

Zompiewolf 211

Chapter 211 Reunion (1)

Ashton walked out of the portal, along with Griffin to see the destruction the trolls had caused there. The attack might have only lasted for a bit over ten minutes. Still, in those ten minutes, the entire courtyard had been painted reddish-black.

Although the casualties were fewer, a large number of vampires had lost one body part or the other. As a result, their blood had played a major role in remodelling the place.

Several injured vampires were laying everywhere, while those who were in a more fortunate position helped them. The princesses were no exception, hell even Michelle and the royal knight were helping them out, despite werewolves being at odds with the vampires for decades.

"Don't look so surprised, Sir Ashton." Griffin smiled even though he could see how many of his kind were suffering right in front of them, "Suffering is an essential part of one's life. Without suffering, strength cannot exist and without strength, nothing can survive. One day, they'll be thankful because of what happened today."

"You are weirdly calm, Axemaster Griffin." Ashton smiled wanly, "Even if you say so, I just can't get one thing out of my head."

"What will that be?"

"Was the appearance of the dungeon just a coincidence?"

Griffin got silent. He was thinking the same thing. While instance dungeons are known to spawn at random locations at any given point in time, the appearance of this dungeon seemed a bit odd.

Not to mention all the irregularities that they had noticed almost made it seem like it was someone's plan rather than just a case of them being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"Just think about it," Ashton continued, "hundreds of important people spread across the continents were gathered here along with the princess of Lycania. No matter how much I try not to think about it, something seems fishy."

"I agree with you," Griffin nodded his head as they walked up to the palace, "it certainly feels odd. But is it even possible to control a dungeon?"

'Of course, it is.' Ashton wanted to say it out loud but held back at the last moment.

After all, he did own two dungeons. First was the cave near the swamps that was filled with Wraith Wolves and the second one was in the form of the Eastern Palace.

That being said, Ashton had no idea whether owning a dungeon would also give someone the ability to create their own instance dungeons. If it was, then the mystery behind the irregular dungeon was solved.

The only thing they would have to look for would be the person responsible for doing something like this. Which was easier said than done.

'I would have to ask Astaroth more about this theory of mine. Only he can say whether what I'm thinking is correct or not.'

"Sir Ashton? Sir Ashton!"

"Oh... apologies I got lost in my thoughts. Were you saying something?"

"I was saying that you should rest. You probably suffered more than us, considering your level."

However, rather than answering Griffin's question, Ashton caught on to something Griffin just said. Something weird, to say the least.

"But I never mentioned my level to anyone here."

Dear in the headlights. That was how the look on Griffin's face could be described as. Nevertheless, the look was merely temporary as Griffin recollected his thoughts fairly quickly. However, before he could answer Ashton, they were quite rudely interrupted.

"Ashton!" Irina and Verina simultaneously yelled while running toward him, "Are you alright?"

Ashton was taken aback by their concern for him. They barely knew each other and yet they were acting as if he had already agreed to their proposal. At the same time, Michelle also approached him.

"It was quite reckless of you to jump inside the portal by yourself." She reprimanded him, but then smiled, "But I'm glad you're back. Are hurt in any place?"

"Not at all." Ashton gave her a short but courteous reply.

Just because everything worked out in the end between them, didn't mean he had forgotten how she screwed him over back in the academy. But then again, she also helped him a bit, so for now, she was off of his 'people to kill' list for a while.

Just then, he could sense the princesses getting a bit... weird because he had completely ignored them. As much as Ashton did not care about them, he could not risk offending them if he was planning on staying there for a while.

"I'm alright, your highness. My deepest apologies for concerning you."

"As our future husband, you do not need to apologies to us, Sir Ashton." The sisters simultaneously replied and jumped to Ashton's side, slipping their arms into his.

"Come, we'll take you to doctor Avalina, she'll heal whatever injuries you might have. Then we can chat freely." Verina smiled while Ashton's arm slipped between her cleavage.

"Hmph, if he gets injured so easily, maybe I should rethink my proposal." Irina turned her face away from Ashton, but tightly held on to his hand. As if she was scared to lose him... or herself.

"... Thanks, I guess." Ashton thanked them while an awkward smile found its way to his face.

Ashton was clearly feeling awkward being sandwiched between them. But upon the mention of his mother, he swallowed the awkwardness and decided to go along with them.

A moment later, Alucard casually walked out of the portal as it closed behind him. The aura around him wasn't tense, but through his high [Perception] Ashton could feel that something within Alucard had changed.

As he was being dragged away by the sisters, he quickly peeked into Alucard's stats again and froze on the spot with what he saw.

'Level 61... grade D... He might just have become the strongest man on the planet.'

By this time, even Griffin had realised something was different with Alucard. Even his appearance seemed different... then it dawned on him.

"You achieved yet another breakthrough?" Griffin asked while smiling through his canines.

"You could say that," Alucard replied with equal enthusiasm.

Chapter 212 Reunion (2)

"Doctor Avalina, could you please check him first?"

Verina announced as soon as they entered the throne room which had been turned into a makeshift clinic to help the vampires.

Avalina along with more than two dozen healers were looking after the injured, but Verina and Irina both were adamant that Avalina should be the one to check Ashton. Probably because she was a well-known figure when it came to healing. It was also the reason why she had been nicknamed the 'Fertility Goddess'.

"I heard you loud and clear the first time, your highness. Please have him seated somewhere, I'll be with you in a moment."

Avalina was just as nervous to meet her son, as Ashton was to meet his mother. But that didn't excuse her from her duties. That was just one of her character flaws... she had a tendency to work herself to the bone and being a vampire only enabled her further considering she did not require to rest or sleep anymore.

Ashton on the other hand was still trying to digest the fact that her mother was indeed alive. Till now, despite Jonathan stating that his parents were alive, there was a small part of him that did not believe it to be true. In a way, Ashton had already made his peace with that fact and used it to feed his anger.

But now all of sudden, he could feel his anger disappearing. Maybe it was because, at that moment, the only thing he wanted was to hug his mother so tightly, that it would mess her insides.

"Ashton, you're shivering, are you okay?" Verina asked once again while Irina watched them from a distance.

"I'm fine..."

"Could we do anything for you?"

"I wanna be alone for a while. If you don't mind?"

"S-Sure. Come, Irina, we should probably check on father as well."

Irina nodded and left along with her. That being said, the sisters seemed a bit taken aback by Ashton's words. But they accepted his request and left him alone, chalking it up to something he had seen within the dungeon.

"Could you show me your left hand?"

The following moment Ashton heard a long-forgotten voice. A voice that had always protected him from the countless nightmares he used to have in his early childhood. A voice that he never knew he would hear again... and yet there he was... sitting right in front of the one that voice belonged to... in front of his mother.

Ashton placed her hands in hers, without ever lifting his face up. He was afraid the moment he would look at her, all of his anger would melt away. Regardless was that he was happy. Happy that he could finally feel her soothing touch again.

