

Evil 281

Chapter 281 - 281: Departure.

The day after the festival, the journalists spread Anastasha's words about her decision to compete with her siblings for the head position. They also wrote about her significant influence across South Neva after Rasmus and Anastasha revealed they were the key figures behind the peace in South Neva. They believed the news would shake the world, especially in East Neva, because the Asghar family was one of the pillars of East Neva.

"You're leaving already, Count? We haven't even celebrated our collaboration," Anastasha said as she watched Rasmus pack his clothes into his suitcase. "Can we at least have a drink? A tea, perhaps?" She asked as she crossed her arms.

"Can you protect yourself, Princess?" Rasmus dismissed Anastasha's suggestion and asked back at her instead.

Anastasha sighed as she leaned against the wall, staring out the window where the snow was no longer falling. She noticed that spring was coming, and the cold would no longer bother her anymore in South Neva.

"I'll stay here, strengthening my influence with Archduke's help. The peace here, it feels like an illusion, a temporary relief..." Anastasha answered with a serious expression as she kept staring out the window. "After all, you bestowed me with significant help from Lady Erlina's people. I'll keep them as they are when you leave and when she comes back," she continued, and looked at Rasmus.

"Use them as many times as you need, just don't ruin her hard work. Although it's not mine, she's my people, and I have to keep everything she has safe," Rasmus said with a serious expression and stared right into Anastasha's eyes.

"I promise, in my name," Anastasha nodded with understanding. "But with one condition, and that's to have one last tea time with me, Count," she smiled mischievously.

Rasmus sighed as he nodded, agreeing with her condition.

"Then I'll take my leave, Count Blackheart. I'll be waiting in my chamber," Anastasha chuckled as she left Rasmus's room.

As soon as Anastasha left, Aris entered with Carrion and Daryus. They took their time to watch Anastasha walk the long hallway, on her own with a folding fan in her right hand.

"I didn't think you had that kind of bond with her," Carrion said as he stood at the door and watched Rasmus pack his stuff.

"It's beneficial, nothing more. She acts that way because she has finally found someone that she can be comfortable with," Rasmus responded as he put his suitcase in his spatial ring. "And? What is it?" He raised his brows as he used his cane to support his weight.

"Sorceress Agnesia left this morning. You were asleep, so she didn't want to wake you up. She then came to me and gave me this..." Carrion showed a sealed letter in his right hand. "She said that you might need this," he offered the letter to Rasmus. "But she said that you shouldn't open it before you awakened," he continued.

Rasmus took the letter and wondered what the content of the letter was. He then put the letter in his spatial ring, remembering about the letter in the back of his head.

"Is everyone ready to leave?" Rasmus looked at Daryus and Carrion.

"Yes, we are ready to leave, Count. We are waiting for Saint Serena since she's still in the meeting hall with the rulers of South Neva. We don't know why she summoned them, but I believe it has something to do with her past, especially when former Saint Astrea was with her," Daryus answered as he put his hands behind his back.

Daryus was expecting Rasmus to ask about Serena, but to his surprise, Rasmus only responded with a hum and seemed unbothered. It was similar to what happened when he asked Rasmus for help, he didn't say a word and decided to help him without hesitation.

"Then I'll have tea with the Princess. It won't take long," Rasmus said as he walked toward the door with a can that supported his weight. "Make sure there's no unfinished business, Carrion. We might be a while in Central Neva, and we might be involved in the same situation as her, facing the emissaries of evil," he said as he looked at Carrion from over his shoulder.

"There's nothing else for me to deal with here, don't worry. And for the latter, I know," Carrion responded with a serious expression as he nodded with understanding.

Rasmus nodded and then left the room, but suddenly Aris decided to follow him. He was curious, but he decided to stay quiet because there must be a reason why she wanted to tag along.

(At the same time in the meeting hall)

Emperors, Kings, and high-ranking nobles were frozen still in their seats when they found out the corruption behind the Holy Nation. It was Astrea who revealed that one of her Cardinals, one of her and her late mother's trusted aides, orchestrated the death of Serena a long time ago. They couldn't believe it when they heard that the Holy Nation would do such a thing.

"It doesn't matter if it was to prevent the prophecy. The issue was that he did it behind everyone's back, and it caused thousands of lives in the process. There was nothing noble about it, not even in the slightest," Astrea said with a serious expression, feeling ashamed that someone had ruined and tarnished the Holy Nation.

"Your Holiness... I mean, Lady Astrea. I apologize if I offended you in any way, but do you believe the Holy Nation has done things that were behind your back?" Dasmont asked with his brows furrowed.

"It's possible and it has been in my mind ever since I found the record of the death of Saint Serena," Astrea answered, the shame and guilt were written all over her face, even though most of her face was covered in bandages. "What I'm afraid of is that the fact there's a demon worshipper even among the high ranks in the Holy Nation, and to see my daughter has to lead with those people behind her back, I can't feel at ease..." she continued, her voice barely above a whisper.

Everyone in the hall had seen people whom they thought to be righteous, kind, and benevolent, who turned out to be demon worshipers. The possibility of demon worshipers acting as high-ranking priests, bishops, or even cardinals wasn't small. They began to wonder how deeply rooted those demon worshipers were, and how they had managed to hide their identity for the past hundreds of years.

"The Great Era of Neva, the mystery behind the war is still there," Thalior said as he looked at everyone at the table. "What we know right now might only scrape the surface of an iceberg. We need to know the real answer to what was happening back then," he continued.

"Great Sage Lenin mentioned something about that a while ago," Astrea said as she stared blankly at the table. "She mentioned the Blackheart family and the reason behind their rebellion. She believed Rasmus's late father kept the record of what happened during the Great Era," she continued.

"So, the rebellion that the Blackheart family did was because they knew about the truth? And we were the ones who stopped them and helped the demon worshipers indirectly?" A king asked, realizing that the ones who fought evil were killed by humankind.

"I'm afraid so, Your Highness," Astrea answered as she nodded slowly. "We were the ones who helped the demon worshipers to live comfortably now because nobody else knew about them other than the Blackheart family," she continued.

"Then, does Count Blackheart know about this?" A Duke asked as he raised his hand.

"He doesn't know. The answers to the reason behind Blackheart's family rebellion lie in his late father's journal. The demon worshipers have been openly looking for that journal as well as we speak, and they have been doing that in the past few months," Astrea answered as she shook her head. "Whatever in that journal, that will help us a lot," she continued.

Everyone nodded without saying a word, thinking it would be a great discovery and would change the tide if they knew the figures that were a part of the demonic cult. Eliminating them would slow down the emissaries of evil's movements, and it would give them the advantage of what they were dealing with.

"Lady Astrea, everyone must be waiting," Serena said as she looked at Astrea.

"You're right..." Astrea looked at the time. "We have to go, Your Highnesses, Lords..." she smiled gently at everyone at the table.

Serena got up and was ready to push the wheelchair that Astrea was in. She watched all the figures lower their heads for one last time to bid the two of them farewell and to show gratitude for saving South Neva from its doom. Once everyone had given their final last words, Serena brought Astrea out of the hall.

"Are you going to be alright, Saint Serena?" Astrea asked as she slowly lifted her head to look at Serena, who pushed her wheelchair.

"About what, Lady Astrea?" Serena looked down and stared at Astrea with a gentle gaze.

"About going to Central Neva, and to face the man who orchestrated your death," Astrea asked. "I'll make sure his deeds are severely punished, but what would you do when you saw him in person?" She asked, worried that Serena would lose control of herself since a Saint was still a human after all.

"I would do nothing," Serena smiled gently at Astrea. "Let's not focus on me, Lady Astrea. It's time for us to go bring you back home, to be with your daughter again and live for her," she continued and smiled with her eyes closed.

"Yes, you're right... I have been waiting for this day to come back home..." Astrea smiled weakly.

After a long preparation, Astrea, Lenin, Novia, Serena, Rasmus, and his people left the headquarters. Their departure wasn't known to the public, and they went straight to the harbor that belonged to the Marines, where Arka was waiting for them.

"What are we going to do first? Erlina asked as she sat across from Rasmus in the carriage.

"Nothing, just follow Lady Astrea to the Holy Nation. We are going to make a mess, a lot of mess..." Rasmus answered as he stared out the window with a stoic expression.

Chapter 282 - 282: Blind obedience.

"So, uh..." Carrion scratched the back of his head nervously as he looked at the table. "We are going to do this here?" He looked at Erlina who only wore a night gown in front of him.

"It's going to take days on this ship... are you going to let me get cold every night like this?" Erlina asked as she wrapped her arms around Carrion's neck.

"God damn it! I lost!" Carrion hid his face with his hands, his ears were red.

Erlina laughed as she pulled her hands away from Carrion and then grabbed the glass of whiskey. She offered the full glass of whiskey to Carrion, and forced him to drink it all in a single breathing.

Carrion struggled to swallow the whiskey that he almost gagged. Once he managed to not throw it all up, he collapsed on the floor as he groaned.

"It's unfair to use your body for this challenge..." Carrion said as he tried to sit up and looked at Erlina and the others at the table. "Ugh... Having to drink in the ship is a bad idea..." he groaned as he held his head.

Astrea couldn't help but laugh and flustered at those two because of their indecent and vulgar displays. She was embarrassed and overwhelmed because she had never seen or experience anything like that before.

"You two... Lady Astrea and Saint Serena are here with us. Please, behave..." Daryus said with a serious expression, however his face was red from witnessing it.

Serena didn't even react to those two's actions since she was Lilith underneath the body. She had so many things down in hell, and how her children seduced then tortured sinners there. What those two did was pale in comparison to what her children did to the tormented souls.

Lenin reacted almost the same as Serena since she didn't find something like that to be taboo. However, Novia was quite the opposite, she kept covering her eyes the whole time because she couldn't handle public affection.

