

Evil 621

Chapter 621: The Rise and Fall.

Lenin and Lazarus were walking in the garden behind the palace, evaluating what information Thalior and Agnesia gave. However, they both felt a pair of eyes that had been observing them ever since they entered the garden. They both turned around and looked at the palace, then they saw her, the High Regent staring at them with an impassive and almost blank gaze. Both of them immediately lowered their heads, and the moment they raised their heads, Aurelia had disappeared.

Before they could continue their discussion, a pigeon came out of the window and flew toward them with a tiny scroll attached to its leg. Lazarus pulled the scroll and watched the pigeon flew away and went into the window it came out from. They both looked at the message and immediately turned to look at each other before they walked back inside the palace.

They walked into the long hallway toward the door at the end of it, before they could knock on the door, Aurelia opened the door for them. She put on a lazy smile without saying a single word as she opened the door wide and pointed at the couch. They lowered their heads toward Aurelia before they walked in and stood in front of the couch, waiting for Aurelia to sit down first.

"Please have a seat, Elders," Aurelia said as she slowly sat down and poured water into three glasses. "I accidentally overheard your conversation, and I'm curious on your opinion about the decision I made," she said as she pointed her hand at the glasses of water.

"Thank you, Your Excellency," Lenin said as she grabbed the glass and took a sip of the water. Although it was just water, she felt refreshed and the fatigue in her body suddenly just disappeared. She had almost forgotten that Aurelia had Saint blood running through her veins and that she was capable of using divine power. "It's a risky and dangerous move, Your Excellency. Predicting a human mind is already hard, but predicting those beings, they're almost impossible. Even Count Blackheart didn't expect Satan would come to West Neva and forced him to retreat," she pointed out.

Aurelia didn't say a word and her gaze focused on the glass that was in Lenin's hand. She didn't show any reaction on her face, and she stayed quiet even after Lenin spoke her piece of mind.

"Every decision can lead to demise. It's not that if we made the right choice or not, it's the lack of tool and skill for survivability. Whether we are prepared or not, the chance of us surviving is not high, Your

Excellency," Lazarus pointed out and took a sip of the water. "We are barely rebuilding the continent, and we don't have enough time to even raise our weapon," he added.

Once again, Aurelia didn't say a word and didn't show any reaction, but this time she closed her eyes and let the silence take over the room.

"May I ask what's the vision you're seeing, Your Excellency?" Lenin broke the silence. She wanted to see a glimpse of the burden that Aurelia was carrying on her shoulders.

"Conflicts, a lot of conflicts," Aurelia answered as she opened her eyes. "Among ourselves," she revealed as she looked at both of them.

"Conflict, Your Excellency?" Lenin furrowed her brows.

"We have been progressing very smoothly while maintaining stability, and as far as I'm capable of understanding things, we have achieved things that many nations have tried to achieve. However, that same stability can bring conflict, fear, and anxiety in this time and age. Everyone is standing on the edge of the cliff, wondering if the ground could hold their weight or if it would break," Aurelia answered as she reached her forehead, letting her fingers feel her skin. "I don't want stability where everyone has to stand on the edge of the cliff," she added, her voice barely above a whisper as if it was a plea rather than a wish.

"Is that why Your Excellency decided to show hostility toward the threats around us? Rather than letting everyone live in stability but haunted with uncertainty, you want to sacrifice that stability but makes everyone aware of the threats? That will bring unnecessary fear, Your Excellency," Lazarus said as he clasped his hands together in between his thighs.

"Deep down, everyone is already living in fear. We just have to tell them the fear is real and band together even more than our current state. It's better to know that they might fall of the cliff and they won't be alone rather than telling them the surface is stable but feeling betrayed when it doesn't," Aurelia said as she lowered her hand and let it rest on her lap. "I'm done with the white lies, Elders. I don't want to build this continent based on lies just like it was before. This land is rebuilt from the sacrifice of the countless lives, as long as humanity exists, sacrifice will remain the price of protecting it. Peace will always demand another generation willing to pay for it," she continued.

Lazarus who was a veteran commander that led North Neva to unification understood Aurelia more than she expected. On the other hand, Lenin had seen enough white lies that brought nations to fall by Rasmus. However, both of them didn't want to use truth as the only measure for everything.

When Lenin wanted to say another piece of her mind, she saw Aurelia sitting still with her eyes closed. She could see the rise and fall of Aurelia's chest, realizing she had fallen asleep due to the immense exhaustion. She remembered what Novia said that Aurelia might stay awake for another week, but now that real problems had appeared from both continents, she knew even an hour to stay awake would be impossible.

"Her Excellency grew up in a world that she believed to be peaceful until she was forced to see the truth and reveal it to the world. She rebuilt everything from that single moment alone should be impossible, and yet here we are," Lenin muttered, her voice barely above a whisper to make sure Aurelia didn't wake up from her voice.

"We both are too old to see through the eyes of the younger generation. Perhaps, we should do our best to assist them and adapt to it," Lazarus nodded as he drank the water. "She understood the consequences, and since she has been prepared to face it, we can do nothing but to stand by her side. After all, she did the impossible, and if she could do it once, she would make sure she could do it again."

Lenin smiled softly as she nodded in agreement.

They both sat there across from Aurelia, seeing a fragile-looking young lady sleeping on the couch, they wanted to become proper adults, carrying her to her bed, but they knew the person in front of them was the High Regent. They sat there, not saying a word and just thought about what Aurelia said and the way she expressed her words with her tone and expression.

"What do you think of Count Blackheart, Lazarus?" Lenin asked out of curiosity since she had heard that Lazarus had met and conversed with Rasmus once.

"Those two reports are enough to summarize what kind of a person he is and I couldn't agree more to that," Lazarus answered as he stared at the white ceiling. "A man that young, done all those things and moved around the world without any sliver of fear and just kept moving, it's unheard of," he added.

"Every time I spoke with him, I forgot that I was speaking with a young man that barely a third of my age, and yet he always made me see through perspective that I always missed to see," Lenin muttered as she stared at the table in front of her. "His ability to adapt, it's terrifying," she added.

Lazarus hummed in agreement and he also saw that during his conversation with Rasmus.

"Her Excellency was his former student along with my grandson, Saint Morgianne's daughter, Ordinal Conclave Julius' son, Alexander, and even the future Ashenvale's patriarch. His adaptability is exceptional, but to change people's views to this degree, that's threatening," Lazarus responded as he crossed his arms.

"I thought that he would create more monsters like him, but it seems once again I'm missing that perspective," Lenin pointed out. "And until this day, I still have no idea what he wants," she sighed.

"A man with such a background of abandonment, hardship, and lived through survival, it's like seeing a fish that can fly. It doesn't make sense, but it exists," Lazarus said with his brows raised and his gaze blankly staring at the white wall. "I suppose that's why he can do all those things because he's that hard to predict even for those beings," he chuckled softly.

"I suppose you're right," Lenin smiled and chuckled softly as she nodded in agreement.

Chapter 622 - 622: Older Generation and Younger Generation.

All the Ordinal Conclaves, the elders, and the guests entered the meeting hall after they had their breakfast, they didn't see Aurelia with them at the dining table and wondered if she ate separately. However, when they entered the meeting hall, they already saw Aurelia sitting in her chair with the same mask on her face. She pointed her hands at the chair, signaling them to sit. Once everyone was seated, there was a scroll for everyone in front of them and they wondered what it was.

"The scroll you're seeing is the plan that I have prepared for the decision I made in the last meeting. Please read it thoroughly and if you have questions or dissatisfied with the plan, do not keep it to yourself," Aurelia said as she looked at everyone's gaze fixated on the scrolls in front of them.

Everyone broke the wax seal and unrolled the scroll in unison and then immediately read the content of the scrolls. The hall was completely silent, and Aurelia observed everyone's expressions while they were reading the plan. For the experienced leaders, they didn't show any expression, but for Monica, Maximilian, and Isador they still showed a slight reaction.

The first one that finished reading the plan was Arthor and then followed by Moriganne, and Julius. The three of them shared a look, doing the exact same thing as Aurelia, to see each other's reaction but found nothing. Once everyone put down the scrolls, they all looked at Aurelia, trying to understand the reason behind that plan.

"Your Excellency, the plan to cut ties with West Neva and South Neva, does that include the South Neva Union and the faction of West Neva that is against the regime under Saint Ermaine?" Arthor asked as he stared at the scroll in front of him.

