

Evil 401

Chapter 401 - 401: Sword and Scale.

Rasmus and Rullein saw Aider and the others coming out of the parlor room. There was an unsettling feeling around them, and the fact Aider was silent and seemed to either break his character as Krus or something else. Luke and Orlean were still inside the parlor, having a private conversation.

They both followed Aider from behind, still playing as his butler and maid without saying a word. There was only silence in the long hallway, not a single of them said a word, but their eyes filled with so many thoughts. Rullein couldn't go and check what was happening inside since there were guards that were keeping an eye on them outside the parlor, it was impossible for her to disappear into thin air.

"I'll go ahead and rest," Jurgen said and decided to follow the maid that was assigned to him.

Mira, Normen, and Vergeus nodded in agreement and also decided to rest after what they had witnessed. Aider was alone with the maid that was assigned to him, to lead him to his chamber in the mansion. Aider then decided to do the same, letting the maid know that he wanted to rest.

Rasmus and Rullein kept stealing glances at each other, wondering what was happening. Without waiting a single moment, Rullein gently brushed the back of her hand with Aider's, using that touch and connection to take his memories of what had happened earlier. Her eyes narrowed for a bit before she slowed down to keep walking at the same pace as Rasmus.

"Oh, you'll love it," Rullein muttered, quiet enough that it didn't even sound like a whisper, but Rasmus could hear it with his sensitive hearings.

Rasmus glanced at Rullein, giving her a nod with understanding.

As soon as Aider entered his chamber, Rullein pressed her finger on her lips, making sure he wouldn't say a word. She slowly wrapped the room with dark energy, thin enough that it wouldn't be detected by the demons. Once she managed to do that, she put away her finger from her lips.

"We are clear now. Nobody can listen to our conversation here," Rullein said with confidence as she walked toward the minibar and decided to indulge herself with alcohol. "Give me your hand," she reached out her hand to Rasmus.

Rasmus walked toward Rullein and held her hand firmly, allowing the memories that Rullein was about to transfer it to his head. In almost an instant, he could see Aider's memories when he walked down the stairs until he arrived in a spacious cave with the massive stone double door. He watched the dozens of big statues that were revealed to be the existing Zevrathi's family members.

Rasmus found out why those ringleaders were utterly shocked and speechless because he was too. He watched as Luke guided them around the cave until they arrived in a room, a big room inside the cave with a dozen long bench seats. It looked like a temple, a church-like hall where people prayed. At the end of the room, there was a statue of an angel-like being, holding a sword and a scale.

Luke revealed that in a week there would be a gathering, an offering ceremony down there, and he wanted all the ringleaders to join. The ringleaders had become a big part of the cult, something was oddly suspicious and unnerving rather than a reward in their eyes, and they didn't know what to feel about it.

That was when Aider's memories ended, and Rasmus went back to reality. He took a deep breath, bothered by the statue he saw on the altar rather than anything else. He poured himself a glass of whiskey and downed it in a single gulp before he decided to think. Seeing his reaction, both Aider and Rullein were confused because it seemed that he knew something that they didn't. They knew for sure nothing could shock him, and yet this did shock him, so they wondered which one was it.

"(An angel holding a sword and a scale... Saint Michael?)" Rasmus thought with his brows furrowed, rubbing his thumb against the digits of his fingers. His gaze was distant as he looked down at the empty glass in his hand. "(They worship Angel Michael? Is Michael the one who granted Divine power to the Zevrathi family? There are too many holes to connect)" He sighed as he put down the glass.

"Are you going to tell us what's going on?" Rullein asked with her brows raised. "Or are you going to stare blankly for the rest of the day?" She added and tilted her head.

"Even if I wanted to tell you, you wouldn't understand," Rasmus shook his head as he crossed his arms. "This is something that I can't even explain either, too many holes to guess and to connect the dots. First, why the Wraiths and the ones that had been hiding in the shadows and the Lord knew about the Zevrathi family members' whereabouts while someone like the Runesche royal family, a royal family

knew nothing about their whereabouts? Are these two groups not on the same page? They don't serve the same cause? They keep each other blind from what they know. Something doesn't add up, and is impossible to guess," he explained as he leaned against the wall, his brows furrowing.

Listening to Rasmus's words, it convinced both of them that it sounded complicated.

"I can't tell you anything until Aider finds out what's going on down there or until I meet Videl and talk about this with him," Rasmus pointed out as he looked at Rullein.

Rullein raised her brows, wondering why Rasmus had mentioned Videl until she remembered that Videl was the Devil. She wondered if it had something to do with hell or the world that she didn't understand completely. On the other hand, Aider was completely lost, not understanding what those two were talking about.

"Should I be worried, Count? About this offering ceremony?" Aider asked with his head tilted.

"You should. We don't know if you're all going to be the offering or not," Rasmus answered as he looked out the window, staring at the highest building in the whole city, the Suncrown Palace. "Any solution to that, Rullein? A way to keep Aider safe from whatever that's going to happen. You can't leave my side because it will be suspicious," he asked with his brows raised.

Rullein hummed, thinking of a way to keep Aider alive but at the same time kept being seen. She couldn't use her power, not wanting to risk that her energy would be exposed to whoever that would be in the offering ceremony.

"There's one way, and that's to switch places with him. I'll be Krus and I can make Aider's appearance to be a maid, but that also has a risk of being caught when they felt my energy," Rullein answered, not having a solid solution without any risk. "What do you think? Do you want to trust his skill in survival and hope for the best that they're not going to use any of the ringleaders as an offering? All possible solutions have their own risks, but it's better to keep us hidden and sacrificing him other than exposing us just for this guy's life," she pointed out.

Rasmus looked at Aider, and knew that Rullein was right.

"It seems like you're on your own, Aider. Just behave, and try to use leverage if they're indeed trying to use all of you as offerings. You can reveal whatever you want about me," Rasmus said with a straight face. "I never roll a dice and hope it's in my favor, but I think there's no reason for them to sacrifice all of you, at least not yet since they still need people like Krus and the others for this situation," he assured.

"So heartless," Aider giggled eerily as he stared coldly at Rasmus. "But that's fine. Knowing that you were considering my life earlier, meaning you're not that heartless after all," he grinned as he nodded with understanding.

"I'm heartless, but I'm not unreasonable," Rasmus answered as he sat down on the chair, looking at Aider. "Survival is your utmost importance, Aider. I want you to know that," he said with a serious expression.

"Of course, but I hope that you can give me a reward for doing such a good job for this," Aider grinned, glaring at Rasmus in excitement.

"That depends on what you're asking, so you need to stay alive for that," Rasmus nodded with understanding. "You should get some rest because tomorrow, you're on your own," he suggested.

Rasmus was still deeply bothered by what he saw, the statue of Angel Michael. He found it both suspicious and concerning because an Archangel that was said to be the one who defeated Satan appeared to be connected with Satan in this world. Knowing that statue existed long before the new era, meaning there was a chance that the one who killed all the True Dragons, a force that could kill the most powerful being in Neva to be Angels or an Angel.

"Videl would laugh at this..." Rasmus muttered to himself.

Chapter 402 - 402: Offerings.

Aider and all the ringleaders entered the hall, wearing black cloaks and hoods that covered their identities. They wore black masks to hide their faces, and they weren't the only ones who wore those. Everyone at the hall wore the same costume, making it impossible to recognize each other.

Aider sat on the long bench in the middle row, looking at the people around him, but he couldn't differentiate between men and women. He chose to separate himself from the group, in case the ringleaders were being targeted, he could blend in with the crowds easily and run.

He looked over his shoulder and noticed the people that entered the altar, they came from different directions. He had suspected that the cave might have countless entrances. He wondered if those entrances spread across the Sun City or if the cave was big enough that it connected cities and towns.

When the last three people entered the altar, the stone door closed on its own. The altar became quiet in an instant when everyone was seated on the benches, and everyone stared at the statue of an angel holding a sword and a scale. It felt eerie for Aider and the other ringleaders because they didn't know what was happening.

One figure slowly got up from the bench from the first row. The person walked toward the altar, slowly but with such an atmosphere around them. However, Aider could tell by the way that person walked, the width of their shoulders, and the atmosphere around them, it was Orlean Xerxes.

"My peers, my brethren..." Orlean's voice echoed throughout the hall. "Today, we have welcomed more people, people that have proven themselves worthy to be a part of us, so please stand up..." He said as he looked at the dozens of people sitting on the bench.

Aider narrowed his eyes, realizing his plan to separate himself from the other ringleaders to be useless. He slowly got up, and to his surprise, the other ringleaders thought the same way. They all sat on different benches, away from each other to blend in with the crowd, making them harder to trace.

All eyes were on them, the eyes that tried to see the faces underneath those masks. It was eerie and disturbing, even for Aider who couldn't help but grin beneath the mask. Whoever those people were behind those masks, some of them harbored something that didn't feel like human beings.

"It's getting thicker down there," Rasmus muttered as he ate his breakfast with Rullein in the annex building where Orlean's butler lived.

