

From Outcast to Overlord The Unyielding Heir (Leander Ashcroft)

Chapter 411

Margot's expression turned, her face marked with disdain and a mocking grin. Her tone clearly indicated that she doesn't care about Leander entirely.

She grabbed her purse and marched up to the second floor with a flick of her wrist, and her frustration was evident.

"This child!" Gemma felt utterly embarrassed but found no words to express his feelings.

Stella frowned deeply, completely perplexed.

She had assumed that Margot would be thrilled to see him again, but this reaction was completely unexpected.

"Leander, we really indulged that girl too much. Don't take it personally," Francis said to Leander with an apologetic tone.

He merely smiled softly, seemingly unfazed. "Mr. Wilson, you're being overly serious. I've always regarded Margot as a little sister. She's grown up now-having a bit of attitude is to be expected."

Nearby, Gemma sighed heavily. The once-vibrant and charming younger daughter had transformed into a rebellious and jaded version, and it pained her heart.

After dinner, he lingered to chat with Gemma and the others, sharing bits and pieces about his life over the past eight years. He avoided mentioning the martial world or the Jeff Enterprises, simply glossing over those details with a casual remark about being away from school.

It wasn't until eleven at night that he and Daphne returned to the guest room that Gemma had arranged for them.

Inside the guest room, Daphne's heart raced noticeably. This was her first time alone with a man in a closed space, and when she noticed there was only one bed, her cheeks flushed with shyness.

"Hah, so Dani can feel bashful too?" he said with a smile. "How about this-you take the bed while I sleep on the floor."

Suddenly, she flashed him a charming smile and wrapped her arms around his neck. The most update novels are published on

"You're the one who called me your future wife. What kind of wife would I be if I let my husband sleep on the floor?" she questioned.

Leander chuckled, put an arm around her waist, and lay down with her on the bed. The atmosphere was warm and tender.

"Ander..." Daphne's voice was gentle as she inquired, "Why do I have the feeling that both sisters in this house have feelings for you?"

Leander couldn't help but laugh. "What are you saying? Stella and Margot were merely friends I grew up with. And then there's Madeline too—the four of us were the closest kids in the neighborhood back then."

Daphne playfully tapped his nose and huffed. "As a woman, I understand how women think much better than you!

"Just look at the way Stella gazes at you. She may have a fiancé, but the attachment in her eyes when she sees you? That's genuine.

"And as for Margot-when she spotted you just now, I noticed a brief spark of surprise and joy in her gaze. She only stormed off when she saw me there," she declared.

His expression became slightly perplexed. "Since when did my Dani start noticing things like this?"

She laughed. "Why wouldn't I? My Ander is so remarkable—who knows how many girls are secretly interested in you? I need to keep an eye out and identify potential rivals. Even if I eventually became best friends with them, I should at least get myself ready mentally, right?"

He couldn't resist giving her a light tap on her forehead. "You little troublemaker, when did you start overthinking things? What do you mean by rivals and best friends?

"Aside from practicing martial arts and spiritual strength, all of my feelings belong to you. There's no space for anyone else. After waiting for me all these years, how could I allow you to get hurt?" he explained.

He softly kissed her forehead and chuckled. "Get some rest. We have to attend Stella's engagement ceremony tomorrow!"

Daphne felt a warm sweetness fill her heart. She nodded slightly, and soon enough, her breathing became slow and regular.

Leander raised his hand slightly, channeling a strand of Nirvana Energy into her body and sealing off all five of her senses so she wouldn't be disturbed. Only then did he quietly get up and exit the guest room.

On the rooftop of the Dale family's four-story villa, Margot, wrapped in a light jacket, leaned against the railing while staring blankly into the night.

"Leander?" she whispered to herself and then let out a heavy, cold snort. "Back then, you just vanished without a word. Now you return with some random girl from who-knows-where... What a joke."

Margot pulled out a cigarette and was about to light it when a long, pale hand reached over and took it away.

"Girls really shouldn't smoke," Leander suggested.

Surprised, she turned her head and saw a tall figure standing beside her. Leander had already come up to the rooftop and was holding her cigarette between his fingers.

She stared at him for a few seconds, then turned away, looking sulky. "Whether I choose to smoke is my own issue. Not even my parents can control me who do you think you are?"

He remained calm and didn't get angry. He simply flicked his fingers, sending the cigarette flying away.

"The Margot I remember would never talk to me in this way. It seems you have changed quite a bit in these eight years," he said.

His gaze suddenly hardened, and his tone turned noticeably colder. "Why are you smoking? Why are you hanging out with those delinquent boys? The Margot I knew understood right from wrong."

He had sensed her presence on the rooftop long ago. His reason for coming up was his concern that a childhood friend might stray down a bad path and ruin her life.

"Don't talk to me as if you're giving a lecture to a child. You really think I still view you as a brother or something?" Margot raised an eyebrow, filled with disdain. "Yeah, I

once looked at you as my.

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fact, I even considered you as a

potential brother-in-law."

"But eight years ago, you disappeared without a single word and never returned. From that moment on, I decided I would never take anything you said seriously again!" she shouted.

"After I went off to school, my world

expanded. I experienced more, learned more, and came to realize that all the lessons you taught me back then were just childish. Idolizing you was merely a phase of being young and naive." She folded her arms, speaking with an air of self-importance.

"Given that we grew up together, I can still refer to you as brother out of respect. But if you're here to scold my parent's on my behalf, you can forget about it. Back in the day, I listened to you. You were the one person I trusted the most. But that was a long time ago!

"Now? You're no longer my idol!" she snapped.

She pivoted away from the railing, leaning against it with a subtle smile tugging at the corners of her lips, exuding that wild, wandering-swordswoman aura.

"Take my sister's fiancé as an example—my future brother-in-law. In terms of wealth or status, he's far superior to you. Yet, I have no respect for him whatsoever. If he doesn't have the right to lecture me, why should you think you do?" Margot asked. Leander's lips turned upward slightly, his expression inscrutable. He replied evenly, "So you're implying that you'll only listen if I earn your respect—if I reclaim the title of your 'idol'?"

Margot didn't try to conceal it. She extended her hands. "Naturally!

"If you expect me to admire you, then you'd better be one of three things: incredibly wealthy, managing tens of billions in assets; occupying a high-ranking position with authority; or an absolute powerhouse capable of taking on a hundred men single-handedly."

She shot him a sideways glance filled with disdain. "Leander, the only reason I looked up to you before was due to my naivety and inexperience with the world. Do you honestly think that, as you are now, I would still idolize you blindly?" Everything she expressed that evening was the release of eight years of pent-up resentment over his abrupt disappearance. It was immensely gratifying. "Tens of billions, controlling a territory, and unbeatable in combat, huh?" Leander's lips curled into a mischievous smirk.

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Chapter 412

Leander leaned against the railing, and his black hair whipped wildly in the night

breeze. "So you're saying that if someone can pull off just one of those things, you'd actually respect them?"

Margot crossed her arms. She was only sixteen, but tall and striking, almost giving Stella a run for her money.

She tilted her head toward him, and for a moment, caught his deep eyes glinting in the darkness. Her expression faltered slightly.

A few seconds later, she lifted her chin with a haughty tilt. "Yeah. So which one of them do you think you can actually do?"

From the start, she had spoken to Leander with pure disdain, like he was nothing to her.

There was a time when she had looked up to him, treated him like the gold

standard, and admired everything about him. But then he disappeared without a word. That had planted a tiny seed of resentment in her heart. Later, when she went off to the city for school, she saw and experienced so much more. That's when it hit her—Leander was just some guy with no family, no transparent background, nothing like the big names at her school or the respected figures she'd known on the streets. He wasn't worth her admiration at all.

After seeing him now, all she felt was that she'd been played. And part of her wanted to unleash all those years of bottled-up feelings. It was almost like revenge.

Leander chuckled softly, saying nothing. He shifted, leaning casually against the railing, a slight smirk tugging at his lips. "You speak so plainly, so organized. Sounds like there's someone you do admire. Hudson? Tens of millions in the bank, his family ranked in the top twenty wealthiest in the county, and he still doesn't impress you. Now I'm curious—who does?"

Margot scoffed, waving a hand dismissively. "Hudson? He's nothing special. Sure, he's loaded, but big deal. Tens of millions? That's not even real money in my world. At my school in the city, most of my classmates have at least five people in their families worth over a hundred million. If you want me to actually admire someone, Hudson's not even close."

She lifted a slender and graceful finger. Her eyes were sparkling with an unusual light. "If there's anyone I really admire, it's got to be the big shot of Ascendia— Gumus!"

"Gumus?" Leander's brow twitched. His expression shifted into something hard to read.

"Absolutely!"

Margot's voice took on a playful lilt as she went on. "Gumus is Ascendia's top-tier boss. Look at the whole Mornwick power rankings he could easily snag a top-five spot. He controls billions in assets and serves as the chief operating officer of Ascendia under Jeff Enterprises. Connections, money, influence—he's got it all. Even the dads of some of my classmates who come from powerful families treat him with kid gloves, pouring him drinks and showing respect. And the biggest thing? He works directly for Mr. Ashcroft of Mornwick—he's one of Mr. Ashcroft's men!"

She shot Leander a side glance. After seeing his confused expression, she rushed to clarify. "Mr. Ashcroft is the underground king of Mornwick, ruling all the big players in the city. One man holds an entire province under his thumb. Guys like Tommy from Southridge, Frankie from Ravenridge, and even Gumus from Ascendia—they all fall in line for him. Being connected to him, even just as a subordinate, makes you elite. Gumus works for Mr. Ashcroft, backed by Jeff Enterprises, and he's got insane connections and influence of his own. That's the kind of person I really admire!"

Leander slipped one hand into his pocket, shaking his head with a faint smile. "I thought you meant someone else... turns out it's Gumus."

His tone was casual, almost understated, with a hint of an unreadable smirk. Margot's brow furrowed. "What's that supposed to mean? From the way you say it... are you saying you're even tougher than Gumus?"

Leander didn't answer right away. He just stretched his neck a little. "Here's the deal, Margot. Let's make a bet. Tomorrow, after Stella's engagement party, if I can prove to you that I can impress you—make you genuinely admire me then from that moment on, you do exactly what I say. Deal?"

Margot sized him up from head to toe and burst out laughing when she noticed his outfit barely cost five hundred bucks. "Leander, do you really think I'm still that little girl who used to follow you around like a puppy?"

Her expression was proud and regal, like that of a haughty phoenix.

"Fine, since you want a bet, let's do it! If you can actually impress me, I'll follow your word without question. Whatever you tell me to do, I'll do it, no arguments. You don't even have to reach Gumus-level heights. Just hit about eighty percent of what Gumus's eldest, Howard, has achieved, and I'll see you as my idol. I'll listen to everything you say."

Her eyes narrowed slightly, a sly smile tugging at her lips. "But if you fail, then I want you to break up with that girl from earlier and spend three days at Ascendia with me. Do you dare take that bet?"

This girl, her temper really isn't anything like it was when she was a kid!

Leander suppressed a smirk, though his expression remained calm. He nodded lightly. "It's a deal."

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The next day, around noon, Daphne finally stirred awake. The sounds of commotion from outside the room immediately reached her ears.

She opened her eyes to find Leander sitting at the edge of the bed. His deep, clear eyes fixed on her. "You're awake. How'd you sleep last night?"

Daphne stretched a little and felt her whole body loosen up. It was the best she'd slept in ages.

"Wow, I don't think I've ever slept that well."

Leander brushed a hand across her forehead and gave her a small smile.

"Come on. Let's head out-all of Mdm. Murphy's relatives are already here. It's

Stella's big day, so we should at least show up for a bit." This content belongs to

Daphne agreed and got dressed before heading out with him.

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Gemma's place was huge-four full floors and an expansive open yard that had to be close to a hundred

square meters. Long tables weret

already set up

ywhere ten

people to a table. The whole place felt like a countryside wedding feast.

"Leander, Daphne. You're finally up!"

Gemma's expression was bright with excitement. When she spotted them, she waved them over.

"Come on. I'll take you to the second floor. You can sit with Margot. A few of her classmates are coming too. You guys will fill a table just right."

Leander nodded and followed her upstairs to the living room. Margot was already there with a group of sixteen and seventeen-year-old girls, chattering away.

They were all dressed similarly. Think nightclub-queen energy. Way too mature and way too bold for their age.

When Margot saw Leander and Daphne come up, she curled her tip

a little. Her besties shot them quick side glances but the moment they noticed how tall and handsome Leander was, their eyes lit right up.

"Margot, Leander is a guest. You're the host, so make sure you look after them."

Gemma reminded her before hurrying back downstairs.

The moment she disappeared, Margot's besties pounced with teasing voices.

"Girl, you didn't tell us you had a friend this good-looking."

"Were you planning to hide him for yourself or what?"

These high school girls spoke without a filter. Bold, loud, and not even pretending to care that Daphne was sitting right there.

"You id*ots, what are you even talking about?" Margot snapped, her cheeks warming for once. She shot them a glare, then turned to Leander with a half-smile.

"Leander, didn't you say you wanted

me to behave and take school

seriously? You now have an audience. Why don't you show my besties what's so impressive about you that I should look up to you?"

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Chapter 413

Margot walked in like she owned the place, eyes locked straight on him, with her besties trailing behind her. They all had that teasing little smirk going on while they checked Leander out.

"Hey, pretty boy. That's a big mouth you've got. You seriously think you can get Margot to look up to you?"

"You do know who you're talking about, right? In our circle, Margot's basically the queen of attitude. Even those big-name guys at school chased her for months and she didn't spare a single one a real glance. Where exactly did you find that kind of courage?"

Their voices were light and playful, every sentence dripping with amusement. Margot might have dressed like a rebellious club girl and hung out late at night with them, but her looks alone made half the school lose their minds. She was tall and striking, carried herself like she was above everyone else, and she could sing like she was born for the stage. Students loved her, good ones and troublemakers alike.

Basketball captains, the student council president, guys who walked the halls like they ran the whole campus. Everyone of them had a soft spot for her. She floated around them whenever she felt like it and never bothered to be nice to any of them.

So when some random guy suddenly showed up and claimed he could make Margot respect him, the girls thought it was hilarious.

Leander didn't react to their little jabs at all. His expression barely moved. "This is Stella's engagement party. After it's over, I'll show you I meant what I said."

He leaned back, hands behind his head, and closed his eyes like he had better things to do.

The girls snorted and turned away. Margot shrugged, completely unfazed.

She had gotten used to being the center of attention these days. Being chased by every so-called campus hotshot made her feel like she was floating above ground.

She glanced at Daphne and gave her a sly grin. "So, Daphne, Leander made a bet with me last night. If he loses, he has to break up with you and take me to Ascendia for three whole days. You nervous yet?"

Daphne's smile barely moved. Leander had already told her everything on the way over.

She shook her head lightly. Her voice stayed calm. "Margot, if you really have what it takes to beat him, he can follow you around for three days or thirty. Makes no difference to me."

Margot's excitement fizzled out in an instant. She clicked her tongue, annoyed that her little taunt didn't land. Before she could say anything else, the sound of a big-displacement engine rumbled outside.

Margot's besties ran to the window. One of them gasped. "Margot, it's Basim Horton and Cain Shaw. They're here!"

Margot didn't even flinch. "So what. Let them come up. Safa, go get them."

The girl practically skipped down the stairs. A few minutes later, she came back with two high school boys in tow.

They looked sixteen or seventeen. Their faces were still a little boyish, but they were both stupidly good-looking—the kind of soft-featured, charming boys who made girls blush without trying.

They were dressed sharply. One in black, and one in white. Both in tailored suits. One wore a Jaeger LeCoultre. The other had a Rolex on his wrist. Both watches cost well into the tens of thousands. They looked polished, rich, and effortless. Margot's besties stared at them with eyes shining like they had just walked into a dream.

"Margot, today's Stella's engagement party. This is from me." The guy in the white suit gave her a warm, breezy smile. He pulled out a thick cash gift that clearly held several tens of thousands.

The guy in the black suit took a quick step forward. "Margot, I've got something for her too."

Their generosity made a few girls nearby stare with barely hidden envy.

"Alright. Thanks, both of you. I'll keep these for Stella first."

Margot stayed calm, tucked the cash gifts against her chest, and then handed them to Gemma a few minutes later when Gemma and some relatives arrived with dishes.

Gemma weighed the cash gifts in her hands, and her expression changed right away. When she heard they came from two young men, her expression lit up, and she greeted them enthusiastically.

The two boys didn't care much for talking to someone like Gemma, a blunt countrywoman, but because Margot was standing there, they still managed to force polite smiles.

After Gemma left, Margot turned to Leander. "Right, Leander. Let me introduce you."

She pointed at the guy in white. "This is Basim. He's the president of our student council. His dad is Zean Horton, the chairman of Broadview Trading Co. in Ascendia."

Then she gestured toward the guy in black. "And this is Cain, our basketball team captain. His family owns the Crown Regent Hotel in Ascendia. It's a five-star place and his dad runs it."

Basim and Cain came from influential families. At school, they were basically campus celebrities. People paid attention to them, and they carried themselves like

it.

Other than sparing a glance at Margot because she was gorgeous, they barely acknowledged Leander. He wasn't worth their time.

Leander looked at them when he heard their names. He only gave a small, easy smile and nodded. He didn't even bother saying hello.

Basim and Cain froze for a second, and their brows pulled together.

With backgrounds like theirs, regular people usually tried to be at least somewhat polite. Even if they didn't grovel, they would still greet them properly. Yet Leander acted like he couldn't care less about who they were. His attitude felt even more aloof than theirs. It left them annoyed.

Margot's lashes fluttered. A hint of disappointment crossed her eyes.

For years, she hadn't focused on school. She had drifted around bars and clubs, spending most of her time having fun. Even so, she was sharp and understood social rules far better than most people.

She used to think of Leander as an idol. After years apart, she believed that even if his life hadn't gone perfectly, he would at least know how to read a room. He should have known how to handle people.

But the way he acted now felt more immature than charming. It didn't impress her. It almost felt laughable.

She opened her mouth to say something. Before she could speak, the sound of engines came from outside.

