

Evil 591

Chapter 591 - 591: A Mysterious Serpentine.

Natia sat in between Rasmus and Anastasha, the low table had a golden pot with detailed engravings on it. Nobody spoke, they all watched her pull the lid, revealing the big pile of dark brown paste with a rich sweet and floral smell. Rasmus knew what it was immediately, it was opium, and it was one of the many things that had been stuck in his mind.

Rasmus stared at Natia's hand and nails that were as white as bone and as sharp as fangs. His mind had one particular question for her, and it was her indulgence with opioids. For a Great Spirit like Yur to indulge themselves with something like that, it was bizarre because Great Spirits weren't like humans, no desire for worldly pleasure. Secondly, he was curious as to why she chose the human form and lived among humans.

"A thousand words written in your eyes..." Natia muttered in a soft voice. "Yet none of them are important enough to be spoken." She used the needle-like tool to take a bead of the paste onto her smoking pipe. With her nature as a Great Spirit, she didn't need an opium lamp to vaporize the opium. "Restraint, commendable..." She muttered.

As soon as Natia said that, both Rasmus and her made eye contact. One was impassive and the other was smiling like a predator toward its prey.

"My daughter will answer all your questions about myself," Natia muttered as a soft slithering and rustling sound could be heard from behind her until a backrest cushion moved toward her side to lean on.

"Mother, I thought you wanted to see me? I wouldn't be here if this was all you wanted to do," Anastasha looked at her mother, inhaling the opium while leaning her side on the backrest cushion. "I don't have much time, mother," she said, but her voice softened by a lot, realizing that she raised her voice earlier.

"House Council will be held in two days," Natia inhaled the vaporized opium and exhaled it to the tall ceiling, her eye was fixated on the shape of the smoke. "It's the time of the year. You were absent in the past two gatherings, by the third year, your father has the right to disown you," she glanced at Anastasha with her glowing golden eye.

Anastasha forgot about the House Council gathering due to her focus on building her own power around the world. She didn't say a word, she lowered her head as a sign of gratification to her mother.

"Will you attend the gathering, mother?" Anastasha asked even though she already knew the answer to that question. Natia never attended the gathering due to her nature as an Evil God, a being that was seen as a bad omen, a curse that lived.

"No..." Natia muttered, her fingers moving slowly, swirling the pipe in between her fingers gracefully and flawlessly. "But you won't be alone. You can bring them with you. After all he has decided to join the Eastern board, a game of power and control," she glanced at Rasmus, smiling with her eye narrowing it slowly and her gaze softened.

Rasmus was amazed by the sharp deduction that Natia made. Something about her that made him think that she could read his mind because he didn't given her any hint beforehand. He wanted to see how far she could read him beyond surface level.

"They're outsiders, mother, not even natives, and they're not related to me at all," Anastasha furrowed her brows and looked at her mother, leaning against the backrest so comfortable.

"Who can send them away even if they wanted to? An Aristoria's offspring, an Aristoria's descendant, a Saint, and an Evil Spirit, a nightmare from the olden world," Natia moaned softly as she arched her back before she lumped and curled up like a snake.

Rasmus wasn't the only one who had been observing Natia, Aris was also interested and curious about her. There was something about Natia's existence that didn't match with Yur as a Great Spirit. When Aris used her draconic eyes, she noticed an energy that she couldn't categorize, something that she had never seen before.

"Would you accompany my daughter, Rasmus Blackheart? Those people that you'll meet are going to be thorns in your path," Natia pointed out as she pulled out the opium dross and replaced it with a new paste to smoke.

"I have no intention of involving myself in a family matter. Thank you for the suggestion, but I wish to not attend the gathering," Rasmus answered and noticed the opium paste in the big pot was half empty,

and based on how fast she smoked the opium, it seemed that she smoked it nonstop and would only take a few days for the pot to be completely empty. Something about Natia that smoked opium was a mystery to him.

"That kind of mindset would take you nowhere in here, Rasmus Blackheart. Whether they like it or not, they must do this kind of move once in a while," Natia pushed herself up with an elbow that supported her body, staring at Rasmus with her serpentine eye.

"I'm not them," Rasmus smiled politely as he slowly turned his gaze to make eye contact with Natia. "They're not me, and you're not them," he pointed out.

Natia who had been putting on a soft expression, suddenly her pupils shrunk like a snake. She completely sat up and slowly leaned forward toward Rasmus as her silk robe fell over her shoulder, revealing her smooth down to the valley of her breasts. She stared at Rasmus from up close, so close that her face was only a few inches away from his.

"Men like you, they're always the one who brings humanity to chaos..." Natia leaned in, and when their lips were about to touch, she tilted her head slightly until their cheeks brushed against each other and whispered into Rasmus' ear. "They'll see themselves in you, the powerful ones. No words, no warning, just desire to get rid of you," she muttered into his ear, a warning.

Natia pulled away slightly until she could stare into Rasmus' eyes. She found nothing on his face, no reaction, nothing. He wasn't affected by her proximity either, and it was as she had expected.

"Believe me, you want to learn about these people, and it's a request," Natia said with a cold gaze and serious expression. "However, I don't mind it at all if you want to stay here, accompanying me here..." Her fingernail brushed under Rasmus' chin.

Rasmus glanced at Anastasha, and he could see the worry in her eyes when she looked at her mother. Anastasha seemed to have gotten used to her mother's antics, however, the worry came from the fact her mother requested Rasmus to accompany her to the gathering.

"Will she be harmed?" Rasmus asked, his eyes fixated on Anastasha.

"When she's alone? Absolutely. With you and those three? Absolutely not," Natia pulled away and leaned back against the backrest.

"You're a powerful Great Spirit, why don't you do it yourself?" Aris asked, finally speaking her mind.

"I don't want to," Natia answered with a fake smile written on her face. "There are reasons, and they're something I have no desire to share," she pointed out.

Rasmus nodded with understanding while Aris and the others looked a bit confused.

"Knowing Anastasha might get harm in the gathering, we will accompany her," Rasmus said and looked at Natia. "It's a mutual interest and benefit, losing her would be an unnecessary loss," he pointed out.

"You're not even taking advantage of the request. Perhaps I was wrong one thing about you, I apologize," Natia smiled softly at Rasmus.

"I don't really mind it," Rasmus shook his head, his expression impassive.

Natia nodded with understanding as she slowly stood up and fixed the silk gown that fell over her shoulder.

"All of you must be tired, get some rest," Natia pointed at the door and took a deep drag of the opium pipe.

Rasmus and the others stood up and left the room, including Anastasha. The moment their footsteps disappeared into the distance, Natia looked at the big pot and flicked her hand, vaporizing the whole opium, filling the room with a sweet sugary and floral scent. She walked back to her bed, hidden behind the curtain as she undressed herself and lied down to rest.

Chapter 592 - 592: Suppress and Restraint.

"Where have you been, Yur? I was expecting you to join us in that room," Rasmus looked at Yur who had just appeared as soon as Anastasha showed them the room for them to stay.

"I don't want to be here..." Yur answered, and Yur looked terrified as Yur looked around, staring at the thick and vile energy in the castle. "This place is filled with vile energy, nothing like those demonic energies that I have felt so far. This energy is different, it absorbs and sucks the life of all living beings that get exposed by it," Yur pointed out and stayed close to Aris to ask for protection.

"You're a Great Spirit, you're not inferior to her, right?" Rullein asked as she climbed the bed, making herself comfortable on the silk sheets and soft bed. "You're capable of protecting yourself against it. Even I'm in my weakened state can prevent the energy from affecting my body," she was lying flat on her belly while staring at Yur with a lazy gaze.

"Because you're not a real spirit like me, you're an Evil Spirit, an accumulation of residues of True Dragons. Just because you can doesn't mean I can. It's similar to how certain animals can't handle noises that make them suffer while other animals don't even hear the noises," Yur pointed out as Yur sat on Aris' lap and couldn't stop squirming from the energy that threatened Yur's existence. "That spirit is dangerous, I have never seen a spirit that blatantly uses its power to consume on the living," Yur grabbed Aris' arms and wrapped them around Yur's small body.

When Aris noticed that Rasmus was no longer staring at Yur, she knew that he had some insight from Yur's words. It was something that she had caught about his behavior of looking away once he connected the dots. Instead of asking like she always did, she tried to think like him, trying to connect the dots of what they had seen and heard so far.