"Yes. In the first place, the faction in West Neva is doing their movements of their own accord. I didn't receive any requests from Sorceress Agnesia to support that faction. Even if they did, I would reject such a request because we have nothing to do with it," Aurelia answered as she looked at Agnesia who sat at the table on the side with Lazarus, Lenin, and Thalior. "For the South Neva Union, they have decided to make a peace treaty with the cult and as the consequence, we are cutting ties with them as well. We will exclude ourselves from the situations that happen around the world with the reason of rebuilding our nation that's currently unstable," she added as she stared at Thalior.

Agnesia and Thalior expected this outcome, but they didn't expect it to come true. They understood Aurelia's reasoning and they both lowered their heads with understanding and accepted the reasoning.

"Your Excellency, even if we found this reasonable, the others might not feel the same way as us. Our survival for the present and the future will be seen as betrayal and abandonment for the other parties and it will raise conflicts and perhaps grudge even if our decision is the correct one," Julius pointed out with a serious expression. "What I'm trying to say, Your Excellency, how are you going to deal with that when the time comes?" He asked.

"That's if we are assuming that both South Neva Union and the faction in West Neva survived. What they think about us is no longer a problem," Moriganne added as she looked at Julius before she looked at Aureli. "What if both Saint Ermaine took down the resistance while the cult devoured South Neva Union and their next objective is our land? We will be nothing but a casualty of the conflict between those two," She asked.

"We will do what we can control in this moment and the safety of our people. I will not risk our nation and our people for something that's not uncertain," Aurelia answered without hesitation.

Arthor didn't say a word and just lowered his head with understanding while Julius and Moriganne still had something to say. However, before they could utter their opinion, Monica raised her hand, making everyone's attention move toward her.

"I believe Her Excellency's plan is the most reasonable decision we can make. We are making a decision based on what we know that is certain, not speculation, not possibilities, not assumptions. We don't know what the cult's current power is, we don't know how far stronger Saint Ermaine has become, we don't know what are their plans, what are their goals, what are their opinions about us. We barely scratched the surface of what they are. Instead of talking about the risk and consequences based on Her Excellency's plan, we should discuss what we can do to prevent that from happening without having to change the plan entirely," Monica said as she looked at everyone at the table and the table on the side where the elders and the guests were. "What Ordinal Conclave said is right, and we should do something about it because we might be able to prevent that from happening. What Ordinal Conclave Moriganne said is also right, but that's uncertain, and if that really what was going to happen, no plans could prevent us from being their next target," she pointed out.

Monica cleared her throat as she took a deep breath before she continued.

"If you may, Your Excellency. I would like to offer a plan where the faction in West Neva and South Neva Union will understand our circumstances and prevent them for feeling betrayed or abandoned," Monica offered as she looked at Aurelia with a serious expression.

"I would offer myself to help as well, Your Excellency. We have Alexander in West Neva, and I believe we can use his influence to help us with this matter," Isador said as he looked at Monica and gave her a nod before he looked at Aurelia.

"I'll be waiting for your suggestion," Aurelia nodded with understanding. "Is there anything else anyone want to add in this matter?" She asked.

Everyone shook their heads because Arthor, Moriganne, and Julius had already uttered what they wanted to say. They continued to give their opinion on the other parts of the plan and neither of them stayed passive and had their own moments of uttering the most crucial risks of the plan. However, Maximilian, Monica, and Isador were the ones who offered solutions to the risks to minimize them without changing the plan. They showed the plan from different perspectives after Aurelia gave her

reasonings it was as if those three understood Aurelia's plan and thoroughly looked at it from different angles.

Lenin and Lazarus couldn't help but smile, where the older generation criticized the younger generation offered a solution and putting an addition to the plan without changing it. There was something different from the way they saw it from their perspective that the younger generation like Isador, Monica, and Maximilan tend to trust Aurelia's decision and tried their best to assist, not to criticize. Those four had created powerful bonds during their days at the academy that began with unhealthy rivalry. Lenin knew that their changes were due to Rasmus' teaching and influence.

"The younger generation, was it?" Lenin recalled her conversation with Lazarus yesterday when they were with Aurelia.

"As you said, maybe this is why Count Blackheart taught them to be. They managed to see things through a different lens first before they spoke. But sometimes to see it too broadly isn't always the right thing to do either," Lazarus crossed his arms and listened to the meeting with a serious expression. "But that's what being young. They made mistake, and they learned. I'm confident that they will learn and keep moving forward," he added.

"Young and brave, old and wise. But not all young are brave, and fools can grow old as well. I have seen them enough during their enrollment in the academy, I can't help but see myself as the Chancellor and not as an Elder in this moment," Lenin smiled softly as she looked at Aurelia, Monica, Maxmilian, and Isador. "I believe in them," she said with nothing but honesty, trust, and confidence.

The meeting ended and the sun was already setting. One by one, everyone left the meeting hall and was ready to proceed with the plan that Aurelia had decided and agreed to by the Ordinal Conclaves. Agnesia and Thalior also left and prepared to go back to their continents to inform where Centriwa would stand.

"Elder, there are things that I want to discuss. I need your time for a moment," Aurelia looked at Lazarus and Lenin who were about to stand up from their seats.

"Yes, Your Excellency," Lenin lowered her head and stayed in the meeting hall with Lazarus.

Once everyone left the meeting hall, Aurelia stood up and walked toward the table on the side of the hall. She carried a chair with her and put it across from Lazarus and Lenin. She sat down and looked at both of them for a moment before she took a deep breath and exhaled deeply.

"How's the progress with the children candidates for my successor?" Aurelia asked as she removed her mask, her expression serious.

"I have selected a few orphans and am about to proceed to the next stage, Your Excellency. But why do you want to ask about them? It's still far away in the future," Lenin asked with her brows furrowed.

"We would never know long I would live with the current situation around the world, Elder," Aurelia answered as she put down the mask on the table.

"Your Excellency..." Lazarus's expression stiffened when he heard Aurelia's words.

"I'm not planning to reign over this nation for long in the first place. My only desire is to rebuild and to make sure we survive this situation. My way of thinking is for survival not for peace. Everything I do it's merely to survive, and I believe when peace time arrive, someone else is more suitable for that moment," Aurelia said as she looked at both of them with a soft smile on her face. "Please nurture them to befit the status as High Regent, Elders," she said as she lowered her head at both of them.

Lazarus and Lenin lowered their heads as they let out a quiet sigh.

"Yes, Your Excellency...." Both of them answered in unison.

Chapter 623 - 623: Unwanted.

The carriage arrived at the inn in Saling City, the city that belonged to one of the big clans of Khan Empire. The carriage attracted unnecessary attention because of how luxurious it was and especially the small banner that represented the Asghar family. Anastasha could easily remove the banner, but she wanted to keep it for a reason.

"Well, there are countless of things why I hate Khan Empire, but their food isn't one of them," Anastasha said as she walked out of the carriage and already felt the gazes pointed at her.

Rasmus, Aris, and Serena looked at their surroundings like they were some kind of unique species. Their facial features, their hair colors, and their heights were nothing like the people of Khan Empire. One thing that they noticed was that almost everyone had a weapon on them.

"Ignore them, they're vultures with shameless and sickening opportunistic tendencies..." Anastasha muttered as she walked past Rasmus and walked into the inn.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Serena tilted her head as she followed Anastasha into the inn.

"They're starving for recognition. A slight fame would be enough to make them float above others," Anastasha answered and looked at the crowded inn where people rested for a night or just to rest and eat. "They would use any mean necessary to achieve that more than their own lives apparently..." she added under her breath and noticed the inn became quiet the moment they entered the inn.

The way everyone looked at them were varied, some looked at them with jealousy, despise, envy, shock, and thrill. An inn servant immediately approached them and lowered her head since she knew Anastasha belonged to the Asghar family. The servant immediately guided them to the second floor where it was more secluded and less crowded.

Once they entered a private room, Anastasha ordered everything on the menu and the most expensive and delicious alcohol the inn had. It hadn't been a minute since the servant left that someone knocked on the sliding door. She slowly got up and opened the sliding door to see a group of men in a white uniform with the emblem of a swan on their left chest. Aris could see the amount of Mana around those men, and they were highly skilled swordsmen but not at the same level as Swordmasters.

