

Paragon 161

Chapter 161 - 161: Eating Like a King

"Little brother, if you don't plan to make these two ladies your women tonight, then stop leading them on," Hanna said, raising an eyebrow at Klaus. He had his arms wrapped around Anna and Lily's waists, their faces flushed in embarrassment.

The two women were clearly flustered beyond repair, unable to meet Hanna's gaze as the tension between them all hung in the air.

Klaus glanced down at the two flustered beauties in his arms and tightened his grip around their waists. With a mischievous grin, he replied, "Don't worry, big sister. Let your little brother enjoy some quality time with these fairies."

Hanna sighed and shook her head, though a small smile tugged at her lips. She wasn't surprised. Klaus's mother had made sure to tell her all about Klaus growing up, as a way to bond with her.

He learned about Klaus's childhood and the struggles he went through after his dad went missing. So Hanna knew he deserved all the joy in this world. Klaus's mother wanted to make sure she became comfortable around Klaus and it worked—Hanna had become comfortable around him, even a bit overprotective, despite not knowing him for long.

She wasn't jealous of Lily or Anna, but she didn't like the way some of the other women were eyeing Klaus either. With a teasing grin, Hanna called over her shoulder,

"Alright, ladies, put your backs into it. Don't let some hungry tigress come along and snatch him away from you two!" Her cheeks flushed red as she hurried off, clearly not wanting to be left alone with the awkwardness. She made her way toward Danny and the others.

Klaus watched her go, a silent thumbs-up forming in his heart. He knew Hanna didn't have feelings for him, but seeing her support made him want to shower her with affection. Her words had done the trick too—Lily and Anna stopped blushing and, instead, started claiming their territory with newfound confidence.

He chuckled, knowing the night was only going to get more interesting. After a while, they were led from the garden into a grand hall, where a large dinner table was set. It became clear this wasn't an open invitation for every youngster competing in the Regional Trial.

Looking around, Klaus quickly realized that less than 2 percent of the participants were there for the Regional Trial were there. Only the best of the best had been invited. Of course, he wasn't concerned about that, his focus was on the food laid before them.

"Welcome, everyone, to Hiroshi Mansion. We are thrilled to host you," a voice rang out just as they settled into their seats.

Klaus turned his head to see a young man with short dark hair, perfect facial features, and a well-built, athletic body speaking. His presence was commanding, and the room fell silent.

"You might be wondering why we extended this invitation..." the man continued, his voice smooth and calculated. "The Hiroshi Family wishes to express our willingness to work with promising youngsters like yourselves in the years to come. We believe we can make this new world a safer place for our loved ones through togetherness and fostering bonds." He smiled gently, the sincerity almost convincing.

Klaus, standing off to the side, smirked silently to himself. 'They could've just said they want to suck up to rising stars and be done with it. What's with this fancy way of saying 'sucking up'?'

He saw through the charade. The Hiroshi family wasn't about fostering bonds or safety. They wanted to align themselves with the future powerhouses, hoping to cash in once these rising talents reached their peak. Klaus knew that as soon as someone fell out of favor or lost their potential, the Hiroshi family would cut ties without a second thought.

But Klaus wasn't bothered. He understood the game, and in some ways, he appreciated it. They weren't the first family trying to secure their future by banking on the youth, and they certainly wouldn't be the last.

"Enjoy your food and the hospitality of the Hiroshi Great Family," the young man said, looking at the smiling faces around the table. With a final nod, he turned and walked away.

Klaus watched him go, a slight frown forming. "Suddenly, I don't feel like being part of a great family," he muttered under his breath. The thought of all the political games and sucking up didn't sit well with him.

But then he glanced to his left and right, where Lily and Anna sat. A grin spread across his face. "But with two fairies by my side, I wouldn't mind joining your families."

Lily and Anna blushed at his words, their faces turning a delicate shade of pink as they shyly averted their eyes.

The night began as usual, with food being served. Klaus, who had just come to the realization that maybe he and Fruity weren't so different after all, wasted no time devouring the meal in front of him. He didn't care about the looks people were giving him.

He knew some of them were hungry but were too busy trying to maintain their ridiculous image, picking at their food to appear refined. 'Not this young master,' Klaus thought. 'I have no such image to uphold.'

His only concern was filling his stomach, and that's exactly what he was doing. Anna and Lily kept sneaking glances at him as he ate with no shame, but they didn't seem bothered. In fact, they looked more amused than anything.

It wasn't just Klaus, either. Danny, Daniel, Kay, and Mark were doing the same. None of them came from great families, so why should they care about keeping up appearances? They were hungry, and the food was there to be eaten.

"Tsk, as expected, the dogs reveal themselves at a table full of Unicorns," a voice suddenly cut through the room.

Klaus looked up to see a young man sitting across from him, his words dripping with condescension, clearly aimed at Klaus and his group. The others around the table went silent, waiting to see how Klaus would react to the not-so-subtle insult.

Klaus paused mid-bite, slowly lowering his fork. His gaze shifted toward the young man across the table, who was staring at him with a smug expression. The silence at the table thickened as everyone watched for Klaus's reaction.

For a moment, Klaus considered responding, but then a smirk tugged at the corner of his lips. He resumed eating, completely unfazed. "You know," he said casually between bites, "if being a dog means I get to eat without pretending to be something I'm not, then bark, bark."

Lily and Anna snorted, trying to hide their laughter, while Danny, Daniel, Kay, and Mark exchanged grins. The insult didn't hit as the young man had hoped, and the tension shifted back toward him.

The smug look on the young man's face faltered, clearly not expecting Klaus to brush him off so effortlessly. He clenched his jaw, trying to maintain his composure. "Typical response from someone without any class."

Klaus wiped his mouth with a napkin, his eyes locking onto the young man. "Class? Is that what you call pretending you're too good to eat? Looks to me like you're starving, but don't worry, there's plenty of food. Maybe one day you'll realize that pretending to be above everyone else doesn't make you better, it just makes you hungry."

The room fell silent again, but this time, it was the kind of silence that followed a blow that hit its mark. The young man flushed with embarrassment, unable to come up with a retort. Of course, the blow wasn't aimed only at him, but since he was the one who asked, he had to take it all.

Klaus grinned, leaning back in his chair, content. He turned to Anna and Lily, who were still stifling their laughter. "Now, where was I? Ah, right. Eating like a king."

"Klaus, do you dare have a duel with me?" a voice suddenly echoed from one side of the hall. Everybody turned only to meet the gaze of a young man storming through the doors, his eyes blazing with rage.

Chapter 162 - 162: Falling Face First

Klaus didn't even bother to lift his head. He kept chewing, completely unbothered. Without looking up, he muttered, "Put a leash on it, boy. This big daddy is eating." His voice was casual, almost lazy, but the message was clear. He wasn't interested in playing games.

The room tensed. Klaus's response was enough to make jaws drop, He wasn't bothered, not even in the slightest. If someone was calling him out like that, they either wanted attention or had something to prove. Neither option interested him.

The young man stopped in his tracks, clearly taken aback by Klaus's lack of response or more like his nonchalant response. His face reddened with anger. "Are you really that scared, Klaus? Hiding behind your food?"

Klaus chuckled softly, finally glancing up. "Scared? Of you?" He leaned back, lazily locking eyes with his challenger, a smirk playing on his lips. "No, I'm just not interested in wasting my time. But if you're desperate for a beating, I can finish up here and give you some attention. Just don't go running to your daddy when I'm done with you."

A few people held their breath. The boldness of Klaus's insult was palpable. Everyone knew the young man challenging Klaus—Taro Hiroshi, the youngest heir of the Hiroshi Great Family. Arrogant yet undeniably talented. He isn't a nobody for Klaus to be disrespecting like that.

So for Klaus to openly disrespect him like that, none of them couldn't believe their eyes and ears.

Taro's eyes narrowed, fury mixing with disbelief. He had expected some kind of reaction, but not this level of defiance. "You think you can just brush me off?" he spat, taking a step closer. "You're nothing but a cocky fool."

Klaus shrugged, unfazed. "Cocky? Maybe. But I've got the skills to back it up. What do you have? A title and a family name?"

"That doesn't scare me."

The tension in the room thickened, as others exchanged uneasy glances. They could feel the impending clash, a storm brewing between two young warriors. Taro clenched his fists, his body tense with anger. "You think you're better than me? I, Taro Hiroshi will show you what real power looks like."

