

Chaos' Heir 501

Chapter 501 Ankle

'Playing with other people's lives,' Khan thought. 'I've had enough of this shit.'

Unreasonable desires invaded Khan's mind. The cloud was in the open now, and Khan experienced its feelings. A faint connection between the spell and him had appeared, which affected them both.

Khan's restraints quickly waned. He felt as if he had held himself back for multiple lifetimes. No matter how much he pushed himself, people still attempted to threaten the important parts of his life, be it his girlfriend or his goal to find the Nak.

The situation felt beyond unfair, and the cloud enhanced that feeling. Khan knew he had jumped head-on into that trap. He knew he could have been more careful. He knew the place had innocent people who had ended up there due to equally sad coincidences. Yet, none of that mattered anymore.

The gust of wind released by the complete appearance of the cloud had put fear into the crowd. After all, the chaos element was deadly in everyone's mind. However, the spell stood still after its creation, partially reassuring the audience.

"What is that?" Wayne asked without hiding his excitement.

"An attempt to find my place in the world," Khan whispered vague words that made sense only to him.

Mister Chares remained silent. His cold eyes moved from Khan to the cloud before returning to him. Ideally, he would avoid a battle, but something told him the negotiations were over.

"Seize him," Mister Chares coldly ordered, and something clicked inside Khan's mind. His wild feelings exploded, and the cloud reacted accordingly.

A deafening clicking cry escaped the cloud, almost covering the last part of Mister Chares' order. The spell dived toward the floor, destroying its metal before making its way toward the swordsman with the holographic device.

Meanwhile, Khan resorted to Maban's technique to sprint forward and jump. Wayne brought his arms to his sides, preparing for the imminent attack, but his eyes widened in excitement when he realized what was about to arrive.

Khan spun twice mid-air before stretching his right leg. The entirety of his momentum converged on his heel as it descended toward the unprepared Wayne.

Wayne's arms snapped upward to intercept the descending kick. He crossed them before the impact, but the attack still made his knees bend. However, he didn't fall.

Khan couldn't help but be surprised once again. Wayne's physical strength was off the charts. He had endured two of his best kicks with his bare hands, and his body had barely wavered in the process.

A cry suddenly spread through the hall. The cloud had dug a channel through the metal floor before reaching the swordsman, who dropped the device to draw his weapon. He even retreated to create some space, but a spike stretched from the spell to catch up with him.

The spike touched the swordsman's arm, and its tip became the new center of the spell. The cloud almost teleported on the third-level warrior, enveloping his limb in its destructive properties.

The swordsman didn't know what to do. Pain spread from his entire arm as his skin broke and shattered. Every inch of the cloud had destruction as its sole purpose, and the third-level warrior's flesh was experiencing its full power.

The event made most of the hall panic. No matter what Mister Chares claimed, many workers weren't warriors. Some had actually never fought in their lives, so seeing one of their strongest members struggling against that strange spell rekindled the fear.

Khan and Wayne were the only ones completely unaffected by that descent into a panic. They stared at each other without letting anything distract them, and Wayne ended up being the first to make a move.

Wayne's right hand opened and turned to stretch his fingers toward Khan's ankle, but he kicked the air to push himself away. Khan flew backward, and the ceiling filled his vision while he joined his palms.

The chaos spear took form, and Khan didn't hesitate to throw it at the ceiling before turning toward the floor. Many had searched for a hiding place, some had reached for the gear on the shelves, and only a handful had converged toward the cloud, but Khan knew all of that even before laying his eyes on it.

The spear exploded on the ceiling while six glowing needles materialized in Khan's hands. Theoretically, he could pursue a more pacifistic approach and focus on escaping, but his mind had rejected reason. He wanted to deal a blow to his enemies and leave, even if pursuing both paths simultaneously wasn't wise.

Khan swung his arms to send the needles downward. He had targeted the third-level warriors and a couple of shelves, but his aim felt off. Four of his spells ended up on empty spots on the floor, one only scraped one of his prey, and another hit a weak worker right in her chest.

The needle expanded inside the young woman's chest, becoming a spherical force that destroyed her insides. She was only a first-level warrior, so her heart crumbled right away, killing her on the spot.

Khan didn't miss a single detail. He had just killed an innocent woman who had no intention to fight. She probably didn't even know about Mister Chares' ploy. Her only fault was being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

'Is this what I must be ready to do to achieve my goals?' Khan wondered while lowering his head to peek at Wayne. The poor aim was probably his fault, but Khan didn't feel right blaming that kill on him.

'Bloody rivers,' Khan thought as his unreasonable sides took over.

Another chaos spear materialized between Khan's palms while he was still mid-air. He promptly spun on himself to throw it on the ceiling before kicking the air above him.

The last kick flung Khan on the floor. He landed in the middle of a crowded area that had the previously-scraped third-level warrior. Weaker warriors were all around Khan, and he forced himself to look at them before summoning his mana.

The spherical version of the Wave spell expanded from Khan's figure and reached the unlucky bystanders before stretching even further. Retreating wasn't an option since many people fell or hindered their companions. Only the third-level warrior reacted fast enough to jump, but Khan's attack hit him anyway.

The decision to hit a crowded area had multiple purposes. The main was to sow chaos and turn the battlefield into something that Khan could manipulate and traverse more easily. Instead, the others had a deeper connection to Khan's state.

Flowing wasn't enough anymore. The wild feelings wanted Khan to be one with the symphony while leaving his mark on it. The chaos element had basically tainted Khan's battle style with its aggression, leading to that deadly attack.

The last and most important purpose of Khan's attack was connected to his mindset. He would do anything to protect his situation, even killing innocents, and that decision required a declaration.

Khan remained unfazed while the Wave spell destroyed skin, flesh, muscles, and bones, revealing the clueless bystanders' insides. That was different from the lake on Nitis. He could have avoided killing so much now. Yet, he needed that gory declaration to silence his hesitation once and for all.

The spell cleared the area, pushing everyone away and killing those stuck in its range. The third-level warrior was one of the survivors, but his previous jump turned out to be a fatal mistake.

The third-level warrior was still flying when Khan appeared in front of him. His arrival had also been too fast, and the lack of footholds made the soldier unable to react to the precise kick aimed at his neck.

Khan diverted his attention when the soldier's neck released a cracking noise. The attack had only paralyzed him, but Khan had more important business to attend to.

Another spear appeared between Khan's palms while he kicked the air to push himself toward the ceiling. He threw the spell upward and prepared himself to return to the battlefield, but something surprising attracted his attention.

Khan's ability to fly gave him a stark advantage against anyone stuck on the ground. He was unreachable by martial arts, and no one could focus on aiming spells at him with the cloud and the general mess.

However, Wayne wasn't anyone. He couldn't keep up with Khan's speed, but the latter had to slow down when throwing his spears at the ceiling.

Wayne had done his best to follow Khan until he found his opportunity. Right after Khan paralyzed the third-level warrior, Wayne climbed on a shelf nearby and threw himself at Khan.

Khan's senses had noticed the entire event. Wayne's leap had been quite incredible. Even Khan would struggle to jump that high without relying on his martial art. Yet, the sky was his reign, and only people with wings could try to dethrone him.

Khan lightly pressed on the air, intending to side-stepping Wayne's leap. Yet, his foothold suddenly grew unstable. He didn't fail his technique, but the mana under his feet shook, forcing him to waste one second to retrieve his balance.

Wayne managed to reach Khan's right foot during that window. He wrapped his hands around his ankle and applied a force that threatened to crush his bones.

Khan held back a curse while delivering a stomp with his free leg. His attack hit Wayne at the center of his face, but he didn't budge. Wayne continued to smile even as blood flowed out of his nose.

Mana immediately flowed through Khan's body to prepare a spell, but a crack eventually resounded, filling him with pain. Wayne had broken his ankle, making his right foot hang powerlessly from his leg.

Wayne didn't hesitate to exploit that second window. He began to climb Khan's leg, but a purple-red sphere expanded on his face. Wayne's skin began to break under the effects of the Wave spell, but his grip remained firm. It took another kick from Khan to make him fall.

Khan tried to fly with one leg, but the floor had grown too close during the struggle, granting some bystanders a clear line of sight. Before he could realize what was happening, two metal spheres landed on his back and released lightning bolts that made him lose control of his body.

The spheres' stunning properties finally brought Khan to the floor. He crashed violently, but the pain released by his broken ankle kept him awake.

More lightning bolts came out of the spheres, but a clicking growl spread inside Khan's mind, sending new strength to his body. A tinge of clarity spread, allowing him to unleash flares of mana that destroyed the weapons on his back and the new incoming bullets.

A buzzing noise filled Khan's ears once his mana dispersed, but he struggled to his knees to point his intact foot at the floor. He could fly with one leg if he had enough space, but the bystanders wouldn't give him time.

The cloud had successfully killed the swordsman and had proceeded to pursue anything in its range. Its assault was random, so the two remaining third-level warriors could ignore it to focus on Khan. The weaker workers who had managed to grab a weapon did the same, and a series of bullets and spells flew toward him during that moment of weakness.

Khan sensed everything coming his way. A giant snake made of yellow flames and tens of bullets converged toward him, making a mess out of the symphony. Moreover, mana gathered around him, giving birth to dark water that took the shape of a sphere and trapped him.

Escaping was impossible in that situation. The bullets and giant fiery snake crashed on the dark sphere, destroying a good chunk of the metal floor and turning the spot into a fuming mess.

Silence tried to spread. The audience held their breath as they waited to see the result of their attacks, but painful cries filled the hall. The cloud was still going wild, chasing after anything that moved, and its aggression attracted a lot of attention.

Nevertheless, the arrival of a blinding purple-red color forced everyone to focus on the column of smoke. That grey gas quickly dispersed, and a monstrous sight reached the audience's eyes.

Khan reappeared, showing his burned body covered with clotted blood vessels. His coat, shirt, and most of his pants had disappeared, granting a full view of his charred flesh. Still, he was standing, even without the help of his right leg, wielding two blinding spears in his hands.

Chapter 502 Side

Gasps and cries tried to resound, but the audience felt unable to breathe. A monster had come out of the smoke, and they feared what it could do.

Khan stood on his left leg, with his right slightly bent to prevent his broken foot from touching the floor. The [Blood Shield]'s full power had been unable to protect his entire body, so some areas were worse than others. The alien technique didn't do anything to the superficial layer of skin either, so burns covered him all over.

The worst burns still let out tinges of smoke, with the most hideous one being on the left side of Khan's head. His ear had survived that assault, but a third of his hair had disappeared, replaced by charred skin.

The smoke enhanced Khan's monstrous appearance, and the retreat of the clotted blood vessels helped even further. Everyone could see the [Blood Shield] disappearing inside Khan's body. It seemed he could control systems no ordinary human should be able to affect.

As for Khan, he struggled to retain a sane mind. Pain invaded him from every direction while wild feelings pushed against that. A proper war had started inside his mind, and his element was winning, granting him the necessary clarity to keep fighting.

"What is that stupid cloud doing?" Khan cursed. The spell was ignoring him to satisfy its desires. It was still helpful for attracting part of the crowd away, but Khan would have better uses for it if he could control it.

A buzzing noise distracted Khan from the symphony, and the appearance of holograms made a few people move aside. It turned out that the swordsman's holographic device had survived the cloud's assault, and new images came out while it rested on the ground.

"Why do you struggle so much?" Mister Chares' voice came out of the device before the holograms could stabilize. "All this killing is pointless. We are on the same side, Captain."

"There is only one side," Khan spoke in a hoarse voice. "My side."

Khan straightened his position, uncaring of his injuries or the single leg keeping him standing. He appeared ready to crumble, but his eyes were completely open, and he pointed them at the holograms before throwing the spears upward.

Explosions resounded while Mister Chares' flickering face and Khan stared at each other. The ceiling could support the entire underground structure, but Khan's spears were beginning to affect its stability. Cracks and holes had already opened, and a single fatal flaw would be enough to start a chain reaction and make everything crumble.

"The cameras are still recording," Mister Chares continued in his cold voice. "How do you think the Global Army will take your actions?"

"Go ahead," Khan stated, joining his palms to create another spear. "Release the footage and show everyone how I respond to threats."

Mister Chares fell silent and watched as Khan threw his new spear to the ceiling. Clearly, Khan was beyond threats. He had also killed, so there was no point in trying to talk reason into him. He had already crossed the line.

"We could have been good allies," Mister Chares commented.

"Next time, send a bottle," Khan scoffed, generating another chaos spear.

"If there is a next time," Mister Chares stated, and the holograms disappeared.

Khan launched the new spear upward, uncaring of the conversation. He had only one goal, and destroying the ceiling was the way to achieve it.

Instead, the audience didn't take Mister Chares' words too well. In their minds, Mister Chares had left them on their own, and noticing another stunning detail intensified their panic.

Khan didn't even wait for the spear to explode before generating another one. That was his eighth big spell, and he had cast it after suffering injuries and intense fighting. In theory, he should be almost exhausted, but the surprises for the audience were far from over.

The audience saw Khan throwing the spear at the ceiling and summoning another without bothering to catch his breath. His resilience and appearance had already entered the realms of monsters, but his mana pool seemed to surpass that.

