

Endless 371

Chapter 371: I Wish All My Dreams Were Like That [Part 2]

Wanting to spend time with Latifa as well, Alex decided to team up with the Fox Lady, leaving Lumi and Noelle to form the other pair.

Before the match even started, Lumi was already trash-talking Alex. She was determined to make him bite the dust, and she informed him of her intention in increasingly creative ways.

"I won't hold back, so you better prepare to lose, Alex!" Lumi declared. "I hope you have already notarized your last will and testament."

"We'll see if you can back your talk," Alex sneered. "During high school, people called me Mr. Quick Shot!"

"Alex... I am not sure that's something you should be proud of," Noelle commented with a beet-red face.

That short intermission ended, and an epic battle of volleyball finally started.

Among Latifa's Alters, Lumi was the one with the most competitive spirit, refusing to lose to anyone.

At the start, Lumi and Noelle worked effortlessly to score some points, targeting Alex's and Latifa's weak spots.

The young man also thought that he would lose this game because Latifa wasn't really athletic. Also, she couldn't even return the balls to their opponent's court with her hands.

To Alex's surprise, his teammate thought of something else.

Since she couldn't use her hands the way she wanted to, how about her tails?

The moment Latifa started using her three tails, her team finally managed to counterattack.

Her graceful movements made her look as if she was dancing while playing the game.

She played her role in defense well. She seamlessly supported Alex, allowing him to spike the ball over to their opponent's court.

Even Latifa didn't expect that she would enjoy playing volleyball so much. Her lovely giggles filled the air as she beat Lumi and Noelle. Clearly, she was quite pleased with herself, but not so pleased that she would gloat.

"You also have a tail. Why don't you use it like she does?" Noelle asked, feeling helpless as they struggled to keep up with Latifa's perfect defense and offense.

"I prefer using my hands," Lumi replied. "Latifa is used to it because she's lazy. I'm not lazy, so I can't do the same!"

"Is that bitterness I hear?" Latifa asked, feeling a little smug. "You need to do better than that, Lumi."

Amused, Alex decided to add fuel to the fire.

"Of all the flavors out there, you chose to be salty," Alex pointed out before laughing in contempt. "Didn't you tell me that you're going to beat me earlier? What's wrong? Fox got your tongue?"

Lumi glared hatefully at Alex, wishing that she could bite him until he cried for forgiveness.

Why?

It was because Latifa was also trash-talking her! However, she couldn't retort convincingly since it was true they had already lost three games in a row.

"Next time, I'll win!" Lumi swore. "You just got lucky this time, Latifa."

“Sure~ I’ll accept your challenge anytime!” Latifa placed her hands on her waist, confident that she would still emerge victorious next time.

Alex joined the banter and ridiculed Lumi for being a bitter opponent. To the surprise of no one, the young lady spiked the ball toward him as revenge.

However, Latifa’s tail caught the ball midair, protecting Alex from getting hurt.

“Nice try, Lumi.” Alex hid behind Latifa and cackled evilly, grating on the fox lady’s nerves.

Just as Lumi was about to throw hands, the world around them suddenly lost its color and started to crack everywhere.

The next moment, Alex found himself staring at Dim Dim, who was only an inch away from poking his nose.

Dim Dim blinked and hurriedly hid its hand behind its back before smiling at Alex innocently.

“Dim!”

“Hahaha. Nice try, Dim Dim.”

A glance at his window told him that it was already morning.

On the bed beside his own, Chuck snored softly and peacefully.

Alex sat up slowly and did a light stretch while reminiscing about the dream he just had.

“... What a dream,” Alex muttered, recalling the laughter, the competition, and even the petty arguments that somehow made the whole thing feel more alive.

Suddenly recalling the image of Noelle tugging his hand toward the sea, followed by the secret kiss they shared underwater, Alex’s cheeks immediately burned.

But he soon calmed down as his mind replayed the scene of Latifa’s tails swishing proudly after every successful block and Lumi’s frustrated glare after another loss, making him smile faintly.

“I wish all my dreams were like that,” Alex whispered as he lightly patted Dim Dim, who had settled down on his lap. The little bun purred in satisfaction as it the soft pats on its head.

He still didn’t know why he kept having dreams with Noelle and Latifa at the same time, but he certainly had no complaints.

The young man simply couldn’t help but feel wistful. If only he could’ve been more forward about his feelings for Noelle back when they had still been on Earth!

He had enjoyed their time together, thinking it was a miracle that someone like her even paid attention to him.

Alex didn’t want to forget her, so seeing her in his dreams kept his heart in place and his feet firmly planted on the ground.

But he knew dreams were bound to come to an end.

Sooner or later, he’d have no choice but to let go of Noelle and accept that their paths would no longer cross.

She was on Earth, and Alex was in Arcana.

They were separated by millions... even billions of light-years apart.

Just like how kids stopped believing in Santa Claus and set their toys aside, Alex knew he must let go and move on to the next phase of his life.

“Dim?” Dim Dim raised its head and asked Alex if he was alright, having sensed the other’s sadness.

“I’m fine, Dim Dim,” Alex replied. “Now, can you tell me what happened yesterday after I lost consciousness?”

Dim Dim nodded. “Dim!”

The little bun told him that after he’d lost consciousness, Charles had carried him out to receive medical help.

Fortunately, Lin and Rin had been stationed nearby, acting as reserve medics in case of any emergencies.

They’d confirmed that Alex wasn’t in any danger and simply lost consciousness from mental instability.

Just to be on the safe side, they’d injected him with their homebrewed potion and asked Charles to let him rest in his room in the Ironheart Dormitory.

When Dim Dim finished its story, Alex sighed, guilty about making everyone worry again.

But there were still questions that needed answers.

‘Is the memory that I saw last night real or not?’ Alex thought.

He couldn’t possibly have memories of Alex Stratos’ childhood since it was just not possible.

Knowing Evangeline's background, he didn't want to make contact with her. At the same time, he also felt it would be best if they talked again to understand why she seemed to know him.

Evangeline wouldn't have said those words without reason.

If she truly knew something about his past—specifically Alex Stratos' past—ignoring it would only lead to bigger problems down the road.

He didn't want to have any unexpected variables, so facing her was his only option.

'Maybe I should have made this character's lore simpler,' Alex thought. 'The last thing I want to happen is to be thrown into a political storm and fight for succession rights with the Princes and Princesses of the Empire.'

The young man sighed for the umpteenth time as he steeled himself to look for Evangeline after a day or two.

Chapter 372: I'm Rich. I'll Take Care Of You For Life [Part 1]

"..."

"..."

"... Smirk."

"Hey! You don't say the word smirk then smirk at the same time!" Lumi complained as she looked at Latifa, who was indeed smirking very smugly at the moment.

Lotte had no idea what had happened between the two. She only knew that ever since Latifa woke up, she'd been in an incredibly good mood, like she had done something worth being proud about.

On the other hand, Lumi acted the complete opposite. Her mood was terrible, almost as if she had been forced to kiss Alex in a punishment game!

“So, what happened?” Lotte asked. “You’ve been smiling like you won the lottery as soon as you woke up.”

Since it was the weekend, there were no classes. Since there were no classes, there was no need to review the materials beforehand.

Also, the farewell party for the Solara and Faellarun Academy had just ended, which meant that Frieden Academy’s guests would be leaving tomorrow.

“Latifa is happy because Alex saw her in a bikini,” Lumi replied. “She’s all grown up now—brave enough to show that much skin to a guy.”

“W-What?! That’s not what I’m happy about, and you know it!” Latifa immediately blushed after hearing Lumi’s nonsense.

However, Lumi’s nonsense wasn’t too far from the truth. Latifa had felt gratified by Alex’s blush and his compliment.

“Oh... Our Latifa has truly grown up.” Lotte smiled. “But I doubt she will be bold enough to wear a bikini in reality.”

