

Chaos' Heir 431

Chapter 431 Classmates

"This way, Miss Solodrey," Eric announced from the bottom of the metal staircase. "Stacy is on her way to the teleport to gather the rest of your belongings. You'll find them in your accommodation."

"Thank you," Monica exclaimed through her elegant smile as she approached the staircase to leave the spaceship.

Khan followed closely behind Monica, but the environment quickly captured his attention. The ship had finally landed in the Harbor, and Khan couldn't help but feel curious about his surroundings.

The network and Monica's notes had given Khan a vague idea of the Harbor. He had been busy during the landing, but he had still caught glimpses of the images captured by the external cameras, so he could somewhat understand the place's general layout.

From a distance, the Harbor shared many similarities with Milia 222. Its domes didn't expand inside the moon, but those structures had a lot in common with the asteroids.

However, getting closer to the moon revealed how the domes were uneven. They had many branches and channels that stretched past the districts or created a wide array of connections.

Of course, the transparent glass-like material enveloped any habitable area, but the buildings inside could change significantly according to their location.

Each dome marked a different district with a specific function. The Harbor had areas meant for producing essential resources, excavating important metals, landing spaceships, the actual embassy, and much more.

Surprisingly enough, the Harbor was almost self-sufficient. It needed deliveries to obtain some vital goods, but it still limited the arrival of cargo ships for safety reasons. The quadrant was peaceful, but the embassy's presence required additional care.

As for the actual location, the Global Army had chosen that moon for multiple reasons. The almost self-sufficiency came from the many resources in that solar system. The quadrant was also close to the territory of alien allies, which added value to its position.

The Harbor resembled Milia 222 on the outside, but its insides strongly reminded Khan of a space station. He was in a hangar that the ship had reached after crossing a short channel, and the area felt quite cramped. It was by no means small, but it couldn't compare to the asteroids' open spaces.

The hangar also existed on a single floor. Khan guessed that the Harbor had many of them, but that specific layout still made everything feel smaller and isolated, which resembled the other space stations visited in the past.

The corridors stretching past the hangar didn't help with that feeling. Khan could partially see and predict how cramped those channels would be. They weren't narrow, but they still carried a style he couldn't appreciate after his time on Milia 222.

An explanation quickly popped into Khan's mind. Milia 222 was a proper home, while the Harbor was a glorified space station. Their main purpose was different, and their layout reflected that.

Nevertheless, the Harbor beat Milia 222 in one field. The harmony seen from the outside was a nice detail, but Khan found something far more intriguing after descending the staircase and lifting his head.

The hangar had a relatively small dome, but its material remained transparent. Khan could see the universe when he lifted his gaze, and that dark spectacle added a mesmerizing vibe to the scene.

'How can I see the stars when the hangar is so bright?' Khan wondered, and the answer sounded obvious.

Pillar-like structures that radiated a white light filled the hangar, and the floor reflected that glow. The place was well-illuminated, but that didn't affect the scene past the dome. The glass-like material probably filtered the internal brightness to grant an almost natural image of the universe.

'Incredible,' Khan couldn't help but exclaim in his mind.

As for the synthetic mana, it was pretty plain. It didn't carry anything unusual, which led to a symphony that Khan had already gotten used to. Some colors were different, but they didn't change things enough to destabilize Khan's senses.

The hangar was strangely empty. Khan saw many ships when he managed to lower his gaze, but very few people roamed in that space. The place had a few guards and engineers busy checking the various vehicles, but nothing more.

Monica and Khan waited next to the ship while Eric handled the unloading process. The two pilots even left their cabin to help, and a couple of guards from the Harbor joined them to provide a floating cart.

The mesmerizing ceiling managed to keep Khan distracted during the wait, but captivating sensations often landed on him. Monica was still flushed, and it took her the entirety of her self-restraint to avoid reaching for Khan. Yet, she couldn't control her eyes, so meaningful stares shot out of her.

Khan was no better than Monica. He had experience in secret relationships, but he had just gotten out of two weeks of constant intimacy. Monica's stares easily rekindled his desire and made him meet her beautiful eyes to convey his thoughts.

The absurd size of Monica's luggage came in handy. Eric, the pilots, and the two guards were too busy unloading the ship to notice Khan and Monica's silent interactions, but their presence still limited their actions, and they both suffered under those restraints.

'I'm getting kicked out for sure,' Khan cursed, even if he couldn't feel too unlucky. The memories from the trip still warmed his mind. He could only hope to replicate them as soon as possible.

As the unloading process continued, Khan struggled to keep his mouth shut. The cart was big, but Monica's belongings seemed endless. The five men had to rearrange them often to make them fit on the floating platform, and they were only part of what Monica had sent to the Harbor.

"Monica, isn't that too much?" Khan eventually let out a joke. "The accommodations here should have laundry areas."

"It seems that the world of women still has some secret for you," Monica chuckled.

"Poor cart," Khan commented.

"The cart would understand if it knew how hard it is to have you at dinner," Monica joked.

"I promised I'd make up for it," Khan played along to keep the conversation alive. Nothing similar had happened, but talking in the open required some pretenses.

"I'm sure you'll make the wait worth it," Monica teased, and awkwardness fell on the scene. The five men could only remain silent since they couldn't join that conversation.

The issue didn't only come from Monica's past threat. Eric could try to enforce Monica's mother's authority in an isolated environment, but the area already had two guards from the Harbor. He couldn't argue or rebuke Monica in the open since it would make her lose face.

The same went for the pilots and the guards. They were in a heavily political environment where respect was paramount. They could gossip in private, but none could say a word when a wealthy descendant was on the scene.

Monica had explained that theory to Khan, so he felt pretty free in his replies. He couldn't interact with Monica as he wished, but he wouldn't have to watch his back from soldiers with a lower status as long as his interactions remained polite.

The five men took a while to load the cart, and only three led the way once everything was ready. The pilots remained behind since they lacked clearance, and Khan and Monica paid them no heed.

The group headed for one of the corridors, which confirmed Khan's predictions. The passage was big enough to fit four carts, but it still felt cramped. The absence of the transparent dome above also added a claustrophobic vibe to the scene.

That vibe was short-lived since the corridor soon opened into an immense area filled with relatively tall buildings. The transparent ceiling returned, and vast streets stretched left and right to divide the place into different blocks.

Most buildings shared identical features. They had the Global Army's iconic black metal and general modern style. The various streets also reminded Khan of a training camp, even if the place had white pillars instead of streetlights. The area resembled a residential district, and one of the guards quickly confirmed that feeling.

"Welcome to the seventh district, Miss Solodrey," The guard announced. "This is the largest residential area in the Harbor, and its services meet the highest standards. Though, I'm sure you'll opt for something closer to the embassy."

"Is the distance an issue?" Monica wondered, knowing that Khan would probably need that information.

"Not at all," The guard reassured while pointing to his left. "Each district has various kinds of transport. The trains are more popular, but we offer a cab service. You can also use your own vehicles as long as the regulations allow it."

"So, this district is no different from a city," Khan guessed.

"Indeed," The guard confirmed, even if his smile remained on Monica. "Prices can differ from Earth, and we might not have the same wide variety of services, but everything else is no different from a city."

'I'll need a map,' Khan thought before giving another look at the guards.

Eric had been openly rude to Khan, but the guards didn't share that attitude. Monica remained their focus, but that came from a difference in status. She was above Khan even after his achievements.

'No enmity from normal soldiers,' Khan thought. 'That's a decent start.'

The arrival of a luxurious vehicle claimed the group's attention and interrupted the conversation. Khan and the others were on the main street, so they couldn't miss the long limousine turning a corner to head in their direction.

Khan also didn't miss the trace of spite that appeared inside Monica. She felt tenser and irritated, but her face remained the embodiment of elegance.

The vehicle stopped by the sidewalk next to the group before its passengers' doors opened. Five young soldiers came out of them, three men and two women, and stepped off the street to gather in front of Monica.

"Monica, I almost couldn't believe when my father told me you were coming," The man in the lead of the newcomers, a blonde second-level warrior with emerald eyes, happily exclaimed.

"Lucian, it's a pleasure to meet you after so long," Monica wore a perfect fake smile. "I didn't expect this welcome."

"It's no bother," Lucian laughed. "The Harbor always feels overwhelming on your first day. We thought it could help to meet friendly faces."

The people behind Lucian smiled and nodded, and their elegant stances said more than enough to Khan. He inevitably thought about Luke and Bruce. Those men and women had to come from wealthy families.

"Though, how did you know about my arrival?" Monica wondered. "I'm not insinuating anything. I'm just curious. After all, we came by ship."

"Your mother shared your flight course with my father," Lucian revealed in a helpless tone. "You know how our parents are. Always plotting something."

"Their plotting put them where they are," Monica praised. "We will have to learn from them sooner or later."

"I'll go for later," Lucian winked, and Monica covered her mouth before giggling.

Khan used those seconds to inspect the group. A first-level warrior was among them, but the rest were on the second level. They were also wearing military uniforms, so he could see that all of them were mages. The stars on their left shoulders even matched those on their right.

The inspection came to an end after Monica's giggle. She had faked it, but she couldn't hide the meaning behind it. Lucian was being polite, and she had to play along due to their status.

Luckily for Khan, Monica used the silence that followed to take care of the faint jealousy growing inside him.

"Lucian, this is Lieutenant Khan," Monica exclaimed while pointing at Khan. "He will join me in the Harbor."

"Oh," Lucian voiced while frowning. He inspected Khan for a second, but his eyes eventually lit up, making him stretch his hand forward.

"You won Onia's tournament, am I right?" Lucian asked while waiting for Khan to shake his hand. "I'm Lucian Hencus. It's an honor to meet you. Monica got herself an exceptional guard."

Monica waited until Khan shook Lucian's hand to clarify the situation. "He is no guard. He'll be a trainee with us."

Surprise filled Lucian's face, which turned into hesitation before Khan's fake smile. The two were still shaking hands, and Khan did his best to sound polite. "I can't wait to be classmates."

"Class-," Lucian began to repeat before clearing his throat and retracting his hand. "I'm actually in advanced courses, but I'm sure you'll catch up in no time."

"I'll do my best," Khan promised. "It would be an insult to Monica if I wasted this chance."

Khan knew exactly what he was doing. He was also aware that avoiding using Monica's first name might have saved him some trouble. Yet, some basic form of jealousy pushed him to show that he was in the same field as everyone else.

The group obviously didn't fail to understand the meaning behind Khan's words, and their reactions revealed how well they could lie. Instead, Lucian seemed earnest, but something dark existed inside him, and Khan couldn't quite understand its nature.

The surprises didn't end there since another vehicle approached the area. The latter didn't use the street. Instead, it flew above the buildings and began its descent once it arrived within the sidewalk's range.

"Can we fly here?" Khan asked since he noticed the surprise experienced by Lucian and his friends.

"Only professors and other important figures can," The guard explained while the small ship landed behind the limousine.

The ship had a triangular shape, a single engine, and a small pilot's cabin covered by dark glass-like material. The latter released a whooshing sound when it opened, and a man in his thirties quickly jumped out of it.

The man wore casual clothes, but they were pretty messy. His brown trousers had marks and small stains, his jumper had holes, and the shirt underneath came out of it in random places. His black hair was also a mess, and the same went for his unkempt beard.

"Professor Nickton?" Lucian called.

"Oh, Lucian, I didn't see you," Professor Nickton casually said before walking past Lucian to stop in front of Khan. "Are you Lieutenant Khan?"

Khan saw far more than ordinary humans. He had immediately sensed that Professor Nickton was a third-level warrior, but his mana reeked of something odd. There was something alien in his presence, but his body wasn't the source of that feature.

"Yes, sir," Khan exclaimed while crossing his arms behind his back to perform a military salute.

"Did you write the report on the Tors on your own?" Professor Nickton continued.

"I did, sir," Khan revealed.

"Come with me then," Professor Nickton ordered while turning to approach his ship.

Khan couldn't help but glance at Monica at that unexpected development, but she was as lost as him. It took Lucian to give some clarity to the situation.

"He is assistant professor," Lucian revealed among the general confusion. "You should go."

Khan looked deep into Lucian's emerald eyes but found no lies. He could only glance at Monica again, and she didn't hesitate to reassure him. "Go. I'll handle your accommodation and luggage."

Khan nodded and forced himself to look at the floor to avoid throwing a warning glare at Lucian's group. He hurried toward the ship, and a leap brought him next to Professor Nickton's seat.

"Fasten your seatbelt," Professor Nickton ordered when Khan sat next to him.

Khan obliged, and the cabin closed. The Professor swiftly pulled the steering wheel to make the ship rise into the air, and a sharp acceleration unfolded once it crossed the buildings.

"I read your profile after your report fell into my hands," Professor Nickton explained while setting a course on the control desk and letting the ship go on auto-pilot. "You have amassed commendable achievements on top of alien knowledge."

"I like to remain open to alternative approaches to mana," Khan briefly summarized.

"You didn't make up what you wrote about the Tors, did you?" The Professor asked.

"No, sir," Khan denied. "I wouldn't dare."

"Good," Professor Nickton exclaimed. "A man with your expertise might be what I need."

The lack of clear explanations told Khan that Professor Nickton wouldn't say more than that. Yet, he had other doubts, and the course depicted on the control desk didn't seem short.

"Sir, how did you-?" Khan began to ask.

"Entering the Harbor is no easy feat," Professor Nickton interrupted. "I was notified about your presence as soon as the landing started."

"Did you pla-?" Khan tried to voice another question.

"No, I didn't plan on consulting you," Professor Nickton interrupted again. "Still, since you were here, I thought you might accelerate the process."

"What process?" Khan asked quickly, managing to finish his question before the Professor could interrupt him a third time.

"You'll see," Professor Nickton stated as his brown eyes remained on the path ahead.

The cabin was dark from the outside, but Khan could see everything while sitting inside it. The ship flew through the seventh district before entering a channel made entirely of the same transparent material as the dome.

Khan wanted to ask more questions, but Professor Nickton's last answer had said enough, so he remained silent and lost himself in the environment. The tunnel led to another district, but the ship eventually made a turn to enter another channel that brought it closer to the center of the Harbor.

The third district reached by ship was small and contained fewer buildings than the residential area. However, they were all taller and larger, and the vehicle soon descended toward one of them.

The dark window that enveloped the building side slid open to allow the ship's passage. The vehicle landed on the nineteenth floor, inside an empty room with glowing labels and reports on its walls. They didn't mean much to Khan, but he remained surprised to spot his essay on the Tors among them.

"Follow me," Professor Nickton ordered once the cabin opened.

The two stepped off the ship and headed for one of the two doors. After crossing that passage, a simple lab unfolded in Khan's vision, and the reason behind the strange mana on Professor Nickton immediately became clear.

The lab had three long desks, all of which had alien flesh resting on their surface. Some were inside transparent cases filled with interactive labels, while others had a prison of holograms around them.

"Here, in the back," Professor Nickton voiced while leading Khan to the back of the room.

The area had a series of locked cases that Professor Nickton opened by placing his thumb on their dark metal. A series of strange tools and more alien flesh appeared in Khan's vision, but his inspection was short since the Professor closed everything after retrieving an item.

The Professor then moved toward one of the interactive desks and swept part of it clean with a sharp movement of his arm. Flesh fell on the floor, releasing blood and leaving wet marks on the interactive surface, but Professor Nickton didn't care as he placed his item on it.

The item had captured Khan's attention even before that sharp gesture. It was a dark-blue tube bent in three different spots, each containing a specific type of mana. Moreover, openings existed on those corners, but Khan couldn't understand why.

"I'm trying to replicate a spell from an alien species," Professor Nickton explained as he crouched under the desk and opened a drawer to take out a rectangular case. "I just don't seem able to find the right combination of filters."

Professor Nickton opened the case to show a series of disks that carried different kinds of mana. All of them were unique, and their size seemed to suit the bent tube. They actually looked perfect for the openings in the corners.

"Do you want me to find the right combination?" Khan understood.

"Can you do it?" Professor Nickton asked while showing his eager face to Khan.

"I don't even know what I'm trying to replicate," Khan pointed out.

"Right," Professor Nickton exclaimed while smacking his forehead. "Give me a second."

Professor Nickton moved to the other side of the desk and repeated the sweeping gesture. More flesh fell to the floor while he began to tinker with the interactive menus, uncaring that his jumper had gotten wet and dirty.

Holograms soon came out of the desk and created a 3D picture of a strange animal. The creature had a dog's body, but a seemingly tough shell grew from its back and stretched until the base of its head. A forked tongue even hung from its mouth, and fur covered it.

The image also had many stats. The holograms overwhelmed Khan with information that he only partially understood. Some descriptions and numbers were beyond his expertise, while others almost made sense when he applied them to his experience.

'A monster,' Khan thought after gaining a vague grasp of the information.

The holograms moved after a few seconds. A metal spear flew at the monster and pierced its shell, forcing one of its legs onto the ground. The creature's tongue went straight, and its fur shook to release mana.

The energy fused and swirled until a blue flame appeared. The fire also expanded on the tongue, and the stats marked the lowering of the temperature.

"It's a cold fire," Professor Nickton explained once the holograms stopped moving, "A specific form of cold fire. I've tried to replicate it for months, but I don't seem to get the process right."

"What about the monster?" Khan questioned. The process would be far easier if he could look directly at the creature.

"Those butchers killed it," Professor Nickton cursed. "The specimen had a rare mutation, and replicating it in captivity is almost impossible without witnessing the transformation. I have its flesh and organs, but my studies aren't going anywhere."

Khan glanced at the bent tube before looking at the still holograms again. His eyes revealed a lot, but he could only see what the scanners had recorded, which might not be enough.

"How are you approaching the experiment?" Khan wondered, and Professor Nickton reached for another drawer to pull out a transparent container full of synthetic mana.

"Mana goes through the tube," Professor Nickton revealed while attaching the container to one end of the item, "And the filters change its composition to replicate this data."

Professor Nickton didn't hold back from giving a demonstration. He activated another series of holograms before pressing a key on the container. Some synthetic mana left it, and the tube sucked it to lead everything toward the filters.

Khan sensed how the synthetic mana gained new natures whenever it crossed a filter. The holograms also kept track of those changes, and a blue flame eventually came out of the tube.

Nevertheless, the blue fire created by the tube didn't reach the same low temperatures as the monster. According to the holograms, their compositions were identical, but the replica remained far weaker.

"Odd," Khan commented.

"Truly odd," Professor Nickton agreed before glancing at Khan. "So, do you have any idea? It's similar to what you described with the Tors, isn't it?"

'Similar in the creation, maybe,' Khan thought before looking at the hologram again. The tongue had clearly assembled different types of mana to generate the blue fire, but the Tors were a purely scientific species, while the creature was a monster driven by instincts.

"Can I?" Khan asked while pointing at the holograms.

"Do whatever you want," Professor Nickton announced while stepping aside. "Just fix it."

The interactive menu was relatively straightforward. Khan could make the holograms play the scene again before pressing on the container to activate the tube. The creation process was truly similar,

almost identical, but he noticed a difference. The monster's expression gave away a detail he couldn't miss.

'Intensity,' Khan realized as his eyes snapped on the container. 'The synthetic mana can't match something produced inside the body of a monster, especially when in pain.'

Khan reached for the container before retracting his hand. His mana wasn't a viable option, and it wouldn't solve Professor Nickton's problem. He had to make the experiment work with synthetic energy, which meant the Nele's approach.

"The next thing might look strange," Khan warned while showing a helpless smile.

"Trust me," Professor Nickton stated. "You can't surprise me."

"Then, I need to open it," Khan revealed while pointing at the container.

"Just press the key on its side," Professor Nickton explained. "You have a couple of seconds before it disperses completely."

Khan nodded and reached for the container. Removing it from the tube was easy, and the same went for finding the intended key. Then, he closed his eyes, opened the item, and voiced a simple request.

"Live," Khan whispered while releasing a whiff of his mana.

The purple-red whiff entered the container before changing the behavior of the mana in its insides. That synthetic energy grew slightly wilder, but it retrieved its previous state after Khan closed the lid.

The holograms confirmed that the synthetic mana didn't change. It almost had the same composition as before. It only showed a trace of Khan's energy now, but that was barely noticeable.

Nevertheless, Khan reattached the container and activated the tube. The synthetic mana flowed through the filters before coming out in the shape of a blue fire that made Professor Nickton exclaim in excitement.

"It's possible!" Professor Nickton shouted when he looked at the data gathered by the desk. The blue flame wasn't as cold as the monster's attack, but it was far better than the previous experiments.

Professor Nickton stared at the flame until it exhausted its fuel and vanished. He moved to the holograms afterward but looking at the data only increased his confusion.

"What did you do?" Professor Nickton eventually asked while turning to face Khan. "The composition was almost identical. The differences shouldn't have been enough to cause such stronger effects."

'How do I explain this now?' Khan wondered until he came up with a vague explanation. "The mana in the environment is generally stronger. You should use that in your experiment."

"Mana in the environment?" Professor Nickton questioned. "Are you talking about its purity?"

"No, no," Khan denied. He fell into his thoughts for a bit, but he could only come up with an unreasonable explanation in that short time. "The mana is alive. You can't expect the same vitality from something created in a lab."

Professor Nickton appeared far from convinced. He diverted his gaze, and thoughts ran through his mind until his eyes lit up. Understanding dawned upon him, and he faced Khan about it.

"The creature was creating something while in pain," Professor Nickton explained. "Stronger, you say. It's not about density. It's about intensity. The scanners must not have picked that due to the various minute parts."

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Professor Nickton nodded a few times before turning toward the interactive desk. Multiple menus popped on its surface as he tinkered with different settings. Khan couldn't understand much about the process, but the curse that followed explained a lot.

"It's pointless," Professor Nickton muttered. "I can't pull out data they didn't record."

"I can help replicate the process," Khan suggested.

"No, you have done enough," Professor Nickton exclaimed while waving his hand to dismiss Khan.

Random words left Professor Nickton's mouth while his attention remained on the menus. He clearly didn't give up on the matter, but Khan's job was over, which left him with nothing to do inside the lab.

"The mana is alive," Professor Nickton scoffed. "Incorrect."

Khan initially believed that the Professor was speaking to him, but those words turned out to be a random comment made while brainstorming. Professor Nickton seemed to have forgotten that Khan was in the lab, and the situation grew more awkward as the minutes passed.

"Sir?" Khan eventually called to remind the Professor of his presence.

"Right," Professor Nickton exclaimed when he glanced behind his shoulder. "I'll award you some merit points."

"Merit points?" Khan wondered.

"It's a currency here," Professor Nickton briefly explained while looking back at the interactive desk. "You can use them to purchase goods or access certain courses."

'Like in the training camps,' Khan understood.

"You can leave now," Professor Nickton announced since Khan remained behind him. "I have work to do."

"I don't know where I am," Khan pointed out.

Professor Nickton completely turned and looked at Khan's helpless expression before voicing another comment. "I'll give you a map of the Harbor. Pull out your phone."

Khan complied, and Professor Nickton also picked up his phone before performing a flicking motion. The gesture sent a file to Khan's device, which turned out to be an interactive map of the Harbor full of valuable details.

"You'll hear from me again if I ever need another second opinion," Professor Nickton stated as the desk reclaimed his attention.

Khan could see that the map described various means of transportation and routes that could bring him back to the seventh district. Still, the Professor wasn't giving him time to study it. It sounded like he wanted him out right away.

"How should I leave?" Khan felt forced to ask.

"Use whatever you want," Professor Nickton responded without bothering to turn.

"Can I take the ship to go back?" Khan tried his chances since Professor Nickton appeared quite easygoing.

"Yes, yes," Professor Nickton said in a dismissive tone before turning to show a frown at Khan's shameless smile. "No, that's my ship."

Khan shrugged his shoulders, and Professor Nickton heaved a sigh before picking up his phone again. He tapped on it to send a message, and his hand pointed at one of the doors when the process ended.

"I've called a cab for you," Professor Nickton explained. "Go past that door and use the elevator on your left. Your ride will be here by the time you leave the building."

"Thank you, sir," Khan dropped the shameless attitude to perform a military salute.

"Yeah, yeah," Professor Nickton voiced as he faced the interactive desk once again. "Leave now."

The Professor didn't give Khan many options, so he hesitated for a few seconds before heading for the appointed door. Following Professor Nickton's instructions led him into an elevator, which brought Khan to the bottom of the building in a matter of seconds.

The building's main hall was empty. It had couches, tables, and various seats, but the symphony there lacked the marks people would usually leave. The place felt abandoned, but it remained clean and well-kept.

A quick inspection of the interactive map cleared part of Khan's doubts. The district mainly featured labs and other research facilities, and only specific personnel had access to them. The place had meeting areas and similar rooms, but the Harbor's citizens probably didn't use them since other domes offered better services.

The street outside the building was empty. The cab mentioned by Professor Nickton wasn't there yet, so Khan studied the map a bit longer while sending a message to Monica and going through the recent events.

Getting merit points on the first day was great, but Khan preferred to see the situation from a different perspective. Professor Nickton didn't have biases. Khan might be able to rely on him in the future as long as he worked on their relationship.

'He can't be the only one,' Khan considered as the scope of the Harbor grew cleared in his mind.

The Harbor was big enough to contain all kinds of people. Professor Nickton's presence proved how there had to be more soldiers who didn't care about status and background. Finding them was the only issue.

'I can't stick to professors either,' Khan thought as multiple possible scenarios unfolded in his vision.

