

The Mafia 551

Chapter 551 Theories of the Beyond

Bella's companions saw a spatial distortion appear in the area where they were standing at the entrance to The Skull City, and their expressions immediately changed.

Some of them stood up from where they were sitting, their eyes widening in anticipation, imagining that their companions might be returning from the cursed city.

And some of their companions did return.

The moment they saw Layla and Vicente appear, the people in that small camp saw the body of an unconscious man on Layla's shoulders while Bella stood right behind Vice.

"Bella!" One of the women outside The Skull City exclaimed at the sight of her teammate.

The others in the group approached them, worried that they could only see two of their three teammates and that one of them was unconscious.

Vicente sighed with relief, having escaped the danger that had haunted him in this city, finally free from the problems of the curse behind the workings of THE Skull City.

'We're safe now, master.' Torne said as his master breathed more easily.

Layla placed the body of the man she had carried there on the ground and explained to the group. "When we entered The Skull City, we saw that one of your companions was already dead. Bella and I saw that man's body being devoured by zombies, so I'm sorry."

"It can't be..."

"Damn it!"

"Damned monsters!"

Layla finished her speech. "As for this person, I saved him from the monsters, but he had already lost a lot of blood. I don't know if he can survive even if he uses some special resources."

Layla had already realized that the man she had carried here was still alive, but he was fragile and could die at any moment.

The people in the group surrounded their companion's unconscious body, checking his vital signs, trying to understand what had happened and what they could do.

"Jack is practically dead!" One of the men in the group said as he closed his eyes and sighed deeply.

"But there's nothing we can do?" Bella asked fearfully. "Layla picked up some resources on her way to help Jack. Maybe we can get him out of danger..."

Vicente said nothing as he sat down some distance away from the group, having already heard from Torne that this man was lost.

Polaris Realm magicians and humans of Earth had more in common than one might think. For example, if you lost a lot of blood, you could only survive with a transfusion. On the other hand, if the brain was deprived of optimal oxygenation for too long, one ran the risk of brain death or permanent damage if one's life was saved.

That was Jack's main problem at the moment. Could he be saved? Perhaps. It was not impossible. But he would have irreparable consequences that would lead to his eventual death, but also to a journey of suffering and dependence on others.

Would any warrior prefer to live like a vegetable in a bed?

With his sharp senses, Torne realized this easily, and Vicente, of course, had no hope for Jack.

But not only Vicente was realistic. The leader of this group was as well.

He saw Layla offering the items she had collected and said with a negative shake of his head. "Thank you for what you've done for my companions. But it would be a waste of your resources to use them on Jack."

"Boss..." Bella felt her eyes fill with tears.

The group leader said. "Guys, the Jack we know no longer exists. Even if we awaken him from his current state and get him out of danger, he won't be even 5% of what he was before."

The people there bowed their heads as they heard this, sad but aware that this man's words were true.

One of the women there said. "Jack had already made his preferences clear to us in the past. If he could no longer be independent and live as a warrior..."

As this woman choked, one of the group finished. "He said that he didn't want to be saved. That was almost all of us's decision when we talked about it. We would rather die than save someone who doesn't want to be saved."

"But, but..." Bella felt very bad because her two companions had ended up very badly because of her.

Then Vicente opened his mouth, "Look on the bright side. At least he'll have the chance to die outside this city."

Everyone looked at the entrance to The Skull City as Vice spoke. "Your other companion will sooner or later become a lich or a ghost. Then he will suffer in this place for who knows how long.

But your friend Jack will have the chance to die here and continue his cycle of reincarnation.

Sigh! Let him go in peace. He must have suffered enough there and will soon be in a better place."

Bella heard these words and said nothing more, wondering if reincarnation really existed and hoping that if it did, Jack would have a good second life.

The cultures of Polaris Realm had many different theories about what happened after death. Among these theories was the idea of reincarnation, an idea that few people on the continent believed in, as the main religion of these lands held a different theory.

Layla's beliefs held that there were two paths after death. Suffer on the continent as an undead, a thankless fate usually associated with punishment for the sins such people committed in life. Or ascend to a higher realm where heroes and good people would have the chance to live in harmony for eternity.

For those who believed in this, the idea of reincarnation was very bad because it meant that no matter how good someone was, they would still end up like the worst of the bad guys: reincarnated.

Layla looked at Vicente when she saw that he believed in the nonsense of reincarnation but didn't say anything out of respect for Jack and those people.

Some believed in other things, but sensing that Vicente was saying that Jack would have a better fate if he died there, they took Vicente's comment positively.

The group leader closed his eyes and took a deep breath before pulling a dagger from his spatial ring.

"I'm sorry, Jack. I hope you can forgive me in your eternal life in paradise." He said before cutting Jack's jugular vein and ending the man's suffering.

Vicente saw that everything was resolved and said. "Well, I'm sorry for your losses. But it's time for me and my companion to leave."

"Hmm, bon voyage, my friends." The leader of the group wiped the blood from his dagger before making a gesture of thanks to Vicente.

Everyone else did the same, no matter how sad they were to lose their friends.

"I wish you luck on your adventures. If we ever meet again, we'll drink and talk about your adventures after this day." Vicente said as he floated into the air, just before he waved goodbye and left the area.

Layla looked at Bella and smiled bitterly. "It was nice working with you. I hope to hear from you in the future."

With that, she ran after Vicente and quickly disappeared from the sight of the people in this group.

Chapter 552 Legendary Magus?

After leaving The Skull City, Vicente and Layla would travel for three days along the border between the Chutha Dynasty and the Seidel Kingdom.

Finally leaving their home state behind and entering the continent's first relatively powerful state, Vicente and Layla would soon reach the first city in this new territory for them.

They casually chatted as they walked side by side along a dirt road about a kilometer away from the first city in the Chutha Dynasty.

"Vicente, don't you believe in my religion?" Layla asked, having given the subject a lot of thought since Vicente's words to the previous group a few days ago.

Religion was a very sensitive topic in Polaris Realm, given the wars and historical disputes that had shed so much blood across the continent.

As much as there was a dominant religion, not everyone believed in the things it proclaimed, and there were different opinions everywhere.

But after days of thinking about it, Layla couldn't stand it anymore and asked about the subject that was bothering her.

"No, I don't believe in what the Congregation of Revelation preaches," Vicente said.

He would not talk about this in public, let alone with Nina, because such a thing in itself could cause problems for his family. But Layla had a profound relationship with him, and telling her the truth would be no danger.