Rasmus didn't even bat an eye toward those two and kept his eyes on the book he was reading. However, he didn't find the commotion to be disturbing or annoying. He enjoyed the light mood that Erlina always brought with her, and it was a pleasant to have her around.

Aris watched the whole thing without blinking her eyes. She was curious about human emotions, especially toward affection. She found it endearing and how something so simple could make them happy.

"Rasmus, can you ask about it to Her Holiness?" Carrion asked as he leaned his body toward Rasmus. His face was red, completely drunk and oblivious to what he was saying. "You know... that thing?" He slouched and slurred like a drunkard.

Rasmus knew what Carrion meant while the others were confused and curious about his words. Rasmus looked at Carrion's eyes that were barely open. Even though he couldn't smell anything, he knew that Carrion's breath smelled like alcohol.

"Can you sit still first?" Rasmus asked as he stared right into Carrion's eyes.

Carrion responded with a giggle, and his body was about to collapse, but Erlina stopped him from falling. Since it was her doing, she was responsible for Carrion's current state. She pushed Carrion onto the chair, and then sat beside him, making sure he wouldn't fall to the side.

"Lady Astrea, everyone might have this lingered in their heads. Carrion is wondering, if you have a husband since there's no history or knowledge about him," Rasmus asked as he closed his book and looked at Astrea.

Everyone became quiet and looked at Rasmus in disbelief to asking for something like that of Astrea. Although he wasn't wrong that they were also curious about it, that question was a bit too personal and quite rude to ask.

"Because there's none, Count," Astrea answered as she smiled at Rasmus. "However, Aurelia is indeed my biological daughter," she continued.

Everyone sat still, not saying a word and even held their breath, waiting for Astrea to explain it further.

"I did experience the love making, but there was no love or intimacy in it. I don't even know who I slept with and who's Aurelia's father because I didn't chose the man, the elders did," Astrea said in a gentle voice as she looked at the table blankly. "They chose a perfect candidate, then they brought him into a pitch black chamber. Then I was informed about it and went there, did it in complete darkness," she revealed.

"I didn't remember that much of that day, or it was because I tried to forget about it," Astrea continued as she looked down at her wrapped with bandages hands. "That's the way of how the Saint keeps producing an heir, at least in the Holy Nation. I don't know how it works for the Sancticus family up north since they can produce more than one heir," she continued.

Everyone could tell that Astrea was uncomfortable talking about that matter.

"And you're fine with Aurelia to follow that path?" Rasmus asked with a stoic expression.

"Honestly, I don't know, Count. Do you think a Saint is allowed to care more toward one person than her followers?" Astrea asked back.

"Allowed? Who forbid it? God?" Rasmus asked back at her again.

When Rasmus mentioned God, Astrea couldn't answer the question. There wasn't a single rule that a Saint couldn't have a partner.

"You're no longer a Saint, Lady Astrea. It's time for you to live as a mother, purely as a mother who wants nothing but the best for Aurelia. She's bright and compassionate, but don't ruin her with a blind obedience. She was born with unnecessary heavy burdens while others saw it as virtue and blessing. Become someone that she can be comfortable and be away from her duty," Rasmus said as he opened his book and continued reading.

The room became silent once again, and this time it was heavier. Mothers like Astrea and Lenin found Rasmus's words to be eye-opening, realizing what they had neglected for the one they loved. For Erlina and the others, they were burdened by their responsibilities, realizing they were born with something that they didn't ask for. The pain, the suffering, the sacrifice, and the bad things that happened to them, it was all connected to what Rasmus said.

"Count, have you always been this empathetic toward people?" Astrea asked out of curiosity because in the past weeks, she felt like she was being comforted by Rasmus in his own way.

"Not toward people, Lady Astrea. He cares toward people he sees fit," Erlina smiled as she looked at Astrea. "You just don't want the people around you to make mistakes, right, Count?" She chuckled, teasing Rasmus, who was focused on the book.

"Mistakes aren't always bring regrets. Some right choices can bring regrets. I just want to make them not to have those regrets," Rasmus answered as he kept reading.

"Well, there you have it, Lady Astrea," Erlina smiled gently at Astrea.

Astrea smiled as she chuckled softly and nodded, finding all of Rasmus words to carve into her mind. She knew Rasmus didn't have any moral compass, but every time she was with him, he spoke nothing but the truth. It was hard for her to put him in which side he belonged to.

"How do you do that, Count? How do you always have the right words to say?" Lenin asked as she crossed her arms.

"Because I don't open my mouth to something that I don't fully understand. It's not that I'm always right, I just speak when I know what's right," Rasmus answered as he flipped the page and kept reading.

"What an admirable self-control you have there, Count," Lenin smiled as she leaned toward the table and stared right into Rasmus's eyes. "Anyway, when are you going to tell us the truth about your servant, Videl? I know that the paladin that serves Saint Serena is him. I have never seen your servants ever since Archduke Thalior mentioned his disappearance a few months ago," she confronted with a smirk on her face.

Novia and Astrea didn't know about that, and when Lenin mentioned it, they began to realize about the disappearance of Rasmus's butler, Videl. Carrion and the others didn't react to it since they already knew, and they didn't want to get involved in this issue.

"Ah, seeing that your people aren't reacting, that means they already know," Lenin said with a smile as she stared at Rasmus.

"They knew, and I didn't try to hide it in the first place, Great Sage. Nobody asked about it, and I don't need to reveal it anyway," Rasmus answered as he stared back at Lenin. "You already know how powerful Videl was back when we went to the spatial room. But the real question is, why do you want to know a lot about him? Is there a specific reason why you're prying on the background of the people that follow me? Is that out of fear, suspicion, or something else?" He asked with a stoic expression.

"Nothing to be worried about, Count. I'm asking out of curiosity because you seem to have planted a lot of seeds wherever you go. Bringing in various people from different backgrounds and different views of reality. And yet here you are, having these amazing individuals under your wings, wondering how many more that you would collect," Lenin responded, still with a smile on her face.

"Who knows, Great Sage. The future is a mystery," Rasmus answered and focused on the book again. "Don't tell me you think I have predicted and planned everything?" He asked as he glanced at Lenin.

"Am I not allowed to speculate? You're just giving me off that aura of someone who would have seen and predict the future," Lenin answered as she chuckled.

The tension in the air became heavy when those two talks began, but suddenly Carrion threw up, and that broke the tension immediately.

"It's getting late, I think we are all tired... so why don't we call it a night?" Erlina asked with a smile on her face.

Everyone nodded in agreement since they didn't want to be a part of the tension anymore.

"Well then, let's head back to our own cabin," Lenin smiled as she stood up. "Let's not do a drink game again tomorrow," she chuckled as she stared at Carrion who was barely conscious.

"Agreed," Daryus nodded.

Everyone chuckled while Rasmus only put a smile on his face as he kept reading the book.

Chapter 283 - 283: Despicable.

Arka was in his cabin, looking at all the reports on his desk that had been giving him a headache in the past few weeks. He expected that South Neva would become the safe haven for the people across Neva since the demon forces no longer exist there. Since the rest of the world was still dealing with the emissaries of evil, they didn't feel safe back home and decided to evacuate to South Neva.

"Commander, Count Blackheart wishes to see you. Should I let him in?" A knight asked from outside Arka's cabin.

Arka sighed and knew that the day would finally come where Rasmus would want to see him.

"Let him in," Arka answered as he pushed all the reports to the side of the table.

Rasmus entered Arka's cabin and saw Arka standing in front of his desk. Arka guided him to the couch and then sat across from him with a serious expression.

"I heard the borders are reopened and people began to take refuge in South Neva. You must have a lot of things to deal with, so I won't be long," Rasmus said as he placed his cane, rested against the couch's armrest. "Any news from the other commanders related to the current situation?" He asked.

"There will be a big meeting among all Commanders of the seas. The Admiral himself has something to discuss about the current situation. With that being said, starting next week, the borders will be closed shut, not allowing any non official or permitted ships to sail the sea," Arka answered as he crossed his legs and leaned his back.

"At time like this to close the borders? Looks like the Admiral has the full authority when it comes to the sea," Rasmus hummed as he tapped his index finger on his knee. "Do you believe that's the right decision to make, Commander?" He asked.

Arka looked over at his desk with the pile of reports, and most of them were some companies and powerful families trying to appeal for permits for their vessels. He took his time to think and it had been bothering him ever since he got the letter of order directly from the Admiral himself.

"Based on where you look at the order, it can be good and bad, Count. In my stand point as a Marine soldier, I serve to protect the people. But to believe in protecting others it can have two meanings, to prevent threats and to bring the people away from threats. That question of yours, I cannot answer," Arka answered with a serious expression as he kept staring at his desk.

"A right choice made from duty may still haunt you if it hurts the ones you meant to protect. Although you're in a dilemma of that situation, as a structured system, order brings stability, disunity brings chaos," Rasmus said with a stoic expression as he stared at Arka.

Arka narrowed his eyes, knowing what Rasmus was trying to say.

"So you're telling me to look away at the possibility of the people that are going to be locked up in the house that's on fire?" Arka asked with a serious expression.

"If you had a choice, would you be so troubled right now?" Rasmus tilted his head, resting it on his fist. "It's a complex, a common one. One believes they can make a better choice but then when they were given the possible choices, they made the same choice as the one they despised," he continued as he sat straight and looked at Arka's desk.

Arka sighed, keeping his arms crossed as his defense mechanism toward uncomfortable truth.

"You can speak the whole ugly truth when you're powerless because there's barely any consequences. But once you hold power, those consequences shackle you. Not because you want to protect yourself, it's because you're protecting those who shouldn't get involved," Rasmus said as he glanced at Arka. "It's not whether what the Admiral ordered is right or wrong, but can you trust him with all your heart that he has made the right choice? You're not an individual, Commander, you're a part of the foundation that

keeps the wall strong that keeps the people safe," he continued as he leaned back and kept staring at Arka.

