

The Witch 521

Chapter 521: Returning Together

While waiting for Vaan and Henrietta to return, Astoria enjoyed the breeze from the great hall floor's balcony. She shut her eyes from the world and focused on the perception of her mind.

The universal laws were ever-present and all-encompassing – while they could not be usually seen, they were all around and truly existed.

Unfortunately, the eyes were easily distracted by the vast information of light they received.

In the Sun God Doctrine, it was said that the Sun God was most commonly known as the god of fire and life.

However, the Sun God was also recorded to be the god of knowledge.

The sun people, Solarans, believed the Sun God was constantly imparting its knowledge down to humans through the light it radiated.

Alas, humans were incapable of processing the vast information contained within the light because they weren't built with the ability to decipher it. Thus, most of the time, the information was lost or simply stored as undecipherable particles of light in the back of the mind.

However, it was also because of this that people sometimes received sudden inspiration, insights, and ideas from seemingly out of nowhere—when in truth, they all came from the information hidden in the light particles after they get deciphered with time.

As such, the Solarans also believed the one who could decipher all the hidden information in the Sun God's light would also understand the secrets of the universe.

The answers had always been in front of them – most people just didn't know how to read them, or rather, they were continuously overwhelmed by the vast information they didn't know where to start.

As a Solaran, Astoria didn't close her eyes to shut off the vast indecipherable information coming from the Sun God's light. She closed her eyes to perceive the information already stored inside her mind.

She didn't need to perceive any other universal law.

The Golden Dragon Bloodline was of the light attribute, and so was the light that radiated from the sun.

The Law of Light was one of the few universal laws that could be visibly observed.

However, in terms of comprehending it, the difficulty was just the same as any other elemental law, or perhaps even more so due to the overwhelming information.

As the saying goes – haste makes waste.

In order to have any hopes of progress in the Law of Light, one had to take a step back and perceive a little at a time. Attempting to comprehend too much at once would only freeze their progress and get them nowhere.

Nevertheless, once her eyes were closed, the vast information would stop flooding in and overwhelming her.

The colorful light particles in her mind seemed numerous, like the sea of stars. In the darkness of her mind, such an image was like an internal version of the universe.

Perhaps it was a star map of the chaosverse, formed by the information the sun had collected from other stars. Or perhaps not.

Astoria wouldn't know unless she comprehended the Law of Light to a certain stage.

Nevertheless, after keeping her eyes closed for a period of time, the light particles slowly faded and became fewer and fewer in number.

With the decrease in light particles, focusing her perception on a single light particle became increasingly easier.

Unfortunately, just when Astoria thought she could make some progress in comprehending the Law of Light, she was interrupted by Vaan's returning presence.

Even though Vaan noticed Astoria was meditating on the laws and avoided disturbing her, she still detected him. Her sixth sense seemed rather effective when it came to finding him.

It could even be said that Astoria's sixth sense was a Vaan Detector.

"Sorry," Vaan apologized with some guilt.

However, Astoria shook her head. She didn't blame him, nor would she. It was her mistake to pick the wrong time and place for meditating on the laws.

That said, even though she lost all her progress up until the moment she was about to comprehend something, she had at least figured out the direction to understanding the Law of Light.

As such, she just needed to choose a secluded place next time to resume her meditation.

"Never mind that. It didn't affect me much at all, really. So don't worry about it," Astoria downplayed the matter before glancing around, seemingly in a pleasant mood even. "Did you finish trading with Henrietta? Where is she?"

"She can't bring the divine energy crystals back to Pangea, so she decided to stay in the sea of stars to refine them. As such, we don't need to wait for her to return. We can leave on our own accord," Vaan explained before mentioning, "I still have business in the Holy Knight Empire."

"Do you want to return with me?" He suggested shortly after.

"Mm." Astoria nodded.

She wouldn't reject the chance to spend quality time with Vaan. She started simulating what she could do with Vaan on the way.

The distance between the Blackthorn City and the holy capital of the Holy Knight Empire was not small. Along the way, maybe they could camp the night and have a romantic evening under the stars. She was prepared to offer her long-guarded innocence to the man she loved.

Although it would still be a bit earlier than Astoria originally intended, she felt a hint of urgency. After all, she did support Henrietta entering the harem, but that didn't mean she didn't have a sense of rivalry.

Since they were both pure, how could she lose to Henrietta in the race for graduation when she was the one to enter Vaan's harem first?!

She needed to set the order, at least!

Alas, Astoria's ideas for a romantic camping trip were dashed when Vaan grabbed her by the waist and shuttled through space with spatial shifts.

Vaan could only leap five kilometers at once with his current comprehension. Still, after a couple of hundred jumps, they reached the holy capital in no time.

"We're here," Vaan casually informed.

"Ah? Are we here? Oh, we are here..." Astoria softly uttered with a blank look, seemingly a little disappointed.

She didn't get to carry out her plan, but it wouldn't have been possible anyway. She was too deep in her romantic imagination she had even forgotten about the dragons' spatial magic.

Nevertheless, Astoria didn't let that put her down.

She just needed to formulate a new plan.

Chapter 522: Faith & Existence

After arriving in the holy capital of the Holy Knight Empire with Astoria, Vaan briefly paused. He intended to land on the palace grounds, but he soon realized he was on the city's southern side.

His spatial shift had taken them much further than he had initially intended.

This seemed like quite a big deal because the miscalculation wasn't small. Vaan could only leap five kilometers with each spatial shift, but he was off the mark by an extra four kilometers.

However, the main issue wasn't the large discrepancy in the miscalculation but the total distance he covered with that last spatial shift.

It was almost twice his present limit for a spatial shift.

In fact, Vaan had also noticed miscalculations in his last several spatial shifts since he had entered the vicinity of the holy capital. But the difference wasn't as significant as his last spatial shift.

His spatial shift had been significantly augmented.

"It's the Sun God! The Sun God has returned and graced us with his divine presence!"

"All hail the Sun God! May your eternal radiance continue to bless and guide us, Sun God!"

"Long live His Divinity! Peace and prosperity to the empire!"

Not long after people discovered Vaan and Astoria's arrival, they ended their activities. They quickly crowded around Vaan and Astoria, prostrating in worship with complete devotion.

At the same time, their sincere praises and prayers touched Vaan's soul; they were like music to his ears.

However, Vaan also knew he wasn't the type who sought attention and enjoyed satisfying his vanity. Thus, it was improbable for him to be moved by the people's praises and prayers.

After careful observation, Vaan discovered that people's sincere and devoted worship produced intangible and invisible pure energy.

More importantly, this intangible and invisible pure energy automatically flowed into his body and washed over his soul. As such, his soul experienced a sense of cleansing.

