

Chapter 41 - 41. Heads

Noah was standing on Quinn's carriage listening to his explanation while moving toward Balvan mansion.

"Young master, this is a Snake essence. It's a powerful elixir that can cure any poisoning! It is made from the livers of snake-type magical beasts and..."

"Young master, that one is the Bear-Fury pill. It will give you a temporary boost in strength and resistance, not that you would need it. You are strong as a bull and graceful..."

"Oh, you surely won't need that one, young master. That's a purple mouse concentrate, they are weak magical beasts but their reproductivity is extremely high, I bet you can guess already the effects of such a fluid, eheh."

Quinn would flatter Noah every time he had the chance while explaining the properties of the many pills and elixirs in Noah's pile of items.

The goods were already moved back on the carriage before they moved again and Quinn, his daughter and one soldier from the Merger family came along.

The other one was left on the rendezvous point waiting for his family's envoy and taking care of the collapsed guard.

Yet, as Quinn's exposition continued, Noah began to feel irritated.

'What's up with this guy, does he have a crush on me? And why is he avoiding all the drugs that seem more powerful?'

His brows furrowed making the merchant panic a bit.

He understood that he overdid a little and so he moved to the next part of his scheme.

"Young master, I'm old and quite tired from all the previous events. Why don't you allow my daughter, Sophie, to keep up with the explanation? I can assure you that I taught her all my knowledge so she is more than fit for the job!"

Realization struck Noah after hearing the merchant's words.

'He wants to set me up with his daughter? Does he think I'm some kind of noble heir of the family?'

Sophie was a young girl that was about 14 years old.

She had long brown hair and green eyes, her body was gracious but was still developing the curves typical of an adult woman.

In Noah's eyes though, still tied to his previous world's canons of beauty, she was just a kid.

Sophie blushed when her father mentioned her and peeked shortly at the young man only to lower her head blushing even more evidently.

Noah was a bit stunned by her reaction.

'Am I really that good looking? Well, I do have Lily's facial attributes but I never thought that they could cause such reactions.'

Noah had taken his mother's pretty face and had her same eyes and hair, coupled with his well-toned body, his strength and the possibility that he was a noble, no common girl could possibly reject him.

Before Sophie could pick up where his father left, Noah stopped her.

"Quinn, I want to make clear that I'm just a bastard inside the Balvan family..."

He continued speaking while taking out something from the pile of goods, a fetid smell enveloped the carriage as seven heads hidden inside layers of body parts of magical beasts were made visible.

Quinn lost all colors from his face and Sophie trembled lightly at that sight.

"And I really think that it's time for you to start speaking about the important drugs."

A wave of coldness enveloped the carriage.

The guard that was on its rear had his head lowered the whole time.

The merchant and his daughter might have not understood Noah's real strength but an initiate on the road of cultivation like him knew that one had to be on the level of a real cultivator to knock up a guard with one kick.

Seeing the severed heads, Quinn understood that the kid in front of him not only did find the robbers' hiding but also killed them.

And he did all of this while being alone!

Quinn hastily kowtowed with his head hitting the floor of the carriage.

"I'm extremely sorry, please forgive this lowly merchant!"

Noah at that sight just shrugged his shoulders and pointed at the goods.

"Keep going."

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When the group was nearing Balvan mansion, Noah was lying on the roof of the carriage deep in thought.

'The Inner-energy pill is my best choice for sure, but it belonged to the Merger family so I don't know if they will let me pick it.'

Apparently, most of the good drugs belonged to the stolen shipment of the merchant so he was unwilling to speak about them, at least until Noah's threat.

The Inner-energy pill was among the best pills that Quinn pointed out.

It was made by concentrating "Breath" in the form of a pill and was one of the best nourishment for the body of the cultivator.

'The other option is its worse version in the form of an elixir, but I believe that the effects will be much lower. I hope it will be enough to complete the fifth cycle.'

The Inner-energy potion was the less powerful version of the previous pill.

Noah's choice as the reward for the mission was between these two options.

'My fifth cycle is almost complete anyway, I believe that in two months my acupoints will stop working so even getting the worse version is not a bad thing. I already got the best possible rewards after all.'

His hand unconsciously went on a spot on his waist where a silver ring was hidden.

Inside it, there were 12 well-made weapons and a big brown pill.

'I can't wait to have a dantian to test the Earth pill, I bet the results will be amazing!'

A light smile appeared on his face as he was daydreaming about his future strength, but he was suddenly forced to awake by a rough voice yelling in their direction.

"You there stop! This is the territory of the Balvan family, you must first state your name and your business with the family if you want to proceed!"

The carriage stopped and Quinn stood up in order to deal with the guard but at that moment a young voice sounded from the roof of the carriage.

"Karl, it's me, let them pass and inform my Master that I'm back!"

Karl was, of course, the guard that stopped them.

Since his constant going out in missions outside the mansion, Noah got to know the names of all the soldiers patrolling the territories near Balvan mansion.

"Oh, it's you! Did you got caught in another mess this time?"

Karl smiled looking at the kid waving at him. With the accident of the rank 3 ironclad spider and the mage in the group of rebels, Noah's reputation was not particularly good.

The soldiers thought that anywhere he went, something unexpected would happen.

"No mess at all, this time I might actually have done a really good service for the inner circle."

Karl shook his head seeing how conscious Noah was of his troublemaking character.

"Then go, I'll tell the vice-captain of your return. You know, he was in a bad mood recently when he saw that you were late."

Noah just smiled while his eyes became darker.

'I'm sorry Master, but I really need to lie to you.'

Chapter 42 - 42. Isolation

"Explain it to me again."

Noah was in a room in the guards building with a big map laid on a table.

William was in front of him with a stern face looking carefully at his disciple.

Noah pointed at the map and spoke in a calm tone.

"I went inside Evergreen forest looking for the Gray Shadows. After searching for two weeks I found no traces of them so I chose to explore deeper in the forest. After some days of travel, I felt signs of life inside a small cave and so I

investigated. The bandits' group was inside sorting their items, so I killed them and used their clothes to carry the goods back to the mansion. On the perimeter of the forest, I found Quinn, the merchant, and he willingly offered me a ride back to the mansion inside his carriage. That's all."

Noah would point out on the map his route while he was describing the events of the mission.

William stared at him for some time before speaking again.

