

S vs Rebirth 41

Chapter 41 100 Years Old Ice Pearl

Just like the prediction, Noel and Anna found a small lake in the middle of the forest. There were at least some distances between the water and the nearest tree, so there was no dead tree floating in the lake.

At the same time, the water itself was a crystal clear, showing that it wasn't contaminated by anything.

"This is..." Anna narrowed her eyes and approached the water, examining it carefully. She even touched the water and felt the cold temperature even though it was still summer.

On the other hand, Noel found his system pop out of nowhere, startling him.

[Mission: Dive into the water.]

[Description: Dive down to the bottom of the lake.]

[Reward: Icy Plain 100 Years Old Ice.]

'This is...' Noel widened his eyes in shock. He almost forgot that his spirits could actually communicate with him through two ways. One was the usual meditation while the other one was through Ardagan's system.

However, this was the first time Noel received this sudden mission. When he looked at Anna who was already suspicious about the water, he could understand the reason. Since he shared his vision with the spirits, they, specifically Heisk, knew Anna had found out something about the ice underwater.

'I see. I should be the one getting this ice then. I don't know their use, but I believe it's useful for me.'
Noel thought as he put down his bag and approached the water. "Move."

"Noel?" Anna widened her eyes, shocked. She felt the water was different. Although it was thin, she somehow saw the fluctuation of Spiritual Energy, albeit barely. That was why she examined the water to make sure of her guess.

But Noel was here and even started taking off his clothes.

"I won't be away for too long." Noel ignored her. Although it was embarrassing to strip in front of her, Noel had an objective.

Wearing only a trunk, he dipped his feet into this icy water lake. It was so cold that his body shivered.

"Kh." Noel gritted his teeth, wondering if he could do it or not.

"Spiritual Energy can resist the cold to a certain degree," Anna shouted, helping him. After that, she examined Noel's movement and thought, 'Did he notice something weird under the water? But even with my sensitivity, I could only sense it barely. If not because of the examination, I wouldn't be so sure something is inside.'

'But from his action, he seems to know there is something in the water. How? I can't understand.' Anna frowned.

On the other hand, Noel used his Spiritual Energy to strengthen his muscle. To his surprise, he could feel the warmth as if his body was enveloped by fire.

This effect reminded him of the time he used the Spiritual Energy to strengthen him.

'Now that I think about it, whenever I used my Spiritual Energy during the dawn, my body would feel warm. On the contrary, my body cooled down during the second and third sparring of the day. Is it because of Ardagan and Heisk? Ardagan has that black flame while Heisk has ice. Ardagan is probably the reason I can withstand this cold. I shouldn't waste this chance then.'

Without hesitation, he walked to the center of the lake.

p 'Ugh. Now that I think about it, I don't know how to swim...' Noel thought while gritting his teeth as he took a deep breath before putting his head underneath the water, searching for something unique in the bottom of the lake.

Luckily, the lake wasn't that deep. It was only three meters.

After walking around at the area where he could stand with his head above the water, he found a small glimmer among the rocks at the center of the lake.

He changed the spots a few times and confirmed the blue gem buried underneath those rocks.

'Can I make it? I can only hold my breath for almost two minutes. The distance between me and that place... Well, the lake is not that deep. A single jump is probably all it takes for me to reach the surface. Getting a single breath to dive should end in an instant.'

After steeling his resolve, Noel took a deep breath and started running. His head gradually submerged as his body moved to the center.

It took him quite an effort to move underwater, but he managed to get another breath after jumping to the surface.

This would make him get more time to retrieve the light blue gem.

As soon as he reached the middle area, Noel hurriedly dug a bit at the spot where he found the sparkle.

'Where is it? Where is it?' He tried hard to see the sparkling, but the dust made the water muddy, covering his vision.

'Kh. This stupid dirt and sand.' Noel clicked his tongue and kept digging until he felt a cold surface touching his finger. 'Wait. This is...'

The shape was round, and the size was only a small finger's joint. However, it was clear that this was the item he was searching for, considering the mission was to grab an icy object.

As soon as he got what he wanted, Noel hurriedly returned to the surface. It might be due to the muddy water or Noel's lack of Spiritual Energy sensitivity, Noel didn't realize there was a green light glowing dimly underneath the ground where the icy object was.

Noel simply took the object out of the water as he laid down his body on the grass, exhausted. This was his first underwater experience.

"Hu... Hu..." He panted a few times while Anna approached him, staring at the blue marble on his hand.

"This is... What? This is not fair. I should have been the one going to the water!" Anna clutched her head as she started regretting to let Noel go. "This is 100 Years Old Ice from Icy Plain. The plain has a unique ice that can absorb Spiritual Energy, thus allowing them to grow stronger as time goes.

"And this 100 Years Old Ice can purify the water and keep it cool. If someone wears this as a necklace, their body will be cool." Anna gritted her teeth.

Noel hurriedly pulled his hand, protecting the blue pearl from getting stolen. "This is mine. We've agreed to split the loot, but it only applies to the crystals, not this one."

Chapter 42 Responsibility

"This is mine. We've agreed to split the loot, but it only applies to the crystals, not this one." Noel hurriedly put it inside his pocket to make sure Anna didn't have any thought about it.

Anna showed an annoyed expression for the first time. She clearly knew the worth of the 100 Years Old Ice Pearl. With this pearl, she could avoid any assassination that involved water. Poison that was spread in the glass or in the water that she drank, the Ice Pearl would simply purify them.

At the same time, the cooling effect could make the water feel refreshed. Wearing this pearl could cool her heart down.

Noel felt satisfied when he saw that annoyed expression since this was the first time he could make her frustrated.

'So, this is the taste of victory. I don't think I will kill her easily from now on. I'm going to defeat her on everything and make her fall into despair. Only after that will I deliver my killing stroke.' Noel thought, not realizing that he had gradually strayed away from the path of revenge.

Meanwhile, Anna thought, 'Now that I think about it... No matter what happened, Noel was supposed to be the one finding this pearl. After all, in my previous life, I wasn't here.'

'Noel must have found out the lake's location from someone. That meant the pearl was never meant for me. Well, I guess I now know Noel possesses this pearl.'

On the one hand, she really wanted the pearl because of its uses. On the other hand, Noel would have been the one to get it because the lake's information was from him.

Ultimately, she let out a long sigh to calm her heart down.