"She didn't seem dangerous, she wasn't even showing any hostility toward us. She was calm, and it didn't seem she released this energy on purpose, at least not with any intention," Aris looked at the tall ceiling as she muttered. "It's more like the energy is leaking out instead of releasing it on purpose," she pointed out.

Aris noticed the way Rasmus glanced at her, and that was when she knew he was listening.

"She chose to hide in this castle like her pit. She knows her nature, and yet she chose to restrain herself," Aris looked at Rasmus, making eye contact. "The thing you called opium, is that a way to suppress her nature?" She asked since she didn't know anything about drugs.

"Highly possible, with such amount, that should make her feel... less of herself," Rasmus answered as he poured himself a glass of whiskey. "If her power can consume others, won't that also affect herself?" He glanced at Yur and took a sip of his whiskey.

"Yes, it does. But that doesn't matter to her because the energy still feeds her. It's basically another way to live forever, unlike other spirits that live forever by nature," Yur answered and nodded.

"Ouroboros..." Rasmus muttered to himself, his voice muffled by the glass of whiskey before he took another sip. "A self-sustaining entity. An inspiration that Anastasha took to create her own system," he put down the glass and stared at the spot on the wall.

"I feel like I was staring at myself when I looked at her," Serena said, her gaze blank as she stared down at the carpet. It reminded her of herself, before she possessed the body of a Saint. Being alone as Lilith, the first human woman that was judged for disobedience and a symbol of individualism. "It was the right thing to do for you to not ask about her even though she gave you the permission to do so," she looked at Rasmus.

"I never asked about someone's past," Rasmus shook his head as he stood up. "I'll check on the others, and all of you need to get ready for the gathering that Natia mentioned. We are going to meet more of half-breed like Anastasha, and I think it would be an interesting gathering knowing that we are going to enter Asghar family's den," he looked at the three of them and left the room.

The next few days, Aris gave her Mana to both Rasmus and Rullein, and she had been doing it in the past months. She noticed that Rasmus' power hadn't stabilized even after giving him Mana that should be enough to power the same magic formation that made Gratlan float in the sky. She wondered if it had something to do with Rullein's core within his body, the Overlord's existence within his body, the Dragon's breath that had become one with him, or even his own existence that had awakened his Aristoria's bloodline.

"The vessel grows bigger, and I'm not sure if I can stabilize it. At least not here," Aris let go of Rasmus' hand and looked at his body with her draconic eyes, seeing too many colors that existed in a single body. "But your condition is stable and you should be fine if you used your power," she pointed out.

Rasmus looked at the veins of his arm, feeling Aris' Mana run through his veins up to his shoulder and went to his back until it entered his heart. He felt like he was living the same life back when he was still Kyros from Earth, old and sick, having to do check-up a few times a week to keep himself alive.

"Focus on Rullein's recovery from now on. I should be fine if I'm not using my power," Rasmus nodded with understanding as he unrolled his sleeves. "Thank you, Aris," he looked at Aris and lowered his head slightly. Not even once had he forgotten to thank her for helping him ever since his collapse.

"You're welcome," Aris nodded and watched Rasmus grab his suit. "Today is the day, right? The gathering," she raised her brows as she stood up from the edge of the bed.

"Yes, and she asked me to tell all of you to find her in the morning..." Rasmus glanced at the window, seeing the faint orange in the dark blue sky. "She should be awake by now," he looked at Aris, Rullein, and Serena. as he fixed his collar shirt.

Aris turned around to look at Rullein who was still asleep while Serena had been reading books of famous romance stories in East Neva. Serena closed the book and put it on the bedside table before she poked Rullein's nose to wake her up. Rullein's eyes fluttered open, not wanting to wake up yet, but when her eyes met with Rasmus, she immediately stopped herself from closing her eyes. She slowly sat up as Aris told her to get off the bed and meet with Anastasha since they were about to attend the gathering. The three of them left the room, leaving Rasmus alone with his thoughts and a notebook in his hand.

Rasmus' eyes were focused on the notebook when he noticed the sun had blinded him for a long time. He stared directly into the sun, and he used his draconic eyes against it. He could see energies with his current state, and the sun had always been the only source of energy that looked like a translucent cloak that wrapped the sky with its light orange rays that waved through the sky.

"Rasmus," Anastasha's voice could be heard from outside the door.

Rasmus glanced over his shoulder at the door as his eyes turned back to normal. When he opened the door, he could see Aris, Rullein, and Serena wearing a silk satin kaftan dress with gems that decorated the dress with patterns made of gold threads. They had the same make-up, black eyeliner that made their eyes look sharper. He looked down at their hands that were painted with henna up to their forearms. They also wore accessories that made them look nothing like the women he knew.

"Well? Any thoughts?" Anastasha crossed her arms with a smirk on her face.

"I have no words that can describe them," Rasmus answered.

"I can't tell if you're just being honest or uninterested," Anastasha chuckled softly as she looked down at her outfit. She wore something different, a white backless dress with a high slit on her left leg.

"That would be an insult to the effort if I'm uninterested," Rasmus answered and closed the door behind him.

"Always have an answer to everything, don't you?" Anastasha moved aside as she pointed the folded fan at those three. "Well, you should be walking beside your... wives..." She winked at Rasmus and decided to walk ahead first. "No need to hurry, the last to arrive will be the one who take the spotlight," she chuckled as she unfolded her fan and covered the lower half of her face.

Chapter 593 - 593: The Peak.

"You're not going to ask anything? We are only a few minutes away from arriving to the main palace," Anastasha looked at Rasmus who was sitting across from her in the carriage. "There will be a lot of people in there, and if I can be honest with you..." She paused as she looked at the palace at the peak of the mountain. "I have nothing much of information to share with you."

"Relying on information is necessary, but most of the time, improvising is the game changer," Rasmus answered as he kept reading the notebook in his left hand. "Just tell us what you want to do in the gathering," he pointed out as he flipped the page.

Anastasha hummed and nodded as she thought of an answer to the question. She knew that all of her siblings would attend, and most of them wanted her dead. Not only that, her father also had decided to go against her climbing the ladder of power. That also meant that the elders, the branch families, everyone in the gathering would point their blades at her.

"A spectacle..." Anastasha raised her brows, wondering if that was the right word to say. "I want the whole mountain to tremble by my presence..." She finally gave a solid answer instead of a vague one.

Rasmus closed the notebook and stored it in the spatial ring. His eyes slowly lifted from his lap to Anastasha's face, where it was written how much she felt betrayed by her own blood when she was the one who wanted to stop the bloodbath for a seat as the family head.

"You want fear or respect?" Rasmus asked a direct question toward her desire.

"Powerlessness," Anastasha stared at Rasmus with a serious expression.

"Fear it is then," Rasmus averted his gaze and stared out the window at the palace.

"Fear..." Anastasha repeated and finally she nodded in agreement, realizing it was what she needed.

Rasmus tried to recall the names of Anastasha's siblings, there were five of her brothers that were fighting for the seat as the head family. The eldest son, Zayn Asghar, followed by Zeke and Zoran, those three were the ones who had sent assassins to kill Anastasha. However there were two more, Zafir and Zen which were Anastasha's younger brothers. All the sons of Zachary started with Z, and it had been a tradition for the Asghar family, making it easy to recognize that they were from the Asghar family.

When they reached the main gate, the gate was made of black rock that shone elegantly, it was made from obsidian with gold engravings around it. The moment the guards noticed it was Anastasha, they opened the gate wide, and that was when Serena sat straight and leaned toward the window to look at the garden with Great Wisteria trees that made the whole place look beautiful. There were man-made rivers from the natural spring that moved around the garden where colorful flowers decorated the path to the palace. There were dozens of exotic birds that flew around and nested on the trees.

"Does it look like heaven?" Rasmus noticed how much Serena admired the scenery.

"Not even close, but this is breathtaking..." Serena muttered.

The carriage moved through the long and spacious garden, and they watched the gardeners take care of the flowers and the trees with utmost care. The flowing river going down from one level to another, making the whole palace to feel like the house of Gods since it was made at the peak of the mountain. Even for Rasmus who had a thing for the beauty of architecture and scenery, that place looked breathtaking.

"Do you think this is beautiful? But there's another place that is said to be the most beautiful place in East Neva. It's the main palace of the Heavenly Martial Alliance, at the peak of the Immortal Mountain," Anastasha pointed out as she glanced at the garden, vaguely remembering her childhood that seemed like memories of her past life rather than her past. "East Neva has its strong attraction to beauty and art," she muttered as she looked away from the window.

