

Evil 321

Chapter 321 - 321: The fall of the grace. (End of Volume.4)

"An envoy from where?" Aurelia asked with her brows furrowed. She looked terrified and in disbelief at the same time.

"They said, they're the envoy from the Blessed, Nemu, Your Holiness," a Cardinal answered with his head lowered. "They're asking for permission to enter the Holy Nation and to ask for your audience," he continues, keeping his head lowered.

Aurelia was irked when she heard Nemu's name, especially with the title he had, the Blessed. The Blessed was something that only the people could give toward someone who didn't belong to the Holy Nation and had the same knowledge and compassion as a Saint.

"Let them in," Aurelia answered as she nodded with understanding. "Bring them to the Guest Hall," she said as she stood up from her chair.

The Cardinal bowed with understanding and immediately left the room. Aurelia immediately went to Astrea's chamber to tell her about the envoys.

"The envoy?" Astrea raised her brows as she stared at Aurelia. "They have finally made a move..." She muttered as she looked at Sima who was busy preparing the medicine for her.

"I'm going to see them, mother. I want to bring Saint Serena with me," Aurelia said as she looked at some of Astrea's wounds that had dried up. "You should stay here, mother. Your treatment is more important than anything right now. So please, Divine Physician, you can keep treating my mother..." She looked at Sima, carefully picking the ingredients for the medicine.

"Of course, Your Holiness. Please rest assured, I will do my best to treat Her Holiness," Sima bowed his head slightly, and then continued to pick the ingredients.

"Thank you, Divine Physician," Aurelia bowed her head at Sima before she walked away and left the room.

Astrea couldn't stop smiling at how her daughter was cool-headed and didn't panic. She noticed the subtle changes in her daughter ever since she found out the dark truth that the Holy Nation hid from the world. She still felt guilty, but the maturity that Aurelia had shown lately when she accepted and overcame it, it was endearing to see.

"Divine Physician Sima. May I ask about the situation in the East?" Astrea asked, finally asking the question that had stuck in her mouth ever since Sima came to the Holy Nation.

"Here is a lot better than in the East, Your Holiness. The war isn't between demons and humans, it's humans against humans. People have fallen for their inner demons," Sima answered as he began to process all the ingredients.

"The Emissary of Evil, they haven't shown themselves?" Astrea asked with her brows furrowed.

"They have..." Sima paused to look at Astrea. "But with such a situation that's happening in the East, is there a way for humans to defeat them when they're still busy killing each other?" He asked with a stoic expression.

Astrea looked outside the window where the sunlight and the shades of the trees painted the scenery. She wondered if it wasn't for Rasmus back in South Neva, would the South end up like in the East?

Astrea didn't have the strength or the will to go to East Neva because of how terrifying it was. East Neva was known for the bloodbath, a continent where no man could trust their backs on someone else, not even their own family. The East was a place where death wasn't mourned, it was counted as statistics, nothing more.

"And what's your conclusion to that, Divine Physician?" Astrea asked, wondering if Sima was as insightful as his knowledge of medicine.

"I have lived long enough to say this, Your Holiness. However, what's happening in the East right now, the Emissary of Evil has so little to do with the situation," Sima answered as he crushed them together to extract them. "The Emissary of Evil, their presence is only enabling the humans' greed," he pointed out as he poured the extract into a bowl.

"Even so, they won't be so blinded by their greed like that. Someone must have encouraged them to unleash their greed," Astrea responded with her brows furrowed.

"The Asghar family, Your Holiness. They're the only ones who want to see the blood spill around them, a family that finds death as entertainment," Sima revealed with a calm and stoic expression. "They didn't need the influence to be who they are right now, they made others fight each other and gained benefit from it. That's how dangerous they are, Your Holiness..." He continued and began to mix the extract with a few more ingredients.

Astrea didn't need to reconsider her feelings about East Neva. From what Sima said earlier, it proved why she didn't want to spread her influence there. The goodness had long been forgotten and abandoned, only greed, pride, and hunger. East Neva was a place filled with the primal instincts of a human being, raw and wild.

"I apologize for asking this question, but why did you answer Princess Asghar's request if you hated the Asghar family?" Astrea asked, wondering why Sima seemed to dislike the Asghar family.

"My gut tells me that Princess Asghar has a different goal than the rest of her siblings. Even to this moment, I'm still thinking that I might regret this," Sima answered with a straight face. "Placing myself in a spot where I'm seen as someone who's placing favorable toward the Princess instead of the other siblings..." He muttered and grabbed the bowl of medicine.

Astrea saw vulnerability within Sima, a wise man who could bring comfort and be comfortable at the same time. She began to see the big difference between Rasmus and Sima, and it was a relief to her.

"Let us focus on your condition now, Your Holiness," Sima said as he grabbed his tools.

"Yes, and thank you for answering my questions, Divine Physician," Astrea smiled weakly and nodded with understanding.

Aurelia and Serena entered the Guest Hall, wearing an all-white robe. The envoys were wearing nothing but a simple gray robe. The moment Aurelia realized how the envoys stared at her in the eyes and didn't avert their gaze, she realized that they didn't see her as someone that they needed to respect anymore.

"(Perhaps I'm still standing behind my mother's shadow. Let's not take it too seriously...)" Aurelia thought as she closed her eyes.

"Your Holiness..." The envoys said as they bowed their heads at Aurelia and Serena. "Thank you for answering our request. There are no words that can convey our gratitude," they said as they kept their heads lowered.

"Please, there's no need to say those things. This nation is open for everyone," Aurelia said as she pointed at the chairs, telling them to sit.

The envoys sat down across the table from Aurelia and Serena. They glanced at Serena and somehow they were too afraid to even stare at her eyes. There was an aura that Serena had that made them anxious. Aurelia on the other hand, who could see divine energy saw how Serena's divine energy was released and almost wrapped the envoys with it as if the energy was about to devour them.

"As the envoys of the Blessed Nemu, it is our first time to make contact, is that correct?" Aurelia asked in a gentle voice.

"Yes, Your Holiness, and we are here to offer our help. Our Lord, Nemu, he conveyed his worries about the situation that happened to the Holy Nation. We are here to offer our money, a charity to help the Holy Nation to rebuild its sacred temple," the envoy answered and kept his eyes on Aurelia, trying to block Serena's presence from his vision.

"We are ready to offer labor, Your Holiness. We can send people to help rebuild the houses for the people here," the other envoy added as he nodded.

"I'm grateful, but I must respectfully decline the offer," Aurelia answered with a smile on her face.

The envoys were shocked when they heard the answer because it didn't take Aurelia even a second to consider their offering. That alone was enough to make them change their expression from respect to confusion and even a little bit of offended.

"Please, gentlemen. There's a reason why I can't accept your offer. The Holy Nation can rebuild itself, and I would hate myself if I had to watch others spare their money for this place. You can use that

money on those who are in need, they're more important than a mere temple," Aurelia said with a gentle smile on her face.

"Then how about the labor? We can offer you that, and the people are willing to help rebuild this nation as a sign of devotion to our religion, our God," the envoy responded.

Aurelia felt like blood was running up to her head when they used religion and God. Somehow, she used to feel blessed and relieved when people used such words, however, this time she felt like it was nothing but empty words. A part of her died when she found out the truth about the Angelis family, her ancestors, and the Holy Nation. However, when she felt Serena's hand on her back, she snapped back to reality, and realized how understanding Serena was when she saw her expression.

"That also I cannot accept. We have enough people and we are already rebuilding everything as we speak, and I believe you both have seen it on your way here," Aurelia shook her head with a smile on her face.

Knowing that the envoys who attempted to help were dismissed, they both immediately put on a stoic expression, hiding their irritation. Aurelia and Serena could see it in their eyes, but they didn't bother to soothe them, and only stared at them with a soft gaze.

"I see... I guess we came here for nothing..." The envoy muttered, but then realized he shouldn't have said that.

Aurelia stared at the envoy, but this time she put on a cold gaze and smiled.

"If there's nothing else, you may leave, gentlemen," Aurelia said.

Without hesitation, the envoys lowered their heads forcefully and then left the hall without saying a word. Aurelia watched those two leave, and as soon as she was alone with Serena, she sighed deeply.

"You did the right thing. Who knows how many people Nemu will try to infiltrate into this nation? They will spread the words and rumors of how the Holy Nation will reject him, stirring issues and problems. That's his plan, and we need to prepare for the worst," Serena said calmly.

"Yes, but this time, it will be me, who's going to be the evil one. I'll reveal the dark truth that the Holy Nation has hidden for more than a century," Aurelia responded without any sign of fear. "I'm ready to be abandoned..." She nodded repeatedly.

Chapter 322 - 322: Truth bearer.

Rasmus and Aris rode their horses past the city wall along with adventurers and merchants. Rasmus's expression hardened when he saw the town square where his parents and all the Blackhearts died from the execution. His heart was pounding really fast, beyond his control because of the core memories of Rasmus that he had inherited.

"We are finally here, the capital city of the Refenus Kingdom," Rasmus said with a cold expression as he patted his horse's neck. "Let's find a place to stay for a day," he said as he lowered his hood and turned his hair color to black simultaneously.

Aris watched Rasmus close his eyes for a moment before he opened his eyes again. His eye colors turned from dark silver into brown and his skin a bit tanned, slowly mastering his genes as Orthias, who were capable of manipulating oneself's appearance.