"Fine. Now that you're done here, you should put on your clothes. Because of the pearl, we don't need to worry about water source anymore. Just purify the water and be done with it. This can be our camp, but where are you going to place the traps?" Anna asked.

Noel thought for a moment and looked around while putting on his clothes. "I don't know. I haven't scouted this area."

"Think so." Anna sighed. "Anyway, you won't be able to work on your traps until tonight. So, it's better we get moving soon. Since we're not chasing the deadline, we can return to this place to build the tent before the dusk. What do you think?"

"I don't have a problem with that."

"Then, we'll have night rotation?"

"2x4hours?" Noel asked.

Anna pointed at the sky. "It's pretty hard to calculate the clock, so... we will use the moon. Anyway, we can discuss about the details for night rotation later."

"Fine by me."

"Then, one last question. Can you cook?" Anna asked.

"..." Noel froze as he couldn't answer them. Still, he couldn't show a weakness in front of Anna, so he claimed proudly, "I can cook!"

"I see. You can't cook." Anna nodded in understanding.

"Wait, wha—"

"I'll cook our meal. You're going to bring firewoods and build the tent. I don't care about your pride as long as we have equal distribution to the tasks."

"Well..." Noel clicked his tongue and agreed.

"Since we've reached an agreement, it's better to get moving. The demons in the Inner Region can come in a group, so we need to be careful where we're moving. You can find the lake, so I'm sure you can find a nice hunting spot, right?" Anna smirked, challenging him.

"Of course." Noel snorted and simply took his sword before letting it fall to the ground, pointing at a certain direction.

"This is..." Anna widened her eyes. "You serious?"

"Inner Region is filled with demons, so no matter where we go, we will find a demon. In that case, we've plenty of options... We just need to focus on one area at a time." Noel shrugged.

"That's understandable, but I expected a lot more from you."

"That's your fault." Noel looked away.

"Argh." Anna gritted her teeth as Noel really frustrated her.

Noel smiled over his small victory and said, "Well, that's the direction. If you don't have any objection, we better go now."

Ultimately, Anna followed Noel as they both explored the area in the direction Ardagan pointed at.

As they predicted, they soon found two demons near each other. This would be extremely dangerous because they needed to face one demon each, but both of them had confidence they could defeat them.

Anna came closer to him so that they didn't alarm the demons when they were talking.

"I'll take care of the left one and you'll kill the right demon," whispered Anna in a voice that only they could hear.

Noel thought for a moment and said, "I'm better fighting against a demon that stands on two feet."

"Then, it's the other way around." As someone stronger, Anna obviously needed to adjust herself to Noel's level by making this arrangement.

"Good enough."

"Then, let's go."

After they reached an agreement, they came out of their hidden spots and approached the two demons.

As soon as they saw Noel and Anna, both of them ran forward according to their own position.

Noel smiled because he was going to face the demon of his choice.

On the other hand, Anna strengthened her body with Spiritual Energy as she sped up, reaching the demon in a second.

With her experience, she easily delivered some heavy wounds to the demon.

Clang!

Clang!

A few clicking sounds echoed in the battlefield as Anna's iron sword clashed with the demon's claws. She intentionally slowed down her pace so that she could take a glance of Noel's progress.

To her surprise, the demon in Noel's direction slipped down and struggled to get up. The demon even moved around its body to make sure Noel didn't take advantage of this situation to kill him.

When she lowered her vision, she saw the small ice floor that obviously tripped the demon. However, one question remained.

'Wait a minute. Where is Noel?' Anna looked around to find Noel but to no avail.

Unfortunately for her, the answer soon came in the form of action. The demon before her screamed in pain before falling to the ground, dying.

Noel finally rose from the ground while pulling his sword out. In other words, Noel used the opportunity to deliver the killing blow to her demon before returning to his position to kill the other one.

"With this, I can surpass you in the kill count."

Anna was dumbfounded as she never expected that she was outplayed by Noel. "Listen here you rascal."

Chapter 43 Simpleton

"Listen here you rascal."

Noel ignored her and focused on taking down the demon.

But when he was about to hit the demon on the ground, Anna suddenly appeared next to him. Her boots were covered with lightning as if she used that power to cover the distance between them in an instant.

Her sword moved even faster now that it was covered with lightning, swiftly slicing the demon's head. The cut was so quick and precise that the demon didn't have the time to react.

Even Noel was stunned to see Anna's true strength that could kill a demon in an instant. Unlike the previous time where Anna saved him for the first time, this kill only relied on her overwhelming strength.

"!!!" Noel stopped in his track when he saw the demon's head flying. "This is..."

"You stole my demon and I did the same." Anna stomped the ground and looked at him coldly.

Noel had no words to say, but this occasion had given him a big opportunity. That was right. He could see Anna's true strength.

In fact, Anna might still be hiding her true strength. However, it was clear that the strength that she utilized to kill a Mid Level Demon wasn't her true strength. It was only because of his interference that she decided not to use it.

'Ah, I should have a clearer head at that time because I can see her true strength. But I ended up ruining that chance... Whatever, I'm going to use this hunt to observe your strength so that I know how much stronger do I need to be. I'm not going to foolishly attack you anymore,' Noel thought with a cold gaze.

Since they had killed both demons, Noel immediately scooped out the crystal on their heads and stored it in Anna's bag.

"It seems you're planning to turn this into a small competition. For what? To frustrate me? I don't really mind about the competition, but I need to make sure you know when to stop. I'm not going to have a stupid competition when our lives are in extreme danger," said Anna while giving a cold gaze at Noel.

"I'm not going to kill myself. And if killing you means I'm dead too, it's better to wait for another chance. You're not the only one in my list." Noel shrugged.

"Good enough for me." Anna smirked. "I'll take you on. This time, I won't let you kill a single monster."

Noel accepted the challenge. She didn't realize that she had fallen into Noel's trap.

If she used all her strength to kill all the demons today, she wouldn't have enough power to do the same tomorrow or the day after. In other words, he could kill more monsters during the second day and third day.

In that case, he would also see how much power she had in that body. The more he knew about her strength, the higher the chance to kill her later.

Noel smirked as he led the way again while hiding his true thoughts.

The duo continued their journey deeper into the inner region.

As they predicted, there were more and more demons appearing together. They often found a group of demons consisting of three or even four demons at a time.

During that time, Noel could see Anna's overwhelming force. He really didn't get any demons for at least three hours.

Unfortunately for him, it seemed Anna had caught a wind of his plan and started decreasing her pace, allowing Noel to kill some monsters.

