

The World 161

Chapter 161 - King's Game, Part 1 (6)

Leon's POV

I kept my focus on the woman even as I sensed eyes on me. I continued to defend against her attacks, parrying when possible. It became evident that she possessed exceptional skill, making it increasingly challenging for me to defend myself. Despite this, she showed no signs of relenting; if anything, her speed seemed to intensify.

I marveled at the velocity of her sword. It surpassed even that of individuals renowned for their swiftness, reaching a level where the blade's tip was barely discernible until the last moment, demanding complete concentration—truly overwhelming speed. Yet, amidst the intensity, I couldn't help but feel exhilarated.

It was a rare encounter with such masterful swordsmanship, a display of fluidity and precision unlike any I had witnessed before.

After a prolonged exchange, the woman ceased her assault. She assessed me with a cold gaze, her scrutiny palpable.

"You... You're not taking this seriously, are you?" she inquired.

"What do you mean?"

"You're belittling me."

"Is that your interpretation? I assure you, I'm exerting every effort to defend myself against you," I countered.

"You deceive." Her accusation sent a shiver down my spine. The way she uttered "liar"... it was oddly enticing. "You're not wielding a sword; you're solely relying on your mana to deflect my attacks. Furthermore, you're not employing your full strength to block them. You're exerting only the necessary force.

If you're not underestimating me, then what is it?"

I wasn't exactly undermining her, but it appeared she perceived it that way.

"Who are you?" she inquired.

"I don't believe it's my place to divulge that information, especially considering I previously posed the same question to you without receiving an answer," I retorted.

"Very well, then. I am Veronica. Veronica Eclair. My full name is Veronica Eclair Silverblade. I hail from the Silverblade lineage. I hold the position of Vice Commander within the Magic Knights.

I am 18 years of age. What more do you wish to learn about me? Perhaps my body measurements as well?"

"I suppose that will do," I replied. Given that I could already discern her body measurements, there seemed little point in pursuing that line of questioning further. "But it doesn't quite sit right with me to divulge my name to someone who just attacked me out of the blue."

"Tch," she clicked her tongue. "Then I shall extract it from you by force." With determination in her eyes, she lunged toward me. The intensity of her killing intent now surpassed anything she had displayed earlier. It felt peculiar, witnessing such a cold, emotionless woman now filled with such hostility. Nonetheless, I did my utmost to evade her relentless assault.

"Cease." The command came from above, spoken by a woman with an angelic yet subtly demonic voice. I glanced upward to see two women descending. The one who appeared to be flying was a stunning dark-skinned beauty with light pinkish hair and eyes. The other, with black hair and purplish eyes, emanated a hint of sadism.

She regarded me from above, her grin betraying a sense of sadistic amusement. It was a familiar expression, one I often wore myself.

"You may cease your actions now, dear sister," she addressed Veronica, who, though still visibly dissatisfied, sheathed her blade.

"Lower me, Laurel," she commanded the woman carrying her through the air. With a nod, the flying woman descended, gently placing her on the ground.

"And who might you be?" I inquired.

"My apologies for the oversight. That was rather impolite of me," she replied, maintaining her smile. "I am Lilia Silverblade, Commander of the Magic Knights. The one and only," she declared.

One and only...

"It's a bit unexpected to have the Commander of the Magic Knights in my presence," I remarked. "What brings someone of your stature to someone like me?"

"Well, you've piqued my interest. You're the first person to meet my gaze so directly," she said, though I sensed there was more to her curiosity.

"Why then did you attack me?" I questioned.

"I simply wanted to verify the accuracy of the information you provided when applying to the academy. You claimed to have no skill, correct?" She then turned to Veronica. "Is that accurate? Does he truly possess no skill?"

What was this? Another attempt at blackmail? It certainly seemed plausible. But even if they did try to coerce me, I wouldn't succumb to their demands. I'd sooner eliminate them all if it came to that. However, I did have a desire to spare Veronica.

If I wasn't mistaken, she was what Elise's "Third" required me to find.

It was conceivable that she was my sister in this world. Given our striking similarity in appearance, features, and age, we might even be twins. Perhaps the Commander's parents had adopted her.

I couldn't help but ponder why my family members were scattered across the world. Who were our parents, even? Well, dwelling on that matter seemed futile for the time being. ???&?EM+?￥?§

Veronica scrutinized me from head to toe, her expression seemingly curious. Though her countenance resembled that of a doll, devoid of emotion, I couldn't shake the feeling of intrigue in her gaze.

After a moment, she shook her head. "He lacks any skill," she declared.

"Oh? Is that the case?"

"Yes," she affirmed.

Veronica appeared to be covering for me.

"What? So this young man is simply dull? What a waste of time," the commander remarked, her smile still intact. "And here I thought he would make a suitable pet. I long for a splendid dog like you, but I have no use for one that is ineffectual. Return to my side now, my dear sister."

Veronica complied, joining Lilia. As she passed by me, she cast a subtle glance in my direction, one that only I seemed to catch.

"Carry me back to our post, Laurel," the commander instructed. The woman, named Laurel, possessed dark skin and an imposing stature, even taller than mine, easily lifted the commander once more, preparing to depart. But before they took flight, the commander fixed her gaze upon me.

"I command you to forget anything that transpired in here, including the altercation between you and Veronica, and my presence," she declared. "Furthermore, you shall revere the name of Lilia Silverblade every day and prostrate yourself before her whenever you are in her presence. Essentially, you will regard her as your goddess."

I sensed her exerting her influence over me, likely utilizing her formidable skill. Gabrielle had mentioned that the commander of the magic knights possessed a potent ability known as Absolute Command. This skill could effectively compel obedience, functioning akin to mind control. Any directive she issued would be followed without question, even to the extent of self-harm if commanded.

However, there were skills capable of countering hers, such as Gabrielle's Guardian and the Queen's Effect Negation. Veronica likely possessed a skill capable of nullifying the Absolute Command, though I couldn't be certain.

My Guardian surpassed Gabrielle's, and even so, I harbored doubts regarding the potency of such a skill over my mind. This enabled me to resist its effects. Nonetheless, complying with her directive seemed prudent for the moment, prompting me to nod in acknowledgment.

"As you have commanded," I affirmed.

The commander's expression resembled that of someone who had just been presented with a wagging puppy, her happiness evident. With that, Laurel soared into the air, disappearing from view. Veronica lingered for a moment, casting a glance over her shoulder, before swiftly departing.

And then, out of the blue, I heard this metallic chime, a sound I was getting used to, echoing in my head.

I figured I'd give her domination requirement list a pass for now and headed back to base.

And that wrapped up that strange encounter.

I returned to the base to find the team already awake.

"Where have you been?" Johanne inquired.

"I took a leak," I replied.

"Uh, alright. But Leon, refrain from using such crude language in front of the Princess," he admonished me.

Princess Myrcella chuckled, "You needn't worry about me. I don't mind. In fact, I find a bit of earthy conversation rather refreshing. It's a rarity in the castle, after all."

During our conversation, I noticed Shredica eyeing me suspiciously. It seemed she harbored doubts about my claim of simply taking a leak outside. I chose to ignore her for the time being.

"Now that everyone is present and awake, I propose we hold a strategy meeting today. Are you all in agreement?" Princess Myrcella inquired.

We all nodded in affirmation, including Harold and Hertrude. With that, the Princess proceeded to outline our plans for the day, emphasizing the importance of avoiding unnecessary confrontations. As she spoke, Shredica's gaze remained fixed on me.

"...?"

I wonder what she wants from me?

Shredica and I got paired up to scout the area and keep an eye out for any potential threats, all part of Princess's grand strategy to get the lay of the land. Meanwhile, Hertrude and Harold were back at the cave, Princess finally deciding they were more of a liability than an asset. She told them to bunker down and defend the cave if things got hairy.

As we were strolling along, Shredica suddenly halted, shooting me this intense look that sent shivers down my spine.

Then, out of the blue, her cheeks flushed crimson, and she leaned in, puckering her lips.

Chapter 162 - King's Game, Part 2 (1)

Earlier

Shredica's POV

I noticed Leon sneaking out of the cave, so I decided to match his sneakiness. I waited until he was out of sight and then crept out myself. Just as I emerged, I heard the unmistakable sounds of a scuffle nearby. Were there people fighting?

Without hesitation, I headed toward the commotion. But as I approached, I saw a white-haired woman with a wicked grin, leaning against a tree with a dagger in hand. She looked like trouble, and I drew my sword without a second thought.

"Good," she purred, a wicked glint in her eyes. "This won't take long." With a sinister smile, she flashed her sword and ran her tongue along its edge, sending shivers down my spine.

I tensed, my senses heightened as I realized this woman was different from those we faced last night.

As I braced myself for what felt like a showdown, beads of sweat formed on my skin, each one a testament to the mounting tension. My heart raced with anticipation, the thrill of the impending confrontation coursing through my veins like a drug.

I focused all my attention on her, feeling a surge of intense concentration envelop me like a cloak. She stood with deceptive nonchalance, her blade dangling lazily at her side, as if daring me to make the first move.

"You know, you look sexy. I might have put you in my collection of bodies that I've killed and displayed in my room, but since I wasn't allowed to do that, it's a shame," she said, her intentions clear as day.

She then positioned her sword at mid-level, her movements calculated and predatory. Her face twisted into a grotesque expression, a feral grin stretching across her features.

"Hmm?" Suddenly, her smile faded. "Hey, why are you grinning like that?"

Was I smiling? Oh, right. I was. My mouth stretched into a grin.

"Oh, I see..." she chuckled. "Heh heh... You're quite the twisted woman, aren't you?"

"You're one to talk," I retorted. "You're even more messed up than I am."

Her grin vanished completely at my words, like I'd struck a nerve.

"Who the hell are you calling messed up?!" she snapped, then lunged forward.

I sprang into action just a fraction of a moment after her. We closed in on each other simultaneously, moving at breakneck speed. My senses heightened, time seemed to slow down, allowing me to perceive every subtle movement as she unleashed her attack.

However, I made a grave mistake...

In the frenzy of battle, I often let arrogance cloud my judgment. I've always fancied myself as unbeatable with a sword, my prowess in martial arts second to none. Underestimating my opponents has become a dangerous habit, as evident in this moment.

