

Chapter 1491

“Young Master Laidler is way too handsome...! I’d die happy as long as I get to be his girlfriend for a day...!” wailed one of the girls in the crowd.

Stetson himself simply casually said, “I believe that there’s been some misunderstandings regarding the incident where I left earlier, Xyrielle... It simply hadn’t occurred to me that you’d bump into such danger. My initial plan had been to lead the demonic bull away from the scene in order to save everyone!”

“...I knew that!” replied Xyrielle.

‘Yeah... Why did I ever perceive him that way? I hadn’t even been pushed off that high platform yet at the time Stetson left... There was no way he could’ve known about the danger I’d soon face...’ Xyrielle thought to herself, feeling much more at ease after hearing Stetson’s explanation.

With that, the night birthday party resumed and Gerald—and the others—simply got ignored as usual...

It was a little while later when a middle-aged man slowly began walking into the place... Looking at Xyrielle and Young Master Laidler standing together from afar, he couldn’t help but break into a gratified smile.

At that moment, Mr. Babel walked up to the middle-aged man’s back—his gaze seemingly filled with awe for the man—as he whispered, “Master...!”

As it turned out, the middle-aged man was none other than Yaakov Waddys, the master of the Waddys family.

Taking in a deep breath, Yaakov then replied, "Very good. How are things going between Xyrielle and Stetson? Is Stetson really the one true lover for Xyrielle that the fortune-teller mentioned?"

From his words alone, it was obvious that Yaakov had been greatly convinced with what the fortune-teller had said. With that in mind, he was very much concerned about his daughter's future.

"...About that..." muttered Mr. Babel as he thought about it.

"Go on, speak your mind!" replied Yaakov as he rested his arms against his back.

"Well... After observing him for a while, it appears that Young Master Laidler conforms to quite a lot of the fortune-teller's conditions! For one, he possesses remarkable abilities that ordinary people could never hope to achieve. He also has a good family background and his martial arts skills are immensely powerful!" said Mr. Babel, prompting Yaakov's smile to widen.

"...However, there is one thing that Young Master Laidler wasn't able to conform to... While the fortune-teller had said that the young lady would surely fall in love at first sight with the person she was destined to be with, she doesn't appear to have too many feelings for Stetson. On the contrary, she's having palpitations for a nobody!" reported Mr. Babel honestly.

"...What? A nobody?" said Yaakov as he frowned.

"Indeed! The person himself was present this afternoon at Heartstone Manor, and Xyrielle even made an effort to invite him over to the Waddys family manor again! His name is apparently Gerald Crawford!"

Hearing all this was certainly beyond Yaakov's expectations. After all, if he had to choose between Stetson and that nobody, it was a no-brainer that Young Master Laidler would be his ideal son-in-law.

"Speaking of which, that's him!" said Mr. Babel as he pointed at Gerald.

“...Humph! He truly does feel like a nobody! That b*stard... As he could ever become the son-in-law of my family! How preposterous!” grumbled Yaakov as he felt a headache coming while thinking about all this.

There had been multiple instances in the history of Weston where rich young ladies fell in love with ordinary men, consequently causing them to fall out with their families. With that in mind, Yaakov certainly wasn't going to allow a similar incident to happen to the Waddys if he could help it.

“Don't get too angry first, master, I haven't ended my description of him yet... While he does look like a nobody, from what I've observed, Gerald is... Quite extraordinary, to say the least. He simply gives off that feeling, at least to me... Regardless, why don't you go meet him first, master? After all, he's the one that the young lady apparently has feelings for... I propose you make your decision after you make your personal observation on him...” replied Mr. Babel, hoping to dissuade Yaakov from acting impulsively.

Hearing that, Yaakov took in a deep breath and calmed himself a little.

“...Very well, then! Tell him to come over later! I'd like to see if he truly is as extraordinary as you described!” grumbled Yaakov despite already having other plans on his mind.

Hearing that—and knowing that the party was at peak excitement—the waiter then bowed before shouting, “The master has arrived!”

The second she heard that, Xyrielle looked up and—upon noticing her father's arrival—called out, “Dad!”

As for everyone else, they instantly stood up before Yaakov—the master of the Waddys family—and greeted, “It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Waddys!”

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As Gerald got to his feet to have a look at Yaakov, everyone found themselves looking at Stetson—who had surprisingly stood up as well—as he said, “Ah, Mr. Waddys! I send my father’s regards on his behalf!”

Yaakov himself simply walked up to Stetson with a joyous face, not even bothering about the other people as he patted Stetson firmly on the shoulder while saying, “You’ve grown a lot more outstanding over the years, Stetson! I hope you’ll demonstrate your extraordinary talent again during this year’s underground festival!”

After exchanging pleasantries with Stetson for a while, the other men in the crowd began introducing themselves as well. However, it was quite obvious that Yaakov wasn’t as enthusiastic toward them since none of them were as important as Stetson in his eyes.

As for Xyrielle, after realizing that Gerald wasn’t planning to introduce himself, she found herself feeling pitiful for him. After all, the other men were definitely far more exceptional compared to Gerald. While Xyrielle had no doubts that he could very well share a world with his own circle of friends, he truly didn’t belong in the same world the guests here were in...

With that, she found herself growing slightly compassionate as she thought, ‘I wonder if it really was a good idea to have invited him over to my birthday party... Well, there’s no use crying about it now that he’s already here!’

Finalizing her thoughts, she then took the initiative to introduce Gerald by saying, “Allow me to introduce these two to you, dad! This is Gerald Crawford, and the one next to him is his friend, Perla Sherwin! They saved me this afternoon!”

While Xyrielle had only introduced Gerald to him out of pity, Yaakov couldn't help but get slightly angered when he heard that. After all, to him, this was her way of trying to get friendly with Gerald.

As a hint of contempt was reflected in his eyes, Yaakov casually said, "So you're Gerald! Tell me, where do you currently live? And what possessions does your family hold? Actually, what kind of capabilities do you even have?"

Staring wide-eyed as her dad bombarded Gerald with questions, Xyrielle found herself asking, "Dad? What on earth are you doing?!"

'Dad, why are you doing this...?' Xyrielle thought to herself as everyone turned to look at Gerald.

By that point, Perla realized that Yaakov had already been planning on targeting her master, even before they met. After all, it was pretty clear that the way Yaakov saw it, Stetson had been the one who had taken action and saved Xyrielle. That wasn't really a surprise since Xyrielle had been treating Stetson as the outstanding person who had beaten up the demonic bull, seemingly disregarding the fact that he had also run away.

Upon summarizing the situation in her head, the now annoyed Perla coldly said, "I'll have you know that my master is currently the guest of honor in my family, and he has a multitude of capabilities! Which one do you propose he should show for you to gawk in admiration?"

Upon hearing that rebuke, everyone present instantly became stupefied.

Yaakov himself was so enraged by her statement that he burst into laughter before snapping, "Your family? Which family do you even belong to?!"

"The Sherwin family from Jenna State!" retorted Perla unyieldingly.

Hearing that, a few executives—who had been standing behind Yaakov—moved closer to him before whispering a few things into his ear.

Following that, Yaakov then nodded with a bitter smile before saying, "...I see! So, you're Terrance's granddaughter! From what I've been told, your family attempted to participate in the underground festival this afternoon, correct? However, you were rejected, no?"

Not expecting Yaakov to actually say such things, Perla found her rage building even more as Yaakov smiled subtly before adding, "Speaking of that incident, I do wonder if you only saved my daughter today to gain access to the party... Were you hoping to get another chance of obtaining an admission ticket or something?"

"...You... What did you just say...?!" growled the deeply infuriated Perla.

'You're a famous and mighty master, are you not? How could you go targeting us like this from the very start?!'

Xyrielle herself hadn't expected her father—who had always maintained a serious façade—to say such a thing in front of so many people.

Just as things arrived at a stalemate, Yaakov's cold laughter broke the awkward silence.

"There's no need to be that angry, Miss Sherwin! I was just joking around! Look, you said that Gerald has several capabilities, correct? Well, you should know that I love capable people the most!" said Yaakov before turning around to look at Mr. Babel.

"With that said, invite him to the backyard, Mr. Babel! I'll be heading on first, but do know that I have some things to consult you about, Gerald!" scoffed Yaakov as he briefly glanced at Gerald before walking off to the backyard, his arms still against his back...

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Despite things not going as smooth as he had liked, Gerald wasn't feeling too worried yet. Worst case scenario, Gerald would have to fight his way into the festival. Even with that in mind, however, Gerald still had a little confidence that things would work out in the end.

As he thought about his next move, Gerald—who had been sitting at the rear seat with his eyes closed—suddenly opened his eyes before ordering, "...Perla, stop the car!"

"...Huh? What's wrong, master?" asked Perla, stunned.

Momentarily paying full attention to his surroundings, Gerald then replied, "...We're being targeted by someone... And it seems that the person isn't too far away from us!"

"What? Could Yaakov have sent people over to kill us? What a b*stard!" growled Perla.

"I doubt that. After all, the one tailing us has an extremely strong aura. I had made sure to observe any exceptional people I came across at the Waddys manor earlier, and as far as I could tell, I'm pretty sure that nobody there was exceptional enough to bear such a strong aura," explained Gerald, still focusing on the surroundings.

"Then allow me to stay back and help you, sir!" said Julian.

"There's no need for that. Just leave together with Perla. I'd like to see who this person is first," replied Gerald.

Before either of them could even reply, both of them watched as Gerald's body disappeared from the car!

The night was dark and Gerald dashed all the way to a riverside which doubled as a moat for Jenna City. Surrounded by dense forestry, Gerald listened intently to the gentle rustling of leaves above the many trees... Someone was running atop them to move above ground.

Despite knowing that and being able to see the slight depression of leaves when they were stepped on, Gerald wasn't able to see the actual person at all. Not even their shadow.

All of a sudden, two distinct snaps were heard, and Gerald found himself tilting just in time to evade a leaf and a branch that came shooting out of nowhere!

Both of them were moving so quickly and with such immense force that they honestly felt like laser beams. The exact power of the attack was made evident when the two projectiles completely smashed a large tree—that was thick enough for three adult men to hug—into pieces upon collision!

By the time the explosive sound had died down, Gerald found himself thinking that the assailant's training wasn't really all that extraordinary...

Before he could ponder any further, Gerald was greeted by the hideous sound of devilish laughter.

"Stop laughing already and show yourself... I'm here, aren't I?" replied Gerald casually.

Since the person had deliberately released his holy sense earlier, Gerald already had a hunch that he had intentionally wanted to lead Gerald there. With that in mind, Gerald wanted to see who the person was and what his motives were.

After waiting patiently for a while, the strange laughter simply resumed. Simultaneously, a series of whirlwinds suddenly formed around Gerald out of nowhere! What a strong aura!

Seeing that the assailant wasn't keen on replying, the now slightly annoyed Gerald added, "Are you done yet?"

Following another roar of laughter—that would send chills running down anyone's spine—from the darkness, a voice finally replied, "You're a young man, no? Have a bit more patience!"

Having had quite enough of the man's games, Gerald furrowed his brows before rushing toward the direction he sensed the man in...

And soon enough, he saw a white-haired old man—donning a black robe—standing at the very tip of a tree.

Seeing that Gerald had noticed him, the man then leaped before slowly descending—like some large bat—onto another tip of a tree that was much closer to the youth.

Once he was there, the old man tilted his head backward before bursting into laughter again, the hideous sound resonating across the entire forest...

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"If I may, who exactly are you, sir?" asked Gerald as he looked up and narrowed his eyes at the evilly grinning man.

From what he could sense, this person's training aura was considerably more powerful than Julian's. With that said, Gerald really couldn't help but have a higher opinion of the old man.

Truth be told, ever since Gerald exited the Waddys family manor, he had felt the presence of a person who had trained to attain spiritual enlightenment. However, since there were too many people there—due to the underground festival—and the person didn't seem to be interested in revealing themselves at the time, Gerald simply ignored them.

However, when the old man released his essential qi earlier, it instantly became obvious to Gerald that the old man wanted him to follow him. With that in mind, Gerald—who wanted to see what that person wanted from him—simply followed him here, eventually leading to the current situation.

Whatever the case was, the old man simply ignored Gerald's question and laughed aloud before saying, "To think I'd bump into such a talented young person today... I have to say, you're much more powerful than Stetson! Heaven truly makes good judgments!"

Not getting his reply, the annoyed Gerald gloomily repeated, "...Again, who exactly are you?"

Tilting his head back as he laughed maniacally yet again, the old man then replied, "I hope you listen closely before you die, boy! My name is Carlos Xenos, and my laugh is capable of stupefying ordinary people, you hear?! Tremble before my terrifying voice! Hahaha!"

As clouds of dust began swirling in all directions the louder his laugh got, Gerald simply shook his head before replying, "I've never even heard of you before."

Upon hearing that, Carlos instantly stopped laughing. As he narrowed his eyes and his expression turned into one of anger, the old man then said, "I have to admit that you're more daring than I initially thought, young man... Still, know that even those who have trained themselves to attain spiritual enlightenment—"

"Look, let's just skip all that. You told me to listen closely before I died, right? Does that mean you intend to kill me or something?" interrupted Gerald.

Carlos had wanted to say that even those who had trained themselves to attain spiritual enlightenment would behave respectfully before him. With that in mind, being interrupted by Gerald only increased the old man's dissatisfaction.

Despite Gerald's arrogance, Carlos kept his cool. After all, he knew for a fact that Gerald was going to pay the price soon.

"While you're definitely smart, you're unfortunately equally as stupid! After all, with how calm you currently are, it appears that you're still a bit too ignorant to realize that I'm as strong as a demon king! Also, you said you've never heard of me before, right? Well, I'll just make sure to drill it into your mind before you die!"

With that, Carlos then let out a booming laugh... which resulted in a shock wave that not only caused the surrounding trees to crack, but also sent the river water surging as though an explosion had just taken place!

"D*mn it, he's doing it again!" growled Gerald, feeling like he was going to have a mental breakdown if he heard any more of that laughter.

Had it not been for that old man's strong aura, Gerald would have zero doubts that Carlos was actually someone who had escaped from an asylum.

Laughing hideously, Carlos then roared, "I've already been training myself to attain spiritual enlightenment for a long while now, and my specialty is sapping others' essential qi and holy blood! In other words, you could regard me as a living nightmare for people like you who train to attain spiritual enlightenment! Hahaha!"

"I see... So, you've trained yourself by draining the essential qi and holy blood of others... If that's the case, I'm assuming you came here knowing full well that lots of people—who are training to attain spiritual enlightenment—would be attending the underground festival, correct? Was your plan to continue lurking in the dark? So that you could sneak up on such people when they were alone before draining them of their essential qi and holy blood?" asked Gerald, finally getting the bigger picture.

“You’re sharp, I’ll give you that! Regardless, know that my initial target had been Stetson. However, once I realized that his talent and the quality of his holy blood could never get close to even comparing with yours, I naturally went after you instead! You truly are a great treasure, you know? Once I’m done draining you, my training will surely advance greatly!” replied Carlos before laughing loudly again, now more smug than ever.

“However, you don’t have to worry about the pain! I’m not that cruel a person, for I’ll make sure to sever your nerves first and turn you into an idiot who can’t feel pain anymore!” added Carlos.

“Hold it-”

Before Gerald could even finish his reply, Carlos suddenly began laughing loudly again. In fact, this was the loudest and strongest he had laughed up till this point!

Explosive sounds followed shortly after as the water in the river erupted like no tomorrow and even more trees began snapping in two! Even massive depressions began forming on the ground as the sickening old man laughed on!

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The soul-shaking laughter boomed across the area for quite a while, and when Carlos was finally done, he placed both his hands against his waist in satisfaction, fully ready to devour his meal...

However, when he turned to look at Gerald again, he found himself instantly stunned.

He had assumed that Gerald wouldn’t have been able to block the magnificent power of his Roaring Laughter since the sound of it overpowered any other noise in the vicinity. Since that was the case, Gerald should have gone mad by this point.

Even so, not only was Gerald completely fine, but he even had both his hands in his pockets as he stared back at Carlos, completely unfazed!

“...H-how could this be...?!” muttered the old man to himself in utter disbelief.

Looking helplessly at the old man, Gerald took the chance to ask, “Look, Master Xenos, please refrain from laughing first... I just want to ask-”

However, Carlos—once again—cut Gerald off by immediately roaring in laughter again, this time even stronger than the last!

“Are you mental or something?!” grumbled the infuriated Gerald as he aimed at Carlos before flicking his finger at him!

It was a split-second later Carlos realized that a beam of light was coming straight for him! Immediately ending his laugh, Carlos attempted to resist the incoming attack, but he soon realized that it was far too late!

Following an explosive sound, Carlos found himself falling off the tree and landing hard on the ground! After a brief moment, he looked up at Gerald in sheer bewilderment.

“T-that... What a strong move...!” stuttered the stunned old man.

Truth be told, Gerald had only attacked him just to make Carlos shut up for a moment. To ensure it wouldn't be too much for the old man, he even made sure to only use a thousandth of his true power.

Regardless, not wanting Carlos to suddenly start laughing again, Gerald quickly said, “Look, calm down for a second and just let me finish my question! The way you're laughing... You're using a variation of the Roaring Lion martial arts skill, correct?”

“Y-yes...!” replied Carlos as he held onto his chest while scanning Gerald from head to toe.

“Thank god... If that wasn’t the case, I’d have thought you truly were a maniac with how insanely you kept laughing... Regardless, I’m guessing you were either trying to shock or knock me out with that annoying laughter!” said Gerald as he nodded understandingly.

“Speaking of which, how strong are you exactly...?” asked Gerald as he looked at Carlos.

“I-I’m a Third-rank master... And my title is Laughing Master! What about you?” asked Carlos, a lot more careful with his words now.

After all, Gerald’s attack from before was enough for Carlos to realize that the person standing before him now was extremely powerful, possibly much stronger than the old man himself! The fact that Gerald was being so composed only served to make Carlos even more terrified.

“I wonder about that myself, to be quite frank. Regardless, since you said that you’re a Third-rank master, you should be one of the people training to attain spiritual enlightenment, correct? Are you considered powerful?” asked Gerald rather curiously.

“...A-am I considered powerful...?” muttered Carlos as his heart instantly began beating wildly.

What utter nonsense! If he wasn’t powerful, why would so many people—who were training to attain spiritual enlightenment—label the Laughing Master as a living nightmare?!

‘Who exactly is this young man...?’ Wondered Carlos, finding Gerald to be extremely strange....

Whoever he was, Carlos found himself unable to reconcile with the fact that he was actually thinking about running away from this immature and inexperienced young man!

As Gerald thought about what Julian had previously told him—that Third-rank masters were considered to be the cream of the crop—Carlos’s face suddenly became enshrouded in darkness, leaving only his now scarlet eyes visible!

He wasn’t about to miss an opportunity to attack Gerald while he was off guard, and with that in mind, he roared wrathfully before rushing toward Gerald to make an attack!

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‘I’ve been living my life unhindered all this while...! With that said, there’s no way I’d lose against this immature and inexperienced young man! It’s simply impossible!’ Carlos thought to himself, an extremely hideous expression on his face as he stretched his palm out!

As five long and black fingernails extended from his palm, Carlos roared, “To hell with you!”

“You bore me,” replied Gerald as he looked at the incoming attack before shaking his head, a wry smile on his face.

Before Carlos could even inflict any damage, he stared wide-eyed as Gerald gently flicked a finger in his direction... sending a beam of light flying toward him!

Unable to evade in time, the golden light rammed right into his darkness, completely countering Carlos’s attack as an explosive sound was heard!

The next thing the old man knew, he was flying backward like a crumpled kite. A huge chunk of his clothes—around his chest area—had been shredded to pieces and blood was already gushing out his mouth like no tomorrow.

Enduring the immense pain he was now suffering all over his body, Carlos looked at Gerald in complete disbelief as he shouted, “H-how... How is any of this even possible...?!”

As far as Carlos could tell, Gerald hadn’t even been serious with his counterattack. After all, the old man had momentarily sensed him releasing an immense aura that was so powerful that it could very well be world-ending!

That was what stunned Carlos the most, and he found himself asking, “...That... What kind of martial arts skill even was that...?”

Hearing that, Gerald simply smiled subtly before saying, “You know, I’ve sworn to myself that if anyone attempted to kill or even threatened me a bit too much, I’d end them without a second thought... And in an extremely terrible manner too!”

Upon hearing that—and realizing that Gerald had completely disregarded his question—Carlos immediately kowtowed respectfully while bursting into tears before pleading, “P-please, master! Please spare my life...!”