“Obviously!” Lumi, who wanted to forget her loss in the dream, decided to focus on embarrassing the young lady who was desperately trying to clear the misunderstanding. “She would probably faint from embarrassment the moment Alex looked at her wearing a bikini.”

“Y-You! I hate you, Lumi!” Latifa’s face was beet-red from anger, defensiveness, and embarrassment. She glared at her Alter, who made a face back like it would negate the crushing defeat in the dream.

Lotte tilted her head to the side and dropped a question that snapped Latifa and Lumi out of their silly little fight.

“It’s strange, right?” Lotte asked. “Latifa, you can enter the dream of anyone if you want to. But it doesn’t work every time you try it on Alex.”

“It feels like his subconscious mind is protected by some sort of seal, preventing anyone from entering it freely. Latifa can only enter his dream whenever that girl, Noelle, is there. I find it very strange.”

Latifa frowned. Lotte was right. She had tried many times to enter Alex’s dream. After their return from the trial, she’d tried to do so again to confirm a few things with him.

But whenever she entered his subconscious mind, she would usually be repelled by a mysterious force she just couldn’t overcome.

However, there were times when that barrier would disappear, just like what had happened several hours ago.

Truth be told, when Charles had carried Alex down the stairs after he lost consciousness, Latifa had been beside herself with worry.

She’d not been the only one feeling this way. Lavinia, Vaan, Chuck, Charles, and Nessia had all been concerned. Even Renard, who seemed least fond of Alex, had seemed a bit uneasy.

Only when Lin and Rin had confirmed that Alex was not in a serious condition did everyone relax, heaving a collective sigh of relief.

Charles had decided to bring Alex back to the Ironheart Dormitory to rest. Due to the “liveliness” of the night, everyone had assumed that Alex had pushed himself too much, especially after the incident with Victor.

Lotte had escorted the two young men to the dormitory before heading back to the clock tower.

Upon her return, Latifa had decided to try dream walking and see if Alex was dreaming or not.

For some reason, Lumi had decided to tag along. She’d claimed that it was not out of worry for Alex but to watch out for Latifa instead.

Latifa had been too anxious to care how truthful that was. When she'd detected that Alex was indeed dreaming, she hadn't hesitated to enter his dream. The result? She and Lumi fell on top of the young man while he was sprawled on a beach chair.

"For some reason, Noelle feels familiar and unfamiliar at the same time," Latifa commented. "It's like I've met her before."

Lotte and Lumi exchanged a glance because they, too, felt the same.

They couldn't put their finger on it, but the familiarity they felt towards Noelle wasn't something that they could brush off so easily.

Just as the three girls were deep in thought, they sensed someone entering the clock tower.

Half a minute later, the portal in their clubroom flashed into life, and a young man with short silver hair appeared before their eyes.

"Good morning, Alex," Lotte was the first one to greet their first visitor of the day.

"Good morning, Lotte," Alex replied. "Good morning, Latifa and Lumi."

"Good morning, Alex."

"Mmm... morning. Why are you here so early?"

Alex focused his gaze on Lumi before answering her question.

"I came here to see if you are still salty about your loss," Alex quipped.

The corner of Lumi's lips twitched. "What are you talking about?"

Latifa entering Alex's dream was a secret he shouldn't become aware of. So Lumi summoned all her willpower and acting chops—which didn't amount to much—and brushed off his taunt like she had no idea what he was talking about.

This exchange allowed Latifa to regain her composure and act normally.

"So you won't admit that you lost to me and Latifa?" Alex pressed, wanting to know if his dream was an ordinary dream or not.

"What did I lose? When? In what?" Lumi crossed her arms over her chest. "Were you kicked by Victor in the head last night? You've become more stupid than usual."

Seeing Lumi's reaction, Alex started to doubt if she had been with Latifa in his dream last night.

Among Latifa's Alters, Lumi was the most sensitive to defeat and ridicule.

Knowing that, he had tried to taunt her to see if she would react differently. But she'd reacted the same as always, prompting Alex to treat the dream as a mere manifestation of his subconscious desires.

He was still unsure whether he wanted to ask Latifa directly, so taunting Lumi was his best shot for now.

If she showed even the smallest hint that she knew what he was talking about, he could confirm his suspicion that Latifa had indeed been visiting his dreams.

Chapter 373: I'm Rich. I'll Take Care Of You For Life [Part 2]

"Alex, I'm glad you're feeling better," Latifa chimed in, hoping to change the subject. "I was really worried last night."

Hearing that she was worried about him made Alex feel something warm and fluffy spread inside his chest.

“Thank you, Latifa,” Alex replied. “Well, then. I’ll be going back to the dormitory. Do you want to come with me? We can have breakfast together.”

Before Latifa could even answer, Lotte replied for her.

“I have a better idea. Why don’t you have breakfast with Latifa here?” Lotte suggested. “It’s easy for me to whip something up for breakfast. What do you say, Alex?”

The young man accepted Lotte’s offer immediately.

He didn’t mind having breakfast with Latifa. Cafeteria food was galaxies far from good enough to make him hesitate.

“Juice or coffee?” Lumi asked. “I can at least prepare that for you.”

“I’ll have coffee,” Alex answered.

“Okay.” Lumi nodded and followed Lotte to the kitchen to prepare breakfast.

She did this on purpose so that Latifa and Alex could spend some time alone together.

The two Alters even gave Latifa the “go on, you can do it!” gaze before waving goodbye to her.

Taking a deep breath, Latifa got off her bed, revealing the rest of her pajamas. She then walked toward the round table, where Alex was already sitting, and took the seat beside him.

“Are you feeling better?” Latifa asked. “Although Nessia told me you’d faked your injury last night, I’m still a little worried.”

“Don’t worry! Aside from suddenly blacking out, I’m perfectly fine,” Alex replied. “Thank you for worrying, Latifa. I greatly appreciate it.”

“Alex, do you mind if I ask something?” Latifa’s voice turned serious. “What did you and Evangeline talk about?”

Alex didn’t reply right away because his memory of the balcony conversation was still a little bit fuzzy. But seeing that Latifa looked genuinely concerned about him, he didn’t want to lie to her.

“She asked me if I remember saving a dying girl when I was ten,” Alex said. “When I tried thinking about it, I was hit by a terrible headache. Fuzzy memories I don’t even remember having flashed in my mind. Soon after seeing them, I lost consciousness.”

Latifa frowned. “Do you perhaps have amnesia? Do you know where you were born? Can you remember your parents?”

“No,” Alex replied. “I was an orphan.”

Alex had been raised in an orphanage, so he really didn’t know where he’d been born or who his parents were.

Hearing this, Latifa felt apologetic and distressed. She might’ve caused the young man to recall unhappy times.

“Don’t worry! The Headmistress of the orphanage did a good job raising me,” Alex continued. “When I grew older, I got lucky and entered a scholarship. I repaid the orphanage by sending it the money I earned.”

Alex was about to say more when he suddenly remembered that he was talking about his past, not Alex Stratos’ past.

Fortunately, Latifa assumed that he was referring to the scholarship he was currently on and that he’d been sending the orphanage his monthly stipend from Frieden Academy.

Many of the scholarship students wished to enter the academy to make their families’ lives better.

It's not unusual for them to send their stipend to their families. Each scholarship student received twenty gold coins every month, enough for a normal family to live comfortably for a few months.

This might seem very little for some, but for commoners, this was actually a very big amount of money.

A copper coin was enough for a loaf of bread. By being frugal enough, a family could survive on two gold coins a month. That could get them wheat porridge for every meal and a bit of meat.

Of course, they wouldn't be getting more than a few pieces of meat per meal. Naturally, people who lived in the countryside often hunted and fished to supplement their diet.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that being able to enroll in Frieden Academy was a dream for commoners.