It felt pleasant and soothing.

When Vaan acquired the Fire Dragon God's inheritance and reached the peak of the Demigod rank in his dragon soul, he felt like he had hit an absolute and unshakeable limit.

No matter what he did, the bottleneck would not budge.

However, to his pleasant surprise, the unknown pure energy could loosen his bottleneck, even if it was only by a meager fraction.

It gave him hope and direction for reaching the divine rank.

'This is faith energy... the power of faith is required to advance to the divine rank,' Vaan thought as his eyes sparkled.

Nevertheless, a short moment later, he frowned.

'No, that's not right. It shouldn't be the only answer.'

Although faith seemed like the answer, Vaan couldn't help but feel like the truth was much simpler than that.

There should be more than one answer.

If the power of faith was important to divine beings, would the Great Devils throw away the lives of their devoted followers at Pangea as they pleased? Or did the Great Devils reach a stage where such faith was no longer important?

Most likely, collecting faith energy wasn't the only way to achieve the divine rank.

There must be another way.

Existence.

The entirety of Chaos was built upon the power of existence. It was the only power that could oppose nihilism.

Everything was existent and used the power of existence to continue existing.

'In order to become a higher level of existence, I must be acknowledged by other existences. People don't necessarily need to worship me; they just need to know me. And the more, the better,' Vaan speculated.

However, simply knowing him wasn't enough. People also had to believe he was powerful – that was the best kind of acknowledgment he needed to advance to a higher stage of existence.

That said, even Vaan could not guess how many people needed to acknowledge his existence before his peak Demigod-rank soul naturally advanced to the Divine rank.

As such, reaping the faith energy of devote worshippers was still easier compared to the acknowledgment of god knows how many people.

After all, he had already become the symbol of an existing religious belief with millions of worshippers.

"Vaan? Is something wrong?" Astoria creased her brows with doubt.

For some reason, Vaan had suddenly paused in deep thought. His changing expressions proved something was on his mind.

Nevertheless, Vaan shook his head.

"There's nothing wrong. I was just figuring some things out," Vaan smiled before suggesting, "Let us walk to the palace together."

"Is that so? Alright." Astoria readily agreed.

Although she didn't get to spend a night of stargazing with Vaan, a leisure stroll together was also not bad.

She was simply content with just his accompanying presence.

Alas, Vaan had other ideas for suggesting to walk back to the palace together. He needed a deeper study of the faith energy and its effectiveness.

Along the way, many people paused their activities to offer their worship.

The casual and non-believers only lowered their heads to acknowledge Vaan's presence. On the other hand, the devoted believers prostrated on the ground and offered their most sincere praises and prayers.

More often than not, the most devoted believers were people who were also in the more desperate and poorest of situations.

Because they had nothing, they could only cling to hope for miracles.

"Your Divinity, I beg of you! Please save my child! I know I have nothing to offer my tainted body and soul... but if you are truly divine, please bless us with some of your divine miracles! As long as you save my child is saved, I will be your most devoted follower!"

Along the way, a desperate mother with messy black hair and ragged clothes broke away from the crowd and obstructed Vaan and Astoria's path. She knelt down and pleaded with a malnourished little boy in her arms despite the rising discontent from the rest of the crowd.

"Fuck! Who do you think you are, woman?! How dare you doubt the Sun God and block His Divinity's path!"

"Someone, quickly remove this filthy wench from the road at once! Throw her into the pen where she belongs! Don't let her upset the Sun God!"

Many people were quick to voice their outrage without compassion for the mother-son duo.

Although they seemed heartless, they were just afraid of getting implicated if the mother-son duo angered the Sun God. They feared Vaan's power after seeing his capability in the past.

And as such, they didn't hesitate to be ruthless to others to save themselves.

Chapter 523: Pure Soul

Astoria had been walking by Vaan's side with her arms wrapped around his intimately without being afraid of the publicity. When they encountered the situation before them, her hands subconsciously tightened.

She wanted to help the mother-son duo but didn't want it to inconvenience Vaan.

After all, if they decided to help the mother-son duo, they would also have to save everyone else who was suffering. Otherwise, their actions would be regarded as hypocritical.

However, the Holy Knight Empire also had its own issues.

Far too many people were suffering under the patriarchal regime. In particular, witches and Darkan people. Of course, Darkan witches had it the worse.

After all, the Holy Knight Empire was ruled by the Solaran people.

To be born with blonde hair and blue eyes in such a country was a privilege. Darkan people with black hair and eyes could only be lower-class commoners and slaves due to their past history with the Great Darkan Empire.

Unless she reformed the country and fixed the problem at its root, there would still be many suffering people like the mother-son duo before her.

Nevertheless, if it were in the past, she would have helped the mother-son duo without a second thought. But now, her decisions were affected by her considerations for Vaan.

Astoria was surprised by how much she had changed due to him.

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Meanwhile, Vaan glanced at the mother-son duo and inspected them.

The mother seemed to be a relatively young Darkan lady in her 30s or 40s. However, she appeared older due to her malnourished, weak body and poor living conditions that hid away her original beauty.

She wore ragged clothes that hadn't been washed for at least three years.

The bruises on her face, neck, arms, and legs also suggested she had been frequently abused, perhaps by a violent partner or master.

Nevertheless, such minor wounds could have been easily healed if she was a witch.

She indeed had the talent to become one as well. But unfortunately, someone had crippled her mana veins. Most likely to prevent her from becoming stronger.

From this, Vaan could tell that the woman's partner or master wasn't strong or important.

On the other hand, the three-year-old boy in her arms, while malnourished due to the lack of nutrition, was mostly unharmed.

Evidently, the little kid was protected by his mother.

After Vaan gathered various information from observing their bodies, a general understanding of their situation was formed.

The young woman lived in an abusive household and was frequently abused sexually and physically.

After she became pregnant and gave birth to her son, her body changes from childbirth caused her to lose her former beauty and appeal. She was thrown out after that.

From then on, she was forced to wander the streets, struggling to feed and raise her son alone. No one would take her due to her lack of appeal and talent.

Vaan was rather surprised that she had not given in to her despair and turned into a fallen witch.

Nevertheless, she was near the end of her ropes. Her son's well-being was the only thing keeping her sanity together. Even when the child could have been unwanted, she still loved him unconditionally.

After all, the child was innocent.

That said, the moment she lost her child, her mind would most definitely fall into the dark abyss of despair.

If Vaan couldn't give people like her the hope of living and the promise of a better tomorrow, there was no telling what kind of disaster they would collectively become in the future.

Perhaps before getting destroyed by Gehenna, humans would have destroyed themselves first.

Since he had seen it, he could not ignore it. And since he could not ignore it, he decided to act on it.