The professors would probably have an easier time disregarding Khan's poor background, but he needed actual friends, and Monica's connections weren't the best way to get them. Lucian and his group had been polite, but a clear wall existed between them and Khan.

'I knew it wouldn't have been easy,' Khan sighed.

The biases against Khan were no significant problem for him. They were annoying, but he could deal with them as long as they didn't cross a specific line.

However, Monica's presence remained a big issue. The previous meeting had given Khan a taste of the flirtatious interactions the wealthy soldiers could exchange, and he couldn't do anything about them.

The situation was completely different from Milia 222. Monica could handle Francis easily there, and the rest of the group didn't get in Khan's way. Yet, the Harbor was a complicated environment, and Monica was an appealing prize many wanted to get.

'It was actually easier with Liiza,' Khan mocked himself as the arrival of a cab attracted his attention.

Liiza and Khan had to keep their relationship a secret for multiple reasons, but they could mark each other. They could show the world that they had someone. Instead, merely remaining alone with Monica might be a problem in the Harbor.

"Lieutenant Khan?" The driver asked from behind her lowered window once the cab stopped near the sidewalk.

"That's me," Khan confirmed.

"I have orders to drive you wherever you want," The woman explained, and Khan didn't hesitate to make himself comfortable in the passenger's seat.

"Where to?" The driver asked through a speaker placed on the metal layer that divided her from Khan's seat.

"Seventh district," Khan replied while reading Monica's message. "Building 34A."

"We'll be there in thirty minutes," The driver revealed as the cab accelerated.

The cab didn't fly, so it obviously went slower than a ship, but that gave Khan a chance to inspect the Harbor from the first floor. He even checked the interactive map to keep track of his movements, but his thoughts often wandered due to the many issues waiting for him.

Nevertheless, the drive back to the seventh district ended up being quite pleasant. The cab's turns and speed changes barely affected its insides, so nothing hindered Khan's comfort or thoughts.

The cab had to cross a few districts before reaching the residential area, but the driver's estimate turned out to be on point. Khan returned to the sidewalk after exactly thirty minutes, and one glance at the interactive map told him that he had arrived in front of Building 34A.

'She is inside,' Khan understood after reading Monica's next message.

Crossing the building's entrance put Khan inside a vast hall, where he immediately noticed that he wasn't alone. A long desk stood past the luxurious couches, tables, and carpets, and a middle-aged man sat behind it.

"Hello?" Khan called as he approached the desk.

"I'll need your identification," The middle-aged man announced as his wary eyes followed Khan's every move.

Khan didn't mind that wary behavior. He placed his hand on the scanner on the desk's surface, and his profile appeared before the middle-aged man.

"Oh, Lieutenant Khan," The man exclaimed as his expression grew gentler. "Miss Solodrey informed me about your arrival. She is waiting for you on the fourth floor."

"Thank you," Khan nodded while glancing at the desk's sides. There were four elevators there, and they all looked empty.

"Lieutenant Khan?" The middle-aged man called while Khan headed for the elevators.

"Yes?" Khan asked while stopping in his tracks.

"I had a nephew on Istrone," The middle-aged man stated without hiding the sadness blooming inside him. "Thank you for your service."

That gratitude wasn't fake. Khan could sense that the nephew's fate had been grim, but the middle-aged man still respected his efforts.

"I wish I could have done more," Khan admitted.

"We all do," The middle-aged man smiled before pressing a key on his desk. One of the elevators opened after the command, and the doorman followed with polite goodbyes. "I hope your stay in the Harbor will be pleasant."

Khan nodded before entering the elevator. Pressing on a key activated the machine, and sadness spread when its doors closed. Istrone felt like a lifetime ago for Khan, but some still carried scars from that terrible event.

The sadness kept Khan company through the short trip inside the elevator, but a warmer feeling replaced it once the doors opened. A vast hall connected to multiple flats unfolded in his vision, and he could spot Monica at its end.

Monica wasn't alone. Lucian and his group were with her and sounded busy exchanging casual chats. Monica even resorted to her fake giggles. Khan didn't like seeing her pretend, but he had to admit that her elegant façade was enchanting.

'I do always get the best ones,' Khan laughed in his mind, recalling one of George's comments.

The warm feeling didn't last long. Khan couldn't hear the conversation from his position, but it seemed that Lucian wanted to show Monica a portrait hung on the wall. However, he didn't limit himself to pointing at it. He also placed a hand on Monica's lower back to make her turn in that direction.

Khan's mind instantly went blank. His mana moved on his own as he stepped forward and performed a short sprint. He was ready to reach Lucian in the next second, but Monica showed her complete control over the situation.

Monica couldn't be rude, but she knew how to handle those interactions. She stepped forward to separate herself from Lucian and turned toward him to change the topic.

The gesture's meaning was evident, and the entire group understood it. No matter how polite the touch was, Monica didn't appreciate it, and Lucian feigned ignorance when he retracted his arm. The interaction was friendly and didn't involve any scolding, but the vibe changed once everyone noticed Khan.

Khan had stopped sprinting after seeing Monica dealing with the situation. He had crossed half of the hall by then, and the tense and confused looks shot in his direction revealed the group's worry.

Those looks eventually fell on Khan's knife and made him realize that he was holding its handle. The weapon was still in the sheath, but his stance remained far from friendly.

Khan's experience allowed him to recover quickly. He drew the knife and waved it to his left while wearing a fake smile that tried to hide his cold tone. "Does the Harbor have blacksmiths? My weapon needs fixing after Milia 222."

The partial lie didn't convince the group, but Lucian opted against calling Khan out and stuck to a polite reply. "Yes, but weapons aren't allowed in the embassy."

"Pity," Khan sighed while sheathing the knife. "I feel naked without this."

"How was the meeting?" Monica promptly changed the topic. "What did Professor Nickton want?"

"He needed someone with a different perspective on mana," Khan explained shortly. "He is an interesting person."

"Professor Nickton doesn't do much teaching," Lucian explained as the situation relaxed, "But everyone praises his efforts in the lab."

"He seemed competent," Khan admitted.

"Everyone in the Harbor is," Lucian pointed out.

Silence fell after that comment, and the tension returned. Khan was getting closer to the group, and Lucian's companions couldn't help but remain wary of his presence. After all, he had appeared unstable just a few seconds ago.

"I think it's time for me to go over my luggage," Monica exclaimed to distract the group from the awkward moment. "Khan, yours also arrived. I took the liberty of choosing a flat for you."

"So, you made up your mind," Lucian guessed.

"I did," Monica confirmed before addressing Khan's curious gaze. "Renting something closer to the embassy would suit my status, but the seventh district hosts many social aspects. It's my job to be part of them."

The group couldn't argue, but Monica didn't end things there. She approached Khan and placed a hand on his elbow before voicing one of her flirtatious jokes. "Besides, after everything we have been through, I feel safer with Khan nearby."

"Monica likes to exaggerate," Khan played along. "She has proven herself able to hold her ground multiple times."

"Lieutenant Khan, was that a compliment?" Monica giggled. "You'll make me blush."

"I was just speaking the truth," Khan gave a collected answer.

The cheerful scene sent a message that the group didn't miss. Monica had avoided Lucian's touch, but she had no problem with Khan. The interaction didn't prove anything, but it felt like a clear statement.

"Your luggage is in my flat," Monica eventually revealed while retracting her arm. "You won't be able to deny me a drink today."

"It's still a bit improper," Khan declared.

"Khan, you'll give them the wrong idea," Monica laughed. "Though I don't really mind that."

"She likes to joke around," Khan explained to the group.

"Oh, I know," Lucian claimed. "That side of her never changed."

Monica and Lucian exchanged a polite smile that made Khan's thoughts go cold. He could force himself to wear a calm expression, but his stance added tension to the synthetic mana that even Lucian's companions managed to feel.

"That reminds me," Lucian soon continued. "I'll host a party in my accommodation during the night, and your presence is mandatory."

"How could I refuse?" Monica promptly agreed before involving Khan in that matter. "We'll be there."

A series of surprised glances fell on Khan, but he pretended not to notice them. The invitation clearly didn't extend to him, but Monica had taken care of the matter, and refusing him would be too rude now.

"I'll wait for you then," Lucian said to Monica before facing Khan. "I'm sure your stories will entertain many of my guests."

Khan smiled without adding anything and followed Monica once she headed for her flat. The door opened at her touch, but the cold emotions that spread in the hall made Khan turn to give one last glance at the group.

Lucian and his companions had dropped their friendly faces now that Monica wasn't looking, and they didn't hide their detachment. Someone showed proper contempt, while others experienced some fear. Only Lucian contained himself, even if his mana reeked of darkness.

'I've fucked up,' Khan understood as he crossed the entrance and let the door interrupt those stares.

"He is annoying," Monica cursed as soon as the flat granted some privacy. "I tried to leave so many times, but he always managed to change the topic."

Khan slowly turned, and the sight of the vast flat distracted him from the raging Monica. The entrance led to a big living room connected to three more areas. Luke's buildings on Milia 222 were luxurious and comfortable, but the Harbor seemed to surpass them in that field.

"Don't worry about him," Monica eventually reassured. "Lucian is a bit pushy, but he knows his place. He won't try anything strange."

Monica was heading deeper into the living room, but the lack of answers from Khan made her turn toward him. His lost gaze confused her a bit, and she pouted when he focused on her.

"What?" Monica asked as she began playing with her curls. She couldn't help but feel weak when Khan showed his intensity.

Khan knew that he had made a mistake. He would have typically managed to hold back, but the sudden sight of another man touching Monica had been too much.

Of course, Khan also knew that he couldn't allow himself to explode like that. Still, those problems only existed in the outside world. He could be honest in the privacy of Monica's flat.

"I'll cut his arm off if he touches you again," Khan warned before leaning on the door and rubbing the corners of his eyes. He had expected things to be tough, but he might have underestimated how much he could withstand.

Monica blushed. She didn't enjoy seeing Khan struggle, but she liked to be at the center of his emotional conflict. It proved how much he cared about her.

"Are you jealous, perhaps?" Monica teased as she approached Khan.

"Jealousy is one thing," Khan explained as he lowered his hand to inspect Monica. "Having to watch others hitting on you without being able to stop them is worse."

"Khan," Monica called after reaching Khan and taking his left hand. "I can handle the likes of Lucian. You must trust me on this."

"I do trust you," Khan sighed while lowering his head to make their foreheads touch, "But I still want to cut their arms."

"Why is that?" Monica joked.

Khan reached for Monica's back and patted the spot where Lucian had touched her before pulling her close. Monica laughed and let go of his hand to wrap her arms around his neck.

Monica pulled Khan's face closer but tightened her grip on Khan's hair before their lips could touch. Her warm breath fell on Khan's mouth and drew him toward her, but she stopped him from delivering the kiss.

"Say it," Monica requested.

"Because you are mine," Khan stated, "And only I can touch you."

"Who is needy now?" Monica teased while finally allowing Khan to kiss her.

Monica's firm stance melted during the kiss. She liked when she could have some authority over Khan, but her feelings always grew honest once their intimate interactions began.

"I only want you to touch me," Monica cutely admitted once the kiss ended.

The admission added fuel to their passion and made another kiss follow. Khan also reached for the edge of Monica's uniform, which warned her about what was about to come.

"Khan," Monica muttered among the kisses. "We have just done-."

"I need to fill your head with me before the party," Khan explained.

"Scoundrel," Monica complained, but her emotions went in the opposite direction. She found herself tightening her hug and jumping to cling to Khan's waist. That action had become so normal to her that she even took off her shoes while Khan carried her inside the flat.

Chapter 433 Condoms

"You did it on purpose," Monica complained while looking at the hickey on her chest. The couple was still on the bed, but only Khan had started to dress up.

"My mouth simply happened to be there," Khan deflected as he tied his shoes.

"I wanted to wear a dress with nice cleavage," Monica pouted. "Now I can't."

"I'll put the next one further down," Khan promised.

"So, you did it on purpose!" Monica shouted as she leaned to her left to grab Khan's arm and pull him.

Khan laughed and let Monica pull him. His head ended on her shoulder, and his smirk broadened in front of her pissed expression. Still, her feelings told a very different story.

"It might help me remain calm knowing that you are carrying my mark," Khan explained, and Monica could only give up on her fake annoyance.

"You could have told me," Monica whispered as she lowered her head and reached for Khan's cheek. "I would have left something on you too."

"Next time," Khan teased before welcoming the arrival of Monica's lips.

"I really wanted to show you that new dress," Monica revealed once the kiss ended.

"You can wear it later," Khan suggested, "When we are alone."

"We both know where my clothes end when we are alone," Monica giggled.

"I wouldn't say no to a nice spectacle," Khan stated, and Monica knew that part of her had already accepted that suggestion.

"Scoundrel," Monica said through her happy smile. "Let's not stay too long at the party then."

"I hoped you'd say that," Khan admitted.

Monica chuckled before pushing Khan down to deliver another kiss. His hands instinctively reached for her naked waist, but she pushed on his chest to separate herself and give a warning. "We'll be late if you don't get dressed now."

"But your bed is so comfortable," Khan joked while crossing his arms in front of his eyes.

"You don't have to come," Monica pointed out as she began to play with her curls. "I can deal with all my suitors on my own."

"How many are we talking about?" Khan wondered.

"Well," Monica voiced. "That depends on how big the party is. Yet, I'll probably be the most sought woman in the room anyway."

Khan lowered his arms to glance at Monica, and she wore a complicated expression. She knew that Khan wasn't doing too well, but lying to him wasn't an option.

"Won't they have fiancées?" Khan questioned. "I thought wealthy kids got engaged at a young age."

"Some are," Monica confirmed. "Still, I remain a descendant from one of the wealthiest families, and you know how beautiful I am."

"I do know that," Khan whispered as he reached for Monica's belly button and traced his way up to the hickey on her chest. Monica grabbed his wrist but let him draw circles around that mark.

"I won't be able to keep up at this pace," Monica gasped once Khan placed his palm on her chest.

"Your ship begs to disagree," Khan joked while moving his hand to Monica's side to pull her down.

"Khan," Monica called when she landed on Khan's shoulder. "We'll get caught if we don't slow down."

"Would it be so bad?" Khan asked, even if he knew the answer.

"My mother would really kill you," Monica scolded, and her tone sweetened when Khan immersed a hand in her hair to pull her closer. "Even if your achievements forced her to spare you, she would still send me away and do anything in her power to bury the story."

"Bury the story?" Khan repeated. "I know my background sucks, but that sounds extreme."

"I'm," Monica hesitated, and some shyness engulfed her when she pointed her puppy eyes at Khan. "Due to a certain scoundrel, I'm not pure anymore. Covering this up might improve my opportunities."

Khan understood Monica's point. He had actually already thought about the topic near the beginning of his relationship. He knew how important that step had been for Monica, and her decision only added fuel to his feelings.

"Are you too shy to say virgin?" Khan teased since the matter had no solution, and a grunt left his mouth when Monica bit his shoulder.

"Idiot!" Monica shouted as she straightened her back and pulled Khan up to push him away. "Get dressed already instead of teasing me!"

Khan laughed and let Monica push him out of bed. The upper part of his uniform was on the floor, so he bent forward to pick it up. Still, some seriousness fell on him when he started to wear it.

"Hey, Monica," Khan called as he approached his luggage in the corner of the room.

"I'm not listening to you anymore," Monica complained.

"If something really happens," Khan continued while showing his back to Monica, "I'll take the blame for everything. With my background, it should be easy to convince others that I tricked you."

Khan didn't speak those words lightly. He had thought about the topic during the trip, and his selflessness had pushed him in that direction. That relationship could ruin Monica, and he planned on protecting her if something happened.

"What are you saying now?" Monica asked in confusion.

"I'll even deny having ever touched you," Khan added as he lifted his luggage and put it behind his back.

Monica snapped. She didn't even bother to take a blanket with her as she left the bed and charged at Khan. Her hand reached for his shoulder, and his resolute face unfolded in her vision when she turned him.

Khan was beyond serious, and Monica could read that in his expression. However, his resolve only intensified her anger and fueled a loud slap.

"Monica, think about it," Khan stated, ignoring the second slap on his cheek. "At worst, they'll send me to a battlefield and try to kill me there."

Monica didn't want to hear those words. She threw another slap, but Khan blocked it by grabbing her wrist. She was ready to attack again with her free hand, but the following statements turned her anger into sadness.

"I'm terrific on battlefields," Khan stated. "I'll probably survive there and come back with more war merits. This is our best option."

"My best option," Monica sniffed as tears filled her eyes. "I'd sacrifice you to avoid problems."

"Your problems can't be fixed by fighting," Khan explained. "A stain on your reputation would have lasting consequences."

"I don't want to hear it," Monica sobbed.

"I know," Khan whispered while reaching for Monica's face and wiping her tears. "What we have is great, but we must be smart about it, which means preparing for the worst."

Monica's face fell on Khan's chest, and her tears left wet patches on his uniform. The scene was sad, but Khan knew it was necessary. That talk had to happen sooner or later, and the arrival in the Harbor was the best time.

"Khan, how much do you know about politics?" Monica asked while her face remained on Khan's chest. Her sadness transformed into resolve, but her question didn't give Khan the time to think about that change.

"What are you talking about?" Khan wondered before giving an honest answer. "I still have a lot to learn."

"Instead, I had multiple teachers educating me in all its aspects," Monica revealed.

"I know," Khan frowned. "We talked about this already."

"So, you know how much damage I can cause if I start acting crazy," Monica stated.

"Monica?" Khan called, and Monica lifted her head to show her angry expression. She wasn't faking it now. She was serious about her words.

"If you sacrifice yourself," Monica announced while pointing her forefinger at the center of Khan's chest, "I will create such a fuss that even the noble families won't be able to cover it up. I will bring so much shame on myself that the Global Army will forget your name."

"Monica, be reasonable," Khan tried to calm Monica down, but the effort was hopeless.

"Reasonable?" Monica repeated. "You know my temper. I'll go so crazy that Jenna will become a sweet memory."

"And who is going to benefit from that?" Khan argued.

"I don't care as long as you drop your idea," Monica declared.

"This is serious," Khan rebuked. "You have seen how I reacted before. We might get caught, and this is the best plan to handle the crisis."

"Then, we won't get caught," Monica claimed.

"You don't know that," Khan responded.

"We won't!" Monica shouted. "Mark me all over. Do anything you need. I don't care, but we won't get caught."

Monica sounded completely unreasonable, but that left Khan with no valuable arguments. Nothing he said would get through her temper.

"You are a piece of work," Khan commented.

"Yes, and I'm your problem to handle," Monica scoffed as she crossed her arms. "Just like you are mine."

Khan and Monica entered a battle of glares, but he quickly accepted defeat. The sigh that left his mouth made Monica smile proudly, and she giggled when he pulled her into a kiss.

The couple didn't need words to know what was coming. Monica soon left Khan's lips to descend through his neck, and he dropped the luggage to reach for his back pocket. However, a frown made its way onto his face when he found nothing.

Khan scoured his other pockets and even threw away his phone to give himself more room, but the search didn't lead anywhere. Monica also noticed something was wrong, so she stopped unbuttoning Khan's uniform to shoot a confused glance at him.

"I can't find condoms," Khan revealed.

"You had the last ones," Monica gasped.

"I thought you took some during the trip," Khan voiced.

"We used those," Monica exclaimed. "That's why I told you to empty the ship before the landing."

"I did," Khan claimed. "There was only one left."

Khan and Monica couldn't believe what was happening, but they knew neither was joking, and a sad realization soon fell upon them.

"We are fucked," Monica announced.

Khan tried to devise solutions, but every thought led to a dead end. The Solodrey family didn't own the ship, so the couple had felt safe emptying its stash, but the Harbor didn't offer that freedom.

The Harbor obviously had medical bays and other shops that could sell condoms, but Monica was too famous to purchase them by herself. As for Khan, he didn't have friends there, so anyone would find a connection if he tried to buy them.

"Okay, let's calm down," Monica stated. "I'm sure there is something we can do."

"You are getting all worked up," Khan teased. "Did you grow to like sex so much?"

"Shut up!" Monica snapped. "Don't tease me even now!"

Monica wanted to add something, but Khan took her into his arms before she could get any angrier. The situation was serious, but he didn't want her to worry about it, especially after her recent speech.

"I'll find a solution," Khan promised. "Leave it to me."

"You better!" Monica muttered while hugging Khan's back. "Slowing down doesn't mean never!"

"I know, I know," Khan chuckled. "Besides, I never agreed to the slowing down in the first place."

"Scoundrel," Monica pouted. "You'll never stop teasing me about this, will you?"

"I'll remind you whenever we are alone," Khan laughed. "Though, it does make me a bit proud."

"Get dressed already," Monica complained while slightly pushing Khan away and tapping a finger on her lips. "I guess we won't be late to the party."

Khan left a goodbye kiss on Monica's lips before retrieving his stuff. His sheath, phone, and luggage soon returned to him, and he exchanged one last smile with Monica before leaving her flat.

'Condoms, condoms,' Khan cursed as he turned to his left to approach the first door that appeared in his view.

Monica had already booked a flat for Khan. The prices in the seventh district were reasonable, but saving money at the expense of a wealthy family didn't sound bad. Moreover, the purchase reinforced the idea that Khan would owe something to the Solodrey family, which was perfect due to Monica's mother.

Khan's flat was identical to Monica's. It had the same four rooms and open spaces, which felt a bit too big considering the size of Khan's luggage. He only had two tracksuits and a pair of elegant clothes, and no number of military uniforms could fill his new wardrobes.

Of course, Khan didn't care about any of that. He barely even inspected his flat as he threw his uniform into the laundry area and entered the shower. His mind was full of different thoughts, none involving his comfort.

'I need this party,' Khan realized as a transparent liquid fell on his head and washed away Monica's scent.

Buying condoms when it was only Khan and Monica was impossible, but that would change as long as one of them made a trustworthy friend. Monica's acquaintances weren't an option, so it was up to Khan to find someone for the task.

The party probably wouldn't provide what Khan needed, but he needed to seize the opportunity. Getting to know Lucian's friends would also give him a better perspective on the Harbor's social array, which he needed for multiple reasons.

As thoughts continued to flow, Khan found himself admitting that he felt better. The fight with Monica had ended with a terrible realization, but its contents had proven how they shared some crazy aspects.

Khan didn't want to see Monica go crazy, but her firm stance on the topic was reassuring, heartwarming even. Her emotions had also felt genuine during her speech, so Khan knew that she had spoken the truth.

Holding back was troublesome, but Khan could find new strength if he added someone he cared about to the equation. The fear of getting expelled or exposing himself wasn't always enough in his new state, but preventing Monica from suffering similar consequences could do the trick.

'She is growing on me,' Khan thought as he wore his elegant clothes and ruffled his hair.

Khan's relationship was young, barely a few months old, but that hardly mattered to him. He didn't experience emotions like humans, especially with his girlfriends. He was extreme, and his behavior had probably affected Monica or ignited her true colors.

Once the tight shirt was on, Khan glanced at the sheath resting on the bed. He would rarely go anywhere without his knife, but it was safer to leave it there. He trusted the new strength coming from Monica's crazy sides, but it might help stop the bad thoughts if his weapon was elsewhere.

Eventually, Khan opted to leave the flat without his knife, and the vast hall welcomed him. Its emptiness didn't surprise him, and he didn't even bother to check his phone. He knew Monica would take her time, so he waited.

Many minutes had to pass before the door of Monica's accommodation opened to reveal her enchanting figure. She wasn't wearing anything fancy, but her turtleneck sweater enhanced her flat belly, and she had the plaid skirt that Khan had chosen on Neo Station.

"I thought we had to be careful," Khan commented.

"My style has the priority," Monica scoffed, "And I wanted you to see it on me."

Monica performed one of her elegant bows that involved slightly lifting the corners of her skirt, and Khan didn't even pretend to remain calm. His gaze stayed glued to the scene, and Monica showed her shy smile under his watchful eyes.

"You better hurry up with those condoms," Monica whispered as she hurried toward one of the elevators.

Khan shook his head, but his mood only improved while he followed after Monica. They didn't dare to do anything outside their flats, but their happy expressions could send clear messages to anyone watching.

"The cab should be already here," Monica announced once the couple entered the elevator. "Also, you should have bought something else. You can't survive the social life here with a shirt and a pullover."

"The uniforms are mandatory in the embassy," Khan complained. "Why would I need more elegant clothes?"

"I will have to attend many of these parties," Monica pointed out. "I believe you'll follow me to all of them, so you'll need more clothes."

"Shouldn't we focus on studying?" Khan cursed.

"Says the guy who barely sleeps to train more," Monica pouted.

"Are you sure I can't wear the uniform at these parties?" Khan wondered.

"Khan," Monica called in a scolding tone.

"Alright, I'll buy new clothes," Khan sighed. "We can use those trips to be together."

"I'll fill your wardrobe in no time," Monica giggled.

"You just want to see me wearing different stuff," Khan teased.

"Shirts do suit you," Monica whispered, and the two exchanged a meaningful gaze that the opening of the elevator forced to an end.

The doorman was still behind his desk, and Khan nodded at him before proceeding forward and engaging in casual jokes with Monica. Still, the man ended up calling him before he could cross half of the hall.

"Lieutenant Khan, a word?" The middle-aged man called.

The event surprised Khan, but the previous interaction with the doorman made him nod at Monica and approach the desk. Yet, the middle-aged man didn't speak even when Khan reached him. He remained silent while gesturing at Khan to come on the other side.