But only the best of the best would be able to pass the trials and become scholarship students.

'Should I give him money to send back to his orphanage this month?' Latifa thought.

The mere thought of Alex scrimping and saving so he had some money to give the orphanage broke Latifa's heart.

'Was this the reason why he blackmailed the Crest Clubs and extorted them for money?' Latifa mused. 'Now I know why Alex seemed so eager to milk those arrogant nobles dry of their gold!'

Alex was too immersed in recalling the scene of the little girl lying on the ground and almost covered in snow.

He only snapped out of his trance when he felt someone holding his hand that was resting on the table.

"Latifa?" Alex asked, taken aback by how her eyes sparkled with conviction. "What's wrong?"

“Alex, don’t worry,” Latifa stated. “I’m rich. I’ll take care of you for life.”

The young man blinked once, then twice, before looking at the pair of hands that were holding his own.

Latifa’s hands were so soft and delicate, he wished she would never let go!

“That sounds like a proposal,” Alex teased. “Are you proposing to me, Latifa?”

“Huh?!” Latifa suddenly realized that her words could indeed be interpreted in this manner!

She immediately panicked and let go of Alex’s hand like it was a hot potato. But Alex was faster, grabbing one of her hands before she could hide it under the table.

And he didn’t want to let go.

The two then stared at each other, their hearts beating fast inside their chests.

“Latifa, I...”

Alex moved closer to Latifa, wanting to tell her something that he had been holding back for so long.

“Alex...” Latifa’s face was still bright red, but her expression was tender.

Just as those important words were on the tip of his tongue, a hot mug was suddenly pressed against his cheek.

The young man was startled back to his senses and immediately backed away, fearing he would end up with a mug-shaped burn brand on his face.

“Have you finally stopped daydreaming?” Lumi glared at Alex before prying his hand from Latifa’s.
“Here’s your coffee, Sir.”

She then placed the cup of coffee in front of Alex before resting her hands on her waist. She stared daggers at him like she was his girlfriend, and she had just caught him trying to cheat on her with her younger sister.

Alex coughed lightly and picked up his coffee. He then blew on it a few times before taking a sip.

As soon as the bitterness assaulted his tongue, he placed the mug down.

“You didn’t add sugar,” Alex complained.

“Why should I?” Lumi asked in contempt. “Who do you think I am? Your sugar mommy? Why would I give you sugar?”

Lotte also arrived, pushing a trolley filled with food.

She didn’t know if she should laugh or sigh at Lumi for prematurely ruining the mood.

They had already finished preparing breakfast and had been watching the conversation from a safe distance.

But when Alex had reached for Latifa’s hand, Lumi had barged right in and interrupted that intimate moment.

‘Just what is Lumi thinking?’ Lotte thought. ‘I thought she wanted Alex and Latifa to be closer. Why did she interrupt them when things seemed to be going smoothly?’

Since the lovey-doveyness was lost and wouldn’t come back for the foreseeable future, she had no choice but to simply serve the food while watching Alex and Lumi bicker over the unsatisfactory coffee.

Chapter 374: Something She Held Sacred In Her Heart

"My Lady, please reconsider," Eleanora said in a serious tone. "You mustn't get too close to Alex Stratos. Not only is his status too low, but the organization has also set its sights on him."

"Eleanora, do you think Alex is a very talented person?" Evangeline asked as she looked out of the window of her room, which had a view of the academy's garden.

"My Lady, if you mean talent for causing trouble, then yes, Alex Stratos is very talented, extremely so," Eleanora replied. "In other words, he's talented for the wrong reasons. I greatly advise you to stop any attempt to reach out to him."

"Then, do you think he's a very capable person?" Evangeline inquired.

"I think I already answered that in your first question, My Lady," Eleanora sighed.

Evangeline nodded. "You're right. Which brings me to the conclusion that he's someone worthy to be recruited. It's an option to pull him under our banner, no?"

"I'm very sure My Lord does not think in the same direction as you, My Lady," Eleanora stated.

"You think so?" Evangeline smiled faintly. "Anyway, if we think differently, so be it. My father and I don't really get along, so his opinion doesn't matter either way."

Eleanora was itching to rebuke and tell her that if someone else from their organization heard what she had just said, they'd definitely think she had gone crazy.

The words of an Executive were like law within their organization.

Granted, there were four such people, but their numbers didn't change the fact that they were the driving force that grew the Demon Worshipers into the organization it is today.

"My Lady... please. Don't do this. You'll only attract trouble to yourself."

“You can leave now, Eleanora. I’ll call you when I’m in need of your services.”

Evangeline’s tone was firm, making Eleanora flinch.

Although she was older than her Mistress by a year, her seniority amounted to nothing given Evangeline’s status within the organization.

“As you wish, My Lady,” Eleanora replied before leaving reluctantly. “But if I may remind you, My Lady, Alex is already in knee-deep trouble with our organization. Even if you succeed in bringing him under your wing, you don’t have the power to stop the other members from targeting him.”

After saying everything she needed to say, Eleanora finally left the room.

When she was certain that her handmaiden was truly gone, a sigh escaped Evangeline’s lips.

She could still remember that fateful day eight years ago when she first tried to escape from their estate.

The weather had turned for the worse, and she found herself facing a blizzard, which reduced visibility to zero.

In search of a safe place to take shelter, she continued walking.

After what seemed like forever, she saw a mansion in the distance and hurriedly made her way in that direction.

Unfortunately, just as she neared its gate, her strength finally gave way, and she collapsed on the cold ground.

Snow slowly piled up on top of her, and the only thing she thought of that time was, “I’m hungry and cold.”

It was then that someone came to her rescue and helped her up from the ground.

Her hunger had made her delirious at that point, so upon smelling the rich scent of blood on the boy who helped her up, she didn't hesitate to hug him tightly before sinking her fangs into his neck.

That was Evangeline's first bloodthirst, and the boy's blood was the first one she'd ever tasted.

Her vampiric powers then came to life, allowing her to regain her strength and senses.

Upon realizing what she had done then, she had felt confused and horrified of herself.

Just as she was about to panic, the boy lightly patted her back and head.

"Are you done feeding?" the boy asked. "Have you calmed down? If so, let's go inside the house. It's cold out here."

With a strength that surpassed his age and body, the boy carried Evangeline inside the mansion.

He gently set her down near the fireplace, then tossed a few logs inside it to warm up the room even further.

Evangeline looked in the distance, recalling that still-vivid scene in her memories.

A memory that changed her life in more ways than one.

"What's your name?" the boy asked after covering the girl with a blanket.

"Evangeline," Evangeline replied. "How about you? What's your name?"

“Aetherius Alexian Vademont,” Aetherius answered with pride. “That’s my name! Remember the name of your Prince!”

“My Prince?”

“That’s right. I am a Prince. You’ve drunk my blood, so you need to pay for it. Do you have money?”

“I-I don’t have money,”

Aetherius placed his hands on his waist. “That’s not good. My blood is very precious. According to Uncle, a drop of my blood is equivalent to a hundred thousand gold coins.”

A faint smile appeared on Evangeline’s lips after recalling this part of her memory. She’d been so scared back then, unsure how she could pay him back.

“Don’t worry, there’s a way for you to pay me back,” Aetherius stated. “From now on, you will become my maid. I’ll give you free food and lodging. Your pay will be deducted to make up for what you owe me.”

“Maid?” Evangeline frowned. “I’ll become your maid?”

“That’s right.” Aetherius nodded. “Those who don’t work don’t get paid. You took my blood, so you owe me money. But since you don’t have any, you must work so you can pay me. This is common sense, you know?”

“But...”

“No buts. I already decided that you will be my maid.”

And thus, Evangeline started her duty as the Prince’s maid. But the training she received wasn’t just for the sake of serving someone.

She was taught to read and write, as well as proper noble etiquette.