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"Get away from the Sun God, you filthy sow!"

After seeing no one willing to step forward and physically remove the mother-son duo, the angry masses decided to hurl stones to remove them.

Seeing the incoming stones, the young mother instinctively pulled her malnourished son back into her embrace and shielded him with her body.

Nevertheless, just when the stones were about to strike them, a wall of fire shielded the mother-son duo from all projectiles.

In that instant, Astoria heaved a big sigh of relief. If Vaan hadn't acted, she would have summoned a light barrier to protect them a split second later.

She couldn't help but feel angry.

Vaan hadn't said anything. And yet, the crowd decided to act on his behalf out of fear for his great power.

"This..."

The angry crowd immediately paused in their tracks once they saw the wall of flames protecting the mother-son duo.

At the same time, they felt a cold chill from Vaan's casual sweeping glance.

"Compassion for those less fortunate than yourself is an integral part of being human. Without it, humans would be no different from beasts," Vaan casually said as he swept another glance at the crowd.

"Are you all beasts, or are you all human? I have not said anything, yet all of you act so unsightly before me. Do not let fear twist your hearts. These two are considered filthy?"

Vaan glanced down at the mother-son duo before shaking his head with a snicker.

"A dirty outer appearance due to circumstances they cannot control does not make them filthy. I only see a great mother wishing the best for her child and an innocent little boy who has not done the world any wrong."

"In comparison, your hearts were rotten for almost stoning them to death. Reflect on it!" Vaan coldly reprimanded the crowd as he exerted overwhelming pressure from his Demigod-rank soul, forcing them to lower their heads in guilt and shame.

"Only pure souls are deserving of entering my divine kingdom! Please get up. The Sun God will not ignore the woes of his suffering followers," Vaan warmly assured.

Despite the young mother being very dirty, he still offered direct help with his hand. The young mother trembled with mixed feelings of fear and gratitude.

"Your Divinity, you mustn't! My body is very filthy!" the young mother cried.

"Filthy?" Vaan shook his head and calmly said, "You must understand that such so-called filth is nothing more than an illusion covering the purity of your heart and soul. It can disappear at any time."

Shortly after Vaan snapped his fingers, a wave of white flames swept through the mother-son duo.

However, they did not get burned or harmed in any way. They only felt a warm breeze swept past them.

The radiance of the white flames vaporized all the impurities on their bodies and clothes. Even the tiny bacteria and viruses gnawing away at their bodies were erased.

Vaan's flames only burned what he wanted to burn. The Fire Law was his to control freely.

Nevertheless, in a short instance, The mother-son duo became clean, and their foul odor also disappeared. Although the little boy was still weak and malnourished, he no longer looked like he was dying from a sickness.

The young mother couldn't be clearer about their situation. Thus, her tears unknowingly overflowed with overwhelming emotions of happiness.

She immediately dropped to her knees and prostrated with her head planted on the ground as she held her son and expressed her gratitude and worship.

"Thank you, my Lord! My child is saved! You are truly divine! I am willing to worship and serve you for as long as I live!" the young mother vowed.

Chapter 524: Strong Faith

Once Vaan received the young mother's heartfelt vow, a strand of pure faith energy immediately washed over his soul.

In that instant, his mind felt rejuvenated with better clarity. The burden of knowledge was lightened, and his sense of self improved, albeit slightly. Even so, it was still a change for the better.

Overall, the single strand of pure faith energy was far more potent than the collective faith received from the worship of ten thousand ordinary believers.

'Only beliefs backed by strong emotions grant greater faith energy,' Vaan's eyes flickered.

Just like the young mother had previously said, if he could save her child, she would become his most devoted follower.

The power of faith he received from her was solid proof of that promise.

Only people like her, who were in the most desperate of situations, would grant him the most faith energy once granted salvation.

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Without waiting for Vaan's request, Astoria cast her light-attribute healing magic on the mother-son duo.

The old scars and recent wounds on the young mother slowly disappeared altogether. Even her bodily changes brought by her childbirth reverted, restoring her former beauty.

However, the extent of Astoria's healing magic only restored the young mother's beauty to a level that matched ordinary women of her age. It couldn't make her any younger than that.

She was not a witch and had also missed the best age to cultivate herself into a top-tier beauty like everyone else.

That said, Vaan had no doubt the young mother couldn't care less about such a matter – her only concern was her son's well-being. She was a selfless woman who only wanted the best for her son, who had been brought into the world without a choice and unjustly abandoned by his father.

"Thank you, Your Imperial Majesty," the young mother expressed her sincere appreciation with a bow when she suddenly staggered from a loss of strength.

Astoria's healing magic used up the mother-son duo's remaining energy to recover and caused them to become incredibly weak and hungry.

The rumblings in their stomachs were the most obvious proof of that.

The young mother didn't even have the strength to hold her son. But thanks to her sheer will, she was able to hold on and not drop him until Vaan nonchalantly supported her with a single hand.

"Who can offer this young mother and her son some food to satiate their hunger?" Vaan coolly glanced at the crowd and asked.

"Me! I have some bread here, Your Divinity! Please take them all!"

"I have some egg sandwiches and fresh milk here, Your Divinity! I wish to offer them to these two as an apology for my previously unsightly behavior!"

Several people within the crowd quickly enthusiastically stepped forward with food to offer and express their guilt. Some people might think they were shameless after everything that had happened, but they didn't mind.

Once people realized the Sun God was reasonable and merciful and not just a divine being that killed indiscriminately, they became more welcoming and at ease with his presence.

Nevertheless, it was that such people didn't accept Vaan as the Sun God because they genuinely believed he was one. They just feared his power and wrath.

If Vaan wanted to harvest a great amount of faith energy from the people of the Holy Knight Empire, he would have to make everyone fully believe in him from the bottom of their hearts.

"I don't take things for nothing. Take it as recompense for the food," Vaan casually waved his hand, and several low-rank mana stones flew out, reaching their destinations without failure.

The food suppliers were ecstatic once they recognized the value of the low-rank mana stones. It was far more valuable than ordinary silver and gold.

"Thank you, Your Divinity!"

"Long live the Sun God!"

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Meanwhile, several baskets were placed at the feet of the young mother. She couldn't carry it all, so she only picked a single bread from one of the baskets and left the rest on the ground.

She handed her three-year-old son with bite-size pieces she had broken off from a long bread stick, ignoring her own hunger. She didn't care if the food came from people who almost stoned her and her son to death. She accepted whatever she received as long as she could feed her son.

Nevertheless, all the food baskets suddenly disappeared into Vaan's Heaven-Swallowing Space, prompting the young mother to look up with surprise and doubt.

"Let's go," Vaan casually said.

