

## The Witch 551

### Chapter 551: Hidden Information

"What are we looking for here?" Astoria wondered without any guard.

Although her late father's study held great sentimental value, she wasn't concerned Vaan would ruin it. She had that much trust in him.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't answer her question.

"Do you think your father was a wise king?" Vaan replied to her question with a question of his own instead, causing furrowed her brows slightly.

She didn't understand his intention, but she gave him an honest answer with a nod.

"Of course!" Astoria stated firmly.

"That's good then," Vaan acknowledged before gesturing to the study, "Take a look around with me. See if anything stands out to you. There's a high chance your father left something behind for you to inherit."

If Siegfried Braveheart were truly wise, as Astoria believed, he would not have taken the history of the Braveheart family to the grave with him when he died.

It was impossible for the knowledge of the past to be passed on to each succeeding head of the Braveheart family through word of mouth alone and survived to the present day.

Instances where the heads of the Braveheart family died untimely deaths must have happened more than once over such a long passage of time.

As such, the heads of the Braveheart family must have at least had insurance in case they couldn't pass on their knowledge verbally.

And as the only child and heir of Siegfried Braveheart, it would only make sense for him to leave Astoria a clue.

At first, Astoria was only curious about Vaan's surprise. But now, his words had caught her full attention.

King Siegfried Braveheart's study was where she had spent most of her childhood learning about moral values, principles, and responsibilities. Most of her memories of the study had already become vague over the years. However, her father's teachings were still quite vivid in her mind.

Her father didn't believe royalty born with privileged statuses shouldn't abuse their privilege. Instead, they had to conduct themselves in a manner that was befitting and deserving of said privilege.

Astoria traced her hand along the row of books on the left shelf as she recalled her memories of the place.

However, nothing particularly special stood out for her, even after she passed all the bookshelves. None of the books on the shelves were particularly memorable or special to her.

But thinking of special books, Astoria suddenly recalled one particular book that had caught her interest – her father's diary.

She remembered her father always wrote in his diary while he was educating her. Thinking back carefully, he only wrote in the diary after she gave answers to his quizzes.

She immediately glanced at her late father's clean desk. The diary wasn't on the desk. Thus, she pulled open the drawers and searched. But even then, the diary was not there.

"Not here..." Astoria muttered blankly before the sound of flipping pages prompted her to glance up at Vaan.

It turned out he had already picked out the diary during the time she wandered around the study's small private library with her mind preoccupied.

Vaan flipped through the pages very quickly but also carefully to avoid damaging the diary. When he sensed Astoria's gaze on the diary, he immediately knew the diary was the object of importance he was looking for.

Whatever King Siegfried Braveheart left behind for Astoria must be hidden in it.

However, even after finishing the diary, he failed to find a piece of important information related to the Braveheart family's history with Pangea and the Sun God Temple.

The diary's contents were mostly about King Siegfried Braveheart's thoughts and praises for his daughter as he watched her grow and learn, becoming an excellent model person.

Of course, he knew the hidden knowledge couldn't possibly be written in plain sight. Thus, he used every known secret code in Pangea to decipher the diary's contents. Unfortunately, he still failed to decipher the diary's hidden information.

Despite his failure, Vaan didn't doubt his judgment regarding the diary being an object of importance.

He could tell there was hidden information contained within the diary due to their sentences not connecting and appearing more like scrambled thoughts that accumulated over time.

The problem was there, but the right formula to reach the answer was missing.

"Your father most likely left something for you inside this diary. Have a look and see if you can figure anything out. His message to you should be coded," Vaan said, passing the diary to Astoria.

After Astoria accepted the diary with a nod, she quickly perused the diary. Reading how proud her father was of her, Astoria's eyes couldn't help but become watery with emotions. She suddenly missed her father again.

Nevertheless, she wiped her tears and kept reading from start to end.

Astoria's reading speed was much slower than Vaan's. Thus, they both ended up spending the entire evening in the study.

During this time, Vaan perused the other books on the shelf and played with Topaz. Ruby, on the other hand, was kept inside the fire spirit space.

He wouldn't want to risk burning the study, even if he were confident in preventing it.

The study was a place with sentimental value to Astoria.

"I remember now!" Astoria suddenly exclaimed, prompting Vaan to glance over.

"You found out how to crack the message hidden in the diary?" Vaan inquired, focusing his attention on the diary. Astoria had only read a third of the diary during this period.

"Mm!" Astoria nodded.

She excitedly sat down at the desk and flipped back to the front of the diary to start over. She also pulled out a spare piece of paper and an ink pen.

"The formula to crack the hidden information in my father's diary is based on my father's answer to a question I once asked him in my early years. It was a question about the conflicting religions between the Holy Knight Kingdom of the past and the Great Ratholos Empire of today."

"I once asked my father, "How come the two countries dislike each other so much due to our conflicting religions yet never warred each other over it?" At that time, I thought it was quite blasphemous that another religion could have such a differing understanding of the beginning."

"Can you guess how my father responded to my question, Vaan?" Astoria asked while deciphering the diary's context at the same time.

However, Vaan calmly shook his head and let her continue.

"My father simply laughed it off and told me a story about the constant bicker between the Great Ratholos Empire's people arguing with our country's people when the two countries still had contact with each other..." Astoria started recounting what she heard.

Supposedly, during the early stages of both countries' religions, there were constant arguments as each side denounced each other's faiths and tried to prove theirs was the correct one. But because there was never a conclusion to the bickering, it became heated to the point where both countries wanted to destroy each other to prove their faith.

Both countries had mobilized their armies on the borders and met each other at the borders. But before the battle could start, they ended up recalling their armies and cutting off all contact.

This was due to something one of Astoria's ancestors said before the battle could happen.

"Everyone is entitled to their own opinions and beliefs. It's either I'm right, and you're wrong, I'm wrong, and you're right, or we are both wrong. But we both can't be right!" Astoria's ancestor had said.

Because of those words, the two countries eventually learned to acknowledge each other's religions, even if they didn't agree with them.

Nevertheless, Vaan immediately saw the pattern.

Right, wrong, wrong, right, wrong, wrong, right, right...

After realizing it was a formula for the preservation and elimination of words, Vaan immediately applied it to the diary's texts in his mind, deciphering it countless folds faster than Astoria's handwriting speed.

Shortly after cutting out the excess words, he was left with the remaining half of the dairy's texts.

Although it still looked like a bunch of nonsense when the words were connected in order, all the keywords were kept. Thus, he mentally rearranged all the words until they made sense.

There was most likely a second part to deciphering the remaining content, but he didn't need it at this point.

After countless rearrangements of words, Vaan finally acquired a complete text that made sense.

King Siegfried's hidden information was divided into three parts.

One part was about the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe's history with the Golden Dragon Pangea, which matched the story from the Elderwatch family.

However, it also included the names of the five ancient families from the Blessed Golden Dragon Pangea.

Namely, they were the Braveheart and Elderwatch families, which he had already learned, the Armstrong family, the Weissman family, and finally, the Evermore family.

The second part included the origin of the Sun God Temple and how to control it.

Unfortunately, the secret method was outdated and no longer worked on the current Sun God Temple since they entered the era of magic and aura users.

Lastly, the third part revealed secrets about Astoria's birth.