Breaking free from that mindset proved challenging. Throughout my life, I've carried a sense of superiority in the art of swordplay. Even my comrades back in my world showered me with praise for my skillful maneuvers with a blade.

That's why... I...

"Nggh?!"

Her sword suddenly curved in a very strange way. I had no time to react. Even though I could speed up my thoughts to make time feel slower, in reality, I was still susceptible. Underestimating her meant I'd let my guard down, leading to her blade slicing into my arm. Thankfully, I managed to deflect it before it could cause a clean cut.

"Oh, you managed to block that?" she remarked, licking the blood off her blade. My blood. "You may lack skill, but you've got some reflexes. Seems like there's more to you than meets the eye."

I quickly applied pressure to the slice on my arm to stem the bleeding. With a flicker of concentration, I attempted to use my mana to heal the wound, but my lack of attention in class meant I only managed to stop the bleeding, not fully close the wound.

"Well, looks like you're barely holding on already. This might just be a walk in the park," she remarked, her gaze unsettlingly intense. It was clear she had some serious mental issues

After my attempt to heal, I gripped my sword tightly once more. The tension between us was palpable, the air heavy with the gravity of the situation. This was no longer a game; it was a fight for survival. She intended to kill me, and I had to do the same to her if I wanted to make it out alive.

"I admire the fire in your eyes. It really gets me going," she remarked, a twisted smirk playing on her lips.

I drew in a deep, steady breath, steeling myself for what was to come. With determination coursing through my veins, I surged forward, refusing to let her catch me off guard again. My gaze locked on her, I made the split-second decision to take the offensive, my grip tightening on my sword.

As I swung my blade in a powerful horizontal arc, aiming to catch her off balance, she deftly countered with her dagger. The clash of metal echoed through the air, sending sparks flying like fiery constellations, briefly illuminating our faces in the dim light.

It was as though the clash itself was the starting gun for our intense duel, and we both threw ourselves into the fray with reckless abandon.

In that moment, time seemed to warp around us, my senses sharpening to a razor's edge. Every movement, every shift in the air, was heightened, amplified. My sword danced through the air in a blur of motion, leaving behind a trail of afterimages that shimmered and flickered like ghostly echoes of my intent. One strike, then five, then ten, then twenty.

But...

My opponent expertly parried each of my strikes, her movements precise and calculated. Whenever she found an opening, she lunged in with a sharp stab, but my lightning-fast reactions saved me from being hit. The battle reached a tense stalemate, neither of us gaining the upper hand.

Yet, amidst the clash of steel, I couldn't shake the chilling grin on her face. A shiver ran down my spine. Was she playing with me? The effortless way she blocked my attacks and struck back with minimal effort seemed to mock my abilities, as if she was daring me to do better.

"Hehe..." she chuckled darkly. "What a disappointment. I expected more from you. Can't you put up a real fight? You're just begging to get killed, aren't you?"

"Guh...!"

I gritted my teeth in frustration.

It stung to hear her call me a bore. I'd never felt so powerless. But then again, I'd faced helplessness before, like in that scrap at the Black Market where I nearly got poisoned, or that arson where death stared me in the face.

"Raaaaah!"

I bellowed, trying to banish those thoughts. I refused to succumb to despair. I'd been through worse in my childhood; I could overcome this.

Swiftly, I raised my sword horizontally, blocking her swing. Our blades clashed with a resounding clang. For the first time, I felt the full force of her ridiculous strength. The impact nearly shattered my wrist, but I gritted my teeth and held on, enduring the blow with both hands. Through the pain, I caught a glimpse of smugness on her face.

"Your blade skills are mediocre," she taunted.

Before I could react, she spun around and delivered a powerful kick to my abdomen.

"Gaha...!"

The breath was knocked out of me, and I was sent flying backward, crashing into a tree. Her strength was astounding. It was almost surreal, considering we were both women, or even human for that matter. Blood gushed from my mouth, and I wiped it away with the back of my hand, staring at the crimson stain.

"Heh..." A dark smile crept onto my lips, though she couldn't see it with my head lowered.

I quickly cast healing magic on myself, feeling the wounds close as I rose to my feet. Assessing the situation, I noticed the woman hadn't followed up with another attack after her kick. She lazily hung her blade by her side, stretching her body with a nonchalant air.

"Ahhh~, this is getting dull. I expected an easy fight, but she's proving to be disappointingly simple," she remarked, cracking her neck.

Taking advantage of her momentary distraction, I dashed forward, seizing the opportunity...

"Huh?"

Before she could react, I was right in front of her. With her blade unprepared, she struggled to respond in time. Though she managed to evade, it cost her a few strands of hair.

"Heheheheheh!" I chuckled, a surge of exhilaration coursing through me. It was the first genuine laugh I'd had in a while.

"You're one twisted woman," she remarked, her tone tinged with a mix of admiration and disdain.

I suddenly felt a thrill like never before, surpassing even the most intense moments I'd experienced in the Zone. It was a rush unlike anything I'd felt before, a surge of power coursing through me.

Sensations began to blur as if I was tapping into some latent energy within myself. I could sense lines of power weaving through me, igniting every fiber of my being. A chill ran down my spine, spreading through my body until it flooded into my head. My senses heightened to an almost supernatural level, everything around me becoming distant and surreal.

Perhaps my senses had been heightened beyond their normal limits.

I licked the blood from the back of my hand, a dark chuckle bubbling up from within me. It was a strange feeling, but I welcomed it nonetheless.

And then, I laughed.

Chapter 163: King's Game, Part 2 (2)

Shredica's POV

It was odd... I felt like I was drifting somehow. What was this... feeling?

As I opened my eyes, I found myself in a completely unfamiliar setting. It seemed familiar, yet everything about it was different. Where was I? Glancing around, I realized I was in a classroom, and the seat next to me sat empty.

Initially, I thought perhaps it was the academy classroom, but it wasn't. Everyone here had black hair and black eyes. Well, there were a few blondes, but it was obvious their hair was dyed.

While I surveyed the room, I caught the gaze of one of the dyed blondes. No, she wasn't looking at me, but at the empty seat beside me. There was a hint of sadness in her expression...

For some strange reason, I felt like I knew that woman... even though that was impossible. It was my first time seeing her. Who was she?

While pondering this, her gaze shifted to me. It was different from when she was staring at the empty seat beside me. Now, her gaze was accusatory. Angry. So angry I could practically feel it.

Just then, the bell rang. I swiftly got up from my seat, slinging my bag over my shoulder. I moved so quickly that I'd be the first one out of the room. But before I could reach the door, someone grabbed my arm.

"...What?"

My mouth moved without my control, words spilling out on their own. The woman who had glared at me earlier was the one gripping my arm now.

"How dare you show your face at school after what you've done? Don't you feel any guilt? Shame? You're the reason he's dead!"

I shrugged her off.

"I don't want to talk to you," I muttered.

"You're truly shameless..."

For some reason, an overwhelming irritation surged within me. My body turned to face her.

"Shameless, huh? Who's really the shameless one here?" I retorted. "Who's truly responsible for your childhood friend's death?"

"What do you mean? You're the reason he died!"

"Oh, is that so?" I scoffed, my gaze flickering momentarily to the young man attempting to placate her before locking onto her once more. "Well, if you insist on placing the blame solely on me, then so be it. But do not forget, you too carry a burden of guilt in this matter."

After my retort, I exited the classroom without sparing a glance for those who continued to berate me. Their shouts fell on deaf ears as I pressed forward.

Suddenly, my vision began to blur, and before I knew it, darkness engulfed my sight.

Sara's POV

After plunging the blade into the woman, I swiftly withdrew it, a rush of blood pouring from the wound.

"And here I thought you'd put up more of a fight. What was even with that laugh?" I taunted, watching as she crumpled to the ground beneath me. With a dismissive shrug, I left her there, her breaths coming in shallow gasps. After a while, her breathing stopped, and I sensed that her life had slipped away. In just a few minutes, she would vanish from this island and reappear in the Church.

Those eliminated from the game would be healed there. However, this woman wouldn't return alive. She would be teleported there, dead. "Hmm, now that I've dealt with you, it's time to attend to the skillless man," I mused aloud. "What a mess he's dragged me into. Did he not realize I have my own agenda to pursue?"

Leaving her body behind, I used my skill. A surge of energy coursed through me, and suddenly, my hair transformed into a vibrant shade of purple—an echo of the woman I'd just dispatched.

"This body suits me quite nicely," I murmured, diving into her memories with a predatory gleam in my eye. With her appearance came access to her deepest thoughts and desires. It didn't take long to pinpoint my next target: a man with striking black hair. A smirk tugged at my lips. "Ah, he's a handsome one, isn't he? I wonder if I should fuck him first in this body before I kill him?"

I've never engaged in intercourse myself, but I've witnessed my brother in the act. I've often wondered if sex was truly as enjoyable as people made it out to be. Well, it was time to find out.

Back to the present...

Leon's POV

Shredica suddenly attempted to kiss me, but I quickly stepped back.

"What are you doing?" Shredica questioned.

"No, what are you doing? Why are you suddenly kissing me?" I demanded.

Shredica appeared momentarily shocked, then burst into laughter. "What, you don't want a taste?" she teased, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "Come on, it's not like my face is ugly or anything, right?"

Her face might not have been ugly, but her personality certainly was. But that wasn't the issue right now. What the hell was going on with Shredica? This wasn't like her at all. No, perhaps this wasn't even the real Shredica. This was someone else.

"Who are you?" I demanded.

"Well, well... looks like I've been caught out," she chuckled. "What a shame. I was hoping to have some fun in this body. Oh well."

"You still haven't answered my question. Who are you?" I pressed.

"I'm not going to tell you that, Mr. Leon," she replied with a smirk. "I mean, why bother copying this woman's appearance if I'm just going to spill my name to you? Besides, I'm impressed you caught on so quickly that I'm not who I appear to be. According to her memories, it doesn't seem like she's particularly close to you. Or so it seems..."

Hmm... Interesting. It appears she may not have shown it outwardly, but deep down, she wants to trust you. Your relationship might be more complex than you think..."

What was that? Shredica wanting to put her trust in me? That was unexpected...

"However, even though I'd love to see where your relationship with her leads, you're going to have to die. Such a shame," she declared, revealing her blade and licking its edge with a sinister grin.