But her touch wasn't as warm as he remembered it to be. She was different but it was something Ashton had to make his peace with it.

"You have grown into a strong, handsome and talented man, Ash... My baby Ash..." Avalina silently whispered.

Even at such an emotional moment, she had to restrain herself from doing something that would attract unnecessary attention. Despite the fact that merely not being able to hug her long lost son ripped her heart out.

"Hm..." Ashton nodded along but didn't dare to say anything more as tears welled up in his eyes and his throat got mysteriously heavy.

In his lust for revenge, he had long forgotten how it felt to cry and now when his body was reacting on its own, he didn't know how to process his emotions.

There was still anger seething inside him, but so was happiness. Ashton didn't know how to disassociate himself from the hurricane of emotions he was feeling at the moment.

He felt angry. Angry at the universe for everything turning out to be the way it did. And yet, he found himself thanking the universe for finally reuniting him with his mother under the same breath.

"Hm... despite the bloodstains, you look just fine to me," Avalina said in between sniffing to hold her emotions together for just a little longer, "But I think I should check whether you are able to perform certain physical activities or not. Would you mind taking a walk with me?"

Ashton opened his mouth to speak, but realised not a single word would come out of it. Thus he shook his head instead, to answer her question.

"Good, let me just inform someone and then we'll leave."

A minute later, both of them were outside, in the garden that was located behind the palace. Away from everyone else, a perfect place for the mother and son to talk. They walked around for a while, not knowing what to say to each other. After a while, Avalina broke the silence once again.

"You sure grew up to look a lot like your dad- oh..."

She had barely managed to get a phrase out of her mouth when Ashton suddenly hugged her. It was quite amusing to see 6 foot-something guy, leaning over a much shorter woman.

So far Ashton had been keeping his emotions in check and this defences up. But the moment Avalina began talking to him, his herculean defences turned into a thin sheet of paper, drenched in his tears.

As Ashton pulled her closer and closer, Avalina wrapped her hands around her son's broad torso, feeling his beating heart, before she broke down herself. Memories from all of the years she had been away from him came flooding back into her head. The overwhelming emotions forced her to cry herself.

As much as she hated herself for it, she pulled herself away from Ashton's embrace and wiped his tears off. The feeling of being able to touch her son again almost made her feel as if she was in a dream... and if it was a dream, it was one she never wanted to end.

The warmth of Ashton's skin was enough to make Avalina snap back in reality. A reality where she could greet her son with a smile on her face, every time she sees him.

Once both of them had calmed down, she pulled Ashton's face down and planted a kiss on his forehead, just like she used to do back in the enclosure they used to live in, before finally pulling away from him.

"Come sit down, I believe we have a lot to talk about."

Chapter 213 Identity Crisis (1)

The two of them sat on the grass, talking their heart out. They discussed about things they had missed in each other's life. Mostly, Ashton was the one answering these questions as Avalina wanted to know about all the little things her son had to go through after they were taken away.

Although she was angry at her inability to protect him, she felt a bit happy that his childhood wasn't as difficult as she had imagined.

Although she was careful enough not to say such a thing in front of the boy. Regardless of whether what she thought was worse or not, it must have been hard for Ashton to go through it all by himself.

It was Ashton's turn next and to Avalina's surprise, some of the questions he asked made her feel that he was much more mature than an average child of his age. The trauma had forced him to mature faster than them.

Little did she know, Ashton's maturity was not because of the trauma and such that he had suffered. But because of the points he had invested in increasing his intelligence.

To Avalina's credit, she answered all of Ashton's questions to the best of her ability. Most of the questions he asked her were about their family and his father. Sadly, there wasn't much Avalina knew about him. In reality, there wasn't anyone who knew about him or what happened to him.

"The land of the undead is a mysterious place. Shrouded by mysterious particles floating in the air, it makes it impossible for even satellites and drones to scan the two continents they rule over. " She said while shaking her head.

"I tried my best to find him as soon as I got my hands on the resources to do so. But it was all in vain. The undead are just too damn good when it comes to hiding their tracks or hiding themselves. It almost makes me believe the things we know about them aren't even true, to begin with."

Ashton nodded along. As much as he wanted to find his father next, he didn't think it was going to be possible for a while. After all, the undead had little to no contact with the other species since the war with humans had come to an end.

Also, the treaty they had with the vampires and the werewolves made it impossible to venture into their territories without their permission first. If someone still made their way to the land of the undead, despite the treaty stating not to, they never return.

On top of that, Ashton was nowhere near as strong as to make an enemy out of an entire species. Not yet anyway. That being said, he still had a lot of questions he wanted to ask her. The 'real' questions, that were not about their family.

"While I was gathering more information about you and dad, I came to know some very... fascinating things. Like you being the founders of the rebels and what not. Is it true?"

Avalina nodded, "Yes, it is... and yet look at us now. The three founding members of the resistance had been turned into the three different species they swore to fight against. Funny, don't you think?"

Maybe Ashton was imagining things, but for a moment, he could see that Avalina had gotten all worked up. Especially when Ashton took a pause while asking her the question. But when he completed his question, she let out a short sigh of relief before answering.

'Is she hiding something?' He thought all the while smiling at her, 'Why would she do that? Is she trying to protect me from something or am I simply overthinking things?'

Ashton's perception skill was high enough to notice the smallest changes on the face of anyone in front of him. While his [Heartbeat Sense] perk could ensure whether a person was speaking the truth or not.

As much as he wanted to trust every word that came out of his mother's mouth, at that moment, he needed to ensure Avalina wasn't lying to him. Even if it was all to protect himself. Thankfully, he didn't have to turn on his vampire genes to use the passive abilities associated with those genes.

"I also got to know about... the weapon."

At that moment, Avalina's face went from all smiles to being as expressionless as a corpse. Ashton had finally asked one thing Avalina was praying to the gods he wouldn't. But she wasn't a priestess that the gods would listen to her prayers.

"Ashton, it's getting late. Maybe we should discuss it-"

She tried her best to evade the question, but she had no idea who persistent Ashton had grown up to be. The little boy who used to do everything she asked him to, was long gone. Years of being by himself had taught him one thing, he did what he thought to be the best for himself.

"Ma... don't try to dodge the question. You said you were going to answer all of my questions. So here's the question. Why am I called the weapon?"

"..."

"Fine. If you don't want to answer then I won't force you." Ashton got up and turned to leave, "You must have your reasons to hide it. However, I'm not going to be here for long... this might even turn out to be the last time you ever see me."

Of course, it wasn't going to be the last time she would see him. But Ashton had seen the power of a little tactic known as emotional blackmail.

Although he felt like the worst piece of shit subjecting her mother to something like that, he needed to do it to get the answers he needed to know, out of her mouth.

Avalina pursed her lips, knowing that regardless of whether she told him the truth or not, it was highly probable Ashton would leave her. However, the burden of such a secret was too much for her to handle, she didn't want to subject her son to the same even if it meant losing him forever.