"Hmm, yes. I'm glad that I didn't choose to switch places with Aider. I don't know what's down there, but we know someone powerful is down there, similar to the Prime Lord that I devoured back then,"

Rullein nodded in agreement, eating the bread dipped in tomato soup. "And thankfully you chose to replace Aris with me because she might get easily detected here," she added.

Rasmus nodded in agreement, wondering what was happening down there.

"Whatever is happening down there, looks like it's getting started," Rasmus said under his breath and took a bite of the crispy, freshly baked bread.

Aider sat down after Orlean forced them to introduce themselves, and thankfully, nobody bothered to stare at them anymore, they were focused on Orlean in front of the altar.

"Today will be the 583rd annual of the offering ceremony. Our numbers have decreased in the past few years, but this year will be the worst because the world is at war. But that won't change our faith in our Lord!" Orlean said loudly. "Our Lord will descend soon enough! Guiding us like how they used to guide us!" He added as he raised his left hand, preaching the Lord's name.

"For the Lord of Salvation!" Orlean said, clenching his left fist.

"For the Lord of Salvation..." All the people in the hall muttered in unison.

Aider glanced left and right, feeling the enthusiasm in those mutters, something eerie. He wondered who the Lord they were speaking about as he looked at the statue, Angel Michael was what Rasmus said. He narrowed his eyes, couldn't believe that an Angel had followers of people who surrounded themselves with demons, embracing them like allies and saviors.

"Now! Shall we begin?" Orlean asked with his arms spread open.

Slowly everyone raised their left hand, pointing their thumb, index, and middle fingers at ten o'clock. Aider and the ringleaders had no choice but to follow those people, pointing their hands and fingers like the others.

There were faint cries coming from behind the wall next to the altar where there was a wooden door. Aider's eyes twitched when he heard those cries, the high-pitched cries of babies. He already had bad

feelings about this, his guts told him, screamed at him to not stay. However, he knew he couldn't leave because death would be guaranteed if he chose to even get up.

When the door opened, Aider saw babies covered in black cloths being carried by people that wore black masks and cloaks. There were a total of 7 babies being held and they were still covered in black cloths.

"These children of demons, they will die for the sins to satisfy our Lord!" Orlean said as he clasped his hand together.

The people that held the babies slowly pulled the black cloths from their arms, revealing the disturbing reality. All the ringleaders averted their gazes except Aider when they saw the babies had a reddish skin color as if they had just been born, but what made them disturbing was their eyes. The babies' eyes were all red, blood red, and their saliva looked like blood.

They ones that carried the babies slowly walked toward the altar, placing the babies on the altar, leaving the babies cries and wiggled weakly. Orlean stood behind the altar, staring at all the babies that were placed on the cold table stone in front of him. He slowly raised his right hand, revealing an ice pick-like dagger in his hand, the blade a bit thicker than the thickest needle.

"Let these impurities, these corrupted beings to be banished from this world..." Orlean said as he walked toward the first baby, pointing the tip of the ice pick right at the baby's heart.

Aider and the others listened to the cries of the baby that grew louder but slowly began to weaker and quieter until there was nothing else coming from the baby. It was sickening, even for Aider, he wanted to puke, he wanted to rip his eyes out, scratch his skin, peel it off as if it was still better than having to witness such cruelty, someone coming from him, the man who skinned people alive.

There were only 7 babies, and it felt like eternity for Aider and the ringleaders who had just witnessed the offering ceremony for the first time. Their bodies lost their strength, and the fact the other attendees, the old members watched everything unfold with their eyes wide open without blinking once, it was enough to say those people were sick, worse than them.

The hall became quiet, eerily quiet after Orlean just did something that not a single person dared to do. To kill one was already sickening, but seven? That was when Aider knew, these people in the hall, they weren't humans anymore.

Mira and the other ringleaders began to vomit, they couldn't hold it anymore. However, there was no judgmental gaze toward them, everyone was aware that they were like that back then. However, slowly but surely, the gaze turned toward Aider, the only newcomer that didn't vomit, even Orlean found it fascinating.

Aider didn't move a muscle, not even looking around at the curious gazes pointed at him. He both had to maintain his emotions, his character as Krus, and maintain his cool both for himself and Krus. However, when they heard a loud thudding from the statue, everyone immediately looked up, seeing the scale on the statue move.

"Ah! The Lord has accepted our offerings! The Lord is pleased!" Orlean said with wide eyes, staring at the statue of Angel Michael. "We have fulfilled our annual offering ceremony, we should celebrate!" He revealed as he turned around at the cult members.

Everyone stood up and did that same gesture again, their left hands and fingers pointed at 10 o'clock.

Rasmus and Rullein were waiting at the end of the hallway when they saw Aider and the other ringleaders coming out of the parlor. They could see the pale in their faces except for Aider since the skin that he wore couldn't change its color, but they could see in his eyes, the horror even for a mad Jester.

They followed Aider back to their chamber without saying a word, and as soon as they were inside, Aider removed Krus' face and went to the bathroom. Rasmus and Rullein could hear him vomiting, both forcefully and unwillingly.

"What did he see?" Rasmus asked Rullein.

Rullein simply offered her hand to Rasmus so he could see what Aider had seen down there. Rasmus placed his hand, and immediately saw what Aider saw. His expression was unfazed, unchanging, not even a flinch or discomfort.

"If he had seen Hell... this wouldn't even bother him," Rasmus said as he watched Aider's face on the toilet.

"I think it's you that's not normal. Anyone would go crazy for witnessing hell, but you didn't. You're a human, a mere human, and yet you're not even find Hell that terrifying, not even affecting you to this day," Rullein said, narrowing her eyes.

"You're not wrong," Rasmus said with a stoic expression.

Chapter 403 - 403: Paradox and Contradiction.

Rasmus sat across from Aider, noticing the emptiness in Aider's eyes. If there was a moment when someone tried to bury their unwanted memories in the back of their mind, this was that moment. He could see Aider trying to use his madness to shred that memory of the offering ceremonial.

"What was that, Count?" Aider asked, his eyes filled with mental exhaustion. "What kind of world is this? I can no longer recognize it anymore," he said as he looked at Krus' face in his hands, wondering if he wanted to put it back on because that memory would immediately come back to haunt him.

"The more you know the less you'll understand, that's the law of nature. Knowledge is a curse rather than a blessing, it's always has been," Rasmus answered, sliding a glass of whiskey over to Aider. "Those who know choose to turn a blind eye, not out of fear but out of safety," he watched Aider take the glass and emptied it in a single gulp.

Aider slid the glass toward Rasmus, his gaze turning cold and no longer hollow. Rasmus grabbed the bottle of whiskey and refilled it full before he slid it back into Aider.

"Is that how you see the world, Count? Being hard cold, anti-humanist and anti-idealistic view?" Aider asked as he took a sip of the whiskey, letting his non-existent lips from the burn scar get wet. "A knowledge is a curse, and people turn a blind eye out of safety?" He added.

"It depends on the context. I can say someone is being naive to turn a blind eye on the truth, but something like this, I can say the other way around," Rasmus answered as he leaned back and read

Aider's gaze. "It's not hypocrisy, it's the truth, it's reality, one truth doesn't make the other a lie," he explained.

"Hypocrisy..." Aider muttered as he scoffed and began to chuckle. "Do you think you're not being one? Not even once?" He asked with his hairless brows raised.

"What's hypocrisy? To believe something that contradicts what is said? Or for having multiple beliefs that contradicts one with another?" Rasmus asked with his brows raised, mirroring Aider. "But if I have to answer that for myself which I rarely do. I embody paradox without contradiction," he answered with a stoic expression.

"Paradox without contradiction? What is that supposed to mean, Count? It feels like you're not a man but riddles wearing flesh," Aider asked, sipping the whiskey less than before as his mind began to calm down from the trauma.

"People can't tolerate the fact that humans live with multiple truths at once, that's what hypocrisy is. They call it hypocrisy when you embody both sides of a paradox, but I call it reality. The lie isn't in holding onto contradictions, the lie is in pretending you don't," Rasmus answered, he could see the calmness in Aider's eyes and words.

Aider narrowed his eyes, trying to understand Rasmus's words.

"We can talk about this when we have free time to waste, but right now, since you came out alive, you wanted a reward, is that correct?" Rasmus asked as he sat straight. "What do you want, Aider? What kind of reward do you want from me?" He asked.

"I want my freedom, Count," Aider answered without hesitation.

"Your freedom? Have I ever taken your freedom? You chose to follow me because you had no more purpose in life, and so I gave you one. I never forced you to do all this, and you didn't say no either, so I assumed you did all this willingly. So, what you're asking me, is something that you already have, and unfortunately, you just wasted your reward," Rasmus said calmly. "Now, if you can't see that, doesn't that mean you still have no purpose in life? You already have your freedom, you just don't know how to use it," he pointed out.

Aider sat there, with the glass of whiskey hovering in front of his mouth, trying to argue but none appeared. He realized that he followed Rasmus's orders believing they were obligations, not choices. He never thought of that, never realized that his view of life had been narrowed to that point, proving Rasmus's words.

"Aren't we done?" Aider asked, finally snapping back to reality. "Because I'm done. Whatever down there, I don't want any part of it anymore," he said in a cold tone.