It was such a shame, but that was enough for the time being. At the very least, he knew what to expect from Anna.

The hunt lasted for eight hours. It was a quite long hunt, but they managed to kill a total of 67 demons today, with Noel killing only 17 of them.

Noel and Anna were the top crops among the trainees, so their hunting speed was insane. However, after more preparation and information about the test, the other teams also worked splendidly.

Some groups even completed the task in a day. Half of them chose to return to the fort to submit their crystals while half of them worked for more crystals, knowing that they could get the rest after submitting ten of them.

Coming on the second and third were Alfred and Kirika's teams. Alfred and Lezlev killed 26 monsters together while Kirika and her new teammate crushed 21 demons.

It wasn't that much compared to Noel's pair, but they were much better than their previous performance.

When the sun was about to set, all pairs seemed to know what to do. They hurriedly found a place to make a camp. This included Noel's pair.

They had returned to the lake before the sky was completely dark.

Noel was searching for firewoods while Anna was preparing their food.

While looking around, Noel had an evil thought in their mind.

"Now that I think about it, I can catch her when she's bathing. Isn't this perfect for shaming her?" Noel narrowed his eyes. "A noble can't show their body easily, but I'm a fallen noble... That rule only applies to her, not me. This is perfect to make her feel ashamed. Even if it doesn't work, just with me being there is enough to prevent her from taking a bath. She will be stink."

As if he'd got a good plan, Noel hurriedly found the necessary firewoods and returned to the camp, only to find Anna cutting some vegetables. It was completely normal, but Noel noticed her wet hair as if she had just finished taking a bath in the lake.

"What?" Noel dropped the firewoods in shock.

Anna noticed his expression and somehow read his thought. She couldn't help but smirk.

"What? Returning earlier than expected so you can take a peek of me when bathing? Or do you want to prevent me from taking a bath?"

Noel's body trembled for a moment as he denied it loudly, "I just want to build the tent and rest as quickly as possible."

"Heh. Simpleton." Anna rolled her eyes, not believing a single thing he said. She couldn't help but remember her past life, thinking, 'This is not the first time you used this kind of tactic. You attacked me when I was bathing in a lake or a river because you could use the embarrassment to make me drop my guard. I've many tricks that you can use, Noel. It won't work against me anymore.'

Chapter 44 Conquer His Stomach

Noel could only grit his teeth when he realized that his plans didn't work against her. He never knew that the Noel in the previous life had utilized all that strategy to trick her.

In the end, Noel built the tent while Anna cooked their dinner.

Growl!

While he was building the tent, the aroma from Anna's dish was carried by the wind to his nose. It was a sweet and warm smell that somehow incited his stomach.

"..." Noel was surprised by the reaction of his stomach and even slapped it a few times as if it had embarrassed him. When he glanced at Anna, the latter felt his gaze and chuckled. It was clear she was laughing at his reaction.

Still, he couldn't help but remember all the meals until now. Compared to the meal in the barrack or the barely edible meal he cooked in the previous test, this meal was far too peptizing.

In fact, the smell alone could reach the professional chef in the Ardagan House.

'How can she be this good? She is a noble lady, right? A noble lady should only learn about etiquette... There's no way she's allowed to go to the kitchen. Even if she is an eccentric woman, she should be too occupied with her training.' Noel had so many doubts in his mind, but the smell didn't lie.

Anna took out two bowls and poured the soup she made into them before extending one to Noel. "Here you go. Oh, wait. Wash your hands first in the lake."

"..." Noel bit his lips. Although he didn't want to admit it, the food managed to tempt him.

The soup had a yellowish color. It was filled with Demon's meats that were similar to that of an animal's meat. There were some potatoes scattered around and Anna even prepared a hard bread for him. A hard bread was usually used for survival because they could last longer and if you poured boiling water into it, the bread would be soft enough for easy consumption.

However, this hard bread actually matched perfectly with the soup. In fact, the soup gave the hard bread a flavor.

Noel couldn't say anything and simply went to the lake to wash his hands. After that, he took the bowl and stared at it for a while.

Anna couldn't help but chuckle, looking at Noel's silly reaction.

"Surviving in the wild like this might be top priority, but why don't you make it more enjoyable? I know that we can't play around, but having a good meal should be a standard. With a good meal, you can get a good sleep and a refreshed mind.

"That's why learning how to cook is necessary when surviving in the wild." Anna made a smug smile. She trained hard to learn cooking because Noel once trapped her in the wild.

It was a torture because the taste of the meat was bad. When she returned, it turned out the demon's meat had one of the best flavors. She simply couldn't process it.

After that, she learned how to cook despite everyone telling her to focus on the training. And it seemed that her training had paid off.

Noel, who had a sharp mouth, couldn't even say anything to her after tasting the food.

"Wait a minute. We're in the middle of a competition, right? Shouldn't I make you just an edible food instead of a good one? This way, you will be under a lot of stress and I can win easily." Anna smirked.

"!!!" Noel's body trembled. However, he didn't want to show any weakness, so he snorted and said, "I don't care. As long as I can eat and have energy to fight for tomorrow, I don't really care."

"Heh." Anna was amused by Noel's question. It was clear that his body's reaction was the honest one. She then saw Noel's bowl was almost empty. It was because he ate too quickly so that he didn't need to make an excuse later.

Seeing this opportunity, Anna then scooped another spoonful of soup and said, "Here you go."

"I don't need it." Noel shook his head, rejecting the soup because it might show that he was too reliant on her.

"Is that so? I'm full with what I have and it's not like I can use it for tomorrow's breakfast. I guess I'll just throw it away."

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes and shouted in anger. "How can you throw it away? Do you know how many people are starving in the fort? Have you ever gone around the fort to see those people? You shouldn't waste food!"

"But I'm full."

"I can eat it even if I'm full." Noel harrumphed.

"Then, here you go." Anna smiled and poured the remaining soup into his bowl.

Noel hurriedly ate the food while Anna kept chuckling as if she had just won.

She secretly took a peek at Noel and muttered inwardly, 'Because of his hatred to me, he can't be honest to me because it means showing his weakness. His reaction is really cute.'

'The Noel in my memory was annoying and troublesome. Compared to him, the current Noel was too cute. How can such a difference exist?'

'Well, that's obviously because of me. Even though I suggested it, my father and the royal family had made an agreement before that. Hence, my suggestion was useless. I ended up becoming the sacrifice.'