Rasmus found it odd that a single continent was enough to make the rest went pale in comparison. East Neva had martial arts, producing powerful people that made Swordmasters look like a joke, they also had powerful spirits that involved humans that ended up creating half-breeds, not only that, the whole continent looked sacred compared to the rest of the world.

When the carriage stopped moving, that was when Anastasha closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She listened to the footsteps that were coming toward the carriage, and the moment the door was being opened, her expression was impassive and intimidatingly cold.

"Your Highness the Princess..." A tall light skinned man wearing full plate armor with a cape that had the Asghar family crest on it. He looked like a menace with his striking yellow eyes. "It has been a while," he lowered his head slightly toward Anastasha as he offered his hand to her.

Anastasha glanced at the hand but she didn't take the man's hand, she walked down the carriage and went past the man that was twice her size.

"Seeing you don't even bother to bow, you have grown arrogant, Safir. I'm still an Asghar, I'm no different from my brothers or my father," Anastasha said as she stared at the palace that stood tall in front of her. "You're still a dog for the Asghar family. Killing you is easy, and none of them even bother to mourn for you when you're gone. Mind your attitude," she glanced over her shoulder at Safir with a cold gaze.

Safir clenched his jaw before he turned around and this time bowed his whole upper body down.

"I'll announce your arrive, Your Highness the Princess," Safir said in a deep and relaxed voice before he walked past her.

Anastasha's gaze was so intense that Safir could feel it piercing his back which was fully protected by armor.

"Keep that head lowered from now on, replaceable dog," Anastasha said as he watched Safir escort her into the palace.

Rasmus and the others walked down the carriage and followed Anastasha from behind, but then Anastasha looked over her shoulder and pointed her left hand at the ground next to her. Rasmus fastened his pace until he walked beside her, and she glanced at him with a smirk on her face when she saw no reaction from him when she mocked and insulted the strongest guard that protected the whole mountain.

When they entered the palace, the whole place was empty, not because nobody had arrived yet, in fact, everyone had gathered in the hall. It was as Anastasha had planned, she wanted to be the last one to arrive to steal the spotlight.

They walked down the long hallway toward the double door made of pure gold that was carved with the Asghar family symbol in the middle. Safir looked at the two guards in front of the door and signaled them to open it so he could announce Anastasha's arrival. When the door was opened slightly, Safir walked in first to inform all the guests and the family members.

"My Lords, Ladies, and Gentlemen... Lady Anastasha, oldest daughter of His Grace, Lord Zechariah of Asghar is entering the hall with Her Highness's guests!" Safir's voice echoed throughout the massive hall and enough to make everyone quiet.

The whole hall went silent in an instant as the double door opened wide where Anastasha and Rasmus stood side by side with Aris, Rullein, and Serena standing behind them. All eyes were on Anastasha, the daughter who had soared in her achievements and reputations in other continents.

"Honored guests and family, I present you, Count Rasmus Blackheart of Central Neva and his wives," Anastasha said with a cold expression with no shred of warmth both in her words or in her eyes. She then glanced at her brothers before she gave a cold glance at the man that was sitting on the chair on the second level of the hall, observing everything from above.

Rasmus stood there and didn't even bow or lower his head, he stood there as kept his head high. It was a gesture of challenge and showed no respect toward anyone in the room, an act of arrogance.

Chapter 594 - 594: Domination.

Anastasha walked through the crowd, and she looked at every face around her. Nobody dared to look her in the eyes, they all lowered their heads, either out of fear, respect, or something else. She then glanced at the other side of the hall, the side that belonged to the family branches of the Asghar family. Even to them, Anastasha was a figure they didn't dare to stare at directly, but there were a few that did, and when she stared back at them, they averted their gazes or lowered their heads.

When she stood in the center of the hall, the remaining people that dared to stare at her were the people in front of her. A whole line of people with fancy outfit while standing tall and stared at her like a lost child. They were the elders of the Asghar family as well as Anastasha's siblings and Zechariah's children.

"I greet the patriarch," Anastasha said, but instead of lowering her head, she lifted her head and stared directly at the man with black long hair with a circlet made of obsidian that decorated his head. A man with dark green eyes, a sharp and cold gaze that looked down on the people like they were pests in his house.

Zechariah didn't move a muscle or even say a single word. He sat on that throne that wasn't made from scratch but rather a part of the mountain that was carved into a throne, it was the stone at the peak of the mountain. That signified his status, a man that sat above the peak. His elbow rested on the armrest while his cheek rested on the back of his hand.

"You look bored, father. Or perhaps you find my presence unsightly?" Anastasha smirked, a direct confrontation with the fact that her father had tried to assassinate her due to her desire to compete for the throne that was against tradition.

"You dare to speak to the patriarch with such manner?!" A male elder stomped his cane on the marble floor that echoed throughout the hall.

"Why should I show my respect to the man that tried to assassinate his own daughter?" Anastasha unfolded her fan to cover the lower half of her face, but she was obviously smiling from the shape of her eyes and the wrinkles that appeared on the corners. "He has been sitting on that seat too comfortably that he didn't even have the gut to take someone's life with his own hands," she chuckled.

The honored guests that came to enjoy the gathering and to create connections or deepen their relationship with the Asghar family suddenly got involved in a family matter, not just any family, but the Asghar family. They began to murmur and whisper to each other, wondering what was happening and if it had something to do with rumors of Anastasha deciding to join and compete in the successor.

"You're outrageous, Ana," a man with similar facial features and eyes as Zechariah with the same long black hair said, his voice was calm and yet commanding, his light skin and his tall figure made him look intimidating and impossible to disrespect that befit him as the eldest son, Zayn Asghar.

"Outrageous, eldest brother Zayn? You called me outrageous when you sent your assassins to hunt me down?" Anastasha arched her brows, still covering the lower half of her face with a folding fan. "There's no such thing as outrageous in our family, everyone that stands in front of me has either pointed their blades or even stabbed their own blood and flesh to be standing here. We are savages, outrageous doesn't exist in our dictionary," she chuckled softly, almost mockingly.

"Creating a scene in front of others like this only makes you look so childish, sister," a young version of Zayn, Zeke Asghar responded, but his skin was lighter and his hair was slick and pulled back, leaving a few strands of hair that he let loose beside his left eye. "But that's given since you have been always like that," he added, his gaze almost lazy and unbothered.

"Brother Zeke, it's better to be loud than quietly playing safe like you always do. This is exactly why you will never be able to beat brother Zayn, or even your younger brother, brother Zoran. You're irrelevant," Anastasha scoffed, she didn't bother to turn her head or even glance at Zeke. "Just wait for the blade to cut your head in the future, brother," she added.

"Sister, father is still the patriarch. His presence, his actions, and his words are absolute, you'd want the same thing from others when you're in his position. So please, mind your words," Zoran said, the third son of Zechariah, unlike his two older brothers, his hair was wavy and dark brown, and his skin was darker compared to his siblings.

"Whose patriarch? Brother Zoran? He has decided to kill me, I don't think I'm an Asghar in his eyes anymore. So, I'll do whatever I want," Anastasha unfolded her fan, showing a playful smirk to her brother.

The guests, and the branch families found Anastasha's words extremely uncomfortable because at that moment, everyone knew how ruthless Zechariah was. They were in a hall where their lives were basically in his hands, and she came in, poking the sleeping dragon that would either eat them alive or burn them to ashes.

Anastasha shifted her weight to her left foot, unbothered by the death stares and killing intents that were pointing at her. She knew nobody dared to command the guards to capture her or to send her away because authority was single-handedly in the hands of Zechariah, a system that had been passed down from generation to generation. However, there was one thing that bothered her, and that was the fact Zechariah didn't show any reaction and still looked as bored and unbothered as always.

"I came here not to cause a ruckus, brothers, sisters, and elders," Anastasha said as she stood tall with her chin lifted. "I came to question the patriarch's decision to get rid of me when I had decided to join to compete for the successor position. I'm still an Asghar, and I was taught to retaliate to whoever dared to challenge me no matter who they were. Including my own flesh and blood," she pointed out, her expression turning cold and serious when she stared directly into Zechariah's eyes.

