missions regarding monsters were so difficult and most requests from the nobles so disgusting that she was seriously reconsidering her career.

'If I have to risk my life again for pocket change, I may as well join the army or the Association.' She inwardly grumbled. After paying for the equipment and covering the travel expenses, even killing a tribe of monsters didn't pay much.

"That's because you have high standards and you travel too much." Phloria shrugged.

"Unless you start dating the members of your unit, only gold diggers will be willing to put up with your crazy schedule."

"Said the one who didn't have a single date for over a year after dumping her boyfriend." Friya's retort made Phloria spill most of her tea on the table. It was an unwritten family rule that only their parents were allowed to mention Lith in front of her.

"Boot camp is no vacation. After that, I was just too busy." Phloria quickly regained her cool.

"Please, even I don't need over six months to get a date. I think you made a mistake breaking up like that. You could have just taken a pause." Friya was still angry at her sister.

Lith was Friya's best friend and the only man beside Orion she was able to fully trust. She blamed Phloria for cutting him off their lives.

"Agreed." Quylla, Jirni, Orion, and even Lucky said in unison.

The big dog had evolved into a magical beast, becoming able to talk and reason. It had also earned him a spot at the family table and a strict diet.

"It's not because of lack of trying on my part." Phloria said while blushing violently, noticing that most of the house staff was nodding at the family's statement.

"In fact, I do have a date for the gala." She said leaving even the butler with his mouth wide open.

Chapter 513 The Day After Part 4

"Is this guy for real or is he just someone you've made up to avoid the crossfire?" Friya asked.

"Kallion is real and just for your information, he is my boyfriend." Phloria didn't even try to hide the pride in her voice. She had much more difficulty compared to her sisters finding someone to date.

Phloria was a very tall woman by Mogar's standards with her 1.8 (5'11") meters. She had long black hair with shades of blue, hazel eyes, and the build of a professional swimmer.

Her features weren't as cute as Quylla's and she was nowhere as curvy as Friya. She was taller, stronger, and magically more powerful than most of the male population, which made her quite intimidating at first sight.

Even a second or third might not help. Phloria was pretty, but her serious expression coupled with her physique gave the impression she could kill a man with just one hand.

When her suitors discovered it actually was an easy feat for her, they would usually run away.

"Why have you never mentioned him before?" Jirni was really curious to meet this Kallion. He had to be either a remarkable man or a fool.

"Because I wasn't sure if he is looking for a fling, a relationship, or something more. Actually, I'm still not sure. Since I don't think that more dates can clear things up, I decided to see if he's willing to meet you and he said yes."

She said while gloating at the thought that her worst fears hadn't come to pass. Kallion's choice meant he was serious about them, otherwise he wouldn't dare face her parents.

"Whatever. I bet he is a fool." Orion's voice was sour like an unripe lemon.

"You should have kept the little monster. He at least had a spine. Not to mention he is collecting titles like they are autumn leaves. Gods, I never thought I would say it, but I miss him so much."

"Dad, you never liked Lith when he was my boyfriend! You never like any of them. I'm sure that if we were to get back together you wouldn't like him again!" Phloria rebuked, obtaining an approving nod from the rest of the family.

"Phloria is right, dad." Friya said. "Try not to ruin everything for Quylla and Phloria. We deserve your support, not your sabotage."

"I'm really glad to hear that, dear." Jirni said with a soft smile that gave her daughters the creeps. It was the kind of warm, motherly smile that she usually displayed before landing a killing blow.

"It would have been so awkward introducing Lith's lovely girlfriend to you otherwise." As usual, Jirni didn't disappoint them. Most of their tea fell onto the table while a couple of cups broke into pieces. Phloria's and Orion's.

'It's over. Jirni already met her and she is giving her approval. She would never call a gold digger "lovely".' Orion inwardly griped, feeling his heart sink.

"Her name is Kamila. She is a smart woman who will become my apprentice in a while."

"Are they..." Phloria attempted to ask with a casual tone.

"Planning to marry?" Jirni interrupted her to land another sucker punch. "Maybe. All I can tell you is that they seemed really close back in Othre and Elina was crazy about her after Lith brought Kamila home a few months ago for his birthday."

The rest of the cups shattered in unison, making the butler emit a low whine. He had just finished cleaning the floor for the second time in less than five minutes.

"Too bad, I liked him." Lucky said. "He had a pleasant smell and whenever Phloria was worried about my weight, he slimmed me down a bit."

"First, he's not dead. Second, he did what?" Even though they broke up three years back, Phloria still felt a bit hurt at the idea that even after being together through thick and thin she had only scraped the surface of the living mystery that was Lith.

At the same time, learning he had cared so much for her that he had even kept Lucky healthy, deeply moved her. Phloria wasn't the kind of woman who would dwell on the past.

She had moved on, yet she had never forgotten about what they had and what they could have become. Jirni didn't miss the lingering affection reflected in her daughter's eyes and exploited that moment to give Phloria advice.

"I understand why you left him and in hindsight, I think you did the right thing. You were too young and had yet to discover who you really were or what you wanted. Now things are different. Sometimes you have to take a step back before being able to move forward."

Jirni had no desire to force Phloria or Lith into a relationship. It was their life, their choice. She only wanted them to realize how much they meant to each other and that they didn't have much time left before their feelings turned into nothing more than a pleasant memory.

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Trawn Woods, Solus's Tower.

Unlike the rest of her family, Tista had no need for Jirni's etiquette boot camp. The Verhen household had never missed one of her birthdays. They were nervous as heck but up to the challenge.

The more Lith's and Tista's reputations grew, the more often they would be involved in social events. They had decided it was time to suck it up and stop avoiding the problem.

Tista would have loved to spend some time with Quylla and Friya. They had become good friends during her time at the academy, when Quylla was retaking her fifth year.

Solus took priority, though. Tista had never heard Solus so shaken and the opportunity to spend a few days together without Lith meddling was too good to turn it down.