He continued. "I don't rule out the possibility that your faith tells some truths. There may be more than one truth about life or the afterlife. But I have things that make me think that the idea that the Congregation of Revelation is promoting is wrong.

I don't know if it's a sincere mistake or something else. But I can't ignore the possibility that it's a well-crafted lie by powerful people who can take advantage of it.

Let's not pretend there aren't advantages to having the trust of countless people across the continent... There are many interests at stake." He smiled. "That's a much better business than mine, I suppose."

Layla didn't like that as she looked at him thoughtfully. "Aren't you afraid of being punished for speaking and thinking like that?"

"The universe doesn't care what someone as small as me believes," Vicente commented. "The only ones who care are beings with very specific powers and interests. But I doubt that there is any magician powerful enough to punish me looking at me right now."

"Tsk!" She clenched her fists and looked away, not knowing if he was saying it to annoy her or if he was being sincere.

"I hope you don't haunt me when you die," Layla said. "Personally, I don't think of myself as a saint. But at least I have a clear conscience. But you'll pay for your twisted thoughts sooner or later, Vicente."

"Oh? And acting alongside me won't corrupt you?" He asked with a mischievous smile on his face.

"Not at all. I'm trying to save your soul and direct you to the higher realm." She looked at him and said it with pure sincerity.

"You believe that... Interesting." He commented as he looked into her gray eyes before focusing on the cherry lips of this beautiful woman.

He smiled and spoke. "But don't worry, I think this is my last chance. If I die, I'll disappear from this world. I feel like I won't get another chance." He looked strangely at the sky, attracting Layla's attention.

He had experienced reincarnation, so he believed in it. But as someone who had been reincarnated once, he had no hope of being reincarnated again.

What is wrong with him? Layla wondered, sensing that he wasn't joking, even though he seemed so annoying on the surface.

Meanwhile, Torne listened to their conversation and felt something different. 'With such a supreme magical form, maybe you won't have to die.' He looked at Vicente's second Magic Gem.

'If you can become a legendary Magus, you will transcend life and death, my master.' Torne thought to himself, remembering the old legends about the magical path in this world.

The level of an Archmage was already legendary enough. In the entire history of the continent, there were only a few human beings who had reached such a level.

Other races in Polaris Realm had more Archmages than humanity, but even the most talented and monstrous races had no more than a few dozen Archmages in their history.

However, there were legends that magic was infinite and that there was a level above that of an Archmage known as a Magus. According to the stories, a single Magus could dominate the Polaris Realm in a single day, turning the heavens upside down and changing the laws of men.

A Magus should have such high vitality that they should be considered immortals superior to vampires!

In the legends, there were no names of people associated with this legendary level, which meant that no known person had ever surpassed the level of an Archmage on the continent. But given Vicente's supreme powers, Torne did not doubt that his master would one day reach such a level.

Never before had someone with two magical forms appeared on the continent, so Vicente had a better chance than any of his predecessors!

But he didn't say anything to his master because he didn't want to disturb Vicente by putting distant ideas into the young man's head.

For now, he just wanted Vicente to focus on what he was already doing and eventually follow his advice to find the ancient sites of the Cataclysm Order.

Vicente had already reached the level needed to go to certain places associated with the Dark Path religion, but Torne was waiting for his master to complete his current mission and advance to the 4th stage to lead him to one of those places.

He had planned to do this earlier, but since he had been unconscious for a long time, he wanted to give his master time to finish what he was doing before leading him to such a place.

Anyway, while each of them had different thoughts in mind, Vicente and Layla passed the entrance of the first city on their way.

It was a small place of 35,000 inhabitants, a simple area located in one of the weakest areas of the state.

The Chutha Dynasty had a very uneven distribution of power, but the areas bordering the Seidel Kingdom were generally considered weak, while the areas bordering other states were stronger.

That was the case for the border with the Kenyth Empire, the dynasty's great enemy, where many of the state's strongest sects and families were located.

There was almost no danger around the city Vicente and Layla had just entered, so the forces there were simpler and weaker.

Still, this city had an average power similar to that of Millfall, a sign of how much stronger the Chutha Dynasty was compared to the Seidel Kingdom.

Chapter 553 Torne's Opinion?

When they stopped to rest in that small city, Vicente gave Layla the chance to sleep first, while he took over the job of watching and protecting his companion.

After leaving The Skull City, they were quite tired, but Vicente wanted to talk about many things that Torne hadn't had a chance to talk about because of Layla's constant company.

With Layla almost always at his side and the risks of battle that came with every journey, it was impossible to have a quiet, uninterrupted conversation.

Stopping there to rest, Vicente finally had the chance to talk to Torne more quietly while watching Layla sleep.

'You have seen my recent experiences... What do you think I should do, old Torne? Are there things that worry you?' Vicente asked in his mind.

The 4th stage ghost thought for a moment and told him. 'There are some things we should talk about. First of all, that man named Newton gave you some advice earlier that wasn't entirely wrong.

Of course, his diagnosis was wrong. But there was no way he could be right. He didn't know about your second magical form, your true talent, let alone the origin of the instability of your magical foundation.

Still, he gave you some good advice. He's not bad at all, master.'

'Yes, Newton is a very intelligent person.'

Torne continued. 'Your problem wasn't caused by an excess of magical resources, as he thought. If that were the case, you'd really have cultivation problems advancing one stage, and you wouldn't become a Sovereign for another two or three years, which is close to what he estimated.

Two things caused your problem. Your own magical form is too strong for you to control on your own, and my intervention, which prevented serious consequences for you.

The awareness of your second magical form also helped you in all of this by lessening the burden of the consequences of using your second magical form.

In short, all of this made you stronger, but it also made your previously solid foundation completely unbalanced. This was not something that could be treated. Only meditation and ordinary cultivation could help you, as Newton recommended.

Now you're close to solving your problem. Before I woke up, you were about a year away from reaching the 4th stage. But with me here, it should happen in less than 6 months.'

Vicente had already imagined many of the things Torne told him, so he wasn't surprised by anything. The fact that Newton hadn't been entirely right about his case didn't bother him either because he was an unusual case.

'Six months?' Vicente asked his slave.

'When I cultivate in your dimension of consciousness, I naturally help you strengthen your foundation. Even though my elements are different from the elements of the master's first form, the very fact that I cultivate mana in this place helps you to some extent.' Torne explained.

'I hadn't thought of that possibility...' Vicente murmured, thinking that was pretty good. 'So having a spirit slave is a big advantage on the continent!'