"Do you feel it?" Aris asked as she lowered her hood, changing her hair color to dark brown and her eye color to black. "It's quite thick in here," she revealed as she looked at the sky.

Rasmus looked up and he could see the Mana was scarce as if Mana was reluctant to enter the city, and the Mana that was inside the city was trapped by something. He couldn't see the demonic energy like Aris did, but he could feel the scarcity of the Mana which was a sign of something abnormal.

"Not yet. I still don't feel it," Rasmus shook his head as he looked at the people around him, not knowing who he was. "Let's find a tavern and have something to drink. I need to know what's been going on recently around here and in Central Neva. There's no best but the tavern to gather that kind of information," he said and gently tapped the horse's thigh.

On their way to find a tavern, they saw a bard, singing a song about falling off the grace. Rasmus decided to listen to the bard's poem where people were surrounding the bard to listen about it as well. It was a common thing to have a bard to recite news that was happening on the other side of the world.

"In days of gold and silver skies,

Where holy bells through the air did rise,

There walked a Saint with eyes of flame,

And all the world did know her name."

"She healed the sick with whispered song,

And bade the stars to dance along.

The meek would kneel, the proud would weep

Such was the spell her hands did keep."

"But lo! From yonder village gate,

There came a soul with gentler fate.

A humble voice, a heart so wide,

The people looked, and some did bide."

"Could grace, they asked, be shared by two?

Could one so low bear light so true?"

The Saint, once still, began to seethe,

And hid her light in shadowed sheath."

"She turned her gaze from those in need,

And let her mercy slowly bleed.

Let them go forth, she coldly said,

And drink from wells where I have bled."

"No prayer could breach her cloistered door,

No hand could touch her robes of yore.

She cloaked herself in bitter frost,

A Saint in name, but spirit lost."

Rasmus listened to the beautiful poem and understood the message behind it. The people who listened began to murmur, believing it was the newly appointed Saint, Aurelia. The poem was about envy and jealousy toward Nemu, a Fallen Watcher who deceived the people with kindness, knowledge, and compassion.

"What's he talking about, Rasmus?" Aris asked, not understanding poetry.

"Aurelia has chosen to close the Holy Nation to her believers. Turning her back from the kindness that Nemu and the believers tried to give, insulting the believers indirectly," Rasmus answered as he narrowed his eyes. "So that's how he's going to bring chaos to this continent, dividing the believers, making them kill each other in the name of righteousness," he revealed with a soft smile on his face.

"The storm is brewing, isn't it?" Aris asked as she watched the people who were bought by the story and began to show their true color.

"You can say that," Rasmus nodded and decided to continue looking for a tavern.

They were riding their horses on the road and saw a tavern in the distance. They were about to get down on their horses when they saw a man with dyed white messy long hair flying out of the tavern in unique and eccentric attire. Rasmus furrowed his brows when he noticed the attire, it was an attire that a jester wore, something that a clown would wear.

"Get the fuck out of here you freak! Don't come near my tavern or I will kill you!" The man shouted as he glared and pointed his finger at the jester.

The jester was still on the ground like a dead man, not moving a muscle. The tavern owner suddenly panicked and tilted his head, checking if the jester was breathing. When the tavern owner approached the jester and shook the jester's body, he was startled when the jester screamed and laughed frantically at him. The tavern owner subconsciously threw a punch at the jester's face knocked the jester back to the ground.

"Freak!" The tavern owner muttered under his breath with a scornful look as he walked back inside.

Rasmus stared at the jester with his all-white make-up that covered his skin color. He couldn't see the man behind those layers of masks that the Jester wore. He then raised his brows when the Jester slowly got up and began to laugh mischievously and pointed his finger at the tavern where nobody even cared about his existence. However, when the jester felt the gaze of Rasmus and Aris, he slowly turned his head at him, smiling widely with his widened eyes.

"Sire! Did you enjoy what you see?!" The jester chuckled mischievously as he walked weirdly like a snake, waving his body toward Rasmus.

Rasmus didn't say a word, only stared into the Jester's eyes with a stoic expression. The jester stared back at him without showing anything, it was the first time Rasmus saw nothing but a mirror from someone's eyes. That alone was enough to pique his interest, a man who seemed to have nothing but the truth.

"What's your name, Jester?" Rasmus asked as he got down from his horse, standing in front of the Jester.

"Oh, Sire! The man has no name..." The jester giggled mischievously with his red lips both from the paint he wore and the blood that dripped from the side of his lips.

"A man with layers of masks not to hide, but to show what's underneath," Rasmus said as he kept staring into the Jester's eyes. "Entertain me, Jester. Entertain me with your knowledge and truth," he said as he pulled one gold coin from the spatial ring.

The Jester grinned when he heard Rasmus's description of him, and then he moved his gaze toward the gold coin in Rasmus's hand.

"Ahh, the currency of man! The greed and pride of humans!" The Jester snatched the gold coin from Rasmus's hand, lifting the coin above his head and stared at it as he giggled mischievously. "What a useless concept..." He muttered and made the coin disappear into thin air.

Rasmus smirked as he watched the Jester perform and spat out his inner thoughts with his mouth. He found the Jester to be someone worth his attention because there was no hypocrisy or naivety in the Jester's words, all nothing but truths.

"Oh, Sire... you asked for knowledge and truth from a madman? That's either you're a bored manipulator or a curious wise man," The Jester said, tilting his head with that eerie smile on his face. He never blinked his eyes once ever since Rasmus saw him, making him more eerie. "I see nothing but a mix between the two. A bored wise man or a curious manipulator?" He giggled mischievously.

"I'm just a man who listens," Rasmus answered, not leaving his gaze at the jester's eyes.

"Ah... an abnormality..." The Jester giggled mischievously. "But, Sire... Are you sure that you're willing to listen to this jester's knowledge and truth?" He asked with his brows raised, frowning in disbelief.

"I'll give you what you want in exchange of your knowledge, nameless man," Rasmus nodded. "Name your price for the pain that you have endured," he said with a stoic expression.

The Jester's smile disappeared immediately, but then it turned into a wide grin. The Jester slowly took a few steps back and began to bow down like a performer. The movement of his body was like a liquid, smooth and swift, especially when he didn't make any sound, even with that attire.

"You asked me to entertain you, sire. But the truth? It's not a comedy. It's a tragedy with a laughing corpse as the narrator. Don't blame me if it makes your stomach sick, Sire..." The Jester raised his head slowly and smiled with his eyes closed.

Chapter 323 - 323: Beneath the mask.

Rasmus went to an inn with a built-in small pub, a place that the Jester guided him to. The place was quite empty since it was located in the far southeast of the capital city. There was barely anyone there except locals who supported the inn's owner by drinking and eating there.

The Jester's unique and eccentric attire made everyone look at him with disgust. Everyone looked at him similarly, and Rasmus noticed that, believing the Jester was well-known by the locals. However, Rasmus never bothered to ask, and wanted the information that the Jester had.

"We are renting this whole place for two days," Rasmus said as he pulled out a pouch of gold coins from the ring, and placed it on the counter. "Can we?" He stared at the inn's owner with a straight face.

The inn's owner's face brightened and immediately grabbed the pouch. He looked at the amount of Gold coins that would be enough to live comfortably for months.

"Yes! Yes! I'll get rid of everyone now!" The inn's owner said and immediately signaled everyone to leave the inn immediately.

Aris went to the table in the corner, hidden in the shadow. She wasn't interested in the Jester at all, and she was confused as to why Rasmus was fond of the Jester.

"Now you may leave," Rasmus said to the inn's owner. "I will make my own drink and food," he added.

"Yes! Of course!" The inn's owner was happy because he didn't need to serve his customers while getting paid a lot. He then left the inn, leaving the Jester alone with his customers.

Rasmus walked behind the counter and looked at the barrels in front of him. He poured the ale into two mugs while he tried to use the silence to test the Jester's reaction to it. However, to his surprise, the Jester began to hum and dance, using the silence as a cue to express himself.

The Jester didn't make a sound once again when he moved his body around. The only thing that I heard was his humming of the song he danced to.

Rasmus listened and observed the Jester as he offered the mug of ale to Aris. He sat down across from Aris, but their focus was on the Jester. Even for Aris, she couldn't help but avert her attention to the Jester because of how eccentric he was.

"The Grace has fallen, the greed has spread, the people are fooled. The truth is spread, lies corrupt the truth, and together they become curse of suffering..." The Jester sang as he danced gracefully and silently. "The eyes are blinded, the ears are deafened, the lips are sealed, and the minds are altered..." He continued as he began to smile widely and his movements began to feel aggressive and absurd, portraying the words he had just said.

Rasmus and Aris silently listened and watched the Jester perform, and it was the first time Aris felt captivated by such words and movements. She began to realize why Rasmus was fond of the Jester, and the answer was because the Jester could express something more than any word could.

"The Grace chose against the people while the corrupted embraced the people. The light has become so blinding it hurts, and the darkness so calming it comforts..." The Jester continued as he spun around slowly and gracefully. "What the world has become when a King speaks blasphemous and the people raise their hands to the king proudly. Alas, beauty is seen as hideous and the hideous is seen as beauty. The wrongs are believed to be the righteous, and the righteous choose to be silent," he continued as he tried to reach the lamp above him, but his hand couldn't reach it.