Khan complied and walked around the desk only to see one of the interactive menus depicting his exit from Monica's flat. The recording didn't have anything incriminating, but his idiotic smile could tell many things.

"Only the elevators and the flats don't have cameras in this district," The doorman explained, "And I can't refuse to hand over recordings if requested."

The recording wasn't an issue, but Khan couldn't explain why the doorman would mention it. Still, the latter promptly explained his reasons.

"Soldiers must look out for each other," The doorman stated, and his feelings confirmed his good intentions. He was only a second-level warrior, so Khan could read him easily.

The gentle purpose of that unexpected warning surprised Khan, but he wasn't the type to refuse it. He couldn't offer anything to the doorman, but he could show him some respect.

"What's your name?" Khan asked.

"Perry, sir," The doorman responded.

"Perry, you can drop the sir when we are alone," Khan declared, "And avoid the Lieutenant since we are at it."

"I'll ignore the second part, Lieutenant Khan," Perry laughed, and Khan smiled back before leaving the desk to return to Monica.

"What did he want?" Monica whispered once the building's exit grew close.

"We can't sleep together," Khan replied while lowering his head to keep his lips hidden from possible cameras. "I'll explain more in the cab."

The cab was already outside the building, and Khan and Monica didn't hesitate to enter. The passengers' seats offered some privacy, so Khan explained himself, and a long conversation followed. The two tried to find solutions to the issue, but only a deeper knowledge of the Harbor could provide them.

The trip turned out to be quite long. Lucian's accommodation was near the embassy, which stood toward the center of the Harbor, and the cab needed almost an hour to reach it.

Once Khan and Monica got off the cab, they found themselves in a small district filled with vast but short buildings. Those structures had long, dark windows that seemed to act as walls for the flats in their insides, and the floors appeared taller from the outside.

The illumination from the white pillars was also dimmer in that district. That different glow created a cozier environment and probably highlighted some of the areas Khan had spotted on the interactive map.

Monica led the way since she was the only one with Lucian's directions. She entered one of the buildings nearby and confirmed her identity on a scanner on an empty desk before gaining access to an automatic elevator. Khan went with her, and the machine soon brought them to the last floor.

The different quality and luxury of the district became clear as soon as the elevator opened. The larger buildings didn't involve a higher number of flats. According to what Khan saw, the place had far fewer accommodations, but their size was incredible.

The elevator had opened at the center of a massive flat that seemed to encompass the entire floor. Some walls were almost transparent and allowed Khan to gaze at the windows in the distance, while others hid private areas that probably involved pools and similar services.

The sight couldn't shock Khan since he had seen something similar during his meeting with Raymond. Still, the many different strands of mana that reached his senses gave him an idea of the number of people on the scene, which was far from small.

As for Monica, she was already aware of the flat's size, and she didn't hesitate to leave the elevator to step into the big main hall. She planned to deal with her social obligations as soon as possible, but her status worked against her.

"Monica Solodrey!" A woman from behind a half-transparent wall exclaimed before approaching a passage that gave her a clear sight of Monica. "I almost thought Lucian lied to me about your arrival."

"Anita, it's so good to see you," Monica responded as her elegant façade activated.

Anita approached Monica and delivered a kiss on both of her cheeks before taking her hands. Surprise mixed with her happiness when she inspected Monica's figure, and praises soon left her mouth.

"You look fantastic," Anita gasped. "How did you lose so much weight? I need to know your secret."

"You know my mother," Monica laughed while using the entirety of her self-restraint to avoid glancing at Khan. "She always knows how to make me look good."

"I would be jealous if I didn't know how your mother is," Anita joked before joining Monica in her laugh.

"Oh, Anita," Monica voiced while turning toward Khan. "He is-."

"Lieutenant Khan, of course," Anita interrupted while leaving Monica and approaching Khan to stretch her arm toward him. "I was confused about your popularity with women. Not anymore."

"Pleasure to meet you," Khan politely smiled while shaking Anita's hand.

"You might be one of the few who actually deserves to be here," Anita stated. "Come, I have many friends who can't wait to meet you."

"Friends?" Monica promptly repeated.

"Yes," Anita confirmed. "Gwen, Zoe, and Vida are here. Even Selma the slut is around, but she has probably already found a hidden corner and a man if you know what I mean."

"Anita, don't tell me that you are drunk already?" Monica joked.

"How do you expect me to survive these events otherwise?" Anita scoffed while taking Monica's hand. "Come now. Drop the hottie to the vixens so you can help me deal with those annoying suitors."

The announcement would normally push Khan to join the conversation and find a way to remain with Monica, but a familiar presence suddenly touched his senses. That mana was somewhat different from his memories, but his feelings reacted before his mind could make a connection.

"Wait, Anita," Monica continued to laugh. "Lieutenant Khan is my guest. I can't just-."

Monica interrupted her line after noticing how Khan had lost interest in the conversation. Something else had attracted his attention, and he walked toward it, uncaring of the fact that he was in an unknown environment.

Khan entered the room where Anita had come from before glancing at a metal wall to his left. Only a half-closed door separated the two vast spaces, and a specific voice stood out among the murmurs generated by the many groups around him.

Many voices flew at Khan, and people even tried to reach him, but nothing could make him stop. He advanced toward the half-closed door to cross it, and a sense of peace immediately spread inside him.

"So, the Niqols delivered this amazing booze," A young man almost shouted from the bottom of the room while a group mainly made of women attentively listened to him, "And the entire dorm got wasted in a matter of hours. It was hilarious."

The women laughed due to the man's loud tones and gestures, and one of them managed to ask a question before her companions. "Didn't you have a superior there?"

"Well," The man grinned, but his mouth hung open when he noticed Khan. Still, his surprise only lasted for a second, and his smile widened again as his tale resumed. "A friend took care of that. Isn't that right, Lieutenant Khan?"

"Someone needed saving more than others," Khan stated. "Do you remember who he was, Mister Ildoo?"

George exploded into a laugh and reached for a bottle on a table behind him before throwing it toward Khan. The sudden gesture made the women around him gasp, but Khan easily grabbed the booze mid-air and even opened it to take a sip.

The room went silent, or, at least, Khan couldn't hear anything. Only George existed in his senses as pure happiness invaded his mind. His journey in the Harbor had looked grim, but those problems instantly vanished. He couldn't imagine himself struggling to face them if George was with him.

Chapter 434 Discussion

The people in the room understood that something meaningful was happening. Khan and George kept staring and grinning at each other without adding anything. Khan didn't break the look even when he took a sip from the bottle.

Of course, the people in the room weren't entirely in the dark. George was a relatively famous figure, and many had heard about Khan. They even knew that the two had been together in a few crises, so making the connection wasn't too hard.

As for Khan and George, the two ignored the murmurs around them to continue inspecting each other's expressions. They seemed able to speak without uttering any word, but the desire to talk eventually took over.

"Are you planning on handing over that bottle?" George sneered.

"I thought you made enough money to buy your own," Khan played along.

"Sharing it with you is priceless," George stated.

"You got all sentimental in these years," Khan teased.

"And you are wearing a shirt," George pointed out.

The two exploded into a laugh that Khan interrupted by closing the bottle and throwing it back at George. George grabbed it mid-air and placed it on the table behind him before reaching for two empty glasses.

"Ladies, make room for the hero of Istrone and a bunch of other places," George announced as he poured the booze into the two glasses.

Khan shook his head as he advanced toward the table, but George's friends didn't comply. The women around him focused on Khan and inspected him from head to toe before wearing charming expressions.

A surge of jealousy flared behind Khan, but that wasn't the time to address it. Besides, George had his back in that situation.

"Come on," George laughed when he peeked past his shoulder and noticed that his companions were still in the way. "Give us a few minutes. We'll get back to you in no time."

Being called out forced the women to step aside. Some felt embarrassed, while others complied to save face. Nevertheless, Khan ignored their motivations and stepped forward to reach George's right side.

The two men faced the table at that point. The party was behind their backs, and the room grew louder, but they seemed able to create their personal space. George even doubled down on that by sliding one of the glasses toward Khan.

Khan picked up the glass and inspected the yellowish liquid before lifting it to his left. George had done the same by then, and the two performed a toast according to the Niqols' traditions.

The event made both men fall into a daze but grins soon followed, and the same went for the emptying of their drinks. Khan and George placed the glasses on the table almost at the same time, and the latter proceeded to refill them.

"[You have blue hair]," George commented in a language that triggered many of Khan's memories.

"[Are you really pulling the Niqols' language on me]?" Khan scoffed. "[I thought you would have forgotten it by now]."

"[I didn't get any better at it]," George stated, "[Differently from you. Do you still practice it]?"

"[I'm just good]," Khan sighed.

"[And humble]," George joked. "[At least we can talk freely]."

"[That's one perk]," Khan vaguely replied as he took the full glass and resumed drinking with George.

Khan and George exchanged another look before fixing their eyes on the window past the table. The district expanded in their view, but neither saw the beauty depicted in the scenery.

"[Why are you here]?" Khan eventually asked.

"[I've grown to love the study of interplanetary politics]," George lied.

George had become a second-level warrior in that period, but Khan could read his emotions easily. Moreover, he knew George well enough to understand the true reasons behind his arrival, and some gratitude inevitably spread inside him.

"[You are the best]," Khan praised.

"[I totally am]," George claimed, "[And the Harbor is no battlefield. I'm not putting myself in danger or anything]."

"[You do realize that you'll have to study, don't you]?" Khan teased.

"[I'll focus on studying a different subject]," George laughed while nodding in the direction of the women behind him. "[I also have the perfect wingman. I only hope he can tone his charm down]."

"[I'm a faithful man]," Khan stated.

"[Maybe that's your trick]," George guessed. "[I think it wouldn't suit me]."

"[You don't seem to have problems getting laid]," Khan chuckled.

"[I bet that will change now that my wingman is here]," George declared. "[I speak for experience]."

"[I have a girlfriend]," Khan pointed out.

"[They don't know that]," George responded. "[They probably wouldn't care either. Unless they knew her name]."

"[I have to wait for a few promotions before that]," Khan shook his head while placing his empty glass on the table. "[Maybe more than a few]."

George also placed his glass on the table and seized the bottle to refill the drinks. However, he shot a glance at Khan to inspect him properly. His previous words had hinted at something, and George wanted to be sure to have understood their meaning.

"[You look better]," George exclaimed.

"[Are we still talking about my hair]?" Khan joked.

"[Do you want to talk about it]?" George wondered.

"[As if you didn't read Milia 222's reports]," Khan scoffed.

"[You have booze and me now]," George announced. "[Even you loosen up with this combination]."

"[I-]," Khan began to sneer before taking the offer seriously. "[I'll probably mention something when I'm drunker]."

George nodded in satisfaction. He didn't know a lot, but reports had spread from Milia 222. Moreover, he could see that Khan's hair had the same color as his scar, and he even recalled what he had summoned in Nitis' underground lake.

"[I wasn't talking about your hair]," George eventually specified. "[I'd say that you looked happy if I didn't know you]."

"[Is that so]?" Khan sighed.

"[I couldn't completely believe you during the call]," George continued, "[But now that I see you with my own eyes... I'm happy for you, man]."

"[What can I say]?" Khan wondered. "[Maybe enough time had passed, or maybe I changed]."

"[You changed, alright]," George agreed. "[You look freer]."

"[When did I even stick to rules]?" Khan pretended not to understand what George was saying to keep the drinks flowing.

"[Count the women you had, and you'll know how many rules you've broken]," George snorted.

"[Breaking this one is going to get me killed]," Khan cursed, "[If she doesn't kill me first]."

"[Just how you like them]," George burst into a laugh.

"[Dammit]," Khan sighed.

"[Is she worth it]?" George wondered.

"[I think so]," Khan admitted before his happy face turned into a shameless smirk, "[You'll like her. She slaps like Havaa]."

"[I'll like her as long as she makes you happy]," George declared, "[And does the things you like in bed]."

"[About that]," Khan voiced. "[I need you to get me condoms. I ran out as soon as I got here]."

"[Did you already pop her cherry]?" George gasped. "[Khan, you had to stick to teaching but on a different subject]."

"[She will snap if you mention that]," Khan revealed, "[But I can't trust anyone else here]."

"[Why do you think I've come]?" George proudly announced.

"[Lascivious women looking for someone with actual combat experience]?" Khan wondered.

"[I swear you come right after them]," George stated, and the conversation took a break since both men were too busy laughing.

"[So, were you serious about those condoms]?" George eventually questioned.

"[There are too many eyes on us]," Khan explained. "[I don't even know if I can find a place where to be alone together without arousing suspicion]."

"[You can always use my flat]," George suggested.

"[Where is it]?" Khan asked.

"[This district]," George revealed. "[It's not as big as this one, but it can do the job]."

"[Am I really going to rely on you for this]?" Khan cursed.

"[I'll become the protector of youthful passions]," George exclaimed.

"[You can barely handle yours]," Khan joked.

"[I might be a lost cause]," George declared, "[But I'm not the one going full marriage as soon as I hook up with a girl]."

"[What marriage]?" Khan scoffed. "[For now, I'll stick to George's cult: Booze, relax, and a woman]."

"[Relax and you have never gotten along]," George chuckled before noticing that something was off. "[Hey, where did our bottle go]?"

"[We drank it]," Khan chuckled at the sight of the empty bottle. Even the glasses were long since gone.

"[A sad fate]," George sighed. "[I guess it's time to turn]."

"[Go easy on the heroic tales]," Khan warned. "[Even I can't sell myself short if you start telling the truth]."

"[Oh, how I've missed this]!" George exclaimed as he finally turned and continued with his loud tone. "Ladies! Sorry for the wait!"

"Do you know where we can find something else to drink?" Khan asked when he joined George. "I'm still new to these kinds of parties."

"He is," George exclaimed while patting Khan's shoulder. "He is a natural with interspecies politics, but actual parties aren't his forte. I hope you teach him well."

"Interspecies politics?" One of the women in George's group exclaimed. "That's so exotic."

"George, you were telling us about Nitis," A second woman announced. "Was Lieutenant Khan involved in the meetings with the Niqols?"

"Involved?" George scoffed. "He aced them, isn't that right?"

"These women probably read my profile already," Khan cursed in his mind while showing his fake smile. "George likes to praise me. Still, yeah, we were part of a special envoy on Nitis."

"We lived among them for months," George continued, "And Khan's achievements don't end there. He also served on Ecoruta, won Onia's tournament, and played an important role on Milia 222, the lawless zone ruled by six different species."

"They definitely know about Onia," Khan cursed again while retaining his polite behavior. "George, they don't want to hear about the gory details."

"On the contrary," A third woman stated while placing a hand on Khan's forearm. "It's so rare for us to meet experienced soldiers. How could we miss the chance to hear their stories?"

"Don't they have mansions full of them?" Khan cursed a third time before opting to play along.
"Well, get us a drink, and the stories will flow."

"George has the bad habit of disappearing whenever we turn," The fourth woman revealed while focusing on Khan. "Can you promise us that you won't run away?"

Khan found four pairs of captivating eyes fixed on him. The four women couldn't match Monica's charm or Jenna's astonishing beauty, but they were by no means ugly, and they knew how to handle men.

Keeping those women company was an easy task for Khan, especially with George at his side. Khan had no problems playing along since his friend made that interaction fun. However, the flare of jealousy past the group only intensified during the chat, and it soon reached a critical point.

"There won't be any need for that," Monica shouted from behind the group, making everyone turn. "Lieutenant Khan is my guest here. It would be shameful of me not to cover for him until he gets used to this environment."

Monica strode forward while lifting the drink in her grasp, and the four women instinctively stepped aside, allowing her to reach Khan. A meaningful glare unfolded when Monica handed over her glass, and Khan could only contain his smirk during the interaction.

"Monica, as your guest, how could I leave you empty-handed?" Khan asked since Monica didn't have anything else with her. Clearly, she had sacrificed her drink to get the four women away from him.

"Oh, Khan," Monica giggled. "You really are new to these events."

Monica's eyes darted through the room and alerted all the curious people peeking at the scene. The fact that Khan and Monica used their first names openly instantly became the topic of many chatters, but her gesture pushed some of the men to reach for any drink in their range.

In a matter of seconds, Monica, Anita, the four women, and George obtained drinks. Those interested in the scene even brought multiple bottles and many clean glasses, turning Khan into the center of the room.

'She does have many suitors,' Khan sighed in his mind. The scene had proven how important and sought Monica was. Even the women in the room didn't dare to contradict her openly.

"See?" Monica exclaimed while lifting her drink through her elegant manners. "You don't have to worry about me. Actually, do it. You are cute when you get protective."

"Miss Solodrey, with all due respect," George announced, "History tells us that Khan is more than cute."

"I wouldn't speak so freely if I were you," Anita snorted.

"Anita, don't take it the wrong way," George began to say.

"It's too late," Anita pressed on. "I've already taken it the wrong way."

"[What did you do to her]?" Khan whispered in the Niqols' language.

"[We had a date]," George explained. "[I forgot to call her back]."

"Hey, you two," One of the women called. "No more alien languages."

"We only say good things about all of you," George lied. No one believed him, but Monica seized the chance to tease Khan.

"Khan, you know I like my praises whispered to my ear," Monica joked.

"Your friends might misunderstand," Khan politely addressed the issue.

"Maybe I want you to understand my intentions," Monica used vague words to play along.

Khan and Monica couldn't help but fall into a daze. Monica was experiencing the same symptoms that had afflicted Khan just a few hours ago. Her jealousy had taken over, and Khan felt conflicted about the event.

Monica's jealousy was reassuring, and it even warmed Khan's heart. However, that bold approach left him with no good answers. Dismissing her openly would cause problems, but he couldn't let their open teasing last for too long either.

Luckily for Khan, George also had sharp senses, and Monica's stance told him enough to understand what he had to do.

"Since we all have a drink," George announced, "Why don't we toast according to the Niqols' tradition?"

"Ooh, what's that?" One of the women gasped in curiosity.

"It's pretty simple," George exclaimed, and his words mixed with the chatter and the surprised cries.

Khan missed a lot of George's explanation, and the same went for when the man started telling stories. Monica's presence was too distracting for Khan, and she never missed the chance to make things hard for him.

Of course, Monica had it even worse than Khan. She was the most sought woman in the room, but that made her almost untouchable. Instead, Khan had to deflect flirtatious offers left and right, and she couldn't do much about them.

George didn't help in the matter. He was probably happier than Khan about that reunion, so he didn't hold back with his stories. He didn't say much about Khan's girlfriends, but the tales of his heroic deeds had many details that made the audience's eyes shine in amazement and respect.

Khan was basically in the middle of that silent conflict. He had to remain polite to work on his social array, deflect Monica's blatant teases, and laugh with George whenever his tales awakened funny memories.

That stalemate continued for entire minutes, and the problems only increased as more people mustered the courage to voice questions. Some even left the other areas of the flat to join that cheerful event, and the seemingly endless amount of booze added more fuel to the matter.

"There you are!" Eventually, a voice resounded above the loud chatters, and the crowd in the room created a passage for that newcomer.

"Lucian!" Anita exclaimed when Lucian did his best to cross the crowd without losing his composure.

The number of Khan's mental curses had long since reached two figures by then, and seeing Lucian added another to the pile. The man reeked of jealousy, even if his face expressed pure friendliness, and his popularity immediately made him join the event.

"I couldn't find you anywhere," Lucian revealed once he joined the inner circle of Khan's group. "So, what did I miss?"

"Mister Ildoo was trying to figure out how tall the Stal were," One of the men nearby summarized.

"Please, Mister Ildoo is my father," George waved his hand to dismiss that polite title. "George is more than enough."

"The Stal?" Lucian repeated in surprise. "I didn't know you served on Ecoruta."

"I didn't," George confirmed before nodding in Khan's direction, "But he fought there before heading for Onia's tournaments. Those aliens must be quite a sight."

"Sight, sure," Khan commented, "But their physical strength is the real problem. One good punch can kill you."

"Imagine if they were as smart as their counterparts," A man in the audience voiced.

"They have Guko's technology," Khan added. "They might not know how to use it very well, but it still increases their danger level."

"It must have been scary to fight them," A woman stated while trying to reach for Khan's arm, but Monica suddenly pulled the edge of his sleeve to force his attention on her.

"I must add this story to one of the topics of our date," Monica suggested.

"I thought it was a work-related meeting," Khan deflected.

"I like to call it a date since it's you," Monica teased while covering her mouth.

A series of surprised faces appeared among the audience. That wasn't Monica's first time making similar comments, but they grew bolder as drinks went by. Some suspected that she had gotten drunk, but no one called her out.

"I reckon that most fights on Ecoruta happen from the safety of the trenches," Lucian stated. "How did you get such a good look at the Stal?"

"Our superiors made us attack enemy trenches at times," Khan explained, "And my team also fell prey to the enemy. Escaping that underground prison granted me more than enough looks."

"Right, I recall that report," Lucian exclaimed. "Though, humans are superior to the Stal in every other field. A smart approach will always lead to victory."

"I don't know," Khan argued. "The battlefield has different environments, and some benefit the Stal."

"Going into a territory that benefits your enemies is a tactical mistake on its own," Lucian uttered.

"I simply followed orders," Khan explained shortly. "Anyway, you don't want to end up in a trench with a Stal."

"Long-range attacks are your friends," Lucian pointed out. "You should never get in the Stal's range."

"Sometimes you don't have that option," Khan declared. "If your superior tells you to invade the enemy trench, you do it."

"There are still ways to exploit their flaws," Lucian remained firm on his argument.

"Did you read that somewhere?" George wondered, doing his best to pretend that he wasn't mad.

"You know, Khan has actually been there. His words are as close to the truth as possible."

"He might have simply forgotten in the heat of the battle," Lucian guessed.

"I didn't," Khan stated. "I had to face many Stal in melee combat, and they were powerful."

The tones were getting heated, and Khan was in no condition to back down, especially since Lucian had been the reason behind his previous jealousy. George was also on his side, so a polite discussion took form.

"I don't want to insult anyone," Lucian warned. "I'm simply pointing out a tactical mistake."

"You can't keep your distance once inside the trench," Khan pressed on. "It's too small, and the Stal are too big."

"Let's take a step back," Lucian uttered. "You are correct. I don't know the size of the trenches. I was merely arguing about the advantages of tactics over brute strength. In theory, no human should ever lose to a Stal."

Lucian was technically correct. Humans had spells that could burn Stal to a crisp from far away. Yet, Khan knew that the situation was more complicated than that. Adding a rifle to the equation or a specific terrain could change the fate of that theoretical battle.

Khan's unconvinced stance added fuel to George's irritation. The booze was starting to show its effects, and George couldn't accept that a random wealthy descendant dared to open his mouth on topics that had claimed Khan's sweat and blood.

"Let me tell you," George announced. "Things get messy quickly in a war. Only flexible tactics can survive there."

No one dared to argue with George. After all, he had seen Istrone's rebellion, and the various families still suffered due to that tragedy.

"True," Lucian agreed. "It takes the right tool to ensure the survival of the tactic."

"Could you do it?" George wondered without hiding his scorn for the word "tool"

"Mister Ildoo, George," Lucian exclaimed, "We all come from incredible families here. We had the best educators and masters growing up. It wouldn't be wrong to say that we were born for that."

"Shall we test that?" George questioned. "My style is well-recorded, and the same goes for the best strategy to defeat it. I can pull out the file right now if needed. According to what you just said, you could enforce it in a real battle, couldn't you?"

Chapter 435 Leash

The open challenge made the room fall silent. Murmurs even spread past it since many were peeking from the entrance. Soon, the entire flat learnt about the conversation, but Lucian still held back from answering.

Most groups also stood still to wait for a development, but Khan wasn't one of them. He shared George's irritation since Lucian's statements had partially insulted him, and the bold challenge made him let out a short laugh. His reaction didn't hint at anything specific, but he hid it anyway by bringing his drink to his mouth.

Of course, the audience saw Khan's laugh differently. He was George's friend, so his gesture seemed to disregard Lucian's point.

Khan had drunk a lot, but his senses were strangely clear. His mind was also perfectly stable, so he could keep track of the room's emotional state. He immediately understood what his laugh had caused, but it was too late to do anything about it.

At first, Khan regretted his reaction since causing drama wasn't ideal in his situation. However, his laugh had been genuine, and there was more than simple politeness at stake. Also, it was fun to have an almost-drunk George next to him.

"George," Lucian eventually felt forced to address the situation. "We are all tipsy, drunk even. Let's drop this before things get serious."

"Backing off already?" George scoffed.

"It's a simple matter of safety," Lucian argued. "Mana is dangerous. Incidents can happen."

Lucian was perfectly right, and many agreed with him. Yet, Khan already knew that George wasn't done.

"So," George announced, "A bit of booze would make any tactic unreliable, right? Imagine what would happen in the chaos of the battlefield."

George's answer hit the mark. The people in the room had chosen to drink, but that was only one variable. A proper war would have far more, which made Lucian's stance inaccurate.

The situation grew tense. Refusing the challenge was the smart move, but reputation went a long way, and the room didn't lack important figures. Lucian would appear as a coward, especially after his previous claims. There were too many eyes on him. He had to accept.

"Alright," Lucian exclaimed. "This district has a set of training halls. We can use them."

"Perfect!" George shouted while gulping down his drink.

"However," Lucian continued. "You need to sober up a bit. It wouldn't be fair otherwise."

"I think I'll keep drinking while you read my file," George stated in defiance.