This situation was getting dangerously out of hand. Why did I have to deal with two troublesome women so early in the morning? I braced myself, channeling mana into my arm and shaping it until it formed a sword-like construct.

The woman who resembled Shredica looked at me in surprise.

"Wow, your mana control is impressive," she remarked. "But unfortunately for you, it's not going to save you in the end."

With that, our battle commenced. She charged toward me, a menacing grin adorning her face as she swung her blade within striking distance. I managed to block her initial attack with my mana, but her follow-up strike came at me with such speed that I could barely react. Yet, I somehow managed to defend myself once again.

"Hmm, you're quite impressive," she remarked, retracting her blade in preparation for her next move. "Looks like it'll be a challenge to take you down."

Taking a step back, I braced myself. But before I could fully regroup, she lunged forward, leaving a trail of dust in her wake as she closed the distance between us. With the fluidity of a coiled spring, she thrust her blade toward me, utilizing the momentum from her initial charge.

I twisted my head to dodge the stab, narrowly avoiding getting skewered, though a few strands of my hair were sliced off in the process.

"Phew. That was a close one," I muttered under my breath. Losing some hair wasn't ideal, but I could always regrow it with my Hair Growing skill.

She wasted no time in launching another attack, recovering from her previous momentum almost instantly. With a swift follow-up, she lunged at me from an angle, forcing me to raise my mana blade in defense. The clash resonated sharply, and I found myself momentarily off-balance. She had put all her strength into that strike.

I recovered from the setback by pivoting, harnessing the momentum of her attack to whirl my body and deliver a powerful swing. The woman leaned back just moments before my mana sword could connect with her head, but a thin line appeared across the tip of her nose.

Her eyes widened in surprise, but she quickly regained her composure. In retaliation, she swung her blade at me, the sharp edge nearly grazing my neck. I managed to dodge just in time, then took a step back to create some distance between us.

As I looked at her, I noticed her grin had vanished from her face.

"What are you?!" she demanded, her voice laced with hysteria. "There's no way someone as skillless as you could dodge my attacks, let alone block them when I put all my strength into them. So why are you still alive?!"

She was seething with anger.

"You're not normal. No, that skillless woman wasn't normal either. Just who the heck are you?! Why haven't you been killed?!" she demanded.

I remained silent, seeing no point in responding to her questions. It was better to keep my mouth shut. While I would have enjoyed asserting dominance over her, considering her shapeshifting abilities, something about her set off alarm bells. It seemed like the best course of action was to eliminate her.

Chapter 164: King's Game, Part 2 (3)

Sara's POV

What was this man? What was his deal?

Initially, I pegged him as the weakest man I'd ever laid eyes on. I mean, all the men I've encountered were pretty proficient in either strength, magic, or academics. Take my brother, for example. He excelled academically and had a knack for manipulation. His swordsmanship was decent, but nothing extraordinary.

His magical abilities were top-notch, although still trailing behind mine—I had a knack for magic, though I preferred the blade.

But even with that, I figured my brother could still easily best this man. Handsome as he was, he seemed unremarkable in every aspect. And observing him now, I still held that opinion.

The man appeared devoid of skill, relying solely on a mana blade for defense. Typically, such reliance on a mana blade would leave one vulnerable in a sword fight. Yet, the way he manipulated that mana blade was astounding. The precision and concentration he exhibited were truly perplexing. Moreover, while I didn't detect any defensive enchantments, he left no openings either.

"You..." I growled, fixing him with a glare that dripped with my bloodlust. But the man just stood there, unaffected by my menacing aura. "Who the fuck are you, really?" I demanded.

"I'm sorry, Miss Shredica, or whoever you are masquerading as Miss Shredica right now, but I can't exactly divulge that information, can I?" he replied calmly. "And frankly, it's irrelevant, since you won't be alive to share what happens here."

I chuckled incredulously. "You... kill me? That's absurd," I scoffed. "You don't have the capability, you skillless bastard!"

"Let's put that theory to the test," he replied coolly.

Leon's POV

I focused all my concentration on infusing more mana into my hand, intensifying the sharpness of the mana blade. With each surge of mana, the blade grew sharper and more lethal. I could feel my mana flowing out of me, but oddly enough, I didn't feel drained.

Yet, as I concentrated, I sensed it—a warmth calling out to me, enveloping me like a mother's embrace. My mana grew louder and more potent, coalescing to such an extent that it was visible to anyone on the island, and perhaps even beyond.

"What an immense amount of mana," the woman remarked. "No ordinary human could wield such power. You're no mere mortal. You're a monster."

Yes, I was a monster. In this world and even back on Earth. A monster capable of killing without remorse. And even if I were reborn, I couldn't change that. So I'll gladly embrace my monstrosity.

The woman trembled beneath the weight of my mana. But then, she stabbed her leg, seemingly to steady herself.

"Hehe..." she chuckled. "Oh... I've never felt this scared before. What is this? Ahh, this kind of fear makes me want to cum!"

Clearly, this woman had some serious mental issues if she found pleasure in being scared.

She repeatedly stabbed her leg, as if trying to ward off her fear. The way she looked at me while doing so, with that menacing grin on her face, was chillingly unhinged. In an instant, I caught a glint of light—no, it was the reflection of her blade. She used it to momentarily blind me, hoping for an opening. But no opening presented itself. Still, she lunged at me, sword swinging, aiming for my neck.

My reflexes kicked in before I could fully process her intentions. My right hand moved instinctively, blocking her attack just in time.

A loud, high-pitched clang echoed through the forest as I successfully deflected her slash. The woman immediately stepped back, clutching her elbow in pain.

"Ngh... What the...?"

I looked at her and inquired, "Is something the matter?" I asked.

"What's wrong with your mana blade? How is it so strong?!"

The shock from her attack must have numbed her right arm up to the elbow.

"Well, it's because you put all your strength into it. When you hit my blade, all that force transferred to your blade and numbed your elbow in the process. You should consider how much force your opponent can withstand when parrying your attack, so you can gauge whether it'll hurt you in return."

"Shut the crap! I don't want lectures, much less from a skillless like you!" she growled, dashing toward me with even more crazed determination than before. I couldn't help but wonder what she actually looked like, but it didn't really matter.

As she closed the distance between us, she swung her blade sideways. I countered with a sideways slash of my own, blocking her attack. Without missing a beat, she followed up with an aerial spin, bringing her sword down overhead. I raised my mana blade to block the attack once again, successfully thwarting her efforts.

This back-and-forth continued for a few minutes until she suddenly seemed to realize something. With a shocked expression, she leaped backward to a safe distance.

"I haven't landed a single hit... Why can't I hit you...? And all you've done is block my attacks this whole time?" she exclaimed, her trembling betraying her shattered pride. "It's unforgivable... No one should be able to withstand my attacks... This is unforgivable."

Her tremors grew more violent, fueled not by fear but by anger. She was furious that I had withstood all her assaults and denied her the opening she sought. It dawned on her that I had been solely on the defensive, never once launching an attack of my own. That realization must have dealt a blow to her pride.

"Heh... Hehehehe... Hehehehehe..." she cackled in a strange manner, her laughter reminiscent of the evil female villains from superhero movies. "This is ridiculous... Defeated by a skillless... Don't toy with me..."

Don't fucking toy with me!"

Suddenly, she reached into her pocket.

"I don't want to die! But I have no choice!" she declared. Then, swiftly, she brought out a pill from her pocket and popped it into her mouth. I moved to strike and kill her before she could fully awaken, but her transformation was quicker than I anticipated. As I swung my mana blade at her neck, it seemed to pass through her without leaving so much as a scratch.

Suddenly, her skin turned purple, and she radiated an overwhelming aura of mana. The mana surged wildly within and around her, forming a massive tornado of energy. The swirling mana whipped up gusts of wind, dragging everything in the vicinity into its vortex.

I quickly leaped back to safety, but before I could react, her fist was inches from my face. In the blink of an eye, I was sent flying into the distance, crashing through several trees before finally coming to a stop against another tree.

"My, oh my," I remarked, assessing my situation. Thankfully, Guardian protected me from any serious injury, but without it, I would have been torn to pieces. "Looks like this is going to be troublesome."

I stood up and brushed the dirt off my uniform. Thankfully, I hadn't showered yet, so getting a little dirty was no big deal.

Suddenly, I sensed something approaching rapidly.

Reacting quickly, I conjured a mana blade and blocked the incoming threat. Before me stood a muscular woman with purple skin and red eyes. The mana swirling around her was thick and palpable, like smoke from a fire, coalescing violently around her.

"Grrrr!" she growled, her veins pulsating with red, threatening to burst forth. She resembled a monstrous creature, and I couldn't help but be baffled by the existence of such awakenings in this world. It seemed akin to using drugs, like steroids or doping in sports.

Without hesitation, she launched a barrage of slashes after my block. I managed to block, dodge, and parry her attacks, but with each exchange, it became evident that her power was rapidly increasing. It appeared that whoever was behind this drug was making the user more and more formidable.

It seemed like it was time for me to put an end to this...

I summoned my Guardian to block all of her attacks. At first, she was shocked to see me using a skill since she knew I was supposed to be skillless. But she kept on attacking. Despite her efforts, she couldn't do a thing to my Guardian. It was renowned as the strongest barrier out there, and only one person was known to have it—Gabrielle.

Her skill was seriously overpowered, making her one of the most famous women in the world.

This woman didn't realize I had it too, so she kept on trying to break through, thinking maybe it was just another barrier skill. Little did she know, my Guardian was way stronger than Gabrielle's.

My Guardian wasn't just strong enough to block her attacks—it could bounce them right back at her. So, I unleashed it, and bam! The woman went flying, launched all the way to Wednesday. She tumbled through the air, crashing through trees like they were twigs until she finally slammed into a rock with a thud. But I wasn't done yet. While she was mid-flight, I was zooming right after her.

The moment she came to a stop, I decked her square in the face with my Guardian-coated fist.

Chapter 165: King's Game, Part 2 (4)

At the same time Leon was locked in combat with Sara...

Myrcella's POV

As we were conducting our survey of the area, a sudden flurry of birds erupted into flight in all directions, signaling that something was amiss.

