

An Understated Dominance [On-Going]

Chapter 2541

When Nathaniel woke up again, it was already nighttime.

Outside the room, Mateo and Emmett stood guard with a team of elite soldiers, ready for any threat.

Inside, Nathaniel's mother, Jacqueline, and several imperial doctors were anxiously keeping watch.

The moment Jacqueline heard that her son had fallen into a coma, she had rushed over with the imperial physicians.

He was her only son, and she had poured almost all her love and effort into raising him.

Fortunately, Nathaniel had worked hard and excelled among the many princes, earning the right to compete for the crown prince's title.

Lately, Jacqueline had been carefully planning his future. With such a critical moment approaching, this sudden turn of events naturally left her deeply worried.

Thankfully, it wasn't life-threatening. Nathaniel had simply passed out from rage.

"Nathaniel, how are you feeling? Are you alright?"

Seeing him open his eyes, Jacqueline immediately stepped forward, her voice full of concern.

"Mother? Why are you here?"

Nathaniel rubbed his throbbing head and slowly sat up.

"I heard something happened to you. Of course, I had to come." Jacqueline took a bowl of medicine from the maid and gently held it to Nathaniel's lips. "Here, it's a tonic for your spirit. Drink it."

Nathaniel nodded silently and finished the medicine in one gulp.

"Son, no matter how precious something is, it's still just an object. If you really want it, I'll have someone find another for you. What matters most is your health," Jacqueline said, her voice warm but firm.

"I know. It's just that everything happened so suddenly... I was furious..."

Nathaniel clenched his fists, and a dark look crossed his face.

He had invested so much effort, only to lose most of it overnight. The anger was overwhelming.

"I already know what happened. I'll take care of everything from here. You don't have to worry," Jacqueline assured him.

"What? Was the thief caught?" Nathaniel's expression sharpened.

"If we catch them, we do. If we don't, we let it go," Jacqueline said, shaking her head.

"What do you mean?" Nathaniel frowned.

"Son, you've been tricked," Jacqueline said with a sigh. "You were too impatient, too greedy. You walked right into their trap. This experience should be a lesson for you."

"A trap?" Nathaniel's frown deepened. "Are you talking about Dustin?"

It finally clicked. Right after Dustin presented the treasure, something had gone wrong in his private vault. No matter how he thought about it, Dustin seemed suspicious.

After all, the vault was filled with hidden traps and heavily guarded. Only a master like Dustin could have escaped without being caught.

Although Nathaniel suspected him, he had no evidence, making it hard to act.

"Dustin was just the knife. Someone else was wielding it," Jacqueline said, her tone serious.

"Who? Who's targeting me?!" Nathaniel's hands tightened into fists, his eyes burning with resentment.

His current rivals were Matthias and Tristan. If either of them had set him up, he would show no mercy.

But Jacqueline, seeming to have figured it out, shook her head. "It's not Tristan or Matthias. If I'm right, the person behind this... is your father."

"My father?" Nathaniel froze, stunned. "That's impossible! Father has always cared about me. Why would he set me up?"

"Son, your father has to think about the bigger picture," Jacqueline said softly. "The Dracan essence affects the fate of the kingdom. Right now, you're the one holding it. If you had handed it over sooner, it would have left a good impression. But trying to keep it for yourself? That's a serious mistake. You're the crown prince—you carry the future of the kingdom. Your father had to act."

“But still, if that’s the case, couldn’t he have just told me? Why go to such lengths?” Nathaniel frowned, still struggling to understand.

“The emperor’s heart is the hardest to guess,” Jacqueline said. “Maybe your father had other reasons. Either way, don’t investigate this any further. Pretend it never happened. Do you understand?”

“Mother, could it be that you’re overthinking it? Are you sure the emperor is really behind it?” Nathaniel asked cautiously.

He was desperate to believe otherwise.

“Son, nothing in Oakvale escapes your father’s notice,” Jacqueline said gently. “Without his approval, no one would dare break into your estate.”

While Nathaniel was unconscious, Jacqueline had secretly sent people to investigate.

Since many people knew Nathaniel had obtained the Dracan essence, she figured it would be easy to find a trail.

But her search turned up nothing.

Even with the full resources of the powerful Spanner family, all she learned was that the people behind this had an intelligence network even stronger than theirs.

In all of Dragonmarsh, only the royal family’s intelligence network could surpass the Spanners’.

And now, the royal intelligence network was controlled by Princess Grace—who answered only to the emperor.