"S-shoot him down!" One worker stammered in her panic, and the rest of the audience snapped awake. All their fears fused into a single goal. They had to kill Khan before he made the ceiling crumble.

Khan threw the spear at the ceiling while a barrage of attacks converged on him. He could feel them getting closer and threatening to turn his injured body into a charred pulp, but no fear existed in his mind. He only felt anger.

"I told you to evacuate!" Khan shouted, and a clicking cry fused with his voice as flares of mana shot out of his body.

The defensive spell took care of the bullets, but the third-level warriors' attacks were too much for it. Yellow flames had gathered around Khan to create a dangerous vortex that grew stronger with each rotation, and a dense dark sword had materialized above him.

The flames and sword drew closer, piercing the purple-red flares in an attempt to crash on Khan at the same time. Meanwhile, a clicking cry continued to escape his mouth, sending more power to his mana and conveying something that only his ally could understand.

A second cry joined Khan's shout while the spells made their way through the defensive technique. The cloud heard Khan's anger and echoed it while flying at full speed toward him.

The cloud didn't abide by common sense. Shelves, boxes, and people stood in its way, but it flew straight through them, leaving a trail of destruction behind.

When the attacks grew too close, the spherical version of the Wave spell expanded from Khan's body, pushing away the flares still lingering around him. The yellow flames couldn't hope to fight the chaos element's destructive power, and only the blade survived for a bit before crumbling under Khan's offensive.

Khan sent mana to his right hand while the Wave spell expanded. A blade grew from his fingers, and he didn't hesitate to point it at his side.

Wayne had charged forward, uncaring of his broken skin or threatening mana before him. He had slammed head-on on the Wave spell, using his bare hands to carve a path through its destruction, but his eyes widened in surprise when he found the glowing blade pointed at his face.

Khan couldn't really move in that situation, but Wayne didn't have it any easier in the middle of the Wave spell. The blade had made him stop his advance, dispersing his accumulated momentum and forcing him to give in to the chaos element's push.

Wayne flew away, and the Wave spell dispersed. Only the glowing blade in Khan's hand was still bright when the cloud reached his side.

"Took you long enough," Khan said in a hoarse voice before stabbing the blade into the cloud. His gesture carried no ill intentions, and the spell suffered no damage. Instead, it absorbed that bright mana to grow even stronger.

As soon as the cloud sucked the blade dry, Khan joined his palms to summon another spear. The action brought all the attention back on him and almost led to another barrage of attacks, but his ally managed to distract his opponents.

The cloud released a deafening cry while its surface grew unstable. The spell seemed on the verge of exploding, and bumps that looked like bubbles ready to burst rose on it.

The bumps grew while the cloud's cry continued to echo through the hall. The event made the crowd step back and lose their grip on the weapons, but the spell attacked before they could retreat.

The bumps transformed into spikes that stretched from the cloud to reach the audience. There were less than ten of them, but their destructive power appeared immense since they pierced metal, flesh, and bones without meeting any resistance.

The spikes didn't stop at the first opponent. They stretched for many meters, reaching deep parts of the crowd before moving in multiple directions. People got cut left and right without ever getting a chance to defend themselves.

Khan's position didn't allow the cloud to cover the entirety of his surroundings with those spikes, but his focus was elsewhere. No one was attacking him, so he threw the spear at the ceiling before preparing another.

However, when Khan completely summoned his new spear, a peculiar tremor ran through the symphony and made him lift his gaze. The detonation of his previous spell was still unfolding, but a crack soon peeked past the purple-red radiance and spread through the rest of the ceiling.

The crack's edges bent, and new fissures spread from them as the ground above pressed on the ceiling. The metal screamed, and the hall began to tremble. Then, a small chunk of bluish ice fell, causing a chain reaction that made everyone forget about the battle.

More ice fell as the ceiling bent in different spots before breaking altogether. Many artificial lights went dark as the small debris transformed into proper boulders. Chaos was descending into the hall, but Khan only saw a path toward the outside world.

The cloud shared Khan's feelings and didn't hesitate to interrupt its offensive to shoot upward. After all, freedom was its deepest desire, and Khan exploited it to create the path he needed.

Khan jumped with one leg and repeatedly stomped it after ending in the air. He chased right behind the cloud, ready to support it with his mana if its power faltered. Yet, he wasn't the only one with similar intentions. Wayne had never once panicked, and seeing Khan fly away made him follow him.

Wayne obviously couldn't fly. He had to jump on a shelf and a falling boulder to hope to reach Khan's broken ankle. However, a blinding glow filled his vision when he was almost about to arrive at his destination. Khan had let go of his last spear, which exploded in Wayne's face and pushed him back to the floor.

Khan didn't turn even once during the climb. He kicked and kicked, sending mana in every direction whenever the cloud created a path too narrow for him.

Ice, rocks, and chaos element filled Khan's vision. Sometimes, debris managed to land on his body and rekindled the pain in his injuries, but nothing reached his mind. He existed for a single purpose now, so he kept looking up and kicking the air.

The cloud seemed unable to lose power. Its unreasonable desires increased the might of the energy in its insides, and mere ground couldn't hope to oppose it. Yet, that mana had limits, and the spell eventually shrunk during its mindless digging.

Khan didn't miss the event, but his right hand had long since been ready. A sword had covered his fingers, and he stabbed it at the center of the cloud to help with the digging.

The cloud drained some of the sword's power before ignoring it. Meanwhile, Khan kept his arm straight, working with his spell to escape that dangerous situation.

The climb didn't last long but felt like an eternity in Khan's mind. He almost couldn't believe his eyes when a new light source appeared above him, but those emotions didn't affect his digging. Actually, the cloud grew even wilder now that the outside world was in sight.

Natural mana, cold, and clean air invaded Khan's senses while he and the cloud crossed the last chunk of ice to reappear in the plain. The ground around them was still crumbling, and new cracks appeared as more space opened below. Still, neither cared while continuing to fly through the snow.

Khan and the cloud flew higher and higher before separating. The spell shot to its left, completely ignoring Khan. Meanwhile, Khan remained in his position as the incredible strength of his wild feelings began to leave room for his pain.

'I can't stop here,' Khan thought as information flowed through his mind. Mister Chares would have never brought him to a place the Global Army could track. The plain must have had jammers or similar items, meaning that no one would be able to find Khan there.

The symphony didn't carry anything unique, and Khan only saw snow in his surroundings. He was stranded, so he picked a random direction and flew in a straight line to put as much distance from the crumbling plain as possible.

Khan had become basically naked after the battle and climb. The last surviving rag had long since slid through his leg, hanging on his knee. Nothing protected him from the snow, but he found some reassurance in that cold due to the many injuries on his body.

Eventually, the pain became too intense, making Khan unable to advance. He could only slow down his descent before ultimately crashing on the side of a snowy peak.

Khan tried to straighten his position before giving up and lying on the snow. He instinctively reached for his pocket before remembering that his clothes were no more. His phone was under the debris with all the illegal equipment and corpses.

'I need to get a new one,' Khan sighed, immersing his head in the snow and letting the cold overtake him. His faint connection with the cloud even disappeared, signaling its dispersion.

Minutes went by, in which Khan went in and out of the meditative state. The cold was helping him with the pain, but he feared falling asleep while he was so weak.

A tremor eventually ran through the symphony, and Khan forced himself to sit down. He didn't know if Mister Chares had another illegal hangar nearby, so he prepared for a second battle even if he was in no condition to fight.

Still, the object that appeared in the distance reassured Khan. He even smiled at that white figure flying through the snowy and cold environment.

'White is the right color,' Khan nodded in satisfaction as his ship grew closer to the snowy peak.

Chapter 503 Barging

Induna's soldiers had gone looking for Khan as soon as they reported back to the Headmistress, and finding him in his injured state caused quite an uproar. The entire outpost ended up moving to get him doctors and someone who could fly him to the Harbor.

"Are you comfortable, Captain?" The pilot asked when the ship was ready for set-off.

Khan didn't know what to say. He found his situation annoying, but George wouldn't be able to hold back the laughs at it. He was on his ship but not in the pilot's seat. Induna's soldiers had loaded a bed in the cargo area, and he was stuck on it.

A doctor had put a metal structure around Khan's ankle to keep it still before bounding it to the ship's ceiling, forcing his leg to stay lifted. A slimy ointment that radiated a pungent smell covered his body too, causing an itching sensation that annoyed him to no end.

That wasn't even the worst part. Due to Khan's extensive injuries and reckless behavior, the Headmistress had put the outpost's strictest doctor in charge of him. She was a middle-aged woman with curly red hair tied in a bun and a mean face, and Khan seemed unable to defeat her.

"Ma'am, if I could at least-," Khan called.

"Captain Khan," The doctor interrupted. "I ordered you to sleep. People asleep don't make requests."

"But I really need to study," Khan almost pleaded, but the doctor ignored him and continued to browse her phone from the seat on the other side of the ship.

"Ma'am, I'm a Captain!" Khan tried to pull rank, but the doctor promptly drew a cylindrical item that ended in a long needle from her pocket.

"Headmistress Holwen authorized me to sedate you," The doctor declared. "I respected your wish to meditate because it helps the healing process, but I won't hesitate to use this if you don't comply."

The doctor let a few seconds pass before adding a "sir" to her threat. Khan could see her mana, so he knew nothing would work against her. He could only give up.

A sigh escaped Khan's mouth as he slammed his head on the pillow. The soldiers had loaded his backpack on the ship, so the mission and his side businesses weren't in danger. Yet, he didn't want that free time. He would rather study than face his thoughts.

"Sir?" The pilot called again.

"Any chance I can decide the ship's speed?" Khan asked.

"None," The doctor firmly responded without lifting her eyes from her phone.

"Just set off," Khan sighed and closed his eyes. It wasn't even dinnertime, but the ship would take more than two days to reach the Harbor at the recommended speed, so Khan had to give up on being a perfect student.

The images from the past battle flowed in Khan's vision while he kept his eyes closed. His fury was still there. His unreasonable feelings had never disappeared, but no power came from them. They had simply settled in the back of his mind, ready to resurface when the situation required it.

'Dammit,' Khan cursed as more problems popped into his mind. He had left a simple message for Monica, but they couldn't have a proper conversation without his phone or access to the control desk. She would get worried, and Khan was powerless about it.

'I really did it this time,' Khan thought as his focus returned to the previous battle. 'I killed innocents just because they stood in my way.'

It almost felt strange how easy killing had gotten, but Lieutenant Dyester had warned Khan about that. Mana gave a chance to be gods among ordinary men, and Khan was a special case on top of that.

'I let my emotions have the best of me many times already,' Khan recalled past teachings, 'But killing isn't meaningless to me yet.'

Khan knew how he truly felt. He couldn't get rid of the sour emotions generated after taking a life. It was simply impossible with his ability to see the symphony.

'Still, that wasn't a war,' Khan admitted, 'And I killed anyway. Am I just at war with the world?'

Khan quickly disregarded that idea. It could be accurate, but he didn't want to follow that reasoning.

'Am I justifying killing now?' Khan mocked himself. 'Isn't that what murderers do?'

A sad answer arrived. No matter what Khan told himself, he had felt like a murderer since his first kill. He had yet to forget that young Kred, and part of him hoped he never would. In a way, he was grateful for his senses since they continued to make him feel bad about taking lives.

Similar thoughts ran through Khan's mind while the ship left Induna and flew toward the Harbor. He knew a thorough briefing awaited him but preparing for it felt pointless. He would rather spend the trip meditating and focusing on his mental state.

Two days passed in a blink since Khan spent most of his time meditating and sleeping. His body greatly benefitted from that constant rest, but he remained far away from a complete recovery. His

superficial injuries had healed, but his ankle remained a mess, and the left side of his head continued to show burned flesh.

On the third day of travel, a short hour before dawn, the ship finally reached the Harbor and headed directly for a medical bay waiting for Khan inside one of the hangars.

More doctors visited Khan and upgraded his bandages. They replaced the metal structure on his ankle with special braces that closed themselves around his foot and half of his leg to provide better support. He could touch the floor with that new item, but walking remained difficult, and fighting was out of the question.

After redoing the other bandages and getting clean clothes, a special cab set off to bring Khan to the embassy, where the Headmistress was waiting for him. By then, he had gotten rid of the strict doctor, but the lack of a phone prevented him from studying or contacting his friends.

The cab crossed most of the Harbor before landing on one of the embassy's roofs. A team was already waiting for Khan, and a soldier approached the vehicle to open his door and hand crutches.

Khan could only go along with that situation. He put the crutches under his armpits and let the team lead the way toward the now-familiar office. The Headmistress was already behind her desk, but her head remained lowered on her many reports even after the soldiers left them alone.

The Headmistress' silence didn't affect Khan. He staggered on his crutches until he reached a chair before the desk and sat on it. Bandages still covered the left side of his head, so he supported his chin on his right hand while waiting for Headmistress Holwen to start the briefing.

The symphony told Khan that the Headmistress didn't like his carefree attitude. She was only pretending to look at the reports, or, rather, she preferred to deal with them instead of Khan. However, the two couldn't just waste the morning like that.

"What did you think you were doing?!" Headmistress Holwen shouted, slamming her hands on the interactive desk and standing up.

"You told me to play the bait, ma'am," Khan replied. "I baited."

"How is going off on your own baiting?" Headmistress Holwen questioned.