The Jester closed his eyes and clenched his fists so that he couldn't reach the lamp. He was waiting, silently, but there was nothing. He slowly peeked with one eye at Rasmus and Aris, and there was no reaction from them. He immediately stood straight, tilting his head with curiosity, staring at them intensely that was enough to make people punch him or walk away from discomfort. However, what he saw, there was no disgust, mockery, or even amusement, only the gaze of someone who listened without judgment.

"Oh Sire, you must have wondered why such grace and light are so stagnant and powerless?" The Jester asked as he spun around, and when he faced them again, there was a huge grin on his face. "This nameless performer believes when the light is too bright, and the grace is too powerful, the shadows won't reveal themselves, and the corrupts will keep hiding..." He revealed as he approached Rasmus and Aris eerily by the way he walked like a snake ready to devour its paralyzed pray.

Rasmus casually took a sip of the warm ale and stared into the Jester's eyes who stood in front of him. The make-up that the Jester put on was nothing but terrifying that would bring discomfort to those who stared.

"What if the grace and the light you portray are wrong? The grace and the light you have depicted are nothing but to hide the corruption and the darkness within," Rasmus said as he crossed his legs and raised his brows. "What if you were wrong, nameless Jester?" He asked.

"Blasphemy!" The Jester acted shocked and petrified as he took a big few steps away from Rasmus, covering his mouth with his hands and eyes wide open. "Sire! If such grace and light aren't real, then is evil the one that's truly real?" He asked in a trembling voice, however, when he lowered his hands from his mouth, he revealed a huge mischievous smile.

"Who would have thought?! That the world is just a big stage where everyone performs a spectacle! There's nothing real, only convenience," the Jester said as he spun around repeatedly. "Oh, what an unexpected revelation?!" He laughed manically.

For the first time, the Jester felt like he was running out of time and ideas. He always had ideas to entertain or to bring discomfort to those who listened to him. However, this time, he felt like his space was shrinking, and his time was ticking, something that unnerved him.

"Ah, Sire... why are you so cold when you asked for such entertainment..." The Jester asked as he stood still under the light, staring at Rasmus with a frown on his face.

"If that unnerves you, Nameless Jester, you must have a lingering feeling that puts you under such pressure. What's holding you back from seeing the whole truth, what are you seeking from this worldly affair?" Rasmus asked as he stood up and slowly walked toward the Jester. "Wealth? I don't think so. Power? You're not a fool. Influence? Perhaps, but what for? Or perhaps, a pain... revenge?" He added as he saw a glimpse of discomfort in the Jester's eyes.

"The only one who has such an empty gaze is the one who has put aside their inner self. However, your act and the way you express it in your performance, they're unnatural, too perfect. How can someone be natural when there's nothing but hollow underneath," Rasmus said as he kept staring into the Jester's eyes. "Now, tell me, Nameless Jester, the price for your performance?" He asked, standing still in front of the Jester.

The Jester unconsciously took a few steps away from Rasmus, finding how unnerving it was to be seen through those masks. He thought the person in front of him was someone he had encountered before, but he was wrong. He realized that Rasmus wasn't looking for such entertainment in the first place but to dissect the man he was dealing with.

"Oh, sire! Why are you interested in a nameless man like me? I'm just a man who seeks nothing..." The Jester said as he bowed his head down, still performing.

"Funny that you're reciting about truth, light, grace, evil, and darkness, yet you're not brave enough to embrace your own words," Rasmus said as he stared down at the Jester. "The dead won't come back, and the pain remains. Are you planning to drown on your own, or are you planning to drown with the one that caused you the pain?" He asked.

The Jester was still bowing and his head lowered like a statue for a long time. There was only silence in the room, and Aris was watching from the corner of the room, enjoying her ale without making a noise.

"Death..." The Jester answered, still with his head lowered and unmoved body. "I want to see deaths..." He continued in mumbles.

"Whose death?" Rasmus asked with a stoic expression as he looked down at the Jester.

"The royal family and their followers... I want to see deaths, the sweet embrace of deaths..." The Jester grinned as he slowly lifted his head to look at Rasmus. This time, there was nothing but madness and rawness in the Jester's eyes.

"Are you willing to perform if I offered you the stage? To entertain me with your natural, unmasked, isn't fabricated performance?" Rasmus asked, staring into the severity of the madness that the Jester projected.

"This nameless man will walk down the stage and stare into the corpses's eyes with a smile," The Jester answered with his shrunk pupil and manical laughter.

Aris closed her eyes and emptied the mug once she found out that Rasmus had found another one that would follow him. This time, a madman who had lost everything and wanted nothing but the downfall of humankind. She noticed how dangerous the Jester was, and knew that the Jester had a dagger hidden underneath his attire, and Rasmus also knew that.

"How many monsters you're going to feed?" Aris asked as she stared at Rasmus.

"I wonder..." Rasmus responded as he walked to the counter and put down the empty mug.

Chapter 324 - 324: Nameless One.

Rasmus sat in an alcove as he stared outside the window at the peaceful city. However, the peace that he looked at was completely different from the one that his mind projected. There was a turmoil in his heart and mind, conflicting against his consciousness that tried to ignore and let go of the past.

"Lurking the darkness..." Rasmus glanced at the distance where a group of people moved swiftly from one alley to another. "One two three..." He muttered as he counted the numbers of people in the distance that were trying to approach the inn.

Rasmus looked up at the sky and saw Mana lingering, stuck and aimlessly floating around. He kept staring at the Mana until they all suddenly moved like how his gaze moved from one building to the other.

He collected as much Mana as he could, condensing them together while he was manipulating them from the distance. He then looked at the 12 people in a black robe moving in the darkness silently.

"Let's give it a try..." Rasmus muttered as he split the condensed Mana into twelve and turned them into condensed swords made of ice.

The people in a black robe had no idea or sense of the ice swords above them. They were too focused on making a move without being seen. However, when they heard whistles in the air, they all looked up and the first thing they saw was the tip of an ice blade in between their eyes.

Rasmus watched all the twelve people in a black robe collapse with an ice sword pierced through their skulls. There was no scream, only gentle thuds that weren't enough to wake everyone up. He then looked at the surroundings, but there was no sign of people waking up.

Rasmus exhaled deeply as he got up and walked to his bed, trying to get some sleep. His gaze was empty toward a crack in the wall, having quite a struggle from past memories that didn't belong to him, and yet they were his.

After Rasmus stared at the wall for a few minutes, he finally let go of the thoughts and closed his eyes. He managed to sleep, but it wasn't a restful one.

The sun hadn't come up, but Rasmus was already awake and went downstairs to grab something to drink behind the counter. He was surprised to see the Jester humming and dancing quietly in the darkness. The moment the Jester noticed Rasmus's presence, he stopped dancing and stood there, staring at him with an eerie look.

"Tell me your story, Nameless man," Rasmus said as he sat at the counter and poured himself a cup of water.

The Jester didn't move, didn't make any noise, and only stared at Rasmus vulnerable back. He slowly reached out to the dagger that was hidden on his back, swirling it around between his fingers.

"The moment you hold that dagger, I'll cut off your head," Aris's voice could be heard in the shadows.

The Jester was startled when he heard Aris's voice from behind. He dropped the dagger because it had slipped through his fingers. He immediately raised his hands, smiling and slowly turning around to look at Aris. He was shocked and in disbelief that Aris had been there watching him for hours without him knowing.

"I'm just playing around, that's all..." The Jester said as he giggled mischievously.

Aris lit the lanterns in the room with Mana, revealing her sitting on a chair with Yur in the owl form, standing with one leg. Yur was staring at the Jester and tilted its head, trying to dissect the human that Rasmus was interested in.

"Are you going to answer my question or not?" Rasmus looked at the Jester from over his shoulder.

The Jester looked down at the dagger that was right in between his feet. He then kicked the dagger away, showing Aris that he was done playing around.

"The man has no story to tell, Sire..." The Jester answered as he turned around to look at Rasmus. "And this man is telling the truth," he said as he bowed his head.

Rasmus found the Jester to be so persistent, and he knew there would be no words that could persuade the Jester from revealing his past. He then chose to pull out a fine wine from his spatial ring, and put it on the counter.

"The man has no reason to refuse a drink, is there?" Rasmus asked as he patted the counter table. "I'm offering you a stage, and now you're declining my offer for a drink?" He asked with his brows raised.

The Jester stared at the wine and at Rasmus, reluctant to agree with Rasmus's offer. However, he had no choice because he knew the man and the woman in the room weren't ordinary people. He then put on a wide smile as he walked toward the counter without making a noise.

"I'm not a wasteful person. I wouldn't put poison in such fine wine or any food," Rasmus said as he pushed an empty glass toward the Jester who stood beside him.

"Ahh, what an admirable person you are, Sire..." The Jester chuckled mischievously as he poured the wine into the glass. "I don't drink, Sire. I hope this much is enough to meet the requirements for your offer," he showed that he filled the glass only a quarter of it.

Rasmus poured the wine into two glasses, and as soon as the one was full, Aris appeared behind him and took the glass. He then poured one for himself, a quarter of the glass just like the Jester's glass.