"I see... goodbye then, mother."

Chapter 214 Identity Crisis (2)

Time flew by as quick as Alucard took down the maiden. Staying true to his word, Ashton did not entertain any of Avalina's attempts at talking to him. Apart from a general courteous greeting, Ashton spent no time around Avalina.

Soon it was time for the guests to depart. They had overstayed their welcome as a result of the instance dungeon popping up. But now that all of it was over, none of them wanted to piss off Alucard who was known to despise being around too many people, despite his status as the Overlord.

Among those people, was Avalina. Who had to return to her lab and continue her research. Ashton's behaviour was churning her insides, but she knew it was for the better to let him go now. Their worlds were meant to cross each other so soon, to begin with.

She could simply live the rest of her life cherishing the sweet moment she got to spend with her son, one last time. However, he couldn't just go away without at least trying to bid farewell to him.

Thus she used Verina to have a letter delivered to Ashton. In which a request was enclosed. A request to meet her son, before she disappeared again. An hour passed, but Ashton didn't arrive at the garden they had met before.

'Optimism... is my worst enemy.' Avalina smiled wanly and began walking away.

She could understand Ashton's pain, but it didn't mean her pain was lesser than his. She too was losing her son all over again, all because she wanted to protect their relationship. In the end, the secret was what ended up destroying whatever semblance of a relationship they had.

"Maybe I should have told him... at least then he would have the right reason to be furious at me." She mumbled a moment before leaving the garden.

"Then tell me."

Ashton's voice filled her ears. As she turned around, there he was... standing right behind her. His arms were crossed in front of his chest while his eyes were fixated on her.

It took her a moment to form a sentence in her mind, because of the sudden overwhelming emotions she felt erupting inside her. However, it only lasted for a moment as she gathered herself fairly quickly.

"I thought-"

"That I wasn't coming?" Ashton gave her a smile, "I might be an asshole, but not such a big one to ignore my mother's first and only request in over a decade."

"Sweet talker..." Avalina pulled him for a hug, "Are you sure you want to-"

"Pretty much." Ashton immediately cut her off, "Let me hit you up with a deal. If you tell me a secret, I'll tell you a secret. Something only a handful of three others know. How does that sound?"

[Oi oi oi, what the hell do you think you're saying? I don't care who the lady is to you, don't you dare spill the beans yet!]

Astaroth was screaming inside his head, but Ashton ignored him entirely. It wasn't like he was going to out him or anything. After all, he just said he would tell her a secret, he never said he would tell her about him being a tribrid.

"You are really persistent. A quality the princesses would admire."

"Yeah... let's not talk about that."

Avalina chuckled as soon as she saw the look on her son's face. She knew it very well that the princesses have been trying to force an engagement upon him. But Ashton was always dodging them.

They were beautiful girls, there was no doubt about it, but their neediness was a huge turn off for Ashton. In fact, he was already thinking of ways to get them off his back permanently. But right now, all of his undivided attention was on what Avalina was about to uncover.

"I'll have to sit before I spill any secrets..." Avalina took a deep breath preparing for the shit storm that was about to start, "Where do I even start? Let see... Five decades after the first generation of mutants appeared on the planet, there was a man they all feared."

"Not because he had any super abilities or any wild thing like that. To the mutants, he was a mere roadblock. But considering most of humanity didn't even measure up to shit in front of them, being branded as a 'roadblock' was their own way of respecting him."

She continued, "Hell, I have read records of the vampires from back then referring him to as a 'Demon'. Pretty damn hilarious for literal monsters to refer to a human as a demon. But they were right... he was the only one who was able to put a temporary stop to their march to dominance."

"No matter how many times they tried to kill him, he always remerged at some other place to mess up their plans all over again. None of them had any idea how did he manage to escape from their clutches every time."

Even though it was hard to believe there could be a human that even the mutants were cautious of, Ashton was impressed by the man in the story.

The more and more Avalina spoke about the man, the clearer it got why the mutants branded the man as a roadblock instead of throwing him along with the pile of shit, they referred to the rest of humanity as. But Ashton was wondering, what the hell does that man have anything to do with him?

"Despite his valour, the man was killed while he was on the mission to bring back the secret hidden within the crashed meteorite." Avalina couldn't cry but the sadness on her face was evident, as she continued.

"However, due to the respect the mutants had for the man, they did not mutilate his corpse as they did with the rest of them. But the man's mission was a success. Whatever remained of his team, brought back two corpses with them. One of the men and the other corpse was of some extraterrestrial species."

Ashton nodded along. This was a detail he already knew of, they had found the corpse of Astaroth. However, there were a lot of inconsistencies in the story, like who was the man and how was he able to fool the mutants so many times.

If Ashton was being entirely honest, all of it seemed like a bad made-up story from some weird bedtime storybook.

"It's not like I don't want to believe you, but do you mind telling me the name of the man in question?" Ashton asked her.

"His name was... Austin Wolfe, my only biological son."

Chapter 215 Identity Crisis (3)

It took a moment for what Avalina said to dawn upon Ashton. He stood there as if his legs had become one with the ground. His eyes were wide, wider than they had ever been, fixated on Avalina's face as if it was the only thing that existed in the universe for Ashton.

"Ashton please... say something." Avalina pleaded as soon as she realised Ashton was slipping into a state of shock.

However, there was nothing for Ashton to say. A million questions were running in his mind, but not a single one of them could be formed into words at that moment.

'Was this her idea of a joke? Does she even believe this herself? What the hell is she even saying!'

Those were the only things he could focus on at the moment. But deep down Ashton knew Avalina wasn't lying or making up a tale. His [Heartbeat Sense] would have detected her lies the moment she spoke.

But she didn't have a beating heart in the first place so Ashton's method of detecting lies wasn't going to work against her.

However, the look on her face was all Ashton needed to see to confirm that she had been telling the truth. Even then, Ashton didn't know how he should have felt at the moment.

"Should I be angry? Silent? Defensive? I don't know..."

"Ashton, listen to me. Once I complete the story, you'll understand everything. Just give me time."

"It's not like I can do anything else..."

Through the turmoil of emotions, Ashton had no idea what Avalina could even say at this point to make up for the damage she had done to him with mere words. But it wasn't like he had any other choice but to hear her out and hope for the best.

Throughout this ordeal, Astaroth was silently listening to the woman explain everything to Ashton. After all, the secret of his life was closely linked to his own and could help him understand what exactly happened after he 'died'.

"With Austin dead, the morale of humanity died as well. People no longer wanted to fight against the mutants as most of the leaders were already preparing to leave the planet for good. The 'flee' section of their brain had activated and that's when everyone decided to give up on the planet entirely."

"Could you... nevermind."

After what he had learned, Ashton was in no mood to listen to her sob story. He just wanted to get it over with so he could get going and collect his thoughts... alone. But it didn't seem like Avalina or whoever this woman was anywhere close to finishing her story.