"Wayne was there," Khan explained shortly. "They were trying to contact me, so I followed to see what they wanted."

Khan had stuck to a simple report while he was on Induna. The planet was already compromised, so the Headmistress wanted to leave the details for her office, and she couldn't help but get curious now.

"Tell me everything," Headmistress Holwen ordered, returning to her seat.

"Didn't you scour the place I mentioned?" Khan wondered.

"You can't expect Induna's forces to dig out everything in two days," Headmistress Holwen said.

"Besides, I'm waiting for my trusted team to get there before starting the real digging operations."

"That's probably for the best, ma'am," Khan agreed. "Anyway, how should I explain this."

Khan kept his explanation short but didn't miss any detail. The Headmistress was ready to sacrifice him if necessary, but her stern character made her trustworthy, and Khan needed powerful allies.

Confirming the connection between Mister Chares and Wayne tried to fill the report with positive vibes, but the rest of the explanation soured the mood. Another criminal organization was doing business in the Harbor's system, and they even had secret warehouses capable of arming rebels.

Of course, the Headmistress heard Khan's description of the crowd. He told her how many people the underground hall held, but she ignored that detail to focus on the Harbor's businesses.

"I need to ask for reinforcements," Headmistress Holwen admitted. "Kidnappers, unclear identities, and now secret warehouses. This system isn't safe."

Khan remained silent while the Headmistress played with her menus. He had said his piece, but the meeting was far from over.

"Captain, you can't be so reckless," Headmistress Holwen warned. "I don't know much about your private affairs, but you are Monica Solodrey's partner. Your death in a classified mission might bring the Solodrey family to the Harbor to ask for compensation."

"I wonder how much you'd pay for me," Khan laughed.

"Stop joking, Captain," Headmistress Holwen warned. "This is serious. You should know the extent of the Solodrey family's reach by now."

"I am serious, ma'am," Khan replied. "Still, we both know you have some of the answers I want. I accept that you can't tell me, but don't blame me for looking for them on my own."

Headmistress Holwen's face grew colder, but Khan knew the true emotions inside her. Some hesitation and even a tinge of guilt had appeared.

The Global Army couldn't exactly wipe the memory of anyone born before the Second Impact. There had to be many higher-ups who knew about Khan's parents, and the Headmistress had confirmed to be one of them with her mana.

"You must understand-," The Headmistress announced.

"I do," Khan interrupted, "But you must also understand my reasons."

"And how good are they if they make you do such things?" Headmistress Holwen questioned. "If that's your chosen path, you'll have to kill much more than that."

Khan scoffed before lowering his head. He had already reached similar conclusions. His battle prowess was his best quality from the Global Army's perspective, so it made sense for him to exploit it to climb the ranks faster.

"On Istrone," Khan announced, "I killed Kred to survive. On Nitis, I killed Niqols save pain from my loved one. On Ecoruta, I killed Stal due to orders. On Milia 222, I killed for multiple reasons."

Headmistress Holwen remained silent since she knew Khan's line wasn't over. Still, even if she knew about Khan's history, the list of his achievement continued to amaze her.

"This time, I killed for myself," Khan continued. "The threats and the survival instincts were still there, but I could have played it differently. Instead, I chose to kill."

"Was it the right choice?" Headmistress Holwen asked.

"It was my choice," Khan replied, shrugging his shoulders. Right or wrong didn't matter as long as he followed his desires.

"Well," Headmistress Holwen sighed, "You clearly can't join missions for a while."

"Ma'am, I can-," Khan tried to object.

"You can't," Headmistress Holwen reprimanded. "End of discussion. It's also better to keep you in the Harbor since we know they are targeting you, at least for now."

Khan had to give up. The Headmistress was right, but he didn't want to pull the brakes on his fame. Yet, she controlled the very ship he used to fly through the system. Khan couldn't go anywhere without her support.

"About the footage," The Headmistress continued. "Mister Chares didn't release anything, but what do you suggest I do if my team retrieves something?"

"Release it, ma'am," Khan firmly responded, knowing that the Headmistress had similar intentions. "Just send it anonymously to one of my sites."

"Are you sure?" Headmistress Holwen asked. "According to what you told me, it doesn't depict a nice picture."

"It will serve as a warning," Khan confirmed, "And you can spin it in my favor. You can pass it as if I stumbled upon a warehouse with the equipment used against Princess Edna and took matters into my own hands."

That was precisely what the Headmistress wanted to do. With that approach, she could bring awareness to the entire system and push criminal organizations into hiding.

Khan's fame would also improve due to his feats, but the slaughter might put some factions and families off. Praising his battle prowess against Tainted animals or kidnappers was easy, but the footage saw him killing seemingly mindlessly.

"As you wish, Captain," Headmistress Holwen eventually stated. "Mind you. I expect you to return to your missions as soon as you heal. My help has a price."

"I expected nothing less, ma'am," Khan declared.

"One last thing," Headmistress Holwen promptly added. "Do you think we might find survivors? Or someone who managed to escape with you?"

The battle flowed before Khan's eyes. He was certain no one had come out with him, and rubble had already filled the underground hall by then. Theoretically, escaping was impossible, but one face continued to appear in his vision, and he had to consider eventual alternative routes.

"If someone was lucky enough to...", Khan began to say before a realization dawned upon him. The matter sounded absurd, but mana could accomplish miracles. He had probably figured out Wayne's element, but nothing escaped his mouth.

"To?" The Headmistress pressed.

"To reach the elevator shaft," Khan quickly came up with a partial lie. "Also, the hall might have had other floors downstairs or additional escape routes. I can't be sure."

"I'll tell my team to scour the underground area too," Headmistress Holwen uttered. "I'll keep you updated about any finding."

"Thank you, ma'am," Khan voiced.

"Now," Headmistress Holwen said, preparing to stand up, but her office's entrance suddenly opened, and a presence that put a smile on Khan's face stormed inside.

"Two days without a single call!" Monica shouted. "More than two days-!"

Monica stopped shouting when her eyes met Khan's. A glance at his figure told her the extent of his injuries, and all her anger vanished to make room for worry.

"Miss Solodrey!" Headmistress Holwen scolded while leaving her chair. "This is a classified meeting in a private area of the embassy. You are trespassing!"

"I apologize for my disrespectful behavior," Monica performed one of her elegant bows. "However, I have complaints of my own. Headmistress, you don't have any right to hold a secret meeting with Captain Khan without warning me first."

"Miss Solodrey, I manage the Harbor," Headmistress Holwen stated. "I have every right to request an immediate briefing."

"Not at the expense of Captain Khan's health," Monica coldly remarked while reaching for Khan's shoulder. "Maybe the Solodrey name has so little value in your mind that you think you can mistreat my boyfriend without facing any consequences."

Khan could almost see an angry answer forming inside Headmistress Holwen's mind, but nothing left her mouth. She opted for silence before one of the wealthiest descendants in the Harbor.

"We are leaving, Headmistress," Monica declared in front of that silence. She even stretched her right hand toward Khan, but he showed a sorry smile when he reached for the crutches.

Monica didn't initially notice the crutches, and that sight deepened her worry. So much had happened that weekend, and the sole idea that Khan might have died tried to put tears in her eyes.

Khan stood up and handed one crutch to Monica, who seized it in confusion. Still, everything became clear when Khan took her right hand to kiss it. The gesture reassured Monica and made her unable to fight with the Headmistress anymore.

"We were done anyway," Khan whispered, seizing back the crutch and turning toward the Headmistress, "Right, ma'am?"

"Yes, this meeting is adjourned," Headmistress Holwen stated. "I'll keep you updated."

"Right, I need a new phone," Khan recalled.

"I'll have one delivered to your flat," Headmistress Holwen responded.

"Chaos resistant," Khan reminded before turning toward Monica. "Let's go home."

Monica was an emotional mess but mustered a nod and another elegant bow before heading for the exit with Khan. Headmistress Holwen soon remained alone in her office, and mental exhaustion fell on her, making her return to her seat.

"What a troublesome pair," Headmistress Holwen couldn't help but comment before acknowledging another detail. "They make a good couple."

Chapter 504 Social Event

Khan wanted nothing more than put Induna behind him and immerse himself in his girlfriend's love. Yet, he felt obliged to tell her everything first. He would kiss Monica only if she still accepted him.

Monica held Khan's hand while a cab flew them to the second district. Her gaze remained lowered while tales of Induna's events reached her ears. Her expression didn't shake even once, and her grip remained steady.

Khan's tale ended with the briefing with the Headmistress. The latter wanted their conversation to remain classified, but Khan couldn't keep things from Monica.

"That's everything," Khan eventually said, lying deeper into the seat's back. He wanted to add something but remained silent to let Monica process his tale.

"Is this why you have yet to kiss me?" Monica wondered, lifting her gaze to show her teary eyes. "Were you worried about my reaction?"

Khan wanted to say something, but Monica lifted her free hand to reach for the right side of his face. She was a bit angry, but her worry was far stronger, and a smile even broadened on her expression when a sniff resounded.

"I told you already," Monica did her best to hold back her tears. "I'd love you even if you were a real monster, and you aren't. You are deeply scarred, but your actions are never cruel. You just do what you have to do."

Khan reached the hand on his cheek to hold it. Even after learning about what he had done, Monica didn't change her opinion of him. It actually pained her that he had worried about that.

"Maybe I was waiting for your approval to move on," Khan explained. "I'm sorry. Bad habits are hard to kill, especially when I make so many problems for you."

"Dummy," Monica sniffed, escaping Khan's grasp to punch his chest. He barely felt her attack due to how little strength she had put into it, and more followed.

"Idiot, stupid, scoundrel!" Monica complained, continuing to hit Khan's chest. "Cause as many problems as you want. Kill whoever you need to kill. Just make sure to come back to me."

Monica couldn't hold her tears anymore. She exploded, and Khan intercepted her new attack to pull her into his chest. Strength abandoned Monica's body, leaving her powerless in Khan's embrace.

"Were you worried?" Khan whispered, caressing and kissing Monica's hair to help her calm down.

"I couldn't sleep at all," Monica whimpered. "Last time you returned, you were a mess. You are even worse today. I'm afraid you won't come back from the next mission."

Monica wrapped her arms around Khan's torso and tightened her hug. She initially held back from applying her full strength for fear of potential injuries, but Khan's calm demeanor eventually reassured her.

Monica didn't mention it, but Khan knew that the lack of calls had worsened the situation. He couldn't even imagine how worried she had been during those days.

"I'll come back," Khan reassured. "I'll always come back for you."

Monica lifted her head to show her teary face. Khan hated himself for making her cry again, but Monica seemed to sense that instinctive reaction, so she pushed herself forward to reach his lips.

"I was going crazy," Monica revealed once the kiss ended. "I thought they would have brought you back in a coffin."

"You won't get rid of me so easily," Khan reassured, reaching for Monica's cheeks to wipe her tears. "You are stuck with me."

"Good," Monica exclaimed. "I wouldn't know what to do otherwise. The bed isn't the same without you on it. The flat feels empty when you aren't around. My days don't start if I don't hear your stupid jokes."

"My, my," Khan gasped. "It seems you have gone mad."

"You made me like this," Monica complained. "So don't you dare die on me."

Another wave of sobs arrived, but Khan was ready to take Monica in his arms again. So much blood was on his hands, but Monica didn't want to be anywhere else. She completely accepted him, and he couldn't help but feel saved.

"You'd be glad to know the Headmistress grounded me for a while," Khan chuckled.

"I'm not," Monica whined. "I don't enjoy seeing you getting hurt all the time."

"I thought you liked taking care of me," Khan teased.

"I don't like it anymore!" Monica snapped, pointing her pleading expression at Khan. "So, stop getting hurt."

"Alright, alright," Khan instantly agreed. "Come here now."

Khan pulled Monica closer to make her stretch her legs over his lap. She was basically sitting on him, and he cuddled her to disperse what remained of her worry.

"How did you get into the Headmistress' office anyway?" Khan eventually asked.

"I threatened all the soldiers I found until one led me to the office," Monica explained.

"That sounds like my lovely girlfriend," Khan nodded, and a giggle resounded in his arms.

"By the way," Khan mentioned. "Shouldn't you be in class?"

"I'm not leaving your side today," Monica stated. "I don't care what you or my mother say."

"Is that so?" Khan smirked. "I was about to say that I don't really want you at my side."

Monica recognized Khan's tempting tone and glanced at the braces around his leg. Her gaze then moved to the bandages on his face. He was still hurt, but Monica could see how full of energy he was.

"And where do you want me to be?" Monica played along since Khan looked mostly fine.

"I can think of a few places," Khan whispered, lowering his head to make their noses touch, "But on me sounds like a good start."

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The trip to the Harbor had made Khan fall behind on his studies, but Monica brought him back to speed while he was bedridden. She even skipped classes to focus on him while Anita and George took care of delivering notes.

Ideally, Khan would attend classes in his injured state, but the Headmistress required time to spin the story in his favor. Being outside would work against him, so he opted for complete rest, meditation, and intense study.

Still, as much as Monica and Khan would love to spend the entire week alone, mandatory social events remained. Khan's injured state also prevented him from moving too much, leading to a strange situation on the weekend's last day.

"Remind me why we are doing this," Khan sighed, straightening his position on the crutches.