#### Chapter 552: King Siegfried Braveheart's Message

Along with the secrets of Astoria's birth were her parents' last messages to her. Their love, dreams, and hope could be clearly sensed in them.

Vaan glanced at Astoria.

At that moment, she was already immersed in deciphering the hidden text in her father's diary. He could guess that she would continue deciphering the hidden text even after he passed the complete information to her.

After all, no matter how wise King Siegfried was, a lot of time and thought must have been invested in producing the hidden information.

Considering what he had just learned from King Siegfried's information, he wouldn't be surprised if the person had started recording the hidden information right after Astoria's birth.

Although Astoria wouldn't realize that until later, Vaan was certain she would still want to solve the puzzle her father made for her, even after she knew the answer.

This was something Vaan could understand but couldn't relate to.

After all, in his reasonable opinion, King Siegfried created the puzzle with the intent to pass the hidden information to Astoria; it didn't matter how she unraveled the puzzle as long as she received the hidden information as he intended.

Thus, the act of solving something that had already been solved by someone else was meaningless.

But, of course, only he saw it as meaningless.

To Astoria, the puzzled diary would be like a family heirloom her father left behind for her. Naturally, she would treasure it; the act of unraveling it on her own was to show that. Thus, there would be meaning.

Nevertheless, Vaan was also certain what Astoria wanted the most presently was to learn the information her father left behind for her.

As such, he walked outside the study room and signaled a palace servant to bring him some blank pieces of paper and an ink pen for writing on them.

Afterward, Vaan placed the paper against a flat wall and wrote down the completed version of the hidden text.

"This is...?"

Astoria glanced at the text-filled pieces of paper Vaan placed on the desk in front of her. She picked them up and started reading.

"The information left behind by your father. I deciphered it and wrote everything down for you," Vaan casually answered.

However, Astoria no longer heard him.

She already knew what it was the moment she started reading. As such, the deciphered information caught her full attention. She was even more absorbed in her reading than when she was trying to decipher the text.

The more she read, the more absorbed she was in reading.

Vaan watched Astoria's expression change from calm to serious, shocked, and finally, heart-aching sadness. Tears filled her eyes and dripped onto the paper, blurring the inked words.

Seeing her like that, Vaan knew Astoria had finished reading the third part of the information regarding her birth.

It was recorded that Astoria's father and mother both performed a blood transfusion on her multiple times. They attempted to strengthen Astoria's Golden Dragon Bloodline by giving up their own.

The Braveheart and Elderwatch families figured that if they could accumulate the thinned-out Golden Dragon Bloodline into one person, the person would have a higher chance of awakening the Golden Dragon Bloodline and reviving the glory of the past.

However, the Golden Dragon Bloodline was so thin that no one could tell they still possessed the Golden Dragon Bloodline. As such, no one from the Braveheart and Elderwatch families was willing to invest their blood essences in what could be a futile attempt.

After all, the blood transfusion would harm their vitality and shorten their lifespans.

Furthermore, no one was willing to make the sacrifice for a newborn baby that wasn't even a male heir. Astoria showed no outstanding qualities when she was born; they had no reason to choose her.

As such, only Astoria's father and mother performed the blood transfusion on her alone.

They sacrificed much more of their blood essences to increase Astoria's chances of awakening the bloodline in the future. As a result of their actions, they were more vulnerable to sickness and destined for short lives.

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"Hello, my little princess."

"By the time you read this message, we will most likely no longer be around. I know you wouldn't have agreed with what we have done, but we both strongly believed it was the best for you and the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe. Forgive us for being selfish and leaving you early, but know that you are loved and always will be."

"We leave our hopes and dreams with you and will watch over you from the stars, always. Regardless of what others say and think, remember that you are our pride and joy. Be careful of the enemies in the dark around you, and live well, my precious."

– Siegfried Braveheart.

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Those were the final words left by King Siegfried Braveheart.

Astoria was affected by the emotional impact of her father's words and couldn't control her tears. They continued flowing down her cheeks and dripped onto the paper she held.

Topaz was also affected by Astoria's mood, and her grumpy heart softened. She left Vaan's head for Astoria's, rubbing it comfortingly.

"Kyu, kyuu..."

Topaz asked Astoria not to cry and said everything was going to be okay despite being clueless as to why she was crying.

Astoria couldn't help but laugh a little at Topaz's innocent act despite her running tears.

Meanwhile, Vaan exited the study room and left the two alone. Since Topaz already acted, he didn't need to join. He figured it was best for Astoria to get over it alone rather than lean on his shoulders.

He didn't want his women to become overly dependent on him.

Vaan closed the door on his way out.

While waiting outside, he thought a lot about King Siegfried's final message. The enemies mentioned most likely referred to the advanced civilization that held the Golden Dragon Pangea captive on the planet.

Although there didn't seem to be anything left of the advanced civilization besides ruins on the moon and in the asteroid field, it had always bugged him.

The battle may have ended, but perhaps the war wasn't over.

If the advanced civilization's home planets and the moon colony were destroyed, where would their survivors flee?

In fact, the answer was quite obvious – planet Pangea.

If the advanced civilization's survivors couldn't flee the star system, they could only retreat to planet Pangea and hide in it.

However, there was an obvious flaw with this assumption.

If the Golden Dragon Pangea's background was the cause of the advanced civilization's destruction, there was no way her people would give the advanced civilization's survivors a chance to thrive again.

Furthermore, they wouldn't leave Golden Dragon Pangea's body on such a desolate water planet to rot away without a good reason.

After all, it wasn't a good grave.

In other words, the possibility of the advanced civilization being destroyed by a different force was higher.

Vaan recalled Emphyrean Scarletsea's story and couldn't help but wonder if the unknown invaders of her Divine Realm were also responsible for the state of the moon and asteroid field.

But if that was the case, why was planet Pangea spared?

Was it because there was no spirit energy to advance the civilization? Were they spared because Pangea's people could not advance their civilizations beyond a certain level? They were too weak, so the foreign invaders didn't care?

There was too little information for Vaan to draw a definite conclusion.

In fact, he couldn't even fully trust the accuracy of the story regarding the Golden Dragon Pangea and the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe.

He didn't doubt Astoria told him the truth, but only according to what she learned. He could even trust the person who told her the story. But the further back history went, the less he trusted.

The scariest part of history was that one could never know if what they heard about it was the real events during such times. Whoever ruled the world could rewrite history according to their preferences, painting black to white or white to black.

Only those who lived through such times would actually know what happened.

As far as Vaan could guess, he wouldn't even be surprised if the advanced civilization that held Golden Dragon Pangea captive belonged to humans. After all, humans could have fled to Pangea and saw her blood essence as a valuable resource for rebuilding their civilization.

As such, they could have claimed themselves as Golden Dragon Pangea's descendants and mixed in with the primitive natives of that era or drove them to extinction.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't care about right and wrong. It had nothing to do with him. Only his survival mattered. No one would care about right or wrong in the face of life or death.

In fact, there was no right or wrong when it concerned one's survival. What mattered was who would die and who could live.

Of the two, Vaan definitely wanted to be part of the latter.

A few hours later, Astoria finished calming down and called Vaan back inside to discuss matters regarding the information they had uncovered.