"The merchant said that there was an Earth pill with its description among the goods, are you sure that you took everything from the deposit?"

Noah shrugged his shoulders and said with an innocent expression.

"I'm sure that I took everything from the cave, I'm not totally sure that all the items remained in the package though while I was dragging it. What is an Earth pill? Is it good? I can go search for it again if you let me keep it."

Noah had his usual attitude greedy for power which only made William sigh and shook his head.

"Never mind, you can go. I'll give you the reward you asked for once everything is delivered to the inner circle."

Noah lightly bowed and exited the room.

At that moment, a figure appeared behind William.

"Do you trust him?"

William looked again in the direction where Noah went and answered with honesty.

"I think he said the truth, after all, it's quite impossible to hide such a good pill from us. And, captain, you seem to forget that he didn't even try to hide the "Breath" blessing last time even if he risked his life to obtain it."

The captain of the guards just looked at William before turning back.

"You are getting too affectionate to that kid, remember that our duty is toward the inner circle and his position will never be good there."

William's face darkened hearing these words.

He could clearly imagine in his mind the small kid repeating the same techniques every day alone in his room only to get a little bit stronger.

He remembered all his determination during the treatments, even with his body broken his mind was still completely focused, striving to make a small step toward a higher level in the road of cultivation.

For the first time in many years, William felt that life was being unfair and he gave voice to his thoughts.

"Are Heaven and Earth really fair?"

The captain stopped his steps for a second before replying for the last time.

"They are, humans are not."

Then he left, leaving William with a conflicted expression alone in the room.

Meanwhile, Noah went back to his building.

He wanted to meet his mother and reassure her on his well-being, yet, her room was closed with only faint sounds coming from inside it.

It has been a while since Noah became able to completely hear anything happening in the room but he forced himself not to because it would only ruin his mood.

He entered his room and unsheathed his saber, then he practiced in all the forms of his martial art until he calmed himself.

Then he picked the Kesier rune and began a full night training in it.

It was only around midday that he was forced to stop the training because of someone knocking on his door.

Nowadays, even if 8 hours of training consumed a lot of mental energy and made him tired and sleepy, he could still force himself to do basic actions and simple reasoning.

He opened the door only to find Lily standing on the other side with a small box in her hands.

Her figure looked extremely weak and pale, she was visibly tired as her hands were trembling slightly.

A big bruise was on her jaw.

"Your Master sent this for you, he said that you did an amazing service for the family."

She was smiling proudly looking at her only son.

Noah took the box from her hands and gently caressed the spot where the bruise was.

Lily just shook her head.

"It's fine, don't you worry. Your father simply can't handle how amazing you are compared with his other son and daughter."

Then she got close to Noah and took his face between her hands looking at him seriously.

"Promise me that you won't do anything reckless, you have to be safe! Don't worry about me, just focus on your future!"

Noah looked at his mother and nodded showing a slight smile, but in his mind, he could only think about how cold Lily's hands were.

Lily seemed satisfied with his answer and hugged him before going away, while Noah stood still for a while before he closed the door and sat on the ground.

CRACK!

The box in his hand shattered from the pressure applied by Noah's squeeze and two bottles fell on his legs.

'As expected, it's just the Inner-energy potion. It doesn't matter, it should be enough.'

He directly opened a bottle and drank its whole contents.

A wonderful sensation of being strengthened ran through Noah from inside his body but he didn't care, he was already looking at the Kesier rune in front of him continuing his training.

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One month and a half passed by, with Noah barely going out of his room during this period.

He would only attend the weekly sparring with his Master and the lunches with his mother, he didn't even go out for missions anymore.

Right now, he was standing in his room, his face was pale and there were large bags under his eyes, yet his eyelids were completely open.

There seemed to be some source of light inside his pupils as his eyes shined in the darkness of the room.

'So, that's what it feels like.'

He was holding the Kesier rune in his right hand in front of his face, yet he seemed to have no difficulties in looking at it.

It was like he was reading any other book!

He smiled and then he put the rune away.

'Next is the sixth treatment!'

Chapter 43 - 43. Amazement

In this month and a half of isolation, Noah's advancements were immense.

The first one was the conclusion of the fifth cycle.

With the help of 12 bottles of Beast's essence and 2 bottles of Inner-energy potion coupled with one month of natural absorption from the acupoints, the fifth cycle got completed in less than three months!

The second one had happened this same day a few minutes before.

He was training in the Kesier rune when its image in his sea of consciousness formed completely.

After that, a humming sound shot out from it and reverberated inside his whole mental sphere making it tremble and enlarge.

Noah only felt a splitting pain in his head and endured until the pain dispersed and the sphere stopped shaking.

The world he saw after the process was over was a different one.

Even though it was deep in the night he could see things almost as clearly as during the day and there seemed to be more details on those.

He took one of his black sabers and carefully inspected it.

The black blade looked perfectly smooth before he advanced but now Noah could see some small dents on it.

He put back the saber and focused on his hearing and perception.

He could sense all the people on the floor!

If he focused enough he could hear the steps of the servants still awake in the distance.

He could feel the air entering his lungs, the blood running in his veins, the "Breath" filling his body.

Even his thoughts seemed to run more smoothly and at a higher speed.

He tried to move the "Breath" according to his martial art with his fingers and he noticed a faint gaseous trace of the color of the rainbow left in the air.

'Is that the Breath of Heaven and Earth? Can I actually see it now?'

He was amazed for a moment before he shook his head.

'No, that was the concentrated "Breath" inside my body. I don't know if I would be able to feel the one of other people so easily too.'

He then laid in his bed to rest since his mind was still a bit confused from the advancement.

'The only problem is how Master will react tomorrow.'

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"WHAT?! How is it possible that you completed the fifth cycle?"

William had his mouth wide open and was standing in front of Noah in their usual training room.

"How is it possible? Even with the Inner-energy potion, you should have at least still two months to go! Are you sure that your acupoints stopped working?"

Noah only nodded and then strongly exhaled to calm himself.

He took something from inside his clothes and raised it in front of his Master.

William was still shocked by the earlier news that he simply stared at Noah's hand without recognizing its contents.

Then he finally discerned that something was strange and picked up the sheet in front of him, he unfolded it and looked at the Kesier rune written on it.

He furrowed his brows and looked at Noah's eyes with a confused expression.