"Some of us decided to stay back and fight. But for that, we needed hope. We needed someone to help us fight back... someone to look up to like we did to Austin. So we chose to do the one thing that was morally wrong on so many levels... We decided to recreate him since resurrection was out of the question."

As soon as she said it, everything hit Ashton like a truck full of shit just hit him. Everything made sense now. Well, not everything but a few things, even though it seemed absurd to even think something like that was possible.

"Throughout their history of living on this planet, humanity had excelled in technological advancements. Creating an immortal being wasn't a dream anymore, though doing so was a tremendously exhausting task-"

"Sure, do you want to throw something else in the mix as well? Like Gods perhaps? Who took pity on their subjects and gave you the power to resurrect the hero of humanity, the saviour who'll force the mutants to commit suicide?" Ashton scoffed loudly and got up to leave.

He had, had enough of her bullshit. Resurrection leading to a dead being was something he could understand as he himself had the ability to do so. But to make a being immortal?

Yeah, if humans had the technology to do it, then why the hell were they on the run? They should have been fighting tooth and nail against the mutants.

No, more importantly, if they had such technology, why didn't the mutants make use of it themselves after defeating them? Whatever Avalina was saying was more than he could chew.

But the same could not be said for Astaroth. After all, there was no denying that he was alive even after death... well, at least in the main sense of the word.

On top of that, for Xyrans, death was but a mere stepping stone in their lifecycle. With enough resources, they could be easily brought back to life but at a price.

That's why most of the families tend to preserve the remains of the Xyran in hope of resurrecting them in future. However, unlike humans they were a seventh tier species, that's why reviving someone just as they were before dying wasn't a complicated task for them. It was merely an expensive one.

It was for that reason Astaroth was intently listening to the woman explain how they 'recreated' the same person after his demise. Maybe that way he would find a way to disassociate with Ashton. However, Ashton did not share the same thoughts as Astaroth did.

[Listen to the lady. The information might help us later on.]

"Shut the fuck up! If you're so interested in her bullshit, then feel free to listen to her, but I'm not."

Aston had completely lost his cool. So much so, he forgot that no one but he could hear Astaroth speaking. Avalina was taken by surprise as soon as Ashton shouted at the top of his lungs and began looking around to see if there was someone other than them present there.

But they were alone in the garden. Which confused her even more and then she remember something about the myths. The myth about the admins contact a few gifted individuals and guide them to greatness.

Judging from the way Ashton was talking to the air, there were only two possibilities. One, he had an Administrator working with him, or two... he had gone mad because of the shocking news he had received.

'Was this the secret he wanted to tell me about? That he was an Irregular?'

However, she did not voice her opinions just yet. Even though just thinking about him having an admin by his side made her happy.

[I didn't want to do this, but now you have forced my hand.]

Astaroth replied and the following moment a quest window appeared in front of Ashton.

—

You have triggered an Administrator Quest.

[Objective]: Find out more about the secret behind your origin from the woman.

[Task]: Sit your ass down and let the woman finish her story.

[Progress]: You're still standing.

[Reward]: 50% increase in all the stats.

[Mission Commissioned by]: Administrator

[Priority Level]: -unranked- (The host cannot ignore the mission, doing so would reduce all of their stats by 50% along with the efficiency of using your skills.)

—

[Now sit down or say bye-bye to half of your skills.]

Ashton stared at the mission prompt in anger. But it wasn't the usual anger that he was used to by now. It felt different, very different.

He was pretty sure if Asstaroth was to materialise in front of him then, he would have torn him to pieces. Hell, he wasn't sure if he wasn't going to kill someone at that very moment. Usually, Ashton would have done whatever Astaroth would have told him to, but not this time.

"Fine, do what you want." Ashton called Astaroth's bluff and rejected the mission request before walking away.

Despite what was mentioned in the quest, the punishment of stat reduction was never carried out. All of his stats and skills were still the same.

Getting Ashton strong was in Astaroth's best interests. Not only was his life tied to him, but if Astaroth was to ever completely recover, he needed Ashton to stay alive and reducing his stats was not the way to go about it.

'Don't ever try to force me into doing something I'll never agree to,' Ashton warned Astaroth and for the first time Astaroth did not retort to his comment, 'You're not Lucifer who could pull strings and remain unaffected with whatever happened to me. Whether you admit it or not, you need me more than I need you. So keep that in your fucking head before pulling a stunt like this.'

But Avalina wasn't going to let him walk away like that. Not before she finished telling her everything she knew.

"Ashton wait-"

"Shut your trap. You want me to believe you? How can I do that when your story is filled with lies." Ashton harshly pushed her hand off his shoulder.

"Lies?"

"You say that man, your biological son was fully grown by the year 3050, that means he was at least 18. Also, he died in 3056, when he was 24. Is that correct?"

"Yes but-"

"Then let's assume that you were 16 when you gave birth to him. That would make you 40 in 3056. But when I was born in 3084, you were still 40. This means either you weren't born till 3044 or you've been lying about everything my entire life. Hell, I'm not even sure if I am who I have been thinking myself to be."

"Ashton, I can explain." Avalina desperately tried to get through to him but failed again and again.

"Of course, you can. You're Immortal as well. Just like me, right?" Ashton's words were leaking with sarcasm, "You know what, it doesn't even matter. For now, I know why you never wanted me to tell about 'my story' because there is none. Goodbye."

Chapter 216 Oath Of Vengeance

As Jonathan had expected, thanks to Ashton, the relationship between Transylvania and Lycania had gotten a lot better. Although Ashton had the bigger part to play in it, there was no denying that Michelle's sudden closeness with Kai had helped form the relationship as well.

Kai returned to continue his studies in the reconstructed academy, along with Ashton and Michelle. But they were the only ones making their way to Lycania. To everyone's surprise, Alucard allowed both of his daughters to attend the academy as well.

Even though there was absolutely no need for them to train in an academy that couldn't offer them anything new in terms of knowledge or skill. But soon Alucard's intention behind proposing such an arrangement was clear.

He wanted them to stay close to Ashton and play the perfect matchmaker for them. Much to Ashton's dismay, there wasn't anything he could do to stop it from happening. After all, how could he stop someone from getting educated?

Also, he had a lot of things going on in his life and he couldn't be bothered to pay attention to the slightest inconveniences in his life. It was still a miracle that he was functioning as usual after what Avalina had told him.

He was sure if, given the chance, she might have been able to explain it all away. But in his state of mind, it was for the better if they did not interact for some time. Ashton had thought by meeting his mother he would gain some clarity, but in the end, the meeting messed him up even more.

But with that, Ashton said a bittersweet goodbye to Transylvania and headed back to Deja to report to Jonathan.

"Well done my boy, you have continuously proven your worth to me." Jonathan laughed heartily, "Maybe it's time for you to take a small break. What do you think?"