When people reached a state like Carlos’s, they would be considered to be extremely rare individuals. The cream of the crop, in fact. With that in mind, his life had definitely been way different compared to what regular people could ever dream of attaining.

However, similar to the others who had gotten to a similar stage as he currently was, when standing before death’s door, he was going to do anything he could to live another day. After all, he had gone through such painstaking and difficult efforts just to get to where he was today. He couldn’t just die here. He absolutely couldn’t allow that to happen...!

As regret washed through him, Carlos found himself thinking, 'Why had I offended such a powerful individual...?!'

Chuckling with a smile, Gerald then looked at the old man before saying, "While I'm definitely not the most compassionate person around, I'm not overwhelmingly cruel either. Fine, then! I'll give you a chance to survive... You now have one minute to persuade me as to why I shouldn't just kill you off. Be as concise as possible!"

"...T-that..." stuttered Carlos as he instantly averted his gaze. He was now so anxious that his mind was completely blank!

"Time's ticking!" replied Gerald a few seconds later.

"I... I... I'm escaping!" shouted Carlos as he momentarily looked up before waving his large sleeves, sending a wave of dust flying toward Gerald!

Once the dust got inches away from Gerald, however, they seemingly disappeared into thin air! Even so, that was enough time for Carlos to take advantage of the situation and dive into the ground!

While Carlos could no longer be seen, Gerald simply shook his head before saying, "It's unfortunate, but you now have zero chances to redeem yourself. I'm saying it right now that you'll be unable to escape my holy sense, even if you're a few hundred miles away!"

With that said, Gerald shifted his divine thought slightly and instantly managed to pinpoint Carlos's exact location.

Pinching his fingers together as though he was holding onto a sword, Gerald was just about to finish off Carlos when he suddenly heard movement coming from the far end of the forest.

Following that, a male voice could be heard shouting, "H-help! Help...!"

As it turned out, the screams for help had come from a running youth who was carrying an unconscious, injured woman. With how bloodied the duo were, it was evident that both of them were equally as injured...

Regardless, the pleas for help were Carlos's saving grace since Gerald now had his attention on the quickly approaching duo who were slowly getting closer to him.

Knowing full well that Carlos could easily die if Gerald really wanted him dead, he simply allowed the old man to run off first. He wasn't really a big deal anyway.

Following that thought, Gerald heard a soft 'thud'...

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The sound had come from the exhausted youth who had just toppled to the ground—not too far away from Gerald—after making quite some distance in that short period of time. Despite having fallen, the youth still tried his best to protect the woman in his arms.

Witnessing the scene, Gerald found his eyelids twitching slightly as the youth—who had just noticed Gerald—shouted, "S-sir...! Please, save us...! I'm begging you...! Help us make a call or something...!"

As he fumbled a few steps forward, the youth's shouting grew increasingly nervous when he realized how feebly the woman was now breathing.

"Meghan? Meghan! Please, don't sleep yet!" cried out the youth as the moonlight finally illuminated the duo just enough for Gerald to have a good look at the woman's face... And when he did, his heart instantly began palpitating.

The woman... She looked extremely similar to Mila at first glance!

As he thought about how much the woman resembled her, a distinct and cold voice could suddenly be heard shouting, "They're right up ahead!"

Snapping out of it, Gerald watched as eight burly men dashed out from the forest and quickly surrounded them.

While that alone wouldn't have surprised Gerald, he found himself feeling slightly astonished that these people—the youth included—all had hints of inner strength in their bodies. From what he could tell, these were all rather exceptional champions.

"Give it up, Yule! There's no escape! With that in mind, why don't you just obediently come back with us? Or would you prefer if we dragged you back after breaking all your limbs? Regardless, your treasured younger sister... She's about to die, huh? Hahaha! I'm saying it right now that I'm quite the pervert, and I don't really mind having a go with a corpse as long as it's still warm! Hahaha!" sneered what seemed to be the leader of the group as his seven men began laughing as well.

"You b*stard...!" growled Yule as he clenched his teeth while glaring viciously at all of them.

"Of course, there's a way to avoid that... If you don't want Meghan to be my plaything, then you know what to do, right...?" taunted the leader as he slowly walked closer to Yule.

Seeing that, Yule hugged his young sister tightly before gently placing her onto the ground... Though his body was heavy from all his injuries, he gallantly stood before the unconscious Meghan, ready to fight them if it was the last thing he did.

Gerald himself—who had been witnessing all this from the side—found an inexplicable wrath growing within him after hearing the leader's words. Maybe it was because that woman's eyes resembled Mila's so much...

While he knew that she most probably just a stranger, it still felt like they were saying all that cr*p to the actual Mila, and that irked him to no end.

“...Huh? Who the hell are you, twerp?” growled the leader as he and his men finally realized that Gerald was present.

Gerald himself was already walking toward them, a frown on his face.

Seeing that he wasn't replying, one of the leader's subordinates then pointed at Gerald before yelling, “The hell's a wiener like you doing out here? Get lost if you want to live!”

Despite the intimidating warning, Gerald completely ignored the threat and simply walked over to the unconscious woman. From what he could see, her arms, chest, and abdomen had been stabbed, and blood was practically overflowing from her.

“...If she doesn't get treatment within a few more minutes, not even a deity can save her,” said Gerald.

“...W-what...?” replied Yule, his eyes momentarily reddening before bursting into tears!

“There's no need to be so anxious. You're lucky you bumped into me!” said Gerald as he gently flicked a few acupuncture points on Meghan's body... And just like that, all the bleeding instantly stopped!

Once he saw the rosiness of her cheeks return, Gerald turned to look at the remaining eight people before asking, “You're all champions, aren't you? Instead of killing others so mercilessly, why don't you use that time to train yourselves properly instead?”

“Oh? So, it turns out that he knows quite a bit! True enough, we are champions! Regardless, consider it an honor to be able to die in our hands today!” sneered another man from the group as the others chuckled sinisterly.

“You know, a champion is capable of hurting others just with flowers and leaves if they train themselves properly... However, I doubt any of you can do that because you’re all still pretty weak! Still... Do you believe that I’m capable of that feat...?” asked Gerald as a green willow leaf suddenly descended onto Gerald’s fingertip and began quivering in place...

Not knowing whether the leaf was shaking because of Gerald’s voice or some other cause, the leader simply glared back at him before growling, “Boy, who even are you? As if you’d ever be worthy enough of attacking with such harmless things!”

Looking at all eight of the wrathful faces, Gerald simply replied, “Allow me to demonstrate, then!”

Following that, Gerald gave a gentle flick and the willow leaf flew into the air...

Upon seeing that, the eight people instantly began laughing before shouting, “Holy cr*p! Just look at this idiot! Is he trying to amuse us to death or something?”

Yule himself had no idea what this man was trying to pull off... He hoped that Gerald had a plan since the eight laughing men weren’t people who could be trifled with...

Just as his thought ended, everyone present instantly found themselves widening their eyes...

While the men had been ridiculing him just seconds ago—as they watched the willow leaf hover in mid-air—they now found themselves feeling astonished beyond words as the leaf suddenly began emitting a golden light!

Not only that, but it was also slowly increasing in size! Soon enough, an explosive sound was heard and for some ungodly reason, the willow leaf had turned into a gigantic leaf blade!

“...W-what?!” shouted the eight people as they stared at the blade that was somehow emitting a murderous aura.

Though their immediate response was to book it, it was far too late for any of them.

With a single swift swipe, the blade sliced through all eight of their necks... and the next thing the wide-eyed men knew, their heads were already on the ground!

Now utterly frightened, Yule found himself screaming in horror at the eight freshly decapitated heads!

However, he quickly stopped himself before gulping down hard. Despite being the best of the best, the eight men had been decapitated in such a short amount of time... Had he not witnessed the scene for himself, Yule would've never believed such a statement... This truly was a tactic only a master could pull off...

Though he was still brimming with fear, Yule quickly got to his feet before bowing deeply to Gerald, filled with gratitude as he declared, “T-thank you for saving our lives, master!”

Choosing not to say much, Gerald simply casually replied, “I’m curing your sister’s wounds now. Turn around and don’t look back!”

Realizing that Gerald didn’t even seem to care about the eight masters he had just killed, Yule immediately did as Gerald instructed. What a terrifying person!

While he had no idea how the master was going to cure his sister, he knew for a fact that it was better for him not to question the master's capabilities.

Once he was sure that Yule wasn't looking, Gerald opened his divine eye and immediately began healing Meghan's wounds.

Naturally, it was a success, and after a short interlude, Gerald got up to leave. Now that he had saved the duo, he wasn't too keen on staying here for any longer than he needed to.

Before he got far, however, Yule quickly ran after Gerald. Bowing before him, he then said, "Please wait for a moment, master! May I ask for your name? As a member of the Quantock family, I'd love to repay your kindness in the future!"

'He's simply too powerful...! I need to get to know him better!' Yule thought to himself as he said that. Only a fool would give up the chance to make acquaintances with such a powerful individual, and Yule was certainly no fool. While Yule had initially thought that such powerful people could only exist in legends, with Gerald currently standing before him, he now knew that that couldn't be further from the truth.

"There's no need to know my name and you don't need to reward me. Regardless, since you're a champion too, I'm assuming that the Quantocks are a secret society as well? Are you perhaps here to join the underground festival?" asked Gerald as he shook his head, figuring that that was the only plausible answer.

Returning a firm nod, Yule then said, "That's right, master! My family's actually a cryptic family, and during the earlier years, the Quantocks had been the ones in charge of managing and controlling the underground forces within Jenna City. Unfortunately, things went south a little later and we ended up getting driven out of the city! Despite the fact that my family specializes in organizing events—such as the underground festival in the past—, to think that all it took was a little under twenty years for us to actually require an admission ticket just to join the festival!"

Following that, Yule turned to look at Gerald before asking, "Have you come to join the festival as well, master? If it isn't too rude, may I know whether you're a guest of any of the participating families?"

"I'm not a guest of any family. While I did come over to join the festival, it's unfortunate that I haven't even been able to get my hands on an admission ticket up till this point!" replied Gerald with a subtle smile.

"...Huh? Not even with your remarkable abilities...?" asked Yule in disbelief.

He, for one, trusted that any family who had personally witnessed Gerald's immense skill and power would instantly yearn for such an exceptional man to be their guest. Hell, it wouldn't be a stretch to claim that the families would rack their brains just to find a way to become a subservient family to that powerful man!

After all, should they manage to do so, the family Gerald chose would definitely gain all sorts of treasures as he participated in the many activities. By the end of it, the family would surely be able to manage and control several properties, allowing that family to further expand their power and influence.

What more, with Gerald's capabilities, most of those probabilities were pretty much already in the bag.

However, the biggest plus to having Gerald on their side was the fact that that family would undoubtedly become an absolute family. A family that would be able to remain at the top from one generation to the next, never wavering in status and power...

With that in mind, Yule had thought that there were already a number of subservient families under his master since he was such a powerful man. To think that his master actually had none!

After considering it for a short while, Yule then said, "...Please allow me to make a presumptions request, master!"

Chapter 1500

As Gerald looked curiously at Yule—who had just knelt before him—Yule then explained, “Not only are you both my sister and I’s benefactor, but you also have such remarkable capabilities! With that said, I’m begging you to protect, and be the guest of honor for the Quantock family!”

Though the Quantocks were a cryptic family, they didn’t have a patron back then, which was honestly the reason why they were driven out of Jenna City in the first place.

Regardless, Yule recalled hearing that there existed a small group of people that had surpassed the level of champions, and after witnessing Gerald’s skill, he was sure that his master was one of them.

If his family had such a strong person on their side, the Quantock’s strength would definitely progress rapidly. With any luck, Gerald’s agreement would surely bring great and positive changes to the future of his family.

Hearing that, Gerald found himself frowning slightly as he asked, “A guest of honor...?”

“Well, essentially, what I’m hoping for is that you’ll agree to take the Quantocks under your wing. Once you do, my family will respect you over the generations!” begged Yule.

Though Yule had said that, Gerald knew what he was really after. He recalled how he had initially assumed that Julian was suffering injustice since he was working for the Duns back then. However, Julian later told him that he was the one who had taken the Duns under his wing!

‘I’ve completely ruined the Duns though,’ Gerald thought to himself.

Whatever the case was, it was obvious that Yule wanted him to protect the Quantocks from future danger.

While Gerald had no interest in such things, he did require a family that was able to get an admission ticket for him. Thinking about it, not only would taking them under his wing not hinder him by much, but he would also obtain a rather good disguise. In other words, it would be like killing two birds with one stone.

With all that in mind, Gerald nodded in agreement before saying, "...I accept!"

Truth be told, Gerald had only considered doing this in the first place since he was slightly moved when he saw how gallant that young man had been when he protected his younger sister earlier.

Regardless, Yule instantly called his family in excitement after hearing Gerald's reply.

While waiting for his family to arrive, Yule began sharing how all this had come to be.

Essentially, he had brought his younger sister along to negotiate about some things. However, on their way there, those eight killers ambushed them! While Yule wasn't completely sure of who had sent them over, he had a pretty good hunch that they were here under the orders of the Waddys, the current ruling family of Jenna City!

It was about twenty years ago when the Waddys had driven the Quantocks out of Jenna City. That incident made it evident that the Waddys weren't a family that people could afford to infuriate.

Regardless, it wasn't long before over ten cars arrived at the scene, and in them, were people from the Quantock family.

Since Julian had left with Perla—under Gerald's orders—and Gerald didn't really have anything to do if he headed back now anyway, he had agreed to follow Yule back to the Quantock family's temporary

manor. He was also incentivized to head there since he had agreed to take the Quantocks under his wing. With that in mind, he knew he had to treat them much more seriously now.

With that, it didn't take long before they arrived at the manor.

As soon as the car stopped, Gerald was immediately greeted by the sight of a middle-aged woman hurriedly running toward them while saying, "Yule? Meghan? Are both of you alright?"

The woman in question turned out to be Yule's mother, Madam Quantock.

Looking at the door, Gerald also saw a middle-aged man standing there, his face brimming with worry and concern. Behind him, stood several other old and middle-aged men as well as disciples, quite evidently members of the Quantock family.

"We're fine, mom! Dad! Had it not been for Master Crawford saving us, I wouldn't have been able to rush back to meet you!" replied Yule excitedly.

"Oh? Where is he?" asked the middle-aged man as he and a few of the older men looked toward the car. When they finally saw what Gerald looked like, all of them found themselves feeling astonished.

Chapter 1501

Xylon—the middle-aged man standing upfront—instantly grew curious when he saw how young Gerald actually was.

After all, despite the fact that his son kept addressing him by 'master' this entire time, Xylon simply couldn't imagine that young man as anything other than completely ordinary. Could his son have somehow been mistaken...?

While Xylon found himself thinking that, he still shook hands with Gerald rather friendlyly in order to express his gratitude.

However, after having a few more exchanges with Gerald, Xylon—being an elder—couldn't help but start feeling slightly contemptuous toward him.

Regardless, after inviting him in for a meal—and finishing it—Xylon brought Gerald and the others for a walk around the manor to show their new master around.

During the meal, Xylon had mentioned a large and strong stone called the Zekterite, and it was evident that he was keen on showing it off.

Upon arriving before the stone, Xylon chuckled before declaring, “This is the Zekterite I was talking about, Brother Gerald! As I've said, it's the hardest stone between heaven and earth! With that in mind, I make sure to bring it along no matter where I move to!”

Hearing that, Yule—who had been standing beside them—grew increasingly anxious. After all, his father and even a few of the family elders were already starting to call him ‘brother’ instead of master, and Yule knew how greatly disrespectful they were being!

Though Yule continually gave his father non-verbal hints to treat Gerald with more respect, Xylon simply pretended not to see any of his son's warnings.

Instead, he simply began elaborating on the stone's history, even though Gerald hadn't asked for it.

According to rumors, the large stone was first found lying at the very top of Tierson Mountain. By the time it was found, it appeared that the stone had undergone the essence of life for a very long time, though it still remains unknown whether it got to that point due to the special aura within it.

Regardless, the stone was well-known for attracting lightning bolts. Despite being a natural lightning rod, not a scratch ever appeared on the giant stone, regardless of how hard the lightning hit. Due to that, the stone was aptly named the Zekterite.

With his explanation now complete, Xylon smugly looked at Gerald before saying, “Well, what do you think, Brother Gerald? This giant stone of mine is truly invaluable, wouldn’t you say?”

Upon hearing that, the other old men who had followed exchanged smiles as well, thinking, ‘You’re just an immature and inexperienced young man... As if you’d know anything about this great treasure...’

Gerald himself simply returned a wry smile as he nodded before saying, “It does feel invaluable!”

“I knew you’d agree! Still, why do I have a feeling that you don’t actually believe that...? Either way, I remember my son stating that you had extremely remarkable abilities! Why don’t you show some to us to widen our horizons?” replied Xylon casually.

“Indeed, Brother Gerald! Why don’t you try splitting the legendary and unbreakable Zekterite for a start?” joked another old man with a sarcastic smile.

Naturally, Gerald easily saw through the sarcasm, though he couldn’t really blame them. After all, he had promised to take Yule and his family under his wing—after saving him and his younger sister—in exchange for his family revering him for the many generations to come. With that in mind, it wasn’t hard to imagine why Xylon and the rest of the family’s elders couldn’t reconcile with that fact.

In fact, Gerald was already aware of their displeasure from when they were eating dinner earlier. Though they exchanged simple topics of conversation, not one of them was about him taking them under his wing, and it was quite obvious that it was a deliberate decision.

Shaking the thought off, Gerald then casually replied, “...The Zekterite truly is one of the hardest things between heaven and earth... From what I can see, not only does lightning do nothing to it, but cannons wouldn’t be able to smash it either! After all, the stone’s been absorbing the essence of life for such a

long time that it now possesses a holy spirit. With that said, the Zekterite is only this strong because it's turned into a holy stone!"

Though Xylon had no idea what Gerald had just said, he simply chuckled before replying slightly sarcastically, "Then is anything that bears a holy spirit a holy item? If that's the case, wouldn't there be many other things that are equally as difficult to destroy?"

"You don't seem to be getting my point. How do I put this...? See, while normal items may be difficult to destroy, you can still inflict damage on them with enough inner strength or with the power of ordinary metals. The same can't be said for the stone since it's a holy item that's been imbued with a holy spirit between heaven and earth!" said Gerald.

"Oh? Is that so? Still, doesn't that mean that you're just ridiculing us old men for not being strong enough, Brother Gerald?" replied another old man with a bitter smile on his face.

As the same old man made fun of Gerald before the others, it was evident that they were giving Gerald a warning that went along the lines of, 'You'd best choose your words carefully, young man! Stop being so impetuous!'

"Oh, that wasn't what I was going for. You clearly misunderstood me!" said Gerald.

Hearing that, Xylon and the others' expressions softened slightly.

Just as they were wondering how Gerald would complete his explanation, Gerald added, "What I meant to say was that you don't even deserve to inflict damage upon the stone! Disregarding your strength, there are simply none of you here who are at the stage where you can even begin dealing damage to it!"

Chapter 1502

Upon hearing Gerald's casual reply, all the eyes of the Quantocks present instantly widened in great wrath.

"You...!" growled Xylon whose expression had turned extremely ugly.

"...Since you've said that, does that mean you're able to split the stone, Brother Gerald? If you are, then please widen our horizons...!" added another old man as he and the others gritted their teeth.

"Of course, I can. What's so strange about splitting it anyway?" asked Gerald as he looked at them before shaking his head with a bitter smile.

"Fun fact, the Zekterite is immune to lightning since it holds similar properties to it. For further clarification, there exist spiritual items that are produced naturally between heaven and earth. With that said, the item will gain immense resistance against the element it is attuned to. Even so, magic arts can be used to split the Zekterite since they're much more powerful than regular lightning!" explained Gerald.

"You ignorant youth! How dare you boast so shamelessly about nonsense like magic arts!" retorted one of the elders who simply couldn't take how arrogant Gerald was anymore.

Xylon himself didn't bother stopping the old man. After all, what the elder had just said was exactly what he wanted to express as well.

"Nonsense, you say? Well, allow me to demonstrate that 'nonsense!'" replied Gerald with a subtle smile as he pinched his fingers together as though he was holding a sword's blade...

After murmuring a barely audible magic chant, light began glowing from where his fingers were pinched... before what seemed to be an electric orb formed between his fingers!

Staring wide-eyed at the cackling cerulean orb that seemed to be bursting with electrical energy, everyone found themselves taking a step back as Gerald flicked the orb of lightning upward!

The second he did that, wild winds and lightning suddenly appeared out of nowhere as thunderous roars echoed throughout the area as well! With how strong the blades of wind were, everyone there felt as though they were in danger of being sliced if they weren't careful.