"Are you giving up on being a mage?"

Noah could only show a wry smile as he looked around him for a bit, then he got close to his Master and spoke with a soft voice.

"Actually, I would need the next rune because I became a mage last night."

A yell that made the walls tremble sounded in the guards building, the soldiers in the courtyard felt that the noise was similar to the vice-captain's voice.

Inside the room, Noah was sitting on his knees with his hands tightly plugging his ears.

He was waiting for his Master to come out of his amazement afraid that he would release another monstrous yell.

William was breathing roughly with his eyes wide open, but after some seconds, he forced himself to calm down and focused on Noah's forehead, staring at it with a serious gaze.

Noah felt some pressure on his sea of consciousness and so operated his mental energy to defend his sphere.

The fight between internal and external pressure lasted for a minute before William stopped his probing and sat in front of Noah with an incredulous expression.

"You really did it."

Noah just nodded, he really could not give any explanation about it.

"If I was called a rare genius what would you be called then?"

William was deep in thought before he understood the real problem about the whole situation.

"I'll find an excuse to get another copy of the second rune, the inner circle must not know that you became a mage, it's too dangerous."

He still didn't realize that what he was doing was lying to his superiors.

"Then, after you pass the sixth treatment, it's better if you always be outside doing missions. The possibility of the family giving you a magic scroll is low but it's better to accumulate merits before you know your element. You never know, they might actually acknowledge you as a real descendant!"

William was planning the best course of action for his disciple, uncaring that his words were an act of treason themselves.

Noah, looking at the mumbling man in front of him, could not help but feel some warmth inside his chest.

'He is really a good Master, if only his position wasn't so tied to the Balvan family... I should at least make sure not to make trouble for him when I'll run away.'

William stopped his planning when he noticed his disciple staring at him with a simple and honest smile on his face.

"What are you looking for?"

Noah only gave a simple answer.

"Thanks."

William was a bit stunned but then smiled shaking his head.

He placed his hand on Noah's head and ruffled his hair a little before speaking with a joyous tone.

"You worked hard, it's fair to have some rewards, and if Heaven and Earth won't give it to you, I will."

The internal conflict that the vice-captain of the guards had before was solved.

'If humans are not fair, so be it. At least I'm doing my part to make things right.'

Noah could not know of his Master's doubts so he didn't really understand his words.

William rose from the floor humming a happy tune and then sat behind a table in the room to sort through some reports, yet, after some minutes, he looked at the kid still sitting on the ground.

"What is it?"

He was still smiling when he asked that.

"Uhm, Master, are we not gonna do the treatment today?"

William's newfound happiness vanished, replaced by a familiar feeling of irritation.

Chapter 44 - 44. Overbearing

The sixth treatment went more smoothly than the others.

The advantage of having reached the level of a mage showed itself during the process as Noah was able to ignore almost completely the inhumane pain that he had to go through.

When his bedridden time was over, his Master abruptly sent him outside the mansion to complete missions.

"Getting the second rune might be difficult but I should be able to do it. For now, just focus on the missions that I give you."

That was what he said to Noah before sending him away.

Noah completed the usual tasks of defending villages from magical beasts' attacks or hunting them down when their packs became too large.

It was not much after he became 13 that a seemingly important mission was delivered to him.

It consisted of escorting a noble caravan from Mossgrove city to Lansay mansion.

Apparently, the Lansay family, a middle-size noble family, committed a crime against the Shosti family and as a punishment, added to a heavy monetary fee, they had to send their main descendant as a political hostage in Mossgrove city.

Now that the punishment ended, the descendant had to go back to his mansion, yet, he chose to set up an escort before starting his trip back.

'I feel that I'm getting myself into some political struggle, why would the main descendant need an escort otherwise?'

Noah was the only one from his mansion that took the mission but a group of soldiers and wanderers had already formed in front of the caravan of the Lansay family when he arrived.

He was wearing his usual tight black outfit with the two sabers sheathed on his back, and his hair was tied together in a simple ponytail.

As he moved toward the group, the soldiers looked in his direction and started to laugh and taunt him.

"What are you doing here little kid, are you lost?"

"Ehy look, those are some nice blades, why don't you lend them to your uncle here? I will give them back after the mission is over!"

"This mission should not be so bad since a kid showed up, hahaha! Look he is coming to us! Are you mad young boy?"

It took Noah one instant to understand what he had to do but he could not help to feel irritated by their words.

'Every fucking time! How is possible that weak people are always so stupid? I'm getting tired of being treated like a kid!'

He neared the soldiers while enduring their taunt and when he was in front of them he just put his hand in front of him in and handshake gesture.

"Nice to meet you, my name is Noah. I hope we can take care of each other."

Noah was smiling innocently and had a pure and clear tone of voice, he was the perfect image of innocence.

His words caused another rain of laughter from the soldiers' group while one of them returned his handshake.

"Don't worry little kid, we will take good care of you."

The soldier could almost not contain his laughter when he spoke those words, yet his face froze when he felt the pressure applied by Noah's grip.

CRACK!

The soldier fell on the ground with his broken hand still in Noah's hand and begged for mercy.

"AHHHHH, please, I was wrong. Please let me go, it hurts!"

The other soldiers were still laughing thinking it was some kind of performance from their friend to mock the kid, however, their expressions paled when they saw the state his hand was when Noah released him.

The hand was completely soft, it seemed that no bones were inside it.

Noah turned his gaze toward the soldiers and pointed at two of them.

"You and you, I believe you mocked me earlier. Come here, I need to congratulate with you."

He still had the same innocent smile as before but it only caused fear to appear in the eyes of the witnesses this time.

The two soldiers looked around them just to notice that the group was stepping away from them.

One of the two tried to apologize.

"Uhm, I am sorry, I didn't know my place."

Noah just shook his head and stated in a cold voice:

"Your hand or your life, your choice."

The other one got angry and unsheathed his sword, yelling loudly.

"If you think that I will be scared of you, you are mistaken. Come, take my life if you have the guts to!"

Noah shrugged his shoulders and moved toward the soldier with a calm expression.

At that moment, a burly man wearing a green robe with an emblem sewed on his left chest area jumped between them and faced Noah.

"Stop making all this noise before we start the selection for the escort or you will have to face me!"