"So you want me to blindly obey every order just because I believe the Admiral is doing the right thing?" Arka asked with his brows arched.

"Again, I asked you the question. Do you have a choice, Commander? If you believe that you can't accept things as is, then raise in power to be the one to decide the fate of the people," Rasmus answered with a calm expression. "But then again, once you find yourself in the position like your Admiral then find out your Commanders don't believe in you, what would you do? What would you feel?" He asked.

Arka chose not to answer because he knew he didn't have the answer to defend himself. He realized there was a context between obedience and limitation that made his obedience don't feel wrong. Risks and consequences, all of them were happening in his head when he chose to disobey.

"The fire isn't a threat yet, Commander. The house is not yet on fire. You can calculate risks and merits, but don't focus only on that. You can be both obedient and a problem solver, you just need to know where to put your duty and conscience," Rasmus revealed.

Arka had so many things inside his head, and he felt like a mess. He furrowed his brows and closed his eyes, trying to sort everything out. His fear toward Anastasha's words still lingered in his head as well when she said she would share with Rasmus rather than kill each other. He felt that the big picture was being repainted by those two while the world was oblivious about it.

"What's your purpose of visiting, Count?" Arka asked as he kept his eyes closed.

"Join us," Rasmus said without hesitation, his gaze pointed at Arka's face. "We will give you everything that you need, while I personally want nothing back from you," he continued.

"Why should I join you? I don't need help from someone like you," Arka answered as he began to open his eyes and stared into Rasmus's eyes.

"Just because the fire isn't a threat yet, that doesn't mean the fire won't grow fiercer, Commander. The lives you can't protect, I can, however, I don't see any benefits from doing so," Rasmus responded with a stoic expression.

"So you're trying to make me feel the guilt, is that it?" Arka said as he clenched his fists on his lap.

"I'm only stating the fact, the guilt will always be there even if I mentioned it or not," Rasmus answered blatantly with a cold gaze toward Arka. "The choice is yours, Commander. I offer you relief and prevent deaths of the innocent, but seeing that you're so reluctant, are you even righteous?" He asked as he tilted his head.

Arka knew what to say, but the words stuck on the tip of his tongue. He knew that his answer would backfire on him because that was how Rasmus was. He knew Rasmus would only push him further into the corner, and that would put him in a place where he no longer saw options or a place to stand to bargain.

"Using the lives of others as a bargain?" Arka asked with his gritted teeth, holding his anger.

Rasmus smirked as he tilted his head, staring into Arka's eyes. That gesture was enough to make Arka feel like he was sitting on the edge of the cliff.

"You don't need power... yet. You don't need wealth. What else can be bargained but your conscience? The purpose of a bargain is to benefit both sides, and I'm doing exactly what you need," Rasmus answered.

At that moment, Arka realized that he was already in the corner. The first question that Rasmus asked him was the trap, and he fell for it. He was utterly shocked when he showed his vulnerability at Rasmus and that made Rasmus find his weakness, the currency that he couldn't refuse.

"Now, Commander..." Rasmus grabbed his cane and slowly got up from the couch. "I'll give you some time to think. No need to rush," he smiled at Commander and then left the cabin.

As soon as the door closed, Arka leaned back and sighed deeply as he rubbed his face. He didn't know what to think at that moment, and deep down he was scared to think about the offer. He would also

hate himself to consider the offer, but at the same time, something else within him that wanted to consider it.

"What should I do..." Arka mumbled as he kept rubbing his face.

Rasmus looked at the vast sea and decided to enjoy the weather, standing next to the railing. He then saw Novia approaching, her expression cold and showing hostility in her eyes.

"I overheard everything you said with the Commander. So this is how you force someone to join you?" Novia asked as she glared into Rasmus's eyes.

"Force him? No. I gave him two options, and whatever he chooses, I'll respect it," Rasmus looked at Novia with a stoic expression. "Each choice has its own consequences, like how it has always been. It's about which consequences he'll bear," he continued. "It gave him an option, not forcing him in any way," he added.

Novia gritted her teeth and clenched her fists as she kept glaring at Rasmus.

"If you find it wrong, why don't you help Commander, Lady Novia. Why don't you offer to help him? But then, do you dare to bear the burden of the lives you couldn't protect?" Rasmus asked with his head tilted.

"You're despicable, Count..." Novia said and then walked away.

Chapter 284 - 284: Fear of change.

Two weeks had passed, and they finally arrived at Cartisel Harbor, one of the Marines bases in Central Neva. It was located in the south of Central Neva, and next to the harbor was the Arbas Kingdom, the Kingdom of Gold Mines.

Everyone decided to take a day to rest at the Marines base since they had been on the sea for more than a week. They met with Janustus Cater, one of the Commanders of the Sea in Central Neva Sea. He had prepared everything for their arrival, including a feast for them to enjoy.

Rasmus barely touched his food because he couldn't feel anything or taste anything. He avoided eating because he often bit his own tongue and inner cheeks. The worst part was that he couldn't tell where the food was in his mouth, and he could choke because he didn't know if the food had been chewed evenly or not.

"It's getting worse?" Carrion looked at Rasmus, who didn't even lift the spoon and fork ever since he entered the dining hall.

"No, it's still as bad as before, I can't eat anything solid right now," Rasmus answered as he drank a glass of water.

Erlina looked at Rasmus and she looked so worried about his condition. She then asked the knights to bring a loaf of bread and a tomato soup. Rasmus glanced at her and realized she wanted to help him to stay healthy and didn't want him to starve.

"When was the last time you ate, Count?" Daryus asked as he approached Rasmus and tried to check Rasmus's pulse.

"I haven't eaten anything in the past six days," Rasmus answered as he looked at how Daryus carefully and thoroughly checked his pulse.

"Six days... but your heart rate is normal and stable..." Daryus furrowed his brows, completely baffled by it. He then checked Rasmus's pupils. "Since you don't feel hungry, I'm worried that your health is going to decline, but somehow your health is still normal..." he continued as he pulled away from Rasmus.

Rasmus also noticed that his health didn't decline even after not eating for six days straight. He didn't lose energy nor did he feel sluggish, he felt normal.

"Give me your hand," Aris reached toward Rasmus's hand.

Rasmus didn't hesitate to put his right hand in Aris's palm. He then watched Aris cut open his palm with her nail. It shocked everyone at the table, but on the other hand, Rasmus didn't even flinch since he didn't feel a thing.

Daryus noticed that Rasmus's hand didn't bleed even though his palm got cut open. He slowly narrowed his eyes to observe Rasmus's palm, finding it bizarre and shocking.

"What's that mean, Lady Aris?" Daryus asked as he looked at Aris.

"His body has stopped aging, and small wounds like cuts won't be an issue anymore," Aris answered as she kept staring at the wound. "His body is slowly adapting with the power within his body. Soon, his body will grow sturdier that human swords won't be able to cut his skin, then after that, he will be able to regenerate his wounds easily," she continued.

Everyone who heard Aris's explanation became scared of Rasmus's awakening. It wasn't because he would become like Aris that could turn a nation into a flat land in a single night, they were afraid of Rasmus's change in his personality. They knew the moment he lost his senses and felt nothing but emptiness, it would affect his way of thinking. They were afraid that Rasmus would change into something worse than he already was.

"What is the chance of me having my senses back, Aris?" Rasmus asked as he looked at Aris.

Aris was the one who always answered a question without hesitation. However, this time she took her time to think of an answer. She had the usual stoicism, but her hesitation was enough to put everyone on the edge.

"I don't know. There has never been a half Orthias before. You're the first case, and your body is of a human, not a personified Mana like the rest of us," Aris answered as she stared into Rasmus's eyes.

"It would be a shame if I can't taste anything," Rasmus responded as he took a sip of his water. "What's the point of staying a human if I can't taste a thing," he chuckled.

Those last words gave everyone goosebumps because they interpreted it as if Rasmus would destroy humankind because he wasn't one anymore. They didn't know if he was joking, being serious, or had a meaning behind those words.

"It's still better than my condition, Count," Astrea said as she chuckled. While Rasmus's condition seemed bad, hers was worse since her health and body were declining slowly but surely.

"Fair point," Rasmus smiled as he nodded.

The knight came with a loaf of bread and tomato soup. Erlina carefully tasted the soup, making sure there was nothing off about the soup. Once she was sure there was nothing weird inside the soup, she offered it to Rasmus.

"Well, there's a saying that you shouldn't forget where you came from. I don't give a damn about your Orthias lineage, but you have flesh and bones. If you're not a human, then you're also not an Orthias. Or, you can be both at the same time. Which scenario will you choose?" Erlina asked as she smiled at Rasmus.

"Why are you asking that as if I'm going to change into something, Erlina?" Rasmus asked back as he dipped the bread into the tomato soup. "I don't seek pleasure, this won't change a thing," he continued and then took a bite of the soggy bread.

"It does matter, and yes, I'm afraid that you'll change, Count," Erlina sighed as she massaged her nose bridge. "You're already boring, so stop becoming more boring," she sighed once again as she stared into Rasmus's eyes.

Rasmus chewed the soggy bread slowly and carefully as he stared back at Erlina. He only responded with a soft smile as he kept chewing the bread before he swallowed it.

Erlina was dissatisfied with Rasmus's response, and immediately held Rasmus's arm and gripped it tightly. She kept staring into his eyes, she then slowly narrowed her eyes as she tightened her grip. There were no words between those two, but Rasmus understood her completely since they both knew each other well enough.

Rasmus knew that Erlina wasn't the type who would push her boundaries. However, this time she didn't hesitate to do so and the meaning behind it was deeper than it looked. He could tell that she didn't want

him to change because the people that followed him would change their minds. She risked her boundaries so Rasmus could be more serious about the issue.

