

The World Is Mine For The Taking #Chapter 1131 - 173 - The Titan Kingdom's Future (2) - Read The World Is Mine For The Taking Chapter 1131 - 173 - The Titan Kingdom's Future (2)

Chapter 1131: Chapter 173 - The Titan Kingdom's Future (2)

I honestly hadn't expected her to say something like that. Not even a little. Hearing her put her loyalty on the line like that—pledging it to me until her life ended—felt heavy in a way I couldn't immediately describe. It wasn't romantic in the way people liked to imagine loyalty. It was weighty, almost suffocating. The kind of promise that lingered in the air long after it was spoken, pressing down on the chest.

To be blunt, it was the sort of vow that was impossible to guarantee. Promises like that only worked in stories or fairy tales, or when someone had a leash tight around another person's neck. And even then, it wasn't real loyalty—just fear dressed up as devotion.

"Are you sure you want to say something like that?" I asked her, my voice quieter than usual. "I don't even know if you're truly sure, or if you're just saying this in the heat of the moment. If you don't really mean it, you can still take it back. There's no shame in that."

I wasn't trying to corner her or test her resolve. If anything, I was giving her an exit. Words carried weight, especially words like those, and once spoken, they were hard to erase.

"Well, I do mean it," she replied, without a hint of hesitation.

Her tone was calm, steady—far too steady for someone acting on impulse.

"I think that right now," she continued, "it's better for us to step away from overly conservative ways of thinking. We should allow ourselves to explore things we haven't seen yet. Things we haven't dared to consider."

She paused briefly, as if choosing her words carefully, then went on. "I believe that doing so will help us understand what we don't know. It will help us see the bigger picture instead of clinging to what feels safe."

There was conviction behind her words. Not recklessness—conviction.

"My father believed that preserving the kingdom's interests meant holding tightly to tradition," she said. "But I think that approach is doing more harm than good. That's why I want to find a different path. One where the people of the Titan Kingdom can grow into something stronger. Something that will benefit us in the long run."

She wasn't speaking like a sheltered princess anymore. She was speaking like someone who had already accepted the burden of leadership, whether she wanted it or not.

She was thinking far ahead—farther than I'd expected. In its own way, it was impressive. No, more than that—it was admirable. I never would've guessed that she'd already be thinking about her kingdom's future on such a long-term scale. She wasn't just reacting to the present. She was planning for what came next, and even what came after that.

Honestly, she really would make a good leader.

I wouldn't mind it at all if she became the queen of the Titans someday. Even now, acting only as a proxy, she carried herself with a quiet authority. The kind that didn't need to be loud or cruel to be effective. I could already imagine her protecting the sovereignty of her kingdom—not with brute force alone, but with foresight.

"For now," I said after a moment, "you shouldn't be thinking about losing hope. It's too early for that. The worst hasn't happened yet."

I wasn't dismissing her concerns. I just didn't want her drowning in them.

"There's nothing wrong with planning ahead," I added, "but you can't let pessimism guide every decision. Not when things are still moving forward."

That much was true. She couldn't afford to assume failure before it even arrived. Preparing for the future was good—necessary, even—but letting fear shape that future was dangerous.

When I finished speaking, she smiled.

Her smile had always carried a hint of shyness, like she wasn't entirely used to letting her emotions show. But lately, there was something different about it. Something brighter. Almost blinding in how radiant it felt. It lingered just a second longer than usual, warm and unguarded.

It was almost as if—

"She's in love."

Tilde's voice cut in softly.

Before I could react, she leaned in close, placing her mouth near my ear, and gently breathed the words against it.

I flinched in surprise and instinctively pulled my head away, my attention snapping back to reality.

At that moment, my gaze drifted back toward the Titans. They were moving throughout the area, each one tending to those affected by the Eternal Sleep. Their massive forms should've been overwhelming, yet their movements were careful, deliberate. Gentle, even.

Despite their size, the ground barely trembled beneath them. I could feel the vibrations when they walked—but only faintly. So faint that it didn't bother me at all. It was almost surreal, watching beings that large move with such restraint.

Tilde had come to me right after my conversation with Layla, and the confidence in her voice when she said those words made it hard to brush them off.

Honestly, it was obvious.

Layla's expression alone had been enough. The way her eyes lingered, the subtle hesitation in her movements, the warmth she didn't bother hiding anymore. Even I couldn't ignore it—not without deliberately lying to myself.

I knew she was in love with me. There was no doubt about it. And there was no way to deny it, no matter how inconvenient or complicated it might be.

"It looks like the Titan Princess has warmed up to you, huh, Leon?" Tilde said, her tone teasing but not unkind. "Considering it's you, it was only a matter of time before you charmed someone like her."

She shrugged slightly. "I wouldn't even say it's impossible for you to get a woman of her size."

She tilted her head, studying me. "Still, I think I underestimated how fast you are at charming women. I know it worked on me the first time we met—but I didn't expect it to work *this* well."

A small smile curved her lips. "Honestly, it surprised me."

She wasn't wrong.

Lately, I'd been managing to have sex with women I'd only just met, one after another. There was barely any buildup, barely any waiting. Things just... happened. Easily. Almost too easily.

It made me wonder if something had changed.

I had been building my public persona, after all. Becoming the face of a company, managing appearances, learning how to speak, how to present myself. But was that really enough to give me this kind of pull?

Enough charisma to draw people in just by talking?

Considering how often it had worked recently, there was probably some truth to it. Even if I didn't fully understand it yet.

"So," Tilde asked casually, a playful edge creeping into her voice, "what are you going to do now, Leon?"

She glanced in Layla's direction before looking back at me.

"Are you going to fuck her?"

"Well," I said, exhaling slowly, "I can't exactly rush something like that. Obviously."

She raised an eyebrow. "Aren't you worried about the real issue here?"

I frowned slightly. "What issue?"

She smirked. "The elephant in the room."

I waited.

"How are you even going to fuck her?"

That... was a fair question.

Layla was a giant. I wasn't. I was just a normal-sized human standing next to someone whose fingers alone were larger than my entire torso. No amount of confidence could bridge that gap.

I trusted my dick, sure—but I wasn't delusional. My cock wasn't even enough to scratch the surface of Layla's lower lips.

Chapter 1132: Chapter 173 - The Titan Kingdom's Future (3)

Well, it wasn't like there was anything I could really do about it right now.

No matter how I tried to look at it, the situation was just... impossible. Unless I somehow managed to become someone absurdly massive and increase my own size to match hers, or maybe found a way—somehow—to shrink her down instead, there was absolutely no way I could possibly have sex with her. It wasn't a matter of desire or attraction. It was a matter of sheer, physical impossibility.

At least not at this point in time.

And honestly, it wasn't even something worth dwelling on too deeply. I knew that overthinking it would just lead me down a pointless spiral. I was already pretty sure nothing was going to happen between me and Layla anyway, not in that sense.

Layla may have fallen in love with me. That much was obvious. Anyone with eyes could tell. But love alone didn't automatically lead to sex. There was no heat in the air between us, no tension that crackled when we stood too close, no lingering looks or half-spoken desires. Nothing that suggested we were heading toward that kind of relationship anytime soon.