I turned to scan the surroundings, a sense of unease settling over me, but found nothing out of the ordinary.

"Is everything alright, Princess?" Johanne, my companion in surveying the area, inquired.

"Nothing... just a strange feeling," I replied. "Do you sense anything unusual, Johanne?"

"I don't... feel anything out of the ordinary," Johanne responded, his gaze sweeping the surroundings.

"Is that... so?" I responded, though I couldn't shake the feeling that something was indeed amiss. But if that was the case, then I supposed it was fine.

Suddenly, without warning, they pounced on us.

"Wha...?!"

Three men, each brandishing firearms, fixed their gaze on us. No, it was me they were eyeing with hunger in their predatory stares.

"Hahahaha! You were right, boss! The Princess is really here!" one of them exclaimed, licking his lips.

"You've got a good eye, boss!" another leered at me, sizing me up like a delectable treat.

"Hahaha, told you so! Stick with me and we'll bag ourselves quite the catch," the leader declared from the middle of the trio.

It was clear they had nefarious intentions involving me. Whatever their plan was, it couldn't be good.

"Princess, stay back!" Johanne commanded, drawing his sword. "You scoundrels, what do you intend to do with the Princess? State your intentions!"

"Oh? Looks like the knight in shining armor has arrived to save the day," the leader sneered. "Do you honestly believe a greenhorn like you stands a chance against seasoned elites like us, who've seen real war? Dream on." His gaze turned predatory. "But if you're so curious about our intentions, I'll enlighten you."

Turning to his cohorts, he grinned wickedly before gesturing toward their crotches.

"We want the beautiful Princess of Milham to get on her knees and worship our cocks." -official

The way they spoke sounded like an attempt to intimidate me, but I wasn't your typical Princess. I hadn't trained in swordsmanship and arcane arts just to tremble at their lewd remarks. I remained unfazed; I'd heard worse.

"You lowlifes!" Johanne exclaimed, assuming his stance, but I halted him by extending my arm outward.

"Hehehe, are you going to surrender to us without a fight, Princess? If so, that's a wise decision," the leader taunted.

"Before I consider that," I retorted, "can you please enlighten me as to who you gentlemen really are? I'm not keen on engaging in any sexual activities with men whose names I don't even know."

"That's irrelevant, Princess," the leader brushed off, his tone dripping with contempt. "I mean, do prostitutes bother with real names when you're fucking them? And rapists, they don't give a damn about introductions as they assault you. So why should we?" His tongue darted out to moisten his lips, anticipation evident in the way he smacked them hungrily.

"In fact, it'd be downright foolish for us to spill our identities to a potential future ruler of this kingdom, don't you think?"

"I see," I murmured to myself, the gravity of the situation sinking in.

These men weren't mere participants in the game; they were something far more sinister. It was clear their objective wasn't just victory but the capture of me. They were terrorists, hell-bent on inciting chaos within the kingdom's borders and igniting insurgencies.

I wasn't in line to inherit the throne; that privilege belonged to my brother. However, if anything were to happen to me, it would prompt my father to crack down on insurgent groups. It wasn't because I was his precious daughter—none of us were precious to him. His motivation would be purely pragmatic. Declaring war on insurgent groups would only stir up internal strife and damage our kingdom.

I couldn't allow that.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I can't give you what you want," I declared firmly.

"Tsk, you should've just accepted it without a fight, Princess. If you had, you wouldn't be in for such a world of hurt," the leader sneered.

In response, they aimed their guns at us. Without hesitation, I activated my skill and deflected all the bullets. With that, our battle against this group commenced.

Hertrude's POV

I found myself in a dream.

In this dream, I was in the forest, accompanied by Mr. Leon, the Princess, and her knight. Suddenly, a figure emerged behind the Princess. Simultaneously, a man wielding a gun fired at me, while Mr. Leon deftly sliced through them with his mana blade. Though Mr.

Leon saved me, the Princess was attacked in the process.

I watched in horror as she was stabbed from behind, the blade protruding from her chest. Blood gushed from her mouth, and when her assailant withdrew the blade, the Princess collapsed to the ground. Finally, I caught a glimpse of the assailant.

I was shocked when I saw who it was. I recognized that person. Well, it's not like I was particularly close with them. In fact, I had only met them for the first time yesterday. That's right. The one who killed the Princess was...

At that moment, my eyes snapped open, and I jolted upright in terror, my arm outstretched as I screamed. It felt as though I had been drowning, my breathing erratic and heavy as if I had been submerged in an ocean.

Harold looked at me, confused. Like me, he was still in the cave. But I had no time to explain. I needed to talk to Leon. I quickly rose from where I had been lying and hurried out of the cave.

Leon's POV

I kept pounding the woman until she began bleeding from the nose. It was tough to land punches hard enough to make her bleed because the pill that boosted her strength also seemed to enhance her endurance.

Even after I'd beaten her enough to bloody her face, it seemed like she wasn't taking any real damage. She just kept laughing as I punched her.

"Your punches are futile! Futile, I say! Hahahaha!"

After her declaration, she released a burst of mana, knocking me away from her. As I staggered to my feet, she backed off to create some distance between us.

"I underestimated the power of someone without skills. Well, it seems you're not entirely without skill, given your current use of one. But still, I underestimated you," she admitted. "I commend you for holding your own against me, but I'm afraid this is where it ends for you."

"Is that so?" I retorted.

My response only seemed to aggravate her further, and she growled, unleashing her mana in all directions, accompanied by a potent wave of bloodlust directed at me.

"You really piss me off," she growled. "And here I thought you were handsome enough that I wanted to fuck you..."

"If you wanted to fuck me, you should've picked a better material," I shot back.

Even though I hadn't had sex all day and was bursting with pent-up energy, if Shredica got horny and attacked me, it was doubtful I'd even get hard. That's why even if this woman looked like Shredica and wanted to get it on, I wouldn't be aroused. I mean, who'd screw someone aiming to off them? That's a major red flag.

We locked gazes for a heartbeat before she sprang at me. Reacting swiftly, I surged forward, our blades meeting with a thunderous clash that reverberated through the air. The sheer force of our collision unleashed shockwaves, sending debris spiraling outwards in a chaotic frenzy.

After disengaging and putting some distance between us, we squared off once more. With every clash of our blades, shockwaves rippled outward from the point of impact, creating a swirling tempest of raw power around us. Despite the ferocity of our exchanges, neither of us yielded an inch, locked in a relentless dance of blades.

Her strength seemed to have increased. It was as if she wasn't the same person I'd faced earlier. Norman had taken the same awakening pill, but this woman just kept getting stronger and stronger. They must have really upgraded the pill.

Stepping forward with my left foot, I swung the mana blade diagonally towards her left shoulder. I wasn't underestimating my opponent, but her reaction was quicker than I anticipated. She disregarded my strike and countered with a sideways swipe of her own blade, narrowly missing me as I hunched down. I felt a few strands of hair rip out as it passed. Damn, my hair was a mess.

Cursing under my breath, I struck again. My blow landed true, but it only grazed her lightly. Her skin was so thick that my mana blade couldn't even penetrate it.

"Goodness, what a pain in the ass opponent," I muttered.

It was the first time I'd encountered an opponent like this. Instead of feeling apprehensive, I was filled with a thrill unlike anything I'd experienced before.

I cracked my neck and stretched my muscles. Surprisingly, my enemy allowed me to prepare without interruption, though she watched me with confusion.

After finishing my stretches, I declared, "I suppose it's time to get serious."

Chapter 166: King's Game, Part 2 (5)

We locked eyes once again, this time holding each other's gaze for an extended period. No words were exchanged, just an intense stare-down. However, we weren't simply idling by.

I was channeling more mana into my mana blade, concentrating it to an unprecedented level, while she was swirling her mana in a potent manner, creating a barrier of force around her that made it nearly impossible to approach without feeling its full impact.

If this were a formal duel, the crowd would undoubtedly erupt into cheers, with all bets favoring her victory. But this wasn't a duel, not in the traditional sense.

With my mana blade now highly concentrated and emitting a powerful aura, causing my hair to billow in the pressure, I assumed a sideways stance at mid-height. Meanwhile, she kept her right hand close to her body, holding her blade horizontally, poised and ready for whatever came next.

She wore a grin, and I found myself mirroring her excitement. This was turning out to be quite exhilarating.

Without hesitation, she leaped forward with remarkable agility, covering the distance between us in the blink of an eye. Twisting her muscular frame to the right, she extended her right hand like a speeding arrow. With immense momentum and force behind her, she thrust twice to the left of my body, followed by a third thrust to the right.

The attacks were seemingly ordinary, lacking in speed but frighteningly precise. While I might manage to evade the first two strikes to the right, dodging the final blow would be impossible.

Her grin widened as I made my move, realizing that I had played right into her hands. I spun to the right in an attempt to dodge her initial strikes, but I knew the third thrust would find its mark.

"You're dead!" she exclaimed triumphantly.

"Dream on!" I retorted.

Instead of allowing myself to be impaled, my mana blade blurred into motion just before her blade struck my body. The trajectory of her thrust was thrown off slightly, and a small spark erupted from the point of contact on her weapon.

By the time she realized I had deftly parried her thrust, I was already launching an uppercut towards her chin. She attempted to pull her sword back, but quickly realized her mistake. If she withdrew now, she'd only immobilize herself, making for an easy target.

Caught in indecision, she remained frozen in place as my uppercut connected with her chin, sending her flying through the air for a short distance before landing hard on her backside.

"Woah..." I exclaimed, impressed by her resilience. "Nice reflexes," I remarked.

She coughed and spat, a mixture of blood and a tooth landing on the ground. It was clear I had inflicted some damage. "Bastard..." she growled, her voice laced with venom.

Without hesitation, she darted towards me. Simultaneously, I glimpsed a dark glimmer hurtling towards the base of my neck. Her attack was swift, but for me, it was...

"Slow!"

The lightning-fast assault was met with a lightning-fast counterattack of my own. A powerful shockwave reverberated through the air as our opposing forces clashed. In the aftermath, I observed the air shimmer with the release of unleashed energy. She attempted to use magic against me, but unfortunately for her, it was only thwarted by the Guardian.

The woman took a step back, keeping a safe distance, and with a growl, she swung her sword overhead. I swiftly moved to the right, deflecting the slashing attack coming down on me. Amidst the sparks and clang, a jolt surged through my hand. That was a solid strike.