"I haven't done anything praiseworthy, your highness. Not till I find those Conundrum bastards anyway." Ashton respectfully replied, "As far as taking a break is concerned, I don't think that would be necessary. With your permission, I would like to continue climbing ranks till I become a Gold-ranked adventurer."

Jonathan nodded and Ashton headed towards his home. There were a lot of things he needed to accomplish in the town before heading to his region and start building it from the ground up.

A few minutes later...

"I wasn't expecting you to be here." Ashton sighed as soon as he entered the hall, only to be greeted by Mera's familiar sulky face.

"What have I been hearing?" Mera sternly asked him.

"Sorry to disappoint you mistress, but I do not possess a skill that could provide me with foresight. Or else I would have definitely known what you have been hearing all these days."

"Please, spare me from your idiotic jokes. What is this engagement that everybody is talking about? Why was I not informed about it beforehand?"

Ashton sighed. This bitch was still thinking he was someone beneath her feet. Too much for being a master strategist, ain't it?

"Oh that, don't worry about it. I'll take care of it at an opportune time." Ashton dismissed her question and began walking toward his room only to be pulled back by her.

"Can you? Do you even know what playing with fire feels like? The overlord is someone who was willing to wage war against Lycania for his nephew. What do you think he'll do if someone breaks the heart of his daughters?"

"Kill them, of course," Ashton replied matter-of-factly with a poker face.

"..."

Mera was stunned for a moment, not knowing whether the kid in front of him was the same kid she had known for a few months. Something had definitely changed in him. It almost felt as if he wasn't scared of her or anyone... and it wasn't a feeling she liked.

She was finally realising how wrong she had been for ignoring him for this long. No matter what, the brat had to be under her feet at all times, starting now.

"Don't forget your place, Ashton. Just because you're a Baron now doesn't mean I can't put you in your place."

"Believe me, I wouldn't want to cause you any inconvenience either. So please, feel free to leave whenever you'd like to."

That was it. Mera had had enough and wasn't going to let the brat disrespect her anymore. that being said, Ashton wasn't scared of her in the slightest. Not after what Astaroth had informed him regarding the secret behind the levelling system on earth.

Throughout the weeks after becoming a tribrid, there was a question lingering in Ashton's mind. Just how was he able to take on stronger opponents than himself? How was he able to overcome the odds no one should have been able to?

Pulling off such a feat was definitely not easy at his level. But for the others who were at the same level as him, it was impossible. No two ways about it.

Thankfully, Astaroth had the answer to his question. Basically being a tribrid or even being a hybrid had its own privileges. One of them being innate abilities the genes granted the host and the second one being the advantages in terms of levelling.

In other words, the common mutants can only level up one type of gene. Meaning, that whatever stats and powers they have, come from the only gene. That's why their levels directly reflected how strong or weak they were.

However, in the case of hybrids and tribrids, their strength comes from the blend of two to three genes. Therefore, they are able to take on opponents and monsters that usually someone of their level would not be able to.

However, in the beginning, the increment in different levels did not show much difference. It was only after a certain threshold was crossed will the genes start complimenting each other and finally reveal the true strength of their host. That was also the reason why Aston's recent growth had been explosive.

That was why the Xyrans had a different way of measuring the strength of hybrids and tribrids, known as Cumulative levels. The cumulative level could then be used to compare the levels of those singular gene beings.

The process of counting the cumulative level was complex but Astaroth was kind enough to do it for Ashton. And it came out to be around level 41. Which meant he was almost on par with the mistress in terms of level... but only when he had all of his genes activated.

Otherwise, if he had only one gene activated, his power would be proportional to the level of the gene only.

That being said, even though Ashton had not evolved into a higher rank, his cumulative level was more than enough to challenge those newly evolved beings without much trouble. This list included Mera who was on level 45.

However, Ashton was not intending on revealing his secret to her just yet. But he did have another trick up his sleeves. A trick, not even the fabled mistress could predict or defend against.

Mera lunged at him but the moment she took a threatening step toward him, half a dozen royal knights rushed inside the building to stop her in her tracks.

Even though Ashton was important to Jonathan, he wasn't as important to let him have 6 bodyguards in the form of royal knights. Well, that was until the boy got under the patronage of Alucard, who personally requested Jonathan to look after his future son-in-law's well being.

Honestly, it was more of an order than anything else. But Jonathan wouldn't like anyone talking about it.

"Baron Ashton is under the direct protection of his highness King Jonathan. Hostility towards him is comparable to hostility towards the king." One of the knights announced, "This is your last chance to back off, or else suffer the wrath of the king."

Mera's face turned red with anger. Blood trickled out of her fist as her razor-sharp nails dug through her skin. She had never felt this angry even when Donovan had betrayed her. Also, unlike then, she had no outlet to get rid of her pent up anger.

Also, even if she was strong, she was nowhere near strong enough to fight six, level 30 Royal Knights. But she could not get past the smirk on Ashton's face.

"Look, as much as I want to see you try to get past them and try to 'put me in my place', I do not have time for this." Ashton shook his head and walked back to his room while Mera did the only thing she could... stare at his back.

She could not contemplate where her plan went wrong. How could she have gotten played like a fiddle by a literal child! There was no possible way. Her blind trust in someone had once again fooled her.

'You will pay for this humiliation. You will pay...!' After swearing her vengeance on him, she walked out of the mansion.

Chapter 217 Intergalactic Investigator

"Welcome, Section Chief 112 Aamon. Lord Beelzebub awaits you." An electronic voice echoed in the empty hallway before a secret door appeared out of nowhere.

"Always taking unnecessary security measures..." Aamon sighed and walked inside the dark room.

This Xyran had pale blue skin with small horns protruding from his forehead. Which were the characteristic of low ranking members of their society. His raven hair was tied in a clean braid which made it look like some kind of a whip extending from the back of his head.

"When half of the galaxy wants to get rid of you, these 'unnecessary security' measures wouldn't seem so unnecessary." Beelzebub gestured for Aamon to sit down but not before paying his respects first.

No matter how many centuries it had been since Beelzebub last stepped on a battlefield, he would always be known as the King of Gluttony. However, he wasn't called that because of his greed or hunger, but solely for his lust for consuming his foes.

But nowadays, Beelzebub had given up his old ways and no longer indulged in such bizarre rituals. However, the horror he had exhibited during the last civil war, was enough not to let anyone mess with him.

That being said, it didn't mean that he had stopped doing dirty deeds altogether. He had simply decided to use others to do his bidding in the promise of power, money, and fame. Basically, everything any living organism in an ever-growing civilization would want.

"How can I be of your service this time, sir?" Aamon asked Beelzebub.

"I would like you to investigate a... tier 2 planet."

"Tier 2 Planet? What could you possibly want from there sir?"

"It's not what I want, but who I want. Lucifer had been acting suspiciously and I have reasons to believe that traitorous bastard Astaroth is still alive and somewhere on that planet."