Klaus wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, a grin spreading across his face. "Power? Is that what you call throwing a tantrum? Come on, Taro. You should know better than to challenge someone who doesn't care about your family Name. And yes, I don't care if you are the son of the Devil himself.

In my eyes, you are a nobody so act like one."

Klaus's words hit like a slap in the face to every Great Family heir present. He clearly didn't care about any of them, especially those who harbored animosity toward him.

"But wait," Klaus suddenly said raising a finger "Why does it seem like you hate me for no reason? This is my first time in this city and my first time entering this Mansion. So why the hostility? Make no mistake, your family's hospitality is great.

I enjoyed my food and will savor dessert, but why does this have to include a jerk like you?" He raised an eyebrow, looking directly at Taro, who was clenching his fists in rage.

"Wait, I didn't steal your woman, did I?" Klaus asked, a smirk creeping onto his face. "Who am I kidding? With a face like yours, you wouldn't have such luck." He relished the way Taro's anger was flaring. Taro is handsome, a lady's man and he knows it, but he just has to poke the bear. Anna and Lily knew there was no use stopping him now.

Taro clenched his fists, his anger simmering just below the surface. He had no words; Klaus was a monster when it came to this verbal game. Instead of enjoying the same freedom he had when entering the room, Taro found himself made a fool, standing there and seething.

As if sensing the tension, Anna leaned in, whispering something to Klaus. A mischievous smile spread across his face after hearing what she whispered into his ears.

"On second thought, Taro, I accept your challenge. And don't worry—you can use your sword. I'll just use this spoon." Klaus picked up a five-inch spoon from the table and began walking toward Taro.

His action caught everyone off guard. A spoon? Was he serious? The room erupted into murmurs, disbelief etched on every face.

Taro's expression shifted from anger to confusion, then to rage. "You think this is a joke?" he shouted

Klaus shrugged, twirling the spoon between his fingers like a seasoned warrior wielding a dagger. "Not at all. I just want to keep things light. You seem so tense" Klaus said with a puffy expression making the others don't know whether to laugh or cry.

The crowd around them watched in a mix of amusement and shock. Klaus was known for his unpredictability, but this was a new level of absurdity. He gave a Legacy heir Handicap, now how, he is giving Taro another handicap? Spoon, really.

"Are you really going to fight me with that?" Taro scoffed, trying to regain his composure.

"Why not? I figured a little spoon would be enough to take care of a honey bastard like you," Klaus replied, gesturing with the spoon as if he were scooping up honey.

Laughter erupted from the onlookers, and even some of Taro's anger seemed to falter in the face of Klaus's ridiculousness. Klaus spun the spoon in his fingers, looking back at Taro.

"Look at you, Taro," Klaus continued, "getting all worked up over a kitchen utensil. If that's all it takes to rattle you, maybe you should reconsider this whole warrior thing."

Taro glared, his face twisting with a mix of fury and humiliation. "You think this is funny? I'll make you regret this!"

Klaus just chuckled, stepping closer, spoon held high like a knight with his sword. "I'm counting on it. Show me what you've got!"

The hall was large enough to accommodate a simple spar between friends, but the tension felt anything but casual. Taro, despite his status as a Great Family heir, drew his sword and looked at Klaus like he was prey. "Don't regret this later," he warned, charging at Klaus with determination.

Klaus smirked as Taro closed the distance. When Taro got close, he stabbed his sword forward, clearly intent on hurting Klaus. But Klaus merely sidestepped a glint of amusement in his eyes.

In one fluid motion, he subtly kicked his leg forward, placing it right between Taro's legs. Before Taro could react, his sword flew from his hand as he tripped over Klaus's leg. He crashed to the floor, his face hitting the ground first with a thud.

The hall erupted in laughter, the sight of Taro's face hitting the floor first was just too comical to watch. Klaus stood over him, spoon raised in triumph. "Looks like you forgot to watch your footing, honey bastard!" he teased.

Taro groaned, pushing himself up and glaring at Klaus, his pride wounded. "This isn't over," he hissed, his face flushed with embarrassment.

"Oh, I wouldn't dream of it!" Klaus replied, still grinning. "Let's see if you can actually land a hit this time."

Taro picked up his sword again, fury in his eyes, and charged at Klaus. But before he knew it, his face was hitting the floor once more. Once again the youngsters in the room laughed but not all. Taro's fall was comical, but not all of them knew how it happened until the second fall.

He charged at Klaus for the third time, but before he could take any action, he was falling on the floor, face first. The laughter in the hall suddenly stopped.

The first fall was amusing; it could happen to anyone. The second was still funny—just a coincidence. But a third? That was something else entirely. Klaus had made Taro's handsome face hit the ground thrice already.

"Wanna try it again?" Klaus taunted, his smirk growing wider. "To think someone who has his eyes on my girlfriend would be this weak. How disappointing." The look on Klaus's face said it all—Taro's challenge was becoming a waste of time.

"Please, when is dessert getting ready?" Klaus suddenly asked.

Clap, clap, clap.

Before Taro could move, applause rang out from one of the entrances, cutting through the tension. Everyone turned to see who had arrived.

Chapter 163 - 163: The Three Hiroshi Sisters

Klaus and the others turned toward the sound of clapping. Upon turning, their eyes settled on three women with otherworldly beauty walking toward them. Leading them was Aoi, and the two women beside her looked nearly identical to her, except they had more mature features.

The moment Klaus's eyes fell on the two women flanking Aoi, his heart seemed to stop. It wasn't because he was charmed or had any intentions of wooing them. It was something deeper—something in the aura that surrounded them.

When he first awakened his Spirit Eye, the senior in his soul sea had told him that he would be able to see energies, though only to a certain extent. At the time, Klaus didn't know what to look for. But now, as he stared at the suffocating energy surrounding the women beside Aoi, one thing was clear: he was no match for them. Not even close.

'How vast is the difference between monsters and humans?' Klaus thought to himself, feeling a chill run through his body.

Klaus had fought monsters far above his level, many Tiers beyond his own. Yet, standing before the Hiroshi sisters, especially the two beside Aoi, a shiver ran down his spine. They were only three realms above him, but it was enough to remind him that humans, too, could be terrifyingly powerful.

"Brother Klaus, don't you think it's rude to come into someone's home and beat them up?" one of the women beside Aoi asked, her voice dripping with a seductive undertone. It was the kind of tone that made Anna and Lily instantly bristle. They exchanged glances, clearly irritated. Being women themselves, they knew what was implied beneath those silky words.

Klaus raised an eyebrow, unfazed by the comment, though he could feel the tension rising behind him. His eyes drifted to Taro whose face was swollen and bruised from the repeated falls.

"I couldn't help it," Klaus said finally, unable to suppress a grin. The memory of Taro's faceplant was too funny to ignore.

The Hiroshi sisters exchanged knowing glances before looking at their younger brother, Taro, who was gripping his sword so tightly that his knuckles turned white. His eyes shot daggers at Klaus, his frustration boiling over. The sisters sighed quietly. They had witnessed the whole ordeal from the start, and, in truth, they had wanted to stop Taro from confronting Klaus.

But their father had told them not to interfere.

Now, seeing the anger etched on Taro's face, they understood why. Their father, Ryo Hiroshi, was not a man respected for his wealth but for his immense strength and warrior spirit. He had risen to prominence through discipline, and seeing his son drifting toward the spoiled, arrogant path, he needed something—someone—to pull Taro back to reality.

In fact, this entire gathering had been carefully planned so that Klaus would attend. It wasn't that the Hiroshi family didn't want to entertain the other young geniuses—they did—but Klaus was the main focus.

Like many youths, Klaus had his share of arrogance, but he had the skill to back it up. Taro, on the other hand, had been seething for weeks, ever since the news broke that Klaus and Lucy, the famed Queen of Vine, Princess of Vine, The wood Princess, were dating. His pride couldn't handle it, and now his frustration was boiling over into something dangerous.

The sisters knew that their father had orchestrated this encounter, hoping Klaus would be the lesson Taro needed.

Looking at Taro's fuming expression, the Hiroshi sisters silently gave their father a mental thumbs-up. He had clearly planned this all along. Outwardly, they remained neutral, though it was obvious they had their own motives for attending the gathering.

"Brother Klaus, still, you should have shown a little more restraint," the other Hiroshi sister said, her smile just as teasing as before.