Which meant everything Grace did had the emperor’s silent approval.

That’s why Jacqueline urged her son to let it go. Digging deeper would only bring more trouble.

Chapter 2542

“But... I’m willing!”
Nathaniel gritted his teeth, his eyes burning with deep resentment.

He had been so close to success—why had his father stepped in now to ruin everything? Had all the affection and favoritism over the years just been a show?

“My son, if you want to achieve great things, you must learn to be patient and not act impulsively,”

Jacqueline advised gently.
“One failure is nothing. Losing a treasure is even less important. As long as you’re safe, you’ll have more opportunities ahead. The Spanner family and I will always stand behind you.”

Nathaniel’s expression finally eased.
Even without the Dracan essences or the support of national destiny, he still had his mother, the Spanner family, and the network he had spent years building. With these resources, he could still compete with Matthias and Tristan.

“What’s done is done. There’s no point dwelling on it,” Jacqueline continued.
“Dustin has a bright future ahead of him—he might even inherit the throne of King West Lucozia. Your father thinks highly of him. Even if he’s wronged you, for the greater good, you must pretend nothing happened. More than that—you need to show goodwill and win him over. A true crown prince knows how to be tolerant.”

Nathaniel took a deep breath to calm himself. Then he nodded firmly.
“Mother, I understand. Thank you for your guidance. I know what I need to do.”

“You’re a smart boy,” Jacqueline smiled warmly.
“As long as you stay focused, there’s nothing you can’t accomplish.”

Her son was excellent in every way—clever, talented in martial arts, and skilled in strategy. His only flaw was being too narrow-minded. If he could overcome that, his chances of becoming the crown prince would greatly improve.

The next morning, Nathaniel personally brought Wynter to visit Dustin.

Gone was the dark and gloomy face from yesterday. Today, he wore a warm, sincere smile, like spring sunshine.

“Brother Rhys, I came to apologize for yesterday. I hope you won’t hold it against me,” Nathaniel said as he strode into the courtyard. As soon as he saw Dustin, he bowed deeply.

Dustin was slightly stunned. He quickly set down the book he was reading, stepped forward, and helped Nathaniel up.
“Your Highness, you’re too kind. Yesterday’s incident was about protecting the mansion’s safety. How could I blame you?”

Nathaniel straightened up, looking sincerely at Dustin.
He sighed.

"It was my impatience that almost caused a major mistake. I came today to offer a sincere apology, hoping Brother Rhys can forgive me."

Then Nathaniel stepped aside, motioning Wynter forward.
"Also, I brought Wynter with me. I know she's sentimental. I thought if she could stay by your side, it might help ease your boredom."

"Your Highness, this is too much," Dustin quickly waved his hands.
"Miss Wynter is a guest at your mansion. How could I take her away?"

He was puzzled. Yesterday, Nathaniel had been furious—yet today, he was acting completely differently.

Was there some hidden motive?

"Brother Rhys, please don't refuse," Nathaniel said, smiling even more warmly.
"My house is full of people. Losing Wynter isn't a big deal. But if she can be of service to you, it would be the best use of her talents."

With that, he gently pushed Wynter toward Dustin.

Wynter lowered her head, her hands tightly clutching the hem of her dress.
Her slender fingers turned pale from the pressure.
She stole a glance at Dustin, her eyes full of pleading—desperately seeking comfort and freedom.

Dustin's heart softened.
Seeing Wynter's pitiful look, and remembering how she had helped him before, he could only nod helplessly.
"Since Your Highness insists, I'll respectfully accept."

Hearing this, Nathaniel laughed heartily.
"Good! Brother Rhys is truly a straightforward man. If you ever need anything, just say the word. I, Nathaniel, will do everything I can to help you!"

Dustin kept a calm expression, but inwardly he was even more confused.

He had expected Nathaniel to hold a grudge over the missing treasure and seek revenge. Instead, Nathaniel not only let it go but also went out of his way to show kindness—and even offered him Wynter.

Something didn't add up.

"Then I'll take my leave. Brother Rhys, please take good care of Miss Wynter." Nathaniel bowed again and left with his entourage.

After he was gone, Dustin turned to Wynter and asked softly, "What's going on with him?"

"I don't know," Wynter shook her head. "Early this morning, His Highness dragged me here to apologize and insisted on leaving me with you."

"Is this a beauty trap?" Dustin narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

Could it be that Nathaniel, seeing how close he and Wynter had become, was trying to use her to manipulate him?

"Whatever His Highness is thinking, the result is good for both of us," Wynter said with a soft, charming smile.