"Social connections require constant nurturing," Monica explained, adjusting Khan's casual clothes. "We can't allow ourselves to disappear anymore."

"But why so many?" Khan complained.

"They are the best and wealthiest in the advanced classes," Monica stated. "Their friendship is a priceless asset among our generation."

"What are the chances that we'll get any studying done?" Khan questioned.

"None," Monica giggled, "But we'll be together in a more restrained environment. We won't need to stick to my mother's rules so thoroughly."

"Someone is eager to take me out," Khan teased. "We shouldn't have been so late then."

"That's your fault!" Monica scoffed, stomping her feet and crossing her arms. "You should have let me go when the first alarm rang."

"I remember it the other way around," Khan chuckled, leaning forward to approach Monica's pouting face. "You almost broke my new phone when you threw it away."

"It's still your fault," Monica giggled, taking Khan's face in her hands. "You should feel bad about it."

"How could I when you make such cute sounds?" Khan joked, but Monica showed no shyness. Instead, her hands slid on Khan's face to take his neck in her embrace.

"Only sounds?" Monica asked.

"Your expressions are worth mentioning too," Khan whispered while Monica pulled him into a kiss.

"Praise me more," Monica muttered, and Khan let go of the crutches to limp toward the bedroom's wall, pushing her in the process.

Monica let out a cute gasp when her back hit the wall, but Khan's lips soon sealed her mouth. All their duties and worries suddenly disappeared to make room for their mad passion.

However, a message lit up above the couple, and its light was bright enough to distract them from their intimacy. They both lifted their gazes and laughed when they read those angry words.

'I'm going to tell everyone about that kinky game of yours if you don't come out,' George said in his message.

"We should show our faces," Khan sighed.

"How can George convince you when I can't?" Monica complained. "Should I be jealous?"

"George doesn't have this," Khan joked, softly slapping Monica's butt. She let out another cute gasp, and an intense expression followed, but reason had the better of her.

"You can have it once everyone leaves," Monica whispered tempting words before kissing Khan and escaping his embrace to pick up his crutches.

"Ready?" Monica asked once Khan had worn the crutches, and he gestured a simple nod to make her open the bedroom.

A series of cheerful cries resounded when Monica and Khan appeared in his flat's corridor. New couches, seats, and tables had appeared in the main hall, and multiple familiar faces filled them while calling for the couple.

"You took your sweet time," Zoe laughed.

"We can excuse Khan due to his injuries," Lucian stated.

"Right," George scoffed. "His injuries definitely are the problem."

"It's uncommon for the host to be late," Lucy commented.

"We can give the Captain some leeway," Mark announced. "After all, this is his first time."

"But not Monica's," Anita sighed. "My girl is on a bad path."

"I might be a bit envious," Marcia admitted.

"Khan, can we smoke here?" John shouted, even if a lit cigarette was already in his mouth.

"Allow me to apologize for the delay," Monica announced when she and Khan reached the array of couches and seats. "I took longer than expected to prepare."

"She couldn't choose a dress," Khan added, stopping his limping to face the entire room. "I told her she would look perfect in any of them, but arguing with a Solodrey is impossible."

"It's still cute when you try," Monica giggled, reaching for Khan's cheek to kiss it. "Never stop."

Laughs and more comments resounded in the hall, forcing Monica to perform an elegant bow that highlighted her yellow sundress. She didn't have the time to prepare thoroughly for the social event, but her figure remained the embodiment of harmonious beauty.

"You guys, sit down," Lucian called. "We are all friends here, so there is no need for ceremonies."

"And I've already filled your drinks," George added, pointing at the empty couch and the glasses on the table before it.

Khan and Monica exchanged nods and smiles while reaching their couch. Khan immediately picked up his drink while Monica folded her legs on the pillow and leaned toward his head to adjust his bandages.

"You need to change them soon," Monica voiced, carefully stretching the cloth over the padded area.

"I'll remove them soon anyway," Khan responded. "My hair is already growing back there."

"I'll take you to a saloon once you do," Monica stated.

"Eager to have a date?" Khan teased.

"Very," Monica replied. "I want the entire Harbor to see me with my man."

The comfort and intimacy shown by the couple silenced the hall. Lucian, George, and Anita had gotten used to that behavior by then, but Mark and the others felt shocked.

"By the way," Lucian cleared his throat to break that awkward silence, "I've taken a look at what you brought back. You can sell most items in the shopping district, while Pandora might be interested in the bones."

"Pandora?" Khan repeated. "How much are they willing to pay?"

"Not much," Lucian admitted. "You might be able to make two hundred thousand, but that's mostly due to your name."

"Wait on the sale," Khan ordered. "There is a chance Pandora might want the shells too."

"Is there something I should know?" Lucian wondered as his eyes lit up.

"I guess a lot," Mark joined the conversation. "Khan has been so cryptic about his mission on Induna. Even the Global Army has yet to release an official report."

"You'll learn everything soon enough," Khan laughed, and the buzzing of his phone put a smile on his face. "Perfect timing."

Only a few seconds had to pass for everyone's phones to ring. The descendants opened that notification, and their eyes widened in surprise when they realized what it was. The video of Khan's battle in the underground hall had just hit the network.

"So, what do you think?" Khan asked as his expression went cold.

"I think," Lucian hesitated due to the amazement those images caused. "I think I need to contact Pandora again."

Chapter 505 Revelations

Khan kept a cold face while inspecting the symphony. That was a good chance to see how influential descendants reacted to his actions. He might be able to divide between potential allies and enemies in the next few minutes.

Everyone remained glued to their phones, even Monica, and Khan peeked at her screen to see what had actually hit the network. As he had expected, the underground hall's footage wasn't perfect due to its damage, but a few interesting details still existed.

The conversation with Mister Chares was absent, and a reoccurring flickering affected the video's clarity. Wayne was also always turned or unclear. No one could take a good look at his face in the footage, which felt fishy.

Khan left those thoughts in the back of his mind while his attention remained on his guests. The goriest parts were strangely clear, too clear for some descendants. Marcia directly closed her phone when a worker's insides filled the screen, and Lucy covered her mouth for fear of how her stomach might react.

Anita and Zoe were no better, and Mark also wore a suffering expression. He didn't like what he saw, but diverting his gaze wasn't an option due to his status.

Only a few managed to handle the video well. George's mindset had switched at the sight of blood, allowing him to focus on Khan's performance. Lucian was also calm and reviewed every detail he could notice. As for John, he appeared strangely excited, and low cheers escaped his mouth.

"Damn, Khan," John exclaimed. "You are hardcore."

Khan ignored the comment but paid attention to the reactions it caused. The room featured a lot of disgust, which wasn't surprising due to how little battle experience those descendants had. Still, some awe appeared, and the same went for respect.

Monica was the only exception. She had gotten used to blood after Milia 222's events, but seeing Khan getting hurt still affected her. Tremors ran through her back whenever an attack threatened to reach Khan, but he placed a hand on her leg to reassure her.

Silence reigned even after the video ended. Lucian, John, and Monica opted for a second watch to review more details. Instead, the others avoided each other's gazes, and only George stretched forward to slide a bottle toward Khan.

"You improved again," George praised. "Am I even suitable for watching your back anymore?"

"The whole point of sending you to your family was to end your time on the battlefield," Khan reminded, taking the bottle to refill his glass.

"Was it?" George wondered. "I don't seem to remember anymore."

"George, we talked about this," Khan sighed.

"Maybe we need to have that talk again," George stated, gesturing toward the bottle, which Khan didn't hesitate to throw.

Only Khan and George understood the context of their conversation. The shared experience of Istrone and Nitis created an unbreakable bond that put them on the same wavelength. In a way, they could understand each other better than anyone else.

"Did the Global Army release an official statement?" Lucian asked, finally lifting his eyes from his phone.

"I'm checking now," Mark revealed.

"This is disgusting," Lucy commented, struggling to return her phone to her pocket. "Why is the Global Army allowing such things to enter the network?"

"Would you prefer censorship?" John laughed. "I think we should have more things like this on the network."

"It was a criminal organization," Khan explained. "I stumbled on it by chance and took care of the threat."

"Couldn't," Marcia cleared her throat in an attempt to sound as polite as possible. "Was this necessary?"

"You have seen the equipment in the video," John pointed out. "Those guns blew Erika's leg off and helped kidnap Princess Edna. Khan dealing with them was mercy."

"Yes, Headmistress Holwen released a speech," Mark declared. "It was a branch of the criminal organization involved with Princess Edna's kidnapping attempt."

"On Induna?" Anita gasped. "How did the Global Army miss it?"

"They could plan a kidnapping attempt on a noble," Zoe pointed out. "Hiding a warehouse doesn't seem much in comparison."

"What does this mean?" Marcia asked. "Is the Harbor even safe anymore?"

"It wasn't safe to begin with," Lucy commented while a strange idea formed in her mind. "Khan, how did you say you found this place?"

"Lucy, I don't like what you are insinuating," Monica snapped.

"I'm just curious," Lucy responded. "I think I speak for everyone when I say I want an explanation."

"Are you implying that I misunderstood what you meant?" Monica questioned as her voice lost any trace of emotion. "Am I that dumb?"

Lucy had only feigned ignorance, but Monica was forcing her to take a stand. Lucy couldn't possibly insult Monica due to her status, so she looked at the rest of her companions, hoping that someone would support her.

"What's with this tension?" John wondered. "Khan met some bad guys and dealt with them. What's wrong with that?"

"I'm simply pointing out inconsistencies," Lucy justified her stance. "I never meant to doubt Khan's loyalty."

"I'm not dumb then," Monica uttered. "I was worried my social skills had gotten rusty."

"You must admit it's quite the coincidence," Mark stated. "Saving Princess Edna only to find a criminal organization connected to her kidnapping is truly odd."

"Maybe this isn't the right place to talk about it," Lucian stated. "These political incidents are above Khan's pay grade. No offense."

"Lucian, we all know why you are saying this," Zoe declared. "I respect and admire Khan's performance, but wanting answers has nothing to do with that."

"I'm with Zoe," Marcia added, lowering her gaze for fear of looking in Khan and Monica's direction. "It's scary to think that criminals live so close to us."

"These guys don't know what true fear is," George chuckled, heaving a helpless sigh when he saw Anita's worried expression.

"It's because of Wayne," Khan revealed. "He appeared as soon as I finished my mission, and following him led me to the warehouse."

"Wayne?" John questioned.

"Is the Headmistress aware of his involvement?" Mark asked. "Why didn't she make it public?"

"Khan, these are serious accusations," Lucian pointed out.

"It's true," Khan declared. "He was there. He's the man who broke my ankle."

Khan lifted his right leg to place the braced foot on the table. The sudden gesture made everyone take out their phones to study the video. The footage had the part when Wayne broke Khan's ankle. The former was simply turned.

"It might be him," John exclaimed.

"I wish I could see his face," Lucy complained.

"It's him," Khan confirmed.

"Khan, are you sure this isn't personal revenge?" Zoe asked. "Accusing someone without proof is dangerous, even for you."

"Is my man a liar now?" Monica pointed her smile at Zoe, but her expression carried no happiness.

"Monica, please," Mark called. "No one is attacking Khan. We are just trying to understand."

"The Headmistress opted to keep Wayne's involvement a secret," Khan explained. "These are classified topics that need your parents' clearance to unlock. I simply decided to tell you in confidence."

The Headmistress would probably get quite mad at Khan for that decision. His actions could potentially hurt her position in the Harbor and push for her firing. Yet, that was the political game, and Khan sometimes needed to play both sides.

"You must understand that this revelation must remain among us," Monica deepened the topic.

"Headmistress Holwen wouldn't dare to endanger us, but making Wayne's involvement public might put his connections on the run. Keeping it a secret increases the chances of finding more criminals."

"That's understandable," Lucian nodded.

"Our families would have learnt about this anyway," Mark continued. "Still, learning about it earlier surely helps. Thank you for trusting us, Khan."

"Just doing my job," Khan rejected that gratitude. "It's mostly a warning in case Wayne tries to contact any of you."

"Is he alive?" John asked. "I thought you made a mountain fall on him."

"He was strong," Khan admitted. "I survived, so there is a chance he did too."

"That strong?" George wondered.

"That strong," Khan confirmed. "I think he wasn't serious about it either."

"You should stop leaving your knife here," George stated.

"Consider it done," Khan nodded.

"What are you two saying?" Anita asked. "This is a matter of public safety, and Khan is injured. You should spend the rest of the semester here and leave the job to specialists."

"We are specialists," George scoffed. "We just don't carry that name."

"So, what?" Anita wondered. "Do you plan to ignore your classes to chase after these criminals?"

"That would be more interesting than studying," George laughed.

"No one is going anywhere," Khan stepped in. "I shared this information with you, but I'd prefer if you kept it to yourselves. General panic won't help anyone."

"Are you asking us to lie to our parents?" Zoe wondered.

"Mark said it himself," Khan pointed out. "Your family will learn about it, eventually."

"He is quite good at this," John exclaimed. "You wouldn't believe he came from the Slums."

"I don't mind having a source of intel faster than my parents'," Lucian chuckled.

"I'm with Lucian here," Mark stated. "I can't miss the opportunity to build something independently."