The others didn't understand them at all because they didn't know the bond those two had before. Even Carrion who knew both of them well, he had no idea what was going on.

Rasmus slowly closed his eyes and opened them again. Not long after that, Erlina loosened up her grip and slowly removed her hand from his arm. He then continued eating his dipped bread in the tomato soup while the others kept staring at him with a curious look on their faces.

Once Rasmus was done eating his soup, he excused himself with Aris beside him. They both went to their room and decided to enjoy the silence and the scenery of the shore from up high.

"You have been observing them lately. Does humankind interest you now, Aris?" Rasmus asked as he leaned against the wall next to the window.

"No, I found them both complicated and simple at the same time. The inconsistency is too much to understand," Aris answered as she leaned against the wall next to the window, across from Rasmus, staring at the city in the distance.

"That's what they called fooling themselves..." Rasmus muttered. "They want to be true to themselves, but they're afraid of rejection. What's the point of being true to themselves when they feel lonely while at the same time, what's the point of being a part of something when you're lying to yourself..." he continued.

Aris glanced at Rasmus for a moment before she decided to ask the question.

"What about you? Will you linger on what you have built while you're slowly changing or to let everything go and be true to yourself?" Aris asked.

"That's a great question, but the answer is no. In the end, they're not aligning with my view of reality, they never have and I never told them to. I don't linger on what I have built, and I'm always being true to myself," Rasmus answered as he softened his gaze when the sun was setting in front of him.

Aris knew Rasmus well enough and had observed him long enough to understand his expression. One thing that she found out was that Rasmus always said the truth with weight.

"That's good to hear," Aris responded and watched the sky turn dark.

Chapter 285 - 285: To feel what is real.

"Your Holiness—I mean, Lady Astrea. Are you sure about this? You will be alone with Rasmus and his people," Lenin asked as she looked at Astrea sitting on the edge of the bed, staring blankly at the stone wall. "Novia heard his conversation with Commander Arka, and I have told you about it. That's the kind of person he is, and you still want me to go back with him even after knowing that?"

Astrea kept staring at the wall, taking her time before she decided to answer the question.

"It's my choice, Great Sage. I don't hold any influence or power anymore. I just want to live for Aurelia, that's all," Astrea answered as she looked at Lenin. "I have served my whole life to God and only go God. I want to spend the rest of my life for my daughter now," she continued with a soft smile on her face.

Lenin noticed the drastic changes in Astrea's behavior and way of thinking ever since she spent a lot of time with Rasmus. She knew that what had happened to Astrea was the main factor of her changes, but she believed Rasmus played a role in that as well.

"Then would you be fine to have someone like Rasmus around your daughter?" Lenin asked as she crossed her arms.

"I have trusted all the Cardinals my whole life, but what did I get, Great Sage? One of them schemed behind my back, tarnishing the name of the Holy Nation. If I had to choose, I would let someone like Rasmus who would say nothing but the truth rather than liars and deceivers," Astrea answered, this time her expression became serious.

"What if you were wrong? You know you can't turn back in time. It's better to avoid someone like him, and you'll lose nothing by choosing that," Lenin furrowed her brows as she put her weight on her left foot. "Don't let Aurelia become Rasmus's pawn, Lady Astrea. We would lose everything..." she continued, her voice was quiet.

"Would you turn back in time and let Count Rasmus die since you already knew how dangerous he became? Do you believe, without him, we could win? You brought Lady Aris to him, you were the one who gave him something that the world shouldn't have. In this time and situation, we both knew that we needed him. Don't give him another reason to get rid of us," Astrea responded, her eye stared right into Lenin's eyes.

Lenin took a deep breath as she sat down on the chair with a conflicted expression. She was lost for words, and there was nothing she could say to argue with Astrea's words.

"The future of humankind is in his hands. Don't make him let go of it, don't make ourselves look like a useless burden. We aren't ready for the demon forces and we aren't ready for him as well. You have known his personality long before everyone else. Please, Great Sage, don't turn yourself into the people you despise the most, the hypocrites," Astrea said as she frowned and stared at Lenin.

"I'm not being a hypocrite, Lady Astrea. We both know that he's dangerous and you know I'm doing this because it's the right thing to do," Lenin said as she frowned as she stared back at Astrea.

"And so what did the Cardinal believe in. He believed that killing Saint Serena was the right thing to do a few decades ago. What makes you different to him, Great Sage?" Astrea asked as she furrowed her brows. "That's enough, Great Sage. I don't want to argue with you when we both have the same goal and dream, the bright future of humankind..." she said as she slowly looked away and closed her eyes.

Lenin nodded with understanding, and then stood up from the chair. She bowed down at Astrea before she left the room and left Astrea alone.

After talking with Astrea, Lenin finally saw the big picture of Rasmus. She became more terrified of him and the future he would bring to Neva.

"Master..." Novia looked at Lenin who looked completely troubled.

"You overheard everything?" Lenin asked.

Novia nodded as she walked beside Lenin.

"You said that Rasmus used deception and manipulated Commander Arka. But that's not the case because now you have heard what Lady Astrea said. He gives and shows people what's real, he lets them feel what's real..." Lenin said as she walked in the long hallway.

"What's real? But being real without the will to change it is pointless. If he doesn't mind the trash around him because that's real, he won't bother to change it since that's who he is!" Novia responded as she stared at Lenin.

"I thought the same, but now you need to think why he has people like Daryus, Carrion, and Saint Serena on his side. It's because they're the ones who are going to clean those trash for him, he gives them a chance that align with their goals, to make a better world..." Lenin said as she stared at Novia.

"Master? Why do you sound like you begin to see him in the light he shouldn't be?" Novia furrowed her brows and narrowed her eyes as she looked at Lenin.

"No, Novia. I'm not saying he's a great person, but I have to admit... He's an exceptionally skilled leader. He knows exactly how to bring people and make them follow him," Lenin answered with a serious expression. "He's not a deceiver..." she muttered under her breath.

Novia lowered her head and decided not to say a word anymore. Lenin glanced at her, and she couldn't see what kind of expression that Novia wore on her face.

The next morning, Lenin and Novia stood in front of the blimp that belonged to the Magic Tower. They were about to leave the harbor and went back to Gratlan after being away for too long. They looked at Astrea in her wheelchair with Serena and Rasmus beside her.

"Count, take care of Lady Astrea. Keep her safe," Lenin said with a serious expression.

Rasmus nodded without saying a word. He then noticed how Novia had been putting on a stoic expression and stared blankly at the distance. He noticed that something had happened to her since she seemed to be putting walls around her, even when she was beside Lenin.

"We will come to visit soon," Lenin looked at Astrea with a smile on her face.

"Don't force yourself, Great Sage. I know you have lots of things to handle, so come when you have free time," Astrea smiled back at Lenin. "Aurelia would love to see you again," she waved weakly at Lenin and Novia.

Lenin smiled as she nodded and looked at every one of them with a soft gaze. She still couldn't shake the feeling from her last conversation with Astrea. However, she decided to bury it deep within her heart and dealt with it later.

As soon as Lenin and Novia entered the blimp, they took off to their destination, Gratlan, the floating island. Astrea and the others watched the blimp go up high beyond the clouds until it looked like a small dot in the vast sky. Astrea took a deep breath and exhaled deeply, feeling conflicted and felt there was a knot in her chest that had been suffocating her.

"Should we go as well, Lady Astrea?" Rasmus asked as he raised his brows.

"Yes, we should get going as well. The journey is going to take a while, and we can't waste even a single day here. I want to go back home, and I want to be by Aurelia's side," Astrea nodded as she looked at her wrapped in bandages arms. "I'm ready to go home, Count," she added as she kept nodding.

Rasmus nodded, and then looked at the others, signaling them to accompany her to the blimp with the symbol of the Angelis family on it. He watched them walk while he stayed behind, and then he turned around to look at Arka with a stoic expression.

"Have you made up your mind, Commander? What kind of choice you're going to make?" Rasmus asked as he stared right into Arka's eyes.

Arka stared back into Rasmus's eyes without a sign of fear in his eyes. He wasn't afraid of what Rasmus was capable of, he wasn't afraid of the future that awaited him, and he wasn't afraid of the consequences of his choice.

"If I chose to follow, what am I to you, Count?" Arka asked.

"Someone equal," Rasmus slowly lifted his right hand for a handshake. "Just like how the others are. They follow because I can open up the path toward their goals, there's only respect between all of us," he continued.

Arka looked at Rasmus's hand for a moment before he reached it and shook his hand firmly.

"I might not be able to save all lives, but I'll do what I can," Rasmus said calmly.

"I don't believe you'll be able to do that in the first place, Count. As long as you can keep the people around you to feel safe, that's what matters," Arka responded coldly.

"Great. Now, if you need anything, tell Princess Anastasha about us. She will help you if you need anything," Rasmus said with a stoic expression.

Arka nodded even though he didn't want to get near that woman ever again since she could mess with his head just like Rasmus did. However, seeing that both of them were allies, it helped him in a way because he had someone that he could rely on when he needed to when he couldn't ask anyone else to do it for him.

"Take care, Count," Arka said as he nodded.

Rasmus nodded and then walked away, joining with the others that were about to board the blimp.

Chapter 286 - 286: Responsibility.

After a whole week in the blimp, they finally arrived at the Holy Nation. A nation that was located in the center of the continent, surrounded by powerful nations. The Holy Nation was small with only a few thousand people living in it, similar to the Vatican. The nation had five layers, making the nation look like a circle maze from above.

"So only the first two layers are open to the public?" Serena asked as she looked outside the window of the carriage she was in.

"Yes, the third layers are open during a ceremony or a celebration. You can see the gap between the fourth and the second layer is a lot wider than the fourth to the fifth layer that you saw earlier," Astrea answered as she looked at the vast field with tall and giant trees with man-made rivers on the sides.