If Dustin accepted her, her status would rise, and she would no longer need to bow and compromise for survival.

No matter how poor she might be now—she was finally free.

Besides, she had already accumulated enough wealth to live comfortably for the rest of her life.

Chapter 2543

Dustin didn't deny what Wynter said.

At first, he thought Nathaniel would use the opportunity to stir up trouble—maybe even put him under house arrest and stop him from leaving.

Surprisingly, Nathaniel did nothing. He even gave up Wynter, the most beautiful woman on the Beauty Ranking.

That kind of gesture clearly showed he wanted to make peace.

At least on the surface, Nathaniel seemed to have no hidden agenda, which made things a bit easier.

“Forget it, we’ll talk about it later.”

Without overthinking it, Dustin left the mansion with Wynter.

Time was running out, and he couldn’t afford to waste any of it.

He needed to follow Grace’s instructions and use the Dracan essences to boost his cultivation—before the two powerful gods of the Pantheon arrived.

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Later

Inside a moving luxury car—

Dustin leaned back in his seat, staring out the window at the passing scenery. His face was calm, but his eyes were serious.

Beside him, Wynter sat in red, her graceful figure poised. She turned slightly toward him, her eyes filled with a mix of nervousness and hope. Her voice was soft: “Mr. Rhys, I don’t have anywhere else to go. From now on, I can only follow you.”

Dustin frowned and looked at her. She lowered her head, long lashes casting a delicate shadow on her cheeks. Her lips were gently pressed together. She looked vulnerable.

He felt a headache coming on.

Nathaniel was no fool—this was clearly part of a calculated move. Dustin didn’t know what his endgame was, and taking Wynter along could create all sorts of problems.

But thinking of how she had helped save his life, he couldn’t bring himself to abandon her.

“Miss Wynter,” he said, shaking his head, “I have no permanent home and too many enemies. If you stay with me, it’ll be dangerous. It’s not a good idea.”

“Mr. Rhys, are you trying to send me away?” Wynter raised her head, eyes shining with tears. “Sure, it may have looked like I lived comfortably in Nathaniel’s mansion, but in truth, I was like a bird in a cage—restricted at every turn. I finally escaped that life and thought I could be free, follow you, but now you’re rejecting me so coldly.”

Her tearful eyes looked directly at him, her voice trembling.

It was hard not to feel sympathy.

“You misunderstood, Ms. Wynter,” Dustin replied quickly. “I’m not trying to push you away. It’s just that things are complicated right now. I don’t want to drag you into danger.”

Wynter’s eyes flashed briefly with cunning, but she kept her fragile act going. She leaned in slightly and said gently, “Mr. Rhys, I’m not afraid of danger. From the moment I met you, I knew you were extraordinary—someone destined for greatness. I want to follow you, to help however I can, no matter how difficult it gets.”

Her voice was soft and alluring, her breath brushing against his cheek, adding a subtle tension to the air.

Dustin leaned back a bit, putting space between them. He coughed lightly and said, “Ms. Wynter, this isn’t as simple as you think. The trouble I’m in is far worse than anything Nathaniel faces. But I’m not ungrateful. You’ve helped me, and I’ll make sure you’re taken care of. I’ll find you a safe place to stay and give you enough money so you won’t have to worry about food or shelter for years.”

Wynter saw he wasn’t swayed, so she stopped pressing. She gave a small nod. “I’ll do whatever you decide, sir.”

She knew pushing too hard would only drive him away.

Though she admired someone as impressive as Dustin, they were still practically strangers. She wouldn’t lower herself too much.

Besides, with her beauty and intelligence, she could easily attract a promising man.

Still, if she got the chance to win Dustin over, she wouldn’t waste it.

After all, there weren’t many young men in Oakvale that Nathaniel held in such high regard.

After about thirty minutes, the car stopped in front of a high-end hotel.

This was one of Grace’s properties and had official backing—something Wynter could easily verify.

It would help prevent unnecessary trouble.

After all, someone like Wynter, ranked on the Beauty List, naturally drew attention. Without some serious backing, she’d be a magnet for rich playboys.

Once Dustin made sure Wynter was settled, he got back in the car and headed to Sun and Moon Tower.

He and Grace had agreed to meet there once the mission was complete.

Fifteen minutes later, the car arrived at the tower.

Thanks to his earlier notice, Dustin made it through the lobby with no issues and went straight to the back garden.

Same place. Same room. Grace was already there, sipping tea.