If anything, it felt distant. Complicated. Something better left untouched for now.

"Well, at this point," Tilde said, her tone light but sharp enough to snap me out of my thoughts, "I think it's better to just wait it out, don't you think?"

She tilted her head slightly as she spoke, her lips curling into a knowing smile.

"I mean," she continued, casually, almost teasingly, "you've got so many pussies available to you right now. Like mine, for example."

I didn't even need a second to process that.

When I was presented with an invitation like that—blunt, confident, and unmistakably clear—there was absolutely no way I could refuse. Refusing her wouldn't have been noble or thoughtful. It would've been incredibly dumb. There was no moral dilemma here, no complicated emotions tied to it. Just opportunity, plain and simple.

And honestly? I had no reason to turn it down.

So I didn't.

I moved with her, joined her on the bed, and then I fucked her.

Two days later.

Natasha and Trisha finally returned.

They didn't come back empty-handed either. With them was the newly developed pill—one that made the first version look almost laughably weak in comparison. The moment Trisha started explaining it, I could tell this wasn't just an upgrade. This was something on a completely different level.

From what I understood, the potency alone was enough to make any sane person hesitate. This pill wasn't even remotely comparable to the first one. It wasn't meant for humans. In fact, it couldn't be used on humans at all.

The power contained within it was simply too much.

Trisha explained that a human body wouldn't be able to handle it. The pill hadn't been diluted to a level safe for people our size. If a human consumed it, the results would likely be fatal. But titans were different. Their bodies could withstand it. They needed something this strong.

When the pills were handed to me, I examined them closely.

Honestly, if you placed one next to the original pill, you wouldn't notice any difference. Same size. Same shape. Same appearance. There was nothing about it that screamed "danger" or "extreme potency."

And yet, this one hadn't been diluted at all.

It was designed specifically for beings as massive as titans.

"Are you sure this is going to work?" I asked, wanting reassurance more than anything.

The titan standing right beside me was trembling slightly. Her massive body shifted as she squirmed, not violently, but enough that it caught my attention. Her sheer size alone made the situation uncomfortable. One wrong move, one unexpected reaction, and things could go very badly.

"Well," Trisha replied, smiling calmly, "considering that titans are structured similarly to humans, I don't think there's going to be a problem."

She spoke with confidence—the kind that came from knowledge, not arrogance.

"It should be fine," she continued. "I've studied their entire structure. Their physiology, their reactions, and the benefits of the pill itself. I wouldn't allow something potentially dangerous to be used on anyone. I'm here to save lives, not take them."

Those words carried weight.

She didn't hesitate. Didn't waver. And hearing that, I felt the tension in my chest loosen just a little.

She was the expert here. Far more qualified than I was to make this call. Letting her take the reins wasn't just logical—it was necessary. And the way she spoke, the certainty in her voice, made it easy to trust her.

Even Layla, who had been visibly anxious, managed to calm herself after hearing that. I could see it in her posture, in the way her breathing steadied. She was placing her trust in Trisha completely.

And honestly, that trust felt justified.

After hearing how professional she was—how deeply she understood what she was doing—it would've been strange not to believe her.

"Well then," Natasha said, stepping forward, "I guess we should proceed with the procedure so they can drink it as soon as possible."

She looked at me briefly before turning away.

That glance lingered just a second too long.

She was probably still thinking about what she'd seen before. Watching me have sex wasn't exactly the kind of thing you just erased from your memory. I doubted that image would leave her mind anytime soon.

With that, they began.

One by one, the titans were given the pill.

And honestly... it was awkward.

Watching men consume something made from my semen wasn't exactly something I'd ever imagined I'd experience. Sure, it wasn't semen in its raw form. The pill had been processed, refined, and altered. It contained my semen because it carried an immense amount of life force—enough to wake someone from the Eternal Sleep Disease.

Still, knowing that fact didn't make it any less strange.

There was also a quiet sense of guilt gnawing at me. They didn't know what they were taking. They didn't know where it came from. But we didn't have a choice. Leaving them asleep meant letting them die.

There was no compromise here.

The pill itself was small, compact, and easy to swallow. Each titan consumed it without much difficulty. After a while, all of them had taken it. Now, it was just a matter of waiting.

Medicine never worked instantly. I knew that.

Even Zeruel's mother, Juna, had taken some time before she showed any signs of waking up. This pill, despite its potency, still needed time to take effect.

That was just how these things worked.

Then, suddenly, someone shouted.

The sound cut through the air, sharp and urgent. We rushed over immediately, hearts pounding, ready for the worst. For a brief moment, I thought something had gone horribly wrong.

But when we arrived, we saw it.

One of the titans' fingers twitched.

Just slightly.

But unmistakably.

That titan was waking up.

After that, it happened faster. One after another, subtle movements began to appear. Shifting hands. Breaths growing deeper. Eyes fluttering beneath heavy lids.

The pill was working.

And finally—

All of them woke up.

Chapter 1133: Chapter 173 - The Titan Kingdom's Future (4)

The King finally woke up.

It had been nearly two full months since he had fallen into what everyone had come to call an eternal sleep—a state so deep and unresponsive that even hope itself had started to feel pointless. And now, after all that time suspended between life and death, this was the first moment he opened his eyes again, the first time light reached him after all those silent days.

"Ah..."

Layla's voice trembled, and she couldn't hide the joy flooding her expression. Not that she tried to. No one could have blamed her for it.

She had already given up once. Slowly, painfully, she had accepted the idea that her father would never wake again. The healers had shaken their heads, the priests had whispered prayers that sounded more like farewells, and every passing day had chipped away at what little hope remained. She had begun preparing herself for the worst, steeling her heart for a future without him.

And now, all of that vanished in an instant.

The moment she saw her father's eyes open, the fear, the grief, the sleepless nights—all of it collapsed like it had never existed.

"Layla?"

The King's voice was low and rough, thick with confusion. It wasn't weakness—it was disorientation. And that was only natural.

Anyone would be confused. One moment, you go to sleep like any other day, unaware that anything is wrong. The next thing you know, you wake up months later, your body heavy, your senses dull, the world subtly different. Time had moved on without him, and he had no memory of it.

"I'm really glad you're here and awake, Father," Layla said, her voice breaking despite her best effort to keep it steady.

She leaned forward and wrapped her arms around him, hugging him tightly. It wasn't a polite embrace or a restrained one—it was desperate, emotional, filled with everything she had been holding back for months. Her shoulders trembled as she held him, as if she were afraid he might disappear again if she let go.

It was a touching reunion. A genuine one.

Watching them stirred a memory in me—Selene and Zeruel reuniting with Juna after she had been asleep for an entire year. That moment had been heavy with emotion too. Relief, disbelief, joy, and lingering fear all tangled together in a way words could barely capture. This felt just like that. Different faces, different circumstances, but the same raw feeling.

Then the King's gaze shifted.

Only then did he notice me.

His eyes moved slowly, taking in the room, before finally settling on my presence. It made sense that he hadn't noticed me at first. Compared to him, I might as well have been invisible. To a Titan King, I was no more than a speck of dust standing at the edge of his awareness. And considering he had woken up with Layla hovering over him, clearly distressed and emotional, it was only natural that I hadn't been his focus.

