

An Understated Dominance by Marina Vittori

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"Azalea Larson?" Abigail was puzzled.

Abigail knew the woman's surname was Larson, but her name was Mandy Larson.

"Are you going to deny it? Do I have to tear off your mask?" Dustin asked.

"Your eyes are getting better. I spent so much time dressing up, but it wasn't enough to fool you." Azalea giggled flirtatiously.

"Is your name really Azalea?" Abigail frowned. She felt like she was tricked.

"I'm Azalea, but I'm also Mandy. I never lied to you," Azalea explained with a smile.

"What are you doing here?" Dustin demanded.

He was always on high alert whenever he was near this crazy woman.

After all, it was difficult to believe someone who murdered their mentor and offered their mentor's head to the Harmon family..

"Aww, aren't we friends by now? Can't you treat me more warmly?" Azalea circled Dustin like a snake eyeing a mouse.

"What happened between us can only be considered a business partnership, definitely not friendship." Dustin was unfazed.

"That makes me sad. I should've known that all men are cheaters!" Azalea grumbled pitifully.

"Ahem, I'm still here, you know? Do you mind toning down the flirting?" Abigail looked at them oddly.

"Abigail, go and train. I have something to talk to her about." Dustin glanced at Abigail.

"Alright, then. I'll stop bothering you two." Abigail stuck out her tongue and headed to the training grounds to practice her staff combat technique.

Ugh, the smell of love!

"Spit it. What are you up to?" Dustin demanded once more.

"Nothing. I'm just here to protect Abigail." Azalea smiled.

"She's the future Grand Sorceress of the Mystic Arts Order, so she'll need bodyguards. I think I'm a good fit for the job."

"What?" Dustin frowned. "How did you know that?"

He was the only one Micheal told this secret to, and even Abigail had no idea. How did Azalea

know this?

"The Dark Lord used to be from the Mystic Arts Order. He happened to share this secret with me." Azalea smirked.

"Abigail isn't ready. Besides, there is no way her father will allow her to join the Mystic Arts Order,

Dustin replied coolly.

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The Mystic Arts Order was the evillest faction in the world, and the same could be said about its people.

Abigail was too kind, so she would be eaten alive if she got caught up in the mess with the Order.

"Never say never. As long as the blood of the Grand Sorceress flows in her veins, the organization will find her sooner or later." Azalea reminded him.

"I don't know what will happen in the future, but Abigail is my disciple right now. I'll protect her with my life as long as I'm alive. You better not try anything funny!" Dustin warned.

"Don't worry. My future depends on her, so I'll protect her with everything I've got." Azalea smiled.

Abigail was the granddaughter of the leader of the Mystic Arts Order, so Azalea had to make sure to get close to her.

If Abigail became the Grand Sorceress, Azalea could ride on Abigail's coattails and become stronger than anyone else.

"You better keep your word." Dustin stared at Azalea. Once he was sure she wasn't lying, he sighed with relief.

"I can't beat you anyway, so you can always kill me if I do anything bad. Still, I wonder if you can do it."

Azalea smirked and placed a palm on Dustin's chest before dragging it downward.

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Dustin frowned and stepped back to put some space between their bodies. "I won't expose your identity, but you better behave yourself. I'll be watching you.

"You'll be watching me?" Azalea bit her bottom lip invitingly. "I'll be showering later. Will you also watch me?"

"You're crazy!"

Dustin ignored her and walked past her to go upstairs. He was certain she wasn't up to anything for now, but he was still wary of witches like her.

The night passed uneventfully.

The next morning, Dustin was out with Abigail for their morning practice when a black sedan pulled up at their entrance.

The car door opened, and Patrick stepped out with a smile.

“Congratulations, Dustin.” Patrick congratulated Dustin.

“The results for yesterday’s tests are out. You passed the test and have been chosen to lead four other martial artists to represent the Glenstead martial arts alliance!”