'Looking at this matter again, our relationship isn't that bad. It's just a misunderstanding. Noel should hate my family instead of me...'

'In that case, let me raise Noel a bit more so that he can help more people in the future. After that, let's solve this hatred.'

Anna had her plan in mind, knowing this was the best outcome that she wanted to achieve.

"What?" Noel furrowed his eyebrows after Anna stared at him for a few minutes.

"Nothing." Anna smiled and pointed at his clothes. "Put the bowl there. I'll wash them later. Also, you might want to use and dip that pearl again later so that it can purify the water."

Noel thought for a moment and nodded. He would take advantage of it too, so he had no reasons to refuse her request.

"In that case, you should wash yourself first. I'm going to sleep first because I need to wake up early to prepare the breakfast."

Noel agreed again as he saw Anna entering the tent nonchalantly.

Chapter 45 System Vs Rebirth

According to their agreement, they only had one tent. In other words, they were going to share this tent. It would certainly be uncomfortable for most people, but Anna didn't feel that repulsive to Noel, so she suggested this idea.

Noel also thought that bringing only one tent was easier. The tent itself was only for sleeping, so he didn't really care about the situation.

However, with Anna sleeping in the tent, Noel couldn't help but stare at it intensely. There were various thoughts in his mind.

Normally, as a boy in his puberty, Noel would have a weird thought in his mind when sharing a roof with a woman, a beautiful one on top of that. However, Anna in his mind was evil that he was just thinking about how to plan against her.

On the other hand, her words about his parents and his family flashed in his mind.

'What was the actual reason for the Royal Family executing my family? Anna Stargaze alone wasn't enough to influence them, so there must be something that scared the Royal Family.

'Did my family have something like that? I hadn't learned much about business from my father, let alone the family as a whole because I was too comfortable in my own zone. So, I didn't really know about this matter.

'However, what I do know is that... My family's wealth was equal to a tenth of the country's entire wealth.

'Despite being a Count, my father's status was similar to that of a marquis or even higher because of that wealth.

'After executing my parents, the Royal Family seized everything other than my family heirloom.' Noel looked at the black blade. At first, it was rusty but after recognizing him as its master, the rust had disappeared.

'Now that I think about it, this sword was used by the family's ancestor. It was said that my ancestor helped the first king to establish the country and fended off hundreds of thousands of enemies.

'Don't tell me... What they wanted was the power of Ardagan? But they didn't think that the rusty sword was actually the reason why my ancestor could achieve all that?

'Well, this is plausible, but I don't know whether it's true or not because I'm not them. I need to investigate this matter closely in the future. And it seems that Anna Stargaze doesn't know much either. She is like a puppet of the family.' Noel frowned.

There were many questions in his mind, but it seemed he could only explore it later.

While he was in deep thought, he was alarmed by the sudden explosion from the lake.

Boom!

"!!!" Noel opened his eyes wide as he took his sword, heading to the water. He gasped when he saw the water burst out so high that it surpassed the trees in the area. "What is happening? No, that's not important."

Taking a deep breath, Noel let out a huge roar. "Anna Stargaze!"

As if responding to his call, Anna hurriedly left the tent and looked around, finding the water raging.

"What happened?" Anna asked as she arrived next to him.

"I don't know." Noel shook his head. His heart was racing and the adrenaline was rushing. But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't find anything extraordinary other than the water.

"Underwater?" Anna frowned.

"Probably. But such a situation..." Noel took out the Ice Pearl and gasped. "Don't tell me... What's the hidden use of the Ice Pearl?"

Anna shook her head. "I have told you all its purposes. But... it's purifying ability... It might be the one that has been keeping this lake calm."

"Then, we should put back this pearl."

"No. It's useless." Anna thought for a moment. "Do you have any clue about what's going on? At least, something at this scale?"

"The instructor didn't tell me anything, so no." Noel shook his head. He didn't know why but a memory flashed in his mind. It was the mission that Ardagan gave him. "Don't tell me..."

[Mission: Eliminate the weakened Ancient Demon Tree within 30 days.]

[Description: There's an Ancient Demon Tree sleeping underneath the Dark Demon Forest.]

[Reward: Demon Hunter Medal and 7 SP]

[Penalty: Lose your qualification to wield Ardagan.]

"No, this might be possible." Noel looked down, contemplating.

"I know that you don't trust me, Noel. But at a situation like this, you should share any possibilities. We can understand the situation better..."

Noel gritted his teeth and ultimately asked, "Can you seal a demon?"

"Seal a demon?" Anna gasped as she finally recalled the memory when a mysterious masked man slain the Ancient Demon Tree. "How do you know there's an Ancient Demon Tree down here?"

"How do you know it's an Ancient Demon Tree?"

"Eh?"

"Eh?"

Both of them were stunned at their own reaction. It was a desperate question, but they blurted out a secret at the same time.

No one was supposed to know about this information, but somehow both of them had this information.

'How did she know? I didn't even realize that Ardagan could even predict something like this... Even the commander shouldn't know about the Ancient Demon Tree.' Noel thought while glaring at Anna.

'As expected, the masked man was him. But how could he know there was an Ancient Demon Tree lying underneath this place? It was clear that Noel was ignorant. He shouldn't have read anything about Demons... So, it was impossible for him to know the Ancient Demon Tree... What did he do to know this information?' Anna also had her own suspicion.

How could Anna know that Noel had the help of Ardagan who seemed to be able to predict the future? Or how could Noel know that Anna had regressed with the knowledge of the future?

Both of them could only suspect each other. Anna's rebirth was one step ahead with knowledge and experience while Noel's system could predict things and was flexible enough to adjust to his need, giving him a perfect growth path.

This was the start of the battle between the power of system and rebirth.

Chapter 46 Rune

"So, tell me what do you know." Anna narrowed his eyes.

"No, it's you who needs to tell me what do you know." Noel returned it back to her. They were glaring at each other, without a single intention to back down.

Both of them wanted to know why they knew about the Ancient Demon Tree.

However, they were interrupted by the raging wave that somehow splashed them.

"..." The duo turned their heads around and saw what was happening.

To their surprise, the raging wave gradually disappeared as if nothing happened.

"This is..." Anna frowned. There were a few questions in her mind, but she only had one way to get the answers.

Without hesitation, she jumped into the water to check the phenomenon herself and found a few green lines buried underneath the ground.