I jumped back, but the woman instantly snapped her weapon forward, as if it had no weight at all. Her swings came one after another, too fast for reactive instincts. I had to meticulously observe her every move to anticipate the next attack and either deflect or evade it. Occasionally, our blades would briefly clash, but neither of us had landed a clean hit yet.

Amidst this rapid-fire battle, I sensed something off. What was happening to her? It seemed that something was amplifying within her, likely due to that pill. Her attack and reaction speeds were unnervingly swift, so much so that even a blink could result in being struck. The ferocity and speed of her assaults sent a sharp thrill racing through my body.

This time, instead of her initiating the attack, I decided it was my turn. Her eyes widened slightly, but her grin took on a menacing edge. I swung my blade in a silver arc, the sound of it slicing through the air filling the space.

Yet, my opponent swiftly repositioned her sword to defend against my strike. The sharp clash of metal on metal made both of us wince. Seizing the opportunity, we both used the moment to create some distance between us.

"Now, this is getting fun!" she exclaimed, her voice tinged with madness. "Oooh, this exchange really makes me want to cum!"

"I may be feeling the same thrill, but I doubt I'll reach climax from this," I replied.

Her keen eyes gleamed with a lethal intent honed by years of combat experience and numerous kills. As she aimed her blade at me, it began to emit a silver glow, indicating the infusion of mana into it.

"Haaa!" With a sharp exhale, she thrust her blade forward, slicing through the air with precision.

The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end as my instincts screamed at me to flee. Reacting instinctively, I swiftly pivoted away from the trajectory of her attack. What was that move? My Guardian had warned me that being hit by it would result in injury... Did that mean my Guardian wasn't effective against such an attack?

No, that's not it. I understand now... So that blade, when infused with mana, acts as a power dampener. It's all clear to me now...

With that epiphany, a grave determination settled over me. I summoned forth my bloodlust, thick and suffocating, permeating the very air around us. Its intensity was palpable, causing the atmosphere to quiver with apprehension. As the woman beheld this ominous display, her once-confident facade faltered, and her legs began to tremble involuntarily.

"W-What the...?"

Her hand, tightly gripping her blade, began to tremble with uncertainty. In that pivotal moment, realization dawned upon her — it was the end of the line. With a surge of resolve, I propelled myself towards her. But it wasn't a mere dash; it was a manifestation of sheer speed, an instantaneous blur of motion. In the blink of an eye, I was at her side, my hand making contact with her shoulder.

And in that fleeting instant, her entire being seemed to crumble as her knees gave way.

"H-Huh? W-What..." she mumbled. "...Who are you?"

She gazed into my eyes, but the moment her gaze met mine, she saw the darkness within. She couldn't comprehend it. She had thought herself superior, yet now she found herself kneeling before me.

"Mephisto," I replied with a smile.

In that instant, her bladder betrayed her, and she peed.

Sara's POV

Mephisto. I'd heard that name before. It was the name that man had always warned me about, telling me to steer clear.

Initially, I had dismissed Mephisto as nothing more than a myth, a tale spun to instill fear. The fantastical abilities attributed to him seemed beyond the realm of possibility, prompting even my brother to doubt their veracity.

But now, confronted with the palpable aura of terror exuding from Mephisto, I could no longer deny the gravity of the man's words.

His gaze pierced through me like a dagger, each glance a predatory strike aimed at my very soul. I quivered under the weight of his intense scrutiny, feeling as though I stood before the merciless eyes of a relentless hunter. A tremor coursed through my body, and beneath me, a warm puddle formed, a humiliating testament to my overwhelming fear.

In that crucial moment, I found myself with no alternative but to reveal my true form, deactivating my skill in a desperate bid for survival.

"Hmm... You're...?"

Before he could fully grasp the situation, I seized my blade, its glint reflecting the dim light, and aimed it directly at my chest. It was a gamble, a last-ditch effort to escape the imminent threat and secure a chance at life beyond the confines of the Church.

With trembling hands, I prepared to take the plunge, to initiate the teleportation process that could potentially save me from a grisly fate. However, before I could follow through with my desperate act, Mephisto intervened with swift and decisive action, his boot connecting with the blade and sending it clattering to the ground.

In that harrowing moment, every fiber of my being screamed for escape. With a surge of adrenaline-fueled panic, I turned and fled, the echoes of my terrified screams reverberating through the halls. Mephisto, the enigmatic figure who had toppled titans of power with effortless grace, loomed ominously behind me. It was a stark realization, a chilling acknowledgement of the perilous threat he posed.

Indeed, confronting Mephisto was akin to staring death squarely in the face.

All I could do was run. I ran, and I ran, and I ran. I didn't have the first idea where I was going.

But I knew I had to keep running.

Chapter 167: King's Game, Part 2 (6)

Myrcella's POV

Gunshots rang out, bullets slamming against the barrier I had conjured. Meanwhile, Johanne clashed swords with the leader, the battle locked in a stalemate since its onset. Neither side seemed willing to yield an inch. These men were no amateurs, and they must have realized that we weren't either.

Despite my skill deflecting their bullets, the two men continued to fire relentlessly at me. Even as they emptied their guns, they quickly reloaded and resumed shooting. Seizing the opportunity, I closed in on them with my sword in hand—a royal knight's blade gifted to me by my father on my fifteenth birthday.

As I closed in on them, I swung my sword horizontally, aiming to strike them both simultaneously. However, they managed to evade by pulling back slightly. Before I could launch another attack, they had already reloaded their guns and fired at me once more. Reacting swiftly, I utilized my skill again to block the barrage of bullets.

Meanwhile, Johanne engaged in a fierce duel with the leader, who wielded a large gun with a bayonet that resembled a blade. They exchanged blows, with the leader occasionally firing at Johanne from a distance. Johanne skillfully sliced through them mid-air. Despite the leader's shock at Johanne's abilities, a sinister smile never left his face.

"This is the first time I've seen a kid swing a sword like that," he grunted, eyeing Johanne with a mix of respect and bitterness. "My boy never had the knack for it, but I drilled him day and night to get better. Just when he was about to make a breakthrough, the bastards came for him. Royal knights, hunting down some lowlife, barged in like they owned the place. My son?

He was just there, wrong time, wrong place. But they didn't care. They cut him down like he was nothing but a damn pig—stabbed him, chopped off his head. And you know what's worse? They didn't even catch the bastard they were after," he spat, the anger evident in his voice.

"If my boy was still breathing, he'd be swinging that sword just as good, if not better than you," he growled, a fierce glint in his eye.

Johanne looked on, shocked by the revelation, but his gaze held a mixture of pity and contempt as he regarded the man. "So you're trying to get back at the Princess to make the royals pay for your son's death? The Princess had nothing to do with what happened!"

"And my son had nothing to do with that damn fugitive either! And yet, they killed him!" the man spat angrily. "I've lost all sense of morality. You really think I'm just gonna sit back and let those bastards get away with killing my son without so much as an apology? No fucking way!" he growled, his voice dripping with bitterness. "But you know what really pisses me off?

I was planning to take out the man the royal knights were after, Norman, myself. But then I found out the bastard's already six feet under. Damn it all. I wanted to take my sweet time cutting off his head, make him feel what my boy went through..."

So he was talking about Norman Amarathea, the man known as the Don of the Black Market. Norman was dead? This was news to me. So that's why there hadn't been any news of human trafficking lately. That explained a lot. But if Norman was dead, then who killed him?

I had no idea he was even dead.

"That's why I'm gonna get revenge on the royals now that Norman's gone," he declared. "And we'll make sure they know it was the Silver Blades."

Silver Blades? So that's who they were. I'd heard whispers about that clandestine organization before. They were insurgents with grand ambitions—to bring monarchies to their knees and reshape nations into democracies.

"How about you sheath that sword and hand over the Princess to us? Do that, and maybe we'll spare you when the revolution comes," the man proposed, his voice dripping with malice.

"Don't make me laugh," Johanne retorted, his tone steely. "I'd sooner die than betray the Princess to scum like you."

"Your damn honor is gonna be the death of you," the man sneered, his eyes glinting with menace.

With that, they squared off, the tension in the air thick as their blades clashed, signaling the start of their deadly dance.

The men who had been shooting at me ceased their gunfire, opting instead for a more personal approach. "Shooting ain't gonna get us nowhere. Let's take her down with our blades," one of them suggested.

"I'm in," the other agreed.

With that, they drew their blades—kukris, sharp and deadly—and advanced towards me, their laughter filling the air as they closed in.

"You know, I had a daughter once," one of them began, his voice tinged with bitterness. "But she was snatched away, raped by some noble prick, and sold into slavery. By the time I found her, she was a broken shell of herself, drugged beyond recognition. Couldn't even recognize her own father. I couldn't bring myself to end her suffering. She's my flesh and blood, you know?"

That's why I'm gonna make them pay instead," he declared, his eyes blazing with fury.

"Yeah, you know what, fucking the Princess isn't even enough to satisfy us," the other man chimed in. "I wanna see that King on his knees, tears streaming down his face, as we fuck all his wife, concubines and daughters right in front of him. That's what he did to me, you know? When that fucking King was just a Prince, he forced me to watch as he raped my wife right in front of me," he growled.

"That King ain't worthy of the throne. He ain't even worthy of being called a King. He's nothing but scum."

This was the first time I'd heard about Father's wrongdoings. I already knew he wasn't as noble as some made him out to be, and I'd heard whispers about his reckless youth. But this revelation about just how vile he truly was came as a surprise. Yet, I wasn't shocked.

Given how many people harbored resentment toward the current monarch and were dissatisfied with his rule, hearing stories like these wasn't all that surprising.

Still, what my father did to these people disgusts me. I can understand now why my mother despised him so much that she stopped speaking to him after they got together.

I decided to speak up. "I get that you're hurting, and apologies may not be enough to heal that pain. But what you're doing isn't right. This isn't justice," I said.

"Don't preach to us about justice, Princess. We know damn well it doesn't exist, and even if it did, it wouldn't mean squat. Revenge is all there is. And revenge is a hell of a lot easier to grasp than justice. That's why we're doing this."

I understood that. Justice was way out of reach for regular folks. Even those living righteous lives couldn't dream of touching it.