"Then we are done here. I can let Rullein take care of the rest from her," Rasmus nodded with understanding.

"Heartless but not unreasonable, huh? Now I understand what you mean," Aider said and then emptied the glass of whiskey. "What do we do now?" He asked.

"We made it like all the ringleaders chose to disappear after witnessing such cruelty, including, Krus," Rasmus pointed at Krus' face in Aider's hands. "We will disappear into thin air," he pointed out.

Aider nodded with understanding as he got up from the couch and walked toward the bed. He had forgotten when was the last time he felt this mentally exhausted. He didn't care about anything else but to use the moment of tranquility to rest, to be unconscious. On the other hand, Rasmus glanced at Rullein, giving her a nod, signaling her to eliminate every ringleader and trying to gather as much information as she could about this cult.

Rullein puffed into thin black smoke and followed Rasmus's orders without hesitation or any question. Rasmus took a deep breath and looked outside the window, the night had claimed another day.

Rullein appeared in Mira's room, and she slowly brushed her fingers on Mira's forearm. Her touch was like a breeze of air to Mira, giving Mira comfort, not realizing that she was being devoured in her sleep. Rullein gained Mira's memories and her existence at the same time, leaving no trace.

Rullein disappeared and reappeared in Normen's chamber, sleeping and reliving the moment during the offering ceremony. She smiled widely and manipulated his dream, making him repeat the worst moment where Orlean killed the babies over and over. Normen twitched in his sleep, his body was telling him to wake up, but his brain was being manipulated by Rullein. She then took his memories before she devoured him completely.

Rullein moved to Vergeus' room and found him indulging in alcohol, too drunk to even notice her presence. She slowly wrapped her arms around his neck, and Vergeus felt a sense of comfort until it made him snap back to reality, realizing someone was in his room. Before he could scream, Rullein's razor sharp nails ripped and cut his throat as she absorbed the blood that had leaked through his throat. She giggled mischievously, staring at the horror in his eyes when his eyes stared at the glowing draconic eyes of Rullein's.

"That's it... keep staring at me like that..." Rullein whispered as she watched Vergeus' body twitched and finally die in her arms.

Rullein smeared her face and neck with Vergeus' blood until her skin absorbed the blood. She then puffed into black smoke and appeared in Jurgen's room, and to her surprise, he was wide awake, staring at the window. Jurgen glanced over his shoulder, furrowing his brows with a confused look, not knowing who she was.

"Who are you," Jurgen asked as his hand slowly reached his sword that was leaned against the wall.

"Me? I'm just someone who's here to condemn you to death..." Rullein answered as she walked toward Jurgen slowly, her black dress and her glowing orange eyes making her look terrifyingly alluring.

"You're that monster... the woman in black, the one that walks beside Rasmus Blackheart..." Jurgen said as he tightened his grip on his sword.

When Jurgen was about to lift his sword, the sword wouldn't budge. He looked down and saw a ball of black smoke around his hand. He tried to move his hand, but he lost control of his hand and watched as his hand slowly became thin to the point there was no flesh in it. He was petrified by what he saw, and when he tried to scream, a sharp blade-like tail pierced through his throat and out of his scalp.

Rullein tilted her head, looking at Jurgen's tongue that was lolling out and his pupils moving in a different direction. She chuckled mischievously as she watched Jurgen's body become skinny in a matter of seconds until nothing was left, not even his skin or bones.

Rullein was about to visit Orlean's bedroom, but then she felt something in his room. She tilted her head, staring at the door in front of her before she decided to puff into smoke and went back to be with Rasmus.

"All done?" Rasmus asked when he saw Rullein appear behind him.

"A Prime Lord is here..." Rullein muttered.

"Hmm, that's unfortunate..." Rasmus said as he got up from the couch. "But that's fine, since we know who Orlean is. We can visit him anytime we want in the future. For now, it's time for us to leave, to disappear," he looked at Aider who was already awake, ready to leave.

Rullein snapped her fingers and opened a spatial space for the two of them to hide.

"That damn deal of yours, is ruining the fun," Rullein said as she sighed.

"You'll get your moment, I can assure you that," Rasmus said as he entered spatial space, and then Aider entered after him.

Chapter 404 - 404: Trust and Truth.

Aris removed her hand from Rullein, witnessing what Aider saw during his disguise mission. She glanced at Rasmus, who seemed to be deep in thought while writing a letter, and knew what he was thinking. She had the same curiosity as Rasmus, especially toward the statue of an Angel that those demonic cults seemed to worship. However, she decided to push that thought aside since there wasn't enough information related to them.

She took a deep breath, staring at the stars with the trees around her. It was peaceful but felt heavier than ever.

Rullein let all the Blackhands understand the situation by letting them see the glimpse of the altar, the hidden cave underneath the Sun City. She also gave Mira and the other ringleaders' memories so the

Blackhands could investigate the Wraiths even more since there were a lot more of them on different continents.

"Joshua, Erdinand, and Herman, I want all of you to create four different teams, and try to dig deeper about the Wraiths from the memories you got from Mira, Jurgen, Normen, and Vergeus. Once you dig up enough information about them all, come back to me," Rasmus said as he folded the letter and sealed it with the Blackheart seal. "Ayla, I want you to go to the Holy Nation and give this letter to Great Sage Lenin," he offered the letter to Ayla.

Joshua, Erdinand, and Herman nodded and immediately gathered all the Blackhands after Rullein finished sharing what they needed to know. Ayla took the letter from Rasmus's hand and bowed her head before she walked to her horse and rode her horse to the Holy Nation. Not long after she left, all the Blackhands moved to do their task, to gather more information related to Luke and what kind of cult that he was in.

"Why are we not going to the Holy Nation ourselves, Rasmus? Videl needs to know what you know, and I know you're curious about that as well, so why?" Aris asked with her arms crossed.

"Because I don't trust him, Aris. I need to hold this information as long as I can and gather more without him knowing. He's the Devil after all," Rasmus said with a serious expression. "And I don't want to be anywhere near the Holy Nation, not after I made a deal with Nemu. We need to be here, to unravel everything and keep an eye on the demons, remember?" He raised his brows.

Aris didn't say a word and just nodded, but Rasmus could see that something was bothering her.

"Talk to me, Aris" Rasmus said as he leaned against the tree.

Aris glanced at Rullein with a stern look on her face, and immediately Rullein puffed into black smoke, leaving them alone. Aris slowly placed her right hand on her chest as she stared at the stars once again.

"I feel like something within me is changing, and I don't know if the mark that Satan left inside me is growing or if it's something else. But, I just want this mark to be removed from my body. It's bothering me," Aris said as she clenched her fist against her chest.

Rasmus stared at her chest before he looked at her face, seeing a hint of fear. She had been dealing with uncertainty, something that slowly gnawed in her mind. He knew that having someone like her to be dulled by things that bothered her would cause a huge drawback for him. However, at the same time, he didn't know if the mark would reveal Videll's existence or not because Satan would know the only being who could remove such a marking would be another Sovereign, the Devil.

"Go, and if Videll asked, just told him that I knew and I would still want him to remove that mark from your body," Rasmus said as he nodded with understanding.

Aris nodded as she looked down, slowly pulling her down back to her side before she looked Rasmus in the eyes.

"When you said something about trust, I have been wondering if you trust her, your mother," Aris asked. "You said that trust is similar to allowing yourself to be fooled in a way."

"No," Rasmus answered without hesitation. "There's no reason for me to trust her since she never asked me or told me to trust her words. She never said anything to me because she had something to hide when we met. So no, I don't trust her," he explained and shook his head.

"What about me? Do you trust me? Everything that I have said, you trusted all of them?" Aris asked, staring into Rasmus's eyes even deeper, searching for any reaction or differences.

"Yes, I trust you. It's because you don't have a reason to lie, you have nothing to hide, nothing to protect, nothing to lose, nothing to gain. You have no reason to lie, and that's why I trust you," Rasmus answered, staring back into Aris' eyes.

Aris averted her gaze, processing Rasmus' words and trying to find out if he was right about her. After a long pause she nodded her head, realizing that he was right, she had no reason to lie.

"Should I trust you?" Aris asked, once again staring into Rasmus' eyes.

"What do you need to trust me for?" Rasmus asked back with his brows raised.

Aris' eyes narrowed slightly as she looked into his eyes back and forth. She wondered why she wanted an answer to her own question. She realized that she didn't need to trust him, and he was right, she didn't need to trust him, and yet, she wanted an explanation, an assurance if she should or shouldn't trust him.

"You don't need to trust me, but I will always tell the truth. Everything that I have shared with you, they're all the truths. However, not everything you ask of me will always be revealed as truths. I have reasons, I have purposes, and I have intentions. It's you to decide whether to trust me or not, and I will never ask you to trust me. We both are using each other, Aris. The moment you put trust in me, that's when I'll use you even more," Rasmus said with a serious expression.

"That's not enough," Aris said as she shook her head. "I want you to stop being ambiguous, Rasmus," she furrowed her brows.

"Don't trust me," Rasmus answered without hesitation.

"But you uphold truths?" Aris muttered.

"I uphold truths, nothing but the truths," Rasmus nodded.

