

Endless 461

Chapter 461: A Midsummer Night's Dream [Part 2]

"I can show you the world... shining, shimmering, splendid. Tell me, princess, now, when did you last let your heart decide?"

The lyrics of this famous song played inside Alex's head as he and the young lady who was pulling his hand soared across the sky of the Capital City of Harmonia.

He might be fond of singing songs, but he was not at all fond of his situation right now.

If the masked lady holding his hand were to suddenly let go, he would plummet from at least hundreds of meters above the ground.

Fortunately, the young lady decided to descend toward the southern edge of the city slowly, landing on a tower very familiar to Alex.

"This place..." Alex muttered.

"It's the church tower of Diabolus," Himea said as their feet touched the top of the tower overlooking the city. "It is probably one of my favorite places in Harmonia."

Alex wanted to say that he, too, liked this place as well.

The church was deserted. No believers had visited it in decades, so its door had always been closed.

But for the young man and the members of their Guild, Endless Horizon, the church had been incredibly important as it had served as their guild base in the game.

Although it had taken a lot of effort and negotiation with the main church of Diabolus, which represented the Major Arcana of "The Devil", they had managed to acquire it successfully through legal means.

From afar, the church looked like an eerie castle where vampires and other undead monsters could spawn at any given time.

Despite its appearance, it was actually very spacious. Although you could not tell just by looking at the church from outside, it also had three levels of basement.

Alex jokingly called the underground rooms the Prison and Torture Room. He had come up with the name since those floors had been frequently used for important guild meetings.

“Um, we shouldn’t be here,” Alex said. “Although this church is deserted, it’s still a sacred place for those who are following the Church of Diabolus. If we desecrate this place, ‘The Devil’ will haunt us for life. He’s known to take the souls of people, you know?”

Himea giggled as Alex comically imitated a scary monster by curling his fingers to resemble claws.

“Don’t worry. I received permission before coming here... Otherwise, your soul would have been mine.” Himea said evily, which made the young man involuntarily shudder.

“Okay, you win.” Alex raised his hands. “Sis, please don’t scare me. I really am afraid of The Devil.”

“Why are you so afraid of him?” Himea asked. “The Devil is actually very kind and cute, you know?”

The corner of the young man’s lips twitched after hearing the young lady’s words.

‘The devil is kind and cute?’ Alex forced himself to keep the smile on his face from breaking. ‘Yeah, right! And pigs can fly!’

However, Alex had completely forgotten that Arcana indeed had a species of pig that could actually fly.

The young man took a deep breath before bowing deeply to the young lady.

“Although this is a bit late, I want to say thank you for helping us in the Dungeon of Beginnings,” Alex said. “Back then, we were in a very difficult situation, and your help saved the lives of my companions.”

“You’re welcome.” Himea didn’t brush off Alex’s sincerity and accepted his thanks with grace. “Please be more careful going forward in the future, okay? You have been attracting all kinds of trouble since you enrolled in the academy.”

Alex couldn’t promise that he wouldn’t attract any more trouble in the future, so he just nodded for the time being.

The young lady sighed and looked at the starry sky, which was truly breathtaking.

“The night is darkest just before dawn,” Himea said softly. “Do you know what this saying means?”

Alex’s eyes widened in shock. How could he forget the question that every aspiring guild applicant must answer during their interview to join the best guild in ELO?

When the guild, Endless Horizon, had just been founded, Alex had decided to join this guild purely because he had thought the name sounded cool.

During his interview, one of the Guild Founders had asked him this question.

Back then, Alex’s answer had been...

“The darkest night brings the gentlest dawn. Yet... beyond the first light lies a horizon without end,” Alex said softly.

But as if caught in a trance or reminiscing about a very fond memory, Alex continued to speak.

“Survive the night, greet the dawn, and conquer the Endless Horizon.”

His voice grew steadier, deeper, almost like he wasn't just speaking to Himea but to the past, to the future, and to the guild that had shaped him.

"To endure what others fear,

to rise when others stay on their knees,

and to walk toward a future only we dare believe exists."

He took a breath, the wind carrying his words like a quiet oath.

"We don't run from the darkness. We face it.

In the face of adversity, we carve a path where none existed before."

As Himea watched him quietly, something flickering in her eyes.

Alex continued, his tone soft but unwavering.

"Because the dawn isn't our destination.

It's only the beginning.

Beyond that first light is an unending journey.

A horizon that stretches farther than fear, farther than limits."

He clenched his hand into a fist over his heart.

“That is Endless Horizon.

Not a place...

but a promise.”

Alex felt his eyes moisten a bit as he recalled the time he had spent with his guildmates... the time he had spent with his Guild Master, Noelle.

All of them were now on a horizon too far for him to reach. Perhaps one day, they would all meet again in some other place, at some other time, with some other possibilities.

The two teenagers fell into a comfortable silence as they admired the skyline of Harmonia.

Finally, this silence was broken as the young lady spoke once more.

“Dawn will come soon,” Himea said. “Would you like to return to your room? Or would you like to greet the sunrise with me?”

Alex pondered a bit and realized that it had been a while since he had last seen the sunrise.

He had been too busy recently and couldn’t spare the time to appreciate the beauty around him, let alone greet a new morning while the sun rose over the horizon.

“I want to see the sunrise,” Alex replied firmly.

“Good.” Himea waved her hands and wrapped Alex in a black mist.

Just like what had happened earlier, the two of them soared toward the sky until they landed on the peak of a mountain overlooking everything for miles on end.

Alex took out a couch and casually set it on the ground before inviting Himea to take a seat.

The young lady didn't refuse his offer and sat at the center of the couch.

Alex blinked once, then twice, before occupying the right corner. He was now only a couple of inches away from Himea.

Just as he thought that he would be waiting with her in silence until the sun rose, the young lady asked him a question.

"Are you enjoying your academy life?"

"Yes." Alex smiled. "I have made some good friends."

"Girl... friends?" Himea asked in a teasing tone.

"No comment," Alex replied.

A giggle escaped the young lady's lips before she remembered something.

"By the way, call me Big Sister from now on," Himea stated.

"Big sister?" Alex blinked. "Why?"

"Because I am older than you. Aren't you going to be eighteen in six weeks?"

"Wait, how did you..."

Since Himea wore a mask, it was impossible for Alex to see her face. If he could, he would see the smirk that was currently plastered on her face.

“I know everything about you.” Himea took out a scroll and showed it to Alex.

Alex opened the scroll and checked its contents.

— — —

Eye Color: Blue

Hair: Silver white

Height. xxx

Weight. xx.x

PP Size: XXX

— — —

When Alex saw the last line, he almost choked on his saliva.

“W-What the hell is this?!” Alex demanded. “Where did you get this?!”

A chuckle escaped Himea’s lips, and it sounded like the laughter of an angel.

She was just teasing Alex. Her prank worked perfectly.

Her laughter spread across that mountain peak and it was quite infectious.

Despite his embarrassment, Alex couldn't help but laugh as well and greeted the next day with a big smile.

Chapter 462: Arriving In The Capital City Of Solivane

That chance encounter with Himea led Alex to gain a new friend.

A few days had passed since then, which Alex had spent on preparations for the excursion to Solara.

"Chuck, please take care of Dim Dim, okay?" Alex said.

Chuck and Dim Dim both fixed their gangster sunglasses at the same time.

"Leave our little bun to me."

"Dim Dim!"

Dim Dim was currently perched on top of Chuck's head. Unknown to the troublemaker, the little bun was actually the one taking care of him as it had been tasked to keep an eye on his movements during their travels.

The agents of the Demon Worshipers were among the escort members, and they would immediately recognize Alex right away if Dim Dim were perched on his head as usual.

Since people had come to associate Dim Dim with Alex, it would be more prudent for the little bun to accompany someone else during the trip.