A convoy of ten luxury cars rolled in. BMWs and Mercedes, all top-tier models worth over a million each, moved in a straight line and pulled up right in front of Gemma's house.

A young man stepped out of the first car. He looked around twenty-three or twenty-four. He had a refined face and gold wire glasses that gave him a scholarly, cultured

air.

Next to him stood a middle-aged man in a gold embroidered suit. His expression was stern, and his presence felt overwhelming even though he didn't say a word.

Behind them, over twenty black suited bodyguards lined up in formation. The sight alone was enough to make the entire yard go silent.

Margot stood by the window, a soft smile playing on her lips. "Look, Hudson and the others are here!"

The group of besties froze for a moment, their expressions lighting up with envy. "Wow, what a scene! I heard Hudson's family is loaded-Stella's really lucky!"

"Seriously, I'd be thrilled if my wedding had even half of this!"

Basim and Cain exchanged subtle glances, clearly surprised. They hadn't expected Stella's fiancée's family to be so well-established.

Only Leander and Daphne stayed put, completely unmoved.

From downstairs came a rising hum of voices—Gemma calling out, people toasting, and congratulations ringing through the air.

About ten minutes later, footsteps echoed from the stairs. Gemma appeared, followed by a group of people, who made their way to the second floor.

Stella wore a striking gold dress today, accompanied by a floral crown on her head and delicate makeup on her face, which gave her an air of effortless elegance. Standing beside her was a sharp-dressed, elegant young man. Together, they looked perfectly matched.

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"Hudson, these are Margot's classmates!" Gemma introduced. The young man raised his glass to them, and they quickly clinked back.

After finishing a drink, Gemma turned to Leander. "This is Leander, Stella's childhood friend. He hasn't seen Stella in years but I made sure he stayed to join your

engagement party. Hudson, he's one of Stella's closest friends, so you two had better share a proper toast!"

At those words, Hudson's expression shifted instantly. "Leander?"

He had heard that name from Stella more than once, especially before he had a chance to win her heart. Stella's roommate had once told him that Leander held a very special place in Stella's heart.

Ever since then, Hudson had kept that name in the back of his mind, though he'd never actually met him. He had never thought much of it.

And now, at this engagement party, here he was-face to face with the person Stella clearly thought of often.

His eyes flickered as he studied Leander. Then he grinned and extended his hand. "Nice to meet you, Leander. I'm Stella's fiance, Hudson. I've heard a lot about you!"

Leander didn't hesitate. He smiled and shook Hudson's hand.

The moment their hands met, a sharp glint flashed in Hudson's eyes. Suddenly, he gripped harder, and his hand pressed with force.

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Chapter 414

The moment Hudson's hand met Leander's, he surged with force.

He wasn't just some college kid from a top university. He came from a well-off family and had been training under an Aikido Master since he was a kid. His martial arts skills were already razor-sharp. At full strength, he could easily crush a brick with his bare hands.

But he didn't go all out. He only applied a bit of pressure, just enough to make Leander flinch or let out a grunt. Yet Leander didn't even flinch. Not a twitch, not a hint of discomfort.

"Huh?" Hudson's brow lifted in surprise. With his current strength, most trained fighters would be sweating bullets under even this small resistance. But Leander's hand didn't

push back at all. It was like the force on his hand didn't even register. After seeing Leander remain perfectly calm, Hudson couldn't help but push a little harder.

No matter how much he pressed, Leander's palm was like a rock-unyielding, unreactive. Just as Hudson was about to unleash his full strength, his hand hit empty air. Leander had pulled back, effortlessly, before he even realized it.

Hudson's mind went blank for a split second. He had practically gone all out, yet Leander had withdrawn without breaking a sweat. His chest tightened with a mix of awe and alarm.

This is a real expert!

Training under an Aikido Master kicked in instinctively, and his sense of danger spiked instantly.

Leander's expression remained unreadable. He glanced at Hudson, then took the cup from Stella's hand and drank it down in one go. "Congratulations, Stella!"

He offered his congratulations to Stella and then shifted his gaze to Hudson. A faint smile tugged at his lips. His voice was low, almost a whisper, meant only for Hudson. New novel chapters are published on

"You're Stella's fiance. Out of respect for her, I let it slide this time. Don't forget. There won't be a second chance."

Leander had felt Hudson's strength the instant he moved. Anyone else and Leander would have crushed their bones instantly. But today was Stella's engagement party. Hudson was her fiance. Looking at Gemma, he could see how fond she was of Hudson. So he let Hudson off this one time.

Still, Leander was puzzled by the sheer hostility Hudson had aimed at him from the start.

Hudson's expression darkened at Leander's words, a storm brewing behind his eyes. He had crossed paths with numerous people in the counties under Ascendia, constantly emerging victorious. But facing Leander was different. For the first time, he felt completely off balance.

He didn't reply. He simply locked eyes with Leander, storing every detail in his memory, then followed Gemma and Stella to continue the toasts elsewhere.

"All right, everyone, let's eat!"

No one had any idea what had just happened, except for Daphne, who had sensed something off.

Margot waved her hand casually, signaling everyone to start. Just as the food was about to be served, a deafening crash shook the air.

Boom!

The sound came from the village entrance. Something heavy had toppled over, sending a cloud of dust shooting into the sky.

Then chaos erupted-shouting, cursing, fighting. The noise from the village entrance was wild and disorderly.

"The thugs are back! Folks, we need to go out!"

Villagers who had been drinking and laughing at the engagement party went pale. In an instant, everyone sprang to their feet and rushed outside. Francis, the host, didn't hold back. He grabbed a hoe by the gate and ran toward the commotion alongside the others.

"Margot, what's going on?" Basim turned to her, clearly puzzled.

"Those unscrupulous developers again. They couldn't buy our village, so now they're trying this!"

"Let's go. We need to see what's happening!"

Margot shot up out of her seat, and her group of besties, all fiery-tempered like her, quickly followed.

Basim and Cain's minds raced. Finally, a chance to show off had arrived. They scrambled to their feet and chased after her. What was supposed to be a perfectly normal engagement party suddenly turned into a ghost town, with hardly anyone left at the tables.

"Ander, should we check it out?" Daphne tilted her head, glancing at Leander.

"No need." Leander shook his head

with a faint smile. "Stella's fiance comes from a capable family. Plus, Margot's two senior schoolmates here are both itching to show off in front of her. With them around, doubt anything serious will happen."

He popped a piece of lean meat into his mouth and chewed with obvious pleasure, wholly absorbed in the act of eating.

Daphne watched the man she loved devour his food with a satisfied grin. Her expression lit up with happiness as she quietly stayed by his side.

At the edge of the village, two excavators loomed like beasts. The nearest guesthouse had already been reduced to a heap of rubble. Around the machines, dozens of burly young men stood. Their hair dyed in wild colors-clearly no good guys.

Hundreds of enraged villagers gathered at the village entrance, brandishing hoes and shovels, shouting in fury. Francis stood at the front with a few young men, bellowing out.

"You id*ots! Do you even know this is illegal?"

Francis was livid. The demolished guesthouse belonged to the village chief of Greenstem Village. No one had imagined these people could be so reckless as to act with such madness.

Next to the excavators, a sharply dressed young man stepped forward with a sneer. "We've wasted enough time dealing with you, country bumpkins. My patience already been bought by us, legally. Ever since the day the village was acquired, it's no longer yours to control."

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He raised the documents in his hand and said in a cold voice, "This is my final warning. Move if you need to, leave if you have to. The money will soon be deposited into your account. Today, I intend to level the entire village."

As his words dropped, the excavators started moving forward.

The villagers weren't about to back down. They surged forward, wielding their farming tools to stop the machines.

Bang!

A dull thud rang out. One of the villagers in front groaned, clutching his stomach, and dropped to his knees.

A middle-aged man stood ahead, his hand in his pocket, his eyes icy, looking at everyone with sheer disdain.

"You want to play rough? Fine, I'll give you rough."

Like a whirlwind, he crashed into the crowd. Every punch and kick sent villagers sprawling. Within seconds, more than thirty were injured, crying out and retreating. Francis himself got hit in the shoulder, stumbling backward with a grimace of pain.

"Dad!" Margot and Stella rushed from behind. After seeing Francis hurt, they cried out in shock. Gemma hurried over to support him, panic etched across her expression.

"You're way out of your league!" the middle-aged man sneered, about to strike again, when a commanding voice rang from behind.

"Stop!" Hudson, dressed sharply in a suit, exuded authority as he led a group of over twenty black-clad bodyguards. He stepped in front of the middle-aged man and glanced at the young leader in the distance.

"This is violent demolition. You are breaking the law, understand?" His eyes were cold, his tone firm. "I'm Hudson, general manager of Linus Trading Co. from Dawnmere. My father is Linus Lavette, the chairman of Linus Trading Co. You would be wise to apologize

to the and leave immediately. I will

personally call your company's leadership later. If you keep pushing,

you won't like the consequences."

Every word dripped with authority. Behind him, the bodyguards' expressions were stern, ready for action.

The villagers felt a surge of hope and relief. Stella and Margot's expressions lit up. Hudson's display of strength and his unwavering tone gave them confidence. Gemma, still supporting Francis, couldn't resist showing off to her friends. "This is my son-in-law," she said proudly, beaming.

The opposing group hesitated for a few seconds. Hudson's pride was palpable— he'd grown up in wealth, never faced real hardship, and everything had always gone his way. Anyone would back down at a word from him.

But the leader of the intruders broke the silence with a strange laugh. "Linus Trading Co.? Never heard of it."

He sneered, dismissing Hudson entirely. "A small-town company manager, daring to block Grandhawk Properties? Get out of my way."

In an instant, the air temperature plummeted.

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- Chapter 415

Chapter 415

Hudson froze, and his expression went completely blank. He wasn't the only one. Stella and Margot both stiffened, stunned.

The people in front of them were from Grandhawk Properties. Stella knew the name. It was a newcomer, having only recently stepped into Dawnmere. Sure, Grandhawk Properties had a bunch of thugs and enforcers under them, but on paper, there was no way they could hold a candle to Hudson's Linus Trading Co.

The young man leading the group was just some mid-level figure from Grandhawk. Yet somehow, this kid had the nerve to completely ignore Hudson, the CEO of Linus Trading Co., and even speak to them with utter disrespect. Stella couldn't wrap her head around it.

How does Grandhawk Properties even have this much confidence and guts?

Hudson's eyes went cold. In all his twenty-something years, nobody had ever brushed him off this blatantly.

His expression darkened. His voice dropped to an icy growl. "Grandhawk Properties is barely even standing in Dawnmere. You're not even in the top twenty. I honestly have no idea who filled your head with this kind of confidence. Give me your director's number. I'll talk to him myself. You're not qualified to talk to me."

"Confident?" The young man leading the Grandhawk Properties curled his lip like he was bored. "You're already lucky I'm talking to you. Linus Trading Co. is a third-rate outfit at best. Even Lakeshore Realty Group, the biggest shark in Dawnmere, wouldn't dare meddle in Grandhawk's business. What makes you think you can?"

He shot Hudson a sideways look, tapped his nose, and let out a mocking snort. "Right, I forgot. Linus Trading Co. isn't even on the list of third-rate companies in Mornwick. No wonder you don't get what Grandhawk is built on. Before you stick your nose in our business again, maybe figure out who our chairman is. Otherwise you might end up tanking your own company."

Hudson felt a jolt in his chest. When he came here, he had already checked Grandhawk's file. The company had only set foot in Dawnmere in September, and its CEO was a young, unknown manager. Nothing worth worrying about.

But the tone coming from this guy was that Linus Trading Co. was something he could crush with two fingers. That calm arrogance made Hudson second-guess everything he thought he knew.

While Hudson was still trying to make sense of it, the Grandhawk leader spoke again. "Master Damon, clear them out. They're wasting our time."

The middle-aged man in front nodded once. Then he stepped forward, fast as a pouncing predator.

"What?"

Hudson's stomach dropped. A blur shot straight at him. He tried to throw up an arm, but the punch landed first, slamming into his chest and knocking him backward. He hit the sand hard.

The twenty-some bodyguards around him finally snapped into action. They rushed in together, but Master Damon, Damon Kranz, moved as if he were walking through an empty hallway. One guy was fighting more than twenty. Three moves at most, and bodies were already hitting the ground. Legs twisted. Bones cracked. Screams everywhere.

"A bunch of trash. You think you can lay a hand on me?" Damon stood there like the whole place belonged to him.

Every villager froze. The crowd fell silent. They wanted to protect their home, but they weren't idiots.

Those bodyguards looked like hardened fighters. Even then, more than twenty of them together got wiped out by one man. If the villagers jumped in, they'd just be lining up to get hurt.

"Hudson!" Stella's voice cracked as she ran to him. She pulled him up, and her hands were shaking. Her eyes were wide with shock.

I've seen what Hudson can do. I watched him take down four or five thugs armed with knives, all by himself, just because he wanted to protect me. I know how strong he is. But even with all that, he still can't block a single punch from this guy. So, how strong is this Master Damon supposed to be?

The young man leading the crew from Grandhawk Properties let out a cold little laugh and wagged a finger at the crowd. "Save yourselves the trouble. This here is Master Damon. We brought him in for a reason. The guy's a top tier internal martial arts master. We're tearing this whole village down today. Anyone who wants to stand in the way can go ahead and test him. If you're dying to spend the night in a hospital, be my guest."

The villagers had been boiling with anger a moment ago, yet the moment he made that announcement, the whole crowd froze. Not a single person dared step forward. Everyone suddenly feared being the first one knocked out.

Cain and Basim, who had followed Margot over, knew instantly that this was turning ugly. They kept their heads down and stayed far from the action because the last thing they wanted was trouble falling on them.

Hudson was boiling inside, angrier than he had ever been. He also knew perfectly well that he was no match for Damon. With Stella watching him, his expression darkened until it was almost purple.

A minute ago, he had bragged confidently that he could settle everything without breaking a sweat. Yet after revealing who he was, the other side treated him like a nobody. They dropped his men like flies, and even he took injuries that left him embarrassed and furious.

He felt like he had just lost every ounce of dignity in front of Gemma and Stella.

While he was still scrambling for a plan, Linus finally stepped forward in his gold embroidered coat.

Linus moved to the front. Even with all his years in business, the scene in front of him made his brows tighten. "Friends from Grandhawk Properties, don't you think you're pushing things too far?" The link to the origin of this information rests in

His eyes narrowed a fraction, and the quiet pressure of someone used to being in charge came through.

"Linus Trading Co. isn't some big fancy brand, but I do know a few people. Grandhawk Properties might have its own hidden backing, but here in Northridge, you don't get to run wild."

The young man from Grandhawk Properties narrowed his eyes as well and let out a casual laugh. "Is that so? Then go ahead and try. Let's see who in Mornwick dares to stop Grandhawk Properties from doing what we came to do."

Linus snorted and pulled out his phone. "Mr. Howard, it's me, Linus."

The call connected. The chairman of Linus Trading Co. instantly switched into a smile and a respectful tone that was almost obsequious.

He greeted the man on the other end, then laid out the whole situation. After receiving what sounded like a reassuring answer, joy flashed across his expression. He straightened up and looked at the young man leading the opposition. "Why don't you take this call?"

The young man walked over with no hesitation at all. He took the phone right out of Linus's hand. "Oh? Mr. Howard?"

He listened for a moment. His expression shifted slightly into something more respectful, although nothing close to fear showed in his eyes.

"Right. We already bought the land. The problem is the villagers keep refusing to move out. So Mr. Dunphy told us to take action."

He added a few more lines, then smirked and handed the phone back to Linus. "Go ahead, Mr. Lavette. You can talk to Mr. Howard yourself."

The casual look on his expression made Linus's stomach sink. Suspicion rose immediately as he reached for the phone.

The young man switched it to speaker mode. Linus hadn't even spoken yet when a cold voice snapped through the speaker. "Linus, right? This isn't your business. You don't have the authority to interfere. Worry about your son Hudson."

The line cut off in the next second. All the confidence drained out of Linus at once.

Hudson stood behind him, completely frozen.

Of course, other people might not recognize the voice on the phone, but how could I not? That's Howard, the eldest son of Gumus in Ascendia. Dawnmere is one of the counties directly under Ascendia's jurisdiction, and Ascendia practically runs the place. Howard's influence alone is enough to shake several counties around us. Even the chairman of Lakeshore Realty Group, the biggest company in Dawnmere, treats him with absolute respect and calls him Mr. Howard without a second thought. In all of Mornwick, there aren't even three young people who can stand on the same level as him. Yet even a heavyweight like Howard wants nothing to do with blocking Grandhawk Properties. If someone like him refuses to get involved, then who in the world is standing behind Grandhawk Properties?

Stella felt Hudson's body tremble ever so slightly, and her stomach just sank. She might not fully understand the politics behind all this, but even she could tell that Hudson's family was entirely out of their depth. Whoever they were dealing with wasn't someone they could afford to offend.

The young man leading the group from Grandhawk Properties gave Linus a sidelong look and let out a soft chuckle. "Mr. Lavette, I didn't expect you to know Mr. Howard. But you really think bringing Mr. Howard here is going to help you? Come on At the end of the day, you're just someone who works under him. Our chairman at Grandhawk Properties is one of Mr. Howard's closest friends. Our chairman is none other than the son of Southridge's Mr. Dunphy, which means he's Mr. Bastian."

The moment those words dropped, the villagers, who were usually cut off from outside news, looked confused. But Linus, Hudson, Stella, Margot, and even Basim and Cain all blanched in shock, voices rising before they could stop themselves.

In Mornwick, the name Bastian wasn't just familiar. It was everywhere. Everyone knew that the three giants ruling Mornwick were Tommy, Frankie, and Gumus. Under the leadership of Mornwick's Legend, all three rose to terrifying heights. Each of them was worth nearly ten billion dollars and held influential positions within Jeff Enterprises, the world's number one corporation. Their rank alone put them on equal footing with the most elite business people alive. Even a provincial governor had to treat them with respect.

And Bastian was Tommy's only son. Even someone like Stella, who barely paid attention to anything happening in Mornwick's underground world, knew exactly who he was.