Dustin opened the door and walked in. He placed two jade boxes on the table—they held the Dracan essences.

“Mission accomplished. I got what we needed,” he said.

“I thought it would take you at least three months. You were much faster than expected. That’s worth celebrating.” Grace smiled.

She poured him a cup of tea and slid it toward him.

The tea was warm—just right.

Now that all five Dracan essences were collected, the real journey was about to begin.

Chapter 2544

“I was honestly surprised I managed to bring back the Dracan essences this time. I was already prepared to cut ties with Nathaniel,” Dustin said.

“Oh? What makes you say that?” Grace raised an eyebrow, intrigued.

Dustin didn’t hold back. He explained everything that had happened—from Nathaniel’s sudden friendliness to Wynter’s rescue and unexpected surrender.

“What do you think Nathaniel’s up to? He used to be suspicious of me and nearly fought me, but the very next day, he completely changed—acting overly friendly and even gifting me one of the top beauties on the Beauty Ranking. It’s just... bizarre.” Dustin shook his head.

“In my view, this probably has something to do with Nathaniel’s mother, Jacqueline,” Grace said after a thoughtful pause. “Jacqueline is smart and calculating. She must have realized Nathaniel can’t match your strength right now. So instead of making you an enemy, she’s likely trying to win you over.

“Sending Wynter your way serves two purposes. First, it shows goodwill. Second, keeping her close could make her useful to Nathaniel later. But whether she’s truly a spy is hard to say. Nathaniel’s clever. If she were a spy, giving her to you so openly would be way too obvious, wouldn’t it?”

Dustin rubbed his chin and thought for a moment. “You’re right. But something still feels off. I’m going to stay cautious.”

"In that case," Grace said with a sly smile, "why not just keep Wynter close? I can help arrange it. If she really has bad intentions, she won't be able to cause any trouble. And let's be honest—it's not easy to land someone ranked on the Beauty Ranking. Miss this chance, and you'll regret it."

Dustin rolled his eyes. "Don't mess with me. I'll keep an eye on her for now. If she turns out to be harmless, I'll take care of her properly. But enough about that—let's get to business."

Grace's smile faded, her expression turning serious. "Now that you've gathered all five Dracan essences, you have a chance to break through. But I need to prepare a few things first."

Merging the five essences into one and channeling them into Dustin's body wasn't going to be easy. She needed to set up a formation and align it with the right time and place.

"Need my help?" Dustin asked.

"No need," Grace replied, shaking her head. "Just stay here and rest. Tomorrow night, come to Loxuia—fifty miles west of the city. I'll have everything ready."

"Alright. I'll leave it to you, then," Dustin said with a nod, ending the conversation.

The sun dipped below the horizon, painting the sky with streaks of gold and crimson.

In the city of Oakvale, inside a hidden stronghold of the Pantheon of Gods...

Zeus and Hera sat side by side, radiating power and authority without even speaking.

Zeus, tall and broad-shouldered, had long golden hair flowing in the breeze. His aura was intense, and his eagle-like gaze looked as if it could pierce through anything.

Hera, dressed in a stunning gown, had a face as beautiful as it was regal. Her noble and holy aura made her presence both graceful and commanding.

In front of them stood more than a dozen people—elite members of the Pantheon, all high-level warriors who had been operating in secret throughout Oakvale. They rarely gathered like this, but today was different.

They had one mission: kill Logan Rhys and strengthen the Pantheon's influence.

"It's been three days, and you still haven't found him?!"

Zeus's cold voice boomed from his makeshift throne. A crushing force swept through the room like a tidal wave.

Everyone felt the weight of it instantly—like a mountain bearing down on their shoulders. Their legs trembled, and sweat beaded on their foreheads.

“Lord Zeus, we’ve deployed all our people. We’re close—we’ll find him soon!” a massive man, over two meters tall, answered with his head bowed.

Though he looked like a beast, fierce and powerful, he was utterly subdued in front of Zeus and Hera—like a kitten.

“You have one more day. If you don’t find Logan by then, I’ll start sacrificing one of you to the gods every day!” Zeus roared.

Panic flashed across the faces of the gathered warriors. They didn’t doubt his words. If they failed, death was certain.

“Lord Zeus! Lady Hera! We’ve got news!”

A blonde woman in a tight leather outfit hurried into the hall.

“Hmm?”

Zeus and Hera looked up in unison. “Did you find Logan?”

“My spies have been tracking him. He’s been staying with Nathaniel, the third prince of Dragonmarsh, for the past two days. It looks like he’s planning to align with the kingdom,” the woman reported.