"We apologize for disturbing your rest, Milady. We are from the Ganyi Clan, and we happened to see your carriage during our patrol. My name is Hue, the squad leader of the White Feather Unit," the man said as he cupped his own fist and lowered his head at Anastasha, but he managed to steal glances at Rasmus and the others before he did that. "If I may ask, what's your purpose of visiting our clan?" He asked, still with his head lowered.

"The White Feather Unit? If I remember correctly, that's second in rank of the whole units that the Ganyi Clan has," Anastasha said with her arms crossed, staring at their lowered heads at her. "It's a bit uncomfortable to speak while standing. Join us at the table, Hue," she offered as she walked back to her seat without waiting to see if Hue would accept or reject her offer.

Hue didn't move from where he stood, he didn't even take a step into the room and kept lowering his head in that posture. Rasmus could feel the tension in Hue's shoulders and a bit of hostility by the way his fist was formed.

"As you can see, I have guests that wanted to see the Khan Empire and experience what makes this empire the greatest," Anastasha answered without looking back at Hue and his subordinates. "We won't make a scene as long as you really do your duty properly. There are eyes that want to take advantage of my presence here. I could easily pay for the damages that we would cause in the future, but of course, it wasn't about money, isn't it?" She asked and her words became sharper and more direct.

"If that's the case, would you mind leaving the city immediately once you have rested well enough?" Hue asked.

Anastasha tapped her forefinger against the wooden round table, letting the silence brew in the room.

"No, I don't think I will," Anastasha glanced over her shoulder and stared at Hue and his subordinates with a cold gaze. "Unless your patriarch himself asked me to then I might consider it. I don't listen to words coming out from the likes of you," she explained.

Hue and his subordinates glared at Anastasha without having to hide their hostility anymore after they heard what she said. However, none of them made a move because Hue didn't order them to.

"We will excuse ourselves and once again we apologize for wasting your time," Hue said and closed the sliding door in front of him before he left.

"They're good people," Serena pointed out as she crossed her legs and leaned her chin on her palm, looking at the door and listening to the footsteps that were fading away.

"They're righteous people, and they hate people like me," Anastasha answered with a smirk on her face. "Is it weird to find peace in this kind of place where I treated like a nuisance?" She chuckled and stared at Rasmus.

"Being around honest people is always pleasant," Rasmus nodded.

When the food and alcohol came, they enjoyed their time with the food that was rich in flavors. Rasmus found it almost eerie no matter how hard he tried to look over it that East Neva really resembled the one he knew from Earth. He wondered if it was designed to be like that or if human nature tended to repeat itself no matter in which world they lived in.

After they finished eating and enjoying the high-quality alcohol, Rasmus and Aris had noticed that the inn had become empty, but they didn't bother to tell Serena or Anastasha. However, the longer they enjoyed the evening, the more people surrounded the inn.

"How righteous this clan is?" Rasmus asked as he rotated the small cup of tea between his fingers.

Anastasha looked at Rasmus with her eyes slightly narrowed by the sudden question.

"Borderline obsessive," Anastasha coldly smiled at Rasmus when she knew that he knew the reason why she chose this city out of other cities in the empire. "They're finally here, aren't they?" She asked.

"If only Rullein is here," Aris said as she took a sip of the alcohol. "She would volunteer to do this," she added and put the cup on the table.

"Even if she's here, I would rather take this opportunity for myself," Rasmus responded as he stood up and fixed his suit. "Come on, you're the one who put us in this situation, so at least take responsibility over it," he stared into Anastasha's eyes as Aris and Serena got up from their chairs.

Anastasha chuckled as she slowly got up and nodded with understanding.

They walked out of their private room to find the whole inn was empty. They walked down to the ground floor and already saw hundreds of men in uniform waiting for them outside with an old man

with a long beard and hair at the front. They all had something in common in their eyes, and it was hostility that was pointed at Anastasha.

"My, to welcome me with such grand is quite touching, Patriarch Gang of Ganyi Clan," Anastasha smirked before she hid the lower half of her face with her hand fan. "But, do you really want to do this when I have guests to please right now?" She asked with her eyes narrowed.

"Leave my city or you'll face the consequence, Anastasha Asghar," Patriarch Gang spoke. "I don't care who those people are, you're unwelcome here," he exclaimed.

"What if I don't want to? I don't remember you own this city, the emperor is generous enough for you to govern it," Anastasha scoffed as she sat on the bench, showing no desire to comply with the warning. "If you have the courage to face the Asghar family, then you have to face the consequence as well, Patriarch," she said with mockery.

Patriarch Gang didn't give another warning and signaled his men. Dozens of highly skilled martial artists entered the inn where Rasmus, Aris, and Serena blocked their path to eradicate Anastasha.

"Oh, right. What am I doing here..." Serena slowly turned around and sat on the bench next to Anastasha. "I think I'm just as delicate as you are in this situation," she chuckled as she glanced at Anastasha and it was enough to make Anastasha chuckle with her.

Seeing the disrespect from Anastasha and Serena, the martial artists didn't hesitate to unsheathe their swords and charge toward Rasmus and Aris. Rasmus and Aris dodged the attacks and took the men's wrists where they held their swords and twisted them before disarming the swords. Rasmus used his shoulder to lift the man over his back and slammed him against the table while Aris used her elbow right into the man's jaw and put him unconscious.

"Be careful or you might kill them because of how fragile they are," Anastasha warned Rasmus and Aris.

"Accident can happen," Rasmus responded as he removed his suit and rolled his sleeves. "Most importantly, we are doing self-defense. That's what matters," he pointed out as he stared at the fuming face of the Patriarch of Ganyi Clan.

Chapter 624 - 624: Layers.

Patriarch Gang was stunned by Rasmus and Aris' skills. He knew they weren't martial artists because of the way they moved with a few unnecessary moves. He was stunned because his most elite unit got defeated so easily by mere brute strength and movements that were unfamiliar to him. The most humiliating part was the fact that Anastasha enjoyed the show and mocked his pride.

Rasmus and Aris were enjoying the fight against the warriors of the Ganyi Clan. They both were fascinated by the clan's swords that were so thin that it could bend easily, making it both unpredictable and as deadly as a whip. They admitted that they had never fought against someone as unpredictable as these warriors.

"All of you stand back!" Patriarch Gang shouted as he unsheathed his sword.

All of the clan's warriors retreated with heavy injuries all over their bodies. They were ashamed that they couldn't even leave a scratch on Rasmus and Aris' bodies. Aris on the other hand took a few steps back because Rasmus said that he wanted to take this opportunity for whatever he meant by that. She sat on the bench, joining Serena and Anastasha.

"Call the elders," Patriarch Gang glanced over his shoulder at his men that only had minor injuries.

A few of them immediately left and jumped from one building to another. Patriarch Gang took a deep breath and exhaled deeply, trying to calm and clear his mind. He knew it wasn't the right time to be overwhelmed with emotions, it was the time for him to focus on the fight. He had observed the fight long enough, and he knew that getting too close against Rasmus would be fatal.

"I have no business with you, and I have no problem with you, esteemed guest. But may I ask your name?" Patriarch Gang asked.

"Rasmus Blackheart," Rasmus answered.

Patriarch Gang didn't show any reaction, he knew it was a foreign name, but he knew nothing else about it. Rasmus who saw that he wasn't being recognized immediately, it felt like a breeze of fresh air.

"Sir, I don't want to fight you because I know that I might not be able to win against you or her. I only have business with Anastasha Asghar, and my only desire is to send that woman out of my city," Patriarch Gang said as he tightened his grip on the sword. "It's a wound on my honor and pride to admit defeat so easily, may I ask you to stand down since I have admitted my defeat?" He asked with a serious expression.

"Funny that you said that when you just told your men to bring the elders. You admitted defeat but at the same time you're buying time for the elders of the clan to assist you to fight these two, don't you?" Anastasha chuckled as she winded-up the hand fan to cool the air around her face.

"If I can use words to prevent more casualties on my side, I wouldn't hesitate. But if I that doesn't work, I have to fight with everything I can, for my clan's honor and for my duty as the lord of this city," Patriarch Gang answered as he clenched his jaw. "You're a threat to the peace that we have tried to maintain. We have no desire to let an Asghar to step their foot into this city, and we have made that clear," He added.

The warriors that were sent to bring the elders had come back with the elders. There were seven old men behind them and they immediately stood behind Gang. Their eyes immediately found Anastasha and showed hostility toward her. They hadn't unsheathed their swords yet because Gang hadn't ordered them to.