Klaus glanced at Taro, whose face was burning with anger, then responded with a casual shrug. "You're right, I should have held back a little. Tell you what, Brother Taro—how about a rematch? This time I won't trip you," he said with an innocent look, clearly taunting Taro into another round of humiliation.

The first Hiroshi sister, sensing where this was headed, quickly interjected. "Brother Klaus has already won, so let's call this duel over." Her tone made it clear she wasn't amused by Klaus's baiting. Many might be caught in his bait, but not her.

Had Taro accepted, the next round would be a new form of humiliation that if care is not taken, can damage his foundation for good. So she she had to stop him.

"Too bad," Klaus said, inspecting the spoon in his hand as if it were the most fascinating thing in the world. "I was really looking forward to a proper fight with him."

Around them, a few people chuckled at Klaus's antics. Though some in the crowd disliked him—whether out of jealousy or rivalry—they couldn't deny his charm. His casual way of mocking without malice, combined with his undeniable skills and prowess, made it hard for anyone not to be amused by his behavior.

"Since Brother Klaus seems so keen on another match, why not have a duel with Aoi here?" the first Hiroshi sister suddenly suggested, turning all attention toward Aoi.

"First Sister!" Aoi exclaimed, clearly flustered.

"Oh, come on," her sister continued with a teasing smile. "You think I don't know you've been putting off your return to the academy just to see him?"

Aoi shot her a look of pure betrayal, the kind that said, "You traitor!" But there was no escaping it now. The entire crowd had heard, and all eyes were on her.

Klaus blinked, surprised by the revelation. Aoi, the elegant and fierce number twelve on the Celestial Mountain Academy's Inner Disciple rankings, had been eager to meet him. It all clicked into place—the reason she had met him earlier in the garden. She hadn't been able to wait any longer.

He chuckled to himself, a wide grin spreading across his face. "Well, well, this just might be the best gathering hosted by a great family yet." He glanced at Aoi, who looked like she wanted the ground to swallow her up.

Aoi's cheeks burned with embarrassment as she avoided Klaus's gaze, clearly wishing she could disappear into thin air. Klaus, however, couldn't help but grin wider. "Well then, I'll gladly have a duel with Miss Aoi," he said, clearly amused by how things had turned out.

"Wonderful! Let's all move to the arena," the first Hiroshi sister chimed in, leading the way with a satisfied smile.

Klaus cast one last longing look at the food spread, almost wanting to shout, 'Where's the dessert?' But he bit his tongue and followed the group.

If he was honest with himself, he had been itching for a duel with the Hiroshi family, knowing their deep mastery of the sword. Taro would've been the perfect match, but it was a shame the guy was a spoiled brat. Now, though, he had an upgrade—a duel with Aoi, a Peak Saint, and an Inner Disciple of Celestial Mountain Academy, and on top of that, she was stunningly beautiful.

The thought excited him. A perfect combination—strength, beauty, and the sword. It was too good to pass up.

A while later, they arrived at the arena. It was much bigger than Klaus's training room—vast and open. He walked in casually, followed closely by Aoi. Klaus stood opposite her and smiled.

"Looks like I will be needing your guidance, Fairy Aoi," he said, feeling a spark of excitement.

Everyone else stood by, watching intently as the duel was about to begin.

"I will also need Brother Klaus's guidance," Aoi replied, determination in her voice. With that, she lunged at Klaus.

In an instant, Klaus's sword appeared in his hand. With a flick of his wrist, he moved ready to clash and see if the Hiroshi family were indeed up to their name as Masters of the sword in the Northern Union.

Chapter 164 - 164: Duel with Aoi Hiroshi

Klaus clashed with Aoi, their swords meeting in a sharp clang. Neither of them was using any active skills; it was a pure test of skill with their blades. Klaus felt the force behind Aoi's strike, but he didn't panic. Instead, he adapted for the second clash. When their swords met again, he found the force was more manageable this time.

Aoi lunged forward with her sword, aiming to stab him. Klaus sidestepped and parried her attack, using the momentum to twist his wrist and strike back. But Aoi was one step ahead; she moved her sword to block his attack. With a swift motion, she spun on her heel, her waist twisting gracefully as she struck forward.

This movement sent her long, silky brown hair swirling in the air, making her look even more enchanting. Klaus shook his head to clear his thoughts—he had to focus. Still, he couldn't deny that she had a certain charm.

Seizing the moment created by her spin, Klaus struck forward, aiming for the blind spot. Yet, just like she had eyes in the back of her head, Aoi defended against his attack with surprising skill.

The duel had just started yet the two had already started showing great skill with the sword, especially, Aoi who seemed to have the sword as an extension of her arm.

Klaus pressed on with a sharpened determination. He feinted left, drawing Aoi's attention, then swiftly changed direction, aiming for her right side. Aoi reacted instantly, her instincts sharp. She pivoted, her sword moving to intercept his strike with fluid precision.

Their swords clashed again, sending vibrations up Klaus's arms. He could feel the intensity of the duel rising, and he relished the challenge. Aoi was no ordinary opponent; her skills matched him at least that was how it looked like, and the thrill of the fight energized him.

As they exchanged blows, Klaus noticed Aoi's breathing—a steady rhythm, controlled and focused. It impressed him. He decided to push her further. With a sudden burst of speed, he unleashed a flurry of

strikes, each one meant to test her defenses. Aoi parried and dodged, her movements a dance of grace and agility.

Then, in a surprising twist, she countered with a spinning slash, aiming for his shoulder. Klaus barely managed to duck in time, feeling the rush of air as the blade swept above him. He could see her determination shining in her eyes, and it made him smile.

"You're stronger than I expected," he called out, his voice filled with excitement.

Aoi smirked, her confidence growing. "I could say the same about you, brother Klaus!" With renewed energy, she charged at him again, launching a series of precise attacks that kept him on his toes.

Klaus adjusted his stance, feeling the rush of adrenaline. He met her strikes with equal fervor, the sound of metal ringing through the arena. The others are watching with both fascination and awe. Just the simple clash is saying a whole lot.

Even Klaus facing Aoi could tell this wasn't just a simple duel. The way she was handling her sword said all he had to know, Aoi is a genius with the sword.

Suddenly, Aoi feinted to the left, then quickly spun to the right, attempting to catch him off guard. Klaus was ready this time. He sidestepped and launched a quick thrust, aiming for her side. Aoi reacted just in time, deflecting his attack with a flick of her wrist.

They both paused for a moment, breathing heavily, exchanging glances filled with mutual respect. The duel was far from over, but Klaus could feel the bond between them growing stronger with every clash.

"Beautiful and skilled, what a tempting combination," Klaus said, gazing at Aoi with admiration.

Aoi blushed slightly, a smile creeping onto her face. "Flattery won't save you in this duel, Klaus," she replied, her eyes sparkling with challenge.

Klaus laughed. "Maybe not, but it makes the fight more enjoyable," he said, raising his sword once more. He was enjoying the duel, but most importantly, he was learning.

With renewed energy, Aoi lunged at him again, her movements fluid and confident. "Let's see if you can keep up, then!"

Klaus met her charge head-on, their swords clashing once more. Each strike felt electric, the connection between them charged with competition and camaraderie. The arena around them faded as they became absorbed in their duel, both pushing each other to new heights now.

"Is that all you've got?" Klaus teased as he parried her strike, grinning.

Aoi responded with a playful glare. "You're going to regret saying that!" She spun around, attempting to catch him off guard again.

Klaus's heart raced as he dodged, feeling the thrill of the moment. Aoi's movements had shifted. At first, it felt like she was mapping out her next steps, but now she seemed to glide through the air as if dancing with her sword.

'She is skilled,' Klaus thought to himself, trying not to let it overwhelm him. He focused on adapting to her rhythm. The Hiroshi family was known for their swordsmanship, so it made sense that Aoi was so talented.

But even if she is the daughter of Ryo Hiroshi, the sword king, she seems a little too skilled, and Klaus, without any formal training in the art of swordplay, is starting to try to keep up with her evolving technique.

As Aoi twirled and struck, Klaus realized he had to tap into his instincts. He shifted his stance, watching her movements closely. Each strike was a challenge, but also an opportunity. He could learn from her, even in this fierce exchange.

With a sudden surge of determination, Klaus decided to push himself. He anticipated her next move, stepping into her path as she lunged forward. Their swords clashed again, the sound echoing in the arena. Klaus felt the weight of her strength behind her attacks, but he stood his ground, matching her pace.