Evangeline also studied side by side with Aetherius, under the watchful eye of his uncle, whom Evangeline had learned to call Uncle Luthor.

For some reason, Luthor didn't ask Evangeline about her background or where she came from.

He just accepted her as she was and treated her like his own granddaughter.

Two years passed, and those years were probably the happiest in Evangeline's life.

Although there were many ups and downs along the way, like her drinking the Prince's blood whenever she was unable to hold back her bloodthirst, she still lived happily in that mansion located in a remote area of the mountain.

But all good things come to an end. In her case, it was the day Evangeline's father appeared after not seeing her during those two precious years she held sacred in her heart.

Chapter 375: I Need To Taste His Blood

Memories of the battle that broke out between Uncle Luthor and her father, who didn't treat her as a daughter, were still clear in her mind.

"It's time for her to go back, Luthor." The handsome man with blonde hair and red eyes spoke firmly.

"Says who?" Luthor sneered. "You?"

"We've talked about this many times already, and each time, I allowed you to keep her out of respect to our relationship," Evangeline's father replied calmly. "But two years is long enough. She needs to go back and inherit her legacy. The more you try to stop it, the more she'll suffer in the future. Is that what you really want?"

At that time, Evangeline had hidden behind Alex, her frail body shaking out of fear and anxiousness.

She feared her father, but she feared leaving her first and only friend, who had been with her through those two years of her life.

“You’re not taking her,” Aetherius declared. “If you do, I’ll wage war upon you! Also, she drank my blood. She can’t leave until she pays it all back!”

“Oh?” Evangeline’s father arched an eyebrow. “You’ll wage war upon me? With what army? You’re just a brat forced to go into hiding because your family wants nothing more than to kill you.

“If it weren’t for the slight connection between your Uncle and me, do you think I’d accept his plea to seek asylum in my territory? Also, you say my daughter owes you money? That’s the funniest thing I’ve heard in over a century, boy.”

Evangeline’s father moved closer and towered over Alex, looking down at him as if he were a bug he could easily crush at any given time.

“This mansion belongs to me,” Evangeline’s father stated. “I provided you with food and lodging. The teachers who taught you everything you know are all my subordinates. All the luxuries you enjoyed since you and your Uncle escaped the Empire are all provided by me.

“Last but not least, I’m the only reason why you’re still alive, you brat. The one who needs to pay is not my daughter, but you. However, I am not a petty person. I will consider the blood she had drunk from you as payment for your rent.

“Do not worry. You can stay here for as long as you want. However, it’s time for me to take my daughter back.”

The twelve-year-old boy with short black hair and blue eyes didn’t budge a single bit, even glaring at the imposing man in front of him.

“I will not let you take Eva,” Aetherius said firmly. “You have to go over my dead body first!”

"No, Aetherius!" Evangeline pulled him back. "You can't fight him. He will kill you!"

"No, I won't," Evangeline's father replied. "I will not kill him. I will 'half' kill him."

"Enough!" Luthor stood between Evangeline's father and the children. "One more month. Let them stay together for one more month, then you can take Evangeline with you."

"And why should I agree to this nonsense?"

"Because we'll also leave this place after a month. They might never see each other again, so let them have one more month to say their farewells."

"... Luthor, don't tell me." Evangeline's father narrowed his eyes.

"The Inquisitors have grown suspicious," Luthor said calmly. "This place is no longer safe. It's time for me and Aetherius to head south."

Evangeline's father frowned. The two adults held each other's gaze for nearly a minute before a sigh escaped Luthor's lips.

"This is the last favor I will ask of you, Nero." Luthor sighed. "After this, you will no longer need to worry about us."

Evangeline's father stared at the Prince's Guardian, whom he had known for a very long time.

"You said that you're going south," Nero said after a minute of silence. "But you can't keep on running forever, Luthor. Sooner or later, they will catch him."

"They won't." Luthor shook his head. "I won't let them."

"Hah... you're still as arrogant as ever." Nero sneered. "Fine, a month then. Nothing more, nothing less."

“Good.”

Nero then shifted his gaze to his trembling daughter, who was hiding behind the prince’s back.

“Foolish child.” Nero sighed before looking at the Prince, who was glaring at him.

The handsome man couldn’t help but appreciate the boy’s strong gaze, which reminded him of the boy’s father.

“A month from now, you will leave this place,” Nero said as he walked toward the door. “However, since I can’t let any information about me spread to the inquisitors, I will put a seal on his memories, Luthor. You won’t oppose this, right?”

“No,” Luthor replied. “I know we owe you that much.”

“At least you still have a conscience.” Nero scoffed before leaving.

And just as he promised, Nero returned after a month and took Evangeline back with him.

— —

That was also the last time she had seen Aetherius, and she’d been looking for him ever since she had mastered the Ancient Blood Arts of their family.

She headed south and enrolled at Frieden Academy, believing she would most likely find Aetherius in the academy, where the most talented young men and women go to study.

Five years had passed since Evangeline had last seen the Prince who saved her from that blizzard and fed her his blood, as well as made her a maid—though he only ever treated her as a close friend.

Given how different she now looked compared to her younger self, she believed Aetherius would be the same, bearing little resemblance to the face in her memories.

No matter his change, she had also thought his base features would remain the same.

But as far as features went, only Alex's eye color matched the Prince she knew.

Blue eyes as clear as a cloudless sky.

Unfortunately, their list of similarities ended at that.

Alex's character and attitude were not the same as the Prince in her memory.

Also, she could fondly remember that the color of his hair was black, not white.

But Alex simply felt familiar to her.

This was why she had asked him if he remembered saving a girl in the past.

Sadly, their talk ended when Alex collapsed during the party, depriving her of answers.

But it didn't dishearten her. There was one sure-fire way for her to determine whether Alex was truly the person she was looking for.

"Blood," Evangeline thought. "I need to taste his blood."

She'd never forget the taste of the blood she had first drunk after awakening her vampiric powers.

It was a foolproof method to find the Prince whom she'd longed to reunite with, even after years since their separation.

"I miss you, Aetherius," Evangeline said softly. "I want to see you soon."

The young lady gazed at the garden and once again sought out the happy scenes in her memory.

Back when she was still truly happy as she spent day after day with the person who shone in her life like the sun.

He chased away the darkness that had tried to corrupt her innocent heart and replaced it with warmth and happiness.

And now, it was her turn to protect him from the Empire, still actively looking for his whereabouts.

'If Alex is really Aetherius, then...' Evangeline clenched her fists tightly as she made up her mind on what she would do once she had confirmed that Alex was indeed the one she'd been looking for.

At that exact moment, a young man felt a chill run down his spine, pausing his trip to his dormitory. He just came from Frann's farm, where he thanked the Beasts that had come to help Vaan and Nessia when they needed it the most.

Chapter 376: The Blessing Of The Sun

"Are you sure you don't want to come with me?" Lady Celestria asked sadly.

"I'm sorry, but I'll be staying here," Renard replied.

"Are you unsatisfied with my offer?" Lady Celestria pressed. "Do you want to add more conditions? I'm open to negotiations."

The flying ships of the Solara and Faelarun would be departing in three hours.

Everyone was now saying their goodbyes to the friends they had made during the past few months of their stay.

Lady Celestria had thought Renard would come with her back to her own academy, but the young man's decision surprised her.

"Your offer is actually very good," Renard said seriously. "I'm sure if I were to go, I'd have a very comfortable life in Solara."

"Then why?" The Saintess's eyes widened slightly in confusion. "You'll get everything when you come with me."

"Indeed." Renard nodded. "But THAT person will not be in Solara."

Lady Celestria pursed her lips before glancing at the handsome young man currently chatting with Prince Kaelen and Prince Garen.

"Are you referring to Alex?" Lady Celestria asked.