Chapter 553: Discussion in the Study

"Thank you."

The moment Vaan stepped back inside the study room, Astoria expressed her sincere appreciation. Some swollen redness could still be seen around her eyes, but her emotions have mostly stabilized.

Astoria was originally a strong, independent woman, not to mention she was much older than Vaan. As such, she still had some pride and wouldn't want to weep pathetically in Vaan's arms, showing him her most vulnerable side.

Although she would have still accepted Vaan's shoulder to lean on anyway if he offered it to her, she was also glad that he didn't.

Vaan acknowledged Astoria's thank you with a nod.

"It seems like you two have become good friends," Vaan casually commented, glancing at Topaz perched on Astoria's head.

The two appeared quite buddy-buddy.

However, shortly after his comment, Topaz immediately took off, returning to Vaan's head. She took turns rubbing both her cheeks against him affectionately, showing him he was still her favorite person.

"Aren't you a little too quick to return to your master, Tia?" Astoria asked ruefully with a hint of helplessness.

Bleh!

Topaz poked out her tongue in response.

Astoria could only shake her head helplessly. Shortly after, she adjusted her mood and focused on the main topic with Vaan.

"A lot of vital information was revealed in my father's diary. I didn't expect my Braveheart family to be the one who founded the Sun God Temple," Astoria mentioned before saying with concern, "But, the method my father recorded... I don't think it will work on the Sun God Temple."

"The Sun God Temple was left to their own devices and has grown into a completely independent and heavily influential force. It won't be easy to control them," Astoria added seriously.

However, Vaan casually smiled.

"You don't have to worry about this issue with the Sun God Temple. I have already resolved it," Vaan calmly assured before adding, "Once I give them the command, they will follow the Braveheart family wholeheartedly again as they did in the past."

"This..." Astoria was stunned before her gaze softened with a sigh.

Before she could address the issue, the problem had already been resolved. She felt fortunate to have Vaan around. She couldn't express how blessed she felt in her current stage of life.

She was shaken and sad by her parent's sacrifice, but she was not the little girl she was three hundred years ago.

As such, although she went back in time for a little while, she was ready to move forward again.

"What would I do without you?" Astoria uttered, glancing at Vaan tenderly.

"But although we control the Sun God Temple, it can't be the Braveheart imperial family's public power, and neither can the Imperial Legion be. You will need to introduce a third force that will be fully under your Braveheart imperial family's control," Vaan stated.

"That way, there will be a balance in the powers of this country, and the people won't think little of your authority," Vaan added.

"But with you by my side, would the people really think little of my authority? Do we really need to introduce a third force?" Astoria asked, not to oppose the idea but to seek further explanation for her understanding.

"Naturally, the people won't as long as I am around. But this is my authority, not yours. Problems will appear if I disappear from this country for too long. As such, introducing a third force is necessary," Vaan calmly explained before adding, "However, doing this isn't just about balancing the forces in this country or reinforcing your authority; it's about uniting the people."

"There's a serious imbalance in the social standings between Darkans and Solarans, men and witches. Only by putting both Darkans and Solarans into equal positions of power in your new order will the Darkans in your country truly feel like they belong to this country, and the Solarans will stop looking down on them."

"This country can't be truly strong if there's a fundamental problem in the discrimination of races, whether they are Darkans or Solarans, men or witches. Thus, you must have at least one representative from each of the four groups in your new order," Vaan firmly stated.

Shortly after, he took out the package of papers and handed it to Astoria.

"This should help you manage the country and resolve everything faster," Vaan claimed.

Astoria didn't even need to read the papers to believe him. Since he said so, it must be true. She trusted him that much.

"Still, the issues in this country can be considered small problems in Pangea. There are more concerning matters mentioned in my father's final messages," Astoria mentioned with a frown, adding, "My father's words seem to imply Pangea's enemies have descended and are living among us."

"I don't think we will stand against Gehenna if this hidden danger stabs us in the back when the time for the decisive battle arrives," Astoria added, feeling deeply concerned.

"You're right about that, Astoria," Vaan acknowledged with a nod before saying, "However, there was too little information in your father's final messages. He did not explain who the enemies were or if they were even humans."

"Most likely, even your father had no idea who these enemies of Pangea are. Whether they are humans or a completely different race, we have zero leads to draw any conclusion," Vaan stated solemnly.

However, if he had to make a wild guess, he could say the remnants of the advanced civilization were humanoids.

The ruins of the moon colony revealed that much, at the very least.

"What a headache," Astoria rubbed her forehead with a frown before saying, "It would be best if it were an entirely different race. Humans have enough trouble among themselves."

"But if there is an entirely different race out there, humanity will be in trouble. After all, it would imply that we haven't caught a single sight of their appearance despite sharing the same planet for so long."

"They must be very good at hiding themselves," Astoria added, deeply frowning.

"Or humans simply never looked hard enough for them. Most aren't aware of their existence or even entertained the thought," Vaan casually added.

#### Chapter 554: Discussion in the Study (2)

Although humans have many countries spanned across the entire Pangea continent, many places were still inaccessible to humans. The dangers that existed in such perilous regions made it difficult for full explorations.

The Thousand Fog Mountains were only one of many examples.

"The Pangea continent only covers about fifteen percent of the planet's surface. Humans haven't fully explored the Pangea continent, let alone the sea. If an alien civilization truly exists on this planet, it could be hidden anywhere," Vaan calmly mentioned.

Naturally, the Divine Serpent Empire was the first on the list of suspicion due to the mist covering its entire land.

However, the sea and sky were vast, unexplored territories that couldn't be ignored either.

"How do you know the Pangea continent only accounts for fifteen percent of the planet's surface, Vaan?" Astoria asked with astonishment.

She knew the Boundless Sea was vast, but she didn't expect it to be that vast. She had originally thought the Pangea continent was quite huge. But considering the whole planet, it would indeed be quite small.

"When you can enter the sea of stars, the planet of Pangea will be quite clear for you to observe," Vaan calmly said.

"I see..." Astoria uttered with a look of realization.

She couldn't help but smile wryly at such an obvious answer. But then again, she had yet to enter the sea of stars. Thus, the thought didn't cross her mind.

Nevertheless, she couldn't help but anticipate the day she could enter the sea of stars on her own.

Shortly after shaking her head, her eyes glinted with seriousness again.

"We may not know who or where our enemies are, but we have a good chance to unite the continent. And a united humanity will be much stronger than it is now—or at least, that's what I believe," Astoria said.

"You're not wrong, but you are also wrong, Astoria," Vaan partly agreed and disagreed, saying, "A united humanity is stronger than a divided humanity – there's no doubt about that. However, it's not as easy to unite the continent as you think."

"I was told the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe's five ancient families would return to revive its glorious days if a member of the tribe awakened the Golden Dragon Bloodline. Even my father's messages confirmed the bloodline awakener would become the chieftain of the revived tribe," Astoria said.

"And now, we have found out that the five ancient families of the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe are much more influential than we could have previously imagined."



"Although I don't know which Evermore family in Pangea belongs to the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe as there are too many Evermore families, the Armstrong family is the name of the Great Ratholos Empire's imperial family, and the president of the Freedom Federation heralds from the great Weissman family."