Everyone had no choice but to keep quiet, even the elders and the main family members after what Anastasha said. Everyone was waiting for Zechariah to answer the question that Anastasha uttered. At the same time, it was the moment Anastasha had been waiting for, the powerlessness of others until she could raise to meet the only person she wanted to confront, her father.

Zechariah hadn't moved a muscle, his cheek still rested on the back of his hand. The moment he shifted position to lean back against the backrest and both arms rested on the armrests, the atmosphere in the hall turned cold and undeniably intense.

"Your achievements so far, they're meaningless," Zechariah revealed, his deep voice echoed throughout the silent hall. "Everything you have done so far in the past year, they're all possible due to that man who stands beside you. You have done nothing," he pointed out and stared down at Anastasha.

"Meaningless?" Anastasha tilted her head, keeping eye contact with Zechariah. "Patriarch, don't speak as if you're different. Look at the people here, they're insignificant in your eyes, but why you allowed them to be here?" She asked with a smile formed on her lips. "Because you need them, my brothers

need them. Don't say that what I did was all thanks to Rasmus, because you have done nothing either," she took a step forward, closing the distance as a sign of challenge. "You're sitting there to make sure the gears keep spinning. You're not the one who built this, you've done nothing as well. What makes us different?" She chuckled softly and took another step forward.

"I have done everything not under my last name, I have done everything under my first name. Those who are standing behind me, they all see me as Anastasha, not as an Asghar. They fear me because of my last name, yes, but they follow my view, my name, not yours. I have done more, than you did because all you did is under your last name, not your name," Anastasha said with a cold expression, her eyes narrowing slightly.

"And yet here you are, desiring for this seat. In the end, you did it all for your last name," Zechariah pointed out, his expression still impassive, bored, and uninterested.

The silence was deafening, now everyone was waiting for Anastasha to make a move, to see if she could escape the corner.

"Yes, so I could burn everything down to ashes," Anastasha answered.

The shock on everyone's face was like an achievement for Anastasha, and yet Zechariah was still impassive and unimpressed.

"All of you hear what your sister said?" Zechariah looked at Zeke and his sons who were competing as successors.

"Yes, patriarch," all of them lowered their heads.

"She asked for legitimacy, and so I'll grant her wish. Fight for this seat and I'll be watching," Zechariah said and once again positioned himself like before his elbow on the armrest while his cheek rested on the back of his hand. "Anything else?" He stared down at Anastasha.

"No, patriarch, that was all," Anastasha said and turned around, walking back to Rasmus' side. The atmosphere in the room immediately became breathable, everyone took a deep breath and exhaled deeply unconsciously from the intensity.

As soon as Anastasha stood beside Rasmus, she glanced at him, who had been staring at Zechariah.

"You can't make him powerless," Rasmus muttered.

"That's why he's the patriarch. I already know that," Anastasha smirked as he glanced at Zechariah from over her shoulder, noticing that Zechariah no longer stared at her like she wasn't significant enough to matter in his eyes. "But I have you," she brushed her hand against Rasmus' chest.

Rasmus could feel the trembling of her hand on his chest.

"Just like he said, try not to rely on me too much," Rasmus pointed out.

Anastasha chuckled softly as she nodded with understanding.

"I'm aware of that," Anastasha said and stared into Rasmus' eyes. "Now, shall we feed your hungry wives? They seem so eager to taste those foods and drinks," she suggested as she walked past Rasmus and approached Aris and the others.

Rasmus smiled and then that was when Zechariah's eyes met his. They stared for a few seconds before Zechariah averted his gaze while Rasmus turned around to be with Aris and the others.

Chapter 595 - 595: The Foster Son.

"We are like an outcast over here," Serena pointed out as she swirled the glass of wine in her left hand and looked around the massive hall she was in. "The atmosphere here is really suffocating. Now I understand why your mother wanted us to accompany you here," she glanced at Anastasha, who was observing her siblings that competed as successors.

"She's just being overly protective," Anastasha smiled softly, she was no longer shaken from the confrontation she had with her family. "But there's one problem here," she pointed out when she saw a handsome man wearing a silk white hanfu robe, his hair was black and silky smooth that he let loose,

making him look flawlessly charming and intelligent. He was accompanied by two men wearing red hanfu robes with gold flower symbols on each sleeve, showing their identity.

Rasmus noticed the flower symbols, it was the symbol of the imperial family of the Khan Empire that ruled over half of East Neva. Knowing the conflict between the two sides of the continent, it was a bit of a surprise to see one of them two giants show up in this place, a place where it stayed neutral from the conflict. He decided to turn away to let Anastasha have some privacy with the man.

"Your Highness the Princess," the handsome man bowed his head slightly toward Anastasha, he had a charming smile that made him look so gentle and fragile.

"Young Master Cyuren," Anastasha mirrored the same gesture as the handsome man by lowering her head slightly. "It's a surprise for the foster son of the most influential eunuch that the emperor himself adored and favored to attend such gathering, especially it's far from home," she revealed Cyuren's identity for Rasmus.

Rasmus was enjoying his wine when he found out the identity of Cyuren. An adopted son of a eunuch but had two people from the imperial palace to accompany him. It was enough to understand the amount of power and influence the eunuch had within the empire.

"I was invited by the Young Lord, Zayn Asghar, but I do have another reason to come here," Cyuren kept that gentle smile plastered on his face, and his eyes never left Anastasha's.

"You came for me personally, Young Master?" Anastasha looked a bit surprised, a performance that appeared like an automatic switch. "And what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?" She asked as she put her hands together on her abdomen. "However, Young Master, you should understand where I'm standing right now, after what I have done," she said with a serious expression.

"I'm fully aware, Your Highness the Princess. That makes my desire even stronger," Cyuren softened his gaze filled with adoration and admiration.

"That kind of desire has been pointed at me since I was a child, Young Master. I have grown accustomed to it that the meaning behind it feels hollow," Anastasha reacted without showing any mockery or hostility, it was an honest answer. "I don't want to be desired, Young Master. I want something real..."

Her voice suddenly grew lower and quieter. "Something that I can feel, touch, hold, and take control over it," she pointed out as her eyes suddenly turned hazy and hooded.

Cyuren finally smiled that revealed his teeth, and his pupils dilated slightly that Anastasha could see that her provocation affected him more than he realized.

"If that's the case, would you give me the pleasure to prove it to you that my desire is real and nothing empty words," Cyuren said, his voice grew quieter and lower that matched Anastasha's.

"Then..." Anastasha paused to take a step closer toward Cyuren. "Would you like to have some privacy, Young Master? Somewhere where decency and judgement do not exist?" She suggested as she took another step closer. "Unless you are afraid of losing your composure because that's exactly what I'm intending to do if you agreed," she smirked as she closed the distance even more until she was particularly standing in front of him.

A slight twitch of Cyuren's neck muscle showed how much he wanted to agree with the suggestion. However, he held back, not wanting to feel desperate, especially not when hundreds of gazes were pointing at them.

"Hesitation? So you still want to perform after all. Yet, here I am, baring myself completely honest," Anastasha's gaze and expression suddenly turned cold. "If you want to keep living in the spotlight, don't try to walk off the stage, Young Master," she sighed as she turned a few steps back away before she turned around and went back to Ramsus' side.

"It's not the stage or the performance, Your Highness the Princess," Cyuren responded before Anastasha could settle beside Rasmus. "It's the circumstances of where I'm standing right now. If I dared to even show a shred of authority and power here, the whole empire would get affected by my own foolishness. I ask Your Highness the Princess for your understanding," his voice was calm and gentle, but this time there was no smile on his face, showing that he could remove the mask if he wanted to.

Anastasha looked over her shoulder and saw Cyuren's expression, showing the honesty in her words, just like how she did it.

"Until next time then, Young Master," Anastasha lowered her head slightly before she approached Rasmus and invaded his personal space.

Cyuren lowered his head slightly and then he glanced at Rasmus for a moment before he walked away and met with the other guests. On the other hand, Rasmus looked at Anastasha with his brows raised, finding it odd to end the conversation like that.

"What? You need to understand that man is the only man that can get in and out of the imperial palace and is the closest person of all the emperor's children. His foster father is one of the few people that the emperor listens to. Cyuren inherited the intelligence and the skills that had surpassed his foster father, he's called one of the Neonate Geniuses of Khan Empire," Anastasha revealed as she took a sip of her wine. "His achievements are out of the ordinary, a future strategist of Khan Empire," she pointed out.