"I don't need to read it," Lucian revealed. "Some of my relatives had suggested a sparring session with you but ultimately changed their minds. Still, I prepared just in case."

Khan didn't hide his surprise when he glanced at George. He knew that his friend had become a sought sparring partner among wealthy families, but that was the first proof of his fame. Until now, the rumors about George had come from women, and they weren't too good.

"Surprised?" George sneered after noticing Khan's glance.

"You actually did some work in these years," Khan commented.

"Did you expect so little from me?" George wondered.

"George, I expect the world from you," Khan declared.

George didn't expect such a straightforward answer, but a joke quickly left his mouth anyway.

"That's how you get your girls. Even my heart fluttered a bit."

"Shut up," Khan scoffed.

"He is so unfair at times," Monica whispered before realizing she had committed a mistake.

"Anyway, is this fight happening? I'm mildly curious now."

"George isn't at his best," Lucian pointed out. "The battlefield might have many variables, but we should avoid them now."

"A bit of booze won't change anything," George fought back.

"You aren't thinking clearly," Lucian rebuked. "You simply can't after all your drinks."

"The Niqols would disagree," George snickered while poking Khan's side.

"He can fight," Khan confirmed. "Booze won't get in the way."

The stalemate returned, but the attention fell on Lucian. Khan's statement didn't prove anything, but everyone understood that it was Lucian's time to make a move, and his choice seemed obvious.

"We can't bring everyone into the training hall," Lucian eventually declared. "The people in this room should be enough."

A series of excited murmurs exploded while Lucian picked up his phone. The battle was happening. The people in the room were in for a show.

"I've called enough cabs to bring us to the training hall," Lucian announced before storing his phone. "George, do you need a sword?"

"No, my fingers will be enough," George proudly exclaimed, and the confidence reeking out of him made a few women bite their lower lips.

Lucian had given up on trying to reason with George, so he nodded and began leaving the room. The audience opened a path for George and Khan, and the two didn't hesitate to tread it. Everyone else followed behind them afterward.

Envy and curiosity filled the flat, but the people heading toward the training hall paid them no heed. Someone exchanged chats with the groups remaining behind, but those interactions never lasted too long.

The elevator was too small to bring everyone down in a single trip, so the group split into many teams. Lucian, Khan, George, Monica, and Anita ended up in the lift together, but no one spoke. George smirked teasingly, but everyone pretended not to notice him.

Leaving the elevator didn't change the silence. The group waited on the sidewalk while the elevator brought more people down, and long cars eventually arrived. Lucian and Khan's team instinctively split up, and Monica did the same to avoid arousing suspicion.

"Ignorant kids," George snorted when he and Khan settled inside a car. "They have no idea how the real world works."

"They really don't," Khan sighed before showing his palm.

"What do you want me to do with that?" George asked while looking at Khan's hand.

"Take it out," Khan ordered. "I'm thirsty."

George smirked before pulling out a bottle from behind his back. He had sneaked it out while leaving the flat, and Khan had obviously noticed him.

"I wanted it to be a surprise," George claimed while putting the bottle in Khan's hand.

"You managed to find booze on the space station above Nitis," Khan reminded. "Stealing a bottle from a flat full of them is hardly a surprise."

"The power of a driven man," George laughed.

Khan shook his head before taking a sip from the bottle and handing it back to George. The latter didn't hesitate to drink, and that exchange continued for the entire trip.

"Hey, George," Khan called once the car stopped, "Let's avoid killing him."

"Don't worry about that," George reassured. "I've gotten better at holding back."

The two didn't need to say anything else. George and Khan left the car only to find Lucian already waiting for them. The other cabs soon arrived, and the entirety of the audience gathered on the sidewalk.

Lucian didn't hesitate to lead the way, and Khan took that chance to inspect the area. The car had brought him to a vast building that stretched for a few districts. The structure wasn't tall, and its black metal walls didn't reveal anything, but that style usually hinted at training halls.

A mere flick from Lucian's phone unlocked the vast entrance and allowed the group inside. A long corridor with numbered doors unfolded in everyone's vision, and Khan recognized that familiar style. Each passage probably led to a different training hall.

Lucian didn't bother to choose a specific hall. He reached for the closest one and unlocked it through his phone before leading everyone in. A big and empty hangar-like room unfolded at that point, and multiple interactive menus lit up on the floor and followed Lucian.

The group didn't need directions. Lucian and George headed for the hall's center while the others reached one of its walls. Khan showed no surprise when he found Monica next to him, and the two only exchanged a meaningful glance before focusing on the contestants.

"Do we need to set rules?" Lucian wondered while tinkering with the menus under his feet.

"What rules do we need?" George scoffed. "We will know once someone wins."

"Alright," Lucian agreed while completing the hall's settings. Khan wasn't too close, but he could see the many glowing labels. Lucian prevented the area from recording the battle and slightly increased the overall illumination.

"Is this really fine?" Monica couldn't help but whisper now that the battle was imminent, but the change in George's stance reassured her completely.

The audience experienced a similar surprise. Everyone had gotten a precise idea of George by then, but the arrival of the battle shattered those beliefs. George's happy and drunken expression vanished as a coldness filled his face. Even his stance grew firmer, adding heavy tension to the hall.

The sharp change left many stunned. George seemed a completely different person now, but the situation was different for Khan. That was George's true face. It actually felt nostalgic to see it again.

"Very well," Lucian announced while taking a step back to put some distance from George.

Khan couldn't help but nod in approval, and George also accepted that Lucian knew his stuff. As a swordsman, George had the advantage in close range, so staying away was the intelligent approach. However, that alone wouldn't ensure Lucian's victory.

George's right foot slowly slid forward, and Lucian took another step back. His immediate reaction spoke for his concentration, but George's offensive had yet to begin.

George brought his right hand to his chest and stretched two fingers before placing his other palm on them. Dark-silver light gathered on them and gave birth to a sword when he lifted his left arm. His ethereal weapon was long, thin, and stable.

The beauty of George's spell gave birth to many suppressed praises. Some even voiced their surprise. The booze didn't get in the way of George's concentration, which was incredible after everything he had drunk.

As for Khan, his attention went deeper. He had kept track of George's mana, and its flow had been smooth. George had improved greatly since their last meeting, and he wasn't even showing his full power.

On the other hand, Lucian had yet to muster his mana. He didn't prepare any spell or attack. He was simply waiting for George to come, which didn't make much sense.

Khan knew the best way to defeat George. The latter's spell required firm concentration, so destabilizing him would leave him weaponless. Still, Lucian's element was a mystery, and the same went for his fighting style.

"I'm coming," George warned while mana gathered inside his legs.

Lucian leaned a bit back to prepare for the assault, and George didn't make him wait long. George shot forward, closing the distance from Lucian in a few steps before thrusting his ethereal sword toward the man's left shoulder.

A sidestep to the right allowed Lucian to dodge the incoming sword, but George was faster than him. His fingers followed Lucian and threatened to leave a deep cut on his chest, but the latter promptly jumped backward.

George's offensive didn't end there. Lucian was retreating, but George was as fast as him, and a step forward put him back in the sword's range.

Lucian was at a disadvantage. He had yet to restore his balance, and the same went for George, but the sword didn't need a stable foothold. George had already lunged ahead, and Lucian would only fall if he tried to dodge again.

That outcome was predictable. Lucian had made a tactical mistake with his simple retreat. He should have launched something back to stop George's assault, but his passive response had left him open.

Nevertheless, Khan noticed how Lucian remained perfectly calm. The sword was rushing toward his chest, but he didn't flinch. His mana finally started to move in those seconds, and a high-pitched noise resounded in the hall when he clapped his hands.

The audience couldn't experience the full might of the high-pitched noise, but Khan saw it clearly. The amount of mana released during the clap was significant, and George had to bear its entire power.

The dark-silver blade shook while George closed his eyes and stomped his feet to retrieve his balance. The noise had messed up his senses, and Lucian didn't waste that opportunity.

Lucian stopped retreating and shot forward, raising his right palm and moving his mana toward it to prepare an attack. However, George's senses stabilized in those seconds, and the sword regained its stability while he waved it at the incoming threat.

Lucian had to interrupt his palm strike to jump on his left and dodge the incoming blade. He retreated just outside the sword's range to prepare another sound attack, but fear filled his face when George pointed his fingers at him.

The sword stretched as soon as Lucian completely stopped. He was at his weakest now, and George knew that, so he poured more mana into his spell to increase its range.

Lucian could only throw himself to his left, but even that wasn't enough to avoid the blade completely. The ethereal sword touched his cheek and dug a deep wound into it before returning into the air.

George swung his hand to follow Lucian, but the latter clapped his hands once his back hit the floor. The high-pitched noise resounded again, and the sword lost enough stability to shatter when Lucian punched it.

Lucian didn't bother to retreat. He straightened his back to throw a palm toward George's waist, but the latter was ready. George recovered in time to kick Lucian away and make his attack miss.

George jumped after Lucian while another ethereal blade grew from his stretched fingers. Yet, Lucian rolled on the floor and snapped back on his feet through a long leap. By the time George landed, Lucian had already put a few meters between them.

"You are annoying," George exclaimed while waving his sword through the air. "I give you that."

During those short exchanges, many gasps, suppressed cries, and comments resounded among the audience. The battle was exciting, but Khan didn't show any reaction. He remained perfectly still as his sensitivity gave birth to various thoughts.

'He isn't using his element,' Khan realized after the second sound attack.

An ordinary soldier would think that the high-pitched noises came from Lucian's element, but Khan knew the truth. The man was using a lot of mana in his attacks, but their effects were relatively weak. A proper spell would have deafened George by then.

'He is holding back,' Khan understood. 'Well, so is George.'

George used his free hand to scratch his ear, but his blade never wavered. He kept it pointed at Lucian while studying the distance between them. Somehow, he knew that the battle would end with his next offensive.

Lucian ignored the wound on his cheek and kept his hands ready. He didn't even try to hide his strategy. He would rely on the sound attack again, and George's expression grew colder at that sight.

George didn't have Khan's senses, but his sensitivity stood far above ordinary humans. He also noticed that Lucian wasn't using his element, and the obvious stance seemed to mock his prowess.

Some killing intent started to join George's presence. He wasn't losing his cool, but part of him wanted to get serious to teach Lucian a lesson. Yet, Khan wouldn't let him go too far.

"George!" Khan shouted to interrupt the intensifying killing intent. "This is a sparring match."

The shout surprised the audience since no one noticed the killing intent, but George understood what Khan meant. He didn't say anything, but his mindset slightly changed. The coldness retreated as some resolve took its place.

A tremor ran through Lucian when George shot toward him. The assault was no different from the previous, so Lucian deployed the same tactic. When the sword swung in his direction, he dodged and clapped his hands, and a louder high-pitched noise filled the hall.

George had to stop and close his eyes to get rid of the noise ringing in his ears, and Lucian seized the change to deliver a palm strike. Still, George seemed unable to recover at that time. He could only bend to his right to make the attack land on his left shoulder.

Lucian's palm strike wasn't too powerful, but creaking noises resounded from George's shoulder anyway. The attack would typically mark the end of the battle, but George suddenly opened his eyes and grabbed Lucian's wrist.

Surprise spread through the audience, but Khan knew exactly what was happening. George had faked his instability to catch Lucian unprepared. The battle could only go in one direction now.

Lucian tried to deliver a palm strike with his free hand, but George swept his legs before he could do anything. Lucian could only fall to the floor while George pulled him, and a dark-silver sword soon filled his vision.

Gasps resounded. George stood above Lucian, firmly holding his wrist while keeping the sword a few centimeters from his forehead. The weapon would pierce Lucian if he tried to move. That was checkmate.

"Never underestimate the power of a sacrificial play," George announced as he dispersed his sword and let go of the wrist before showing his hand to Lucian. "A desperate opponent is all it takes to make any tactic useless."

George's cold face broke into a smile when Lucian took his hand. The two even exchanged a respectful nod when George helped Lucian to his feet. Meanwhile, the audience began to cheer, and some women even launched bold praises for George.

Khan was no stranger to those celebrations. He felt happy seeing George getting the praise he deserved, but the sudden movement of a light strand of mana made his feelings go silent and pushed him forward.

George let go of Lucian's hand to wave at the audience, but Khan suddenly landed between the two. His arrival surprised the men, but he gave no explanation when he grabbed George's hand.

The trace of mana grew clearer in Khan's senses while he held George's hand. A foreign strand of energy had entered his palm and had settled right under his skin, but its presence was too faint for George's sensitivity.

George was confused, but Khan's serious face kept him silent. He trusted the man from the bottom of his heart, so he didn't get in his way.

"This will hurt a bit," Khan whispered while glancing at George, and the latter promptly nodded.

Khan closed his eyes and let his sensitivity take over. The symphony became clearer than ever, allowing him to see the black spot hidden inside George's palm.

A strand of mana left Khan's hand and entered George's arm before flowing toward the black spot. George could oppose the process, but he let Khan do as he wished, ultimately leading to his energy enveloping that foreign mass.

Khan kept his mana in that position for a while, but the chaos element's innate destructivity appeared unable to remove that black mass. So, he made his energy condense that foreign shade before forcing everything to come out.

A chunk of George's skin broke while Khan's mana pushed out the black mass. Khan opened his eyes at that point, and the strand of foreign energy became clear among the minor injury. That dark mana left George's palm and rose through the air before dispersing into the hall.

Khan didn't sense any ill feeling in that dark mana. He couldn't understand its purpose, but he knew its source, and George also realized that. His cold gaze didn't hesitate to fall on Lucian, who appeared surprised about that development.

"I'll handle it," Khan stated while his eyes inspected the ceiling to study the faint remains of that dark mana.

The inspection didn't lead anywhere, forcing Khan to lower his gaze. He planned to talk to Lucian immediately, but the audience's strange confusion ended up claiming his attention first.

Khan looked at Monica and the others only to find some scouring the ceiling with their eyes. Many wore frowns since they didn't understand what Khan had looked for, and the scene brought a sad realization.

The audience had imitated Khan, but none saw the world as he did. Only he could notice the dark mana with his bare eyes since his vision didn't belong to humanity anymore.

That sadness was short-lived. Khan disregarded the audience to turn toward Lucian, who welcomed his gesture with a cold face. Only the two of them knew what was happening, and the lack of proof prevented open accusations.

"Can we talk?" Khan asked, making sure not to hint at anything.

"Why not," Lucian vaguely replied before heading toward the hall's exit.

"Get patched up," Khan whispered to George before following Lucian. The wound on the palm was nothing serious, but his shoulder needed care.

George didn't say anything and followed Khan's departure with his eyes before rejoining the audience. Meanwhile, Khan and Lucian left the training hall and walked a few steps through the corridor until the latter stopped.

"What's your deal?" Khan asked while Lucian turned to face him.

"Your profile speaks greatly about your senses," Lucian exclaimed through a straight face. "I admit I underestimated them until now."

"My senses have nothing to do with the matter," Khan revealed. "I met a similar cloaking technique in the past, so I prepared accordingly."

Khan was speaking the truth. The dark mana inside George was faint, but he would have normally sensed it. However, that energy had cloaking properties that Khan had uncovered due to his past studies.

"Oh, I thought the technique was alien," Lucian stated. "No one noticed my seeds in the past."

"Seeds?" Khan wondered.

"They aren't harmful," Lucian announced while raising his arms to reassure Khan. "They only gather information. Mister Ildoo turned out to be stronger than expected, so I thought to keep track of him."

Khan's glare remained cold. Lucian had sounded honest, but he didn't trust the darkness inside him. There was something off about him, and Khan couldn't explain what.

"Am I that untrustworthy?" Lucian chuckled. "Don't you have some alien techniques to check whether I'm speaking the truth?"

The offer had sounded honest again, but Khan didn't have anything specific for the task. Yet, an idea eventually popped into his mind, and his gaze fell on his palm while nostalgic memories unfolded.

"So?" Lucian asked.

"Stay still," Khan ordered as he approached Lucian and raised his hand.

Lucian let Khan do as he wished, and a palm soon landed at the center of his chest. Khan closed his eyes as understanding dawned upon him. He finally realized why Jenna and Liiza were so fond of that practice. He could hear the entirety of Lucian with his hand there.

"What are those seeds?" Khan asked while keeping his eyes closed.

"They help me keep track of certain soldiers," Lucian explained. "There is nothing harmful about them, and they even dissolve in a matter of weeks."

Khan confirmed that Lucian was speaking the truth, but the explanation revealed more details about his character. The darkness wasn't evil. It didn't carry any ill intention. It merely expressed detachment.

"What about you?" Lucian asked when Khan removed his hand and opened his eyes. "What's your deal?"

"I'm simply looking out for a friend," Khan replied.

"I'm not talking about that," Lucian said while wearing a meaningful grin. "What's the deal between you and Monica?"

"There is no deal," Khan scoffed.

"I've seen Monica flirt around many times," Lucian revealed. "She always faked it, obviously, but it's different with you. She actually loses her cool with you around."

Khan hesitated as he inspected Lucian's grin. The desire to come clean ran through his mind and grew stronger with each passing second, but he managed to ignore it. Telling the truth would only cause problems for Monica, and the fear of that outcome beat his other feelings.

"I'm not dumb," Khan mustered one of his perfect pretenses when clarity descended on him. "She might like me, but we live in different worlds. I wouldn't dare to touch her."

"Really?" Lucian wondered. "So, no nasty affairs in Milia 222?"

"We both had work to do there," Khan pressed on.

"What a waste," Lucian sighed. "You won't get another chance like this."

"Why do you care so much about it?" Khan questioned. "If you are interested in her, you should just ask her out."

"I admit we would be a perfect couple," Lucian declared, "But only on a political field. Still, she is too difficult to approach. I can find a better match who doesn't have the same issues."

"So, you are all about politics," Khan commented.

"Look, you said it yourself," Lucian scoffed while spreading his arms. "You live in a different world. Don't pretend to understand mine."

"And how does yours work?" Khan wondered.

"Don't take this as an insult," Lucian warned. "You seem an incredible soldier, but I'll eventually become the leader of one of the wealthiest families. I play a different game, and you aren't in it."

Those words expanded on the detachment felt before. Lucian simply didn't care. His career was his only interest.

"On this topic," Lucian continued, "You are someone worthy of his fame. I wouldn't mind having you on my payroll."

"I'm not that kind of soldier," Khan immediately refused.

"Mister Cobsend managed to hire you for Milia 222," Lucian pointed out. "Are you sure you aren't on his payroll?"

"If you have a mission for me," Khan announced, "I'll give it a look. I might even accept if the payment is right, but you can't buy my loyalty."

"Everyone has a price," Lucian grinned. "Maybe money isn't yours, but what if I could give you Monica instead?"

"As far as I know," Khan said, holding back the flicker trying to run through his eyes, "Her family is as wealthy as yours."

"Sort of," Lucian admitted. "Yet, my plan would involve you. I can grant you the status required to be with her."

Khan couldn't help but fall silent. He wasn't speechless, but he couldn't find a proper answer. Refusing Lucian would cut a potential political path while accepting wasn't even an option.

In the end, Khan decided not to address the matter. He straight-up turned while giving one last comment. "Don't try anything funny with my friends."

"I promise I'll stay away," Lucian declared. "Don't take too long to get to advanced classes."

Khan ignored the comment and returned inside the training hall only to find a funny scene. George had taken off his jumper, and his muscular body had become the focus of most of the women. Giggles and praises also resounded, and George often laughed with them.

"Oh, you are back!" George shouted when Khan entered the hall. Lucian soon followed, and the two eventually reunited with the audience.

"Well, that was a good diversion," Lucian laughed once he reached the group. "Mister Ildoo's fame is well-earned. I wouldn't have lasted a single exchange if he had a real sword."

Lucian's comment garnered the respect of his peers. He had lost the battle, but acknowledging his defeat enveloped him in a mature vibe.

George wasn't in the mood to accept Lucian's praises, especially after what had happened. Still, the alluring gazes that flew in his direction improved his temperament and made him wear a proud expression.

"Now, my party is still going," Lucian continued. "Shall we go back to it?"

The audience seemed to agree with the offer, but Khan had a different idea. George was also injured, so he didn't hesitate to use him to justify his decision.

"I think I'll call it a day," Khan stated. "I even have to accompany George to a medical bay. His shoulder is making strange noises."

"I'm also beat," Monica didn't waste that opportunity. "Lucian, I hope you don't mind if I leave early."

"Of course," Lucian replied. "You didn't have the time to settle properly either. Don't worry. There will be other chances."

"Thank you," Monica performed one of her elegant bows.

"It wouldn't be fair if I left you alone now," Anita ended up scoffing while inspecting the reddening patch on George's shoulder. "Besides, Lieutenant Khan doesn't know the Harbor. I'll escort you to the medical bay before taking my leave."

"Did my performance surprise you so much?" George teased.

"You are a long way from earning my forgiveness," Anita snorted.

"George, I'll come too," One of the women in the group exclaimed.

"He needs all the help he can get, doesn't he?" Another woman announced.

More women tried to join the trip to the medical bay, and George inevitably gloated at that attention. Yet, looking at Anita's glare made him decide to refuse those offers.

"Ladies, I think it's better to split up tonight," George declared. "I don't want you to miss the party because of me. Don't worry. You'll see me around soon enough."

"It's settled then," Anita suddenly exclaimed. "Monica, will you ride with us?"

"How could I refuse?" Monica smiled, and the four quickly left the group to approach the exit.

The four didn't speak during the walk. Only George let out a groan when he tried to wear his jumper before giving up on the task. His shoulder had started to hurt too much, so he avoided getting dressed.

The street past the large building still had many cabs parked by the sidewalk, and the drivers only needed one look at Monica to open their doors. The group chose a random car, and a short discussion unfolded as soon as they settled inside.

"To the medical bay," Anita ordered through the speaker.

"No, let's go to my flat," George contradicted. "The fight sobered me up. I don't want to sleep like this."

"You need to get your shoulder checked," Anita pointed out.

"It's fine," George stated while slightly shrugging his shoulder. The process hurt, but nothing seemed broken.

"What do you say, Khan?" Monica wondered.

Khan already knew the state of George's shoulder. The injury wasn't too bad. The medical bay would help a lot, but George would probably heal on his own in a week. In theory, he didn't need a doctor right away.

"I'll bring him to the medical bay in the morning," Khan sighed. "We can celebrate tonight. After all, he won against Lucian."

"See?" George laughed.

"Fine," Anita gave up. "Do you have guest rooms in your flat? Hopefully, you won't mind if I crash there tonight."

"I thought I had to work harder for that," George admitted.

"Lieutenant Khan still doesn't know where the medical bay is," Anita explained, "And who knows if you'll even go there once you wake up. You need a responsible person around."

"Sleeping in the same flat with two men is improper," Monica joined the conversation. "I'll also stay. It might be fun to have some company."

"Oh, Monica, you are the best," Anita exclaimed while taking Monica's hands. "We can share the same bed and exchange gossip all night. You also have to tell me everything about Lieutenant Khan."

"I'm still here," Khan coughed.

"It would be hard to miss you," Anita giggled before bringing her focus back to Monica. "I know you are hiding something, girl. Is the hottie here involved?"

Monica and Anita fell prey to their gossip, and Khan and George could only exchange a helpless gaze in the meantime. Still, the atmosphere remained cheerful, and the trip felt short because of that.

The four eventually left the cab and headed for the closest building. They crossed an interactive desk and used an elevator before finding themselves in a big flat similar to Lucian's. The place wasn't as spacious, but it remained immense nonetheless.

"Well, we'll be on our way to bed," Anita exclaimed once the group reached the living room. "Lieutenant Khan, don't keep him up for too long."

"We'll sleep in no time," Khan promised. "It was a pleasure to meet you, Miss Wildon."

"Oh, call me Anita," Anita giggled. "Goodnight then."

"Have a good night, George, Khan," Monica said in her usual elegant tone while exchanging a meaningful glance with Khan that Anita's pull cut short.

George and Khan waited until the two women disappeared behind a door before throwing themselves onto two different couches. The short table between them already had bottles, and they didn't hesitate to open them.

"So, how did it go with Lucian?" George asked while placing his legs on the table.

"I can't understand his kind," Khan sighed as he lay on the couch and used the armrest as a pillow. "He's all about his career."

"Maybe it's for the best," George suggested. "He won't try anything anymore now."

"Hopefully," Khan agreed. "Though he has good eyes. He suspected Monica and me."

"She didn't exactly hold back," George joked. "She must have fallen hard for you."

"I don't know how long we'll last at this pace," Khan cursed. "I can deal with my instabilities, sort of, but her mood is unpredictable."

"Maybe try to say that without smiling," George mocked, and Khan voiced another curse when he noticed his own grin.

"You sure like her too," George stated. "I haven't seen you so happy in a while."

"It might be just me being tired of moping around," Khan guessed. "Still, yes, she is definitely good for me."

"How's the sex?" George wondered.

"Shut up," Khan laughed. "Should I ask about Anita instead? She is into you, and she is far from ugly."

Anita wasn't as beautiful as Monica, and she lacked some elegance, but her long blonde hair and deep dark eyes added a lot to her delicate features. Her figure was also quite sensual, which made her gorgeous.

"I don't know," George groaned. "She might be too much work. I have many easier women at my disposal."

"Man, you need a leash," Khan joked, and both men ended up laughing.

"You are the one to talk," George eventually snorted. "I've read the reports, and I know you. That Nele woman wasn't just a friend, right?"