The soldier with the sword in his hand relaxed seeing the man from the Lansay family and lowered his sword but then he felt his vision spinning and then descending into darkness.

These were the last things he saw.

Noah was beside his headless corpse with his hand raised in the direction of the remaining soldier.

The man from the Lansay family felt cold sweat running down his spine when Noah completely disappeared from his field of view only to reappear behind him.

The remaining soldier was scared stiff but after some seconds, he managed to place his hand inside Noah's one.

CRACK!

He fell on the ground with the bones in his left hand broken but uttered no sound, he was too scared of enraging the monstrous kid in front of him.

All the presents gulped and swore to themselves to never look Noah in the eyes in the days to come.

Noah went in front of the burly man still petrified on the spot and asked smiling:

"I'm sorry, were you saying?"

Before the man could answer though, a voice sounded from the caravan and another man donned in the robes of the Lansay family appeared.

"You must be the envoy from the Balvan family, William could have not chosen a better disciple. I'm Kevin Lam, head of the guards of the Lansay family, I hope you can accept my excuses for the bad behavior of my man."

Kevin was the most brawny man Noah had ever seen, he was more than two meters tall and his arms were almost as large as a man's waist.

Noah felt a faint sense of danger coming from him so he chose to stop to his overbearing attitude.

He lightly bowed and said in a cool voice.

"If it is Mister Lam's request, of course I will accept them."

Chapter 45 - 45. Formation

Noah was sitting inside one of the carriages of the caravan.

Kevin had invited him inside finding unnecessary his participation in the selection for the escort group.

"You know, me and your master were considered the best warriors of our generation. We would usually meet during our training days doing missions since the relationship between my Lansay family and your Balvan family has always been friendly."

Kevin was speaking while being seated in front of Noah.

"But, well, he became the vice-captain of Balvan's outer ring while I became the head of the guards of my family, so we didn't have a chance to meet in a long time."

He was pouring what seemed wine in two cups from a clay jug in his hand, then he offered one of the cups to Noah.

"When I heard that his disciple was going to assist for this mission I was instantly curious. I must say that you live up to your master's reputation."

He raised his cup in a toasting gesture and Noah welcomed it by doing the same with his cup, yet he was using his mental energy to scan the liquid inside it.

'There seems to be no problem with the wine, I think he is telling the truth, his relationship with Master must be really good.'

Noah didn't hesitate anymore and took a sip from the cup.

A familiar burning sensation ran through his throat but was soon suppressed by the healing ability of his body.

'Oh right, with a rank 2 body in the higher tier I bet it will be pretty hard to get drunk.'

He had entered the sixth cycle so the effects of the Forging of the Seven Hells were becoming more prominent as he neared the completion of the process.

His healing abilities had improved, the same went for his "Breath" perception and his martial art execution.

'Well, I could not feel the increase in perception since it was outclassed by my advancement to rank 1 mage but my martial art has reached a whole new level, it should have fully broken through the level of a rank 3 magical beast.'

His most powerful attacks were already on that level after he obtained a rank 2 body but with the sixth cycle already nearing the rank 3 limit, his whole martial art had reached that level.

'My limit should be around thirty attacks at full power and if I factor the absorption of the acupoints I should be able to double that number. I should be fine unless I find myself in a really long fight.'

The disadvantage of not having a dantian was greatly reduced but still existed which made Noah still concerned about a fight with a real cultivator.

"Do you like the wine?"

Kevin's voice made him realize that he had lost himself in thoughts and he hurriedly made an explanation.

"I'm sorry, I had something in my mind."

Kevin looked confused and said:

"You are too polite, no one has ever apologized for a few seconds of silence."

Noah was surprised.

'Uh? Few seconds? Has my thinking speed become that high?'

He hastily raised his cup again to hide his confused expression and took another sip.

Then he put down the cup and stared at Kevin with a stern expression, a bit of coldness was released by his eyes.

"Shall we start with the real talk?"

Kevin seemed to approve as he emptied his cup and answered with a calm voice.

"What do you want to know?"

Noah's question arrived instantly.

"Why the escort?"

The question hit some crucial point as Kevin sighed and a sad expression appeared on his face.

"As you know, the young master in the caravan is the main descendant of the Lansay family. Logically speaking he should succeed his father as the patriarch of the family but..."

He filled another cup of wine before resuming his speech.

"But he is too young. His father is gravely ill and will not live for long so his uncle might use this trip as a chance to kill the heir and take control of the family."

Noah understood something but there were still some doubts in his mind.

"How is it possible that a patriarch of a medium-size noble family could have let the situation escalate to this?"

Kevin drank again and answered.

"It was the patriarch's fault if the Lansay family got punished so his brother, Tobias Lansay, used these events to gather consensus with the other soldiers

in the inner circle. The only corp that remained loyal to Benedict Lansay, the patriarch, is the one with me in this mission."

The situation was far worse than what Noah imagined.

"And what bringing back the heir can even do? They can just kill him once he is in the mansion."

Kevin put down the cup and got near to Noah.

His voice became extremely low.

"This is a secret of the inner circle so if I ever find out that you disclosed it to anyone I will make killing you my lifelong mission, do you understand me?"

A dense killing intent was released by Kevin.

The soldiers and wanderers that were going through the selection outside the carriage trembled as the atmosphere became incredibly stiff.

Noah simply kept looking at the big man in front of him but a trace of admiration was formed his mind.

'He is a veteran of the battlefield, I can't even imagine the number of lives he has taken.'

The stalemate lasted for a whole minute before Noah made up his mind and nodded.

Kevin stared at him for a few more seconds before he revealed the information.

"Lansay treasury is protected by a special formation. I don't know much about formations but I know the rules behind this one. Only the current patriarch or his descendants can control it and can determine the fate of every item inside the treasury. Benedict Lansay already gave the control of the formation to his son but he must first get there to accept it. If he was to die before that, the

control of the formation would directly go to the next in line of succession, which is to say Tobias Lansay."

'There is such a thing in this world, the branches of cultivation are really various.'

He remembered how when he was still a child, the mansion's wall wounded a dragon.

'That should be a formation too, they seem some really powerful things. I should ask Master about the various applications that cultivation has once I go back.'

"Are you saying that the formation will know if the heir dies?"

Noah's question was answered by a slight nod from Kevin.