Rasmus knew if he accepted Gang's request, he would betray Anastasha but at the same time if he chose to stand for Anastasha for something that had nothing to do with him, he would be seen as a threat not just to the Ganyi Clan but to the other clans that he deemed unnecessary. Both Anastasha and Gang looked at him, waiting for his decision.

"I owed Anastasha for many things, and I have chosen to be her ally," Rasmus responded and it was enough to put Gang and the elders to look at him as an imminent threat. "However, I have no reason to bring myself into the conflict between your clan and the Asghar family. My alliance is with Anastasha, not with the Asghar family," he pointed out as he walked out of the inn. "I know that wouldn't resolve the problem. May I propose something else entirely?" He asked as he looked at Gang and the elders with a serious expression. He found a way to not hurt the Ganyi clan's honor and assure them that they weren't a threat.

"And what is it, esteemed guest?" Patriarch Gang asked.

"All of you can use your most powerful attacks and if you can leave a single scratch on my body, we will leave the city immediately. But if you failed to do so, please allow us to stay and I can promise you under

my name that I will not let her cause any problem to you or your city," Rasmus proposed. "Isn't that right, Anastasha?" He looked over his shoulder and stared right into Anastasha's eyes.

"Even if I wanted to cause a problem, I could die by your hands whenever you wanted. Yes, I can promise you that," Anastasha smiled as she nodded.

"What do you think, Patriarch Gang? Would you accept my proposal?" Rasmus asked.

"Why would I accept such a proposal when my only desire is to send her away from our city?" Patriarch Gang asked with his brows furrowed. "I know you haven't even shown your true ability, Rasmus Blackheart. I'm not confident even if we all used our most powerful combined attack. It's a lost for us no matter what," he pointed out.

"And I'm not saying that we will stay even if you lose, Patriarch Gang. We just wanted a night to rest, that's all what we are asking of you," Rasmus said as he used the same hands gesture that Hue showed him before, wrapping his left hand around his right fist.

"If what you desire is only a night to rest than you're welcome to stay in our clan. That way, we can keep an eye on her until the morning so you can leave as soon as the sun rises," Patriarch Gang said with a serious expression.

"Thank you for your hospitality, Patriarch Gang," Rasmus lowered his head.

Patriarch Gang responded with the hands gesture at Rasmus before he turned around and walked away with the elders while he let a few of his warriors escort Rasmus and the others to their estate. Rasmus and the others then walked along with the warriors of the Ganyi clan with the patriarch and the elders in front of them.

"Where are you from, Rasmus Blackheart? I don't know if what you have shown me was a martial art or just pure instinct. The way you use your hands to disarm my men, using your whole body and momentum to throw them around so flawlessly are unheard of," Patriarch Gang asked.

"I was born and raised in Central Neva. I wouldn't call it a martial art compared to yours, Patriarch Gang. You can say it's an art of self-defense," Rasmus answered with a smile on his face.

"What kind of life you have lived in for a young man like you to have such a terrifying skill for survival like that?" Patriarch Gang asked as he looked at Rasmus over his shoulder.

"An unpleasant one," Rasmus answered.

When they entered the Ganyi clan estate, the servants escorted Rasmus and the others to where the guests slept. Rasmus looked at the beautiful pond with the reflection of two moons and the swans floating where they stayed with their partners closely. He decided to admire it and stayed there while the others went inside to rest.

"Can't sleep?" Patriarch Gang asked.

Rasmus looked at Gang, seeing different sides of the man that he had just met in less than an hour. A man that looked so transparent but at the same time had many layers to his existence.

"No, it's just a waste to not admire the view," Rasmus answered as he watched the swans intertwine their necks.

"Are you admiring the beauty?" Gang asked as he stood beside Rasmus.

"The beauty, the tragic, and the irony," Rasmus answered as he kept staring at the swans.

"They are..." Gang smiled.

Chapter 625 - 625: Honor.

Patriarch Gang walked into the main building and went into the meeting room where all the elders had gathered. He didn't expect to be summoned by all the elders early in the morning, and he knew why they all looked restless and anxious. When he sat down and poured tea into everyone's cup, he leaned back and settled comfortably in his chair.

"Patriarch Gang, the reason we asked you to join us is because of what happened last night," one of the elders said as he took a sip of the tea. "Why didn't you accept that man's proposal? Instead of sending them away, you welcomed them into our clan, that woman as well," he asked and glanced at Gang.

Patriarch Gang nodded as he brushed his beard with his fingers, listening to the elder speak while observing the other elders that seemed to have a similar opinion. He understood their concern, especially when it had something to do with their honor and pride.

"Because I know it would be impossible to scratch him even with our combined attack," Patriarch Gang answered with confidence.

"We are one of the big clans, our martial art isn't that inferior to the great clans. If this accident ended up ruining our reputation, you'll be the one who take responsibility for this," another elder said with a serious expression with dissatisfaction written all over his face.

"There's an invisible line that separates arrogance and confidence. One who refuses to acknowledge the other outcomes while the other who already acknowledge the outcomes and have the ability to deal with them no matter what the results are. What I saw last night in his eyes wasn't merely confidence, it was something beyond that," Patriarch Gang responded with a calm voice. "If you believe that we can put a single scratch on him and you're confident that you can, I will gladly accept my punishment and put down from my position as the patriarch," he said with a serious expression as he looked at every elder at the table.

All the elders looked at each other as soon as Gang said those words without hesitation. Gang was chosen as patriarch not merely from inheritance, he was a patriarch because he was the reason Ganyi Clan was still one of the big clans to this day. He was experienced in battle, in decision making, and in his ability to run the clan.

"If all of you care so much about your pride and honor, then I have no choice to request Rasmus to test those things you're so attached to," Patriarch Gang slowly stood up and left the room.

Rasmus and the others were ready to leave the Ganyi Clan's estate when they saw Patriarch Gang and the elders following him from behind. Rasmus stared at them and lowered his head to show respect to those who had shown their hospitality.

"Are you leaving, Rasmus?" Gang asked.

"Yes, as I have promised, we are going to leave the city, Patriarch," Rasmus nodded. "I wasn't expecting to see you and the elders of your clan to see us leave," he pointed out.

"They're not here to see you leave, they're here because they wanted to accept the proposal you offered to us last night at that inn," Gang answered as he looked over his shoulder at the elders. "I know that the proposal is no longer necessary, but they wanted to test whether they can put a scratch on your body or not with our combined attack," he pointed out.

Anastasha, Aris, and Rullein were smiling when they heard it, they could see the pride of the elders being stepped to the ground in their faces.

"Very well," Rasmus nodded with understanding.

Everyone went to the training ground where the warriors of the Ganyi Clan were training intensely. The warriors were confused and surprised to see Gang and the elders entering the training ground. When Gang ordered them to empty the training ground, all the warriors moved aside and stood next to the walls while he and the elders stood at the center with Rasmus.

When Gang and the elders stood in positions where they surrounded Rasmus, the warriors began to murmur to each other. They knew that formation, the Eight Feathers formation, which was the strongest and the most complicated attack formation of the Ganyi Clan. Aris and the other overheard about it and wondered what kind of attack it was.

The moment Gang and the elders unsheathed their thin swords and readied their stances, the air became thicker and heavier by the amount of Mana they produced. The Mana each of them released amplified the others', creating a density that would normally be almost impossible to control. Yet none of them showed the slightest strain and only focused on their target in front of them. As soon as they had all coated their swords and limbs with Aura, they dashed toward Rasmus.

Rasmus watched their swords wobble almost like floating strings, and it was fascinating because Aura enhanced the durability and sharpness of the blades, yet the blades still maintained their flexibility. The amount of control to do that was immense and worth praising. The moment they were in range, they

swung their swords at him, and with the momentum like a whiplash, the swords stiffened and hit him from all directions.

The whole platform cracked and released a devastating shockwave that sent big chunks of the platform flying in all directions. The warriors dodged and covered their eyes from the debris. Everyone stood there in silence when the thick dust blocked their visions, wondering if Rasmus died from that attack. However, the moment the dust dispersed and dissipated, everyone's eyes shot wide in disbelief. Gang's and the elders' swords broke into pieces, their clothes ripped and tore apart, but Rasmus was still standing, unharmed, not even a scratch on his suit, only covered in dust.