"Humans?" he said, his tone neutral but sharp enough to cut through the air.

"Ah—F-Father," Layla said quickly, pulling back just enough to look at him. "I know I acted on my own."

She hesitated for a brief moment, choosing her words carefully.

"But given the state of everything, I thought it would be best to ask for their help."

The King didn't answer immediately. Instead, he looked at Layla, really looked at her, as if gauging her resolve, her exhaustion, and the weight she had been carrying in his absence. Then his gaze shifted downward, toward his own body, likely sensing the lingering effects of whatever had been done to him.

"I see," he said at last. "Now I understand the situation."

His voice was calm, steady, and thoughtful.

"You acted on your own for the sake of the people," he continued. "I don't blame you at all."

It was clear he already understood more than he was saying. He didn't need a full explanation to piece things together. Something had happened to him, and because of that, something had happened to the Titan Kingdom. Layla hadn't acted out of rebellion or recklessness—she had acted out of necessity.

"And so," the King said, turning his attention back to me, "what do you want as repayment, Human?"

He paused, eyes narrowing slightly.

"No... you aren't human, are you?"

There was no shock in his voice. Just curiosity.

Honestly, I couldn't even answer that question myself with complete confidence. I knew I was something like an offspring of Lilith—something born from her influence, her power, and her existence. That alone disqualified me from being normal by any reasonable standard.

"I don't really want any repayment," I said plainly.

"Oh?" he replied.

"Aren't you the Elven Breeder?" he continued. "The one attempting to unite all the countries and tribes of the Great Forest into a single nation?"

At this point, I barely reacted to the title. Being called the Elven Breeder had become routine enough that it didn't bother me anymore.

"Well," I said, "it's not like my main goal is to force unification."

I shrugged slightly.

"But it would be good if it happens. Honestly, it's fine if you don't consider it. Still, it would be highly appreciated if you joined."

I knew I was being vague. I wasn't cornering him or making demands. And judging by the way his eyes studied me, he understood exactly what I was doing.

"You seem like someone who's good at bargaining," the King said. "I've seen your kind before. You're a snake. You slither into circles where you don't quite belong, always searching for something to gain."

The words weren't an insult. Not really. They were an observation.

He paused for a moment, then let out a faint smirk.

"But snakes like you are the most interesting kind," he added. "And I don't think there's anything wrong with trusting your judgment."

With a deep breath, he shifted and sat up from his bed. The bed itself was enormous—easily a hundred times larger than me—and even now, it groaned and creaked beneath his weight, the sound echoing through the chamber.

"You want my country to join this unification, correct?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered without hesitation. "If you permit it, I want your country to unite with the newly established nation."

The King chuckled quietly, a sound heavy with experience.

"You're trying quite hard," he said. "While saving our people was commendable, I don't think that alone is enough for me to immediately accept your proposal."

Then he stopped.

"But..."

He turned his head and looked directly at Layla.

"I don't think I'm the one who should be deciding this."

Layla froze.

Her eyes widened, and confusion flickered across her face. It was obvious she hadn't expected that—hadn't even considered the possibility.

"Layla," the King said calmly, "what do you think?"

"Um..."

Layla hesitated, clearly unsure how to respond.

And honestly, so was I.

Even though he was the King, he was deliberately placing the decision in someone else's hands. But as I watched the way he looked at his daughter, it became clear that this wasn't uncertainty.

It was intention.

And whatever he was planning, Layla was at the center of it.

Chapter 1134: Chapter 173 - The Titan Kingdom's Future (5)

"Y-You want me to answer this?" Layla asked, her voice wavering just slightly as her eyes flicked between the King and the others present. The question slipped out almost reflexively, as if she needed to hear the confirmation aloud to believe it. Given the situation, it was only natural for her to doubt her own assumption. She genuinely had no clear grasp of what this was all leading to, or why the weight of the moment suddenly felt so heavy on her shoulders.

"That's right," the King replied calmly.

His gaze stayed fixed on his daughter, steady and unreadable, yet there was something deliberate behind it. He wasn't looking at her like a king addressing a subject, nor even like a father lecturing his child. It felt more like he was placing something fragile yet important into her hands and waiting to see how she would hold it. There was no hint of guidance in his tone, no suggestion of what answer he expected. He truly wanted Layla to speak for herself.

At that moment, it became clear—or at least it felt clear to me—that the King was doing this intentionally. He wanted Layla to start becoming someone capable of ruling. This wasn't just a test of her opinion; it was a test of her resolve, her judgment, and her confidence. He was forcing her to think, to weigh consequences, and to decide without leaning on anyone else. Whatever answer she gave, it felt like he had already resolved himself to accept it. Not because it was convenient, but because he believed it was time.

"You are someone who has already made decisions for the Titans on your own," the King said, his voice carrying a quiet authority. "And those decisions were made for the betterment of everyone."

He paused briefly, letting the words sink in before continuing.

"You were the one who decided to bring this person here. That choice was yours alone. And yet, you didn't act selfishly. You thought like someone who wanted what was best for her people. You weighed the risks, you considered the consequences, and you still chose to act. That was your decision."

Layla stiffened slightly, clearly not expecting that much acknowledgment.

"Because of that," he went on, "it is only right that you decide what you want from him. Whatever you think. Whatever you choose. I will accept it."

His words grew firmer, more resolute.

"You were the one who made that decision. Even if it is something I do not agree with, I will still accept it. And the people of the Titan Kingdom will have no choice but to accept it as well."

That was when it truly hit me.

This wasn't just about a proposal. This wasn't just about alliances or cooperation. The King was handing Layla the reins and telling her, without directly saying it, that her voice now carried weight equal to his own. The future of the Titan Kingdom—whether it would cooperate with this unification or stand apart from it—rested entirely on her shoulders.

"W-Why me?" Layla asked.

The uncertainty in her voice was unmistakable. She wasn't acting. She wasn't trying to be modest. She genuinely didn't understand why this responsibility was being placed on her now, of all times.

It was a natural reaction. Layla had never been someone who made decisions for the kingdom as a whole. Those kinds of choices were reserved for one person alone—the King. Unless you held the throne, you didn't get to decide things that could alter the fate of an entire race. That authority had always belonged to him.

So being asked to decide now, so suddenly, must have felt overwhelming. Confusing. Almost unreal. It was obvious she didn't yet understand what all of this was building toward.

"That's because," the King said, his voice steady, "as of now, I am officially crowning you as the heir to the throne."

The words landed like a shockwave.

"And as the one who will rule next," he continued, "I believe it is only natural for you to begin practicing decisions that may have a significant impact on the kingdom."

"M-Me? Your heir?" Layla blurted out.

Her eyes widened, and she actually pointed at herself, as if she needed to physically confirm that she was the one being addressed. The reaction alone made it obvious just how stunned she was. She looked like someone who had just been told the world had shifted beneath her feet.

Honestly, I didn't quite understand why this was so shocking at first. From my perspective, it seemed logical. But then it clicked.