"As the head in the field of magitech research and development, the Weissman family could be said to be the most influential power in the entire Freedom Federation and its neighboring countries. If we can gain their cooperation, we'll be seventy percent close to a unified race," Astoria stated hopefully.

"But that is also where the problem lies. Human nature is unpredictable and susceptible to change. Those in positions of power and authority are more likely to be unwilling to relinquish their power and authority to someone else," Vaan calmly mentioned.

"Even if Emperor Varan Armstrong and President Elfed Weissman acknowledge you as the chieftain of the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe, it doesn't necessarily mean they would return to serve the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe. They are more likely to continue their independence. For better or worse, the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe is a thing of the past."

"What will you do if they even consider proposing marriage to claim more authority and power for their own families in this revived Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe? Do you think they will cooperate if you refuse them?" Vaan casually mentioned shortly after.

Astoria blinked with surprise at Vaan's statement before her lips soon curved into a cunning smile.

"Would they dare ask for my hand in marriage in front of you?" Astoria asked, briefly teasing Vaan with a naughty look.

"You'd be surprised by human stupidity," Vaan casually replied.

"That's true," Astoria readily agreed without a hint of surprise, having already been aware of the issues Vaan mentioned. "Humans can be quite stupid."

"However, I feel like we are running out of time. We must take the chance to speed up our unification before Gehenna decides to invade us in full force. Even if I can't get Emperor Varan and

President Elfed to cooperate with us, revealing myself as the awakener of the Golden Dragon Bloodline could force our enemies out of hiding."

"Unfortunately, that's too risky, Astoria," Vaan objected.

"We don't know who our enemies are nor their strengths, but they are remnants of a once super-advanced civilization. We can be sure that they won't be weak. It's quite possible that in the process of luring them out with your golden dragon aura, we risk losing everything. I can't put you and everyone in danger."

"Haste only makes waste," Vaan stated.

"That's true, but..."

"No, buts." Vaan assertively denied Astoria's protests and said, "Just focus on developing this country. This package of notes will keep you busy for a while. So, you won't be able to handle too many things at once. Leave the other matters to me and everyone else."

"...Fine," Astoria reluctantly agreed when faced with Vaan's assertiveness.

Glancing down on the package of written papers, she could guess Vaan had recorded a lot of things to aid her country's management. She was also aware there was only so much a single person could do.

"Then, before you leave for other matters, can we... do it again?" Astoria hesitantly requested with a blushing yet bold look.

"Can't wait to get another taste?" Vaan smiled amusingly.

"How can I when you gave me such an unforgettable night? Is that a problem?" Astoria softly replied, learning how to seduce Vaan with her womanly charms as she gave him a tender look.

"Kyu?"

Topaz tilted her in wonder regarding the direction of their conversation.

"Alright, back you go, Tia." Vaan smiled, patting Topaz on the head before sending her back inside the earth spirit space.

Shortly after, he walked around the desk and boldly pulled Astoria up into his embrace. He went easy on her because it was her first night, but it seemed he would need to give her a taste of the next level.

Meanwhile, Astoria was immediately startled by his sudden move.

"Wait, not here... Ahh~!"

#### Chapter 555: The Ministers' Thoughts

Vaan assaulted the side of Astoria's smooth, vulnerable neck with his lips, teeth, and tongue.

A combination of soft nibbles, licks, and kisses caused electrifying, chilling, and cool, pleasant sensations to race along Astoria's skin and through her body. They were like waves that repeatedly battered against the wall, weakening her will to resist alarmingly.

Astoria thought she had already experienced everything about the pleasure between men and women.

However, she soon realized it was foolish of her to have thought that when she had only seen the tip of the iceberg. It was clear that Vaan had not shown her all of his skills in the art of pleasuring.

Astoria's body couldn't help but shudder under Vaan's skillful stimulation; her expression revealed a hint of fear for the unknown but also a greater anticipation.

She was willing to explore new things.

Astoria wrapped her arms around Vaan's neck and pulled his head down, burrowing it between her twin peaks to disrupt his rhythm and regain her control.

"You can do anything to me, but not here... Ahh~!"

Astoria gave a startled cry when Vaan changed his target of assault to her white rabbits.

Vaan rubbed his face between the two bouncy mountains roughly like a rabid dog chewing out his prey. With a few fine touches and bites here and there, he almost made Astoria's will cave in immediately as she lost all her strength.

Shortly after, he lifted his head and grinned at her.

"Did you know you are playing with fire?" Vaan asked.

Astoria's heart palpitated.

Without waiting for her reply, Vaan swept Astoria off her feet and carried her out of the study room in his arms, heading back to their bedroom.

"Y-Your Divinity, do you need anything?" a palace maid stuttered in the corridor, doing her best to remain tactful, but her eyes kept wandering between the two figures.

The palace maid's imagination immediately ran wild as she recalled the Imperial Princess's moans last night.

It caused her to blush heavily.

However, Vaan took no notice of it, or rather, he couldn't care less about what the palace maid knew and thought.

"Send ten jugs of fresh water to our room," Vaan ordered, walking off without stopping.

Among his women, Astoria was the one that could make him ejaculate the fastest. And thanks to his powerful body, each shot was not a small load. As a result, it was easy for him to dry out from repeated climaxes.

However, suppressing his climax through tempering and potions wasn't the only solution to last longer in bed. In fact, there was an even simpler solution – replenishing his lost bodily fluids with drinking water.

He wasn't fond of small breaks during the act, but it was indeed necessary until his body was tempered to a certain level.

After all, his body wasn't made of infinite fluids.

Nevertheless, shortly after Vaan reached the bedroom and had the ten jugs of fresh water delivered to him, the doors to the bedroom were shut tight, followed by Astoria's continuous cry of sheer bliss and euphoria.

The session went on from day to night and night to day.

Vaan made sure to fully satisfy Astoria before leaving for other matters. As such, he applied fourth-level pleasure and had her mind ascend into a new realm of heavenly bliss, causing her to reach climax many times more than him.

In the end, Vaan hardly required ten jugs of fresh water to replenish his bodily fluids. One jug was more than enough.

That day and night, Astoria learned what it was like when Vaan was rough and fierce in bed. It was wild but even more exciting. Only such battles were more suited for her. It truly exhausted her in both mind and body, but that was exactly what she wanted.

It allowed her a deeper state of relaxation.

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The following morning, Minister Mistral and the other official ministers gathered in the Great Hall for an early meeting. They all wore awkward smiles when they glanced at each other.

When they left the palace yesterday, they heard rumors of the Sun God and Imperial Princess going at it again. And when they returned to the palace the following day, it was still going on.

For an instant, they thought they had stepped into a brothel when they heard the palace servants quietly gossiping about it.

An awkward silence filled the Great Hall as the ministers had similar thoughts.

The gossip among the palace servants had made them curious.

They had overheard multiple palace servants boldly expressing their desires and dreams to experience such a night with the Sun God based on the joy they heard from the Imperial Princess's moans.

Supposedly, the palace maids all had to touch themselves that night to calm themselves down.

"It seems His Divinity doesn't just have godly power, but also godly skills in the art of pleasuring," the Minister of Internal Affairs commented while stroking his white beard with a thoughtful look, causing the other ministers to look at him with signs of disapproval.