“Really? That’s great.” Dustin smiled softly, not surprised by the news.

It would be more surprising if someone managed to get a higher score than him, who got full marks for all five tests.

“Are you joining the Knighthood Society Tournament? Can I tag along?” Abigail asked eagerly.

“Only if you don’t cause any trouble,” Dustin warned.

“I promise!” Abigail promised.

“Me too. I want to go, too,” Azalea chimed in.

There was no way she’d miss out on such an exciting show.

Dustin glanced at her but didn’t answer. Instead, he stepped into the car.

Abigail and Azalea followed too. Azalea plopped herself into the seat next to Dustin’s, her breasts jiggling from the movement.

The car began to move, starting their journey to the tournament.

The tournament was being held at Shinefield Lake, which was located at the foot of Mount Shinefield. The beautiful scenery there made it the perfect location to host the tournament.

When they arrived, the lake was full of martial artists from different places.

The grand tournament between the Balerno and Glenstead martial arts alliance took place every three years. Today’s battle was more about honor than interest. Each participant must do their best to make their alliance proud.

“Dustin, the others who will be representing Balerno are over there. Follow me.” Patrick glanced around to ensure he was in the right direction before leading Dustin and the others over.

“Stop right there!”

Suddenly, a group of people blocked their way. When Dustin saw who they were, he had a smirk on his face.

They turned out to be the same people from Steeljaws Fellowship yesterday.

“You killed Dominic yesterday, and we demand justice!” One of them accused before Dustin could say anything.

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“What?” The sudden accusation took Dustin aback. “Dominic is dead?”

“That’s right. It’s all your fault, you murderer!” Gianna shouted angrily.

“Don’t be stupid. What does his death have to do with me? Don’t pin the blame on me,” Dustin

replied.

“Stop lying! Dominic wouldn’t have died if it weren’t for your tricks!” Gianna shouted.

“Did you think we won’t discover that you intentionally kept the lever at the max so you could trick Dominic into entering the pressure machine. The moment the door closed, Dominic exploded!” Devon growled.

Dustin was speechless by their stupid accusations. He had merely forgotten to return the lever to its initial position. 1

How could he have known that someone would be stupid enough to start the machine without looking at the lever?

He had never met such a dumb bunch. It was ridiculous that he was blamed for such an ignorant incident.

“First of all, I didn’t plan anything, so I had nothing to do with Dominic’s death. He died because of his actions alone.” Dustin held his hand open.

“Yeah, right! I know you did it on purpose!” Gianna didn’t believe a word he said.

“I’ve already explained myself. You can decide whether to believe me.” Dustin couldn’t be bothered to continue talking to those idiots.

“You’ve got guts, kid. How dare you walk away like nothing happened after killing someone?” Just then, a man in black emerged from the crowd.

Although the man looked ordinary, the sword he was holding gave off an imposing air. This man was the first disciple of Steeljaws Fellowship, Jared Yancy.

“And where did you come from?” Dustin raised an eyebrow.

“How rude! This is Jared. He’s one of the five martial artists competing today!” Devon shouted.

“So what?” Dustin shrugged.

“You might have some skills, kid, but that’s far from enough if you want to challenge me. Dominic’s death can’t be in vain, so you’ll have to pay up!” Jared retorted icily.

“What kind of payment do you want?” Dustin put on a fake smile.

“If you break both arms, I’ll let you live,” Jared demanded.

“Are all Boulderthorn people crazy or something? First, you randomly accuse me of something I didn’t do. Then demand I break my hands. Did you think I’ll do it?” Dustin shot them a disdainful look.

“I’m giving you a chance right now. You won’t just be breaking two arms if I have to do it myself.”

Jared threatened.

He drew his sword lightly, exposing the razor-sharp blade as a warning.

“You better not cross the line!” Abigail snapped, unable to control her anger. She stepped forward and put herself in front of Dustin.