'Yes, the prominent families and sects give their young talents familiars for a long time. That is similar to what I am to the master, which naturally speeds up the cultivation of these people.'

Familiars were beasts who were deeply connected to their masters, and they served their masters similarly to Torne. The main difference would be that the beasts wouldn't have as high a rational capacity as ghosts, but their raw power would be much stronger than a ghost of the same level.

These familiars could also serve as mounts for their masters. They could be used freely without their masters having to fear reprisal.

That was not the case with Vicente and Torne. He had to hide that he had a ghost at his side, or forces like Layla's organization would look at him strangely.

'If so, I'll find a relative for Nina as soon as possible.' Vicente commented.

'That can't happen. Familiars can only be linked to magicians at the 3rd stage or higher. A familiar would cause problems for magicians weaker than that.' Torne explained.

'But why did you and I get along?'

'The master's case is special. You're not normal, and I willingly submitted to you the moment I realized your greatness. Besides, I'm a ghost, not an animal. Our elemental kinship also contributed to our success.

In short, we work well because of many peculiarities that are difficult to satisfy. I wouldn't expect the same with young Nina.'

Vicente understood the problem and did not doubt Torne's words. 'Then, I'll look for a familiar for her when she becomes a Mage.'

Torne commented. 'The master can do that during the hunt for your next pentagram. You can get an excellent familiar then.'

Vicente became interested in the subject as soon as he heard Torne and then asked him about it. 'Old Torne, do you know where I could find my fourth pentagram? It has to be Cyan, right?'

'That's right.' Torne sighed. 'You'll have to go to the north of the continent. A cyan pentagram can only be formed by high-level phenomena and magical beings at the Paragon or Archmage stage.

Gulp!

While Vicente swallowed his saliva, Torne gave his opinion on the matter. 'Master, you shouldn't seek your fourth pentagram until you become a peak Sky Sovereign. You already have 4 pentagrams counting your second magical form, so you won't have any problems with the stability of your magical foundation.

You need to be as strong as possible before you go after your fourth pentagram, or you will really die chasing pentagrams this time.

The beings who can have such an essence are the strongest on the continent, so we can't rush. We must raise our power to the maximum and form a properly prepared team before we go after them.'

Torne looked at Vicente differently, feeling his non-existent heart beating harder with emotion as he simply thought about what he was about to say.

'But after you hunt your fourth pentagram, it will be time for you to go after the pentagrams of your second magical form.

When you start adding magical essences to the Throne of Darkness, you'll be able to control it masterfully and show its true power to the world. You will become a Paragon as strong as the continental leaders at that time!'

Chapter 554 Continental History?

'That looks really promising.' Vicente commented to Torne with a curious expression on his face. 'But I'll have to be one of the strongest. I'm sure I'll be hunted as soon as I start to control my second special power.'

'It will happen one way or another. The consciousness of your second magical form is hiding it inside you. But at some point in the future, your progress will send signals to the continent's experts. At that time, they will begin to hunt you down, even if you've lived a life of seclusion in the mountains.' Torne explained.

'Your first enemies will be humans from this woman's organization.' Torne pointed in Layla's direction. 'But they won't be able to do anything against you once you fully control your second gem.'

Then, you'll have enemies from the monstrous races of the continent. Vampires will sooner or later stand in your way, along with other monsters that are difficult to fight.

These will be your real enemies, the ones who can make you use everything you have, master. You must be careful with them whenever possible. They won't hunt you down because you're a threat. They'll do it to use you as a nutrient to grow stronger.

Humans will eventually give up on you, but monsters like vampires will never do it. You have to be strong and cautious to defeat them. If you can do that, you will be able to reach the peak of the continent.'

'Reach the peak?' Vicente laughed. 'I just want to save my sister.'

'The magical journey has no turning back. It's like the cursed city you just passed, master. Once you start down that path, there's no turning back. The only way is to go all the way and survive.' Torne

advised. 'If you want to avenge your family and then bring safety to Nina and Lauren, you'll have to be invincible.

As long as you're not feared and invincible, enemies will use them to weaken you. They can take them away from you if you don't know how to deal with such problems.'

Vicente clenched his fists as he listened, imagining that he would have to do things to achieve his goals that would eventually attract the attention of enemies. After that, there would be no point in telling the world he didn't want any trouble.

He sighed in realization.

'I'll do my best.'

Torne liked Vicente for many reasons, but the fact that this young man was intelligent and listened to the voice of the most experienced was what pleased him most.

He smiled from the space of this young man's consciousness and said to comfort his master. 'Don't worry about it yet. It will take you years to reach such a level. You'll still have the chance to see Nina become an independent adult before you have to fulfill your potential.

Just remember what I've told you. It will be important for the future.'

...

Vicente and Torne would eventually talk about everything there was to talk about after the long time they had been unable to communicate.

After a few hours that day, it would be time for Vicente to get some rest while Layla took care of his safety.

The next day, they would shop in this border city before finally heading west, intending to travel for another week before their next stop.

Layla had sent a letter to Jasmine in the city where they had stopped, telling her about the monsters they had encountered on their way.

Apart from that, nothing important happened to them in that city. The journey over the next few days wouldn't be that eventful for them either since the area they had just entered was one of the weakest in the state.

It would only get busier next week when they enter the dynasty's deepest parts.

...

Six days after they departed from the small city near the Chutha Dynasty's border with the Seidel Kingdom, Layla's letter reached Jasmine in Saltstar City.

Receiving such a message from her friend and protector, Jasmine learned a little about Layla and Vicente's condition and how far they were from her current city.

But she also read about something disturbing, hearing for the first time about the goblins between Millfall and Martell Village and about the recent case of the ogres near the western end of Seidel Kingdom.

These were two rare cases in those areas, but serious enough for someone like Jasmine to worry about.

Human forces conquered the continent and became dominant in most of Polaris Realm. But this had only happened after many ancient wars and the coming together of many different races to form the Magic Alliance.

The Magic Alliance was a non-exclusive organization that included most of the continent's human powers. Its sole purpose was to deal with matters related to the war against the monsters and the threat of new wars.

In the distant past, it had given humanity victory in the last war against the monsters, bringing humanity out of hiding to dominate more than 65% of the lands of the Polaris Realm.

Without the Magic Alliance, 80% of the continent's current human cities would not exist, and the human population would be much smaller.

Given the history behind the continent's current state, Jasmine didn't underestimate Layla's warning. As soon as she read the letter, she issued a warning to her organization to be on the alert for the presence of monsters in the Seidel Kingdom.