They feared the Minister of Internal Affairs would speak ill of the Sun God and cause the Sun God's wrath to descend upon them.

However, their concerns were unfounded. The Minister of Internal Affairs only had praises for the Sun God as he considered his interests.

"At least we know His Divinity isn't someone who frowns on these mortal acts. That's good. If Her Imperial Highness could bear His Divinity's seed and give birth to a son, the country would have a divine heir," the Minister of Internal Affairs continued.

"However, it'll be even better if His Divinity could spread even more of his seed and have many offspring. His Divinity's children will not be ordinary and will become the force that brings this country greater prosperity and glory."

"Hm, I have a daughter who has just come of age. She has also inherited her mother's witch talent and beauty. I wonder if His Divinity will also fancy her?" the Minister of Internal Affairs wondered, thinking of introducing his daughter to the Sun God.

As a result, he received several glances of speechlessness.

Minister Mistral thought the Minister of Internal Affairs was shameless for wanting to use his daughter as a bargaining chip to further his position.

## Chapter 556: Revisiting the Delarosa Marquisate

Although several ministers thought the Minister of Internal Affairs was shameless, they couldn't help but acknowledge his idea was indeed a good move to secure their positions.

Who wouldn't want to be a grandfather to the Sun God's children?

Even if they were forced to retire from their official positions, they would still have a powerful connection to rely on. Such a connection would guarantee their rivals and opportunistic opponents would never think about stepping on them to get ahead.

"How can His Divinity fancy your daughter when my daughter is even prettier than yours, Minister Mathias? The way I see it, my daughter has a better chance to catch His Divinity's eye," the Minister of Agriculture boasted shamelessly.

However, he only received jeers from his peers.

"Good grief, Minister Walter. Your daughter doesn't even know how to walk yet. You're a monster and a fool if you're thinking about introducing her to His Divinity," Minister Mathias criticized.

"Ahem!" Minister Walter coughed awkwardly before quickly explaining, "I don't mean now. But twenty years later, my daughter will become an absolute beauty like her mother. I don't want to brag, but my wife is the most beautiful."

"Che, every man thinks his wife is the most beautiful. Who are you kidding?" multiple ministers immediately dismissed Minister Walter's claim.

Nevertheless, after the ministers removed the awkward mood from the atmosphere, they soon discussed the nation's affairs. At the same time, they deemed they were unlikely to have an audience with the Imperial Princess any time soon.

Thus, they instructed the palace servants to pass their messages to the Imperial Princess when she was ready to receive them.

They would come back later to discuss her coronation ceremony.

...

Meanwhile, Vaan left Astoria soundly asleep in her bed after spending a day and night together. He quietly took his leave after cleansing the room and dressing.

Ding!

<Your status has been updated>

...

=====

«Physical Attributes»

[1020 → 1050 Defense (↑30)] [Peak-level Rank 4] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 2725 → 2755 (↑30) (Early Demigod Rank)]

[1150 Strength] [Peak-level Rank 4] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Strength: 2855 (Early Demigod Rank)]

[810 → 930 Speed (↑120)] [Mid-level Rank 4] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Speed: 2515 → 2635 (↑120) (Early Demigod Rank)]

...

«Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation»

Effect: 50% base physical attributes increase.

[1050 → 1575 Defense (↑525)] [Peak-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 2755 → 3280 (↑525) (Early Demigod Rank → Middle Demigod Rank)]



[1150 → 1650 Strength (↑575)] [Peak-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5] [1705 Aura Power]  
[Total Strength: 2855 → 3430 (↑575) (Early Demigod Rank → Middle Demigod Rank)]

[930 → 1395 Speed (↑465)] [Mid-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5] [1705 Aura Power] [Total  
Speed: 2635 → 3100 (↑465) (Early Demigod Rank)]

Dragonwolf Scale Armament: High-level Rank 5 defensive power (Durability: 100%)

Enhanced Dragonwolf Claws: High-level Rank 5 offensive power (Durability: 100%)

...

«Elemental Affinity»

[Earth: 70%]

[Wind: 13%]

[Lightning: 12%]

[Light: 20 → 30% (↑10%)]

[Wood: 25%]

[Fire: 80%]

=====

...

Despite dual-practicing with Astoria for an entire day, the degree of improvement had grown smaller than the first time.

However, Vaan wasn't surprised by this; it had become the norm for him.

More importantly, his physical attributes had become even more rounded. He did not mind that his strength showed zero progress all this while.

Balance was important.

Furthermore, Astoria should have gotten something better from their passion exchange, considering her observable improvements from the last session.

'I've been showing Astoria a lot of my affection these days. I shouldn't neglect the others,' Vaan mused.

In the next moment, he used spatial shift and left the holy capital of the Holy Knight Empire, heading back to the Kingdom of Black Rose.

He covered great distance with his repeated jumps and crossed the borders within no time.

For his first stop, Vaan dropped by the Delarosa Marquisate, the closest destination along the way back to Blackthorn City.

He had been gone for some time. It was time to check the Delarosa sisters and their mother.

...

At that moment, Linetta and Lillias were both accompanying their mother, Belline Delarosa, side by side in the back garden of the Delarosa family's estate. They sat under the small pavilion and chatted over morning tea, enjoying the tranquil scenery at the same time.

Although Zodreg fully treated Belline, her limited lifespan caused her appearance to age quickly. She didn't just lose youthful beauty but was also conformed to a wheelchair for support.

Even if her lifespan were extended with potions, they would still wilt away as long as the hex on her existed.

"Vaan!" Linetta and Lillias exclaimed with brightened eyes.

The moment they spotted him softly landing in front of the small pavilion, they immediately rushed over to welcome him by clinging to his body intimately with joy.

They thought Vaan had forgotten about them.

Nevertheless, they couldn't express the joy they felt to see him. The past few days had been the happiest they had been in a long while.

They didn't forget they owed it all to him; they were completely indebted to him.

Meanwhile, Belline glanced at both her daughters with a hint of helplessness. They did not hesitate to abandon her side the moment they met their savior.

Despite that, she could accept it since it was her benefactor. The Delarosa family was truly indebted to the person.

However, she also felt a sense of inferiority in her daughters.

Considering her daughters had recounted all the events within the kingdom in the past few days, she was well aware that her daughters were quite lacking. They wouldn't stand a chance against the other notable women by their benefactor's side.

To put it bluntly, her daughters were unqualified.

Despite that, the person still reached out and helped them resolve the Delarosa household's internal conflict. Evidently, her daughters have a place in their benefactor's heart.

Still, she wanted to understand if their benefactor's feelings were sincere or only temporary.

Whichever the case was, she hoped to be able to do something good for her daughters before her lifespan expired.

"Can you leave us for a moment, Linette and Lily? Mother would like to talk to Lord Vahn alone," Belline requested.

"This... Alright, Mother," Linetta and Lillias briefly hesitated before agreeing.

Chapter 557: Deja Vu

"My deepest apologies for not being able to thank you properly for everything you have done for me and my daughters," Belline expressed apologetically from her wheelchair before continuing, "I know this isn't the time to ask of my savior, but I hope you could answer a few of my questions honestly."