The Jester looked at Rasmus's glass for a moment and somehow he felt intimidated by it. He slowly reached for the wine and poured another quarter of the glass, making it half full. When Rasmus saw it, he smirked and poured another quarter into the glass, making it half full as well.

"Oh, Sire... Such cruelty is unacceptable..." The Jester frowned as he stared at Rasmus.

Rasmus raised his glass, and so the Jester followed. They took a sip of the wine, and the Jester made a genuine sour expression because he didn't drink as he had said.

"Now, Nameless one. Since I offered you the stage, it might take a while to set the stage. What are you going to do in the meantime?" Rasmus asked as he took another sip of the wine.

"How long, Sire? This man is willing to wait as long as Sire keeps his words," the Jester answered as he mimicked Rasmus's movements and how he drank his wine. "This man will be exploring around the city, entertaining the people in the meantime," he continued and giggled mischievously.

"Not long enough that you would be tired of waiting," Rasmus answered and took another sip of the wine. "You need to be careful, Nameless one. Associating with me is more dangerous than being alone and mocking the king," he glanced at the Jester.

"Oh, you jest, Sire..." The Jester responded with a huge grin on his face.

Although the Jester said that, he didn't brush off Rasmus's words and knew that Rasmus was telling the truth. That alone was the reason why he put on such a huge grin, because it made him more intrigued about the man he was staring at. Rasmus knew that, and he didn't need to explain more.

"Sire, may I ask your name?" The Jester tilted his head, staring into Rasmus's eyes.

"A nameless, just like you," Rasmus answered as he stared back at the Jester.

"What a mysterious gentleman and lady," the Jester chuckled as he stared at both of them who seemed distant and yet close to each other. A unique bond that even the Jester found it mysterious and

intriguing. "If this man speak of his name, would Sire speak of his name?" He asked with his brows raised.

"That seems a fair trade, but are you even ready to reveal your name?" Rasmus asked back.

"Oh, Sire... You read me like an open book!" The Jester laughed manically. "Perhaps, once I performed my amazing performance on the stage, this man will speak of his name," he said as he took a few steps back and began to dance.

Neither Rasmus nor Aris bothered to watch the Jester perform because they didn't understand the mind behind that madman. Even Rasmus could only understand a glimpse of him because there was a lingering feeling that prevented the Jester from abandoning his old self.

"Oh, Sire. If I may ask. Where are you planning to go? It seems to me that Sire isn't planning to stay in the capital city for long," the Jester asked as he kept dancing silently.

"The Trivula Forest," Rasmus answered without hesitation.

The moment the Jester heard about Rasmus's destination, he stopped dancing and stood still like a statue. Rasmus noticed that the Jester had stopped moving, and he saw a glimpse of turmoil in the Jester's eyes as if the Jester had a history with that place.

"Ah, what a beautiful place to go, Sire. May I ask the reason behind your visit to that place, Sire?" The Jester asked as he stood still and stared at Rasmus.

"To see the lake," Rasmus answered as he took a sip of his wine.

The Jester stared at Rasmus with a stoic and cold gaze, not saying a word and not moving a muscle. Rasmus glanced over his shoulder and noticed how the Jester's demeanor changed almost drastically. However, he didn't ask and continued to enjoy his wine.

Rasmus and Aris continued their journey, leaving the Jester behind. On their way to the city gate, Rasmus noticed that nobody talked about the dead bodies he had killed last night. It wasn't because they didn't care, but it was as if the bodies were never found and disappeared.

"Did they get rid of the bodies?" Rasmus muttered as he looked around, observing the people who seemed to be talking casually.

"Yur said that the bodies were devoured by black substances like liquid. It could be tar, and we both know where it's connected to," Aris responded as she rode her horse beside Rasmus.

"Tar? So there's a high-ranking demon in this city," Rasmus looked at the palace in the distance with a stoic and cold gaze. "It will be a grandiose stage then," he said, and then looked at the city gate in front of him.

As soon as they left the capital city, Rasmus wanted to visit someone. Someone who had so many connections with nobles in the Refenus Kingdom.

It took them three days to reach the closest town, Drunel Town. A town that belonged to Viscount Heward Rednil, a man who climbed up his status from a commoner to a noble because of his wealth and connection. The town was said to be the place where the fate of wealth resided, bringing good fortune or bad fortune to those who sought it.

Rasmus and Aris looked at how lively the town was, and how many merchants came and went. It was a busy town, and the people were selling their unique products since Drunel was a land of fortune. There were unaffiliated mages, scholars, and merchants that tried to sell their creations from books, magic tools, and rare goods.

"The Mana is abundant here, quite a surprise," Rasmus said as he looked at the Mana flowing freely in the air.

"I wasn't expecting this as well," Aris nodded in agreement as she looked at the people around her. "Who are we going to meet here?" She looked at Rasmus.

"The Viscount himself. It's fortunate that Eduard knows this man and is smart enough to make a partnership with him," Rasmus answered as he pulled out a letter with the seal still intact. "I wonder what the content of this letter is," he said as he stared at the letter.

"Doing an errand for a friend, that's first," Aris said as she chuckled at Rasmus.

"He was the one who helped me when I was struggling to survive. I don't forget the hands that reached me," Rasmus responded and nodded. "Let's find the merchant's guild," he said, and continued to ride his horse.

When they arrived at the merchant's guild, they saw how crowded it was from both merchants and adventurers. One who traded goods and paid fees for affiliating with the guild, while the adventurers were hired for their escort service.

"The Silver Platter Guild," Rasmus smiled softly, finding the name to be quite catchy and interesting.

They entered the crowded building, and the receptionists were overwhelmed by the amount of members and customers that came in. Rasmus decided to wait, finding an empty space for him to stand on without blocking anyone. He observed the crowd in the guild and found out how odd it was based on the expressions of the merchants and the receptionists.

"You're going to wait for a while, Sir. Is this your first time here?" A skinny old man asked as he looked up at Rasmus. The old man seemed to be sick and tired, and how he was constantly coughing.

"Yes, is something the matter here? I noticed the number of the members demanding more adventurers for their journey the amount of goods that are being sold, and the unhandled paperwork on the counter," Rasmus said as he observed the chaos.

"Ah, you haven't heard? These merchants used to affiliate with the Holy Nation, but after the rumor spread that the Holy Nation didn't need any help, these merchants decided to sell their goods here. You can say that this is some kind of a protest where the Holy Nation have to realize that without the people, they're nothing," the old man answered, staring at the hectic situation in the guild.

"Honestly, this is just wrong..." The old man said. "These people only look at half of the picture and ignore the other half. The Holy Nation didn't need any help because they didn't want anyone to spend their money or materials on the Holy Nation. However, this is has been going too far, and I don't think people care anymore about what they're protesting anymore, and just follow where the crowds go," he continued as he coughed badly.

Rasmus hummed while Aris observed the old man's condition, knowing that he was extremely ill and that his body was slowly dying. However, Aris didn't try to warn the old man and chose to be silent and waited until Rasmus finished with his business here in the merchant guild.

"You seem to be a wealthy young man, a noble perhaps?" The old man asked with his brows raised, staring at Rasmus from top to bottom. "You doesn't seem to be here to buy or sell goods," he pointed out.

"Yes, I'm looking for the guild master, but I'm not sure if I can with this kind of situation they're dealing with," Rasmus answered with a smile on his face.

"Ahh, the guild master is always free in his office. He doesn't deal with these things here. If you want to ask for an audience with the guild master, you talk to that young lady over there. It will depends on what purpose you want to meet the guild master whether he accepts your request or not," the old man said as he pointed at the lady that stood behind the counter with barely any line in front of her. "I also want to meet with the guild master for a loan, but I'm too scared to ask because I know that he won't give me any..." he continued.

Rasmus hummed as he looked at the lady as he pulled out a gold coin from his spatial ring. He stealthily put the two gold coins into the old man's hand, and smiled at him. When the old man looked down at his hand and opened it slightly, he was baffled when he saw two gold coins in his hand.

"Sir?" The old man's eyes were watery, touched by the generosity of a random person.

"That's the payment for your useful information. You said you came here for a loan, and I'm repaying you with something that you need as well," Rasmus said with a smile. "Treat yourself, old man. Get some best medicine," he said as he patted the old man's shoulder and then walked away.

Rasmus and Aris waited in line, and everyone paid attention to them because of how tall they were. They had never seen two people so tall and standing side by side, making them easy to spot. They were quite intimidating to look at as well because of how distant their cold gazes were, and how they both wore a stoic expression.

"Yes? What can I help you Sir?" The lady receptionist asked with a smile.

"Can I meet with the guild master? I have something important to deliver to Viscount Rednil," Rasmus said as he showed a letter with a seal on it. "I believe this is an important letter, and I do believe I can't just meet with the Viscount like walking in the park," he continued.

"Ah, give me a moment. I will inform the guild master," the lady nodded with understanding and hurriedly went upstairs.

"You could just meet the Viscount, why do you choose to go here first?" Aris asked with her brows raised.

"I have a good intention, and since this is someone that Eduard knows well, I don't want to ruin his name and reputation. I wouldn't bother to do this if this is my own business," Rasmus answered as he watched the lady walk down the stairs.

"Sir, the guild master is waiting for you, please come this way," the lady said with a smile as she pointed at the stairs.