"Wow, you are gorgeous!" Tista said after Solus showed her humanoid body to her.

"If that's a joke, it's not funny. I'm a midget and even if this is actually a template of my real body, I have no damn features. I could look like a witch, have green skin, or only my maker knows what." Solus pouted.

Being called gorgeous by Tista sounded more condescending than complimentary. Even if Solus's real face was that of a goddess, she would still look like an ugly duckling compared to her friend.

"Someone is really grumpy today. Are you sure my brother isn't around?" Tista was surprised and hurt by Solus's outburst. She had just arrived and knew nothing about the wargs mission.

Tista thought that after longing for a body for so long, Solus would rejoice and hug her. Such behavior was completely out of character.

"I wish he was here." Solus sobbed. Small drops of golden light streamed down her face, disappearing the moment they left her skin.

"At least I could blame him for how I feel. I wouldn't have to face this horrible void that is eating me from the inside alone. How can you people stand all of this silence? It's driving me crazy!" Her shout echoed throughout the tower.

Like it had happened in Othre, Solus and Lith were so far from each other that their mind link was broken, no matter how hard she tried. Back then, though, the separation had only lasted for a little while and she had been so worried that her mind was kept busy.

Now she had remained completely alone for hours until Tista had finished her business and joined her. During that time, Solus had realized that her problems were worse than she thought.

#### Chapter 514 The Day After Part 5

Solus broke into tears and hugged Tista.

Only after a few minutes, did she manage to find the strength to tell Tista everything that had happened since Lith's birthday. The discovery of having finally acquired a body made of light, how her happiness had turned into disappointment while testing her new limitations.

Back when Solus was just a ring, human contact was simply impossible. It made her life lonely, but at the same time, it was easier to accept her fate, since she had no other option besides enduring.

Now she was constantly conflicted about whether or not to share her new form with Lith. On one hand, she felt guilty for keeping it a secret, but she only did it because she was afraid of ruining his relationship with Kamila.

On the other hand, it was her opportunity to make her move on him and understand if the deep feelings they had for each other were just friendship or if they could develop into something more.

Solus's words were like a flood and Tista never interrupted her, not even when she told her about their encounter with Scarlett the Scorpicores, about the existence of cursed objects, which Solus was supposed to be, nor when she recounted the story about the wargs.

"Let me get this straight." Solus's narration had been a bit incoherent, jumping from past to present events. Tista needed to make sure she had a clear picture.

"You are supposed to be either a sentient tower or a soul trapped inside it. You believe you have romantic feelings for my brother, who is allegedly corrupting your mind, and you feel guilty for how you reacted during the wargs' onslaught?"

"Yes." Solus nodded while wiping her tears. "You are oversimplifying things a bit, but yes."

"That's quite a lot to take in all at once. I really need to sit down." Tista felt light headed from all the sudden revelations. Having spent the last hour and a half standing in the middle of the tower's ground floor with Solus hugging her so tight that she had squeezed the air out of her lungs didn't help.

Despite her diminutive stature, Solus was really strong, even by Awakened standards. She Warped them both inside Tista's room, leaving her friend flabbergasted as she sat down on the bed.

"Why are we in my room?" Tista asked.

"Because I don't think we should get inside Lith's without his permission."

"No, I mean why are we not inside your room?"

"I never thought about making one for me." Solus stuttered.

"Okay, let's talk about one thing at a time. I have no idea what a cursed object is exactly, but I'm certain that you are not just a thing. You think, reason, have feelings, and gods, you're too messed up to be anything but human."

"Thanks. I guess." Solus looked on in confusion as Tista was holding her own head between her hands, trying to find the right words to help Solus.

"Why do you feel bad about the wargs, exactly? It's not like you had much of a choice. Sure, it was a situation that would give me nightmares for months, heck, I still do dream about Othre's flesh monsters, but according to your own words, you've seen much worse. What's different this time?"

"I'm different! Usually, amid all that chaos, while your brother only thinks about how to eliminate the threats around him, I'm the one who is worried about his survival. I'm the one that steers his emotional reins to make sure he remains human.

"This time, he was the one empathizing with the wargs' sacrifice while all I could think about were my own hopes and dreams. I didn't cry for them, but for myself. I wasn't angry at Tezka for what he had done to them, but for what he had done to me.

"I felt so betrayed when I discovered that the mutated wargs were puppets in his hands instead of the beacon of hope I had made them out to be in my head, that I gave into my anger without thinking about the consequences.

"I could have killed us both. Maybe I really am a cursed object. Only a monster could be so egotistical in the face of such terrible events." She hiccupped.

"So, you're sad that you're becoming human?" Tista had a hard time suppressing a sneer.

"Honestly, I already find it amazing that you have lived your entire life caring only about other people's feelings, to the point of trampling over your own. You're setting your standards too high, Solus. Being egotistical is the proof of being human.

"You can't call yourself a monster for a single slip up. Nobody's perfect."

"At first, I thought it was Lith influencing my emotions, but even after being separated for a while, I still feel the same. I mean, I feel bad for the wargs and for the farmer's family, but most of all, I feel stupid for having fallen for the Abomination's deception.

"I feel betrayed, like something important has been robbed from me. Also, I feel guilty because my first thought was blaming Lith for my own thoughts and actions. Once he left me here, I felt better for a while, but as time passed, I felt much worse.

"He may make the world appear bleaker and colder, but at the same time, he fills me with confidence. Lith's unwavering determination is something I got too used to. Without it, my doubts and insecurities eat at me from the inside."

"Well, saying that my brother goes around corrupting people is too much." Tista shook her head. "It makes him sound like some dark lord hell bent on world's domination."

"In the land of Mogar, where the shadows die." Solus chuckled at her joke.

"The what?"

"Nothing. Something only Lith would understand." Solus shrugged.