"That's fine, Lady Belline. I also have a few questions to ask you," Vaan calmly said, taking a seat by the tea table under the pavilion and leveling their eyes to meet. Then, he politely gestured for her to speak, "Please ask away."

"Thank you," Belline Delarosa accepted the good gesture with a nod before gathering her thoughts.

"From what I've understood, Lord Vahn has achieved an unprecedented and unparalleled level of power in Pangea. The authorities of this kingdom or any country hold no sway over you. If you wish for it, you could have any number of women more beautiful and powerful than my daughters..."

"What I want to ask is why did you still help them... or help us? It doesn't seem like there's anything we can offer you that you can't acquire with your current standing," Belline wondered.

Vaan lightly smiled before casually replying, "Lady Belline, don't you think the world would be a darker place if everyone's actions were based on benefits and losses?"

"Your daughters and I share a connection bound by a chance encounter and experienced life-or-death situations together. Furthermore, they have been a tremendous help to me when I was a no-name with nothing. A poor man does not forget his favors once he achieves success, Lady Belline."

"Thus, I find it quite rude that you would discredit the special bond we share and suspect my act of repaying kindness with kindness as one guided by benefits," Vaan coolly stated.

"And I apologize for that, Lord Vahn," Belline calmly apologized, fully knowing her questions could be offensive. Then, she said, "If killing me is what it takes to relieve your anger, I am fine with that."

"I just had to be sure I am leaving my daughters in good hands. You see, we both know my time is running out. Before I leave this world, I only wish the best for them. Hearing what you said, I am relieved."

"I truly didn't think my daughters would be all that important to you, Lord Vahn," Belline said honestly.

"You're belittling your daughters too much, Lady Belline. Even if they weren't important to me, their potential is nothing to look down on," Vaan casually replied.

"Nobody is born strong from the start. With my help, they will surely grow into powerhouses. You see them as burdens to me now because they have nothing substantial to offer. But even then, they would still be burdens I can afford."

"But, like I said, they have been a tremendous help to me when I was a no-name. So unless they betray me, I will not abandon them," Vaan firmly stated.

If there were multiple turning points in his life, meeting the Delarosa sisters would be one of them.

After all, if he had encountered witches with an overbearing and supremacist-like nature in the escort group instead, he would have likely experienced a lot more hardship and conflicts.

In fact, if the Delarosa sisters hadn't given him such solid backing, he would have likely embarked on a road of killing witches and becoming a big fugitive in the kingdom.

Suddenly, Vaan's body stiffened.

A series of vague images flickered across his mind. It was flipping pages in a book at an incredible rate that blurred all the contents.

However, Vaan's powerful mind still managed to capture several snippets.

In one image, he saw Linetta and Liliias lying in puddles of blood in a barren land, which appeared to be part of the Blackmoon Region, after leaving the underground cave. Their bodies were sliced and diced with sword wounds.

Several bodies of the escort group could also be seen lying nearby.

The overall details of the image painted a scene of an internal struggle between the Delarosa sisters and the escort group over the Stalactite Milk.

The subsequent images were the deaths of witches in the forest region of the Red Goblin Mountain.

However, these witches didn't appear to be killed by the goblins. They died to sneak attacks from behind them by members of their own group – the hired mercenaries.

Nevertheless, not all of the images revealed the death of witches. Some showed places of taverns and interactions with aura users Vaan had never met, and in places he had never been.

The images were like real events that eventually led up to the destruction of the Black Rose Kingdom.

Henrietta fell in the war against the Holy Knight Empire. Astoria, along with other high-ranking witches of the kingdom, also died in the war.

They didn't die valiantly in battle but were assassinated in secret. It almost seemed like a single person had orchestrated it all.

Yet, he also sensed that person's pain and regret at the end of it all.

Vaan felt lethargic from seeing the vivid deaths of his women.

Obviously, such events never happened. And yet, the images conjured in his mind appeared so real, like he had been there every step of the way.

It was such a strong sense of déjà vu.

"Are you alright, Lord Vahn? You suddenly look a little pale," Belline mentioned with concern, noticing his abrupt changes.

Vaan shook his head and calmed down.

"Thank you for your concern, but I am fine, Lady Belline," Vaan said.

Despite that, the series of images lingered in his mind. He couldn't understand why such images would appear in his mind. After all, he didn't intentionally visualize them.

Glimpses of a parallel universe or an alternate reality?

Vaan wracked his brain, but only this possibility stuck to him like glue despite its improbability. It was the only one that could make sense of what happened.

He did suspect the influence of a mental spell attack, but the system didn't notify him. Heck, he didn't even sense any movements of magic.

The problem came from within himself.

Vaan frowned.

Chapter 558: Belline's Astonishment and Gratitude

'Compared to the people of Pangea, my growth rate would be considered shockingly fast. But the number of unresolved mysteries isn't lessening but also growing,' Vaan mused with a frown.

He had neither the power nor the knowledge to explain the strong sense of déjà vu with certainty. Thus, he could only push it to the back of his mind for another time.

"If you say you are fine, then that's good," Belline acknowledged with a nod, not intending to pry any further. She continued their conversation with a gratifying smile, "I think I will be able to leave this world with peace of mind."

She was fully aware of her limited lifespan and had accepted her fate.

Nevertheless, she still had some regrets.

"It's a pity I won't be able to see how my daughters grow in the future," Belline added with a sad smile.

"It's too early to be giving up on life, Lady Belline," Vaan calmly said, placing a vial of diluted Divine-rank Stalactite Milk on the table. "If you're gone, Linetta and Lillias will be sad. And I can't allow that, especially when it's within my power to prevent it."

"This is..." Belline glanced at the transparent glass vial with semi-white liquid on the tea table with curiosity.

It looked like Stalactite Milk, but its quality was unlike anything she had ever seen before. Thus, she wasn't confident if it was truly Stalactite Milk.

However, the rich, potent earth-attribute power contained within the vial made it pretty clear that it was anything but ordinary.

"Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk," Vaan calmly stated.

After finding the right dilution ratio, he managed to reduce some of his Divine-rank Stalactite Milk down to the Transcendent level.

Although its quality had greatly dropped, it didn't make it any less incredible to those who had never come across it.

"Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk!" Belline exclaimed, her eyes widened with great shock.

In the world of herbology, years were the measurement of quality for plants, herbs, or anything with medicinal value, for that matter. As such, their exact age didn't always equal their quality.

For example, a seven-year-old hematosis grass could possess the medicinal quality of a thousand-year hematosis grass for a number of reasons, including but not limited to a blessed environment and artificial cultivation through magic.



A Ten-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk was equivalent to a high-rank medicine. Thus, Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk would be equal to a Hundred-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk!

Previously, Belline's good daughters had shared some Ten-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk, which they had acquired on their adventures, with her. They hoped the Ten-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk would improve her condition and extend her lifespan.

However, the effects were limited since she had the fortune of encountering some Ten-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk in her younger years.

Hundred-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk, on the other hand, was something unheard of.

Belline recalled that Lord Vahn had also acquired a portion of the Ten-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk. Her mind immediately spun with greater shock.

Did Lord Vahn refine the Ten-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk into a Hundred-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk? – Belline wondered with astonishment.

Whatever the case, the Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk would definitely improve her natural talents and extend her lifespan by a great deal.