“Shut up! You have no right to talk!” Gianna slapped Abigail hard, leaving a visible palm print.

Dustin’s face darkened, and his blood boiled. But before he could do anything, there was a shadow as something flew toward Gianna’s arm.

It was a black venomous snake!

“Aargh!” Startled, Gianna flung the snake to the ground and crushed it to death.

The spot where the snake had bitten her had already turned black. It was easy to tell that the snake was incredibly venomous.

“Who was it? Who snuck up on us?”

The Steeljaws Fellowship disciples looked around furiously. They couldn’t believe someone had used such a dirty move!

“I did it.” Azalea stepped out from behind Dustin, a cold smile on her face. “She should pay the price for slapping my sister.”

“Give us the antidote!” Jared ordered.

The venom had already spread to the rest of Gianna’s arm. It would spread to the rest of her organs in another three minutes.

“There is no antidote. The only way to save her is to slice off her arm to stop the venom from spreading.” Azalea grinned.

An eye for an eye, a slap for an arm. It was a good deal.

“You’re dead meat!” Furious, Jared drew his blade, about to attack.

“Stop!”

Patrick stepped forward and took out the Hill family emblem. "Today's the Knighthood Society Tournament! Participants are not allowed to engage in personal fights!"

Jared gritted his teeth but eventually lowered his sword. He didn't have a choice since this was the Knighthood Society Tournament, and he was afraid of Patrick.

"Save me, Jared! I don't want to die!"

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Gianna burst into tears as she watched the venom spread further, terrified. Her arrogant attitude from earlier disappeared.

Without a word, Jared swung his sword and sliced Gianna's arm off.

Flustered, Gianna stared at her arm lying on the floor and looked at her shoulder. After she

realized what had happened, she cried before passing out.

"Once the tournament ends, I'll make you pay for your actions!" Jared spat before leading his men.

away.

"Dustin, Jared isn't someone you want as your enemy. You should be careful." Patrick warned.

"He should be the one who's careful," Dustin replied.

If it weren't for Patrick, he would have killed Jared!

"It's almost time. Let's go and find Grandpa." Patrick gestured and led them into a luxurious lakeside villa.

The spacious villa had a rustic charm and a huge courtyard where everyone was resting.

Meanwhile, Paul was chatting comfortably in the villa's living room with a middle-aged man. It was none other than the leader of Balerno martial arts, Ronald Reeds.

Paul was Ronald's mentor, so they could chat comfortably.

"Sir, I've heard you recently found someone with great potential. The person managed to defeat Terry Doyle and performed well in yesterday's tests," Ronald said with a smile.

"He's incredibly special. As long as I train him properly, he might become your successor," Paul said thoughtfully.

"I'm curious to know the person you got your eye on." Ronald was excited.

His mentor had always been picky, and regular geniuses meant nothing to him.

"Dustin is here, Grandpa." Patrick suddenly entered.

"Right on time." Paul smiled. "Tell him to come in."

"Alright." Patrick went out again to lead Dustin in.

"Greetings, Sir Paul." Dustin greeted Paul.

"You came at the right time, Dustin. Let me introduce you to someone." Paul gestured to the man next to him. "This is the current leader of Balerno martial arts, Ronald Reeds."

"Ronald Reeds?" Dustin raised an eyebrow.

He recalled Micheal mentioning that Ronald was his good friend. He just didn't expect that friend

to be the leader of Balerno martial arts.

"Do you know each other?" Paul was surprised.

"Of course, I've heard of Sir Reeds' accomplishments. Nice to meet you, Sir Reeds." Dustin greeted

once more.

“A talented individual indeed.” Ronald nodded with a smile. “The alliance is fortunate to have young, talented individuals like you as its future leaders.”

“You flatter me, Sir Reeds.” Dustin lowered his head politely.

“I don’t have anything to gift you besides this knife. It’s sharp enough to cut through metal. I hope you accept this token to commemorate our first meeting.” Ronald pulled out the knife he carried and handed it to Dustin with a smile.