"What? But I thought-"

"While it's a shame that my plan to kill him failed," Beelzebub took a swig from his drink, "It's not too late to finish the job. For obvious reasons, I can not do anything myself. My hands are tied taking care of the things here. That's why you will have to do the job for me."

He continued, "Visit Planet earth and investigate Astaroth's whereabouts. Do not even think about coming back here without finding some damning evidence. I don't have to explain what will happen to you if you fail me, do I?"

"Not at all, sir. I'd die before disappointing you."

"What will your death accomplish, you fool?" Beelzebub shook his head in dismay, "Just... do what I ask. The money will get deposited in your account as usual. Now go."

Aamon bowed once again before disappearing into the shadows. While he had never visited any lower tier planets before, he had heard about earth quite a few times. Especially in the last century, because of Astaroth and the civil war.

It wasn't an exciting planet, to visit at the least. A downright boring and primitive civilisation that no one would have even noticed if they weren't so hell-bent on destroying themselves. Even after their intervention, the situation of the planet remained more or less the same, which made the planet feel hopeless to the Xyrans.

That's why most of them had even forgotten about it. That was also the reason why the technical support related to the mutants inhabiting the planet had been severely reduced as well.

While most of the mutants from other planets under their jurisdiction had their own administrators to guide them, it was a miracle if anyone from earth made a contact with the admins.

Even the few Xyrans that were allotted to look after the earth, were forced to do so and it was comparable to punishing someone. In short, the earth was a planet none of them gave a shit about.

"Meh, there's no point thinking about it anymore. Since King of Gluttony has given me the orders, I have an obligation to do so. I hope that dissonant place has beautiful women to offer."

Aamon sighed while heading over to the ship bay, the place where all of their private and governmental ships were kept at.

Usually, Aamon would have selected a spaceship belonging to the government to carry out his missions as the full prices to get those things running wasn't anything to laugh at. But since this was Beelzebub's personal request, he had little choice but to use his own vehicle.

"Aamon, long time no see!" Another low-ranking Xyran greeted him, "Where to this time?"

"No fixed destination, Preta." Aamon replied, "Pull my babe out of her prison cell, will you?"

"You are one weird Xyran, Aamon. You don't have some weird fetish for your Glider, do you?"

"You got a death wish?"

"Believe me, man, I don't judge." Preta laughed, "How much fuel should I add?"

"... Fill her up," Aamon mumbled underneath his breath.

"What?"

"Fill the damn thing up to the brim!"

As mentioned before, the fuel prices for Xyrans wasn't a joke. Even after achieving the highest possible technological advancement, the tier 7 civilisation had failed in its battle with fuel prices.

It was because of that when a stingy guy like Aamon wanted to fill the tank up, Preta couldn't help but ask again. Just to make sure he heard him right.

"Relax, no need to yell at me. It's just that the prices of star shards have increased once again." Preta shook his head in dismay, "I promised my wife a vacation, but man, I really don't wanna blow savings on fucking fuel!"

"Damn, how much is it?"

"450 Yeno per shard."

The look on Aamon's face said it all. Although he had enough money to fill the tank, it would leave quite a significant blow to his bank balance.

"How many shards would you need?" Preta knew exactly how many shards Aamon's glider could store, but that didn't stop him from messing with him.

"Around a thousand..."

"What the hell? I can buy a fucking solar system for that much!" Preta laughed and charged Aamon for his services, "Adding storing cost and refuelling cost... you will have to pay 600,000 Yenos. Thanks for doing business with us!"

Chapter 218 Livan: A City Where Everyone Is Equal (1)

A week after his confrontation with Mera, Ashton finally left Deja for good and headed toward the city of... well it didn't matter. He was going to rename the city either way. The only other problem was...

"Wow... so much snow. Even Transylvania doesn't have this much snow." Verina exclaimed loudly, "Did you choose this city of yours with our comfort in mind?"

"Quit being so noisy!" Irina immediately silenced her sister, "If you keep acting like this, how will Ashton accept us as his brides?"

"Could you remind me why did you have to come with me?" Ashton sighed in defeat.

As much as the sisters liked to test the limits of his annoyance, coming along with him to a place known for its harsh environment was a bit too much. Even Alucard tried to sway his daughters from making such a decision, but there was no stopping them.

"To tend to your needs of course! Also, you would need strong allies beside you if you want to assert dominance and make the residents of the city respect you." Verina replied, "The soldiers accompanying you are undoubtedly strong, but not strong enough to defend your territory or to do... anything to be honest."

That was a fact Ashton already knew. As much as Virgil and the rest of his crew were of use to him, their slow levelling speed was a bit concerning. But now that he had nothing better to do, he could focus on their growth as well as his own.

"Also, with us being added to the mix, there are going to be a lot of challengers who will challenge you for our hand." Irina clarified.

"Wait I thought the two of you had the right to propose whoever you liked?" Ashton was a bit confused by now.

"That is true. But once we propose someone, till the day we get married, anyone can challenge you for our hand." Verina replied with a smile, "Which means, if you lose to someone in a duel or someone kills you, we will have to accept their proposal and test their might ourselves."

"Since it'll be a hassle if someone defeated you in a duel, so we decided to help you out by staying closer to you at all times."

Before Ashton could give pry further into their culture and get to know how to pass their 'love' on to someone else, their fleet of cars came to a halt.

"My Lord, we have arrived." The driver announced.

Ashton stepped out of the car, marking the snow under his feet. Behind him were the six royal knights, his team and the about 500 newly recruited soldiers. These people were the only defence force he had to ensure the security of the city.

Baiter's wife and Ashton's slaves were also there as Ashton believed leaving them back in Deja wasn't safe for them. Especially after he had angered Mera. There was no knowing what that bitch would have done to them in his absence.

"It's... quite barren." Renee pointed out the most obvious thing she could.

"Wow, your eyes work? I never knew that!" Fae retorted while Virgil struggled between them.

"Enough!" Ashton smacked both the ladies on the back of their heads, "First impressions matter. At least for you idiots who would be spending most of their time among the crowd."

"Crowd? There is not a single person in sight." Irina pointed at the isolated city in front.

"Yeah, I was wondering the same thing- Wait, how the hell are you fine standing under direct sunlight?" Ashton was genuinely baffled.

"Oh, sunlight doesn't affect us much. Since we are direct descendants of Dracula himself, the sun has little to no effect on us." Verina replied clapping her hands together, "That's why we said we'll be accompanying you 24x7. You are cute and all, but not cute enough to warrant our deaths."

At that moment, Ashton was wondering whether being related to Dracula could have such an effect and if it did... he lowkey wanted that gene for himself. It would have made his life a tad bit easier considering his stats wouldn't get nerfed every time he stepped out in sun.

As they discussed that, a few people could be seen in the far distance, rushing toward them. The royals knights along with a few dozen foot soldiers, immediately jumped in front of their lord to fulfil their duty. But Ashton knew there was little these people could do to him or anyone present there.

"It's alright, let them through."