However...

"I can't accept something this valuable, Lord Vahn," Belline said with a soft sigh, adding, "Something this valuable should be saved for my daughters."

Even if Lord Vahn could raise the Stalactite Milk's quality, there should be a limited amount.

As such, it was better to invest it in someone with brighter futures and better potentials like her daughters – Belline thought.

Nevertheless, Vaan's lips curved into a smile when he heard Belline's reply.

"It looks like I haven't misjudged you, Lady Belline. You are worthy of this vial of Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk," Vaan said, casually waving his hand over the tea table.

Another two vials of Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk appeared beside the existing vial, totaling three.

"I apologize for testing you. Since it was our first official meeting, I wasn't sure of your character and if you could be trusted, Lady Belline," Vaan explained.

"However, you have proven that you can be. I supposed only a great mother can produce excellent daughters. You don't need to worry about Linetta and Lillias. I've naturally prepared their shares of this miraculous water as well."

"So, if you have any will to keep living for your daughters, drink these vials. Then, we will continue to talk," Vaan said seriously.

"But..." Belline still hesitated, voicing her concerns, "Such a precious elixir will be wasted on me. My life force is constantly seeping out of my body..."

"We will tackle that problem after," Vaan coolly stated before speaking assertively, "But right now, that isn't important. I want to know – do you want to live or not? If yes, then drink."

Belline was surprised by Vaan's sudden assertiveness, but she wasn't repulsed by it.

If anything, she felt touched.

Given the choice, no one was willing to die. As such, her answer was quite obvious – she wanted to live and see her daughters grow.

With a single teardrop running her right eye, Belline picked up the vials of Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk and emptied them one by one.

The potent effects of the Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk quickly strengthened her body and restored some of her youthful appearance.

Some of her wrinkles disappeared, and her grey-white hair recovered some brownish color.

Although Belline didn't regain her prime beauty, she acquired a mature form that was rare in most witches, making her appearance unique with its own charms.

Vaan's gaze only revealed simple appreciation and no deeper intentions.

"Words alone cannot express how indebted I am to you, Lord Vahn," Belline said gratefully before mentioning, "I recalled you wanted to ask me some questions. Please ask away, Lord Vahn."

"Are you aware a type of curse magic called the Life-bound Hex is causing your loss of lifespan?" Vaan asked.

Belline immediately revealed a startled look before shaking her head at a loss.

"Not at all. I thought it was the result of my old wounds from the Holy War flaring up," Belline replied before frowning. "Do you have any idea who could cast such a curse on me, Lord Vahn?"

"I was hoping you could answer that, Lady Belline." Vaan shrugged his shoulders with a helpless, wry smile before continuing, "But it seems you are completely in the dark regarding the matter."

Vaan proceeded to ask Belline Delarosa a number of questions regarding her potential enemies and rivals who may have wished to harm her.

However, Belline shook her head at all of them, thinking none of them could have been capable enough to cast such an intricate curse magic on her without her knowing.

"Then, do you have any relationship with the Great Ratholos Empire?"

"The Great Ratholos Empire?"

Once Vaan mentioned the Great Ratholos Empire, Belline quickly frowned with seriousness. Her eyes flickered, having thought of something.

Chapter 559: Main Family

"Great Ratholos Empire..." Belline muttered again with a distant, reminiscing gaze, recalling the past of her younger years. After a while, she claimed, "I was from the Great Ratholos Empire."

"Is there some connection between the Great Ratholos Empire and the Life-bound Hex I've been afflicted with, Lord Vahn?" Belline asked shortly after.

"During your treatment, we extracted the subordinate component of the Life-bound Hex. Among the ingredients used to create the subordinate component, we found a particular fishy substance uncommon in these areas, Lady Belline," Vaan explained.

"I see..." Belline uttered with understanding.

"So that's why the Great Ratholos Empire, possessing one of the largest aquatic markets in Pangea, was mentioned. Only a few places, like the Great Ratholos Empire's sea market, sell exotic and unusual aquatic creatures and plants."

"There's no need to guess. My family was the one who cast the Life-bound Hex on me. I'm sure of it," Belline said with certainty.

"How can you be so sure when you didn't even have a clue a moment ago, Lady Belline?" Vaan casually asked with interest.

"That's because I only considered my potential enemies and rivals, Lord Vahn. Who knew it wasn't my enemies or rivals but my own family that harmed me instead?" Belline said with a self-deprecating, sorrowful smile.

"My Delarosa family had quite some power and wealth in the Great Ratholos Empire. Everything would have been provided for my sister and I. We wouldn't have to worry about food for our whole lives."

"Even so, my sister and I still decided to leave the family and join the war efforts to stop Gehenna's invasion—against our family's will, of course. As such, you can say we didn't leave on a good note," Belline mentioned.

"But that still doesn't explain how you can be so sure it was your old ancestral family that cast the Life-bound Hex on you, Lady Belline," Vaan reminded.

"About that... There was one condition our family head imposed on us for letting us leave to join the Holy War—to drink a strange magic potion the family head brewed," Belline explained.

"Supposedly, the strange magic potion would let the family keep track of our life status. Whether we were still alive or died in the war, the family would know immediately. So, thinking back on it, I must have fallen under the Life-bound Hex when I drank that strange magic potion."

"I just don't understand why it's posing a life-threatening problem to me now after so many years have passed. There has been zero contact between us in these past three hundred years," Belline mentioned, frowning with doubt.

"Hearing you say that has made me become more interested in your ancestral family, Lady Belline," Vaan said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

Thanks to Belline Delarosa's information, he knew where to look for the master component of the Life-bound Hex.

However, what made him curious was the main Delarosa family's proficient knowledge of hex magic.

Considering the study of magic was still in its infancy during such a time, Vaan found it hard to believe the main Delarosa family could possess hex magic knowledge without acquiring some sort of opportunity or making a deal with a foreign entity.

And by a foreign entity, he implied every being that wasn't native to Pangea, whether in soul or body.

Empyrean Scarletsea, the Red Dragon Clan, and even Vaan could all be considered foreign entities that came to Pangea, whether by choice or by the guiding hands of fate.

Of course, the denizens of Gehenna and Chaos were also foreign entities.

And if the main Delarosa family situated the Great Ratholos Empire truly had any dealings with foreign entities to acquire their hex knowledge, they would be the biggest suspects.

"I don't have any solid proof, but I do have a bold assumption regarding why your life force has been drained drastically in recent times, Lady Belline," Vaan mentioned before asking, "Do you want to hear it?"

"Please, share with me what you think, Lord Vahn," Belline openly expressed, willing to hear any opinion on the matter.

"I believe someone in your main family is using the Life-bound Hex to drain your life force in order to supplement their own. And it's quite possible this someone is nearing the end of their lifespan," Vaan guessed before seeking Belline's opinion, "What do you think of this assumption, Lady Belline?"

"I don't understand the general nature of hexes, but that does sound like a plausible explanation, Lord Vahn," Belline acknowledged.

"Then, in that case, how do you plan to deal with the main Delarosa family?" Vaan casually wondered, adding, "Your life is practically in their hands if it is true."

"I don't owe the main family anything!" Belline firmly stated with a solemn look.

