

THE VILLAIN'S POV

Chapter 19 19: The True Beginning (1)

The Ninth Month, Year 2423 AD

Imperial Capital – Belgrade

Belgrade was known as the Jewel of the North. No matter how far one traveled, there was no place safer than this city—or so the people of the Valerian Empire believed.

After all, this was where the Imperial Palace stood, where the strongest living human resided—the Fourth Emperor, Maekar Valerion, a man known as The Phenomenon. A direct descendant of the legendary warrior who had saved the world three centuries ago—the One Sword.

But today, Belgrade was more alive than ever.

The reason was simple.

The city was hosting the annual summit—a gathering of the empire's most powerful forces, held once a year.

In attendance were the three great noble families, along with the Imperial Family itself.

Inside a grand palace, a massive conference table had been set, encircled by four imposing thrones.

On the eastern side, seated atop a white throne adorned with a golden star, was an elderly man with long white hair. Despite his advanced age, he still exuded an air of authority, his posture as straight as a drawn spear. He sat with his eyes closed, radiating a composed presence. Behind him stood a young woman in her early twenties, her jet-black eyes and white hair forming a striking contrast. Today, however, her expression was particularly dark.

"Still here, Leonidas? How many times must I see your wrinkled face? Haven't your old bones had enough?"

Leonidas lifted his head, following the voice to its source.

On the western side, seated upon an icy throne engraved with a crescent moon, was a man who appeared to be in his mid-forties. His skin was deathly pale, as if frozen by an eternal winter. His deep blue hair and glass-like eyes gave him a chilling presence.

This was none other than Baelor Moonlight, the current lord of the Moonlight Family—an SS-rank existence feared across the empire. The Ice Demon.

But Leonidas remained unfazed by the tyrant before him, answering in a calm, steady voice.

"The day I can no longer serve my family, I will step down of my own accord. Until then, you'll keep seeing this face... Baelor."

Baelor chuckled softly. "Still as unyielding as ever. No wonder the Starlight Family has managed to endure for so long."

To the untrained ear, it might have sounded like praise. But Leonidas understood the hidden meaning. Baylor was clearly referencing the death of the previous Lord of the Starlight Family—Abraham.

Once, the Starlight Family had been the mightiest of the three great houses. Now, they had fallen to the bottom.

Leonidas, of course, was no fool. He understood Baelor's implication. But before the tension could escalate, another voice cut through the air.

"Alright, alright. I must say, it's a pleasure to have a member of the old generation among us. Men like Leonidas are always welcome here—to guide us toward a better future."

All eyes turned toward the speaker.

On the southern side, seated upon a throne of flame, its surface engraved with the symbol of the sun, was a man with fiery red hair and a beard that burned like living fire. He appeared to be in his fifties.

This was Lord Iris Sunlight, known as the War King.

"I'm glad someone here still values such wisdom."

Leonidas chuckled, and Iris joined him.

"Since the Emperor has yet to arrive, there's no need for this tension. Let's talk about the one standing behind you, Baylor."

The room's attention shifted toward her.

Everyone, without exception, had stolen glances at her throughout the meeting—even Leonidas.

She was simply too breathtaking.

The young woman standing behind Lord Baylor Moonlight looked like a porcelain doll brought to life. Her snow-white hair cascaded down her back like a silver waterfall, her sapphire-blue eyes gleamed like rare gemstones, and her pale complexion seemed to glow under the dim palace lights.

She was Seris Moonlight—the woman whom Frey Starlight had once loved to the point of madness.

"Every time I see her, she grows even more beautiful," Iris mused. "What do you say, Baylor? Why not marry her off to my son?"

Behind Iris stood a young man with fiery red hair, his presence regal and his gaze filled with unwavering confidence.

"They're both set to enter the temple this year. A marriage between them would benefit both families. A fine match, wouldn't you agree?"

"Haha, as blunt as always, Iris," Baelor said before turning to Circe.

"My niece truly is beautiful. Your proposal is certainly appealing, Iris. However... this is something I've left for her to decide."

Seris cast a brief glance at the confident young man before her. It lasted only a second before she returned her gaze forward, her face blank, unreadable.

"As flattering as Lord Iris's offer may be, I have no interest in such matters. My focus is solely on my duty to my family."

Baelor shrugged apologetically. "You heard her."

"Haha, well, that's unfortunate."

Fortunately, Iris Sunlight was a man of broad vision. He took no offense.

At that moment, Baelor Moonlight turned his attention back to Leonidas, and Eris followed suit.

Whenever Seris was mentioned, one name inevitably came to mind.

"This reminds me of something important, Leonidas... I heard that Abraham's son entered the Nightmare Lands a year ago and never returned. Is that true?"

For the first time, Leonidas's calm expression wavered. Behind him, Ada fared even worse—her nails dug deep into her palms.

She still refused to believe that Frey was truly gone.

By tradition, each noble family was represented by two individuals—the family lord and the heir apparent.

This was the case for both the Moonlight and Sunlight families.

But for the Starlights, things were different. Their lord had perished, leaving Leonidas, the head of the Senate Council, to represent them instead.

Ada wasn't ready yet. Despite holding the title of Lord, she remained in the background.

But she knew this wasn't her place.

It was meant for her brother—Frey.

Leonidas composed himself and responded evenly.

"Frey Starlight lost his life during a training expedition in the Nightmare Lands. As painful as it is, fate has not been kind to our family. We lost Abraham, and then his son soon after."

Ada clenched her fists even tighter.

She knew how much of a hypocrite this old man was. No one had been happier about her brother's death than Leonidas himself.

"How unfortunate... truly unfortunate," Baelor murmured. "He used to visit my palace quite often, after all."

He attempted to sound regretful, but his expression betrayed him.

For the first time, Seris expression shifted slightly as she recalled the black-haired, black-eyed boy.

Of course, he had come for her every time.

She had tried to remain civil, given the ties between their families.

She had thought she had buried those emotions long ago.

But Frey Starlight had managed to stir them back to life... in the worst way possible.

Other than her father, there was no one she had despised more than him.

He had pursued her relentlessly, whether through charm or manipulation.

His very name disgusted her.

"Hmph. Let's end this pleasant conversation here," Baelor interjected. "I don't particularly enjoy talking about the dead... Besides, he's here."

The atmosphere in the room shifted instantly.

The only empty throne stood at the northern position—a grand golden seat, larger than the rest.

Now, its rightful owner had arrived.

The great doors of the hall swung open as a heavily armored man strode in, his presence overwhelming. In a booming voice, he announced,

"Bow before the Emperor!"

Everyone rose as a man in his forties entered, his golden hair shining like sunlight, his piercing yellow eyes burning like fire.

The strongest human alive—Maekar Valerion.

Behind him stood a younger version of himself—his firstborn son, Crown Prince Aegon Valerion.

Everyone in the room knew why the Emperor was furious.

"Let the summit begin," Maekar declared, his voice deep and commanding.