"And that's the real core of your problem. Being reliant on someone is a good thing, being dependant, is not. I'm not questioning your feelings, but you've lived all this time as nothing but his secretary." Tista would have slapped her brother for being so inconsiderate. Luckily for him, he was beyond her arm's reach

"You gave yourself such a small role in your own life that you didn't even make a room for yourself! You need your own spaces, dammit! Buy yourself some clothes, some furniture, you can't spend your life being Lith's ring.

"The relationship you two have is wonderful, but it becomes unhealthy the moment it prevents the both of you from growing further. As long as Lith is the only man you know, you'll never understand if what you feel for him his love or just affection."

"But..." Solus timidly replied.

"No buts! You made his room, mine, now make your own!" Tista ordered.

"How should I make it?"

"How should I know? It's your room, you are the one who has to like it."

"I don't know what I like." Solus lowered her gaze in embarrassment.

"Can you leave the tower's premises?" Tista asked.

"Yes, if I return to my ring form."

"Do you have money?"

"Plenty in my pocket dimension."

"Then get changed! Today, I'm going to teach you all about shopping."

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Lith woke up the next morning in Kamila's bed. His memory was fuzzy. The last thing he remembered was returning to Belius after leaving Solus in Lutia.

'My clothes are on, which is new but unsurprising. I was quite messed up yesterday and definitely not in the mood for...'

His train of thought derailed when he realized that he couldn't move.

Chapter 515 The Day After Part 6

His battles senses awakened immediately, clearing his mind and priming his body. Lith remembered how after reaching Belius, he had noticed that his pain and suffering had decreased remarkably.

The mental relief had been so intoxicating that he felt like he could break a random stranger's neck with the same ease he could order a beer. His conscience remained as dead as a doornail until someone bumped into him and Lith almost gave in to his impulses.

Until he thought about what his family, Kamila, and Solus would think of him if he actually did it. Only then did he regain his common sense. He could easily make up a lie for the local constables, but he couldn't lie to them.

'Is this really who I am without Solus and without a mission? Do I really not give a rat's ass about other people's lives?' It took barely a single minute to admit to himself that the answer was "yes" to both questions.

Just like back when he was still a kid on Mogar, he didn't care about hurting others as long as he was certain he could get away with it. Yet all those years since then had changed him enough to realize how wrong it was, to the point that he was almost scared of himself.

His next move had been going to a bar to drink. Alcohol made him softer and more susceptible to emotions. Lith drank until he was certain he would think about it at least twice before offing someone for petty reasons.

Only then did he go to Kamila's home, where he fell asleep due to the boredom of waiting.

'Whoever bound me is about to enter in a world of pain once I...' His angry train of thought derailed when a simple air spell lifted the bedsheet revealing Kamila snuggled up between his arms wearing a thin nightgown.

"Is that a spell in your hand, or are you just happy to see me?" She asked with a sleepy voice as the small storm in Lith's right hand faded away.

"How did we end up like this?" Lith asked pointing at his left arm and leg stuck under her body.

"Well, when I returned home last night, someone had one drink too many and screwed up all my plans for our evening." She sighed while thinking about the time and effort she had wasted to come up with a way to console him and pick up his favourite dishes from their favourite restaurant.

"Then, as soon as I got in bed, you clamped me like a bear trap and here I am."

Lith checked his pocket watch, discovering it was quite late in the morning.

"Why didn't you wake me up? You should be at work already." Lith felt like an idiot, yet he didn't let go of her. Kamila's warmth was keeping the cold, indifferent void his mind experienced while Lith was away from Solus at bay.

"Don't worry about that. I took sick leave to take care of a relative in need." She replied with a giggle. Kamila didn't have the heart to wake him up, nor to leave him alone after what he had gone through.

Little did she know that the nightmares she had witnessed Lith experiencing had nothing to do with the wargs. Alcohol was a double edged sword which opened old wounds related to his brother's death.

"I'm not your relative and as far as I know all leave had been revoked. This could get you in trouble. Why did you do that?"

"Because you looked like you needed it." Her loving smile warmed Lith's heart and so did her words when he realized they were the same he had used during his birthday party.

"Besides, according to the law I have no family, and after ten years of loyal service I doubt someone will care about a couple days off." Kamila noticed that despite Lith seeming to have completely recovered, his hands were shaking.

She pulled the blankets back up, hugging him tightly as she tried to understand why he felt so cold.

"What do you mean, no family? I remember you talking to me about your parents and your siblings." Lith tensed up, thinking that Kamila had lied to him right from the start.

Lith pushed her far enough away to look her in the eyes while questioning her. His voice sounded much colder than usual. Kamila swallowed a lump of saliva along with her feelings. His lack of trust hurt her.

"I think it's time to talk about those sad things I often mention but always gloss over." She said with a sad voice. Reopening old wounds was painful, but the sudden gap that had appeared between them was much worse.

During the past few months, every time Lith had given her his report on the army amulet, he would later call her from his civilian one to share his feelings about his missions, the loneliness he experienced in the wilds, or simply to enjoy her company.

He had opened up to her little by little, whereas she had kept him in the dark about her past.

'It's better if I explain everything to him now instead of letting this grow into a stupid misunderstanding. The gods know both of us have no need for useless drama.' She thought.

Kamila told him about how she had escaped from her family to avoid an arranged marriage, how she had gotten disowned by her father, and how she had later returned the favor once they had tried to manipulate her again.

"Why didn't you mention any of this before?" Lith inwardly sighed in relief as his doubts were replaced by empathy. Kamila's parents reminded him of his own back on Earth, making him feel compassion for her and bloodlust for them.

"Because at first, it was none of your business." She said with a firm tone, never averting her gaze.

"I don't go around dumping my problems or my baggage on complete strangers.

"I agreed when you asked me out because you were the first mage who ever gave me a second glance and also because I was curious about Lith Verhen, the Kingdom's new golden boy. I never expected things to develop this way.

"I'm afraid of commitment, and I thought that between our difference in social standing and the age gap, you would have soon lost interest in me." Then, she lowered her eyes.

