"Why?" I whisper sadly, feeling like I've just been stabbed.

And she calmly gives me a straight answer, "I couldn't risk you giving away that you knew. Apeiltik's life was at stake."

I'm actually surprised that hearing her say it is so painful since I already knew the answer, but I think I simply believed that our relationship was more than it really is. "Your lack of trust in us is vexing," I state, disappointed.

"I…" she begins but stops as her mind gets hung up. It seems that she's realized she fucked up because she changes gears into a more serious and reassuring tone. "I didn't know how well you could deal with imperial plotting. You were merely a commoner before, and now you're suddenly in control of a huge chunk of territory, so I had to… I had to keep it secret."

The way she's repeating herself tells me that her mind is reeling from the impact of my words, but how much can I trust her? How much is she hiding from me? Which of her faces is the real one? Or rather, does she *ever* show her true feelings?

"What if we didn't want to fight them? What if we wanted to remain neutral in the Purification?" I sternly reply as anger is lit within me.

But this time, my words don't have an impact on her as she confidently retorts, "Please, Wolf. It was clear you had a vendetta against Katasko, and even if we didn't influence them, they'd have attacked you sooner or later."

And her presumptuousness enrages me. "But you took our choice from us! We could've engaged them on *our* terms instead of *yours*!" I shout angrily.

Her expression becomes tense, and a hint of frustration slips into her tone as she hesitantly questions, "You… understand why I couldn't risk it?"

I let my pain pour out through my words, "Yes, because you didn't trust us, and that's exactly why it hurts. You gave us the impression that you wanted to become a true ally, not just a 'business partner,' not just someone to work with occasionally, but something more intimate, something *meaningful*. But you couldn't even trust us by telling us your plans or *asking for help*. We'd likely have agreed to participate in your scheme *if you had asked*!"

Then she stays silent, and I notice her body gradually becoming more tense as she fails to contain her anger. She even closes her legs and lets any pretense of sensuality drop in favor of taking me 100% seriously.

But as angry as she seems to be, she understands that she isn't in the right.

"I'm sorry, Wolf… I made a mistake," she quietly replies, her dark eyes staring at mine without blinking, carefully observing me for every single reaction.

So this is the perfect moment to drive it home. "If you truly want to become my ally, then you need to do better. I'm not so desperate for your body that I'd work with you just for sex," I state sternly, letting my draconic anger tinge my words with deadly seriousness.

Now *that* hits her pride. To be scolded like this, to realize that you wounded a friend, and to be told so clearly how they're disappointed in you. For a normal person, those three things would *hurt*, so I hope that she still has enough heart left in her for my words to affect her like that.

And from the way she averts her eyes downwards in shame as she frowns frustratedly, it does seem like she's still capable of feeling hurt.

"That was all I had to say," I add after a silent moment, and she simply nods, so I stand up and leave.

Intermission – Vanea

"Master…?" Loctar's gentle voice wakes me from my stupor. "Do you need something from me?" he gently asks, and I feel guilty for making his cute face look so worried.

"A hug," I blurt out and immediately feel embarrassed for asking for something so childish, but when he wraps his little arms around my body, all regret is instantly washed away.

I'm thankful that he doesn't ask me what's wrong because even I can't explain it. I'd have actually enjoyed it if Wolf raped me, but [Mental Pain Conversion] didn't activate even after the verbal raping he gave me, and I don't know why.

Is this… guilt? The last time I felt this way was… when Arman died…

But what's more surprising is that Wolf actually managed to make me feel guilty for disappointing him.

Intermission end.

That went… not exactly how we had imagined. I just got really angry that she used us like this even though we expected it, but it also seems that she understood my feelings, so I think things will be fine after we cool down again. But the real test is whether or not she'll do something like this again.

"There is still hope for her," Ciel kindly states. "The ones who are too far gone have lost all remorse and are hard to reason with."

"Like Aisco," Roxanne suggests, feeling uncomfortable just from thinking about the weird elf.

"Perhaps, yes," Ciel hesitantly agrees. She also feels uncomfortable just from thinking about the kind of person we have working for us. It's not like she'll judge him until he actually does something evil, but she has an awful feeling that it's just a matter of *when, not if*.

"I actually want to help Vanea," Alissa suddenly chimes in, and we're left momentarily speechless.

"Another slut for Wolfy?" Yunia casually remarks and raises her thin golden eyebrows questioningly.

"She's actually being earnest… this time," Ciel hesitantly defends the fox.

"Are you *really* sure you want to help someone as… 'damaged' as Vanea?" Roxanne questions soberly, a rather unusual tone for her.

"Don't say that," Ciel scolds the neurotic succubus.

But she frowns back and crosses her arms, unconvinced. "Then what do we call someone like her? She's like me: a crazy bitch."

"You're not crazy," Ciel kindly reassures her, and the charming sweetness of the angel's tone acts like a dagger that stabs into the succubus' heart.

"You aren't *anywhere near* as crazy as Vanea," Yunia cheekily corrects, and Ciel glares at the smug elf.