"Yes," Renard confirmed. "I'd feel like a loser for life if I were to leave now. I might even develop a heart demon, which would prevent me from reaching the goal I have in mind."

"And your goal is?"

"To be the strongest."

Lady Celestria studied the prickly young man, whom she believed shared a destiny with her. Her Patron had hinted that she might find the person who would stand by her side for life in Frieden Academy.

After getting to know Renard, she realized that he was the person her Deity had talked about.

"Is there anything I can do to get you to change your mind?" Lady Celestria was not ready to abandon the hope that she could convince Renard to come with her. "I'll do anything. If you wish for it, I can also be your fiancée—"

A single finger pressed against her lips lightly, but that was enough to prevent her from finishing what she was about to say.

“You’re a wonderful lady, Celestria,” Renard said with an awkwardness that was rather endearing.
“You’re too good for me, so you don’t have to lower yourself like this. I’m still a First Year, and there are still many things that I want to do in this life. Right now, I don’t have any intention of being tied up with anyone or anything.”

Renard then pulled his hand back and took out something from his pocket.

“I’m not really a rich person, but I bought this with my own money,” Renard said as he carefully handed Celestria a small box.

“Is this for me?” she exclaimed, scarcely believing her eyes.

“Yes.”

“Can I open it now?”

“Of course.”

Inside was a simple yet beautiful piece that made the young lady’s heart skip a beat.

She lifted the necklace out of the box by its delicate silver chain so she could better admire the pendant, a teardrop of polished amber.

The golden resin gleamed warmly in the light, as if trapping within it the glow of a sunset.

Tiny veins shimmered faintly inside the gem like a living flame, gentle yet enduring.

"It's not much," Renard added softly. "But I want you to have it... as proof that I will never forget our time together."

Lady Celestria held the necklace firmly before looking at Renard tenderly.

She was very touched by his gift. It was simple but well-made, so she was certain Renard had spent good money on it.

The young man was a commoner. He didn't have a father with deep pockets, so a gift like this demonstrated his sincerity beyond a doubt.

"I will treasure it," Lady Celestria promised, knowing he did not want her to forget him either. "Then can you do me a favor?"

"If it is within my power."

"Please help me put it on."

Renard was taken aback by her request, but he still agreed after getting over his surprise.

The Saintess turned around and moved her hair to the side, showing the young man the nape of her neck.

The young man was keenly aware that, due to his status as a commoner, many people would deem his proximity to the Saintess of the Solara Kingdom inappropriate or even impudent.

But he didn't hesitate to do as she'd asked, ignoring the Solara students who were looking in their direction.

"It's done," Renard stated before pulling back. "It looks good on you, Celestria."

The Saintess smiled and rested her hand over the amber teardrop.

“Since you gave me something, allow me to hand you a present as well,” Lady Celestria said.

She then raised her right hand and gently touched Renard’s forehead.

A soft radiance spread from her palm, wrapping him in a gentle warmth.

“In the name of the Sun, I grant you its blessing,” Lady Celestria whispered. “May your path always be clear, may your spirit never be shrouded in darkness, and may the fire of your heart burn away all doubt and despair.”

Renard felt the warmth sink deep into his chest as strength and clarity welled within his body. For a brief moment, he thought he could hear the faint echo of a hymn, carried by the morning wind.

“This is the Blessing of the Sun,” Lady Celestria continued softly, her voice carrying a power that few wielded in the world of Arcana.

“It will protect you when your life is in peril and guide you whenever shadows threaten to consume your heart. No matter where you go, a ray of light will always shine upon you when you need it the most.”

The glow around her hand brightened, weaving golden motes of light that danced across Renard’s skin. His veins tingled with warmth, as if liquid sunlight was running through them.

“I gift you the warmth of morning,” Lady Celestria declared, giving him her personal blessing. “When you falter, it will restore your strength.

“I also gift you the heat of noon, unyielding, relentless, empowering you from the inside out. Last but not least, I gift you the peace of dusk, to remind you that every ending is but the promise of another dawn.

“And one day, under the blessing of The Sun, let our paths cross once more. Let us talk about happy days, let us tell each other wonderful stories. So Renard, continue to dream... continue to believe... and continue to survive. I’ll be waiting for you.”

Renard’s breath hitched. The words resonated deeply within him. He instinctively placed his hand over his chest as he gazed at the beautiful lady, granting him the blessings of her Patron and herself, which quickly settled into his heart.

“Carry this light with you, Renard,” Lady Celestria instructed, her tone tender yet solemn. “So long as you do not abandon yourself to despair, The Sun... no, I will never abandon you.”

Her hand lingered on his forehead for a heartbeat longer before she finally withdrew, her eyes filled with tenderness and unspoken affection. Yet within their depths, there lingered a tinge of loneliness and sorrow as well.

“Thank you,” Renard said with all the sincerity that he could muster.

He wanted to tell her many things, but he held back in fear that it might break his resolve.

So he thanked her.

Even then, these words rarely came out of Renard, who believed that the only one who could help him was himself.

Lady Celestria offered her hand for a handshake.

One last touch—that was all she wanted from him.

Renard firmly held the young lady’s hand and shook it twice.

But just as he was about to let go, Lady Celestria tightened her grip.

“Let’s stay like this for a while,” Lady Celestria said as she lowered her head, not wanting Renard to see the blush blooming on her face.

“The next time we see each other will be during the Inter-Academy Competition that will be held in the Kingdom of Faelarun. I pray that you’ll be cooler than you are now when that day comes.”

Renard lightly scratched his cheek with his finger and looked away.

If Alex had been there, he would not have missed the tinge of red appearing on Renard’s cheeks. He would’ve teased Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues nonstop.

Fortunately, Alex was already occupied, busy saying his goodbyes to Prince Kaelen and Prince Gerard. He would never know how his politeness had cost him a beautiful opportunity to gather some blackmail material against one of the Main Heroes of Endless Leveling Online.

Chapter 377: My Blood Is Priceless

After the guests left, Frieden Academy returned to its usual routine.

The First Years studied diligently, making great strides in their understanding of literature, magic, and martial arts.

“Starting today, the First Years will gain access to the Mission Hall,” Professor Arabella announced to the students of Class 1-C. “I’m sure all of you are now aware of the many ways of earning Academy Points.”

The Professor then waved her hand, creating a projection that everyone could see.

“In case some of you are still unaware, I will briefly explain how you can get academy points, which you can use at our Exchange Center. The most common way to gain Academy Points is by impressing your Professors.

“The students who give the right answers, perform well in exercises and tests, stand out, and work hard may all be rewarded with Academy Points.

“The second method is by accepting quests in the Mission Hall. Of course, other students can also commission you to work for them. I know some of you already have some experience with this.

“The third method is for you to sell your craft to the other students. Those who specialize in production often choose this path because it allows them to consistently earn Academy Points in exchange for their products and services.

“Now, I’m certain you’re all excited and want to earn as many academy points as you can, but do not forget this.”

Professor Arabella paused for a bit to scan her classroom and make sure every student was listening.

“Do not bite off more than you can chew,” Professor Arabella reminded, her tone serious. “Every year, several students get seriously injured—and some even die—because they have chosen missions way beyond their ability to handle.

“To minimize the likelihood of such tragedies, the academy has implemented a system that color codes missions by difficulty. The difficulty levels match the four grades. If you see a mission with a green badge, it means it’s highly recommended for the First Years.”

As she spoke, she paid special notice to some of the students, especially those the Headmaster and the Professors had labeled troublemakers.

“I will repeat this, the missions that have green badges are the recommended missions for the First Years,” Professor Arabella added. “The ones with yellow badges are for Second Years.

“Missions with orange badges are for Third Years, and those with red badges are for Fourth Years. However, if you ever see a silver badge, it means that this is a mission that cannot be taken by anyone unless they gain approval from the Student Council.