In particular, she wrote a letter to her father detailing the disturbing sightings of monsters throughout the kingdom and the province where she currently lived.

Finally, she sent a communiqué to her organization's headquarters, pointing out the possibility of a monster-

related problem on the continent.

She didn't expect an immediate response, but she wanted to alert the local forces at least that a serious problem might be lurking.

If she could find out more in order to prepare her group, that would be great. But that was all she could do, for now, given her position.

Either way, she warned the members of the Fuller family about Vice's concerns and his current condition. She warned Rory and the others to be more careful.

The sighting of a group of monsters was something that could happen. But two sightings in such a short time were very strange!

...

With Jasmine's movements, Vicente and Layla were successful in their plans to prepare their people and alert larger forces to the problem.

Meanwhile, they were approaching the next city they would stop in, the first major metropolis they would visit on their way to the Bone Mountains.

Chapter 555 Genius

Upon arriving in Eaglewind, Vicente and Layla couldn't help but take a good look around this huge city.

That was a city of nearly 300,000 people!

For these two young people from the Seidel Kingdom, a place where the largest city in the kingdom, the capital, had only 280,000 inhabitants, this was a very large metropolis.

This place was so big that it seemed to have no boundaries, like a jungle of blocks and stones.

There were a lot of Mages there, unlike any other city the two of them had been to. Even some Sovereigns lived there!

But the most impressive thing was not that this place was rich and powerful but that it was still one of the mid-level cities of the Chutha Dynasty.

If one traveled further northwest, one would eventually reach the strongest and richest area of the state, where even Paragons could be found if one looked hard enough.

Few of the Chutha Dynasty's forces had Paragons. However, the state's ruling family and two continental organizations with branches in the dynasty had Paragons living locally.

For this reason, the dynasty's capital was an even better place than Eaglewind, the city where Vicente and Layla had just arrived.

As they walked along the local sidewalks, appreciating the local beauty and noticing the many opportunities in the city, the two approached the center, where they would spend most of the next few hours.

They would stay there for a day or two to rest and do business, then continue on their way.

"Are we going to a restaurant?" Vicente suddenly asked Layla. "I'm hungry. Let's get something to eat before we find a place to rest."

Layla hadn't had a decent meal in days, so she didn't refuse.

They arrived in the city's center, looking for a restaurant with a smell that would catch their attention. Mages like them could sense scents dozens of meters away from its focus, so it was easy to find the best place to eat.

When they walked into a luxurious restaurant, they had no problem with reservations or anything like that. The two of them had learned to show their aura at the right time, and when they did, they easily got a table in that establishment.

That was a city that had Sovereigns, but there were less than 15 Sovereigns there. Meanwhile, the number of High-level Mages was ten times the number of Sovereigns, but not all of them went out to eat at the same place at the same time every day.

Two of them looking for a seat in a renowned restaurant was enough for the establishment to make an exception and find a place for them.

Vicente and Layla soon settled into one of the best seats in the restaurant, overlooking Eaglewind's central square as well as the rest of the restaurant.

After ordering their respective dishes, they were served drinks and snacks until their attention was drawn to a group of new arrivals.

A brown-haired young man, very well dressed and accompanied by powerful women and guards, entered the area where Vicente and Layla were standing and immediately caught the attention of everyone there.

Several people in the area stood up to greet the brown-haired young man, while others merely nodded in respect.

Layla looked at the light blue-eyed man and opened her mouth in surprise.

"A Sky Sovereign ?" She murmured as she felt the powerful aura of this young man who couldn't have been more than 20 years old.

How could she and Vicente know the age of a stranger? As people in the area greeted the young man and his companions, some murmured pertinent things about this genius passing through the city.

Kai Tillsley, 19, Cyan talent, popularly known as The Lion, the youngest elder of the Brass Crocodile Soldiers, was passing through Eaglewind on his way back to his sect after completing a mission.

Hearing the murmur of the people around them, Vicente and Layla couldn't help but stare in awe at the young man with the Cyan Magic Gem on his forehead.

Even Vicente, who normally wasn't very impressed, opened his mouth as he felt the magical fluctuation of this person, who must have been around Lauren's age.

'There are people like that all over the continent, master.' Torne commented, sensing his master's surprise. 'In a way, this young man is not so different from you. That is the first time you've met a genius who can cultivate as fast as you, but that's because such people are rare, not because they don't exist.

They exist all over the continent, and if you were to put them all in one place, they would probably fill a ballroom. You'll definitely come across a lot of them as you get stronger and venture into the northern lands.

But the farther south you go on the continent, the fewer of them you'll see. They are rare, so you cannot find them in simple, weak places.'

'Is he really only 19? Is it serious?'

Torne said. 'I can't be sure of his age. Sovereigns can disguise their appearance very easily. But there's no denying that his vitality is magnificent. He's definitely under 100.'

To be under 100 and already close to the threshold between the 4th and 5th stages was impressive!

Anyone who achieved such a feat would be considered a genius throughout the continent!

Paragons usually reached their levels between 500 and 1,000 years old. But to reach the 5th stage at the age of 700, for example, would already be a great achievement, considering that less than 1% of magicians with the potential to become Paragons reached the 5th stage.

Vicente knew a little about the number of experts on the continent and how difficult it was to advance when you were already at high levels. That was why he couldn't ignore the existence of this brown-haired young man and look at him in a different light.

'I see... Leaving the Seidel Kingdom is proving to be more enlightening than I imagined.'

Torne said nothing when he heard this comment, knowing that it would be challenging for his master to stay in Saltstar City for long after this journey.

The reason why most of the talented and powerful people who were born in the Seidel Kingdom left wasn't just because the kingdom didn't suit them. It was because after getting to know something better, it became complicated to ignore some of the shortcomings of weaker places and not wish for change.

Some would definitely try to improve the quality of their city's or family's services to suppress these differences a bit, but sooner or later, they would have no choice but to leave their homeland behind.

It was impossible to change the mana wealth of a region. Even if you increased the flow of valuable resources to that place and attracted powerful magicians, it was impossible to change a place permanently!

Chapter 556 Dangers?

Torne knew that Vicente would leave the Seidel Kingdom sooner or later on his own, so he didn't say anything to rush his master. As backward as such a state was, it was minimally good at protecting weak people from the dangers of the continent.

"It looks like there are monsters like you all over the continent..." Layla commented as she looked at Vicente. "I imagine you'll be a Sovereign by the time you're his age.

What's it like to meet someone like you?"