"...W-what...?" stuttered those who could still speak in nervous voices as they continued staring at Gerald in utter terror and disbelief.

Before they could even recover from their shock, an explosive sound suddenly burst from the sky, causing everyone's hair to stand on end as a massive bolt of blue lightning struck the Zekterite!

While the scene was nothing short of dazzling, it also embedded a massive fear among all who witnessed it.

Seconds after yet another explosive sound was heard, several jaws instantly dropped when the Quantocks realized that the stone had been smashed to pieces from that single strike!

As the debris settled and the wild winds died down, the nights soon returned to its initial peace and silence... It was almost as though nothing had ever happened...

Naturally, the biggest change was how dumbfounded all the Quantocks were. For what seemed to be an eternity, none of them dared to even speak or breathe... until finally, Xylon knelt before Gerald.

His action prompted the rest of the Quantocks to do the same as Xylon cried out, "You... You truly are an incredibly powerful person, Master Crawford...!"

Chapter 1503

While the Quantocks were kneeling before Gerald, a young man—who was participating in the festival—could be seen standing before a middle-aged one within the Laidler manor’s study.

“So tell me, Stetson, how’s your current relationship with the Waddys family’s young lady?” asked the middle-aged man.

“Everything’s under control, dad! With how infatuated Xyrielle is with me, I doubt there’ll be any problems with me gaining her affection!” replied Stetson with a subtle smile.

“Hahaha! That’s great to hear, Stetson! While the Waddys themselves don’t own much strength, the force backing them up is nothing short of terrifying. Regardless, I believe that you’ll be able to handle everything well. If all goes according to plan, we’ll definitely be able to use your relationship with the Waddys to eventually allow the Leidlers to have their day! Also, you had best not slack on your training either. The underground festival will be held in two days, and our family has to be crowned the victor this year no matter what!” instructed Mr. Laidler.

Hearing that, Stetson instantly replied, “Loud and clear! Still...”

“...Hmm? What is it?” asked Mr. Laidler.

“The festival... It’s held once every few years whenever a priceless treasure is located, right? I’m curious to know if they managed to find another one for this festival...” replied Stetson.

“Well, I’ve been investigating it myself, and I’ve found that the treasure is greatly important to exceptional people who are training to attain spiritual enlightenment. In relation to that, many such people have been drawn to this event, though they make sure not to reveal too much about themselves. With that said, it’d do you good to do the same!” advised Mr. Laidler in a concerned tone.

“Understood, though I’m sure many of them have already diverted their attention from me after witnessing my deliberate loss to Yagrorok back in Heartstone Manor!” replied Stetson as he shook his head with a wry smile on his face.

“That’s good to hear. You can rest a bit easier while you make the following preparations then. If things go well, and we obtain the Waddys family’s resources, we’ll definitely be able to expand our own family!” declared Mr. Laidler with a loud laugh.

A short while later—after Stetson left—the corners of Mr. Laidler’s eyes couldn’t help but catch a glimpse of something in the corner of the study...

If one looked a bit closer, they would surely be able to see a humanoid figure flickering in and out of existence there...

Moving on to the brightly lit Waddy’s mansion, Yaakov could be seen knocking on the door to his daughter’s room while asking in a gentle tone, “Xyrielle...? Are you still awake...?”

After a short while, the door to the room opened and Xyrielle—who clearly looked like she had just finished washing her hair—replied, “Dad...? It’s already so late! What can I do for you...?”

“Let’s just say that there are some things I need to talk to you about...” said Yaakov as he rested his arms against his back before walking over to take a seat inside her room.

“What’s this about...?” asked the curious Xyrielle in return.

“Well, it’s regarding how strict I’ve been toward you over the years... Especially when it comes to love-related affairs... I’ve been prohibiting you from chasing after love all this time... Do you hate me for that?” asked Yaakov with a smile.

“Of course, I don’t! After all, I know that you’re only being this strict for my own good!” replied Xyrielle as she shook her head.

“I’m glad that you understand my motive... Regardless, I’m pleased that you’ve developed feelings for Stetson... After all, I think pretty highly of him as well. Since your relationship with him has been going quite smoothly, I wanted to ask if you’d like to take it a step further with him...” said Yaakov.

Instantly blushing, Xyrielle then replied, “I... I’m not too sure about that yet...!”

Seeing this, Yaakov could easily tell that his daughter was being troubled by something, and Mr. Babel had apparently noticed it as well.

Since Xyrielle was still having doubts about her feelings for Stetson, Yaakov couldn’t find it in himself to further persuade her to be with him, at least for now...

Chapter 1504

Whatever the case was, Yaakov believed in his daughter’s insight and perception. With that said, he was certain that she definitely wouldn’t end up falling for a man like Gerald.

“I see... Well, that’s fine for now. Regardless, while I promise to always be by your side no matter what, I hope that you understand that you’ll eventually end up getting married to Stetson... After all, his future looks extremely promising! With that said, I hope you mentally prepare yourself for that...” said Yaakov.

Since Xyrielle didn’t look like she was particularly against the idea, Yaakov left her room with ease in his heart.

As for Xyrielle, after watching her father leave, she felt her heart palpitate as she muttered, “...Gerald...”

So, her father had come over just to tell her all that... As a sense of loss filled her while muttering his name, she could almost see his figure in his mind...

Fast forward to two days later, the underground festival was launched as scheduled.

On the day itself, no shortage of prestigious and influential families from all over the place could be seen gathered at the venue. Of course, there were even more guests who were secretly attending after receiving special invitation cards.

They were all here since according to how the previous underground festivals had gone, the champion of the festival would gain a rank similar to the most powerful person in the world of martial arts. Aside from that, they would also obtain the right to distribute a few mysterious items...

Regardless, it was also noteworthy that many families who had participated in the underground festival found themselves rising up the ranks extremely quickly! In fact, it wasn't a stretch to claim that many of the world's most powerful and major families today had relied on the underground festival to get to where they currently were! With that in mind, any families looking to improve themselves would surely value the festival.

Of course, there were also quite a number of families who were foolishly attracted by the secrets of the attending underground forces. Such families either ended up being cheated or forced to get money through thievery if they didn't have enough on hand.

Either way, while most of the ordinary people only attended the festival to enjoy the hustle and bustle, the insiders all knew that the festival's true purpose was to have deity-like people brawl against each other.

Despite how big the fights were, nobody ever dared to record a thing, which was why no relevant information had yet to be leaked. After all, should information accidentally leak out, the family who had taken the recording would most certainly be exterminated...

Moving on to the actual venue, while the festival was still being held within Heartstone Manor, it was now separated into two main areas, that being aboveground and underground.

Comparing the two, the area aboveground was similar to the size of a kindergarten when placed side by side with the university-sized underground area.

While the former was a place where regular bosses could entertain themselves, the latter was an area where people duelled against each other in authentic battles!

Regardless, Gerald himself had just arrived with the Quantock family's executives, alongside Julian and a few other people from the Sherwin family.

Just as they were about to enter, however, a smiling woman—who had been chatting with her friends while walking toward the main door—suddenly froze before calling out, "...Gerald? What are you doing here?"

Hearing that, Gerald turned around to see who the owner of the feminine voice was... and was instantly shocked when he realized who she was!

"Oh? Fancy meeting you here!" replied Gerald with a slightly helpless smile as he looked at the woman.

"Why wouldn't I be here? Still, it hasn't been that long since we've last met! Why are you treating me as though I'm a stranger? Regardless, weren't you unable to obtain an admission ticket? How did you manage to enter this place then? Either way, now that we've bumped into each other, I'd like to ask you to do me a favor!" said the woman with a chuckle.

The woman in question was none other than Xaverie. As for the other girls in her group, they were naturally also friends of Xyrielle's. Xyrielle herself wasn't present, though it was completely understandable. After all, she was one of the function's main characters, so there was no way she was going to be able to stay by her friends' sides like how she usually did.

Whatever the case was, Xaverie couldn't deny that she was curious about all the people accompanying Gerald here today... Still, she wasn't too afraid since she ended up subconsciously thinking about Gerald's true identity.

With that, she then grabbed onto his arm, making it extremely evident that she wanted to lead him someplace no matter what he said.

Seeing that, Yule looked like he wanted to say something before whispering, "Master..."

While the Quantocks no longer controlled or managed Jenny City, they were still a family that owned extraordinary strength. If someone was disrespecting their master, they'd surely have to teach that person a lesson!

Understanding what Yule was getting at, Gerald simply signaled for him and the rest to stand down for now. After all, while she was slightly capricious, she hadn't really done anything wrong to him.

With that in mind, Gerald revealed a bitter smile of resignation as he said, "All of you head on in... I'll see what she needs help with first before regrouping with you..."

Chapter 1505

With that, Gerald then followed Xaverie as she led him someplace...

He found himself slightly surprised when he realized that she had simply wanted him to help her carry a parrot.

Though the parrot distinctly knew how to mimic human speech, it hadn't said a word upon arriving there for some odd reason.

Recalling that Yagrorok was afraid of Gerald too back then, Xaverie deduced that the bird must have simply been too terrified to speak within Gerald's presence! It was exactly because of that that she was asking his help to carry it.

Not wanting to be further pestered by Xaverie, Gerald simply shook his head at the comment before agreeing to help with a nod.

"Still, to think that you were actually able to get acquainted with the Quantocks! Regardless, you really have to thank me this time, Gerald! For context, carrying this parrot isn't the only reason I called you over..." said Xaverie in a slow tone after both of them descended into the underground area.

"Oh? What do you mean by that?" asked Gerald with a curious smile.

"You may not be aware of this, but the Quantocks and the Waddys have held grudges against each other for quite a while now... What I'm trying to say is that the Waddys will definitely notice that you're with the Quantocks... In other words, you're pretty much sentencing yourself to death!" replied Xaverie in a slightly bitter tone.

"...Oh? So, this is what you wanted to tell me? Hahaha! I guess I really do owe you my thanks for warning me!" said Gerald with a smile.

"Why are you being so concerned for this loser, Xaverie? Could you have fallen for him?" teased one of her friends as the rest of the girls in the group snickered while covering their mouths.

"What utter nonsense! There's no way in hell that I'd fall for him!" replied Xaverie in a defeated tone.

Though she said that, Xaverie honestly had a pretty good impression on Gerald. After all, he was a nice and extremely kind man.

Regardless, Xaverie and her group of friends were permitted entry into the entire Heartstone Manor since they benefited from being acquainted with the Waddys. With that said, once they were in the underground seating area, they quickly found the perfect place to take their seats. Even Gerald was able to sit relatively close to the main stage since he was now associated with Xaverie.

Quite frankly, he had initially planned to leave after helping her. However, after realizing that Xaverie had called him over for his own good, he had a change of heart.

In addition, he now had access to better seats, meaning that he was going to be able to get a closer look at the formal showdowns between exceptional people—who were training to attain spiritual enlightenment—for the first time!

Either way, now that he was seated, Gerald began looking around the gigantic annular venue.

Right in the middle, was a high platform where the battles would take place. From what he had been told, there were over thirty families participating in the battles, and they could all be seen sitting below the high platform now.

While the families appeared to treat the Waddys with utmost respect, undercurrents naturally existed among them. After all, all the present families definitely understood how important this festival was, which meant that they were all most probably secretly competing against each other.

Regardless, from what Gerald could observe, he deduced that the only families who held true strength among the others were the Waddys and the Laidlers.

As for the remaining families, he had a pretty good hunch that they were simply being controlled by those training to attain spiritual enlightenment. While that was the case, none of the puppet masters appeared to be anywhere as strong as Stetson, and Gerald's assumption turned out to be correct.

One by one, they were mercilessly defeated by Stetson almost immediately upon entering the ring.

As the fights went on, Yaakov felt that something was off. He knew Stetson's capabilities well, and by right, he was only a First-rank Master... Even so, wasn't he defeating too many of the other similarly ranked masters a bit too easily? How had he managed to increase his strength so rapidly within that short amount of time?

Could he have managed to surpass that rank...?

Yaakov could only continue staring in astonishment as yet another old man fell off the high platform, swiftly defeated by Stetson.

The old man himself quickly got to his feet and bowed respectfully before Stetson while saying, "I'm now utterly convinced that you young people have surpassed our generation!"

Watching as the old man quickly left after saying that, Yaakov could hardly calm himself anymore. He was simply too strong!

"Was the power to rule finally going to the Laidlers this year...?"

Chapter 1506

Though Yaakov was muttering worriedly to himself, Xyrielle had admiration reflected in her eyes as she looked at Stetson. After watching all those battles, she felt as though she could finally see through that man.

As the fortune-teller had predicted, Stetson truly had immense martial arts skills and no ordinary person could ever come close to being compared to him...

Xaverie, on the other hand, found herself looking at Gerald slightly contemptuously before saying, “While Stetson is arrogant, he’s undeniably handsome! It’s no wonder why Xyrielle fell for him! Though I do wonder if you’ll get jealous of hearing me say such things! After all, I’m pretty sure you’re in love with her! Sadly enough, Stetson has all the strength and glory in the world! You simply don’t stand a chance!”

In response, Gerald simply grunted with a nod.

He had been preoccupied this entire time, observing each battle closely, wondering if anyone stronger than Stetson would show up.

After all, this was an extremely grand festival. It was impossible that only First, Second, and Third rank masters would attend, right?

‘There has to be someone more powerful than that attending!’ Gerald thought to himself.

That thought was the only thing keeping him from stepping forward yet.

As Yaakov smiled in resignation, Yule, on the other hand, was anxiously scratching the back of his head while looking from side to side as he muttered, “How immensely frustrating! Where could the master have gone? The festival is going to end soon!”

Seeing the crossed-armed Stetson—who had his eyes closed—standing atop the platform only served to further anger Yule, and he wasn’t the only one feeling taunted either.

‘That mother*cking guy really knows how to put up a show...!’

'That condescending b*stard...!'

While these were the shared thoughts of many, nobody actually dared to teach him a lesson. Not that they were capable enough in the first place.

Noticing how nervous Yule was, Yaakov—who had been sitting close to the Quantocks—turned to look at the members of that family before mocking, “Oh? Isn’t the Quantock family sending anyone out to battle? Or do you have nobody capable enough? Now you’re just making me wonder whether you just came to witness all the fun!”

“You...! You’re just a pot calling the kettle black, Yaakov! I don’t see anyone from the Waddys family capable of dealing with Stetson either! Regardless, mark my words that we’ll soon be settling some of the grudges between us...!” snapped Xylon.

Laughing aloud, Yaakov simply replied, “I see! I’m interested in seeing how you Quantocks are going to settle those grudges of yours! Hahaha!”

Following that, Yaakov turned to look at Stetson—who was standing alone on the platform since nobody was daring enough to challenge him—before shouting, “With the representative of the Waddys family defeated, I do wonder if there’s anyone among us still daring enough to challenge Stetson? If there aren’t any objections, I’ll be handing the power to rule over this festival to this fine young man!”

After a momentary silence, a roar of ear-shattering laughter could suddenly be heard echoing throughout the venue!

As objects within the venue began cracking or shattering from the immense noise, many people were also starting to scream and even faint.! Covering their ears didn’t seem to help with the situation either!

Noticing that Xaverie and the other girls were also wailing in pain, Gerald simply sealed their blood vessels in order for their hearing to return to normal.

Still, the longer he listened to the laughter, the more familiar it felt... Was it really Carlos?

“Aren’t you being a bit too generous, Yaakov? Giving someone else the power to rule... Just cut the act! I’m bloody sure that you’re extremely reluctant to make that exchange! Aren’t I right, you b*stard?” taunted the sarcastic voice before continuing to laugh almost maniacally.

Hearing that, Yaakov’s face instantly reddened in embarrassment as he retorted, “Who the hell are you? Show yourself!”

The second he said that, he was immediately greeted by a tight slap to his cheek! He didn’t even see it coming, and he ended up toppling to the ground, his slapped cheek now extremely swollen...

“Oh? You still have no idea who I am...?”

Moments after that statement ended, everyone in the venue witnessed as an old man began falling from the ceiling...

And landing right atop the high platform.

Chapter 1507

“...W-who is that person...?!” shouted several people in bewilderment as many others simply continued screaming.

Stetson himself couldn’t help but widen his eyes as he scanned the old man from head to toe before declaring, “It... It’s you! You’re alive, Carlos?!”

Upon hearing that, Yaakov instantly cupped his swollen cheek as he got to his feet and stared at the old man before muttering, "...C-Carlos...? The god of death...?!"

Even Finnegan Laidler—the master of the Laidler family—immediately stood up when he realized who the old man was.

Completely aghast, Finnegan nervously turned to look at his son before shouting, "S-Stetson! It's far too dangerous there! Retreat!"

Xyrielle was also looking at Stetson rather anxiously, worried about his safety.

"There's no need to worry about me, dad! Since he's shown himself, I'm taking down this fearful villain today!" replied Stetson as a subtle smile began forming on his face. He couldn't help but feel slightly excited now that he was facing a truly strong enemy.

"Amazing! Truly amazing! Hahaha! Truth be told, I had already anticipated that you'd be an idiot, but I never thought that you'd be this remarkably brainless! It wouldn't be a stretch to claim that you're the stupidest person I've met throughout the three hundred years I've lived!" announced Carlos as he continued laughing loudly while staring straight into Stetson's eyes.

Just a few days ago, Carlos had been seriously injured by Gerald, both esteem and strength-wise... With that in mind, he wanted to redeem all that loss by going all out during this grand event!

Regardless, he had been busy trying to locate Gerald all this while, thinking that he belonged to one of the larger attending families. Naturally, he hadn't been able to even catch a glimpse of Gerald throughout that period, and that honestly made Carlos more relieved than anything.

"For saying that right in my face, I, Stetson Laidler, will skin you alive, old man!" retorted Stetson, the corners of his lips twitching as he bumped both his fists together...

The second he did that, a force blowing upward began forming around Stetson, causing his long hair to seemingly dance about gracefully as he readied his attack!

Despite how dashing he looked, Xyrielle was still worried and she quickly shouted, "Be careful, Stetson!"

Truth be told, Xyrielle disliked Stetson's temperament quite a bit, to the point where she even found herself wondering if it was wise to fall for him. Even so, who was she to deny her fated lover that heaven seemingly decided for her?

Hearing that, Stetson simply nodded before taking a step forward... and launching himself toward Carlos as though he were some kind of human spring!

"Have a taste of my Lightning Fist!" roared Carlos as streams of electricity suddenly began surrounding his fist!

Carlos's immediate response, however, was to form a smug smile on his face before retorting with a laugh, "Come at me, you buffoon!"

The moment the old man's sentence ended, he extended his large hand, promptly summoning a darkness that shot out directly at Stetson!

An explosive sound was heard as both light and darkness collided with each other!

While Stetson wasn't holding back anymore and had fully revealed the fact that he had the strength of a Second-rank master, his expression had now changed drastically. Soon enough, Carlos's attack completely overwhelmed him, momentarily distorting Stetson's face as he faced the full brunt of the attack!

Not even having any chances to dodge, Stetson was immediately flung into the air... Before being thrown right back down onto the platform! Vomiting blood, he instantly began writhing in pain within the newly formed depression on the platform... To think that he wasn't even able to withstand a single blow!

"...B-by god...!" shouted several people at the scene as they released horrified screams.

Yaakov himself could feel his eyelids twitching erratically while Finnegan had his eyes wide open in worry and fear.

As for Xyrielle... She had initially anticipated that things would end the same way as how Stetson had dealt with Yagrorok. After all, the confidence he had earlier expressed was similar to his confidence the other day. With that in mind, the end results should have been the same, right...?

After watching him get taken out with only a single blow, however, Xyrielle found herself covering her mouth in shock, finally realizing how wrong her guess had been...

Chapter 1508

Laughing maniacally as he shook his head, Carlos then said, "What an utter fool! To think that you even dared to go up against me in the first place! Who the hell even gave you such courage?"

Following that, the old man raised his hand... and began lifting Stetson into the air without even touching him!

Watching as Stetson screamed in terror in his suspended state, Xyrielle—who was under the platform—quickly shouted, "D-dad! Hurry and think of a way to deal with that villain!"

Despite hearing his daughter's pleas, even Yaakov was at his wits' end.

As for Carlos, he found himself turning to look at who was shouting for Stetson's sake. The second he laid eyes on Xyrielle, he paused for a moment before declaring, "It appears that you're quite gifted too, young lass! Alright then, since you're so loyal, I'll just drain both of you dry together!"

Laughing as soon as his sentence ended, Xyrielle wasn't even able to react in time before Carlos lifted his hand again and drew the poor girl toward the platform as well!