"I'll stay," Marcia declared. "Just don't show me that video anymore."

"I won't tell anyone," Lucy declared, "But I don't like these methods. I'll take my leave early tonight."

"Lucy," Zoe called, but Lucy shook her head while heading for the flat's exit.

"I," Anita voiced among her hesitation. "I think I'll leave too. I'm not feeling too well."

"Anita?" George called. "Do you need help?"

"No," Anita reassured. "I just need to rest. I'll see you tomorrow."

Anita also left the flat, and a new tension descended into the hall. The atmosphere had changed into something that Khan understood very well. He could almost smell the arrival of ploys and secrets, but some sadness remained. George and Monica had made their decision, but they didn't expect to see a friend turn her back on them.

Chapter 506 Possibilities

"She'll come around," Zoe reassured after the group spent a few seconds in silence.

"Maybe it's better if she doesn't," George sighed, lying deeper into his couch's back and gulping down what remained of his drink.

"No need to get all depressed," Mark joined Zoe.

George shook his head before shooting an annoyed glance at his empty glass. He didn't want to go over those topics sober and with those people. Yet, he couldn't pass for someone who didn't care about Anita either, which put him in a pickle.

"It's not like that," Khan intervened. "Our world has blood and corpses. It's not a place you want your loved ones to know."

Khan let go of Monica's leg to immerse his hand in her hair before continuing. "I definitely didn't want her to know mine and share its problems."

"But you couldn't keep me out," Monica whispered, turning her head to lay it on Khan's palm.

"Not for lack of trying," Khan sighed, rubbing his thumb on Monica's cheek while memories resurfaced. He lost himself in that beautiful face, and the kiss that Monica delivered on his palm put him deeper into that state.

Khan didn't forget Monica's injury during the battle with the Nak's hand. That wasn't strictly Khan's fault, but he still put it on himself, and things got worse afterward due to the political implications of their relationship.

"You were ready to remain unhappy to spare others from your pain," Monica muttered, leaving Khan's hand to reach his shoulder. "I loved how protective you were, but someone had to beat some sense into you."

"You should have been uglier," Khan cursed, closing his left arm around Monica's head to bring her closer, "And not being so cute when you are angry."

"Khan, they can hear us," Monica complained, but Khan retained his pensive expression while seizing her nose with his right hand. Monica felt weak before that face, and only a whispered whimper escaped her mouth. "Stupid, kiss me already."

Mark, Zoe, Marcia, and even Lucian remained stunned before the kiss. The gesture alone was surprising enough to be on the front page of every news and seeing Monica's submissive side added fuel to that feeling.

John couldn't help but leave his couch and sit beside Mark to be closer to that interaction. He even took out his phone to capture the kiss, but Mark promptly covered and lowered the device.

"He tamed Monica Solodrey," John gasped, gazing at Mark. "He is the chos-."

"Before we continue," Khan spoke before John could finish his line. "I don't know Lucy too well. Should I worry?"

"I'll talk to her later," Zoe stated. "Though it would be better if Monica came with me."

"It's not a problem as long as she apologizes to Khan," Monica declared.

"Monica," Khan scolded.

"Lucy must mind her tone in your presence," Monica explained. "It would be disrespectful toward my family and me if she didn't treat you with the appropriate respect."

"Monica is right," Lucian joined the conversation. "Khan, you aren't a simple Captain anymore. Any action toward your figure is reflected on the Solodrey family, and ignoring offenses would show that you don't respect your new status."

Khan didn't expect Lucian to be on Monica's side. He preferred things to be friendlier, especially in that isolated environment. Yet, a single look at the room told Khan that his other companions agreed with Monica too.

"I see," Khan accepted, glancing at Monica. "Maybe we should meet her together then. It could be an opportunity to have a group date."

Monica's eyes lit up when she heard the word "date", but she forced herself to remain calm due to her companions' presence. She adjusted her position in Khan's embrace and put her hands on her folded legs before responding casually. "If that's what you want, we can plan something out."

Khan had a hard time containing his smile, but his efforts were pointless before that audience. Those descendants had received the best type of political and social education. They couldn't miss how excited Monica was at that idea.

"I thought you had plenty of dates already," Marcia announced, leaving her couch to sit next to George and be closer to the couple.

"We would have known about that," Mark pointed out.

"What did you do instead of going out?" Zoe teased. "Don't tell me you jumped into his arms without getting to know him."

"It was complicated," Monica giggled, trying to reject those statements. "Mister Cobsend's mission had the priority, and Khan was always busy being Khan. We only stole moments and a few nights before deciding to give us a chance."

"It sounds like Zoe is right," John exclaimed, lighting a new cigarette and crossing his legs on the couch.

"We had our moments," Khan revealed. "A drink now and then, a few honest talks, and I clearly remember a slap."

"We don't talk about that," Monica voiced an awkward laugh, reaching for the bottle on the table to refill her drink.

"Why not?" Khan teased, showing his empty glass to Monica. "I knew I liked you after that."

Monica wanted to snap and go full whiny girlfriend mode, but the situation prevented that behavior. She still didn't know if she could trust her classmates, and that meeting was about Wayne and the criminal organization now. As much as she wanted to monopolize Khan, she knew and respected her other priorities.

"Unfair," Monica limited herself to whispering, filling Khan's glass, "But you are taking me out to buy a dress first."

"Anything you desire," Khan immediately accepted, and Monica brought her glass to her face to hide how happy she was.

"Shall we go back to the main topic?" Lucian eventually cleared his throat.

"Don't ruin the mood," John booed.

"Joking around is fine," Mark exclaimed, leaving his couch to reach the nearest wall, "But the situation is quite serious."

Mark played with the flat's menus until holograms appeared on one side of the array of couches. He even approached them to make the images display the Harbor's system, and red marks spread on those azure lights whenever his fingers touched them.

"The kidnapping attempt happened on Nippe 2," Mark stated, leaving a red spot on the mentioned planet. "Then, Wayne joined the advanced classes, only to lead Khan into a secret warehouse on Induna."

Red spots appeared on the Harbor and Induna after Mark's touches. The map still felt too empty, but that was a start.

"Do we know anything else?" Mark asked, turning toward his classmates. "Khan, do you know why they contacted you?"

Khan could sense Lucian's gaze on him. The two had already spoken about the topic, and Lucian had even provided a better version of that map.

"They wanted a pilot," Khan revealed before nodding at Lucian.

"I've already assembled all the routes I could find," Lucian declared, also standing up to connect his phone to the room.

New holograms appeared, and Lucian reached Mark to make them fuse with the map. The red spots remained, and many routes joined them to create a complicated scenery. Even after isolating the Induna and Nippe 2, the options remained too numerous.

"A pilot means goods to transport," Mark continued. "Possibly, illegal goods. The equipment used during Princess Edna's kidnapping attempt is an obvious answer, but we can't exclude anything."

"Drugs are always valuable," John pointed out. "Abora is full of strange plants and whatnot. The illegal substances might be in the hundreds."

"And we can't exclude Abora," Zoe pointed out. "These criminals had a warehouse on Induna. They probably have similar structures in the rest of the system."

"Valuable metals," George announced. "Weapons are hard to smuggle, especially after the kidnapping attempt. Instead, the alloys used to build them don't have those problems."

"Metals," Mark repeated, using an empty part of the holograms to note those suggestions.

"They might simply want to cover their tracks," Monica guessed. "The nobles won't let go of the kidnapping attempt anytime soon. Maybe these criminals want to get rid of the hot merch to resume doing business."

"What about an attack at the Harbor?" Marcia wondered. "The embassy contains countless classified documents. A force with enough influence can create multiple political incidents with them."

"The embassy and the Harbor are well protected," George declared. "Even an entire fleet will struggle to invade it."

"These criminals have access to disposable teleports," Khan revealed. "Any chance they can teleport an army inside the Harbor?"

"The idea of an invasion is unrealistic," Lucian commented. "The nobles would blow up the entire system if it really fell into criminals' hands."

"So, are we safe?" Marcia asked. "I can't imagine a foreign force strong enough to face the nobles, but the kidnapping attempt still happened."

"It's not too foreign," John chuckled.

"Not foreign at all, I bet," Zoe sighed.

"We would have learnt about their existence long ago otherwise," Monica nodded.

"What?" Marcia gasped. "Do you mean there are traitors among us?"

"Lucian?" Mark called, and Lucian nodded before clearing his throat to attract everyone's attention.

"It's no secret that nobles and families stand above the Global Army," Lucian explained. "However, conflicts are the very foundation of that political array. It might be in someone's interest to create a criminal organization to affect the balance of power in some fields."

"Your family alone can create six or seven of them," George declared.

"Indeed," Lucian agreed. "Except for Khan, we are all privy to the complex internal struggles of our families. It's perfectly reasonable for a weak faction to resort to criminal methods to earn favor."

"How is that reasonable?" Marcia questioned.

"That's what I'd do," Lucian stated. "If I were a criminal, of course."

"About the drugs, the alloys, and the cover-up," Khan changed the topic. "Which do you think is more valuable?"

"Potentially?" Lucian asked. "All of them."

"Then they aren't what we are looking for," Monica responded. "Such rash behavior can only involve things these criminals can't afford to lose or fail. It must be something we would accept as the sole answer as soon as we learnt about it."

"Only the embassy matches those requirements," Zoe pointed out.

"And criminals wouldn't mess with interspecies treaties," Mark added. "Even they must fear the potential consequences."

"I feel Monica is up to something," John stated. "They wouldn't have exposed themselves over drugs and weapons. They aren't worth it."

"Lucian just said the opposite," Khan exclaimed.

"I'm not talking about their value in Credits," John explained. "They showed themselves, forsaking their secrecy, which should be priceless for criminals."

John's statement made so much sense that the entire room fell silent. Once again, Khan and the others found themselves without enough clues. They could exclude many options, but what remained was still too much for them.

"I'll tell you if I learn anything," Khan eventually exclaimed. "There might be something privy only to the Global Army."

"And how would you uncover that?" Marcia asked.

"I'm sure you all know about Professor Parver's intensive course," Khan uttered. "I'm injured, so this is a good chance to join it."

"Khan, there is a reason most of us don't attend it," Lucian voiced. "Most info about the Harbor is public or not classified enough for our parents."

"Well, I'm the youngest Captain in history," Khan stated. "That should be worth something in Professor Parver's eyes."

Chapter 507 Perfect

The group brainstormed and drank until late at night without ever getting answers. They didn't have enough clues, but Khan still obtained something from the social event. Deepening his relationship with those wealthy descendants and gaining insights into their characters was a valuable experience on its own.

Khan heaved a tired sigh when the elevator closed for the last time, granting him some yearned privacy. He wasn't alone yet. Monica and George were still in the flat's main hall, but their presence was the opposite of exhausting, especially when they were only the three of them.

The crutches' short noises resounded through the flat as Khan returned to the main hall and threw himself on Monica's couch. She welcomed him with open arms but ended up lying on his shoulder since the situation required more drinks.

"You have been great," Monica praised, kissing Khan's cheek while George dealt with the empty glasses. The tables among the couches already had multiple bottles, but a single social event couldn't deplete the flat's stash of booze.

"So," George announced, sliding two glasses over the table to make them stop right before Khan and Monica, "What do you think?"

"I think I'm getting sick of this fake politeness," Khan cursed, seizing his glass to lie on the couch's back. "I mean, they always respected me, but it took Monica to push them toward an earnest attempt to get closer."

"That's what happens when you have the best girlfriend in the world," Monica giggled.

"I can think of a few things that make you the best," Khan voiced, "And none involves these events."

"Just a few?" Monica teased before forcing herself to change the topic. George's presence wasn't a problem, but Anita's departure was still fresh. Her gesture had affected her enough to put restraints on her mood.

"Mark seemed pretty honest," Monica exclaimed to establish a suitable conversation. "His reputation isn't bad either. He can be a good ally."

Mark's short light-brown hair, green eyes, and friendly face appeared in Khan's mind. Monica was right. Mark had been a perfect acquaintance ever since the Solodrey's family announcement. His expertise, position, and family made him a valuable asset to add to Khan's connections. Khan simply didn't know how strong that bond could become.

"He's Lucian without the ploys," Khan stated.

"I'm sure he has ploys of his own," George pointed out. "My money is on Zoe and John. They are too stupid or uncaring to attempt a betrayal."

Zoe's long blonde hair and brown eyes filled Khan's vision. She was good-looking, and her random childish approaches granted her some charm. Yet, her explicit respect came from her past advances to Khan. Zoe felt she had already offended Monica, so she wouldn't dare to attempt any ploy.

Instead, John was a strange case. The man had short black hair, dark eyes, light-brown skin, and a mature face that didn't match his careless behavior. Khan almost saw him as a drunker version of George who had taken a liking to him.

"Zoe is just scared about Monica," Khan explained. "John is peculiar. I give him that. I simply don't know how helpful he can be."

"You love peculiar types," George pointed out.

"I guess I do," Khan sighed, scratching the healthy side of his head. "He's worth keeping around."

"What do you mean by that?" Monica scoffed as her eyes darted between Khan and George.

"Khan has a type," George laughed.

"Khan?" Monica called in the hope that her boyfriend would defend her.

"Monica, you chased after me and chose to be my girlfriend," Khan stated. "That's the definition of crazy."