To prevent attracting suspicion, Chuck and Dim Dim left first.

Alex then headed to the Old Library and changed into his butler clothes there. To be perfectly safe, he made sure to open his map to check if he was being followed.

After confirming that there were no suspicious people around, he changed into his new uniform and put on the Mirror Mask.

He then headed to a quiet spot near Vermillion Crest Dormitory where he and Princess Xenia had agreed to meet.

"You're late," Princess Xenia said while lightly tapping the fan in her hand.

"I'm sorry, Your Highness." Alex bowed respectfully. "I had to make sure no one's following me."

"Fine. But don't be late next time."

"Understood, Your Highness."

Alex then took his spot a few steps behind the princess's left.

He made sure that he would match Mary's distance, which was appropriate for serving those of the royal family.

Princess Xenia's Godfather, Sir Alphonse, the Rank 5 Steel Knight, stood nearby along with his men just like always.

He had also been informed of Alex's circumstance, so he didn't say anything about a new butler accompanying their retinue.

"Let's go," Princess Xenia declared as she walked toward her parked airship.

When they arrived, Alex noticed Chuck chatting with an old man wearing the same gangster sunglasses as him.

Lex would also accompany them on this trip. As such, the old man had taken great pains to look presentable.

The old man with long hair and beard was now gone, replaced by a prim and proper gentleman wearing a tuxedo and a matching black hat.

He looked like one of those happy-go-lucky, noble grandpas who would spoil their granddaughters rotten.

Since he was also going incognito like Alex, he decided to call himself Marvolo Reedle.

Princess Xenia then glanced at her butler, who had also changed his name to Sebastian Mikeaelis.

(A/N: Those who know, know.)

Why did he choose the name Sebastian? The answer was really simple.

A good butler must have the name Sebastian.

At least, that was Alex's opinion.

"Good morning, Sir Marvolo," Princess Xenia greeted the old man.

"A great morning to you, too, Your Highness," Lex bowed deeply to the princess, who had allowed him to join them on this trip to Solara.

The princess nodded and purposely ignored the fact that there were two people and a little bun wearing matching gangster sunglasses like they belonged to the one very flashy mafia family.

All Endless Horizon members had gathered, and every single one of them was completely geared for this trip, ready for battle.

Lumi was the one who would represent Latifa on this trip, while the latter remained in the clock tower to hold their fort.

The other students, who were agents of the Demon Worshipers, kept on glancing at the members of Endless Horizon as if looking for someone.

“Since everyone is here, let’s board the airship,” Princess Xenia stated.

As the princess boarded the ship, Stan Dupp walked closer to Chuck.

“Where is your club president?” Stan asked. “Isn’t he going with you guys?”

“Ah, he decided not to accompany us on this trip,” Chuck answered. “The poor guy is having diarrhea and is currently married to the toilet in our room.”

Hearing this outrageous slander uttered so casually, Alex almost tripped and fell face-first on the boarding ramp.

However, since he couldn’t reveal his identity, he decided to hold his grudge for a while and repay it in full when the chance presented itself!

The agents of the Demon Worshipers didn’t look pleased, but since they were already there, they had no choice but to follow through with their mission.

At least they could use this opportunity to gather some intel. It was not a bad idea to familiarize themselves with their accommodations and host city before the other First Years arrived a week from now.

Alex didn’t forget to tell the Guardian of the North that the other students were agents of the Demon Worshipers.

Because of this, Lex was monitoring them. If they made their move to capture or, worse, kill Alex in Solara, the old man would quickly put them in their place.

Solara was nowhere near Harmonia, but since they had prepared thoroughly beforehand, it would only take them a few hours to arrive at their destination.

The city with teleportation gates had been granted access to teleport directly to the nearest city within the Kingdom of Solara.

From there, they would simply head to another city, which would allow them to jump two more times before arriving at their destination.

Trips taken by the members of the Royal Family were done in this manner. That way, they wouldn't be inconvenienced by spending days travelling just to arrive at another sovereign kingdom's capital city.

The capital city of Solara, Solivane, was remarkably beautiful.

The castle was designed with golden rays on its sides, resembling those of the sun.

Alex had to admit that this was one of the most beautiful palaces that he had seen in ELO.

The moment their airship arrived, they were greeted by Gryphon Riders, who escorted them to the parking area in the flying port.

From there, they would be escorted by the city guards to their temporary accommodations.

In order to ensure that the First Years would have a good time in Solara, the King had decided to reserve the best hotel in the city just for them.

Coincidentally, this hotel was also near Solara Academy, making visitation easier.

When they arrived at the hotel, Alex recognized some familiar faces.

They were the nobles who had visited Frieden Academy to protest what they deemed an injustice for their Saintess.

That protest had escalated to a duel, the news of which had now spread far and wide within the Kingdom of Solara.

The marriage partner of the Saintess was someone whom everyone wished to meet. It was no exaggeration to say that the whole kingdom was looking forward to seeing the young man lucky or unlucky enough to be their Saintess's potential boyfriend.

Princess Xenia gave these nobles a sidelong glance before heading to the main entrance.

"He's not here, huh?" one of the nobles said.

"I bet he was too scared to come," another noble commented.

The members of the Endless Horizon looked at these nobles calmly before following the princess.

Renard was still in the academy, training until the last moment. And when he arrived in Solara, he would show everyone that he wasn't a doormat they could easily step on.

Chapter 463: Exchange Of Pointers [Part 1]

"Wow, are they all from Frieden Academy?"

"Those girls are all beautiful."

"Oh! That young lady elf smiled at me!"

"Fool! She didn't smile at you. She smiled at me!"

The students of Solara Academy all looked at the representatives of the First Years from Frieden Academy who were currently touring their school.

Princess Xenia and Prince Edward were at the front. Behind them were Mary and Alex, serving as their maid and butler.

Since bringing the entire knight squad into the academy might cause offense, the royal siblings decided to just let Sir Alphonse and two knights under his command follow them.

Alex played his role as a servant perfectly, never letting his expression betray how happy he was when he heard the students praise the beautiful ladies.

After all, more than half of the girls in their entourage belonged to his club, with some of them being Main Heroines or Supporting Heroines.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that their lineup was akin to an idol group in ELO.

"If that fox lady becomes my girlfriend, I can die happily," one of the students said.

Alex was tempted to tell the young man that he was shooting for the stars. Lumi would not hesitate to beat the crap out of anyone who got under her skin.

But he had to concede that the student had good taste because the Alter looked exactly like Latifa.

However, there were some minor differences.

Latifa had a softer gaze, while Lumi always looked alert and critical. The latter gave off the presence of a cold beauty, as if everyone around her were below her.

"That Catkin looks hot!" a Second Year commented. "She's so sexy. Damn, I think I'm in love!"

Alex wanted to tell the Second Year that he should find someone else because Lavinia was already taken. But since he was supposed to be a butler, he was forced to remain silent as he walked respectfully behind the princess.

“Guys, is it just me, or does that maid over there look dreamy?” another noble chimed in. “I don’t mind having someone like her serve me... hehehe.”

Suddenly, Chuck stepped up and stood before that student, blocking his indecent gaze from reaching Mary.

“Sorry, pal. But she already has a boyfriend,” Chuck said before fixing his sunglasses using his middle finger.

Dim Dim did the same, matching the troublemaker because it also didn’t like the way the student was talking about Mary.

The student council president of Solara Academy, Matthew Mcknight, gave that student a pointed look, making the latter’s face turn pale.

As if everyone understood what was happening, they all refrained from making more inappropriate comments as they observed their guests.

Mary glanced at Chuck and decided to be a little nicer to him during their field trip.

“That fool didn’t know that he managed to escape death by a hair’s breadth,” Chuck muttered. “Of all the ladies that he could have set his eyes on, he had to pick Mary.

“He doesn’t know that this girl has the hobby of kissing my pictures in private. Has he forgotten the brotherly code? Thou shall not touch crazies!”