"Soon this place will be opened to the public since there will be a ceremony to officially make Aurelia the next Saint," Astrea continued as she placed her hand on the window, staring at the nation that she spent her whole life in.

Serena looked at the beautiful and peaceful scenery as far as her eyes could reach. The shades that the giant trees provided, the clear rivers with fish swimming, and the bright clear sky gave her unimaginable comfort. It reminded her of heaven that she had long forgotten, but she knew what she saw back in heaven, nothing in the whole world or universe that could be compared to it.

"What's in the second and first layers?" Serena asked as she looked at Astrea.

"The second layers are where the priests and the paladins lived. It's their second home, live and train to serve the Holy Nation. The first layer is where the high-ranking officials live, the Archbishops, Cardinals, and the Elders," Astrea answered as she looked at the white wall ahead of them that led to the second layer.

"And where do you live, Lady Astrea?" Serena raised her brows.

"In the Angelis Palace, behind the Angelis Temple. The Palace is off limits from anyone, even the high-ranking officials or the elders. The Palace is more sacred than any place in the whole Central Neva continent," Astrea answered with a soft smile on her face. "It's so sacred that Aurelia and I have to clean and cook for ourselves because not even maids are allowed to be there. We always cleaned the palace once a week, just the two of us," she chuckled softly.

"That's surprising," Rasmus said with a tuck of smile on the corner of his lips.

Astrea looked at Rasmus, and she noticed that he had become a lot paler. A few strands of his hair had turned silver, reflecting the light. His eyes became more blue compared to before, and sometimes his pupils shrunk impossibly small when he absorbed the light.

"When are you planning to leave, Count?" Astrea asked in a soft voice.

"In a few days... I think everyone deserves to have a long rest after a long journey," Rasmus answered as he watched the priests take care of and water the plants and flowers on the sides of the road. "I believe

Daryus will stay by your side since his reason to tag along is to take care of you, Lady Astrea," he glanced at Astrea with a stoic expression on his face.

"You're fine leaving him here alone, Count?" Astrea asked with her brows raised.

"I don't see a problem in that since it's his choice," Rasmus shook his head. "Is there a reason that I should be worried?" He raised his brows as he looked at Astrea.

"No, I just thought that you might want him to be by your side," Astrea shook her head as she smiled. "The Holy Nation is the safest place. However... I don't know if I should still believe that or not..." she said quietly.

"Nothing is safe in this world when countless minds live in the same place. I'm not going to explain it further, but Daryus has lived his life in places where dangers reside. He will be fine, and it's his choice in the first place. Whatever happens to him, it's his responsibility and the consequences he chose," Rasmus responded as he watched the carriage enter the second layer of the nation.

"You can be so heartless sometimes, Count. Two sides of the same coin, isn't it?" Astrea chuckled softly.

Rasmus shook his head, in disbelief how Astrea had begun to feel too comfortable around him.

"I have always been a heartless, Lady Astrea. The image that the Great Sage and Archduke Thalior put on me, making people idolize me. The lies and the illusion they put on those people, soon they will find out that they'll be betrayed by their own expectations of me," Rasmus responded as he looked at the training grounds and the numbers of Paladins patrolled around the wall.

"Is it my fault or is it their own fault to believe in such an illusion? Or perhaps they're the victims of those two? In the end, it's none of my problems when the people are heartbroken, and those two? If they feel a slight of joy or feel nothing at all from that, aren't they worse than me?" Rasmus asked as he kept staring at the distance.

"Hmm? But didn't you reap the illusion that Archduke Thalior and Great Sage Lenin placed onto you? You used that image they both placed on you during the speech you gave with Princess Asghar.

Wouldn't that make you slightly responsible for whatever you would cause to the people because you betrayed their expectations?" Astrea smiled as she tilted her head and stared into Rasmus's eyes.

"It's as I said earlier, Lady Astrea. I've always been a heartless person," Rasmus smiled back at Astrea. "It's them who placed me on the stage, and so I performed to my liking. Whether the audience found it enjoyable or not, that wasn't my fault since I wasn't the one that asked to be on the stage," he continued.

"Just because you're right, that doesn't mean he's wrong," Aris muttered as she looked outside the window. She was sitting across from Rasmus in the carriage.

Rasmus and Astrea turned their heads to look at Aris, surprised that she had suddenly decided to join the conversation. It was the first time Aris would join a conversation, and the fact she spoke to a human, made it even more shocking to Astrea.

"I guess I can't argue with that logic," Astrea nodded as she looked at Rasmus, still surprised that Aris would mention her. "That sounds like something that comes out of your mouth, Count," she chuckled with her brows furrowed.

"Because it is..." Rasmus looked at Aris and noticed that she was smirking at him.

Aris remembered Rasmus's words that he taught Carrion about winning an argument. She remembered that Rasmus said that Carrion shouldn't argue his ideals with the person he argued with, and to dissect and cut through the person's flaws of their ideals. However, this time Rasmus argued Astrea's ideals with his, and that was something that contradicted what he had taught Carrion. She wondered if Rasmus had never tried to win an argument with Astrea or if there was another reason behind it.

"So this is the first layer..." Serena muttered as she looked at the temple that looked like a massive dome. The temple was surrounded by giant trees, making it look sacred.

"Yes... I'm finally home..." Astrea hummed as she stared at the temple with a blank expression. "Welcome to The Holy Nation..." she smiled as she looked at Aris, Serena, and Rasmus.

Dozens of Paladins and the high-ranking officials had waited for Astrea's arrival at the entrance of the temple. The Cardinals, the Bishops, and the Priests looked so worried and happy at the same time. They watched as the carriages stopped in front of them.

"Are you ready, Lady Astrea?" Rasmus asked.

Astrea looked at her arms, legs, and felt her face that were all covered in bandages. She took a deep breath to steel her heart and mind before she slowly nodded.

Rasmus was the first that came out of the carriage. He didn't care about the gazes that were pointed at him until there was someone that stuck out compared to the others. A young lady wearing an all-white robe and a mitten, staring at him with a shocked expression, it was Aurelia, his former student.

"Count!" Aurelia hurriedly walked toward him, and she noticed the cane that supported his legs. "Count! Welcome!" She looked at Rasmus and realized that his appearance had changed drastically. He was a lot taller, more muscular, paler, and his hair became a bit shinier.

"Aren't you a bit too young to become a Saint, Lady Aurelia?" Rasmus smirked as he looked down at Aurelia since she looked smaller than the last time he remembered.

"Does maturity has anything to do with age?" Aurelia narrowed her eyes.

"No, but experience does. But you barely have any of it as well," Rasmus responded as he turned around to look at the carriage. "But I'm not worried, not at all. Seeing you comfortable enough wearing that attire, that's good enough," he said.

Aurelia was surprised when Rasmus said something nice to her, and that always felt special even back then in the academy. People had complimented her and believed in her, but somehow, Rasmus's words weighed more than those because he never took his words lightly.

"Your mother has gone through a lot, and endured a lot. She doesn't need understanding and pity, what she needs right now is for you to make her feel like home," Rasmus said as he put his weight on the cane.

"Yes, I understand..." Aurelia nodded and slowly looked at Astrea in her white robe where her face and arms were covered in bandages. Her chest felt like being squeezed and crushed, but the moment she saw Astrea smile at her, that feeling disappeared.

"Welcome home, mother," Aurelia smiled as she approached Astrea who struggled to walk down the carriage. "I miss you..." her voice trembled and tears lingered in her eyes.

"Sweetheart... I miss you too..." Astrea slowly wrapped her arms around Aurelia's body and caressed her hair.

Chapter 287 - 287: Grudges.

There was nothing grand when Astrea came back home because she had requested in the letter a while back that she didn't want that. She also didn't want her arrival to be known by the people because she didn't want to worry the people with her current condition. With that being said, only those who lived or belonged to the Holy Nation knew about her arrival.

Rasmus and the others were brought into the temple, and it was quite dark for a temple. There was barely any source of light because of the giant trees around the temple that blocked the sunlight. For Carrion, Erlina, and Daryus, they found the temple was eerie, while Rasmus, Serena, Aris, Javi, and Videl found the place to be comforting because of the sacred atmosphere.

"Count, there's someone here with us..." Aurelia looked at Rasmus, who walked beside him as she pushed the wheelchair. "It's one of your former students, make a guess," she pointed out with a smile on her face.

"Isador? What is he doing here?" Rasmus asked as he raised his brows.

Aurelia was baffled that Rasmus immediately knew that it was Isador Suncrown, the future emperor of the Sun Empire. She knew that Rasmus knew that Isador was close to the Angelis family, but she didn't expect he would be so confident in guessing it.

"I told him..." Aurelia said as she looked down at Astrea, who was sitting in the wheelchair. "You don't mind, right? Mother?" She grimaced as she frowned.

"Of course, I don't mind, Sweetheart," Astrea slowly lifted her head to look at Aurelia. "But since the Crown Prince is here, that means His Imperial Highness is here as well?" She raised her brows as she stared at Aurelia.

"Yes... but..." Aurelia paused as she leaned in to Astrea's ear, and she began to whisper something into her ear.

Astrea listened carefully with her brows furrowed, but then suddenly her eyes were wide open. She slowly turned her head toward Rasmus and cleared her throat. She then leaned toward Aurelia's ear and whispered something back to her.

"Hmm, Count. Can you wait for us for a moment? There's something that Aurelia and I have to take care of. I'll ask someone to guide you to the parlor where all of you can relax and enjoy some snacks while you wait," Astrea said with a smile on her face.

Rasmus nodded with understanding and then watched Astrea signal one of the archbishops to guide Rasmus and the others to the parlor. He watched Astrea and Aurelia go to the other hallway, and then he glanced at Aris, who seemed to have overheard their conversation earlier.