Margot felt her heart slam against her ribs. It didn't even feel real. She studied in Ascendia, so she always heard news before anyone else. Gumus's eldest son, Howard, practically ruled the entire generation. He was the kind of man who could summon storms with a sentence. CEOs and board chairs bowed to him. His influence was staggering.

And Bastian was every bit his equal. He was the heir to the throne of Mornwick. So when Margot heard that Grandhawk Properties had him standing behind them, all she felt was pure hopelessness.

With someone like that backing the project, the fate of Greenstem Village being flattened was essentially already decided.

Basim and Cain, who had been ready to step in earlier, froze completely. Their bravado vanished. Neither dared to move.

"So the chairman behind Grandhawk Properties is Mr. Bastian. Hudson offended you before. That has nothing to do with Linus Trading Co. We won't get involved." Linus acted like the seasoned businessman he was. Once he realized the name they were dealing with, he gave up instantly. He lifted his hands, stepped back, and removed himself completely.

Francis, Gemma, and the others turned to Hudson with desperate hope in their eyes. Hudson didn't say a word. He simply followed Linus to the side, head lowered so far he couldn't meet anyone's gaze.

"Hudson, you....." Gemma might have been a simple village woman, but even she understood the significance of this. Her face burned hot. She wished she could crawl into the ground and disappear.

She had puffed herself up earlier, promising the villagers that Hudson could settle this with no trouble. The villagers believed her. They flattered her. But now, reality hit them like a slap.

"Fine."

Stella stood alone, feeling the strength drain from her limbs. Her expression went blank.

Margot held her up. Her chest ached with frustration, but there wasn't a single thing she could do.

Even though I'd spent the past few years drifting toward the excitement of the outside world, this place was still the home that raised me for more than a decade. I couldn't

bear the thought of watching Greenstem Village get wiped off the map. But no matter how much I hated it, I had to admit there was nothing left I could do. And the truth hits even harder now. The man behind them is Bastian. Looking across all of Mornwick, unless Frankie, Gumus, or Tommy speaks up for themselves, who in

the world can make Bastian change his mind?

In the middle of her panic, she suddenly froze.

Off to the side, out by the fields, a tall figure came into view.

He was strolling over with a drink in one hand and the other tucked into his pocket, moving like he had all the time in the world. And there he was at last. Leander.

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Chapter 416

Leander strolled over like he owned the place, moving slower than anyone else, completely at ease. Around him, the tension was thick and the situation tense, but he didn't seem to notice a thing, like none of it had anything to do with him.

Margot had been hoping for some kind of miracle, but the moment she saw Leander, she couldn't help shaking her head quietly.

Leander shows up now, carrying that whole savior vibe. Usually, heroes make their entrance last, but in this mess, what good does it do for him to show up at all? The

Hudsons, as powerful as they are in Dawnmere, look like nothing more than scared little pups in front of Grandhawk Properties. They don't dare so much as make a sound and just hover awkwardly on the sidelines. Leander isn't even on the Hudsons' level. How could he possibly take on Mornwick's top gun, Mr. Bastian?

Leander walked across the field and finally came to a stop between the two groups. His eyes immediately landed on Francis, clutching his shoulder and wincing in pain. UPDATE FROM

"Mr. Wilson?" He bent slightly, pressing a hand gently onto Francis's shoulder.

A warm rush spread through Francis at once. The pain in his shoulder began to ease, like sunlight melting away the ache.

Leander still held his drink in the other hand, and his gaze shifted to Stella. "Stella, who hurt Mr. Wilson?"

His tone was calm, almost casual, as if he were asking a simple question.

"That man!" Stella's expression drained of color, her finger trembling as she pointed at the middle-aged man, Damon.

Damon snorted, completely unconcerned. He crossed his arms, standing tall with the air of a master.

"Is it him?" Leander refocused, his cold, piercing eyes locking on Damon.

Damon's expression froze. It felt like some ancient beast was staring right at him, leaving him utterly speechless for a moment.

Leander's lips curved in a faint smile, but it carried no warmth at all. He tilted his head toward Margot and said quietly, "Margot, I had planned to wait until Stella's engagement party was over to prove this to you. But it looks like the timing changed."

Margot looked confused, but before she could process anything, Leander was already stepping toward Damon.

"Leander, what are you doing?" Stella's eyes went wide, her voice rising in alarm.

Everyone can see Master Damon's skills clearly. He easily takes down dozens of villagers, dispatches over twenty of the Lavette Family bodyguards in an instant, and even Hudson, who has trained in martial arts since elementary school, goes down with a single move. Now Leander steps forward-it's like trying to stop a speeding train with just a stick.

"Leander?" Even Margot froze, worry flashing across her expression.

"Kid, from the look on your expression, you're planning to get revenge on that old man, huh?" Damon sneered as he watched Leander approach.

"Kid, you better turn back before you bite off more than you can chew. I'm—"

Before he could finish, a hand shot out from the side without warning. Damon didn't even have a chance to react. A tremendous force lifted him off his feet and slammed him hard into the middle of the field.

Blood spurted from his mouth, painting the ground red, and he passed out immediately.

The head of the martial arts school from Ascendia had no clue what hit him until he went unconscious.

Whoa!

The villagers of Greenstem Village gasped in shock. Margot and Stella, the two sisters, gaped with mouths wide open, completely dumbfounded.

Hudson stood off to the side, frozen in place, mouth hanging open like he could swallow a whole loaf of bread.

I've trained in martial arts myself, and even I can't withstand a single move from Master Damon. His strength is wild—he could probably take on dozens at once, easily outclassing me. But in front of Leander, Master Damon can't even block one strike. He gets slapped and knocked out cold. What kind of power is that? I suddenly remember what happened when I shook hands with Leander. His warning echoes in my mind, making sweat break out all over me. If Leander had actually gone all out on me just now, there's no way I could have stood a chance.

He froze for a moment, lost in thought, then a shadow of a smirk curled at the corner of his mouth. "Hmph, Leander, so what if you can fight?"

Behind Grandhawk Properties stands Bastian, the kind of top-tier heir Mornwick knows well. Leander thinking he can go toe-to-toe with Bastian using just his fists is pure fantasy. Taking down Damon doesn't intimidate them in the slightest. On the contrary, it marks Leander as an outright enemy of Grandhawk Properties.

From Hudson's perspective, going up against Bastian was basically a death wish. He secretly hoped Leander would push it. If Leander went head-to-head with Grandhawk Properties, Bastian would step in himself and deal with him, clearing the path for Hudson to finally eliminate Leander as a rival finally.

"I'm giving you one chance. Take your people and get out of Greenstem. Don't ever come around here again. Today's Stella's big day. Don't make me act!" Leander took a sip of his drink and shot a sideways glance at the rest of Grandhawk Properties.

The young man leading Grandhawk

Properties stiffened when he saw

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Damon badly beaten, but he didn't panic. He narrowed his eyes at Leander. "Kid, you've got some nerve sticking your nose in Grandhawk Properties' business. I'll give you that, you can fight. Even Master Damon couldn't touch you. But you really think you alone can change anything? Be smart. Step aside. Once we flatten this village, I'll put in a word for you with Mr. Bastian. You'll have the opportunity to serve him directly. Someone like him won't forget you. But if you don't play it smart, Mr. Bastian will send someone over. And then, trust me, my tone won't be this polite."

He stood there full of confidence, leaning on Bastian's name. In Mornwick, he could walk like he owned the place. Everywhere he went, people gave him respect and space. He had nothing to fear.

"Leander!" Stella stepped forward, ignoring the fact that she was about to be a bride. She reached out and grabbed his arm, trying to pull him back.

"Don't pick a fight with them! You can't take on the people behind Grandhawk Properties! They've got Bastian, Mr. Dunphy's son from Southridge, backing them!" She held him tight, not caring how close or intimate it looked. She just didn't want him running headfirst into a death trap.

If Bastian got seriously riled up, the whole of Mornwick would have no place left for Leander to hide.

"Leander, stay calm!" Margot's leather-clad figure exuded composure. "Bastian isn't someone ordinary folks like us can stand up to. Even the whole village together couldn't go against one word from him. Don't let a moment of anger ruin everything."

Leander's move against Damon had definitely fired her up, but that made her even more desperate to keep him safe. She had to warn him.

Leander's lips curved into a faint smile, but his body didn't move an inch. "Stella, don't worry."

He turned to Margot, a touch of disdain curling at his mouth. "Margot, you really think Bastian is untouchable? Hmph. He's still got a long way to go in my book." Leander lifted his gaze to the young leader of Grandhawk Properties. "So you're Bastian's subordinate. Perfect. I'm in a good mood right now. If you're smart, you'd better call Bastian immediately. Tell him my name is Leander, and he'd better get his ass over here to meet me right now."

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Chapter 417

The moment Leander finished speaking, shock spread across every face.

Stella and Margot, Hudson and Linus, and the team from Grandhawk Properties- all froze.

What Leander had just said was outright insane.

Bastian, Tommy's eldest son, was a powerhouse in Mornwick, controlling assets worth over one billion. After a serious injury last year, he had kept a low profile, founding Grandhawk Properties as a behind-the-scenes chairman. From the shadows, he built it from the ground up into one of Mornwick's top twenty firms, holding over ten million acres of land. Not long ago, he had been named one of Mornwick's Top Ten Outstanding Young Entrepreneurs.

Even Josiah, Frankie's son, and Howard, Gumus's eldest, couldn't compare. Among Mornwick's younger generation, Bastian's influence was unmatched.

Many old-school tycoons also faded in his presence. No one dared command him to appear, but Leander, barely twenty, boldly did just that.

"Leander, you..."

Stella clutched Leander's arm, frozen. Margot covered her forehead, her heart sinking.

Earlier, Leander had crushed Damon. That had been ruthless, but it hadn't been enough to earn Bastian's personal wrath.

This one sentence changed everything. Leander had thrown himself onto a cliff's edge, daring Bastian to appear. The audacity was staggering.

"Good try, kid."

The young Grandhawk Properties leader clapped three times, his smile turning colder by the second.

"Joking about Bastian? I've got to hand it to you—you're brave. Telling him to come crawling over—do you even know what you're saying? A single line like that could bring disaster on you and everyone standing with you."

Behind Leander, Hudson and Linus cursed silently.

If you want to die, don't drag us with you!

Fewer than five people in Mornwick would dare say that out loud. Leander clearly wasn't one of them. They wondered if he even knew who Bastian was.

"Consequences?" Leander asked, a faint smile on his lips as he waved his finger.

"Even Bastian wouldn't dare speak to me like that. You? You're just his lapdog who thinks too highly of himself. When I broke Bastian's legs, you didn't even know what was going on. And you still dare to run your mouth at me?"

The lead youth's expression snapped.

"Shattered his legs?" he muttered. The casual confidence vanished, replaced by raw fear.

Few knew about Bastian's broken legs—only his family and a handful of aides. The injury had changed him, making him calm, methodical, and a rising star in Mornwick's business world.

It had been over a year, but the lead youth remembered clearly. He knew who had done it—a true giant, someone even Tommy had to bow to.

Now Leander claimed he had done it. His heart jolted. Seeing Leander's young face and recalling the name, his expression froze.

"So young, last name Ashcroft, and he shattered Bastian's legs—no mistake. That's him."

Cold sweat poured down his back. In an instant, he felt like he'd fallen from heaven into hell.

"Ashcroft..." His lips trembled, unable to speak.

Without hesitation, he bowed before Leander, panic written all over his face.

"I'm sorry! I didn't know it was you! I really didn't know!"

Everyone else was stunned—on both the Greenstem Village and Grandhawk Properties sides. No one understood how Bastian's right-hand man could bow from a single sentence.

Stella and Margot were frozen, unaware of the depth of his fear.

"Rumor said he left Mornwick for Highcliffe over three months ago. How is he here?" This chapter is updated by

Cold sweat ran down the youth's face. He didn't want to believe it, but he knew no one in Mornwick would dare impersonate such a figure.

"Oh? So you know who I am," Leander said, finishing his drink with a faint smile.

"Yes! I know now! I was blind before. Please, show mercy."

The whiplash left everyone's minds spinning. The once-imposing youth was now shaking in front of Leander.

"Was it because of what Leander said just now?"

Margot tilted her head toward him,

still confused. There was no world in

which a casual remark should,

be

enough to make someone bow on

the spot.

Leander stood tall, expression cold.

"Stop wasting my time. Call Bastian. Tell him to get here. I'll give him twenty minutes."

"Yes!" The youth didn't hesitate and dialed Bastian immediately.

At Grandhawk Properties headquarters in Dawnmere, Bastian was shirtless, enjoying himself with a third-tier young model, when the phone rang.

He glanced at the display, annoyed. "Rory, didn't I tell you to settle the Greenstem

Village situati Why are you calling now? I'm busy."

"Mr. Dunphy, something's happening in Greenstem," Rory said. "Someone's protecting the village—and he even told you to come see him."

Bastian's eyes blazed. "Who has the nerve to tell me to come?"

The young model smiled flirtatiously.

"Bold words. That person must have a death wish."

There was a pause. Then Rory's voice shook: "It's... the one who broke your legs."

Bastian's face froze. He flung the young model aside, threw on his clothes, and sprinted out without looking back.

The young model looked utterly stunned. She had only been with Bastian for a few days, yet she had never seen him so flustered and shaken.

At Greenstem Village, both sides stood tensely. Rory remained bowing. Without Leander's word, he didn't dare rise.

The villagers looked on, confused.

Stella and Margot were about to ask Leander something when the roar of engines thundered.

Heads tilted up. A helicopter approached, hovering overhead, and a rope ladder dropped. A man zipped down in a hurry.

He was a young man in an Armani

line

suit, exuding wealth and power. When he landed, Margot and the others finally saw his face. Hudson

and Linus gasped.

"Mr. Dunphy?"

Margot and Stella reacted instantly, their faces changing with each passing moment.

The man who had arrived by private helicopter was none other than the top young master of Mornwick-Tommy's son.

Before anyone could react, Bastian took a long step forward, walked straight to Leander, and bowed deeply.

"Bastian, paying respect to Mr. Leander!"

Silence fell over the crowd.

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Chapter 418

Bastian lowered himself to his knees. "Greetings, Mr. Leander."

The entire crowd fell silent in disbelief.

The sight bordered on unreal. Bastian, Tommy's son and the undisputed wealthy heir in Mornwick, knelt before them. He was the young man whom the state's most powerful business leaders treated with almost exaggerated respect. No one was ever granted the right to command that same respect from him.

Yet here he was, bowing before a plainly dressed Leander and addressing him with genuine respect. It was almost impossible to comprehend.

Hudson and Linus were so stunned they barely moved.

Margot and Stella stood rigid, their jaws hanging open as they stared at Bastian. Words simply refused to form.

The people of Greenstem Village were completely confused, and Francis and Gemma were even more overwhelmed. The scene felt unreal.

They didn't know exactly how influential Bastian was, but they recognized one thing — anyone who could mobilize a team from Grandhawk Properties and arrive by helicopter had wealth and influence far beyond anything they had seen. Chapters first released on

They also knew Leander's origins—a boy Hazel had rescued long ago, an orphan with no family name behind him.

The contrast between the two men could not have been more dramatic. Yet Bastian was kneeling, his voice trembling with fear.

Gemma, especially, could not understand it. The future son-in-law she had bragged about for years—who strutted around Dawnmere like he owned the place didn't even dare raise his head before Bastian. He lingered behind them like a frightened child.

But Leander, who seemed the most ordinary of all, remained silent and still made the true powerhouse collapse to his knees. The difference between them was more than a gap—it was a canyon.

Stella clung to Leander's arm, still dazed. Leander kept a hand in his pocket and said coolly, "Stand up."

Bastian did not move. His head dipped even lower, and sweat soaked his back as he knelt before Leander.

"Mr. Leander, regarding Greenstem Village, I wasn't abusing my authority," he said, his voice shaking.

"I bought the entire village and gave everyone time to relocate. But after receiving the compensation, the villagers refused to move by the deadline and even blocked the construction crews. That's why I pushed back at first.

"Please look into the situation, Mr. Leander. Please."

Everyone behind Bastian inhaled sharply.

They had followed him for years. They knew how forceful he could be—fearless, domineering, the type to flatten obstacles without blinking. But now, in front of a stranger, he trembled like a hunted bird. The sight was shocking.

Only the young man from earlier knew exactly why Bastian was terrified. The man standing before them was the true ruler of Mornwick—Mr. Ashcroft.

"Why are you so scared of me?" Leander's smile held no warmth.

Bastian froze. Words stuck in his throat. Leander was the shadow he could never escape. Not even his father frightened him this much.

But Leander haunted him.

Even if he didn't know every detail, the titles alone—ruler of Mornwick, chairman of Jeff Enterprises, first place on the Astria Power Index—were enough to strike fear into anyone.

Leander looked away from him and turned toward Gemma and the others.

"Mdm. Murphy, is what he said true? Has the land already been sold?"

Gemma hesitated before nodding.

"It was sold, and the contracts were signed. But when they measured the plots, they cut corners everywhere. Almost every household lost tens of thousands. That's why the villagers are furious and refusing to move."

"Oh?" Leander's eyes shifted back to Bastian.

A chill ran down Bastian's spine. Panic surged through him.

"Mr. Leander, I swear I didn't know!" he blurted out.

"I instructed my people to measure everything properly. Grandhawk Properties became what it is because we value integrity. After you punished me last time— broke both my legs-I haven't done anything that violates my conscience."

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Leander narrowed his eyes. He detected no falsehood in Bastian's voice. It became clear that Bastian hadn't intended to cheat the villagers. His subordinates were another story entirely-greedy, undisciplined, and ready to exploit any loophole.

And the one responsible for Greenstem Village was clearly the suited man who had been barking orders earlier.

Leander extended his hand and tightened his fist.

The man in the suit shot upward as if hauled by unseen wires. Leander's hand closed firmly around his throat.

"So you're the one pulling the strings, aren't you?"

The man met Leander's icy stare and felt his courage drain. Being dragged through the air had already broken whatever confidence he had left.