"And yet you don't want me to trust you..." Aris closed the distance until she stood right in front of him. "Why?" She asked as she slowly reached for Rasmus's suit, gripping it with both hands tightly.

Rasmus was mildly shocked when Aris stood in front of him, holding him like an anchor. However, he didn't get swayed by it, by the situation that was happening between them. He could see it in her eyes and hear it in her voice.

"Is this fear?" Aris asked, tightening her grip on Rasmus's suit to the point she ripped and tore his suit.

"Yes, that's fear," Rasmus answered, staring into Aris' eyes filled with uncertainty. "You fear of the unknown, fear of uncertainty, fear of losing yourself, fear of doubting yourself," he pointed out.

"Why?" Aris asked as she closed the distance even more, her forehead almost touched with Rasmus'.

"Because you're questioning your existence, your purpose, and none come out as an answer that you're looking for," Rasmus answered, feeling the trembling hands of Aris' on his chest.

"Why that bothers me? I shouldn't be bothered by it," Aris asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

"That, I don't know the answer," Rasmus shook his head.

"Why? Don't you know everything about other people? You always do," Aris asked, pushing Rasmus even harder against the tree.

"Because that's something that only you can find the answer to, Aris. I might be able to understand and change others' perspectives, but I can't change who they are. I can understand your perspective once you find the answer, but until then, I can't give you any answer," Rasmus answered. "Now, why don't you go and deal with what has been bothering you? Go and get that mark erased, and use the time to find the answer to your question," he pointed out.

Aris took a deep breath and exhaled deeply, loosening her grip on Rasmus's suit before she slowly took a few steps away from him. She slowly nodded, but to her surprise, Rasmus offered her the Dragon's Breath. She looked at it for a moment before she looked at Rasmus with a confused look.

"Use it when you think that you can't find the answer. The only one who knows you better is no other than your predecessor, my mother," Rasmus said, offering the Dragon's Breath to Aris.

"You're giving me this?" Aris asked as she grabbed the Dragon's Breath from Rasmus' hand.

"As I said, I trust you," Rasmus answered and watched Aris look at the Dragon's Breath in her hands.

Aris chuckled softly as she shook her head.

"I'll be gone for a while..." Aris said as she stored the Dragon's Breath in the spatial ring.

"I know, take your time," Rasmus nodded with understanding.

Aris nodded and then turned around, walking into the woods until she disappeared into the distance.

Chapter 405 - 405: Hope and Desperation.

Rasmus drank the luke warm beer in a rundown pub where townspeople gathered after a long day of labor. He changed his appearance that made him look like an ordinary person with Aider and Rullein at the table. They listened to the people's conversation, especially rumors about what was happening around Central Neva.

"We are doomed," a regular said as he slammed his jug on the table. "The future of humankind is doomed. The Holy Nation is a fake! The Magic Tower is taking a side with a fake Saint! War is happening everywhere! And soon we will be drafted to become a militia because of a damn war that's about to happen here!" He shouted, his cheeks were red, drunk from drinking too much.

"Don't you hear about the missing thousands of soldiers from the three nations that tried to take over the Referus Kingdom? More than ten thousand armies disappeared in a single day! The demons are already making a move, and people are still fighting each other rather than standing together to fight them?! What the fuck is this bullshit! We are going to get drafted and die in a pointless war?!" His friend added, slamming his fist against the table.

"Should we just move away? We all should move to the Sun Empire and take refuge there. We won't get drafted, and the Sun Empire faction is the strongest. We will be safe there," the other friend suggested.

"With what? Do you have enough money to bring your whole family to the Sun Empire? Are you crazy? We don't even have the money to even live there on our own because everything is expensive there. There's no hope for people like us!" The drunkard said and gulped the luke warm beer like it was water.

"Then let's just move to the Cerdentis Kingdom, they're taking refugee right? For the believers?" The other friend asked, looking at his friends.

They all looked at each other for a moment before the drunkard shook his head and waved his hand, dismissing the idea.

"Fuck that, I don't believe in any religion anymore. Those guys are deceivers, using the fear and panic of the people to make them strong. If former Saint Astrea could heal the wounded and reveal that she was fake, what made you think those people over there weren't the same as the Angelis family? I'm not going to take my risk, and they're shady, I just now deep in my gut that they're no different, or perhaps worse. My gut is always right, so I'm not going, you guys can just go without me," the drunkard answered as he emptied the jug.

The friends looked at each other, seemingly believing in the drunkard's words.

"So, we are doomed?" The friend asked as he rubbed his face. "The big war is coming, and we don't have anywhere to go..."

"We are commoners, what do you think will happen to us? We are just cogs in the wheels, replaceable and not even worthy ten gold for our heads," the drunkard scoffed and watched the waitress bring his new jug of luke warm beer. "Well, whatever happen, I just want to spend the time I have left with my family, my kids, and my wife," he sighed and decided to focus on drinking his last beer.

Suddenly a man entered the pub, panting as he held a piece of paper in his hand. Everyone in the pub looked at him with a confused look, then looked at the paper in his hand.

"The Holy Nation is welcoming refugees! Lady Aurelia is promising us a place to stay, food, and money for work!" The man said as he put the paper on the counter.

The pub owner took the paper, looking at it for himself first before he grabbed a nail and a hammer. He then nailed the paper to the wooden wall so everyone could see it. Everyone gathered around the counter to look at the message that Aurelia herself had written.

"This is... we should be able to avoid getting drafted, right? I don't care about the Holy Nation's rotten truth! The Magic Tower is supporting Lady Aurelia, and there's no safest place than the Holy Nation right now," a man said as he kept reading the message.

"I agree, the Magic Tower is the only one we can trust right now. They have been neutral for hundreds of years and the Great Sage is the embodiment of peace and righteous, but seeing that they support

Lady Aurelia and the Holy Nation, we can trust them, right?" The other guy asked as he narrowed his eyes.

Everyone murmured, considering this chance to run away from being drafted into countless of wars with zero chance of survival. At a time like this, to be given a place, food, and safety from someone that embodied justice, righteousness, and peace, the people would take that risk.

One by one they left the pub to inform their families and their neighbors, knowing that they all had the same chance of survival. Rasmus, Aider, and Rullein had been listening to their conversations, and the turn of events was unexpected.

"That was quick," Aider giggled mischievously. "They cursed at religions, the Holy Nation, and the other nations, but the moment a single hope appeared, they licked their own spits without hesitation," he laughed quietly, covering his mouth and suppressing his laughter from attracting attention from the remaining people in the pub.

"That's the power of hope and desperation, combined together, nothing can stop them, not even their own consciousness," Rasmus answered, taking a sip of his beer. "I'm more surprised that Aurelia knew how to use this strategy, I guess my teaching isn't really a waste," he smirked.

"Teaching? Lady Aurelia the Saint?" Aider arched his brows. "What do you mean by that, Count?" He asked.

"Aurelia was my student at the Gratlan Academy. Aurelia Angelis, Monica Sancticus, Alexander Ravenshroud, Isador Suncrown, Maximillian Wyverncrest, and Valari Ashenvale. They were my students," Rasmus answered and took a sip of his beer.

Aider blinked repeatedly, trying to digest what Rasmus had just revealed. He slowly snorted and slammed his hand against the table, laughing in disbelief.

"Oh, the world is doomed..." Aider laughed as he covered his face in disbelief.

Aider's laugh attracted everyone's attention, looking at him with a weird look. He immediately suppressed his laughter, turned into a chuckle before he completely took a deep breath and exhaled

deeply. He was shocked, utterly shocked when he found out the most prominent figures, the people that held big roles in the future were Rasmus' students. He didn't know what was more disturbing, the fact that they were Rasmus' students or the fact that everything seemed to revolve around him and connect to him.

"If you said that she used your teaching, what's the point of her doing this? You're someone who doesn't use kindness as is, you're someone who do it for a reason, not out of kindness," Aider asked as he looked at Rasmus.

"There are many things that she gains from this. Influence, recognition, putting herself and the Holy Nation into a new light, regaining its status as a nation rather than an empty and abandoned nation that other nations can take over with force. With that, it will make other nations rethink of marching their armies toward her nation. She'll rebuild the nation, befitting it to what she believes and use the truth as its foundation, creating the power to unify the continent. Those who are still against her, that will make them look like the bad people," Rasmus explained as he put down the jug and looked at Aider. "There are a lot more, but I think these are what important to her right now," he added.

Aider narrowed his eyes, finding that explanation as nothing but a chessboard.

"So even hope... even kindness... are just weapons to her? Is that what you thought to all your students?" Aider asked, crossing his arms as he leaned back and stared at Rasmus.

"Weapon? I would call them tools rather than weapons. I taught them how to wield the tools, and the outcome is them to decide. So, no, even if hope and kindness are tools to her, she means it because I also taught them not to use lies and deceptions," Rasmus answered as he shook his head.

Rullein yawned as she rested her head on her fist, staring at both of them. She was bored, completely bored by this idle conversation that she didn't care about.

"Are we done here? Are we going to do something like this for the next few days?" Rullein asked as she looked at Rasmus.