"Is it now?!" Monica snorted. "I hope you enjoy your crazy girlfriend getting angry then."

"I do enjoy that very much," Khan said with a blank face. It looked like he was stating the obvious.

Monica wanted to complain even more, but that statement wasn't surprising. She wasn't clueless about her mood swings. She had actually been the first to warn Khan about it, and seeing him reiterating his acceptance of those crazy sides made her give up on the matter altogether.

"Why can't I ever win against you?" Monica pouted, almost slamming her head back on Khan's shoulder.

"Because you love when I sweet-talk my way back into your arms," Khan revealed, immersing his face in Monica's curls.

Monica couldn't even pretend to be angry. She smiled and let Khan pull her closer. That interaction usually led to intimate times, but the conversation still required their attention.

"What about Marcia?" Monica questioned.

"She sounds sweet," Khan declared, recalling every memory of that woman. Marcia had a relatively muscular figure that went against common beauty standards, but her long brown hair and big dark eyes added enough cuteness to make her feminine.

"And desperate," George chuckled.

"She is so into a guy she can't date!" Monica exclaimed. "I pity her a bit."

"Just a bit, I hope," Khan added. "I don't expect every descendant to have your guts, but seeing her looking for your approval is sad."

"I've become an icon for impossible loves," Monica joked. "I can probably create a business to handle those problems."

"They told me something similar about a different topic," Khan recalled.

"I will hit you if it's about women," Monica warned.

"I have bad news for both of you," George commented.

"Does it count if they are alien?" Khan laughed, and Monica turned to deliver a harmless punch that he easily intercepted.

"Just think that among all my opportunities, I still chose you," Khan uttered, lowering his head while pulling Monica's arms above him.

"Can't you let me be mad for a few minutes?" Monica complained as their faces drew dangerously close.

"Oh, that's easy," Khan nodded. "Just think that those women are still out there."

Monica had to suppress an angry cry, which she surprisingly managed to accomplish. She went silent before turning again to rest on Khan's shoulder. Her arms were crossed, but her face said that she was ready to continue the conversation.

"Are you noting down these jokes for later?" Khan whispered.

"I've started noting them since you returned from Induna," Monica proudly claimed. "Now, that leaves us with Lucy."

"She was disrespectful to Khan," George declared. "No way around it."

"I kind of like her," Khan revealed, depicting that tall and athletic figure in his mind. "She was the only one with the stones to accuse me."

"What did I tell you about his type?" George eyed Monica. "The more complicated they are, the faster Khan jumps into their arms."

"And they are always women," Monica cursed. "Luckily, I'm the most complicated woman Khan will ever meet."

"How is that good?" George shook his head.

"Because it's me," Monica stated, "And Khan loves everything about me."

"How is that an answer?" George scoffed, and Khan simply shook his head from behind Monica. When she reached that point in her arguments, making her change her mind became impossible.

"I obviously can't understand who to trust in a single meeting," Khan rekindled the conversation.

"I'm actually more worried about Anita. Is everything okay between you two?"

Monica dropped any joking attitude to focus on George. The topic couldn't help but make her sad, and George probably was the only one with the answers she sought.

"I don't know either," George sighed, gesturing toward the bottle that Monica didn't hesitate to push toward him. "Things are good, but this is no small thing."

"I'm sure everything will be fine," Monica tried to reassure. She liked that their best friends were a couple. It made her private world cozier, and George and Anita appeared happy together too.

However, Khan knew George far better and could even see his mana. He understood his internal conflict since he had experienced something similar on Reebefell.

"Is she too good?" Khan wondered.

"She can be a real pain," George snorted. "Still, yeah, she is truly good."

Monica didn't initially understand what was happening, but one look at Khan gave her an idea. After all, George and Khan were similar in many aspects, so it was easy for her to connect the dots.

"How is that a problem?" Monica questioned. "You found a good woman. Shouldn't you be happy that she shares your feelings?"

"Do you realize that you come after Khan's perfect girlfriend?" George mocked. "Khan, did you even tell her about Cora?"

"Monica, he is right," Khan sighed. "You know he is."

"But Anita-," Monica gasped.

"Would only suffer if things don't work out," Khan interrupted. "Or George would sacrifice himself for years until the inevitable explosion."

"I knew I shouldn't have opted for something serious," George cursed. "You should have stopped me."

"It made you happy," Khan stated before diverting his gaze. "Maybe part of me wanted you to be happy with her to stay away from the battlefield."

"I don't miss it," George revealed as more exchanges of bottles happened. "I don't miss the corpses, the death. Still, I look at these walls, these structures, and know what to expect from the rest of my life."

George stood up to gulp down his glass and slam it on the table. He spread his arms, and a helpless expression filled his face as his gaze wandered over the hall's walls.

"These walls will never be us," George announced. "We desire the thrill of battle. I don't hate peace like you, but knowing that this will be my future remains depressing, especially with someone who can't understand."

Khan recalled the exchange of lines between him and George when the video arrived. He knew his mana didn't change, but a question felt necessary. "Do you regret your decision from back then?"

"I don't," George sighed. "It's what I want. It simply has consequences, boring consequences."

"Just think it through," Khan warned. "If anything happens, I have booze."

"That you must," George chuckled. "Alright, I'm off. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Night, George," Khan voiced.

"Goodnight," Monica managed to say before the elevator closed, but her angry eyes soon ended on Khan. That reaction wasn't one of her mood swings. Her feelings were genuine since they involved one of her closest friends.

"Why did you tell George that?" Monica questioned.

"I don't lie to George," Khan stated, "Or you for what matters."

"You basically told him to break up with Anita!" Monica continued. "I thought she was your friend!"

"She is!" Khan responded in an equally loud tone, "And so is George. That's why I want them to be happy."

"Can't they be happy together?" Monica cried.

"I don't have any idea!" Khan shouted. "It's up to them. I simply know that Anita isn't like you."

"Like me how?" Monica complained. "Perfect like Cora?"

"Perfect for me!" Khan scolded, ending in a loud sigh. "Perfect for George."

Truth be told, Monica and Khan already had a similar conversation. He had told her almost everything about his past relationships, and she had even received Jenna's advice. Monica was angry because the matter involved Anita, but Khan wasn't the problem. He was actually her solution.

"I just don't want her to suffer," Monica admitted.

"If it were up to me," Khan added, "I'd make them live happily ever after, but love many times isn't enough."

Monica looked at Khan. He was diverting his gaze for reasons she knew far too well. That wasn't her first time hearing that line, and she hoped from the bottom of her heart that it would never apply to them.

Khan's gaze focused when a hand reached for his collar and gently pulled him down. He found himself lying on Monica's lap, and she even adjusted his legs to make him stretch comfortably on the sofa. Sadness shone in her expression, but happiness filled her eyes when she looked at him.

"Do you hate peace so much?" Monica wondered.

"I enjoy fighting," Khan answered honestly. "I enjoy using my power. I love the struggle, the sweat, the clash of forces that have taken years to form."

"Do you love me because I'm difficult?" Monica giggled.

"No, you are just cute," Khan said, closing his eyes when Monica carefully caressed his hair.

"You know," Monica muttered. "I'm glad my family made me suffer so much. I would have never been a good fit for you otherwise."

"I hate that you have been alone for so long," Khan responded without opening his eyes.

"It was worth it," Monica stated. "After hearing George, I realized that I'm the same. My family has my future planned out for me. These walls are my legacy. I can take breaks from them, but something far stronger than me will always bring me back."

"We can still be space pirates," Khan pointed out, making a laugh resound above him.

"You are the first thing I truly desired for myself," Monica continued. "I never disobeyed my family so much before you. I was nothing more than a puppet until I fell for you."

"Arguably, I led you on a bad road," Khan stated.

"No," Monica shook her head. "I still don't know what I want from my future, but one thing is certain. You are my beginning, and I hope with my entire being you'll be my end."

"Don't cry," Khan said, opening his eyes since he felt the tears accumulating above him. "Don't let bad thoughts distract you from what we have."

"I'm just emotional, dummy," Monica sniffed. "Tell me that you love me, or shut up."

Khan couldn't find the strength to tease Monica any longer. He straightened his position and did everything in his power to convey the entirety of his feelings to his beautiful, moody girlfriend.

Chapter 508 Backdoor

Khan resumed attending lessons the day after the social meeting, and his arrival at the embassy gave him a better idea about the public reception of the footage. The Headmistress had depicted it as a heroic act that granted him more popularity, but some lingering fear had appeared due to the nature of his actions.

The situation was different inside the advanced classes. In theory, Khan's battle had directly benefitted those wealthy descendants since they believed themselves to be the targets of those criminals. Some still had reservations, but no one dared to announce them publicly.

Khan limited his answers and contained himself in those public situations, using Monica or his injuries to spend as little time in the open as possible. The day went by quickly thanks to that, but the arrival of the night brought new tasks, and not only for him.

Monica was alone in Khan's flat when the elevator opened to bring a friendly figure. She left the bedroom in a hurry, and a smile bloomed on her face when she saw a confused George in the main hall.

"George!" Monica exclaimed, trying to adjust her messy hair and creased tracksuit. "I wasn't expecting you."

"Right, Khan is with Professor Parver tonight," George recalled. "I'll return in a few hours."

"No, please, stay," Monica exclaimed. "I'll get you a drink right away."

George didn't have the chance to refuse since Monica stormed away, hurrying outside the main hall to retrieve one of the many bottles. He could only sigh and approach a couch to wait for her return.

Monica came back in a few seconds, handing a clean glass to George before pouring booze into it. She had a cup for herself too but waited until she reached the couch on the opposite side to attend to it.

"You know you don't need these ceremonies with me, right?" George commented when Monica tried to assume an elegant sitting position and adjust her hair again. "I thought we were past that after I've seen your underwear and bra all over this flat."

"I'm sorry," Monica stated, diverting her gaze in embarrassment. "I just don't know how else to approach this."

"What is it?" George asked, bringing his glass to his mouth.

"I wanted to apologize for yesterday," Monica explained. "It wasn't my place to lecture you about relationships."

"What?" George frowned as if he couldn't understand what Monica was talking about.

"It wasn't my place to speak about Anita and you," Monica clarified. "I'm sorry."

"Oh," George finally understood. "Anita is your friend. It would have been stranger if you stayed silent."

"But still," Monica pressed on. "I shouldn't have spoken to you like that just because my relationship is doing well. I had no right."

George scratched the side of his head before opting for a straightforward question. "Monica, are we friends?"

"Of course!" Monica promptly replied.

"Then, you had every right," George continued. "We can't be friends if you don't speak your mind."

Monica smiled. George was rarely serious, but his wise moments always carried truth. Monica had also developed proper respect for him after Nippe 2's events. He was Khan's closest friend for a reason, but thinking about that reminded Monica of the problems the potential break-up could cause.

"I'm surprised you didn't go with Khan," George commented. "Professor Parver can't really refuse you, can he?"

"We agreed it was better for him to go alone," Monica explained. "My presence would have lowered his chances of getting answers."

"Better for me," George laughed. "I can steal his booze freely."

"You are richer than him," Monica pointed out.

"Stealing gives an additional taste," George claimed before looking at his half-empty glass, "And the Headmistress is sending him excellent stuff. Such a lucky bastard."

Monica didn't take offense at those words. She knew George meant no harm. He was probably the only one who could talk about Khan like that.

"You can bring his bottles to your flat," Monica suggested, lowering her voice to hide her lingering worry. "Anita might want some too."

George looked at Monica, but she hid her gaze. The signs were there, and anyone could see them. George had come to Khan's flat alone, hinting at a bad outcome.

"We didn't break up," George announced, making Monica's face snap back up. "We talked, I played dumb, and she got angry, but we eventually understood each other. We don't know if we'll separate, but we are still a couple for now."

Monica smiled again but decided to remain serious. No matter what George said, she still planned to leave his relationship alone. It simply wasn't her business.

"If you do break up," Monica mentioned, "I can leave some nights to yourselves. I know how you guys like to drink together."

"Weren't you the clingy type?" George joked.

"Did Khan tell you that?!" Monica snapped before shaking her head to calm down. "I'm serious. I don't want Khan to have to choose between you and me."

"We can just drink together," George pointed out.

"But you know how we are," Monica voiced without hiding how pleased she was about her connection with Khan.

"A true man would never stop his friend from getting laid," George claimed, slamming his fist on his chest to add value to his statement.

"George!" Monica cried.

"What?" George wondered. "The entire Global Army knows that you have sex. Khan even promised me a chance to pick your child's name."

"We are not calling him George Junior!" Monica complained.

"He actually told you," George snickered. "You two really are a married couple."

George expected Monica to snap even further, but she diverted her gaze to play with her curls. Her behavior didn't say much, but George knew her enough to understand what she was hiding.

"Are you getting married?" George gasped.

"No!" Monica shouted before showing her shy side, "But I did tell him I wanted to spend my life with him yesterday. Sort of."

"How long have you been together exactly?" George questioned.

"It's too early, isn't it?" Monica asked, placing both hands on her cheeks. "I made a mistake, right? Did I scare him away? I'm going crazy."

"No, no," George shook his head. "You're already crazy, alright."

"What do I do now?" Monica pleaded.

"Knowing Khan," George laughed, "Get crazier. He loves that stuff."