Alissa rises past the banter and calmly explains herself, "I believe what Wolfy said about her is true. It's likely that she doesn't have friends, aside from Prince Tommen, so I want to give her some support and a chance to prove that she's trustworthy."

"I can't argue against that," Yunia casually concedes. Having someone as shrewd as Vanea on our side would be really helpful.

Roxanne just shrugs. She knows how messy Vanea's mind probably is, but if Alissa is ready to take it on…

Hana is conflicted. She doesn't like Vanea because she's uncontrollable, the opposite of Roxanne, so the straightforward dragonkin doesn't know how she would even approach Vanea.

Ciel is supportive. It was literally her job to help people with broken minds.

Aoi is suspicious. Her draconic nature influences her to be protective, so she doesn't like unstable people because they could be dangerous to our family.

"Why do so many people dislike her?" Lina suddenly questions, but we have no immediate answer for her. "It can't be just because of her eyes, can it?"

Yunia hums thoughtfully, then honestly praises her, "That's… actually a good question, little Lina. We need to know more about Vanea and her relationships to understand what kind of person she really is."

And the adorable girl blushes at the kind words from the elegant elven Queen.

But then all eyes fall on me.

I'm similar to Hana, hesitant. "I don't know what to think. She still scares me, and I don't know how we could even begin to help her."

Alissa grabs my scaled hand, then soothingly runs her palm over the sharp scales as she gives me the purest smile a degenerate, corrupted, cum slave, cuckquean could give. "We'll work together to help her, so you won't have to face her alone," she reassures me with a tone so gentle that it could even rival Ciel's.

She's not *deliberately* trying to charm me, but she still succeeds at it. Together, we can do *anything*, so I choose to believe her.

But there's one little thing that I just *have* to confirm, "Does this mean that you girls will finally take my place in meetings with her?"

"Oh, shit…" Roxanne hums, and her pale face becomes paler.

"Can I back out of this? I never really gave a clear 'yes' or 'no,'" Hana replies with a shit-eating grin.

But Ciel lands a hand on both of their shoulders and pulls them in for a hug. "Be strong, sisters. This is for the greater good," she states while smiling peacefully, yet her tone has an edge that's quite uncharacteristic of her, which makes Lina so wary that she doesn't even try to argue.

"If I'm going to have to meet with her, so will *all* of you," Yunia warns them soberly.

"It isn't that bad as long as you prepare yourself," I try to encourage them.

"And with time, we'll learn to get used to it," Alissa states, more to convince herself than the others.

"If that's truly what you want, then I'll follow your lead," our little blue dragon boldly affirms, making the orange fox and I grin happily.

The girls mumble and whine a bit, but the conversation dies down as they resign themselves to this "horrible" Fate.

So I happily interject, "A~nyway… how about we just enjoy ourselves this evening?" And Gify finally lifts her little chibi head now that "party" is back on the menu.

We have our guests and our Companions to entertain, so I don't want to waste a single moment more on wallowing in negativity.

And so, this short session of the Ryder Family Meeting comes to an end.

But while we try to have fun, everyone is feeling a bit exhausted from training all day, so we mostly just chill and joke a bit. Still, it's Aoi's birthday, so I pull out the Cinco Flores bottle, and our mood improves a considerable amount.

We all have some casual matches on our game tables, and the girls take turns "compensating" my Cock. Hukarere is especially thirsty today, so I give her a double load, which means that I have to give double to Aoi, then to Alissa, then to Laguly, and then I decide to just drain the rest of my MP onto their faces already.

Today is the 13th, Ne, day of Water, day of storms, and one of the few occasions when it actually rains in the capital.

Dragon-Aoi wakes me up, and the first thing I see are her mesmerizing eyes. Black sclera with red and blue, dual-colored irises. Then I see my cock wrapped in her long and slick tongue, dwarfed by her huge mouth lined with sharp teeth.

I give her a nice load that she collects on her tongue and shows to me, then happily swallows.

No level-ups because we didn't train our skills, specifically. We just trained our coordination with the men.

Our breakfast is quiet and wistful. The sky is cloudy, and the contrast in illumination makes me realize how bright the capital usually is. The drizzle makes us feel lazy, and the lack of imperial royalty for us to entertain allows our minds to drift.

But today is the last day before the battle, so our breakfast is cut short as Sandoro, Almaria, Enomosa, and Brett arrive from Escanso through the Imperial Network.

Urmeie calls for a meeting and the continuation of the training, so Sandoro joins them after giving us a brief greeting. Ciel goes to check up on Brett to see how much he has improved since we left, and the rest of us convene in private with Aisco and work together to improve our supersonic javelin launcher.

"What are you trying to kill with it?" The psycho elf asks, unemotional like always.

"A Gifted," I answer assuredly.

But he cautions me, "We could build a weapon that can kill the Emperor himself, and yet it might have no effect on a Gifted."

And that opens a Pandora's Box inside my mind.

The supersonic javelin failed to kill us or even significantly harm us, so I wanted something stronger, but what if the Gifted has a kinetic force field that allows him to ignore everything physical thrown at him?