"After breaking away from the main family and having no contact for three hundred years, we are no different from strangers. So, I cannot tolerate the family head scheming against me and stealing my life force."

"Once I recover, I will definitely collect my dues!" Belline declared with a grudging, vengeful look.

Even though she left the main family, she brought honor to the family name by making great contributions during the Holy War.

And yet, her efforts were repaid with malice.

How can she endure it?

"I see. I've heard enough," Vaan calmly smiled, knowing he wouldn't have to be mindful of killing members of the main Delarosa family if the situation led to it.

Shortly after some more idle chat, Belline requested to be left alone and have some time to think in peace.

"Lord Vahn, if you don't mind, I would like some time alone. But please stay and join us for a meal tonight. I'll be sure to thank you properly for what you have done for us," Belline said before adding, "Until then, I'm sure my daughters would love your company."

"Alright," Vaan acknowledged her request with a nod.

Shortly after he got up and left to find Linetta and Lillias, Belline stared blankly at the garden in the distance, feeling lost.

The ones who harmed her the most weren't her enemies nor her rivals but those related to her by blood.

She wondered what she had done wrong to deserve such a family.

Sigh...

The fault lies not with her but with the family. Thus, it was better off disappearing. They brought it upon themselves – Belline silently thought.

#### Chapter 560: Lillias's Boldness

Inside Linetta's bedroom on the second floor, Linetta sat by the windows, where she could watch her mother and Vaan from a distance. Her gaze blurred when she focused on Vaan's distant features, recalling her memories.

She suddenly missed the times they had spent traveling together from the Blackmoon Region to Redpine City.

Although there were dangers to her life, Vaan's company also gave her strong security during those times. As such, she wasn't too concerned about the dangers. If anything, she felt like those moments were exciting and fulfilling.

She found that kind of adventure with Vaan to be a form of happiness.

Unfortunately, Vaan had grown too fast and left her far behind. He had become an existence that no longer needed to rely on her power or background. Thus, she felt useless and insecure.

Even if she could go on another adventure with Vaan, she would be nothing but a burden.

Her happiness was so fleeting.

What could she do to go back to those times and experience them with Vaan again? – Linetta wondered with a dreamy look.

Suddenly, Lillias barged into the room with a pen and notebook. She pulled a chair over and sat beside Linetta with an eager look.

"W-What do you want, Lily?" Linetta felt a little skeptical of her younger sister's intentions, especially after the latter responded to her question with a cheeky smile.

"Hehe!" Lillias slightly giggled before stating, "I came to study with you, sis!"

"Study... what? Magic? Alright, I'll help you study. What do you want to know? I'll teach you to the best of my ability," Linetta's gaze softened with a smile, thinking even her sister was doing her best to become stronger.

She should do the same.

Even if she would only be chasing Vaan's tail, drifting further and further behind due to the difference in their growth rates, she didn't want to give up.

Alas, Lillias had other intentions.

"Wow, really?! Those were your words! You can't go back on them!" Lillias exclaimed excitedly, flipping open her notebook and preparing to write. She quickly looked seriously before asking, "So, what did it feel like during your first time?"

"...What? My first time?" Linetta quickly became dumbfounded by her younger sister's question.



"Yeah! Your first time with Vahn. Quickly tell me about it, sis! I need to know what to look out for!" Lillias urged, pestering her elder sister with more questions, "How much did it hurt? What did you feel? What were Vahn's touches like?"

Tell me, tell me!"

Linetta was too stunned for words; she was completely speechless.

After hearing so much from her younger sister, she finally realized what the younger lass wanted to study.

She didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

However, even she felt embarrassed by her younger sister's questions. Her young sister was too open or simply had no shame.

"How can you ask me such personal questions? Find someone else," Linetta replied, blushing heavily. But then, she blinked twice and sharpened her gaze. "Wait a minute. Are you trying to steal your sister's lover, Lily?"

"Steal? No, no, no, you got it all wrong, sis!" Lillias quickly denied the accusation while shaking her head. "How can it be considered stealing? I would call it sharing. Besides, Vahn also has several other older ladies and women."

"Us young birds have to join forces to have a chance at scoring some of his affection," Lillias said justifiably while patting her chest.

Linetta was speechless.

She hated to admit it, but her younger sister seemed to have a point. She couldn't say anything to refute it.

"Also, I've already been marked by Vahn. So, whether you approve of my feelings or not, sis, I will only have eyes for Vahn!" Lillias stubbornly claimed, shocking Linetta.

"What!" Linetta exclaimed with wide eyes, baffled. "W-When did this happen? Why don't I know anything about it?"

She recalled her memories but failed to recollect any moment where Lillias could have gotten the opportunity to be deflowered by Vaan.

"But you do know about it, sis!" Lillias argued before mentioning, "You were so bold in that underground cave, doing it with Vahn while your little sister was sleeping beside you. I was stained by Vaan's mark then, so of course, I am also his—!"

"Ahh! Don't talk anymore! You're embarrassing me! I don't know what possessed me back then, okay?" Linetta blushed heavily with a rapidly beating heart as she recalled those moments. She must have been greatly charmed by Vaan to do what she did back then.

Nevertheless, she also felt relief after realizing the marking her sister was referring to. Even so, it made her all the more embarrassed.

Naturally, it was some of Vaan's essence shot that landed Lillias's sleeping face while they were doing the deed together.

Linetta's face felt so hot that she wanted to find a hole to hide in.

Despite being the elder sister, she didn't have the same courage to speak about such sensitive and personal matters so openly.

Her younger sister was definitely a wild cat.

"You two are as close as ever," Vaan's sudden comment trickled over from the open doorway, taking Linetta and Lillias by surprise.

Vaan leaned against the wall as he glanced at Linetta, who was trying to cover Lillias's naughty mouth from spitting more nonsense.

"Vahn!"

"Vahn!"

His name was called out twice simultaneously, one with excitement and the other shrieking with surprise.

Lillias immediately broke free from Linetta and pounced onto Vaan with a big leap like a cat, hugging him happily.

"Did you finish talking to our mother? What did you two talk about?" Lillias quickly inquired with curiosity as her body swung with her hands interlocked behind Vaan's neck.

"Some adult stuff," Vaan replied vaguely with a calm smile while settling Lillias down on the ground, causing the latter to pout.

Shortly after, he glanced at Linetta, who appeared more reserved around him.

Deep, complicated emotions were hidden in her eyes as she wanted to copy Lillias's actions but couldn't find the courage to.

"What's wrong? You weren't this reserved and unconfident before, my Lady," Vaan casually mentioned, speaking to her like he did in the past.

At the same time, he tamed the energetic Lillias by caressing her head.

"That's because our status isn't the same as it used to be..." Linetta softly replied, gripping the hems of her dress while looking down nervously.

Vaan briefly shook his head.

Right after settling Lillias aside, he strolled forward and took Linetta by surprise with a long, passionate kiss that sapped away her strength and thoughts.

He could say any amount of words to calm Linetta's heart, but it would never be as convincing as proving his affection with his actions.

The difference in their statuses wasn't what bothered Linetta – it was her fear of abandonment.

As such, the moment their hearts connected via the physical contact of their lips, Linetta's needless worries melted away like the sun of spring greeting winter snow.