He went ahead without waiting for anyone and left the young woman in confusion. She did not understand his intention.

However, Astoria did.

"Did you intend to return to living on the streets after this? Do you think the Sun God would let you continue such suffering after he decided to help you? Follow back to the palace with us. We will give you work and a place to stay," Astoria said, supporting the young mother on the way.

The young mother couldn't keep her tears from overflowing. She was overwhelmed with emotions once more.

She didn't expect much when she threw herself in front of Vaan and Astoria, but she was glad she did. She received far more help than she dared to imagine.

Even if such kindness were only an illusion, she would still engrave it in her heart. It was the greatest kindness anyone had shown her in her entire life.

"Thank you, Your Imperial Majesty! Thank you, Your Divinity! Thank you...!" the young mother repeatedly thanked the two while choking on her tears and happiness.

On the way to the palace, many more people came forward, seeking Vaan's divine help.

However, only a few truly needed it due to their terrible circumstances. They also happened to be Darkans – like the young mother.

While the rest of the people who sought help were also Darkans, they were also opportunists. They lied about their situation in order to secure a better life with Vaan's divine intervention.

Unfortunately, Vaan wasn't an easy person to fool.

He treated the Darkans who genuinely required help and punished those who lied to his face. He didn't need dishonest people in his future divine kingdom.

Nevertheless, once everyone else saw how harshly the opportunists were punished, they refrained from doing the same thing.

They didn't want to get beaten half to death for nothing.

Chapter 525: Minister Mistral

After reaching the palace, Vaan and Astoria arranged the new living quarters for the group of homeless and jobless Darkans they had helped along the way. Later, they would be assigned jobs in the palace according to their skills and talents.

In the history of the Holy Knight Empire, no Darkan had set foot in the palace, which had been built and ruled by the Solarans.

As such, the Darkans felt overwhelming honor and misgivings to be the first Darkans granted such an opportunity.

The Darkan group all had similar situations, like the first mother-son pair who received help.

Although not all of them were parents like the young mother, some of them were once little children like the three-year-old boy. The only difference was they had already lost the protection of their mother and grew up as orphans.

Even so, this group of children between twelve and sixteen years of age could survive on their own until now because they developed their fighting skills and street smarts.

They might seem wild and untamed, but Vaan still took them in because he believed otherwise. They could be trained.

After all, even though they had stolen from others to survive, they still had their principles. They didn't steal more than needed and only took the minimum required to keep living.

Evidently, their mothers raised them well despite the cruelty of their circumstances.

"Do you have a name?" Vaan asked the young mother.

"I do, but it's a name given by the man who abandoned us," the young mother admitted before pleading, "Please give us new names, Your Divinity!"

"Then I will call you and your son Asfiya and Hector," Vaan casually named them.

When the young mother heard the new names, her body trembled as tears full of emotions filled her eyes again.

Despite what she had suffered in the past several years, she endured it all without shedding tears. But she had been crying nonstop since meeting the Sun God due to happiness she could not put into words.

However, she couldn't help it. She understood the meaning of the two names.

Asfiya carried the meaning of pure and clean, while Hector was tenacious and resilient. She understood the Sun God's intentions well. Her body was filthy and tainted, but the Sun God still acknowledged her as pure and clean.

How could she not feel overwhelmed with gratefulness?

"The world had wronged all of you. But since none of you abandoned the world, the world will also not abandon you," Vaan casually stated to the Darkan group.

"Where there is life, there is hope. You may rejoice. Today, your suffering ends. Since you believe in me, I will give you all opportunities to change your destinies. However, that also means you may face untold hardships unlike anything you have faced before."

"Are you still willing?" Vaan asked.

"For the Sun God, we are willing!" Asfiya and the rest of the Darkan people firmly replied with all their strength.

Vaan's soul continued to be nourished by the faith energy he received from the Darkan group. The collective power of faith lifted his mood and made him feel pleasant.

It was only a group of a hundred Darkan people, but their faith was far stronger than a million half-believers.

'The effect is definitely, but I still can't tell how much is needed to advance my soul to the divine rank. It seems it's not that easy to enter the divine rank,' Vaan briefly mused.

Shortly after, he returned his attention to the Darkan group.

"There will be a feast for you to fill your bellies to your heart's content tonight. You all deserve it. But tomorrow, your duties will be assigned. So rest well until then," Vaan casually announced.

Shortly after the palace servants arrived to guide the Darkan people to their living quarters, Vaan and Astoria left the happy group behind.

However, a few breaths after stepping into the inner courtyard, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, Mistral Tombend, immediately appeared before them.

The person was a Solaran old man nearing a hundred years of age with short blonde hair and dragon whisker-like long blonde mustache. He wore a white minister robe with some golden markings and patterns that differentiated him from the people of the Sun God Temple.

Although the person was only a Mid-stage Aura Grandmaster, he seemed to possess worldly wisdom and intelligence, reflected in his gentle aura.

"Your Divinity. Your Imperial Majesty. It's great that you are finally both back," Minister Mistral rejoiced as he greeted the two with relief. "The envoys from the Great Ratholos Empire arrived two days ago and have been waiting for an audience with you since."

"Two days ago?" Vaan glanced at Astoria.

He may have been gone from the Holy Knight Empire for over three days, but Astoria should have been around during this time after her recovery.

"The envoys of the Great Ratholos Empire express their wish to establish a friendly relationship with our empire and negotiate a trade for some dragon blood from the Red Dragon Clan. You weren't here, and I couldn't arbitrarily make the decision on my own, either. So I haven't met with them yet," Astoria explained.

"Where are they now?" Vaan furrowed his brows before turning back to Minister Mistral.

"They are currently staying in the foreign guest building outside the palace," Minister Mistral answered before excitedly suggesting, "Should I quickly arrange a meeting for you, Your Divinity?"

"No, let them keep waiting," Vaan coolly stated.

"T-This..."

Vaan's unexpected response made Minister Mistral stunned for words. He didn't know how to think or respond.

But after a moment, he calmly accepted it.

"Understood, Your Divinity," Minister Mistral complied, bowing with one fist over his chest. A short moment later, he inquired, "Then, should I ask the Minister of Defense to send over a report on what the envoys had done during their stay in our empire?"

"Oh?" Vaan immediately gave Minister Mistral a second glance with interest as he reevaluated the old man. "That would be appreciated."

"I understand, Your Divinity. Then, I will ask the Minister of Defense to send the information to you right away," Minister Mistral acknowledged.

Evidently, they all understood the Great Ratholos Empire had hidden intentions for sending their envoys over during such a sensitive time.

As such, they had assigned people to monitor the envoys secretly throughout the duration of their stay.