Rasmus nodded and went upstairs with the lady escorting him. When they reached the second floor, they saw a few adventurers, sitting on couches with their expensive armor and weapons. They all immediately looked at those two and at their hands. Warriors could see the hands of someone who held a sword, and they could tell immediately that those two weren't ordinary people.

"The guild master is right behind this door, Sir..." The lady pointed at the door behind her.

Rasmus nodded and entered the room with Aris following behind him. Aris glanced at those adventurers with a cold gaze, and they all immediately felt a killing intent like when they saw a blade right under their chin. They immediately looked away and minded their own business.

"Weaklings..." Aris muttered as she entered the room and closed the door behind her.

Chapter 326 - 326: Guild Master.

The Guild Master sat at his desk, staring into Rasmus's and Aris's eyes silently. The man didn't look like a merchant with his muscular body. His toned and muscular arms, wrists, and hands that made him look more like a warrior. One thing that Rasmus noticed was the fact that the man tried to hide his battle scars by wearing long-sleeved attire.

"Welcome to the Silver Platter Guild, please have a seat," The Guild Master pointed at the two chairs across from his desk. "May I know your name, Sir and Lady?" He asked as he watched Rasmus and Aris sit across from him.

The Guild Master looked at the tanned skin of Rasmus and the height of both Rasmus and Aris. He could tell that they weren't from Central Neva, and if he had to make a guess, he would guess that they were from East Neva, which was something that he didn't want to deal with.

Rasmus slowly changed his appearance back, turning his hair back to white silver and his eyes to light blue. Aris also did the same, revealing her silver and blue-ish hair color, and her striking blue eyes. At that moment, the Guild Master held his breath and his heart began to race when he met the famous Blackheart. He didn't know if he should be relieved or anxious when he found out the person in front of him was Rasmus Blackheart and not someone from East Neva.

"Now, may I know yours, Guild Master," Rasmus asked as he stared right into the Guild Master's eyes.

The Guild Master took a short inhale when he snapped back to reality. He glanced at Aris, and it was the first time he had seen an Orthias, something that could be called a miracle.

"My name is Gorge Millan, you can call me Gorge, Count Blackheart," The Guild Master answered as he swallowed his saliva nervously.

"Thank you for allowing us to meet you," Rasmus said as he placed his hands on the armrests. "Do you know a merchant named Eduard from Hurgel Village?" He asked with his brows raised.

Gorge's eyes brightened when he heard Eduard's name, however, he tried to compose himself because he had no idea why Rasmus Blackheart suddenly asked about that. He tried to not show any expression and acted like a proper guild master.

"Yes, I know him. I believe most of us here know who he is," Gorge answered as he nodded.

"A great man with a big heart. I believe that he's well-known in the Refenus Kingdom," Rasmus said as he nodded in agreement. "And the reason why I'm here is because I'm conveying a message from the man who helped me..." He revealed as he placed the letter on the desk.

Gorge looked at the letter and saw the seal of a trading company that almost monopolized the market in South Neva. Everyone knew that trading company, the Fair Share company that belonged to Eduard, but the truth was it belonged to Rasmus and Rasmus alone.

"This letter, I heard you wanted to give this to Viscount Heward? If this is from Eduard, then I can send someone to tell him about this," Gorge said as he looked at the letter on the desk, didn't dare to hold it since it was a letter that wasn't meant for him. "However, lately, the Viscount is quite busy because he has been attending a few parties in the capital city, and I heard about the coming-of-age ceremony for Princess Amarylis," he revealed.

Rasmus hummed as he nodded with understanding while Aris glanced at Rasmus. She knew that he was going to put a stage for the Jester, to kill the royal family. She knew it was a perfect opportunity to build that stage, especially since Viscount Heward seemed to have a connection to the royal family. It was as if everything had moved toward his favor when the truth was it was him that sought and used the momentum.

Gorge once again glanced at the letter, and his gut was telling him something wasn't right. He listened that Eduard was helping Rasmus, but there was something amiss when he tried to connect the dots. He knew that Eduard suddenly stopped becoming a merchant a year ago and moved to South Neva, and somehow Eduard became successful. Then Rasmus came up with his so many rumors and achievements he had done in South Neva, feeling a bit off that it was Eduard who had helped him, not the other way around.

"(This man, he's not a messenger...)" Gorge thought as he looked at Rasmus and Aris. "(I don't like where this is going...)" He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

"You're saying that Viscount Heward is busy, so I'm assuming it won't be easy to meet him, correct?" Rasmus asked with his brows raised.

"Yes, but if he knew that it was you, Count Blackheart, and the fact a letter from his old friend, I think he would try to free his schedule to meet you," Gorge answered as he nodded.

"No, it's unnecessary," Rasmus shook his head. "I don't want to stay in this place for too long. Things are leaning toward chaos at the moment, and with what I have achieved in South Neva, those eyes have been following me around," he pointed out.

Gorge swallowed hard when he understood what Rasmus meant. He knew the existence of demons in Central Neva, and he knew those demons were lurking in the shadows. He didn't want to be a part of this mess, and he had been thinking of taking refuge in South Neva, but it would be too early to make such a decision.

"I understand, Count. However, what should I tell the Viscount when he asked when are you going to come and visit him?" Gorge asked.

"When is the Princess's coming-of-age ceremony?" Rasmus asked back.

"I believe it's in a month or so," Gorge said as he furrowed his brows, looking to the side and trying to remember the exact time.

"Then I might come back here in two weeks," Rasmus nodded with understanding.

"I see, then I'll inform the Viscount that you want to have an audience in two weeks," Gorge nodded, beginning to pull a piece of paper and a quill to write the message. "I'll keep my mouth shut, Count. I won't tell anyone that you're here," he said as he wrote the letter to Viscount Heward.

"Thank you, Guild Master. I really appreciate your consideration, and for thinking of your own safety," Rasmus said with a smile as he stood up, reaching his hand for a handshake to Gorge. "We will take our leave then."

Gorge got up and wiped his palms on his shirt before he shook Rasmus's hand. He nodded with understanding and escorted him to the door. He watched how both Rasmus and Aris changed their appearances again so flawlessly and so effortlessly, something that was enough to intimidate him.

"Take care," Gorge said as he opened the door for them.

Rasmus nodded and then left the room with Aris behind him.

Gorge closed the door in front of him, and he immediately exhaled deeply. He had never thought that two people would make him feel that exhausted and anxious as if he was surrounded by hundreds of people with their weapons pointed at him.

"I don't like this at all... I should really consider taking refuge in South Neva..." Gorge muttered as he walked back to his desk.

Rasmus and Aris continued their journey to the Trivula forest which would take them three days without resting. Since Rasmus had a plan to meet with Viscount Heward, he didn't have the luxury of resting or stopping by anywhere. They both rode their horses at a fast pace, leaving the town hurriedly with Yur flying above them, observing the surroundings for them.

"Lady Aris..." Yur flew down and flew in between Rasmus and Aris. "I see a powerful demonic energy oozing in the far distance. I also see demonic energies on our left and right, and they all seem to be moving toward the same direction as us," Yur continued.

"Oozing a demonic energy? On purpose?" Rasmus asked as he looked at Aris.

"Perhaps those demons encounter with someone powerful," Aris answered as she used her draconic eyes to see in the far distance. "I can see two men fighting against six people wearing a black robe. It seems those two men are trying to flee from those demons," she said as she watched the two men struggle to fight the six men.

"Demons are hunting them down? That's quite interesting," Rasmus said as he tried to use his draconic eyes, but he couldn't see anything but a vast field and woods in the distance. "Let's see what they're up to since they seem to be in the same path as ours," he said.

Aris nodded with understanding, and they both decided to follow where the demons were going.

Chapter 327 - 327: A long lost master.

"Who are you people! And why are you trying to kill both of us?!" A man with long wavy brown hair clashed his sword with a mysterious man in a black robe and hood that covered his upper face.

"Stop talking with them, Erd! These guys are definitely assassins! We need to get out of here, now! They know who we are, and we have to run and hide!" A man with black short curly hair blocked the attacks of three mysterious men around him.

"Run where?! They have been following us for hours, Josh! Do you think we can get them off our tails? These guys are definitely not human with the stamina they have..." Erd responded as he repelled the attack of the mysterious man, and immediately dodged the ambush attacks that two other mysterious men had thrown at him.

"Just run!" Josh said as he clashed his sword with the enemy, and then used his legs to push the enemy away. "Hurry!" He glared at Erd, telling him to stop fighting.

Erd sheathed his swords and used both hands to cast two different magic formations. One was ice magic and the other was fire magic, releasing them together to create a thick mist. He and Josh used that opportunity to run away while they could. However, the mysterious men could follow him even amidst the thick mist that no eyes could see through.

"Demons?" Josh asked as he ran into the woods with Erd beside him. "Damn it! How did they find us? We have been living in the dark for more than a decade, but they found us now?" He added, moving swiftly between trees and tight gaps.

"Don't ask me... but they have been researching the Count's history and territory in the past year. I don't know what they're looking for, but whatever we know, they want it..." Erd answered as he looked over his shoulder and saw the mysterious men following them so effortlessly.

Josh grunted in irritation as he began to coat his body with Aura, boosting his physical ability. He began to run in the front, leading Erd toward where he was leading him to, which was safety. On the other hand, Erd formed a magic formation on each hand and placed them on the trees that he ran past by.