Mary almost tripped after she overheard the troublemaker's muttering. Her earlier thought of being a bit nicer to him instantly vanished. In its place was her vow of beating him until he begged for mercy and then beating him some more.

Alex's body stiffened as he did his best to stop himself from laughing out loud. He could see Mary's gaze filling with killing intent and understood that Chuck would be in a world of pain later for his... regrettable remarks.

"This is the founder of Solara Academy," Matthew said as they stopped at the base of a statue that was at least seven meters high. "For countless batches of students, it is a tradition to offer prayers here before taking an exam.

"They believe that by getting the blessing of the founder's spirit, they will be able to graduate without problems."

The Frieden students glanced at the statue. However, they noticed something unusual on top of the founder's head.

Perched on top of the statue's head was a pink slime with wings. And it seemed to be taking a nap!

"Let me introduce our academy's Angel Slime, Mimi," Matthew continued with a smile. "She's a bit of a troublemaker, so please, do not offend her no matter what."

Since slimes were a protected race in Arcana, having a troublemaker slime could indeed be quite a headache. No one could do anything, no matter how outrageous the slime's behaviour.

Most slimes understood that while there was no creature in the world that could hurt them, they shouldn't offend others for no reason. Most did their best to respect others and mind their own business.

But since they were a playful race, they would often arrive in human villages, towns, and cities, interacting with the locals during their journey.

Some of them decided to stay wherever they felt the most comfortable, and Mimi seemed to have chosen Solara Academy as her home after her long journey.

After that short stop at the statue, Matthew continued the tour, showing the different attractions inside the academy.

The alchemy rooms, the music rooms, the theater room, as well as various classrooms equipped to handle all sorts of magic and magical accidents.

Finally, they arrived at the training room, where several students waited for them.

"I heard that a student from Frieden Academy will have a duel with some of our students in the Colosseum a week from now," Matthew commented. "How about we begin with a sparring match to foster good ties between our two academies?"

Sparring matches were one of the ways students from different academies could compete with each other.

The students of Solara Academy and Faelarun Academy had done the same during their visit, which had allowed them to assess not just how strong they were, but how strong they were in comparison to Frieden students.

What Alex didn't know was that as soon as the elves had returned to Faelarun Academy, they immediately asked their music teacher if there was a way to defeat Alex in the Battle Choir.

For them, the young man would surely become the greatest threat in the Inter-Academy Competition unless they figured out a solution within the next few months.

Prince Edward and Princess Xenia glanced at each other before nodding at the same time.

"We accept the sparring match," Prince Edward replied before facing the students behind him. "Who among you wants to exchange pointers with our friends?"

Chuck flipped his hair, so it made Prince Edward think that he planned to volunteer. But as if sensing the Prince's intention, Chuck hurriedly hid behind Charles.

Seeing his future brother-in-law's blatant cowardice, the prince fought the urge to grimace.

Just as everyone thought that there would be no volunteers, a young lady stepped up to accept the challenge.

"Allow me, Your Highness."

Lavinia decided that this was a good opportunity to test just how strong the students of Solara were, so she volunteered to fight first.

After hearing that a beautiful lady was going to be their sparring partner, dozens of Solara boys offered to fight!

Matthew narrowed his eyes and pointed at a First Year whom he believed would not fail his expectations.

"You're up, Philipp," Matthew said. "Please remember that this is a friendly match. Moves that can cripple, kill, or maim your opponents are not allowed."

Lavinia and Philipp nodded in understanding before both of them moved to the center of the training field, facing each other.

Alex placed his hands behind his back and looked at the young lady, who seemed to be brimming with confidence.

Everyone watched with bated breath as the first exchange between Frieden Academy and Solara Academy started with both fighters charging at each other as soon as the signal to fight was given.

Chapter 464: Exchange Of Pointers [Part 2]

Lavinia was a very competitive person.

In a way, she was similar to Renard. She longed to fight against her fellow students to help her improve and grow stronger.

As a Catkin, she was usually faster and more agile than her opponents.

But the one she was facing wasn't a pushover.

The first clash was enough for both teenagers to realize that they were facing a strong opponent.

Phillip was a magic swordsman who specialized in a rare kind of sword.

A sword whip.

It snaked around Lavinia as if alive, while the young lady calmly deflected it with great precision.

Alex found this exchange quite amusing for one simple reason.

Lavinia was also a sword whip user.

However, she kept the sword in her hand like a normal sword and deflected the "unpredictable" attacks that Phillip had used to dominate his batchmates.

Due to his unusual weapon, many of his peers were unable to counter his attacks, making him one of the most feared opponents in duels.

But today, he was fighting someone who understood how to use a sword whip as if it was part of her own body.

"You're good," Phillip said with a smile as he and Lavinia backed away from each other. "I've never met someone who can counter my attacks so easily."

"Maybe you only fought against weaklings," Chuck commented from the side, which made everyone gaze in his direction.

However, the young man immediately turned to look at Charles as if he owed him money.

"Charles, you should never tell people that they only fight against weaklings," Chuck exclaimed with righteous indignation. "I know that there are many people that bully the weak and fear the strong. But you mustn't tell them that to their faces, okay?"

Dim Dim almost slipped off the slimy troublemaker's head due to how shameless he was. In the end, the little bun decided to abandon ship and jumped into Lapis's arms.

Charles, on the other hand, sank his face into his open palm. Right now, he wanted nothing more than to insist that he did not know who Chuck was!

Fortunately, Mary came to the rescue and pinched Chuck's waist, making the latter wail like a pig about to be slaughtered.

"Can you stop talking?" Mary glared. "You're embarrassing all of us."

After Mary restored some semblance of order, Lavinia and Phillip turned their focus back to the fight.

"I'm sorry, but I will end this now," Phillip declared. "No hard feelings, okay?"

"No hard feelings," Lavinia agreed before taking a fighting stance.

The two stared at each other for a few seconds before Phillip swung his sword, making it transform into a flaming cobra that lunged at Lavinia with its fangs ready to strike.

When the flaming cobra was only a few inches away from the Catkin, the young lady took a step forward and disappeared from where she stood.

She used the skill that Alex had given her—Flash Step.

In just a few heartbeats, the young lady's sword was resting against Phillips' neck, signaling that their sparring match had come to an end.

The students from Frieden Academy clapped their hands and cheered for Lavinia.

Alex clapped his hands with a smug expression.

Why?

It was because Lavinia had won without unleashing her own sword whip, which would have made Phillipp understand why his opponent seemed to predict exactly where his attacks would be coming from.

"Good job," Alex said in a volume that only Lavinia could hear as she walked past him.

"Thanks," Lavinia replied, giving the butler a knowing gaze before exchanging high fives with Nessia, Lumi, and Evangeline.

"Who wants to fight next?" Chuck stepped forward as if he were an expert looking for an opponent to fight.

"I'll fight you!" declared a student. Chuck remained unfazed until the challenger stood up, revealing that he was over two meters tall.

"U-Um?" Chuck subconsciously took a step back from the student towering over him. "Did I say that I was the one going to fight? I am just asking around because my friend here, Charles, is itching for a fight!"

The troublemaker was right.

Charles indeed itched for a fight, but the one he wanted to smack so badly was Chuck!

“Come on, my friend!” Chuck lightly patted Charles’ shoulder. “Show them what our academy is made of! Hmph! He is lucky that I’m not the one fighting. If I fought him myself, I’d twirl him up and make him look like spaghetti!”

Princess Xenia was starting to regret some of her life decisions.

‘What was I thinking when I decided to bring this fool along?’

The princess wanted to cover her face so badly, but she had to keep the dignity of the royal family.

The massive student crossed his arms over his chest and looked down on Chuck and Charles, who were supposed to be his challengers.