Upon seeing that, Yaakov's nervousness peaked, prompting him to immediately shout, "I-I'm begging you, laughing master...! Please, spare my daughter...!"

Anxiously watching as Xyrielle struggled to free herself from being pulled any closer toward the old man, Xaverie—who had already stood up by this point—found herself yelling, "X-Xyrielle!"

Unsure what else he could do, Yaakov then added, "I-I'm sure you don't want to make an enemy out of that family, right, Laughing master? What more, my daughter doesn't even have access to any of the training realms! There truly is no reason for you to hurt her...!"

Hearing that, Carlos found himself frowning for a brief moment. However, he quickly recovered and laughed aloud before replying, "Hey, now, don't you think it'd be a bit too shameless on my part if I just released the person you told me to? How about this, I'll let you choose who gets to die! Will it be Stetson? Or Xyrielle? I'll let the two of you decide between yourselves! Consider it my way of paying the Waddys some respect! Hahaha!"

While she was still nervous, Xyrielle turned to look at Stetson with an expectant gaze...

However, what she saw was an extremely pale-faced youth who instantly pleaded, "S-sir! I'm begging you to let me off...! Xyrielle is just an ordinary person, so killing her would be as easy as squashing a

bedbug for you...! Also, do note that as another person who's managed to enter the training realm, I can still be of some value to you...!"

"...W-what...?" muttered Xyrielle as she immediately began trembling wildly.

This... This wasn't how she had imagined things would go... He was a man whom she had grown to admire... Yet to think that he would actually compare her to nothing but a bedbug...!

Laughing at Stetson's response, Carlos then turned to look at Xyrielle before saying, "His words do make some sense! And how about you, young lass? What do you think?"

At that moment in time, Xyrielle had been stunned completely speechless. After all, ever since that fortune-teller had told her what her future lover would be like, she had patiently been waiting for him to appear... The fortune-teller had even told her that the man was someone worthy of her love... Someone who would remain by her side till death did them apart...

To think that her destined lover turned out to be such a person... Was all that talk about her destiny mere a cruel joke then?

Thinking about it that way made her want to cry out, 'Just go ahead and kill me!'

Xyrielle was snapped back into reality when she suddenly heard an angry woman shouting, "You claimed to have lived for over three hundred years, right? I feel like that's a big fat lie since only a thousand-year-old b*stard would be capable of what you're doing! To think that you aren't even letting off an innocent woman! To me, you're nothing but a monster!"

The woman who had shouted was none other than Perla, and her fury had kicked into overdrive when he saw how Carlos was treating Xyrielle. Due to all that rage, she had yelled her true thoughts out without considering the implications.

When Carlos heard that, he turned to look at Perla before replying, “Oh? I have to say, it truly is an interesting day today! After all, I’ve managed to consecutively bump into three people who don’t appear to appreciate favors! Regardless, know that I have a habit of giving people—regardless of gender—particularly horrible deaths if they choose to disrespect me! With that said, you really are one unfortunate girl!”

After shaking his head with a bitter smile, Carlos—who had been casting a formation this entire time to lock Xyrielle and Stetson up—raised his hand toward Perla, ready to pull her over as well.

However, before he was even able to lift her off the ground, a beam of white light suddenly appeared and bolted down directly above Carlos! The light itself was extremely bright, and it seemed to illuminate every inch of the underground area.

Even so, Carlos managed to notice it just in time to barely dodge the attack.

While leaping to avoid the light, the old man found himself raising an eyebrow as he asked, “Who dares?”

Chapter 1509

The second the light hit the platform, an explosive sound ensued as large cracks began forming on the platform’s surface!

As everyone stared wide-eyed at the platform that had almost been split clean in half, the distinct sound of a blade being sheathed could be heard...

Following that, a middle-aged man wearing ninja-like garments stepped out of the clouds of debris.

Watching as the middle-aged man stared at him, Carlos found himself chuckling before saying, “So it’s you, Ghose!”

From that statement, it was made evident that he was acquainted with this person...

Regardless, the second Stetson saw him, he looked like he had finally attained a glimmer of hope as he shouted, "M-Master Ghose! Save me...!"

The ninja's earlier attack had freed both Stetson and Xyrielle from Carlos's grasps, and Stetson quickly used this chance to run over to Ghose, gritting his teeth as he glared back at Carlos once he was standing behind the middle-aged man.

His eyelids now twitching slightly, Carlos placed his hands against his waist, laughing out loud before saying, "Interesting! How very interesting! I would've never imagined that Ghose, the infamous elite ninja of Goldenslinger, would actually seek refuge from such a small family as the Laidlers! Do correct me if my guess was wrong!"

"You are correct, though in return, I have my own question for you. You, too, are a famous person who's been training to attain spiritual enlightenment, no? Why would you make things so difficult for these juniors? If you truly wanted a worthy opponent, you could've just looked for me! Either way, as long as I'm here, know that you won't be able to lay a finger on Young Master Laidler!" retorted Ghose, his pronunciation slightly off every once in a while.

Either way, it was evident that both of them were the best among the best, and their conversation alone was enough to create a strange and pressuring atmosphere that engulfed the entire underground area...

Expecting a large battle to commence between the two at any second, nobody dared to speak or even breathe too loudly...

However, much to everyone's surprise, when Carlos finally opened his mouth again, he simply laughed before saying, "While I, Carlos, am a fearless man, it's honestly way too much trouble for me to have to deal with the ninja of Goldenslinger. I'm sure you're well aware that you don't scare me, Ghose. Even so, I really don't want to have to deal with any extra trouble from the Goldenslinger, at least not for the

time being. With that said, I'll leave Stetson alone today! Consider it as my way of paying respect to you today!"

After saying that, Carlos simply waved his hands slightly, a clear indication that he wasn't going to continue giving Stetson any trouble for now.

As Finnegan—who was still standing below the stage—heaved a long sigh of relief, Carlos asked, "Speaking of which, are you going to help the Laidlers obtain the power to rule this time around?"

"I am, and if you're planning to obtain it for yourself, I'm not against having a brawl with you!" replied Ghose as he delicately held onto the hilt of his katana.

"Just forget it! I've recently suffered a number of serious injuries and I truly don't have the energy to have a large battle with you now! Still, I remind you that at my peak strength, the stronger person could be either of us, Ghose. Putting that aside, while I'm fine with letting Stetson off since he's with you, I'm pretty sure there's no need for you to interfere when it comes to those two young women. Putting it simply, if you aren't fighting me over them, I'm planning to drain their life essence dry in order to heal myself!" said Carlos as he pointed at Xyrielle and Perla.

In response, Ghose simply replied in a cold tone, "I only care about Young Master Laidler's safety!"

Hearing that, Yaakov instantly got up and bowed before Ghose, pleading, "M-Master Ghose! I beg of you to save my daughter as well...!"

Even Xyrielle and Perla found themselves getting increasingly nervous when they realized that Ghose didn't even know who Yaakov was.

Getting no reply, Yaakov then turned to look at Finnegan before saying, "Please, Finnegan! Please tell him to save my daughter as well! I... I'll hand the power to rule for this year to the Laidlers if you do, and I'll make sure that the Waddys fully support you throughout that period!"

Upon hearing that, Finnegan—who had just calmed down just seconds ago—found himself hesitantly saying, “...That...”

As Finnegan thought about it, Xaverie and the rest of her friends—who still hadn’t moved from their initial spots—anxiously awaited his answer. Still, who could have anticipated for such a villainous person as Carlos to appear out of the blue?

With how powerful that old man was, it was evident that the Waddys and Laidlers were finding it difficult to deal with him.

Regardless, thinking about all this reminded Xaverie about Stetson.

‘I remember him closing his eyes as he stepped up that platform... It gave the illusion that he was some kind of exceptional man... Even so, I’m now convinced that he isn’t all that great. After all, every time he bumps into an opponent more powerful than himself, he ends up in such a pathetic state!’

Completely speechless as she thought about it, Xaverie suddenly remembered that Gerald was still beside her.

“...Hey, Perla’s your friend, right? Aren’t you anxious at all...?” asked Xaverie as she turned to look at him... Only to find that Gerald’s eyes were closed!

‘My god! Is he actually taking a nap at a time like this?!’ Xaverie thought to herself, now boiling mad as she gently began shaking Gerald’s shoulder.

The second Gerald opened his eyes, however, she momentarily saw two beams of light shooting out of them! How terrifying!

Chapter 1510

Upon being shaken, Gerald finally snapped out of it as he turned to look at Xaverie.

The truth was, he had entered such a state since the five disks in his body had reappeared a little earlier. With that in mind, Gerald couldn't keep himself calm enough to continue watching the fights at full concentration.

While Gerald was still pretty much aware of the incidents happening around him, his mind was more preoccupied on the disks, which explained his lack of action.

"What are you looking at me for? Look down there! Your friend's about to die!" said Xaverie, feeling speechless.

"She's not really my friend... She's merely my disciple!" replied Gerald with a subtle smile, finding her over anxiousness slightly amusing.

"...Disciple? Are you still half asleep?!" grumbled Xaverie in resignation as her friends turned to look at him with odd gazes.

"Not really, no. Regardless, I don't think I've mentioned it, but I appreciate your kindness earlier, Xaverie! Now then, I'm heading off to aid my disciple!" replied Gerald as he stood up, finally ready to leave the sidelines.

Seeing how much trouble Perla was currently in, Gerald knew he had to step in quickly before something bad happened to her.

Before he could even make a move, however, he felt Xaverie tugging his sleeve while saying, “The hell are you doing, Gerald? You can’t just move around so casually! They’ll kill you!”

Chuckling in response, Gerald simply replied in an indifferent tone, “I’ll be fine, don’t worry!”

With that, he slowly began making his way toward the platformed area...

At that exact moment, Carlos—who was done waiting—was just about to draw both Perla and Xyrielle over to him when he suddenly heard a familiar voice calling out, “I do hope you’re doing well, Laughing Master!”

He recognized that voice anywhere, and Carlos’s legs instantly began trembling frantically as though they had just been struck by lightning.

Slowly turning around to see if the owner of the voice was truly him, Carlos’s eyes widened when he realized that his worst nightmare had come true... Gerald was now slowly walking toward the platform!

“...Hmm? Wait... it’s you again!” exclaimed Yaakov in bewilderment when he saw Gerald slowly walking past him.

‘He’s the one who’s endlessly pestered my daughter before this... Still, the way he called Carlos earlier... Is he acquainted with that old man or something?’ Yaakov thought to himself rather doubtfully.

“...Gerald...?” muttered the shocked Xyrielle who had also noticed Gerald’s presence by this point.

Xaverie and her friends were equally as flabbergasted as they watched the calm Gerald—who had slid his hands into his pockets—finally walk up the platform.

Now that Gerald was a little too close for comfort, Carlos found himself gulping as he took a few steps back, his eyes squinting in Gerald's direction as he muttered, "...What... What are you doing here...?"

Noticing Carlos's sudden change in demeanor, Ghose narrowed his eyes slightly as he stared at Gerald before asking in a cold tone, "...Who is this person, Carlos? And why are you so afraid of him? Don't tell me he's the one who inflicted all those wounds on you..."

Finding it hard to even speak without stuttering, Carlos quickly replied, "...That's him alright...!"

"I see. How interesting... I feel that this is my first time meeting such a young exceptional person... Regardless, if he truly is as strong as you've said, Carlos, I don't mind helping you kill him today! Though he may have been able to inflict terrible wounds on you, I believe that with our powers conjoined, we'll be able to take out at least half of those who've entered the training realm!" sneered Ghose.

"No!" replied Carlos almost instantaneously as he shook his head rapidly.

"What? Why not? Don't tell me you're too afraid to even make a move!" replied Ghose, feeling slightly surprised.

"Me? Afraid? Ghose, I'm Carlos! The man who's been able to enter the training realm with barely any hindrance! Do you think I know what fear is? Under normal circumstances, even if I bump into much stronger opponents, I'd still make a gamble and go all out on them despite understanding that I could very easily be the one left dead in the end! Note, however, that every time I do something reckless—like trying to drain the essential qi of my opponents or fighting exceptional people—it's always because I know that winning will either enhance my strength or fame!" explained Carlos while shivering.

"...What do you mean by that?" asked Ghose with a slight frown.

"What I mean is clear and simple. I know I'll die if I face him, and I don't want to just perish so meaninglessly!" replied the old man as his legs trembled one final time before his knees touched the ground with a soft 'thud'.

“Please spare my life, Great master...!”

Chapter 1511

The second they saw Carlos kneel, everyone’s eyes instantly widened.

The hell? Wasn’t this the extraordinarily powerful and evil Third-Rank Master, Carlos Xenos? Was he actually kneeling before this young man before even attempting to make a single move? How was this even possible?

Who... Who was this young man...?

As the people in the crowd continued discussing the matter among themselves, Xyrielle herself simply stared at Gerald who was now calmly walking closer to the kneeling old man, his hands still in his pockets.

Xyrielle hadn’t expected any of this to happen. Nobody had.

Whatever the case was, he was now no longer hiding his pressuring and powerful aura, and anyone who sensed it would surely feel their hearts palpitate. Xyrielle, of course, was no exception to that.

As for Ghose, he quickly recovered from the shock of Carlos kneeling before Gerald and—with rapidly twitching eyelids—turned to stare at the approaching youth.

Upon stepping before the old man, Gerald took a hand out before holding onto Carlos’s head as though he was punishing a naughty child.

“Now then... Why didn't you just wait obediently for me to kill you back then? I'm sure you knew what was coming, right? Despite that, you fled the moment I got slightly distracted by some pleas for help...”

“P-please, Deity! It was wrong for me to have tried to escape! I shouldn't have run away!” cried out Carlos as tears began rolling down his cheeks.

“You really aren't acting like a proper elder should be, you know? Either way, it's impossible for a person to truly escape if I want them dead! Wouldn't you agree?” replied Gerald with a laugh.

“O-of course you are, Deity!” said Carlos, his entire body already trembling uncontrollably.

Hearing that, Gerald then turned to face the audience before announcing in an indifferent tone, “Regardless, I'm here today representing the Quantocks for the right to gain control! If anyone's against that, you're free to come challenge me!”

It took him a second, but he then scratched the back of his head before adding, “Oh, and I almost forgot to mention this. You don't need to challenge me one by one. You can all challenge me at the same time! If you prefer, that is!”

Watching as he then put on an innocent smile, everyone below stage instantly found themselves horrified.

“What did he say?”

“My god! How ruthless!”

Despite their dissatisfaction, nobody dared to say a word.

Ghose, however, wasn't about to just accept such mockery. Understanding that Gerald didn't even consider him to be an opponent, Ghose found himself growling, "Don't you think you're being a bit too arrogant, young lad? Can't you see that I, Ghose from the Goldenslinger, am here?!"

"I mean, yeah. You've been standing there for a while now. What of it?" replied Gerald.

"Bakayarou!" roared the now furious Ghose.

Finnegan himself was angered by Gerald's comment, prompting him to say, "You shameless brat! There's no need to hold back, Master Ghose! Just kill this arrogant man however you please!"

To think that Gerald would actually dare to claim control... He truly was asking for it!

Hearing Finnegan's command, Ghose instantly drew his katana before growling, "I'll show you the true power of the Goldenslinger if it's the last thing I do!"

A gleam almost seemed to run down the sharpened blade as Ghose prepared his attack...

It was an attack so powerful that it was the best the Goldenslinger could offer... And it was called the Thirteen Stances of Waterflow!

A slash could split water, and two could slice through a soul. No soul could survive the third slash, and Ghose knew that for a fact since he had already mastered the three blades realm!

Once the gleam pierced through Gerald's soul, Ghose was more than certain that the arrogant youth's soul would be no more!

While all this was happening, Xyrielle found herself getting increasingly nervous as she saw how much danger Gerald was in.

After all, to think that her palpitating heart had been right this entire time... Now that she knew how strong Gerald truly was, she was sure that this was who the fortune-teller had actually been referring to!

With that in mind, she was feeling a complicated cocktail of emotions as she continued staring at Gerald.

However, before she could even decide on what to do, she stared wide-eyed in horror as she realized that Ghose's blade was already swinging down on Gerald!

Expecting bloodshed, everyone sat at the edge of their seats... only to be left completely dumbfounded by the results.

With one hand still in his pocket, Gerald had lifted his other to gently pinch onto the katana's blade... Despite making it look so easy, it worked. Ghose couldn't bring the blade down any further!

"...W-what?!" cried out Ghose in terror.

Though he wanted to retreat a few steps back, he found that he couldn't even move a muscle!

"Oh? I do wonder what kind of stance this is... And what kind of sect is the GoldenSlinger?" asked Gerald in an indifferent tone.

"Y-you...!" growled Ghose as he used all his strength to attempt to regain his mobility. Unfortunately for him, he remained as frozen as a statue...

"...I admit that you're stronger than I thought!" added the angered Ghose after a while before laughing aloud.

“Oh? Does that mean you have other stances up your sleeve?” asked Gerald, feeling slightly surprised when he saw Ghose’s reaction.

Chapter 1512

Ignoring Gerald’s question, Ghose simply closed his eyes for a moment... And when he reopened them, a momentary flash of fire could be seen reflected in his eyes as he roared, “Flaming Blades!”

Following that, the hilt of his katana seemed to light ablaze, shooting upward toward the tip which Gerald was still holding onto!

Much to Ghose’s dismay, the second the flames were about to burn Gerald, they suddenly extinguished with a sizzling sound!

“...W-what...? How is this even remotely possible?!” stuttered the wide-eyed Ghose in disbelief as he stared at the youth.

Sensing that Ghose probably wasn’t going to reveal any relevant information if he continued holding onto his blade, Gerald simply released his grip on it, immediately causing Ghose to take a few steps back.

At that moment, seven distinct ringing sounds could be heard coming from where the Laidlers were seated...

Almost immediately after, seven figures leaped out from the shadows, taking only a split second to surround Gerald as they shouted, “Master!”

From what Gerald could see, all seven of the masked men were dressed in ninja-like garb, and each of them had murderous auras as they held onto their steel knives.

Regaining his composure, Ghose then turned to look at Gerald before saying, “Now then... If you didn’t already know, Tierson Mountain is extremely important to the Goldenslinger, your excellency... With that in mind, I’ll say it right now that if you still wish to gain control over the area, you’ll surely offend the rest of the Goldenslinger... You wouldn’t want that, would you...?”

“Oh? I see, I see...” replied Gerald as he nodded.

“Hmm? So, you’re finally starting to get scared? Wise of you, really. Now then, why don’t we have a seat and get a bit more acquainted with each other?” said Ghose as he took a step toward Gerald.

“Scared? I’m afraid you’re mistaken. Regardless, you really shouldn’t have said that to me,” replied Gerald as he shook his head.

“...I beg your pardon? What do you mean by that, your excellency?” asked Ghose, stunned.

“Well, quite honestly, I had only planned to fend you off at first. Following that, I’d have asked you regarding how you went about with your training routes as well as a little on your sect. Before I even got to that, however, to think that you’d actually dare to threaten and blackmail me!” replied Gerald.

“...What? With that said, are you not interested in allying with us? I’m afraid you don’t know how powerful the Goldenslinger truly is!” said Ghose as unease swept through his entire being.

“Whether they’re powerful or not is beside the point. I hadn’t intended on killing you just now, you know? However, for daring to threaten me, you’ll be paying with your life!”

Glaring at Gerald—who still had one hand in his pocket—Ghose tightened his grip on his katana’s hilt.

Gerald, on the other hand, simply looked back at the furious ninja before flicking his fingers at him rather nonchalantly.

With immense speed and precision, the next thing Ghose knew, his kneecaps had already been pierced by some unknown force!

Watching as Ghose screamed miserably—unable to stop himself from falling to his knees in front of Gerald—the seven other ninjas instantly raised their blades, ready to launch their attack!

In response, however, Gerald simply raised his hand before waving it slightly...

And just like that, a glowing halo—that centered around Gerald—suddenly appeared and immediately began widening itself in all directions!

Unable to dodge the counterattack, all seven of the men were sent flying backward as though they were nothing but newborn lambs!

Seeing that, Ghose immediately began begging, “P-please, have mercy! Please spare my life...!”

He now finally understood why Carlos had reacted that way when he first saw Gerald. This youth had abilities that would make anyone feel powerless!

Ghose was now feeling like the weakest man alive as he stood before Gerald.

Not wanting things to just end like this, Ghose quickly snapped out of it before saying, “The Goldenslinger are a secretive and mysterious sect with a thousand-year history in Japan! We have many experts without our ranks, so there’s no need to offend us, Deity!”

“Well, since I still wish to gain control, the Goldenslinger are going to be offended either way, no?” replied Gerald.