Ashton was there to be their lord and he wanted to win over the residents so that they could help him out later. The best way to do that was to become approachable first.

"Young Lord, our apologies for not coming out earlier. I'm Nebulus Offrey, the chief of this... humble city and this is my wife Alucia Offrey."

An old bald man who was probably in his 80s apologised while struggling to get on his knees to greet Ashton. Beside him was a woman who appeared to be equally old along with a few young lads with wooden clubs and metal pipes in their hands.

"There's no need to apologise." Ashton pulled the man back to his feet, "Just tell me what's going on here?"

The old man stared at the woman struggling to form a sentence. It was clear they were struggling and there was a reason behind it. Although the city in question was known to be small, there should have been at least ten thousand people inhabiting it.

Also, there was no sense why the buildings appeared to be so rundown when records showed that just last year numerous skyscrapers were built there.

Not to mention the nearby mines should have provided enough resources for them to maintain their... usual lifestyle and not wear rags for clothes. A lot of things were not adding up there and Ashton wanted to know why.

"My lord... the problem-" The city chief opened his mouth to explain the situation but was interrupted by one of the men standing behind him.

"This city is cursed, your lordship. that's why no noble wants to take control of the city."

"And who you might be?" Ashton asked the red-headed man.

"Janis Offrey, sir. The city chief's eldest son."

"F-Forget about him, your lordship!" Nebulus immediately smacked his son right in front of everyone, "He keeps rambling about useless made-up stories. Don't believe him!"

"Let the man speak. I can decide whether to believe him or not myself." Ashton immediately retorted, "So Janis, why did you say this city is cursed?"

Chapter 219 Livan: A City Where Everyone Is Equal (2)

In the moments that followed, Janis revealed a plethora of reasons why their city was going through the worst crisis it ever had, along with the reason why they were powerless to do anything to help themselves.

The more information he revealed the graver the expressions of the rest of them got. So much so, that even the vampire sisters who had nothing to do with the people or their misery couldn't hold back the level of disgust they felt.

As for Ashton, he was angry, but not at the misery of the residents. The sole reason he had picked the town to establish as his base of operations was because of the rich resources scattered all around it.

But upon hearing that a certain noble has been doing as they pleased with the people and resources the city had to offer, he was pissed. It almost felt as if someone had cheated money out of him.

At the same time, the chief and his wife had ended up in tears. The reason they did not want Janis to reveal any wrongdoing of the noble in question was because, to them, Ashton too was a noble.

Also, since it was obvious a noble would always support another one, they felt if they opened their mouths to ask for help, their situation would end up getting worse. It was for the same reason why none of them informed the king or anyone else about the shit that had been going on there.

"The nobles have been requesting money from the treasury to build this place to uncover the city's 'true potential', and pocketing it instead." Janis' voice was filled with rage, "They even enter the town as they please and... abuse our women. They even force some to go with them and the last time they took my wife..."

'So that's why he was so hell-bent on reciting every bit of wrongdoing going on in the city.' Ashton shook his head, 'The only time people don't turn a blind eye to wrong things, is when it's their turn to suffer. That's why people like me can go unhinged, doing as we please.'

Ashton was no saint. That wasn't a secret. The only time he was good to people was because they either had something that he needed or he was too weak to openly dislike them. In the end, all of them were there to serve as a means for him to take his revenge on certain people.

Despite whatever Ashton looked like to them, his intentions were far from noble. The resources, free labour and its strategic location were the only things Ashton was interested in. Not in the well-being of the citizens.

However, as he heard more and more about their plight, he subconsciously began sympathising with them. It got to a level where he had to remind himself why he was there.

"I can't believe werewolves would do something like this to their own kind." Virgil spat out in disgust.

"Does it matter more because they are hurting their own kind or because what they are doing was wrong?" Ashton gently asked Virgil, "Humans have been on the receiving end of the same abuse for more than a century. It was about time those bastards found a new playtoy, which turned out to be their own kin."

"No, I didn't mean it in that-" Virgil immediately wanted to clear himself out but Ashton dismissively raised his hand, cutting him off.

"Don't worry Virgil, I know what you meant. Someone like you would never say something so insincere. I was just saying what came to my head." He then turned towards Janis, "Is there anything else you'd like to share? Any other problems or anything in general."

"Yes, my lord," Janis spoke through his gritted teeth. His eyes were red from anger and dehydration.

"Speak then."

"I want to kill the bastard who took my wife away from me."

"And how are you planning to do that? With that metal pipe of yours?" Ashton smirked before pointing at Duncan, "It'll barely put a dent on the human standing behind me. Do you think you'll be able to take down an army of trained soldiers with something like that?"

Ashton's words were harsh, but more than revenge, Janis needed a sharp dose of reality. While hatred could fuel someone to achieve things that wouldn't be possible under normal circumstances, hatred alone won't be able to turn something impossible into possible.

There was a reason why they had been abused for so long and it was their weakness. Simply put, it was because they were weak and the abuser had the power to relentlessly abuse them without facing any sort of consequence.

As long as they were weak, they will keep getting abused and taken advantage of. Even if Ashton saved them now, once he was gone someone else would appear to make their lives hell again and the cycle would repeat over and over again. Till they found the courage and strength to break out of it.

"The first step towards taking revenge is getting stronger, believe me, no one knows it better than I do. You might think it's the only way you can ever feel anything in your life. But it's not. Not until you take proper revenge against the ones who made your life hell."

Ashton placed his hand on Janis' shoulder, "Let the metal pipe go, and I'll give you some proper weapons. My friends here will teach you whatever you need to defend yourselves, and I'll protect you while rebuilding the city. However, keep one thing in your head. Your revenge is yours to take, not mine. Is that clear?"

"Thank you, my lord... Thank you!" All of them fell to their knees thanking Ashton repeatedly.

At that moment, Ashton felt the level of cringeness in his words like he never had. But for the sake of getting the people over to his side, it was necessary to act like a hero and a saviour. After all, those were the types of people the weak looked up to.

However, despite saying that they'll have to take their revenge themselves, Ashton wasn't planning on staying put when someone had screwed him over. It might not have been intentional but he wasn't going to let someone who 'stole' his resources go unscathed.

In the meantime, what Ashton had failed to notice was how his speech had not only moved the weak citizens but also his own party members as they stared at him with puppy eyes.

'Yup, cringe dialogues always work like a charm.' Ashton thought to himself as one of the royal knights approached him.

Unlike most of the guards appointed under him, Sheera was the only female royal knight and also the platoon leader in charge of the 500 foot soldiers Ashton had.

Having such qualifications, it was no wonder the brown-skinned lady was appointed as his second-in-command even though he had only known her for a few weeks.

Sporting a shining armoured bodysuit that hugged her curves perfectly, the raven-haired lady was a master when it came to strategic intelligence and warfare. So much so, that even Jonathan had placed her on strategic command of his entire army on multiple occasions.