"No, not at all. We are here just for a small break because we are going to do something big soon, and you'll going to love it," Rasmus said and emptied his jug. "Until then, bear with it," he smiled at Rullein.

Chapter 406 - 406: Indirectly involved.

"Ready your weapon!" The general raised his sword as he looked at the hundreds of knights ahead of him.

All the soldiers unsheathed their swords and raised their shields, waiting for the general's next order. They looked at the militia that was at the far back of the line, they could see the fear and anxiety in their eyes and the way they held their spears. They knew that some of them or most of them wouldn't make it out alive. When the enemy sounded their horn, they knew there was no going back now.

Mykel was watching in the distance with Aider when the two forces collided and began to shed blood. It was obvious who would win the battle, especially that Rullein was there, pretending to be a soldier. She was going to devour them all, turning this event to be an unsolved mystery in the future.

In just 3 hours, the battle was already over and the victor of the battle was obvious since Rullein was on their side. However, she didn't fight to win or to kill, she fought to prolong the fight, inducing every person with her dark energy that made them go almost in a frenzied state. They fought to kill, until their lungs burned from exhaustion and they either passed out or died from exhaustion.

"What's happening to their bodies..." The general narrowed his eyes when he looked at the corpses scattered on the battlefield. "They're all so skinny and pale in just in three hours?" He muttered as he looked at the corpses with their skins that clung onto their skeletons as if there was no flesh and muscles in between.

The mystery put everyone on edge and the general issued an order to retreat, leaving the field behind as they brought their dead comrades back with them. They were terrified by what had just happened, and how the bodies seemed to be drained like dead flowers. The general had to make the hardest decision and burn the dead bodies, fearing that they might be cursed.

"You're letting her kill those people while knowing the demon force is growing?" Aider asked with his brows raised.

"Which one would you prefer? To let them be fodders for the demons or to be Rullein's nourishments? Either way, their deaths serve more purpose for both of them, and I would rather her than making the demon stronger," Rasmus answered as he looked at the sunset in the distance. "Oh, and I believe this

will prevent them from waging wars in the future. You can say we indirectly made them stop killing each other and perhaps unite them to fight the demons," he added.

"So you're going to roam around, gathering information related to skirmishes, wars, and battles to feed her?" Aider asked as he looked at the battlefield that had been completely abandoned, leaving the enemy's corpses behind like undesired trash.

"Isn't that what you have been doing? Don't you enjoy performing in front of different crowds every day?" Rasmus asked as he got up and brushed his trousers. "Your method to gather information is flawless, and I'm thankful for that. Let's leave," he said as he walked away.

Days turned into weeks, wars were happening everywhere and Rullein was always there to join. The mystery of the dead that turned like husks began to circulate around the people, wondering if a curse of the demons had spread across the continent. That slowly made the nations stop waging wars, knowing that the demons might gain something from this. However, it was already too late because the commoners had taken refuge in the Holy Nation out of fear and safety.

Aris stood in front of the gate, and the Paladins that guarded the gate were shocked when they saw her silver hair and blue eyes. They didn't know if they wanted to let her in or to send her away, but they knew they wouldn't even be able to stop her.

"I'm here for Saint Serena, let me in," Aris said with a stoic expression as she stared at the Paladins. "I don't have time for this, so let me in or die for nothing," she warned.

The Paladins clenched their swords, but they all nodded with understanding and immediately moved aside. Aris nodded as she put back the hood on, covering her hair as she walked into the city. One Paladin escorted her to the inner circle of the city, keeping an eye on her and because she was an important guest.

Aris was surprised that there were so many people in the city already, especially after she heard that the Holy Nation had opened their gate for refugees. She looked at the people rebuilding the houses and the buildings that seemed to be destroyed during the war. She looked at the city walls that were being repaired and reinforced by the mages from the Magic Tower.

Her arrival immediately reached Lenin and Aurelia's ears, and they all immediately went to see her. They thought that Aris had come with Rasmus, but to their surprise, they only saw her alone. When Serena and Aris shared a look, Serena knew that Aris had come for her or Videl.

"You're looking for me?" Serena asked as she approached Aris. "Let's have a conversation in private," she grabbed Aris' hand as she glanced at Aurelia and the others, knowing that they might want to know what was going on.

Aris glanced at Lenin, Aurelia, Novia, and two figures that she didn't know who they were, which were Alexander and Marina the Sorceress. She then walked into the palace with Serena and went to Serena's chamber.

"I need to meet with Videl," Aris said as she stared into Serena's eyes.

"Videl? That's a bit disturbing and concerning," Serena tilted her head, wondering why Aris, the woman who didn't like Videl at all, was looking for him. "Did Rasmus send you here? That's not it, is it?" She raised her brows.

"No, I need him," Aris said as she shook her head.

Serena narrowed her eyes and crossed her arms, she then nodded with understanding. She went to find Videl, which she knew exactly where he was. It didn't take a few minutes until she came back with Videl. He had the same reaction as Serena, confused and disturbed that Aris was looking for him not because of Rasmus but because of her own will.

"I'll keep it simple, I have been marked by Satan and I need you to remove that mark from me," Aris said as she approached Videl.

Both Videl and Serena raised their brows, surprised by the revelation. Aris made it brief when she explained what happened to both of them. It was unbelievable that Satan took this matter into their own hands, especially to make a move against her.

"You're quite unlucky that you got marked by Satan," Videl said as he sat on the couch, crossing his legs and resting his arms on his lap. "The good news, I can easily remove that mark from your body since I have gained a lot of power, but the bad news..." He paused as he tapped his fingers on his lap.

"That the chance of Satan to know your existence will be guaranteed? Because the only being that could remove the mark was nobody else but a being with the same rank as Satan?" Aris asked, crossing her arms.

Videl was surprised that Aris knew that, but then he knew it must be Rasmus that told her.

"Yes, you're absolutely correct," Videl nodded in agreement. "And I think Rasmus was the one who told you that? If he knew the risk, he knew that it would blow our cover, mine and Rasmus's..." he muttered as he sighed.

"He said that it didn't matter and he wanted you to remove the mark from my body," Aris said with a serious look on her face. "If he wanted this mark to be removed, meaning that he knew the risk and consequence. So, are you going to remove the mark from my body or not?" She asked.

"Well..." Videl grinned as he sat straight and uncrossed his legs. "I'll remove the mark if you could win against me," he said with a smirk on his face.

"Oh dear..." Serena said as she took a few steps away from them.

Aris pulled out Aristoria's armor from her spatial ring, letting them fall on the ground. Serena and Videl looked at the armor parts, noticing the immense energy that the armor released. Videl's smirk widened as he got up from the couch as he pulled out a blood red sword from thin air.

"I knew you would accept the challenge, after all, you're not that different from us..." Videl said as he swung his sword around, watching Aris put on the armor that felt like a second skin on her body.

"Not this time..." Aris said as she put the greaves, gauntlets, pauldrons, and chest plate on. "I really want this mark to be removed from my body, completely free from this," she stared into Videl's red eyes as she pulled out both Rasmus's and her swords.

Chapter 407 - 407: Powerful Individuals.

The right wing of the palace turned into rubble in just a matter of a second, causing panic to everyone in the palace. Lenin and Aurelia thought a powerful demon had attacked the palace to take Zevrathi's body. When they ran toward the right wing of the palace, they saw Serena standing in the middle of the rubble, staring at the distance. They found out that it wasn't a Prime Lord or a powerful demon, but rather Aris and Videl who had just clashed their swords.

"I might need your help here, Great Sage. If those two are going all-out, nothing remains here," Serena said as she clasped her hands together, creating a big Divine barrier to contain Aris and Videl inside.

"Novia, put them around the barrier," Lenin said as she gathered Mana around her.

Novia hurriedly pulled out magic tools that looked like sticks made of Mana stone. She stabbed them around the Divine barrier and immediately a magic formation appeared around the magic tools. A translucent almost transparent barrier wrapped around the Divine barrier.

Lenin fed the Mana barrier with the Mana she had gathered, making it transparent. Marina added more Mana into the Mana barrier and made it extremely powerful.

Videl and Aris glanced at the crowd, noticing that they had finished isolating them in the barrier. Videl began to release Aura from his body, and immediately the ground trembled with the intensity of his footings. Aris on the other hand coated her with blue energy around her body, clashing with the Aura that Videl had just released. The Divine barrier trembled and it affected Serena directly since she kept channeling her Divine power onto the barrier.

"You're getting stronger... I thought I could easily overpower you with just this..." Videl chuckled as he used more of his strength into his grip on the sword.

Aris didn't say a word as her eyes glowed bright blue and her hair began to float. The moment she put more energy onto her swords during the clash, a shockwave was released, shattering the Divine barrier. Serena immediately coughed blood and collapsed, shocking everyone.

"Saint!" Aurelia screamed as she ran toward Serena.

"I'm fine..." Serena wiped the blood off her chin as she got up. "I should have put more effort in this," she sighed as she clasped her hands together once again.

A bright orange Divine barrier was formed around the Mana barrier, but this time there were ancient language words around the Divine barrier. Aurelia realized that Serena was taking this seriously when Serena chose to use the language of God to seal the barrier.