"What's it all about?" Rasmus said under his breath as Aris walked beside him.

"They mentioned someone called Arandil D'Armond," Aris answered quietly.

Rasmus suddenly stopped walking, and the others immediately stopped walking and stared at Rasmus with a confused look. They glanced at his left hand, where he gripped his cane tightly. They didn't need to say it out loud, but they all knew that he was quite angry about something that they didn't know about.

Rasmus felt a knot in his chest when he heard Arandil's name. That feeling was similar to when he was haunted by his past, it was a foreign feeling that was enough to shake his core. It had been a while since Rasmus had been reminded of the painful and unimaginable suffering of the past. Something within him was screaming in fear, anger, and desperation, something that he believed wasn't his.

Videl was the only one who knew of the issue with Rasmus's existence. Although Rasmus knew that he and his past life as Kyros were the same person, there was a gap in between those two. Rasmus still believed he was Kyros from Earth, and the past of Rasmus wasn't completely his. That gap or error was the reason Rasmus always felt conflicted when his past was brought to the surface.

"Arandil D'Armond, he was the one who beheaded my parents, Aris. He was the one who killed your predecessor," Rasmus said as he stared into Aris's eyes.

As soon as Aris found out about that, her hair suddenly raised and everyone got pushed to the ground by an immense and thick energy. The glass windows in the hallway shattered into fine dust, the walls and the floor cracked open, and lastly the Archbishop, Carrion, and Daryus fainted by the immense pressure. Rasmus was the only one who wasn't affected by her energy, his body reacted quite the opposite because his body resonated with the energy that she released.

Aris was about to turn around to go where Astrea and Aurelia had gone. However, Rasmus grabbed her wrist and prevented her from taking the first step.

"It's not the right time, Aris..." Rasmus said with a serious expression. "You're breaking the place down. Calm down," he continued as he tightened his grip on Aris's wrist.

Aris slowly unclenched her fists and stared down at Serena, Videl, and Javi who struggled to keep themselves conscious. Videl, the devil who had regained half of his power, couldn't withstand Aris's wrath.

(At the same time in the cloister room)

Arandil was standing beside Emperor Julius Suncrown, listening to the conversation between Astrea and Julius. However, suddenly he felt his whole body like being rubbed eerily for a moment before he felt like his body was being scratched by sharp nails. He immediately unsheathed his greatsword on his back and pointed it at the door.

Julius, Astrea, Aurelia, and Isador turned their focus to Arandil. They were startled by his sudden hostility, but then they noticed his hands trembled when he held his sword tightly.

"Lord Arandil?" Astrea asked with her brows furrowed.

"I feel a dangerous killing intent coming from this building, Your Holiness. This place is dangerous, someone is about to commit a murder..." Arandil answered as he kept pointing his sword at the door.

Aurelia and Astrea looked at each other for a moment, and they might have known who that might be.

"Lord Arandil, Your Imperial Highness, there are people who came here with me. They're Count Rasmus Blackheart and Lady Aristoria, the Orthias. I believe they overheard and knew that you were here in this building," Astrea pointed out as she stared right into Arandil's eyes.

Arandil, who heard those names, suddenly flinched his eyes. He didn't expect to meet those two in a place like this, especially since he was the one who was responsible for the deaths of both Rasmus's parents. He killed Rasmus's parents, and he also killed an Orthias, not a great responsibility he had.

"Count Rasmus is here, Your Holiness?" Isadora asked Aurelia with his brows raised, not knowing about it since Aurelia hadn't told him about it.

"Yes, and he should be in the left wing of the temple right now," Aurelia answered as she nodded. "Or maybe not..." she muttered with a worried expression.

"Someone is coming..." Arandil said as he tightened his grip on his great sword.

Everyone perked up, their backs were straightened like they had never been before except for Astrea since she had known Rasmus and the others enough. They stared at the door for a few seconds until someone knocked on the door and their hearts skipped a bit when they heard it.

"Come in," Aurelia said calmly.

When they saw it was a Cardinal, they suddenly felt intense relief and slowly slouched on their chairs. However, they could see the panic in the Cardinal's face.

"What's the matter, Cardinal Rudell?" Aurelia asked with her brows raised.

"Your Holiness, my apology for disturbing your time... but, there's an issue right now. The left wing of the temple is badly damaged..." Cardinal Rudell answered as he lowered his head. "Count Rasmus Blackheart said it was his doing. He wanted to apologize and he would love to pay for the damage he caused..." he continued.

Astrea closed her eyes, hiding and holding back the smile that was trying to reach the surface. She already knew it would be the case, and she knew that it wasn't him since he was unable to use any magic because of his condition. She believed it was Aris's doing since she was quite expressive, especially toward things that she despised.

"Mother? What should we do? I don't know what I should do in this kind of problem," Aurelia asked with a concerned look written on her face.

"Hmm? Why do you ask me, Sweetheart?" Astrea chuckled, teasing Aurelia. "You should be discussing this matter with Count Blackheart himself. You need to learn to deal with any kind of problems, while I can just lie back and enjoy my leisure life," she continued.

"Mother..." Aurelia pouted.

Everyone looked at Astrea, and they were shocked at how laid-back her personality had become. She had never shown that side of her personality, or perhaps she didn't have it before. However, ever since the war and her condition, something within her had changed.

"Let's meet him later, Sweetheart. Right now, there's a more important issue to discuss," Astrea's demeanor changed into a serious one as she looked at Julius. "We don't have time to waste because this involves the future of Central Neva," she continued.

Everyone nodded in agreement, and the Cardinal excused himself, giving them privacy.

Chapter 288 - 288: Danger from within.

Astrea shared her experience during the war against the demon force. She didn't try to hide or exaggerate how powerful the demon force was, especially the emissaries of evil, Kiel and Yaza. She also revealed how she ended up like that by offering her body to a divine being, an Angel.

Arandil listened to how powerless Uriel was, the 2nd Swordmaster of Neva. He knew that he was in a different league compared to Uriel, but he didn't expect that she couldn't even touch Kiel or Yaza, and the fact she was close to dying many times.

"My God, if everyone knew what happened, it wouldn't give them courage, it would be quite the opposite..." Julius said as he clasped his hands together in front of his mouth, his gaze distant and filled with thoughts. "If it wasn't because Count Blackheart's mind and strategy, and Lady Aristoria by his side, nobody would be alive by now," he continued as he closed his eyes and pressed his thumbs against his nose bridge.

"Not to mention that colossal being called Nephia. I didn't know something like that exist until Her Holiness revealed about it," Isador added as he looked at his father. "If they were capable of creating something like that, what would happen now if the other emissaries decided to make one as well?" He asked and looked at Arandil.

"We found out that it wouldn't be possible if we prevented the people from becoming their sacrificial lambs. Creating such being required dozens of thousands of humans," Astrea answered as she looked at Julius and Isadora to assure them it shouldn't be the biggest threat. "And yes, even with the two of them, if Saint Serena didn't come to help us, even they wouldn't survive back there," she added.

Aurelia kept holding Astrea's hand the whole time, wanting to comfort her mother. However, Astrea didn't show any sign of pain, fear, or regret in her words. She had accepted what had happened, and what mattered to her was to live the rest of her life by Aurelia's side.

"But I believe in them now. Count Blackheart, Lady Aris, Saint Serena, and his butler, Videl. Those four are in a different league than ours, not to mention Count Blackheart is currently awakening his bloodline as Orthias," Astrea revealed as she stared at Arandil.

Julius knew that relying on Rasmus wouldn't be a good thing. The people at the table and the Council of Neva, everyone was guilty for the death of the whole Blackheart family. The death and what Rasmus had witnessed, the suffering, and everything that happened to him, they were all because of them.

"I know what you're thinking, Your Imperial Highness. We killed his whole family, and he has all the right to seek revenge. However, we also need him because he has the whole arsenal and the knowledge to fight our enemy. What choice do we have?" Astrea looked at Julius with her brows raised.

Aurelia and Isador stayed quiet, staring at each other and felt uncomfortable with the topic. They knew Rasmus well since he was their former instructor, and they knew how he could manipulate people's minds to make them doubt themselves.

"We don't have a choice, but at least we need to know if he's truly willing to fight the demon forces with us," Julius answered as he crossed his arms on the table. "I want to meet him in person and have a talk with him," he said as he exhaled deeply.

"Are you sure about that, Your Imperial Highness? If he decided to get rid of you, nobody could stop him," Astrea warned with a serious expression. "It would be better if the Crown Prince went to talk to him instead. He will become the future emperor, so he should handle someone like Count Blackheart," she suggested as she smiled at Isador.

Julius found that suggestion wasn't a bad one at all, and Isador was Rasmus's former student as well. He had seen the growth in Isador's way of thinking and his understanding of human nature was exceptional ever since he enrolled in the academy.

"I can do it, father," Isador said with confidence. "He never showed hostility toward me, and he's not the type to be hostile toward someone that hasn't done anything to him," he continued.

Aurelia nodded in agreement, convincing Julius that Isador could do it.

"Well then, I believe you also have something to catch up with Count Blackheart, Isador," Julius nodded with understanding. "Then it's time to discuss the real issue here in Central Neva while you were away, Your Holiness. There are a lot of things to discuss, and it would be great if Great Sage is here with us as well," he said with a serious expression.

"Tell me the problems that we need to take care of immediately, Your Imperial Highness. I will convey the problems to Count Blackheart later," Astrea responded as she held Aurelia's hand gently.

Julius began to explain about the appearance of wyverns and they had destroyed villages and small towns on the northern Central Neva. Those wyverns acted and behaved oddly, and they came from North Neva.

Julius revealed that a third of North Neva had been conquered by the demon force left by Ermaine, the false prophet. The situation in North Neva was as bad as East Neva, and the Sancticus family was currently being targeted by powerful demons.