“But...” Dustin was taken aback.

“Ronald likes talented individuals very much. Since he wants to offer you a gift, you might as well accept it.” Paul smiled.

“Alright. Thank you, Sir Reeds.” Dustin accepted the knife humbly.

“I hope you do your best to make the Balerno martial arts alliance proud,” Ronald encouraged.

“I will,” Dustin promised.

“It’s almost time, Ronald. Why don’t you tell the other participants to come in so we can discuss strategies,” Paul said to Ronald.

“Sure. I’ll go get them.” Just as Ronald was about to stand up, one of the alliance workers walked in nervously.

“I have bad news, sir! We received a report that three participants-Chase Newman, Andy Cannon, and Shawn Mcgee-have been poisoned. They are currently all unconscious!”

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“What? Poisoned?” Everyone paled.

It was no coincidence that three participants were poisoned on the day of the tournament.

“How could this happen? Who did it?” Ronald growled.

“We don’t know yet. We’re still investigating.” The worker shook his head.

“Bring me to them!” Ronald headed out hurriedly.

Workers had closed all the exits at the temporary training grounds to stop everyone from leaving.

When Ronald and the others arrived, they saw three strong men lying unconscious in the center. Their breathing was faint, and their faces were ashen. But their lips had turned black.

“It’s an extremely potent venom!” Ronald was displeased.

The three men were martial artists on *The Heavenly Immortals* and were crucial to their tournament. What was he supposed to do now that they were poisoned?

“Hurry, get someone from Stoneray Order!” Ronald ordered.

“No need for such hassle. Dustin can take care of this,” Paul said.

Even Nicholas hadn’t been able to treat him back when he had been injured, yet Dustin had managed to save him.

“Do you practice medicine, Dustin?” Ronald was surprised.

“A little.” Dustin didn’t bother denying it.

“Then, please take a look at them.” Ronald stepped aside.

Nodding, Dustin walked over and crouched down to study the three men’s conditions.

Soon, his expression turned grave.

“They were poisoned with a slow-acting poison. It’s tough to get rid of it. Symptoms don’t appear until they do any vigorous exercise. But the moment they do, the infected will fall unconscious and might even die,” Dustin explained.

“Can you cure them?” Ronald asked worriedly.

These three men were important for the tournament. He couldn't afford to lose them.

"I can save their lives, but they'll be weak for the next week. I doubt they'll be able to take part in today's tournament." Dustin shook his head.

Ronald and Paul both frowned when they heard this. Clearly, the person who poisoned these men was trying to make them lose this year's tournament.

"Please save them, Dustin." Ronald suppressed his anger.

"Alright." Dustin nodded and quickly pulled out his silver needles to treat the men.

"Who do you think did this, Sir?" Ronald asked, pondering deeply.

"Who else could it be? It's those bastards from Glenstead!" Paul snarled.

"They aren't sure whether they'd win, so they used these underhanded tactics instead. How shameless!"

"Still, we don't have any proof. We can do nothing about it." Ronald frowned.

He also knew that the Glenstead martial arts alliance had something to do with this. The two alliances had been at odds for some time. He never expected them to resort to such dirty tactics.

"Why don't we push the tournament back for a few days? We'll resume things when they've recovered." Patrick offered.

"Everyone is paying close attention to the tournament. There's no way we can just change the date.

Ronald shook his head.

"I guess we'll just have to find three substitutes." Paul's expression was grim.

Chase, Andy, and Shawn were powerful martial artists who were on The Heavenly Immortals. With their help, Balerno had a high chance of winning the tournament. But that would change if they had to switch participants.

"We still have time. I'll go and look for decent substitutes." Ronald left hurriedly. He had to try no matter how little time there was left!

Time flew by, and it was soon noon.

The sun shone brightly, and the brightness reflected off the lake's surface.