"But what about you?" Monica asked.

"You should have seen him on Nitis," George smirked. "He used to ignore his surroundings to whisper jokes with Liiza. You are just louder."

"George, please," Monica whined.

"You are lucky he isn't the polyamorous guy," George continued. "He would have had a harem by now. Such a waste."

"George!" Monica shouted.

"This is way too easy," George chuckled. "No wonder he is having so much fun with you."

"I still have Anita on my side," Monica reminded George.

"Hey, I'm joking here," George lifted a hand to signal his surrender. "Still, I hope that you get my point. I never expected Khan to be so happy after Nitis. I'd never get in his way."

"How," Monica voiced while calming down. "How was he there? How was he before?"

"Didn't he tell you?" George questioned.

"I want to hear it from you," Monica stated. "He doesn't hide anything from me, but his perception can be distorted."

"That's a nice way to put it," George scoffed before a sigh took control of his voice. "He was different, even on Istrone. He had this force that made him react faster than anyone. I'm not exaggerating when I say the rebellion would have had far more casualties without him."

"I know you had it hard after Istrone," Monica uttered. "I can't imagine what you must have seen down there."

"You kind of can, can't you?" George replied. "I read Milia 222's reports. That was an outright mess."

"You were kids," Monica pointed out.

"We still are in many ways," George exclaimed. "Well, I was pretty lost after Istrone, and Khan was no different. Yet, he still had that strange force pushing him forward."

Monica knew about the nightmares and desperation, so she could immediately connect the dots. However, that understanding saddened her. Her education was nothing compared to Khan's life, but those events had affected him anyway.

"Don't get me wrong," George continued. "The guy is an idiot. He is the dumbest man in the entire Global Army. He is so stupid that he thinks he can take everyone's pain on his shoulders and go on with his life."

"His protective side surprised me too," Monica agreed.

"It was probably worse back then," George explained as his gaze wandered through the room.

"Khan believed himself to be the only one entitled to pain. Luckily, Liiza was there for him."

Silence fell into the hall as the two let their thoughts wander. It almost didn't seem real that Khan had gone through so much at such a young age, but his profile didn't lie.

"You know," George smirked. "He initially felt guilty about Liiza. He had this girl on Ylaco-."

"Martha," Monica interrupted. "I met her on Milia 222. She was nice."

"Right," George recalled as a curse left his mouth. "He really had the harem ready for him."

Monica glared at George, and he felt forced to show a shameless smile, but she quickly calmed down. She would rather hear more about Khan than let her emotions get the better of her.

"How can I be better than Liiza?" Monica couldn't help but ask. "I know I'm not supposed to fill anyone's shoes, but I still want to do my best."

George didn't expect that question, but Nitis always made some of his seriousness appear. Besides, Monica looked beyond resolute, which deserved an honest answer.

"You probably can't," George admitted. "Not because you are inferior or anything. The two of you are simply different. He isn't even the same anymore. In a way, he reminds me of Liiza now."

"So, what am I supposed to do?" Monica questioned. "Being myself around him is easy, but I want to do more, and you know him better than anyone."

"Can't you just stick to that kinky play I spotted the other night?" George wondered. "I can give you more ideas too. Most women don't want to try it because it hurts, but you probably don't apply."

"What are you even saying?!" Monica shouted, taking off a shoe to throw it at George. "Stop it with this stuff."

"Hey, it's perfectly natural," George pressed on. "Just some lube and-."

George had to interrupt his line since Monica threw her other shoe at him before moving to her glass. He had to jump behind the couch to protect himself, but his laughs continued to resound among Monica's angry shouts.

"There might be one thing!" George shouted, daring to lift his arm past the couch to attract Monica's attention.

Monica stopped shouting, and George mustered the courage to peek past the couch. She stood with the bottle firmly held in her grip, ready to throw it at him, but her expression gave him enough confidence to leave his hideout.

"You know Khan will never stay put," George cleared his throat. "It's not in his genes. So, when the time comes, don't leave him alone. Don't make him relive what happened with Liiza."

"I won't be able to follow him everywhere," Monica muttered.

"Not in that sense," George clarified. "You'll understand once the situation arrives."

Monica didn't fully understand, but George had spoken honestly, so she nodded in agreement.

"You are a good friend, George," Monica exclaimed, putting the bottle back on the table.

"I'm the best of friends," George announced. "Well, that title probably belongs to Khan. He saved me in many ways, so make him happy. He deserves it."

"He really does," Monica sighed before showing a genuine smile. "Drink with us as many times you want, even if something happens with Anita. He is happier when you are around."

"My heart will always follow booze," George proudly claimed. "Anyway, the backdoor isn't as dirty as everyone thinks. You can have a lot of fun with it."

Monica frowned, but her eyes widened in anger when she understood what George was saying. Her hand instinctively went on the bottle on the table, but the flat's walls lit up and interrupted her gesture.

"Is it Anita?" George asked.

"The flat knows her," Monica shook her head while heading for one of the menus. "Who is this?"

"Monica, it's me!" A male, pleading voice came out of the menu. "Please, let me in to explain myself."

Monica immediately recognized the voice, and a headache threatened to appear. She knew exactly who was speaking. Francis Alstair was right inside the building.

Chapter 509 Calls

Professor Parver held the intensive course inside his lab on the hidden floor since Khan was the only student. The room's privacy gave them more freedom, allowing them to share a few drinks while going over the lesson.

Khan drank and took notes while Professor Parver explained and expanded on the many holograms coming out of the two interactive desks. The man had to take many breaks during his illness' outbursts, but the lesson flowed smoothly nonetheless. Khan could only complain about its contents.

Professor Parver's course aimed to educate on the immense field of alien environments. The subject had more branches than specialists, so the Professor had to start from its very foundation, opting for a broad and general topic that would span for many days.

Khan didn't exactly hate that idea, but many of Professor Parver's initial explanations covered topics he had already learnt in the advanced classes. They were more detailed in the intensive course, but that didn't completely justify the time spent reviewing them.

Of course, a few interesting points appeared throughout the course. According to Professor Parver, every environment enhanced by mana followed specific patterns. The latter were quite broad, and the Global Army didn't claim to know all of them, but a deep knowledge of those topics could make the difference between a good and bad scout.

"Sir, there is something I don't understand," Khan announced once Professor Parver stopped coughing. "Why are we going over the procedures to identify said patterns? I only need my senses for that."

Khan could have said "eyes" instead of "senses" but preferred to keep the details of his sensitivity to himself. The Global Army didn't need to know how alien he actually was.

"Yes, you indeed are an exception," Professor Parver showed his kind smile while immersing his hand in the holograms. "These teachings are probably useless for you."

"Then, why should I study them?" Khan wondered, playing with his almost empty drink while skimming through the holograms. "It would save both of us a lot of time if we skipped this topic."

"Captain, you might only need a glance and some knowledge to identify a pattern," Professor Parver stated, "But your team won't be able to understand you. Studying this will help you explain what you sense to them."

Understanding dawned upon Khan. The Professor was educating him to be a scout, which involved a team of specialists and an ambassador. In that arrangement, he would be the first to acquire information, which required a common language to convey to his eventual teammates.

"Besides," Professor Parver continued, "Eventual discoveries must be tested and proven by the Global Army's methods. The scientific field won't just take your word."

"That sounds slow," Khan pointed out.

"It is," Professor Parver confirmed. "Science moves slowly and only when it's certain that a phenomenon works according to its descriptions. We don't allow mistakes. We merely strive to clear the darkness of our ignorance."

Khan didn't share Professor Parver's passion for the scientific field but could acknowledge its strict requirements. It was the same with the many regulations covered by the advanced classes. Aliens might not need them, but they were necessary to humankind.

Coughs took control of Professor Parver after his last statement. The violent reaction forced him to lean on a desk nearby and almost made Khan stand up. Yet, the man lifted a hand to stop him and let that outburst go away on its own.

"I'm afraid I reached my limit for tonight," Professor Parver used his kind tone before clearing his throat.

"Is the schedule I requested too harsh for you, sir?" Khan asked. He was still grounded, so he had asked Professor Parver to have those lessons every night.

"No, no," Professor Parver chuckled. "It's perfectly fine. Exhaustion is a small price to pay to enlighten such a bright mind."

"Sir," Khan couldn't help but feel a bit bad, "You know I'll never pursue the scientific path."

"Don't overthink it," Professor Parver reassured, reaching for a seat and retrieving his full glass. "I don't expect you to do anything. I only want to share my knowledge with someone who might benefit from it."

Khan nodded but remained silent. Truth be told, he had learnt to agree with Professor Parver's idea. Starting as a scout didn't sound too bad. The job didn't only suit him. His status would also make promotions and advantages arrive sooner.

"Anyway," Professor Parver exclaimed after taking a sip from his drink, "How are your injuries?"

"The doctors said I'd need a full month," Khan revealed, tapping on the floor with his braced foot. "I think I'll be fine in a couple more weeks."

Khan was actually staying humble. His grounded status gave him a lot of time to meditate, and his body's recovery speed surpassed humans. He might need less than fourteen days to heal.

"That's good to hear," Professor Parver said. "What about your tasks? According to the reports, you are surpassing everyone's expectations."

"They are easy," Khan admitted, "Easier than war, at least."

"Few can say that," Professor Parver revealed before heaving a deep sigh. "I feel I must apologize. I initially planned to gradually increase your tasks' difficulty, but the situation-."

"I asked for this, sir," Khan shook his head. "It's better for me anyway. I would have questioned the value of your tasks if I spent months retrieving rocks from caves."

"Those rocks are worth tens of thousands of Credits," Professor Parver laughed. "Mister Nore and Miss Bevet can't wait for you to recover. They have praised you to no end."

"I'm glad I'm helping," Khan stated. "I'll get back to work as soon as the Headmistress clears me."

"Excellent," Professor Parver exclaimed. "I also wish you to have another meeting with the Harbor's specialists. Everyone is eager to meet you."

"I'll make the time, sir," Khan promised. He couldn't leave anyway, and meeting potential future employers was for the best.

"So," Professor Parver announced. "You've seen most of the Harbor by now. What do you think of this system?"

"I have been meaning to ask," Khan said since the Professor mentioned the topic. "I know the Harbor has many valuable resources, but I was wondering if there was something truly special in the system."

"Are you referring to your recent endeavor?" Professor Parver questioned. "I've seen the video. Awful stuff. I'm glad you are okay, Captain."

"I was simply wondering why a criminal organization would be so active here," Khan clarified. "Princess Edna left weeks ago."

"Oh, you are asking if there is something worth these risks," Professor Parver declared. "The Harbor is mostly self-sufficient due to the resources in its system. Yet, I can't think of anything unique or priceless."

"Even from a political standpoint?" Khan pressed on.

"Captain, I'm a scientist," Professor Parver smiled. "Those fields don't concern me, and my illness keeps me more away than my peers. I'm afraid I can't help you."

Khan kept track of Professor Parver's mana but didn't notice anything wrong. He knew the man could mask and hide part of his presence, but his answer didn't feel like a lie.

"Thank you for your honesty, sir," Khan decided to answer.

"Anytime, Captain," Professor Parver exclaimed. "Now, you should go back to your lodging. Don't let me get in the way of your recovery."

"It was a pleasure, sir," Khan nodded, retrieving his crutches to stand up. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Good night, Captain," Professor Parver revealed a last kind smile before the two separated. Khan left the private lab and found a jeep waiting for him outside. The vehicle also had a driver ready for him, so his trip back to his flat started immediately.

The long elevator brought Khan back to the upper floor, where he found another vehicle waiting for him. The cab set off immediately, marking the end of that peaceful night.

'Nothing from Professor Parver either,' Khan sighed inside the privacy of the cab. 'Maybe John is wrong. Maybe they are just trying to relocate somewhere safer.'

Various thoughts ran through Khan's mind, but nothing put him closer to the truth. He felt unable to find the true reasons behind those criminals' behavior from the Harbor. Those results made sense when he considered that the Headmistress was as clueless as him.

'Do I just have to wait for them to make the first move?' Khan wondered.

Khan's phone rang while he was immersed in those thoughts, and seeing Jenny's name on the screen confused him. Her updates only arrived on the weekend, meaning something odd had happened.

"Sir, I'm sorry for the sudden call," Jenny announced as soon as Khan brought his phone to his ear.

"What is it?" Khan directly asked.

"There is this strange contact," Jenny revealed. "It's not trying to importunate you, but I can't find its identity. It's only requesting a minute of your time."

"Can't it be a crazy fan?" Khan questioned. According to Jenny, he received hundreds of those requests every week. Someone tech-savvy enough to get noticed had to appear sooner or later.

"I don't think this is the case," Jenny revealed. "This contact surpassed many security measures just to show that it could before making its request."

'Mister Chares?' Khan immediately thought. 'Is he trying a politer approach?'

"Get it through," Khan ordered. "I'll deal with it immediately."

"As you wish, sir," Jenny complied, closing the call to make another reach Khan's phone.

Khan answered right away, but only silence came out of his phone. No one spoke, but he wouldn't make the first move. If that was a polite request, he had to wait for the contact to expose itself.

"Captain Khan," A voice that almost made Khan's mana boil eventually resounded in his ear. "The new title suits you."