For generations—countless generations, from what I had come to learn—the Titans had been ruled by kings. Men. Always men. Not a single woman had ever sat on the throne. That history alone made this moment unprecedented.

"What? You don't want it?" the King asked, raising an eyebrow slightly. "You should already know that I don't believe I can continue ruling for another generation."

His tone softened, but his words didn't lose their weight.

"My way of thinking has become too traditional. And the world is changing. It already has. In times like these, someone with a clearer, more modern mindset would be better suited to take the reins. Don't you agree?"

"B-But..." Layla hesitated.

She opened her mouth as if she wanted to say more, but the words refused to come out. Accepting something like this wasn't easy. You couldn't just nod and move on when the future of an entire kingdom was suddenly placed in your hands. Anyone would struggle with that.

"What is it?" the King asked again. "You don't want it?"

He let out a quiet breath before continuing.

"Layla, I'm not getting any younger. Sooner or later, my body will no longer be capable of ruling. If I wait until that happens, it may already be too late. That is why I am preparing you now. I want you ready. I want the transition to be seamless, smooth, and easier for everyone involved."

"But is that really okay?" Layla asked quietly.

Her doubt wasn't about herself alone. It was about the people. About tradition. About what might happen once word got out.

Chapter 1135: Chapter 173 - The Titan Kingdom's Future (6)

The King let out a quiet breath before speaking again, his gaze steady and unmoving.

"What? Are you worried there will be opposition simply because no woman Titan has ever sat on the throne before?" he asked.

His tone carried no irritation, no trace of mockery or doubt. It was firm, grounded—filled with a kind of confidence that came from someone who had already weighed the matter carefully. It wasn't a challenge. It was a statement.

"I don't believe that will be an issue," he continued. "You've already proven yourself, not through words, but through action and judgment. You've shown that you can think independently, without leaning on tradition as a crutch. One of your decisions alone saved the entire Titan race."

The weight of that statement hung in the air. It wasn't flattery. It was fact.

He met her eyes directly, his expression serious now.

"So," he said, lowering his voice slightly, "think carefully. What is your decision?"

Layla didn't answer right away.

Instead, she turned her head slightly and looked at me. It was only for a moment, brief enough that anyone else might have missed it, but I saw it clearly. Her eyes searched my face, as if trying to find something—reassurance, doubt, confirmation, maybe even permission. Her jaw was tight, her lips pressed together, and I could practically hear the gears turning in her head as her thoughts raced forward and back again.

The tension in her posture was obvious. This wasn't an easy choice. It was the kind of decision that followed you for the rest of your life.

But the hesitation didn't last long.

After only a short pause, Layla straightened her back, rolled her shoulders as if shedding the weight pressing down on her, and turned to face her father once more. Her stance was firm now. Grounded.

"I think it would be better for us to accept the proposal given to us by Sir Leon," she said.

Her voice didn't waver. It wasn't loud, but it was clear. Steady.

"And why is that?" the King asked.

He didn't react immediately—no nod, no frown, no sign of approval or rejection. His face remained neutral, almost unreadable, like stone weathered smooth by time. Despite that, Layla didn't falter. She didn't shrink under his gaze or rush to fill the silence. If anything, she looked more composed than before.

She had already made up her mind.

"I think joining with the other kingdom is far more beneficial than refusing to do anything at all," Layla said. "I believe this is the weakness the elder once spoke about before he passed."

Her words slowed, measured.

"The same weakness he experienced himself before he stepped down as King of the Titans. I think what he meant by 'weakness' wasn't our lack of power or numbers. It was our mindset."

She lifted her chin slightly.

"We Titans are stubborn. We've always been stubborn. We think that making drastic changes is something we can't—or shouldn't—do. We convince ourselves that tradition is strength, even when it holds us back."

She continued, her voice gaining a little more edge.

"That weakness is our inability to cooperate with others. Because of that, our thinking becomes stunted. We focus only on tradition instead of considering the future. We refuse to broaden our perspective, and as a result, we stop growing."

The King listened without interruption.

"So you're saying that we Titans," he said slowly, "who are known across the lands for our strength, have a weakness."

He paused.

"And that weakness comes from our inability to cooperate?"

"That's right," Layla replied immediately. There was no hesitation at all this time. "That's the weakness we need to overcome. And we can overcome it by cooperating—by accepting this unification."

She took a brief breath, then added, "I also believe this unification could bring benefits to us."

"Such as?" the King asked.

"Sir Leon appears to have strong connections with the rulers of the countries within the Great Forest."

"Well," the King said, one brow lifting slightly, "considering he's dubbed the Elven Fucker, I can already imagine that being the case. So what's your point?"

Layla didn't react to the remark. If anything, she seemed used to this kind of blunt humor.

"With those connections," she said calmly, "this unification could give us certain advantages. A degree of freedom we don't currently have. Mutual communication. Mutual benefits—resources, manpower, shared information."

She paused briefly before continuing.

"While the Titan Kingdom doesn't need those things right now, I believe that in the future, something will happen that forces us to rely on others. A situation where our strength alone won't be enough."

Her eyes hardened slightly.

"Just like now," she said, "when you all fell and were struck by Eternal Sleep."

The room went quiet.

"I see..." the King murmured after a moment. "So this is your decision? To accept the unification?"

"Yes," Layla said.

She didn't raise her voice, but the conviction behind that single word was unmistakable.

"Yes."

"Don't you think," the King said, his tone sharpening slightly, "that this man standing here only helped us because cooperation was what he wanted from us? That everything he did was calculated, done because he stood to gain something?"

His gaze flicked toward me briefly.

"Don't you think it's possible he's luring us into a trap—one we might never be able to escape from?"

I couldn't deny it.

What he said made sense. In truth, that was exactly my goal. I wanted a connection with the Titan Kingdom, and the opportunity had practically fallen into my lap. I hadn't forced it—but I hadn't rejected it either.

"I've already considered that," Layla said.

She didn't try to deny the possibility.

"But even so, my decision doesn't change. At the end of the day, regardless of whether he has an agenda or not, I can't ignore the fact that he helped us through this crisis."

She let out a slow breath.

"It's entirely possible that I'm being manipulated. I'm aware of that. I'm not naïve enough to believe otherwise."

Her voice softened slightly, but it didn't lose its strength.

"But the truth is, I can only see a brighter future for the Titan Kingdom if we accept this unification. Turning away from it out of fear would only trap us in the same cycle we've always been in."

Layla spoke with firm conviction. She openly acknowledged that I might bring trouble to them in the future. She wasn't blind to that risk. But she also believed that closing themselves off—refusing to take a step forward just because the path was uncertain—would be an even greater mistake.

"Well..." the King said at last.

He exhaled slowly, the tension in his shoulders easing just a bit.

"Then I suppose I have no choice but to accept your decision."

The words settled heavily in the room.

With that, the King made his choice.

Chapter 1136: Epilogue 21 - The United Republic Of Viritoginy (1)

The unification had not yet been officially finalized. No seals had been pressed, no grand declaration announced to the world. And yet, despite all that, it was already in motion—slow, deliberate, and inevitable. Like a massive river gathering strength upstream, it was only a matter of time before it surged forward. When it finally did, the result would be nothing short of historic: a nation so vast and influential that it would stand among the largest countries the world had ever known.