"After Othre, the camellia, and meeting your sister, I still didn't tell you because I was afraid of driving you away. Let's be honest, I have nothing to offer besides a troublesome past and an uphill career..."

Lith drew Kamila close to him and held her tenderly.

"That's bullshit, you have a lot to offer. And since we are talking about sad stuff..." Lith told her about his early years. About the cold, the hunger, his two brothers, and Tista's illness.

"Wow, Orpal really was a dick! He and my brother Kaz could be best friends." She blurted out while snuggling between Lith's arms again. They spent the next hour not saying anything, just thinking about each other's past while exchanging cuddles.

"Do you want to stay in bed a bit longer, or do you want to try the delicacy I've been practicing?" Kamila asked when Lith's stomach repeated grumblings broke the tenderness of the moment.

Aside from the beer, he hadn't eaten anything since he had left Maekosh.

## Chapter 516 Preparing for the Gala Part 1

While Kamila cooked, Lith took a shower and assessed his mental condition. He had never spent so much time away from Solus, so he had never had the opportunity to understand how much their bond influenced his way of living.

Without her, Mogar was an awfully silent place. He felt no pleasure while the hot water ran over his body, washing away both his physical and mental fatigue. Everything felt like a waste of time to him, so Lith mulled over the progress he had made in his research to bind his soul to Mogar.

'Becoming a cursed object is a no go. The Black Star proved that even years of planning can be screwed up by a small mistake. Turning into an undead is feasible, but aside from attaining lichhood the other species have too many limitations.

'After comparing notes with Kalla, even if I use her research as a base, it would still require a lot of work. There is no precise method, each person has to find the proper way for their soul and life force to be split and stored.

'The process is unique just like the individual attempting it. There is no cookie cut version or shortcut. Fuck Dungeons & Looting, here sacrificing innocents makes you a sociopath, not a Lich.

'So far, my best shot is Arthan's Madness. If Thrud made it, so can I. There are too many people on Mogar that don't deserve to live. Thanks to Invigoration and Body Sculpting, I can turn anyone into a proper vessel. At least in theory.

'I'll keep that as a backup plan if I can't find something more definite. Repeating the process is a hassle, not to mention Solus might not be enthusiastic at the idea.'

Only the thought of his loved ones prevented him from considering human lives in terms of statistics or in terms of a cost-benefit analysis.

'The bad news is that I'm still a monster and that without Solus my family is the only thing that prevents me from acting as a living Lich. The good news is that now I'm able to care for someone even if they have no use to me.

'Back when I attended the academy, I wouldn't have given a damn about someone like Kamila. Yurial and the others were just a means to an end. Even though I'm alone, I regret treating Yurial like I did and letting Phloria go without fighting for her.

'Now, instead, my feelings for Kamila are strong enough that as long as we are close, I can fight the void in my soul. I don't want to screw things up with her as I did with Phloria.

'I never thought the day would come where I would say it, but I'm happy Solus and I are separated. I've become so dependent on her that my self control and emotions are almost impaired.'

Lith joined Kamila in the kitchen. The wonderful smell spreading from the oven made his stomach grumble again. He used spirit magic to set the table while thinking about how to bring up the latest news.

'Every time I said "we need to talk" Phloria thought I was going to break up with her, just like Kamila finds "I need to tell you something" ominous. I'm out of opening lines, and without Solus, I only have the direct approach left.' He thought.

Kamila had prepared the Mogar equivalent of lasagna and practice had made it delicious.

"It was supposed to be enough for a second meal!" Kamila said as Lith cleaned the oven dish with some bread after taking his third serving.

"I was hungry."

"All that work in the kitchen and you ate everything in just a few minutes. You could have at least chatted a bit, maybe have even complimented the cook instead of eating like a famished troll." She grumbled.

"It was really good, Kami. You make a great cook. I'll do the dishes to make up for my gluttony." Lith said hoping she wouldn't remember that with darkness magic it would take him less than a minute to perform his 'herculean labor'.

Kamila was delighted at his offer. There was a lot of stuff to clean and she could use some help. The compliment sweetened the deal and made her heart flutter.

"I've been invited to Lady Ernas's birthday and I was wondering if you wanted to come as my date." Lith dropped the news like a live grenade, making Kamila's fork fall onto her plate.

"Isn't that a really big event?" She said swallowing a big lump of saliva.

"Yes. Jirni's birthday is also the day of her wedding anniversary. This year she and her husband celebrate their 25th. She and I are going to be awarded for the mission in Othre, so there will be a lot of stuck up nobles, part of the royal family, and mages."

"I'm not a big fan of galas." Kamila's stomach was churning.

"I have never attended one, I have nothing to wear for it, and my etiquette is rusty at best. Also, if I come with you, all eyes will be on me. It would be incredibly awkward. Thanks for the invite, but maybe it's better if you take Tista."

"Actually, my whole family has been invited already, so Tista will come with her own date. I've been friends with the Ernas ever since I dated their daughter, Phloria. I can understand if you would prefer to..."

The lasagna in Kamila's stomach rose like a Romeo longing to be reunited with the Juliet waiting for him on the plate.

"I've changed my mind. I'll gladly accompany you." Kamila cut him short. The opportunity to meet her mentor was already a strong motivator, but Lith's family's presence and the potential threat of an ex gave her all the courage she needed.

"When is the gala?"

"A couple of weeks from now. I received the invite right before the mission in Maekosh. I didn't bring it up earlier because you already had a lot on your plate." He explained before she could ask, just to play it safe.

"Oh gods, I have a lot to do. I need a dress, a few etiquette lessons, and time to practice." Kamila stabbed at the remaining lasagna like it had betrayed her.

"I can provide you everything you need. You're my guest, so it's my treat. Unless I get called for an emergency, I can be by your side the whole time." He took her hand and kissed it, making Kamila blush.

"Really? Would you do that for me?" Even the simplest gala dress was bound to be expensive. She was aware of what it meant for someone as stingy as Lith.