"Jenna," Khan sighed. "She helped me a lot on Milia 222. She reminded me of Liiza."

"Damn," George exclaimed. "How did you not end up with her?"

"I didn't want her to be a replacement," Khan revealed. "It wouldn't have been fair to either of us."

"So, not even a quickie?" George wondered.

"The Nele's love doesn't work like that," Khan laughed. "We literally couldn't. Though there have been strange situations."

"Like?" George asked.

"Well, for my birthday," Khan began to tell before opting to hold back. "Actually, it's better if I keep that for myself. Monica would kill me otherwise."

"Wait, don't tell me," George gasped. "You got them together!"

"Not in the way you think," Khan corrected, but George had already fallen into complete disbelief.

"You are my hero," George revealed.

"It's not what you think!" Khan chuckled. "And not a word with Monica. She will really kill me."

"I need details," George almost begged.

"They will remain forever in my mind," Khan stated, "And only in my mind."

"Damned, scoundrel," George snorted. "You couldn't settle for one."

"I settled for one," Khan claimed, but his idiotic smile remained, and George could only join him in that reaction.

The conversation went silent at that point, and the two men limited themselves to drinking. Still, George's focus eventually fell on Khan's hair, and a question soon followed.

"I read about the disaster," George revealed. "That was the hand of a Nak, wasn't it?"

"It was," Khan admitted. "It's lucky I could absorb it."

"Lucky?" George repeated. "I thought you'd kill yourself rather than accept the Nak's help."

"I do hate my new hair," Khan declared while placing a hand on his chest, "Just like I hate my scar, but I can't decide how to obtain power."

The mature answer surprised George, even if he sensed some helplessness in it. Khan obviously didn't like that outcome, but he was doing better than George expected.

"Besides," Khan continued, "This is better than benefitting from many deaths. I'll be the only one to suffer like this."

"Maybe you don't have to suffer at all," George commented. "What am I even saying? We both know you are a masochist."

"I remember you telling me to leave the peace and search for war," Khan pointed out.

"There is something wrong in our heads," George uttered. "That's not a surprise."

"It would be strange otherwise after everything we've seen," Khan added.

"At least we are together in this," George exclaimed.

Overwhelming affection invaded Khan. He still needed to address the matter adequately, and that was a perfect time. "Hey, thank you for coming. I needed a friend."

"Don't even mention it," George scoffed. "I needed to get out of home anyway. You gave me the right excuse."

"Really, George," Khan pressed on while glancing at his friend. "Thank you."

"My heart fluttered again," George joked. "You are dangerous even for a straight man."

"I'll give Anita a leash for you," Khan replied, and both men laughed again.

Chapter 436 First Lesson

"Anita is coming over," Monica complained when Khan pulled her, "And we have yet to find an excuse for me."

"What's there to justify?" Khan wondered while Monica laid her head on his shoulder. "You came here a bit earlier to help me with my classes. Anita will buy it."

"We both helped in the past week," Monica whispered, making sure that her warm breath ended on Khan's neck, "And this isn't even my first time staying behind."

Khan had to agree with Monica. Almost two weeks had passed since Lucian's party, and the Harbor had not been nice to them in that period.

Nothing major or terrible had happened. A few parties had taken place, but they had never lasted too long. Khan had laughed with George, gotten to know many people, and dealt with Monica's mood as well as he could. Yet, the chances for some privacy had come rarely.

The Harbor's vast array of cameras was to blame for that issue. Monica and Khan could use George's flat, but they couldn't be the only ones to enter the building. Monica couldn't even stay behind on her own too often since it wasn't proper for her to be in the same accommodation as two men, and Anita was a presence she couldn't ignore.

Khan and Monica had limited their privacy to hours or minutes stolen during special circumstances. Anita's social obligation had also granted the couple a few nights together, but they had been rare occasions that couldn't match the freedom experienced on the ship.

The beginning of the lessons played a crucial role in creating those special circumstances. Anita, Khan, and Monica had spent most of their time outside parties inside George's flat to plan their courses, and they had often slept over, allowing the couple to seize some privacy when no one looked.

Still, the morning before lessons had arrived. The days were bound to grow busier, so Monica decided to sleep over. Luckily for the couple, Anita had to attend to private matters the previous night, but she was coming now. The clock was ticking for Khan and Monica.

"The risk was worth it, wasn't it?" Khan teased since the situation didn't give him a chance to say anything reassuring.

Khan could feel Monica's mouth broadening into a smile. She didn't even try to deny his statement. Actually, she snuggled closer into Khan's neck to confirm it.

"I wish we could be truly alone," Monica whispered while her mouth left wet marks on Khan's neck. "I miss the ship."

Khan could only pull Monica closer at those words. He was leaning on a metal wall, and his fingers were clinging to her trousers' edges while his other hand was on her waist. They had dressed up, but their passion wanted to come back.

"You didn't take too long to get used to George's flat," Khan kept teasing. "Your timid side barely came out."

Monica slammed her palm on Khan's chest, but the attack only made him laugh. She wanted to punish him for his constant teases, but the lack of loud complaints marked her agreement with those words.

"It's your fault," Monica eventually voiced.

"Is it now?" Khan played along.

"You are always around sluts because of George," Monica explained. "I'm way too jealous to be shy once we get some privacy."

"You are jealous in public too," Khan joked. "Even Anita has stopped calling me hottie lately out of fear of getting in your way."

"Shut up!" Monica shouted, hitting Khan's chest again. "You can go to Anita if you enjoy her compliments so much."

Even after that comment, Monica didn't leave Khan's neck. Still, her jealousy was genuine. That emotion had been a constant aspect of her mood since George's fight.

"Please," Khan whispered. "Even Jenna couldn't keep me away from you."

The jealousy slowly melted and made room for cozy warmth. Monica left Khan's neck to stare deep into his eyes, and the two soon exchanged a long kiss.

"It's not fair," Monica pouted while her thumb traced the edges of Khan's lips. "You have George while I'm all alone."

Khan inevitably revealed a complicated smile. Monica was right. His emotional state had constantly improved due to George's presence. He still experienced wild urges, but they didn't take him by surprise anymore.

The emotional stability had even almost convinced Khan that his rash reaction had only been a temporary consequence of the transformation. Enough time had passed, so his body and mind had probably gotten completely used to his new state.

Of course, that was only an idea. Khan didn't let his guard down simply because everything was going well.

"I know it's hard on you," Khan admitted while laying his forehead on Monica's, "But I like seeing you all worked up. It makes me happy."

"Are you happy about my dwindling self-restraint?" Monica scoffed. "I'm a disgrace. My parents would disown me if they saw me acting like that."

"I'm happy that we feel the same things," Khan revealed, and Monica couldn't help but lose herself in his expression.

"Unfair," Monica muttered before delivering another long kiss. Her fingers even peeked past Khan's collar, and some buttons of his uniform opened under their weight.

"After all the resolve it took us to dress up," Khan scolded as he tried to reach for Monica's lips again, but she pushed on his chest to keep him away. Still, a teasing smile appeared on her face. She liked when Khan desired her so openly.

"What?" Khan asked since Monica limited herself to inspecting his captivated expression. "We still have a few minutes."

"I just want to look at you," Monica said as she pushed herself further back and began buttoning up Khan's uniform.

Khan let Monica do as she wished, and her happy expression slowly brought a strange silence to his mind. Monica rejoiced in adjusting Khan's uniform and straightening it out to make it highlight his muscles. Some pride even joined her good mood once the process ended.

"You definitely are a hottie," Monica stated as she ran her palms over Khan's torso to straighten his uniform again. "My hottie."

"Should I adjust your uniform too?" Khan asked while pulling Monica back on him.

"You'll have to leave to take out your fingers from my trousers for that," Monica teased.

"They are part of the uniform now," Khan chuckled, and Monica joined him in his laugh while wrapping her arms around his neck.

"So," Monica whispered while her lips were dangerously close to Khan's, "What part of me kept you from going with Jenna?"

"You really want to hear me praise your butt, don't you?" Khan joked, and a slap promptly arrived on his cheek.

"I was talking about my personality, idiot!" Monica scolded, but Khan laughed, and she couldn't help but imitate him. She even pulled him to deliver another kiss, but menus suddenly lit up on the walls and interrupted that interaction.

"You have to leave first," Monica groaned.

"Give me another kiss first," Khan requested, and Monica didn't hesitate to comply.

Khan left the room afterward. He had no choice. The menus had warned about Anita's arrival, and he couldn't let her catch him alone with Monica.

The now-familiar flat ran through Khan's vision as he reached for the big living room. George was there, snoring on a couch with a half-empty bottle in his arms. He wasn't even wearing his military uniform and probably needed a shower.

"George," Khan called when he reached the couch and lightly kicked George's foot, "Anita is coming up."

"Wha-?" George gasped due to the abrupt awakening. "Anita? What time is it?"

"We have one hour before our first class," Khan explained while George scratched his eyes.

"One hour?!" George cursed. "Why didn't you call me earlier?"

"I was busy," Khan voiced, but the grin on his face explained more than enough.

"Damned scoundrel," George declared. "You get all the fun while I'm relegated to this couch."

"You have three empty beds in this flat," Khan pointed out.

"You," George stated while pointing his forefinger at Khan, "You win this one."

Khan and George laughed, but they both got to work once the menus on the walls warned about the elevator's arrival. George jumped on his feet and headed for one of the bathrooms while Khan sat on the couch and took out his phone to open specific pages.

Anita soon entered the main hall, showing her perfectly tidy military uniform with two stars on each shoulder. Her hair appeared softer than usual, and she wore light makeup to be at her best for the classes.

"Khan, good morning," Anita happily announced, but her smile froze when she saw the half-empty bottle on the table. "Where is the lost cause?"

"He is in the bathroom," Khan explained. "He'll be ready in no time."

"I won't wait for him," Anita snorted, but she still approached the couch in front of Khan and sat on it.

"Excited for the beginning of the academic year?" Khan asked to make conversation and keep the topic away from Monica.

"Anxious, rather," Anita sighed. "My family expects a lot from me. I need to pass every class, or I'll have private teachers waiting for me at home."

Khan nodded before bringing his attention to his phone. He had actually already had that conversation with Anita and Monica. The two women were in a similar situation, which was both privileged and annoying.

"You'll be fine," Khan reassured. "Monica showed me the files about the advanced courses. With your preparation, you'll ace them."

"Did she?" Anita exclaimed in a teasing tone. "My girl sure lost her head over you."

"She only indulged my curiosity," Khan lied.

"The files about the advanced courses are partially classified," Anita pressed on. "A nice treat like you deserves to be there, but receiving the help of Monica Solodrey is something else."

The Harbor had many available positions. Soldiers could find any kind of job there, and the embassy was no exception. The building offered many classes divided into basic and advanced, and only those who met certain requirements could join the latter.

Monica and Anita had helped Khan choose suitable classes, and, in theory, he had already met the requirements for the advanced versions of many of them. Yet, the Harbor wanted to test him out personally, so he had to attend the basic lessons first.

The situation was different for Monica and Anita. Their education had come from famous instructors accepted by the Harbor, so they could go directly to the advanced classes. Monica couldn't refuse that advantage, but she still decided to use her privilege to help Khan.

"She is indeed kind," Khan tried to change the topic.

"Your innocent face is cute but pointless," Anita giggled. "Everyone has seen how Monica behaves around you. I know you two are up to something."

"And what would that be?" Monica's voice resounded from the end of a corridor, and her figure soon appeared in the living room.

"Monica, you are glowing!" Anita praised seeing Monica's natural beauty. "Does this flat hide some secret beauty treatment?"

"You are too kind," Monica thanked as she approached Khan's couch and sat next to him. "Sadly, I have no secret to share. I've merely bathed."

"Bathed with two men in the same flat?" Anita questioned. "Since when did you get this shameless?"

"Don't tease me," Monica laughed. "I arrived only one hour ago to help Khan sort out the last details."

Anita bought the lie but still eyed Monica and Khan with interest. She, like many others, had begun to suspect that the two liked each other. She wouldn't dare to believe they had a secret relationship, but that didn't make the situation any less interesting.

"You have alien languages first, right?" Monica asked as she elegantly leaned toward Khan to peek at his phone. The two didn't touch, but it was clear that they were comfortable with being so close.

"Alien languages in the morning," Khan confirmed, "Alien customs and alien environments in the afternoon. The bad ones are in the next days."

"They aren't as hard as they sound," Monica reassured, reaching for Khan's phone to scroll through his schedule. "Interplanetary regulations merely are a mnemonic exercise, and the same goes for the interspecies treaties. The others require some instinct, but you have that."

The Harbor's classes went beyond five subjects. Khan would also have to study regulations related to the Global Army and its allies. A few lessons even involved broad topics he had never studied too deeply due to a lack of resources.

Of course, the books in Monica's ship had given Khan general knowledge that would help him a lot, but memorizing wasn't everything in the Harbor. He would eventually need to apply those regulations to complicated situations, and the tests rarely had a single correct answer.

"I'll have to study a lot," Khan sighed, "And things will get worse once I reach the advanced classes."

"Graduating from the Harbor will open many important paths for your career," Monica explained. "You might even get a job here as an assistant or join a crew to establish connections with newly discovered intelligent species."

"I know," Khan nodded while scratching the side of his head. "I can hardly believe you had to learn all this when you were still a kid."

"I didn't learn everything," Monica revealed. "I was merely introduced to most of these subjects. My instructors added details only when I was ready to learn them."

"She means all the time," Anita added. "Monica is famous for being a quick learner and a dedicated student. I remember my parents comparing myself to her whenever I failed a test."

"You hated me so much back then," Monica joked while covering her mouth.

"I was mostly jealous," Anita corrected, "Until I understood that she had it even worse than me. We instantly became friends afterward."

"How many meetings did you have together?" Khan wondered.

"Too many to keep count," Anita cursed. "Now that I think about it. I'm surprised Mister Alstair didn't join you in the Harbor."

"Our paths sadly led us in different ways," Monica vaguely explained.

"That was lucky," Anita exclaimed. "You can have Khan all for yourself now."

"That's an outcome I appreciate," Monica laughed.

"I'm still here," Khan stated.

"And so am I," George shouted from the bottom of the hall. He had just entered the area, and the upper part of his uniform was still open. Also, his hair was wet, and only a towel took care of drying it.

"You've grown fond of showing your chest ever since your battle with Lucian," Anita commented.

"Do you like it?" George proudly asked.

"Cover it up," Anita ordered. "Someone might think you are compensating for something."

"Two weeks, and you have yet to forgive me," George sighed as he let go of the towel and started buttoning up his uniform.

"Do you think you've earned it?" Anita wondered. "You go back to the same nonsensical idiot whenever we go to a party."

"Do you wish I focused only on you?" George fought back.

"Nonsense," Anita immediately rejected. "Besides, everyone knows that booze is your true love."

"Khan can trample that," George claimed.

"Don't put me in the middle of this," Khan warned.

"There is no this," Anita scoffed as she shot to her feet. "We'll be late if we don't leave now. I hope I don't have to remind you how to button your uniform."

"You could always offer yourself to do it since you care so much," George sneered.

"Get a maid for that," Anita responded. "Though I'm sure you already have some back at your home."

"Well," George voiced, and that word was enough to explain the truth.

"Unbelievable," Anita snorted as she turned toward the elevator to leave.

Khan and Monica smiled at the same time as they glanced at George. Anita was doing her best to act responsibly, but George seemed to be her weak spot, and the couple rejoiced in seeing some drama outside their lives. Besides, George's reactions were simply too funny.

"Let's go," Khan announced as he left the couch. "I'm actually a bit curious about the first class."

"How many alien languages can you speak fluently?" Monica asked while also standing up.

"Three or four, I guess," Khan replied. "Though I still mess up some accents, especially with the others."

"You'll ace the basic class," Monica whispered, revealing one of the faces she showed only when they were alone.

Khan remained a bit amazed. Anita's comment had been on point. Monica was truly glowing, and he was happy to see that, especially since he was part of the reason behind her mood. Still, the situation didn't allow them to expand on that interaction.

Monica, Anita, George, and Khan took the elevator to leave the building and found two cars waiting for them next to the sidewalk. The group had to split at that point, and a series of short goodbyes led to Khan and George settling in the same cab.

Casual chats went by as the cab led the two men into one of the Harbor's core districts. From the window seat, Khan could inspect the sharp change in environment and style. The domes abandoned the sleek and straight structures to focus on a single, massive building that occupied the center of an immense area filled with parking lots, soldiers, and white pillars.

Getting off the car gave Khan a better view of the scenery. The embassy's district was far from small, but its open spaces seemed limited due to the monumental building at its center. A pyramid-like structure grew from the floor and almost touched the dome above.

The structure's surfaces didn't draw a straight line. The building's exteriors had the shape of massive steps featuring white pillars meant to highlight every corner. The embassy resembled a pile of giant, rectangular halls amassed together to create a triangular silhouette.

The parking lots could only pale in comparison to that colossal structure. Khan couldn't even count the number of floors it had, let alone its capacity. He had read that the lessons were only a small part of the embassy, but that scene gave him a proper idea of how much it could offer.

'Amazing,' Khan couldn't help but exclaim in his mind as soldiers rushed toward him and George to handle their identification.

Going through a few genetic scanners granted the two men access to the embassy's perimeter. A group of soldiers escorted them toward the immense structure, and a few precise touches on its black walls eventually uncovered a secret entrance.

The black metal slid open to reveal the embassy's insides. An immense corridor expanded in Khan's view and allowed him to notice the many offices stretching from it. Jobs he could barely conceive shone on labels on the various interactive doors, and that was only the lower part of the building.

'Alien fraud,' Khan read as the soldiers escorted him and George through the corridor, 'Insurance against interplanetary deals, orbital fines, unauthorized parking. Wow, there's even something for misunderstandings due to alien languages.'

Khan couldn't see inside the offices. The white illumination shone on black walls that didn't reveal anything. Even his senses couldn't go past them, but reading the various labels gave him an idea of how big minor problems could be.

The life of a soldier was relatively easy, especially for someone deployed on battlefields. Khan had barely scratched the surface of the many minor jobs required to keep an interplanetary alliance going, but that corridor worked as an eye-opener.

The walk didn't last long. The corridor seemed to stretch endlessly, but the soldiers eventually turned to unlock a secret elevator through the same precise touches as before. They didn't follow Khan and George inside, and the opening of its doors revealed why.

When the elevator stopped, a completely different environment expanded in the men's vision. A sense of familiarity invaded Khan at the sight of staircases and numbered halls filled with young students donning military uniforms. That scene reminded him of his time in Ylaco. The embassy had replicated a training camp.

"I don't recognize any of them," Khan commented after leaving the elevator and inspecting the groups of students roaming through the area.

"Many people live in the Harbor," George stated. "We have probably only met those going to the advanced classes."

"I see," Khan voiced as hope bloomed inside him. He had initially been worried about the Harbor's social array, but each discovery opened many possibilities. He could ignore the extremely wealthy descendants when he had so many people at his disposal.

"Do you remember which one is our hall?" George wondered while rubbing his eyes. He had yet to wake up fully, and the trip had only delayed that moment.

"Hall twenty-five," Khan replied without needing to look at his phone. "The interactive menus there should have directions."

"Look at you getting all technological," George scoffed but still led the way toward labels flickering on a wall near the closest staircase.

The interactive menus revealed another astonishing detail. Khan could sense that the area stretched for more than two floors, but the truth left him speechless. There were actually six of them full of halls and other services. The embassy basically had a piece of Ylaco built in its insides.

"This is like a city condensed into a building," Khan exclaimed.

"More like a big space station," George corrected, "A really big one."

Merely thinking about the secrets hidden inside something so big made Khan's thoughts wander. George also was in no speaking mood, so the two climbed staircases and crossed corridors in silence until they reached their destination.

Hall twenty-five already had a line of soldiers slowly entering inside. Its door was narrow and could fit only two people at the time, but Khan counted more than one hundred young men and women waiting outside.

The symphony even told Khan that the hall already had people in its insides. Its size had to be incredible, and his mind wanted to focus on that wonder, but an awful feeling eventually touched his senses.

Khan and George had approached the line by then, but the arrival of that feeling forced the former to turn toward a small group waiting on the wall. The team was relatively small. It only had eight soldiers, with two of them in the second level. Yet, the awful sensation came from the weakest of them.

"Oh," George voiced once he noticed where Khan was looking.

"Do you know him?" Khan whispered while replying to the first-level warrior's intense gaze. The man was barely above eighteen. His blonde curls covered his ears, and his azure eyes expressed purity, but his expression carried arrogance, entitlement, and hatred.

"He might be annoying," George revealed.

Khan scoured his memory but couldn't find anything about the first-level warrior. He was sure they had never met before, but that hatred was genuine, and he didn't know what could have caused it.

"They'll start admitting pigs at this pace," The man shouted while Khan was still immersed in his thoughts. "The Harbor will lose prestige if too many commoners invade it."

The man had been far from subtle. The line was silent and orderly, so his shout had reached the entire group and even stretched through the corridor. Needless to say, countless eyes fell on Khan right afterward.

'And here I thought I could be anonymous,' Khan sighed in his mind. No one had recognized him during his walk, but that event was bound to put a banner on his head.

"Can I help you?" Khan directly asked through his poker face.

"Oh, look," The man laughed. "He can speak."

The rest of the soldiers in the man's group echoed the laugh, and awkwardness immediately fell on the corridor. Many ignored the scene, while others actively diverted their eyes to avoid getting involved.

Those reactions and the changes in the symphony explained a lot to Khan. The man had to be somewhat wealthy or wealthier than the people in the line. Also, a few seemed aware of what was happening, and George was one of them.

"Did pigs teach you how to speak in the Slums?" The man continued with a taunt that triggered the laughs of his companions.

"If the Slums had pigs," Khan earnestly replied, "We would eat them."

The honest answer left the man and his group speechless. Some smirks appeared inside the line, and faint chuckles also echoed, but Khan remained serious.

The man wanted to retort with another taunt, but one of his friends eventually whispered to his ear while eyeing George. The former couldn't help but remain surprised, and no more insults came out of him, but he wore a smirk that counted for hundreds of them.

As for George, his mind went into battle mode as soon as he found an enemy of Khan. His cold face also expressed his stance clearly, so the man's group opted to avoid continuing with the insults.

Khan didn't ask anything and let the line flow inside the hall until he also got in. The place turned out to be a massive half-circular room with steps made of interactive desks. The tallest of them was three-story high, and staircases ran among them to connect each seat.

A long interactive desk stood at the bottom of the hall, near the wall and before a bright screen. That obviously was the professor's seat, and a mere look at the area's layout told Khan that he wouldn't have problems following the lesson even from the tallest spots.

The silence continued while Khan and George proceeded inside and seized a relatively isolated interactive desk for themselves. Headphones, folders for various devices, and other services were part of that machine, and the same went for cameras that could zoom in on the professor's seat.

"His name is Tobias Odse," George explained as soon as he and Khan sat down.

"What's his deal?" Khan asked. "The name doesn't tell me anything."

"He doesn't have anything against you, specifically," George stated. "He just hates people who come from the Slums."

"I needed another entitled wealthy kid against me," Khan sighed.

Truth be told, Khan didn't mind the event. It was annoying, but his newfound mental stability made it a minor threat. He could ignore men like Tobias easily without even going against his wilder urges.

"His hatred is common knowledge," George continued. "It was a big deal back then, at least among wealthy families. His father apparently left everything to run away with a commoner, and that isn't ideal when you run most of the internal businesses."

"Oh," Khan whispered. "I guess the father is still MIA."

"That's not the main issue," George cursed.

"Wait," Khan gasped as he recalled something. "Odse! Isn't that the name of-."

Khan couldn't finish his line since a tall figure stormed inside the hall and headed for the professor's desk. The man had Tobias' blonde curls, but his eyes were dark. Still, the resemblance with the man was obvious once ignored the height difference.

"Hurry to your seats," The man ordered while tinkering with the interactive desk to activate its functions. "We are already late, and our course has to cover many topics. We won't get over all of them if we start wasting time on our first day."

George could only shrug his shoulders when Khan glanced at him. He had finally understood the reason behind George's silence, and the professor didn't hesitate to make it clear to the whole room.

"I'm Professor Oscar Odse," The Professor announced when various labels appeared on the screen behind him. "I will teach you the most famous and useful alien languages as well as a few alternative approaches to the topic. Now, sit down, and let's begin."

"Why didn't you mention anything earlier?" Khan asked.

"Someone was too busy in the other room to have a drink with his friend," George snorted.

"We drank every single night!" Khan pointed out.

"Time sure flies when you are having fun," George laughed. "On a serious note, Professor Oscar is just a distant relative. He has no real connection with Tobias' father."

"But since Tobias is here," Khan added.

"Yeah," George sighed. "Hopefully, the professors in the Harbor are beyond nepotism."

George didn't sound too convincing, but Khan found the matter unlikely. Corruption was bound to exist even inside the Harbor, but Khan had entered through the Solodrey family. His achievements were also undeniable. There was probably little the Professor could do to get in his way.

Every student eventually took their place and fell silent to wait for the beginning of the lesson. The entirety of the crowded hall focused on Oscar Odse, but the man didn't flinch. He was only a second-level warrior, but he clearly had experience in that field.

"Let's go over a few basic questions," Professor Odse announced once the silence satisfied his standards. "I want to understand your general level before starting. There are merit points on the table, so I hope that your families invested well in your education."

'Right,' Khan suddenly recalled. 'I have yet to see how many points Professor Nickton gave me. Luke's payment should have also arrived.'