Aris swung her swords and it was enough to overpower Videl's strength, sending him a few meters away from her. She immediately dashed toward him and swung with the intention of killing him. Videl swung his sword and clashed with Aris with her massive momentum. The clash turned the inside of the barrier into a complete sandstorm, and nobody could see what was happening in there.

Each clash shook the ground and the people thought it was an earthquake. Aurelia sent a priest to inform the Paladins to tell the people they shouldn't panic and that everything was fine.

"So this is the power of an Orthias?" Alexander's eyes were wide open, his hands trembling in disbelief.

"I'm not sure if you should be amazed by her or the fact there's someone that can match with an Orthias, no, an Aristoria," Marina said as she crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes when the Mana barrier had long shattered and disappeared. "Whoever that man is, I think he's the most impressive one here," she added.

They could see the fine dust that blocked their vision inside the barrier, making it impossible for them to see what was going on. However, they could see dozens of shockwaves being released every second. The only thing that prevented the shockwaves from killing them was the Divine barrier that Serena had created.

Each second that went by, the intensity of the battle became destructive. The Palace might crumble at any moment if those two didn't stop at all. The worst part, Serena was taking indirect damage from those two since she was using her power to maintain the barrier. Her nose started to bleed and Aurelia was worried about her, and tried to transfer her divine power to Serena.

"Who's that man?" Marina asked as she narrowed her eyes.

"That man is Videl, Count Blackheart's personal butler," Lenin answered.

"Someone as strong as him exists in this world? And we have never heard of him?" Marina furrowed her brows as he watched the shockwave and the epicenter around the barrier.

"You're not the only one who has been wondering about that, Sorceress," Lenin answered as she narrowed her eyes and watched the Divine barrier that might break at any time. "We need to stop them somehow, or the whole city would turn into dust," she pointed out.

They all knew that, but who was strong enough to stop those two while they the battle only intensified from there.

"All of you, stay back," Serena said, her voice trembling.

With Serena's order, everyone moved away from Serena and the battlefield. They didn't know what she was planning and how she could stop those two. However, when she began to take a deep breath and closed her eyes with an immense amount of Divine power, they knew something was about to happen.

Serena's body began to glow bright yellow like the sun as she was reciting a language that nobody could understand. Astrea had never seen a Saint that could emit such light from their bodies, and there was no history of anything like that. Everyone was enticed by Serena's power, and when they saw a halo above her head, they felt like they were staring at an angel.

The moment Serena opened her eyes, her eyes glowed bright yellow, similar to what Astrea did when she got possessed by an angel. Wings made of Divine energy appeared behind her and she began to float. Astrea panicked because she knew exactly the cost of using one's body as a vassal for a higher being.

Serena flew toward the barrier and a massive and long sword made of light appeared in her right hand. She spun and swung the sword down vertically, cutting the Divine barrier in a single strike. The impact was enough to push Aris and Videl away, shocked by an intense energy that separated them.

Videl was actually covered in blood, there were thousands of cuts all over his body. His full body armor had been completely obliterated and his sword was on the brink of shattering. On the other hand, Aris was unscathed and her armor emitted blue energy that looked like flowing water around it. It was obvious who was winning the battle, but they didn't know that Videl was holding back, that he didn't use his demonic energy at all in that fight.

Aris and Videl landed on their knees as they stabbed their swords on the ground to stop them from going further. They were shocked when they saw Serena in that state, which shocked Videl that Lilith could borrow power from the angels.

"Are you two done?" Serena asked, her voice was so angelic that it was soothing and hypnotizing. "Videl, I can easily erase you from this world if you don't stop now," she warned, knowing that she could easily kill him in his current state.

Videl smirked as he threw his sword, and the moment it hit the ground, it shattered into pieces. He slowly raised his hands, admitting defeat to Aris, but the way he stared at Serena, there was a hint of annoyance and disgust.

"It's over, Aris, there's no need to fight anymore," Serena stared at Aris.

Aris put her swords in the spatial ring as she dispersed the blue energy around her and turned her eyes back to normal. It had been a while since she had let go of everything and just used her power as she pleased. She then walked past Aurelia and the others, giving them chills down their spines when they made contact with the remnants of her energy.

Serena walked toward Videl and casually brushed off the Divine energy around her and turned back to being her normal self. She offered her hand to him with a smirk on her face, rubbing him in the wrong way.

"Since when you have been hiding that power?" Videl asked as he grabbed Serena's hand and pretended to be weak.

It wasn't just Videl who was shocked about Serena's power, Astrea, Lenin, and Aurelia were shocked. No humans could withstand such power because they had seen how Astrea was almost dead from possessing such power, and yet Astrea was completely fine.

"I don't think that's none of your business," Serena chuckled softly as she helped him walk. "Don't even think that you have the higher ground around me, because I won't hesitate to make you burn the power you have been accumulating."

Videl scoffed as he let Serena guide him back into the palace.

Lenin and the others watched those two walk in the hallway without saying a word. Novia could see the concern in Lenin's face.

"What's wrong, Master?" Novia asked.

"It bothers me that the people around Count Blackheart are all powerful individuals. Who can stop them when one day they choose to fight against us?" Lenin asked with her brows raised.

Everyone looked at Lenin, finding the uncomfortable truth on her words before they all turned their heads to look at Serena and Videl.

Chapter 408 - 408: Exposed.

Serena put a Divine barrier around the room, preventing anyone from entering the room or eavesdropping on their conversation. Videl cracked his neck and slowly his body began to deform and ripped his attire. It was the first time Aris saw Videl in his Devil form, long horns, crown-like hair, hands and legs with four fingers and toes on each hand and foot, his left hand was bigger than the right one, with long razor-sharp nails.

His body sizzled by the divine energy around him, but he wasn't bothered by it since it didn't hurt him at all. He slowly walked toward Aris, his size was two times bigger than Aris, even though Aris was already tall. However, Aris didn't fear his presence because he had seen him before through the memories of the demon that Rullein took and shared it with her.

"This will feel unpleasant, bear with it," Videl's voice rumbled like a crack echoing through the heart of a mountain, deep, powerful, and could put all demons trembling in fear.

Videl's left fingers reached to Aris' chest and pierced through her body. It didn't hurt at first since he didn't harm her body, but the moment his long fingers and nails reached her essence-like soul, Aris' eyes widened. She could feel like her whole existence was being ripped apart a thousand times every second.

Aris had never felt pain in her whole life, this was the first time she felt pain and it made her scream. It was unbearable that she unconsciously released her blue energy and her eyes began to glow as if it was her defense mechanism. She was about to push Videl's hand away from her chest, but Serena wrapped her arms around Aris' hands from behind, preventing Aris from doing so.

"Just endure it, Aris. This is what you're asking for, so don't fight it," Serena said as she held Aris' hands from behind. "I can promise you, whatever you feel or think, he's not trying to harm you," she assured and began to hug Aris from behind.

Aris could only grunt as she tried to endure the unbearable pain that was shredding the inside of her body. She glared at Videl, she wanted to grab his horns and pull them apart and split his head open.

"This is interesting..." Videl pulled his hand away from Aris' chest. "I thought that the mark would be more a powerful one, but this was almost broken," he pointed out as he hummed.

Aris collapsed to her knees as she clenched her fist on her chest, could finally breathe and the pain was slowly fading away. She took a deep breath as she closed her eyes, feeling the lingering pain in her chest.

"It's because Rullein. She said that she managed to take away the power in the mark, but she couldn't erase the mark completely," Aris answered as she slowly got up and looked at Videl.

Serena and Videl tilted their heads, not knowing who Rullein was and how Rullein was capable of handling a mark that Satan had placed on Aris' body.

"Who's Rullein?" Videl asked as he turned himself back to his human body.

Aris walked to the couch and settled down before she revealed who Rullein was. When those two heard about Rullein's origin and what she had done, they both were in disbelief. A being born from the

accumulated emotions of True Dragons, an anomaly even in a world like Neva. It surprised them that there was another entity on Rasmus's side.

"Dark Spirit, huh? That's an interesting one," Serena hummed as she crossed her legs and arms. "But that's a great news for you since it should be easier for Videl to get rid of Satan's mark on your body," she added and looked at Videl.

Videl nodded in agreement, but his expression stiffened. He was worried about the risk and consequences of removing the mark in Aris' body. He had no choice since Aris had already won against him in the spar earlier, and he couldn't take back what he said.

Videl got up from the couch and transformed his left hand into his demonic hand. He placed the razor-sharp fingers and nails into her chest without a warning. Before Aris could feel the pain, Videl had already pulled his hand from her chest.

"There, it's done," Videl said as he walked back to the couch and settled down. His expression was grim, filled with uncertainty and even anxiety. "I hope it's worth the trouble," he stared into Aris' eyes, but he wasn't talking to her but rather questioning Rasmus' decision.

"But you're lucky, Aris," Videl sighed as he crossed his arms. "If the mark didn't get destroyed by Rullein back then, by now you would have become one of Satan's pet. And even earlier, the mark was about to fix itself. If you were late by a week, it would take a lot of effort to get rid of it," he pointed out.

"Is that so..." Aris said as she brushed her fingers on her chest. "Thank you," she looked at Videl and Serena as she stood up. "I'm going to have a stroll..." she added as she walked toward the door.