"Of course. I will even craft some jewels for you." She took his offer as affection, but it was actually a way to save some money. Thanks to Rena's father-in law, Zekell the blacksmith, Lith could obtain the materials at a discounted price.

Lith had long since learned to use magic in the forge to shape precious metals without the need of a goldsmith. Even in the past every piece of jewelry he had gifted someone had been made at cost.

"Thank you so much." Kamila was almost moved to tears.

"If there's anything I can do to repay you, you just have to ask." She rubbed his hand against her cheek before kissing it.

"Actually, there is. Speaking of plates, are you going to eat that?" Lith pointed at the remaining lasagna.

"Yes, of course I will." She took a big bite to emphasize her point. Lith had ruined the moment for her, the least Kamila could do was return the favor.

## Chapter 517 Preparing for the Gala Part 2

Lith and Solus spent the next few days apart, each trying to find a way to cope with the sense of inadequacy the absence of the other caused. Where Lith was bordering on impassivity, Solus was too emotional.

He was as strong willed as she was indecisive. Even when Tista had brought her shopping, Solus worried more about what Lith would say after checking the prices or about Tista's opinion instead of focusing on her own needs.

Tista ended up buying her a lot of clothes that Solus wanted to return at first, only to then spend hours trying on each of them once they were back at the tower.

Lith was surprised when Jirni summoned him to house Ernas a few days before the party. He gladly accepted so that he could give her his gifts, but went to pick up Solus first. He was certain she would like to meet the Ernas girls again.

Also, he really missed her.

Neither of them shared the details about their days apart, and simply enjoyed the feeling of being whole again. Solus told him about her own room and the furniture she had chosen, but not bought, for it.

Since she could materialize almost anything within the tower's premises, window shopping had been more than enough. As for Lith, he told her about Kamila's issues with the gala and the presents they were about to offer Jirni.

'You really are a cheapskate to the bone.' She sighed.

'Couldn't you just buy something for Kamila and Jirni instead of doing the gifts yourself? With all the money we have in our pocket dimension, it's not like we're poor.' Solus felt a bit hypocritical, since she was borrowing Tista's words.

The difference between them was that Lith really was stingy, whereas Solus felt guilty at spending the money they earned without his consent.

'It's not being stingy so much as creative.' Lith had been expecting her remark, so he had a rebuke ready.

'Anyone can buy a gift, but that's impersonal. My creations, instead, express how well I know the person who receives them. Besides, feel free to check the market prices. Be they jewels or enchanted items, what I make is worth a lot.'

Solus had to admit that thanks to Zekell's help, Lith was able to craft small masterpieces by using spirit magic as a mold. Yet it was his ability as a Healer that was truly priceless.

'I wonder why Jirni wants to meet you in person.' Solus changed the topic, a bit sad at the idea that she couldn't take part in the gala. Even if she had a human form and everyone accepted her as a friend, there was no mana geyser nearby.

'We are about to find out.' Lith replied as they walked through the Ernas's Gate. Jirni had never revoked the pass they had granted him back when he dated Phloria.

The room he stepped into was richly decorated for the incoming gala. A pleasant smell emanated from garlands were hung on the walls, but instead of being made of woven flowers or plants, they were made of gold and silver.

Several coat hangers were lined up against the walls along with sealed weapon racks for their esteemed guests. Most of them would only bring ceremonial weapons, but some members of the military would refuse to leave their arms home.

A single long carpet led from the Gate to the double doors of the main hall. It was blue and white, the colors of house Ernas's coat of arms. Lith found a handmaid waiting for him.

She was a petite woman in her thirties, with ashen gold hair and clear blue eyes who somehow reminded him of Jirni. Her uniform had been replaced for the occasion by a simple but stylish black day dress with white evening gloves.

'I don't think she's a servant at all.' Solus thought with a stupefied tone.

'She is wearing so many enchanted hidden weapons that she glows like a chandelier to my mana sense.'

Lith checked her out with Life Vision the moment she turned around to show him the way.

'This woman is no mage, but no handmaid either. Unless since the last time I checked, house staff is required to have the strength of a professional athlete. She might really be Jirni's relative. Maybe she's part of the security.' Lith thought.

"Lith, it's so good to see you again." Jirni said with a radiant smile the moment the handmaid opened up the door to her dressing room. It looked like a five star hotel lounge, with white walls decorated with gold inlays and many silk covered sofas arranged around a small table.

Several mannequins dressed in Jirni's most beautiful evening gowns were orderly put on display in front of a huge mirror covering the center of the north wall. The mannequins lacked heads and arms, so that by standing right behind them Jirni could see her reflection like she was wearing the clothes they had on.

Lith remained amazed when he noticed that every single wall was actually a finely carved closet, each one filled with dresses, shoes, and hats for every season. The doors separating them were so smooth that he would have never realized their real nature if some of them hadn't been left open.

His surprise peaked when he managed to stop calculating how much money was that single room was worth and looked at his host. For a moment, Lith didn't recognize her.

Lady Jirni Ernas was a petite woman, barely 1.52 m (5') tall, with blonde hair that extended mid way down her back and sapphire blue eyes. She wore a beautiful light blue day dress worthy of the Court, her hair was perfectly curled, framing her face like she had been taken out of a painting.

It wasn't the smile, the dress, or the stylish hairdo in place of her usual ponytail that left him dumbfounded. He and Jirni had attended several galas together, it wasn't his first time seeing her all dolled up.

Jirni was a woman in her early forties, but thanks to proper care and good genes she usually looked like she was in her mid thirties. Now, she would barely pass as older than Kamila, it was like she had suddenly got ten years younger.

"Lady Ernas, you're stunning." He said with a little too much enthusiasm, making both his host and her maid giggle.

"Thanks, but remember that I'm a married woman, young man." She hugged him as he bent down to give her a bow.

"You're among friends, drop the formalities and call me Jirni. You've already met my cousin Dyta. She'll supervise the security of the event. My maiden family always takes care of these kinds of events."