Aoi paused for a brief moment, surprised by his response. "Not bad, Klaus!" she exclaimed, a hint of admiration in her voice.

"Thanks! But don't think I'll go easy on you!" Klaus shot back, a grin spreading across his face.

With renewed vigor, they resumed their duel, both pushing their limits. Klaus felt the thrill of the fight coursing through him, and he realized that, despite the gap in their training, he was holding his own.

Klaus's brain functioned like a digital camera, recording every move Aoi made and implementing them into his next clash.

'He is copying my skills,' Aoi realized, her keen instincts as a skilled swordswoman quickly picking up on Klaus's actions. But instead of feeling frustrated, a smile spread across her face. 'He is a genius.' She said inwardly

With each strike, Klaus adapted, mirroring her movements and refining his technique. Aoi found herself impressed—not just by his quick learning, but by the style he was using to learn it.

"Is that all you've got?" she teased, her voice light, even as she lunged at him again.

Klaus chuckled, feeling the thrill of the challenge. "Not even close!" He sidestepped and countered, using the technique he had just observed.

The duel evolved into a captivating exchange, each of them pushing the other to improve. Aoi found joy in the spar, appreciating how Klaus embraced the challenge. She was learning a new thing from him, the thrill of battle and he was stealing... *cough*...learning from her.

"You're picking this up faster than I expected," she admitted softly, a hint of admiration in her tone.

"Just trying to keep up with you!" Klaus replied, grinning as they clashed again.

However, no matter how she wanted to continue the battle, she knew it had to end. Klaus was learning her techniques and skills, something he first had to ask for permission from Ryo Hirosho before doing. So she knew she had to end the battle somehow even if he had just learned a fraction of her technique.

The duel continues like usual Aoi not knowing how to end it. She could win any moment she wanted, but she didn't want to. So she continued to repeat her techniques over and over again hoping Klaus would notice, and he did. He knew what she was trying to communicate.

So in one swift move, he parried her attack, then, using the momentum, he drove the hilt of his sword toward her, disarming her with a surprising twist. In a graceful motion, he spun her around, catching her like a princess in a tango dance.

Aoi blinked in surprise, caught off guard. Klaus had won in a rather peculiar manner, and for a moment, she was speechless, her cheeks flushing.

Chapter 165 - 165: Ryo Hiroshi

'She made me win,' Klaus thought inwardly as he gently lifted Aoi up. She had given him all the signs. In truth, Aoi was saving him from embarrassment and, possibly, from learning too much too soon. Having practiced since she was seven, it was only natural that she would be much better than Klaus.

But Aoi was shocked by how quickly Klaus was learning her swordplay. What took others years to master was being grasped by him in mere seconds. It was a talent that was hard to ignore.

"Nice duel, Brother Klaus," Aoi said, walking out of the arena, her cheeks flushed. Klaus's hands had pressed against her waist during the ending of the duel, and even though he had let go, she could still feel the warmth lingering there. The sensation made her blush deepen.

She couldn't shake the feeling of his touch, and it left her both flustered and intrigued. What had started as a friendly match had turned into something more meaningful, and Aoi found herself smiling despite her embarrassment.

Klaus, oblivious to the effect he had made on Aoi, felt a rush of his gains despite the handicap offered to him this time. He had learned so much in such a short time. But he also felt a pang of realization about how much he still lacked when it came to using a sword without any active skills.

Even though Aoi had helped him win, he couldn't help but smile as he walked toward his friends. As he stopped near them, he glanced at the two Hiroshi sisters. Aoi was hiding behind them, so he couldn't see her expression, but the looks on the sisters' faces showed they were unaware of Aoi's role in his victory.

"Brother Klaus, I didn't know you were good with the sword," one of the sisters said, her eyes wide with surprise. "By the way, I'm Miki, and this is Mio."

"Trust me, Sister Miki, I'm good with the sword through and through," Klaus said with a grin. His words didn't come off as arrogant; instead, they carried a different tone that made everyone look at him oddly. However, a few of the guys caught the hidden meaning behind his statement.

Daniel, one of his closest friends, gently tapped Klaus on the shoulder and nodded knowingly. It was clear to him that Klaus was both a monster on the battlefield and a beast in other ways.

Miki and Mio exchanged glances, still puzzled by Klaus's words. Aoi, still hiding, felt her heart race for some reason.

"Wow, we've got a real swordmaster among us!" Mio exclaimed, breaking the tension. Klaus chuckled, amused that she didn't catch the hidden meaning in his earlier words.

"Maybe you should teach us some moves," Miki suggested, her curiosity clearly piqued.

Klaus grinned and said, "It will be my pleasure, Sister Miki. This little one doesn't mind going a few rounds with each of you." He spoke in such a casual tone that the ladies thought he meant he would train with them.

But for the boys, it felt like a direct line to all the hidden meanings behind Klaus's playful words. They exchanged knowing looks, trying to suppress their laughter.

"You are one bold and arrogant youngster," a deep voice suddenly interrupted. A man stepped into the arena, towering at 6'2" with a sword tattoo etched on his forehead. He had an athletic build and a calm presence that commanded attention.

"That is Ryo Hiroshi," Lily whispered to Klaus, making sure he understood before saying anything too brash. "He's the patriarch of the Hiroshi Great Family—Aoi, Miki, Mio, and Taro's father. They call him the Sword King."

Klaus felt a rush of respect wash over him as he took in the imposing figure. Ryo's reputation preceded him, and Klaus knew he was in the presence of a true master. The air around him even spoke more than one had to say.

"Nice to meet you, sir," Klaus said, straightening up. He wanted to make a good impression, despite the playful banter just moments before.

Ryo looked at him with a measured gaze, then smiled slightly. "You have skill, Klaus. But remember, confidence is important, but so is humility."

Klaus nodded, appreciating the advice. He glanced at Aoi, Miki, and Mio, all of them watching the interaction with a mix of pride and apprehension.

"Let's see if you can back up that confidence in a proper duel sometime," Ryo continued, a challenge hidden in his tone.

Klaus's heart raced at the thought. "I'd be honored, sir," he replied, feeling both excited and intimidated.

Ryo glanced at Aoi, who was looking down, her face hidden. "You did well, kid," he said, his voice calm yet firm. "It's just that this brat is too talented." Aside from Klaus and Aoi, he was the only one who knew Aoi had helped Klaus win.

He knew Aoi was concerned about Klaus learning her family technique, so he made him win when she could have easily defeated him.

Instead of letting Klaus lose, Aoi had chosen to support him, wanting him to feel good about himself. So hearing her father's praise, Aoi smiled and nodded, her heart swelling with pride.

He himself wouldn't have easily let Klaus learn the technique that has been in their family for many generations, even before the apocalypse go to a stranger that hasn't known for that long. So seeing her daughter place her own win aside just so she could preserve their heritage made him feel like a proud and accomplished father.

"Alright, you youngsters should continue enjoying yourselves," Ryo said, his tone shifting slightly. "Good luck tomorrow in the regional selections." He cast one last glance at Klaus, a look that seemed to carry a warning before he vanished into thin air.

Klaus smiled after him, then muttered to himself, "Father-in-law sure knows how to make an entrance and an exit." His words were quiet, but somewhere far from the arena, Ryo smiled too, murmuring to himself, "I might just have to kill him someday."

Klaus, still in the arena, felt a chill run down his spine for reasons he couldn't quite grasp. Shaking it off, he glanced at Aoi. "Fairy Aoi, if you don't have any big plans tomorrow evening, would you join me and my friends for a night out after the Selection Trial?"

Aoi, taken aback by the unexpected invitation, quickly recomposed herself. "I would be honored," she replied, her heart racing. She glanced at her sisters, who were looking back at her with teasing smiles.

"Brother Klaus, maybe you should win first before making a move on my sister," Mio said, her teasing tone clear.

Klaus chuckled. "A wise man once said, strike while the iron is still hot."

"Does that mean you'll also strike these two hot irons?" Miki teased.

Klaus's smile widened. "I don't want a certain somebody cutting my sword off," he replied, prompting laughter from the group, especially the boys.

Miki, Mio, and the other ladies joined in the laughter, but suddenly, the realization hit them like a crashing mountain.