Chapter 526: Mortimer Tombend

Outside the imperial palace's eastern entrance, a white five-story building by the name of Star Bridge Tavern stood out among other buildings found on the main street of Eastern Radiance.

It wasn't the most magnificent or tallest building on Eastern Radiance, but it wasn't the worst or the shortest either. It was just somewhere in between, very average in design and value.

However, it had the symbol of a handshake wrapped in five-point stars, indicating it was a building for accommodating foreign guests of the country.

At that moment, a group of large, bulky men gathered in the dining hall for drinks with growing discontent.

They were all dressed in rough beast leather and fur clothing that only covered the core of their upper and lower body. As such, much of their tanned skin was exposed, revealing their extremely toned muscles that couldn't be found on just any ordinary aura users and body refiners.

Coupled with their uncouth, rowdy, and unfettered behavior, they seemed like warmongering barbarians who had lived primitive but free lifestyles and appeared out of place.

Several chairs and tables had been damaged simply because they could not control their brute strength. The locals considered these same chairs and tables quite firm and stable. But to these brutes, they were very fragile.

Without a doubt, this group of people were the envoys and their accompanying guards sent over from the Great Ratholos Empire.

Only the people of the Great Ratholos Empire would have such appearances and behaviors.

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"Dammit, it's already been two days since we arrived in this country, and yet we haven't even caught a single glimpse of the new ruler or the dragons!" a Peak-level Rank 3 warrior slammed his half-filled mug down on the table with frustration.

"Right?! These people aren't taking us seriously!" another Peak-level Rank 3 warrior shouted before suggesting with a dark look, "Maybe we need to show them our strength before they start taking us seriously! Lord Mortimer, please lead us!"

"That's enough, Gaian!" the only Mid-level Rank 4 warrior and leader of the group, Mortimer Tombend, snapped. "I am just as frustrated as all of you. But I need to remind all of you this is another country."

"Starting trouble on another's turf will not do us any good nor for our cause," Mortimer firmly added.

"Then what are we supposed to do? Keep waiting? We don't even know if the new ruler will meet us. Are we supposed to wait here forever?" the Peak-level Rank 3 warrior, Gaian, asked angrily.

He whisked his mug of mead and downed everything to calm his frustration, but his excessive strength broke the mug and splashed some of the honey drink over his face.

"God fucking dammit!" Gaian cursed furiously.

In his anger, he hurled the remains of the mug at a wall with a substantial amount of strength, splintering the broken mug into pieces upon impact and leaving cracks on the tavern's wall made of white bricks.

"The least they could have done is settle us somewhere of higher quality! Everything here is so god-damned fragile! They truly have no respect for us! How are we supposed to endure this?!" Gaian blamed the property for being cheap rather than his excessive force.

"I said enough, Gaian!" Mortimer barked with a fierce glint.

His violent aura exploded outward in that instant, suppressing the hot-headed Gaian. The latter dropped onto one of his knees with his head lowered like something cumbersome was weighing him down.

The air and everything else in the area felt thicker and heavier as if gravity had suddenly increased in folds.

"You're scaring the waiters and barkeeper! You should be grateful they are providing everything to us free of charge," Mortimer thundered furiously, not knowing his anger scared the tavern workers more.

Although Gaian calmed down and apologized to his lord afterward, he still held opposing feelings in his heart.

Be grateful for everything being provided free of charge?

They were representatives from another country that wasn't the least bit inferior to the Holy Knight Empire, for god's sake!

They weren't beggars!

Nevertheless, after Lord Mortimer forcefully calmed the heated group down with his gravity-attribute aura, they heard some commotion outside the tavern.

Curiosity brought them outside to understand the situation.

Immediately, Lord Mortimer and his men noticed large and small groups of people all moving towards the southern district with hurried footsteps as if something there strongly attracted their interests.

There were some Solarans among them, but they were mostly Darkans.

What could it be?

"Hey you, Darkan boy. You got a second to spare?" Lord Mortimer reached out for the shoulder of a sixteen-year-old Darkan boy full of scars, who appeared to be the closest person at the time.

Although the sixteen-year-old Darkan boy revealed his discontent for getting stopped, the expression was immediately wiped off his face when he glanced over his shoulder.

The person who called him didn't seem much different from a prehistoric beast. It was probably best not to offend such a person.

"C-Can I help you?" the Darkan boy asked nervously.

"Relax, there is nothing to worry about. We are just wondering for what reason you are all heading over to the southern district?" Lord Mortimer wondered.

"You haven't heard?" the Darkan boy furrowed his brows and quickly said, "The true heir and Sun God have returned from their trip and started helping people in need, especially unfortunate Darkans like me."

"I see..." Mortimer released his hand from the boy's shoulder.

"If that is all, I'll be on my way, Sir," the Darkan boy gave a short but quick bow out of respect before hurrying off with everyone else.

"It seems the new ruler and self-proclaimed Sun God wasn't in the capital, to begin with. We were angry over nothing," a Low-level Rank 4 warrior muttered before saying, "Since they returned now, I expect we'll be called into the palace for a meeting soon."

"I hope so, Eiram," Lord Mortimer replied.

Unfortunately, the Great Ratholos Empire's envoys were bound to be disappointed.

At that moment, Vaan had just entered a private study room that had been set up for him. A bunch of valuable scrolls had accumulated on his desk during his absence.

They were all unique aura cultivation methods from the regional lords and nobles of the empire.

Chapter 527: Sun God Temple

During Vaan's previous stay in the Holy Knight Empire, he had sent out an ultimatum to everyone in a position of power or status within the defeated country – they were required to surrender their personal aura cultivation methods to show their loyalty and support for their new ruler.

Those who failed to comply would be seen as holding contempt for the new monarchy and considered rebels.

Of course, Vaan had also informed them of the fate that awaited such rebels – to be burned in the radiance of his semi-divine flames.

It was an overbearing demand that could easily raise discontent and spell the doom of its tyrant ruler. Even so, the threat was very effective in producing the desired results.

More than five hundred scrolls had piled on Vaan's desk.

Throughout history, tyrant rulers have always met untimely ends. As such, overbearing demands couldn't be made of the country often – it would shake its stability with uncontrollable unrest.

However, at the start of a new monarchy, an appropriate amount of force was required to stabilize the country.

Furthermore, Vaan had a plan to fill the populace with greater satisfaction than the discontent they felt from being forced to surrender their household's aura cultivation methods.

As such, he was never concerned about the unrest that would rise from his threat.

Shortly after Vaan picked up the first aura cultivation scroll and perused its content, he quickly absorbed its information.

Ding!

<You have comprehended the mid-rank aura cultivation method of Count Regales of the Krosstoen County, Burning Sun Art>

The aura scroll didn't just contain information about the Burning Sun Art but also recorded the name and status of its original owner.