"This makes no sense!" One of the elders exclaimed, his pupils trembling in disbelief.

Gang expected failure, but he didn't expect it didn't end with just a failure, it ended with the realization that there were heights beyond what the Ganyi Clan had believed possible. On the other hand, the other elders were too stunned to speak.

Rasmus did the hands gesture toward Gang and the elders, he had just seen and learned something new about Aura. He didn't say a word and just looked Gang in the eyes.

"Thank you for opening our eyes, Rasmus," Gang said as he did the hands gesture.

"The honor is mine," Rasmus mirrored Gang's hands gesture.

Rasmus excused himself since he had promised to leave by the morning. Gang, the elders, and the warriors of the clan could only watch him and the three women leave.

"You're covered in dust, how can you be so comfortable covered in it?" Serena chuckled softly as she brushed off the dust from Rasmus' shoulders.

"I don't want to be unnecessarily seen as being disrespectful," Rasmus answered as he brushed the dust off his sleeves. "Now that you're done playing with them, where to next?" He asked as he looked at Anastasha.

"Hmm? There's no need to be in a hurry. We just put the chicken in the pot, let it broth seep into the meat first. Let's just go to somewhere peaceful for a moment," Anastasha smirked.

At the same time at the training ground, the elders looked at Gang and they all lowered their heads at him. They admitted their wrongdoings and that their impulsive act could ruin the clan even more if Gang chose to accept Rasmus' proposal last night in front of the eyes of the people.

"Now do you see what I see, elders?" Gang asked as he looked at them. "A man with such power has no reason to lower his head at us, he did it because he had no reason to tarnish our honor and reputation. If he did, all of us would be on the ground on our knees," he pointed out.

The elders didn't have anything to say and kept their heads lowered.

"We need to send a message to the other clans. I still don't like Anastasha Asghar in the empire, and not only that, the guests she brought, aren't ordinary people," Gang said before he walked away.

"Understood, Patriarch," all the elders answered in unison as they did the hands gesture.

Chapter 626 - 626: Uninvolved.

After Rasmus and the others left Saling City, they went into a village at the base of a mountain. Unlike in the city, the villagers didn't know anything about the banner that represented the Asghar family, they were too secluded to care about what was happening outside the village. When they arrived, they went into a small restaurant. It was empty because the villagers didn't eat there, the restaurant was only meant for travelers.

"It's cold out here, so refreshing too..." Serena stretched her arms above her head, inhaling the air mixed with dew and mist. "Nature is always the greatest escape from reality," she sighed as she turned around and looked at the children that already surrounded Aris and Rasmus because of their tall bodies and white hair.

"Are you saying the Asghar mountain isn't as great as this?" Anastasha smirked with her arms crossed.

"It reeks..." Serena muttered as she lifted her head and inhaled the cool fresh air. "As a Saint, you can smell certain scents in human bodies or places that reveal their history. Your city, reeks of blood and the mountain reeks of something foul," she pointed out and looked at Anastasha with a forced smile on her face.

"No wonder I never liked being home," Anastasha chuckled. "I must have reeks of blood too then, so I suppose anywhere we go, you'll always smell that," she smirked at Serena before she turned to look at the restaurant owner cleaned the table and the benches for them.

"Not just you, those two smells too. If it wasn't because of their powers, the smell of blood would be overwhelming," Serena pointed out as she looked at Rasmus and Aris, who were bending down to let the children touch their hair.

The restaurant owner then approached them, telling them that the table was ready. The four of them walked into the restaurant while Aris waved at the children and watched them leave to continue playing with their sticks that acted like swords and spears. Once they were seated, Anastasha ordered the most delicious dish that the owner's wife could make for them.

"Anyway, it has been a while now since you sent the Blackhands to gather information around East Neva. And that precious doctor of yours, Daryus. You're fine with him wandering around on his own? You're not afraid that he would sell out information about you?" Anastasha asked as she watched the restaurant owner's daughter bring a teapot and four wooden cups carefully toward their table.

"It's a new field for them to explore, and they can easily be spotted because of their appearance that screams they're foreigners. It might be hard for them to even approach someone to gather information even though Javi is from this continent and taught them a lot of things about this continent," Rasmus answered and watched the little girl put the cups on the table and tried to pour the tea carefully to not spill. "For Daryus, it has been a while since he came back to his homeland. He wanted to help others who were in need, and I had no reason to stop him. And for your concern about him selling information about me, that's not a bad thing, it's a free publicity," he continued as he took a sip of the bland and almost tasteless tea.

"Fair point," Anastasha nodded.

When they were enjoying their food, the sound of horses galloping could be heard outside the restaurant. They turned to look at the outside and found two men riding horses, one was covered in

blood and open wounds while the other was barely hanging on the saddle with arrows on his back, lifeless.

The wounded man immediately jumped down from his horse and pulled his dead partner from the horse. He smacked the horses' backs, letting the horses free and left the village to distract whoever was chasing them. The man was about to enter the restaurant and he saw the banner of the Asghar family on the carriage. However, he ignored it and walked into the restaurant while carrying his partner.

"Please, kind sir, help us..." The wounded man begged at the restaurant owner. "Let us hide here just for a moment. I'm begging you, kind sir," he said in a trembling voice, his legs trembling from exhaustion and could no longer carry the weight of his dead partner on his shoulder, but his eyes kept looking at the back in fear.

"Don't let him hide here, restaurant owner. Hiding people like him will not only endanger your family, your business, but also the villagers," Anastasha said with a serious expression. "It's better for you to offer him to whoever chases after him. By doing so, your village will be safe," she pointed out.

The restaurant owner held his wife's hand and his daughter's hand as if he was trying to protect them from the wounded man. On the other hand, the wounded man was running out of time, strength, and options. The wounded man immediately knelt, his head hitting the wooden floor, begging, crying, and writhing in pain. The villagers began to gather outside the restaurant, and the restaurant owner was in a dilemma and didn't know what to do.

However, it was already too late for the wounded man to run or hide, and it was too late for the restaurant owner to help the man because those who were chasing him had arrived at the village. They could see the crowd outside the restaurant, knowing that the man they were chasing down was in there. The group of warriors jumped down from their horses, wearing the same uniform. The villagers immediately scattered because they didn't want to be part of what was happening.

When the group saw the carriage and saw the Asghar family banner, they hesitated for a moment. However, when they glanced inside the restaurant, they saw the man they were chasing, kneeling with his dead partner beside him. They glanced at Anastasha and when they made eye contact, she arched her brow and it was enough to make them all lower their heads.

"What are you waiting for? Just ignore us and get it over with," Anastasha said as she rested her chin on her palm.

The group of warriors entered the restaurant, but then they saw the wounded man slowly standing up and unsheathed his sword before he turned around. His hand could barely grip the sword's handle, his eyes were barely open, and he even struggled to take a proper breath.

"I'll kill you all!" The wounded man screamed his lungs out as he charged at the group of warriors. However, before he could even swing his sword properly, the warrior at the front had already swung his sword and decapitated the wounded man.

The group of warriors immediately grabbed the head and the two bodies, but before they left the restaurant, they lowered their heads at Anastasha out of fear. The restaurant owner's eyes were shut as he covered his daughter's eyes. Rasmus then watched the group of warriors leave the village hurriedly.

"They feared you," Rasmus glanced at Anastasha.

"The righteous clans despise me, the unrighteous ones fear me. Now we know which side they're from," Anastasha answered as she continued to eat her noodle.

"What a great timing. Now I can smell nothing but blood even after going all the way here," Serena sighed as she pushed her bowl of noodles, losing her appetite because somehow it reminded her time in hell.

"Unfortunate indeed," Anastasha chuckled softly as she watched Aris take Serena's bowl of noodles and eat it.

Chapter 627 - 627: For reasons.

"Can I ask you something?" Anastasha asked as she looked at Rasmus who was taking a bath in the natural hot spring in the mountain.

"Knowing you asked that question first, it's not something serious?" Rasmus glanced at Anastasha sitting on top of a big boulder with Serena, enjoying the alcohol that Natia brewed.

"Well..." Anastasha poured the alcohol into Serena's cup. "That depends," she shrugged. "Anyway, since you can alter your appearance completely, have you never been curious to become a woman? And what about you, Lady Aris? You never tried to become a man since you're capable of doing that as well?" She asked with her brows raised.

Serena coughed because she choked on the alcohol in the middle of swallowing it. Aris was also taking a bath across from Rasmus, and she didn't expect to be a part of the question as well.