I knew all too well that justice was a lofty goal. Professor Gabrielle thought joining the magic knights would bring her closer to it, but when she did, she realized just how corrupt the whole system was. Even in the magic knights, justice felt like a distant dream.

But it was still within reach. I could reach it. If I became the monarch of this kingdom, I could overhaul the system, boot out the corrupt nobles, and put competent people in their place.

I could make justice attainable. I just needed to convince these people that I could.

"If you want justice, then... will you kneel to me? I promise that if I become queen, I'll give you the justice you're after."

At that, they burst out laughing. The leader's laughter was so hearty he had to clutch his belly.

"Come on, Princess? Seriously, is now the time for jokes?" the leader chortled. "You really think something like that's achievable? Do you honestly believe we'd even consider trusting you? Dream on, Princess! You'll never accomplish anything, even if you do become a monarch.

All you'll do is piss people off and cause more problems. And besides, how could we trust a woman? No fucking way you'd do any good. Forget about ruling and just stick to sucking dicks! That'd make people happier than you on the throne. Keep dreaming."

"She actually thinks she can bring justice? Get real," chimed in one of the men. "Even if you became queen, chances are slim you'd even have a shot at it."

"Why don't you just shut the fuck up, come with us, and let us fuck you already?" said the other one.

It seemed they weren't about to take me seriously. Understandable. I was a woman, after all. Men were supposed to be more capable than women. That was the belief ingrained in everyone's minds. That's why they couldn't fathom the idea of me becoming queen.

All they thought I'd bring was more misery. But I was determined to chase that dream. And to do that, I had to show these people just how determined I was.

With that, I took a deep breath and prepared for another round of blade-to-blade combat. The men looked like they were having a blast mocking me for even trying to fight them.

However, in an instant—so quick that if you blinked, you'd miss it—their heads were sailing through the air.

Chapter 165 - King's Game, Part 2 (4)

At the same time Leon was locked in combat with Sara...

Myrcella's POV

As we were conducting our survey of the area, a sudden flurry of birds erupted into flight in all directions, signaling that something was amiss.

I turned to scan the surroundings, a sense of unease settling over me, but found nothing out of the ordinary.

"Is everything alright, Princess?" Johanne, my companion in surveying the area, inquired.

"Nothing... just a strange feeling," I replied. "Do you sense anything unusual, Johanne?"

"I don't... feel anything out of the ordinary," Johanne responded, his gaze sweeping the surroundings.

"Is that... so?" I responded, though I couldn't shake the feeling that something was indeed amiss. But if that was the case, then I supposed it was fine.

Suddenly, without warning, they pounced on us.

"Wha...?!"

Three men, each brandishing firearms, fixed their gaze on us. No, it was me they were eyeing with hunger in their predatory stares.

"Hahahaha! You were right, boss! The Princess is really here!" one of them exclaimed, licking his lips.

"You've got a good eye, boss!" another leered at me, sizing me up like a delectable treat.

"Hahaha, told you so! Stick with me and we'll bag ourselves quite the catch," the leader declared from the middle of the trio.

It was clear they had nefarious intentions involving me. Whatever their plan was, it couldn't be good.

"Princess, stay back!" Johanne commanded, drawing his sword. "You scoundrels, what do you intend to do with the Princess? State your intentions!"

"Oh? Looks like the knight in shining armor has arrived to save the day," the leader sneered. "Do you honestly believe a greenhorn like you stands a chance against seasoned elites like us, who've seen real war? Dream on." His gaze turned predatory. "But if you're so curious about our intentions, I'll enlighten you."

Turning to his cohorts, he grinned wickedly before gesturing toward their crotches.

"We want the beautiful Princess of Milham to get on her knees and worship our cocks." -official

The way they spoke sounded like an attempt to intimidate me, but I wasn't your typical Princess. I hadn't trained in swordsmanship and arcane arts just to tremble at their lewd remarks. I remained unfazed; I'd heard worse.

"You lowlifes!" Johanne exclaimed, assuming his stance, but I halted him by extending my arm outward.

"Hehehe, are you going to surrender to us without a fight, Princess? If so, that's a wise decision," the leader taunted.

"Before I consider that," I retorted, "can you please enlighten me as to who you gentlemen really are? I'm not keen on engaging in any sexual activities with men whose names I don't even know."

"That's irrelevant, Princess," the leader brushed off, his tone dripping with contempt. "I mean, do prostitutes bother with real names when you're fucking them? And rapists, they don't give a damn about introductions as they assault you. So why should we?" His tongue darted out to moisten his lips, anticipation evident in the way he smacked them hungrily.

"In fact, it'd be downright foolish for us to spill our identities to a potential future ruler of this kingdom, don't you think?"

"I see," I murmured to myself, the gravity of the situation sinking in.

These men weren't mere participants in the game; they were something far more sinister. It was clear their objective wasn't just victory but the capture of me. They were terrorists, hell-bent on inciting chaos within the kingdom's borders and igniting insurgencies.

I wasn't in line to inherit the throne; that privilege belonged to my brother. However, if anything were to happen to me, it would prompt my father to crack down on insurgent groups. It wasn't because I was his precious daughter—none of us were precious to him. His motivation would be purely pragmatic. Declaring war on insurgent groups would only stir up internal strife and damage our kingdom.

I couldn't allow that.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I can't give you what you want," I declared firmly.

"Tsk, you should've just accepted it without a fight, Princess. If you had, you wouldn't be in for such a world of hurt," the leader sneered.

In response, they aimed their guns at us. Without hesitation, I activated my skill and deflected all the bullets. With that, our battle against this group commenced.

Hertrude's POV

I found myself in a dream.

In this dream, I was in the forest, accompanied by Mr. Leon, the Princess, and her knight. Suddenly, a figure emerged behind the Princess. Simultaneously, a man wielding a gun fired at me, while Mr. Leon deftly sliced through them with his mana blade. Though Mr.

Leon saved me, the Princess was attacked in the process.

I watched in horror as she was stabbed from behind, the blade protruding from her chest. Blood gushed from her mouth, and when her assailant withdrew the blade, the Princess collapsed to the ground. Finally, I caught a glimpse of the assailant.

I was shocked when I saw who it was. I recognized that person. Well, it's not like I was particularly close with them. In fact, I had only met them for the first time yesterday. That's right. The one who killed the Princess was...

At that moment, my eyes snapped open, and I jolted upright in terror, my arm outstretched as I screamed. It felt as though I had been drowning, my breathing erratic and heavy as if I had been submerged in an ocean.

Harold looked at me, confused. Like me, he was still in the cave. But I had no time to explain. I needed to talk to Leon. I quickly rose from where I had been lying and hurried out of the cave.

Leon's POV

I kept pounding the woman until she began bleeding from the nose. It was tough to land punches hard enough to make her bleed because the pill that boosted her strength also seemed to enhance her endurance.

Even after I'd beaten her enough to bloody her face, it seemed like she wasn't taking any real damage. She just kept laughing as I punched her.

"Your punches are futile! Futile, I say! Hahahaha!"

After her declaration, she released a burst of mana, knocking me away from her. As I staggered to my feet, she backed off to create some distance between us.

"I underestimated the power of someone without skills. Well, it seems you're not entirely without skill, given your current use of one. But still, I underestimated you," she admitted. "I commend you for holding your own against me, but I'm afraid this is where it ends for you."

"Is that so?" I retorted.

My response only seemed to aggravate her further, and she growled, unleashing her mana in all directions, accompanied by a potent wave of bloodlust directed at me.

"You really piss me off," she growled. "And here I thought you were handsome enough that I wanted to fuck you..."

"If you wanted to fuck me, you should've picked a better material," I shot back.

Even though I hadn't had sex all day and was bursting with pent-up energy, if Shredica got horny and attacked me, it was doubtful I'd even get hard. That's why even if this woman looked like Shredica and wanted to get it on, I wouldn't be aroused. I mean, who'd screw someone aiming to off them? That's a major red flag.

We locked gazes for a heartbeat before she sprang at me. Reacting swiftly, I surged forward, our blades meeting with a thunderous clash that reverberated through the air. The sheer force of our collision unleashed shockwaves, sending debris spiraling outwards in a chaotic frenzy.

After disengaging and putting some distance between us, we squared off once more. With every clash of our blades, shockwaves rippled outward from the point of impact, creating a swirling tempest of raw power around us. Despite the ferocity of our exchanges, neither of us yielded an inch, locked in a relentless dance of blades.

Her strength seemed to have increased. It was as if she wasn't the same person I'd faced earlier. Norman had taken the same awakening pill, but this woman just kept getting stronger and stronger. They must have really upgraded the pill.

Stepping forward with my left foot, I swung the mana blade diagonally towards her left shoulder. I wasn't underestimating my opponent, but her reaction was quicker than I anticipated. She disregarded my strike and countered with a sideways swipe of her own blade, narrowly missing me as I hunched down. I felt a few strands of hair rip out as it passed. Damn, my hair was a mess.

Cursing under my breath, I struck again. My blow landed true, but it only grazed her lightly. Her skin was so thick that my mana blade couldn't even penetrate it.

"Goodness, what a pain in the ass opponent," I muttered.

It was the first time I'd encountered an opponent like this. Instead of feeling apprehensive, I was filled with a thrill unlike anything I'd experienced before.

I cracked my neck and stretched my muscles. Surprisingly, my enemy allowed me to prepare without interruption, though she watched me with confusion.

After finishing my stretches, I declared, "I suppose it's time to get serious."

Chapter 166 - King's Game, Part 2 (5)

We locked eyes once again, this time holding each other's gaze for an extended period. No words were exchanged, just an intense stare-down. However, we weren't simply idling by.

I was channeling more mana into my mana blade, concentrating it to an unprecedented level, while she was swirling her mana in a potent manner, creating a barrier of force around her that made it nearly impossible to approach without feeling its full impact.

If this were a formal duel, the crowd would undoubtedly erupt into cheers, with all bets favoring her victory. But this wasn't a duel, not in the traditional sense.

With my mana blade now highly concentrated and emitting a powerful aura, causing my hair to billow in the pressure, I assumed a sideways stance at mid-height. Meanwhile, she kept her right hand close to her body, holding her blade horizontally, poised and ready for whatever came next.