“I don’t mind if the two of you fight me at the same time,” the tall student stated.

“No need.” Charles shook his head. “I’ll be happy to be your sparring partner. My name is Charles, how about you?”

“My name is Gideon Frost,” Gideon replied. “You can just call me Gideon.”

After exchanging their names, the two faced off at the center of the field.

“Is he really a First Year?” Chuck asked Matthew.

“He is a First Year,” Matthew confirmed. “He is a quarter giant.”

Alex's ears perked up after hearing those words.

If the blood of giants really flowed in Gideon's veins, it meant that he should be incredibly strong too.

"Is he going to be alright?" Chuck asked Nessia, who only glared back at him.

Charles was a pacifist and didn't like to be in the spotlight. However, he had no choice but to step up because it would look bad if their delegation refused to accept the sparring match after winning the first time!

Alex focused his attention on the battle between Charles and Gideon.

To be perfectly honest, he wanted to see just how strong his friend had become after learning Growth [EX].

What Alex didn't know was that because of what he had done, Charles would become a powerhouse who was no weaker than the Main Heroes themselves.

A power that could bring the downfall of any nation or organization who dared to target him.

Chapter 465: Exchange Of Pointers [Part 3]

Gideon was considered one of the most powerful First Years in Solara Academy.

Not only was he big, but he was also strong.

Very strong.

According to Matthew, a single full-powered punch from Gideon could shatter a boulder. The student councillor couldn't help but mention it, a little worried that Gideon might seriously injure their guest.

Although he had been the one to initiate the sparring match, he also understood that if any of their guests ended up hurt, let alone seriously injured, he would be the one to take all responsibility.

Nessia appeared calm as she gazed at her boyfriend. However, deep inside, she felt very anxious.

Funnily enough, it wasn't because she worried that Charles might get hurt. The young lady was actually anxious about Gideon's safety.

'I hope Charles doesn't accidentally kill him,' Nessia thought.

While everyone felt concerned about Charles, she was the only one who worried about Gideon.

"I'll go easy on you," Gideon declared. "I'll only use half of my strength."

"Thank you," Charles replied.

After that brief exchange, Matthew raised his hand to signal the start of the spar.

"Battle start!"

As soon as the signal landed, Gideon lunged at his opponent with the intention of grappling him.

He believed that the moment he grabbed any part of Charles' body, the match would be over in an instant.

"What is he doing?" Chuck muttered. "Why isn't he moving?"

Princess Xenia and Mary both narrowed their eyes at the same time, ready to stop the match if necessary.

While they trusted and knew that Charles was a capable fighter, they had yet to see him fight seriously in battle.

When Gideon was only two meters away from Charles, he broke into an evil grin. He then reached out to grab his opponent, making sure the other wouldn't be able to get away, no matter what.

The ladies from Solara Academy couldn't help but cover their faces, not wanting to see the gruesome scene they expected to follow.

Then, it happened.

Gideon's hand was only a foot away from Charles' head when it froze completely.

A second later, the tall young man, who had the blood of giants flowing inside his veins, collapsed on the ground unconscious.

"Hoh... not bad," Lex commented, crossing his arms over his chest.

As someone who had fought many life-and-death battles and reached Rank 8, he was one of the handful of people who had seen exactly what had happened.

Even Matthew, who had been ready to stop Gideon had he gone too far, was shocked by the outcome of the battle.

"Don't worry," Charles said. "I just knocked him unconscious. He'll wake up after a few minutes."

The young man unclenched his right fist, which had turned pitch-black.

He gave it a few shakes and the darkness in his hand vanished without a trace.

After giving his opponent one last glance, Charles walked towards Nessia.

"I'm glad you didn't accidentally kill him," Nessia said as soon as Charles stood by her side. "Things would have gotten very troublesome if you had."

"I only used a fifth of my strength," Charles replied. "He'll be fine."

Matthew and everyone close enough to hear them flinched after hearing the two teenagers' conversation.

While they didn't know if Nessia and Charles were being serious, they were glad that Gideon didn't suffer any serious injuries after their brief inspection.

Chuck was itching to call out and ask if there were more challengers, but Mary grabbed hold of him and gave him the "if you talk, I'll make you regret it" glare.

Knowing when to retreat and when to advance was Chuck's specialty. Since it was not possible to advance right now, he decided to take a step back and behave himself for a bit.

Matthew asked some of the students to take Gideon to the infirmary before continuing the tour of the academy.

Both sides had come to an unspoken agreement that the spars would end for the time being.

Their last destination was the garden, where a table filled with delicious dishes had been set up.

Magical tents also hung overhead, blocking the sunlight and ensuring that the guests could enjoy the food in the shade while observing the garden's splendor.

Alex remained standing, just like Mary.

He paid close attention to the surroundings and realized that even now, Lady Celestria and the fifth Prince of Solara, Prince Garen, were nowhere to be found.

'I assumed that they would be here,' Alex thought. 'Maybe they were told not to meet us at this time. Well, sooner or later they will have to show their faces. There's no need to rush.'

There was still a week before the other Frieden students arrived in the capital city of Solara.

By then, it wouldn't be too late to have a private talk with the two teenagers and ask them a few questions.

"Don't let your mind wander and focus," Mary said in a volume only Alex could hear. "You're here to serve the princess, not to think of anything else."

After being reminded of his role, Alex snapped to attention and focused on attending to the royal siblings.

Meanwhile, Dim Dim was happily chewing the cookie that Lapid handfed it.

The little bun got along well with everyone, and Alex was happy to see Lapid make a new friend.

Although she was the Third Princess of the Elven Kingdom, she didn't have many friends.

More often than not, the reason was because those who approached her tended to compare to her perfect sister, whom everyone looked up to.

Some even approached her just so they could form a connection with Aeris.

Due to countless similar experiences, Lapid felt like everyone who wished to be her friend didn't like her for who she really was but for her relationships with other people. She had begun believing that most of the people trying to befriend her were doing so out of ulterior motives.

This was why she was very happy to befriend Dim Dim, who didn't care about such things.

To a certain extent, she was also opening her heart to the members of Endless Horizon, who never once asked her about her sister. For the first time, she felt like she had found a place where she could just be her true self.

Alex smiled faintly before glancing at the agents of the Demon Worshipers, who were still disappointed that their target hadn't joined the escort mission.

Truth be told, he was thinking about what he should do with them, especially since Lex's presence meant that he and his friends were in no real danger.

'You guys really fancy yourselves the hunters, huh?' Alex sneered internally. 'Just you wait. I'll make sure that you guys are dealt with by hook or by crook.'

Alex's lips curled into a smile that didn't reach his eyes.

He kept his posture relaxed, but every muscle in his body hummed with the kind of alertness that came from training in places where people did not die politely.

If the Demon Worshipers wanted a scrap, they'd get one, but on Alex's terms.

Chapter 466: Whether He Is Good Or Bad Doesn't Matter

"Finally..." Alex sighed in relief after entering his room. "I didn't think that being a butler was this exhausting."

He wasn't tired physically but mentally.

After listening to Mary's instructions and ensuring proper etiquette at all times the whole day, he felt that it was easier to fight monsters than serve as a butler.

"And I have to continue being a butler until the excursion is over." Alex sighed again while lying down on the bed.

He then looked up at the ceiling and decided to take a nap for a bit.

Perhaps due to how drained he was, he drifted off to sleep without even taking his shoes off.

A few minutes later, Lumi entered his room by passing through the walls in her ethereal form.

When she saw that Alex was sleeping on the bed, she decided to take a better look at the butler, who had worked hard until they returned to their hotel.

'He slept without removing his clothes or his mask,' Lumi thought as she sat on the bed, lowering her head to take a closer look at the sleeping young man.

'He only looks gentle when he's asleep,' Lumi mused as she gently parted the hair that covered the young man's forehead.

For some reason, she was more attracted to Alex's current appearance. This was surprising to even her.