"I could, but Sanya told me something about the benefits of being a female," Aris answered as she looked at her reflection in the water.

"Oh? Can you tell me about those benefits?" Anastasha asked as she looked down at Aris with curiosity.

"Bone structures that give flexibility and have better balance than males. For humans, males are stronger because of their muscles, but for us Orthias, strength is the same for everyone because we don't use muscles, we use Mana as measurement," Aris answered as she watched Serena sliding down the boulder and decided to join the bath. "And being female is less threatening for humans. They tend to see female as something delicate and fragile even among other females. It's hard to get rid of that because that's how humans think no matter how powerful the females are," she added.

Anastasha hummed as she nodded with understanding, and then she looked at Rasmus. When their eyes met, she only shot her brows up, waiting for him to give his answer.

"I don't want to be stared at by men in that way," Rasmus answered.

Anastasha chuckled and then turned into laughter. She didn't expect to hear such a straightforward answer like that from Rasmus. She never saw this side of Rasmus, and somehow she wanted to see that side of him more.

"Why not? There are no men here right now," Anastasha smirked playfully. "Why don't you give it a try while we are in this subject?" She chuckled mischievously as she slid down from the boulder and dipped her legs into the hot spring.

"Just once?" Serena raised her brows and stared at Rasmus as she sat beside Aris and rested her head on Aris' shoulder.

Aris and Serena looked at Rasmus, and the worst part was that Aris was as curious as the other two. He could see it in her eyes even though she didn't show any expression. He let out a quiet sigh before he closed his eyes and imagined the anatomy of a female body. With mere thoughts, his body began to change and he could feel the weight in his body shift and faint ticklish feelings all over his body. When he opened his eyes, the three of them were staring at him without blinking.

"Oh, he just looked like you, Lady Aris," Anastasha raised her brows with a shocked expression.

"It's not a surprise since Aris and Rasmus share the same origin," Serena pointed out as she narrowed her eyes, staring at Rasmus thoroughly. "But isn't he looking more like his mother the more I look at him?" She asked Aris and tilted her head to the other side.

"You have met her mother? I thought she died at the public execution?" Anastasha looked at Serena with a confused look.

"I saw it in Rasmus' memories, she's like Aris but looks more delicate and fragile," Serena answered as she kept staring at Rasmus.

Aris had been quiet the whole time and when her eyes met with Rasmus, she felt something in her chest like a connection that she never knew it existed before. She had lived among the females of Orthias her whole life, and she never had male Orthias around her. When she saw Rasmus in a female form, she felt like she saw another Aristoria instead of a man with an Aristoria's blood running through his body.

"That should be enough," Rasmus said and slowly changed his appearance back to his male body. He was fascinated that his body remembered what his body looked like as if it had a shape memory ability.

"Oh, you should keep..." Before Anastasha could finish her sentence, the words were sucked out of her breath and her eyes fixated on something behind Rasmus.

The hot spring suddenly lost its warmth, the water became eerily cold and the steam slowly turned into mist. Rasmus could see Aris and Serena's eyes fixated on something behind him. When he slowly looked

over his shoulder, he saw black smoke in a shape of a person, staring at them with glowing dark orange eyes from beneath the mist. He knew it was Rullein, but what he saw there wasn't the same Rullein he knew. It wasn't just Rasmus who saw her that way, Aris and Serena also saw her in the same way. The three of them used to see Rullein's power to be vague, something that couldn't be explained, but now they could sense danger from her.

"You're back," Rasmus said and stared directly into Rullein's draconic eyes.

The black smoke dispersed and Rullein appeared from it with a playful smile written all over her face.

"Enjoying the hot spring without me?" Rullein asked as she walked into the hot spring and the black gown she wore vaporized into black smoke the moment it made contact with the water. She then sat beside Rasmus while looking at the others with her brows raised. "What?" She asked as she reheated the spring water, regaining its warmth.

"Congratulation, on your awakening," Rasmus said as he closed his eyes to enjoy the bath again. "But there's something that I want to talk about, Rullein," he pointed out.

Aris understood what Rasmus meant and slowly rose from the hot spring. She patted on Serena and Anastasha's shoulders, signaling them to give those two some privacy. Seeing Aris, Serena, and Anastasha leaving, Rullein furrowed her brows with a confused look and then she looked at Rasmus with her head tilted.

"About what?" Rullein asked.

"About us," Rasmus answered and looked her in the eyes. "We have gathered enough information about spirits here, and I know that you also know more about them ever since you took reign over the Great Spirits. I'm talking about the bond between spirits and the person they're attaching to," he explained while maintaining eye contact.

Rullein went quiet and she averted her gaze, realizing what Rasmus was talking about. She then saw Rasmus' hand in front of her, and she looked down at it for a moment before she took it. She read the memories of his when she was busy subjugating the Great Spirits. She saw what Aris had said to him, about Rullein growing stronger that would affect Rasmus because neither could get stronger without devouring the other's power.

"You want me to sever our bond?" Rullein asked, her voice quiet.

"I want us to live," Rasmus answered. "As you can see from earlier. Your power and the Overlord's power are starting to intertwine. Sooner or later, you'll absorb everything withing my body and I'll have nothing, including my life," he added with his brows raised.

"I don't want to..." Rullein said and looked at Rasmus. "I don't care about the Overlord's power, I don't care about anything. I just don't want to sever it because I'm comfortable, and you are the very reason why I can restraint myself," she explained.

Rasmus nodded with understanding without saying a single word. It was as Aris said that severing the bond would make the spirit lose the purpose of existing.

"I don't want to sever it," Rullein exclaimed as she stared into Rasmus' eyes.

"I heard you," Rasmus looked at Rullein with a bit of a smile formed on his lips.

"That's it? Is that really it?" Rullein asked as she searched Rasmus' eyes and tried to see if he was lying or pretending but she couldn't tell.

"That's it," Rasmus nodded as his smile widened. "Just don't devour me yet. I still need to finish what I came to this world for," he added before he closed his eyes as he dipped into the water deeper up to his chin. "You don't have to think about it anymore. I mean it."

Chapter 628 - 628: Caring.

Aris looked at the black qipao dress she wore, wearing something that felt nothing like a second skin was a new experience. She found it interesting to wear, especially with the high slit that prevented her from losing her mobility.

Rasmus and Rullein walked out of the forest after they had their private conversation. Aris eyes immediately fixated on Rasmus, but when he gave her a shake of his head, she shot a sharp and cold

gaze toward Rullein. Rullein avoided her gaze, and she knew that she was being selfish and knew that Aris was really displeased by her decision.

"Oh, that looks good on you," Serena said as she looked at Aris from top to bottom. "I think I would prefer this one over that one," she said as she looked down at the white hanfu dress she wore. "Ana really knows how to make us look good, isn't she?" She smiled at the beautiful dress she wore.

"Yes, I like it," Aris answered, but her gaze was like a hawk staring at its prey toward Rullein.

Serena could see the tension between those two, and it was the first time she saw Aris shown such emotion. She looked at the guilt in Rullein's eyes, and she was the most transparent compared to everyone in the group. She didn't know what happened, but she knew one important thing, and that was the bond that everyone had.

"Rullein, Ana also has a dress for you. Do you want to try it?" Serena asked with a soft smile.

"Sure," Rullein nodded.

When Serena and Rullein walked toward the carriage, they didn't expect that Aris would follow them. Serena looked over her shoulder and saw Aris' eyes never leaving Rullein. The way Rullein walked was stiff as if she forgot how to walk. Rasmus could only watch and found it funny because it looked like an older sister who was about to scold her younger sister for being stubborn and irrational.

"Okay, what this is all about?" Serena said as she stopped and turned around to look at Aris and then glanced at Rullein. She crossed her arms and waited for either of them to speak of what was going on. She never saw herself as the oldest even though she was, more than anyone since she was Lilith, the first human woman that God created, long before Neva existed, long before Earth was suitable for humans to live in.

Aris didn't hesitate to tell Serena everything because to her, Serena was beyond human and she gave birth to countless demons that despised her existence in return. Serena was the one who cared for everyone in the group no matter who they were as if she was trying to become a mother figure that had been denied for as long as she had lived.

Serena understood the situation and she didn't choose any side to comfort because showing favorability toward those two would only make things worse. The only option was to defuse the issue by standing on the same side as the person in the matter, Rasmus.