Dyta was surprised by Jirni disclosing such details to a stranger, but she didn't let it show. She gave Lith a polite curtsy and left them alone.

"Where are the girls? I was hoping to say hi and catch up with them. I haven't seen them in months." Lith looked around a bit disappointed. He liked Jirni, but she always had a hidden agenda.

"I asked you to come now precisely because only Lucky and I would be home. There are a few things we need to talk about before the gala." She sighed.

#### Chapter 518 Bearer of Gifts Part 1

Lith had no idea why she included the dog on the list. Lucky's only worth was that it made Phloria happy, otherwise Lith would consider it just an overweight lump of fur.

"First things first." Lith took out the first part of his gift from his pocket dimension.

"I wanted to give you this now, so that you had the opportunity to wear it at the gala. If you like it, of course. This is my birthday present." He handed to her a finely decorated circlet.

Since Jirni was blonde, Lith had made it out of silver, so that the contrast would emphasize the beauty of its wearer. The diadem seemed to be made out of small and thin feathers, each one with a small black diamond set near its end.

"It's beautiful. Almost worthy of a Queen." Jirni wasn't being polite. Although the circlet was really light, each feather was so life like that she expected to see them fly away at the first gust of wind.

The 'almost' was required, since to be perfect, the diadem needed a big black diamond on its center, where Lith had left an empty space. It wasn't just a matter of him being stingy.

The Verhen household had no fief nor noble titles. Any more effort on his part would be interpreted as showing off or even make the circlet appear like a betrothal gift. That was the reason why Lith had left it perfectly imperfect.

"Now it's time for my anniversary gift." Lith said.

"Please, give me your hands."

Jirni did as instructed, feeling a warm sensation spread throughout her body the moment they touched. Lith used Invigoration while chanting some gibberish to spot and fix all bone, muscle, and even intervertebral disc damage.

Normal healing magic only sped up recovery, so internal scar tissues and calluses had accumulated inside Jirni's body over time, due to her line of work and aging.

"Good gods. Not only do I look ten years younger, but I also feel that way now." Jirni knew her body well enough that it only took her a few steps to realize what had happened.

"Healers capable of using rejuvenation magic are already rare, I would've never thought to meet one also capable of dabbling in cosmetic magic." Jirni said with a grin, making Lith lose his poker face for a split second.

Rejuvenation magic was a rare branch of healing magic that allowed the mage to restore an aged body to its prime condition. Even the three Great Countries had very few mages capable of using it, and they were all as elusive as Manohar.

It made his gift extremely valuable. Each treatment was valued at five gold coins for a regular person, but over a dozen for the battered body of a veteran fighter.

"Cosmetic magic?" Lith had never heard of it, not even during his studies at the White Griffon academy.

"No need to feign ignorance." Jirni laughed. "I had my suspicions since the first time I met your parents. I would have never been sure if Lucky hadn't ratted you out."

"Lucky did what?" As if to answer Lith's confusion, a small Ry entered through one of the doors wagging its huge tail. It was as big as a pony and had the characteristic crimson fur of the wolf type magical beast.

"Sorry, brother. I didn't know it was a secret." He said with an apologetic tone while offering Lith his huge belly in sign of contrition. He also hoped for a conciliatory scratch, of course.

"He told us how you slimmed him down from time to time. Also, do you think that I missed how Phloria's skin and hair improved while you two were together? Yours are minor treatments, but it's still an amazing feat for someone so young.

"If you manage to master it, you'll be set for life. Consider that I had to spend one hundred gold coins to become like this." Jirni waved at her own younger appearance.

"One hundred gold coins?" Lith almost choked on those words. It was more than the whole village of Lutia and its lands were worth, his own house included. A single gold coin was equivalent to one hundred silver coins.

Even Officers like Lith, Kamila, and Jirni were paid in silver.

"Are you saying that a mage did that?" Lith found it hard to believe. Rejuvenation magic was already a very difficult subject. He wouldn't be able to use it if not for Invigoration. Cosmetic magic was simply unheard of.

"Yes. It's a new trend in the Capitol. It's very expensive and doesn't last long. It requires heavy alchemical machinery and according to its creator, Mage Hossa, it's a safe procedure even if it involves the alteration of the patient's life force.

"Normally I wouldn't care for such things, but since half of the royal family has become their regular clients, so did anyone who can pay for the treatment. I can't afford to be outshined by any of my guests. At least not on the day of my anniversary.

"It's one of the reasons I called you here. Even if you don't possess Mage Hossa's expertise or equipment, you're the only mage I know who can use it. Before spending a small fortune to get my whole family treated, I want the opinion of an expert. Is it really safe?"

Lith inwardly cursed Lucky, then himself, and lastly his bad luck.

'Who would have thought that such a couch potato could evolve and become able to talk? Did I ever tell him anything compromising?'

'Aside from cursing Orion from time to time, no.' Solus replied. She had checked Lith's memories for every one of their past interactions with the dog. Lucky was true to his name, there was no reason to have an 'unfortunate accident' befall him.

Lith sighed in relief while checking Jirni's condition with Invigoration.

'What the heck? Cosmetic magic my ass. An Awakened just removed some impurities from her skin and hair. I wonder if they are doing it because they need money, or simply to get connections with the most important families in the Kingdom.' He pondered.

"When did this new trend start, exactly?" Lith asked.

"About a few months ago, but the shop has moved around for years. Cosmetic magic is not officially recognized because only one mage knows how to use it and its exorbitant cost makes it impractical.

"Mage Hossa returned recently from the Gorgon Empire. Princess Syntilla decided to give it a try and got one heck of a makeover. After that, all the homely and rich heiresses became her clients, forcing the pretty ones to do the same."

"Well, for starters it's safe." Lith replied. "There is no damage to your life force, but I must warn you, the treatment will barely last for a week. Unlike me, Hossa can make big changes, but they are temporary."

"Can you do better?" Jirni had an expectant look.