"M-Mr. Leander, I... I..."

Leander flicked his arm and hurled him aside like garbage. The man crashed into an excavator with a heavy thud.

Coughing blood, he looked up to see Leander's expression remain stone-cold. "Before today ends, return every cent you stole from these households. As for the homes you bulldozed, compensate them at their full original value."

"From this moment on, don't show yourself in Mornwick again. If you do, you won't leave alive.

"Get out."

Leander's low command rolled out like an unseen force, knocking the man back another step. He scrambled to his feet and sprinted off, begging as he ran like a beaten dog.

With one hand in his pocket, Leander turned to Francis and Gemma.

"Mr. Wilson, Mdm. Murphy, spread the message. Every family will receive their missing money before midnight. You don't need to worry anymore."

The two elders and the crowd behind them felt as if they were dreaming. They had confronted

Grandhawk Properties countlessnet

times and never made progress. Leander said a few words, and the man fled for his life. The entire issue seemed to dissolve instantly. It hardly felt real.

Leander gave them a faint smile before addressing Bastian. "Bastian, this is your project and a fair business deal. I don't interfere.

"But if you plan to start construction in Greenstem Village, you will have to wait until every villager has a home to move into. If even one family remains, your crew doesn't set foot here. Understood?"

Bastian didn't dare refuse. He nodded immediately.

After apologizing and offering several polite remarks, he gathered his workers and left. Silence returned to the entrance of Greenstem Village.

At last, the villagers processed what had happened. They erupted into cheers, praising and thanking Leander Gemma glowing with pride, told everyone this was J adopted son-practically her own

nonet

nephew-and her joy was no

unmistakable.

Stella finally realized she was still holding Leander's arm. Her face reddened as she let go.

She looked from her fiancé—stiff and silent—to Leander's calm figure. A bitter smile tugged at her lips.

She had believed her new fiancé surpassed Leander, that she could finally bury her feelings.

No one could have imagined that, in a crisis that plunged the whole village into fear, her fiancé would stand helpless while Leander resolved everything with a few sentences. The contrast stung her heart.

Leander rubbed his nose, a faint smile lingering, then turned to the stunned Margot. "Margot, about our bet—it seems we know who won, don't we?"

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Chapter 419

Leander's voice interrupted her thoughts, and Margot snapped out of her daze as if waking from a dream.

Her bright eyes darted toward him, wide with disbelief, and her heart pounded fiercely in her chest.

The moment Bastian knelt before Leander, she knew she had lost—completely, utterly lost.

"Leander, why is Bastian so terrified of you?"

Despite her admiration, she couldn't hold the question back.

She couldn't comprehend it—Leander must have possessed some hidden identity that had reduced Bastian to near terror.

Considering Bastian's status, not even Frankie or Gumus could have forced him to kneel and beg on the spot, which meant that Leander's power was far beyond anything they had.

Stella shared her curiosity, sneaking glances while speculating about Leander's true identity. At that moment, Linus, chairman of Linuscar Enterprises, hurried over to Leander and bowed a full ninety degrees.

"Greetings, Mr. Ashcroft! I'm Linus Lavette."

Hudson and the others were still catching up, but a businessman like Linus would never miss the significance of the moment.

Bastian's terror left no doubt that Leander was none other than Mornwick's Legend, the man who had overshadowed all of Mornwick.

"Mr. Ashcroft?"

Hudson's eyes narrowed, and his jaw dropped as if it could swallow his own fist.

Margot and Stella froze, then gasped in shock.

"How is this possible?"

The sisters exchanged stunned glances, struggling to trust what they saw and heard.

Within Mornwick's upper echelons, the title of Mr. Ashcroft had become legendary— a pinnacle none could surpass. Margot and Stella had not yet reached that circle, but the name had resonated like thunder in their ears. They had longed to meet him.

He was the true legend of Mornwick, its ultimate authority. Even a state governor could at best stand beside him.

Although his fame shook the city, very few had actually seen him. Most people didn't even know what the legend looked like.

And at the moment, the boy who had grown up playing alongside them had become that legend.

"No need for formalities. You're Stella's father-in-law, which makes you my elder as well," Leander said, waving lightly with a faint smile.

He didn't care much for Linus, but for Stella's sake, he showed a little courtesy.

Behind them, Hudson had gone completely stiff. He was likely the most devastated of all.

He had approached Leander as a rival in love, ready to assert himself, only to discover that this casually dressed young man was the overlord of Mornwick—a peak he could never reach in his entire life.

Status, influence, wealth, power-the gap was astronomical. And he had tried to provoke Leander. What a joke.

"Leander, you're the Mornwick Legend?" Stella whispered, still struggling to process it.

"Yes," Leander admitted, his voice carrying an apologetic tone. "Sorry, Stella. I never meant to keep it from you."

Stella's gaze froze, and words failed her. Beside her, Margot's eyes gleamed sharply.

She remembered what she had said to Leander the previous night and let out a self-mocking laugh. She had asked why he deserved her respect. Thinking back, she realized she had been ridiculous.

Her so-called standards—unfathomable wealth, dominion over a region, the ability to fight alone—were trivial to him.

Leander didn't just command a region; he dominated an entire state. Earlier, Damon had annihilated dozens of villagers and more than twenty black-clad bodyguards, yet Leander had eliminated him effortlessly, proving that he could take on the opponents alone.

As for wealth, Leander ran Jeff Enterprises from the shadows, with assets far exceeding tens of billions.

It was laughable that she had once bragged about admiring Gumus, a big shot in a single city, when she was standing before the man above him.

Her gaze dimmed, and for the first time, she bowed her proud head to Leander.

"Leander, I'm sorry. I've lost," Margot admitted.

Leander smiled and gently tapped her forehead.

"Margot, I know you've left the village, experienced the city's bright lights, and met countless influential people. But that is not the whole world-the world is vast, far larger than you can imagine."

His tone hardened. "We made a deal. You lost, so now you listen to me.

"From today onward, respect your parents, treat your sister well, study diligently, and avoid temptation.

"I'll have Gumus look out for you in Ascendia. Next time I see you, I don't want you to be like this again. Understood?"

Hearing the authority in his voice, Margot felt no resentment-only exhilaration. She nodded repeatedly.

Fierce by nature and devoted to strength, Margot worshipped power. And Leander was the strongest person she had ever encountered.

The engagement party proceeded as planned, but the smiles of the bride and groom looked strained and forced. Nobody knew that Stella had already lost interest in the engagement.

Upstairs in the second-floor lounge, Leander lounged casually on the couch. Daphne sat beside him, peeling fruit.

Margot and a few friends clustered around, chattering and grilling him about how he had become Mornwick's Legend. Everything about him captivated them.

Meanwhile, in the president's office at Highcliffe University, Christopher was practicing calligraphy when the door abruptly swung open.

A woman stepped in, clad in a sharp leather jacket and fitted pants. Her long hair cascaded over her shoulders, and her features were strikingly refined—Anastasia, a rising star in the Shadow Division.

"Mr. Gardner," she greeted, bowing her head slightly before extending a file toward him.

Christopher took it and scanned a few lines. His expression stiffened instantly. Read full story at

"A phenomenon has appeared in Edgemontale?" he asked.

The attached photographs depicted a brilliant beam of light shooting into the sky. Ordinary people might have seen it as a celestial sign, but Christopher was no ordinary observer. As a practitioner of the Transcendent Realm, he recognized it for what it truly was—arelis was about to surface.

The last time something like this had occurred was 60 years ago.

"I understand. You may leave for now," he said, dismissing her with a wave.

Anastasia departed without another word. Once the office was quiet, his expression darkened further.

"The emergence of a relic will attract every powerhouse in existence. 60 years ago, 18 Transcendent Realm practitioners clashed over one. Four of them were in the Infernal Crown Transcendent class alone. The sky nearly shattered under their battle he muttered.

"What kind of bloodstorm will it trigger this time?"

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He paused, thinking, then picked up the phone and dialed the Shadow Division's main line.

"Dispatch Sky Mantis and the Armored Duo to Edgemontale. Ensure no foreign Transcendent Realm practitioners disrupt Astria's territory."

After hanging up, worry still shadowed his face. "Sky Mantis" and the "Armored Duo" were the vel

Division's top operatives, nearly reaching the Infernal Crown Transcendent realm. Yet he knew

that when a relie surfaced even their combined strength might not suffice against the flood of powerful contenders.

As he wrestled with the implications, a sudden spark of realization ignited in his mind. A figure flashed before his eyes.

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Chapter 420

"No idea whether he'd step in," Christopher murmured, his gaze tightening as he thought of someone.

"But if he was willing to go with us, we might not gain full control of the situation, yet at the very least, those international powerhouses wouldn't dare push their limits on Astrian soil."

With that thought, he called the counselor from the Department of Horticulture and Landscaping.

"Leander isn't in class? He's been absent for two days?"

After confirming it, Christopher hung up, pulled the department's roster, and located Leander's number.

Leander had accepted Gemma's warm invitation without hesitation, so he and Daphne spent another night in Greenstem Village. Around noon, just after lunch and preparing to leave, his phone lit up with an unfamiliar number.

"Hello?" he answered.

A strong, weathered voice filled his ear.

"Sovereign Ashcroft, it's been a while. Do you still remember me?"

Leander froze for a moment before recognizing the voice. "Mr. Gardner?"

Daphne glanced over, startled, wondering why Christopher was calling him now. The man on the other end laughed loudly, as if delighted.

"I'm glad you still remember me, Sovereign Ashcroft!"

Leander's tone stayed calm and detached. "Mr. Gardner, let's skip the greetings. What do you need?"

Christopher hesitated, then admitted, "I do need something. I want your help."

He briefly described the strange phenomenon that had appeared over Edgemontale — an anomaly ripping open the sky.

"An anomaly surfaced, sending a brilliant beam straight into the sky?"

Leander's expression sharpening. Ancient records called that the mark of a supreme treasure being born-whether a weapon, a divine pill, a spirit-vein site, or a life- spring.

After a moment's thought, he asked, "What do you expect me to do?"

Christopher's voice grew firm. "This anomaly means a rare treasure is emerging. The news has already spread worldwide. Powerhouses from every major nation are converging to fight over it.

"The authorities are afraid the situation will spiral, so the Shadow Division dispatched three Transcendent masters-Sky Mantis and the Armored Duo-but even they might not be enough.

"Sovereign Ashcroft, I hope you can go as well. You defeated the Wanda Sect's Grandmaster Galen not long ago. Your strength already surpasses the Infernal Crown Transcendent Realm.

"With you, Sky Mantis, and the Armored Duo working together, we might maintain control."

"You want me to go?" Leander asked, a faint, unreadable smile tugging at his lips.

"Mr. Gardner, you misunderstand. I'm not part of the Shadow Division, and I don't owe you anything."

His tone cooled. "In the martial world, when a rare relic appears, the strongest claim it. The fact that it's happening in Astria doesn't automatically mean it belongs to us.

"You've already sent your people. Whether they can handle it or not has nothing to do with me. Good luck.

"I have more important matters to deal with. Goodbye."

He ended the call without hesitation.

On the other end, Christopher lowered his phone with a sigh. Leander had always walked his own path; calling him had been a gamble.

He hadn't expected such a blunt refusal.

He let out a soft sigh and shook his head, realizing he had nothing left he could do.

The Shadow Division was Astria's top combat force, and aside from him and the director, Sky Mantis and the Armored Duo were the strongest they had.

He and the director were tied to national oversight-they couldn't simply rush into battle. Now everything depended on Sky Mantis and the Armored Duo.

Relics went to whoever had the strength to claim them, but Christopher still hoped Astria would come out on top. The stronger the foreign martial world grew, the heavier the pressure on their own nation became.

At the entrance of Greenstem Village, Leander said his goodbyes to Gemma and the others. Dressed in bright red, Stella watched him leave like a grieving widow standing on a cliff's edge, frozen in place.

Margot, however, vibrated with excitement. She quietly vowed to start over.

She had always believed those so-called elite circles she admired were what she should chase-but after learning who Leander truly was, she realized she didn't need to chase anything.

Staying close to him alone could lift her far higher than those circles ever could.

Gemma and Francis traded looks, both carrying the same regret. If they had known earlier, they would have urged Stella to delay her engagement. Then she might still have had a chance with Leander.

But now, it was too late.

"Ander, what did Mr. Gardner want?" Daphne asked as they walked along a mountain trail.

"He wanted free labor," Leander said lightly.

He understood exactly what Christopher had hoped for-drag him northwest to reinforce the Shadow Division and confront a crowd of global elites. That kind of thankless grind held no appeal for him.

His priority now was reaching Whitville to find the Deepcoil Dragon, obtain the Deepcoil Dragon Core, and forge the foundation for his spiritual strength cultivation.

Whitville sat along the lower reach of the Lyradon River in the Northeast, and both the surrounding rivers and the city shared the same name.

They had traveled from Ascendia to the northeastern stretch of the Lyradon River before finally reaching its lower course.

The river surged quickly there, splitting into twisting channels that only a handful of seasoned, independent fishers were confident enough to navigate.

Yet on this particular day, the lower river resembled a lively gathering. Dozens of boats passed by Leander and Daphne.

Some were narrow one-man dugouts, while others were large sailboats dragged forward by rope teams.

What unsettled Leander was the same strange detail repeated on every deck. Except for the boatmen pulling the lines, nearly all the passengers were martial artists and most of them were promising young talents.

He rubbed his nose, puzzled. "What event could draw this many young martial artists here?"

Daphne's eyes lit up, and she snapped her fingers.

"I remember now!

"Downstream along the Lyradon River, there is a sect that practices the Dual Insight Technique between men and women as its primary martial method. It has existed for nearly a century and is known as the Dual Meridian Sect.

"People say the heiress born to each generation is a breathtaking beauty. Once she turns 18, the sect hosts a suitor selection ceremony. Young elites from across Astria compete, and the one most compatible for dual cultivation becomes her partner."

She continued, "I heard that 25 years ago, they selected an extraordinary husband someone who rose from obscurity, challenged the leading names on the Astria Power Index, and defeated them all. He only lost a single exchange to the top ranked expert of that era, the Laughing Monk of West Ridge, before

retreating into the Dual Meridian

Sect."

"I know the current heir," Daphne added. "If I'm counting correctly, she just turned 18 this month."

Leander nodded. He had heard of

the Dual Meridian Sect as well. The sect remained relatively quiet, but its strength placed it firmly within Astria's top five just beneath the long-established giants such as the Lingster Sect, the Wanda Sect, and the Twinfang Sect.

"Ander, it looks like today is their husband-choosing day," Daphne teased. "Why don't you join the competition? You'd win first place without even trying."

Leander chuckled and shook his head.

To him, the sect and its dual insight technique were nothing but empty decoration.

He had no interest whatsoever.

His mind was focused solely on the Deepcoil Dragon. On such a wide river, he believed he would eventually catch its trail.

When they reached the later section of the river, Leander approached an elderly fisherman. After a brief round of bargaining, he bought the man's worn dugout for ten thousand bucks.

He grabbed a bamboo pole and prepared to push off with Daphne, letting the current carry them downstream. Updates are released by

Before they could set out, two sharp gusts shot out from the reeds. They landed on the flagstones with a crisp slap—two stacks of hundred-buck bills.

The old fisherman froze, wide-eyed.

A clear, confident female voice called out,

"They offered ten grand. I'll pay 20. We're buying that boat."

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Chapter 421

"We're buying that boat."

The voice was soft and pleasant, yet it carried a sharp edge—the kind that warned anyone not to cross her.

Leander and Daphne both turned toward the sound. From the reeds, a young man and woman emerged. The woman appeared to be just over 20, dressed in a pale- green

gown. Her features were refined yet understated, though her brows carried a bold, almost boyish determination.

The young man, perhaps 18 or 19, wore simple sportswear and looked timid. Upon seeing Leander and Daphne, he instinctively stepped slightly behind the woman.

"Hey, sir!" the woman called out.

She cast a brief glance at Leander and Daphne before fixing her gaze on the elderly fisherman. "I heard your price. They offered ten thousand. I'll pay double. This boat is mine."

She thumped her chest with fearless swagger—a bravado more typical of men than women.

The old fisherman eyed the two bundles of cash on the ground and hesitated, but eventually shook his head.

"Sorry, miss. I've already sold it to these two. You're too late."

Her brows knitted in irritation. "What's that supposed to mean? You don't want more money?"

The fisherman let out a low chuckle. "It's not about the money. It's about honoring my word."

He turned and walked away, leaving the confident young woman standing there, momentarily at a loss.

Leander and Daphne exchanged a small smile and prepared to push off. Suddenly, the woman called out again.

"Wait!"

She looked at Leander, then turned to Daphne with a note of pleading. "Hey—I mean, miss, could you let us take this boat instead?"

She gestured to the young man behind her. "This is my brother. I'm bringing him to a matchmaking event. It's important for us."

"Matchmaking event?" Daphne's eyes flickered with recognition. She scrutinized them for a few seconds and then understood. "Are you heading to Dual Meridian Sect for their suitor-selection ceremony?"

The woman blinked in surprise. "You're a Martial Practitioner too?"

The woman had recently reached the Intermediate Grandmaster stage, while the young man was slightly stronger at Advanced Grandmaster. Daphne, however, had advanced to Martial Sovereign days ago; there was no way they could sense her true level.

Daphne smiled lightly. "I'm Daphne Florian."

The siblings froze.

"Daphne Florian? One of the Twin Stars of Highcliffe? The daughter of the Florian family?"

Among the young generation of Astria's martial world, Daphne's name was thunderous. Everyone knew it.

When Daphne nodded, the woman practically leaped with excitement.

"Oh my goodness! This trip is completely worth it! I finally get to see one of the legendary Twin Stars of Highcliffe!"

"Hi, Daphne. I'm Aria Clarke, and this is my brother, Grant Clarke. We're from Steelblade Hall in Edgemontale Desert. I'm taking him to the Dual Meridian Sect for the suitor-selection ceremony," Aria said brightly. Despite being slightly older than Daphne, she carried herself with an eager, youthful energy that made Daphne chuckle.