“Hah! Does he really think he’ll be safe with Nathaniel? What a joke!” Zeus sneered.

If Logan had taken refuge in the palace under the protection of that old eunuch, Zeus might have hesitated. But Nathaniel? He wasn’t even worth worrying about.

“Lead the way,” Hera ordered.

A deadly aura erupted from her.

Chapter

2545

Night had begun to fall.

High above Nathaniel’s mansion, two figures hovered in the air, silently observing the scene below.

They were none other than the gods—**Zeus and Hera**.

“This is the place,” Zeus said.

With a brief exchange of glances, the two turned into beams of light and shot down, crashing heavily at the mansion's gate and knocking the two guards unconscious.

Without hesitation, Zeus raised his hand. With a thunderous boom, the front door exploded into dust.

A powerful aura instantly spread through the entire mansion.

"Who dares break into the residence of the Three Emperors?!"

Startled by the commotion, **Mateo** and **Emmett**, two generals of the Imperial Guard, rushed out with their troops and quickly surrounded Zeus and Hera.

But the moment they felt the overwhelming power radiating from the intruders, both generals stiffened, their expressions growing grim.

"Where is Logan?" Zeus asked coldly, hands clasped behind his back. He didn't even glance at the guards surrounding him.

"I don't care who you are—leave now or face the consequences!" Mateo shouted, trying to hold his ground.

"Foolish."

Zeus let out a cold snort and casually raised his hand.

A thick bolt of purple lightning shot out, slamming into Mateo's chest.

Boom!

In an instant, Mateo's body exploded into a mist of blood—completely destroyed.

"What?!"

The soldiers stared in shock, frozen in disbelief.

General Mateo Veilleux, one of Oakvale's strongest fighters—nearly at the level of a master—had been wiped out in a single blow.

He never stood a chance.

"I'll ask one more time. Where is Logan?" Zeus said flatly. Lightning danced at his fingertips, crackling with deadly force.

At his level, killing a martial arts master was no harder than crushing an ant.

"You're Zeus... the King of the Gods from the Pantheon?" Emmett asked, finally realizing who he was facing.

The man's Western appearance—and the way he killed a master with lightning in one second—left little room for doubt.

"Hmph. At least you're not completely ignorant," Zeus sneered. "Since you know who I am, answer my question—or die."

"S-Sir, the man you're looking for isn't here. He already left," Emmett stammered, thinking quickly. He guessed the person Zeus wanted was **Dustin**.

"Left?" Zeus frowned. "Where did he go?"

"He's like a dragon hidden in the clouds—impossible to track. We truly don't know," Emmett replied, shaking his head.

"You don't know?" Zeus's expression turned dark. "Then there's no reason to keep you alive."

He raised his hand, ready to strike.

"Wait!" Emmett cried out, knees nearly giving way. "We might not know now, but we can find him! We have spies all over Oakvale—we'll track him down quickly!"

Zeus slowly lowered his hand.

Although the Pantheon had deployed forces in Oakvale, they had been cautious and hadn't gained deep access. If Nathaniel's people helped, they could find Logan more efficiently—and avoid unnecessary trouble.

"You have until tomorrow. If I don't get what I want, I'll destroy this mansion," Zeus warned coldly.

"Understood!" Emmett nodded frantically.

Against a being like Zeus, he had no bargaining power. Refusal meant instant death.

Survival came first. As for what happened afterward, that would be up to Nathaniel to handle.

"Let's go."

Zeus turned and shot into the sky, vanishing into the night.

Hera followed, but not before casting a chilling spell. She blew softly in Emmett's direction, releasing a wave of black death energy that seeped into everyone's bodies.

"Don't even think about failing. If you mess this up—you die."

With a sneer, she turned into smoke and vanished.

Once they were truly gone, Emmett collapsed, drenched in cold sweat. His legs had gone completely numb.

The other soldiers looked just as pale, like survivors of a nightmare.

The pressure Zeus and Hera left behind was crushing—especially the moment when Mateo exploded. That scene was burned into their memories, leaving a deep psychological scar.

After sitting in stunned silence for a while, Emmett finally snapped back to reality. He sprang to his feet and ran straight to Nathaniel's courtyard.

This was beyond his authority as a deputy general. He had to report it to His Highness immediately.

If possible, they needed to summon a top expert from within the organization to deal with this crisis.

Whether that would be enough to stop Zeus and Hera... was another matter entirely.