The mysterious men noticed the magic formations and decided to spread, not following Josh and Erd from a straight line. The trees began to explode, creating small and sharp wooden shrapnel while at the same time toppling the trees around the explosions. However, it barely slowed down the mysterious men and how they managed to keep up with those two.

"I sense more of them..." Erd said as he looked to his left and right. "They're far away, but they're coming toward us..." He added as he gritted his teeth.

Josh tried his best to find the best route to get the enemy off their tails, however, no matter how fast and how best the route he took, the enemy managed to follow him. He knew there was no point in running away, just like what Erd said, but at the same time, if they didn't run away, they would end up dead.

"Fuck it..." Josh stopped running and immediately unsheathed his swords. "We can't endanger the others if we brought these assholes with us," he said as he breathed heavily, trying to regain his stamina from all the running.

Erd stopped running and stood beside Josh, unsheathing his sword as he looked at his surroundings. He noticed that Josh had taken a different route to their hideouts, knowing exactly why he did that.

"I was about to say the same thing, Josh. I guess this is it for both of us..." Erd breathed heavily as he tried to regain his stamina.

"One day the mouse will get caught eventually. We both know that," Josh nodded as he watched the mysterious men begin to surround them in a matter of seconds.

When they both were about to break the enemy's line of defense, an owl rested on the tree branch, hooting softly, attracting everyone's attention. They all looked at the owl, noticing how the owl was staring back at them as if the owl understood what was going on, like a silent watch. When the owl hooted again, and how the owl stared at both Josh and Erd, those two felt that as if the owl was speaking to them.

As soon as the owl spread its wings and began to fly away, those two began to run and follow the owl was going. They had no idea what it was, but they were moved by the owl and chose to follow their guts.

The mysterious men began to chase them, and this time they were no longer passive. They were trying to kill those two with magic as they chased them, however, Erd managed to repel and block their magic attacks with his Mana barrier. Josh on the other hand, he was focused on leading the way and showed the path to take to Erd.

"Don't die on me, Erd! Keep up with me!" Josh noticed that Erd was slowing down, and he knew it was because Erd had already used too much energy. "I don't want to carry your heavy ass," he said as he kept his eyes on the owl that flew oddly fast than a normal owl.

"Don't make me talk... I'm trying to reserve my energy here," Erd said as he released random fireballs around him, exploding them when he was at a safe distance. He knew that he couldn't afford to reserve energy when the enemy had chosen to become aggressive.

Josh noticed someone in the distance, in between the trees, a man and a woman piercing their swords through the heads of men in a black robe. Josh realized the ones who sent the owl were those two, and he immediately put a huge smile on his face.

"Erd! I see them!" Josh said with a huge grin on his face.

Erd looked at the front and saw a man and a woman sliced the bodies in half, throwing them away. He was in disbelief that someone could effortlessly slice a body in half, and the fact that the ones they killed were the same enemy they fought that they believed to be untouchable and demons.

When their eyes met with Rasmus and Aris, those two didn't feel relief, but rather fear from their gazes. They began to question themselves whether they should approach them or not, but knowing the death

that followed them, they had no choice. However, when they saw Rasmus point his hand at them, they felt cold sweat on their foreheads.

The moment Rasmus clenched his hand, they both flinched and felt something just flew past them. In less than a second they heard the sound of a loud thud and something wet being squeezed. When they turned around, one of the men in a black robe had turned into a small ball, painting the trees and grass red with his blood. Josh and Erd were baffled, their eyes were shaking when they witnessed something inhuman, not even them had seen anything like that before.

"What the hell is that magic..." Josh looked at Erd from over his shoulder.

"That wasn't magic..." Erd slowly shook his head as he stared at Josh, signaling to him whoever that man was, he was extremely dangerous.

Rasmus suddenly swirled his fingers, snapping both of them back to reality. Suddenly they saw redness and felt extreme heat on their backs. When they turned around, all the robed men were blazed in fire, making them squeal and squeak that didn't sound like humans at all. They saw the black smoke that came out of the melted bodies, something vile and dangerous.

Josh and Erd flinched as they watched the smoke slowly form into humanoid bodies with the deafening screeches of pain. Suddenly Aris dashed past them, she had gone way ahead but the wind just blew their hair and faces. They watched Aris slashed the demons in their true forms, banishing them and getting absorbed into the blade of her sword.

"Seeing that you two aren't reacting much about their true nature, that means you two have seen them before..." Rasmus said as he stared at them. "Or perhaps used to deal with them..." He rephrased his words.

Josh and Erd turned around and looked at the tanned man with brown hair, staring them in the eyes.

"Yes, this isn't our first encounter with demons," Josh answered, unconsciously placing his hand on his sword's handle. "We were knights that specifically trained to hunt them," he revealed.

"Which family do you serve?" Rasmus asked with a stoic expression and cold gaze.

Josh and Erd glanced at each other, thinking if he should tell the mysterious man. However, based on the man's appearance, he didn't look like from Central Neva. They assumed there was no reason for them to hide it.

"We used to serve the Blackheart family..." Erd answered with a stern look, his piercing gaze stared into Rasmus's eyes. "We are outcasts, nomads..." he added.

Rasmus slowly pulled down his hood, slowly changing his appearance back to his original look. Josh and Erd's eyes were wide open when they saw the white hair and dark blue eyes of Rasmus. They reminded them of their young master, Rasmus Blackheart.

"Young master..." Erd's voice trembled as he slowly went down to one knee and lowered his head. "We have been searching for you ever since we heard your arrival to Central Neva..." he said as he clenched his fist on the ground.

"Yes, I'm back," Rasmus said as he looked down at both of them who had finally found their master again.

Chapter 328 - 328: Aligning.

Josh was still in disbelief that the person in front of him was the young master, the son of the late Count Erglade Blackheart. He could see the resemblance of the master he had sworn his loyalty and life to. He looked at the cold expression and the way he stood was similar to Erglade, full of confidence and mystery.

"Josh..." Erd glanced at Josh who hadn't kneeled.

Josh snapped back to reality and immediately went down on one knee. He lowered his head, still with a shocked expression. His mind still couldn't process that Rasmus had survived on his own for more than a decade.

"Young Master, I..." Josh was speechless, couldn't utter his joy and disbelief. "Joshua Beryl is at your service..." He said proudly as he hardened his expression and slowly lifted his head to look at Rasmus.

"Erdinan Renafel is at your service, Young Master..." Erd said as he slowly lifted his head to look at Rasmus.

Rasmus looked at both of them, observing their worn-out attire and weakened bodies. He could tell those two had been living a hard life, a life that nobody would want to experience.

If it wasn't because of Yur who observed them silently and communicated with Aris telepathically, Rasmus wouldn't know who those two were. Rasmus chose to help them when Yur mentioned that those two talked about the Count, and how those two were strong enough to survive against a dozen possessed.

"You mentioned about the others, who are the others?" Rasmus asked as he looked at Erdinan. "I don't know who you two are, but your loyalty is oddly admirable," he said as he looked at Joshua.

"Young Master... we were the Black Hands, a secret and elite division of the Blackheart's knighthood. We swore our loyalty and life to serve the Blackheart family," Erdinan answered as he lowered his head. "There are fifty of us in total, the remaining ones..." He added.

"We have become nomads for almost fifteen years... We were—" Before Joshua could reveal the story behind their fate, Rasmus raised his hand toward them, making him stop talking.

"You two are exhausted, let's find a safe place for you two to rest. This isn't the time for a reunion, we need to get out of here first to remove our traces from the demons," Rasmus said as he looked at the distance and the damage he caused that might have attracted the demons.

Joshua and Erdinan nodded with understanding, and when they were about to stand up, they saw Aris walking past in between them. They couldn't feel her presence at all until they saw her from the corner of their eyes. They slowly turned their gaze toward her, witnessing her blueish silver hair, an Orthias, just like the Countess Blackheart.

Aris stood beside Rasmus and commanded the horses to come. Yur flew and landed right on Aris's shoulder, hooting at Joshua and Erdinan. The two of them looked like mountains in Joshua and Erdinan's eyes, something that they could never climb.

The Young Master that Joshua and Erdinan remembered, a cheerful and full of curiosity had turned into a man. The man in front of him who had nothing could reach far beyond what his father could reach, it was both petrifying and inspiring.

After they managed to leave the woods and went far away from the scene, they decided to take some rest on the hill. It was a perfect place to scout their surroundings without any blind spots.

Joshua and Erdinan made the campfire while Rasmus and Aris sat there, treated like masters. It was a peaceful evening, however, the silence was a bit too much for Joshua and Erdinan.

"The Black Hands. I have heard about it once from my father," Rasmus said, recalling the memories from Rasmus's childhood. "But I don't actually know what the Black Hands do," he looked at Joshua and Erdinan who sat across from him and Aris.

"The Black Hands were made to become the sole hands of the Blackheart family. We don't exist in the world, our world solely revolves around the Blackheart family. We were chosen and raised by the elders of the Blackheart," Joshua answered as he stared at Rasmus with determination.

"We did all kinds of things, Young Master. Assassination, embezzlement, fraud, manipulation, stealing, surveillance, and extraction. We follow what the current head of the Blackheart family orders us to do," Erdinan added as he put more branches into the campfire.