“That’s right! However, if you hand the controlling rights over to us, I’ll definitely beg the Goldenslinger to spare your life!” cried out Ghose in his panicked state.

“So, it appears that you still don’t get what I’m trying to say, nor do you understand my style of doing things. Regardless, I’ve already offended you anyway, so I may as well just finish off what I’ve started. I’ll still be killing you off now, and if the Goldenslinger find fault with me later on, I’ll just end them when they come for me!” replied Gerald as he squinted his eyes before extending his right hand...

As his hand began glowing, it began radiating an aura that manifested into a giant pair of hands that swiftly grabbed onto Ghose!

Before Ghose could even react, Gerald clenched his fist... and the next thing anyone knew, Ghose had already been reduced to nothing more than a lump of bloodied meat!

Having witnessed such a cruel scene, everyone in the area instantly began screaming in sheer horror!

Chapter 1513

As everyone either screamed or stared dumbfoundedly at the bloody scene, one of the family heads managed to snap out of it and immediately bowed before Gerald, expressing his amazement and respect by shouting, “Master Crawford...!”

Upon seeing that, the other family heads immediately bowed in unison as the words ‘Master Crawford’ echoed throughout the entire underground area.

Finnegan, on the other hand, turned to look at Stetson—who was still frozen on stage—and signaled him to escape together with him. To his relief, Stetson saw and understood Finnegan’s signal, prompting both of them to slowly begin walking away from the area.

Despite his name being shouted, Gerald appeared indifferent, and he simply turned to look at Carlos before saying, “Carlos Xenos... I remember asking you something before you fled... Since I didn’t get an answer, I’m just going to repeat what I said. Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t kill you.”

Upon hearing that, Carlos instantly gulped before replying, “I... I’ll be your lackey till the day I die, Master Crawford...!”

Despite being rather unwilling to be Gerald’s servant, anything was better compared to facing a death similar to Ghose’s. That ninja’s death was truly pitiful...

“Hmm... I accept. With that, I’m sure you know what you have to do next, correct?” replied Gerald as rested his arms against his back before turning to look at the escaping father and son.

Instantly getting what Gerald was trying to say, Carlos then roared, “How dare both of you offend Master Crawford!”

Since Finnegan had earlier instructed Ghose to kill Gerald, he had pretty much already sealed his fate by that point.

Either way, Carlos easily caught up to the duo and after receiving three strikes each, both of them flopped to the ground, dead.

“Now then... If there aren’t any further objections, does that mean that I’ve now gained full control over this underground world?” asked Gerald.

“But of course, Master Crawford! We’d very much prefer having you be the person in control rather than the Waddys!”

“Indeed! With how strong you are, the Yahtos are more than willing to serve you as our head for the generations to come! Even so, please don’t underestimate my family, Master Crawford, for we own a third of the assets in the entire Jenna Province!” added the head of the Yahtos in a flattering tone.

While the other family heads were already fawning over Gerald, Yaakov didn’t even dare to say a word.

With mixed feelings in his heart, he wondered how he had been so blind... How he had actually failed to recognize how strong and powerful Gerald actually was at the start...

Regardless, he understood very well that he had previously offended Gerald quite a bit. It was the reason why he was staying put in complete silence, fearing that he would share the fate of Finnegan and his son.

Despite Yaakov’s worries, Gerald didn’t even look at him from the start till the very end.

After a brief moment, Gerald then declared, “I only wish to obtain one thing from the miracle on Tierson Mountain. Once I obtain it, the rest of the items will be equally distributed to all of you!”

“...W-what?! T-Thank you, Master Crawford...!” cried out the family heads, unable to contain their excitement.

Watching as Gerald stood in the limelight, Xyrielle felt her heart pounding rapidly.

Just as she had thought... Stetson hadn’t been the one the fortune-teller had predicted to be her optimal lover... No... As it turned out, Gerald was the actual one for her!

Now genuinely feeling happy for him, she hoped that he would at least turn back to look at her...

To her disappointment, after he explained a few things to Perla—about the distribution benefits since he was placing her responsible over that—Gerald swiftly went off without another word.

Seeing that, Xyrielle felt slight feelings of loss and bitterness in her heart...

Fast forward to after the underground festival, several big changes had already taken place within the Jenna Province.

The changes included several ancient martial arts families, secret societies, as well as several forces that possessed special skills. Essentially, all of them now obeyed and took orders from Master Crawford.

In relation to this, there were also quite a number of people—who were training to attain spiritual enlightenment—who stepped forth to meet Gerald. While they had previously entrusted themselves to the powerful families within the Jenna Province, they were now pledging their allegiance to Gerald instead.

These were all people similar to Julian in the way that they were all self-taught and weren't particularly tied to any organizations. With Gerald's agreement, they were all overjoyed to finally have a strong and powerful person to back them up.

Among the twenty-seven people who had attached themselves to Gerald in that short amount of time, Gerald found that most of them were First-rank masters while the others were Second-rank ones.

While that meant that Carlos was most definitely the strongest among them, he opted not to turn down any of them. After all, he was truly in need of people at the time.

Regardless of how powerful they were, Perla was still Gerald's first disciple. With that said, despite being considerably weaker than the rest, her words were still absolute among the other disciples.

Chapter 1514

Since Gerald's new force was still relatively small, those within it instantly began discussing the matter. Eventually, they wondered if it would be best if they set up a sect. In doing so, they'd surely be able to properly establish everyone's respect and ensure that they had a name.

Unfortunately, after they brought their concerns up to Gerald, he simply turned down their request, stating that it still wasn't the right time for them to do so yet.

Either way, after postponing any further discussions about that topic, Gerald used that opportunity—since they were all already there anyway—to tell them that he would be staying atop Tierson Mountain for a few days. He also added that nobody was allowed to enter the mountain throughout that period...

Meanwhile, Perla and her cousin sister could be seen getting ready to leave for one of Jenna City's luxurious clothing malls.

"Are you sure about this, Perla...? Didn't grandpa tell us not to go out so much...? After all, girls have been going missing all over Jenna City throughout this period of time... I fear that bandits are the ones responsible for this! With that said, shouldn't we be a little more careful...?" muttered Perla's cousin.

"I know, I know... But think about it. Do you actually think that anyone in this city would dare lay a finger on us now?" replied Perla in a slightly defeated tone.

Hearing that, her cousin thought about it for a bit. Of course, Perla was right. After all, she was Master Crawford's disciple. While it was mostly just a fancy title, it was nonetheless a great title to have.

What more, after that incident, the Sherwins had risen up the ranks, now seconded only by the Quantocks.

As if that wasn't already enough, the many individuals with hidden talents within Jenna City would now all line up respectfully whenever they came across Perla.

With all that in mind, who in the right mind would still dare to provoke anyone from the Sherwin family?

"Besides, I'm only heading out since I wish to prepare some nice clothes for Master Crawford today. After all, he'll be setting up his own force in the future, and with that in mind, he has to at least own some decent clothing! Speaking of which, Qiselle, I'll be needing your help in selecting clothes for him as well. With how elegant he is, I wonder what kind of clothes would suit him best..."

Following that, the two girls then chatted and laughed between themselves, eventually arriving at the most luxurious clothing mall in all of Jenna City.

To their dismay, they instantly bumped into someone annoying upon entering the building.

"So, it's you again! How terrible is my luck for me to have to keep bumping into you!" scoffed the woman who was currently blocking the two girls' way, malice reflected in her eyes.

"Indeed, Jenny..." grumbled Perla. Of course, it had to be Jenny...

Perla recalled how her master had punished that woman back at Heartstone Manor's parking lot just a few days ago. Even so, from what Perla could see, Jenny seemed to have already forgotten all about that incident...

Regardless, Perla soon realized that a few of Jenny's friends were also present.

“Hah! You really are amazing, you know that? Having fun at Heartstone Manor and even entering a luxury store... Have you Sherwins already given up on living or something?” said Jenny with a snort, sarcastic as ever.

“Say what you want as long as you’re happy...” replied Perla in a defeated tone as she put on a wry smile before tugging on Qiselle’s hand to leave.

“Stop right there! Who gave you permission to leave? We still have an unsettled score, you know?!” growled Jenny as she firmly held onto Perla’s shoulder.

Hearing that, Jenny’s friends immediately began surrounding Perla as well.

“Don’t let her leave, sisters!” shouted one of Jenny’s friends who had her arms crossed.

“Just what is the meaning of this, Jenny...” growled Perla, an icy expression on her face.

“Are you playing dumb? Did you think I’d forget about that little incident we had back at Heartstone Manor? Regardless, now that I have your attention, tell me where you hid that pathetic loser from last time. I’ll say it right now that Benson and the others have been looking everywhere for that kid! Once he’s found, they’ll tear him apart, and you, too, will be done for then! That being said, how dare you play that mean trick on us that day?!” hissed Jenny, getting angrier by the second as she thought about that incident.

In fact, she got so angry that she began yanking on Perla’s hair in her frustration!

Little had she expected that Perla would actually retaliate by slapping her hard on her face!

“You... Have you gone mad?! You dare hit me, Perla?! You really have a death wish, don’t you, you b*tch?! Fine! I’ll gladly fulfill that wish for you then!” roared Jenny before fishing her phone out and making several calls in a way that suggested that she was the leader of some underground gang.

Soon enough, eight Buick commercial vehicles came to a halt right before the mall's entrance, and out stepped a group of burly and strong-looking men...

Chapter 1515

As the men quickly rushed over and surrounded Perla, what seemed to be the leader of the group asked, "What happened, Jenny?"

Upon closer inspection, Perla realized that the leader was no stranger. He was Benson, the cocky guy who had tried to outmuscle Gerald but ended up getting tricked the other day!

"She slapped me, Benson! Also, remember that kid we met at Heartstone Manor's parking lot? It appears that Perla is closely related to him!" replied Jenny in an exaggerated manner.

"D*mn it! I've been looking for that little b*stard for the longest time! I'm going to rip him to shreds once I finally find him! Regardless, to think that you'd actually dare to hurt Jenny! Are you sick of living or something?!" roared Benson as he raised his palm, fully ready to hit Perla.

"Stop this at once!" shouted a cold voice at that moment.

Turning to look at the source of the voice, Benson saw that the one who had shouted was a middle-aged man who had a tag above his front pocket stating, 'manager'. Following closely behind him, was a group of security guards...

The manager himself was fuming mad. This was the most famous clothing mall in all of Jenna City! Anyone daring enough to cause trouble here must surely be tired of living!

However, after stomping a bit closer, the manager suddenly stopped in his tracks when he saw who the leader of the group was.

A surprised expression on his face, the manager then said, "...Oh? Is that you, Benson?"

"Hmm? Ah, so it's you, Manager Xenthe! It's nothing much, really, I'm just teaching this woman here a lesson! It's a personal grudge, you see. With that said, I'm sure you don't have a problem with that, right?" asked Benson with a cold smile on his face.

"Heh! But of course, not! Since you're involved, I'll be giving you some face this time around!" replied Manager Xenthe with a snort before laughing aloud.

"Is there really a need to talk this much, Benson? Go beat her up already! I need to show her what happens when someone dares to offend me!" grumbled Jenny.

Perla herself was currently feeling a slight mix of anxiousness and anger. After all, she really hadn't expected the manager of the shopping mall to not care about his customers at all!

While Perla wanted to take immediate action, after thinking about it for a while, she figured that with her current position, she didn't need to personally do anything in order to resolve the problem.

With that in mind, Perla then took in a deep breath before saying, "I'll have you know that I'm only choosing not to retaliate because I don't want any trouble, Jenny. In other words, I'm not afraid of you in the least. Regardless, take my advice and cease this nonsense before it's too late!"

“Hahaha! Are you actually trying to threaten me, Perla Sherwin? Come to think of it, you’re the kind of person who’s terrified of being humiliated in public, right? Well guess what? I’m going to be recording you getting beaten up and once I’m done with you, I’ll be uploading it on social media! I’m going to make sure that everyone sees what has become of the great young lady from the Sherwin family!” scoffed Jenny as she prepared to record all the action with her cell phone.

Upon hearing that, Benson instantly began tugging onto Perla’s hair!

However, before he could do anything else, everyone suddenly heard an angry voice shouting, “Stop, right there!”

The next thing Benson realized, a person had come dashing toward him before landing a swift kick onto his wrist!

As a result, Benson—who was now in great pain—lost his balance and ended up toppling onto the ground!

Holding onto his aching hand as he screamed miserably, he turned to look at his assailant—who was now standing right in front of Perla—before roaring, “Who the hell are you?!”

By that point, several other middle-aged men had gathered behind the attacker, though none of them even bothered replying to Benson.

Regardless, the middle-aged man who had first arrived then walked toward Perla and bowed before ashamedly saying, “My sincerest apologies, Miss Sherwin! To think that you had been so close to getting humiliated!”

“...Don’t mention it... And you are...?” asked Perla.

Truth be told, she had already planned on how to avoid Benson's attack earlier. To think that someone would suddenly come to her aid instead! Even so, she hadn't the slightest idea who he was.

"Ah, where are my manners. I go by Hanson Luwie, and though you may not know me, I certainly know who you are. The thing is, I first came across you while I was accompanying Chairman Yahto, the head of our family!" replied Hanson in a respectful tone.

Chapter 1516

"I see... that explains it!" replied Perla with a nod.

"...What? Hanson Luwie? Who the hell is he? Is he powerful? Perla couldn't be acquainted with anyone powerful, right?" muttered the surprised Jenny who was still standing at the side.

"Keep your voice down! That person is Chairman Hanson Luwie, the former driver of Lord Yahto from the Jenna Province's Yahto family! Not only is he a great man with exceptional abilities, but he's currently also the general manager of several shopping malls!" whispered Benson who was equally as shocked as Jenny was.

Still, that at least explained why Chairman Luwie's bodyguards were so strong!

At that moment, Hanson asked in a serious tone, "Could you detail what happened here earlier, Miss Sherwin?"

Anyone who wasn't living under a rock knew that all the forces in Jenna City were now under the control of the incredible and mysterious Master Crawford. Hanson, for one, knew this, and he also knew that Perla was Master Crawford's most beloved disciple.

With that in mind, despite knowing that Perla could very easily handle herself, there was no way he was going to risk her accidentally getting humiliated, especially not in his territory. Besides, this was a prime opportunity for him to prove his allegiance toward Master Crawford, and he could show how serious he was as well.

Hanson also feared that if he didn't step in, news about that would reach the ears of his head of the family who was still trying to curry favor with Master Crawford. Should that happen, he'd surely be done for! With all that in mind, he was determined to help Perla vent her anger out today.

"Well... This woman here keeps pestering me! She even called for backup so that they could force Master to come get me after beating me up! After hearing that they wanted to rip master to shreds, I instantly got angry and hit her in response! That's pretty much the gist of it!" replied Perla with a subtle smile.

Momentarily stupefied, Hanson shouted, "What? You... You actually dare show that much disrespect toward Master Crawford?!"

Finding herself gulping, Jenny felt slightly intimidated not only because of Hanson's high rank, but also because of his reddened eyes that were now glaring straight into her soul...

Even Benson was stunned by Hanson's response, and he was so terrified that he quickly replied, "C-Chairman Luwie! There must be some sort of misunderstanding here! My uncle's name is Finnegan Laidler, you know?"

Despite bringing up his connections, Hanson barely even flinched as he ordered, "Men! These people are daring enough to cause trouble in our mall! With that said, break their legs in accordance with the rules! Also, that woman there was disrespectful to our VIPs! With such a potty mouth, the only reasonable punishment is to slap her till she can't speak anymore!"

The second his sentence ended, several of his bodyguards instantly took action without the slightest hesitation.

What followed after were screams of pure pain and terror that echoed across the entire mall...

Looking at Benson's broken legs as well as his subordinates who were now all convulsing erratically on the floor, the terrified Jenny found herself slowly taking a step back... Before turning around to book it!

To her utter dismay, she felt as her hair was yanked right back to where she had initially stood!

Turning around, she realized that one of the bodyguards had found a thick wooden plank somewhere, and he was now slowly walking toward her...!

Once, twice, and thrice. The plank continuously and mercilessly smacked the arrogant woman's face. Soon enough, Jenny's face was completely bloodied, and her cheeks were both so swollen that her face almost looked deformed.

By that point, even Perla couldn't bear to watch anymore. All this was simply too cruel!

As his eyelids twitched, Hanson knew that he didn't really want or need to be this cruel either. After all, breaking someone's legs was already punishment enough.

Even so, he had ordered his men to beat these people half to death, and he was aware of how vicious his order had been.

However, there was simply no other way to deal with them. After all, these people had chosen to offend Master Crawford of all people, even going so far as to threaten to rip him to shreds!

Had they not said that, they wouldn't be suffering as much as they currently were.

Regardless, teaching these people such a ruthless lesson was his own way of showing mercy. If he didn't do so now, he was worried that they wouldn't even know how they ended up dying later on...

Chapter 1517

Naturally, Jenny was swiftly dealt with without much hassle.

Moving back to Gerald, there were simply too many people these days who were looking for an opportunity to approach him.

While it was honestly getting to a point where he found it troublesome, Gerald was thankful that he was going to be staying in the miracle cave on Tierson Mountain for the next few days.

As suggested by its name, the place truly was a miracle, and Gerald found several magic artifacts inside. Even so, it took Gerald three whole days before he was able to find the exact one that Master Ghost had told him to find.

It was a blue elite crystal that was about the size of an adult's nail...

While he was pleased to have finally found it, Gerald hadn't the slightest idea how to even use it. After observing it for a while, however, he realized that it seemed to contain a very strong and special form of energy within it.

'I wonder why Master Ghost insisted on locating this specific gem...' Gerald thought to himself before continuing to research it.

However, even after a few days had passed, he still didn't have any idea how to utilize it. With that, he concluded that he needed Master Ghost's help to figure it out.

Knowing Master Ghost, Gerald had a feeling that that man had already foreseen him locating the crystal. In other words, everything was probably going according to how Master Ghost had planned.

Even if that was the case, however, where was Master Ghost even hiding...?

Just as Gerald was beginning to worry, Julian walked up to him before saying, "Master Crawford, Miss Xyrielle from the Waddys family is here! While I had expected her to leave after denying her entry, she's been waiting for you outside for an entire day and night! She keeps saying that she has to meet you no matter what!"

"...Hmm? Xyrielle? What is she doing here?"

Naturally knowing who she was, Gerald remembered how indifferently she had behaved every time she was around him. Aside from her birthday banquet, they pretty much had no other reason to meet each other. Even so, if she truly had been waiting for him for an entire day and night, he had no reason not to meet her. Besides, he felt slightly guilty for initially thinking of using her to obtain an admission ticket.

"Let her in, then!" added Gerald with a nod.

With a flick of his wrist, the blue crystal disappeared just as Xyrielle was brought into the backyard.

The moment she saw Gerald, her heart instantly began palpitating as she stuttered, "G-Gerald... No- M-master Crawford!"

Thinking back, she wondered why she had found this person to be so mediocre just a few days ago... Honestly, hadn't she been acting rather high and mighty before him at the time? To think that she would now be too nervous to even look him in the eye!

Smiling as he turned to look at her, Gerald then asked, "So... I'm here. Did you want to talk to me about something?"

"Y-yes! Though... I doubt you'd agree to my request..." replied Xyrielle in a slightly saddened tone.

She was fully aware that what she wanted to ask from him was slightly impolite, and though she was sure that Gerald would've agreed with it had she not found out about his true identity, now that all this had happened, she wasn't so sure anymore. To make matters worse, her nervousness and inferiority were making it extra hard for her to bring the request up.

"Well, that depends on the request... Go on..." said Gerald.

"W-well... The thing is, I wanted to ask if you could accompany me on a trip to Sacrasolis Mountain... B-but I can see now that you're very busy so...!" replied Xyrielle.

Though she said that, her hopeful eyes clearly betrayed her.

"Hmm? Sacrasolis Mountain? Is there a reason you'd like me to accompany you there?" asked Gerald, flashing a slightly wry smile.

"...T-that..." muttered Xyrielle.

She didn't really know how to explain it without making the request sound absurd. In the end, however, she simply gave up and decided to be straightforward about it.

Essentially, Xyrielle wanted him to accompany her there since she wanted to look for the fortune-teller that she had previously met at the riverside behind that mountain. In other words, she wanted the fortune-teller to determine whether their marriage truly was predestined by fate, despite knowing how ridiculous her motive sounded.

It didn't help that she was well aware that while marriage was the only thing on her mind, Master Crawford was an actual busy person.

Chapter 1518

Her understanding of that only served to further increase her embarrassment.

Despite that, Xyrielle still valued this predestined marriage too much for her to ignore.