Even what little bit of success they had had in conquering the swamps, was a direct result of the strategies she came up with. That's why it was a wonder how Ashton managed to persuade the king to let such an important person serve him instead.

"My lord, although it wouldn't be wise to do so, maybe we should let his highness handle this matter?" Sheera respectfully suggested, "A feud between a Baron and some other noble household would not sit well in the eyes of other kingdoms."

"Sheera, you said it yourself. It wouldn't be wise to approach his highness with just a meagre conflict. After all, I have to prove my abilities as a Baron as well." Ashton had his signature sinister smile spread across his face.

He continued, "As far as fighting a noble is concerned. I'm not going to be the one fighting. I'll be defending my territory from an unwarranted invasion. If someone thinks I'm an easy prey then I'll have no choice but to retaliate."

"I see. Then I'll immediately begin setting up defences around the city." Sheera bowed and immediately began barking orders at the soldiers.

"Please do whatever you think will be helpful." Ashton mumbled before turning towards the soldiers, "Unload the resources we have and share them with the citizens. Fae, I know it's a bit too much to ask, but could you take a look at any sort of illness they might have?"

"Judging from how long they have been without proper food or water, it'll a miracle if they aren't," Fae mumbled and immediately got to work, "Whatever the case might be, I'll do my best to help them out."

"I'll help out in building defences. I have a few things that could help in that department. Once that's done, I'll focus on fixing the buildings." Baiter volunteered and headed towards Sheera.

In the meantime, Virgil, Renee and the rest of the royal guards took on the responsibility of training the citizen in combat. Verina and Irina happily decided to help out as well.

Their decision to help was mostly made out of goodwill, but it was also an opportunity for them to prove their usefulness to Ashton. All in all, it was a good start for building his own territory.

"Now all I need to think of is a name for the city..." Ashton scratched his chin, "How about... Livan? A city where everyone is equal. Sounds cringe enough, I guess?"

Chapter 220 A Familiar Name

"So, how does it look?"

"Not good, My lord." Baiter shook his head.

After setting camps throughout the city to host the soldiers and themselves, Ashton had sent his team on a special mission. Their task was to check the number of mines that had been completely excavated around Livan. Sadly, the result wasn't what he had expected.

"All mines within 5 kilometres radius have been thoroughly mined." Virgil hopped on the bad news train, "Not a single gram of Effium was found inside those caves. Whoever was behind it, most have received help from a talented Mineralist or an Alchemist."

"Thoroughly cleaned huh... well that makes it easier to find who was behind this shit. As there aren't name people with such talent."

Although Ashton was smiling, in his head he had already thought of a hundred ways to kill the person responsible for this shit. Deep down he knew the situation of Livan sounded too good to be true.

A well-developed city, sitting on the pile of Effium also known as firestone was something straight out of fantasy. Someone or the other had to use the area and its untouched rich resources sooner or later.

The fact that someone exploited the people and the resources didn't bother Ashton. But the extent to which it had been done was the thing that annoyed him the most.

"Sheera should already be on her way with information about the nobles who might be responsible for this shitshow. In the meantime, you can rest for the night. Tomorrow's going to be a long day for all of us."

"That it will be. Also, My Lord-"

"Baiter, how many times do I have to tell you to stop addressing me like that." Ashton sighed, "Virgil, Renee and fae don't do it after I told them not to but you always ignore my request. Would you like it if I start addressing you with your full name in front of everyone?"

"I don't think it'll be wise to do so." Virgil sniggered, "Although I'm sure Baiter would love it, we should also consider the presence of everyone around us. We wouldn't want to be branded as... fappers. If you know what I mean."

"Oi! Stop messing around with my grand name you muscle-headed freak!" Baiter immediately went off to defend his name while the rest of them shared a fit of laughs.

"Alright, enough joking around. Go and rest, we'll talk tomorrow."

"If you don't mind my suggestion, you need the most sleep out of all of us. After all, you have been overworking yourself day in and day out ever since you returned from Transylvania." Fae expressed her concerns before walking out, leaving Ashton alone with his thoughts.

"I have been overworking... that's the first time I've heard about it." Ashton smiled wanly, however, as soon as he recalled what happened between him and Avalina, his smile disappeared.

It hadn't been too long since he returned to Lycania and he was already regretting his actions back then. The way he behaved was inexcusable and the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to kill himself. Figuratively of course.

He looked around and saw the previously sad and malnourished residents of Livan happily dancing around a huge bonfire while eating to their limits. It was a good thing he had brought enough food to feed about a thousand people for two weeks, excluding his soldiers and teammates.

The longer he looked at their happy faces the weirder he felt. When he had arrived there in the morning, these people were nothing but invaluable extra mouths to feed. But after seeing them happy and lively, Ashton began to feel like he had found a place where he 'belonged'.

For him it was a strange feeling, considering it hadn't even been a day since he arrived there and yet these people felt like they were somewhat important enough to him to actually give a shit about them for once.

"And what is our dearest baron doing sulking all alone huh?" Verina appeared behind him out of nowhere.

Rather than answering her, Ashton immediately raised his hand in front of his face and caught a small throwing knife. It was blunt enough that it wouldn't have done any lasting damage to the target, but getting hit in the nose by it would have hurt like bitch.

"I thought other competitors would try to kill me, and not the princesses?" Ashton murmured and tossed the knife aside.

"I was simply testing you." Irina replied before appearing in front of them, "Can't have you getting soft all of a sudden, can we? Also, why did you block the knife? You could have easily dodged it."

"Hm... letting the knife hit your sister would have been funny, wouldn't it? Maybe I'll pull something like that the next time. All that aside, how was your first day in my humble and useless-for-now territory?"

"You want honest answers?" Verina inquired, to which Ashton nodded, "Well, it's obvious the city has seen better days. Apart from the kind-hearted citizens, everything else is a mess. In fact, I would say the city is a complete replica of one of those old cities that humans once ruled over during the great war."

"I couldn't agree more." Irina chimed in, "We'll have to do a lot of work to restore this place to its former glory."

"We? You're not leaving?" Ashton sounded surprised.

He had thought after seeing the condition the city was in, they would leave after a few days. After all, their living conditions weren't suitable enough for royalty to live in. No electricity, no regular supply of clean water and food were just mere starters in terms of issues.

There were a plethora of other reasons why no one in their right mind would want to live in a dump like Livan.

"Who do you think we are?" The sister smiled at him confidently, "We are proud vampires. We never go back on our word. When we said we'll help you, it meant we'll help you to the end."

"Ahem, My Lord, I have what you asked for." Sheera's voice interrupted the throuple, "It would appear a total of three noble households have been responsible for the state of Livan."

"The Morgans, it's the first time I've heard of them. Then... these Grunta bastards never learn, do they? I'm not even surprised they were involved with this crap... What the hell?"

Ashton took the list Sheera and went through it, but when he saw the name of the third family involved, he couldn't believe it, "Mistress Mera... what a displeasure it is to read your name here."