Vicente smiled at his companion. "The same feeling I get when I look at you or anyone else."

"Really?" She laughed. "You didn't have that open mouth and shocked look when we first met."

"I was too busy trying to protect my life," Vicente spoke as he corrected his posture and put aside his apparent shock. "But I can't deny seeing someone so strong and young is a surprise."

She stopped joking and sighed. "It's like that on the continent. If you travel further north, you'll find more and more people like him.

But even then, people like him are only a fraction of those with the potential to reach this boy's level. Most of them die halfway through when they're Mages or Sovereigns." She turned her full attention to him. "Do you know why that is?"

"The pentagrams?" Vicente asked, but he knew that was the right answer.

"Yes, hunting pentagrams gets harder and harder as you go along. As much as we get stronger as we go through the levels, the quality of the pentagrams has higher and higher requirements as you go up the 'ladder.'

The higher the quality of the pentagram, the higher the power level of the being that created it. That in itself makes everything difficult, as the chance of a magician defeating a magical being with a pentagram of interest to them is 50%. Half will succeed, while the other half will die in the hunt.

But since humanity has won the war for control of the continent, our numbers have significantly increased, and we have more high-level people than there are magical beings capable of creating the best pentagrams for those magicians. That naturally leads to a competition for pentagrams among the strongest on the continent.

In the fight for the best essence, some geniuses fall before becoming Paragons." She looked back at the brown-haired young man. "That makes him even more impressive. Becoming a Sky Sovereign can't have been easy..."

There were enough pentagrams for all the magicians in Polaris Realm. But most people would rather fight over a good pentagram than look at an average or weak one. For this very reason, pentagrams with a green rating or higher were very difficult to find, and there were usually several people interested in each of these essences.

Vicente had only not experienced this in Scott Province because there were no Sovereigns in that area. After all, only Sovereigns or stronger hunted green pentagrams.

Layla looked back at Vicente and said sincerely. "That is why you must be careful. The chances that you will meet this kind of person from now on are very high. Eventually, you'll meet people like him or stronger on your journey to find stronger pentagrams. So be careful."

He nodded at her. "I will."

They were silent for a moment until a waiter brought their respective plates.

They ate in silence for a moment and then went back to talking about their local affairs. They needed to rest, but they also needed to do some shopping and selling in the city.

Layla had collected some resources in The Skull City that would be of no use to them. Some could be used on Vicente's family, but they had agreed to sell others to collect coins and buy other resources that could be useful to them.

Layla hadn't forgotten about her friend Jasmine and planned to bring some interesting things for the pink-haired woman when she returned to Saltstar City. So she had to do some shopping on the spot.

On the other hand, Vicente had to buy resources for his family, study his forge, and buy materials for 4th-stage blacksmiths.

That was partly so that he could improve his forging skills when he became a Sovereign, but it was also so that he could report to the Council of Elders of the Saltstar City Blacksmith's Association, something he had promised earlier.

Until that day, they hadn't been anywhere interesting for him to shop. But in Eaglewind, he could start shopping and get what he needed to justify his trip to the Chutha Dynasty.

So, after chatting for a while while finishing their meal, they paid their bill and left the restaurant full of influential and powerful people.

It was not easy to avoid the many guards and powerful magicians in the area without attracting unnecessary attention, but they would manage to get out of there and eventually find an inn to rest in.

They wouldn't resume their plans until the next day when they would split up to settle their affairs.

...

The next day, Layla and Vicente left the inn where they had rested for 24 hours and parted ways.

She went to the local Awakening Temple to send a letter to Jasmine, while he went directly to the Blacksmiths' Association building.

From these two locations, they planned to continue their plans for this city before meeting in front of Eaglewind's central square to reunite and leave.

Neither would encounter any difficulties on their way that day, and they would soon accomplish their goals on the ground.

At the end of the afternoon, they would meet in front of the downtown restaurant where they had eaten lunch the day before and begin their journey to one of the local exits on the west side of town.

However, before leaving the city, a group of boys would stop on their way and hand Vicente an envelope, surprising him and Layla!

...

"What's this?" Layla asked as she looked at Vicente and the boys, who had stopped looking at them as if they were expecting something.

Vicente read the contents of the letter strangely at first, but he soon understood what it was about, and his expression improved.

He took out a gold coin and gave it to the boys, causing them to move away as they talked and smiled.

He looked at Layla and said. "It's about Casey. It seems that my investigators were in this city not long ago. They left this letter with the boys to give to me when I came by."

"That..." She looked at him with doubt in her eyes.

But Vicente's investigators knew he would pass through this city on his way to the Bone Mountains. It wasn't difficult to leave such a message since there were ways to target such messengers.

"Are you sure it's your investigators?" She asked him. "I don't want to be pessimistic, but they could be criminals trying to trap us."

"I don't think so," Vicente said. "It could be, but to put the code I left with this group in that letter, other people would have to kidnap them and torture them to get them to talk."

"That could have happened..."

"Yes, but I don't think so. In any case, it's worth following the letter's trail. Either my investigators are in trouble, or the contents of the letter are reliable, and we could be close to Casey's trail," Vicente said confidently. "Either way, we have something to solve. And since the path this will take us on won't take us away from our main journey, I don't see a problem with it, even if it doesn't lead to anything."

With that, they left Eaglewind with a new destination in mind!

Chapter 557 Investigator's Findings

Three days after his passage through Eaglewind, Vicente entered another city in the Chutha Dynasty.

Following the instructions in the letter he had received earlier in Eaglewind, he went to the group of investigators he had hired to follow Casey's father's trail.

This was the last point the investigators had reached, and they were waiting for him or new investigators on site to continue or complete their mission.

So, Layla and Vicente soon found themselves face to face with the Mazzanti men.

...

In a tavern in a small city in the central area of the Chutha dynasty, Vicente and Layla sat side by side, facing three men, Low-level Mages.

The place they were in was dark, lit by a few windows and lamps. The smell of food was mixed with the smell of smoke, alcohol, and other scents common to similar places.

There weren't many people around at the moment, but there were enough for the sound of several mixed voices to cover the area.

Amid it, groups like Vicente's could converse without fear of being overheard by onlookers.

"So?" He asked as he looked at the three people in front of him.

"Don, we've reached a point in our journey where we can't continue investigating, or we'll get into trouble." Said the man in charge of this group.

"What happened?" Vicente asked.

A bald man answered. "Several things. First, Casey probably advanced in level and became a Mid-level Mage. His father is a High-level Mage, so it was already becoming increasingly difficult for us to follow them. With Casey's advancement, the two have increased their movement speed."