Eventually, she gave in and simply told Gerald more about the fortune-teller that had given her, her reading back then.

"...Hmm? A fortune-teller? What does he look like?" asked Gerald in a simultaneously excited and serious tone.

After all, the description she made... Was the person she had gotten her reading from actually Master Ghost?

Could Master Ghost have been hiding on Sacrasolis Mountain this entire time? If that truly was the case, then Gerald didn't have to waste any more time and effort locating him!

After thinking for a short while, Gerald agreed to escort her over to the mountain. This was a chance for him to reunite with Master Ghost, and he wasn't about to say no to that.

Regardless, the second Xyrielle heard that Gerald was willing to go along with her request, she instantly felt both surprised and happy.

Fast forward to sometime later, both of them were able to see a church in the distance...

Sacrasolis Mountain was located south of the Jenna Province, and it was also where Sacrasolis Church could be found. There were apparently quite a number of pilgrims who came here too.

Regardless, the more he looked at the church, the more Gerald felt that Master Ghost truly was in there.

Upon getting close enough to the church's entrance, two young priests stopped them from proceeding.

"Have both of you come to pray?" asked one of them in a respectful tone as the two priests smiled warmly.

"Not at all, sir. We just came here to have a look at the back of the mountains. Also, why are there so few pilgrims here today?" asked Xyrielle while looking around.

"Oh? Our apologies, but Sacrasolis Mountain has been closed for about a month now! With that said, the back of the mountain is no longer open to the public... I'm afraid that both of you are going to have to go back if you're heading there just to have some fun!" replied the other priest as he lowered his head.

Though it was subtle, Gerald managed to catch that same priest—who had just spoken—sneaking glances in between gulps as he stared at Xyrielle's bosom. From that alone, Gerald could tell that these two weren't good people.

It was also at that moment when Gerald noticed traces of deliberately hidden murderous auras exuding from the two. Things like these weren't going to escape Gerald's eyes that easily.

With that, Gerald activated his divine sense to get a better grasp of his surroundings. A brief moment later, he realized that the two priests truly were the only people atop the mountain.

Giving the duo a brief—but cold—glance, Gerald decided not to say anything for the moment.

Xyrielle, on the other hand, looked visibly disappointed to hear that news. Just as she turned around, ready to leave, Gerald noticed the two priests nudging each other by their elbows while exchanging glances.

As Gerald pretended not to have noticed, the two priests eventually chose to run up to Xyrielle before saying, “Miss! Do stay!”

“...Huh? Is something wrong, masters?” asked Xyrielle.

“Let’s just say that both of us have seen how pious you are. Due to that, we’re making an exception and granting you access to the back of the mountain!” explained one of the priests.

“What? Seriously?! I greatly appreciate it!” replied Xyrielle, both surprised and overjoyed.

“However, note that while we’re permitting you entry, you’ll only be allowed to head up the mountain one by one. The other person can wait and rest in the guestroom till the other party returns. It’s just how things work here, and it’d be difficult for us to explain ourselves if others somehow noticed that we led both of you in at the same time!” added the priest.

“...I see! I’m fine with that!” replied Xyrielle as she turned to look at Gerald.

Since he didn’t look like he was against the idea, Xyrielle simply nodded, now more determined than ever to meet up with that fortune-teller. With any luck, she’d be able to get another reading from him.

The fortune-teller had previously shared the exact location for her to find him too, which was why she wasn’t worried about not being able to meet up with him once she was at the back of the mountain.

With that, Gerald and Xyrielle then followed the two priests into the church.

Unbeknownst by the priests, Gerald secretly flicked his finger toward Xyrielle, injecting a stream of essential qi into her body...

Chapter 1519

Naturally, the first to enter was Xyrielle, and one of the priests promptly began leading her to the back of the mountain.

As for Gerald, he was led toward another mountain path by the other priest.

Walking slowly with his hands in his pocket, Gerald heard as the priest suddenly laughed before saying, "I have to say, you really are fortunate, brother! Your girl's a real beauty you know? Probably among the top hundred beauties in the world!"

Displaying a smile, Gerald then replied, "Really? I don't think she's that beautiful!"

"I see... What a pity! Well, since you don't even realize how lucky you are to have such a beauty by your side, why not give her to us instead?" said the priest with a snicker as he smiled coldly.

Was he finally showing his true colors? Whatever the case was, Gerald pretended to be momentarily surprised before angrily retorting, "What? What kind of talk is that? Aren't you a priest?! Aren't you afraid that I'll look for the head priest and complain about you?!"

"Hahaha! You fool! You're actually thinking of complaining about me? Do you think you'll still be able to even speak once I'm done with you?" scoffed the priest before laughing.

“...What do you mean by that?”

“Hah! Truth be told, both your fates had already been sealed from the moment you approached the mountain! You know, my brother’s probably already turned that girl of yours into his plaything by now!” replied the priest as he laughed sinisterly.

The second his sentence ended, Xyrielle’s terrified screams could suddenly be heard coming from a distance!

“Heh! I’m sure you heard that too, right? With that, I’m sorry but I’m not going to be wasting another second on you! After all, if I don’t rush over and get my share of the fun now, I’ll probably have to wait in line once the other guys hear her screams!”

Before Gerald could even reply, the priest swiftly slammed his palm right into Gerald’s chest!

Shouting in pain, Gerald ended up flying backward until he eventually collided against a tree! The second the impact hit, blood instantly began spurting out of his mouth before Gerald fell feebly to the ground...

A few twitches later, Gerald finally stopped moving, now fully unconscious.

“What useless trash! It’s such a waste that that woman ended up with you! No matter! Once I’m done with you, I’ll quickly head off to have some fun with her! Still, that d*mned Calven... You should’ve been more careful about her screaming!” grumbled the priest as he quickly tossed Gerald’s corpse to the side.

As the priest ran in Xyrielle’s direction, Gerald remained utterly still...

It was only a few seconds later when some rustling could be heard... and all of a sudden, several people—who were all well-camouflaged—suddenly dropped down from above!

After testing to see if he still breathed and confirming that he was truly dead, the men exchanged glances with each other before quickly running after the priest.

It was only then when Gerald finally decided to slowly open his eyes again.

Following a loud 'crack', Gerald's body began straightening itself again as though some form of necromancy was being used on his body.

'This mountain truly is interesting... From what I've observed, it appears that not only are there quite a lot of masters here, but there also seems to be two different forces present!' Gerald thought to himself with a frown.

Realizing that Xyrielle was most probably still in danger, Gerald swiftly made his way in the direction that all the others had headed to...

Dialing back time a bit, Xyrielle had been so anxious to find the fortune-teller earlier that she truly hadn't expected the priest to actually have malicious intentions toward her.

When he attempted to force himself onto her, Xyrielle was instantly scared half to death. After all, while Xyrielle did have a bit of training, she was well aware that the priest was much stronger than her. She wasn't his match at all!

Watching Xyrielle struggle desperately as he continued pushing her onto the ground, the sinister-looking priest then laughed maliciously before saying, "Go on, continue screaming! And make sure to struggle all you want because nobody's coming for you~! Push a little harder, won't you? Hahaha!"

It was at that moment when Xyrielle's flailing caused her to accidentally hit the priest at the side of his neck...

Almost immediately after, a loud sound was heard as massive amounts of essential qi was released where Xyrielle's palm was!

Chapter 1520

And just like that, the priest was momentarily sent flying... Before his body exploded into a million pieces!

Staring wide-eyed at the bloody mess she had caused, Xyrielle's first reaction was to scream in horror.

After calming down slightly, the dumbfounded Xyrielle found herself staring at her palm. Despite being terrified out of her mind, she was simultaneously curious where all that power had suddenly come from.

It was around then when the second priest from earlier arrived and witnessed the aftermath of her unintentional attack.

Utterly flabbergasted by the scene before him, the horrified priest instantly yelled, "F-f*cking hell! You were this strong this entire time?!"

Realizing that the other priest was now present, the terrified Xyrielle instantly began backing away as she shouted, "Y-you... Don't come any closer...!"

As Xyrielle extended a hand, hoping that it would deter him from coming any closer, the priest—who thought that she was charging up an attack—became so frightened that he almost felt like wetting himself on the spot!

However, the priest soon realized that no attack was coming for him. Though he was still afraid, the priest then laughed before shouting, "W-well? Don't tell me that your powers have suddenly disappeared!"

“I-I’m warning you...! Don’t you dare take a step closer to me...!” retorted the terror-stricken Xyrielle.

Even so, the priest felt that she would’ve attacked by now if she could. With that in mind, he disregarded her warning and instantly ran toward her, ready to pounce!

However, before he could even get far, the priest felt a hard kick against his back that sent him flying face-first into the dirt!

Crawling back up as soon as he could, he quickly turned around to see who his assailant was.

Standing not too far behind him, the priest was able to identify three masked males.

Not knowing when they had even snuck up behind him, the priest then roared, “Who are you people? How dare you trespass into Sarcasolis Mountain?!”

“Quit it, you fake priest! You must really want to die!” retorted the one who had attacked.

Just as that masked man was about to launch another attack, the priest pulled out a hidden paper talisman that—upon activation—created a large ‘boom’ before a flame shot out of it!

Unable to dodge it in time, the masked man’s arm ended up getting wounded!

Before the masked man could recover, the priest had already drawn out another talisman. This time, however, the flames produced were green, and they shot into the sky before exploding dazzlingly!

“This isn’t good! Our location’s been exposed!” yelled the leader of the trio in a cold voice.

Following that, he pulled out a dagger, hoping to at least end the priest's life and save Xyrielle while they still could.

Unfortunately, several rustling sounds could suddenly be heard, and the next thing he knew, dozens of people dressed in priest-like clothing were already descending from the treetops!

Now completely surrounded, the trio of masked men could all sense the immense murderous auras exuding from the ruthless-looking men who had encircled them.

Before the masked man could make another move, a middle-aged priest waved his hand before ordering, "Capture them!"

Heavily outnumbered, the masked man could only surrender as the other priests quickly took the three masked men and Xyrielle under their custody.

Ripping off the leader's mask, the middle-aged priest then sneered, "So it really is you, Hubert Younger! To think that you'd actually dare to ascend Sacrasolis Mountain! I guess you never anticipated getting caught, huh? No matter! Take them away!"

After laughing mockingly, the priest then began leading the four of them away...

Eventually, they arrived before a large cave located at the back of Sacrasolis Mountain.

Watching as the four people were led into the heavily guarded area, Gerald—who had been witnessing all this from afar—found himself thinking, 'There seems to be quite a big problem with Sacrasolis Mountain... Could Master Ghost really be here...?'

He had already guessed that the priests on the mountain were all up to no good. It was the reason why he had earlier injected some essential qi into Xyrielle. After all, he would very much prefer if she didn't suffer any harm throughout this incident.

Either way, Gerald had already planned from the very beginning that if things went awry, he would definitely make a move.

With that said, he deduced that his current best course of action was to capture one of the priests for interrogation. He'd start making further plans once he knew more about the current situation...

As evening drew close, one of the priests on duty craned his neck as he walked toward a wooded area to relieve himself...

Before he could even do so, however, he was suddenly yanked away by some invisible and silent force!

Chapter 1521

When the priest finally awoke again, was greeted by the sight of a young man's back.

Recalling that he had been yanked by some strong and invisible force earlier—before he blacked out—the shocked priest then muttered, “W-who are you...?”

“Who I am doesn't matter. However, what does matter is who you people are, and what you're all planning to do here on Sacrasolis Mountain,” replied Gerald as he slowly turned around before staring coldly at the man.

The second that man saw Gerald, his entire body began trembling uncontrollably as he stuttered, “Y-young Master?! It's you?!”

Watching as the terrified man knelt right before him, Gerald couldn't help but frown slightly as he curiously muttered, "...Young Master?"

"Indeed! Still, when exactly did arrive, Young Master?" asked the priest

"I can come and go as I please, can't I?" sneered Gerald in response.

While he wasn't exactly sure why the priest was referring to him as 'Young Master,' Gerald still felt that this was the perfect opportunity to bait some information out of the man. He was hoping that some probing around would do the trick.

"Also, you've yet to answer my first question!" added Gerald in a commanding tone.

Hearing that, the frightened priest quickly bowed before replying, "H-how could you possibly have forgotten, Young Master...? Regardless, we're all here since we got secret orders from the family to head to Sacrasolis Mountain to refine the holy stone! There's an area here called the Sacrasolis Pond, and we've been refining the Sacrasolis Holy stone for over a month now!"

"The Sacrasolis Holy Stone, you say? I see. And what happened to all the original priests from Sacrasolis Church then?" asked Gerald as he nodded while slowly piecing together the bigger picture.

"W-well, anyone who wasn't compliant was killed on the spot... The rest of them are currently imprisoned in the dungeon! Regardless, I wonder if the chief knows that you're already here, Young Master? I can immediately report to Mr. Hoyt Crawford about your presence if you'd like!" replied the priest.

"That can wait. Speaking of which, have you heard of a person called Master Ghost before?" asked Gerald, now more certain than ever that there were loads of secrets hidden within this mountain.

“Master Ghost? But of course, I know him! After all, you were the one who ordered us to hunt him down! If you’ve forgotten, we already have him in our hands! You even ordered the chief to keep a close eye on him at all times!” said the priest.

“So Master Ghost has been captured by your group this entire time?!” replied Gerald as he slightly raised an eyebrow.

“...Y-young Master...? What are you...?” muttered the priest as he raised a slight brow as well, finally realizing that the person in front of him seemed to have a rather different personality compared to the young master he knew... Besides, wasn’t it bizarre that the young master of all people was asking him all these questions...?

‘Well, this is just perfect! To think that I’d get all this information that easily!’ Gerald thought to himself.

As it turned out, Master Ghost had fled all the way to Sacrasolis Mountain to hide within Sacrasolis Church, and all this had led to the incident where he had met Xyrielle and told her about her fortune at the back of the mountain a while back. Unfortunately, this group of ‘priests’ came over sometime later and completely turned Sacrasolis Mountain upside-down for two distinct reasons. Firstly, to seek out and capture Master Ghost, and secondly, to gain access to the Sacrasolis Pond.

With that said, no wonder he couldn’t find where Master Ghost was this entire time!

“...So, who is this Hoyt Crawford that you mentioned? Also, detail me a bit more on your young master,” replied Gerald with a smile.

“...H-huh? So, you really aren’t the young master...?!” replied the priest as he instantly got to his feet, a vigilant expression on his face.

“I’m honestly surprised it took you this long to notice,” replied Gerald with a chuckle, knowing full well that this man was trying to escape.

Chapter 1522

As the priest attempted to book it, he didn't make it past the third step before some ungodly force began lifting him off the ground! This time, however, all his internal organs felt like they were simultaneously being torn apart!

Trembling violently from the near-unbearable pain, the priest quickly began shouting, "S-spare my life! P-please, spare my life...!"

"I'll consider once you answer my question. If you need a refresher, I asked why you recognized me as your young master," replied Gerald.

"W-well, Young Master's appearance highly matches yours! It's almost as though you're his doppelgänger! With that said, there's no way I could've been able to easily tell you apart! Though, I do wonder if you're also a member of the Crawford family... After all, there's no other reason you could look so similar!" explained the man who was still aching terribly.

"...Oh? The Crawford family, you say?" replied Gerald as his eyes momentarily lit up.

Observing the squirming man, Gerald could see that the priest appeared to be a master-in-training, though he was probably still far from achieving his goal.

'Does that mean that the Crawfords that he's talking about are the other Crawford family that Second uncle found out about? Are these people connected to grandpa...?' Gerald wondered in slight bewilderment.

"Tell me the location of your Crawfords," said Gerald.

“T-they’re currently on Yearning Island! Are... Are you from that family as well?” asked the priest in shock.

However, before Gerald could say anything in response, the priest seemed to realize something. Staring wide-eyed at Gerald, he then said, “I... I get it now! Are you from the Crawford family from Northbay?!”

“You got me red-handed. Regardless, I’m assuming that Daryl is the head of the Crawfords from Yearning Island?” asked Gerald in an indifferent tone.

“T-that’s right!” replied the priest as he nodded.

‘So there really are two separate Crawford families... Then... Doesn’t that mean that everything Second uncle found out about is true...? But... Why would grandpa do any of this...?’ Gerald thought to himself with a slight frown, feeling extremely puzzled.

Whatever the case was, Gerald had a hunch that his family’s disappearance had something to do with these other Crawfords. He now knew that he had a lookalike in the other family as well. After all, the priest truly seemed to have believed that he was his young master earlier.

As Gerald frowned slightly while thinking about all the clues he had just gathered, the priest suddenly grabbed a handful of dirt from the ground. Following that, murderous intent seemed to flare out of his body as he tossed the dirt toward Gerald’s head!

However, instead of dirt, the contents he threw now appeared to be a volley of golden needles that glowed brightly as they flew toward Gerald’s head!

Much to the priest’s surprise, Gerald’s essential qi simply blocked the needles when they got too close.

Watching as the momentarily petrified priest stared wide-eyed at the falling needles that were slowly reduced to dust, Gerald then asked, "You already know my identity, no? In other words, you should know full well that we're from the same clan by this point. With that in mind, why are you still trying to kill me?"

"T-there's a huge bounty on your head if we manage to kill you!" replied the terrified man.

"And who was it who issued that order? Also, were you the ones who had kidnapped my family?" asked the puzzled Gerald, wondering why all this was necessary in the first place.

"If you wish to learn more, you should ask Mr. Hoyt yourself!" replied the priest as he sneakily lit up a paper talisman...

Shortly after, the talisman began releasing multi-colored smoke that quickly dissipated into the air!

Knowing that it was most probably some sort of secret code, Gerald then turned to look at the laughing priest who smugly said, "Look, I know that you're just one of those lowly Crawfords who's managed to slip away. I bet you hadn't expected me to fire off a warning signal while you were questioning me, right? Regardless, you're done for this time, kid!"

Feeling even more puzzled now, Gerald then replied, "...Why are you even getting so excited for? I was already aware that you were lighting that talisman up from the moment you started doing it, you know? Besides, I'm not going to just leave immediately after getting here. With that said, why are you so happy?"

"Hahaha! Since you look exactly like Young Master, I'm sure you have a pretty important role among the other lowly Crawfords! With that said, I'll surely be promoted to deputy chief once I successfully capture you! Just so you know, several experts are already making their way here! Does that answer your question?" replied the priest as he laughed joyously.

“Ah, I see, I see... So, you’re feeling proud of yourself, thinking that you were being resourceful earlier... You must be feeling ecstatic from assuming that you’ve already captured me by this point! Still, you keep repeating the phrase, ‘lowly Crawfords’... Just to clear things up a bit, I hope you realize that to me, you’re nothing more than an ant!” said Gerald with a wry smile on his face.

Chapter 1523

“...You...! To think you’d still behave so presumptuously even though you’re about to be done for!” growled the priest in anger.

Before he could say anything else, however, the priest momentarily froze. Now staring-wide eyed at Gerald, the priest was able to somehow see flames reflected in Gerald’s eyes. He couldn’t look away, and shortly after, the priest began feeling a burning sensation on the soles of his feet...

Following that, the priest screamed miserably before turning into nothing but dust in less than a second!

“And to me, the lives of ants are insignificant!” declared Gerald as he shook his head with a smile before placing his arms against his back.

With that out of the way, Gerald’s figure slowly wavered as it became one with the wind! Due to that, he was able to swiftly return to the cave where Xyrielle had last been led into.

The cave was naturally still heavily guarded, and the second the guards noticed Gerald’s presence, they immediately attempted to stop him from entering.

However, just as Gerald had earlier said, all of them were simply ants to him, and he swiftly took all of them out. Though they were technically Crawfords as well, since these people were clearly not against harming him, all of them had to die!

Watching as the group of experts—who had been standing guard at the mouth of the cave—got annihilated like they were nothing, the prisoners who were located just a little deeper in the dungeon found themselves shocked beyond words.

Before they could even recover, all of them stared wide-eyed as a miniature hurricane blew its way into the cave, eventually dissipating and revealing Gerald!

The second she saw him, Xyrielle instantly shouted excitedly, “G-Gerald!”

Truth be told, Xyrielle had been scared half to death earlier, thinking that she was eventually going to get raped by those people! With that in mind, it was no wonder why she was so overjoyed to see Gerald now.

“Everything’s fine now,” replied Gerald indifferently as he gently flicked his fingers...

And just like that, all the shackles simultaneously clicked open. The prisoners were now free!

Looking around, Gerald saw that the three masked men who had attempted to save Xyrielle earlier were present. Aside from them, there was also a group of priests. However, what shocked Gerald the most was the fact that there were so many ordinary women who were trembling in fear in the innermost part of the dungeon...