"First of all," Professor Odse exclaimed after a short pause, "Who knows what the Ipina convention is?"

Professor Odse pressed on the desks, and a series of menus appeared in front of each student. Khan saw a multiple-choice question lighting up on the interactive surface under him, and it only took him a look to know the correct answer.

The interactive desk could trace Khan's genetic signature, and his name even appeared on the screen when he pressed the correct answer. However, the menu only buzzed at his touch and never forwarded his decision.

"Well, I'm happy to say that quite a few of you got it right," Professor Odse declared while looking at the results from his desk. "I'll send the merit points right away."

"Professor, sir!" Khan didn't hesitate to call before the Professor could complete the action. "There is a problem with my desk. It doesn't record my answer."

Khan had been loud enough to make the entirety of the hall hear his voice, but the Professor didn't flinch. He didn't even raise his head as he forwarded the merit points and went on with the lesson.

"Now, next question," Professor Odse continued. "Who actually knows how to use the Ipina convention?"

The menus under Khan changed. A new multiple-choice question featuring hand signs appeared on the desk, but the same issue happened when he tried to answer. The program buzzed but didn't record his choice.

"This is always a tough one," Professor Odse laughed when he read the results. "Still, not bad. I've seen far worse across the years."

"Professor, sir!" Khan called again, but the Professor sent out the merit points without even bothering to look at him.

The hall had understood what was happening by now, and many shot confused or even sympathetic gazes at Khan. The Professor was ostracizing him from getting any reward, and the culprit didn't hesitate to show his face.

A clear laugh resounded among the general silence. Khan didn't even need to turn to know that it came from Tobias. The short man had sat in the front row, and he sneered whenever he turned to look at Khan.

Generally speaking, that wasn't a major issue. Losing out on merit points was annoying, but Khan could deal with it. He wasn't broke anymore, and he even had the support of wealthy friends.

Yet, cracks appeared in Khan's beliefs whenever that annoying laugh reached his ears. He could feel his emotions growing wilder at each echo of Tobias' sneers. He wasn't going to snap. He wanted to.

The scene inevitably reminded Khan of his angry meeting with Milia 222's soldier, the one who wanted to steal his knife. Even after all his feats, people still tried to find loopholes and tricks to undermine his future. He had witnessed so much death to accumulate his current knowledge, and a mere feud against commoners was getting in the way.

"Next up is," Professor Odse continued, but Khan had stopped listening to him by then. Only Tobias' laugh resounded in his mind, and that pushed him to ask a straightforward question.

"George, how much can you cover for me?" Khan whispered as he stretched his neck. His wild emotions were becoming uncomfortable to contain. He had to do something, but he wanted to remain in control.

"Anything my family has to offer is yours," George declared without showing any hesitation. "You could also call the big guns. She'll be happy to help."

"No, it's fine," Khan sighed. "I'll see whether to call you depending on what happens."

"Do you need a hand?" George questioned as his mind went into battle mode.

"No, I want to do this myself," Khan stated, and George simply nodded. No matter what happened, he would support Khan.

Tobias was ecstatic, and his companions only made him laugh even harder by adding jokes to the situation. Some mocked Khan by imitating his serious call for the Professor, while others rejoiced at the sight of their free merit points.

The laughs became so hard to contain that Tobias had to close his eyes at some point. Yet, when he reopened, he discovered that his line of sight with the professor's desk was no more. A pair of legs had fallen on it.

"Wha-?!" Tobias didn't have the time to exclaim since a hand grabbed his collar and lifted him out of his seat.

Astonishment filled Tobias' face when he found himself before Khan's cold gaze. Their eyes almost shared the same color, but Khan's expression was so chilling that Tobias couldn't muster any word.

Gasps resounded through the hall, but Khan acted before anyone could scream or call for help. He performed a sharp turn, putting as much raw strength as he could to throw Tobias past the seat and toward the Professor.

Professor Odse could barely believe his eyes, and he definitely didn't react in time. Tobias' back filled his vision before flying past it to crash on the screen on the wall. Cracks inevitably appeared on the device, and sparks even came out of it as Tobias slid head-first into the floor.

"What do you think you are doing?!" Professor Odse shouted, but his eyes betrayed him again. He had looked in the direction of Tobias' desk, but Khan had already left it. He had just landed next to him.

"You-!" Professor Odse suppressed his surprise to speak, but Khan was faster.

"You can hear me then," Khan interrupted, showing his true colors and making sure that the synthetic mana echoed them.

The statement made Professor Odse freeze for a second, but his experience allowed him to retrieve his cool. Still, as soon as he tried to move his mana, Khan's eyes snapped to the exact position of that energy.

The gesture could have been a fluke, but Professor Odse couldn't believe that possibility. He felt naked under Khan's watchful eyes. The latter seemed able to see the very flow of his blood, and he had already shown to be fast enough to react to anything the Professor tried.

A profound realization suddenly fell on the Professor. They might have the same number of stars on their shoulders, but Khan was a completely different soldier. Oscar had gotten his current position through his family and studies, while Khan had swum through blood and corpses.

Of course, Khan had reached a similar conclusion even before his reckless action. He could smell the Professor's faint traces of synthetic mana left behind by the infusions. The man was no warrior, and his energy was no threat to Khan.

As dangerous as the situation seemed, the Professor still managed to muster his courage. He couldn't beat Khan in a fight, but he remained an authority, at least in that hall.

"The Harbor's regulations are clear," Professor Odse announced. "Your punishment is set in stone."

"I need to be part of this class to be punished," Khan responded.

"What are you-?" Professor Odse tried to ask.

"Am I part of this class?" Khan questioned.

"O-of course!" Professor Odse stuttered.

"Then I must report that my terminal had a technical issue," Khan explained. "It didn't record my answers. I've committed the Ipina convention to memory months ago."

"What?" Professor Odse asked in confusion.

"My merit points," Khan conveyed. "I knew the answer. I want my merit points."

"Merit," Professor Odse muttered before falling prey to his anger. "Who do you think you-?!"

Khan moved before the Professor could finish his line, and his sharp gesture made the man gasp and take a step back. As for Khan, he reached for the confused Tobias on the floor and grabbed him by his nape.

"What are you trying to do with him?" Professor Odse said before another gasp left his mouth. Still, his cry didn't manage to echo in the hall since crashing noises suppressed them.

Khan kept his eyes on Professor Odse while his right hand pressed on Tobias' nape. The latter's face had slammed on the interactive desk, digging a small hole in it, and the sharp shards that had remained intact had opened cuts on his skin.

Professor Odse didn't know what to do. Tobias was bleeding on his desk, and Khan still held him tightly. Khan was in complete control of the situation.

"Do you realize what you just did?" Professor Odse eventually let his anger take over again, but Khan only voiced a helpless sigh as he lifted Tobias and prepared to slam him on the desk again.

"Wait, wait!" Professor Odse shouted when he understood what was about to happen. "I'll give your merit points. I just need to use my desk."

Khan nodded toward the desk, and Professor Odse hastily tinkered with it to bring the first question to the intact part of its surface. Khan didn't hesitate to answer, and Professor Odse promptly pressed on the command that delivered the merit points.

The process repeated itself for the second question, and the third even appeared. Khan knew more than one alien language, so the Professor had to award him merit points again.

Professor Odse looked at Khan in fear at that point, but the latter quickly explained that he wasn't done. "Did you have other questions?"

Professor Odse looked at the bleeding Tobias still in Khan's grasp before nodding and moving to the desk again. Question after question popped out, and Khan knew the answer to all of them. Most of that knowledge came from himself, but he had to thank Monica for some of it.

"The questions are over," Professor Odse stated once the process ended. "Now, let go of Tobias and accept your punishment."

"Punishment for what?" Khan asked, showing a fake smile to feign ignorance.

Anger tried to rise through Professor Odse again, but he managed to hold it back and convey a firm reply. "Assault of a fellow student, threats to your professor, and damage to the Harbor's machinery. You'll be lucky if they don't kick you out of the Global Army entirely."

"I didn't do any of that," Khan laughed as he pulled Tobias and forced him to turn toward him. "He tripped and broke your desk and screen."

"I didn't-" Tobias tried to mutter, but Khan slammed his face back on the desk before he could finish his line. Khan's smile even disappeared, and the expression that Professor Odse feared so much returned.

"Let's try this again," Khan exclaimed while pulling Tobias' face out of the mess of broken glass and exposed wires. "You tripped and broke the equipment, right?"

"Y-yes!" Tobias sobbed while pain filled his face. The injuries were mild, but some shards were still on him, and they hurt whenever his expression changed.

"You have a confession," Khan declared as his smile returned. "Write it down."

Professor Odse had given up on trying to reason with Khan at that point. He approached the intact part of the desk and wrote a report for Tobias. Khan let go of the injured man afterward.

Chapter 437 Surprise

Tobias fell to the floor, but Professor Odse moved only when Khan nodded at him. Oscar reached for Tobias' arm at that point, and faint orders left his mouth. "Come on, Tobias. Stand up!"

Professor Odse managed to get Tobias on his feet, but that didn't help the young man. Tobias' face was a mess of blood, tears, and glass shards, and standing up only revealed his state to the entire class.

Tobias sobbed louder when he noticed the many gazes that had fallen on him and even tried to hide his face in Professor Odse's chest. The latter was too angry to accept that shameful reaction, but his scolding didn't lead anywhere.

"Raise your head," Professor Odse scolded. "This isn't appropriate!"

Tobias ignored those orders, and his sobs eventually calmed down Professor Odse. The physical injuries were mild, but Khan had delivered a powerful mental blow to the young man. Orders couldn't fix that.

"I will bring Mister Odse to the medical bay," Professor Odse announced while looking at the class. "Class is adjourned. I'll see you all next week."

Professor Odse didn't hold back from glaring at Khan when his announcement ended, but he only saw the same fake smile from before. Khan feigned complete innocence even while the Professor carried Tobias away and left the hall.

An awkward silence fell in the hall. The students were bewildered by that development, and none left their seats. They inspected each other, trying to understand what to do, but the situation was clear. The lesson had ended.

A sigh replaced Khan's fake smile. Raging emotions still surged into his mind and made him aware of how much he resented the recent events. The situation had been completely unfair, especially to him, and it was too late to take his actions back.

A short laugh soon resounded among the awkward silence and made everyone turn toward a specific spot in the audience. George stood up and jumped on his desk before leaping over the others to descend through the various seats.

Some complaints resounded whenever George risked bumping into the students or left footprints on their interactive desks, but he didn't care. He quickly reached the bottom of the hall, and Khan's complicated smile welcomed his arrival.

"You are as subtle as ever," George mocked, forcing Khan to shrug his shoulders.

"I messed up earlier than I expected," Khan sighed again.

"That guy was a dick," George snorted before wearing a serious expression when his gaze fell on the hall's exit. "You should contact the big guns."

"I'm," Khan began to say before accepting that his mental state was still a mess. "I need some time to calm down and think."

George had grown used to Khan's confident side, so seeing him in that conflicted and confused state alerted him. George felt unable to do anything for his mood, but time was something he could provide.

"Alright," George cleared his throat while approaching the professor's seat and spreading his arms. "Since the Professor had a complication, I'll take over this class. You can address me as sir from now on."

Some laughs resounded among the audience. George's idiotic announcement moved the attention on him and gave Khan some room to breathe.

"Thanks," Khan whispered when he and George exchanged a glance before sprinting toward the exit. The students realized that he had left only when it was too late to do anything about it.

Khan hurried through the corridor and descended staircases without bothering to inspect his surroundings. Luckily for him, the area was pretty empty since everyone was attending classes, so he could sprint freely without meeting any problems.

The sprint didn't improve Khan's mental state. He was boiling inside. The sole thought that such a petty grudge could cost him the Harbor, George, and Monica made him angry beyond reason, and that feeling stretched to his collar and the walls around him.

Everything felt too tight. No matter how freely Khan chose to be, limits still existed around him, and he was in no position to ignore them. He could handle a spoiled brat, but a mere professor probably was too much for him.

'Do I really need to involve Monica?' Khan wondered once the elevator gave him better privacy.

The anger didn't diminish as the seconds passed, but Khan's thoughts remained strangely clear. He could experience the desire to break everything without falling prey to it. His state would typically create a duality inside his mind, but that didn't happen now. He was wild and calm at the same time.

Monica was Khan's first option but also his least viable one. Her family had already put him in the Harbor. Making them aware of his reckless behavior might force them to go back on their decision.

Still, Khan's options stretched far past Monica. He didn't want to cause problems for George, but Luke wouldn't miss the chance to earn a favor. The same went for Lucian, and Khan wasn't even considering Rick for now.

'Asking favors that I can't repay would only limit myself even more,' Khan realized once the elevator opened and a couple of soldiers arrived to escort him out. 'I can't resort to that so quickly.'

The issue had no proper solution, and Khan couldn't even take advantage of the situation. He had made a mistake. That was undeniable. He could only work toward limiting the punishments.

Exiting the embassy was a breath of fresh air for Khan. His anger didn't diminish, but being able to move freely helped, and leaving the district eventually put an end to his internal struggle.

'Fuck them,' Khan cursed as he walked through the street connected to the next district. 'Fuck the professors, the families, and the Global Army. I'll ask for help only if I can't handle things by myself.'

Reaching a conclusion allowed Khan to focus on his state, but he found nothing surprising there. He knew what was happening to himself. He had only hoped that the changes wouldn't be so evident.

George's presence had brought stability, but Khan had simply changed. Pretending was fine, but his true face was bound to come out whenever someone pushed his limits.

'Holding back was never an option,' Khan mocked himself as a faint smile appeared on his face. His mana cheered when he accepted that point, and the anger transformed into a vague intensity that leaked into his presence.

The path back to the seventh district was long. Khan could hop on a train, but he wanted to walk, and the idea of rejecting his desire didn't even cross his mind.

Nevertheless, Khan didn't face the matter without thinking about its consequences. Someone would eventually approach him to discuss the punishments, but he remained a student until then, and classes were waiting for him that afternoon.

'I don't have time to go home and come back as long as I walk,' Khan calculated when he checked the map on his phone. Truth be told, he would love to spend those hours with Monica, but she was also busy, and it was probably better if he avoided meeting her right now.

Khan eventually opted to kill time in his current district. The place mainly contained shops, restaurants, and other services, but Khan spotted a few training halls on the map. He could eat and destroy some metal puppets while he waited for his next class to begin.

'I should check how much I have now,' Khan recalled when he began to cross the main street to head for the nearest restaurant. However, a peculiar sight suddenly caught his attention and almost made him forget to keep walking.

A huge, black spaceship left one of the channels meant for flying vehicles and hovered right under the dome as it crossed the district. The ship was too big to go unnoticed, and its shape forced Khan to scour his memory to connect it to a model.

'Isn't that exclusive to the army?' Khan wondered when his search didn't lead anywhere. He had seen and memorized similar models but couldn't find a name for the vehicle flying through the district. He could only find common features with ships studied in the past.

'Some big shot must have arrived,' Khan thought as he reached the opposite sidewalk and followed the ship with his eyes. He found no surprise when he saw it heading for the embassy's district.

Thinking about ships made Khan remember how much he liked flying, and the idea of purchasing something for himself returned stronger than ever. He was even in a shopping district, so he picked up his phone to recheck the map, but the big vehicle suddenly made a turn and claimed his attention.

Khan frowned at that sudden turn. The path to the embassy was right ahead, but the ship ignored it and began to descend. The scene kept Khan curious, but surprise replaced that feeling when the vehicle stopped above him.

The ship didn't give Khan time to think since a circular platform detached itself from its bottom and descended at high speed before slowing down once the street became close. Khan saw the item expanding in his vision, and the sensations captured by his senses only deepened his surprise.

The platform carried four third-level warriors and a blank spot. Someone strong enough to trick Khan's senses was descending toward the street, but the faint influence leaked onto the synthetic mana partially revealed his identity.

"Their response can't be so quick!" Khan shouted in his mind, but the platform landed in front of him before he could complete that thought.

The platform's arrival confirmed the initial idea caused by the synthetic mana. The blank spot gained a face after the landing, and Khan almost couldn't believe his eyes when he saw Colonel Norrett.

"I thought I recognized you," Colonel Norrett announced while jumping off the platform. "Your new hair almost made me ignore you."

The four third-level warriors followed Colonel Norrett on the sidewalk and took firm stances at his sides. The group had two women and two men, and none bothered to inspect Khan. The street claimed their attention, and they glared at it as if threats could hide behind every corner.

"Why would a fifth-level warrior need protection?" Khan wondered before voicing the first polite comment that popped into his mind. "You have good eyes, sir."

"The scanners did most of the work," Colonel Norrett laughed. "So, you were quick on getting rid of the job I found for you."

Khan snapped out of his surprise and performed a military salute. Still, the words that came out of his mouth ended up being way too honest. "Sir, I'm grateful for your recommendation. I simply grew bored of the training camp after a while."

The answer left the Colonel surprised, and he wasn't the only one. Even Khan realized that he could have put the matter into better words. He simply didn't want to.

"Spoken like a true soldier," Colonel Norrett eventually voiced. "Is the Harbor treating you any better?"

"Sir, didn't they tell you?" Khan questioned. "Aren't you here to punish me?"

"Punish?" Colonel Norrett repeated. "What did you do?"

'I guess it was a coincidence,' Khan thought before choosing to exploit that fortuitous situation. "I assaulted one of the students and threatened a professor."

Colonel Norrett's face remained perfectly still, but the four guards shot surprised glances at Khan. Their reaction told Khan that his actions were no joking matter, but he didn't try to justify himself just yet. Somehow, he felt that waiting for the Colonel's comment was better.

"Is there a reason for that?" The Colonel quickly asked.

"They plotted to deny me merit points," Khan shortly explained. "They belong to the same family, which apparently holds grudges against commoners."

Colonel Norrett scratched his beardless chin before scoffing. "Even the Harbor is no stranger to these issues. It's sad. Give me their names."

"Will you take care of this for me, sir?" Khan asked.

"It will send the right message," Colonel Norrett revealed. "People need to understand that you have my support."

Khan had hoped that explaining his situation would have put the Colonel on his side, but the actual outcome surpassed his expectations and made him understand that something was off.

"What did I do to deserve your support, sir?" Khan asked before opting for a more specific question. "What brings you here?"

"Winning Onia's tournaments is no small feat," Colonel Norrett pointed out. "Still, I'm here because a common friend put a good word in for you. Your efforts on Milia 222 didn't go unnoticed. I'm promoting you."

Shock, confusion, and coldness rushed through Khan. The news was obviously good, but he didn't share any friends with Colonel Norrett. However, he could guess who had enough authority to convince such a lofty figure.

"Mister Raymond did this?" Khan couldn't help but gasp.

"You earned this," Colonel Norrett corrected before showing his palm to one of his guards. The woman quickly opened her backpack and took out a rectangular container that she didn't hesitate to place in the Colonel's hand.

"For the courage shown against our oldest enemy," Colonel Norrett announced while approaching Khan and handing the container to him, "I offer you this gift and a new rank. Congratulations, Captain Khan."

Khan had yet to accept that development, but he still seized the container. At that point, the four guards turned toward him and performed a military salute, which made the situation more real in Khan's mind.

"Captain Khan," Khan whispered before the intensity of Colonel Norrett's gaze increased, forcing him to focus.

"Still wary of your superiors," Colonel Norrett chuckled. "Still too young."

Khan wanted to question Colonel Norrett about those words, but the latter suddenly frowned and tilted his head. His eyes inspected Khan from head to toe, and the process only deepened his confusion.

"Do we have a scanner down here?" Colonel Norrett asked while stretching an arm toward his guards.

One of the men opened his backpack to take out a cylindrical item and hand it to his superior. Colonel Norrett pressed a few keys on the device before rotating his forefinger to voice a silent order.

Khan obeyed. He turned to show his nape, and the Colonel placed the scanner there. A few seconds had to pass before Colonel Norrett broke the silence with a proud chuckle.

"I knew it," Colonel Norrett exclaimed while pushing on Khan's shoulder to bring them face to face. "Your uniform needs an update. You are missing a star."

Chapter 438 Articles

Khan peeked past his shoulder to look at the holograms coming out of the cylindrical item. The scanner wasn't as detailed as those seen inside the medical bays, but its results were clear. The number "70" shone next to the attunement with mana and confirmed the Colonel's statement.

"When did I become a third-level warrior?" Khan wondered, but the situation didn't let him fall into his thoughts.

"I had just updated your profile," Colonel Norrett scoffed as he threw the scanner behind him, and one of the guards grabbed it mid-air. "It seems that I have to send another official report."

"Updated?" Khan repeated, but his eyes immediately widened. He wanted to check the network right away, but the Colonel's smile made that process pointless.

"I approved your promotion a few hours ago," Colonel Norrett explained. "The network received the news at the same time."

'I won't hear the end of it,' Khan mocked himself while nodding at his superior.

"Well, I didn't plan our meeting to happen in the middle of the street," Colonel Norrett revealed, "But maybe it was for the best. My arrival here comes with many obligations, and I'd rather handle them before our next meeting."

"Will I see you again, sir?" Khan asked.

"Tonight," The Colonel stated. "Promotions to captain and above require special celebrations. I'll send an invitation with every detail later on. We'll talk more there."

The Colonel promptly turned to reach the platform, and his guards went with him, but he glanced at Khan again when he recalled something. "Before I forget, give me the student and professor's names."

Khan opened his mouth to speak before going changing his mind. He had already punished Tobias, and Oscar was bound to go crazy after hearing about the promotion. Getting the two kicked out of the Harbor would only turn the Odse family into an enemy.

"So?" Colonel Norrett asked while snapping his fingers.

"I want a different incentive," Khan declared, using the same words that Colonel Norrett had voiced back on Onia.

"Oh?" Colonel Norrett said in a curious and pleased tone. "Speak."

"I want access to the advanced classes," Khan revealed.

"That's still not special," Colonel Norrett sneered before nodding at his companions. "Consider it done."

The platform began to rise, and it soon accelerated to exit the range of Khan's senses. He saw the item return to the ship before the entire vehicle headed for one of the many passages stretching from the dome.

Khan followed the ship with his eyes, and pure chaos fell on him as soon as it disappeared from his vision. He acknowledged everything that had happened in the past minutes, but he didn't even know where to begin to sort that out.

'Fucking Raymond Cobsend,' Khan cursed. 'Why did he help me?'

The paranoia had the priority. Khan couldn't rejoice about the event before worrying about its many implications. Raymond had pushed for his promotions, and there had to be a reason for that.

'What can he possibly get from my promotion?' Khan wondered as his superficial knowledge of the Global Army ran through his mind.

Truth be told, Khan saw nothing but contradictions. He knew that Raymond had a specific interest in him, but a higher rank would grant him more political influence and fame.

Raymond would have a harder time exploiting, controlling, or even affecting Khan if his rank continued to improve. He wouldn't be able to use him as freely as before if he started developing proper social defenses. Still, that probably was the core of the matter.

'There might be other parties involved,' Khan coldly realized. 'This promotion might be Raymond's way of protecting me from them. Well, preserving rather than protecting.'

Raymond couldn't be the only one interested in the power of the chaos element, and he had already proven himself ready to sacrifice an entire asteroid. Other parties might target Khan directly, and becoming a captain could provide some political shield.

Of course, that guess was purely hypothetical, but it made sense. The Nak were an important and secret topic, and Khan had shown the world that he had a lot in common with them. His element also played an important role there, so his reasoning didn't feel crazy.

However, that hypothesis led to a precise conclusion. The political shield would theoretically hinder Raymond too, but he had given it to Khan anyway, meaning that he could overcome it when necessary.

'Is he underestimating me?' Khan wondered as some anger returned before vanishing once he found a different answer. 'No, Raymond is a political monster. He probably knows exactly how much he can push, and I can't hope to match his knowledge any time soon.'

Losing was unavoidable as long as Khan tried to fight Raymond on those terms. The political battlefield couldn't give him a chance to win, and that situation wouldn't change for many years. However, Khan had another weapon at his disposal.

Khan tried to lift a hand, only to notice that he was still holding the rectangular container. His mind was elsewhere, so he sat on the sidewalk and placed the gift on the floor before resuming his initial action.

A whiff of purple-red mana came out of Khan's palm as soon as he opened it. He couldn't notice anything odd in his energy, but the scanner didn't lie. He had become a third-level warrior.

'Seventy percent,' Khan thought as he closed his eyes to inspect the mana in his insides. 'Why didn't I feel it?'

Becoming a second-level warrior had granted Khan a smoother flow of mana, but the recent checkpoint didn't bring anything like that. Khan felt no different, but that could explain his situation.

The transformation had been too radical. Khan didn't even know how much of him still abided by human standards. All the data gathered in the past five hundred years might not apply to him anymore.

Still, that could be the reason behind the lack of significant benefits. Khan had already undergone tremendous changes, so his body had probably failed to notice the arrival at the new checkpoint. That goal simply wasn't much compared to the transformation.

Khan obviously considered other options. His unstable and wild mental state could be a consequence of his new level, but his sudden growth could also explain it. His body could also face those breakthroughs differently now that the mutations had returned stronger than ever.

Only proper experts could grant answers, but that would require actual inspections and check-ups, which Khan wasn't willing to face. Raymond had given him a vague idea of his value, so making scientists aware of his condition was risky, especially in his current situation.

'I'm stuck,' Khan realized. 'Getting stronger is my best option, but I can't predict where that will lead me.'