Then Aria looked at Leander. Though plainly dressed, he was strikingly handsome, radiating a quiet, magnetic presence. Shocked, she exclaimed, "Wait—are you Gareth's son? The other Twin Star of Highcliffe, Ethan Ashcroft?"

In Astria's young martial world, people assumed Ethan and Daphne were a pair and possibly engaged. No wonder she had confused Leander for Ethan.

Daphne covered her mouth to stifle a laugh. "Aria, you've got the wrong person. He's not Ethan. His name is Leander Ashcroft."

"Leander Ashcroft?" Aria echoed blankly. Unfamiliar with the name, she quickly lost interest and turned her attention elsewhere.

"Daphne, are you heading to the Dual Meridian Sect too?" she asked.

"No, we're here for something else," Daphne replied.

Then she glanced at Leander and smiled. "They came all the way from Edgemontale for the suitor-selection ceremony. It wasn't easy. Let's drop them downstream first, then continue with our plan."

Leander, understanding Daphne's generous nature, nodded. "Of course. We're already at the estuary, so there's no hurry. We'll take them there first."

The siblings expressed their gratitude repeatedly to Daphne but treated Leander with casual indifference.

The boat ride to Dual Meridian Sect took only half an hour. Leander handled the oars expertly, while Aria and Daphne sat together, chatting.

"Daphne, do you think my brother can secure the top spot and catch the heiress' attention?" Aria asked.

Daphne smiled faintly, unsure how to answer.

She knew the current heiress of Dual Meridian Sect. A year ago, the girl's realm had already rivaled her own. Although the sect maintained a low profile and she wasn't listed among the Great Seven Geniuses, her strength matched that of Daphne and Ethan.

According to her calculations, the current heir of Dual Meridian Sect had undoubtedly reached the Martial Sovereign realm. Several young practitioners attending the suitor selection ceremony had already passed by at the peak of Elite Grandmaster level. Even these alone were far beyond someone like Grant, who was only at the Advanced Grandmaster level. Not to mention, there were likely a few half-Sovereigns-or perhaps even full Martial Sovereigns-among the contestants.

With so many top contenders, Grant had no chance of taking first place; it was nothing more than a daydream.

But she didn't want to discourage the siblings, so she let out a soft chuckle. "Considering Grant's cultivation, I'd say he has about a 70 percent chance."

When Aria heard Daphne's words, her face lit up. "Grant, did you hear that? Even Daphne thinks you have a 70 percent shot. You better bring your A-game, got it?" Her eyes shimmered with excitement and hope.

Steelblade Hatt sounded prestigious, but the reality was different. Only her dad practiced martial arts, and he

was a lone wanderer who had studied an old manual called Steelblade Six Forms. They were somewhat known in Edgemontale, yes, but almost no one across Astria had ever heard of them.

She had dragged Grant all this way, hoping the heiress of Dual Meridian Sect would select him as a husband and train alongside him in the Dual Insight Technique.

If that happened, riding the momentum of Dual Meridian Sect, the name of Steelblade Hall would rise, becoming known throughout Astria.

Leander rowed in silence, a faint smile playing on his lips, but he kept his thoughts New NOVEL chapters are published on to himself.

Thirty minutes later, they arrived at Midriver Isle, downstream along the Lyradon River. Leander intended to drop them off and continue toward his own destination, but Aria spoke up.

"Daphne, are you really not coming to Dual Meridian Sect?"

She turned to Daphne. "During this suitor-selection ceremony, Dual Meridian Sect will open the Dragon Gate. They say there are magical beasts inside, enshrined there for over a hundred years. Don't you want to see it?"

Before Daphne could respond, Leander's eyes flickered. "Dragon Gate?"

He had never heard of it before.

He paused, narrowing his eyes. Dual Meridian Sect was located in Whitville. The old legend of 'chasing the dragon' had taken place nearby. Everything seemed connected to what they called the Dragon Gate.

If there truly was a Deepcoil Dragon in Whitville, the locals—Dual Meridian Sect—would know best.

A plan took shape in his mind. He steered the boat toward the shore.

"Dani, let's go. We might as well see this suitor-selection ceremony that Dual Meridian Sect is hosting."

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Chapter 422

"Dani?"

Aria, standing beside Daphne, caught Leander using that nickname for Daphne. Her brows immediately furrowed.

Girls like her were naturally bold and revered strength above all else.

Daphne, the Florian family's daughter, was already a rising legend among the younger martial artists in Astria—a figure Aria both envied and respected. Yet here was Leander, a nobody, standing close enough to call her "Dani." The audacity of it made Aria's stomach twist.

"Sure."

The icy, aloof woman everyone spoke about smiled brightly at Leander, slid her arm through his as if it were the most natural gesture, and strode ahead with confidence.

Aria and her timid little brother, Grant, froze. The usually quiet Grant couldn't resist whispering, "Aria, isn't Daphne supposed to be paired with Ethan from the Ashcroft family? Then what's going on with Leander?"

Aria shook her head in confusion, equally at a loss, and followed behind them.

Leander walked with his hands in his pockets, blending into the crowd of young elites en route to the Dual Meridian Sect.

The sect sat in the heart of a mountain stream on the central island downriver from the Lyradon River. Generations of heirs had discovered this hidden sanctuary and invested heavily in master craftsmen to shape it into a discreet, inward-facing compound. The terrain was secretive, tucked deep into the mountains. Without a guide from Dual Meridian Sect, most people would never find the entrance. Fortunately, today was the suitor-selection ceremony. Disciples of the sect were already waiting outside to usher guests from the martial world into the residence.

Led by a disciple, Leander and the others crossed the stream to a sheer rock face. The guide tapped lightly at the edge of the stone. Mechanisms clicked and whirred, revealing a massive hidden door.

"Rumor says the Dual Meridian Sect inherited the ancient Mohist school's legacy, and those people were famous for their ingenious contraptions. It seems the stories were true."

Daphne gazed at the concealed sanctuary, a soft sigh escaping her lips.

Leander nodded. In ancient times, the Mohist school's inventions had been unmatched, astonishing even among the Hundred Schools. They had devised mechanisms capable of repelling iron cavalry. Constructing a hidden mountain stronghold like this would have been a trivial task for them.

Though the sect was buried in the mountain, the interior glowed brilliantly. Jade lamps and crystal lanterns dotted the halls—a testament to immense wealth and a storied heritage.

Leander, however, barely noticed the ornate lighting. His eyes scanned the surrounding stone, narrowing in focus.

Claw marks. Half a foot deep. Razor-sharp. Every gash radiated raw ambition and dominance.

There was no doubt these were not human marks.

So the Dual Meridian Sect is hiding something unusual.

He smirked inwardly. His spiritual strength rippled outward, forming a faint dome over the entire compound.

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Meanwhile, deep inside the sect, in a stone chamber, someone snapped his eyes open. "What?"

He wore a black robe, his hands hidden within its sleeves. His aura was dense, heavy, and suffocating, compressing the very air in the room.

"Who is that?"

His gaze sharpened, his face tightening into a grave expression.

A beautiful woman in a colorful dress approached with graceful steps, clearly puzzled by his agitation.

"What's wrong? The ceremony hasn't even started. Why are you awake so early?" The man pulled back his hood, revealing a handsome, hard-edged middle-aged face. His fingers curled slightly as he spoke, his voice low and measured.

"Just now, I sensed an immensely powerful surge of spiritual strength. In all my decades of training, aside from the overwhelming force I once felt at Ancient Lingster and Twinfang Sect, I have never encountered a third presence like that. "But it vanished

almost instantly. It felt as if it was probing us here in the Dual Meridian Sect. Now I sense nothing."

The woman blinked in surprise.

"Vanished? Could you have misjudged it?"

She was stunned. He was not merely op-tier martial artist; he was skilled in spiritual detection. If even he could not identify it, then not even someone from Infernal Crown Transcendent could have done so.

The man's eyes turned ice-cold as he shook his head.

"I don't know."

After a pause, he exhaled and stood.

"Forget it. Since I'm awake, let's begin the ceremony.

"This time, we must find Ela the perfect husband to inherit our sect's supreme techniques.

"Only by cultivating the Dual Insight Technique with a partner can she produce two Transcendent Realm experts in the shortest time. Then, even if the Bloody Palm Sect attacks, our sect will still have a 70 percent chance of victory.

The woman nodded firmly, and together they walked out of the stone chamber.

Guided by their escorts, Leander and the others eventually arrived at the main hall, Most of the guests were already seated, their chins lifted and their expressions filled with pride giving the room an almost

suffocating sense of authority.

Aria and Grant scanned the hall in awe. Coming from a lone-cultivator family in Edgemontale, they had never witnessed the martial world gathered on such a massive scale.

Nearly 80 percent of the people present were heirs of old sects or influential clans. Next to them, the siblings appeared plain—so unimpressive that no one bothered to look twice.

The seats were divided into two

halves. One side was reserved for young rogue cultivators and the successors of second- or third-rate sects. The opposite side belonged to the long established sects such as Skycrown Sect, Mount Sect, Songridge Sect, and Stonepeak Sect.

Even the refreshments highlighted the divide. One side received lavish fruit trays and delicate pastries; the other had ordinary offerings.

Without giving it much thought, Aria headed toward the VIP section with Grant, but a gatekeeper from Dual Meridian Sect stopped them with an arm extended.

The man, a middle-aged cultivator at the Elite Grandmaster level, offered a polite smile. "My apologies. VIP seats are reserved for designated guests only. Please take the standard seats. Thank you for cooperating."

It was obvious that VIP seats were for the heirs of ancient sects. Aria and Grant, coming from a lone-cultivator family, simply did not fit that category.

Aria's temper flared the moment she was blocked. "So you're saying we're not good enough for VIP?"

She gestured toward the Skycrown and Stonepeak disciples.

"If they can sit there, why can't we?"

She tried pulling Grant forward, but the gatekeeper lifted a foot and blocked her path. His voice turned colder.

"You're guests of Dual Meridian Sect, and we will treat you fairly.

But if you don't accept our arrangements, you may leave. If you try to force your way in, I won't hold back."

The message was unmistakable—one more step, and he would strike.

"You!" Aria's cheeks flushed with anger and embarrassment, yet she did not dare move. She lacked strength, but even she sensed the crushing pressure radiating from him.

Up in the VIP row, a young woman stood calm as ever. When she caught the drama, she couldn't help snickering under her breath. Original content can be found at

"Kian, they're seriously bold. They're at the Dual Meridian Sect and still pretending the rules don't count. Watching them get kicked out later is going to be a show."

Beside her sat a young man with a longsword on his lap, posture rigid and serious—Kian, one of the "Three Brilliants."

Kian smiled. "Dual Meridian Sect doesn't intimidate guests. But if they can't read the situation and end up removed, that's their own fault."

Mocking gazes gathered quickly, ready to watch Aria and Grant stumble into disgrace.

Humiliation burned through Aria. She had already begun stepping back toward the standard seats when a cheerful voice sounded behind her.

"In Edgemontale, Steelblade Hall shakes all of Astria. And that still isn't enough for one VIP seat at your sect?

"Move. Unless you want your Grandmaster questioning you later. You can't afford that."

The voice was light, yet it carried enough weight to make several people stiffen.

Kian, who had been casually talking in the VIP section, turned toward the sound.

When he saw the speaker, his expression froze. Shock drained the color from his face.

"That's impossible. Why would he be here?"

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Chapter 423

"That's impossible. Why would he be here?"

Kian lifted his gaze, and shock washed across his face again and again.

He was not the only one. Several well-known young Martial Practitioners nearby— each with impressive cultivation—also paled as if they had seen a ghost.

"Kian, what's going on?"

The girl beside Kian looked toward the entrance, confused. Behind Aria and Grant stood a young man and a woman she did not recognize.

One was strikingly handsome; the other was breathtakingly beautiful. But as a gifted young swordswoman from Mount Sect, she was not easily swayed by appearances. She had no idea why the usually composed Kian suddenly seemed unsettled. "It's actually him!"

Kian muttered, ignoring her question entirely.

"Kian, who are you talking about?"

She scanned the hall and noticed that many prominent young fighters were staring in the same direction. To her surprise, they were not focused on the stunning woman who had entered, but on the plainly dressed young man.

"Kian, who is he? Why is everyone looking at him like that?"

Curiosity lit her eyes.

Kian finally tore his gaze away and let out a strained, bitter smile.

"Who is he? He's the person you've always wanted to meet."

Her expression went rigid before shock hit her in full force. "You mean he's..."

A sharp brilliance lit her eyes, and she could no longer look away from the entrance. She had never imagined that she would meet the powerful figure she had admired for so many years—and in a place like this.

The one who spoke up was Leander. He had seen Aria and Grant travel all that way only to be stopped at the VIP entrance. It was a pitiful sight, so he stepped in.

The middle-aged gatekeeper eyed Leander with suspicion.

He had never heard of Steelblade Hall in Edgemontale, yet Leander spoke boldly, directly mentioning the Dual Meridian Sect's Grandmaster. Compared to the other so-called prodigies, his presence felt overwhelming. The gatekeeper did not dare act rashly.

"Go on. Let's head inside."

Daphne walked forward and nudged Aria gently. Aria snapped out of her daze and led Grant into the VIP seats.

The gatekeeper started to move again, but one look from Leander struck him like a blow. His breath stalled, and his limbs refused to respond.

Only after Leander and the others sat down in the VIP area did he finally regain control of his body. Cold sweat drenched his back.

Who is that man? A single glance froze me in place, as if he stole my will. With power like that, he might be on par with the old Grandmaster. How can someone that young be this strong?

Still shaken, he prepared to report the incident when a graceful figure appeared at the front of the hall.

A thin veil hid her stunning face, and her pale dress drifted around her, showing off long legs and curves that didn't quit. She looked like someone straight out of a fantasy—gorgeous and out of reach. Every man in the place whipped around to check her out.

Daphne shot Leander a playful wink.

"Ander, that's the Dual Meridian Sect's heiress for this generation."

Leander nodded slightly. Her cultivation had already reached the Martial Sovereign realm, matching Daphne's level. There was no question she was the sect's new heiress.

But beyond that, she possessed an air of power and mystery, and combined with her natural beauty, she was devastating to most men.

To Leander, however, someone at her level did not warrant more than a passing glance. He looked at her once, then leaned back and closed his eyes.

Most of the VIP guests wore luxurious robes and ornate accessories. Only Leander appeared plain, yet no one in the hall dared show even a trace of disrespect toward his table.

Disciples from major sects even bowed politely to Aria and Grant, their smiles sincere. The siblings felt deeply honored and quietly proud.

They assumed all the attention came from Daphne's status. They never realized it all stemmed from the young man they had dismissed at first sight.

"That should be the Dual Meridian Sect's heiress," Aria whispered, nudging Grant.
"Grant, that's your target. Understood?"

Grant nodded quickly. He had been dragged here at first, but once he saw the heiress' beauty, his heartbeat kicked hard in his chest.

Onstage, the heiress offered a graceful bow to the hall, and half the audience seemed instantly enchanted. Even a rising star like Kian nearly lost his composure. This is trouble, he thought.

Her gaze moved across the crowd until it settled on Daphne's table.

"Daphne!"

She rushed down from the stage and headed straight toward her, her voice bright with excitement.

"Ela, it's been a long time."

Daphne smiled and waved her over.

"I didn't expect you to show up today. If I'd known, I would've met you at the entrance myself."

The heiress voice was soft and

youthful, light enough to draw attention. Ignoring the curious-looks from nearby tables, she sat right beside Daphne

Aria and making Get full chapters from

Grant perk up. fre

"Ela, we haven't seen each other since Jowale two years ago. Your cultivation has grown so much."

Daphne sighed quietly. Two years earlier, while training in Jowale, she had run into the Dual Meridian Sect's heiress by coincidence.

Back then, both of them were barely touching Grandmaster level. Now, the heiress felt outright dangerous.

"Don't tease me," the heiress laughed behind her hand. "You've improved just as much."

There wasn't a trace of arrogance in her; she and Daphne interacted like lifelong friends.

She raised her eyes, taking in Aria and Grant. After sensing their strength, she gave a polite nod. But when her gaze landed on Leander, she hesitated. "Daphne, who is this?"

All she could sense from him was a calm, unreadable stillness-like water without ripples.

"Right," Daphne said with a smile. "Ela, let me introduce you. This is Leander Ashcroft-my future husband."

"Your future husband?"

The heiress's brows drew together, genuinely stunned. If not for the shy, pleased expression on Daphne's face, she would have assumed it was a joke.

No one knew Daphne better. Not even when Ethan had been by her side had she ever seen Daphne behave this way.

She studied Leander more closely, trying to read him. But there was nothing-only the aura of a quiet, scholarly man.

It was hard to believe. With Daphne's pride and standards, she chose him.

Unless he's hiding something enormous.

Just then, Leander opened his eyes and looked directly at her.

"You're Dani's friend-the heiress of the Dual Meridian Sect?"

His voice was calm and flat.

"That's me she replied, though irritation flashed beneath her polite tone. His attitude carried no hint of respect as if she were just another

stranger at the table.

Leander didn't seem to care. He leaned forward and went straight to the point.

"Since you're Dani's friend, that makes things easier.

"Do me a favor-summon the Dual Meridian Sect's master. I have questions, and I want the answers directly from them."

Her expression turned rigid.

Her grandparents were the sect

masters legends in the martial world, respected throughout Astria. Yet Leander, just a junior, spoke as if he were summoning them for casual errand.

Who on earth is this man?

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Chapter 424

"Are you looking to meet the Sect Master of our Dual Meridian Sect?" The young mistress's enchanting eyes shimmered slightly as she frowned.

"My grandparents are currently engaged in deep meditation within the sect. They aren't prone to casual visits from outsiders. Gaining an audience with them... will not be simple." Her voice carried a hint of frost—this was already the most courteous she could be for Daphne's sake.

Ordinarily, if someone approached with a demand to see her elders, she would have lost her patience long ago.

"Meditating?" Leander's lips formed a slight smile. Although his spiritual sense wasn't exceptionally potent, it still far exceeded that of most Transcendent Realm Martial Practitioners. Even an Infernal Crown Transcendent might not be his match.