Perhaps she was looking for a "mature" version of Alex because she thought that the young man was too childish at times.

Thinking that he might be feeling uncomfortable, she decided to take off his shoes and socks for him.

After doing that, she decided to unbutton the black suit so that the young man could breathe more easily in his sleep.

Since Alex was wearing a white shirt underneath, she thought that he wouldn't mind if he loosened up his clothes.

'Now, that's better.' Lumi nodded after the young man's breathing had become more relaxed.

Noticing that he was starting to sweat a bit, she took her handkerchief and wiped his face gently so that he wouldn't wake up from his sleep.

When she was done she took out a small incense burner from her storage ring and placed it on the side of the bed.

Faint wisp of cold white smoke oozed from it, making the room a little colder than usual.

There were times when even Latifa found it hard to sleep, so Lumi and Lotte would use incense to keep the room cold or warm, depending on the season.

When the room had gotten a bit colder, Lumi thought that it was now a good time to leave.

Suddenly, Latifa reached out to her, making the young lady fall into a trance.

A moment later, a soft sigh escaped Lumi's lips.

She returned to the bed, and looked at the sleeping young man before lying beside him.

Latifa was momentarily borrowing Lumi's body, which was the reason why she had asked her Alter to go to Solara in her place.

Regardless of the distance, she could be together with Alex without leaving the clock tower.

The young lady then hugged Alex, using him as her hug pillow just like usual.

It didn't take long before she, too, fell asleep, while hugging the young man, whom she missed dearly.

— — —

Meanwhile, somewhere in Solara...

"Uncle, isn't this a bit much?" Prince Garen asked Lady Celestria's father.

"It's for her own good," the Duke of Dawn, Percival Dawnflare, replied. "Everyone is waiting for her to make an appearance. Also, according to my subordinate, that young man called Renard Vale is not with the Prince and Princess of Avalon."

"Uncle, Renard is actually a good guy, you know?" Prince Garen added. "I'm sure that you will like him."

"Whether he is good or bad doesn't matter," Duke Percival replied. "My daughter is too precious to associate herself with a commoner."

Prince Garen sighed internally because this issue was something that he couldn't interfere with.

Duke Percival had always believed that nobles should marry among themselves, ensuring that their influence and lineage would continue to remain strong.

"Unfortunately, you don't get to decide who I associate myself with, Father."

A young lady opened the door without bothering to knock and walked inside the room with the confidence and the grace of the Saintess of Solara.

"Do not think that my obedience is akin to agreeing with whatever you are thinking," Lady Celestria stated. "I'm only allowing this... house arrest because I don't have a reason to go out right now."

Duke Percival eyed his daughter coolly, but didn't criticise her rudeness.

Her mother was just as bold as she was, and frankly, the Duke preferred a strong-willed daughter over a weak-minded one.

“Then, should I deal with that commoner brat for your sake?” Duke Percival arched an eyebrow. “I heard that he was challenged to a duel by some of the nobles that wished to ask for your hand in marriage. Do you think he would be able to beat them?”

“Ask ‘The Sun’ instead of me,” Lady Celestria replied with a smile. “After all, His Excellency was the one who asked me to go to Frieden Academy to look for someone. Everything I do is by His Excellency’s will.”

“Really?” Duke Percival crossed his arms over his chest. “Or you are just using His Excellency as a shield to do whatever you wish to do.”

“Who knows?” Lady Celestria’s smile widened a bit. “What do you think, Father?”

“I think you’re being too naughty right now, Celestria,” Duke Percival replied. “His Excellency’s will is absolute. But do not mistake divine purpose for divine indulgence. Even the sun casts shadows, Celestria. Perhaps this boy is one.”

“Perhaps,” Lady Celestria replied, her golden eyes gleaming. “But even shadows only exist because the light allows them to.”

Her father frowned but said nothing more.

The argument had no true conclusion.

It never did.

The Duke would continue to disapprove, and Celestria would continue to follow her own rhythm, as if she danced to a melody that only the heavens could hear.

Prince Garen looked at the father and daughter before scratching his head.

Both of them were strong-willed and stubborn.

Even though Duke Percival was Lady Celestria's father, she was someone who held a special position within the kingdom.

As the Saintess of their Patron Deity, her influence was second only to the King of Solara.

In fact, with just a word, the Knights of the Sun would mobilize and go to a crusade for her.

Fortunately, Lady Celestria wasn't a person who abused her power and authority. She was actually a very gentle, kind, and affectionate person.

But when the time to be firm and stubborn was needed, she was like a bamboo who would sway and dance alongside the storm that could never bring her down.

Chapter 467: You Seem To Be Talking From Experience

The delegation from Frieden Academy was staying at the Soleil Hotel.

It was one of the best hotels in the city and often hosted guests of Solara Academy.

Since it had been reserved for the exclusive use of the First Years, Alex and the other students were allowed to check every nook and cranny of it to ensure that no harm would come to Princess Xenia and Princess Edward.

Fortunately, the hotel staff cooperated. The inspection was completed without too much trouble.

In regards to their accommodations, Alex had no complaints whatsoever.

But if he had to nitpick, the security was not as thorough as he hoped. His room also didn't offer that much protection from prying eyes!

Unfortunately, this wasn't something he could solve by complaining to the staff because it wasn't the fault of the hotel in the first place. He simply had a visitor who could enter and exit his room with or without his permission, sometimes even without his awareness!

For the past four days, he would wake up to Lumi hugging him in her sleep.

Naturally, she always said that Latifa was the one who had temporarily used her body to sleep beside Alex.

The young man didn't know whether she was telling the truth or not. But it was indeed true that Latifa had slept beside him when he had taken a short nap four days ago.

He was already aware that the sleeping beauty could temporarily possess her Alters, allowing her to control their bodies no matter how far her physical form was from them.

Because Alex was taking his mission seriously, he always wore his mask even when he was sleeping.

There was always a chance that the agents of the Demon Worshipers had some kind of artifact that could spy on people even when they were in their hotel rooms. To be on the safe side, he never took his mask off unless he absolutely had to.

The only time he took his mask off was when he was taking a bath because he didn't want to get it wet.

As for Lumi staying inside his room, he decided to just let her be.

'She really looks like Latifa when she's asleep,' Alex thought as he glanced at the young lady hugging him.

Lumi had the sharpest gaze among the Alters, so this stark difference between her sleeping and wakeful expressions was quite precious to see.

Suddenly, Lumi stirred.

The first thing she saw when she opened her eyes was Alex. The young man smiled like a prince and greeted her good morning.

Perhaps Lumi was still half asleep, so she closed her eyes once more and snuggled closer to Alex.

“Five more minutes,” Lumi said before she drifted back to sleep.

The young man looked at the clock on the wall. He still had exactly forty minutes before he needed to be by Princess Xenia’s side.

After an internal struggle, he decided to let Lumi sleep a bit longer.

After waking her up, he would take a quick bath and report for duty.

Mary and him would share a sandwich or two before accompanying the princess to the dining room to have breakfast with the other students.

Having done this for a few days, the young man had mostly adapted to his new schedule and responsibilities.

The only thing that he was worried about was the arrival of the rest of the First Years.

By then, Alex would return to being himself because he already thought of a plan to deal with the agents of the Demon Worshipers.

Five minutes later, he woke Lumi up and the latter sleepily kissed his cheek before passing through the wall to return to her own room.

Alex then headed to the bathroom and twisted the faucet. He was still thinking about the agents of the Demon Worshipers and finalizing his plan.

‘I am not called the Blackmail King for nothing,’ Alex thought as the cold water from the showerhead hit his face. ‘They think they have the advantage, but they don’t really know who they are dealing with.’

Since Lex was also aware of his situation, he had been paying careful attention to the agents of the Demon Worshipers.