He fell deep in thought before asking with an expressionless face:

"What do I gain from helping you?"

Chapter 46 - 46. Spoiled noble

"Magic scrolls and various techniques are off-limit. As for resources, I believe we can work out a deal."

Kevin's answer was immediate, he knew too well the difficulties of getting stronger without a noble status.

Noah had suspected such restrictions so he demanded what he needed more at the moment.

"I need potions or pills for the nourishment of the body, the level must be the same as the Inner-energy pill."

Kevin furrowed his brows.

He was surprised that such a young man knew of the existence of the Inner-energy pill but he was principally impressed by the fact that Noah directly requested something of that value.

"I don't have the authority to promise such a good reward."

Noah shrugged his shoulders at the answer.

"Then bring me to someone who has it."

Another stalemate followed by, with a giant man and a kid staring at each other in silence inside the carriage.

At some point, Kevin nodded.

"Follow me, and please remember to be respectful."

Kevin jumped off the carriage with Noah following close behind him and went for the second-last carriage of the caravan.

He knocked at the door and bowed speaking in a firm voice.

"Young Master, it's me."

A young voice came from inside the carriage.

"Come in."

The door opened and Kevin went through it indicating to Noah to follow.

A young man donned in green was sitting inside the carriage with a chalice in his right hand.

He had curly blond hair and some traces of beard, he was around 14-15 years old and had a pale complexion.

A bit of arrogance was exuded from his expression.

Noah looked attentively at the heir of the Lansay family and could not help but feel disappointed.

'He is so weak, what's the point of being a noble if you don't even make use of your status to increase your strength. No wonder his uncle is so close to deposing him.'

There was the faint presence of "Breath" around him which meant that he had at least trained in some body-nourishment technique but, apart from that, he had only his status to protect him.

Noah was still staring at the young man when he felt an angry gaze looking at him.

He turned in its direction and saw Kevin staring at him as he was waiting for something.

'Oh right, a weak noble is still a noble.'

Noah lightly bowed.

"Greetings, heir of the Lansay family."

The nobleman seemed to notice Noah's presence only after he spoke and looked with an inquisitory gaze toward Kevin.

"He is Noah, the disciple of a good friend of mine. He will be a good asset in this mission."

Kevin spoke and then he turned to Noah.

"He is Basil Lansay, son of Benedict Lansay, the true heir to the title of patriarch."

Basil put the chalice down and asked with an annoyed tone.

"Why did you brought him here, what's the matter?"

Kevin bowed.

"He is asking for a reward that I don't have the authority to promise."

Basil snorted.

"Hmph, once I get access to the treasury I can make sure that you won't have to work anymore in your life. There is no need to come here in person."

Kevin continued.

"He is asking for body-nourishment pills, and of high level too."

Basil's eyes opened wide.

"How can someone younger than me be worthy of such resources, just kick him out and teach him a lesson."

Noah got immediately irritated and a cold pressure began to be exuded from him.

The pressure emitted from a mage was unsustainable by a weak person like Basil and he started to gasp for breath.

At that moment though, Kevin's killing intent surged again forcing Noah to retract the pressure.

Basil breathed roughly and got angry beyond reason.

"How dares a lowly one like you hurt me! Kevin, don't bother with what I said earlier, just kill him and show his corpse to those animals out there. Maybe they will understand the difference in status this way!"

However, Noah was already going out of the carriage.

'Nevermind, it's useless to take on such a risky mission just for reputation and merits. I'll go back to the mansion and make up an excuse.'

Before he jumped off though, Basil's voice sounded again.

"Wait!"

Noah turned to look at Basil.

"It seems that I misjudged you. I indeed need strong people for this mission since we will have to go against the guards of my uncle. We can work out a deal, but first, you have to apologize for your behavior from earlier."

'So he does have some intelligence between all the noble crap.'

He looked in Kevin's direction and saw him smiling proudly while nodding at him, he presumably managed to persuade the young noble with his words.

"No."

Noah's answer was firm.

Kevin's smile froze and even the young heir was at loss for words, he only managed to stammer a weak question.

"W-Why?"

"Because you are weak, noble or not you don't deserve my apologies."

Basil got angry again and was about to yell when Kevin placed his hand on the nobleman's shoulder.

"Young master, I know that he is rude but we really need all the help that we can find. Only once you get your position as a patriarch you can act as overbearing as you want."

Noah just shook his head hearing these words.

'Don't tell me that even the descendants of the Balvan family are like this. Maybe my theory on the idiocy of weak people is right.'

The discussion between Kevin and Basil went on for a while, with Noah's irritation increasing for every second that he was forced to hear more of it.

In the end, Basil agreed to Noah's request and Kevin hurriedly carried him away before he said something that could ruin again his young master's mood.

When they were back in the previous carriage Noah could not help but mock Kevin.

"A mighty cultivator like you being forced to be the nanny of a spoiled kid, you sure have it rough."

A slight smirk was on his face as he looked at the big man massaging his temples to calm himself.

"It's not entirely the young master's fault. He grew up with the descendants of the Shosti family bullying him all the time and when his moment to do the bullying finally came he met with a man like you. Don't worry, when we reach the mansion I'll personally make sure that you get what he promised."

Noah nodded, he believed in Kevin words.

Meanwhile, the trial for the escort mission outside the caravan was over.

They were ready to set off.

Chapter 47 - 47. Massacre

The caravan began to move in the direction of Lansay mansion.

Their speed was slow due to the high number of people moving by foot around the carriages.

The caravan had four carriages and the men that had passed the elimination process of the selection amounted to forty, so it was impossible for all of them to find a sitting spot.

Coupled with the ten soldiers belonging to the Lansay family, their appearance resembled a small troop going to war.

With their speed, it would take them about a month to reach their destination.

Noah was sitting on top of the roof of the second carriage, but whenever he looked at the group below him he would just shake his head.

'Do they even realize in what mess they got themselves into? We will have to fight against the guards of the inner circle of a noble family. The Lansay family might have declined but their sheer number of cultivators still surpasses ours. They will be just used as cannon fodder.'

Before he accepted, Noah stormed Kevin with questions about the plan to be sure that it was actually feasible.

When he heard about the quantity of the cultivators under Tobias Lansay, he was about to give up on the mission uncaring of the promised rewards.