Questions and doubts raged inside Khan's mind. He felt pretty sure that his reckless behavior was nothing more than a true expression of his character. Yet, he couldn't avoid considering other problems.

The check-up technique was a perfect example. Khan had confirmed that everything was okay multiple times, but the spell had human roots. It could be unable to grasp the entirety of his new being.

'No, no,' Khan shook his head. 'Even Caja said that I was fine. Well, fine for Nele's standards.'

A helpless sigh that tried to transform into a shout escaped Khan's mouth. All that thinking seemed pointless when he had so few viable options. Actually, attempting to contain or limit himself out of fear of what could happen made his wild emotions return.

The internal fight between a collected approach and a mindless pursuit of power unfolded inside Khan, but his thoughts remained clear. His mind seemed made for that conflict, but that inevitably pushed him toward one extreme.

'Fuck it,' Khan cursed. 'My mana won't allow me to hold back too much anyway. I just need to keep increasing my value. No one will be able to touch me even if I mess up at that point.'

The conclusion to the internal struggle raised another valuable point. Getting stronger through regular training was Khan's best option, but George's fight had taught him important lessons.

Lucian had been no match for George, but he had still put up a decent fight without resorting to his element. The non-elemental spells had more value than Khan had initially thought. Getting access to the good ones was the only problem.

'My element pushes me toward a specific battle style,' Khan thought as another whiff of purple-red mana escaped his palm, 'But there must be non-elemental spells that can empower it. I can even try to modify them at my current level.'

The more Khan thought about the matter, the more he acknowledged its value. He could partially ignore his hesitation toward increasing his own power by adding multiple techniques to his arsenal. Even if his search left him empty-handed, he could still gain a lot from that additional knowledge.

Once the troublesome matters fell into the back of Khan's mind, he found the time to focus on other topics. He picked up his phone, and a soft scoff left his mouth when he opened his profile. The network had already replaced his title, and it was only a matter of time before the news spread.

'Captain Khan,' Khan scoffed again. He had barely spent three years inside the Global Army but had already reached an incredible goal. He had even surpassed many of the superiors met in previous missions.

Some excitement inevitably surged inside Khan. Raymond's involvement in the promotion had added a bitter taste to the matter, but the event remained incredible. The very network was carrying proof of his growth. His efforts didn't go to waste. He was getting closer to fulfilling his goals.

Headmaster Pitcus' words resounded in Khan's mind. Something was bound to change after his promotion. His new rank would provide multiple benefits, and he couldn't wait to read them out.

However, as Khan browsed his profile, he found many articles attached to it. The network had been aware of the promotion for a few hours, and various groups had already written pieces about it.

The same pages Luke, Monica, and Bruce checked to remain updated about various meaningful events now carried Khan's name. A quick search even told him that those articles didn't stop at describing his achievements. Some went quite deeply into his life, even mentioning reports that should have been classified.

'What?!' Khan gasped as he read through the articles. 'Probably lost his virginity to an alien? How do they know this stuff?! Used his political skills to subdue the famous Nele? What?!'

Some articles were accurate, while others were a complete fabrication. A few even stated that Khan's mother was an alien to justify his friendliness with other species. One also used his past relationships to draw a chart about his tastes in women.

The articles weren't stand-alone pieces either. People could leave comments, and Khan almost regretted reading some of them. Those statements were anonymous, and they only spread more misinformation and rumors.

'What the fu-?' Khan barely had the time to curse when a call arrived. Luke was trying to contact him, but the storm of messages that followed almost made his phone give up on buzzing.

Luke wasn't the only one who tried to call. Bruce, Anita, George, Martha, and many more contacted him almost simultaneously while sending as many messages as possible. It seemed that the news of the promotion had reached every corner of the Global Army.

'Colonel Norrett even has to add my new level,' Khan sighed as he planned to store his phone and ignore the mess. He didn't think fame could be so troublesome, and he had no interest in dealing with it now.

Still, a call that Khan felt unable to refuse reached his phone before he could put it away, and accepting it led to a loud shout.

"Did you make it to captain?!" Monica shouted as soon as Khan picked up the call.

"It's a long story," Khan laughed while placing a hand on the street. Luckily for him, the area was empty due to the lessons, so he could enjoy some privacy even while sitting in the open.

"And what's all that stuff about you starting a fight?!" Monica continued.

"George ratted me out," Khan laughed again.

"What ratted!" Monica scolded. "He was worried about you, and so am I. Where are you?"

"Don't you have classes?" Khan asked. "Can you really call me?"

"I hid in the bathroom," Monica explained as her voice dimmed. "I swear. If you try to tease me about this-."

"I don't plan to," Khan interrupted. "Listen, everything is a bit of a mess. It's better to leave the explanations for when we see each other."

"Khan, I'm your girlfriend," Monica declared, even if a trace of shyness appeared near the end of her line. "If you have problems, I want to be there for you. I want you to be able to rely on me."

"Monica, it's not that," Khan revealed. "Just, if I saw you now, we wouldn't talk at all."

Monica went silent for a few seconds before a whisper came out of the phone. "Scoundrel. I told you not to tease me."

"I wasn't teasing," Khan chuckled, and a giggle resounded from the other end of the call.

"You might deserve a gift," Monica sneered. "Captain is an important milestone in your career."

"Might?" Khan teased.

"Shut it," Monica pouted, but her voice immediately grew sweeter. "When can I see you?"

"Give me some time to cool down," Khan stated. "I also have a few things to handle, and I still don't know about the afternoon lessons. I'll keep you updated."

"Don't make me wait too long," Monica muttered.

"Do you miss me already?" Khan joked.

"Yes," Monica claimed without adding any shame to her tone, "And it's your fault, so take responsibility."

"I'll see after the gift," Khan laughed.

"You are lucky you have the best girlfriend in the world," Monica snorted.

"I'll see you later then, okay?" Khan changed the topic, and Monica only needed to hear his affectionate voice to understand that the teasing phases had ended.

"I'll try to stay put in the meantime," Monica promised. "Still, congratulations. No one deserves this promotion more than you."

Khan couldn't help but smile at that praise. The bitterness caused by Raymond's involvement grew fainter when Monica conveyed her feelings. Khan almost decided to see her right away while her words resounded in his ears, but he eventually opted for something funnier.

"You know," Khan announced. "You are the only call I picked up."

Silent took control for a few seconds, but Monica's question eventually arrived. "Really?"

"Really," Khan confirmed.

"What about George?" Monica asked.

"Only you," Khan repeated.

"Really?" Monica gasped.

"Really," Khan confirmed again. "I have to go now. I'll hopefully see you tonight."

"Sure," Monica voiced. Other words appeared in her mind and tried to take form in her mouth, but some fear and shyness stopped her from speaking them. The call ended right after.

Khan glanced at his buzzing phone after the call ended. He had thought about the same words that had crossed Monica's mind, but he was in no mood to think seriously about them. The time to sort out his feelings for Monica would come, but he had other matters to handle now.

Some hunger showed its presence, but Khan wanted to do something else first. He stood up, picked up the rectangular container, and reopened the map on his phone. His attunement with mana marked him as a third-level warrior, but he could add another achievement to that feat.

Khan hurried through the almost empty streets, uncaring of the few gazes that fell on him or the cars that stopped to peek at his face. He had a clear destination, and he reached it in less than ten minutes.

The doors of a large building opened when Khan moved his phone over their interactive menus. He didn't even check how much the access to the structure was as he rushed inside the corridor and entered the first empty area he found.

A training hall unfolded in Khan's vision. The place was smaller than where George and Lucian had fought, but Khan didn't care about those details. His feet moved quickly on the menus on the floor, and a reinforced circular target soon came out of a wall.

'I can't lack in control,' Khan declared inside his mind while joining his palms and summoning his mana, 'And I can't imagine a better state for my element.'

The wild and cold mindsets were already one, and Khan drew power from both extremes while performing the chaos spear. He mustered more mana than ever before during the casting of the spell, and the spreading of his arms showed the results of that reckless action.

The chaos spear took form, but its surfaces were far from stable. Short flares left the glowing weapon and leaked part of its mana into the environment. Some purple-red dots even ended on Khan's uniform and dug holes, but his skin could handle that level of destruction.

The spell seemed ready to explode, but it didn't. It remained between Khan's palms while its small flares continued to leak mana. A few tense seconds passed, but Khan eventually seized the glowing weapon and threw it toward the target.

An explosion wilder than anything Khan had ever generated expanded on the circular target before giving birth to a violent pillar. The purple-red light became almost blinding as the spell unleashed the entirety of its power, and it took a while for it to disperse.

The target remained strangely intact, but many marks and cracks had appeared on its surface. Yet, Khan only cared about the screen near its base. The device showed the number "3", confirming his initial guess.

'I knew it,' Khan claimed. 'I can be a third-level mage right away.'

The chaos spear still needed some tuning, and the same probably went for the other spells, but Khan had time. Almost half a day separated him from his next classes, and he didn't even know if he had to attend them.

Khan sat on the floor while the target remained in its position. He would get to the testing part, but many people had contacted him, and a few deserved answers.

However, the container captured Khan's attention before he could get to the messages. The brown metal box was as big as his arm and lacked any label, but Khan could guess what it carried, and he felt like drinking now.

Khan moved a key to unlock the lid and lifting it confirmed his guess. The container carried an expensive bottle that made him desire to taste it right away. Yet, there was something else there. A small screen rested in the corner and lit up as soon as Khan touched it.

'Genetic signature,' Khan realized as words lit up on the screen. The device carried a letter, and its contents turned Khan's complicated excitement into a pure frenzy.

'Captain Khan,' Khan read on the letter. 'For the exceptional service shown in many missions, the Global Army is honored to provide flying courses free of charge. We wish you good luck on your journey toward your license.'

Chapter 439 Future

'Flying courses?!' Khan shouted in his mind as both his hands went on the screen.

The letter went on to explain how to redeem those lessons. Khan only needed to reach a hangar controlled by the Global Army, and the soldiers there would handle the rest. The device worked as an official permit, so he was good to go right away.

'Flying courses,' Khan repeated while browsing through the letter once more. 'It's actually happening.'

Flying had been in Khan's mind since his departure from Nitis, but learning about the various issues involved had forced him to postpone that interest.

Becoming an official pilot would cut Khan from a big part of the Global Army, which went against his main goal. As for paying for flying classes, he didn't have the necessary money. Even if he did, he never stayed in one place for too long, which would make any course pointless.

However, the letter couldn't have come at a better time. Khan was on a moon. The Harbor didn't lack spaceships, and he had even just arrived. Months of classes were waiting for him, so he could find the time to focus on that project. The free-of-charge part only added more benefits to the offer.

Excitement built up inside Khan. He couldn't express how much he liked flying, and seeing that idea becoming a reality made his blood boil. He wanted to get to a hangar immediately, but his reasonable side made him aware of his priorities.

'Classes, food, celebration,' Khan repeated. 'I'm probably not even close to affording a ship. I need to take it one step at a time

Khan couldn't help but look at the metal target. He had decided to handle his other priorities, but the ship remained a loud thought, and he knew exactly what he lacked to get it. He needed Credits, and his experience told him that working wasn't always the shortest path.

'I'm already here,' Khan smirked as he put away the letter and picked up the bottle.

A captivating scent spread through the hall as soon as Khan opened the bottle. The booze smelled amazing, and taking a sip confirmed that sensation. That was the best thing Khan had ever drunk, and he made sure to taste it again before standing up.

Khan knew his profile would offer incredible jobs once his breakthrough became official. He was also sure that he could find something worthwhile in the Harbor. Yet, he could get money through achievements, and turning into a third-level mage was bound to attract valuable attention.

The next classes were in the afternoon, so Khan had time to kill, and training felt mandatory now that flying had become a real possibility. His spells needed to be up to par to get the additional star, and testing his new power sounded reasonable.

Khan went over his entire arsenal, grinding through metal puppets and reinforced targets. He took breaks to drink, order food, and exchange messages with the most valuable people in his life, but training remained his main task.

Testing out the limits of the new body turned out to be more than necessary. The transformation and the breakthrough had given Khan far more power than he initially realized, but the hours spent inside the training hall solidified his understanding.

Being a third-level warrior was amazing. Khan could perform many techniques in a row without even getting close to feeling tired, but the power they expressed remained their most surprising aspect, and he didn't know how much of it came from the transformation.

Of course, Khan couldn't separate the two things, so he limited himself to testing his limits. Everything felt normal, but seeing his new power in action left him stunned multiple times. He had vague comparisons due to his experience, and they told him that he was far stronger than he should be.

The spells gave similar results. They weren't as straightforward as the martial arts since they often strived for unstable forms, but their power was undeniable. Khan walked on a path that stood above humans, and his prowess reflected that feature.

Eventually, a message that warned Khan about the change in schedule reached his phone. Colonel Norrett had stayed true to his word and had given Khan access to the advanced classes, which excluded him from his afternoon tasks.

Khan took the news happily since the training had long since captured his full attention, but the second part of the message hinted at troublesome consequences. Colonel Norrett had pushed for an update of Khan's profile again, and he felt no surprise when his phone resumed its crazy ringing.

"Yes," Khan said through his munching, holding his phone between his ear and shoulder, "The Colonel scanned me. I'm a third-level warrior."

"And when did you plan on telling me?!" Monica shouted, seemingly attempting to deafen Khan.

"I told you I would talk to you later," Khan reminded while gulping down the last bits of food left in his tray.

"I'd still like to learn this stuff from you instead of reading it from your profile," Monica complained.

"Did you check my profile the whole time?" Khan teased.

"Idiot," Monica pouted. "Another article about you came out. I simply got a message."

"What do they say about me now?" Khan wondered.

"They say that you learnt some secret training technique through your alien girlfriends," Monica scoffed. "What girlfriends? Why do they always include Jenna there?"

"They are not wrong," Khan chuckled before moving to serious topics. "Hey, they canceled my afternoon classes, so I'll remain in the training hall. I'll see you once I come out, okay?"

"Someone should tell them that Jenna wasn't your girlfriend," Monica whispered.

"Are you still hiding in the bathroom?" Khan joked.

"It's a different bathroom!" Monica shouted before gasping and opting for another whisper. "Yes, I'll come to your flat once I'm done with classes. Tell George to come before me."

"Of course," Khan reassured. "Later then."

The call ended, and Khan couldn't resist the temptation to check the new article about him. It turned out that Monica had gone easy on him. The piece even considered the possibility of a betrayal on Khan's side, and the comments weren't any better.

'Wow,' Khan thought. 'When did people become jealous of my life?'

Khan didn't waste too long on the article. Milia 222 had made him used to the attention, so he quickly disregarded his new fame to focus on his training.

Hours went by until another message from Colonel Norrett put an end to Khan's training. The soldier had finally sent the details about the meeting, and time was relatively tight.

Khan hurried outside the training hall, but a surprising sight welcomed his arrival on the street. A crowd had gathered on the sidewalk, and the excited faces that spread through the audience told Khan that they were waiting for him.

"Captain Khan!" A middle-aged man at the top of the crowd shouted. "I'm Carl, from the training district. I'd be honored to make your stay in the Harbor more comfortable."

"Don't mind him!" A middle-aged woman next to the first speaker cried. "I'm Clara, from the PR department of the embassy. I'd gladly take care of your job offers from now on."

"You are here because you suck at your job," The first speaker rebuked, and a third one seized that chance to throw another request at Khan.

'Right,' Khan recalled as the crowd overwhelmed him with offers. 'The benefits of a Captain.'

Khan's new rank came with benefits that he had barely begun to read. Discounts and other free or cheaper services were obvious, but being a Captain also allowed him to hire soldiers under his payroll.

As a captain, Khan could request a team directly from the Global Army, even if that often involved actual missions. Still, he could hire caretakers, drivers, and many more workers to make his life in the Harbor easier. Yet, he had no interest in those benefits.

'Another minor infraction can't hurt,' Khan sighed as he jumped over the crowd and stepped on heads and shoulders to sprint past that blockade.

In theory, the Harbor forbade techniques and spells in its streets, but Khan felt sure that no one would punish him, especially after what he did that morning. His sprint brought him past the crowd and around a corner a few blocks away, where he felt forced to stop to call a cab. He would run all the way home, but time wasn't on his side.

Luckily for Khan, the cab that came to pick him up didn't seem to have any interest in requesting a job. He could hop in and watch the scenery while the car brought him back to the seventh district.

Truth be told, Khan had barely used his flat. George's apartment always had free beds, so Khan had never bothered to return to the seventh district.

However, the flat in the seventh district carried Khan's name, so any delivery would go there. Colonel Norrett's message said that a new uniform had arrived, so Khan knew that he had to go back home to get it.

The situation in front of Khan's building was no different from what he had seen outside the training hall, but the Harbor had luckily done something about it.

A crowd had gathered, but soldiers stood on the sidewalk to create a safe passage toward the building. Khan could jump off the car and tread that path to get inside without meeting any hindrance, but he still agreed to exchange a few words with the doorman once he called.

"Congratulation on the promotion, Captain Khan," Perry announced once Khan got close enough to the main desk.

"Thank you, Perry," Khan smiled. "Any chance you can drop the captain?"

"Not even one," Perry politely replied.

"News sure spreads fast," Khan sighed. "I didn't expect the crowd."

"It will quiet down," Perry reassured. "Give it a couple of weeks."

"That's a couple of weeks too long," Khan joked as he reached the elevator.

"At least, the fame is well-deserved for once," Perry praised before moving to the updates. "Mister Ildoo is waiting for you upstairs, and a package came in earlier."

"The Harbor moves quickly," Khan threw another joke as the elevator opened.

"Have a good night, Captain Khan," Perry exclaimed.

"The night is still long," Khan cursed while entering the elevator. "Way too long."

The elevator brought Khan to the fourth floor, where he found George sitting in front of his door. The man didn't hesitate to jump to his feet, and a curse immediately followed.

"You sure took your time," George cursed.

"Have mercy," Khan laughed while lifting the rectangular container. "I bring goods."

"Ooh?" George exclaimed as his eyes lit up. "You might not be an awful friend."

"I did drink most of it," Khan revealed once he reached George and unlocked his flat's door.

"I won't bail you out anymore," George scoffed as he followed Khan inside.

The corridor had a package at its center, and Khan handed the container to George to check it out. A series of new military uniforms filled his view, and they all featured three stars on their right shoulders.

"So," George announced as he jumped on the bed and began to open the container. "Did your fans do that?"

"Fans?" Khan repeated before understanding what George meant when he inspected his uniform.

The martial arts didn't do much, but testing spells had ruined the military uniform. Khan found holes all around his chest area, and his sleeves had also turned into torn rags.

"Hey!" George shouted while Khan was still busy studying the damage done by his spells. "Did you really drink this?"

"Why?" Khan asked.

"This bottle is for collection!" George revealed while taking out the booze from the container. "You are not supposed to drink it unless it's a special occasion."

"What's the point of booze that you can't drink?" Khan frowned.

"I have no idea," George stated as he opened the bottle and took a sip.

"Don't you have thousands of those in your holiday house?" Khan wondered as he also reached the bed.

"My parents would kill me if I opened one of these," George said, handing the bottle to Khan.

"I'm sure they won't say anything if you get promoted," Khan suggested. "Why don't you take the test? You are more than qualified to be a lieutenant."

"Ranks are useless in my case," George explained, "At least the lower ones. I'd have to make it to major or higher to expand my family's wealth."

"Is that what you want?" Khan questioned. George could rely on his family for his future, but it seemed that he had yet to make up his mind.

"I don't know what I want," George groaned while lying on the bed. "I'm young and full of opportunities. I can think about that stuff later."

"The life of a wealthy descendant sure is nice," Khan joked.

"Sometimes I envy you," George admitted. "Having a purpose sounds nice, but then I remember how shitty you have it. Though, I'd take your luck with women."

"Leave my women alone," Khan laughed. "Well, you'll get somewhere anyway. I can't imagine you being a simple soldier."

"Graduating from the Harbor will prevent that," George stated. "Right, you skipped the afternoon classes. Was it wise in your situation?"

"I gained access to the advanced classes," Khan revealed before rolling his eyes. "I sort of requested it for my promotion."

"What?!" George cursed. "Are you leaving me alone in the normal classes?"

"I know you were there only to keep me company," Khan snorted. "How long will it take you to get to the advanced?"

"A week," George declared. "And here I thought I could take it easy for a while."

"How long did you think it would have taken me to advance?" Khan sneered.

"More than a day!" George exclaimed, and both men ended up laughing.

The bottle ended in no time, and Khan and George killed some time talking and joking around. Still, the meeting was about to start, so Khan began to prepare to leave, but someone knocked on his door once he finished wearing a new uniform.

"It must be Monica," Khan voiced as he pressed a menu on the wall to unlock the entrance.

The door opened, and Khan peeked into the corridor to welcome his girlfriend. Yet, the words remained stuck in his throat when he laid his eyes on that enchanting sight.

Monica had dropped the military uniform to wear an exquisite brownish sheath dress. The clothing only revealed her arms and half of her legs, but it was tight on the waist, highlighting her fabulous figure. It also fit her perfectly, giving her a mature and formal aura.

The door closed behind Monica as soon as she entered the flat, and Khan stepped into the corridor to get a better sight of the scene. His expression described his thoughts, and Monica revealed a shy smile under his intense gaze, but she still walked toward him.

"You are stunning," Khan whispered when Monica reached him, and she performed an elegant bow before placing her hands on his shoulders.

"Do you like it?" Monica asked while her eyes remained glued to Khan's. "I took longer than expected to choose a dress for the occasion."

"It was worth it," Khan said without shame. "Come here."

Monica didn't dare to refuse. The two fell into a kiss that Monica felt forced to interrupt when things became too dangerous. Khan didn't hide his disappointment at their separation, but he still smiled when Monica began to adjust his uniform.

"That new star suits you," Monica whispered while her expression carried tempting meanings.

"I'll make sure to add another soon," Khan uttered before recalling the meeting. "Now I feel bad. I should have warned you. I have to join a celebration for my promotion tonight."

"I know, stupid," Monica giggled. "It's customary with promotions to captain and above. Besides, I've been invited."

"Invited?" Khan repeated. "But they told me that the uniform was mandatory."

"Only if you go as a soldier," Monica explained. "I've been invited as a member of the Solodrey family. Showing my best dresses is almost mandatory for me."

The news was surprising, but Khan rejoiced nonetheless. He would have an ally that night. He only had a minor gripe about the matter.

"What is it?" Monica whispered.

"Part of me doesn't want anyone else to see you wearing this," Khan revealed. "More than a part."

"Don't you want to show off your girlfriend?" Monica teased.

"Not at all," Khan replied while laying his forehead on Monica's. "I want to be the only one to know how beautiful you are."

"The others get the dresses," Monica showed her bold side. "You get everything else."

Khan and Monica were on the verge of kissing again, but George's complaint interrupted them.

"Can't you do this in my flat, where I can be three rooms away from this?"

Monica pouted and hid her face in Khan's chest while he voiced a joke. "I remember a different George on Nitis."

"I had more booze there," George snorted. "Still, Monica, you are bolder than I expected."

"What are you implying?!" Monica shouted as she tried to peek past Khan's chest, but he kept her in his hug.

"Feisty as always," George laughed.

Monica wanted to respond, but her and Khan's phones rang simultaneously. The two picked them up only to discover that their rides had arrived, so the time for jokes ended.

"I'll see you there," Monica whispered before adjusting Khan's uniform again and giving him a kiss.

"I'll call you whenever I need saving," Khan declared.

"You'll do great," Monica reassured, giving Khan another kiss. "Bye, lost cause."

"I think we are starting to bond," George laughed, and Monica snorted before hurrying out of the flat.

Khan let the door close and checked the hour on his phone. It was safer to wait a few minutes so the cameras wouldn't pick up anything suspicious, and George used that time to throw more comments.

"She is so into you," George declared as he left the bed. "When is the marriage?"

Khan leaned his back on the wall and lightly bumped the back of his head a few times. His expression said words George could read, which added some seriousness to his following comment.

"I know that face," George sighed. "You love the problematic ones, don't you?"

"It's too early to say," Khan responded.

"That's not what the Niqols taught us," George pointed out. "You know that better than me."

"I'm," Khan hesitated. "I'm not sure."

"That's reasonable," George agreed. "Just don't hesitate out of fear. It doesn't suit you."

"Do you have any idea how I'll act if I truly fall for her?" Khan asked.

"You have already assaulted a student and threatened a professor," George exclaimed. "Getting one or two families against you isn't such a long jump."

"It's not like I can lie to myself anyway," Khan continued.

"Remind me," George sneered. "How many days did you last with Liiza after Paul's warning? Or was it hours?"

"Paul," Khan chuckled. "I wonder if he ever made it to Lieutenant."

"He did," George confirmed. "He is doing something somewhere now. I don't really remember."

"Good for him," Khan claimed while leaving the wall. "Time for a political meeting."

"Do you have any booze here?" George wondered.

"I barely used this flat," Khan shook his head as he approached the exit. "Warn me if you invite someone."

"Good luck," George stated, and Khan waved his hand while the door closed behind him.

Chapter 440 Killing Machine

Leaving the building put Khan among the curious and loud crowd again. Surprisingly, those people had yet to disperse, but the Harbor's soldiers kept a path open for him.

Khan crossed the sidewalk only to find himself before a couple of soldiers guarding a long ship. The vehicle was another black model exclusive to the Global Army, but its shape hinted at its inability to fly in open space.