"That's... That's strange." Layla said. "As you put it, it sounds like his father intentionally increased his speed after Casey advanced."

"That sounds like what happened." A blond man said. "We get the impression that Casey's father knows his son is chasing him. But we're not sure if our groupmate is aware of it..."

A brown-haired man, the leader of the group, continued. "Anyway, Casey's father stayed in this city for a few days. That gave us time to wait for you but also to try to find out what he was doing or where he was going.

But we weren't that successful in understanding this person's situation. I don't know. His movements are pretty strange, Don." The man looked at Vicente strangely. "He did some local shopping but spent a lot of time on the black market.

He'd often just look at the products and not buy anything. If there was a big deal, it was very discreet, and we couldn't see it."

"What about Casey?"

"We first saw him a week ago when his father was leaving the city. We tried to contact him, but it didn't work. We were 'accidentally' blocked by a group of drunken troublemakers who made us miss our only chance."

"Accidentally?" Layla narrowed her eyes as she looked at Vicente.

Vicente asked. "You think someone got in your way on purpose."

"Yes, his father probably knows about us too." The brown-haired man said before adding. "That makes us think he's plotting against Casey."

The bald man added. "It seems to me that Casey hasn't found any trace of his father as we thought. He may have been guided by this man all along."

"Why?" Layla asked. "Casey hates his father. Why would such a man attract him?"

"We don't know that." The head of the investigators said with a doubtful expression. "But we believe that this man is trying to lure not only Casey but us as well. If you follow his last tracks, you'll probably end up at the same place as Casey."

"All right," Vicente said. "I want one of you to accompany me to the local black market. I want to see the places Casey's father passed through before he left the city. Maybe there's a clue to what he's planning that you haven't picked up on."

"All right."

...The inception of this chapter's publication is linked to N0v3lb11n.

Later that day, Vicente and the brown-haired, apparently middle-aged man entered an area where there was a small harbor.

The Chutha dynasty didn't have access to the sea. Still, it did have a complex river system with several rivers that could accommodate ships and connect many parts of the state.

The city Vicente was in today had a large port, although it was a small place, where many crews passed through to rest or broker cargo exchanges.

On one of the docks in the area, there was a large building with few windows, where shabby people stood around, and people of good social standing came and went.

This was the local black market!

Vicente followed in his subordinate's footsteps, leaving Layla and the others behind and coming to this place with as few people as possible.

As he entered the building, he saw a large open area, with several cells in the center of the area where humans and special magical creatures were chained, but he also saw shelves along the sides of the building.

There were small trading rooms in some parts of the building, while in others, business could be conducted in daylight.

Vicente focused on what was most prominent in front of him: the trade in living beings and black market slaves!

"So there is this possibility locally..." He muttered to his subordinate.

"Yes, the Chutha Dynasty allows the trade of living beings, so the black market in this state doesn't hide its operations like in the Seidel Kingdom."

In the Seidel Kingdom, the black market also sold living beings and slaves to anyone who wanted to buy them. But it was much more discreet.

Someone new to a city wouldn't be able to walk into such a place in the Seidel Kingdom as Vicente had just done. In his homeland, someone interested in trading humans would have to make contacts and eventually move to private places where such negotiations occurred.

Such places changed hands frequently, so it wasn't easy for someone to gain access to such black market deals.

Debt bondage and some variations of it existed in the Seidel Kingdom. However, the parallel slave trade was forbidden in the kingdom.

The Chutha dynasty was very different. There were no restrictions on the slave trade. The only major obstacle that made the black market the biggest player in the local business of selling living beings was taxes.

There were official living being shops that sold slaves in noble places without any shame. But the prices in those places were high.

Anyway, as soon as they entered this area, one of the black market officials approached Vicente and the young man's subordinate.

"Young master, what are you looking for today? We have some beautiful women with us here. We also have some special magical creatures that can do a lot of interesting things."

Chapter 558 The Black Market?

When confronted by the clerk of this particular store, Vicente handled the matter as if he was used to doing business there. "I'm not looking for anything in particular. But if something catches my eye, we can do business."

"Oh? So the young master is interested in seeing our catalog?" The salesman didn't find it strange.

The black market was not a continental organization but an association of groups that exploited the parallel trade in various things. Among them were items that were banned from official sale or at

least restricted from sale. Not only that but items were also traded at a discount due to non-payment of taxes by the forces behind the black market itself.

But the black market in Saltstar City and the one in this city weren't necessarily part of the same organization. They followed similar practices, with the necessary discretion and offering of items that would move the official forces if their contents were made public.

Each area had different groups behind the black market.

As a result, each black market had a different product catalog, and the only way to know if you would find your items of interest in a particular place was to go there and see it for yourself.

Black markets didn't advertise what they had. If they did, they would surely get into trouble with the authorities. They kept their products hidden in their stalls, where not everyone could enter.

How did they choose who could come and go from such a place? That was the duty of the many guards who would guard any unit similar to the one Vicente had entered moments ago.

Official forces would never be allowed to enter the black market with identification or their public identities. But people who were unknown or hiding their identities could come and go with relative ease, depending on the type of item being sold in outposts like the one in this city.

How could this not cause problems for groups like those behind the local black market? Because members of the official forces needed to have groups at their disposal willing to sell special products without the high cost of the places that paid taxes.

The state itself had its rules and was harmed by forces using the black market, but people in general benefited greatly from the existence of such places.

So, it wasn't interesting for people from the official forces to fight against such places.

Since black market businesses were often very discreet and unspoken, there was no evidence of their actions to justify the action of the official forces.

Vicente knew how the black market worked because his family had at least three black market stores in Scott Province.

The only business he wasn't involved in was the trade of living beings, which, by the way, didn't violate his principles. The only reason he hadn't sold slaves before was a lack of opportunity.

So he looked at the creatures in the market cells with interest.

'Most of them are human, but there are also some monsters for sale... I didn't expect to find that.' Vicente thought as he looked at three cells next to each other, where a Lamia, a Goblin, and a Minotaur were.

Torne looked in the direction Vicente was looking and said. 'Magicians hoard all sorts of things, master. It may seem odd to buy a Minotaur, for example, but there are those who are interested in it.

Some will simply force such creatures to serve them as warriors, which is easy to do with a contract of slavery. Others will use these creatures in battle arenas, where they can win prizes with their slaves.

Some individuals will do experiments with those creatures, eventually killing them and using their bodies for various purposes.