Videl was stunned when Aris said those two words of gratification, and he thought he was hallucinating or had heard it wrong. He looked at her with a shocked expression, and he noticed that Aris seemed to have changed drastically. He wondered what had happened to her, and how could Rasmus change her.

"Wait, are you not going to introduce that cute little owl out there?" Serena asked with her brows raised.

Aris stopped in front of the door and turned around to look at them.

"Not right now, I want to be alone for the time being," Aris said and left the room.

At the same time in a temple in the North Neva.

Ermaine was sitting at the throne-like chair made of stone, staring blankly at the door. She was startled when the door barged open and saw Satan with the four Prime Lords walking into the temple. She slowly got up and could tell by Satan's expression in her little girl's form.

"What is it, Master?" A Prime Lord asked as he followed Satan from behind.

"The mark that I placed on that Aristoria, it has been completely erased," Satan answered as she sat on the throne while Ermaine stood beside her.

All the Prime Lords were surprised when there was someone who was capable of removing their master's mark. There was nobody in the whole world, the whole universe even, that could remove Satan's mark other than high-ranking angels.

"There's nobody in this world that can remove my mark," Satan said as she tapped her fingers on the armrest. "The only one who can do that is that one ugly being that rules hell, Devil," she pointed out.

The Prime Lords stared at Satan, their expressions were stoic, not even a single reaction appeared on their faces. On the other hand, Satan's eyes glowed bright red and the dark temple suddenly got caught in hellfire. She got down from the throne and reached her hand to Ermaine, dragging her out of the temple.

"This is interesting... this is very interesting..." Satan grinned as she walked out of the temple with the Prime Lords following behind her. "Now we know he's here in this world, and the fact that he helped that Aristoria woman, meaning that Rasmus is that guy, the one that God sent to this world," she laughed and the hellfire immediately devoured the temple completely.

"What should we do, Master? Now that we know he and Rasmus are out there in Central Neva, meaning we won't stand a chance against them," Kiel asked, looking down at Satan's small and fragile body. "Should we tell Nemu and Deja to fall back?" Kiel added.

"No, tell them to play safe and gather as much souls as they can," Satan shook her head. "If we sent them back here, that would only make things worse, especially when we are currently at war with those Orthias beings. We need chaos, we need to make humans kill each other, take their souls, and feed them to me. I need those souls," Satan explained as she looked at the Illidan that was standing in front of the demon lords that were gathering more and more humans to be used as vassals for the demons.

"Who do you want to send us to them, Master?" Yaza asked.

Satan hummed as she beckoned Illidan to approach her. Illidan stared at her for a moment before she walked toward Satan and went down to one knee and lowered her head. Satan gently caressed Illidan's head like she was her daughter, someone precious.

"Kiel, you will be my messenger. Go and find Nemu and Deja, tell them about the danger," Satan said, gently cupping Illidan's cheeks with a gentle smile on her face. "We will be fine, we are more than fine... isn't that right, the Child of Morning Star?" She giggled as she stared at Illidan.

Illidan didn't say a word and just slowly nodded in agreement.

Chapter 409 - 409: A man of wisdom.

Lazarus came back with dozens of the Northern Stars and Paladins that were badly injured, the smell of blood and rot thick in the air. The priests and priestesses treated the wounded with everything they got and the holy water that Moriganne had prepared. Arthor and Maximilian watched Lazarus enter the Sancticus Monastery before they followed him.

"Father, how was Nehas Creek? Seeing that everyone is badly injured, it was bad?" Arthor asked Lazarus, who was standing at the statue of a Goddess, staring at it with a cold expression.

Lazarus stood there, slowly removed his fur cape that had been covered in the blood of the dead, the Corrupted. He removed his cloak which had the pungent smell of rotten flesh. A man who was said to be the strongest man in the whole of mankind, a force of nature, the one who had single-handedly prevented the demon forces from advancing and conquering the north, Lazarus Wyverncrest.

"They were there again, the Demon King rank demon. We were lucky that we didn't lose anyone," Lazarus answered, placing his hands behind his back. "The enemy has grown weaker," he pointed out, looking over his shoulder at his son and his grandson.

"Weaker? They have been trying to expand their territory and even more active in the past few weeks," Maximilian asked with his brows furrowed.

"That's exactly why they're weak, Max. They know that we have the Orthias that want the same thing as us, eliminating the threat. They're out of option, their master is starving, and we have been stopping them from feeding the master. They're desperate," Lazarus explained, his eyes closed as he prayed to the Goddess.

Eveline Sancticus arrived at the Monastery, slowly pulling down her hood as the priestesses followed her from behind. She was relieved when she heard that Lazarus had come back safely and that nobody had died during the battle.

"Elder, you're safe, thank Gods," Eveline said as she stood behind Lazarus. "If you're looking for Her Holiness, she's not here, Lady Sanya took her to the land of Orthias," she revealed.

"The land of Orthias? They have finally accepted our request?" Lazarus slowly turned around and looked at Eveline. "It's the greatest news that we can have in this situation. When did Her Holiness leave?" He asked, slightly tilting his head.

"Two weeks ago, and Monica has been the one that handles the safety of the people. She has been waiting for your arrival, elder," Eveline said as she pointed at the door in the corner of the big hall. "She has something to discuss with you, elder, about the future wars," she revealed.

Lazarus nodded with understanding and allowed Eveline to escort her to Monica's working space.

"My Lady..." Lazarus lowered his head when he entered Monica's office with Eveline.

"Elder, please come in and have a seat," Monica bowed her head and pointed at the couch. "How was the battle, elder? Things have been quite chaotic in the past two weeks. Any particular reason behind their approach?" She asked as she sat down after Lazarus sat down on the couch.

"Things aren't great, My Lady, not when the Corrupted have entered the world of the living. The report has stated and confirmed that the Corrupted have crossed the Blackcliffs," Lazarus answered, watching Eveline pour a hot tea into his cup.

"And their numbers?" Monica asked, reaching for her teacup and bringing it to her lips.

"Five to ten millions, My Lady," Lazarus answered, his expression stoic and pointed at Monica. "Their numbers will increase and have increased exponentially in the past weeks. Soon the North will be flooded by the Corrupted," he warned.

Monica halted the teacup that was already on her lips. She stared into Lazarus' eyes for a moment before she took a sip of her tea and put it down. She hummed with understanding, there was no panic or anxiety in her face or in her eyes.

"I heard that Her Holiness is currently at the land of Orthias with Lady Sanya, My Lady. For what reason?" Lazarus asked, sipping his tea, washing the dry throat and the lingering scent of blood in his mouth.

"Lady Sanya proposed that the Orthias have accepted the Northern as the only humans that are worth their recognition. It was all thanks to Lady Sanya because she was the one who managed to convince the Orthias to recognize us," Monica answered with a calm expression. "Her Holiness has been chosen as our representative, and the Orthias wants to speak with their elders, to create a connection, a relation, an ally to fight the same enemy," she explained.

"But I summoned you here wasn't for this, elder," Monica said as she pulled a small scroll from under her sleeve and placed it on the table. "This came from the Magic Tower, the Great Sage herself," she pointed out.

Lazarus looked at the scroll and took it as he opened the scroll. He read it carefully, his expression unchanged even when he scrolled the paper once again and put it back on the table. He took a deep breath, his gaze was distant and filled with thoughts.

"Should we believe that information, My Lady?" Lazarus asked.

"That information is from Count Blackheart, and whether to believe it or not, it will depend on us, elder. I have sent people to investigate this matter, and if what was written there were true, I would like the elders to take this matter personally," Monica answered with a serious expression.

"I have known those families ever since I was a boy, My Lady. Those families are quite influential in the North, and if questioned their loyalty, it would only cause more problems if you were wrong," Lazarus stared into Monica's eyes with a sharp and serious gaze. "This isn't about whether you're prepared for the risks and consequences, but it's about bearing the downfall of the North if you were wrong, you would be the reason of that downfall," he warned.

"I understand, elder," Monica nodded without hesitation.

Lazarus observed Monica's conviction and confidence that were quite endearing to look at. He had noticed the changes in his grandson, Maximilian, and they both said to have changed ever since they enrolled into the academy. He remembered the person who had caused those changes in those two, and it was Rasmus.

"This man, Count Blackheart, your trust in him is almost like someone has a blind loyalty toward their master. It's admirable that someone can put my grandson and the future Saint to have such trust in him. I have asked Max about this, and I have heard his answer, but I have never asked this to you, My Lady. Why do you believe in this man?" Lazarus asked, and his gaze was that of a predator that stared at its prey.

"Because Count Blackheart is someone who has an undeniable purpose and would do anything to achieve it. He's a dangerous person, the most dangerous person I have known, elder. However, he never lied, he never used empty words to achieve his goal. He gave this information not for free, but he never asked something in return either. He gave this information because it aligned with our goal, and that's how he manipulate people, to give them what they needed and he gained something from it as well. That's who Count Blackheart is," Monica answered without blinking her eyes or averting her gaze from Lazarus' predatory gaze.

Lazarus hummed, slowly nodding as he tried to understand this mysterious man called Rasmus Blackheart.