"And?" Rasmus asked.

"And I believe I just made myself a pawn for the Khan Empire," Anastasha put her glass of wine on the table. "Though..." She paused and glanced at Cyuren, who was greeting the other guests from the south of East Neva that should be his enemies because of the current conflict between the two sides. "An unplanned accident like this is a welcome one," she turned her head to look at Rasmus.

Rasmus nodded with understanding and looked at how Cyuren used his expressions when he spoke with the other guests.

"What do you want to do now?" Rasmus asked and took a sip of his wine.

"Now? I believe we still have the remnants of fear in the air. Shall we take advantage of it?" Anastasha suggested with a playful smirk on her face.

Rasmus thought for a moment and when he put down his glass, Anastasha chuckled softly as she offered her hand to him. He effortlessly gave his right arm to her to wrap around.

"Let make yourself known in the board of the game," Anastasha wrapped her arm around Rasmus' arm and guided him toward the guests while Aris, Rullein, and Serena stayed behind to do their parts.

Chapter 596 - 596: Dragged.

Zayn was talking with the guests of his at the gathering. Although his eyes were focused on the guests, he had been observing his other siblings and their guests from the corner of his eyes. It was so subtle that nobody noticed it.

Suddenly, the sound of glass breaking silenced the hall, but then gasps and murmurs followed after. Zayn thought it was Anastasha that made another scene, but when he checked, he was surprised to see a guest, his guest, unconscious on the carpet with the shattered glass of wine beside him. What surprised him wasn't the guest, but the three women in front of him.

"Those are... Count Blackheart's wives," a young man that was talking with Zayn immediately pointed out. "And that man in is..." He held himself back from saying the name since Zayn's gaze had turned cold, already knowing the man's identity.

The moment Zayn made his presence known and his step heard, all eyes turned from the scene to him. Everyone moved aside, showing how much power and authority he had in the room. Most of the guests believed that the position for the next patriarch would land to his hand, but they couldn't address it because that would be disrespectful to the other candidates, and being disrespectful to the other candidates would also count as disrespecting the Asghar family itself.

"What happened here?" Zayn asked, but his gaze fixated on the old man on the floor with a bruise and swollen cheek.

Nobody dared to speak when they didn't know the whole truth, not toward the Asghar family. However, the silence had gone far too long, a few seconds that felt like an eternity to them.

"Young Master, Lord Tarek was being disrespectful toward Mrs. Blackheart. He touched her inappropriately," an old woman answered with her head lowered and pointed her hand at Rullein.

"He was?" Zayn glanced at the old woman, realizing she was one of the figures that supported Zeke to become the successor.

Zayn thought it was a scheme that his other brothers had done to weaken his position. Seeing hundreds of guests around, it was a perfect time to embarrass him by showing the people who supported him were immoral. On the other hand, he could see the disgust in Rullein's eyes, proving her innocence.

"Lady Orman, I believe your words since I know your reputation," Zayn said as he stared at Rullein.

"I wish I didn't see it with my own two eyes, Young Master," Lady Orman said, still with her head lowered. "I believe a few guests also saw it happened."

Zayn stared down at Lord Tarek with a cold gaze, and it was enough for everyone to imagine what kind of hell that Tarek would face once he regained consciousness. However, Zayn knew something was off about all this even though he knew Tarek was known for his lust for women with voluptuous bodies. He knew Tarek wouldn't be that reckless in this kind of situation, and he knew how professional Tarek was, which was why he wanted him to be one of his supporters.

"(Who was smart enough to make him fall for his lust?)" Zayn glanced at the guards, signaling them to take Tarek away from the hall. "(Zeke? He's not someone who dare to do something like this. I couldn't agree more with Ana about him being too passive. Was it Zoran? But He's not someone who would dare to confront me like this. The other two? No, they wouldn't even dare to even raise their heads in front of me)" He narrowed his eyes slightly, finding this situation odd to be an accident. He believed someone had fabricated this.

Zayn then glanced at Anastasha and Rasmus, wondering if it was truly Anastasha's doing. When he saw the way Rasmus stared at him, his brain almost forced him to look away, something that only happened when his father stared at him. He took a deep breath and slowly turned around and lowered his head toward his father, knowing that he should apologize since he was the one who invited Tarek.

"Patriarch, I apologize for the commotion that my guest had caused. I have no excuse," Zayn's expression was still impassive, but the way he lowered his head, it was obvious that he was anxious.

Zechariah didn't say a word, react, or even move a muscle, he stared down at Zayn without any possibility to interpret behind the stare. Nobody knew what to do, they were too scared to open their mouths and pretend that nothing had happened.

"Dear brother, you need to remember where we are. Those who had made a scene in this place, they all ended up with the same fate, death. I believe it's the only way for him to pay for what he did, it's the unwritten law here," Anastasha broke the silence, and she purposely hid the lower face with the folding fan, but anyone could tell she was smiling beneath the fan.

Zayn kept his head lowered while facing Zechariah, but hearing Anastasha's words, his suspicion toward her increased. However, he didn't know how she pulled something like this, not when he had been keeping an eye on her and never saw her anywhere near Tarek.

"And you should know, that's Count Blackheart's wife, and since it was your guest who did something inappropriate, aren't you supposed to apologize to him and his wife first?" Anastasha smiled with her eyes.

Zayn blinked his eyes longer than it should, and then he stood tall before he turned to look Rasmus in the eye. There was no slight reaction from his jaw, not tense in his fists, he was like a solid wall, just like his father. He knew that Anastasha was right, and it wasn't a secret anymore, he had seen a few heads rolled on the ground since he was a child in this exact place.

"You haven't shown any sign of respect toward the patriarch who allowed you to stand here in this hall. Without respect, you have no right to receive an apology," Zayn said in a calm voice. "But I will apologize to your wife," he said as he turned around and looked at Rullein.

Everyone looked at Rasmus to see his reaction, but they didn't see any, but it was different from Zechariah. Rasmus's expression was impassive, but there was no coldness, no resentment, nothing.

"Mrs. Blackheart, I apologize for what my guest had done to you. If there's anything that you wish to say, please tell me and I'll do what I can to make you feel better," Zayn said, but he didn't lower his head which made his apology look insincere.

"I want that man to die, Young Master," Rullein answered without hesitation and stared into Zayn's eyes. "You have two choices, Young Master. Kill him... or I'll ask my husband to collect his head for me," she said with a cold gaze, a pure irritation and anger toward Zayn that had just disrespected Rasmus in front of the people.

Zayn slowly glanced at Rasmus from the corner of his eyes, and that was when he saw a faint smile painted on Rasmus' face. His expression turned cold, realizing that he had just fallen into a trap, or to be exact, he was dragged into the trap by these people.

"I'll bring his head," Zayn nodded with understanding and walked past Rullein, paying his price for his own words.

Chapter 597 - 597: Moving pieces.

Zayn came back into the hall, and everyone's eyes widened before some of them looked away from the horror. His hands were bloodied with a dagger in his right hand, covered in blood and dripping to the carpet. His other hand was holding a red cushion with Tarek's head on it, his eyes were wide open, his mouth was agape, the skin around his neck was cut roughly. It was a sign that he died in the most painful way possible, a warning for anyone who dared to show any disrespect in the Asghar Palace.

He stood in front of Rullein and presented the head without saying a word. His gaze was fixated on Rullein's dark orange eyes as if he had challenged her to take it and take responsibility for what she had asked for.

"Did he beg for his life?" Rullein asked as her hand grabbed Tarek's head by the hair and lifted it so everyone could see the rough wound on the neck.

"He did when I was halfway through beheading him," Zayn answered, his expression was calm and his voice was relaxed.

Rullein hummed as dark smoke was released from under her nails and began to wrap around Tarek's head. Everyone watched her power for the first time, and they were petrified when they watched the skin and flesh decay, leaving only the skull clean. The moment she crushed the skull, it shattered into fine dust, blown into the air.

"Thank you, Young Master. For the offering," Rullein smiled coldly, knowing that the whole situation was fabricated, and that he fell into it the moment he involved himself in the situation.

Zayn had gathered enough information about Rullein, but he barely got anything about her unlike how easy it was to gather information about Aris and Serena. Nobody knew who Rullein was, and what kind of power she possessed. All he knew was that she was extremely dangerous just like the rest of them.