In fact, the old man had even managed to track their “accomplices” in Solara and was only waiting for Alex’s orders before making his move.

After knowing that Alex Stratos was arriving in Solara, Demon Worshipers who were Rank 5 and below had flocked into the city and formed groups of their own.

Even a handful of Rank 6—who were originally staying in Solivaine to spy for their organization—had joined them.

Alex didn’t plan to deal with them right now, but the small fries were fair game.

A few minutes later, he knocked on Xenia’s door.

“Come in.”

When the young man entered the room, he was surprised to see that Princess Xenia was still in her nightgown, calmly sipping some coffee by the window.

Mary stood behind her like the dutiful maid that she was.

“Should I come back later?” Alex asked. “Maybe after Her Highness has finished dressing up?”

Alex made sure to keep his gaze low. He did not want the Princess, whom he treated as a close friend, to feel uncomfortable by his presence.

“Alex, I’ve been wondering something as of late. What do you plan to do in the future?” Princess Xenia asked.

Her gaze shifted from the scene outside of her window to the young man who seemed really engrossed by the carpet's pattern around his feet.

"My plan is to live a peaceful life after graduating from the academy," Alex answered. "Have a dozen kids and raise them with my wives."

Princess Xenia smiled faintly after hearing the young man's answer.

"Are you talking about Latifa and Lavinia?" Princess Xenia teased.

"I'm sorry, but my private life is my own, Your Highness," Alex replied, not budging an inch.

Princess Xenia chuckled and decided not to pry.

"Alex, if you ever get into trouble with the Demon Worshipers, you can just continue working as my butler for as long as you need," Princess Xenia offered.

"Thank you for the offer, Your Highness," Alex replied. "If I become desperate enough, I'll make sure to hide behind your back."

"Good." Princess Xenia took another sip of her coffee before asking Alex to wait outside the door for fifteen minutes.

The young man obeyed and left the room, leaving Princess Xenia and Mary behind.

While Alex was waiting for the princess to get dressed, Chuck suddenly appeared with Dim Dim perched on top of his head.

"Good morning, Alex."

"Dim Dim!"

“Good morning, Chuck. Good morning, Dim Dim.”

The three chatted idly talking about the First Years who had tried to flirt with the girls on their delegation a few days ago.

“I’m surprised that you’re not getting jealous with how popular Lavinia and Lumi are with the students here,” Chuck said in a mischievous tone. “Are you not afraid that someone might be able to charm them?”

“How about you?” Alex arched an eyebrow. “Mary is also very popular with the students. There were even nobles who promised to make her their concubine.”

“Good luck to them.” Chuck shrugged. “They are underestimating how scary that lady is behind closed doors.”

Alex smirked. “You seem to be talking from experience.”

“That is because I AM talking from experience,” Chuck replied. “That girl is crazy in...”

Suddenly, the door opened and Mary stepped out, looking at Chuck as if he was already a dead man.

“I mean,” Chuck said hastily, “that girl is crazy beautiful behind closed doors.”

The young man had enough self-preservation instinct left in him to immediately reverse whatever he was going to say and ensure that only praises would pass his lips from this moment forth. “That long, silky hair, that sexy body, that voice that makes you shudder every time she calls your name. That...”

“Shut up,” Mary instructed. “The Princess is done changing clothes.”

The maid then moved to the side, allowing Princess Xenia to walk through the door.

She was wearing a casual dress, which made Alex think that the princess planned to take a stroll around the city like a normal tourist.

“After breakfast, we will visit the attractions of Solivaine,” Princess Xenia declared. “I will only be bringing my Uncle and two guards with me. The two of you will also accompany me on this trip.”

“Can I say no?” Chuck voiced out. “Actually, some First Years from Solara Academy invited me for lunch yesterday.”

“You have two choices.” Princess Xenia smiled. “Accompany me or don’t accompany me ever again.”

Chuck blinked before heaving a long and deep sigh.

“Fine, I’ll go,” Chuck replied. “How long will we be out?”

“Until sunset,” Princess Xenia answered. “I already made arrangements to have dinner with Lady Celestria today.”

At the mention of the Saintess’s name, Alex and Chuck perked up.

They had been trying to find an opportunity to talk to the young lady. Unfortunately but quite understandably, she seemed to be intentionally avoiding them.

Now that they had the opportunity to see her, Alex, and Chuck decided to get into the bottom of the true story of why Renard suddenly found himself in the crosshairs of the noble young men of the kingdom of Solara.

Chapter 468: Taking A Stroll In The City Of Solivane

Xenia walked side by side with Mary, who had also changed into more casual clothes at the princess’s request.

She had ordered Alex and Chuck to do the same so that they could roam the city like actual tourists.

The guards following the princess from a safe distance were in dress shirts with loud, garish prints that shouted, "We aren't locals!"

While that was tacky, Xenia and Alphonse reasoned that Demon Worshipers would assume that someone dressed this way could not possibly be travelling incognito.

Besides, such shirts seemed oddly popular among visitors.

Princess Xenia had already given her itinerary to her guards so that they would not have a hard time following her through the crowd.

"Both of them looked like they're used to doing this," Chuck said to Alex, who was walking a few steps away from the two ladies.

"I think Prin—errr Xenia needs to unwind from time to time," Alex replied. "The role she plays is very important. I am sure it comes with a lot of pressure. It's like she's working all the time without any day off. Playing truant for a day isn't a bad thing."

Chuck nodded in agreement. He was engaged to the princess due to a political agreement between his father and the King of Avalon.

However, he had already had a heart-to-heart talk with Princess Xenia. She knew that Chuck was only doing this for the sake of his sick mother.

The princess had also given her word that she would help to search for the ingredients needed for the cure. Until then, they would remain engaged to each other so that the King wouldn't set her up with another noble who might be... less pliant.

It wasn't because she wasn't loved by her father.

On the contrary, she was treasured and treated well by the King. However, she was still a princess, and as a princess, she needed to make sacrifices for the sake of her people.

"The majority of people think that being born in a noble household is a good thing," Chuck said. "But it still depends on which noble household you are born to. While I do agree that being born into aristocracy has its advantages, sometimes, I wish that I had a different father."

Alex could tell from his friend's tone that his relationship with his father wasn't the best.

"Alex, I've always been curious, where is your hometown?" Chuck suddenly changed the topic. "I've asked Dim Dim, but it wouldn't give me any answer."

Alex glanced at the little bun, who was humming while resting on top of Chuck's head.

It was enjoying the scenery around it, but still paying enough attention to catch the conversation between the two teenagers.

"I came from a very far away place, Chuck," Alex replied.

"Where exactly?" Chuck asked. "Come on. Aren't we friends? You can tell me."

Alex steeled himself. "Well, since you insist, I'm going to tell you where I came from."

Chuck looked at his friend with anticipation because this was something that he had wanted to know for a very long time.

"I came from there." Alex pointed at the sky above their heads.

"You came from... up there?" Chuck asked in disbelief. "Who do you think you are? Mr. Bean? Someone who fell from the sky?"

Dim Dim giggled after hearing Chuck's comment. The little bun did know someone named Mr. Bean and it found that guy quite amusing.

Alex didn't know if he should laugh or cry. He had told the truth, but Chuck refused to believe him!

"Tsk!" Chuck clicked his tongue. "Do you think you can fool me? I'm sure next time you'll say that you were shot out of a cannon and somehow landed in Arcana."

Alex and Dim Dim blinked at the same time.

This had really happened. But there was no way Chuck would buy that.

In the end, Alex just shook his head helplessly and changed the subject.

The teenagers strolled around the city for several hours, enjoying the sights and sounds that Solivane had to offer.

More than once, Chuck was forced to share the food he had bought from street stalls with Princess Xenia and Mary. Alex and Dim Dim smirked as the poor guy grumbled under his breath.

Chuck complained that the two could buy their own food, but the two girls simply preferred eating food he had bought for himself.