Khan's mind went blank for a second. He didn't expect that man to call him now, but two words still escaped his mouth. "Mister Raymond."

"Raymond is fine in private," Raymond chuckled. "I hope you didn't forget that."

"How could I?" Khan wondered. "I haven't forgotten anything about your involvement in Milia 222's crisis."

"As expected from you, Captain," Raymond uttered. "Still, I heard strange rumors. It must be awful to have criminals in your neighborhood."

"Do you know anything about them?" Khan went straight to the point.

"I know many things," Raymond revealed. "I know you think they are after goods. You are close, but not by much."

"Just tell me what you want," Khan eventually ordered.

"You can't possibly imagine what I want," Raymond spoke words similar to his last interaction with Khan. "However, I suggest you take another trip to Honides. I heard the winds in its eleventh quadrant are beautiful."

"What-?" Khan began to ask, but Raymond closed the call before he could finish his question. His phone went silent, and Khan felt the unreasonable urge to throw it away.

However, another name appeared on the screen, making the device ring again. The Headmistress was calling, and multiple messages followed the event, with many coming from Khan's classmates.

Chapter 510 Guards

Monica didn't immediately answer. Countless thoughts ran through her mind as the entirety of her political knowledge worked toward a singular goal. She had to decide how to handle Francis, which wasn't as easy as it sounded.

Francis' family was extremely wealthy, basically at the same level as Monica's. Talks about their possible engagements had gone on for years, ever since Monica's childhood. The Alstair family had been the main force behind those offers, but the Solodrey family had always played along due to the value such a political alliance could have.

Of course, none of those talks had ever taken into consideration Monica's opinion or Francis' behavior. Their parents and the trustworthy figures in their inner circles knew about those social struggles, but no one had given them much thought due to the descendants' young age.

Nothing had ever been set in stone, and Monica's parents had always pushed her toward better suitors. Still, that effort had never been too forceful since no one expected Khan to join the fray. The Solodrey family believed to have far more time to plan Monica's future, but Khan had ruined all that.

Khan's involvement had spread chaos inside a big faction of the Solodrey family, and the Alstair family had suffered from a similar fate, at least when it came to the forces betting on Francis. Monica's public relationship had dealt a significant political blow, ruining plans older than her.

That and more ran through Monica's mind as she tried to find the ideal approach. Refusing Francis had been easy in the past due to her explicit unavailability. Yet, things had changed now. Her reputation wasn't as pristine as before, and the slightest missteps would inevitably send ripples toward Khan.

"I'm coming down," Monica eventually announced through the flat's speaker before studying the hall. Her gaze remained lost even when she found her shoes, and seeing her reflection on one of the metal surfaces made her stop in her tracks.

Monica donned her shoes and inspected her tracksuit before running toward a bathroom. The hesitation intensified when she reached a proper mirror. Her clothes, hair, and general appearance were unworthy of her social status, but making Francis wait wasn't an option.

"It's trouble, isn't it?" George broke his silence when Monica left the bathroom to head for the elevator.

"Just stay here," Monica ordered while her eyes continued to dart left and right. "I'll deal with it."

"Do you need help?" George asked.

"It's better if I go alone," Monica remained vague. "It would be dangerous for you down there."

Monica wasn't trying to belittle George's prowess. Her tone carried no mockery or scorn. George's family was outclassed down there, and eventual rash reactions could create immense problems for him.

George understood that words were useless. He crossed his arms and watched the elevator bring Monica downstairs. Yet, as soon as the lift stopped, he headed for the menus on the walls to see what the cameras had captured.

A simple search on the network linked the face on the footage to the problematic man that Khan had mentioned a few times. George was aware of Francis, and recognizing him put him in a pensive mood.

Differently from what many believed, George knew his way around the political field. He didn't like it, but that didn't make him ignorant. Something in that event was off. It simply didn't make sense for such a wealthy descendant to arrive unnoticed in the second district, especially in a period when Khan was the network's main topic.

'Someone let him in,' George understood. 'Maybe the Headmistress chose to ignore his arrival on purpose.'

That explanation would match what George knew of the Harbor. The Headmistress had to prioritize peace, which prevented her from taking sides. If a conflict between two big families had to happen, it would make sense for her to turn a blind eye and let those powerful forces deal with the problem.

'He's the desperate guy,' George recalled as much as possible, and a smile slowly broadened on his face. 'This sounds fun.'

George turned toward the elevator before recalling something else. His eyes went to the table, where a bottle and a glass had survived Monica's rage. She had destroyed the other, but George could still drink with what he had.

Monica heaved a helpless sigh when she reached the first floor. The empty main hall gave her insights into Francis' intentions, and crossing the entrance confirmed her suspicions.

Francis stood at the sidewalk's center, with four luxurious cars parked behind him. Six guards wearing elegant clothes had also come out to remain on the street. There were no onlookers in the immediate surroundings, but it was clear that Francis wanted that meeting to be as public as possible.

"I hope you can ignore my appearance," Monica announced as soon as the entrance closed behind her. "I preferred respecting your time than dressing up for the event."

Francis had worn his best suit, and the new muscles developed after his infusion filled it perfectly. His black clothes gave him a smooth, firm figure that radiated a mature aura. He had prepared for the event, but Monica's appearance stunned him.

Monica was by no means shabby, but her casual clothes, messy hair, and unmatched shoes went against anything Francis thought to know about her. That wasn't the same woman he had grown up with. She was a beautiful stranger he could recognize only from her familiar manners.

"We have known each other long enough to ignore these ceremonies," Francis said, clearing his throat to stick to his plan. "You look as enchanting as ever, Monica."

"Thank you, Francis," Monica nodded in respect. "I'm happy to see that you are doing well too."

"I had to put some effort after Milia 222," Francis revealed. "I couldn't let myself be unprepared any longer."

"I can see that," Monica stated, but her eyes never stopped at Francis' figure. They went past it to study the guards waiting by the cars.

"I'm sorry for the sudden summoning," Francis promptly stated to bring Monica's attention back to him. "I was afraid you would have avoided me if I tried to plan a meeting."

"Why is that, if I may?" Monica questioned. "As you said, we have known each other for a long time. I see no reason for refusing a proper invitation. It would have spared me from this shameful act."

"I apologize for forcing your hand," Francis uttered, clearing his throat once again. "However-."

The entrance opened, interrupting Francis' line. George stepped onto the sidewalk and shot a glance at the scene before leaning on the building wall. He had the bottle and his glass in his hands, and booze fell into it as he calmly prepared a drink.

Monica let George distract her only for a second before pressing Francis to speak. "However?"

"However," Francis cleared his throat a third time, "I now feel these circumstances perfectly express the issue in my mind."

"Francis, would you be so kind as to get to the point?" Monica showed a fake smile. "Each second I spend dressed up like this is a blow to the Solodrey family's reputation."

"I've set things straight with Headmistress Holwen," Francis reassured. "These are to be considered as private matters between families. No onlookers or common soldiers are allowed in the area."

"You underestimate the power of curiosity," Monica scolded in an emotionless tone, and Francis inevitably glanced at George at those words.

George wore a carefree smile as he proceeded to enjoy his drink. No one knew the reason behind his presence there, not even him. Still, he had booze, so he drank to sort out his thoughts.

"Francis, the reason for your visit," Monica felt forced to remind.

"Y-yes!" Francis stammered before gaining a firm and deep tone. "It is my duty as one of your oldest friends and an ally of your family to help you during this rough patch. I'm here for you, Monica."

"Help me how?" Monica asked.

"It's possible that Milia 222 inflicted serious traumas on your psyche," Francis explained. "Your behavior and decisions in the past months have shown clear differences from your old self. Many experts I contacted believe you have post-traumatic stress disorder."

"Excuse me?" Monica voiced.

"The signals are evident," Francis continued. "You are pursuing actions that go against your family's values and reputation, which never happened before. You make rash decisions that endanger everything you have built in the last years, even going as far as requesting interviews to spread news faster."

Monica wanted to snap at that very moment, but that would only work in Francis' favor. The latter had yet to mention Khan, which was ideal for Monica. She would consider the event a success if she could send Francis away without involving her boyfriend.

"Your concern is heartwarming," Monica summoned her elegant façade, "But I can't help but find your accusation distasteful and disrespectful. I currently am the best student in the Harbor, and Princess Edna can vouch for my sanity."

Bringing up a noble was a dangerous play, but Monica knew that no one would dare to question her. Princess Edna herself would find the matter funny. In a way, she was the perfect shield, but Francis turned out to be more persistent than expected.

"Monica, I've come here as a friend," Francis sighed. "I wish our tones to remain friendly."

"I don't understand the reason behind such caution," Monica's voice grew colder. "I believe you remember where I was during Milia 222's crisis. I fought alongside the asteroid's inhabitants. I can handle direct words."

Monica could use that chance to insult Francis. After all, he had been in the safety of the first floor during the crisis, but she decided otherwise. The Harbor was watching her, so Francis had to be the first to overstep to justify an eventual angry reaction.

"It seems you are more lost than I feared," Francis muttered before pointing a hand at Monica.

"Monica, look at yourself. The old you would have never worn such unbecoming clothes in public. The old you knew the importance of reputation."

"I didn't change out of respect," Monica stated. "Now I know my sacrifice means nothing to you."

"Monica, you wouldn't have needed to change in the past," Francis pressed on, abandoning some of the moral superiority that had filled his speech. "The only reason you are dressed like this is-."

Francis halted his mouth and lowered his head to suppress his worst sides. He was about to mention the only topic that could make that conversation pointless, but Monica wouldn't simply ignore that mistake."

"Is?" Monica asked. "Please, enlighten me."

"Monica, be reasonable," Francis lowered his voice. "Come with me. My family has already prepared a team of specialists for your rehabilitation. We are willing to satisfy your every demand. Just return where you belong."

"All of this in exchange for my hand, I suppose," Monica guessed.

"That's not up to you or me to decide," Francis declared. "If our families find an agreement, then yes. If they don't, I'll be happy to know that I helped a friend."

"That's impossible," Monica immediately refused. "I've already gotten my parents' approval, and I must complete the semester. It would be disrespectful and unbefitting of the Solodrey name to give up."

"Monica, when was the last time you visited your flat?" Francis asked. "This news reached me far before I even planned this trip. How can you not acknowledge your problem?"

"It's hard to see it as a problem when you can't speak openly," Monica exclaimed. "What is it? Are you worried about the consequences of your actions?"

"Why would I fear Captain Khan?" Francis took the bait. "He is an outstanding soldier. No one is questioning that. My issue is with your status. It pains me to see you reaching such lows."

"What lows are you talking about?" Monica smiled again.

"These," Francis stated, moving his stretched arm up and down to point at the entirety of Monica. "You are disregarding your status to fall to his level."

"Oh?" Monica feigned surprise while grabbing her tracksuit's edges and pulling them down. "Do you mean these clothes? Do you think I wear these to make Captain Khan more comfortable in my presence?"

"Why else would you show yourself in such improper attire?" Francis asked. "This is only one of the many clues that fill your past months."

"Francis," Monica giggled, partially covering her mouth. "I don't wear clothes when I'm serving Khan."

The statement silenced Francis and tried to kill any desire to keep the conversation under friendly terms. Yet, he suppressed his rasher reactions since the forces at work there were scary even for him.

The Headmistress had not been the only one to give her authorization for that meeting. She alone didn't have the necessary authority, and Monica had long since understood that. She knew her family had taken part in that ploy.

A tense atmosphere fell on the sidewalk, and even the experienced guards near the cars remained startled. Monica's straightforward answer was shocking, to say the least, especially for someone as emotionally involved as Francis.

Still, a snicker soon broke the silence, bringing many gazes to the wall next to the building's entrance. George couldn't contain himself in that situation, and the booze didn't suppress his voice. He openly laughed at that blatant mockery and seeing Francis' face added fuel to that reaction.

"I'm really sorry," George did his best to apologize, lifting his hands only to wave his bottle and glass left and right. "I didn't mean to interrupt. Please, continue."

"How dare you even attend this meeting?" Francis diverted his irritation on George.

"I live here," George shrugged his shoulders, closing the bottle with his thumb to use it to point at the building. "I think you should have chosen a more private location."

"Who do you think you are?" Francis couldn't contain himself.

"George Ildoo," George calmly revealed, "And you are the guy who has to get women wasted to get laid."

"What?!" Francis gasped.

"You know," George continued, ignoring the glare that Monica was shooting at him, "I could give you some pointers. Humbly speaking, I'm quite good."

Francis knew who George was, which intensified his stupor. It didn't make sense for someone from an inferior family to show such disrespect, especially during their first interaction. Still, George only continued to pour more booze and snicker with himself.

Francis seemed so lost that one of the guards left the cars to intervene, but an empty glass flew in his direction before he could cross the sidewalk. The soldier easily dodged the item, but seeing it shatter on the floor made the tension skyrocket.

"Protect Mister Alstair!" The guard that had stepped on the sidewalk shouted, and his companions left the cars to approach Francis.

"What are you doing?" Monica couldn't help but ask, but seeing George drinking directly from the bottle made her lose any hope of finding a reasonable solution.

"Look," George announced as soon as he lowered the bottle. "I understand the Mister doing what he wants, but you are guards, and this is the Harbor. You showed enmity, so don't be surprised when someone reacts."