"You two need to understand something about Rasmus," Serena said as she looked at both of them and held their hands tightly. "No matter what you said, if Rasmus didn't want to do it, he wouldn't do it. Neither of you made a decision for him, never. Whether he listened to Aris' warning or Rullein's reasoning, those didn't matter. He will choose what he wants to choose," she pointed out and squeezed their hands. "If you want to blame Rullein for being ignorant, you should look at yourself first. When you made that decision to Rasmus that you wouldn't let Aristoria take control over your life, then what are you now? You're neither yourself nor Aristoria. I also made a deal with Satan for the peace treaty behind Rasmus' back. He never ever, dictates what you do, and he always respect those decision of yours," she added and looked at both of them with a gentle smile on her face.

Aris and Rullein looked at Serena for a moment before they looked at each other, realizing that neither were wrong or right about each other. Aris sighed as she nodded with understanding while Rullein still felt guilty for choosing to keep the bond she had with Rasmus.

"We only have each other, that's what Rasmus said. We all care for each other, but don't force each other's views toward others. Mutual respect and mutual understanding, right?" Serena showed a small grin at them with her eyes closed.

"I'm sorry, Aris. I don't know if I can sever my bond with Rasmus. He's the reason why I can restraint my nature, he's the pillar that keeps me safe and those around me," Rullein pointed out her reason.

"I know, and I just wanted you two to be safe, nothing more," Aris responded as she nodded with understanding.

"Now!" Serena removed her hands from those two and then clapped her hands in excitement. "Let me help Rullein choose her dress, come on," she wrapped her arm around Rullein's and dragged her to the carriage.

Aris watched those two for a few seconds before she turned around and went to check on Rasmus. She knew that he wouldn't mind this outcome, and he wouldn't even bother to think about it since there was no solution to it.

"Did you scold her?" Rasmus asked when he saw Aris approaching him.

"No, Serena stopped me before I could scold Rullein," Aris shook her head with a bit of a smile on her face. "I realized that I have no right to be mad at her," she pointed out and stood beside Rasmus as she looked down at her dress and realized how much she loved it.

"I'm glad that you did, it shows how much you care for everyone," Rasmus said as he looked at the way Aris admired the dress she wore.

"Does that mean you don't care about us since you never mad at us?" Aris raised her brows as she looked at Rasmus.

"You have been using my words against me lately, Aris," Rasmus smirked as he looked at the sky with a lazy gaze. "If that's the case, then tell me what you think. Do I care or do I not care about you or the other?" He asked.

Aris crossed her arms and stared at Rasmus' face with a serious expression, the only thing that she still couldn't read even after years of walking by his side.

"It feels like you don't. You're giving us freedom and respect for our decisions because you've gained a lot of help from all of us. You did that because you owed us for helping you this whole time, or at least that's how I see it," Aris answered with a straight face. "But, if that's the case, you're being ungrateful because we helped you and yet you have done nothing for us because our freedom isn't yours to grant," she pointed out. "Maybe you care about us, and that's why you respect our decision. But that's not caring, but by respecting our decision, you chose to endanger yourself in this matter. If you didn't care, you wouldn't let Rullein free, you would force her to sever the bond," she added.

"It's complicated and contradicting, isn't it? The only person that truly knows if someone cares about others is no one. Even themselves can interpret it as care when in truth it's just an excuse," Rasmus responded with a smile on his face. "You're not wrong when you said I owed you all, but that has nothing to do if I care about you or not," he pointed out under his breath.

"So? Do you care about us or not?" Aris asked.

"Who knows. It's better for you not to know because if I say I am, you'll immediately think that something I do in the future will be seen as me caring about you. It's not a bad thing, but it has a possibility that you'll be blinded by it," Rasmus said as he stared blankly at the ground.

"Can't you just make it simple? Sometimes you always make it complicated which is unusual for someone like you," Aris asked with her brows furrowed.

"Well, do you care about me? If you do, then you shouldn't stop yourself from telling Rullein to sever the bond. If you care for me and Rullein, are you going to tell her to sever the bond or are you going to let her be because you know that she has a solid reason as to why she doesn't want to? If you let her be, then I could also say you don't care about me," Rasmus asked back with a smile on his face.

Aris opened her mouth but immediately shut it again.

"I see... well, Anastasha has prepared an outfit for you to wear to make you look like someone from around here," Aris said before she walked away toward the carriage. "Sorry that I asked," she looked over her shoulder at Rasmus.

I'm sorry that I can't give you an answer," Rasmus responded sincerely.

Aris put a bitter smile and then went to check on Rullein and Serena.

Chapter 629 - 629: Intertwined and connected.

Anastasha tilted her head as her head swayed by the rough road the carriage took. Her eyes fixated on Rasmus, Aris, and Rullein that sat on either side of Rasmus. She didn't know what had happened, but ever since Rullein came back, those two had been glued to Rasmus.

"So, Miss Rullein. Is there anything you want to share with us? About the Great Spirits, especially the Ancient Ones?" Anastasha asked with her brows raised. "If I can be honest, I'm interested with the one that has blessed my family," she pointed out.

"Zagres?" Rullein tilted her head and stared at Anastasha. "What do you want to know about him? I can ask him to come here if you want to," she offered.

Anastasha raised her brows and the idea of summoning Zagres on a whim was terrifying because nobody had seen Zagres unless they were the patriarchs of the Asghar family. She never thought that Rullein could subjugate the whole kingdom of spirits, or even Zagres. She looked at Rullein both in awe and fear that the terrifying stories that her mother told her about Great Spirits suddenly felt like children's literature compared to the one that was sitting across from her.

"No, I don't think that's necessary," Anastasha chuckled as she shook her head. "I'm going to meet him in person soon enough anyway," she looked out the window, her words filled with confidence because she had fixated her focus on becoming the family's head.

"Is that so? Well, he's the lazy type though. He's not like what I have imagined after I saw your family," Rullein revealed.

"Lazy type?" Anastasha arched her brows as she glanced at Rullein.

"Every Great Spirits, especially the Ancient Ones, they showed off their elegance and grace, he was laid-back, uncaring," Rullein answered as she crossed her arms and nodded. "And those Great Spirits who are bound with the Asghar family are under his protection. He's like the elder of those Great Spirits," she added.

"That's interesting, it has a similar system to how the people of East Neva do. Having elders to have influence over those below them, I suppose the Great Spirits are the ones who introduced such system to them to begin with," Serena joined the conversation. "But such structure and combined with human nature, that structure has been smeared with a lot of blood by now," she added.

"Yes, and they don't care much about that. They're spirits which most of them have no attachment to humans and their world," Rullein pointed out.

"How irresponsible, introducing such a thing but doesn't hold accountability for it," Aris commented.

"They have seen through many civilizations that they think they have figured everything out and the world would operate quite smoothly if everyone else would do as they suggest. Or to put it simply, they have grown arrogant because of their long existence," Rasmus said under his breath as he stared out the window. "But enough about that. I want to know which powerful families that have the Ancient Great Spirits support," he looked at Rullein with a serious expression.

Rullein told everyone in the carriage about the Ancient Great Spirits and which families they belonged to. However, among the nine Ancient Great Spirits, only two maintained significant influence over humanity, Agon and Zagres. It was enough explanation for why the Asghar family was powerful and untouchable and why the Khan Empire never fell or why the imperial family never ceases to exist. However, although the other seven weren't connected with humans, they had favorability toward one particular pillar, it was the Heavenly Alliance because they upheld righteousness and maintained peace across East Neva.

"Heavenly Alliance that belongs to the Khan Empire has good relationship with the sultans?" Rasmus looked at Anastasha to confirm Rullein's words.

"Yes, and those who are affiliate with the Heavenly Alliance from the Khan Empire, even with the current state of belligerency between the empire and the sultans, they have been keeping close ties with them. It's one of the many methods to prevent the war from breaking and a slight protest toward the imperial family that they don't support the war," Anastasha nodded, affirming Rullein's words.

"Do you know the reason behind this war?" Rasmus asked.

"I'm not sure, there are too many rumors to confirm because none of them have the same roots of cause," Anastasha shook her head. "Such information is hard to get, especially when it comes to the imperial families. For the sultans' side, they tend to keep it to themselves when it comes to this kind of issue," she added.

"To keep quiet even in this state?" Aris furrowed her brows.