Anna widened her eyes in shock as she never expected to see these lines.

'Impossible.' Anna gasped for air and came out to take another breath. After that, she started sweeping the dirt that covered the lines and made sure its existence. 'This is Sealing Rune. How can there be a Rune in this place? Noel was supposed to invent the rune... But Noel fought against the Ancient Demon Tree in the past, he might learn something from this seal and re-invented the rule.'

She said 're-invented' because the rune had existed in the past and Noel simply discovered it and remade the rune so that people could use it.

'Or there might be a treasure that explained the runes inside...' Anna frowned and explored the rune for a bit more. After another ten minutes, she discovered that the rune was still intact.

'Hmm. I don't see any problem with the rune, but the raging water... is there something wrong with the rune? I can't understand.' Anna frowned.

On the other hand, Noel also saw the glowing lines after Anna cleared the dirt on top of it. As if recognizing the rune, Ardagan suddenly presented him with a new training and skill.

[Recognizing Arvart Ardagan's Rune.]

[Opening up a branch of career.]

[Because the host has chosen the swordsman, the career is adjusted.]

[Rune Swordsman is opened.]

[Career: Rune Swordsman]

Skill: Rune Mastery (0/10)

Requirement: 5 SP

Noel gasped when he saw that name.

"Arvar Ardagan? The ancestor of Ardagan Family?" Noel's face became pale as he looked at the green lines on the lake's floor. "But what do you mean the career is adjusted? Becoming a swordsman seems to be the reason. So, if I chose 'Commander,' I would be a Rune Commander?"

Noel frowned, albeit he received no answer.

"Still, Ardagan said he didn't want me to know much about my ancestor... Did he lie to me? But Spirit doesn't lie. In that case, it was my misunderstanding. The reason Ardagan didn't want to tell me was simply to make me choose my own path instead of chasing after my ancestor.

"Finding this was obviously out of the equation, so it gave me all this new stuff." Noel wasn't one hundred percent sure about his conjecture, but he couldn't meditate to meet Ardagan for the time being, so he could only believe this assumption for the time being.

After a while, he saw Anna returning to the surface.

"And now I'm wet..." Anna let out a long sigh. "Maybe I should have taken off my clothes first... If only the little pervert wasn't here, I would've done that."

Noel's eyebrows twitched as he asked, "So, what did you find there?"

"Why don't you go there and find out?" Anna smirked, taunting him.

"If you don't want to say anything, that's fine." Noel shrugged and looked away. Assuming that Ardagan could predict the future by showing how he could know there was an Ancient Demon Tree underneath this lake, he realized that the time limit was real.

No matter what he did, the Ancient Demon Tree would only come out near the time limit since he needed a bit of time to kill the Ancient Demon Tree.

'In that case, one day or two days before the time limit.' Noel thought. 'The demon will be severely weakened because it just wakes up. Considering my ancestor was the one that made the Ancient Demon Tree fall into slumber, the tree hadn't woken up for around a thousand years. Even the current me had a chance against this demon tree.'

Anna looked at Noel's expression and said, "How about you ask me one question and I ask you one question? It's obvious that we don't want to tell our secrets, so a question about that is a no-no. Only general questions are allowed. What do you think?"

Noel contemplated for a moment. Although he knew about the time limit, knowing more about the rune itself was good, so he accepted the condition. "I'm alright with it."

"That's good. In that case, I'm going to change my clothes first." Anna nodded and returned to the tent.

While Noel was thinking about the question he wanted to ask, the light from the tent distracted him. There was a silhouette behind that thin cloth that separated them. Although she was an evil woman in his mind, Noel almost forgot that Anna was considered one of the top beauties in the kingdom.

Even if it was only in the form of shadow reflected by the light, her curvy body could be considered perfect and it was still growing. He didn't realize it until now.

"!!!" Noel hurriedly shook his head and screamed inwardly, 'What are you doing, Noel? That's your enemy. Don't have any weird thoughts about her!'

Noel ended up closing his eyes to calm his thoughts until Anna finished changing.

Fortunately, he managed to control his emotion that when Anna came out with a short pants and tight white shirt, he had no change of expression.

Noel maintained his calm face and sat near the campfire, asking, "Who will be the first to ask?"

"Since I'm so magnanimous, I'll allow you to ask the first question." Anna smirked.

"Then, I will take up your offer." Noel nodded, shamelessly accepting it.

"Wait, what?" Anna widened her eyes in surprise. "Shouldn't you suppose to say, 'Hmph. I am more generous than you, so I'll answer the question first?' That's what I thought you were going to say from your previous action."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Noel rolled his eyes. "Anyway, I'll be asking the question."

Chapter 47 Spirit Oath

"..." Anna's eyebrows twitched as she never expected Noel to be this shameless. Noel's change was too much and too fast. However, she had offered it, so she could only accept her fate. "Fine. Ask anything. However, we need to make a Spirit Oath first."

"Spirit Oath?"

"Spirit never lies. I'm sure you've heard about this, right?"

"Yes."

"With the Spirit Oath, it will force you into that situation. In other words, the Spirit Oath will prevent you from lying."

"A good reason to torture someone." Noel narrowed his eyes, making a small remark.

Anna looked away as the torture was indeed used to make them swear a Spirit Oath. This way, they could dig information.

"In that case, where is your Spirit Seal?"

"Spirit Seal?"

"You don't know about that too? It's the mark of your spirit... You should have a tattoo in your body, right?" Anna sighed and slightly pulled her shirt, showing a yellow zig-zag line like that of a lightning on her waist. "We're going to have them connect to each other so that we can't lie. This is one of the primary uses of the Spirit Oath and Spirit Seal."

"How are we going to do that?"

"Just put the two seals together."

"That sounds annoying." Noel had an annoyed expression. There were so many things that could go wrong in this process.

"Haha, certainly. What if you have a mark on your private areas? You obviously can't show that." Anna shrugged. "Well, you hate me so much that you can only see me as an evil witch, so I am not that embarrassed."

"Heh..." Noel narrowed his eyes.

Anna's eyes became cold as she stated with killing intent, "Sexually harass me and you'll die."

Noel shrugged and took off his glove. The reason why she suggested the Spirit Oath was because she had seen this Spirit Seal when Noel dove to the water.

"Just have them touch each other. That's enough." Anna held her shirt.

Noel hesitated for a moment but still placed the back of his hand where Ardagan's seal was on Anna's waist so that the two Spirit Seals touched each other.