Rasmus had never heard anyone mention the Black Hands. In the memories of Rasmus's past during the execution, he didn't remember anything about the Black Hands either. He only remembered that all the Blackheart's knights died during the rebellion, leaving only his late father and mother. That meant, the Black Hands lived up to its name, didn't exist in the world.

"Young Master..." Erdinan stood up and immediately bowed down to his knees, his face touching the grass, unbothered by the heat of the campfire. "We weren't able to find you, and we failed to protect you when your whole family got executed. We were ordered to hide during the rebellion, we had no choice..." he said as he clenched his fists, furious at himself.

Josh looked at Erdinan and didn't follow him because he knew that it was pointless to apologize. He knew that it was too late, and apologizing would do anything. However, when Rasmus and Aris glanced at him, his heart stopped beating as if he was being judged for not groveling.

"He knows it's pointless to apologize, and I agree with him, so please stand up, Sir Erdinan," Rasmus said as he looked at Erdinan. "You were following orders, and there's no reason for you to apologize in the first place," he added.

Josh sighed in relief, and he never thought the aura that Rasmus emitted was similar or even more threatening than his late father, Erglade. He slowly lowered his head, feeling like he should have groveled and done exactly the same as Erdinan.

Erdinan slowly lifted his head and nodded with understanding as he took a seat beside Josh.

"Tell me, how did you two end up being chased by demons? How did they know who you are, and why they hunted you down?" Rasmus asked as he looked at both of them.

"We were searching for you, Young Master. We heard the news in South Neva that you became the hero who defeated the demon forces. That was when all of us decided to get back to our feet, gathered in one place to plan on finding you, Young Master," Josh said as he stared at the campfire with his eyes narrowed. "When we heard you were in the Holy Nation, we tried our best to reach you, but somehow the demons knew our intentions and who we were," he continued, staring into Rasmus's eyes.

"In the end, we were hunted by demons, forcing us to hide. If we didn't make a quick decision to retreat, we would have died a long time ago," Erdinan added.

"I heard from Great Sage Lenin that the demon forces have occupied the Blackheart's territory, is that right?" Rasmus asked.

Josh and Erdinan shared a look, thinking about what to answer, but then Erdinan took a deep breath as he nodded.

"Yes, Young Master. They burned everything to the ground, there's nothing left of it. They managed to erase the remaining image of the Blackheart from the world," Erdinan answered as he clasped his hands

together, staring blankly at the fire. "They tried to find all the secrets that the Blackheart had gathered and dug into demonic cults. However, during the rebellion, we were the ones who managed to take those secrets away, putting them in a safe place for you to find, Young Master," he continued.

"Yes, Young Master. Your late father, Count Eglade had planned everything from the beginning. He wanted to let you find out the whole truth about this world, and he wanted you to use it, to get rid of them for whatever reason you have, Young Master..." Josh added as he nodded.

Rasmus didn't say a word as he listened to the sound of the crackling campfire. He began to connect the dots and found out how threatening the Blackheart family was to the world. If he could compare it, the Blackheart family was the only one who dove into the abyss of lies and gained all the power to destroy everything that was built with lies. However, that wasn't his main priority, but rather the thoughts of those two and all the members of the Black Hands.

"You two had followed my father and the Blackheart family. I want to know what do you think of them?" Rasmus asked with a stoic expression and cold gaze.

There was only silence for a few seconds because it was hard for Josh and Erdinan to answer such a question.

"We don't know, Young Master. We have never thought of that before, and we believe whatever they did, it was for to erase something that shouldn't exist in this world," Erdinan answered. "We see everything as a target or to ignore, nothing more, Young Master," he continued.

Rasmus closed his eyes as he nodded with understanding.

"Then you can follow me. My vision and my predecessors are the same," Rasmus said as he flicked his finger and put out the campfire in an instant without leaving a single trace of smoke. "Now, bring me to where the others are," he said as he got up.

"Yes, Young Master. They're all hiding in the Trivula Forest," Josh nodded as he stood up.

Rasmus slowly raised his brows when he heard the location, aligning with his destination.

"Lead the way," Rasmus said as he covered his head with a hood.

Chapter 329 - 329: Loyalty.

Rasmus rode his horse and looked at the scenery around him. It was exactly like what he saw in his dream, the monkey pod trees. He began to vaguely remember the memories of Rasmus's of this moment when his father brought him here.

"My father brought me here once..." Rasmus said as he looked at the trees that prevented the sunlight from seeping through.

"Yes, Young Master. This place was Lord Erglade's favorite place whenever he wanted to have some time alone," Erdinan answered, walking behind Rasmus's horse. "This place..." he paused, thinking if he should say it or not.

Rasmus looked over his shoulder at Erdinan who hesitated. He then glanced at Josh, making Josh feel pressured by the glance.

"This place is mystical, Young Master. The Trivula Forest isn't a place that anyone can visit freely. This forest is alive," Joshua answered.

Rasmus furrowed his brows, and slowly turned his head toward Aris. Since he wasn't sensitive enough to see what Aris could see. He wanted to know if she had seen what Joshua had described about the forest.

"It's indeed alive, more alive than the Spring Forest... perhaps even denser and more dangerous," Aris said as she stared at the distance. "Even Yur begins to feel it too, the atmosphere in this forest is nothing like any forest," she added.

Rasmus never thought the Trivula Forest would be a place like what Aris had described. He began to understand why both Joshua and Erdinan seemed to be anxious about the forest.

"And yet the others stay here?" Rasmus asked as he looked at Joshua and Erdinan.

"Because we were allowed to stay here, Young Master..." Joshua answered as he looked around the trees as the night became darker because of the cloudy night.

Before Rasmus could say anything, suddenly Yur landed on Aris's shoulder. Yur in its owl form, trembling uncontrollably as if it was deeply terrified. Even Aris kept her eyes at the front as if keeping an eye on something that could threaten the group.

"It's so scary..." Yur finally spoke in a human language.

Joshua and Erdinan were shocked when they heard the owl speak. It wasn't the first time they heard an animal speak a human language, and they knew what kind of creature that could do such a thing.

"Young Master, is that owl a spirit?" Erdinan asked as he looked at Rasmus with his brows raised.

Rasmus nodded, but his focus was on Yur's trembling body, hiding its face in Aris's hair. He had never seen Yur that scared before, except from Aris. As a great spirit to be scared like that, he wondered what lived in the deep of the forest.

Aris suddenly made her horse stop advancing, and Rasmus decided to stop ahead of her. She looked at the air in front of her, listening to the sound of the air, or at least that was what the other heard.

Rasmus looked up at the sky when he noticed something shiny. He furrowed his brows when he saw something like glitter in the air, floating and moving so slowly. He used his draconic eyes and focused on those glitters until he realized those were spirits in its light form.

"The spirits are warning us to not go any further," Aris said as she listened to the spirits' voices that overlapped with each other. "This is unnatural..." she said as she jumped down from her horse.

"How dare they to tell Lady Aristoria to go away!" Yur said, pointing its left wing at the glitter. "But Lady Aris, let's not go in there..." Yur murmured, frowning in anxiety.

Rasmus also thought the same as Yur that it was bizarre that spirits dared an Aristoria to go away. The spirits should know what an Aristoria was, and yet they didn't want her to go any further. That raised the question of who sovereign over the forest, the one who was strong enough to make the spirits think that Aris was less of a threat than that being.

"You said you were allowed to stay in the forest, by whom?" Rasmus turned around and looked at Joshua and Erdinan.

"A spirit, in a human form," Joshua answered. "It happened when we went off the grid after the rebellion. We didn't know much, and it was the only time we saw that spirit," he added.

"This forest is the reason why we are safe to this day, Young Master. Lately, we saw a few adventurers or seemed to be adventurers who came here. However, they went missing, and we found their dried corpse a few days later in the forest," Erdinan said anxiously.

Rasmus looked at Aris, and she seemed to find that information to be interesting. When they both shared a look, they both knew what they were about to do. They both began to advance, going further into the forest.

"Young Master... the others are this way..." Erdinan said as he pointed at the small path on the right side.

"Lead the way," Rasmus nodded, and then glanced at the distance at the main road where his father had brought him to the lake where the dead tree was.

The journey took them more than half an hour until Rasmus and Aris saw the small village. There were only three buildings in total, and he saw a few men and women patrolling around the village. Suddenly, Josh clicked his tongue, attracting the people's attention.

In less than ten seconds, everyone in the buildings began to come out. Their ears were so sensitive that they could even hear that click even though from far away. Rasmus saw there were 48 people in front of him, staring at him with their eyes wide open. The numbers were exactly like what Joshua and Erdinan said, the remaining Black Hands.

"He's our Young Master," Josh pointed his hand at Rasmus as he stared at them.

All of them immediately kneeled, placing their right hand on the ground with their heads lowered. Not a single of them hesitated to bow down, accepting Rasmus as their new master. Their loyalty was admirable, even Rasmus found it interesting to still be loyal to the Blackheart family even after a decade of being nomads and outcasts.

"You shouldn't call him the Young Master anymore, Josh. I believe we should address him as Count Blackheart now," a man with a scar across his face, his left eye was all white, blind from the scar. His gaze was cold and his expression was stoic when he stared at Josh.

Joshua nodded with understanding as he walked toward them with Erdinan beside him. They both stared at Rasmus for a moment before they kneeled as well.