He had heard of the missing women cases before he set off for the mountain a few days ago. As it turned out, this was all the handiwork of the fake priests...

Were these truly Crawfords...? How could they be this disgusting and lustful...? The thought of it alone made Gerald extremely angry.

Regardless, the captives were then led out of the dungeon, and the second the cave's entrance was in sight, an old priest—who seemed to be the leader of the group—bowed respectfully toward Gerald before saying, "Thank you for saving our lives, master! I don't know how to repay your kindness!"

"There's no need to be so polite with me, priest. Regardless, the reason I came here was to look for someone."

"Oh? Who could you be looking for?" asked the old priest.

"I'm looking for a person called Master Ghost. From what I've managed to gather, he once took lodging here atop Sacrasolis Mountain. Despite that, I didn't see any traces of him in the dungeon at all!" replied Gerald.

Hearing that, a middle-aged man—who had been standing beside the old priest—turned to face the elderly man before respectfully asking, "Master, do you think this is the Master Gerald Crawford that Master Ghost told us about?"

"That's right, I'm Gerald Crawford!" replied Gerald as he nodded joyously.

"So that's the case! You know, Master Ghost kept saying that you were a supreme genius... After witnessing your capabilities, I have to admit that he was right, Master Crawford! You truly do have supernatural powers! Regardless, Master Ghost had first come to us to avoid the pursuit of the Crawfords. Unfortunately, he failed to escape in the end, and he ended up being taken away by Hoyt instead of being locked up together with the rest of us!" explained the old priest.

"Do you know why they were so keen on hunting Master Ghost down?" asked Gerald.

"That I'm unsure of... However, do know that Master Ghost placed all his hopes on you before the great calamity. With that said, whether he manages to escape it or not all depends on how soon you find him!" replied the old priest.

“Copy that!” said Gerald with a slight nod.

Chapter 1524

At that moment, the leader of the three masked men—who had been standing behind Xyrielle this entire time—came forth and said, “Thank you for coming to our rescue, sir! I go by Hubert Younger!”

“Oh? You were here as well, Mr. Hubert?” exclaimed the old priest as he immediately greeted the three masked men as well, making it clear as day that they were well acquainted.

“Indeed! After receiving your secret message stating that Sacrasolis Mountain was in trouble, we immediately rushed over to investigate. Still, to think that Hoyt would end up getting this powerful in just a few decades since I last saw him... I honestly found it exceedingly difficult to withstand even a single blow of his. Had I not dispatched my Dragon Zone, I wouldn’t have been able to fight against him and his men at all! All that aside, I made an almost fatal mistake today when I decided to save this girl’s life! Due to that action, all three of us ended up getting captured by his men!” explained Hubert.

Following that, Hubert couldn’t help but take a good long look at Gerald’s extraordinary temperament. From what he had witnessed, Gerald was also a master of using profound and unpredictable methods that left even him surprised. How had he not heard of such an amazing person before?

Whatever the case was, he was now brimming with respect toward Gerald.

Just as he was about to exchange a few words with him, however, one of the younger priests—who had earlier been sent out to scout the area—came running back while nervously shouting, “M-master Crawford! Things aren’t looking too good! Those men have completely surrounded us!”

Upon hearing that, the kidnapped girls instantly began screaming before huddling together in fear. It was clear as day that this reaction was due to the psychological trauma that those men had left on them.

“There’s no need to panic, just follow my lead!” instructed Gerald as he began leading the group out of the cave.

As he stepped out into the open, Gerald could see that a large number of ‘priests’ had encircled the area right outside the cave, completely blocking any possible escape routes.

Upon seeing Gerald’s face, a middle-aged man—who appeared to be the head of the opposite team—was instantly stunned. However, it turned into an expression of joy just seconds later.

Laughing aloud, the man then declared, “So it’s you! To think that you’d walk straight into my lap! I guess I don’t have to waste any more time hunting you down now! But before that, allow me to confirm something... You’re Gerald from the Crawfords of Northbay, correct?”

“That is correct. And you are...?” asked Gerald.

“Finally! Do you even have any idea how hard we’ve been searching for you? Where the hell have you even been hiding this entire time? Even the picture of the sun couldn’t locate you! Regardless, keep in mind that the one who captured you today goes by the name of Luther Crawford!” sneered Luther.

“The picture of the sun? I’ve had access to it myself. Regardless, can it also be used to locate others?” asked Gerald.

“Hah! You? As if a cheap and lowly b*stard like you would be worthy of possessing the real picture of the sun!” retorted Luther.

“...Whatever the case is, it appears that you truly are the ones responsible for capturing my family members. Still, I just don’t understand. From what I’ve gathered, both of us are essentially from the same family, no? Why participate in all this senseless murder?” asked Gerald rather curiously.

In all honesty, Gerald was still in disbelief of all this. None of their actions seemed to make any sense to him at all!

“Let’s just say that due to some incidents, the lord’s plans have deviated slightly, and he predicts that things will only continue developing in a bad direction... Due to that deviation, however, it appears that the Crawfords on your side won’t be of any use to us anymore! With that said, it’d be better to take care of all of you while we can rather than leave a chance open for you to possibly ruin our entire plan in the future!” replied Luther with a snicker.

“I see... Speaking of which, I’d like to know whether my grandpa, the man I’ve always respected, is the actual mastermind of all this. Has my family been used this entire time?” asked Gerald.

“Hahaha! I can’t say anything about the former part of your question, but for the latter, of course, you’ve been used! That’s the only use of such lowly people as you! Also, I’d prefer if you stopped saying that you’re from the same clan as us! Know that we’ve always been ashamed of you, so it’s honestly great news for us that you’re finally going to be taken out with our very own hands now!” retorted Luther with a sinister laugh.

“I see. And what about the rest of my family members?” growled Gerald, immense murderous intent reflected in his eyes.

“Hah! If I remember correctly, by the time I began carrying out this mission, Dylan had already been tortured beyond recognition! I honestly don’t even know if he’s still alive now!”

“That’s great to hear!” replied Gerald with a nod.

“Did I hear that right? It’s great to hear? That man’s your father!” declared Luther while looking at Gerald and wondering if he had gone mad.

“You misunderstand me. Of course I wasn’t talking about how terribly you people have treated my father, but nonetheless, your statement has dispelled all my worries. Now then, since I’ve probably

gotten all the relevant information out of you, I can kill all of you without any hesitation! Mark my words, not one of you is leaving alive!”

Chapter 1525

“Humph! You truly are an expert at saying conceited things, Gerald! It appears that you won’t be able to understand how wide the gap between us is until I show you my training!” retorted Luther before laughing again.

“You’re a Second-rank master, no?” asked Gerald.

“Oh? Color me surprised! You actually know a thing or two about those who train to attain spiritual enlightenment!” replied Luther as he stared sinisterly at Gerald.

“Just curious, but what is Hoyt’s rank then?” asked Gerald.

“Hah! Our chief is a legendary master that’s at a level close to that of a Fifth-rank master! A realm that no ordinary person would ever be able to comprehend!” said Luther, his eyes momentarily filled with admiration.

“I see. So it appears that there truly are a lot of experts within the Crawford family... To think that there even exists a fifth rank!” replied Gerald as he rested his arms against his back.

“I do wonder why you’re still asking so many questions. No matter! I’ll just capture you first and hand you over to the chief so that he can deal with you!”

Following that, Luther positioned his hand into a sword finger, and immediately after, flames began bursting out of his body! With a layer of fire surrounding him, the man then rushed toward Gerald!

From an outsider's point of view, Gerald could very well be taken out in a single swipe if those large, burning hands ever caught onto him.

Regardless, everyone else present was shocked speechless by the intense flames.

This was the Fire Armor Demon Technique! Anyone using it would be able to summon flames—that could burn through anything—that would then surround the user's body! Upon coming into contact with said flames, the virulent fire would instantly burn all the victim's main internal organs!

'If even Luther is already this terrifying, what kind of power does Hoyt even have...?' Hubert thought to himself as he trembled in fear.

By the time Luther was close enough to Gerald, Gerald still had both his hands in his pockets. He, of all people, knew that the flames were nothing to be alarmed about.

Even so, the others didn't see things the way he did, and Xyrielle instantly shouted, "P-please be careful, Gerald...!"

Hearing that, Gerald simply turned to look at Xyrielle before nodding as he replied, "Don't worry, everything's under control!"

Following that, Gerald extended a hand before snapping his fingers.

The next thing Luther realized, a golden aura had appeared before him! Unable to react in time, he felt as the aura's golden rays began piercing through his body, causing his skin to start smoking!

"What?!" shouted the surprised Luther as he instantly attempted to escape the attack. However, it was far too late for him.

The second the golden aura fully engulfed him, Luther felt as though his entire body had just been pierced through! The next thing he knew, he was already spurting blood as he flew backward!

Upon landing on the ground, he found that he couldn't even move a muscle anymore! The only indication that he was still alive was the fact that his eyes were wide open on his bloodied face...

Upon snapping out of his shocked state, Luther instantly cried out in disbelief, "You...!"

Meanwhile, the other Crawfords each found themselves gulping as they slowly took a few steps back.

Luther had ended up in such a state from just a single blow...? This person was way too terrifying...!

Hubert himself had his jaw hanging wide open after witnessing all that. By god! What kind of person even was Gerald?!

Sliding his hand into his pocket again, Gerald then casually walked over to Luther. Once he was standing before him, he stepped on Luther's face, slowly applying pressure as he said, "I haven't even utilized my true capabilities yet, you know? Is this all you've got to capture me with? How pathetic!"

"You...! L-look, while I admit that I severely underestimated you, know that you can't just kill me! I'm just following orders, you know? If you really want to settle the score, you should duke it out with chief Hoyt instead of me!" replied the stupefied Luther.

"Of course I'm going to settle the score with him. However, I hope you realize that me killing you won't affect that outcome at all! I hope you all know that I, Gerald Crawford, always keep my promises! With that said, I promised to kill all of you today, and I'll make sure it happens!"

Chapter 1526

The second his sentence ended, Gerald increased the pressure of his foot without warning! A split second later, a sickening sound was heard as Luther's head exploded like a watermelon!

Seeing that Luther had been reduced to such a state before he could even scream, some of the remaining Crawfords instantly yelled, "H-hurry! Run for it and tell the chief about this...!"

With that, the hundred over terrified people began scattering in all four directions, hoping to escape with their lives intact!

"Oh? Are all of you seriously trying to escape now?" said Gerald with a faint smile before closing his eyes...

As soon as he did, a golden eye suddenly appeared on his forehead! Almost instantaneously, a strong light was then ejected from the eye! The light itself easily homed in on everyone Gerald deemed as an enemy, and whenever the light pierced through someone, their bodies would end up exploding in gory sounds!

While all this was taking place, those standing behind Gerald could only scream in terror. After all, all this was simply too cruel for them!

Once everyone was taken out, Gerald closed his divine eye before turning to look at the old priest while asking, "Are you sure that Master Ghost is currently in Hoyt's hands?"

"Y-yes, Master Crawford!" replied the shocked old priest.

Though he had experienced a great deal throughout his lifetime, this was the first he had witnessed such a bloody scene... It made him fear Gerald since the young man was actually willing to resort to such vicious methods...

“Very well, then. Regardless, I’ll have to trouble you to lead my friends down the mountain and settle down there for a bit. For your own safety, please don’t re-ascend the mountain till I get down!” instructed Gerald.

Before anyone could even say a thing about that, Gerald’s figure had already dissipated into thin air...

Regardless, Gerald’s words seemed to be imbued with some sort of magic. After all, though some of them were initially hesitant, everyone eventually hurried down the mountain in retreat.

A little while later, two rows of people could be seen sitting on both sides of a secret chamber located on Sacrasolis Mountain. Sitting at the highest point in the chamber, was a middle-aged man with a square jaw.

Lying right in the middle of this group, was an oil cauldron, and right beside it was an old man who was being held captive.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but I remember you promising us that you’d give us the answers we wanted after a month of purification. We trusted in you, but it’s now well over a month. Since you attempted to deceive us, I’m now reminding you that there isn’t a way out for you. Look, either you fulfill your promise and cooperate with us, or my men will dunk you into that boiling hot oil cauldron!” sneered the middle-aged man—who was clearly the leader of the group—as he took a sip of his wine.

“Oh? Did I promise such a thing? I’m sorry, my memory hasn’t been the best! Do tell me what exactly I promised at the start!” replied the old and extremely thin man sitting by the oil cauldron.

As expected, the man was none other than Master Ghost, though he now looked rather haggard after being tortured for so long. Even so, his eyes were still brimming with vigor.

“Firstly, I want you to tell me where Gerald is. You, of all people, should know how much we’ve gone through throughout the years just to locate him. Secondly, I need you to tell me where the Astrigite is.

Even so, aren't you just playing a fool, Master Ghost? Do you think any of us here buy your confused act?" growled Hoyt.

"Hahaha! I've already told you, haven't I? Gerald's coming over to find you sooner or later! However, you got impatient and captured his family members! Regardless, as for the second request... Let's discuss that once you meet up with Gerald. That is, if you're still alive by then!" replied Master Ghost before laughing aloud.

This prompted a fat middle-aged man—who had a katana sheathed under his Japanese garments—to slam his fist onto the table before shouting, "You old b*stard! Who do you even think Gerald is? Killing him would probably be easier than killing an ant for me!"

"Look, if you know what's good for you, just tell us where Gerald is right now! Otherwise, you'll be facing so much misery that you'll be wishing that we allowed you to die!" grumbled another impatient person.

At that moment, everyone heard slow, but distinct, footsteps approaching the room...

"...Hmm? Who could that be?"

Chapter 1527

Realizing that all of them had heard the same thing, everyone turned to look at the doorway...

Following that, a young priest who was trembling in fear walked into the room...

Staring at him, Hoyt then asked in a cold voice, "What is it—"

Before his question could even end, a figure—who had been hiding behind the priest’s back—slowly revealed himself. Naturally, it was Gerald.

It took Hoyt a moment, but when he finally realized who the youth was, he found himself muttering, “...You... You’re Gerald from the Crawford family, no?”

“Bingo!” replied Gerald with a subtle smile.

“M-master Crawford...! I’ve already led you here! You... You promised you’d spare my life once I did that, right...?” stuttered the priest fearfully.

The second his sentence ended, however, Gerald simply flicked the back of his palm against the priest’s skull... and just like that, the priest’s head exploded! As if that wasn’t already enough, the priest’s entire body then quickly dissipated into a bloody mist!

What a joke... As if Gerald would’ve ever considered sparing his life!

Regardless, Hoyt and the others were momentarily stunned speechless. As it turned out, Gerald was actually pretty skillful!

“Young brother Gerald!” announced Master Ghost who couldn’t help but sigh with relief.

“Master Ghost! I’m so sorry that you had to suffer this much just because I was a little late!” replied Gerald as he, too, nodded in relief when he saw that Master Ghost was still alive.

Before anyone could say another word, Hoyt slammed both his hands against his table before shouting, “We’ve been searching for you for so long... To think that you’d actually come to our doorstep on your own accord! Very well, then! You’ve truly saved me a lot of trouble and manpower!”

The second his sentence ended, Hoyt's figure seemed to waver for a moment... and the next thing anyone knew, he was already standing before Gerald!

Even the eight experts—who were standing on both sides of the room—were already armed and seemingly ready to attack at any moment.

From what Gerald could see, some of the experts were Japanese, whereas the others were from other foreign regions.

"Is he the one, Chief Crawford? Is the Herculean Primordial Spirit really inside his body?" asked one of the eight people as they exchanged glances among each other with joyous expressions on their faces.

"That's right! Speaking of which, I'd like to remind all of you that it was the Crawfords who had spent a great deal of time and effort to nurture the Herculean Primordial Spirit. With that said, you'll still have to listen to the Crawford family's commands if you wish to even get a share of the pie, understood?" warned Hoyt.

"That's only natural!" replied all eight of them gleefully.

"You know, I've heard from Luthor that the Crawfords of Northbay are nothing more than a tool to your half of the family. Does that mean that the Crawfords of Northbay were created just so you could nurture the Herculean Primordial Spirit within me?" asked Gerald in slight disbelief.

"Oh? It appears that you're quite smart! Every word you said was pretty much true! Regardless, we'll be harvesting the Herculean Primordial Spirit in advance due to some changes!" replied Hoyt.

"I see... While I'm sure that you'll be getting rid of my family members sooner or later, I can't imagine why you guys are being so ruthless. So what if we're vastly different? In the end, we're still from the same family, no?" asked Gerald, finding all of this to be increasingly outrageous.

“Well, I guess it wouldn’t hurt to tell you this since you’re about to die anyway! Look, are you really stupid enough to believe that your Crawford family is from the same lineage as ours? Hahaha! You see, the ancestor of your Crawford family was initially just a stand-in for our Crawford family’s ancestor! In the end, we allowed him to create the Crawfords of Northbay—which would eventually end up becoming a world-class power that owns over half of the planet’s wealth and assets—just for the sake of this nurturing plan! As an extra titbit, in order to ensure that your Crawford family wouldn’t branch out, we personally made sure to get rid of as many of your family’s members as possible!” sneered Hoyt.

“And here I was wondering why my family’s lineage didn’t seem to be prosperous despite the fact that we’re so economically strong... So they were murdered by all of you...!” growled Gerald, his eyes filled with rage.

Chapter 1528

“But of course! Regardless, everything is perfect now! After waiting for over a dozen generations, the prophecy of the picture of the sun is finally going to be fulfilled! After all, you’re the true bearer of the Herculean Primordial Spirit!” declared Hoyt with a laugh.

“What I’m hearing is that since the mission is now complete, my family and I should no longer exist among the living, correct?” asked Gerald.

“Naturally. While I admit that you’re able to see through issues pretty thoroughly, it’s quite unfortunate that there really is no other way out for you. Your fate had already been determined from the moment you were born! You were always destined to end up in our hands!” retorted Hoyt, his mocking expression filled with ridicule.

After taking note of all of this, Gerald then laughed bitterly before replying, “You almost sound proud of your ability to manipulate others and play god.”

“Of course, I am! As if there’s anything more exciting than that in the world!” sneered Hoyt before laughing aloud.

“From what you’ve said, it appears that aside from my strength, everything else that I’ve experienced up till this point could very well be artificial! Regardless, I had trusted others way too easily, resulting in my family getting kidnapped and possibly even harmed... What a pity that I was so careless...” muttered Gerald, hints of remorse reflected in his eyes.

Why hadn’t he thought of establishing a protective formation for his family upon awakening to his powers? That could’ve possibly prevented his family members from getting kidnapped!

Thinking about all this also made him slightly frightened. After all, had Zyla not helped him unlock the natural gift from the Herculean Primordial Spirit, he could’ve easily died at the hands of either this group or the King of Judgment Portal.

Momentarily staring at his palm, he couldn’t help but clench it slightly.

“Hahaha! Well, truth be told, it’s exactly because you were late that your family members are still alive! Had we found you that day, none of them would be among the living anymore!” replied Hoyt as he fished out his cell phone before playing a pre-recorded video...

From what Gerald could see, the video had been recorded in some kind of dark dungeon...

Upon the video zooming in, Gerald realized that a person was being tortured with an iron whip! The person himself looked badly mutilated, and Gerald’s eyes were filled with rage the second he saw the victim’s face. It was his father!

As Gerald’s heart began beating wildly, he noticed the presence of a masked youth who was sitting at the side of the dungeon. That person simply sat there, laughing and ridiculing Gerald’s father who was still being whipped repeatedly.

“While it’s true that they’re alive, it’s only fair that we make them suffer in exchange! Well, Gerald? Are you feeling powerless now? Hahaha! I understand how you feel! After all, it must be quite unpleasant to know that your entire family was manipulated like mere pawns!” sneered Hoyt with a malicious laugh before putting his cell phone away.

“Chief Crawford, there’s no point talking to him anymore. Why don’t I capture him first? Once that’s done, we’ll use the remaining time to discuss how we’ll share the energy from the Herculean Primordial Spirit!” grumbled a Japanese man who was among the eight experts. From what Gerald could see, he was at the very least a Fourth-rank master.

Not even waiting for Hoyt to reply, the samurai then leaped forward in an attempt to grab hold of Gerald’s neck!

Gerald, however, was having none of that. Now extremely furious, Gerald instantly declared, “You utter b*stards...! For doing all this, I, Gerald Crawford, swear to turn all of you into nothing but ashes once I’m done!”

Following that, Gerald was instantly covered in a bloodred glow that made the hearts—of anyone who saw it—palpitate wildly. Adding that to the pressuring killing intent that Gerald currently exuded, it almost seemed like he could murder just with the two!