"No, but I can make it last longer. With my skill, I can make it last for at least a month, but I must ask you to not divulge my secret. I don't want this Hossa to feel threatened nor do I want to spend my life treating vain people." He said.

'More importantly, she would discover that I'm an Awakened just like her. Maybe Hossa could put me into contact with the Council. She could be a precious ally if properly handled.' He actually thought.

## Chapter 519 Bearer of Gifts Part 2

"Don't worry, between her prices and her travels, Hossa is a flash in the pan. Once she's gone, everyone will return to their senses and stop wasting money."

Lith attempted to take her hands again to perform the treatment, but Jirni stopped him.

"That can wait. I didn't call you for your gifts, nor just for cosmetic magic. I need your assistance with a couple of things. First, since you are good with holograms, I'd like your help to make the event memorable."

"I've already tried to ask Manohar, but he ran away the moment he heard my voice over the communicator and I'm not going to chase him over such a trivial matter."

"Consider it done." Lith nodded.

"Second, I'm worried about the girls' boyfriends, especially Phloria's."

Those words stung at Lith's heart and Jirni rejoiced for it.

"What's the matter with him?" He had suddenly found his old glare back.

"His name is Kallion Nuragor. He's a powerful mage from a noble family that has done nothing bad in the recent past but nothing good either. I have a strong suspicion that he's just using her.

"If anything happens to Gunyin, my oldest son, Phloria is the next in the line of succession. I can't rest easy until I discover the game he's playing."

"Have you told Phloria?" Lith clenched his hands hard enough to turn his knuckles white.

"What for? If you were in her shoes, would you listen to your paranoid and manipulative mother? Besides, forbidding a relationship is the best way a parent has to make it thrive. Phloria needs to burn her hand to learn her lesson."

Lith had to admit that she was right.

"What do you want me to do?" Lith asked.

"I'm sorry to have to ask this of you, but I need you to do nothing." Jirni sighed.

"What do you mean, nothing?"

"If I'm right, Kallion will try to provoke you. Nothing big, just enough to look good at your expense. You're going to become the youngest Spellbreaker of your generation. Ever since the plague in Kaduria, you've kept stealing the old noble households' spotlight.

"There are many who resent you for that and would do anything to destroy your reputation. Whatever Kallion does or says, I need you to stay calm and endure. I'll do the rest."

"What about Friya and Quylla?"

"Quylla may have gotten herself another gold digger. His name is Anathor Voross. He is an Assistant Professor at the White Griffon and comes from a minor noble family. His background check is clean, but he's been avoiding me too much.

"I'm afraid he is just playing with her feelings. I need you to grill him in my stead. Quylla will not be on guard against you. She loves you like the brother she always wanted. As for Friya, alas, she's got no one. Can you introduce someone to her?"

"Sorry, but no. In my line of work, I don't get to know many people and Kamila mostly has female friends." Lith shrugged.

"You know what the worst part of cosmetic magic having your seal of approval is? That now I'm going to have to waste a bucket of gold coins for my daughters and to avoid my poor husband looking like my father while standing by my side."

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Contrary to what many would expect, the use of the Warp Gate Lith had used just a few days earlier was reserved for the arrival of guests of secondary importance. During big events, members of the Royal family or special guests would walk a red carpet.

According to tradition, they had to arrive by stagecoach and walk their way to the entrance, where their host would personally receive them before they would be announced to the other guests.

It was intended as an opportunity to flaunt one's wealth and status. The later a guest arrived, the more important they were. The last ones to come were always the members of the Royal family so that they were the only ones who didn't have to introduce themselves.

Lith would have gladly passed as a minor guest rather than waste so much time in the stagecoach that Orion had waiting for him outside the local branch of the army. For warriors like Jirni and him, being rejuvenated was a priceless gift.

After Lith had restored Orion's vigor, making him feel like he was twenty again, the Commander of the Knight's Guard had been adamant in assigning Lith the best stagecoach and the best honor guards his Grand Duchy had to offer.

'I can't believe I treated him so badly in the past.' Orion inwardly griped.

'He could've asked me hundreds of gold coins and I would've gladly paid the price. No amount of gold is worth making sure that I come back home to my lovely wife and children.

'Yet he gave it freely to me, even though he knows it's easier to find a unicorn than a rejuvenator. I take back at least half of the bad things I thought about him.'

Yet Lith didn't do it out of the goodness of his heart. The Crown had finally granted him access to several forbidden books about souls, allowing him to take a new step forward in finding a solution for his reincarnation problem.

Unfortunately, most of them were very obscure. They would constantly quote other books or complex theories that Lith had never heard about, requiring him to further expand his research.

To do that, he needed to prove his worth as a Healer. He couldn't afford to be considered just an exceptional diagnostician. Revealing that he was able to Rejuvenate made him the fourth most important Healer at the Crown's service.

Only Manohar, Marth, and Vastor were known to be capable of using rejuvenation magic. This move had allowed Lith to help his friends and make the Crown grant him more privileges without him even asking for them.

Two birds with one stone.

Lith had discovered that souls were a controversial matter. Only Necromancers and Healers who had sought the perfect resurrection had thoroughly studied them, but each one had a different theory, which made things even more confusing.

The silver lining was that thanks to his resurrections, Lith had practical experience on the matter. It allowed him to rule out all those paths of research that weren't able to explain his condition.

"This is bullshit!" Lith lamented for the umpteenth time since the carriage had started to move, making his family and Kamila groan. He was wearing a very expensive and very formal suit, closely resembling White Tie attire from Earth.

It consisted of a black dress coat with tails over a white shirt, a piqué waistcoat, and a white bow tie worn around a standing wingtip collar.

"I spent months learning how to open dimensional Gates, why do we have to waste all this time? Isn't it much fancier and more practical to Warp to their doorstep?"

"Not at all." Kamila explained. "This way our identities have been verified and our possessions searched before the Gala. Otherwise every guest would have to be detained upon arrival until they are cleared.