For Alex, this was the most relaxing trip he had experienced in the city.

But this simple happiness came to an end over lunch.

When Princess Xenia decided to eat at a restaurant near a popular attraction, Lavinia, Latifa, Lumi, Evangeline, and Eleanora also arrived at the same place by "accident".

Of course, Alex did not believe this was a coincidence. Lumi had this knack of finding him wherever he went that sometimes he wondered if she or Latifa had placed a tracking spell on his body.

For some reason, the two always knew where he was.

Lumi had even found Alex in the old library when he had been having a private talk with Evangeline.

Alex suddenly found himself stuck between Lavinia and Evangeline while Lumi sat across from him.

“Say ahh...” Lumi said as she spoonfed Alex with some ice cream.

Lavinia and Evangeline blinked at the same time before they, too, scooped up some ice cream and shoved it into Alex’s mouth in spite of his protests.

“Girls, are you forgetting that I am disguised?” Alex said softly after swallowing the ice cream. “Why are you trying to expose me like this?”

“Don’t worry, no one is following your group,” Eleanora replied. “We have been following you since earli— I mean, we were touring the city just like you and we didn’t see anyone suspicious.”

Alex sighed internally and thought that he should have opened his map during their stroll.

If he had done that, he would have easily noticed that the girls from his club were secretly following them from behind.

The only reason why he hadn’t done that was because he didn’t want to rely on his map too much.

If he were to always have to check his map, his senses would dull. He would always be ill at ease unless he checked his map.

This was the same training he had done with Dim Dim in the past. The little bun could detect monsters like a monster radar.

But since Alex had wanted to develop his own monster sense, he had asked Dim Dim to let him do the scouting. He could never gain experience if he never did anything himself.

“Where are you going after this?” Lavinia asked. “Will you go back to the hotel?”

Alex shook his head. “No. Princess Xenia is going to have dinner with Lady Celestria.”

The girls seemed to all come to an understanding, so they no longer continued the topic.

All of them were curious to know if Lady Celestria was truly in a relationship with Renard. Back then, the two had become close, but they hadn’t seemed more than friends.

This was why they had been all surprised by the nobles suddenly showing up at their school and kicking up a fuss.

“Will you go with the princess?” Lumi asked.

Alex nodded. “If possible, I want to talk to Lady Celestria in private. There are a few things I want to ask her.”

“Then will you be back late?” Evangeline asked. “I plan to have a midnight snack later.”

The term “midnight snack” was actually Alex’s and Evangeline’s code word for “I want to suck your blood tonight.”

He agreed to let her drink his blood once a week. It had indeed been a week since he had shared his blood with her.

“I don’t know when I’ll be back,” Alex answered. “There is also the possibility that Lady Celestria would ask the princess to stay over for the night.”

Evangeline nodded in understanding because this was quite a common thing among noble families.

Since there was a chance that Alex wouldn't be able to return in time, she decided to just wait for another opportunity to drink her fill.

After a very tiring lunch, Alex once again followed the princess as she explored the city.

The other ladies from his club also continued their own sightseeing, but they took a different route and no longer followed Alex and his group around.

After the princess finally got tired of walking, she hired a carriage to take her and her escorts to the mansion of the Duke of Dawn.

Alex and Chuck gave each other a knowing glance because the time to meet Lady Celestria had finally come.

They hoped that the young lady would be able to answer their questions because it involved the safety of their guild member, who was training hard every day back in Frieden Academy.

Chapter 469: Dragged Into A Drama He Didn't Ask For

"Welcome to the Dawn Estate, Princess Xenia," Percival Dawnflare said with a smile. "You bless us with your presence."

Deeming the occasion important enough, Lady Celestria had chosen to inform her father about the dinner invitation she had given the third princess of Avalon.

The father and daughter didn't get along on most things out of stubbornness, but when it came to upholding the honor and dignity of their house, both of them would play their role perfectly.

"Thank you for coming, Princess." Lady Celestria smiled. "I apologize for my failure to welcome you and the rest of the students from Solara a few days ago. I had matters to attend to at the time."

Princess Xenia reciprocated the Saintess's smile. "You don't need to apologize, Lady Celestria. I'm just glad to see you now."

After exchanging some pleasantries, Princess Xenia introduced her fiancé, Chuck, to them.

As for Mary and Alex, she simply said that they were her trusted servants.

The Knights protecting Princess Xenia from a distance didn't enter the mansion. Instead, they waited outside the gate.

No one bothered them, for the estate guards had already been informed about Princess Xenia's security.

Both sides were just doing their job, so they made sure to mind their own business. After all, no one wanted to be bothered in the middle of work.

Inside the Mansion...

"We've prepared some local delicacies for all of you to enjoy," Duke Percival explained as he gestured for everyone to sit. "Please, enjoy them to your heart's content."

The table was covered with many delicious dishes that Alex had never seen before.

Having been taught etiquette, Alex made sure to eat properly so Princess Xenia and Mary wouldn't look down on him later.

However, when he glanced at Chuck, the young man felt that all of his effort was wasted.

Chuck was oddly casual when he ate, even feeding Dim Dim food from his plate.

However, no matter what he did, his every move was done so perfectly that no one could find fault in it!

Chuck had that grace and confidence that could only come from the unshakable belief that he was perfection personified even if he ate with his hands.

In fact, it wasn't only Alex who was having these thoughts.

Duke Percival and Lady Celestria, as well as the butler and maids who were present in the dining room, couldn't help but give the young man a thumbs-up in their hearts.

Princess Xenia and Mary ate without even glancing at Chuck. Clearly, both of them were already used to his antics whenever they were around nobles.

When they dined privately, Chuck returned to his usual self and simply ate like everyone else, with little care for elegance or manners.

Duke Percival coughed a little to dispel the spell Chuck seemed to have almost everyone under. "Your Highness, I've heard that you're looking for interesting places to visit in Solara," the Duke said. "If your itinerary still has room to squeeze in a new attraction, I would be glad to show you around our hunting grounds."

Seeing Xenia's eyes brighten, the Duke continued, "Our hunting grounds might not be the biggest or most breathtaking, but we have taken care of the place for generations. It is the closest to unspoiled nature without sacrificing convenience or safety. By carriage, it's about two hours away from the city. By airship, mere minutes."

"That sounds wonderful, Your Grace," Princess Xenia replied. "I heard that the private hunting grounds of the Dawnflare Family have many amazing beasts within. I would indeed love to see it while I'm here in Solara."

The Duke smiled faintly after hearing the princess's praise.

His private hunting grounds were indeed a great place to visit. In fact, many hunting events were held there, and even the members of the royal family would participate from time to time.

“Then it’s settled.” Duke Percival chuckled. “There’s still three days before the rest of the Frieden students arrive here in Solivane.

“They may want to explore the city later on, so how about we visit the hunting grounds six days from now? After all, there’s still that duel everyone among our circle is looking forward to.”

Princess Xenia kept smiling and acknowledged the Duke’s statement.

“Indeed,” Princess Xenia replied. “A few young men visited our academy and challenged Renard Vale to a duel. Since he is also part of my club, I am also looking forward to his performance.”

Her words implied she had no intention of stopping the duel even if she thought the young nobles had overstepped.

Alex glanced at the Saintess and wondered if she would comment on the duel. But Lady Celestria continued to eat and simply listened to the conversation.

Of course, Chuck wasn’t going to let her have her way.

“I don’t mean to be rude, Lady Celestria, but what do you think of this duel?” Chuck asked. “Renard’s academy life was moving along peacefully when a few nobles suddenly barged in. They then challenged him for a duel, thinking that he had become your boyfriend.

“I may not be super close to Renard, but I know he’s single-mindedly pursuing his goal of becoming the strongest student in the academy. Renard may not be as handsome as me, not as dashing, graceful, cultured...”