What if they can regenerate like an undead?

What if they have super speed that allows them to dodge anything?

What if they can become invisible?

What if they can become a spirit?

What if they can teleport?

What if they have something more powerful than [*Telekinesis*]?

What if they have mind control?

What if they can create perfect illusions?

What if they can poison us from kilometris away?

What if, what if, what if, what if…

The only Gifted we know are us, Brett, and Reinhold, but that's hardly enough to make a comprehensive analysis of the average firepower of a Gifted, let alone guess how we can make a weapon specialized in *killing* them.

I turn to Yunia and state, "We need Sa'Haa's help. She might have more information on Gifted than we could imagine."

My ever-so-reliable elven wife nods in understanding.

Then I turn to Lina. "If we don't know the power of our enemy, we ready as many different tools as possible. Sa'Haa is also the leader of a merchant alliance, so we need her to give us every offensive enchanted tool that she has."

My ever-so-reliable little dwarven wife nods in understanding.

Next, I turn to the golems. "Javelins alone won't be enough. We need the launchers to be adapted so that they can fire APFSDS rounds."

The ever-so-obedient golems nod robotically and immediately access Lina's memories of enchanting with Gify's help.

Now I turn to Roxanne and Aisco. "With stronger cannons, we can also push the APFSDS rounds further, so we need more firepower."

The two eccentric and workaholic mages nod, 100% serious now that their life's purpose is being fulfilled.

And finally, I turn to the rest of the girls. "We'll need to link our minds together to boost our processing power, first to brainstorm, then to process whatever information Sa'Haa might give us, and lastly, to figure out how the hell we'll assemble this monstrosity of a weapon."

The most loyal wives in the world nod, then we get to work without saying another word.

While we focus on our work, a small part of my mind becomes increasingly terrified.

The fight with Evil Me at the end of the Antreos Crea arc keeps coming back to my mind. It was chaos, pure chaos, completely different from the usual, controlled, carefully planned, and methodically executed battles we've been in before.

If we were to repeat that battle, how would we even prepare?

So far, I didn't even consider fighting other Gifted because we're clearly favored by the Gods, and the Gods are the ones who give Gifts, so why would they give two different people Gifts just so that they would fight each other? But now, there's a very clear political reason for two Gifted to exchange blows, and I don't know if the Gods will interfere in anyone's favor.

There won't even be a risk of death, but the uncertainty terrifies me. We have too much to lose to leave things to chance.

Then the dragon smothers the fear. I'm already doing everything I can, and wasting brainpower on being afraid of what I can't control won't help me change what I can.

Sa'Haa answers positively to our request and shares with us everything she knows about the Gifted.

In essence, they're comic book superheroes.

Their powers are usually straightforward, like super-strength, control of the elements, etc. Powers like mine, conditional breaking of the rules of the divine level and skill system, are much, much rarer.

"Everyone believes that Lord Wolf has something like an affinity for all magic, but since he can apparently bestow his power upon others, I believe it's related to the system," Sa'Haa remarks stoically as she stares at Yunia.

"An interesting guess…" The Queen replies ambiguously, and the two share a brief smile.

As we read through the records of known Gifted, a clearer image of them starts to form in my mind. The magic-oriented ones have the most firepower, but they're also incredibly vulnerable to assassination since their bodies are still limited by physics

and magic; the body-strengthening Gifted, like Brett, may not have the most impressive firepower, but they're incredibly difficult to deal with because they're basically fucking invincible; and the system rule-breakers like me are the most difficult to gauge since they can be basically anything.

Ciel bounces on my cock as I fondle her jiggling cow tits. The expression on her gentle face is one of bliss as she pleases herself with my thick meat rod, and her pussy drips with lewd fluids that run down my shaft only to pool on the bedsheets. Then Alissa serves us another finger of Eia extract, and the connection between our minds is boosted once more.

We're having sex because it improves our Gestalt, of course. There's definitely no other side of me that's milking, in both figurative ways, this situation.

Lunch comes in the blink of an eye, and we're forced to share our mealtime with the royals once again.

"What have you been doing this morning, Royal Lord Wolf?" Urmeie asks so politely that we almost suffer from whiplash with how fast our necks turn towards her in disbelief. "Fuck, that was creepy," she blurts out in surprise.

"I heard you all have uncanny coordination," Sa'Haa remarks, her stern eyes narrowed in suspicion.

Yunia kindly answers for us, "Yes, you're correct. We had a 'Gestalt' session earlier today as we analyzed the data you gave us, so we're still a bit 'in sync.'" Her is tone so gentle that it seems like she got possessed by Ciel for a moment.

"Hm…" Urmeie hums impassively and goes back to eating her meal.

Vanea and Tommen casually observe our conversation, the former not showing any signs of awkwardness after yesterday's "talk" (which is expected since we're also trying not to look awkward in front of the royals) while the latter is more interested in speaking with his friend.

But we all notice a problem looming like a storm. There's something on Urmeie's mind, and she's definitely going to give us a big piece of it very soon.