Anna and Lily hid their faces behind Hanna, while Miki and Mio's cheeks flushed a deep red. It finally clicked for them what Klaus meant when he said he was good with the sword through and through. All the cheeky comments he had made suddenly made sense, and they couldn't stop blushing.

The atmosphere shifted as they processed the implications of Klaus's words. Aoi felt her face heat up, realizing she had unwittingly stepped into a playful yet dangerous game. The teasing had been light-hearted, but now it felt more serious, charged with shameless meanings.

Klaus noticed their reactions and raised an eyebrow, a smirk playing on his lips. "What? Did I say something wrong?"

"Not at all," Miki managed to say between giggles, her face still flushed. With that, they went back to enjoying the evening. Klaus finally managed to enjoy his dessert and even cast Miguel a few mocking smiles. A while later, the gathering was over and Klaus and his friends left back to their hotel.

Chapter 166 - 166: Night Chat With Lucy

When they got back to the Third Finger Royal Hotel, Klaus and his friends didn't go to sleep right away. Instead, they sat together, talking about the Trial that awaited them the next day. After a while, they all retired to their rooms. As usual, Klaus didn't head to bed. Instead, he entered his soul sea and began studying the Pentaface Bead.

'Klaus, are you there?' A voice suddenly echoed in his mind, pulling him from his focus. Klaus immediately exited his soul sea with a smile.

'Yes, my love, I'm here,' Klaus replied in his thoughts. He smiled because Lucy was using the connection they shared to speak to him. After their recent time together, something special had happened between them—a bond formed during their intimate moments.

At first, Klaus thought there might be a limit to how far they could communicate. But when Lucy went back home, she could still reach him, no matter the distance. This made her incredibly happy. On her way back to the academy, she kept testing the bond to make sure it was still working.

Her joy was unmatched when she realized she could even reach Klaus while in the academy. Since she wasn't an Inner Disciple yet, she couldn't use the communication devices there. Before Klaus attempted Assassination when she went back to the academy, she missed him greatly.

So now that she had a way to reach him, she felt like she was on top of the world. Sharing a mental link with your boyfriend, which lady wouldn't want that?

The day after Lucy returned to the academy, she entered seclusion, preparing for her Stairway to Heaven test. She promised Klaus she'd reach out to him once she passed. So, the fact she was contacting him now meant only one thing—she had become an Inner Disciple.

"Klaus, I passed! I passed! I'm now an Inner Disciple!" Lucy's voice rang with excitement in Klaus's mind.

A smile tugged at Klaus's lips as he leaned back, closing his eyes. He could feel her joy through the connection, and it warmed his heart.

"Of course, you did. I never doubted you for a second," Klaus replied, his tone filled with pride. From the little he knew from Lucy, he knew for a fact she was a genius, so he was happy for her.

"Thank you," Lucy said suddenly, her voice soft but full of meaning.

"There's no need to thank me. It was all your effort," Klaus replied.

"No, I mean it. Thank you," Lucy insisted. "I don't know what you did, but after our... you know, I started getting stronger. At first, I didn't understand what was happening, but now I do. Klaus, I don't know what that star tattoo is, but it's making me stronger—like, really strong."

"Even my Master is shocked by what happened today," Lucy added.

"What happened?" Klaus asked, his curiosity piqued.

"I walked through the test like it was nothing. There was some resistance, sure, but I didn't even sweat," Lucy said, her voice swelling with pride. The stairway to heaven is like the most difficult obstacle every outer disciple would have to face before becoming an inner disciple.

So to hear she just walked through it, that sounded wild, however, Klaus wasn't shocked, not even in the slightest.

Klaus chuckled. "Well, looks like I didn't sweat for nothing."

"You... you knew all along?" Lucy asked, suddenly suspicious.

"I suspected, but I wasn't sure. It's clear now though—the star is more than just for telepathic communication."

"Klaus, what is happening to me?" Lucy's tone shifted, a slight panic creeping in.

"Hey, my love, there's nothing to worry about. I don't know exactly what this is either, but I'm sure of one thing—you're not in any danger. If anything, you should be happy. You're just going to keep getting stronger." Klaus felt certain his star qi was affecting her in ways even he didn't fully grasp.

"Klaus..." Lucy's voice trailed off.

"What?" Klaus teased, grinning. "Want me to come over and make sure you're still strong?"

Lucy, now sitting in her lush room, flushed red. Somehow, the white-haired bastard had managed to make her blush from thousands of miles away.

"You're my woman now, Lucy. No need to overthink everything," Klaus said with a grin. "This is good—at least I won't have to worry about you being left in the dust. And hey, if you need a little boost, you can always come for a refuel," he joked again, knowing full well she was blushing on the other end, even though he couldn't see her.

His meaning was obvious. If being intimate with her made her stronger, he had no complaints. Any man worth his salt wouldn't pass up something that beneficial.

"Klaus, you're not cheating on me and Sister Ohema with other women, are you?" Lucy asked, trying to steer the conversation away from his teasing. But it wasn't that simple.

"As a matter of fact, I've got two damsels in my bed right now," Klaus said, playing along.

"You..." Lucy stammered, unsure how to respond.

"What? Aren't you the one pushing me to go after your sister?" Klaus teased, his tone mocking. Lucy didn't say anything, but he could sense her smiling on the other end, even though they weren't face to face.

"Just don't hurt her," Lucy said, clearly pleased by the banter.

'What kind of weird sister is this?' Klaus thought to himself. 'She seriously wants me to bed her sister?' It was bizarre how happy she sounded when he joked about it. Of course, she knew he was lying, but still—it was strange.

"Lucy, you're not having any weird fantasies, are you?" Klaus asked, amused. "Tell me, Big Daddy Klaus will make them happen."

"You pervert! What are you thinking?" Lucy's face flushed red as she blushed hard, but Klaus's laughter only grew.

Lucy huffed, trying to hide her embarrassment, but the connection between them made it impossible. Klaus could feel her flustered emotions, which only fueled his amusement.

"Come on, love. Don't be shy. I'm just making sure you're not imagining things you shouldn't be," Klaus teased, his voice full of playful mischief.

"You're impossible!" Lucy muttered, but there was a lightness to her tone that let him know she was enjoying the back-and-forth. "You always know how to turn everything into a joke."

"Well, someone has to keep things interesting," Klaus said, grinning to himself. "Besides, it's my job to keep you entertained. I can't have you getting bored of me now, can I?"

"Like I could ever get bored of you," Lucy replied softly, a hint of warmth slipping into her voice. "Even when you're being insufferable, I still... I still love you, you know?"

Klaus's teasing tone softened as he heard the sincerity in her words. "I know, Lucy. I love you too." He meant it, every word.

There was a brief pause before Lucy spoke again. "So, what are you going to do tomorrow? The Trial is coming up, right?"

"Yeah, it is," Klaus replied. "But don't worry, it's nothing I can't handle. I've been through worse, remember? You just focus on settling in as an Inner Disciple. The academy isn't going to know what hit them once you start showing your strength."

"I will also contact Sister Ohema and let her know I am now an Inner Disciple, also tell Anna and the others. I will contact you tomorrow, the usual time" Lucy's voice cut off from Klaus's mind. He smiled and then went to the fridge for water.

He went back to the bed and was about to sit when he suddenly stopped for a split second. With a smile, he jumped into bed lying face down.

Chapter 167 - 167: An Assassin's POV

Six days ago, Number 91 woke up to a dark envelope under his pillow. The moment he saw it, his body tensed. He quickly grabbed the envelope and tore it open. Inside the envelope is a payment token and a photograph of a young man with incredibly dashing white hair.

Beneath the photo was a single word: Kill. Behind it are the name and location of the target. Without any hesitation, he burned the picture and loaded the token into his account. Then, he got out of bed and headed for the bathroom. After a quick shower and breakfast, he dressed in a business suit and left his apartment. A short while later, he was on a plane to Ross City.

Upon arrival, he passed through customs like any ordinary traveler and hailed a cab. His destination wasn't far. When he reached a certain hotel-like building, he entered quietly. Immediately he approached the counter, he flashed a ring at the woman behind it.

Her welcoming smile instantly vanished as she pressed a hidden button beneath the desk. Moments later, he was escorted to an elevator that took him to the top floor.

There, he sat down in front of a computer and began his search for information on the white-haired target. After two hours of digging, he had what he needed. He stood up, left the building, and made his way toward the western part of Ross City.