Suddenly, his body trembled as a sharp pain somehow jolted his mind, followed by lightning that electrocuted his body.

"This is..." Noel was surprised by this feeling, but he knew that something had truly happened. He also thought, 'It seems that I need to go to a library or something to learn about Spirits. If this ritual actually made me in a disadvantageous position simply because I didn't know about it, I would have regretted that decision.'

While he was in his thought, he could feel Anna's body had an increase in temperature. It seemed Ardagan's flame had affected her.

"The Spirit Oath is done. Let's finish this as soon as possible."

Noel nodded. Ardagan could easily connect to him, so if this was a dangerous ritual, he would have created a mission for him to reject this. Since Ardagan didn't do anything, it meant she had been telling the truth. That was the only reason why Noel dared to do it despite having no knowledge about the Spirit Oath.

After Anna confirmed it, Noel uttered his first question. "What do you know about the lines you have found underneath the lake?"

"Those lines are called Rune. It's a kind of Spirit Technique that utilize the Spiritual Energy more effectively. And this particular rune is called Sealing Rune. Like the name implies, it seals something inside." Anna paused for a moment. "Then, it's my turn. What do you know about Rune?"

Noel wanted to test it first, so he tried to lie. Surprisingly, his mouth couldn't open at that time. He even felt a jolt straight to his brain as if warning him not to lie.

He tried to pull his hand but couldn't do it as if his hand had been attached to her.

'It seems that the only way to stop this is to fulfill the Spirit Oath. No wonder this technique is used for interrogation after a torture.' Noel thought before answering Anna's question. "I don't know anything about runes. I haven't even learned about it."

Anna frowned. Because of the Spirit Oath, he was indeed not lying.

On the contrary, Noel could feel that the restriction in his hand was gone. If he pulled away right now, the Spirit Oath would be broken since both sides had asked and answered one question.

Still, Noel had another question in his mind. He asked, "Where do you learn about Rune?"

"..." Anna paused for a moment and answered. "From a book called Basic Rune."

Anna obviously couldn't say it was from him since it would cause more trouble. So, she told him about the book that he wrote. This was the loophole of a Spirit Oath. She might not be able to lie, but it didn't mean she needed to tell the whole truth.

"My turn. From my observation, it doesn't look like the rune is damaged even though you've got the Ice Pearl. But... How long will the rune break?" Anna asked with a serious expression.

"!!!" Noel's heart skipped a beat. He realized he had been trapped in that last question. If he said the time limit, it would make her suspicious because it didn't match his lack of knowledge.

On the other hand, he had no way to lie. He wanted to use the fact that it was a sensitive question, but Anna truly took advantage of the loophole.

'How do I escape this?' Noel panicked. 'I can't lie, but I can't really tell her the truth. She will suspect me after that. But what should I do?'

Noel was racking his brain as the electricity shook his brain a few times because he had been trying to lie.

Anna smirked as if saying, "You're sweating, Noel. It seems that you're hiding something."

Noel gritted his teeth. It was clear that in this situation, they couldn't say anything but he somehow understood what she was saying in her heart. He also wanted to shout, "Shut up. You're hiding something as well."

Unfortunately for him, he couldn't do it. In fact, could he even escape this situation?

Chapter 48 Thoughts

Noel gritted his teeth as the pain started numbing his body. If he continued, he would have passed out sooner or later.

'How should I answer this?' Noel attempted to find the answer that could make him escape this situation, but no matter how hard he tried, nothing came into his mind.

'As expected, there's no way to get around this. In that case, I should avoid the worst case scenario.'

Noel had resigned to his fate as he said, "It can be tomorrow, it can be a few weeks from now on. Who knows."

Although the system had told him the time limit, two weeks had passed. So, there were only two to three weeks left. Luckily, he could still say a few weeks since two weeks could still be considered more than one. At least, this play of words was enough to make him look like he didn't know anything.

As soon as he answered, he could feel the power that attached both Spirit Seals became loose. Without hesitation, he pulled out and glared at her, thinking, 'As expected, that woman wants to trap me. She's truly a manipulative evil woman.'

"So, a few weeks, eh?" Anna smirked. "How do you even know the time limit? Maybe you know something about the rune?"

Noel didn't want to lose to her, so he said, "What about you? How do you know about Runes? The knowledge itself shouldn't be passed on since if the effect is like you said, there will be many people learning it already."

Anna and Noel ended up glaring at each other, knowing that they were poking each other.

"Since you are not planning to ask another question, then I'm going to sleep. I've wasted too much time for this." Anna harrumphed and returned to the tent.

When she lied down, she thought, 'As expected, Noel knows something about the Ancient Demon Tree and the rune. There are many questions that I want to ask, but he won't fall for the same traps twice. How do I acquire the information from him?

'Anyway, the Ancient Demon Tree will wake up soon. Its power will be extremely weak, probably only around Mid Level Demon or a bit higher, but it definitely doesn't reach Advanced Level Demon. I need to prepare a few things to fight against that tree...

'And since Noel knows something about the time of the awakening, I should follow him within the next few weeks. I bet he's going to fight this demon secretly. Sorry, but the Ancient Demon Tree is a huge temptation even for me.' Anna smirked.

On the other hand, Noel was looking at the tent with a complicated expression.

'How does she know about runes? I haven't read any records, but if the world knows about such a technique, they'll become famous already. After all, their reputation will become higher than any other Spirit Users. Even the ignorant me would have heard about them.

'That's why it doesn't make sense. Should I ask her about the author of that book? Was my ancestor the last person to use it? I wanted to ask Ardagan, but I knew that he wouldn't give me any answer.

'At the same time, Anna Stargaze managed to turn around the situation this whole time. Whether it was my trap or trick, she somehow used it against me. How smart is she?'

Noel didn't realize that he was the smarter one among them. The only reason she could turn around the situation was due to him using that particular trick in the previous life.

'Anyway, I don't think I'll be able to get her to answer that. In that case, I should focus on another thing.' Noel opened the system again. Looking at the Rune Mastery, he was planning to use it because it looked extremely useful.

After making his decision, he stood up and pulled Ardagan out. "Well, looking out is boring, so I should spend it training. As long as I don't lower my guard down, I should be able to see any demons around us."

Without hesitation, Noel started swinging his sword. Obviously, he couldn't run around because of the situation, but swinging his sword wouldn't take much movement and attention, allowing him to progress his training faster than his original plan.