"If you can describe Count Blackheart, what kind of a person he is, My Lady?" Lazarus asked.

"A man with undeniable wisdom like you, elder, but the difference is that he doesn't hold on to morality," Monica answered.

"So a wise man with a reason to turn the world upside-down," Lazarus said, nodding with understanding.

"Yes, elder," Monica nodded in agreement. "To trust someone with the ability to turn the world upside-down, I believe his information is worth to be considered. He may despise humans, he is, but he knows better than letting demons to interfere with his goal, elder," she added.

Lazarus nodded with understanding and emptied his cup of tea that had gone cold. He slowly got up from the couch and looked outside the window where the moonlight lit the sky. His breathing was calm, a man who never let fear and uncertainty haunt him.

"Please keep an update to your investigation, My Lady. I will keep my squire here by your side, to send the report you have gathered about this matter, about the demonic cults that have been hiding in the North," Lazarus said and lowered his head to Monica.

Monica got up and bowed her head to the elder.

"I will check my men because the winning the battle doesn't mean winning the war," Lazarus said and excused himself, leaving Monica and Eveline in the room.

Monica took a deep breath before she exhaled deeply and succumbed to the couch.

"By now, my mother should be with the Orthias, right?" Monica asked Eveline.

"I believe so. Moriganne has always been a strong one compared to me, I know that because I'm her younger sister after all. Moriganne will be able to pull this out, my niece. She will," Eveline said, looking at Monica's cold and stoic expression.

Chapter 410 - 410: The Land of Orthias.

Moriganne walked out of the forest and the blizzard became more fierce and heavier. She couldn't see anything but whiteness in front of her, and the cold was too extreme that anyone would freeze in a matter of seconds. If it wasn't for her Divine energy, she would have frozen to death.

"We have arrived," Sanya said, staring at the distance in front of her.

"Arrived? I can't see anything, Lady Sanya..." Moriganne said, furrowing her brows and narrowing her eyes, trying to see through the extreme blizzard.

Sanya snapped her fingers and immediately the blizzard disappeared in an instant. That was when Moriganne lost for words and her eyes were fixated on the city in front of her. A colossal temple that was as big as the whole city was right in front of her eyes.

Moriganne looked at Orthias, dozens of them walking around the city entrance with big walls that prevented her from seeing the inside, walking down the stairs, and carrying massive cubes of rock on their shoulders. She couldn't blink her eyes by the magnificent view of the walls and the entrance that looked like a temple, making her feel so small, standing in front of the entrance that the top half was covered and blocked by the thick clouds.

"Welcome to the land of the Orthias," Sanya smiled softly as she began to walk ahead of Moriganne.

Moriganne tried to keep up with Sanya while she tried to be respectful to the Orthias around her. She was surprised that none of them even looked at her, but then she was completely shocked when she saw humans among Orthias. She couldn't believe what she saw, humans lived among Orthias and she didn't know anything about them.

"Lady Sanya, those people..." Moriganne looked up at Sanya who was walking beside her.

"They're humans, yes," Sanya smiled at Moriganne. "Their ancestors and before them, they had served us the Orthias for centuries. We took them and took care of them," she explained as she looked at the humans that were wearing a thick fur coat to keep them warm.

Moriganne didn't expect humans to exist on this land, and thought that they were the luckiest humans in the world. She then pushed that thought aside and kept following Sanya until she noticed the Orthias that had walked past them, and they bowed their heads to Sanya. She was curious as to why they showed respect to Sanya even though she knew that Sanya wasn't an elder.

Moriganne chose to be quiet since she didn't want to be rude to Sanya. They walked up the long stairs toward the entrance to the temple, and it still felt surreal for Moriganne that she was there in the land of Orthias.

As soon as Moriganne went through the massive double door stone, she was surprised it was a whole big city inside. She lost her breath from the magnificent beauty of the city that looked ethereal and godly. She looked at the isolated city inside tall walls, and the bridges up high from the ground that connected all the colossal buildings. The thick mists covered the city with the blue energy floating around the city and the auroras that floated in the sky above the city.

"(This is the city... the city that might have existed long before human's civilization...)" Moriganne looked up and around her, feeling small and insignificant.

Sanya guided Moriganne to the temple in the center of the city. This time, everyone looked at them and bowed their heads to Sanya as if she was the most respectable Orthias even among themselves.

Moriganne entered the courtyard and saw a dozen Orthias gathering around. When they saw Sanya, they immediately moved to the side to give her a path to walk on. Some of them were twice the size of a human, making them look like giants.

"Veyra Sanya, drelas voren," one of the Orthias spoke, a man with long silver hair with blue eyes and a long sword sheathed on his back.

"Nehra velon ethariel korthas veylra hunan. Veylra hunan-tar," Sanya said, her expression stoic when she looked at the Orthias in front of her.

"Ehra, Veyra Sanya," all the Orthias answered at the same time as they lowered their heads to Sanya once again.

Moriganne looked at them, wondering what they were talking about. However, she noticed the word Veyra before they spoke of Sanya's name, a title perhaps.

"This is Moriganne Sancticus, the Saint of humans in the North. She's the representative of humankind, the one that the elders have recognized and summoned her to our land," Sanya said as she placed her hand on Moriganne's back and pointed her other hand to Moriganne's face.

The Orthias looked at Moriganne and judged her appearance. Moriganne knew that the word Saint had a bad taste in their mouths and memories. She knew about the thing that had happened in the past, about the event when humans hunted Orthias and led by the first Saint.

"Please, Lady Sanya, my title isn't necessary..." Moriganne said as she looked at Sanya.

"Is that so? Then just call her Moriganne," Sanya looked at the Orthias.

"Welcome, Lady Moriganne. The elders are inside and have been waiting for you," the man said, pointing his hand at the big double stone door.

Moriganne bowed her head at the Orthias in front of her before she turned her head toward where the man was pointing. She could see the bright blue light coming from the inside, and she knew that she was about to meet the elders of Orthias, the ancients of the ancient race.

Sanya walked up the stairs with Moriganne beside her. They walked on the long bridge where Moriganne could see the city from below. She wondered how many Orthias were there, but if she could make a guess, there would be hundreds of thousands of them. The city was way too big for only thousands of Orthias.

"Lady Sanya, is there anything that I need to know before I appear before the elders?" Moriganne asked, her heart racing and she could hear her heartbeat in her ears.

"There's nothing you need to worry about. They're just a bunch of old people in your terms. Just speak what you want to say, and look at them if you're curious about them. As long as you're by my side, those old people will behave," Sanya smiled softly at Moriganne.

Moriganne was baffled when Sanya could speak of her elders like that. She was afraid and confused as to whether to take Sanya's words seriously or not. She didn't want to offend or be disrespectful to the elders that would cause this opportunity to form an alliance with the Orthias.

"I'm not joking, Saint Moriganne. Just believe in me," Sanya said as she looked at the massive entrance into the temple in front of her. "There's nothing to be afraid of," she assured as she walked into the temple.

When Moriganne entered the temple, she was welcomed by the sight of a statue of a dragon decorated the surrounding wall and the ceiling. She could see the statue's eyes glowed bright blue as if it was alive, and she was trembling in fear. She then looked at 10 Orthias who were standing in a circle, speaking with each other in Orthias language. They either wore full-body armor or a robe, their size was almost three times bigger than Sanya's, truly like giants.

When the Orthias noticed the presence of a human, they stopped talking and glanced at Moriganne with their glowing bright blue eyes. They slowly turned their bodies to face Moriganne, staring down at her like a lost child.

"You're here, human..." A woman with long white braided hair that reached the cold stone floor stared at Moriganne. "You must be the Saint," she added.

Moriganne glanced at Sanya, hoping that Sanya would guide her on how to respond to the woman or if she should bow down or not. However, Sanya didn't say a word and just looked around, staring at the hall since it had been a while since she had come here.

"Yes, Elder. My name is Moriganne and you can call me by my name rather than my title," Moriganne said as she lowered her head to show respect.

The elders looked a bit confused by Moriganne's gesture.

"There's no need to be respectful and polite, Moriganne. We can see and hear your thoughts, there's no reason for you to be polite and respectful when we already know you're being polite and respectful from the inside," a man with long straight hair said in a calm and relaxed voice. "You have proven yourself worthy to stand among us, your family has proven that not all humans are evil," he added.

Moriganne was mildly surprised when she heard that coming from the mouth of an elder of Orthias. She slowly lifted her head and stared at all the elders in the eyes, and they all gave a nod of approval.

"Our guest here is a bit tired from the journey. She needs to rest for a bit," Sanya said as she stared at all the elders in the eyes with a cold expression.

The elders stared at Sanya with a stoic expression before they all nodded their heads with understanding. Moriganne was so confused as to how the elders seemed docile toward Sanya. She couldn't help it anymore, and she wanted to know why the elders and the Orthias seemed to respect her deeply.

"Come, Moriganne. I'll show you a room to rest with food to eat," Sanya said with a soft smile on her face.

"Yes, thank you..." Moriganne couldn't decline the offer since she wasn't tired at all, but if Sanya said so, she couldn't say no.