'Twenty-five cultivators against ten of them and a bunch of meat shields, it would be impossible to do if not for the fact that we only have to get Basil inside the mansion for the mission to succeed.'

If the two groups were to fight, the only outcome would be a total defeat.

However, Kevin revealed to him that once Basil entered the gates of the mansion he could already take control of the formation.

With the resources accumulated by the Lansay family for years at stake, Tobias would either have to abandon his plan to become the patriarch and run away or forsake his status as a noble.

After all, nobility was about wealth and techniques.

'If we use the non-cultivators as a shield and run straight to the middle of their defense, we might actually do it.'

That's why Noah decided to stay, he was sure that with Kevin's frame, breaking through a line of defense was a feasible task.

The first week of travel passed with nothing out of the ordinary happening, the caravan had moved smoothly, but then trouble appeared.

Noah was the first to sense an unusual amount of people on their road and when the caravan stopped the blockage was clearly visible.

Fifty or so men were blocking their path, yet there were no cultivators among them.

They were dressed in commoner's clothes or rusty armors but their weapons seemed newly made and of good workmanship.

Noah jumped off the roof of the carriage and walked in the direction of Kevin that was already staring at the group with a bit of anger in his eyes.

When he sensed Noah next to him, he spoke.

"They must have been hired by the young master's uncle from nearby villages. He wants to probe us.

If I send my men to fight them we will reveal most of our abilities, but if I send the non-cultivators their numbers will decrease endangering the plan. I never thought that Tobias would be so ruthless to actually send people to die just to investigate us."

Noah was looking at the troop of commoners but internally he was sneering.

'Aren't you doing the same? It's not like most of your newly recruited men will survive anyway.'

He sighed a little and then replied.

"Then we just have to be more ruthless."

Noah unsheathed his sabers and walked toward the enemy troop.

"If I take care of them we will reveal almost no information and we will keep uninjured your precious meat shields."

Kevin felt a bit of shame from Noah's comment but did not reply, he just watched the kid getting near the group of commoners.

When Noah was at twenty meters from them he stopped and then spoke loudly.

"Anyone that still wants to live will better step away from this path. After I count to three, all those still in front of me will die."

A kid was threatening fifty or so grown-up men.

However, before they had any chance to laugh, a chill ran through them as they saw the kid's eyes emitting a suffocating coldness.

"One!"

All these commoners were recruited from villages that suffered from the Lansay family's punishment, they were poor beyond reason.

"Two!"

Since the Lansay family had to pay a huge fee to the Shosti family, they heavily raised the taxes on the people in their domain, bringing them on the verge of starvation.

"Three!"

Because of that, not one of the villagers stepped back in front of the dreadful kid, they had already taken part of the payment from Tobias and if they managed to survive, that sum would duplicate.

What followed was a massacre.

From the point of view of the weak soldiers around the caravan, Noah was just walking between the enemy lines.

However, anyone he passed near to would just fall on the ground with their throats sliced or their chests pierced.

Blood was flowing on the ground filling it with red puddles.

No one noticed that some of the best weapons of the villagers disappeared before touching the ground and were sucked in a spot on Noah's waist.

When Noah came back to the caravan, his leather shoes were drenched in blood and were leaving vivid red marks on the ground where he walked.

An indifferent expression was on his face, like he had just come back from a simple walk.

'The stronger I become, the less I consider weak people as humans. I guess that the emotional detachment from normal humans is just a natural cause of my power rising.'

The soldiers moved away from his path and left a road for him to go back on the roof of the carriage.

Noah casually jumped on it and threw away the dirty shoes, leaving his bare feet in the air hanging from the roof.

BLEGHH

Basil was outside his carriage puking on the ground.

He had secretly watched Noah's battle and could not hold back the retches he was feeling.

Kevin hurriedly went next to him and brought him back to the carriage under the disappointed gaze of his soldiers.

They were comparing internally this young noble with the ruthless kid on top of a carriage and could not help to shake their heads concerned about the future of the Lansay family.

Chapter 48 - 48. Introspection

In a basement inside Lansay mansion, a man in his fifties with curly blonde hair was watching a map with some pawns on it.

At some point, a soldier appeared behind him and kneeled on the floor.

"Lord Tobias, the spies in Basil's escort have sent the report. None of Kevin's men joined the battle, only a kid went to fight and killed all of the peasants. They now have resumed their trip toward our direction."

Tobias nodded not even turning back to look at the soldier and moved one of the pawns on the map.

"Did you find the carriage where Basil is staying?"

"Yes, the spies reported that he went out of his carriage to relieve himself from the harshness of the battle."

Tobias shook his head.

"That kid is too weak, the patriarch's bloodline has gotten too soft, no wonder we are in this situation."

He sighed and then pointed on the map.

"Send the mages to intercept them on Twilboia Cliff, put an end to my nephew's dream."

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Meanwhile, on the caravan, Noah was lying on the roof of a carriage concentrating his mental energy to scan the surroundings.

They were nearing a place called Twilboia Cliff which in Kevin's opinion was the perfect place for an ambush, so he was wary of anything out of the ordinary that entered his perception.

Lansay mansion was in the opposite direction of Balvan mansion from the point of view of Mossgrove city, so Noah didn't know much about the environment of this region.

At some point, he felt someone getting close to his side.

He turned to look in that direction and saw Basil clumsily trying to climb to the top of the carriage where he was.

Noah waited patiently for the nobleman to succeed in his climbing and smiled a little when he saw him sitting next to him.

"Can I help you with something, mister heir?"

Basil nodded and answered.

"I want you to reply to some of my questions."

Noah became slightly interested.

"Go ahead, I don't have much to do anyway."

He had yet to receive the second Kesier rune so his training had momentarily halted.

"How did you kill those men?"

Noah was momentarily confused and pointed at the sabers on his back with a questioning look.

"No, I mean, how could you do that so naturally?"

Basil corrected himself and Noah finally understood the meaning of his words.

"Mh, I believe you won't feel bad about killing animals to feed yourself. It's the same with humans on my road toward power: they stood in my way so I killed them."

Basil was bewildered seeing a man younger than him speaking in such ways about human life.

"B-But you won't die if you don't have power, it's not the same! They were just hungry commoners fighting for food!"

Noah looked at him with scorn.

"Weren't you the one that wanted to show my corpse to the animals defending you?"