After another few hours, Anna woke up. She thought Noel didn't wake her up, but it seemed she was a bit too early for her shift.

When she took a peak at the outside, she saw Noel swinging his sword, shocked.

'What? Did he use all this time to train his body? Does he not know that rest is important as well?' Anna wanted to stop him, not knowing that Noel's body followed the system's enhancement instead of natural human body's progress.

Although rest was good, Noel didn't need to bother with it too much.

As soon as Anna came out of the tent, he said, "Since you're up, it's time for me to sleep."

"Y-yeah?" Anna saw Noel passing her nonchalantly without even waiting for her answer. Before he entered the tent, Anna shouted, "Wait a minute. Wash your body first. You reeks of sweat!"

"Does it bother you?" Noel smirked as if planning to use it to annoy her.

"You don't want a good meal, don't you?" Anna narrowed her eyes, not scared of Noel's threat.

"..." Noel's eyebrows twitched as he eventually snorted and walked to the lake.

Before going to the tent, Noel said, "Listen. I didn't wash my body because I was scared of your threat. I just wanted to make you work for me like a chef. It sure feels like you're my maid. Hahaha!"

Anna chuckled, not caring about Noel's petty thoughts. "Yeah, yeah. Whatever."

"..." Annoyed by Anna's uninterested reaction, Noel went to the tent with a frown. The moment he lied down, a sweet smell somehow entered his nose.

'What is this?' Noel thought while closing his eyes. 'The sweet smell... somehow feels a bit too relaxing... That woman must have used a perfume or something to make her sleep well. I'll take advantage of it too.'

Noel didn't realize that Anna never had something like that as his consciousness had gradually faded, wandering to the dreamland.

Chapter 49 Return

The next day.

Clang!

Cling!

A few clashing sounds echoed inside the wood as Noel was repelling three Low Level Demons at the same time.

"Tsk." Noel clicked his tongue. Usually, the demons would split into two groups with at least one of them chasing after Anna, but it seemed he was unlucky today. All three demons ignored Anna and focused on him.

'This is annoying.' Noel glanced at Anna who seemed to have no intention to help him. It was clear that she wanted to test Noel's limit with three Low Level Demons.

However, Noel was only annoyed, not angry. How could he get angry when the demons came to him?

Medal: Military Service Merit II

Requirement: Kill 25 Demons (24/25)

Reward: Military Service II Medal and 5 Honor Points

Knowing that the demons were available for him to kill, Noel could progress his mission and get more Honor Points.

When the three demons came to attack him, Noel bent his knees and lowered his center of gravity. After that, he used the Ice Control to create an ice floor around him.

This was the same ice floor that he used to take down Anna in their last spar. But the ice spread in all directions so that it tripped all the demons.

The only reason for lowering his center of gravity was to prevent the attack that would come to his crotch, causing that pain.

As soon as the demons tripped and started sliding on the ice, Noel took a step back and swiftly cut one of them.

Swift Strike.

,m The stroke was quick and precise. Noel knew that the demon didn't have a hard skin so he used this ability to kill the demon.

On the other hand, Noel used his Mega Slash to take down the other two.

Huft!

Noel let out a long breath as he felt a bit exhausted after using all those abilities. After making sure he got the kill, Noel turned to Anna. "Why don't we split the loot right now? It's better to have more Spiritual Energy."

"Nope. I can't let you do that. We need to wait until we reach a safe place. It might be because you haven't absorbed one, but if you absorb the crystals continuously, it will make you feel exhausted.

"Your body will be sluggish because the Spiritual Energy that just entered your body starts circulating around. That's why it's better to wait until we go back to the fort." Anna explained with a smile.

"..." Noel looked at her for a moment, not satisfied with her explanation. However, he couldn't retort any of her claims because he indeed felt that when absorbing the first ten crystals.

'I don't know why but he appears more docile in the last couple of days... How can someone change that much in just a few days?' Anna furrowed her eyebrows, suspecting something wasn't right in Noel's personality. She was suspicious that Noel was planning something big to kill her.

"Whatever." Noel clicked his tongue and gouged the crystals out of the demons' heads before tossing them to Anna.

After that, they continued their journey with Noel focusing on killing as many demons as possible. He didn't even bother with the competition anymore because he had a clear goal in his mind.

With the previous mission, he now had 8 Honor Points. As long as he could complete the next mission which was to kill 50 demons, he would get another 8 Honor Points. With these points, he could learn about Rune.

Although he didn't want to admit it, pairing up with her meant to have a better hunt. She somehow managed to work with him, preventing most of the injuries that they would have if they fought alone.

He might have gotten some bruises and scratches here and there, but he didn't need to buy anything from his system anymore, saving some Honor Points. He could use those points to upgrade his ability.

Noel endured all the hardships he needed to endure just to kill one more monster.

"Oi. We should go back right now. This is already the third day and we need to go back before the dusk. The sky has become orange." Anna shouted while watching Noel fighting against four Low Level Demons.

"After this." Noel clicked his tongue.

"That's what you said two hours ago!"

Yeah, Noel had been delaying their return trip because he hadn't finished the mission.

He needed another three more Low Level Demons to finish the mission.

"You're forcing me to kill those demons right now, Noel!" Anna gritted her teeth, frustrated.

"You can go back first if you want. No one is stopping you."

"Unlike you, I'm a team person. I can't abandon my teammate."

"Then, stick with that curse." Noel shrugged.

"Kh. This brat." Anna clenched her fists, wanting to smack Noel's head.

"What brat? We're at the same age." Noel glanced at her while furrowing his eyebrows as if he noticed something from her words.

However, his focus soon returned to the demons as he killed the demons one by one.

It took him another ten minutes to finally finish the fight.

'It's finally done.' Noel was short of breath, so he gasped for air while observing the demons.

But his actual gaze lied upon the system screen that only he could see.

Medal: Military Service Merit III

Requirement: Kill 50 Demons (50/50)

Reward: Military Service III Medal and 8 Honor Points

'With this, I can start learning about runes.' Noel thought as he took care of the last few crystals. He then returned to Anna and handed the crystals over. "Let's go back."

"Finally! You're doing at your own pace, aren't you?"

Noel looked away, ignoring her.

"Ignoring me again, eh?" Anna smirked. "Well, whatever. We've got a quite big hauls this time. I need to check it again, but I think I've killed 137 Low Level Demons and 4 Mid Level Demons. As for you, it should be around 71 Low Level Demons and 1 Mid Level Demons.