"The Sultans have their own agencies and rivalry. Even if they're at the same table, I can assure you they wouldn't even mention anything about the war but about their conflicts with each other," Anastasha scoffed as she leaned back and crossed her legs. "But you must be wondering how can they still can fend off the Khan Empire, don't you?" She stared into Rasmus' eyes. "The Sand Tower," she revealed before he could even ask, her expression was serious and cold.

"The Sand Tower again, and even now we don't know who's the master of that tower," Rasmus nodded, contemplating the mystery behind the Sand Tower that he always found its secrecy to be interesting. "We might encounter with them later on, but let's get back to the Great Spirits," he pointed out since his focus was on the Great Spirits. "About the three Evil Gods, the Great Spirits that don't belong with the others. Do you find anything about them since Ana's mother is one of them," he asked as he looked at Rullein.

"Yes, I found out that the Great Spirits despise them for one reason, they're not malice, but because they have no reason to join with the others because the Evil Gods believed they're better than them. You can say that they're putting themselves as outsiders among spirits," Rullein answered as she looked at Anastasha, knowing that her mother, Natia was one of them. "Are they powerful? I don't know but for the Ancient Ones to even pay attention to the Evil Gods, that's enough to say that they are," she added.

"We saw how Natia could suppress the power of the Great Spirits back there when Zechariah paid a visit with all his other wives which were Great Spirits. If it wasn't the blessing from Zagres, I don't think those Great Spirits could suppress her," Aris pointed out. "And, I know that she is powerful, more than you can imagine, Ana. Your mother might look like that, but when she stopped consuming opium, I saw a glimpse of what she truly was," she revealed.

Anastasha didn't know if she should feel proud or scared by what Aris said. She only nodded her head, acknowledging Aris' words and it made her wonder what kind of existence her mother was before she decided to succumb and hide herself from the world.

"Do you know who they are, the Evil Gods?" Rasmus looked at Rullein.

"Natia, Ginas, and Sunwu. Ginas is the embodiment of terror, Sunwu is the embodiment of chaos, and Natia is the embodiment of stagnation. The three Evil Gods that the Ancient Ones named them those titles," Rullein revealed.

"Stagnation, huh?" Anastasha muttered to herself, her gaze fixated on the window.

Rasmus walked out of the carriage and saw something that had never happened in other continents. He looked down the cliff where two groups of warriors, each representing the clans they belonged to. He watched them swing their swords like butchers, cutting each other's throat and gut until their insides burst out of their stomachs. He noticed the uniforms they wore, those were the same as the one he saw from the secluded village on the base of the mountain.

"Those two clans again," Anastasha crossed her arms as she looked down at the grass that had been smeared and dirtied with blood and chunks of flesh. "Looks like the war between these two clans are going to happen soon," she pointed out.

"To think they didn't wear a single armor is disturbing," Serena furrowed her brows. "Every other continent, they wear armor to prevent wounds and injuries like that."

"Armor is a sign of cowardice for those martial arts clans. It's basically saying that if you get cut, meaning you're weak and slow and deserve to get punished for their own weakness. They wore those scars either like badges or shames, nothing in between," Anastasha pointed out.

"So they romanticize everything in this empire?" Rasmus asked as he watched the warriors get more motivated the more they were injured and clashed their swords with each other.

"Yes, it's nauseating and suffocating," Anastasha answered under her breath as she nodded. "Almost everyone in this empire got doctrine from birth. They're savages wrapped in ideologies," she added.

"You have been so biased toward the Khan Empire, Ana," Aris turned to look at Anastasha. "Do you hate them that much?" She asked since Anastasha had never been biased and exaggerated about her dislike of someone or something.

Anastasha didn't expect to be pointed out like that, especially by Aris when she had expected Rasmus to question her bias. She put on a bitter smile as she kept watching the decisive battle below her. She didn't want to recall what happened when she was a child, the treatment she received when she first came to Khan Empire.

"Yes, I despise them, every single one of them. There are two types of resentment, one you can tolerate and one you can't. Their resentment toward me is something that I can't tolerate," Anastasha answered without having to reveal the details.

Rasmus, Aris, and Serena were the ones that listened to Anastasha's words and observed her expression while Rullein was busy cheering for both clans to keep fighting to the death. Aris knew she shouldn't ask any further because it was more than enough.

"Wow, these people are good at fighting. I have never seen those moves before, it looks like they're dancing with their swords," Rullein broke the tension in the air. "But looks like those guys are going to win soon," she pointed at the warriors from the unrighteous clan.

The battle was fierce, but in the end, it was almost one-sided because the unrighteous clan only had a few casualties while the righteous one were all dead. Rullein purposely released killing intent to check the skill of those warriors, and it didn't take a while when all the warriors turned their heads and noticed that they had been watched. They didn't know who were watching them since it was too far away to look at, but the fact they could feel the killing intent from that far, it was already a life-threatening situation.

The warriors ran deep into the forest to avoid another fight that they barely survived. However, that was when they noticed something was off, it was daylight, and even if the trees were tall and big, it shouldn't be that dark. They realized they went into the forest and suddenly it felt like nighttime.

"Why are you guys in a rush?" Rullein asked as she appeared from behind a tree. "Did I scare you?" She chuckled softly as she stared at the wounded warriors.

The warriors took a few steps back and went into a defensive formation because they knew the woman in front of them was beyond their league. They drew their swords, but they didn't point them at her, it was their only option to protect themselves.

"Grandmaster, are you from the Demonic Cult?" The leader of the warrior asked, his voice trembling out of fear.

Rullein tilted her head when they heard the question, but before she could open her mouth, Rasmus telepathically spoke to her.

"(Play along)" Rasmus said.

"So what if I am?" Rullein smirked as she took a few steps forward and watched those warriors take the same few steps back. "It's not like you can leave this place alive unless I allow you to," she giggled.

The warriors slowly coated their bodies and swords with Aura even though their bodies were already screaming in pain. Rullein raised her brows and looked down on them in mockery as she flicked her hand, removing the Mana from their bodies. The warriors succumbed to the Mana deviation and made their condition worse because they felt like their internal injuries had just spread throughout their bodies. All of them fell to their knees and dropped their swords to clench on their chests because their hearts might burst from the internal injuries.

"She can even manipulate our Mana, she's not just a Grandmaster..." The warrior's leader warned his men to not make any foolish decisions.

"Hmm, adorable..." Rullein stood in front of those helpless and weakened warriors. "If you have something precious with you, I'll let you live," she leaned down as she stared into the leader's eyes with her glowing and slit pupils' eyes. "Now, give me your precious memories..." she put her forefinger on the man's forehead.

The other warriors could only watch and wonder what was going to happen to them. They were experienced warriors that had sharpened instincts, and their instincts were screaming at them to stay still or their heads would roll off their bodies the moment they tried to run away.

The moment Rullein pulled her finger away from the leader's forehead, she took a few steps back. The leader had no idea what was happening, or if the woman in front of him really saw his memories. There were too many questions but not enough courage to ask them.

"Now, leave, before I changed my mind," Rullein said coldly. "Tell your leader and the other clans that the Demonic Cult is preparing for a war," she warned with a wide smile on her face.

The warriors slowly stood up, and they didn't bother to grab their weapons. They kept their eyes fixated on Rullein as they slowly walked away from her. As soon as they turned around, they ran as fast as they could. When the warrior on the far back looked over his shoulder, Rullein had disappeared.

A puff of black smoke appeared behind Rasmus and the others and Rullein came out of it.

"Demonic cult, what are they?" Serena asked Rullein.

"They're not demonic in the same way as we know. Demonic for them is the teaching and the doctrine of doing evil deeds because the world is already corrupt and they see themselves as the saviors of the sufferers, not that they worship demons or anything like that," Rullein explained based on the leader's view through his memories. "The righteous and the unrighteous conflicts are tiny in comparison to the Heavenly Alliance and the Demonic Cult. To understand the scale of the threat, the Demonic Cult is the ultimate threat to the Heavenly Alliance, the righteous clans, and the unrighteous clans," she pointed out.

Rasmus narrowed his eyes as he watched the ravens and crows begin to fight each other to monopolize the dead bodies of the fallen warriors.

"Oh, I almost forgot," Rullein snapped her fingers. "The Ancient Ones believed that the Evil Gods are helping the Demonic cult and there's a chance they're living among them," she revealed.

"Hmm, that might explain a lot of things," Rasmus nodded slowly.