"Now then," Solaris began, her voice calm yet carrying an unmistakable weight, "I suppose this is the first time in history—since the Great Forest rose to become one of the world's most important pillars—that we leaders have gathered like this."

She was seated at the long table, her posture composed and dignified. The chair beneath her was carved from ancient wood, polished but still bearing the marks of age, much like the land she represented. Around her sat the other leaders of the Great Forest, each occupying a seat that reflected their authority, their presence alone enough to warp the atmosphere of the room.

Agneis was there, arms folded, eyes sharp and unyielding. Lionel sat upright, his expression measured but guarded. Reilhahand leaned back slightly, appearing relaxed on the surface, though the tension in his shoulders betrayed his true state of mind. The only one missing from the table was Iska, the King of the Titans. Given his colossal size, it was impossible for him to enter the hall, let alone sit among us. His presence was instead felt through the ground itself, a looming pressure just beyond the walls.

I was already seated when the meeting began. After all, I was the one who had called for this gathering, the one who had insisted that this conversation needed to happen sooner rather than later. Alongside us were many of the tribal leaders within the kingdom—figures who held power not through crowns, but through tradition, loyalty, and survival.

Not all tribes were represented. Some had chosen not to attend, clinging to their independence and refusing to involve themselves in what they saw as unnecessary change. They preferred the status quo, a life apart from politics and alliances. While they would still technically exist within the borders of the new nation, they would remain autonomous, untouched by its governance. That condition had been discussed and accepted long before this meeting ever took place.

This gathering was meant to mark the final step before everything became official. The moment where scattered kingdoms and fractured tribes would finally become one—a united republic under a single banner.

And yet, despite the significance of the occasion, the tension in the room was suffocating.

Agneis and Solaris were locked in a silent exchange, their gazes sharp enough to clash like blades. There was history there—deep, unresolved, and far from pleasant. Reilhahand and Lionel, though they had spoken several times in the past, still carried the weight of old grudges. Their words might have been civil, but the air between them was heavy with memories neither had forgotten.

Honestly, it was no surprise. These people had spent years, even decades, viewing one another as enemies, rivals, or obstacles. This was likely the first time all of them had been gathered in the same space, stripped of battlefields and borders, forced to

confront one another as equals. Even Iska, whose voice alone could shake mountains, seemed uneasy, his massive presence radiating discomfort rather than authority.

"It's honestly quite surprising, isn't it?" Lionel finally said, breaking the silence. "After years upon years of refusing to acknowledge one another, we've reached a point where we're sitting face to face like this. If you had told me this would happen, I wouldn't have believed you. Not in this lifetime."

"It's certainly not something I ever expected either," Reilhahand replied. His tone was calm, almost reflective. "The fact that this is happening at all tells me we've reached a moment where fate itself decided to step in. Like it or not, we were meant to meet here."

"Fate has a nasty habit of messing with people," Agneis muttered, his voice low and edged with bitterness.

"You're not wrong," Solaris said, her lips curling into a faint, humorless smile.

Their exchange sounded casual, almost lighthearted, but it fooled no one. The tension never left. If anything, it coiled tighter with every word spoken. I couldn't shake the feeling that if someone pushed too hard, if one wrong phrase slipped out, this entire meeting could collapse into chaos.

"Now then," Solaris continued, her voice cutting through the unease, "I believe all of us have already been briefed on the purpose of this meeting. We are here to formally establish a new republic, and to decide on the name this nation will carry."

She turned her gaze toward me, and in that moment, every eye in the room followed. The weight of their attention pressed down on me as I rose from my seat.

"That's right," I said, steadying my voice. "But this meeting isn't just about paperwork or titles. It's also about understanding. Like it or not, we're about to become neighbors. Our borders will touch, our people will mingle, and our decisions will affect one another. Because of that, I think it's only right that we start by actually talking."

I let my gaze sweep across the room, meeting each of their eyes in turn.

"More importantly," I continued, "this is our chance to settle what's been left unresolved. Old grudges, past conflicts—if we let them fester, they'll poison everything we're trying to build. If we're going to move forward, we need to do it without dragging the past behind us."

That, more than anything else, was the core of this meeting. A union built on resentment wouldn't last. And everyone in that room knew it.

"This gathering is also where we decide the name of our united country," I added. "A name that represents all of us, not just one kingdom or one tribe."

"I see..." Agneis said after a moment of silence. "I understand what you're trying to do here. And I think the rest of us do too. Like I've said before, I'm not opposed to unification."

"We are committed to this unification," Solaris said firmly. "With it, the Great Forest will become a force strong enough that no kingdom—not even the empire—will dare to challenge us. We will protect the ecosystem of the forest and defend our interests against any foreign power that tries to interfere."

"The number of slaves will drastically decrease," Lionel added, his voice hardening. "Slavers will find it much harder to operate within our lands."

"And our manpower will increase significantly," Reilhahand said. "That alone changes everything."

"Which is why cooperation is essential," Iska's deep voice rumbled from outside the hall, vibrating through the stone walls. "For something like this to succeed, unity isn't optional. It's necessary. This unification is needed."

One by one, they voiced their agreement. There was no hesitation, no open resistance. To my surprise, none of them pushed back.

I had expected arguments. I had expected refusal, maybe even outright hostility. Instead, what I saw was acceptance—reluctant in some cases, cautious in others, but acceptance all the same.

For now, at least, the path forward was clear.

Chapter 1137: Epilogue 21 - The United Republic Of Viritoginy (2)

Carl's POV

The sharp, metallic ringing of steel against steel echoed endlessly across the coliseum, bouncing off stone walls that had long since learned how to drink in sound—and blood. Sparks flew every time the swords collided, brief flashes of light against bodies already soaked in red. I watched from above as the two gladiators hacked at one another with what little strength they had left, their movements sloppy, desperate, and slow. Their armor was cracked, dented, barely clinging to them. Blood streamed down their arms, legs, and torsos, pooling beneath their feet with every uneven step.

They were both already half-dead, yet neither seemed willing to be the one to fall first.

Normally, a fight like this should have ended minutes ago. There was always a point where things stopped being entertaining—where exhaustion replaced skill, and desperation replaced spectacle. This was one of those moments. Their breathing was ragged, chests heaving like bellows on the verge of collapse. They could no longer

move the way they had at the beginning, when their steps were confident and their strikes sharp. Now, every swing looked like it took everything they had, and even then, it barely landed with any real force.

It was sluggish. Predictable. Boring.

I leaned back slightly in my seat, resting my chin against my knuckles as I stared down at the arena, my eyes dull with disinterest.

"It looks like it's going to end soon, huh?" James said beside me, his voice casual, almost amused.

James. The man who had appeared out of nowhere, uninvited and unexplained, carrying nothing but words—words that should've sounded like bullshit, and yet somehow kept turning into results. Even now, I still didn't fully understand who he really was or what his endgame might be. But I wasn't stupid enough to deny reality. Everything he'd done so far had helped me stay right where I was—at the top.

I wouldn't say that out loud. Still, I knew it was true.