Count Regales had included such information in the scroll as proof that he had complied with the Sun God's demand.

After all, no one might have known the Burning Sun Art came from him.

Nevertheless, Vaan finished memorizing the information and placed the scroll in one corner to separate it from the unread scroll pile.

Without delay, he picked up the next scroll to read.

Ding!

<You have learned the low-rank aura cultivation method of Lord Keene, Great Flame Method>

<You have learned the high-rank aura cultivation method of Marquis Gunnar, Burning Heaven Art>

<You have learned the mid-rank aura cultivation method of Earl Bardo, Revolving Sunfire Method>

...

Vaan continued to go through the scrolls one by one until he encountered a problem.

<You have learned the high-rank aura cultivation method of Fontayne Stonehart, Nine Shifting Sun Art (flawed)>

Based on Vaan's rich accumulated knowledge of aura cultivation, he quickly understood the original Nine Shifting Sun Art would have been a high-rank aura cultivation method.

However, the version of the Nine Shifting Sun Art he received had been purposely altered to fail and inflict self-harm on its practitioner. It was just ordinary self-harm but one that damaged the meridian channels and led to crippled cultivation with prolonged practice.

Individually, the flaws wouldn't cause much harm to the body. But once they were combined, the effect would skyrocket to such a level of severity.

Evidently, the Nine Shifting Sun Art owner had insidious intentions and wanted to ruin whoever practiced the high-rank aura cultivation method.

Vaan's eyes immediately flickered with a sharp glint.

The person thought he was clever, but his petty tricks were no different from a kid showing off in front of a master.

Vaan had easily seen through the problem and intention.

But even if he regarded it as a petty trick, the person's intentions were cruel. Thus, he had zero intention of sparing the person.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't intend to take immediate action against Fontayne Stonehart, who submitted the scroll.

There were still many scrolls to go through.

Vaan placed the flawed Nine Shifting Sun Art in a new separate pile. He continued shifting through the remaining scrolls to see how many more people had similar ideas.

Once he was done reviewing them all, dealing with his enemies all at once would be easier.

Ding!

<You have learned the high-rank aura cultivation method of the Sun God Temple, Holy Aura Scripture (flawed)>

"..."

Vaan was briefly silent after he comprehended the scroll submitted by the Sun God Temple. Still, he showed no surprise.

The Sun God Temple's influence was second only to the ruler of the Holy Knight Empire.

After all, its members were the highest authorities in the entire Sun God religion. They were the Sun God's most ardent believers and the closest to the Sun God. As such, it wasn't strange that the Sun God Temple would also pull such a trick against him.

A false, self-proclaimed Sun God like him definitely wouldn't be recognized by them.

Of course, if the Sun God Temple had made up the entire religion and were fully aware that the Sun God didn't exist, the Sun God Temple still wouldn't recognize him.

After all, his existence was a threat to their authority.

Without him, the highest authorities in the Sun God Temple could continue spewing whatever they want and claim it as the words and intentions of the Sun God to suit their agendas.

But with him around, they wouldn't be able to do that anymore.

Vaan knew he was bound to butt heads with the Sun God Temple at some point, but it was still later than he anticipated.

No one from the Sun God Temple had stepped out to denounce his proclamation or taken any action against him until now, for that matter.

The Sun God Temple was either afraid or wary of him.

However, the Sun God Temple wouldn't be able to remain silent for much longer. It didn't matter if the highest authority in the Sun God Temple didn't recognize him as the Sun God as long as everyone else did.

He would be the lie that became the truth, and Sun God Temple's truth would become the lie. The Sun God Temple would lose all credibility and followers if they chose to deny him at that point.

'Before the Sun God Temple loses all its influence, it is bound to make a much bigger move against me soon...' Vaan mused.

Of course, if the highest authorities in Sun God Temple were wise people, they would choose to surrender and acknowledge him.

Chapter 528: Venerable Sage of Aura Cultivation

Ding!

<Your understanding of aura cultivation has reached the epitome of the mortal rank>

<In accordance with Pangea's education classification, the system recognizes you as the Venerable Sage of Aura Cultivation (Mortal-rank)>

...

=====

[Title]: Venerable Sage of Aura Cultivation

Effect 1: You can recognize the flaws in any aura cultivation method of the peak rank and below.

Effect 2: You can detect if any alteration had been made to aura cultivation methods of the peak rank and below.

Sub-effect 2.1: If the alteration to the aura cultivation method did not exceed 20%, you can recover the original version based on your mastery of aura cultivation.

Effect 3: You can create new aura cultivation methods of the peak rank and below.

=====

Shortly after Vaan filtered through all the scrolls in his private study, his knowledge of aura cultivation reached a level that could be said to be second to none on Pangea.

Even his magic theory had not reached such a level despite spending a greater deal of time and cumulation of knowledge on it.

Clearly, magic was a much broader subject than the study of aura.

Ding!

<You have detected a 7% alteration to the high-rank aura cultivation method, Nine Shifting Sun Art (flawed)>

<You have recovered the original version of the Nine Shifting Sun Art (High-rank)>

<You have detected an 11% alteration to the high-rank aura cultivation method, Fireforge Golden Body Method (flawed)>

<You have recovered the original version of the Fireforge Golden Body Art (High-rank)>

<You have detected a 9% alteration to the high-rank aura cultivation method, Holy Aura Scripture (flawed)>

<You have recovered the original version of the Holy Aura Scripture (High-rank)>

...

After recovering a dozen flawed aura cultivation methods, Vaan noticed a pattern.

Eleven of the dozen flawed aura cultivation methods were self-harming and could ultimately lead to cultivation disabilities.

Although the last flawed aura cultivation method was also self-harming, it wasn't anywhere near as severe as the other eleven flawed aura cultivation methods.

However, that was also precisely what made it the most dangerous.

The core of aura cultivation has always revolved around the circulation of aura through the body's existing channels. No matter the method, the circulation path was mainly situated in the upper body, where the Middle Dantian and Lower Dantian were located.

The Upper Dantian in the head was never involved.

This was because the brain was sensitive and had complex channels. A mistake could cause irreparable damage to the psyche, not to mention it was extremely difficult to guide the blood and mana through a specific path with just bodily exercises.

Only witches would have an easier time due to their ability to manipulate mana with their minds.

Nevertheless, the flawed version of the Holy Aura Scripture involved circulating aura to the head, specifically the prefrontal cortex part of the brain.

That's right, the Holy Aura Scripture didn't target the Upper Dantian but the prefrontal cortex.

The prefrontal cortex was the brain region that regulated one's thoughts, actions, and emotions. It was the high-order cognitive process modulator.