Basil became silent to Noah's reprimand and a bit of shame appeared on his face.

"I-I was just imitating the way the people in the Shosti family acted. I never saw a corpse before your fight."

Noah shook his head.

'He is still a kid after all, I'm the strange one since my appearance doesn't reflect my real age.'

He thought for a bit and then he answered with sincerity.

"If a dragon was to pass by right now and attacked us we would all be dead. Good, evil, and all the other human constructs would be reduced to ashes by a random event. You say you won't die if you don't have power but that is false: those villagers were weak so they got exploited until they chose to go against a group of cultivators, their end was decided the moment they accepted your uncle's deal; you are weak so your family is hunting you down due to the status you were born with and all you can do is hide in a carriage hoping that Kevin will be strong enough to protect you."

Basil lowered his head hearing these words but Noah's speech wasn't over yet.

"If you care about something, you should be strong enough to defend it. If you want something, you should be strong enough to aim for it. If you are weak, you should aim to become stronger. If you want to become stronger, you must have the resolution to climb mountains of corpses. You should have understood by now that the cultivation world is not a nice one."

Basil nodded and expressed the last question he had in his mind.

"Killing fifty innocent men to protect one only for some small increase in power, aren't you afraid that the world will consider you a demon?"

This question made Noah fell in deep thought.

He ran through all the experiences he had in this life.

The battles with the magical beasts, the sparring with his Master, his mother's smile, the various missions until only one image remained in his mind.

There was an elderly man floating in the air.

He had one hand raised to block a lance of flames launched by a dragon.

In the eyes of a baby, he looked like a god free from any restriction, untouchable by normal humans.

'I wonder how much will it take for me to reach that level.'

Noah had unconsciously raised his gaze to the sky, staring at a fixed point with vacant eyes.

A pure and boundless yearning for power made itself clear inside his mind and then, he answered.

"So what?"

Basil was about to ask more before a chilling sensation enveloped him.

Noah was still looking at the sky but his eyes were dark and cold, like a beast looking at its prey.

Seeing no changes in his attitude, Basil gave up on asking more questions and climbed down the carriage to go back to his original lodging.

Noah stared at the sky for a long time before he moved his gaze toward a small mountain next to a cliff in the distance.

'If the world will call me a demon, so be it. If it will give me the power to save my mother and to pursue the road of cultivation without restrictions, I will gladly forsake my humanity.'

The caravan continued on its road to Twilboia Cliff unaware of the spies in its group or of the battle that was waiting there for it.

Chapter 49 - 49. Battle intent

Twilboia Cliff was a deep gorge next to a small mountain called Twilboia Mountain.

A narrow passage divided the two and, since the caravan could not climb the mountain, it was its only possible road.

When the caravan neared the passage, a faint pressure dawned on the escort group.

They were aware that if Tobias had set up an ambush here, the battle would not be an easy one.

They had the disadvantage of the terrain while the enemy could attack from the mountain and retreat at will.

Kevin was staring at the gorge with some solemnity and Noah could not help but go next to him to ask more questions when he saw that expression.

"What's down there?"

Noah asked following Kevin's gaze.

"It's not sure. We know that the concentration of "Breath" is high at the bottom but the place is magical beasts' territory. The last time someone tried to clean the gorge and put their mansion there the cultivation world lost a medium-size family."

Noah gulped a bit, the cliff had become incredibly scary in his eyes.

"What's the plan for the ambush?"

They were against a man aiming for the title of patriarch of a medium-size noble family, if the gorge was the best place for him to attack, Noah was sure that an attack would be there.

"We can't retreat and we can't allow them to push us in the gorge. I'll charge ahead as soon as I see an enemy while you with some of my men will be in charge of defending the young master's carriage. The others are free to use their lives to give me the time to kill everyone."

A thick battle intent exuded from Kevin which made Noah tremble a bit.

'I really did the best choice by apologizing back then.'

His confidence in holding his own against Kevin was reduced by a large amount.

'He was the head of the guards after all.'

The caravan entered the passage and the escort group set up a battle formation around it.

Noah was on the roof of Basil's carriage with his eyes closed, sharpening his senses to sense the enemy approach.

The passage was not long, only about a day of travel with their speed, yet every minuted passed in there seemed to last an eternity.

The concentration of "Breath" had already increased when they entered the passage and seemed to reach its peak when they were in the middle of it.

At that moment though, something happened.

A bullet made of water hit one of the cultivators near Noah and pierced his skull, the man fell lifeless on the ground.

No one on the caravan had seen the attack coming and a suffocating silence followed the death of the soldier.

"MAGE!"

Noah broke the silence with his warning as he hastily unsheathed his sabers staring in the direction of the mountain.

He didn't feel the enemy attack coming which meant that the assailant had bigger achievements in mental energy than him!

The escort group was about to fall into chaos when Kevin's yell calmed them down.

"Get in position! Push toward the mountain! Follow me!"

He took the vanguard position and charged toward the mountain wielding a huge hammer with both his hands.

Another water bullet was shot in his direction but Kevin simply swung his hammer and shattered it, and then he jumped toward the area where it came from.

Two more bullets were fired only to get blocked by the hammer, then Kevin swung it downward hitting the ground in front of him.

BOOM!

An explosion rang out and a five meters deep hole was created on the side of the mountain.

"Irvin come out and fight me face to face!"

Kevin yelled seemingly to the air but then a figure appeared between the smoke raised by his blow.

"You never change Kevin, always charging ahead. I'm afraid that this time it won't work though."

A short man donned in green robes came out of the smoke and faced Kevin.

Irvin raised his hand and two more water bullets shot out from it.

Kevin just deflected them and charged in his direction with an oppressing killing intent.

Seeing the huge man rushing at him, the mage simply stood in his place releasing a torrent of bullets.

Most of the shots were deflected by the hammer but some of them hit Kevin's skin and left some small wounds on it.

When Kevin was about to reach the mage, three strings of water sprouted from the ground and tied themselves around Kevin blocking his movements.

Irvin nodded at the sight of the trapped man and spoke with pride.

"As expected from a rank 4 body, my water bullets can't hurt you consistently. If you were the one to kill the situation would have been really troublesome, yet your life is of no importance to Lord Tobias."

As soon as he said these words, a group of soldiers wearing green armors shot out from another point of the mountain aiming for the group defending the caravan.