While he was deep in thought, he felt a sharp flick of air hitting his left ear, and he immediately put a distance between him and Rullein. That feeling only happened when his mother was around, and it was a sign of warning. He slowly turned around and walked away, excusing himself from the gathering for a moment to change because of his unsightly appearance.

The hall had never felt peaceful ever since Anastasha's arrival, and everyone had been on the edge, wishing to leave but they didn't want to disrespect the Asghar family who had allowed them to attend the gathering. Most of the guests had no idea how terrifying it was when the Asghar competed for the seat as the family head, they only heard rumors that the whole East Neva was affected by it. Some rumors said that the conflict between the two sides of East Neva was due to the battle for succession.

"Well, Aris, Rullein. I think we have to get to know the other guests since we don't want to be seen as cold and unapproachable," Serena smiled and stood in between Aris and Rullein as she held their hands. "After all, we are going to stay here in East Neva for quite a while," she chuckled softly as she looked at both of them.

Serena's voice was quiet, but since the hall was completely silent, everyone could hear her. Her words were interpreted differently from each guest, they interpreted it as a warning, as an opportunity, or something else entirely. But then, when they saw Aris, Rullein, and Serena suddenly move separately in different directions, they all felt anxious. They had seen what happened to Tarek, and they didn't want to be their next victims, but at the same time, if they avoided them, that would only make them seen as enemies by Anastasha and Rasmus.

The guests were anxious, but it wasn't just them, Zeke and Zoran were shocked when they saw Aris and Serena approach their supporters, benefactors, and allies. That was when they realized those women had been observing them and knew which guests that belonged to them. They wanted to prevent those women from approaching their allies because they didn't want to end up like Zayn, but on the other hand, if they approached them, they might have ended up like Zayn as well.

"(So this is how you want to play, Ana...)" Zeke thought as he stared at Anastasha with Rasmus and Rullein next to her.

Zeke decided to do the unexpected, he walked toward Zoran who also had the same suspicion and uneasiness as him. When Zoran glanced to the side, he saw Zeke approaching him, and he decided to meet him halfway, to signal a temporary truce and cooperation. However, their plan was canceled the moment they heard the clacking sound of heels that approached them.

"Brothers, I hope my words earlier didn't hurt your feelings," Anastasha said as she unfolded the fan that had been covering the lower half of her face. "Seeing you two together, it's such a rare occasion that I can't help to join," she smirked and stood in front of them, staring at their eyes, knowing what they were planning to do.

Zoran glanced at Rasmus and Rullein, and they had moved to the guests that belonged to Zayn. He didn't know if he should be impressed or terrified by the scheme. Everyone knew in the family how smart Anastasha was, and she used to be the golden child of the family, the only daughter that didn't get sold off to another family.

"Sister, you're forcing our hands to work together if you keep doing this," Zoran said in a calm and gentle voice. "Is that your plan all along as well?" He asked.

"Oh, my dear brother, do you think I'm capable enough to handle the three of you altogether? Surely you're not thinking I'm that foolish, aren't you?" Anastasha chuckled as she crossed her arms and shifted her weight to her left leg. "Although, it would be nice to see all of you work together for the first time. Our family has been on the top of the food chain, just like lions unbothered by other predators but among themselves," she pointed out, pointing her folded fan at both of them and the other siblings in the background.

"What are you trying to say, Ana?" Zeke's expression showed irritation and annoyance from the way he furrowed his brows.

"Sooner or later, an unknown force would take advantage of our arrogance, and we were so used to cutting each other's throats that we forgot how to work together. When that happened, our family will crumble so ungracefully," Anastasha explained in a soft and quiet voice.

"Aren't you acting like that unknown force right now, Ana? You're the one who's going to make this family crumble if you keep doing this," Zeke pointed out with his brows arched and stared into Anastasha's eyes.

"If you think I'm that dangerous in your eyes, you have no idea what kind of danger that unknown force can bring into this continent. You both have been living in a pond, when the ocean has been ravaged by the storm," Anastasha sighed, she had witnessed everything from what happened in South Neva, Central Neva, and even West Neva, yet her brothers thought she was on the same level of those beings that tried to turn the world upside-down. "Dear brother, if I'm capable of destroying this family, they can do it even faster," she warned with a serious expression.

Zeke and Zoran glanced at each other, but they had no interest in listening to Anastasha.

"Ana, if we are that foolish as to not understand the situation outside East Neva, you're wrong. You believe that you're better than us, that we are incapable of leading the family? You're always so arrogant," Zeke said with his arms crossed.

"Oh, brother..." Anastasha closed the distance between her and Zeke. "The fact you sent assassins to get rid of me as an only option to compete, that's speak volume about your inability," she said with a cold expression. "I can easily kill all of you if I wanted to, but that only makes me just like him," she glanced at Zechariah. "I am better than all of you, because I will compete without having to hang your body up for our siblings to see."

Both of them didn't have a word to say.

"Keep this in mind, dear brothers. Try to send assassin once again, make me change my mind if this family isn't worth saving," Anastasha's eyes were cold when she looked at both of her brothers.

Chapter 598 - 598: Anomalies.

Zeke and Zoran had been clenching their fists that their nails had cut through their palms. Every second that passed, they felt their power and influence weakened. They couldn't walk away, not when Anastasha was right in front of him, holding them hostage and preventing them from approaching their allies. They could see the expressions of their guests, seeing the anxiety, the fear, and the confusion when Rasmus, Aris, Rullein, and Serena took control over the guests.

At the same time, Zayn had come back after he changed his attire, and noticed that Rasmus and Rullein were among his guests. Unlike Zeke and Zoran who were held hostage by Anastasha, Zayn could prevent Rasmus and Rullein from ruining his relationship with his guests and supporters. However, as he stood still, he had found out how dangerous Rullein was.

"Stay away from that Spirit. She has the ability to manipulate emotions and take control over any living being's body and mind."

Zayn remembered those words when he heard his mother's voice, and with that warning, he couldn't carelessly go near Rullein. When he stared at Anastasha, she immediately glanced at him with a playful smirk written on her face. The three brothers that competed for the successor position had been completely defeated and caged by Anastasha,

Zechariah glanced at the massive window that reached the high ceiling, noticing the sun was at its peak. He slowly shifted his position and it was enough to make everyone stop talking and turn their heads toward him. He slowly rose from the throne, signaling that the main purpose of the gathering was about to start.

"Please enjoy the rest of the afternoon," Zechariah said in his deep and commanding voice before he walked down the steps. "The party will be held when the sun is down," he added as he walked toward the door.

Zechariah glanced at his sons who looked powerless under Anastasha's scheme. Zeke and Zoran all looked at him with a subtle pleading gaze as if they had begged him to interfere in Anastasha's scheme.

"If you have no trust with your own people, you shouldn't have brought them here in the first place. Do not point at other for your incapability for finding the right people," Zechariah said as he walked past Zayn, Zeke, and Zoran and left the hall.

All the main family members and the family elders then followed Zechariah out of the hall to attend the annual family gathering. The hall was completely occupied by the guests, but they all knew the ones who had conquered the hall were no other than Rasmus and his so-called wives.

As soon as the main family left the hall, almost all the guests and the family branches left the hall out of fear. Everyone needed a space where they could finally breathe, and they knew if they stayed in the hall, a different kind of suffocation had taken over the room. They didn't want to stay when Rasmus and his people were, they had enough and would rather be seen as weak and a coward than being in the same room as those four.

"I'm surprised..." Serena said as she walked toward Rasmus and glanced at a few groups of people who stayed. "There are still people who stayed," she raised her brows, staring at Cyuren who still had that bright and gentle smile plastered on his face even after everything that had happened.

"Most of them are unaffiliated to the siblings, perhaps they're the patriarch's people," Rasmus answered with his left hand in his trousers' pocket while his other hand held a glass of wine. "It was as the patriarch said, if he didn't trust his own people, he wouldn't bring them here, or they have nothing to fear because they have nothing to hide," he muttered and took a sip of his wine and glanced at Cyuren.

Cyuren noticed that he was being stared at by Rasmus and the others. He turned his head and looked at them with that soft smile before he lowered his head toward them before he continued to converse with the other guests.

"So, what do you think of Zechariah, Rasmus?" Aris asked and stared at the empty throne, which still had Zechariah's presence that lingered on it.

"He's someone who has achieved the impossible," Rasmus answered as he memorized the faces of those who stayed.