Even the Japanese master who had earlier rushed forward found himself freezing in place when he felt Gerald’s monstrous killing intent.

“W-what...?!” muttered the man as he instantly felt a strong urge to take a step back.

However, before he could even do so, he felt a strong force yanking him toward Gerald! His hand now over the Japanese man’s throat, Gerald then squeezed it hard...

And with a sickening sound, the man's head exploded into a million pieces... He was now as good as a lump of flesh.

"...H-huh...?!"

It took everyone a moment to register what had just happened, but when it finally hit, their eyelids instantly began twitching rapidly.

This was especially the case for Hoyt, who was already taking a few steps back in sheer horror and amazement after witnessing Gerald's terrifying change.

How... How could any of this be?!

Chapter 1529

"Just because you people have a slightly higher rank, you all think you're so invincible... Is being strong the reason why all of you think it's fine to manipulate the lives of others? Well guess what? Your lives are dirt cheap before me!" roared Gerald.

"Everyone, keep your guard up! Attack him together or we'll never be able to capture Gerald!" ordered Hoyt whose eyelids were still twitching.

Since the remaining seven experts now had a common enemy, all of them instantly began charging up their strongest attacks before assaulting Gerald together! Due to the immense release of essential qi, the entire area began trembling rather violently...

With debris and dust flying everywhere, the seven men were just about to land their attacks on Gerald when suddenly, he seemingly vanished into thin air!

Before anyone could even react, the first wail of despair could be heard... Then another... And another...

By the time the dust finally settled, seven mangled and bloodied corpses lay at Gerald's feet.

Gerald himself appeared to be completely unharmed, and there wasn't even a single trace of dust on him!

"A-amazing... You truly are amazing...!" stuttered Hoyt as he revealed himself from behind a stone pillar.

As Hoyt stared at the seven corpses on the ground, Gerald saw that the man was simultaneously strangling Master Ghost with one of his hands! In Hoyt's other hand, he seemed to be holding some kind of bead...

Regardless, as Hoyt continued muttering something in his horrified state, Gerald simply remained calm as a cucumber. Sliding his hands into his pockets, Gerald then smiled while asking, "What exactly is so amazing?"

"Y-you are, of course! Just so you know, the eight who you just murdered were all great masters, and all of them were incredible individuals! Despite the fact that you were face to face against seven of the strongest attacks from the best of the best, none of them even seemed to be a match against you! With how tragically each of them died, I admit that we've seriously underestimated you! You're simply too strong and capable compared to us...!" replied Hoyt as he continued holding Master Ghost hostage. It was also evident by this point that the bead in his hand was no ordinary object.

Though Hoyt did appear to be extremely surprised, he seemed unusually calm for some reason...

“Whatever the case is, it appears that you’re no idiot, at least when compared to all the stupid folk I’ve had to meet before. After all, you didn’t just rush over to me to attack. Now that would’ve instantly spelled your doom. Instead, you actually used your wits to hold Master Ghost hostage amidst all the chaos!” said Gerald with a sincere smile on his face.

Though Hoyt realized that Gerald’s praise was authentic, he still remained stern as he chuckled before coldly replying, “...Well, as they say, when a young man has great power, he’ll surely get extremely arrogant and think that strength will get him anything that he wants! Just so you know, when it comes to fights between masters, wisdom is what counts at the end of the day!”

“...I’m sorry, did you... Did you just say wisdom?” replied Gerald who was so caught off guard by Hoyt’s words that he almost felt like his jaw was about to drop.

“Are you... honestly saying that you’re filled with wisdom just because you’ve taken Master Ghost hostage...? Or is it because of that toy in your other hand?” added Gerald with a wry smile.

“I’ll say it right now that I’ve been nicknamed ‘the Crawford family’s wisdom’ for the longest time among those in the realm of training. Also, did you just say that this bead is a toy?!”

“Indeed. It appears to be a toy that’s currently being held by an infant!” replied Gerald with a nod.

“Hahaha! Now you’re just being ridiculous... While I could explain what it is, I think it’d be better if Master Ghost elaborated on it. After all, you’ve been seeking him for such a long time!” scoffed Hoyt.

“I-it’s the Thunderstorm Formation...!” exclaimed Master Ghost, a fearful expression on his face.

“Insightful as ever, Master Ghost! That’s right! I hope you understand, Gerald, that as long as I move my finger, the formation will instantly activate, and when it does, the chaos it’ll cause will disallow even an inch of grass to grow within a hundred-mile radius! Needless to say, all three of us will be ashes by then! While dying now doesn’t matter to me, I’m sure it’d be a shame if you lost your life here, no? After all, the rest of your family members are still suffering in the hands of my half of the family! Regardless, it

seems that in the end, both of your lives are still under my control! With that said, I don't think I need to spell it out for you, for you to know what's most important, right?" scoffed Hoyt rather smugly.

Shaking his head with a wry smile, Gerald simply replied, "Well, since you're calling the shots, what do you propose I should do then?" asked Gerald as he took a few steps forward, his hands in his pockets.

"You... Don't you dare come any closer! Make one more move and all three of us are dying together!" roared Hoyt nervously as the muscles on his face twitched slightly.

"What's wrong, Wisdom? Are you that scared already when I've barely even moved? Speaking of which, there's something I'd like to remind you about," said Gerald.

"...What is it?"

"As I've said, that formation in your hand? It's nothing but a toy to me. Consider the fact that I murdered all eight of your 'experts' as easily as slaughtering chickens. Have you ever thought about what would happen to you if the formation fails to hurt me?" asked Gerald.

"...T-that..." muttered Hoyt with a gulp as his face went deathly pale.

While Gerald simply looked like an ordinary person, the aura he exuded was simply too overpowering...

Chapter 1530

After hearing what Gerald had to say, Hoyt's nervousness and anxiety instantly peaked. Feeling cold sweat drip down his forehead, he was now having trouble just holding the bead steadily in his hand.

"I advise you to think this through. Know that if you get careless, I'll make sure to fully dismantle you as you watch your body fall to pieces before the formation even activates... I'm not one to joke around, just in case you were wondering," replied Gerald.

"...T-that...!" muttered Hoyt as he stared at the carnage that Gerald had left behind, too nervous to even speak anymore.

Both Hoyt's hands now trembling violently, he watched as Gerald extended his own hand to take the bead off him.

"So... This is the Thunderstorm Formation?" asked Gerald as he carefully observed the bead. True enough, Gerald was able to sense a small formation contained within the bead.

"T-that's right!" replied Hoyt as he nodded like an idiot.

Following that, both Hoyt and Master Ghost's eyes widened as Gerald tossed the bead up into the air... instantly triggering the formation!

The second it activated, a dark cloud came out of nowhere and quickly began spreading out across the ceiling...

Seconds before the bolt of lightning—that would decimate everything—struck, Gerald flicked his finger as he called out, "Recall!"

And just like that, the dark clouds turned into nothing but smoke before completely disappearing.

"...W-what...?" muttered Hoyt who took two steps back before slumping to the ground.

Master Ghost himself was so terrified that his face had gone as pale as a sheet. Simultaneously, he was also feeling shocked to see how far Gerald had come.

Though he already knew that Gerald was no ordinary mortal, he truly hadn't expected the youth to already possess such terrifying abilities...

Once the fear and shock passed, however, Ghost quickly began feeling overjoyed!

Gerald, on the other hand, displayed a wry smile before saying, "Now do you see that I wasn't kidding? This bead is simply a toy to me!"

"M-master Crawford! P-please, please spare my life...!" pleaded Hoyt as he fell to his knees the second he regained his senses.

After watching Hoyt kowtow repeatedly while begging for mercy, Gerald then asked, "I want you to tell me the coordinates of Yearning Island."

"...Y-Yearning Island? That's my Crawford family's island... It's at..."

Without completing his sentence, Hoyt suddenly raised his head before crushing a jade talisman that he had hidden up his sleeve!

Almost immediately after, a bright light appeared and the tiles beneath Hoyt's feet suddenly began cracking open! And just like that, Hoyt vanished into the crack, successfully making his escape!

Seconds later, several huge stone doors began toppling around them with explosive sounds, completely sealing the place up!

"That cunning man! He actually managed to escape!" exclaimed Master Ghost in a regretful tone.

“There’s no need to worry too much, Master Ghost. I’ve already planted a spell on him, and with any luck, he’ll eventually head back to Yearning Island. When that time comes, I’ll be able to find the island without too much effort and finally rescue my family!” replied Gerald while shaking his head with a wry smile on his face.

“...Oh? Apologies, I got a little flustered due to how panicked I was... That’s right, you’re no longer a person to be trifled with, Mr. Crawford... After all, despite Hoyt’s strength, he was nothing but an ant before you! Regardless, this place is filled with traps... How are we to get out?”

“Oh, that’s simple!” replied Gerald rather indifferently as he waved his hand...

Following that, a golden light shot out, causing the ground to shake so much that the ceiling of the area collapsed, revealing a new opening!

From below, the light from the outside world was so bright that Master Ghost had to momentarily look away to adjust his vision...

Truth be told, Master Ghost was still utterly shocked by how much Gerald’s skills and techniques had improved... Turning to look at Gerald, near-incomparable awe and admiration could be seen reflected in Master Ghost’s eyes...

Chapter 1531

The reason why Hoyt was able to escape was because Gerald had deliberately let him go.

He originally thought that he would be able to make use of Hoyt so that he could find Yearning Island.

Unexpectedly, Hoyt had actually gone into hiding on his own instead.

Since Hoyt was no longer of any value to him, Gerald would obviously not let him off just let that. At that moment, he activated his spell on the spot in order to kill Hoyt, who was a thousand miles away.

Fortunately, he had already found Master Ghost. So, once Master Ghost had recovered his vitality, Gerald believed that at that time, Master Ghost would be able to determine the direction that Gerald's family was in, then.

Over these past few days, Carlos and the others could not hold back, and they kept coming forth to request for Gerald to set up his own cultivation sect to formally establish his superiority in front of his subordinates.

The difference this time was that this proposal had been directly approved by Master Ghost.

At this moment, even Master Ghost had explained and shown the importance of establishing his own cultivation sect to Gerald.

After all, in the future, he would not only need to face the Crawford family, but he would also need to face many other cultivation forces. It could already be seen directly from the fact where his family members had been captured that Gerald would not be able to personally get everything done on his own no matter how strong he was.

This point struck Gerald directly in his heart.

"It seems as though it is time for me to establish a cultivation sect of my own!"

Gerald looked at the group of people who were looking at him with an eager expression in their eyes before he nodded.

“That’s simply perfect!”

“Hahaha! That’s right! Our presence will be considered justified, and we’ll also be people who belong to a certain organization in the future!”

“In the future, Mr. Crawford will be our magnificent lord! Master Ghost has great foresight, and he could be our magnificent lord’s military advisor!”

Many of the masters present were all extremely excited as they spoke and communicated amongst themselves.

“Greetings to our magnificent lord!”

At this moment, Carlos and Julian led the crowd to shout in unison.

Gerald could not help but smile wryly at this scene.

Master Ghost also said helplessly, “What’s the hurry? Even if you want to set up a sect, you should occupy a region in advance before coming up with a name for our sect, right? Besides, we will also have to inform the Ringmasters of Obliteration about the matter regarding our sect first!”

“That’s right! Our military advisor is right! We do not have a name yet, right?”

“Also, where should our territory be? It could not possibly be in the Sherwin Manor, right? This is downtown!” Someone said.

“Hahaha. I actually have a territory in mind, and that is none other than Sacrasolis Mountain. After the incident this time, the priest was also worried that the Crawford family would return and retaliate. So, he already had the intention of giving Sacrasolis Mountain to us. Therefore, this matter is basically settled!” Master Ghost said.

“This mountain is so huge! It’s definitely possible!”

Everyone laughed out loud.

“As for the name, sir, I’ll have to trouble you to personally determine a name to meet and satisfy these people’s wishes!” Master Ghost said as he bowed slightly.

In truth, even back at Langvern Mountain, Master Ghost had already determined that Gerald would be the person that he would follow in the future.

So, Master Ghost had already been making all the preparations ever since then.

“Sacrasolis Mountain, Sacrasolis Church, and even the power that I first awakened, all happened to be the Sacrasolis almighty power. So, I think that I have some sort of fate with this word. If I were to come up with a name for my sect, I think that I’ll just name it Sacrasolis Palace, then!”

Gerald said after thinking about it.

“Sacrasolis Palace? Master Crawford, no, Magnificent Lord Crawford, that is indeed a good name!”

At this moment, a voice sounded from outside the door.

It was a middle-aged man.

This person was none other than Hubert, who had been staying at the Sherwin Manor after getting saved by Gerald.

“Oh! Mr. Younger, how is your injury?” Gerald asked as he smiled faintly.

Hubert was the captain of a small team from the Dragon Squad in Weston. He could be considered to have already set one foot into the cultivation realm.

Chapter 1532

It had already been very difficult for him to go even further throughout all these years.

It was probably because he was born into an ordinary mortal life in the first place. However, even though he was not very strong, Gerald also had very high regard for him.

As for Hubert, he was naturally filled with reverence for Gerald.

“My injury has been completely healed after receiving treatment from you, Magnificent Lord. I rushed here as soon as I heard that you called for me!” Hubert said as he bowed slightly.

“Well, I heard Master Ghost telling me that the Dragon Squad has a very systematic underground resource network. So, I would like to ask for your help for a certain matter, Mr. Younger!” Gerald spoke up.

“I owe my life to you, Magnificent Lord. So, please give me any commands you may have!”

Hubert said as he bowed.

“Julian, Carlos...” Gerald looked at these two men.

“Yes, Magnificent Lord!”

“Since the establishment of Sacrasolis Palace has already been determined, I’ll assign the both of you to assign the tasks so that we can complete the establishment of our force within three days. Both of you can go ahead and coordinate these matters on my behalf. There are still some other things I need to do!” Gerald instructed.

Everyone in the hall retreated immediately to get things done.

“Master Ghost has already spoken to me about it. Magnificent Lord, you want to ask me about the whereabouts of Yearning Island, right?” Hubert said.

“That’s right!”

“Yearning Island is very hidden, and there has always been a curse on the people from Yearning Island. None of their clan members are allowed to tell or reveal the location of Yearning Island to anyone at all. Otherwise, they will suffer a violent death directly on the spot!”

“It is also precisely because of this wicked reason that the location of Yearning Island has remained hidden for so many years. No one knows its location, and not even a single person in the cultivation realm knows about the location of Yearning Island at all!” Hubert said.

It was no wonder why Hoyt had dared to risk death just to escape. It was because if he were to mention the location of Yearning Island, he would definitely suffer a horrible death in front of Gerald!

Gerald nodded with some understanding.

“In that case, is there truly no way for us to find Yearning Island, then?” Gerald asked anxiously.

“Not necessarily. I have a magic artifact hidden in the Dragon Squad called the Soul Arch Compass. Back then, my father also had several acquaintances with Master Ghost because of the Soul Arch Compass. With the Soul Arch Compass and Master Ghost’s Nine Dragons Calculation Technique, coupled with the systematic mechanism of the Dragon Squad’s ground network for so many years, I believe that it would not be difficult for us to uncover the location of Yearning Island!” Hubert said.

“Sir, that is precisely the reason why I asked Mr. Younger to come here. If we want to find Yearning Island, we will have to make use of the Soul Arch Compass. I believe that Mr. Younger will have a way!” Master Ghost said to Gerald.

“Okay!”

Gerald nodded.

“Magnificent Lord, in addition, I, Hubert Younger, have a small request. However, I do not know whether I should speak about it or not!” Hubert suddenly lowered his head as he pondered for a moment. After that, he spoke up in a soft voice, almost as though he was still feeling extremely uncertain.

“What is it?” Gerald asked.

“Well, after the battle this time, I realized that the people from the Dragon Squad are indeed a little too weak when facing certain real masters. Yesterday, I heard Master Julian saying that you intend to teach certain techniques and formations to the people in Sacrasolis Palace. We, from the Dragon Squad, are naturally not as talented as Master Julian and the others. However, since you’re well-versed in these formations and techniques, I wonder if you could take the time to teach the members of my Dragon Squad a technique or two? It would certainly be of infinite and great use to us!”

Hubert was particularly eager as he spoke about this.

If Gerald were to teach them, the combat power of the Dragon Squad would certainly be greatly strengthened without limits.

“This...”

Gerald thought about it. Speaking of it, Gerald did indeed have certain techniques and formations that would be suitable for the cultivation of the members of the Dragon Squad.

Naturally, since the Dragon Squad kept one side safe, even if Hubert had not helped Gerald, if Hubert had a request, Gerald would still help if he could do so.

“Okay! I agree to your request!”

Chapter 1533

Since the Soul Arch Compass belonging to the Dragon Squad was so important, Gerald did not dare to delay any longer. After assigning certain specific tasks, Gerald rushed to the Dragon Squad’s base with Master Ghost.

The Dragon Squad base was a base that was located in Tierson Mountain.

Of course, this area of Tierson Mountain was also forbidden to the outside world.

However, anyone who could enter the Dragon Squad base were all first-class masters who had to complete a variety of restricted tasks to ensure the safety of their party.

So, the Dragon Squad was naturally known as the hidden dragons of Weston.

It was under the direct control of Weston.

“Hubert Younger, are you insane?! How dare you bring such an immature and inexperienced young brat to the Dragon Squad base? That is already bad enough, but you even dared to recommend him to become an instructor at our base?!”

In the chief captain, Team Leader Lock’s office.

As Hubert was excitedly talking about this matter, the other captains felt incredulous.

Even Yeshua was a little surprised.

Yeshua was about sixty years old. He had a head full of white hair, but there was also a burst of energy and vitality in his gestures.

It was obvious that this person was extremely extraordinary.

As the chief captain, he naturally had his own calm and steady aura. He was simply listening quietly at the side as his sub-captains argued over this matter.

The person who had refuted Hubert directly was the sub-captain of the first division, Burnard Jole, who was over forty years old.

What was worth mentioning was the fact that he was the three hundred and sixty eighth-generation heir of the iron palm. It was rumored that one of his iron palms could easily penetrate a rock!

However, the remaining sub-captains did not have this kind of quality.

Who would not know that the first sub-team, the Jole team, and the second sub-team, the Younger team, were extremely difficult to deal with? So, no one dared to interrupt when the both of them were engaged in an argument.

“Burnard Jole, what’s your hurry? The reason I’m doing this is for the sake of the entire Dragon Squad! Mr. Crawford has extraordinary strength and abilities that are far beyond our imagination! He is only willing to impart some of his techniques to us because I worked hard for it! Team Leader Lock, you know me very well. I would never do anything unreliable!” Hubert said.

Yeshua could not help but nod gently. It was indeed true. Hubert was an extremely stable person, and he trusted him a great deal.

If Hubert said that the man named Gerald Crawford was so powerful, Yeshua could only presume that Gerald Crawford was indeed exceptional, then.

“Alright, then. Since you highly recommend him, I think we can give it a go. In addition to what you have just mentioned, what other conditions does he have, Hubert?” Yeshua could not help but ask.

“Oh! Mr. Crawford simply wants to borrow and use the Soul Arch Compass!” Hubert said.

As soon as he heard this, Burnard raised his brows.

At this moment, he said coldly, “Pfft! Who does he think he is?! He actually wants to use the Soul Arch Compass?! The Soul Arch Compass is a magic artifact belonging to the Dragon Squad! Can anyone simply use it whenever they want to? Are there no longer any rules in this place?!”

“Burnard Jole, don’t go too far. The reason why I invited Mr. Crawford here is because I was thinking about the overall strength and future of the Dragon Squad!”

When he saw that the both of them were about to start arguing again, Yeshua hurriedly stopped them as he said, “Okay, that’s enough. Why don’t we do this, then? We can put the matter related to the Soul Arch Compass aside for the time being. Let’s see what this Mr. Crawford that you’ve brought here can offer to the Dragon Squad first!”

Yeshua was obviously not someone who would allow something to go completely unchecked. To be honest, he felt that Hubert was exaggerating by describing a young man in his twenties to have such extraordinary and supernatural abilities!

Yeshua only believed in Hubert’s words slightly because he was giving Hubert face.

“Alright. It’s decided, then. You guys can withdraw first!” Yeshua said as he waved his hands.

“What?! Team Leader Lock, you’re not going to see Mr. Crawford even though he is already here?” Hubert asked in surprise.

At this moment, Yeshua frowned a little.

As for Burnard, he took advantage of the situation as he said coldly, “Hubert Younger, you must have hit your head and lost your mind during the mission this time, right? You’re actually asking Team Leader Lock to go and meet with a young lad?!”

“But!”