In short, buying a magical creature is an easy and safe way to get a special creature that is useful in many ways.'

Vicente understood this crucial point. Not everyone had the power to control a special creature, but many might be interested in using it. At the same time, there were certainly hunters who were willing to collect creatures to sell in places like this.

'That makes sense. I've heard that Minotaur horns have excellent medicinal properties.' Vicente looked at the horrible creature in one of the cells.

'Yes, not just its horns, its entire body. The eyes of a Minotaur can improve the eyesight of a sick person, its tongue can be refined into a powerful stimulant, and its testicles are said to be powerful and miraculous. Even a sterile old man might have a chance to regain his virility after eating the testicles of a Minotaur.'

'That's a bit disgusting.' Vicente joked.

'Magicians are people who would eat horse manure if they're told it might benefit them, master.'
Torne laughed.

After walking around the place for a while, Vicente tossed a bag of coins to the black-market employee accompanying him and asked.

"My friend, an acquaintance of mine came through here several times recently. Can you tell me what he was doing here?"

Vicente showed the portrait of Casey's father to the man, who quickly changed his expression.

"Young master, I don't want any trouble." The man said as he put the gold coins Vicente had given him into his spatial ring. "But since you're quite generous, I'll tell you this. He was looking for humans. He didn't find what he wanted and took something else instead. But I can't talk about that."

"I see..."

"But I don't know about this person, young master. He seemed strange. And the times he came here, he spoke to several of our slaves, but only one of them spoke to him more than once."

Vicente looked in the direction the man indicated, where the Lamia was.

The woman-like creature, lying on the floor of her cell, had her eyes wide open, scanning her surroundings as if preparing to make a move.

Vicente approached the creature, famous for its seductive powers but also for its monstrous abilities and thirst for blood.

He looked at her in silence, noting that this creature's 2nd-

stage cultivation was capable of hiding her true face from those weaker than her, but not from someone of Vicente's level.

'What would a creature like that have to attract Casey's father?'

There was no point in questioning this creature. It would only obey him if he bought her. However, the price of a 2nd-stage Lamia wasn't low enough for Vicente to buy her just to answer that question!

For 4,000 gold coins, Vicente would never buy this creature!

The Lamia looked Vicente in the eye but was not impressed. Many men came to her without her trying to seduce them.

'That smell...' She closed her eyes and took in the scent emanating from his body. 'That is the smell of a great talent!'

"What do you want, human? Do you want my body or something else?" She asked, wondering what to do with this human. "Say what you want. I'll help you make the choice you need."

Chapter 559 Going to Casey?

Vicente didn't want to ask this creature any questions because she had no reason to answer him. But since the Lamia was talking to him, he had no reason to ignore her.

He showed her the portrait of Casey's father and asked. "I heard that this man came to see you several times recently. What did you talk about? Do you know anything pertinent about him?"

Looking at the portrait of Casey's father, the woman narrowed her eyes, and slowly, a smile formed on her lips.

"Him? Why do you want to know about him?" She looked Vicente in the eyes with interest.

"I don't know him, but he's planning something against one of my men." Vicente didn't lie.

"He is indeed up to something, haha." She laughed in agreement. "But boy, is it worth it for you? I'll give you a tip because you are cute. Don't get close to that person, or you'll regret it."

"Why?" Vicente made a strange expression.

She gave him a smile and said nothing about what he wanted to know.

"What did you talk about?" Vicente changed his question.

"Nothing much. He was looking for preys. I told him about the people in this place and led him to better preys." She looked around and said mischievously. "There are hardly any interesting people here. This place sucks."

Vicente clenched his fists when he realized she wouldn't give him anything useful and turned to leave.

But the Lamia called out to him. "Hey, kid, why don't you buy me?" She smiled at him as she leaned seductively against the bars of her cell.

Even though she was in this terrible place, poorly dressed, she was still provocative enough to stimulate the male desires of a man like Vicente.

Vicente looked at her and realized why Lamias were so dangerous.

"Not today, Lamia."

She laughed as she answered him. "I hope you don't regret it... But don't forget what I said, boy. Put this person aside and do something else with your life."

After walking away from the cell where the Lamia was, Vicente's subordinate took a deep breath and said to the black market employee. "Damn. What's wrong with this place? Why weren't that woman's powers blocked by her cell? I was about to lose control of my senses!"

The vendor bitterly laughed. "Actually, her powers are very much suppressed. If it weren't for our formations, she probably would have hypnotized all of us."

"Just looking at her, I feel something strange... She looks so beautiful." Vicente's subordinate commented.

Vicente looked at this guy and said. "If you were alone in a room with her, she'd devour your body, Peter. She doesn't want you the way you want her."

"I know. That's why it's so weird..."

"Sigh, thanks for your help anyway." Vicente turned to the vendor and shook the man's hand. "My friend and I have other local businesses to attend to. Maybe we'll come back another day and buy something."

"Hmm, I hope to see you again."

Vicente and his subordinate left the shop while Torne warned his master.

'That Lamia knew something.' The ghost said in Vicente's mind. 'She didn't warn you to help you, master. She probably wanted to pique your interest to get you to go to that man. The Lamia must have sensed that your talent isn't as simple as your gem shows.'

'Is that so? She didn't seem to be lying.' Vicente asked as he had analyzed various signs on the woman's body, looking for something that would tell him if she was telling the truth.

But he hadn't found anything that said she had lied.

'It is possible that she used the truth to ensure that you would go to this person. Didn't she talk about preys? Maybe she saw you as an interesting target for Casey's father.' Torne considered the possibility.

'It is possible...' Vicente remained silent as he walked beside his subordinate. 'But Casey is precious. Everything will be easier if I can have him by my side when I go after Lauren.'

'Of course. The boy's mental abilities are impressive. If he can become a Sovereign by the time you go in search of Lauren, he'll be able to obtain important facts that even Paragons have difficulty accessing.' Torne didn't disagree.

'That's why I can't give up on him now. When I realize that the danger of saving him is too great, I might even back down and give up. But now is not the time.' Vicente felt confident to solve this matter. 'That Lamia may be plotting against me. But she doesn't know my true power.'

Torne said nothing more while Vicente's mind was made up.

...

After returning to the rest of the investigators in the city, Vicente did not hesitate to leave the city with his companion. In contrast, the three investigators went in the opposite direction, back to the Seidel Kingdom.

Vicente and Layla followed the last clues they had about Casey's father. That was already one of the strongest areas in the state, so the two of them had to be more careful from now on.