During his journey to the Dual Meridian Sect, he had scanned the surroundings with his spiritual strength. He detected two Transcendent Realm Martial Practitioners— and they were heading towards them.

Just as he was about to speak again, Daphne shot him a teasing glare. "Ander, today is Ela's suitor-selection ceremony. Why not wait until the event concludes? After she selects her future spouse, you can inquire again. It's not urgent."

Leander rubbed his nose. He had no interest in the so-called selection ceremony, but since Daphne had spoken up, he simply nodded and refrained from pressing further.

"Hmph." The young mistress—barely an adult—let out a soft, irritated huff.

"Ela, try not to be upset with Leander. That's just his personality. He genuinely does have something significant to discuss with your elders," Daphne explained and smiled softly before turning back to Leander.

"Ander, allow me to introduce you. This is the Dual Meridian Sect's young mistress and our current generation's prodigy—Elara Whitlock," she introduced.

He nodded in respectful acknowledgment. Elara returned the gesture, but inwardly, she felt unimpressed.

She thought, Leander? What a joke.

He doesn't appear much older than me. And I, the esteemed young mistress of the Dual Meridian Sect-what gives him the right to be addressed so familiarly? Follow current novels on

If it weren't for Daphne's warmth toward him, I wouldn't even qualify to share a table, let alone enter the Dual Meridian Sect's VIP area.

What puzzles me even more is how sincerely Daphne seems to care for him—regarding him as her future partner, her lifelong companion. I simply can't fathom what Leander has done to earn the affection of Highcliffe's renowned beauty. Elara scrutinized Leander for a few moments. Silently, she circulated her inner strength to activate the Dual Meridian Sect's exclusive Dual Insight Technique. Only initiated disciples were permitted to learn it. Once engaged, it immensely sharpened her perception, allowing her to delve into a person's core essence.

This was also the conclusive test performed during the Dual Meridian Sect's suitor selection ceremony. Through this technique, each individual revealed their unique light color and intensity, indicative of their innate talent and compatibility.

The richer the color and the more potent the glow, the more deserving the candidate was for cultivation alongside her.

Her confidence soared. Even a Transcendent Realm expert could never conceal themselves from this technique. If he held any hidden strength, it would be revealed instantly.

Yet, to her astonishment, she perceived nothing.

Leander was akin to a still lake: tranquil, unremarkable, entirely devoid of essence. The Dual Insight Technique revealed not a shimmer of light within him. Even Grant, nearby with his average cultivation, emanated a bright yellow glow. But he alone... exhibited nothing.

"How can this be? He doesn't possess even a hint of light?" She maintained a calm demeanor, but internally, she was taken aback.

She believed that for him to capture Daphne's affection, he must possess some formidable power. However, it now appeared that his capabilities were inferior to those of an average person-through the Dual Insight Technique, he

didn't even register a hint of a glow.

What she couldn't know was that he had already attained the state of returning to simplicity, fully hiding his essence. Someone at her status wouldn't be able to detect him at all.

The Dual Insight Technique functioned similarly to the Lucent Blade of Silvermoon Sect—it penetrated superficial appearances to reveal one's true essence. In the past, Claire had glimpsed Leander's inner world, but only because he had yet to enter the Transcendent Realm.

Now that he had achieved the Transcendent Realm, his cultivation had sunk into complete tranquility. Even an Infernal Crown Transcendent, standing right in front of him, might not realize he was a Martial Practitioner—let alone Elara, who was simply at the Martial Sovereign.

"Daphne, did you really fall for this guy's facade? How could he possibly gain your trust with such a level of capability?" Elara asked.

Unaware of the truth, Elara found it hard to believe. She was just about to use the Spirit Voice Technique to question Daphne when two figures suddenly manifested on the ceremonial platform.

A man and a woman appeared, both adorned in traditional outfits, unmistakably a married duo.

They glanced toward her and she quickly understood, bid farewell to Daphne, and ascended the stage.

All the attendees in the main hall of the Dual Meridian Sect redirected their focus to the platform. Some keen observers had already identified the middle-aged couple—these were the Grandmaster of the Dual Meridian Sect and his consort.

"Those two must be Ela's parents. The Dual Meridian Sect is truly filled with hidden talents." Daphne expressed this with a touch of emotion in her voice.

"Indeed," Leander replied.

His eyes shifted toward the stage. Both newcomers had reached the peak of Martial Sovereign—each one powerful enough to contend with experts like Sean or Skyarc, the top threats listed in Astria's power rankings.

He was certain that if the Dual Meridian Sect hadn't adopted such a low-profile approach for many years, the list would include two more names.

On the platform, the couple stood closely together. The man stepped forward and addressed the gathering with a strong, resonant voice that resonated throughout the Hall. "Today, we have gathered here with famed young geniuses of Astria's martial

world-peerless talents in your respective rights. Your presence at our Dual Meridian Sect's suitor-selection ceremony truly honors our humble sect."

He started with courteous introductions, then seamlessly transitioned to the main matter. "As you are aware, since the time of our founder, our sect adheres to one principle: every generation's successor must hold a public suitor-selection ceremony upon reaching adulthood, inviting all of Astria's martial world. Today marks my daughter Ela's coming-of-age ceremony.

"I, Darius Ravenscroft, have never

been one

to dilly-dally. Given that

most of you are here for my daughter anyway. There is but one condition for this suitor-selection ceremony: challenge my daughter, Ela. The individual who can defeat her will become the Dual Meridian Sect's son-in-law. The tournament commences now. Please take a moment to get ready," he

announced.

As Darius concluded, the hall burst into applause. The energy was so palpable that even the Clarke siblings felt their blood race. The impending confrontations promised to be unprecedented, with a multitude of prodigies assembled—well beyond anything from their distant northwest homeland.

"Grant, did you catch that? You'd better perform brilliantly later. Aim to impress the young mistress!" Aria leaned closer and reminded Grant with urgency. "Understood," Grant replied, nodding with tension.

In the VIP area, Kian's hands quivered slightly, and he thought, It's undeniable—the young mistress of the Dual Meridian Sect is truly remarkable, on par with Claire and Daphne, the two celebrated beauties of Astria's martial world. The sect's secret techniques are terrifyingly potent. Once someone masters the Dual Insight Technique, their strength skyrockets. Forget merely reaching Martial Sovereign—entering the Transcendent Realm becomes a realistic goal. Who wouldn't find that irresistible?

"I must grab this opportunity... this time, definitely." He clenched his fists beneath the table, resolute in his decision. Today, he would demonstrate his abilities to the world he would claim first place.

At that moment, the young Mount Sect talent next to him suddenly asked, "Kian...

do you think he might join the competition too? If he does, who could even compete against him?"

Kian tensed. He discreetly glanced at Leander, who was reclined in his seat, hands behind his head, eyes closed as if asleep.

Only then did he chuckle softly and shake his head. "You're thinking too much. Why would he be interested in the techniques of the Dual Meridian Sect with his cultivation? Even if their most powerful elder appeared, that elder wouldn't stand a chance against him. His perspective is far beyond this level—he wouldn't stoop to participate in this juvenile contest."

The girl nodded slowly, partially comprehending and partially in reverence. The hall remained quiet for about fifteen minutes. Then Darius made his way back to the stage. His voice resonated throughout the hall with a grand motion. "Everyone, the moment has come. I hereby declare the formal commencement of the Dual Meridian Sect's Seventh-Generation Suitor-Selection Ceremony!" The crowd erupted once more—cheers, shouts, and enthusiasm reverberated throughout the hall. One by one, the young geniuses drew upon their inner strength, gearing up to achieve glory.

Elara stood on the stage wearing a simple snow-white gown, a veil concealing her face. She resembled a divine maiden descended to the mortal realm—calm, poised, awaiting challengers.

However, amidst the hundred prodigies present, not a single individual dared to step forward. None wished to be the first to fall as the sacrificial lamb.

The martial technique of the Dual Meridian Sect was enigmatic and erratic—most contestants preferred to observe, strategize, and analyze before acting. Thus, silence enveloped the hall momentarily.

Aria gave Grant a firm nudge, sensing an opportunity, and encouraged him to ascend the stage. But just as he was about to move, a spine-chilling howl sliced through the air.

The roar resonated throughout the hall, so intense that tables, cups, and decorations shook violently. Even Kian—one of the most formidable young contenders present—felt a jolt of alarm as his expression turned grave.

The howl drew closer. A figure wielding a folding fan dashed across the courtyard like a specter and landed elegantly on the stage.

He was a strikingly handsome young man, likely around twenty-five or twenty-six years old. His appearance was almost wickedly charming, and his long robe billowed like that of an esteemed scholar from a bygone era.

He swiftly opened his fan with a simple flick, and his piercing, sharp gaze locked onto Elara. "A grand occasion such as the Dual Meridian Sect's suitor-selection ceremony—how could it be complete without my presence?"

"The young mistress of the sect is renowned throughout the land for her beauty. I have admired her for a considerable time. Today, I plan to be the first to get ahead and experience her skills for myself." His voice was relaxed and oozing confidence, and he showed no interest in anyone else present.

As soon as he arrived, Elara and her parents tensed up—their expressions darkening instantly.

The rest of the hall reacted similarly. Many gaped in astonishment at the scarlet handprint symbol marked on the young man's chest.

Even Daphne, seated next to Leander, couldn't suppress a quiet gasp. "The Shadowrealm Sect..."

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Chapter 425

"Shadowrealm Sect?" Daphne whispered, her eyes slightly trembling.

"Shadowrealm Sect? Daphne, what are you referring to?" Aria turned to her, confusion evident on her face.

Fixating on the blood-red handprint etched on the young man's chest and she spoke gently, "The Shadowrealm Sect is an ancient lineage!

"According to legend, its founder was an imperial bodyguard of the kingdom of Orenthall over a century ago. He traversed the martial world, wielding a lethal Bloody Palm technique, which garnered the Sovereign's attention, leading to his appointment as head of the imperial guards.

"However, during the invasion of Stanton Academy, that bodyguard betrayed his homeland. Not only did he fail to defend his country, but he also assisted the invaders. He feared retribution from the kingdom of Orenthall, so he fabricated his own disappearance and escaped overseas.

"He adopted the Bloody Palm technique, as the name of the sect. He then established a sect, which became known as the Bloody Palm Sect. Its disciples terrorized the borderlands, engaging in murder, looting, and committing unspeakable atrocities. Their

followers became notorious for their wickedness and lust. They inflicted so much harm that people began to regard them as monsters, earning the Bloody Palm Sect the title of Shadowrealm Sect," she explained.

Only then did Aria and Grant grasp the situation, and she gasped in surprise, "So, you're implying that that fan-wielding individual is essentially a top-tier scoundrel?"

Daphne nodded slightly, but her concern for Elara intensified. Follow current novels on find-novel-net

It was said that the founder of the Dual Meridian Sect hailed from the royal lineage of the overseas Kingdom of the Shimmering Isle. When the Bloody Palm Sect ascended to power abroad, they ultimately eradicated the Shimmering Isle. It was only after that that the royal survivor fled to Astria and established the Dual Meridian Sect.

The Dual Meridian Sect and the Bloody Palm Sect were fundamentally opposed— like fire and water, sworn enemies to the death. Now that a disciple of the Bloody Palm Sect had unexpectedly shown up at the Dual Meridian Sect, it was clear he didn't arrive with good intentions.

It was clear that his cultivation was from the thunderous roar earlier, at least on par with Elara's cultivation. The Bloody Palm Sect's vicious and peculiar martial technique; a confrontation between them could lead to unpredictable results.

"So it's truly someone from the Shadowrealm Sect... What are they doing here?" someone asked.

Kian's expression grew tense as he began to sense the heavy, murderous intent.

The other talented youths on the platform also felt the atmosphere darkening. Their gazes sharpened and their pupils narrowed.

On the stage, Darius's eyes were frigid. Next to him, his wife, Lyra Clarke, wore a chilling expression and was devoid of any warmth.

Dressed in a simple white gown, Elara spoke with deep disdain in her voice. "Since when do individuals from the Bloody Palm Sect have the audacity to come to our Dual Meridian Sect and act as if they belong here? Leave!"

She had been brought up on tales from a young age of the animosity between the Dual Meridian Sect and the Bloody Palm Sect. Her loathing for the Bloody Palm Sect was ingrained deep within her. Now that one of their disciples had arrived at her doorstep, there was no chance she would show even a trace of politeness. "Young mistress, you possess quite the fiery temperament," the young man replied. His expression remained unchanged. Instead, he offered a slight smirk. "The suitor- selection ceremony of the

Dual Meridian Sect has always been accessible to the entire Astria martial world. Although my Bloody Palm Sect operates overseas, our founder was an Astrian.

"By that reasoning, the Bloody Palm Sect qualifies as a legitimate Astria Sect. Since other sects' young elites can participate here, why shouldn't I?" he inquired.

Elara's expression was as frigid as ice as she let out a scoff. "A traitor who betrayed his own people still has the audacity to call himself a child of Astria?"

She advanced, her inner strength surging. The entire platform shook beneath her, the boards rattling as if they might break apart at any moment. "Your life ends here if you stay!"

In that instant, the young mistress of the Dual Meridian Sect fully unleashed the commanding presence deserving of her position, killing intent flashing in her eyes.

The young man erupted into hearty laughter, completely unbothered. "Such grandiose claims from the Dual Meridian Sect's young mistress. You are this generation's successor of the sect, and I am the most gifted prodigy of the Bloody Palm Sect. Allow me, Felix Donovan, to experience your sect's renowned techniques."

As they completed their declarations, their auras surged. The platform beneath them actually lowered by half a foot, and a confrontation loomed on the horizon.

"Stop right there!" Just when they were about to engage, a voice suddenly emerged from the VIP seating area.

Their amassed strength dissipated as they turned in puzzlement. Everyone else also directed their attention toward the VIP section.

There, the foremost prodigy of the Mount Sect, Kian, stood up. He stepped forth from his seat with a longsword in hand.

He landed on the platform with a light and effortless leap. Then cupped his fists toward Elara. "Young mistress, I am Kian from Mount Sect. If it pleases you, may I take this fight?"

His voice held a captivating calm and a sense of righteousness. "We are all gathered here today for one purpose-to vie for the opportunity to become your husband. If we aspire to be the son-in-law of the Dual Meridian Sect, then it is our responsibility to act between you and a genius from the Bloody Palm Sect, not yours.

"I won't profess to be the strongest of our generation in Astria, but I am confident that I can handle this battle on your behalf. I hope you will grant me that privilege," he declared.

His unexpected move onto the stage was far from impulsive.

He thought, The Bloody Palm Sect and the Dual Meridian Sect are sworn enemies. Now, a prodigy of the Blood Palm Sect has intruded into the Dual Meridian Sect's territory. If I can step up, fight Felix, and win in Elara's stead, I earn significant favor from the Dual Meridian Sect. When it comes time to select a son-in-law, my odds dramatically improve, giving me a considerable advantage over the competition.

Ever since he had been defeated on

the Southern Shore by four followers

of the War God Sanctum, he

retreated to Mount Sect for deep reflection. Eventually he discovered an ancient internal cultivation technique and a supreme sword technique left on a sheer cliff by an esteemed master. His power increased significantly, and he officially ascended to the ranks of Martial Sovereign. His confidence was now at an unprecedented high.

He aimed to use this upcoming battle to establish his reputation throughout the Astria martial world. Even though Felix hailed from the Shadowrealm Sect, Kian was completely confident he could confront—and defeat—him.

Elara's sparkling eyes glimmered slightly at the sight of him stepping forward. She looked at Darius standing beside her, and upon noticing his slight nod, she took a step back. "In that case, I'll express my gratitude to Kian in advance."

A surge of joy filled his heart. He advanced, taking the place where she had just stood, now directly facing Felix.

Felix narrowed his gaze, the corners of his mouth turning up into a subtle, mocking smirk. "I've heard that in the younger generation of the Astia martial world, there are 'Three Heroes and Four Beauties.' So, you are one of the three heroes-Kian of Mount Sect?"

"That's correct," he responded coolly with a nod. "I've often heard that the Bloody Palm Sect wreaks havoc overseas, creating chaos and fear wherever they go. Today, wish to see firsthand just how impressive the so-called fearsome techniques of the Bloody Palm Sect truly are."

As he concluded his words, his sword moved. A sharp, resonating note filled the hall

as his blade was unsheathed, casting a streak of white sword light that illuminated the stone walls.

All around the hall, the other prodigies watched with heightened anticipation. To be fair, Kian's cultivation level was definitely among the elite of their generation. This battle essentially represented a clash between Astria's finest and a prodigy from beyond its borders.

"Hmph." Felix still remained largely unmoved. One hand was clasped behind his back while the other held a folded fan, his posture relaxed to the point of appearing arrogant. This nonchalant stance shifted the expressions of many bystanders. One of the prodigies thought, Felix appears completely unfazed, facing Kian—he's even using only one hand?

"How arrogant!" Fury ignited in Kian's heart. His longsword lunged forward with a fierce shout.

As he thrust, his inner strength erupted like a dragon rising from the depths, flooding into the blade. A flash of white sword light cut through the air like a rainbow piercing the midday sun.

In an instant, it was a blur, like a horse sprinting through a narrow passage.

A sharp, resonant clang echoed through the hall, reminiscent of a flood dragon soaring through the sky. Many of the young elite stood in disbelief, secretly amazed by Kian's might.

The sword light aimed at Felix—a strike powerful enough to slice a car in two—yet

he made no attempt to evade or retreat. Instead, he stepped directly into it, a folding fan in hand, and casually tapped the air.

At that moment, Kian's expression shifted dramatically. He could tangibly feel his sword's momentum severed right in half, his force split cleanly by Felix's touch.

In that brief moment, a sharp ache erupted in his chest. A tremendous force propelled him backward over ten feet, landing him at the edge of the platform. After delivering just that single strike, Felix merely retracted his hand, as if uninterested in launching a second attack.

Except for Elara, Daphne, and the couple Darius and Lyra, nearly everyone else in the hall couldn't comprehend what had just unfolded.