"We've agreed to split it evenly. But since we have one excess Mid Level Crystal, I'm going to take it because I contributed more. Also, you need to talk once more or I can simply ignore our agreement and grab everything that is mine."

"Yeah, sure. So, 104 Low Level Crystals and 2 Mid Level Crystals for both of us. The rest is for you." Noel nodded.

"Haha, you're greedy." Anna smirked, teasing him that he would do everything as long as he got benefits from it. This was also something that she could use to gradually change him.

However, Noel immediately looked away, ignoring him again. He had talked earlier, so the agreement was valid.

"I want to hit you." Anna's eyebrows were twitching as she had clenched her fists as if planning to hit her.

"Then do it!" Noel shrugged. He realized that Anna had another thought about harming him, so he shamelessly used it against her argument.

"Argh. Just you wait, I'm going to annoy you to death later!"

Chapter 50 Acting

When the two returned, there was only one person in the training ground. He was Shale, the man responsible for the entire test.

As soon as he saw Noel and Anna, he felt relieved that nothing happened to both of them. Knowing their strength, they would venture deeper to the region, so he was quite worried.

But when he took a peek at their bag, he realized there was no need to worry about them. It was clear from the bulging in their bag that they'd got a lot of crystals.

Without hesitation, Anna took out a small pouch with ten Low Level Demon Crystals in it. "This is for the test."

"Certainly." He accepted the pouch with a smile. "Well, this will be given back to you after the official appointment from the commander himself."

"So, the pair is going to continue?" Noel frowned.

"Yes. Normally, it will be a group of three, but the commander hasn't decided whether to keep the current arrangement or go back to the usual procedure. It'll be announced the day after tomorrow. You've got a whole day to rest." Shale nodded.

"In that case, do you mind if I ask you something?" Noel raised his hand with a poker face.

"What is it? I'm telling you this, but if you want to learn about Spiritual Energy, you should wait for the appointment ceremony."

"No. I'm sure that I won't be able to learn everything after that. So, I want to read some books about it. Even if you don't want to teach me, there shouldn't be a problem if I read something, right?"

"Hmm..." Shale thought for a moment. "To be honest, because the lack of literacy among the commoners, there are no rules stating that you can't go to the library to read things. There are, of course, a few records about it. And we're planning to teach you the foundation of the Spiritual Energy."

"Since there is no record, that means I can go in, right?" Noel kept pressuring him for an answer.

Shale was hesitating, but Noel's expression ended up making him agree. "Yes There is no rule stating that you can't read either. If you want to read some books, you should ask Evan in Infirmary. He has the control over it."

"Understood." Noel nodded, satisfied.

Anna was a bit skeptical about this matter, but there wasn't anything interesting in the library. She also couldn't really follow him to the library since it had gone beyond the boundary.

People might even think her as a pervert who loved to follow Noel everywhere. Ultimately, she decided to focus on her training.

"Since you're done, bring all the items you've used there and go back."

Noel and Anna nodded at the same time as they immediately put their luggage down and split the crystals.

Due to them giving ten crystals to Shale, they ended up with only 99 Low Level Crystals and 2 Mid Level Crystals each.

Of course, Shale, who was watching the entire transaction, could only suck a cold breath as this was the first time there was a pair that could bring back more than two hundred Low Level Crystals. They even had Mid Level Crystals.

'They surely got a lot.' Shale thought before raising his head, sensing someone's presence. He looked at the tower on the corner of the training ground and released his killing intent, warning this guy to not mess with him. They were the trainees under his protection, so eliminating the trainees would mean his failure in protecting them.

There was already a lot of pressure since the outbreak, so he couldn't allow any more mishap. After Noel and Anna went separate ways, Shale immediately disappeared from the training ground.

The mysterious guy with a black suit that covered his entire body other than his eyes suddenly felt a cold, sharp blade on his neck. He sucked a cold breath because he couldn't even feel Shale's presence when he approached him.

"Who are you? Depending on your answer, I might need to kill you." Shale's expression was cold as he wouldn't have any hesitation to kill him the moment he didn't get a satisfactory explanation.

To his surprise, Anna managed to climb the tower as well, albeit far slower than Shale.

"He is with me, Instructor."

"Mhm?" Shale glanced at Anna for a moment as if he was hesitating to believe it. There were too many things he needed to consider, but Anna was the genius of the kingdom. After a momentary contemplation, he lowered his sword and said, "As long as you don't do anything dangerous, I'll turn blind eyes on this. Even though you're a noble, we still have rules here, Anna Stargaze. I'm sure that even Marquis Stargaze doesn't want to fight our commander."

"That is of course. Don't worry. I'll handle this properly." Anna nodded calmly.

After getting the assurance, Shale let out a helpless sigh before disappearing again.

'As expected, he is not an ordinary man. Shale, the Demon Exterminator... He is considered to be one of the top ten fighters in this fort. And above him is the commander of Demon Banner Army. With this line up, they're considered to be one of the strongest force in the kingdom. If not for their role to maintain the safety of the kingdom, their influence will be spread far.' Anna thought, assessing Shale's strength.

"Young Miss." The guy in the black suit hurriedly fell on one knee, apologizing for the blunder.

"That's enough. I'm sure that you're already aware of what kind of place this fort is, right?"

"Yes. But Master is worried about you."

"I can protect myself." Anna snorted.

"That's... It's because Young Miss has paired up with..." The guy looked away and stopped his sentence. However, his meaning was clear.

Anna smirked evilly as she said with killing intent. "Don't you think it's amusing? What if there is a person who plotted your entire family's execution in front of you? And no matter what you do, you can't surpass that person, let alone kill her? His heart will break apart slowly but surely. I'm going to play with him a bit and make him fall into despair... Yes, I'm going to break him apart completely."

"..." The guy lowered his head. When he felt the killing intent, he felt Anna said the truth. He couldn't help but think her action was vicious. However, it was clear that Anna wouldn't have any relationship with their enemy, Noel Ardagan.

"If you understand, go back and tell my father not to send anyone else here. It's annoying."

"I understand. I shall convey Young Miss' intention." The guy nodded and disappeared.

After his presence disappeared, Anna's cold expression turned to a poker face as she muttered inwardly, 'That's done. It should be enough to fool my father for the time being. Now, my task has increased... I can't only mend my relationship with Noel, but I need to handle the relationship with my family as well. Such a troublesome task...'