"And what that might be?" Aris raised her brows, finding Rasmus' answer to be shocking because he had never complimented someone like that.

"He has conquered reality. We are living in his reality, this whole continent and everything that happens, it's all his," Rasmus muttered as he stared down at his own reflection on the wine. "To achieve your ambitions and desires, you must conquer the current reality first before you can reshape it," he explained.

"Can you conquer his reality?" Serena tilted her head with a smile on her face as she stared at Rasmus.

"No, because I have no desire over it, Anastasha does, and that's the reason why we are here in the first place," Rasmus answered and took a sip of his wine. "And I don't think my reality is inhabitable for humans to live in, it's lifeless," he muttered before he emptied his glass of wine.

Rasmus glanced at Rullein and when they made eye contact, he nodded to her. Rullein offered her right hand to them, and they immediately placed their hands on top of it. They looked through the memories of the guests that Rullein had taken the memories from. It was a series of memories of each individual that she had filtered out and only kept the ones that she found them important, and she already knew what kind of memories that Rasmus needed, even the trivial ones.

"Did you get his memories?" Rasmus asked as he pulled his hand from Rullein's hand. "I didn't see his memories in there," he pointed out about Zayn's memories since he was that close to her earlier.

"No, I couldn't. Something inside him pushed my energy before it could touch his skin. I believe it has something to do with his bloodline, after all all Zechariah's children are half-breed from powerful Great Spirits," Rullein shook her head as she explained the reason. "I could easily force my way in, but that would be too obvious and I was afraid that it would endanger Anastasha's plan and yours," she added.

Rasmus nodded with understanding as he pulled out his notebook and began to write down the important information that he had gotten from reading the guests' memories. He knew almost everything about their schemes, their weaknesses, and their desire to join the factions.

"But aren't you guys curious? How could a single man mate with so many Great Spirits?" Serena tapped her chin as she looked at the ceiling and the huge chandelier above her head. "Let's compare it to the Ashenvale family. Their guardian spirit is passed down and they're blessed rather than reproduced, more like their ancestor protecting them. Does the Asghar family originally doesn't have a guardian spirit? But even so, each child of each generation has a different power, ability, and guardian spirit?" She asked as her head slowly tilted to the side.

Rasmus found out from Yur that its spirit was capable of manipulating their spiritual body into a physical body, just like Rullein, who had been sleeping with Rasmus a few times. They could imitate how living beings reproduced and used their essence and their partner's life force as the requirement, just like Rasmus' mother, an Aristoria that shouldn't be able to conceive but managed to give birth to Rasmus.

"Looks like this family is too complex to be called a family," Aris crossed her arms and used her draconic eyes to see through walls, and found Zechariah and the main family members gathered in a spacious room with round tables at the center and chairs for the elders to sit behind Zechariah. "It's either he mated with Great Spirits or he made Great Spirits blessed his children," she pointed out.

"Now I understand why Natia wanted us to accompany Anastasha here," Rasmus put the glass on the table. "And she was right, I didn't expect what I found here to be so important," he closed the notebook and put it in his spatial ring. "Right now, we just need to wait for Anastasha's return. And you shouldn't eavesdrop on them, Aris. That part isn't our business," he looked at Aris's draconic eyes.

Aris blinked her eyes and her eyes went back to normal before she nodded with understanding.

Chapter 599 - 599: Moment of vulnerability.

Anastasha sighed as she closed her eyes, feeling the hot water take over her nervous system. She tried to feel the warmth of the hot spring, but no matter how hot the water was, the coldness of her father's gaze and words had pierced through her bones. When her eyes fluttered open, the steam had filled the great bath, and the red sky painted the horizon.

"More..." Anastasha muttered.

A maid approached Anastasha and she immediately bowed down to the point her forehead hit the ground.

"My Lady, the water is already boiling..." The maid muttered. "If we put more hot stones into the water, your skin will be damaged and it's going to be harmful for your well-being."

"Don't make me repeat myself..." Anastasha glanced at the maid, but then her vision went blurry for a split second until she felt hotness coming down to her lips. "Just leave..." She ordered as her hand reached her lips to find blood coming out of her nose.

The maid nodded and slowly got up, but then she felt a hot hand grip her ankle. The maid felt the blood in her body turn cold, and she slowly lowered her head and faced Anastasha.

"Yes? My Lady?" The maid asked, her voice trembling in fear.

"Summon Rasmus Blackheart..." Anastasha muttered as she gripped on the maid's ankle tightened for a moment before she let go.

The maid nodded repeatedly and hurriedly left the great bath.

Anastasha stared down at her reflection, to find the blood dripping into the water, blurring the image of her expression. She wondered what she looked like, but the drops of blood prevented her from seeing her feelings. She sighed and leaned back as she closed her eyes, trying to calm her mind and body.

However, every time she tried to keep her mind blank, the memories of the private gathering came back to haunt her.

"So you can bleed," Rasmus' voice could be heard from behind Anastasha.

Anastasha scoffed and the new batch of blood ran down to her chin and dropped to the water. When she opened her eyes, she saw a handkerchief from the corner of her eyes. She reached out to the handkerchief and slowly wiped the blood from her nose.

"I'm not as special as you think..." Anastasha answered, her voice muffled by the handkerchief.

Anastasha could finally see her reflection on the water, and what she saw was worse than she had imagined. She looked lifeless, weary, and the worst part, she looked weak. She glanced at Rasmus' reflection, and she saw him staring at her reflection and their eyes met through it.

"Rullein can see through people's memories and past, and you have ordered her to see through all the guests' memories back there..." Anastasha paused as her free hand moved under the water to blur the reflection. "Did you look into my memories?" She asked without looking back at Rasmus.

"No, I didn't," Rasmus answered without hesitation.

"Why?" Anastasha asked, her head still lowered, making sure the reflection stayed a blur.

"Same reason why I didn't look into Javi's past, Daryus' past, Erlina's past, Carrion's past, and the Blackhands' pasts, or those who I have encountered like the Great Sage, Archduke Thalior, and the others. Because I already knew what they wanted, just like you," Rasmus explained as he stared at the blurry reflection on the water.

"So, you're not curious as to how I survived the assassination attempts even though my father sent his best assassins to hunt me down?" Anastasha asked.

"No," Rasmus answered immediately.

Anastasha's hand stopped disrupting the water until the water became still and the reflection became clear. She slowly turned her head to stare into Rasmus' eyes before she mapped his face.

"Join me," Anastasha faced forward once again and made herself comfortable in the hot spring. "I'm asking..." She muttered.

Rasmus undressed himself, only leaving trousers to cover his lower half. He walked into the hot spring and sat down next to Anastasha, leaving a huge gap between them. He noticed the blood that lingered in the water. Blood that was too thick to be dissolved by water.

"My blood is poisonous, it can even dissolve steel..." Anastasha spoke to break the silence. "A sword can cut through my flesh just like any normal human, but the moment the blade got exposed to the blood, it dissolved before it could do more harm to my body," she pointed out.

The silence once again filled the great bath, but this time Anastasha felt the cold slowly disappearing from her body. She then let out a deep and shuddering exhale as she closed her eyes once again, without desiring to open them at least for that moment.

"Can you tell me something about yourself, Rasmus? It can be anything trivial, just anything..." Anastasha muttered.

"I used to have a wife," Rasmus answered after he thought long enough for an answer.

"Used to? You mean during your survival time after your family is ruined?" Anastasha asked as her eyes fluttered open. "To think someone like you has a soft spot in your heart for someone else to rest in. That's shocking," she smiled softly. "What kind of a person she was?" She asked in a soft mutter.

"She was so ordinary that I had almost forgotten about her face," Rasmus answered, and he didn't need to elaborate on her first question. The wife he mentioned was the wife he had when he was Kyros in his previous life on Earth.

"What? Even for me that sounds a bit too harsh," Anastasha chuckled softly as she tilted her head and stared at Rasmus' face, finding nothing but the truth.

"We mostly memorized the moments, not the people. No matter how memorable those people are, it's still the moments that we remembered. Although she was ordinary, I couldn't forget about her presence," Rasmus answered and stared back at Anastasha.

Anastasha stared blankly at nothing, and she tried to recall her memories. But it was as Rasmus said, she had forgotten the faces she had encountered in the past, she might have forgotten with whom she was with in those moments, but the moments lingered.

"And what happened to her?" Anastasha asked before she looked at Rasmus again.