All eyes turned to Kian, who stood at the platform's very edge, his face pale and his eyes empty, like a person whose spirit had been dislodged.

On his chest, right above where his heart lay, his clothing had been pierced, leaving a perfectly round hole that exposed the skin beneath—but his flesh was not broken

even half an inch.

A wave of gasps rippled through the hall. Expressions shifted everywhere. Everyone grasped it-Kian had lost. Completely lost.

Someone thought, He loses with just one move. The renowned swordsman of Mount Sect has his heart directly targeted. If Felix doesn't hold back at the last moment, that single strike pierces his heart, ending his life instantly.

Both are Martial Sovereigns. How can the disparity be so vast?

The prodigies of the Astria martial world bore solemn expressions. Who in their generation can possibly contend with him, given Felix's cultivation?

Even Elara's gaze tightened. She was confident she could defeat Kian-but to do it in one move? That was something she knew she couldn't achieve.

Felix stood tall on the stage, the corner of his mouth curling into a sneer.

"This is one of Astria's so-called Nine Geniuses? What a farce. It appears that after a century, the Central Realm of Martial World has exhausted its supply of true fighters!"

His words were a slap to the face of the entire Astria martial world, belittling every young elite present-yet no one dared to respond.

Truly, Kian was already at the Martial Sovereign and had been taken out in a single move. Who could possibly claim the authority to step forward and vindicate their honor?

At that moment, Leander, from a reclining chair in the back-who had been lying there the entire time-finally opened his eyes!

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Chapter 426

Leander opened his eyes, calm and distant-not at Felix. A punk like him wasn't worth the glance.

Felix had mocked the so-called young prodigies of Astria's Central State, but it meant nothing to Leander. He wasn't the one being insulted.

Over a hundred prodigies were present, yet none dared step forward. None could defeat Felix. Naturally, Leander wouldn't intervene.

Pressed under the heel of a genius from the Shadowrealm Sect, these Central Realm of Martial World prodigies only inspired Leander's pity.

He had opened his eyes because he sensed three terrifying auras. The weakest was Blaze Transcendent, while the strongest had reached Infernal Crown Transcendent-enough to rival Galen, Grandmaster of Mount Martial.

The auras shared a faint similarity with Felix's. Likely from the same sect, these three were probably also from the Shadowrealm Sect.

"Dual Meridian Sect? What a messy day," he murmured, interest flickering in his eyes.

"Hah! The Central Realm of the Martial World' Nine Geniuses? All hot air," Felix sneered, arrogance dripping.

"Anyone else want to speak up for the Dual Meridian Sect's young mistress? Come at me. I'll take you all on," he called.

The hundred-plus prodigies bristled, but after Kian's defeat, none dared step forward. Anxiety hung heavy.

"Grant, go have a round with him?"

Seeing the silence, the impulsive Aria nudged her brother.

"Aria, I can't beat him," Grant muttered, reluctant.

"Can't beat him? What are you scared of?" Aria thumped her chest. "Our Steelblade Hall has a secret art. You can explode with Martial Sovereign-level power for a moment. The side effect is just a few days of weakness. Go, use the Steelblade Nine Forms and teach him a lesson. You'll shine in front of all these prodigies!"

Grant refused, shaking his head. "Even with the secret art, I'll barely match that Mount Sect guy. I can't beat him."

They spoke quietly, but every Martial Practitioner present could hear. Felix glanced at them, cold light flickering-killing intent simmering.

Leander shook his head at Aria, unsure how to even comment on this carefree, oblivious girl. She appeared bold and unrestrained, but in truth, she was inexperienced and naive. Felix, hailing from the Shadowrealm Sect, was narrow-minded, and Aria didn't even realize that a few careless words had already angered him, sowing the seeds of disaster for her and Grant.

If Felix found an opening, he would crush them without hesitation.

"This is the Dual Meridian Sect. The Bloody Palm Sect don't get to run wild here,"

Darius, the sect's nearly-betrothed son-in-law, stomped. Power surged, shaking the platform beneath him.

He pointed at Felix, fingers curling. Power gathered at each fingertip. He was ready to strike.

"Oh?" Felix flicked open his fan. "So the Dual Meridian Sect bullies with numbers. And you call yourselves the Shimmering Isle royal family?"

Darius ignored the provocation. "Against the Shadowrealm Sect, we owe no courtesy. You barged in alone. Be ready never to walk out." New NOVEL chapters are published on

His right arm surged with power as he struck.

Heat and force swept sideways. Felix's eyes narrowed as he infused his fan with inner strength, making it harder than steel to block the blow.

He was one of the most outstanding prodigies of his generation from the Shadowrealm Sect. He had reached Martial Sovereign at twenty-six and now stood

at the intermediate stage. Yet even so, when facing Darius, an elite Martial Sovereign, he was still clearly outmatched.

Their powers collided. Felix grunted, staggering to the platform's edge, his right arm numb.

Darius followed up with a sky-cleaving palm. A pale-red palm mark tore forward, aiming to smash Felix.

A thunderous boom shook the hall as rocks exploded overhead, sunlight piercing through.

Two figures descended like

immortals. One flicked a sleeve, a

wall of force shredding Darius's
palm attack. The leftover energy
hurled him more than a hundred feet back.

Bang!

He slammed into a rock wall, blood spilling from his lips. The hall froze. Every eye
was fixed on the two uninvited guests who had dropped from the sky.

They looked forty to fifty, about Darius's age, dressed in white robes like Felix. A bloody
handprint glared from their chests.

Hands clasped behind their backs, they floated thirty feet above the ground, looking
down on everyone.

"Transcendent Realm?"

Elara and her mother, Lyra, gasped in fear.

Darius had reached elite Martial Sovereign. To injure him in a single strike, only a
Transcendent could manage it.

Their robes marked them as members of the Bloody Palm Sect. Two Transcendents
from the sect meant they had come prepared.

Even among the Bloody Palm Sect, Transcendents were elite. Two here meant serious
intent.

"After all these years, the Dual Meridian Sect still bullies the young. Pathetic," the
middle-aged man who had struck Darius sneered.

"If you like throwing your weight around, I'll gladly crush a few egos."

His sleeve flicked. A power ribbon, over a hundred feet long and ten feet thick, crashed
toward Darius and his allies-aimed to kill.

Elara and Lyra froze. There was no escape. Even three Martial Sovereigns would have
been obliterated.

Boom!

A rainbow streak shot from deep within the Dual Meridian Sect, colliding with the ribbon
midair and shattering it.

"What?"

The middle-aged man paused. He did not attack again. Both he and his partner turned toward a rock wall.

From a tunnel mouth appeared a man and woman, standing shoulder to shoulder.

"A hundred years later,

Shadowrealm Sects are still

infuriating," the man in blue said, hands clasped behind his back.

Beside him, a graceful woma

matched his steps. Each movement carried a natural rhythm. Both were Transcendents.

The prodigies sucked in their breath. Every instinct screamed to run.

This was supposed to be a marriage proposing event. It had become a four transcendent showdown if they fought here, half.

the hundred-plus spectators would die from falling rocks.

Only Leander stayed calm. He lifted his gaze and focused on the blue-robed man.

Surprise flickered across his face.

"So it's him?" he said, eyes narrowing as he chuckled.

He never imagined the Transcendent he had met in Ravenridge would be part of the

Dual Meridian Sect.

The blue-robed man was none other than the Lord of Umbral-the one who had once asked Leander to spare several of the Umbral Court's Six Wraiths.

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Chapter 427

Leander's eyes flickered as he looked at the man in blue. He was a bit surprised.

Back in Ravenridge, he had wiped out the Umbral Court by himself. In the end, this same man in blue had appeared and used the Arbitration Office's resources to save the last member of the Wraiths.

"The Lord of Umbral, huh," Leander muttered softly.

He remembered what Daphne had mentioned earlier about the talented man who once married into the Dual Meridian Sect. That story matched what Spearstorm and the others had told him about the Lord of Umbral. They were the same person. That explained why the Lord of Umbral had risen so quickly from obscurity to fame and had defeated the abbot of Ancient Lingster back then.

It turned out that he had been chosen by the former master of the Dual Meridian Sect to be her husband. They had trained together with the sect's techniques, which boosted his strength. That was how he managed to dominate the last Astria Power Index and win against many top practitioners.

The middle-aged woman standing beside the Lord of Umbral was probably the grandmother of the sect's heiress. She was also a practitioner at the Transcendent Realm.

"The Dual Insight Technique is indeed something."

Leander had seen brief mentions of it in a few books, but he had never taken it seriously. Now that he saw the Lord of Umbral in person, he felt surprised. The last time he saw him was three months ago. Back then, the man had reached only the Kindling Transcendent Realm. Now he had already advanced to Ember Transcendent.

People knew that every tier in the Transcendent Realm had a large gap. Moving up to the next tier usually took years. Some needed more than ten or even several decades and still could not reach the next level. That was why some old monsters who had stayed in the Transcendent Realm for decades or nearly a century were still stuck. They could not move forward at all.

Trying to climb another tier in a few months was almost impossible. A practitioner needed great talent and understanding. They also needed the right opportunity. Without that, there was almost no hope.

Leander himself could do it only because of "Devourer's Ninefold Path," which let him absorb others' power as his own. But the Lord of Umbral had managed it through the Dual Insight Technique. That was impressive, even to Leander.

His surprise faded quickly. He could tell that the Lord of Umbral's foundation was unstable. It seemed like a forced breakthrough. It was nothing compared to Leander's smooth and steady progress.

What surprised him even more was the woman beside the Lord of Umbral. Her cultivation was higher than his. She had already reached Blaze Transcendent.

The Lord of Umbral stepped forward and shielded Elara and the others. He looked at Darius and asked, "Darius, are you alright?"

Darius shook his head gently. A moment later, a mouthful of blood came up. Elara looked furious. "Grandpa, you must not let those Bloody Palm Sect b*stards go. They hurt Dad!"

The Lord of Umbral nodded and sent a stream of inner strength into Darius' body. Darius' expression eased as the redness faded from his face. His breathing steadied.

Then the Lord of Umbral turned to the two Transcendent Realm practitioners from the Bloody Palm Sect.

"Elder Grimshade, Elliot Palecrest, you two have been at the Transcendent Realm for decades. Don't you think it's beneath you to strike at a junior?" His tone was cold as he questioned them.

"Hmph."

The two men, one dark-skinned and one pale, both sneered.

"In this world, the strong rule and the weak fall. There's no such thing as senior or junior.

"Take the strongest man in Astria right now, the so-called Iron Sovereign. He's only in his twenties. The Arbitration Office sent countless elite Arbitrators after him. In the end, he killed every one of them. Was there any talk of fairness then?

"That alone proves there is no age or rank in martial arts. There is only strength and weakness. Your son-in-law was hurt because he wasn't strong enough. He has no one to blame but himself."

The Lord of Umbral let out a low grunt. He had no answer. The others from the Dual Meridian Sect stayed quiet.

"Bloody Palm Sect b*stards, always twisting words!"

Before he could speak again, the middle-aged woman beside him stepped forward. She raised her hand and sent out a palm strike.

A massive purple palm shadow formed, stretching more than thirty feet as it rushed toward the two men. Her strike was sharp and strong. The innate vitality coming from it made every young practitioner nearby tense up. This was the real power of the Transcendent Realm, the level they all hoped to reach someday.

"Hmph."

The two elders did not look afraid. Albert lifted his hand and met her strike head-on.

A loud boom echoed as their forces clashed. The shockwave spread through the hall and pushed strong gusts of wind over the guests. Tables and chairs nearly flipped over.

The Lord of Umbral moved quickly and raised a hand. A wave of energy spread out, shielding the crowd and keeping them safe.

"Princess Clara of the Shimmering Isle royal family, your strength is impressive. You are twenty years younger than we are, yet your power is already on par. The Dual Insight Technique must have its secrets."

Albert laughed and stroked his beard after blocking her strike. His eyes showed admiration.

The woman was indeed the former princess of the royal family of the Shimmering Isle. Her name was Clara Whitlock. Her father had been the last sovereign of the outer Shimmering Isle. The founder of the Bloody Palm Sect had killed him.

After the Shimmering Isle royal family fell, she hid in the Central Realm. She had secretly founded the Dual Meridian Sect to preserve her family's legacy.

A thin mist gathered around her palm as her eyes grew cold.

"Bloody Palm Sect b*stards, I'll kill every last one of you someday! Since you came here today, we'll settle this right now. As long as I'm alive, none of you will leave this place!"

Her voice carried a steady resolve. She was ready to fight.

The Lord of Umbral stepped beside her. Their auras blended as their strength aligned.

Elara, Lyra, and the others stayed alert. The Bloody Palm Sect had clearly come prepared. Two Transcendent Realm practitioners were already here. Their strongest members had shown up as well. A fierce battle was unavoidable.

"Haha, such big talk. But your sect doesn't have that kind of strength."

Felix, who had been knocked back earlier, had already recovered. He opened his

folding fan and smiled with a wicked look.

"Today is the day the Dual Meridian Sect falls!"

He shouted, "Welcome, Lord Lloyd!"

The Lord of Umbral and Clara froze.

"What?"

They looked up as a golden light came down from the sky and shattered the stage.

A figure stepped out of the glow. His presence seemed endless, and his aura felt deep and heavy.

The man wore a blood-red robe. His hands were behind his back. His black beard and white hair gave him the air of an old sage, but the cold and greedy look in his eyes showed his true nature.

His gaze moved across the hall and stopped on Clara.

"Princess Clara, it has been sixty years since we parted outside the Shadowrealm.

You still look as radiant as ever."

His pupils held the weight of time. They looked deep and strange.

"It's you?"

Even Clara looked shocked.

"Reid? You actually came out of seclusion?"

She could hardly believe it. This man was the one who had destroyed the Shimmering Isle royal family sixty years ago. He was the founder of the Bloody Palm Sect and the former Imperial Commander, Reid Lloyd.

It was unbelievable. Sixty years ago, Reid had led his forces into the Shimmering

Isle Palace and fought her father in a battle that shook the kingdom. In the end, her father died at Reid's hand.

But before her father died, he had unleashed one final attack that badly injured Reid and damaged his core. By her estimate, Reid would not have recovered for at least seventy years. By then, he should have been close to death. That should have been their chance for revenge.

But now, only sixty years had passed. Reid stood here again, stronger than before. How was that possible?

"You seem surprised," Reid said with a small smile. He stepped into the golden light and carried an ancient sword on his back.

"I should thank your father. If he hadn't pushed me to my limits back then, I wouldn't have risen again and reached the Infernal Crown Transcendent Realm."

"Infernal Crown Transcendent?"

The Lord of Umbral's pupils shrank. Everyone behind him—Elara, Clara, and Darius - looked horrified.

Those three words marked the peak of the entire Transcendent Realm.

Even if the Dual Meridian Sect used all its strength, it had never produced a single Infernal Crown Transcendent. Clara had reached only Blaze Transcendent.

Now the enemies had two Blaze Transcendents and one Infernal Crown Transcendent. The sect was in grave danger.

The Lord of Umbral made a quick decision. He sent a Spirit Voice to the three younger ones behind him.

"Lyra, Darius, Elara, when the fight

starts, Clara and I will hold them off. You must not look back. Run straight to Highcliffe. Go to the Ashcroft family and find the Iron

Sovereign, Jeff. Tell him I'm here for him

Owes

help. I met him once, and he owes me a small favor. He will protect you.

"With Jeff there, even Reid won't dare to act recklessly. Go now!"

At such a desperate moment, the first person he thought of was the undefeated man he had met once.

During a Spirit Voice transmission, the lips barely moved, which left almost no trace.

But someone like Reid would not be fooled.

He let out a cold chuckle and shook his head.

"Wyatt, even now, you think anyone from the Dual Meridian Sect can escape the Lyradon River alive? Don't kid yourself."

He pointed his finger. The space around Elara and the others rippled. Invisible walls of energy formed, trapping them completely.

"Today, every person in the Dual Meridian Sect will die."

His words sent chills down everyone's spine. He did not plan to destroy only the sect. He planned to wipe out every living person.

"Kian, what do we do? Should we run?"

A small female swordswoman from Mount Sect whispered nervously beside Kian.

Kian had already recovered from his earlier defeat. His eyes were sharp, but he shook his head.

"Don't panic," he said. "Don't forget. He's still here."

His gaze moved toward Leander's direction.

At Leander's table, the Clarke siblings were already pale with fear. They had traveled from the

northwest only to attend the Dual

Meridian Sect's suitor-selection ceremony. They never thought they would get caught in such chaos.

Now, an Infernal Crown Transcendent was here, threatening to kill everyone. Who could stop him?

A clear and steady voice came from behind them.

"Such arrogance from outsiders," it said.

Everyone froze. They were shocked that someone dared to speak at a moment like this. Even Reid turned to look. The source of this content is

A young man with black hair and dark eyes leaned casually in his chair. He opened his palm and smiled faintly.

"I didn't care about your grudge with the Dual Meridian Sect," he said. "But since you plan to kill everyone here, I want to see if you really have that ability."

His voice was calm. His smile looked relaxed.

The Lord of Umbral, who had been tense only a moment earlier, suddenly looked overjoyed.

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Chapter 428

"Do you have that kind of ability?"

The young man was Leander. He held a piece of cake from the banquet hosted by the Dual Meridian Sect. He leaned back in his chair in a relaxed and carefree way.

There were more than a hundred young talents in the hall. He was the only one who spoke. Everyone else stayed silent.

Those who had seen Leander's strength before looked pleased. Those who did not know him were stunned.

The four experts from the Shadowrealm Sect were present. The weakest among them was Felix. He had already reached the Martial Sovereign level. He had defeated Kian in a single move. Behind him stood three experts who were even stronger. They were all at the Transcendent Realm.

Even the two elders of the Dual Meridian Sect looked uneasy. They were also at the Transcendent Realm. For them, it was hard to believe that a young man like Leander had the nerve to speak up.

Even Elara, the heiress of the Dual Meridian Sect, found it unbelievable. She had sensed Leander twice before and had never felt any martial power from him. Yet he still dared to speak up to the founder of the Bloody Palm Sect. Even she would not dare to do that. She did not understand how Leander could.