A short subway ride later, he found himself at an amusement park. He boarded a roller coaster, but his eyes weren't on the ride. Instead, he focused on a mansion far in the distance—his real destination.

After hours of watching the house, Number 91 returned to his hotel. The next day, he went back and repeated the same routine. He did the same on the third day, but this time, something felt off. There seemed to be some sort of block—an obstacle he couldn't quite put his finger on. Nevertheless, on the fourth day, he returned.

To his surprise, he noticed a car leaving the mansion that morning. Discreetly, he followed it. The car led him to Ross Mansion, a place with far more security. A short while later, a private jet took off from the property, heading toward Hiroshi City.

Number 91 returned to his hotel, calmly cleaning his room as if everything was normal. A few hours later, he was already en route to Hiroshi City, his focus sharp and unbroken.

Upon arriving in Hiroshi City, Number 91 wasted no time. He checked into a modest hotel under a different alias and immediately began scoping out the area. His target had to be somewhere in the city, but Hiroshi was large, bustling, and known for its heavy security presence. This wouldn't be as simple as following a car.

The next day, he planted himself near the airport, scanning for any familiar faces. His patience was rewarded when, late in the afternoon, some youngsters handed in a private jet and got in a sleek car, flanked by two bodyguards. Number 91's heart didn't race—he had trained for this. Calmly, he tailed them from a distance.

Although they aren't the white-haired boys he was interested in, the new group has something in common with Klaus; they are here for the Regional Trial of the Celestial Mountain Academy.

He knew by sticking close to anyone coming to Hiroshi City for the same event, his chances of getting the location and a step closer to the target were very high. So he gathered the patient and did the only logical things, staying alert and following them.

He followed them until they stopped and entered a hotel located at the City's center. Number 91 watched carefully as the group checked in and was escorted upstairs. He knew rushing in now would be suicide. This would take precision.

He continued to observe the hotel from a distance, watching carefully for any sign of the white-haired target. After a few hours, a flying car arrived and picked up a group of youngsters. To his advantage, Number 91 spotted the white-haired boy among them. Rather than pursue it, he decided to play it smart.

He checked himself into the hotel, making sure his room was close to the suite the white-haired youngster had come from. Once inside, he blended in, ordering room service and behaving like any other guest. He knew better than to attract attention, especially in a place like this.

An hour later, to maintain appearances, Number 91 entered his room with a seductive woman by his side. He laughed and chatted with her, playing the part of a carefree traveler, but his mind never strayed from his target. Every detail mattered. The lady was just part of his cover, nothing more. This was the life of a professional—always in control, always watching.

That evening, Number 91 entered the jacuzzi with the same lady, sharing kisses and engaging in all sorts of intimate moments. They laughed and enjoyed the warmth of the water, blending in perfectly with the atmosphere of the hotel. Around 10 PM, however, his attention shifted when he noticed the same flying car dropping off the white-haired youngster and his friends.

A satisfied smile crossed his face as he returned to his room, the lady still at his side. They finished what they had started, and soon she drifted off to sleep, her breathing steady and peaceful.

Once she was asleep, Number 91 slipped out of bed and took a bath, washing away the distractions. He changed into a dark leather outfit, the fabric fitting snugly against his body. He grabbed his bag and pulled out a laptop. But instead of using it to check emails or browse the web, he dismantled it piece by piece.

With swift, practiced movements, he rearranged the parts. In a surprising twist, the laptop transformed into a dagger with a burning dark red blade, glinting ominously in the low light. He carefully laced the blade with poison, ensuring it would do its job if the moment came. Satisfied, he sheathed the dagger, readying himself for the task ahead.

He moved silently to the bathroom, then slipped through the window, carefully entering the adjacent room—it belonged to the lady in his bed. He climbed closer and stopped just as he was right beneath the sealing.

He took his surroundings into his mental note before carefully touching the sealing. Like a foam in hot water, he discovered into the ceiling eerily.

Moments later, he found himself in a kitchen, making sure his aura was canceled out completely. He walked toward the washroom, once again merging with the wall. This time, he didn't emerge on the other side. Instead, he found himself staring at the white-haired youngster, who was drinking water, oblivious to the presence lurking just beyond the wall.

After a moment, the boy moved back to his bed. Number 91 watched intently, noting how he paused for just a heartbeat before jumping onto the mattress. Quietly, he sighed and unsheathed his dagger, preparing for the moment he'd been waiting for. He stepped out from the wall, making sure to remain undetected as he approached the bed.

Each step was calculated, and soon he was just a breath away from his target. He will be able to strike any moment, all he has left is a single step and he took that step.

But as he leaned in, ready to attack, something dark pierced through him—or more precisely, something stabbed at his soul. In that instant, his vision began to darken, and the dagger started to loosen in his grip.

He lost control, unable to fight against the creeping pain and helplessness he found himself in. His dagger slipped and his body lost all strength. His vision turned blurry...

Just before he blacked out, he caught the white-haired boy's gaze who was muttering something at him. He managed to read the boy's lips as he murmured, "Sleep tight. We have a lot to talk about when you wake up."

His vision faded into pure darkness, the world slipping away from him.

Chapter 168 - 168: Interview with an Assassin

Klaus stared at the body of the man in dark clothes, passed out on his floor, and smirked. The moment the man slipped into the wall, Klaus sensed him. It was a foolish mistake. Though Klaus didn't know how to limit his senses to a specific radius, he never let them go easily.

It was evening now, and he figured if he focused on their suit, he might see more, especially with three ladies in the room nearby. So, he deactivated his full awareness but kept a part of it active. The instant the assassin used his spiritual qi to slip through the walls, Klaus felt it.

He then activated his sense knowing he would have to apologize to some people in the morning. But after sensing the intruder, he found that the man was just a saint. So, Klaus did not attempt to reveal that he had sensed him. Instead, he jumped onto his bed and waited.

As the assassin drew closer, just a step away, Klaus activated the Bell of Harrows. It didn't ring out loud on the outside, but inside his soul sea, it rang clearly and he directed the north the sonic, and the soul attack to the intruder. Its effect hit Number 91 hard he is currently passed out from both soul and mental attack.

Klaus formed a hand seal, and a rune appeared on his forehead. It moved and entered the assassin's body. He glanced at the man one last time, then jumped into his bed, ready to relax while he waited for him to wake up.

"Well, how was your sleep?" Klaus asked, watching the dark-clothed figure slowly open his eyes. He hadn't bound the man at all; even his dagger lay on the floor beside him.

In response to Klaus's cheerful greeting, the assassin reached for his dagger. But as he tried to move, he realized his body wouldn't obey him.

"What? Performance issues?" Klaus asked, a mocking tone lacing his words.

The assassin glared at Klaus, frustration etched on his face. "What did you do to me?" he demanded, his voice strained.

Klaus chuckled lightly. "Just a little something to keep you from getting any ideas. You seemed so eager to play, so I figured I should spice things up a little bit"

The man started to struggle against an invisible force, trying to regain control. "You won't get away with this," he hissed, his anger rising.

Klaus leaned back casually, propping his feet up. "Oh, I think I will. You're not exactly in a position to threaten me." He paused, enjoying the moment. "Besides, I'm curious about you. What brought you to my doorstep, or more accurately, what brought you through my walls?"

The assassin's eyes narrowed. "You think I'll tell you anything? Just lift this witchcraft and I will show you amateur what I am made of"

Klaus raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "Amateur? You're the one who got caught. I'd say that makes you the amateur here." He smiled, leaning closer. "Why don't you make it easy on yourself? Tell me who sent you, and I might let you leave in one piece."

The assassin hesitated, weighing his options. "And if I refuse?"

Klaus shrugged. "Then we can play a different game. I have all night." His tone turned playful, but the glint in his eyes showed he was serious.

The man's resolve faltered. "I won't be your pawn."

"Not a pawn," Klaus corrected. "More like a guest. You can choose to be helpful, or we can see how far your stubbornness takes you."

With that, Klaus settled back, allowing the assassin time to think. The tension hung thick in the air. Klaus noticed the man trying to bite down on something hidden behind his teeth, but he felt nothing. Klaus had long since removed it. In fact, it was the senior in the soul sea who advised him to do so. This will be Klaus's first time catching an assassin after all.

It was a bewitching spell. When cast into someone's body, it would enter their soul and strip them of their free will. The spell wouldn't allow the caster to read the victim's mind, but it would let Klaus know when the man was lying. Moreover, he could end the assassin's life at will, and the victim would be unable to harm him, or themselves no matter what.