“Completing these missions will give you a guaranteed ten thousand Academy Points, so the competition for them is very stiff. If you have a bad academic record or don’t get along with the Student Council, the chances of you getting these quests are nonexistent. Do I make myself clear, Mr. No Rizz?”

Some of the students chuckled after their classroom's troublemaker was called out.

However, instead of being offended, Chuck looked genuinely pleased by the attention he was getting.

"Worry not, Professor." Chuck flipped his hair with his hand. "For I, the most handsome, refined, elegant, and charismatic student from Class 1-C, shall not even glance at a mission above my humble station."

"I will stick to the green badges like glue on parchment. In fact, I will be finishing these missions in record time and leave everyone in the dust. So, let me apologize to everyone in advance. You guys might miss out on easy missions because I will prioritize picking them!"

"I am not some brute who will go around fighting monsters in dungeons or slaying them in open fields. If you want to die, be my guest. I am a pacifist by heart. Sparkling elegance flows inside my veins."

"Does that mean," Alex asked slowly, as if formulating a new scheme, "that I can sell your blood for gold?"

"You can't," Chuck replied, unfazed by whatever morbid thoughts that might be frolicking in Alex's brain. "Because my blood is priceless. No one can afford it. Of course, that means I am priceless too."

"..."

"..."

"..."

Their classmates didn't know if they should applaud Chuck for his consistency or applaud him for his shamelessness.

In the end, Professor Arabella coughed lightly and gave her students a few more reminders before ending the class.

“First Years may accept missions with yellow badges even though they are meant for Second Years,” Professor Arabella said solemnly. “However, I must insist that you evaluate the mission requirements and your own capabilities objectively. Do not accept missions for fun or to impress others. I strongly advise all of you to stick to the missions with green badges.

“You only have one life, so do not challenge any mission that you cannot confidently tackle with your current strength.”

Originally, the First Years were only supposed to gain access to the Mission Hall a month from now.

But after the incident in the Orion Dungeon, Professor Rowan decided that letting the First Years gain combat or field experience earlier than scheduled would be for the best.

After Professor Arabella dismissed the class, Alex, Charles, Lavinia, and Fran headed to the Training Grounds for their next lesson.

Professor Gareth Thornwell was teaching the Magic Combat Class, which was very popular among students who wished to learn Martial Arts while still using magic.

Depending on whether they majored in a combat class or a mage class, they were often called Magic Knights or Battle Mages.

To Alex’s surprise, Evangeline was also there. She was even looking at Alex like she wanted to talk to him.

However, since he was surrounded by his friends, the young lady deemed that this was not the right opportunity to talk to him.

“Today, you will be fighting in pairs,” Professor Gareth announced. “But we will spice things up a bit. Instead of fighting one-on-one battles, we will be doing one-versus-two battles today.

"I will call out a few students. If you hear your name, you will be fighting two of your classmates today. To be fair and safe, I've made sure to choose those with high combat experience."

Professor Gareth then took out his list and smiled faintly.

"Those I call will stand to my right," Professor Gareth added. "First off, Alex Stratos!"

Alex wasn't too surprised, so he walked forward confidently and took his place beside the Professor.

"Next is Lavinia Hartwell," Professor Gareth stated. "Charles Lambert. Fran Terra."

The four students stood beside the Professor as if they were the Dream Team of Class C.

Chuck was at the Mage Training Grounds, and Renard was at the Fighter Training Grounds, so they weren't part of Professor Gareth's class.

"All of you will be picking a ball from this ballot box," Professor Gareth explained. "If your ball has the number one on it, you will be fighting Alex. Those who get number two will fight Lavinia. If you get three, Charles. Four, Fran."

Professor Gareth then whispered something to Fran, which Lavinia accidentally overheard due to her exceptional hearing.

"Make sure to hold back, Fran," Professor Gareth said. "Don't break their bones if possible."

"Understood, Professor." Fran nodded seriously.

The dwarf girl was the only Rank 4 in their class and was also a Dwarven Berserker, making her the most powerful in Class 1-C.

Even if Alex and Renard were to work together to fight against Fran, the chances of them winning against her would be slim.

At most, they would be able to fight her to a draw, but that was if they only fought her defensively.

When it was Evangeline's turn to draw a ball from the ballot box, she snapped her fingers inside it.

A moment later, a ball flew into her hand, which she took out of the box.

"Number one," Evangeline said to Professor Gareth after confirming that she got the number that she wanted.

When Alex realized that Evangeline was one of his opponents, he felt that this match-up wasn't a coincidence.

But since he didn't have any proof that the young lady had pulled a fast one, he had no choice but to fight against her, even though that was the last thing that he wanted to do.

"Professor, there is a chance that our opponent might get injured in this match, right?" Evangeline raised her hand. "Although all of us will hold back, we will not be punished with demerit points if we accidentally wound our classmate, right?"

"You won't get any demerits as long as you don't seriously injure them deliberately," Professor Gareth answered. "But if it is intentional, you will get demerits."

"Understood." Evangeline nodded.

She had been having a headache trying to come up with a way to casually and discreetly drink a drop of Alex's blood to confirm her suspicions.

Since this was the perfect opportunity to do it, the young lady was more pumped up than her teammate, who was already thinking of ways to bypass Alex's strong defense.

Chapter 378: Victory In Defeat [Part 1]

Jessica was one of Alex's classmates, but she didn't really stand out from the rest.

She was certainly pretty, but with beauties like Lavinia, Nessia, Evangeline, and Fran in the same class, she was like one of those faint stars surrounding the moon.

Her grades were also average, and like most girls in their class, she had a secret crush on Chuck.

After all, he was the most handsome boy in the class, and he was also the son of a Duke. For most ladies, he was ideal husband material.

Even now, that hadn't changed. However, Jessica must also acknowledge that although Alex wasn't a noble, he was still very popular with the ladies.

It was just that, instead of being charmed by him, most of them just feared him.

Alex was very friendly and easy to get along with.

But the ladies were intimidated by his boldness and shamelessness. His title of Blackmail King certainly didn't help.

Even so, during the party, she couldn't help but admire Alex because he truly looked like a prince as he danced with Vaan.

"Is there something on my face?"

That question brought Jessica back to reality, where she was about to spar with Alex in a match during Magic Combat Class.

"I-I was just thinking that Chuck is better looking than you," Jessica stuttered.

Alex laughed good-naturedly, but his eye twitched. "I think you should visit the infirmary. There might be something wrong with your eyes."

Jessica sighed as she pulled her chestnut brown hair back and tied it into a sleek bun to keep it out of her way during the battle.

Evangeline gave her teammate a side-long glance before taking a fighting stance. She was holding a wand in her right hand and a small dagger in her left.

Seeing that as a signal that their spar would start soon, Alex summoned Everguard and his hammer, Sacrament.

Among the Heroines, Evangeline had a unique power that made her very difficult to fight in battle.

Her skill, Future Sight, allowed her to see ten seconds ahead. Since she could counter most attacks, she was nearly untouchable.

However, she could only activate this ability by awakening her bloodline powers. For now, she had no plans to do so. If people were to realize she was a Dhampir, she might get branded as evil by nature.

Alex knew that Evangeline would rather lose this spar than let anyone discover her secret.

"Evangeline, I know that we don't really talk to each other, but for now, let's work as a team," Jessica said as she held her staff firmly. "Alex is a close combat fighter, so we will fight him with ranged magic if possible. If he comes near one of us, the other one will use that opportunity to attack him."

"Okay," Evangeline replied as she distanced herself from Jessica so one of them could act as bait to give the other the chance to bombard Alex with magical attacks.

Professor Gareth glanced at the three students before raising his hand.

"Battle Start!"

As soon as the signal landed, Alex immediately used his Shield Charge to close the gap between him and Jessica.

He wanted to take Jessica out first, knowing Evangeline was much more difficult to defeat.