"Count, we swear our loyalty to the new head of the Blackheart family..." Erdinan said with conviction. "Please, accept our loyalty, and accept us as your Black Hands..." he continued.

Rasmus looked at them for a moment, checking each individual in front of him. Nobody moved a muscle, showing their conviction and unwavering loyalty to the Blackheart family. He wondered how the elders raised such loyal subjects like them, and it reminded him of the Sand Tower in East Neva where they raised loyal and elite assassins that only obeyed orders and didn't care about their own lives and existence.

"I have nothing to offer, and following me will lead you to nothing but death. Are you still willing to follow me and swear your loyalty?" Rasmus asked with a cold expression.

"We were raised and trained to serve the Blackheart family. That's the only purpose we have, and we can't live a normal life because we are being hunted. We live without a purpose other than serving the Blackheart family, and if we are looking a new purpose, it's already too late, Count," the man with the scar said.

"Is that an excuse?" Rasmus asked, staring down at the man with a scar.

"It's not an excuse, Count. It's the truth," the man with the scar answered. "Our future is grim, Count. We don't have the luxury to live a normal life, and we hope you can accept us into your life, Count..." he added.

Rasmus kept observing them, and none of them found the confrontation to be unnerving. They all shared the same mind and vision, which made them a solid group that could work together in harmony.

"I accept your loyalty, Rasmus nodded. "You all may raise."

All of them slowly got up, feeling the weight on their shoulders dissipating. They all looked at Rasmus and bowed to show their gratitude and respect toward the long lost master.

"It's getting late, all of you should get some rest. I have so many questions to ask, but it can wait until tomorrow," Rasmus said as he looked at the time on his wristwatch. "I have to visit the place that my father brought me," he muttered as he looked in the direction where the lake should be.

All of them bowed their heads and went back inside to the buildings where the men and women were separated, leaving only a few to patrol the area.

Chapter 330 - 330: Darkness.

Rasmus followed the path in the middle of the night with Aris following from far behind with Yur in its child form. He had never felt scared of walking in the woods before, however, this time it felt somewhat eerie for him. He couldn't keep looking at the sides from the corners of his eyes.

"Not even a single spirit is seen ever since then..." Rasmus muttered under his breath. "How could this place to be your place for solitude..." he added, thinking about his father.

Aris was looking at the woods and she could see the spirits hiding in the trees. Those spirits were terrified of something, and not her. They were hiding from something that might roam around the forest in the middle of the night.

"Lady Aris..." Yur floated behind Aris, gripping on Aris's shoulder as Yur looked around and at the back. "I don't want to live here, and I don't think the other spirits want to stay in a place like this too..." Yur continued.

"If the demons haven't touched this place, that means this place is safe. This is suitable for you and the other spirits to live in," Aris said as she looked at how dense the Mana was in this forest compared to in Spring Forest which was already abundant in Mana. "However, I want to know first what makes this forest safe," she added.

Yur whimpered as Yur hid behind Aris's back, completely sticking on her back like a backpack.

Rasmus suddenly stopped walking, his gaze pointed at the distance. He saw the lake in the distance with the water that reflected the moonlight. He also saw the massive dead tree on the small island in the middle of the lake, the same tree that didn't seem to grow old or bloom as if the tree was frozen in time.

The moment Rasmus used his draconic eyes to look at the dead tree in more detail, suddenly the clear sky became cloudy again. It happened in almost an instant, and that alone was enough to make the three of them look up.

"I'm a great spirit, but to think there's someone that can change the weather in this large scale in almost an instant..." Yur said, staring at the thick dark clouds in the sky, making it a complete darkness. "I really hate this place..." Yur squirmed, wrapping its tiny arms around Aris's neck.

Aris also found this phenomenon to be bizarre and shocking. She felt like such power could only be possessed by a dragon. She began to realize that the one who was sovereign of this place wasn't just residing in this forest, but rather controlling the whole area as if it was under its dominion.

"This energy..." Yur suddenly perked up its ear and turned into an owl. "This is worse than I thought..." Yur continued, staring at its surroundings.

Aris looked at her surroundings and didn't find any abnormalities. However, when she looked at how the Mana moved and behaved, she noticed something was squeezing the Mana, sucking it and devouring it rather than transforming it.

"That tree..." Aris pointed at the tree where all the Mana was being sucked and devoured.

Rasmus turned around to look at Aris and Yur, who seemed to be disturbed by what was going on. He could see the Mana gathering around the lake, the Mana looked like a thick mist, and how it moved in circles was similar to how a storm was brewing.

Suddenly, the thick Mana turned into dark smoke that blocked their vision. The whole lake was covered by smoke until the smoke began to spread out at the speed of sound. It was enough to push Rasmus and Aris away, and how their skin became dry and hard.

"Is this demonic energy?" Rasmus asked as he looked at the dome of black smoke.

"No... this is Dark Energy," Yur answered, holding onto Aris's shoulders. "It's similar, but different.

"Dark Energy?" Rasmus furrowed his brows, thinking if it was the same thing that Videl had shown him before about Black Magic.

"Yes, some humans learned this, and it's not demonic energy, but a process that turns Mana into a more dense and uncontrollable energy," Yur answered, nodding its head repeatedly. "Dark Energy originated from spirits, but not from us, it's from Dark Spirits," Yur explained, staring at the dead tree in the distance.

"Dark Spirits, they're not a part of the big five?" Rasmus asked as he stared at the dead tree.

"They're not a part of us. Dark Spirits are anomalies, a mistake. They're born from True Dragons' resentment, but we know that True Dragons' don't bore such feeling, they're the highest being who don't hold any emotions," Yur answered, terrified by the fact a Dark Spirit existed in this place. "With that being said, Dark Spirits are the opposite of natural order... They're chaos," Yur revealed as its whole body trembled in fear.

Aris narrowed her eyes, remembering her encounter with Aristoria in the Void Realm. She remembered that Aristoria and Sanya went to the Dragon's Maw where they found remainings of True Dragons'. The mystery of their extinction, and the birth of Dark Spirits, it was all connected to each other.

"Rasmus, you're on your own here," Aris said calmly. "If I tried to follow you over there, whatever that resided in that dead tree will try to fight me," she pointed out.

Rasmus was a bit surprised that Aris didn't want to take this opportunity since she always wanted to have a fight with strong opponents. However, when he stared into her eyes, there was something amiss, something that he couldn't understand, something that she didn't want him to know.

"I see," Rasmus nodded with understanding as he began to take step forward on his own.

"Please! Don't wake it up!"

"Don't wake it up!"

"Please!"

"Please..."

The voices of the spirits were heard around Rasmus like chattering in the skull. He could feel their fears and desperation to stop Rasmus from going further. However, Rasmus ignored the spirits because oddly enough, he felt like the dead tree was calling for him.

The darkness surrounded the island in the middle of the lake, Rasmus was standing there on the edge of the lake, staring at the circling black smoke in front of him. He took a shaky breath as the ambient made him anxious, and then he held his breath when he saw a glowing pair of eyes from beneath the smoke. Glowing golden eyes that pierced through the darkness as it stared right into Rasmus's soul that made his heart stop beating for a brief moment.

The moment the smoke dispersed, that was when Rasmus, Aris, and Yur saw the sovereign of the Trivula Forest. Rasmus's eyes widened when he saw a shadow standing on the edge of the island with the oozing dark purple smoke that lingered on its body. The shadow had a pair of wings, wings that didn't look demonic but rather dragonic, massive with claws on each edge of the wings.

The shadow being slowly raised its right arm and beckoned at Rasmus, signaling him to approach the shadow. However, Rasmus chose to stay, staring at the shadow being without any sign of being intimidated or fearful. At that moment, the shadow disappeared and appeared right in front of him in a blink of an eye, floating above the lake. The shadow was twice the size of Rasmus, towering over him and could devour him if the being wanted to.

Aris clenched her fist and she was ready to pounce on that Dark Spirit if something happened to Rasmus. However, the moment she had such an intention, the Dark Spirit glanced at her, knowing her intention, and the worst part was the Dark Spirit provoked her by beckoning at her, challenging her. Aris put up a smirk, mocking the arrogance of the Dark Spirit, and it was quite refreshing to see such behavior.

"Resentment of a True Dragon, what an arrogant spirit," Aris scoffed as she crossed her arms.

The Dark Spirit focused on Rasmus who was standing right in front of it, its piercing glowing draconic gaze pointed at Rasmus's eyes. However, the Dark Spirit found nothing but emptiness in those eyes, no emotions, no desires, nothing.

"Your name..." The Dark Spirit asked, its voice vibrating that made its gender unknown because it wasn't deep or high.

"Rasmus Blackheart," Rasmus answered, staring back into the Dark Spirit's eyes.

"Ah... you're Aristoria's son that she talked about..." The Dark Spirit responded, narrowing its majestic and gorgeous golden draconic eyes.

Rasmus was a bit surprised that the Dark Spirit mentioned his mother rather than his father who used to go to this place. He thought the Dark Spirit would mention his father, but then he connected the dots and realized there was a chance the Dark Spirit was brought here by his mother.

"My mother brought you here, didn't she?" Rasmus asked.

"Yes, she did. She raised me, and took care of me..." The Dark Spirit smiled with its eyes.