Her eyes lifted a little as she glanced at Daphne. She looked worried. Daphne's calm and steady expression made her heart tighten.

Can it be that he really has the strength to challenge the Bloody Palm Sect? Is he the descendant of some ancient and powerful clan?

While Elara was lost in thought, Felix from the Bloody Palm Sect spoke.

"You brat, who do you think you are? You dare talk to my master like that? My master came here today to wipe out all of you weaklings from the Central Realm of the Martial World. Killing you would mean nothing to him. Yet you dare question him?"

He turned to Reid and cupped his hands.

"Master, this brat is being disrespectful. Please allow me to take his head for you!" Reid's face stayed calm. He glanced at Leander and gave a small nod.

Felix's mouth curved into a cruel smile. He leaped forward. He crossed several young prodigies and landed in the VIP section.

"Oh no!"

Elara's heart sank. Felix had defeated Kian in one move. Dealing with Leander would be too easy for him.

She was about to rush forward to help, but Wyatt, the Lord of Umbral, raised a hand to stop her.

"Grandpa?"

Wyatt gave her a faint smile and shook his head. She did not understand why.

By then, Felix had reached Leander's group. He swung his palm down through the air. The force exploded like a shockwave. It formed a blast of energy aimed straight at Leander.

Leander's face stayed calm. Daphne tensed up beside him and was ready to strike. Before she moved, Aria shouted.

"Grant, go!"

Grant's muscles tightened in an instant. A strong aura burst from him. The sword behind him flew into the air. He grabbed it with both hands. He swung it with all his strength and cut sideways through Felix's punch.

Even Leander looked a bit surprised.

He had not expected the Clarke siblings to step in at a moment like this.

Grant's eyes stayed firm. The Clarke family of Edgemontale Desert Steelblade Hall was not well known. Still, every generation believed in repaying kindness. Leander had rowed the boat for them and brought them safely to the Dual Meridian Sect. He had spoken up when they were not allowed to enter the VIP area. Since Leander was now in danger, there was no way they would stand aside.

The sword light flashed and broke Felix's energy punch.

Even so, the force behind Felix's strike was too strong. Grant's blood surged. The skin between his thumb and forefinger tore open. He stumbled backward.

Felix's killing intent rose when he saw someone dare stop him. "You're asking for death!"

He did not kill Leander first. Instead, he charged straight at Grant.

He threw three punches in a row. Each one carried strong inner strength. Grant pushed his limits and fought back with his secret technique. The difference in strength was too great. Each punch forced a grunt from his throat. His face turned red. He was pushed back ten steps, and each step left a deep footprint in the floor.

"D*mn it!"

Aria saw her brother being overpowered. She let out a low growl. She activated her secret technique. Her aura rose to the half-Sovereign level. She slashed her sword toward Felix's back.

"You really don't know your place!"

Felix sensed the wind behind him and sneered. He did not even turn his head. He lifted his sleeve to block.

A sharp clang echoed through the hall. Aria staggered back. Even with her secret technique, she could not withstand his casual strike.

As she retreated, she looked at Daphne beside Leander. Daphne sat calmly next to him. She did not look worried at all. It confused Aria even more.

Why wasn't she reacting when Felix attacked Leander?

A folding fan shot toward Aria's chest at lightning speed. She could not dodge. She could only watch it come closer.

Grant was behind her. He was too injured to move. His energy was sealed, and he could not help her.

"Watch closely."

The voice came from Leander.

Before she could react, her left hand moved on its own. Her sword tilted at a strange angle. She struck the lower edge of the fan.

A clear metallic sound rang out. The fan flew back. Felix trembled. He even took a step back.

His face froze.

He had used seventy percent of his strength. Her sword had hit the weakest point of his strike. It broke through his force and even pushed back.

Aria felt a shock in her arm and took half a step back.

Her eyes widened. That move had not been hers. Someone had taken control of her body.

Is it him?

She looked at Leander. She still could not believe it.

"To block one move, not bad. Let's see how many more you can handle."

Felix recovered fast. He smirked. He folded his fan and moved forward like lightning.

His palm lashed out again.

Aria felt the air twist around her. She froze.

Don't panic. Hold the sword tight.

The same voice spoke again. A

strange power flowed through her. It

guided her
movements. She did not
dodge. She charged straight at
Felix's strike.

Everyone in the room was horrified. They thought she was about to die.

At the last moment, Aria shifted her stance. The palm missed her by inches. Her
sword pierced Felix's chest from a blind angle.

"How... is that possible?"

Felix's body went stiff. The light faded from his eyes.

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Her sword had pierced his heart. ended his life. He could not understand how he had
lost who had not even reached the Martial Sovereign level.

girt

The hall fell silent. No one could believe what had happened.

Aria's secret technique had pushed her to the half-Sovereign level. That was still far
below someone like Kian.

Kian had lost in one move. Yet Aria had killed Felix in one strike.

Even Elara, Lyra, and Darius were stunned.

Felix's body hit the floor. Aria pulled out her sword. She looked at Leander with
mixed feelings.

"Was it you helping me?"

Leander took a sip of tea. He gave a small smile. Read full story at find-novel.net

"You stepped in for me, so I gave you a gift. I let you feel what it's like to win against

someone stronger while being weaker.

"Use your strengths against your

enemy's weakness. Find the most fragile spot in their defense and

strike it. Even someone at half-Sovereign can defeat a Martial Sovereign that way. Do you understand now?"

Aria nodded. She still looked confused.

Who exactly is Leander? How can he have that kind of power and insight?

Before she could think further, Reid spoke. His feet glowed with a faint golden light.

"So that's who you are. The Iron Sovereign himself."

A faint smile crossed his face. He clasped his hands toward Leander.

"Sovereign Ashcroft, I've heard of you for a long time."

The hall erupted in shock.

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Chapter 429

The whole place went silent. One shocked gaze after another turned to Leander.

Who was Reid? He was the high and mighty founder of the Bloody Palm Sect. He was a former Imperial Commander, a peerless swordsman born in the last century, and a man who had reached the level of Infernal Crown Transcendent.

Even he called Leander "Sovereign." That meant Leander's identity was clear to everyone.

"Sovereign Ashcroft?"

Aria turned around with a stiff movement. She could not look away.

She had lived in the northwest for years, far from the Central Realm, yet the name of the undefeated Iron Sovereign had spread across the world. She had heard of him long ago.

But she never imagined that Leander was that legendary, unmatched hero.

The man who destroyed the Arbitration Office and defeated the War God Sanctum had actually been the one helping them row the boat earlier.

Just thinking about it made her feel like she was dreaming.

Everyone from the Dual Meridian Sect, including Clara, looked shocked and speechless.

Elara finally understood why she had not sensed Leander's level of cultivation. It was not because he was weak. It was because he was already far beyond her reach.

"So he's Jeff."

Elara gave a bitter smile. No wonder even someone as strong as Daphne became gentle around him.

"Yes, that's me."

Leander leaned back with both hands behind his head and crossed one leg over the other.

"You said you wanted to kill everyone here. Why don't you say that again now?" Hearing the tone in Leander's voice, Reid raised an eyebrow. His eyes turned cold. But when he looked at Wyatt and Clara, who were ready to fight, he remembered why he had come here today. He forced down his anger and kept a polite smile.

"Sovereign Ashcroft, you're joking. I spoke carelessly earlier. Other than the people from the Dual Meridian Sect, everyone else can leave freely."

The young prodigies present let out a quiet breath of relief. They were also deeply impressed.

Reid had clearly planned to kill everyone. The moment Leander showed up, he changed his mind. That was the kind of power only the Iron Sovereign carried.

"Oh?" Leander smiled. "Your sect's top prodigy died because of me. Don't you want revenge?"

He was talking about Felix, who had been killed by Aria's sword.

Reid's face darkened. The Bloody Palm Sect had other geniuses, yet Felix had been the best among them.

His death hurt Reid, but his top priority at the moment was destroying the Dual Meridian Sect. He did not want to start more trouble.

If Leander took their side, the whole battle would turn around. What was supposed to be an easy win would suddenly become even.

Even though he had reached Infernal Crown Transcendent, Reid was not foolish enough to be arrogant.

Leander had defeated eleven Transcendent Realm masters at the Southern Shore. Two of them had been ranked on the International Combat Units. None had reached the Infernal Crown stage, yet his strength was still beyond measure. Reid knew better than to underestimate him.

After thinking it through, he kept his face calm and shook his head.

"Felix dared to attack you first. He brought it on himself. No one else is to blame. Today's matter is between our sect and the Dual Meridian Sect. It won't involve anyone else."

His tone sounded polite, yet everyone there could tell that Reid had already given way to Leander in some sense.

"Not involving anyone else? That's a good one."

Leander still did not plan to leave. With him there, the crowd who had been afraid earlier now felt safe enough to stay and watch.

He stood up and stretched lazily. Then he looked at Wyatt.

"Lord of Umbral, this is our second time meeting."

Wyatt clasped his hands with a polite smile. "Last time in Ravenridge, it was an honor to meet you, Sovereign Ashcroft. I still remember it well. It's a shame I couldn't attend the Southern Shore battle in person to see you destroy the War God Sanctum and the Arbitration Office."

As the ruler of the Umbral Court and the most powerful son-in-law of the Dual

Meridian Sect, Wyatt still looked cautious in front of Leander.

He knew that even ten of him together would not match one Leander.

"There's no need for small talk."

Leander waved his hand and pointed at Reid and the others.

"With things as they are, how confident are you that your sect can hold them off?"

Wyatt hesitated, then shook his head. "Less than ten percent."

"Is that so?" Leander put one hand in his pocket and raised a finger.

"Last time in Ravenridge, you asked me for a favor. This time, I'll give you a chance too. A chance to make a deal with me."

Wyatt froze for a moment before he asked, "What kind of deal do you want to make?"

At this point, Leander staying here was already the biggest deterrent to the Bloody Palm Sect. Reid and his men had made a move because new this well

ofhim Wyatt

"I heard your sect has a place called the Dragon Gate."

Leander pointed toward the back of the Dual Meridian Sect's grounds.

"The Dragon Gate?"

Everyone from the Dual Meridian Sect, including Wyatt and Clara, looked alarmed.

The Dragon Gate was something Clara had found by chance after founding the sect. It was a

mysterious land filled with spiritual energy that could sustain the sect for centuries.

It was the heart of the entire sect.

If anyone else had mentioned it, they would have been furious. Since it was

Leander, no one dared say a word.

Wyatt thought for a moment. Then he asked, "Yes, Sovereign Ashcroft, we do have the Dragon Gate. What do you plan to do with it?"

Leander's eyes turned sharp. He nodded slightly.

"Good."

He raised his hand and pointed at Reid and the others.

"My offer is simple. If your sect agrees to take me into the Dragon Gate, I'll help you destroy your enemies. How about that?"

The moment he said that, Reid and the others looked furious. Their expressions darkened at once.

"Jeff, I respect you as a strong man of this age, and I didn't want trouble. But don't push me too far!"

As the founder of his sect and a former Imperial Commander, Reid had his pride. He could not hold back anymore and shouted.

Leander ignored him. He looked at Wyatt and the others and waited for their answer.

Wyatt stayed quiet for a while. Then he looked up.

"Alright. On behalf of the Dual Meridian Sect, I accept your terms, Sovereign Ashcroft."

Clara was startled. She grabbed Wyatt's arm.

He glanced at her and shook his head. "The Dragon Gate may be our sectene

but if we cecet

today, what's the point of keeping it?"

Clara went silent. After a few seconds, determination filled her eyes. She looked at Leander.

"Sovereign Ashcroft, if you can help our sect survive this, we'll personally take you to the Dragon Gate."

"Good."

After he got their answer, Leander turned around to face Reid and his men.

Reid's eyes went cold. The calmness was gone.

"Jeff, our sect has no grudge with you. Are you really going to side with them against us?"

Leander acted like he did not hear him. He stretched his neck a little and spread his hands.

"Too bad. The Dual Meridian Sect has something I want. Your sect doesn't."

He pointed at Darrow and the two elders beside him.

"You said no one in the Central Realm could match you. I'd like to see where that confidence comes from."

Light flashed in Leander's eyes. His fighting spirit filled the air.

"The Bloody Palm Sect will fall today. I'll crush it myself!"

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Chapter 430

Right after Leander spoke, a gust of wind rose under his feet. It wrapped around him and the people nearby, cutting them off from everything else as if they were in a different space. His aura shot straight toward the three Transcendent Realm practitioners in the sky.

The young prodigies around him felt their hearts pound. Elara and the Clarke siblings stared at Leander's back without blinking.

Leander's name had spread across the nation and shaken the world, but they had only heard of him before. Now they could finally see the Iron Sovereign fight for real.

They wanted to know if Jeff, the man said to be ruthless and unbeatable, was really as terrifying as the rumors said.

"You want to wipe out my sect?"

Reid stood with golden light under his feet. His eyes filled with killing intent and rising anger.

"Jeff, what a big mouth you have!"

His cold gaze sharpened. The golden light rose from his legs to his hands and then to his head, until it enveloped his whole body.

"You think that because you defeated eleven Transcendent Realm practitioners at Southern Shore, you're invincible now?"

"Even if there were twenty Blaze Transcendents, I would still kill them all!"

"You have no idea what level an Infernal Crown Transcendent has reached!"

He clenched his palm. The inner walls of the Dual Meridian Hall shook. Stones rolled down. The whole ground trembled.

"Jeff, I respected you as one of the strongest in the country. We had no grudge. I did not want trouble. Don't think my sect fears your title as the Iron Sovereign!"

"This is your last chance. Leave or die!"

At that moment, the former Imperial Commander revealed his true nature. This was who he really was.

In his younger days, he had dominated the world and defeated many masters from the former dynasty. He had lost at first but later rose to victory. In the palace filled with masters, he earned the title of Imperial Commander. His power had once shaken the empire.

When foreign armies invaded, they feared his strength so much that they avoided a direct fight. They pressured him and tempted him until he switched sides. That alone showed how strong he was.

The Shimmering Isle royal family had ruled the lands beyond the desert. Their king reached the peak of power decades ago, yet Reid still killed him in battle.

The Shadowrealm Sect was known for how vicious it was. Its disciples were fierce and bloodthirsty. As the founder of the Bloody Palm Sect, Reid had a reputation that came from real strength, not empty talk.

He was not listed in the International Combat Units, but if ranked by power twenty years ago, he would have easily made the top ten. Now that he had stepped into the Infernal Crown Transcendent level, his confidence grew. He believed he could rank in the top three in the world.

Leander's fame was immense, but in Reid's eyes, he was still a young man. Reid felt no fear.

He also had no idea what happened in Highcliffe when Leander fought the Wanda Sect leader, Galen.

Major families in Highcliffe watched that fight, and no other practitioners were present. The Captain General and four other top-ranked generals blocked the news, so it never spread.

If Reid had known that Leander defeated Galen, an Infernal Crown Transcendent, and even matched a move with David from the Ancient Lingster Sanctum without losing, he would have walked away at once.

"Is that so?" Leander's eyes stayed calm. He hooked his finger.

"Then show me."

Reid's aura deepened until it felt like a heavy weight pressing on the hall. Many young prodigies struggled to breathe.

Albert and Elliot, who stood behind him, stepped forward. Both were Blaze Transcendents and watched with sharp eyes.

"Iron Sovereign, people say you're powerful and killed over ten Transcendent Realm practitioners alone. I don't believe that!"

Albert's long beard moved with the air. His black robe rustled. His thin hand reached out from his sleeve. A dark glow flashed over his palm, followed by sparks of light.

"Blaze Hundredfold!"

He swung his arm back, then formed a fist and struck forward.

His punch carried fire and light. The air lit up. A massive flame fist more than ten yards wide formed and blasted toward Leander.

"Wyatt, let's stop those two elders so Sovereign Ashcroft can focus on Reid!"

Clara patted Wyatt's shoulder and prepared to move. Wyatt lifted his hand to stop her.

"Clara, don't. Just watch. Ever since

Sovereign Ashcroft appeared, he has fought every battle alone and won every time. He has never needed will only get nly get

help if you step is you wifi caly

in his way."

Clara looked confused, but Leander had already moved.

Albert's fiery punch filled the air and sealed off all space around Leander. Everyone watched as Leander slowly raised his right hand and pointed his index finger.

A soft sound spread through the air as if a thin layer had been pierced.

A blue streak of energy shot from his fingertip and pierced the center of the flame fist.

The fiery fist was massive, and Leander's attack was only an inch wide. The difference in size was huge.

But that small blue strike cut through the attack like a knife slicing through something soft. It broke the flame apart at once.

"Not good!"

Reid's gaze sharpened. He moved to the side and tried to block something.

Leander's attack was too fast. Everything ended in a blink.

A sharp sound followed. Albert froze. A small hole appeared between his brows. It went straight through his skull. [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT](#)

His body lost support and fell heavily to the ground. He stayed silent.

The crowd gasped in shock.

It happened in a second.

A Blaze Transcendent is dead?

Everyone was stunned.

Even Clara and Wyatt stayed silent.

Clara was stronger than Wyatt, but she was still only a Blaze Transcendent. Did that

mean Leander could kill her just as easily?

"Killing a Blaze Transcendent as easily as crushing a bug? His strength really can't be measured by normal standards."

Wyatt shook his head with a bitter smile.

When he first met Leander in

Ravenridge, he knew he could not win but could still sense the gap Now Leander felt like a vast ocean, boundless and impossible to grasp.

Reid's expression darkened. Rage burned inside him, but he could not hide his shock.

He had tried to save Albert, yet even with Infernal Crown Transcendent power, he was still too slow.

He could now see that Leander had killed a Blaze Transcendent with ease.

He did not know that ever since the

know

fight at Southern Shore, where

Leander killed eleven Transcendent

Realm practitioners, Leander's strength had grown even more. His fight with Gafen and Daviding Highcliffe had pushed him to a new level.

Now, Blaze Transcendents were no different from insects to him.

Leander looked calm as he spoke.

"The next one."

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