She wore a grin, and I found myself mirroring her excitement. This was turning out to be quite exhilarating.

Without hesitation, she leaped forward with remarkable agility, covering the distance between us in the blink of an eye. Twisting her muscular frame to the right, she extended her right hand like a speeding arrow. With immense momentum and force behind her, she thrust twice to the left of my body, followed by a third thrust to the right.

The attacks were seemingly ordinary, lacking in speed but frighteningly precise. While I might manage to evade the first two strikes to the right, dodging the final blow would be impossible.

Her grin widened as I made my move, realizing that I had played right into her hands. I spun to the right in an attempt to dodge her initial strikes, but I knew the third thrust would find its mark.

"You're dead!" she exclaimed triumphantly.

"Dream on!" I retorted.

Instead of allowing myself to be impaled, my mana blade blurred into motion just before her blade struck my body. The trajectory of her thrust was thrown off slightly, and a small spark erupted from the point of contact on her weapon.

By the time she realized I had deftly parried her thrust, I was already launching an uppercut towards her chin. She attempted to pull her sword back, but quickly realized her mistake. If she withdrew now, she'd only immobilize herself, making for an easy target.

Caught in indecision, she remained frozen in place as my uppercut connected with her chin, sending her flying through the air for a short distance before landing hard on her backside.

"Woah..." I exclaimed, impressed by her resilience. "Nice reflexes," I remarked.

She coughed and spat, a mixture of blood and a tooth landing on the ground. It was clear I had inflicted some damage. "Bastard..." she growled, her voice laced with venom.

Without hesitation, she darted towards me. Simultaneously, I glimpsed a dark glimmer hurtling towards the base of my neck. Her attack was swift, but for me, it was...

"Slow!"

The lightning-fast assault was met with a lightning-fast counterattack of my own. A powerful shockwave reverberated through the air as our opposing forces clashed. In the aftermath, I observed the air shimmer with the release of unleashed energy. She attempted to use magic against me, but unfortunately for her, it was only thwarted by the Guardian.

The woman took a step back, keeping a safe distance, and with a growl, she swung her sword overhead. I swiftly moved to the right, deflecting the slashing attack coming down on me. Amidst the sparks and clanging, a jolt surged through my hand. That was a solid strike.

I jumped back, but the woman instantly snapped her weapon forward, as if it had no weight at all. Her swings came one after another, too fast for reactive instincts. I had to meticulously observe her every move to anticipate the next attack and either deflect or evade it. Occasionally, our blades would briefly clash, but neither of us had landed a clean hit yet.

Amidst this rapid-fire battle, I sensed something off. What was happening to her? It seemed that something was amplifying within her, likely due to that pill. Her attack and reaction speeds were unnervingly swift, so much so that even a blink could result in being struck. The ferocity and speed of her assaults sent a sharp thrill racing through my body.

This time, instead of her initiating the attack, I decided it was my turn. Her eyes widened slightly, but her grin took on a menacing edge. I swung my blade in a silver arc, the sound of it slicing through the air filling the space.

Yet, my opponent swiftly repositioned her sword to defend against my strike. The sharp clash of metal on metal made both of us wince. Seizing the opportunity, we both used the moment to create some distance between us.

"Now, this is getting fun!" she exclaimed, her voice tinged with madness. "Oooh, this exchange really makes me want to cum!"

"I may be feeling the same thrill, but I doubt I'll reach climax from this," I replied.

Her keen eyes gleamed with a lethal intent honed by years of combat experience and numerous kills. As she aimed her blade at me, it began to emit a silver glow, indicating the infusion of mana into it.

"Haaa!" With a sharp exhale, she thrust her blade forward, slicing through the air with precision.

The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end as my instincts screamed at me to flee. Reacting instinctively, I swiftly pivoted away from the trajectory of her attack. What was that move? My Guardian had warned me that being hit by it would result in injury... Did that mean my Guardian wasn't effective against such an attack?

No, that's not it. I understand now... So that blade, when infused with mana, acts as a power dampener. It's all clear to me now...

With that epiphany, a grave determination settled over me. I summoned forth my bloodlust, thick and suffocating, permeating the very air around us. Its intensity was palpable, causing the atmosphere to quiver with apprehension. As the woman beheld this ominous display, her once-confident facade faltered, and her legs began to tremble involuntarily.

"W-What the...?"

Her hand, tightly gripping her blade, began to tremble with uncertainty. In that pivotal moment, realization dawned upon her — it was the end of the line. With a surge of resolve, I propelled myself towards her. But it wasn't a mere dash; it was a manifestation of sheer speed, an instantaneous blur of motion. In the blink of an eye, I was at her side, my hand making contact with her shoulder.

And in that fleeting instant, her entire being seemed to crumble as her knees gave way.

"H-Huh? W-What..." she mumbled. "...Who are you?"

She gazed into my eyes, but the moment her gaze met mine, she saw the darkness within. She couldn't comprehend it. She had thought herself superior, yet now she found herself kneeling before me.

"Mephisto," I replied with a smile.

In that instant, her bladder betrayed her, and she peed.

Sara's POV

Mephisto. I'd heard that name before. It was the name that man had always warned me about, telling me to steer clear.

Initially, I had dismissed Mephisto as nothing more than a myth, a tale spun to instill fear. The fantastical abilities attributed to him seemed beyond the realm of possibility, prompting even my brother to doubt their veracity.

But now, confronted with the palpable aura of terror exuding from Mephisto, I could no longer deny the gravity of the man's words.

His gaze pierced through me like a dagger, each glance a predatory strike aimed at my very soul. I quivered under the weight of his intense scrutiny, feeling as though I stood before the merciless eyes of a relentless hunter. A tremor coursed through my body, and beneath me, a warm puddle formed, a humiliating testament to my overwhelming fear.

In that crucial moment, I found myself with no alternative but to reveal my true form, deactivating my skill in a desperate bid for survival.

"Hmm... You're...?"

Before he could fully grasp the situation, I seized my blade, its glint reflecting the dim light, and aimed it directly at my chest. It was a gamble, a last-ditch effort to escape the imminent threat and secure a chance at life beyond the confines of the Church.

With trembling hands, I prepared to take the plunge, to initiate the teleportation process that could potentially save me from a grisly fate. However, before I could follow through with my desperate act, Mephisto intervened with swift and decisive action, his boot connecting with the blade and sending it clattering to the ground.

In that harrowing moment, every fiber of my being screamed for escape. With a surge of adrenaline-fueled panic, I turned and fled, the echoes of my terrified screams reverberating through the halls. Mephisto, the enigmatic figure who had toppled titans of power with effortless grace, loomed ominously behind me. It was a stark realization, a chilling acknowledgement of the perilous threat he posed.

Indeed, confronting Mephisto was akin to staring death squarely in the face.

All I could do was run. I ran, and I ran, and I ran. I didn't have the first idea where I was going.

But I knew I had to keep running.

Chapter 167 - King's Game, Part 2 (6)

Myrcella's POV

Gunshots rang out, bullets slamming against the barrier I had conjured. Meanwhile, Johanne clashed swords with the leader, the battle locked in a stalemate since its onset. Neither side seemed willing to yield an inch. These men were no amateurs, and they must have realized that we weren't either.

Despite my skill deflecting their bullets, the two men continued to fire relentlessly at me. Even as they emptied their guns, they quickly reloaded and resumed shooting. Seizing the opportunity, I closed in on them with my sword in hand—a royal knight's blade gifted to me by my father on my fifteenth birthday.

As I closed in on them, I swung my sword horizontally, aiming to strike them both simultaneously. However, they managed to evade by pulling back slightly. Before I could launch another attack, they had already reloaded their guns and fired at me once more. Reacting swiftly, I utilized my skill again to block the barrage of bullets.

Meanwhile, Johanne engaged in a fierce duel with the leader, who wielded a large gun with a bayonet that resembled a blade. They exchanged blows, with the leader occasionally firing at Johanne from a distance. Johanne skillfully sliced through them mid-air. Despite the leader's shock at Johanne's abilities, a sinister smile never left his face.

"This is the first time I've seen a kid swing a sword like that," he grunted, eyeing Johanne with a mix of respect and bitterness. "My boy never had the knack for it, but I drilled him day and night to get better. Just when he was about to make a breakthrough, the bastards came for him. Royal knights, hunting down some lowlife, barged in like they owned the place. My son?"

He was just there, wrong time, wrong place. But they didn't care. They cut him down like he was nothing but a damn pig—stabbed him, chopped off his head. And you know what's worse? They didn't even catch the bastard they were after," he spat, the anger evident in his voice.

"If my boy was still breathing, he'd be swinging that sword just as good, if not better than you," he growled, a fierce glint in his eye.

Johanne looked on, shocked by the revelation, but his gaze held a mixture of pity and contempt as he regarded the man. "So you're trying to get back at the Princess to make the royals pay for your son's death? The Princess had nothing to do with what happened!"

"And my son had nothing to do with that damn fugitive either! And yet, they killed him!" the man spat angrily. "I've lost all sense of morality. You really think I'm just gonna sit back and let those bastards get away with killing my son without so much as an apology? No fucking way!" he growled, his voice dripping with bitterness. "But you know what really pisses me off?

I was planning to take out the man the royal knights were after, Norman, myself. But then I found out the bastard's already six feet under. Damn it all. I wanted to take my sweet time cutting off his head, make him feel what my boy went through..."

So he was talking about Norman Amarathaea, the man known as the Don of the Black Market. Norman was dead? This was news to me. So that's why there hadn't been any news of human trafficking lately. That explained a lot. But if Norman was dead, then who killed him?

I had no idea he was even dead.

"That's why I'm gonna get revenge on the royals now that Norman's gone," he declared. "And we'll make sure they know it was the Silver Blades."

Silver Blades? So that's who they were. I'd heard whispers about that clandestine organization before. They were insurgents with grand ambitions—to bring monarchies to their knees and reshape nations into democracies.

"How about you sheath that sword and hand over the Princess to us? Do that, and maybe we'll spare you when the revolution comes," the man proposed, his voice dripping with malice.

"Don't make me laugh," Johanne retorted, his tone steely. "I'd sooner die than betray the Princess to scum like you."

"Your damn honor is gonna be the death of you," the man sneered, his eyes glinting with menace.