"Well, this is getting boring, isn't it?" I said, opening my mouth wide as I yawned, deliberately exaggerating my lack of interest. "Get to it."

The command wasn't directed at James.

Behind me stood a warrior—silent, unmoving, loyal. He had been standing there for so long that most people would've forgotten he was even present. At my words, he immediately stepped forward, placing a clenched fist against his chest as he bowed deeply.

Then, without hesitation, he leapt.

The platform dropped away beneath him as his body cut through the air, plunging downward. Seven floors. The wind howled briefly, and then—

He landed.

Perfectly.

No stumble. No crack of bone. Just a solid impact as his feet hit the arena floor below, stone cracking faintly beneath the force.

"Oh, wow... and he didn't even break a knee," James muttered, leaning forward slightly. "That was seven floors down."

"Well, he *is* that kind of monster," I replied, a slow smirk tugging at my lips.

The warrior didn't waste time. The moment his feet touched the ground, he moved. One step. One swing. Then another. Steel flashed once—twice—and both gladiators lost their heads before they even realized what was happening. Their bodies collapsed a second later, twitching briefly before going still, blood spraying across the already ruined floor.

Clean. Efficient. Too efficient.

The crowd fell silent for half a heartbeat.

Then the boos came.

A wave of angry noise rolled through the coliseum as the audience realized what had just happened. They had wanted a drawn-out end. Screams. Begging. Pain. The kind of suffering that made the blood worth watching. Instead, the fight had been cut short, ended almost mercifully.

If anything, that irritated me.

He should have let them feel it. Let them bleed. Let them understand how pointless their struggle was. Ending it so quickly felt like a waste.

As the noise continued, the warrior crouched slightly and then leapt again, launching himself upward with terrifying ease. In a single motion, he returned to our platform, landing right in front of us as if gravity itself bent to his will.

"Oooh..." James breathed, openly impressed. "He jumped all the way back up here that easily. He really is powerful."

"He is," I said calmly. "But he did something unnecessary."

The warrior didn't speak. Didn't react. He simply stood there, waiting.

"That means he needs to be punished."

I reached for the whip, the leather coiled comfortably in my hand. The sound of it unfurling was soft, but it carried meaning. Without being told, the warrior turned around, presenting his back to me. His posture was straight, his expression blank, as if this was no different from breathing.

I smiled.

The whip cracked through the air and struck his back with a sharp snap. The sound echoed loudly, followed by the dull thud of leather against flesh. I struck him again. And again. Each lash left marks—angry red lines that quickly darkened, some splitting open to draw fresh blood.

I didn't stop.

His back was already covered in scars, old wounds layered over older ones. Proof that this wasn't new. Proof that I'd done this before—many times. The marks overlapped, blending together into a mess of damage that told a clear story.

The first time, he had screamed.

Back then, every strike made him flinch. His body had trembled, breath hitching, pain spilling out in broken sounds he couldn't hold back. But now?

Nothing.

No cry. No twitch. No reaction at all.

He stood there, perfectly still, as if the pain no longer reached him. As if his nerves had simply given up.

That almost annoyed me more.

I lashed him ten more times before finally stopping, lowering the whip with a disappointed sigh.

"Whipping you has become boring too," I said flatly. "You don't even cry anymore."

"Well," James said after a moment, shrugging slightly, "that's probably because you've done it so many times. Anyone would get used to it."

I considered that.

"...Yeah. That makes sense."

"Get out of my sight," I said, waving him away. "Your bloody back is ruining my view."

The warrior bowed once more and left without a word.

I settled back into my seat, adjusting my posture as I looked down at the arena once again. "Next," I said lazily. "And tell the next pair not to cut off each other's arms. When they do that, the fight gets dull."

I paused, eyes narrowing slightly.

"Or maybe... it's time for the main event."

"I think it's still too early for that, Emperor Carl," James said, glancing toward the arena. "Don't you want to watch more people kill each other?"

"At this point?" I scoffed. "That's boring too."

I leaned forward, resting my elbows on my knees. "I think it'd be far more interesting to let all the gladiators fight the Empire's monster. Don't you agree?"

James was quiet for a moment.

"Well... I suppose," he said finally, a slow smile spreading across his face.

"Well then," I stood and spread my arms wide, my voice carrying across the entire coliseum, "the main event it is!"

The soldiers surrounding us exchanged quick nods and moved at once. Heavy footsteps echoed as they descended, mechanisms grinding loudly. Moments later, a massive gate creaked open, and trembling gladiators were shoved forward into the arena. Their eyes darted around in panic as they stepped over bodies—over blood, over the remains of those who had come before them.

"Now then," I muttered, watching closely, "open the gate."

Another gate began to rise.

A deep, low growl rolled out from the darkness beyond it, vibrating through the stone beneath our feet. The sound alone made the gladiators freeze in place.

Then something stepped forward.

The moment they saw it, the screams started.

It was a monster—an existence whispered about in fear, said to have fought the Great Ones themselves. Its presence alone seemed to suffocate the air.

I grinned.

"Now, Ouroboros!" I shouted. "Kill them all!"

Chapter 1138: Epilogue 21 - The United Republic Of Viritoginy (3)

I watched as Ouroboros descended upon the gladiators, one after another, like a living catastrophe made of scales, teeth, and endless hunger. Every single one of them was shaking, their weapons trembling in their hands, knees buckling before they could even think of running. Fear had already hollowed them out. They didn't get the chance to scream properly, didn't get the chance to fight back, didn't even get the dignity of a final stand. The moment Ouroboros moved, they were gone—snatched up, crushed, swallowed whole as if they were nothing more than scraps tossed into a pit.

As the monster feasted, massive metallic rebars slammed down with a deafening clang. Thick. Heavy. Reinforced. They sealed off every opening that connected the arena to the spectator stands. It was done instantly, flawlessly, as if rehearsed countless times. The intent was obvious: no matter how wild Ouroboros became, it would not reach the audience.

There were far too many important people seated here. Nobles. Sponsors. Influencers. Figures whose deaths would cause inconvenience, chaos, and unnecessary complications. Naturally, I couldn't let them die. It only made sense to protect them.

Not that I cared.

Honestly, their lives meant nothing to me. They were tools, parasites clinging to power, trying to leech off my influence for their own benefit. But then again, I was doing the exact same thing to them. A mutual transaction. Hypocritical, maybe, but effective. And as long as they still had value, I wasn't about to let them be torn apart by a monster in front of everyone. Their deaths would be wasteful. Premature.

Below us, Ouroboros continued its slaughter. It didn't pause. It didn't hesitate. It didn't discriminate. Armor, flesh, bone—none of it mattered. The moment something moved, the beast reacted. A snap of its jaws, a violent twist of its massive body, and another gladiator vanished. Blood splattered across the arena floor, staining the sand dark and wet. Steel clanged uselessly as weapons slipped from dying hands.

It was a massacre.

For the gladiators, it was hell made real.

For us?

It was entertainment.

"Fufufufu! Eat them all, Ouroboros!" I laughed, my lips curling upward as excitement buzzed through me. "Stuff yourself! Don't leave a single one! There'll be plenty more where that came from!"