The young man made the most logical choice, but his opponent had already expected this to happen.

Without any hesitation, Jessica tapped the ground beside her feet with her staff, which created a geyser that propelled her upward.

High above the air, Jessica pointed the tip of her staff in Alex's direction.

"Bullet Rain!"

Countless Water Bullets were fired in Alex's direction, which he blocked with his shield.

For a time, the sound of the magical bullets colliding on the young man's shield was all that could be heard in the arena.

They weren't strong enough to pierce Alex's defenses, but that was enough for Evangeline to take advantage of the situation.

"Frost Breaker!" Evangeline shouted as she aimed her wand at Alex.

Immediately, a wave of Ice Spikes jutted out of the ground and made their way to Alex, forcing him to crouch down and use his shield to block the attack.

He succeeded, but he had forgotten something important.

He wasn't fighting a single person!

"Water Beam!"

Jessica's Water Attack combined with Evangeline's Ice Attack, creating a fusion reaction that froze Alex's shield in place. Try as he might, he couldn't dislodge it.

Unable to retrieve Everguard in that short period of time, Alex was forced to leave it behind to dodge the barrage of Ice Spikes and Water Balls that rained down on him without mercy.

"Great! You got his shield!"

"Jessica, finish him!"

"You can do it, Evangeline!"

The guys of Class 1-C cheered for the two ladies, who now had the upper hand against Alex.

But Evangeline and Jessica understood that this battle was far from over.

They didn't hesitate to unleash spell after spell in order to keep Alex at bay, but the young man also had ranged attacks of his own.

"Shield!" Alex yelled, and four magical shields revolved around his body, protecting him from the spells hurled at him.

The young man summoned four more shields and used the skill Multitask to command them to attack the two ladies at the same time.

The shields flew like boomerangs, spinning in a curved trajectory that forced Evangeline and Jessica to defend themselves.

Lavinia, Nessia, Charles, and Fran paid careful attention to Alex's strategy, which he was using for the first time in battle.

Back then, Alex had been unable to utilize this strategy because he had lacked the Mana needed to sustain them.

But after becoming a Rank 3 Oathkeeper, he'd gained enough mana to unleash this attack.

Alex summoned magical shields one after the other, throwing them at Evangeline and Jessica, who were finding it hard to avoid the spinning shields that seemed to have minds of their own.

Whenever the girls used magic to repel or block the shields, these shields would shift their trajectory, evade their attacks, and circle back toward them for a counterattack.

"Isn't that cheating?" one of the boys asked his friend as the number of shields that were circling the two girls reached thirty.

"Uh... I don't think so?" his friend replied. "It's a skill, so it's not cheating."

While the two ladies were occupied with evasion, Alex used his hammer to free Everguard from the ice and reclaimed it once more.

Seeing this, Evangeline narrowed her eyes before glancing at the wet ground under her feet.

A plan then appeared inside her mind, which made her smile.

She could already predict what Alex would do next, and she would use that opportunity to set a trap that would work on him.

Chapter 379: Victory In Defeat [Part 2]

'Oh no!' Jessica panicked when she saw Alex successfully retrieve his shield before giving her a playful wink.

The young lady gritted her teeth as she dealt with the annoying shields that were attacking her from every direction.

“Here he goes again,” Nessia commented with a wry smile.

“He never changes.” Lavinia clicked her tongue as she watched the young man close the distance with a Shield Charge.

He perfectly timed this attack so that Jessica—who was busy fending off three shields at once—would be unable to do anything.

In the end, the only thing she could do was squeeze her eyes shut and brace for the impact that was about to hit her.

But the pain that she was expecting never came.

Instead, Alex lightly patted her shoulder twice.

“Okay, you’re out,” Alex said.

Jessica slowly opened her eyes and looked at the young man who was standing beside her and using his shield to block Evangeline’s Ice Spike.

“Um, things might get intense, so I would greatly appreciate it if you just concede,” Alex said. “I don’t want to hurt you, Jessica.”

“Tsk!”

“Tsk!”

“ ... ”

The guys and Lavinia clicked their tongues loudly and in unison because Alex was acting like a cool guy in front of them.

Jessica understood that Alex was being considerate, so she decided not to make things difficult for him.

“I concede!” Jessica shouted.

“Okay.” Professor Gareth nodded. “Please go to where the other students are, Jessica.”

After Jessica surrendered, Alex no longer held back and used his Shield Charge to close the distance between him and Evangeline.

He was already very satisfied with the performance of his Boomerang Shields, which were still relentlessly attacking Evangeline.

To many of the spectators, Evangeline was at a disadvantage. But when Alex was only a few meters away from her, the young lady smiled faintly as she unleashed the trap that she had prepared for him.

“Ice Domain!”

The arena was covered with water due to Jessica’s attacks earlier. Because of this, Evangeline could unleash ice magic faster than usual.

The ground froze solid, which made Alex slip during his Shield Charge.

For a brief moment, Evangeline’s eyes turned crimson as she activated her Future Sight.

She was careful to do it for only a fraction of a second. In the chaos of the battle, no one noticed that her eyes changed color.

Before Alex could understand what happened, he felt something prick his shoulder as he skidded across the frozen ground.

Just as he regained his balance to continue the battle, Evangeline raised her hand and said...

"I surrender!"

Everyone was surprised by her decision, but soon realized that she made the right call.

If Evangeline and Jessica couldn't defeat Alex together, fighting him one-on-one would ultimately result in her defeat.

Perhaps understanding that fact, Evangeline chose to quit while she was still ahead.

At least, that was the conclusion of everyone who watched the battle.

"Winner, Alex Stratos," Professor Gareth announced.

Alex blinked once, then twice, before returning his shield and hammer to his storage ring.

Although he didn't know why Evangeline decided to surrender, he was still happy that the battle was over.

Evangeline walked away without even sparing Alex a side-long glance.

But those who were paying close attention would see the faint smile on her face and the subtle spring in her steps.

The tip of her dagger had a tinge of red. When she turned her blade downwards, the red pooled to form into a single drop of blood that turned into a small red bead as it fell into the vial she held under it.

She then quickly kept the dagger and vial inside her storage ring, to be used at a later time.

Her reason for fighting Alex wasn't because she wanted to win against him.

What she wanted was to gain a sample of his blood, which was enough to confirm her suspicion.

"You did well, Evangeline!" Jessica complimented. "You should have seen Alex's face when he slid on the ice. It was hilarious!"

"Was it?" Evangeline was in a good mood, so she didn't mind chatting with Jessica, who had unknowingly helped her achieve her goal.

"Yes!" Jessica giggled. "I can't believe that our magical abilities complemented each other so well. In the future, when we need to form teams, can we form a party together?"

Evangeline glanced in Alex's direction before replying.

"I think that is a good idea," Evangeline answered. "Yes. Let's team up again in the future."

"Great!" Jessica shook the young lady's hand happily. "I'll count on you when that time comes!"

Evangeline didn't really have any friends in Class 1-C. If Jessica was willing to be one, that did not seem like a bad thing.

She then finally shifted her attention to Alex, who was casually chatting with Charles, Nessia, and Lavinia.

A glance was enough for Evangeline to see how close the young man was to his friends. She felt a slight ache in her heart.

She, too, once had a friend who took good care of her even though she was his maid.

Perhaps if her father hadn't separated them from each other, they would still be standing side by side, just like how Alex's friends were standing by his side.

Frankly, Evangeline wished that classes would end as soon as possible.

That way, she could return to her room and finally taste the blood of the young man, whom she believed was the Prince that she hadn't met for many years.

Alex seemed to sense her attention, because he suddenly turned to her and their eyes met.

Evangeline felt her heart skip a beat. For a moment, she thought that Alex was able to read her thoughts.

Time seemed to slow down as they continued to stare at each other.

If possible, she wished that this moment would last forever because Alex was not looking at anyone else but her.