If it were damaged, behavioral changes and intelligence reduction were just some of the more minor effects and not the most important problem.

The most crucial problem was what people could do to him once such a vital brain region was damaged.

"Heh," Vaan snickered.

He could already read the Sun God Temple's intention. Its high authorities most likely wanted to brainwash him into becoming their puppet god.

It was the Sun God Temple's strength – to brainwash people into joining their religion.

Nevertheless, these people were underestimating him too much.

Now that he had recovered the original version of the Holy Aura Scripture, its imperfections also disappeared.

Ding!

<You have consumed five mid-rank mana stones>

<You have produced a unit of holy aura power>

Vaan briefly practiced the Holy Aura Scripture to produce some holy aura before stopping. He figured the holy aura would be handy for the near future.

'The names of the rebellious lords and nobles have also been memorized, and the holy aura had been cultivated. That's two agendas out of the way,' Vaan mused.

He could finally resume his original plan.

Ding!

<You have created a new peak-rank aura cultivation method, Heavenly Fire Art>

<The Heavenly Fire Art allows aura users to cultivate a fire-attribute aura comparable to true flames>

...

Ding!

<You have divided Heavenly Fire Art (Peak-rank) into four volumes and created an additional four aura cultivation methods>

<Heavenly Fire Art (Vol.1): The Way of Fire (Low-rank) has been created>

<Heavenly Fire Art (Vol.2): The Great Way of Fire (Mid-rank) has been created>

<Heavenly Fire Art (Vol.3): The Superior Way of Fire (High-rank) has been created>

<Heavenly Fire Art (Vol.4): The Heavenly Way of Fire (Peak-rank) has been created>

...

After creating the four volumes of the Heavenly Fire Art, Vaan softly sighed in relaxation.

He only created the Heavenly Fire Art for one purpose – to distribute it to the men in the Black Rose Kingdom and Holy Knight Empire to practice.

Every man would be provided the first volume free of charge.

However, if they want to acquire the latter volumes of the Heavenly Fire Art, it would depend on their contribution and loyalty.

The biggest issue with aura cultivation in both countries was that there was no quality standardized method of aura cultivation. The current aura cultivation methods circulating through the market and made readily available all had flaws and issues.

Ordinary male witch descendants who practiced these methods would develop problems hindering their future progress.

Thus, if he wanted to strengthen the populace in preparation for the unknown future in Chaos, he had to remove the flawed methods from the market and give them a universally acceptable aura cultivation method – one that even ordinary men could practice.

Naturally, without innate mana veins, ordinary men couldn't cultivate aura effectively like male witch descendants.

They would have to work many times harder to build up their body and nourish their veins with mana repeatedly before they had a chance of developing mana veins and producing a shred of aura.

Nevertheless, a fire-attribute aura cultivation method wasn't suitable for everyone.

As such, Vaan intended to develop more flawless aura cultivation methods.

Chapter 529: Astoria's Determination

Even from a strategic perspective, having an army full of fire-attribute aura users could be disastrous.

Sure, the army of fire-attribute aura users would have great destructive power. But raw attack power wasn't the only factor that determined victory in a war.

If Gehenna had an army resistant to fire, they would be at a significant disadvantage.

As such, a versatile army comprising different element aura users would be more useful. They would have the option to use their strength to target the enemy's weakness.

Nevertheless, the Heavenly Fire Art was enough for the time being.

...

Shortly after tidying up the private study, Vaan visited the imperial library to peruse more books.

The imperial library contained countless thousands of books. A single session was nowhere near enough to read them.

Last time, he had only touched upon the Divine Serpent Empire, the Great Ratholos Empire, and a bit of the Freedom Federation.

However, there were still numerous countries, wonders, and dangerous zones in Pangea that he had yet to learn about and visit. There were other rare minerals and plants out there that couldn't be found within the domain of the Holy Knight Empire and the Seven Witch Kingdoms.

Nevertheless, Vaan was most curious about the impact of the rogue asteroids that entered Pangea and how the local powers reacted to them.

Unfortunately, such recent information wouldn't be found in the imperial library.

He could only wait for Eniwse and Aeliana to collect the information.

The last time he had seen them, the two devoted ladies personally suggested taking over the old Assembly of Silent Night's bases to establish a new intelligence-gathering network for him.

Since the resources and hideouts were already there, it would save them a great deal of time and money to set up the new intelligence-gathering network.

Naturally, Vaan had no reason to disagree.

However, it would take some time for the new intelligence-gathering network to expand to other countries. Even if they had the spare funds to support the operations, the shortage of human resources wasn't easy to resolve in a short time.

Even so, Vaan estimated Eniwse and Aeliana would have something to put on his table by the time he returned from his trip to the Great Ratholos Empire.

...

Vaan continued to spend his time in the imperial library, flipping through books one after the other. Unknowingly, several hours passed, and night arrived.

A palace servant soon informed him of Astoria's invitation to dine together for dinner.

A lavish meal was already laid out on the long table when Vaan arrived. The chandelier lights were all dead, and the only illumination came from the thoughtfully arranged candles on the dining table.

Although the candles weren't strong enough to illuminate the whole dining hall, they painted a romantic atmosphere.

Evidently, it had been Astoria's idea to set the mood.

Furthermore, Astoria had dolled herself up.

She wore a pretty blue dress without any armor and put on some light makeup to enhance her beauty. Coupled with her lightly braided side-swept hairstyle that revealed much of her right shoulder, she appeared especially captivating tonight.

Vaan was easily fascinated with the arrangement. He was curious how Astoria intended to go about seducing him.

Unfortunately, since they sat on opposite ends of the long dining table, they did not engage in any deep and meaningful topic related to their relationship. Instead, they discussed the internal affairs of the empire and its management reforms.

Of course, the Holy Knight Empire wasn't much better than the Seven Witch Kingdoms.

If the Holy Knight Empire didn't have border passes and trade relationships with the southern countries, its developments would have also stagnated.

In a sense, the witches' situation in the Holy Knight Empire was far worse than the ordinary men's situation in the Seven Witch Kingdoms.

After all, men didn't need to bear the labor of pregnancy and childbirth.

Miscarriage was already common among witches, but the rate of frequency of miscarriage was even higher in the Holy Knight Empire due to the regular abuse.

At the same time, the death rate of witches in the empire was higher than men in the seven witch kingdoms.

Vaan had to give Astoria some credit for tackling these issues calmly without flipping out.

After the two finished their dinner together, the palace servants came in to clean up the dining table. At the same time, Vaan intended to return to the imperial library.

However, Astoria pinched his sleeve, stopping him from leaving and forcing him to glance back at her.