The sound of my laughter blended with the screams below, with the crunch of bones and the wet, awful noises of something far too big enjoying its meal.

"You really love this spectacle, don't you, Emperor Carl?" James said beside me.

I didn't even look at him at first. My eyes were glued to the arena, to the way Ouroboros moved with terrifying efficiency.

"Well," I said eventually, "this isn't exactly something you expect to see in your lifetime. Finding something like this feels like a blessing, really. It's... fascinating." I tilted my

head slightly. "Think about it. Where else would you see something like this? In your entire life, you probably wouldn't witness people getting slaughtered on a daily basis by a monster like that. It's rare. Special."

"It certainly is a spectacle," James replied.

But even without looking at him, I could tell. He wasn't impressed. Not excited. Not disturbed, either.

"So?" I asked, finally glancing his way. "Does this bore you?"

"It's not that," he said calmly. "I'm not bored by the sight of people being slaughtered. It is interesting, and I do find it entertaining in its own way." He paused. "But human lives are far too disposable. That's what disappoints me. I've seen it too many times. I've grown numb to it."

He kept staring down at the colosseum as he spoke. His eyes were cold. Empty. Like there was nothing behind them—no excitement, no disgust, no pity. Just observation.

Honestly, if someone told me he'd been born without the ability to feel things properly, I would've believed it. That was how unsettling he was. A man who could witness mass death and feel absolutely nothing.

"By the way," he continued, as if the slaughter below was nothing more than background noise, "have you heard the news?"

"About what?" I asked.

"The establishment of a new country."

"Ah. That," I said. "Leonora mentioned it to me once. She said the slaves—or rather, the ones who were supposed to become slaves—banded together and formed a nation of their own. Elves, Dwarves, Beastkin, all of them teaming up so they could defend themselves against me and my power." I scoffed. "Do they really think they can just huddle together like that and escape my grasp? How naïve. They have no idea how vast my power truly is."

"You shouldn't underestimate them," James replied. "If you plan to invade their land, you'll need to think carefully. With their current alliances, they might be your equal. Possibly even stronger."

I didn't respond immediately, so he continued.

"They have the Elves, masters of magic. The Dwarves, unmatched in craftsmanship and innovation. Centaurs with incredible speed. Beastkin with raw strength and agility.

Titans whose sheer power can crush armies. With all of them united, it's only natural to be cautious. You, of all people, should understand that."

I clenched my jaw slightly. Annoying as it was, he wasn't wrong.

The reason that country existed was obvious. They feared the Empire. They feared me. They feared my armor. And honestly? That fear was justified.

Still, fear alone wouldn't save them.

"Give it a few years," James said, his voice steady. "With enough preparation, and with me helping you plan, we can dominate that forest completely. When that happens, you'll stand at the top of this world. The man who conquered it. The one who forced everything into submission."

My heartbeat quickened at his words. The image formed clearly in my mind.

"That's right," I said, my voice rising as exhilaration took hold. "This world is mine for the taking. Land. Money. Women. Power. Everything will be mine!"

Below us, the final gladiator disappeared into Ouroboros's jaws.

The beast let out a low, satisfied rumble as it licked its lips, its massive tongue dragging across blood-stained scales. And yet, even then, it didn't look satisfied. Not truly. Its eyes still burned with hunger.

"Bring in the next batch!" I shouted, my voice echoing through the stands. "Let Ouroboros feed!"

Chapter 1139: Epilogue 21 - The United Republic Of Viriloginy (4)

James's POV

The Emperor had been exactly as easy to manipulate as I predicted—no, *easier*. It was almost insulting how little effort it took. Laughably easy. I hadn't needed clever traps, layered lies, or even a well-constructed narrative. I barely nudged him, and he marched forward on his own, eager and obedient, like a dog chasing a treat it didn't even understand.

There was something genuinely wrong with how his mind worked. Or rather, how it *didn't*.

His thinking was shallow to the point of absurdity. Childish. Crude. Blunt. There were only three things that occupied space inside that hollow skull of his, and he had proudly announced them himself without the slightest hint of shame: land, money, and women.

That was it. Nothing else. No legacy, no ideology, no long-term vision. Just accumulation. Ownership. Indulgence.

Typical of an emperor like him, really. Almost stereotypical.

And yet, that was precisely what made it so frustrating. He could have wanted more. He *should* have wanted more. With the power he held, with the influence at his fingertips, he could have aimed higher than any ruler before him. He could have reshaped history, rewritten borders, forced the world to bend in ways no one had ever dared to imagine.

But he didn't.

Because that stupid brain of his simply couldn't reach that far. His ambitions were stunted, trapped in the shallow mud of his own desires. He didn't think beyond tomorrow, beyond the next conquest, the next payout, the next woman warming his bed. It made him predictable. Manageable. Disposable.

"You seem a little down, James," Leonora said.

Her voice pulled me out of my thoughts.

She stepped out of the bathroom then, the door creaking softly behind her. Steam rolled off her skin in slow, lazy waves, clinging to her like a second layer. Droplets of water slid down her body, tracing curves that were, objectively speaking, very well-shaped. Balanced. Deliberate. Almost sculpted.

If I weren't a woman myself, if my interests lay elsewhere, I would have jumped at the opportunity without hesitation. Her body alone was enough to make most people lose their composure.

"You're staring pretty intensely," she added, tilting her head slightly. Her lips curled into something teasing, something deliberately provocative. "Don't tell me you finally see me as a woman?"

"I don't," I said immediately.

Flat. Unmoved.

Leonora sighed, not surprised in the slightest. "Well, that's just like you," she said, rolling her shoulders slightly. "I know you're not interested in women at all. You've never been subtle about that. But why not try it anyway? Just once. A taste. I think both of us could benefit from the experience, don't you think?"

She paused, then continued, her tone turning just a bit more honest. "I mean, neither of us has had our first time yet, right? And I can tell you this much—I absolutely do *not* want my first time to be with that emperor."

"I don't want my first time to be with someone I don't love," I replied calmly. "And more than that, I don't feel anything from you. No arousal. No pull. Nothing. I wouldn't be able to do it with someone I feel absolutely nothing toward."

Leonora clicked her tongue in annoyance. "You really are an old thinker," she muttered. "That traditional mindset of yours is honestly making me sick. Love, first time, emotional connection—don't you think you're taking it all way too seriously?"

"Then why don't you have sex with the male fragment of Lilith?" I asked, my tone sharp but controlled. "I'm sure he'd be more than willing. And if you did that, we might finally be able to get rid of him once and for all."

That name alone made something inside me tighten.

He had been a thorn in my side from the very beginning.

Every plan I had laid out, every subtle adjustment I made to the flow of events, every careful manipulation designed to let the butterfly effect guide everything into place—he ruined them. Again and again. It was almost uncanny. As if the world itself bent to keep him in my way.

I had accounted for chaos. For resistance. For unexpected variables.

I hadn't accounted for *him*.

Because of that, everything I had built from the start had begun to crumble. Slowly at first. Then all at once. The strain of constantly adjusting, constantly compensating, had started to weigh on me. It was becoming exhausting. Demanding.

I *had* to succeed.

If I didn't... I wouldn't be able to make it.