In this state, the number of places where 4th-stage magical beings existed was much higher than in the Seidel Kingdom.

While there would be one or two areas where Sovereigns could be found in each province in the Seidel Kingdom, there were Sovereigns in practically every forest and area that was not inhabited by humans in the Chutha Dynasty.

One had to be very careful when making long journeys in this state. People traveling between cities usually had to use roads, as alternative routes were too risky.

Vicente and Layla hadn't used roads for part of their journey to the last city they had stopped in. But from now on, they would do so whenever possible, already aware of the great risks of the area they were passing through.

And so the next few days of their journey would pass quickly. Without knowing it, they were getting very close to Casey!

But they weren't just getting closer to Casey. As they deliberately follow the last traces left by Casey's father, the two naturally get closer to this person.

Casey had no idea what he was being drawn to, and even if Vicente and Layla were suspicious, they had no idea what they were in for.

But at this point in their journey, they could do nothing to change their fate. In the next few hours, they would finally face the problem they had been lured into for the past few weeks!

Chapter 560 Bad Feeling?

In the middle of a fog-covered forest area, the night seemed rather evil that day, with moderate rain falling over one of the many forests in the central mountains of the Chutha Dynasty.

In one part of this forest, there was a place where there were hardly any magical beings around a peak that was about a kilometer high between its lowest and highest points.

In the middle of the peak, which covered an area larger than Saltstar City, was a relatively large cave with torches partially illuminating the surroundings.

As one moved further into the cave, one would see blood flowing from the inside of the cave toward the exit, where rain washed away the blood flowing down the side of the cave.

Meanwhile, screams of pain were coming from inside the cave, where a man with long white hair, tattoos on his body, and tanned skin was standing, waiting for the words of the man behind the screams and blood in the area.

If Vicente had come face to face with this man, he would have been shocked to see someone so similar to Casey!

The only difference between Casey and this person was his age, visible in the man's experienced eyes, but also in the signs of his wrinkles and white hair.

As he waited, an evil voice came from the cave's depths. "Joseph, the last group you brought me is far below my needs. Perhaps you have lost your value to me?"

Joseph shuddered as he heard this and replied. "Not at all! I'm bringing the master a few more people. They should be here soon."

"But will they make up for this latest failure?" The voice asked. "If it doesn't pay off, I'll have to use you next time."

Gulp!

"It will pay off for sure." He replied, trying to stay where he was. "I am an old man without much time or opportunity, master. But the people who are coming to us are young and full of vitality. You will not be disappointed with the next group."

"Let me know when they arrive. Let's see what your next gifts will be."

After that, the screams inside the cave resumed as Casey's father appeared outside the cave, ignoring the rain.

'Casey, you should have forgotten about me.' Joseph thought to himself, "Since you haven't forgotten me, help your old man live a little longer!"

...

Meanwhile, not far from the cave, Casey was climbing the peak he had just reached, following in his old man's footsteps.

Casey was currently a Mid-level Mage and had the ideal configuration of pentagrams: a red, an orange, and a yellow.

That was nothing compared to Vicente's set of pentagrams, but it was excellent for a man of just over 20.

Since his ability was very unusual, it had given him a lot of confidence, which made him go in search of his father as soon as he had finished absorbing his third pentagram.

On that day about a year ago, he had successfully strengthened himself with a new pentagram and found traces of his father after years of not hearing from the man.

As someone who wanted his father dead as much as Vicente wanted revenge on those responsible for Kate's death, Casey didn't hesitate to begin the journey that was about to end.

As he climbed the peak, he couldn't help but remember his little sister killed by Joseph, feeling stronger as his heart shook with hatred for his father.

'Joseph, just wait for me! I'll turn you into a vegetable, just like you did with Ruby!' He clenched his fists in hate and walked off into the rain, not caring about the terrible feeling in the surrounding area.

...

As Casey was approaching the cave where his old man was waiting for him and Vicente's men, Vicente and Layla started to climb the peak.

'Master, something's wrong.' Torne alerted his master when he felt an evil aura that even he felt threatened by.

But Torne didn't have to say anything. The moment Vicente and Layla started to climb the peak, they noticed the same sensation coming from that place.

Vicente felt less bothered by the sensation, but even he noticed that what was there was not simple.

As for Layla, as a magician of the Light Path, she was the most affected of the three, and she immediately began to tremble at the sensation coming from the cave where Joseph's master was.

"What is it?" She looked at Vicente in doubt, as she had never felt anything like this before. "This is worse than what we felt in The Skull City. It's like death itself is on this peak!"

Vicente looked at the peak in front of him, seeing only a few meters ahead due to the fog in the area. "This feeling... What kind of magical being could create that?"

Then he remembered what the Lamia had told him and realized that she really had told him the truth.

"What has Casey's father gotten himself into?" He worried.

But then Torne said in his mind. 'I found your friend Casey, master. He's a little ahead of us. But he's already too close to the source of this evil feeling. We can no longer save him without risking ourselves as well.'

Vicente clenched his fists, feeling the doubt between abandoning Casey after all the way here and risking a little more.

'Damn it!' He closed his eyes and said to Layla. "You should go back. I'll keep going."

"What? Why?" She asked, not understanding why he wanted to go on alone.

"It will be too risky, Layla. You'd better not go with me."

"What about you?"

"I owe Casey a debt. He helped Nina in the past, so I'll help him this time."

Layla grabbed one of Vicente's shoulders and said. "That's not proportional at all. Casey wouldn't ask you to do this."

"But I'm going to do it anyway. If I can save him, I can benefit from his help in the future." Vicente commented as he took a step forward.

"Then I'll go too." She stepped forward as well, making Vicente stop and look into her eyes.

"I may not be able to protect you."

"Tsk! Are you worried about me?" She looked into his eyes, so close to Vicente that she could feel his breath.

"You don't have to risk your life for me." He said seriously.

"If I don't have to do that, what kind of companion am I?" She asked him seriously. "I may not agree with you on many things, but as long as we're traveling together, I'll do my best to help you, just as you've already done for me.

If you're going, I'm going too. There's no debate about it. Either we go back together, or we go on together!"

Vicente smiled when he saw the determination in the gray-

haired woman's eyes. He moved closer and touched one of her cheeks while his other arm went around her waist.

"If we survive this, I'll make you my woman."

Having said that, Vicente kissed Layla's pink lips, surprising her. She hadn't expected it, but she didn't refuse. When she felt his tongue enter her mouth, she let go for a moment and kissed for the first time in her life.