Although her head was lowered, hiding her face from his direct view, Vaan could immediately tell her previous calmness had all disappeared. She was very nervous yet seemingly anxious as well.

Vaan's lips curved into an amused smile.

"Yes?" He answered, feigning ignorance.

Astoria pursed her lips.

She had already planned out her idea and made her determination to go through with it. And yet, when it was actually time to carry it out, she suddenly lost all courage.

She couldn't stop her heart from racing or suppress the butterflies in her stomach. She felt helpless against such uncontrollable feelings. She didn't think there would still be obstacles she couldn't easily overcome at her age.

At that moment, she would rather face ten thousand demons on the battlefield than look Vaan in the eye. She never thought such a situation would be the greatest challenge yet in her life.

Having never been in love until now, her over three hundred years of life experience failed to prepare her for it.

Even so, Astoria knew she couldn't just stand there and not reply. As such, she mustered up all the courage she could to open her mouth.

"Stay with me... tonight?"

Astoria glanced up at Vaan with trembling eyelashes and requested in the tiniest, softest whisper he had ever heard.

It was adorable and plucked his heartstrings.

No man could have refused such a request even if they had been mad at the person for whatever reason.

Vaan smiled.

Instead of replying with words, Vaan directly grabbed her waist and pulled her closer to steal her lips. His actions were bold, but his kiss was gentle.

He answered her with his action.

Chapter 530: Astoria's Cry

Vaan started slow with a few short, gentle kisses before he became increasingly aggressive. Soon, he slipped his slithering tongue past Astoria's soft lips to catch the little red serpent hiding inside.

Although the little red serpent was startled, it didn't have time to escape before it was caught and playfully coiled by Vaan's tongue.

The exchange of passion only lasted a few breaths, but Astoria quickly felt all her strength leaving her body. Her body and heart melted as she leaned into Vaan's body and was supported by him.

Before she knew it, she was already swept off her feet and carried in Vaan's arms like a princess.

Even so, their lips never separated as they continued their deep, intimate kissing. Astoria closed her eyes and savored the memorable sensation of their contact. Unfamiliar as she was, she still tried to match Vaan's tempo.

The tight tension of nervousness gripping her heart slowly disappeared, replaced by a warm, fuzzy feeling. Her body continued to loosen and relax. With her strength gone, her body and mind felt light and weightless like a feather.

At the same time, Vaan skilfully navigated his way to Astoria's private bedroom without looking. With his lips seemingly inseparable from Astoria's, he took her breath away.

Several passing palace maids gasped with surprise along the way before they tactfully cleared the way for the couple.

By the time Vaan reached the room and lay Astoria on the large white bed, she was panting defensively.

Her dress strap was loosened, exposing much of the fair skin on her shoulders. It looked like the dress could slip right off with a tug. Even so, it was just the right level of sensualness to accentuate her alluring beauty without a hint of vulgarity.

At that moment, she was truly the most beautiful woman in the empire.

Everything after flowed naturally.

Vaan joined Astoria in bed and sank his face into her perfectly shaped bosom as he embraced his prize. Astoria's soft, sweet fragrance helped him feel relaxed and stress-free.

It was like he was lying in a field of Gardenia, a beautiful white flower with a strong floral aroma.

Gardenias symbolized trust, clarity, hope, and renewal. They could also convey the message of dreams, intuition, self-reflection, and protection. They were also symbolic of peace.

Vaan had come a long way before he finally reached this step.

He truly felt at peace.

Although Astoria rushed herself due to external factors, he wasn't one to deny her will and efforts. Especially not when he had been waiting for her to offer herself to him willingly.

Meanwhile, Astoria subconsciously caressed Vaan's head with affection and warmth.

It wasn't their wedding, but it felt like their wedding night. It was also her first night, but she didn't feel the least bit nervous or anxious. Rather, she only had calm anticipation.

She could sense his complete relaxation and trust as he unloaded his stress and forgot about his burdens. It was an inexplicable connection she could not explain, but he felt like she understood him better.

Vaan was never a cold and emotionless person.

No matter how heaven-defying his mental talents were, he was still human at heart. She had already learned about the sentimental person he once was in his past life. Such a character wouldn't just disappear.

He only appeared cold and emotionless because he had to hide his weakness. The world forced him to be strong to survive.

People didn't mature due to age but circumstances.

That's why real men didn't talk about their problems; they kept it to themselves. They shouldered the world and everything if they had to.

Only sweat and blood fixed their problems; tears were meaningless.

Astoria wasn't sure if it was because she had fallen deeply in love with this person in front of her. However, she was willing to accept every part of him – his strengths as well as his flaws.

She felt like she understood him better than anyone.

As such, she could accept it no matter how many more women he acquired. The connection she shared with him wouldn't be surpassed by anyone else.

The difference in age no longer bothered her.

After all, how difficult was it to live before one could meet the right person? The difference in age seemed trivial in comparison.

"Make me a woman, Vaan," Astoria softly whispered in Vaan's ear before stimulating him with a few naughty nibbles. She was fully prepared in both mind and body.

Vaan calmly nodded.

Shortly after, he slightly slid off Astoria's beautiful blue dress and assaulted her exposed white rabbits, one with his hand and the other with a combination of his lips, teeth, and tongue.

A tantalizing and addictive shock immediately traveled through her body, causing her to grip the bedsheet as her body tensed up automatically. But under such a state, the pleasure was clearly felt.

"Mmm..." Astoria unconsciously let out a soft moan due to the euphoric sensation. "Ahh...!"

Astoria couldn't control her unfamiliar feminine yet erotic voice. It became louder and more drawn out as Vaan continued working his magic on her body.

"Unnn...!"

Astoria bit her nails as she tried to suppress her voice but still failed to keep her moans from escaping her lips.

She was embarrassed, but it was still bearable. She didn't want Vaan to stop, either. As such, she just endured it.

Nevertheless, Vaan eventually moved on from her twin peaks. He slid off her blue dress bit by bit as he made his way down to her belly. Before long, her hidden cave was exposed due to its leaking love nectar.

'This... isn't bad at all. Why did people say that the first time could be scary? What's so scary about this? I can get used to this...!'

Astoria's thoughts were innocent until she witnessed Vaan pull out his monstrous raging dragon. Her eyes immediately widened in shock, and her eyelashes started trembling with a hint of fear.

No matter how much she thought her body and mind were ready, nothing could prepare her for such a shocking sight.

'I-Is that going to fit?' Astoria wondered with distress.

However, Vaan didn't wait for her mental preparation. Since he had pulled out the raging dragon, it was time to enter the dragon's cave!

"W-Wait—Ahhhh~~~!!!"

Astoria's cry resounded from her bedroom and reached the far corners of the corridor, startling several palace servants.