Irvin had used himself as a decoy to draw out the stronger person of the escort, weakening deeply the defenses of the caravan.

The enemy soldiers amounted to fifteen people and directly stormed through the line of defense made by the normal soldiers, none of them could block any of the enemies.

The normal soldiers that were on their path were instantly killed or gravely wounded by just one swing of their weapons.

'They are all cultivators!'

Noah from his position on the carriage could clearly see that his moment was imminent and sharpened his mind like never before, a tinge of battle intent could be discerned in his cold eyes.

'Finally a real battle against a cultivator. I really want to see how far I am from their level.'

Tobias Lansay's soldiers broke through the first line of defense and engaged a battle with Kevin's soldiers.

Noah scanned the enemies and picked a man with a heavy ax as a target.

He sent a wind slash at him following it to deliver a melee attack when the soldier tried to block it.

The soldier though, seeing the wind slash, swung his ax to meet the slash.

The slash was shattered by the sheer strength of the blow and Noah was forced to block the ax that maintained its trajectory.

CLINK!

Two sabers blocked the heavy blow and Noah was sent flying for some meters before safely landing on the ground.

The soldier turned in his direction and was a bit surprised to see that the kid easily blocked his swing, but most importantly, that he was smiling looking at him.

Chapter 50 - 50. Transformation

Noah had never fought for real against a cultivator.

His fights with William were only spars and against Orson's group, he was just playing a supporting role.

At that moment though, he was facing a real cultivator alone and that made him feel extremely excited.

'Finally, someone that doesn't die in one hit!'

The soldier from the Lansay family was initially stunned by Noah's smile but then focused again on the battle and charged ahead with his ax raised.

Noah didn't notice his own smile, all his attention was on the ax coming to him.

When the ax was a few centimeters from his head, Noah abruptly dodged on his left rotating his sabers in the process aiming for the soldier's head.

The soldier hid behind the metal handle and blocked the swing, yet a cut appeared on his cheek: the handle could not block the blow completely!

He retreated by some steps and resumed his posture, wary of the smiling kid slowly moving toward him.

They jumped at each other at the same time and exchanged a few blows before separating again.

This time a couple of light wounds appeared on the soldier's right leg.

Noah didn't choose his target randomly but picked the one who would suffer more from his fast attacks coming from two different directions.

The big ax the cultivator was wielding wasn't suited to block Noah's two sabers and, with his ability in deflecting and a rank 2 body nearing the peak of the rank, it was almost impossible to break his defense with only sheer strength.

Noah understood that he could not directly kill the soldier until he made a mistake and the soldier had his same thoughts so they charged at each other again waiting for one of them to commit an error.

Wounds kept on accumulating on the soldier's body as Noah pressed on attacking him everytime he tried to separate from the kid to resume a defensive posture.

After more than ten exchanges, the soldier's armor was almost entirely tarnished by its owner's blood.

However, Noah wasn't in a better situation.

Even though he had no wounds on him, the "Breath" in his body had halved and he didn't manage to deliver a fatal blow to the enemy.

The battle had become an endurance competition.

Noah attacked again slashing with both his weapons and the soldier raised his ax to block them.

CLINK!

Another clash occurred but the soldier became confused when he heard that only one of the sabers had hit his handle.

The other saber had momentarily vanished only to reappear in his face pointing at his left eye.

He hastily ducked but, in that moment of surprise, Noah had already slashed with his other blade on his chest area.

The invisible blade was dodged but the other one cut vertically his abdomen leaving a deep wound on it.

Noah didn't waste any time and quickly retreated on the roof of the carriage to replenish the expended "Breath", as for the soldier, he only had the time to look at his wound before his insides came out from it and he fell dead on the ground.

'As expected, the Snake-wrist form is too weak to consistently hit cultivators, at least it gave me the chance to end the battle sooner.'

What he had used was the first technique he had learnt five years ago by scamming guards.

He had never used it because the techniques he received after it were much stronger than an incomplete form of a rank 2 martial art, yet that didn't mean that he had forgotten it.

Seeing that the battle could have lasted for many other clashes, Noah chose to try a feint with the Snake-wrist technique and, even if it didn't fool the soldier, it was enough to create a decisive flaw in his defense.

'At least now I know where I stand compared with a cultivator. My techniques and their executions are above their average, but the flaws of not having a dantian are pretty severe.'

He understood that he could not fight prolonged battles on this level so he chose to rest and analyze the situation to find where his help would create the biggest results.

Meanwhile, on the mountain path.

Kevin was still immobilized by the water magic of the mage but was moderately safe since Irvin was assaulted by the horde of non-cultivators that came with him.

Nevertheless, the situation could not last for long since Irvin took out a whip from his back and randomly slaughtered the normal soldier that charged at him.

Kevin felt restless watching the fight in front of him and the cultivators attacking the caravan so he chose to use his hidden ace.

His skin became of a yellowish-brown color and his muscles swelled, his height too seemed to increase.

A roar came out of his mouth as he used all of his strength to break free from the water bindings.

The ground under his feet cracked and the strings holding his body still stretched until they couldn't handle Kevin's monstrous strength anymore and shattered.

Kevin was finally free!

When he was out of the strings his body continued to grow until he was three meters tall!

The soldiers around him froze when they saw the form he had assumed and even Irvin's expression became serious looking at the brown giant.

"You've mastered the ability of your body technique in the end."

Kevin didn't reply to Irvin's words and slowly walked in his direction wielding the big hammer in one hand.

The mage shot two water bullets but when they hit the brown skin, they only left some small white marks on it.

Seeing that his magic had no effect on him, Irvin summoned again the three water strings which fused together to become an azure half-transparent whip that he wielded in his left hand.

Together with the other whip in his right hand, he charged straight at Kevin.

Irvin launched an attack with the normal whip but Kevin easily raised his arm to block it.

The whip though, wrapped on his arm and the mage was about to launch an attack with the other one when Kevin grabbed it and forcefully pulled!

Irvin was immediately sent flying in Kevin's direction and was about to clash with the hammer when the water whip transformed in a shield and blocked the incoming blow.

The water shield managed to stay intact against the tremendous strike but Irvin still suffered from the impact and was flung away at over ten meters of distance!

No one noticed that a small crack had appeared on Kevin's shoulder.