"Well," Leonora said after a moment, her expression turning more thoughtful, "Leon seems wary of me. I can't exactly tell what's going on inside his head. He's insane when it comes to people with vaginas, sure, but that doesn't automatically mean he'll stick it into anything that moves."

"You sure seem to know a lot about him," I said, narrowing my eyes slightly, "for someone who's only met him briefly."

Leonora shrugged. "Even if we're far apart, I think I can understand him to some degree. We were born from the same source, after all. Doesn't that mean I'd naturally have some insight into who he is?"

She wasn't wrong.

Leonora was a fragment of Lilith. Just like Elise. And just like the one I referred to as the Faceless Playwright.

There were five fragments in total. Five pieces of a whole. I only knew of four. The fifth remained unaccounted for, slipping through the cracks no matter how carefully I searched. Leonora claimed the fifth was close to the Playwright, always near but never fully revealed. That narrowed things down somewhat. Either the academy, or somewhere within the Milham Kingdom.

Regardless of where they were, all five fragments were fascinating in their own way.

But the Faceless Playwright stood above the rest.

There was something about him that unsettled me. Something familiar. Not in the sense of recognition, but in the way a half-forgotten memory scratches at the back of your mind. I couldn't place it, no matter how hard I tried, and that bothered me more than I cared to admit.

"Either way," I said finally, breaking the silence, "something has to be done about him. If not, then all of our plans—everything we've worked toward—will be for nothing."

Leonora let out a slow breath. "I suppose you're right," she said. "I still can't believe he managed to unite all the kingdoms within the Great Forest and establish a republic. The United Republic of Viritoginy."

She shook her head slightly, almost in disbelief. "This might be the first time the world has truly seen what kind of change is possible when someone actually has the ability to follow through. Leon is terrifying. If nothing is done about him, I honestly believe he could achieve world domination without people even realizing it's happening."

Chapter 1140: Epilogue 21 - The United Republic Of Viritoginy (5)

That was true. Painfully true, in fact. That person possessed the terrifying capability to move the pieces on the board without ever needing to touch them. It was as if the board itself responded to his will. His mind didn't just think ahead—it leapt forward, skipping steps that ordinary people needed just to understand what was happening. His brain felt alien, as though it operated on an entirely different frequency, detached from normal logic yet frighteningly effective.

"Well, now that he's gone and done this—managing to bring all the kingdoms of the Great Forest together—the Emperor is going to have a hard time trying to gain more footing in this world," Leonora said, her voice calm but heavy with implication.

"Considering that he has to pass through the forest in order to reach the countries beyond it, I think he'll be forced to act against the forest first. And now that the forest is being treated as a bastion—a unified stronghold with military power far greater than the Empire's at this moment—I don't think we can proceed with the plan the way we originally intended."

She wasn't wrong. Not even slightly.

The establishment of the United Republic of Viritoginy had completely derailed everything I had prepared. All the careful planning, the contingencies, the scenarios I had mentally rehearsed over and over—they were now twisted beyond recognition. It wasn't just an inconvenience. It was a fundamental shift in the balance of power, one that I hadn't been able to prevent or even slow down. Whatever foundations I had laid before were now cracked, if not entirely useless.

Still, despite the frustration clawing at the back of my mind, I refused to believe it was over. There had to be a way to salvage this situation. There always was. But it wouldn't be easy, and it definitely wouldn't be clean. We'd need planning far more intricate than before—layered, flexible, and fast enough to adapt to a world that was changing almost overnight.

That was the biggest problem.

He was fast. Incredibly fast. Fast enough to tear down nations before others even realized what was happening. And that meant I had to be faster. Not just in action, but in thought. I couldn't afford hesitation. I couldn't afford doubt. If I slowed down for even a moment, he'd already be several steps ahead, and there would be nothing I could do to stop it.

The way the world bent around him was unsettling. Every major shift seemed to trace back to his actions, as if the world itself acknowledged him as its center. Like a protagonist in some twisted story, everything revolved around his decisions. And if that was the case, then the only choice left was to disrupt that flow—to interfere before those changes could settle and become irreversible.

"Well then, we have a lot of work to do..." I muttered, more to myself than to anyone else.

"Right," Leonora replied simply.

Kaori's POV

Princess Myrcella's sword was fast.

No—that didn't even begin to describe it.

Her blade moved with such speed and precision that it left afterimages in the air, each strike flowing seamlessly into the next. I couldn't find an opening. Not even a hint of one. Every time I thought I saw a gap, it vanished the moment I tried to act. Her footwork was just as frightening—light, elegant, almost effortless. Each step was placed perfectly, as though she'd already decided where she needed to be before the thought even crossed my mind.

Compared to her, I felt slow. Heavy. Awkward.

It had been weeks since I last held a sword, and even now, it didn't feel natural in my hands. The grip felt wrong. The weight felt wrong. My body refused to move the way I wanted it to, lagging behind my thoughts like it didn't fully belong to me anymore.

"You're using your sword arm incorrectly," she said, her tone firm but not cruel. "You need to put your whole body into it. Right now, you're only swinging with your arm."

"I don't think... this is going to be enough for me to defeat you, Princess," I said, breathless as I continued to swing. Each motion felt forced, my muscles screaming in protest.

My swordsmanship was a mess. There was no grace, no rhythm, no proper form. I wasn't fighting—I was flailing. I swung the sword wherever my instincts told me to, without any real technique behind it. It looked bad. It felt worse. But that was only natural. Before all of this, I had been nothing more than an ordinary person. No training. No experience. No reason to ever pick up a blade.

"It's not about defeating me," she replied calmly. "If you can't fight properly using the basics, then you won't survive in this world."

"I know that," I growled, frustration spilling out before I could stop it.

"If you truly understand that," she said, raising her sword once more, "then come at me with everything you have."

Her words hit harder than any strike. She didn't sugarcoat anything. She didn't try to comfort me. Instead, she forced reality into my face, over and over again, until I couldn't ignore it. Right now, I was weak. Right now, I was useless.

Time blurred as we continued. Sweat soaked through my clothes, my arms trembling with every swing. Eventually, though, it ended. Three hours had passed, and my body had reached its limit.

I collapsed onto my back against the stone pavement, staring up at the sky as heat radiated through the ground and into my spine. The sun felt merciless, pressing down on me like it wanted to crush me where I lay. The fact that I hadn't collapsed from heatstroke felt like a miracle—but then again, they said our bodies had changed the moment we arrived in this world.

"You need to work on your stamina," the Princess said as she looked down at me. "With your current endurance, you wouldn't last long against me."

"Well, you said it yourself, Princess. It'll take time before I can defeat you," I replied weakly. "And honestly, thinking about it now, I don't think I could do anything against you."

I forced myself to sit up. Staying flat on the heated stone would only make things worse, even if sitting up didn't really help much either.

"That's only natural," she said, sitting down beside me. "Unlike you, I've been training since birth. So it's expected that you'd lose. It will take time before you can finally surpass me. But you will."

She paused, then continued, her voice softer.

"Just from watching your form earlier and feeling the strength behind your strikes, I can tell you're improving. You're getting stronger. I believe your status as a hero is influencing that."