The two soldiers performed a military salute, and Khan nodded at them before crossing the ship's open doors. He had seen far better insides, but the seats were comfortable, and the closing of the entrance brought some cozy solitude. Khan couldn't help but think about his conversation with George, and being alone helped.

The ship set off almost immediately. People continued to shout from the outside, but the glasses and metal blocked any sound. Khan was in a quiet environment, and the scenery from his window kept him company while his mind wandered.

The imminent meeting wouldn't be Khan's first political event. He had already faced something similar on Reebfell when various families sent representatives to complain about his teaching methods.

Khan had used facts and honesty to win over most representatives, but the imminent meeting didn't involve concerned families. The important figures Khan would meet would be there due to his promotion, and he couldn't predict what they would talk about.

A choice that Khan had met in the past showed its presence again. He had to decide how to approach the meeting. Wearing a political persona would be wise, but he had already opted against that, and his condition only pushed him further to that extreme.

The trip was far from short. The meeting would happen in the embassy, and the seventh district wasn't exactly close, so Khan could enjoy the silence for a while. He couldn't find a perfect answer, but part of him had already made a decision.

The gigantic triangular building eventually appeared, and the ship flew toward its top. From that height, Khan could spot many vehicles resting on the ceilings of the rectangular blocks, and his ride soon landed on an empty one.

The two soldiers from before immediately left the ship to have their military salute ready for Khan's arrival on the ceiling. Still, they couldn't claim his interest when he was in such a peculiar location. The vehicle had left him near the top of the embassy, and the scenery past the block's edge was too captivating for him.

'So tall,' Khan praised as his eyes darted among the parking lots, landing areas, and many white pillars under him. He had already guessed that the embassy contained an uncountable number of activities, but that new perspective increased his initial estimate.

The opening of a wall on the other side of the rectangular block forced Khan to turn. The arrival of an empty spot had accompanied the event, and Khan felt no surprise when he saw Colonel Norrett at the center of the new entrance.

"The man of the hour," Colonel Norrett announced as he stepped on the landing area and let the wall close behind him.

"Sir," Khan voiced as he performed a military salute, and the two soldiers in front of him also turned to welcome the arrival of the Colonel.

"At ease," Colonel Norrett exclaimed as he waved at the two soldiers, "Especially you, Captain Khan. This night is for you."

Khan and Colonel Norrett walked toward each other to stop at the center of the platform. The latter gave him a long look before nodding in approval, and the soldiers entered the ship in the meantime.

The atmosphere relaxed with that newfound privacy. Colonel Norrett even stopped hiding his presence, and the appearance of his heavy mana forced Khan to focus on the five pairs of stars on his shoulders.

"Still wary of your superiors," Colonel Norrett sneered. "Don't worry. I'm the last person you have to worry about tonight."

"Who will be there?" Khan asked.

"The Headmistress," Colonel Norrett explained, "Some representatives from a few families, and a reporter. I'm sure you can handle this much."

"Should I be worried about anyone?" Khan wondered.

"All of them," Colonel Norrett laughed. "You are the youngest Captain in history. Everyone can't wait to find a weakness to exploit."

Khan frowned, and his reaction prolonged Colonel Norrett's laugh, pushing him to continue. "I hope you didn't expect this to be a simple dinner. What you do here will set the foundation of your political career."

'Reassuring,' Khan thought as he diverted his gaze. The news wasn't shocking, but the event sounded more important than he had initially predicted.

"Is this too much for you?" Colonel Norrett questioned. "Did I give you this promotion too soon?"

"Not at all, sir," Khan confirmed before taking his chances. "I was only wondering if you had some advice."

Colonel Norrett shot a long look at Khan before bringing a hand on his chin. "There might be something worth mentioning."

Khan's eyes snapped on the Colonel, who remained silent for a few seconds before voicing his thoughts. "I bet you don't see any difference between a representative and me. We must be the other side in your eyes."

"Sir?" Khan asked.

"The Global Army and the families are different entities," Colonel Norrett explained. "Connected, fused even, but still different. Keep in mind that you will be going in as a soldier while the others will be representatives."

Khan felt able to understand something, but he continued with a question anyway. "What about you, sir?"

"I'll also be a soldier," Colonel Norrett stated. "I am a soldier, but I already went through this. It's your turn now."

Khan nodded, but an idea slowly crept into his mind, and a shameless smile appeared on his face when he decided to voice it. "Colonel, sir, since you approved my promotion, won't a poor performance on my side affect your reputation?"

The statement could have multiple interpretations, but the shameless smile revealed what Khan meant, and the Colonel didn't miss that. His expression even froze for a second before breaking into a scoff.

"Little shit," Colonel Norrett smirked. "I'll only introduce you and step in if they go overboard, but the rest is on you, so don't disappoint me."

"Aye aye, sir," Khan stated while performing a military salute again, but his shameless smile didn't disappear, and Colonel Norrett found that scene funny.

"Hurry up," Colonel Norrett declared. "The Headmistress wants to have a talk with you before heading for the meeting. She is our first stop."

Khan remained slightly surprised, but the Colonel was done with the talk. He headed directly for the wall, and Khan could only follow behind him.

The wall opened as soon as Colonel Norrett approached it, and a small room unfolded. The area seemed nothing more than a big closet filled with screens closed behind transparent containers. Khan guessed that they were reports and similar items, but the Colonel led him into the next room before he could study the place any longer.

A door led the two soldiers into a big office, which brought another presence to Khan's senses. The place had identical transparent containers, a couple of big screens, and a desk, and an aura that matched Colonel Norrett's power sat behind it.

"You are late," The middle-aged woman sitting behind the desk announced while taking off her circular glasses. "Our guests are already waiting."

The woman left the glasses on the desk before standing up, and Khan couldn't help but inspect every inch of her figure. Her dark skin matched the color of her long straight hair, while her eyes carried a deeper blackness. She was slim and short, but her figure radiated heavy power, and her cold face highlighted that feature.

"Waiting is what they do best," Colonel Norrett scoffed as he pushed Khan forward. "Captain Khan, this is Headmistress Holwen. She handles most of the embassy."

"Pleasure to meet you, ma'am!" Khan exclaimed while performing a salute. The Headmistress was wearing a military uniform with five stars on each shoulder, so Khan found it proper to greet her like that.

"Captain Khan," Headmistress Holwen called as she walked around the desk to reach Khan. Her presence changed during the process. It transformed into a cold aura capable of making anyone shake.

"Yes, ma'am?" Khan asked while the Headmistress looked deep into his eyes. To her surprise, Khan didn't shrink under her pressure, but she misunderstood the reasons behind his endurance.

Khan had an easier time ignoring the fear caused by the mana, but he didn't need to rely on that ability in the Headmistress' case. He had gotten used to Liiza's coldness, so that freezing aura only made him feel cozy.

The Headmistress felt almost on the verge of praising Khan for keeping his cool, but she noticed something was up when he started to relax. She dropped her attempt to intimidate him at that point to move to the core of the matter.

"Let's make one thing clear," Headmistress Holwen stated while her eyes remained glued to Khan's. "I don't condone any violent behavior in my embassy. I don't care about the situation or injustice. If you have a problem, come to me or one of your superiors."

The Headmistress didn't need to explain herself to make Khan understand what she meant. His actions against Oscar and Tobias didn't go unnoticed, and Colonel Norrett's intervention couldn't save him from that reprimand.

"That being said," The Headmistress continued as her chilling presence waned. "Your decision to let the matter go is commendable. Mister Odse and Professor Odse will receive punishments, but keeping things inside the Harbor is for the best. It's always a mess when outsiders get involved."

The Headmistress finally broke her stare to look at the door past the transparent containers, and her speech soon resumed. "The embassy is a frail ecosystem. Too many families have too many descendants here, and keeping track of everyone is impossible. We can only make them stay put."

The "we" in the Headmistress' speech added to what Colonel Norrett had said earlier. Khan's background made him an outsider, but there were equally deep fractures between the soldiers and the families. Khan even guessed that they could be deeper than he could imagine.

'Soldier,' Khan repeated in his mind as a sigh tried to escape his mouth. He knew how he would act in the meeting. He could only hope that his new rank would award him some basic respect.

"Let's not waste time then," Headmistress Holwen eventually declared as she focused on Khan again. "Young man, don't punch anyone this time. Are we clear?"

"Technically, I didn't punch anyone," Khan pointed out, and his joke awarded him another glare, but Colonel Norrett also fell prey to the Headmistress' stern look when he laughed.

"Norrett, the warning applies to you too," Headmistress Holwen stated. "This is my jurisdiction. Try to be respectful."

"Aye aye, ma'am," Colonel Norrett replied in the same words used by Khan previously, and he didn't miss that detail. He didn't turn toward the Colonel but felt that the two had reached a silent understanding.

Headmistress Holwen's eyes darted between Khan and Colonel Norrett before giving the okay to enter the meeting. "Follow me."

"One last thing," Colonel Norrett uttered when the Headmistress reached him. "Is the Princess coming?"

"Who knows," Headmistress Holwen sighed. "Last I heard, she was orbiting the moon."

"Princess?" Khan asked.

"Don't worry about it," Colonel Norrett promptly stated before following the Headmistress toward the door past the transparent containers.

Khan couldn't see much from behind his two superiors, but his sensitivity drew a picture in his mind. His senses touched multiple masses of mana, some strong and some weak, while the symphony hinted at the presence of a big hall.

The sensitivity turned out to be on point. Once the Colonel and the Headmistress got out of the way, Khan could see a big hall featuring multiple people and a long table filled with delicacies. Food and drinks spread their alluring scent in the area, but the tension that fell prevented Khan from appreciating that detail.

Many gazes moved over Colonel Norrett and Headmistress Holwen before falling on Khan. Only the waiters standing next to the walls didn't look at him. As for everyone else, their inspection was so intense that the synthetic mana moved toward him. Someone even attempted to throw a formless and invisible spell at him.

Colonel Norrett's mana moved as the slow spell flew toward Khan, but he held back from intervening. His lack of actions told Khan enough, and he didn't hesitate to release a tinge of energy while his thoughts sent a silent request.

'Disperse it,' Khan thought, and the whiff of mana released from his back fused with the synthetic energy before flying toward the incoming spell.

The invisible spell wasn't strong. The caster seemed to have sacrificed speed, power, and stability to focus on its cloaking properties. Because of that, Khan couldn't find the source, but his simple request was more than enough to take care of it.

Colonel Norrett wore a faint smile when he felt the invisible spell dispersing. Instead, Khan sent his gaze left and right to check whether someone reacted to his feat. Still, no one did anything suspicious. He could only see polite and cheerful faces.

'Political monsters,' Khan cursed while stepping forward to match the Colonel and the Headmistress.

"Dear guests," Headmistress Holwen announced as soon as Khan reached her. "I'm sorry for the wait. I present to you, Captain Khan."

"As most of you might have heard," Colonel Norrett continued. "Captain Khan earned his promotion by serving on active battlefields and performing heroic duties during unexpected crises. I'm sure you can't wait to know him."

Colonel Norrett and Headmistress Holwen stepped aside, and the people in the hall formed three groups. The most numerous headed for the Colonel and the Headmistress, while only a few approached Khan directly. Monica was there, but she remained in the back and chose to go for the Headmistress for obvious reasons.

The first to approach Khan was a slightly fat middle-aged man, a third-level warrior wearing an elegant red suit that matched the color of his curly hair. His face was the least cheerful of the bunch, but Khan felt a friendly vibe in his mana.

"Captain Khan, it's a pleasure to meet you," The middle-aged man exclaimed while stretching his arm forward. "I'm Robert Bizelli of the Bizelli family. I have to say. Your fame precedes you."

"I hope the reality met the expectations," Khan kept it polite while shaking Robert's hand.

"How could they when you put a soldier outside his natural environment?" Robert wondered. "Still, I know Mark personally. He wouldn't promote someone unworthy."

"The Bizelli family builds many of the scanners used in the medical bays," Colonel Norrett explained while shaking another man's hand. "Mister Bizelli here is a renowned surgeon who patched me up more than once."

"He doesn't call me Mister Bizelli in private," Robert revealed as a smirk formed. "You are so young, but you already performed priceless services to the Global Army. You have what it takes to reach the top. Keep working hard, and you'll get there."

"Thank you, sir," Khan honestly said.

"I'll be in the drinking area," Mister Bizelli voiced. "Look for me if you are interested in a path in the medical field. The doctors are never enough in these troubled times."

Khan barely had the time to nod that Robert left the group to approach the table. A youthful blonde woman took his place, and she lifted the edges of her long black dress to perform a bow as soon as she arrived before Khan.

"Captain Khan," The woman exclaimed through a clearly fake smile. "I'm Nadia Chaunac of the Chaunac family. I've already been authorized to book your first year after graduation from the Harbor. If you accept, you won't worry about money or resources for the next two decades."

"Hey, Nadia," A man from the back of the group shouted, "I thought we agreed on keeping the bribes for later."

"Hector, playing dirty is only normal when the youngest captain in history is involved," Nadia Chaunac responded while peeking past her shoulder before bringing her eyes to Khan again. "The offer is negotiable. Look for me if you want to discuss it."

Nadia left before Khan could utter any word, and someone else immediately took his place. Another important name resounded in Khan's ears, and a tempting offer didn't hesitate to follow.

The first attempt to bribe Khan pushed the others to match the initial offer. Khan rarely found the time to speak after the polite greetings since everyone tried to capture his interest by mentioning important names and wild promises. Someone was even ready to give him control of a small settlement, but he limited himself to nodding and smiling.

Soon, Khan went through his entire group, but others made sure to follow. The people who had chosen Colonel Norrett and Headmistress Holwen as their first interlocutors moved to the other superior before heading for Khan, so his line never emptied completely.

All the interactions were polite, but they grew colder as the group moved on. The last in line didn't have a considerable interest in Khan, but they still forced themselves to perform detached greetings. They also never forgot to say their names, and Khan struggled to remember them as time passed.

Eventually, Khan met some troublemakers. As the line reached its last group, a fat man who couldn't be much older than Khan stepped toward him and crossed his arms before falling silent to inspect him from head to toe.

The inspection added a bad scent to the synthetic mana that didn't only come from the man's clear disregard for Khan. His actions and stance were even pretty explicit, and they seemed to aim to be disrespectful on purpose.

"A captain at the age of nineteen," The man eventually spoke while his gaze kept going up and down. "I'm sorry, Colonel Norrett. I have to disagree with your decision. He is talented but too young to be a captain."

"Mister Dunac, Captain Khan's promotion is already official." Colonel Norrett stated. "We can only see how he performs from now on."

"The families should have more control over promotions," Mister Dunac sighed. "Anyway, Captain Khan, I'll keep an eye on you."

"Sure," Khan replied, omitting the "sir" on purpose since Mister Dunac was only a first-level warrior. The latter didn't miss that faint lack of respect, but he only hesitated for a second before leaving the line.

The man that followed was so thin that his cheeks had caved in, but they were rosy due to the booze he drank before the meeting. His breath even reeked of alcohol, which added to his cheerful behavior.

"The youngest captain in history!" The man happily exclaimed while shaking Khan's wrist with both hands. "It's an honor to meet you. I'm John Raulon from the Raulon family."

"Pleasure to meet you," Khan couldn't help but show a kinder side to that tipsy behavior. "I'm afraid I'm unaware of the Raulon family's businesses."

"We occupy many fields," John revealed. "Mine involves the application of mana, and yes, I read your report on the Tors. Quite enlightening stuff."

"Thank you, sir," Khan laughed.

"Don't worry about the sir," John also chuckled. "Your insight into alien arts is spectacular. You should consider a position in the scientific department. I'm sure they'll value you a lot there."

The topic killed any happiness that friendly interaction had generated inside Khan. He knew he had to hold back, but his mouth moved before his smile could disappear.

"Sir, don't you know who my father is?" Khan asked. Colonel Norrett and Headmistress Holwen had left the entrance to entertain the other guests by then, but Khan's question made them turn in his direction, and they weren't the only ones.

"Oh," John gasped when he realized what he had done. "I misspoke. I should let the others introduce themselves."

Awkwardness fell on the scene and followed John until he reached the table. Some sneered when they saw him picking up more booze, and Khan couldn't remain interested in him anymore.

"Captain Khan, I'm Emilia Lamalot," An old woman with long white hair combed into a thick braid replaced John Raulon. "Your achievements are as famous as your looks. You are a sight for these old eyes."

Those words were flattering and polite, but Khan couldn't show any friendliness due to the scent radiated by Emilia's mana. Bitterness and a sense of superiority leaked out of the old woman and infested the synthetic energy, telling Khan how her intentions were far from gentle.

"If I may," Emilia Lamalot continued after her polite bow. "I'd rethink your habit of ending up with aliens. You are at the right age to find a worthy woman, a human woman. You should quell your youthful curiosity and stop pursuing futureless endeavors."

Some laughs resounded among the people who had spread through the hall. It seemed that many were aware of Emilia's character, and they had even looked forward to her meeting with Khan. Still, the suggestion sounded like a terrible insult to Khan, and his tongue promptly fought back.

"Ma'am, with all due respect," Khan wore a fake smile. "Where I stick my dick is my own business."

Sounds of coughing resounded. Part of the audience ended up choking on their drinks or food when they heard Khan's reply. The others froze, Emilia included, and only a loud laugh separated itself from that group.

Headmistress Holwen glared at the laughing Colonel Norrett. The latter had to clear his throat to calm himself down, but Emilia's reaction triggered another chuckle.

"I was only speaking in your best interest," Emilia scoffed as she turned to leave. "It seems that the Slums are still rooted inside you."

Khan was too annoyed to heave a helpless sigh, and the youthful figure that followed didn't give him the time to inspect the situation anyway. The woman had fair skin and long curly hair tied into a ponytail. Her brown eyes shone with curiosity, and she approached Khan while holding a device ready to note down words.

"Captain Khan, I'm Katia from the Heavenly News," The woman announced. "If you don't mind, I would like to ask you some questions."

Khan didn't read the news unless necessary, but his recent achievements had made him aware of many names in the field, including the Heavenly News. Colonel Norrett had also warned him about the presence of a reporter, so he immediately made the connection.

"Didn't you already make many articles about me during the day?" Khan questioned while glancing at Colonel Norrett. The latter was also inspecting the situation, and his behavior told Khan that he had to be careful about what he said.

"Having actual statements to corroborate articles always helps," Katia explained. "Don't make me beg, Captain Khan. You faced aliens and monsters. I can't be worse than them."

Katia was wearing a revealing black dress, and she didn't hesitate to close her arms on her chest to enhance her curves. Her cleavage also went slightly down, making her attempt to sway Khan more than obvious.

Intense jealousy surged behind Katia, and Khan could only pretend to ignore it. The reporter also leaned toward him during the wait, making it harder for him to reject her request or leave.

"I can't promise answers," Khan eventually replied, and Katia immediately straightened her position to bring her focus on the device in her hands.

"So, how does it feel to be the youngest Captain in history?" Katia began with her questions.

"I'm the same soldier I was yesterday," Khan honestly responded. "I need some time to notice the changes."

"Why were you on Milia 222?" Katia continued.

"That's a private matter," Khan stated.

"It really isn't," Katia objected. "Mister Cobsend's reports are open to the public."

"It is for me," Khan stated without bothering to add more details. The articles from earlier had shown him how easily misinformation could spread, and he didn't want to say anything Katia could use. Also, he wasn't completely lying about Luke's mission.

"Is it true that you faced the severed hand of a Nak on Milia 222?" Katia changed the question.

"That's classified," Khan uttered.

"That's false," Katia declared. "The Global Army doesn't have a monopoly over Milia 222, and the disaster there involved every species."

"I don't know what to say," Khan voiced.

"Are you lying to me, Captain Khan?" Katia wondered. "Why do you feel the need to lie? Are you protecting someone?"

"This is my first time receiving an interview," Khan revealed. "I'd rather remain silent than risk messing it up."

"I see," Katia nodded while wearing an excited smile. "Let's move to personal topics then. You should know how much you can reveal there."

"It will depend on the question," Khan pointed out.

"Is it true that you had an interspecies relationship on Nitis?" Katia asked.

"It's true," Khan couldn't lie about Liiza.

"Why?" Katia wondered. "Did you use it to garner a political advantage over the Niqols?"

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't jump to disrespectful conclusions," Khan declared. "I loved her. That's why I was in that relationship."

"Not love love, right?" Katia questioned as she browsed through her device to pull out reports.

"According to the soldiers stationed on Ecoruta with you, you entertained a short relationship with an older woman before opting for something longer on Reebfell."

"Ma'am," Khan called, but Katia didn't give him the time to speak.

"Milia 222 was no different," Katia continued. "You ended up with the famous Nele of all species. How do you explain that?"

"I don't understand the interest in my romantic life," Khan kept it cool even if wild emotions began to build up inside him.

"Captain Khan," Katia exclaimed, "Your age and achievements make you one of the most sought men in the entire Global Army. You are top five among your generation, and it's the job of the Heavenly News to provide as much help as possible to hopeful readers."

"I'm not looking for a relationship," Khan tried to cut it short.

"Your record begs to differ," Katia stated. "So, what's the truth? Did you love all your girlfriends, or were they simply bursts of passion?"

"Ma'am, enough with the questions," Khan requested, but Katia didn't stop.

"Do human women have any hope after you had a taste of the Nele?" Katia pressed on.

"I," Khan hesitated since he didn't know if Jenna and the Nele as a whole would benefit from the truth. As for Katia, she saw his growing irritation as a sign that an interesting event was about to unfold.

"Though it's surprising," Katia declared in an attempt to make Khan reach the breaking point. "The Nele only love once. Did you leave with the promise of returning, or did you simply use-."

"Shatter," Khan whispered, and Katia felt forced to interrupt her line since a crack opened on the screen in her hands. The fissure even expanded until the device crumbled into pieces.

"Wha-?" Katia gasped, but Khan was faster at that time.

"I suggest you choose your next words very carefully," Khan threatened as his whole being influenced the synthetic mana to apply pressure on Katia. "I'm young and inexperienced, but I won't stand your insinuations."

"What did you do?" Katia asked as fear built inside her. She was a second-level warrior, but Khan's pressure was too much for her to handle after the surprising event.

"What do you mean?" Khan tried to feign innocence, but his cold tone told the entire hall that he was pretending. "You shouldn't bring damaged equipment around. You never know when it can shatter."

Khan used the same word from before on purpose, and his decision paid off. Katia felt truly worried about her life under Khan's chilling stare. His techniques were even unclear, which added fuel to her fear.

"It has been a pleasure," Katia hurriedly muttered before turning to leave. She didn't even head for the table. She directly reached for an exit on the other side of the hall.

Colonel Norrett approached Khan after Katia's departure, forcing Monica to wait for her turn a bit longer. He stepped on the broken device, disregarding the shards stabbing his shoes to stand before Khan. He showed his back to the hall in that position, which helped convey secret praises.

"That was good," Colonel Norrett whispered. "Rude but good. Don't let them step on you too easily, and have no mercy with the reporters."

"Yes, sir," Khan imitated the whisper.

"Now, stick to me," Colonel Norrett ordered. "We'll have another conversation with all of them, but my presence will show my support. Even that old hag will have to be respectful."

Something warm spread inside Khan. It felt nice to have a superior caring after him, and the Colonel also seemed a like-minded person. His mana didn't lie either, which pushed Khan to trust him.

"Still," Colonel Norrett smirked as he stepped aside, "I believe you must greet one last person. Miss Solodrey, I'm sorry for the interruption."

"At ease, Colonel," Monica giggled while covering her mouth. "I'm lucky enough to be able to see Captain Khan whenever I want. I made an effort to let him socialize before claiming him for myself."

Colonel Norrett could only voice an awkward laugh while Khan held back from teasing Monica. The reporter had clearly pissed her, so she had already stepped up her jokes.

However, before the Colonel could leave, the door behind Khan opened, and the entire hall felt shocked at the sight of the three newcomers. Khan also abruptly turned due to the threatening sensations one of them triggered in him.

A woman who looked as old as Monica and two massive middle-aged men had entered the room. The trio wore elegant clothes, but Khan could sense that the two men were fourth-level warriors. Moreover, the one on his left seemed able to turn the synthetic mana dark with his sole presence.

'What is he?' Khan exclaimed while inspecting the fourth-level warrior.

The man was more muscles than body. His elegant suit suffered under his size, and no number of baths could fix his rough skin. A long scar ran through the right side of his head and created an area where the black hair couldn't grow. Still, the soldier kept it extremely short.

"Blue hair," The woman between the two men casually voiced, forcing Khan to divert his attention.

Another wave of surprise filled Khan at the sight of that astonishing beauty. The woman had long brown hair that resembled silk and bright green eyes. Her skin was smooth and fair, and her curves created perfect proportions.

The woman's beauty wasn't as striking as Jenna's or as elegant as Monica's, but it carried a unique vibe that made her look perfect. Her very body radiated harmony, and the synthetic mana seemed to agree with that feature.

"Princess Edna!" Headmistress Holwen exclaimed while hurrying toward the entrance, but the woman ignored her.

"He must be Captain Khan," Princess Edna said before glancing at the huge man that had alerted Khan. "Jack, how is he?"

The fourth-level warrior moved his gray eyes on Khan. His gaze carried no emotion, but Khan knew the weight of that void. He wasn't in front of a man. The soldier before him was a perfect killing machine.

"He knows death," Jack evaluated. "He might surpass me in five years."