Klaus had placed the mark on the assassin a while ago, rendering him docile. His mind was still his own, but he was bound by the spell's power. Klaus leaned closer, watching as the assassin's frustration slowly turned to resignation. "So, what's it going to be?" Klaus asked, breaking the silence.

The assassin glared, but the fire in his eyes was dimming. "You think you can control me?"

Klaus smirked. "Control? Not quite. I prefer the term 'guiding hand.' You can still think, feel, and plot. You just can't act on those thoughts without my say-so."

The assassin's jaw tightened, but he stayed silent, weighing his options. Klaus could see the struggle within him, the conflict between pride and survival.

"Tell me what I want to know," Klaus urged, his tone shifting from playful to serious. "Who sent you? What's your mission?" Of course, he already knew he was there to kill him and even knew who sent him, but he had to fake it to get what he wanted.

After a moment, the assassin finally spoke. "I'll never tell you anything."

Klaus shrugged. "Fair enough. But remember, the longer you resist, the more time we have for this little game." He leaned back, waiting for the man to crack.

The assassin was completely docile, and he knew it. He could move, run, or even shout if he wanted, but the spell wouldn't allow him to act on his own will. Yet, despite this, that foolish thing called loyalty kept him from cracking. Klaus watched him with mild amusement, knowing the man was trapped in his own stubbornness.

Klaus wasn't in any rush. He didn't have much pressing on his mind or hands at the moment. If push came to shove, he could easily shove the assassin in a closet and head out for the trial. By the time he returned, even the devil himself would have cracked.

"Honestly, I've got all the time in the world," Klaus said with a shrug. "But you, on the other hand, don't. How long do you think that loyalty of yours will hold up? A day? A week?"

The assassin glared, his lips pressed into a thin line, refusing to respond. Klaus sighed dramatically. "Well, since you're choosing the hard way, I suppose I'll just go handle my business. By the time I get back, you'll be begging to talk." He stood up, stretching lazily as if the entire situation bored him.

He glanced down at the assassin one last time, his voice cold and final. "Loyalty won't save you from what's coming. But hey, enjoy your stay in the closet."

With that, Klaus moved away, heading back to the hall. He didn't want to keep looking at the bastard—he might accidentally kill him out of sheer annoyance. Leaving the assassin to stew in his own thoughts, since that was all he could do now, Klaus decided to have a drink.

As he left, Klaus reached out to his senior in the soul sea, asking if there was a more powerful spell he could use to break the assassin's mind. But the senior's response was blunt: "The current you can't handle the karma that comes with such a stronger spell." Klaus had no choice but to make do with what he had.

Not long after, Klaus found himself in a small bar inside their suit. The low lighting and the quiet atmosphere were a welcome break from the tense encounter. Just as he settled down with a drink in hand, Anna walked out of her room, her eyes slightly puffy from lack of sleep.

"Can't sleep, huh?" Klaus asked, taking a sip from his glass.

Chapter 169 - 169: An Unexpected Conversation [Bonus]

Anna sighed, rubbing her eyes as she sat down across from him. "Yeah..." she muttered, clearly exhausted.

She glanced at what Klaus was drinking and, without hesitation, poured herself a glass of the same. Klaus raised an eyebrow as he watched her gulp down the juice in one go.

"You're not worried about the trial tomorrow, are you?" Klaus asked in a sarcastic tone, trying to lighten the mood. But Anna didn't smile. Instead, she looked at him with a seriousness that made him pause.

"Klaus, do you think I can make it into the top ten?" she asked, her voice steady but filled with uncertainty.

Klaus took a slow sip from his drink, then replied, "Of course, Anna. You can easily make it. Just don't overthink it."

His words seemed to lift some of the weight from her shoulders, but they didn't erase the doubt from her eyes.

"My sister... she was first in the Regional Trial during her time. I just don't want to fall too short," Anna admitted, her tone troubled. Klaus raised an eyebrow, finally understanding why she was so tense. It was about her sister.

"Anna, you're not your sister," Klaus said after a moment, his voice firmer. "You're your own person. So instead of worrying about living up to her level, focus on walking your own path."

He wasn't great at comforting people, and he knew it. His reserved nature didn't leave much room for consoling others, especially when it came to women like Anna. He could be bold, even shameless, around them, but this... this was different.

"You say that, but I see the way you look at me," Anna said softly, her gaze shifting. "It's not the same way you look at my sister."

Her eyes held a hint of sadness that made Klaus's stomach churn. This conversation was veering in a direction he didn't want to go. Not that he hated it but he didn't want to have that conversation now, especially with an assassin currently held hostage in his room. But Klaus knew this was also a chance to play a small game on her.

He gulped, feeling a sudden wave of discomfort. "Anna, I—" He struggled to find the right words, but nothing seemed right.

"It's okay," she interrupted, forcing a small smile that didn't reach her eyes. "I just... I don't want to disappoint anyone."

Klaus rubbed the back of his neck, feeling the tension rise. "You're not going to disappoint anyone. Least of all me." He meant it, but he wasn't sure if it was enough to ease her mind.

Anna stared into her empty glass, her fingers tracing the rim. "I just wish I could believe that."

Klaus sighed, leaning back in his chair. This was not the conversation he had expected, and he wasn't sure how to navigate it. He wanted to tell her everything would be fine, that she didn't need to compare herself to anyone, especially her sister. But the words stuck in his throat, feeling hollow and unconvincing.

Nevertheless, Klaus knew what had to be done. He has been planning on doing that already.

After a moment, he spoke, his voice more serious. "Anna, I don't want to sound cruel, but... you're being unfair here." He paused, meeting her gaze. "You know I love your sister, and I've never hidden that from you. But between you and me, you know I don't hate you, not even in the slightest"

Anna's expression didn't change, but her eyes held a flicker of something—pain, maybe. Klaus hesitated, searching for the right words, but this conversation was like walking through a minefield.

"It's just that... things are different between us," he continued. "I've always seen you as... well, someone I care about deeply. But it's not the same as what I have with your sister."

The air between them grew heavy with silence. Klaus hated the words coming out of his mouth, but he couldn't stop now, he had already ventured into the delicate part of her heart.

Anna looked down at her hands, her fingers tightly gripping the glass. "So you're saying you love me, but not in the way you love her," she whispered, her voice trembling slightly.

Klaus nodded slowly. "Yeah... something like that." He wished he could make it sound better, but he didn't know how. Lucy is her older sister and she is still young.

"I see," Anna said quietly, her shoulders slumping as the weight of his words sank in. "So, I'm just... second place?"

"No, that's not what I'm saying at all, and you know it" Klaus replied quickly, leaning forward. "You're not second place to anyone, Anna. It's just... complicated."

"Complicated," she echoed, her voice flat. She took a deep breath, forcing a smile that didn't reach her eyes. "Well, I guess that makes sense. Life's always complicated, right?"

Klaus winced, knowing how much his words had hurt her, even if she wasn't showing it. He hated this. Hated seeing her in pain because of him. But what could he do? The truth was the truth, no matter how much it stung.

"Anna, I didn't want to hurt you. I'm just trying to be honest with you," he said softly, reaching across the table to touch her hand. "I care about you more than you know."

She pulled her hand away gently, shaking her head. "It's fine, Klaus. Really. I just... I need some time to think."

He nodded, feeling a sharp pang of regret in his chest as she stood up. Anna gave him one last look, her eyes full of unsaid emotions, then turned and walked back to her room, leaving Klaus alone with his thoughts.

"Little brother, that was cruel," Hanna's voice suddenly came from behind Klaus, soft but sharp. "But it had to be said, and I understand why you did it," she added, stepping closer.

Klaus sighed, his shoulders slumping. "I know. But I had to check whether she would have a straight mind and continue her cultivation if something were to go wrong. I don't hate her at all, I just don't want her to get into something she later might regret.

I have seen how my influence can be on people and I know despite her feelings for me, those influences might be clouding her judgment somehow. If she can get through this, then she will be ready for what comes next"

Since regaining parts of his past memories, Klaus no longer felt young and naïve. The weight of his experiences had aged him beyond his years. Fruity might not be the social type, but he was in the midst of intelligent monks for over 15 years. It has been a long time since I have learned a lot about life.