"Unlike those who take the Ernas's Gate, we get to skip all of the security checks. Use this time to relax, or at least try to not upset me more than I already am. I can't believe I'm going to meet the Royals at my very first Gala."

Chapter 520 Ernas Household Part 1

"She's right, dear." Elina said. "We're already on edge, don't make things even harder for us." She was wearing a silk satin cream colored ballgown which left her shoulders and arms exposed and had a square neck.

The others joined her plea, forcing him to shut up. Lith was very nervous too and couldn't wait for the Gala to be over. Meeting Phloria again after so much time was a bittersweet event to him, especially since now they had both moved on.

Things with Solus weren't great either. Lith was happy seeing her grow as a person, but at the same time, he was sad at not being able to spend as much time together as before.

Solus now spent her free time in her own room, receiving her friends rather than being around him like in the past. Tista, Kalla, and even her vampire daughter, Nyka, visited Solus whenever they had a chance.

It always happened when Lith was spending time with Kamila, so that Solus wasn't forced to hole up in her room to give them some privacy.

'Am I jealous?' Lith thought while being careful so that Solus couldn't hear him.

'I never took Solus for granted, yet I would have never expected that being separated from her even just from time to time could be so painful. Heck, if she ever gets a body, things will become even more complicated.'

'I can only hope that Solus is faring better than me and she doesn't have conflicting feelings about our situation like I do.' Lith thought.

Unfortunately, she had realized their problem long before he did and wasn't any closer than Lith to finding a solution. As for Solus's feelings, calling them a mess was an understatement.

The more time they spent apart, the more she understood how badly she lacked in every social aspect.

Tista had been schooling both Nyka and her about how to act in human society, but despite all the time she had spent watching Lith from the sidelines, the only thing she was better at than the vampire, was keeping her clothes on.

Nyka had gotten used to living with the customs of an undead beast, making personal hygiene optional and her dress code non-existent. She would say anything that came to her mind, no matter how rude, and was completely oblivious of her body language, just like Solus.

They would both yawn whenever the topic at hand bored them and eat like starving beasts. Nyka because she had no concept of cutlery, Solus because she would become so engrossed in discovering new flavors that she would forget her manners.

'I would have never imagined that being polite could be so hard.' Solus inwardly sighed. 'Because of our mind link, I'm not used to sugarcoating my words nor hiding my feelings. I'm a terrible liar, I did it only once and I'm still regretting it.' She thought.

'Yet human interactions are mostly based on deception. Even Tista says that my honesty is refreshing at first, but soon becomes obnoxious. To make matters worse, the few humans who I've met in the Trawn woods all ran away screaming.'

'No matter how pretty my dress is or how kind I am, I'm nothing but a monster in their eyes.'

While Solus and Lith were brooding about their problems, their stagecoach finally reached the Ernas ancestral home. It was Kamila's first time seeing something so magnificent.

The manor was surrounded by high white crystal walls, which generated an array that prevented anyone from flying or Warping past its boundaries without the use of a special amulet.

Their coachman showed his ID to the guards stationed at the gates, who in turn lifted an amulet over their heads. It emitted a ray of light that resonated with coachman's uniform first, then his papers, and lastly the entire stagecoach.

Each of them glowed with a silver light, proving the authenticity of the documents, the man's identity, and that the magical seals placed on the vehicle hadn't been tampered with.

Kamila gasped while looking through the passenger window as she noticed that the park around the manor extended as far as her eye could see. Even though the night sky was covered by black clouds, the gardens were perfectly lit.

Each statue, bench, and even fountain which decorated the area radiated a gentle glow, giving the hosts the impression of having walked into a fairy tale. The air smelled of freshly cut grass, flower beds adorned the cobblestone paths that went from the front gardens to the main building.

Trees and bushes were all artistically trimmed to resemble mythical beasts, like unicorns and griffons. The benches were made of white marble and engraved with runes that made them water and dirt proof, keeping them dry and clean no matter the weather.

The manor itself was bigger than Belius' army headquarters. It extended for at least 3,000 square meters (32,292 square feet), divided into a main building, a left and a right wing forming a reversed U shape.

The massive hardwood double doors of the house were wide open, letting all noise and light coming from the Main Hall reach the stagecoach's stopping area. Jirni and Orion were welcoming their guests as soon as they arrived, letting their house staff escort them inside.

Despite the chilly night breeze, the moment the coach door opened Kamila felt suffocated like she was stepping into a furnace.

'This isn't right. This isn't my place. I'm just the disowned daughter of a dishonest merchant.' She thought as her body was being covered in nervous sweat.

Kamila tried to stand up, but her weakened knees failed her, making her stumble on the coach steps. Lith managed to catch her by the waist, using water magic at the same time to cool her burning skin and make the sweat disappear.

"You almost literally fell head over heels for me." Lith chuckled at his terrible joke as he got off the stagecoach first to help Kamila by holding both her hands. His kind gesture made Kamila find her strength again and made Lith's parents hope for the best.

The Ernas couple watched the scene too, but with mixed feelings about it.

"Long time no see, Lith. It's too bad you haven't grown much since your days at the academy." Orion joked. He was over 1.96 metres (6'5") tall, with black hair, brown eyes, and a perfectly shaven face.

His physique was lean but muscular. Every one of his movements was full of vigor.

"It's nice to see you too. Is everyone inside?"

"Yes. I'll join you as soon as we're done with our guests. I have a little surprise for you."

Two members of the house staff accompanied the Verhens to the Ballroom. One of them was Dyta, Jirni's cousin, who was still disguised as a housemaid. The other was Deiter, an old family butler who managed to glare at Lith like he was a traitor while maintaining perfect composure.

'I guess it's reasonable to assume that the rest of the staff blames me for the break up too.' Lith thought.

The entrance had a double staircase leading to the first floor of the house, which formed an arch above the door leading to the Main Hall, where the guests would mingle while waiting for their hosts to arrive.

Lith sighed, hoping that when his past and present clashed, he wouldn't be caught in the middle.