"And how's Saint Moriganne? Is she fine?" Astrea asked with a worried expression. She didn't want another Saint to fall in this situation because she was one of the pillars that kept humanity standing.

"Elder Lazarus Wyverncrest, he showed how strong a Black Star was. He single-handedly defeated everything that tried to harm Saint Moriganne. He and the other elders fought relentlessly, and there's a rumor that the Orthias are about to join the war," Julius answered.

"That's good to hear, but about the wyverns, what do you mean they behaved weirdly?" Astrea asked with her brows furrowed.

"Lord Arandil hunted one of the wyverns and we discovered that they might have become a demonic beast. They attacked villages and small towns, massacring and turning people into ashes," Julius answered. "And there have been more of them in the past month because of the increase in reports of their sighting," he continued.

"Might have?" Astrea tilted her head with a confused look.

"We aren't sure, but Her Holiness had checked the corpse of the wyvern, and she felt a lingering demonic energy on it," Julius answered as he looked at Aurelia.

Astrea looked at Aurelia with a surprised look because she didn't expect her daughter to have contributed to something important. She felt proud, and she couldn't help to show affection by caressing Aurelia's cheek with love.

"Perhaps Lady Aris might know about these wyverns since wyverns are still related to dragons. This information might be useful to Count Blackheart as well," Astrea responded as she nodded.

Astrea seemed to be fond of Rasmus, and it was noticeable even for Isador. Her cheerful, relaxed, and laid-back personality was so jarring compared to how she used to be. Aurelia also found it surprising, but she loved the changes in her mother's demeanor.

"What about Nemu the emissary? Has he made any suspicious movements?" Astrea asked.

"He's still helping the people and hasn't shown any suspicious movements even after the news about South Neva. It's as if he wasn't bothered by it at all," Aurelia answered as she looked at Astrea. "The number of his followers has increased significantly. People found and believed that his wisdom and understanding about divine beings surpassed us," she continued.

"His knowledge about this world, the universe, and how he opened people's eyes to do good deeds is amazing. People began to rely on him more, and it caused conflicts among the people. Some believed Nemu was one of the demonic cult leaders, but his followers said otherwise because there wasn't a single evidence that he was evil," Isador added.

Astrea hummed and found the issue to be exactly like what Rasmus had predicted. She and Rasmus had discussed this matter back in the ship, and he believed that Nemu's method was to bring kindness and knowledge that made people question the world and their existence, furthering themselves away from God.

Rasmus expected that soon Central Neva would be divided by two sides. One who still held their beliefs toward the Angelis family, and the other one who relied on Nemu's wisdom and kindness.

"Getting rid of him would bring chaos. We thought about it during the meeting with the leaders of each nation. The prosperity and the peace that Nemu brought to the people was a threat to us, and we don't want to kill the innocent who got deceived by him," Julius pointed out as he leaned back and crossed his arms.

"Because we don't have a single evidence of his connection with the demons," Astrea nodded with understanding. "Even a visible scratch on his body, his followers would point at us and accuse us of

harming him," she continued as she closed her eyes, thinking of a solution to prevent Nemu from growing his influence.

"Those are the current problems that we are having. With you here with us again, your presence will unite all of us and prevent the people from getting deceived by Nemu," Julius nodded as he stared at Astrea.

Astrea slowly closed her eyes, realizing that even after she had lost everything, sacrificed everything, and had given away everything, people still demanded something more from her.

"I understand, Your Imperial Highness," Astrea nodded with a heavy heart.

Chapter 289 - 289: Greatest teacher.

Astrea sat in her wheelchair while Aurelia pushed the wheelchair with Isador walking beside her. They went to meet Rasmus and the others on the other side of the temple. However, when they saw the damage, Aurelia and Isador were petrified by the massive cracks on the walls and shattered glass on the floor.

"This... what happened here?" Aurelia asked the priestesses who were busy cleaning the mess.

"We don't know, Your Holiness. But Archbishop Lorne said that it all happened out of nowhere, and everything crumbled in an instant," one of the priestesses answered as she lowered her head.

"Hmm, that means it was really Lady Aris who did this. It reminds me of her during the war," Astrea muttered as she looked at the damage on the ceiling, walls, and the floor. "You two will meet her in person soon. She's something else..." she continued with a smile on her face.

Aurelia and Isador gulped as they continued walking the hallway as they looked around at the damage. They had never seen an Orthias before, in fact, nobody had seen an Orthias since they had been hiding their existence from humans because of the dark past. They had heard about Aristoria and Sanya when those two helped the expedition team hunt the false prophet, Ermaine. They were curious when they heard the story, but now that they were about to see one, there was fear within their hearts.

When they stood in front of the door to the parlor, they took a deep breath as Astrea knocked on the door. When they heard Rasmus's voice to tell them to come in, Isador slowly opened the door and felt the heavy atmosphere in the room. They saw Rasmus sitting on the couch with an Orthias and a Saint. The ones who sat across from him were Erlina, a beautiful Madam, Daryus, the Doctor, and Carrion from the prominent family, the Earnwind while Videl was standing behind Rasmus.

Isador and Aurelia were anxious, more nervous than meeting with Kings, Queens, or high-ranking nobles. The way they were being stared at with sharp gazes without a stoic expression, they felt like they were being seen naked.

"Please, come in," Rasmus said as he stood up.

As soon as Rasmus stood up, everyone followed, except for Aris who was still a bit emotional about Arandil. She was in a really bad mood, and that was why the atmosphere in the room became heavy and suffocating. For Rasmus and his people they got used to it, but for Isador and Aurelia, it felt like they were entering a pit of snakes.

Aurelia slowly pushed the wheelchair and entered the room, followed by Isador who was still on the edge. However, the moment Erlina bowed her head to Saint Aurelia, Carrion and Daryus followed her. Rasmus didn't bow his head, and neither did Aris, Serena, or Videl. They then sat on the couch while Erlina, Carrion, and Daryus chose to stand up behind Rasmus with Videl.

"It has been a while. How are you, Crown Prince?" Rasmus asked as he rested his hands on the cane.

Isador remembered every detail of his encounter with Rasmus back in the academy. He still remembered when Rasmus confronted his beliefs and ideals, which was a turning point in his life. Rasmus was a teacher whom he never thought he needed in his life.

"If I said that I'm doing fine, that would be a lie, Count. Everyone in this continent is struggling to choose what to believe," Isador answered as he nervously placed his hands on his knees. He glanced at Aris who kept a stoic and cold expression with her gaze pointed at the spot on the wall. "I'm afraid of disunity, conflict, and war..." he continued as he gripped his knees tightly.

"You sound like you're one of them, Crown Prince. You seem to struggle to choose what to believe. War is going to be inevitable, and you don't want to accept it," Rasmus responded with his brows raised.

Isador chuckled nervously as he nodded, admitting that Rasmus was right. He forgot how comforting and unnerving Rasmus's words were.

"Don't be afraid of war and conflict. It's the choice you should think about because you have to make a choice and where you put yourself when that happens. You're going to be an Emperor, and you have to begin to make choices," Rasmus said calmly.

"Yes, I understand," Isador nodded.

Rasmus glanced at Aurelia who seemed to be anxious and hesitant. Aurelia was still as expressive as ever, and it made her look like an open book.

"Your Holiness, should we discuss the damage I caused?" Rasmus asked with his brows raised. "I might have tarnished what's sacred. So I believe money isn't the issue here but rather something else?" he added as his eyes kept on Aurelia.

"Yes, you're absolutely right, Count. It's not the money, but the deed you have done to this place that concerns me," Aurelia said, trying to put a serious expression even though she was anxious when she glanced at Aris.

"If that's the case, what do you want from me, Your Holiness?" Rasmus asked as he put on a stoic and cold expression.

Aurelia knew exactly the expression that Rasmus had put on. The expression that made her look at herself in the mirror, the ugly truth of her words that would backfire at her.

Astrea was hoping for this moment to happen because she was always curious about Rasmus's way of teaching. She had heard a lot of things about him from Aurelia, and how he managed to put six prominent figures who could change the future into obedient students.

"Faith and beliefs of religion aren't about the place where they pray but the mind and the heart. This temple is indeed sacred, but this is simply a building made of stones," Aurelia said as she tried to

outmaneuver Rasmus. "Since you believe you're responsible, then I want you to help the Holy Nation fight against evil," she pointed out with a serious expression and furrowed brows.

"I refuse," Rasmus responded without hesitation.

Aurelia lost her composure and broke the image she had just built earlier. She thought Rasmus would agree or at least took his time to consider it, not a direct and instant rejection.

"But you said you were responsible for the damage..." Aurelia said in disbelief.

"I did, but since you said that temple has no value, I don't believe what you asked for is equal to what I have done. So, why should I comply with your demand?" Rasmus asked as he smiled.

Aurelia closed her eyes and realized that she had made a stupid mistake. She was frustrated, but then she heard Astrea chuckle, and it made her pout a bit.

"I don't mean it literally, Count. Although I said this temple is just nothing but a building made of stones, doesn't mean you can disrespect it as you wish. It doesn't matter if it has value or not, it's about being respectful or not," Aurelia said, spouting whatever that came out of her mind.

"That's more like it, Your Holiness. You need to know with whom you're dealing with before speaking," Rasmus said with a smile. "But I still refuse," he pointed out as he shook his head.

Erlina and the others never knew what was going on in Rasmus's head, and it would be impossible to predict his next move. They chose to listen silently and watched from behind.

"Tell me, Your Holiness. Why should I fight side by side with the people who were overjoyed over the dead bodies of my family? Why should I protect the people who killed my family? Why should I help those who abandoned me?" Rasmus asked with a serious expression, there was no game of wit in his expression, only seriousness.