He was much more mature now. In the past, he wouldn't have hesitated to shower Anna with sweet words, comforting her without a second thought. But things had changed. Now he knew what needed to be done for her own good. At least for now, he wanted her to understand some things, even if it hurt.

"Then why didn't you just tell her that?" Hanna asked.

Klaus exhaled deeply, rubbing his temples. "Because if I pamper her and tell her all the sweet things, it might get stuck in her head. She might start believing everything is okay when it's not. Also, I want to see if she's doing all this just to please me or if she truly wants to become stronger—much stronger than she is now."

Hanna nodded slowly, watching her little brother with a thoughtful expression. She understood what he was trying to say, even if it wasn't easy to hear.

"And," Klaus continued, a faint smile pulling at the corner of his lips, "if I'd been all sweet now, it would've spoiled my reward for her after the trial tomorrow."

"A reward?" Hanna raised an eyebrow, intrigued.

"Yeah," Klaus said, a glint of mischief in his eyes. "I've got something planned. She just needs to prove herself first." He leaned back, letting out a small chuckle. "But she'll never see it coming."

Well, that would have been true if not for a certain young lady currently hiding beside the doorway, eavesdropping on Klaus and Hanna's conversation. Lily, with a mischievous grin on her face, had overheard everything. She tiptoed away, barely excited, before bolting down the hall and straight into Anna's room.

A few moments later, the sad Anna was now smiling, the previous sadness washed away. Klaus's mission to test her has clearly failed.

Chapter 170 - 170: An Assassin's Loyalty [Bonus]

Klaus spent a few minutes chatting with Hanna. When midnight came, he asked if he could stay the night with her. Hanna didn't mind at all. They were siblings now, and despite Klaus's reputation for being shameless, she instinctively knew he wouldn't do anything inappropriate.

She couldn't explain why she felt so certain, but the way Klaus looked at her told her everything. There was no hint of bad intentions in his eyes. Their mother had even reassured her, saying she didn't need to worry about Klaus. He wasn't the type to cross that line with her.

In truth, Klaus's past—his life as Fruity—made him extra protective of Hanna. He carried memories of the time they had spent together, the love and care she had shown him, and the ultimate sacrifice she had made for him and his in the end.

Klaus knew just holding her hand as they slept wouldn't be enough to repay that. In his heart, he vowed to make her happy, to ensure she never had to worry about anything again. That night, they both drifted off to sleep with peaceful smiles on their faces.

At 4 a.m. the next morning, Klaus quietly got up and went to his room. He had an assassin under his spell, and it was time to check on him. The senior had told him to be patient—the spell would work on its own, but it required time.

When Klaus entered the room, he found the assassin sitting silently, staring at his poison dagger. The man looked like he was thinking about ending his own life, but something was stopping him. The Bewitching spell wouldn't let him take that final step.

"So, are you ready to talk, or are you still holding on to that loyalty?" Klaus asked casually, his expression relaxed.

Number 91's hands trembled as he stared at the mocking smile on Klaus's face. He wanted nothing more than to sever that head off his neck while that infuriating grin was still there, but he couldn't. No matter how much he tried to muster the strength, he was powerless. His stubborn loyalty was eating away at him, but it wasn't just that—his very soul was being consumed by the spell.

In truth, Klaus could've ended it easily. If he used the Eye of Malevolence, he'd be able to extract some memories from the man's mind, it would be painful for both of them. He doesn't yet have the mental and Soul capacity to do such a thing.

But even if he could, a part of him didn't want to. He was savoring the situation, watching the once-loyal assassin squirm. Another part of him thought it would be far more satisfying to record the man spilling his secrets and send the footage to his employers.

They had tried to kill him, and now Klaus wanted to strike back—hard. The best way to do that was to show the Dark Order that he could turn anyone. When he said "anyone," he meant even the most loyal could be bewitched.

"Let me make this clear," Klaus said, his voice cold and sharp. "You will die today. Or maybe tomorrow, depending on how fast you talk. But instead of getting your fingers cut off, then your toes, then your hands, feet, tongue, ears—every piece of you, little by little—your death could be quick. Painless, even. All you have to do is tell me what I need to know."

Number 91's breathing quickened, sweat dripping down his face. Klaus's words cut through the room like a knife, leaving the assassin no room for hope. He knew Klaus wasn't bluffing. The man standing before him had no mercy, and the only thing keeping him alive now was his silence.

But for how long?

Klaus's cold eyes gleamed as he watched the assassin's internal battle. The assassin's resolve was cracking, his defiance hanging by a thread.

"So," Klaus continued, his voice even colder now, "what's it going to be? Are you going to keep holding on to that worthless loyalty and suffering... or are you going to save yourself from unnecessary pain?"

"The Dark Order sent me," Number 91 muttered, his voice barely above a whisper. He looked down, avoiding Klaus's piercing gaze. "And before you ask who they are or where to find them, know this—I'm just an assassin with the designation Number 91. I receive orders and payment, and that's all I can tell you."

Klaus raised an eyebrow, amused. "That's all you can tell me? Or all you will tell me?" He leaned in closer, his tone dark and menacing. "Because right now, you're not in any position to make that choice."

Number 91 swallowed hard, his throat dry. He had given Klaus something, but it wasn't enough. The name of the Dark Order meant nothing to Klaus, and he knew that. It was like throwing a scrap at a wolf and hoping it would walk away.

Klaus smirked, clearly unimpressed. "I've heard about the Dark Order. They think they're untouchable, moving in the shadows, sending their puppets to do their dirty work." He stepped closer, his eyes locked on Number 91. "But you're wrong if you think you're just a nameless pawn. You do know something, and I'm going to get it out of you."

Number 91's heart pounded in his chest. He knew there was no escaping this. The spell, the pain, and Klaus's cold gaze on him are menacing enough.

"Now, let's try again," Klaus said, his voice chillingly calm. "Tell me everything. Names, locations, and how they operate. Don't make me ask twice."

"I receive orders through an envelope, and that's about it," Number 91 said, his voice trembling slightly. "But there are safe houses in every city. To access them, you need a key. This ring—" he lifted his hand, showing a plain black band on his finger, "—is that key."

He paused, his breathing uneven. "Like I said, I don't know where the Dark Order's headquarters are. Not even at the Regional level. If you're trying to find them, the best place to start is their safehouses in the cities."

He looked up at Klaus, hoping that was enough, that he'd finally said all he knew.

Klaus studied him for a long moment, his eyes sharp and calculating. There was no hesitation in Number 91's voice, no flicker of a lie. Klaus could tell the man was being truthful. Maybe he didn't know everything, but what he had given was valuable.

Klaus nodded slowly, his expression neutral. "You've done well," he said, his tone flat but with a hint of something darker beneath. He took the ring from Number 91's trembling hand, examining it briefly before slipping it into his pocket.

Number 91 let out a shaky breath, unsure if this meant his suffering would soon end. His eyes darted to Klaus, desperate for any sign of mercy.

"So, where is the Dark Order's safe house in this city? Or in Ross City?" Klaus asked, his tone sharp and demanding.

After a tense pause, Number 91 finally gave up the locations. His voice wavered, barely holding together as he shared the secret he had sworn to protect. Klaus listened carefully, memorizing every detail.

Once Klaus had the information he needed, he stepped back and looked at Number 91 with cold, emotionless eyes. "You should have picked a different line of work," he said, his voice low and harsh. "Instead of getting paid to kill people."

Klaus's gaze hardened. "But for telling me what I needed to know, I'll grant you a quick death."

With that, Klaus's sword materialized in his hand, glowing faintly with power. In one swift, fluid motion, the blade sliced through the air. Number 91 didn't have time to react as his head rolled from his body, hitting the floor with a dull thud.

Klaus slid his sword back into his space ring with a swift motion, the blade vanishing from sight. He bent down, encasing the severed head in an ice sculpture, preserving it perfectly before tucking it into his space ring as well.

The body was a different matter—he glanced at the lifeless form and with a flick of his fingers, ice began to creep over it, freezing it solid. Once it was completely encased, Klaus shattered it into fine pieces, dissolving it into nothingness.

He stood there for a moment, satisfied with how clean the process was. No trace, no mess. Just like that, he had secured a lead.

"Now the Dark Order will know exactly who they tried to kill," he said, a faint smile tugging at the corner of his lips. Even if it was just a contract from someone else, they would soon realize their mistake for trying to kill him and making those around him worry.