Chuck paused for a few seconds, tapping his chin dramatically as if thinking of more praises to pile on himself.

“Nor as magnanimous, well-read, socially gifted, spiritually centered, devastatingly charming, flawlessly groomed, impossibly humble, and universally beloved as I am...”

“But he’s still a hardworking young man. I may outshine the heavens themselves, but Renard has potential. It just feels unfair that he’s suddenly dragged into such a silly drama that didn’t concern him just because some nobles were not raised to know shame and decorum.”

Alex almost choked on his drink because Chuck was the furthest thing from humble.

Even Duke Percival’s lips twitched. Meanwhile, the butler and maids wondered what kind of weed the young man was smoking.

Lady Celestria finally looked at Chuck as if seeing his true nature for the first time.

She didn’t look offended, merely surprised that someone could praise himself that extensively with such natural confidence.

Princess Xenia resumed her meal but something about the way she was cutting her steak told Alex that in her mind she was slicing through the flesh of her fiancé.

If she didn’t allow the anger to fill her, she would be consumed by the urge to find a hole somewhere on Duke Percival’s vast estate to bury herself in.

Mary rubbed her forehead. She was used to this but still not completely immune to secondhand embarrassment.

The room fell silent for a brief moment.

For that brief moment, Alex even thought that he could hear a cricket chirping.

Perhaps, the only one that wasn’t affected by the tension was Dim Dim, who was nibbling one of the macarons that had been piled on its small plate.

Lady Celestria blinked once then twice before she finally remembered where she was.

Duke Percival leaned back slightly, as if overwhelmed by the sheer audacity radiating from their guest.

When everyone thought that things couldn't possibly get worse, the Saintess finally opened her mouth to give her reply.

Chapter 470: Like Oil And Water

"I have no excuse for the hardship and confusion that Renard has suffered because of this incident," Lady Celestria replied. "It truly isn't my intention to implicate him. I had simply answered a question during one of the parties held after our return from Frieden Academy.

"A noble, who happens to be my suitor, asked if I had someone in mind. My answer had been vague. I told him that I had met many outstanding candidates at Frieden Academy, and if I were to choose someone as my partner, I'd probably look there.

"No name was mentioned, but my fellow students who had accompanied me on that trip noticed that I had been exceptionally close to Renard. They must've assumed that I was talking about him. It reached the ears of other nobles, spurring them to create trouble for Renard and Frieden Academy.

"I plan to give him a proper apology when he arrives here in Solivane. About the duel, I have every intention of stopping it and making a public apology for causing the misunderstanding."

"Oh, you shouldn't stop the duel."

"Don't stop the duel."

Mary turned to look at Chuck and Alex, who looked back at her with the same surprise she was feeling.

Their mouths—and greed—had moved on their own.

Alex almost slapped himself, having forgotten, for a brief moment, that he was supposed to be Sebastian Mikeaelis the butler.

Perhaps noticing Alex's plight, Chuck decided to draw everyone's attention to himself.

"Why would you stop something absolutely entertaining?" Chuck asked. "Also, even if you personally apologize, the duel will still continue. Who do you think Renard is?"

"That guy likes to beat up people every single day. He's been training for an entire month for this duel. If you come and try to stop it, won't he hate you?"

Lady Celestria frowned. "He will hate me if I stop the duel?"

She failed to understand why that would be the case.

"My Lady, men are simple creatures," Chuck declared. "For the sake of leaving a good impression on a lady, they are willing to do many things. The nobles who challenged Renard are just like that too.

"Even if you stop the duel now, they will simply find another way to cause trouble and force Renard to fight them. Since that is the case, won't it be better to hold that duel publicly so the many pairs of eyes on them will force them to behave properly?"

"That way, they will not resort to underhanded tricks. My friend, Alex Stratos, will also earn some cash on the side. As for Renard, he will be able to punch people to his heart's content. This is hitting three birds with one stone."

Alex gave Chuck two thumbs-up in his heart. Since he planned to charge an entrance fee to the Colosseum that could fit tens of thousands of people, he had a solid chance of drowning in money.

Even if he only got thirty to forty percent of the profits and gave the rest to the organizers, he would still make a killing as long as he charged ten gold coins per person.

For nobles, ten gold coins was nothing. In fact, they were likely willing to pay more to see their fellow nobles beat the crap out of a commoner who dared to "covet" their Saintess!

"I did hear that Alex is the one who organized this duel," Lady Celestria replied. "But is Renard really fine with dueling people who unjustly challenged him?"

"It is precisely because it is unjust that it is an insult that you cannot expect a man to take lying down," Chuck pointed out. "But that's not important. The only thing that matters is whether you will watch the duel or not. Last but not least, make sure to clarify things with Renard after the duel ends."

The implication of those words left Celestria wordless, but Chuck wasn't done.

"The last thing I want to see is Renard developing some kind of hate for women after this incident. I don't know if you are in a relationship with him, but for his sake, it will be best to be honest about it. That way, he won't be chained by something called false hope."

Princess Xenia and Mary wondered if Chuck had drunk the Conqueror's Heart Potion because he looked so confident and suave right now.

He spoke calmly and firmly, as if he wasn't in the presence of a Duke and the Saintess of a neighboring kingdom.

Suddenly, Duke Percival laughed out loud.

"Celestria, this young man is to my liking," Duke Percival said. "I don't mind if you decide to marry him. Just say the word, and I'll go to the Kingdom of Avalon to play matchmaker for you."

Princess Xenia coughed lightly, prompting the Duke to turn to her.

"Sir Chuck is engaged to me, Your Grace," Princess Xenia stated softly. "I'm afraid he is in no position to agree to your suggestion."

"Such a shame." Duke Percival sighed. "He has some good genes. I'm sure that he and Celestria would have angelic children if they were to end up together."

Chuck blinked once then twice before tilting his head to the side.

“Where am I?” Chuck blinked. “Who am I?”

Princess Xenia and Mary glared at the young man who was feigning amnesia to get out of his current situation.

“What kind of person is this Renard fellow?” Duke Percival asked. “I’m now getting curious about him.”

“Renard may not be as handsome, dashing—”

Chuck was about to say more, but Princess Xenia coughed lightly and silenced him with a steely glare, so the young man decided to skip those praises entirely.

“Renard is a straightforward person, but he is also very cautious and independent,” Chuck explained. “It’s why he constantly strives to grow stronger. He believes that only by becoming the strongest can he handle any situation that life throws at him.

“I don’t know why he is like that, but he is what he is. It’s why I advised Lady Celestria to be honest with him. I observed the two of you back at Frieden Academy and while I don’t believe that the two of you are lovers, I am certain both of you are at least friends.

“Renard doesn’t let people into his heart so easily. Gaining his trust is akin to gaining a treasure. If Lady Celestria breaks that trust, I fear that it is something she may never regain.”

Chuck paused for a while before adding something.

“Well, I think Renard also trusts one person the most.” Chuck smiled. “Perhaps he even believes in that person more than he believes in Lady Celestria.”

At that, the Saintess’s expression turned solemn, genuinely curious about this mysterious individual.

“That person is none other than our club president, Alex Stratos,” Chuck declared. “Truth be told, Renard and our club president are like oil and water. They don’t really get along. I think Renard trusts him because he knows that he cannot be trusted.”

Alex almost threw the knife in his hand at the bastard who was talking sh*t about him right in front of his face.

But he held himself back since it was indeed true!

Princess Xenia and Mary also smirked, for they also knew about Alex’s interesting relationship with Renard.

After becoming part of the Endless Horizon Club, they had seen how the two interacted with each other.

However, after pondering for a bit, they had to concede that Chuck wasn’t just funny. He was also right.

Although Alex and Renard had a complicated relationship, they were usually on the same page when it came to protecting their club. For matters that were truly important, both young men had no difficulties setting aside their differences.