The moment Aurelia was bombarded with those questions, a big lump appeared in her throat. She couldn't even make a breathing sound, not even a decibel could be heard from her mouth.

Astrea already knew Rasmus would say something like that the moment someone tried to push him to the corner. She realized that Aurelia wasn't ready to become a Saint because she still couldn't consider the reality of the person she was speaking with.

Daryus who never liked how heartless and despicable Rasmus could be found it hard to disagree with Rasmus. He had seen enough pain and suffering that morality didn't matter anymore. In the first place, it was Aurelia who was morally wrong to ask Rasmus to help those who were the source of his pain and suffering.

"What are your answers, Your Holiness?" Rasmus asked, still with a serious and cold gaze.

"I don't have any, Count..." Aurelia lowered her head, feeling ashamed and guilty.

"What was the first thing that I taught you in my class?" Rasmus asked as he looked at Aurelia and Isador.

Aurelia and Isador shared a look before they turned their heads to look at Rasmus.

"That gaining recognition is important, Count..." Aurelia and Isadora answered.

"And how to achieve that based on the assignment that I gave you?" Rasmus asked with his brows raised.

"To achieve that, we need to be considerate and understand those we want to gain recognition from. To show and to see what others failed to see in others..." Aurelia answered.

"And yet you failed to do so right now, Aurelia. Why?" Rasmus asked as he leaned back, softening his gaze and expression.

The moment Rasmus called Aurelia by her name and not her title, she suddenly felt seen. The weight of responsibility and the burdens on her shoulders suddenly got sucked into the void.

"Because I thought you didn't need those things, Count," Aurelia answered quietly.

"You're right, I don't. However, to be inconsiderate is worse. Am I wrong?" Rasmus asked.

Aurelia shook her head slowly as she lowered her head. She felt relieved and grateful that she was being treated as nothing but herself. She realized how powerful and effective it was to be seen and to be understood. Although Rasmus never asked to be recognized, his consideration made her recognize him as her greatest teacher.

"Recognition means nothing if you beg for it. But when you give it, despite not needing it, others will hand you theirs without question. It took us so many revisions of our assignment to understand that," Aurelia smiled as she looked at Rasmus.

Rasmus closed his eyes as a bit of a smile tugged on the corner of his lips.

Astrea was pleased to finally witness how Rasmus became a teacher that all six prominent figures looked up to.

Chapter 290 - 290: Hypocrisy.

"What?!" Aurelia was deeply shocked that her eyes were wide open. "I... I..." she slowly looked at Serena.

"You wanted my help, so I gave you someone who aligned with your wish," Rasmus said as he looked at the priestess pouring tea into his cup. "But before that, I believe Lady Astrea should tell Aurelia about the hidden truth," he pointed out and looked at Astrea.

Astrea nodded, and then Rasmus excused himself since he knew it would be best to let those three have some privacy.

After Aurelia got her lesson from Rasmus, she didn't expect that he would recommend Serena to help her. It was Rasmus's plan all along, to put someone in the Holy Nation other than Daryus.

The ones who stayed behind were Daryus, Serena, and Videl who acted as Serena's paladin. Those three played a huge role in protecting Astrea and Aurelia while Rasmus and the rest gathered information about Nemu and the other emissaries that might be hiding in Central Neva.

Rasmus approached Isador who was standing next to the window, staring out at the peaceful garden.

"Tell me about Arandil D'Armond, Crown Prince," Rasmus said as he looked out the window. "The man who beheaded both my parents," he slowly turned his head and stared at Isador.

Isador felt cold ice going up from his lower back to his nape. He was anxious, especially when Rasmus went straight to the question. He realized that he would get into the same situation as Aurelia, but he didn't expect it to be this soon.

"He's my father—the Imperial Highness's closest aid. He became a Swordmaster when he was still 12 then climbed to the top when he was 15. The Imperial Highness offered a Commander position in the Imperial knight order," Isador answered as he glanced at Aurelia who seemed to be anxious near Serena.

"Long story short, Lord Arandil played a huge role in helping the South Neva Union to unite South Neva. His Imperial Highness granted him a title, Count title and became his personal imperial guard ever since," Isador continued and looked at Rasmus nervously.

"How old was he when he killed my parents, Crown Prince?" Rasmus asked with a stoic expression.

"He was 27 at that time, Count," Isador answered.

Rasmus glanced at Aris, who was staring at Isador with a sharp and cold gaze. She had listened to the whole conversation, and found out that a 27 year old man could kill an Aristoria. It didn't make things better, even Aurelia and Isador noticed the change of atmosphere in the room.

"Do you want to kill Lord Arandil D'Armond, Aris?" Rasmus asked as he glanced at Aris.

That question made everyone fall silent, their eyes were pointed at Aris.

"Yes, I'll kill him in the most painful way that a human can bear before death," Aris answered coldly, her eyes kept staring at Isador. "His death will be by my hand," she added.

"You heard her, so what are you going to do now, Crown Prince?" Rasmus asked.

Isador knew he was being tested just like Rasmus tested Aurelia earlier. He knew he couldn't make a single mistake that might lead him to his defeat. He thought really hard and looked for an answer that Rasmus couldn't argue.

"The Blackheart... your parents killed the whole royal family during the rebellion, Count. Justice needs to be upheld or the world will be in chaos because there are no orders. What he did was nothing but to protect the innocent, and if Lady Aristoria decided to kill him, nothing good would come out of it for either of us," Isador answered as he tried to look at Aris but his eyes and body refused.

"You think she cares about that, Crown Prince?" Rasmus tilted his head. "She despises humans, and whatever happens to them, she won't even bat an eye," he continued.

Isador forgot the one who wanted to kill Arandil was an ancient race who got betrayed by humans. He forgot that it wasn't Rasmus that he was against since logic would work on Rasmus. He tried to fix the mistake he made and tried to deal with someone who didn't use both logic and morale.

The moment Isador thought about dealing with such an opponent, he realized there was no point in arguing. Whatever reason he had, when the opponent didn't care about logic and morale, it was pointless.

Isador suddenly thought of a carrot and a donkey, giving what the donkey wanted after the donkey brought him to where he wanted to be. However, he didn't want to use that method because it was wrong, and he didn't have the courage to do something like that to Aris.

"(What can I do...)" Isador thought really hard with a troubled expression on his face.

"You're struggling about morality, Crown Prince?" Rasmus asked.

Isador snapped back to reality, and he was petrified when Rasmus seemed to read his thoughts. He was speechless and his mind went blank.

"Is one life worth more than thousands, Crown Prince? If we are talking about context, if it was your mother, you would choose your mother's life over the thousands. However, Arandil is nobody to you, you don't have any attachments to him. One life for a greater good, it doesn't sound bad at all, doesn't it?" Rasmus smiled coldly at Isador.

Everyone in the room listened to them, and they thought if they got asked the same question, they would agree with Rasmus. However, it was their minds that made the decision, not their hearts.

"Nothing is all black or all white. I taught all of you back then, and choice is one of the many forms of manipulation. It doesn't matter if you're righteous or evil, because when both sides clash, the innocents are the ones who suffer. Who is to blame? Both of them. One doesn't care and the other suffers from guilt, but that's how it is, always has been," Rasmus said as he walked toward the couch to be with Aris.

"So, Crown Prince. One life..." Rasmus clenched his left hand. "Or the thousands? Your choice," he clenched his right hand and offered both hands to Isador.

Astrea who was a Saint would have prevented those two from continuing. However, even her found it impossible to look away from it or pretended that it never happened or would never happen.

"Count, I can't decide someone else's life..." Isador shook his head as he closed his eyes.

"That's interesting, Crown Prince. Because your father, the emperor, Great Sage Lenin, Lady Astrea, and many more decided to end my parents' lives along with all the bodies with Blackheart's blood in them, publicly," Rasmus raised his brows. "You want to be morally right to not decide someone else's life, and yet, it's called justice when they killed all Blackhearts in public, in front of my eyes?" He tilted his head with his brows furrowed.

Isador got completely defeated, he lost for words and he found hypocrisy within his morals and logic. Once again, he was completely broken, losing sight of his ideal that he had just rebuilt and forged. Even after everything he learned from Rasmus, he realized he was still naive.

Rasmus was about to open his mouth to say his finishing line, but suddenly he felt a chill down his spine. He didn't know what happened to him until Aris suddenly jolted from the couch and hurriedly walked toward the window.

The tension immediately shattered and all eyes were on Aris. She looked at the sky in the distance for a few seconds when suddenly everyone heard a faint sound of the bell being rang.

"It's a warning signal..." Astrea said with a worried expression. "Lady Astrea, what's going on out there?" She asked.

"Wyverns..." Aris answered as she narrowed her eyes. "They're coming, and they're angry..." she pointed out.

Everyone hurriedly left the room to look at the sky from outside the temple, except for Rasmus and Astrea. He stayed behind because he was powerless and extremely vulnerable. He couldn't use his magic and he couldn't even stand up without his cane.

"Count, I think you were a bit too harsh on Isador and my daughter," Astrea said, the room felt empty the moment everyone left, it felt like a dead space. "You're breaking their morale compass, and that's not what I wanted from you. You promised me that you would take care of Aurelia when I'm gone, but I don't want her to be like you," she continued with a frown on her face.

"I'm not breaking their morale compass, or I'm trying to turn them into puppets. I just want them to be brave enough to make a decisive move and bear all the consequences without hesitation," Rasmus responded as he stared out the window. "The age of peace is long gone, Lady Astrea. They will see deaths more than they see people's smiles," he continued and glanced at Astrea.

"Can you promise me another thing, Count? Can you promise me that you won't turn Aurelia to be like you?" Astrea asked.

"Not even once I gave them my solutions to their problems, Lady Astrea. I made them think, not to follow," Rasmus answered. "The last thing I want is to have someone like me around. So I can promise you that," he nodded.