Unfortunately, she didn't have the power to stop time.

Everything returned to normal. Alex simply gave Evangeline a nod of recognition before resuming his conversation with his friends, who were teasing him about how he'd slid across the ice.

Evangeline patted her chest to calm her wildly beating heart.

Jessica noticed this. She looked at Evangeline, then at Alex, then at Evangeline again, and then at Alex.

A thought then appeared inside her head.

'Does Evangeline have a crush on Alex?' Jessica wondered. 'Should I help her?'

To Jessica, they were already friends. And what kind of friend would she be if she didn't care about Evangeline's future happiness! If the aloof young lady needed her help to get closer to Alex, she would not hesitate one bit!

She had no idea that her resolve would land her in the middle of a storm threatening not just her friendship with Evangeline but her life as well.

Chapter 380: Strong-armed To Join A Club

After the sparring matches ended, Evangeline headed straight to her room.

She fought the strong urge to sprint all the way back, not wanting to raise anyone's suspicions. Right now, nothing else mattered more than confirming her suspicion about Alex's real identity.

Just as she had entered the dormitory, her handmaiden came to talk to her. However, before Eleanora could even say anything, Evangeline cut her off right away.

"Let's talk later," Evangeline said as she climbed up the stairs. "There's something important I need to do, and I mustn't be disturbed no matter what."

Eleanora froze in shock, for this was the first time her Mistress had spoken to her so sternly, leaving no room for objections.

For a brief moment, she saw Evangeline's father in her expression, which made her feel intimidated.

In the end, she could only watch helplessly as Evangeline headed to the second floor.

'What's gotten into her?' Eleanora wondered. 'This isn't like her. Did something happen during class?'

Many questions flooded her mind, but she understood she wouldn't get any answers right away. In the end, she decided to just wait for a few hours before meeting with Evangeline once again.

When Evangeline was finally back in her room, she made sure to lock the door properly so no one would be able to disturb her.

"Finally," Evangeline muttered as she took out the vial of Alex's blood from her storage ring. "The moment of truth has arrived."

The young lady carefully raised the vial to her lips and drank the single drop of blood within it.

A second later, her eyes widened in shock, but this shock was soon replaced by tears.

Covering her mouth, Evangeline lost the strength in her legs. Leaning against the wall for support, she sank to the floor as she sobbed uncontrollably.

The feelings that she had held back for many years were now rising to the surface.

"I knew it," Evangeline said amidst the tears that were pouring out of her eyes. "It's really him."

Although she only tasted a drop of his blood, Evangeline was convinced that Alex and her dear friend—whom she hadn't seen for many years—were one and the same.

It took her several minutes to calm down and regain her composure. She was very tempted to leave her room and confront Alex so that she could reveal her true identity to him.

She wanted to tell him that she was the maid he used to have for two years, before he was forced to head to the south to flee from Inquisitors coming after his life.

"Calm down, Eva," Evangeline muttered. "Take a deep breath. You need to calm down."

After taking some deep breaths, the young lady felt less shaken and could now think more clearly.

'How should I deal with this situation?' Evangeline thought

There was a reason why Alex had fled the North, so she needed to handle this properly.

If word leaked out that Alex Stratos was actually the Prince of the Aetherion Empire, his life would once again be in danger.

'I cannot tell this to anyone, not even my father.' Evangeline clenched her fists tightly. 'Especially not him.'

She knew her father didn't hold the Prince in high regard. She had once overheard him muttering that he should've handed Alex over to the Inquisitors back then.

'I cannot trust anyone with this secret.' Evangeline sighed in her heart. 'I don't want to put him in danger.'

The young lady knew that Eleanora was a spy that her father had planted in the academy to watch over her.

This was why she didn't befriend any of her peers lest they be used against her in the future.

She understood what kind of organization the Demon Worshipers were. They were the sort who wouldn't hesitate to use dirty tricks as long as they could get what they wanted.

'I can't let the Demon Worshipers kill him,' Evangeline vowed while her brain scrambled to come up with ways to keep Alex out of harm's reach.

However, the Demon Worshipers were not easy to deal with at all. After nearly half an hour of thinking, she came to the conclusion that the only way to protect Alex was to be by his side whenever he left the academy because of his missions.

A moment later, an idea popped into her head.

'Why didn't I think of that?' She finally had a method of being closer to Alex without arousing anyone's suspicion.

Now that she had determined her course of action, Evangeline didn't hesitate to leave her room to enact her plan right away.

Time didn't wait for anyone, so what better time to take action than the present?

The moment she left her room, she immediately saw Eleanora leaning on the wall of the hallway with her arms crossed over her chest.

Clearly, she wanted to say something.

"Have you been waiting for me?" Evangeline frowned.

"Yes," Eleanora replied. "I need to tell you something very important."

"Will it take long?"

"No. Just a few minutes, My Lady."

Evangeline nodded before pushing her half-open door to let Eleanora in. Since her handmaiden had come to talk about something very important, it meant that it had something to do with their organization.

When the two were safely inside the room, Eleanora looked at her Mistress gravely.

“My Lady, I may not be able to assist you for the time being,” Eleanora said. “I have been strong-armed into joining a club.”

“Join a club?” Evangeline blinked. “What club?”

“Endless Horizon,” Eleanora replied, clearly resigned to her bad luck. “Chuck forced me to join the club. I can’t say no to him.”

“Then what are we waiting for?” Evangeline grabbed her handmaiden’s hand before the latter could start wallowing in her misfortune. “Let’s go!”

“Huh?!” Eleanora could only look at her Mistress in disbelief.

She had assumed that Evangeline would command her to disobey Chuck because joining a club meant she had less time to serve her.

To her surprise, her Mistress seemed to be very eager to take her to the clock tower, which was the club room of Endless Horizon.

Truth be told, Evangeline had planned to convince Eleanora to join Endless Horizon with her. She hadn’t figured out how to achieve that exactly, but that seemed unnecessary now.

The vampire lady was a subordinate of Eleanora’s father. She couldn’t defy him even if she wanted to.

Recently, Eleanora had been ordered to make Alex her subordinate. Of course, she couldn’t do this because Chuck had given her a firm order not to touch any of his friends, especially the members of Endless Horizon.

Because of this, she had been racking her brains for ideas to get around this. She didn’t need to succeed if she could make her Master think she’d been trying her best to get close to Alex.

As long as she put some effort into doing it, her Master wouldn't find fault even if she failed.

But as soon as classes had ended, Chuck had come to find her and ordered her to join Endless Horizon.

Eleanora had felt both shock and relief because this would allow her to get close to Alex.

Although she didn't have any plans on making him her subordinate, the fact that she managed to enter the young man's club would make her Master think that she was at least trying!

Frankly, she had approached Evangeline to complain. She'd also wanted to notify her lady that she might not be available all the time because she would be at her new club.

She hadn't expected that Evangeline herself would drag her to the clock tower as if she couldn't wait to get rid of her!

"M-My Lady, I can walk on my own!" Eleanora protested when they left the dormitory. "I can go there myself!"

"No, Eleanora," Evangeline replied, increasing her grip on the young lady's hand to ensure that she wouldn't be able to run away. "Since I am your Mistress, I need to make sure that you will not be mistreated in that club. I will also join Endless Horizon to keep you safe."

"E-Eh?!" Eleanora gasped in shock.

She even felt a little touched that Evangeline was willing to go that far for her sake. Even though she was just a servant, Evangeline didn't treat her like a slave but like a friend that she could count on when she needed it the most.

'Serving you has been worth it, My Lady,' Eleanora thought as she allowed her Mistress to drag her. 'All those years of hardship have not been in vain!'

If only Eleanora had known that Evangeline was using her to join Alex's club for her own reasons, the vampire girl might have coughed up blood then and there due to this unexpected betrayal