"She died. She put herself in my world, and I let her into my world. I expected that to happen," Rasmus answered as he stared at the sky.

Anastasha wanted to be playful, to tease Rasmus that it was his fault, but then she realized it was nobody's fault. She sat there silently and a smile appeared on her face, thinking if she would end up just like him, to have someone you chose to die and you expected that to happen.

"Would you let someone else in again?" Anastasha asked.

"I don't know, I'm not sure," Rasmus answered as he shook his head.

"Did you love her?" Anastasha asked again, but this time her voice grew quieter as she hugged her knees.

"At one point, I did," Rasmus nodded.

Anastasha smiled once again, but this time she didn't need to hide it or suppress it. She raised her head and stared at the red sky, signaling that the battle was far from over, that the night was when the party started and this was a perfect break from the upcoming battle.

"Thank you, for being here..." Anastasha said and for the first time she felt a lump in her throat.

"I'm a guest here, of course I would come if you summoned me," Rasmus answered as he looked at her.

"That's not what I meant..." Anastasha scoffed, but she knew why Rasmus answered that way. "You're surprisingly considerate, aren't you? Hiding it behind facts and truths," she chuckled softly.

Rasmus didn't say a word and let out a bit of a smile.

"But you're also quite rude to not appreciate the woman with nothing on her..." Anastasha smirked as she looked down, having nothing that covered her body.

"I think there's contradiction in there, and I'm not going to play along in that matter," Rasmus said as he slowly stood up. "May I take my leave?" He looked down at Anastasha.

"Yes, you may..." Anastasha nodded, her voice barely above a whisper and then she watched Rasmus put on his shirt and leave the great bath.

Rasmus was on his way back to his room when he glanced at the window toward the back of the castle. He saw Aris standing still in an open space toward the garden, staring at the sky with Aristoria's sword in her hand. He stared at her for a moment before he decided to approach her.

"Seeing you holding that sword, it feels like bad things are about to happen," Rasmus said as he walked toward Aris.

Aris looked to her left and saw Rasmus standing beside her, staring at the sky just like she did.

"I felt something not too long ago. The direction, it came from South Neva," Aris pointed out and stared at the sky. "From that direction..." She pointed at the distance in front of her.

"South Neva..." Rasmus hummed as he narrowed his eyes. "The angels are making a move?" He asked and turned to look at Aris, noticing that she was using her draconic eyes.

"I believe so. The sky is glowing white right now..." Aris pointed out as she saw billions of glowing white strings going up high into the sky and beyond the horizon. "I have never seen anything like this..."

Chapter 600 - 600: Shrink.

The evening party's atmosphere was way lighter than the gathering that morning, or at least for Anastasha. However, for her siblings, they were busy maintaining their connections with their supporters and allies. Her siblings were confused because a few of their supporters had decided to back away from the battle, believing they were unworthy or too ambitious with their desires.

What shocked the guests were the announcement of the two sons of Zechariah who backed down from the successor position. It wasn't Zeke or Zoran, but the two younger brothers that had so little influence from their little factions. Those two declared it during the family gathering in front of the elders and Zechariah. Their reason was simple, it was because of Anastasha, who had been recognized as a successor by Zechariah.

The party looked normal for the new guests, not those who were there during the gathering. However, the words had spread, all of them had heard of what had happened in the morning. They all looked for Anastasha, they wanted to see the woman who wished destruction for her own family. Many of the guests didn't like the Asghar family due to the power they held over the people of the continent, but they knew obedience was the only way of survival.

Anastasha became the center of attention, they wanted to know what she was planning, to see if she truly meant what she said. She never had the chance to be alone even for a second because wave after wave of people came to greet her.

On the other hand, while the siblings were busy maintaining their foothold, Zayn was as calm as ever. It wasn't arrogance, it wasn't ignorance, it was an assessment of the situation.

Rasmus, Aris, Rullein, and Serena were on the side of the hall, away from the others. Their focus was on something far more important than the political game, it was the revelation of what was going on in South Neva. However, Rasmus couldn't escape the board that he had decided to join when Zayn suddenly walked across the hall just for him.

"Count Blackheart, do you have a moment?" Zayn said with his head held high as he stared Rasmus in the eyes.

Zayn had observed Rasmus long enough and noticed something was different about him. The one he saw during the gathering, Rasmus looked arrogant, but at this moment, Rasmus looked nothing like the one from before. Something about Rasmus that made Zayn see a man with a gaze that looked beyond the mountain while others were busy admiring it.

Rasmus glanced at Aris and the others, he didn't need to say a word or make a gesture because they already knew. Aris and the others then walked away, leaving him behind with Zayn while Anastasha couldn't help but stare at her brother, wondering what he was scheming to approach Rasmus.

"You have every continent under your palm, and yet here you are trying to conquer another. People with ambition and power would choose to maintain the ones that already in their grasp, making sure nobody would dare to take what was theirs. And yet, here you are, doing something that no people with power would do," Zayn said with a serious expression as he maintained eye contact with Rasmus. "What's your purpose? What is it that you're after that those continents couldn't give?" He asked.

"A man with your stature should already grasp the answer behind your question, Young Master," Rasmus answered and glanced at Anastasha.

Zayn slightly furrowed his brows before he glanced at Anastasha. He knew that Anastasha planned to bring down the Asghar family, he knew that she planned to break the tradition where blood was required to sit on the throne. She wanted reformation, and Rasmus supported her cause, meaning he wanted the same thing. However, he knew that Rasmus was someone who would see beyond that, perhaps wanted what was after the reformation.

After Zayn used that conclusion as one of the foundations to grasp what Rasmus was after, he thought of all Rasmus' achievements in the other three continents. Rasmus was involved in all the wars in South Neva and Central Neva, and that was when Zayn managed to connect the dots to the foundation. He realized that Rasmus had managed to reform South Neva, removing conflicts through wars against demons, and erasing unnecessary factions. Rasmus did the same thing to Central Neva, reforming it into one solid continent and calling it Centriva. He then looked at what happened in West Neva, and he knew Rasmus had left that continent a lot faster compared to the two, but that was because of an appearance of a Saint, Ermaine.

"You want unification..." Zayn concluded from the information that he had.

Rasmus casually swirled the glass of wine in his hand, not reacting to Zayn's guess. That alone was enough for Zayn to understand that wasn't the correct answer. With that gesture alone, Zayn wondered once again if unification wasn't the goal, it meant Rasmus looked even way further from that.

"You want a new world?" Zayn narrowed his eyes slightly.

"I'm not that ambitious, Young Master," Rasmus answered as he took a sip of his wine. "But that would be one of the consequences of what I'm after," he pointed out.

"Consequences? You called such a thing as consequence?" Zayn was mildly shocked. "If that's not the goal, nothing in this world can give you what you want," he pointed out with his brows furrowed.

"Who said what I want is in this world?" Rasmus asked back and stared back at Zayn.

At that moment, Zayn felt like he shrunk, then the palace, then the whole mountain, then the whole continent followed by the other continents until the whole world felt small, existing beneath the man in front of him. He would find that ridiculous, he even laughed at people with ambitions to unify East Neva, but this time, he couldn't react at all.

"Is there anything else you want to ask, Young Master? If not, I have an important matter to discuss with my wives," Rasmus said and made Zayn snap back to reality.

The deafening silence from Zayn's perspective suddenly dispersed, the chatter and laughter of the guest began to fill the hall once again. He gave a simple nod at Rasmus and watched Rasmus walk away to be with Aris and the others once again. He looked at the people around Rasmus. He would call Rasmus' words lies or pretentious, but seeing Aris, Rullein, and Serena on his side, he knew it wouldn't be hard for Rasmus to rule the world, but that wasn't the truth.

"(You decided to join the board of power, and yet you moved without following the rules and moved as you pleased without any consequences. You're not playing like the rest of us...)" Zayn thought as he walked away with his gaze fixated on the throne.

Anastasha glanced at Zayn through the guest that surrounded her. She could see the deep in thought based on his calm and impassive expression.

"Did you find what you had expected to find?" Anastasia asked with the folding fan covering the lower half of her face.

The guests that surrounded Anastasha immediately walked away when they realized she was talking with Zayn. They didn't want to be seen as favoring Anastasha in front of Zayn or their lives would be in danger.

"You wanted to see our world burn, didn't you?" Zayn glanced at Anastasha with a cold gaze.

"More or less..." Anastasia smiled with her eyes.