With that, they squared off, the tension in the air thick as their blades clashed, signaling the start of their deadly dance.

The men who had been shooting at me ceased their gunfire, opting instead for a more personal approach. "Shooting ain't gonna get us nowhere. Let's take her down with our blades," one of them suggested.

"I'm in," the other agreed.

With that, they drew their blades—kukris, sharp and deadly—and advanced towards me, their laughter filling the air as they closed in.

"You know, I had a daughter once," one of them began, his voice tinged with bitterness. "But she was snatched away, raped by some noble prick, and sold into slavery. By the time I found her, she was a broken shell of herself, drugged beyond recognition. Couldn't even recognize her own father. I couldn't bring myself to end her suffering. She's my flesh and blood, you know?"

That's why I'm gonna make them pay instead," he declared, his eyes blazing with fury.

"Yeah, you know what, fucking the Princess isn't even enough to satisfy us," the other man chimed in. "I wanna see that King on his knees, tears streaming down his face, as we fuck all his wife, concubines and daughters right in front of him. That's what he did to me, you know? When that fucking King was just a Prince, he forced me to watch as he raped my wife right in front of me," he growled.

"That King ain't worthy of the throne. He ain't even worthy of being called a King. He's nothing but scum."

This was the first time I'd heard about Father's wrongdoings. I already knew he wasn't as noble as some made him out to be, and I'd heard whispers about his reckless youth. But this revelation about just how vile he truly was came as a surprise. Yet, I wasn't shocked.

Given how many people harbored resentment toward the current monarch and were dissatisfied with his rule, hearing stories like these wasn't all that surprising.

Still, what my father did to these people disgusts me. I can understand now why my mother despised him so much that she stopped speaking to him after they got together.

I decided to speak up. "I get that you're hurting, and apologies may not be enough to heal that pain. But what you're doing isn't right. This isn't justice," I said.

"Don't preach to us about justice, Princess. We know damn well it doesn't exist, and even if it did, it wouldn't mean squat. Revenge is all there is. And revenge is a hell of a lot easier to grasp than justice. That's why we're doing this."

I understood that. Justice was way out of reach for regular folks. Even those living righteous lives couldn't dream of touching it.

I knew all too well that justice was a lofty goal. Professor Gabrielle thought joining the magic knights would bring her closer to it, but when she did, she realized just how corrupt the whole system was. Even in the magic knights, justice felt like a distant dream.

But it was still within reach. I could reach it. If I became the monarch of this kingdom, I could overhaul the system, boot out the corrupt nobles, and put competent people in their place.

I could make justice attainable. I just needed to convince these people that I could.

"If you want justice, then... will you kneel to me? I promise that if I become queen, I'll give you the justice you're after."

At that, they burst out laughing. The leader's laughter was so hearty he had to clutch his belly.

"Come on, Princess? Seriously, is now the time for jokes?" the leader chortled. "You really think something like that's achievable? Do you honestly believe we'd even consider trusting you? Dream on, Princess! You'll never accomplish anything, even if you do become a monarch.

All you'll do is piss people off and cause more problems. And besides, how could we trust a woman? No fucking way you'd do any good. Forget about ruling and just stick to sucking dicks! That'd make people happier than you on the throne. Keep dreaming."

"She actually thinks she can bring justice? Get real," chimed in one of the men. "Even if you became queen, chances are slim you'd even have a shot at it."

"Why don't you just shut the fuck up, come with us, and let us fuck you already?" said the other one.

It seemed they weren't about to take me seriously. Understandable. I was a woman, after all. Men were supposed to be more capable than women. That was the belief ingrained in everyone's minds. That's why they couldn't fathom the idea of me becoming queen.

All they thought I'd bring was more misery. But I was determined to chase that dream. And to do that, I had to show these people just how determined I was.

With that, I took a deep breath and prepared for another round of blade-to-blade combat. The men looked like they were having a blast mocking me for even trying to fight them.

However, in an instant—so quick that if you blinked, you'd miss it—their heads were sailing through the air.

Chapter 168: King's Game, Part 2 (7)

Heads were sent flying through the air, their blood spraying from the neck stumps like gruesome fountains. The headless bodies remained standing for a moment, blood gushing from their necks before they collapsed to the ground.

"Wha...?" I managed to gasp, the shock reverberating through me like a thunderclap. What had just unfolded before my eyes?

"This body's a bit gnarly, but it'll do," remarked a man. But that couldn't be right. The man had just been decapitated in front of me, yet here he stood, whole and unharmed. It was as if someone had assumed his identity after killing him.

"Oh, but it seems there's something even more enticing," the man added, his tongue flicking over the blood-slicked blade that had wrought the carnage, his gaze fixated on me with predatory intent.

Not sexual, though. It was more akin to hunger than lust.

The way she spoke was seductive, yet she wasn't a woman. Her mannerisms, however, were distinctly feminine. It seemed the person who had taken on the man's form must have been a woman.

"Who the hell are you?! What the fuck did you just do?!" the leader exclaimed, his shock palpable after witnessing the sudden violence. It was no wonder; two of his comrades had just been slain in an instant. Those two had been fighting for vengeance, but at least their deaths had been swift, sparing them from prolonged agony.

"Oh, quiet down. If I want to escape from that monster, then I'll need to drink that woman's blood. Come to me, you bitch!" she declared, her voice echoing with a chilling determination before she lunged towards me with alarming speed.

"Wha...?!"

"Princess!"

The woman who had just taken on a man's form moved with incredible speed. It was lightning-fast, almost inhuman. Her movements were so rapid that it was hard to believe she was even human. She moved with such velocity that even if you tried to follow her, you wouldn't catch her in motion. She seemed to vanish from one spot and reappear right in front of me.

I had no time to react, no time to activate my skill or defend myself. I was completely caught off guard by the sheer speed of her attack.

Luckily, Johanne intervened just in time, blocking the assault.

"Nghhh!" Johanne groaned, feeling the impact of the woman's powerful attack reverberate through his body. His wrist nearly shattered under the force of it, but he gritted his teeth and stood his ground, defending me. However, he couldn't shield me completely, and I ended up with a slight cut from the woman's blade.

The woman stepped back, licking her blade. "A small droplet of blood will do just fine." With that, her appearance changed, morphing into my own.

"How...?!" Johanne exclaimed, clearly taken aback by the sudden transformation.

This was unexpected. I never imagined such a skill existed—one that could change a person's appearance to that of another. Then again, skills were incredibly diverse, so it wasn't entirely surprising to encounter something so unusual.

"A fine body. Perfect for a woman like me, wouldn't you say?" the woman who now mirrored my appearance remarked. "Now, I just need to make my escape before—"

"Not so fast," interjected a man with a deep, commanding voice. Instantly, I felt my knees buckle under the weight of that voice. The pressure emanating from that alone was almost tangible, overwhelming me and leaving me feeling weak.

"What... What is this...?" Johanne wore the same bewildered expression as me.

"Johanne, don't move," I instructed, my voice tense with urgency.

That's right. We couldn't afford to make any sudden moves in a situation like this, and Johanne understood that. He complied, frozen in place alongside me.

"Here he comes..." the woman murmured, a hint of excitement in her voice. "Now then," she declared, locking eyes with me before suddenly seizing me and twirling me around. My senses spun as the world whirled around me, leaving me disoriented when she finally came to a stop.

"What did you do?" I demanded, my head throbbing from the abrupt motion, my hand instinctively reaching to steady myself.

"What did you do?" she echoed in perfect synchronization, her own hand pressed against her forehead, mimicking my gesture.

"Huh?" I exclaimed in confusion.

"Huh?" she echoed, perfectly mimicking my tone and expression.

She was copying me. She was... copying me so flawlessly that it felt like I was staring into a mirror.

"W-What are you doing?" I stammered, my voice trembling with uncertainty.

"W-What are you doing?" she echoed, her tone matching mine with eerie accuracy.

What was she trying to accomplish? That question lingered for only a moment before it was answered in the most terrifying manner.

"Hiii?!" I gasped, nearly buckling under the weight of fear that washed over me.

Before me stood a man, his face concealed by a smooth, featureless mask, clad in dark clothing that seemed to absorb all light around him. His presence exuded such malevolence that it was impossible to gauge its depth—it was like staring into an abyss.

And that abyss was staring back at me.

Now I understood why this woman had taken on my appearance. It was a desperate attempt to confuse the man behind the mask, to make him question which of us was real. Whether he even knew who I was, despite being a Princess, was uncertain. But it seemed unlikely that he cared. He exuded an aura of indifference to the world, as if his sole purpose was to bring death.

The woman copying my appearance was clearly foolish for attempting such a stunt. She seemed to have overlooked the numerous loopholes in her plan. Firstly, the man could easily dispatch both of us simultaneously if he couldn't distinguish between us. Taking chances was not his style—he would likely eliminate us both without hesitation.

Secondly, if she managed to escape with my appearance, albeit slim chances, she could have a shot at freedom. However, by remaining here with my likeness, she only increased her risk of being killed by the man. These were just a few loopholes I could identify, but I was certain there were more.

When he appeared, he cast a scrutinizing gaze upon both of us.

I attempted to steady my trembling legs, but they betrayed me, causing me to collapse to my knees once more, and then I involuntarily relieved myself again. The sheer terror that emanated from the man was overwhelming. I couldn't believe that I was experiencing this humiliation for the second time in such a short span.

Just yesterday, I had embarrassed myself in front of Leon, and now, I had done it again. It was beyond embarrassing.

As I emptied my bladder, I noticed that the woman beside me remained dry. The man turned his attention to her, and in the blink of an eye, he was right before us. He seized the woman by the neck and hoisted her up.

"Gahhhh!"

"You seem to enjoy playing games," the man remarked, his voice cold and devoid of emotion.

"How the fuck did you know? Ugh. Is it because she peed herself? If I pee myself too, will I be spared?"

"How about we put that to the test?" the man taunted, his bloodlust exploding forth like a violent storm. The woman's eyes widened in terror, her screams echoing through the air as she desperately

struggled against his iron grip. But it was futile; his strength was unyielding, holding her in place as if she were nothing more than a rag doll tossed about in the wind.

Her cries pierced the tense atmosphere, a symphony of fear and desperation that filled the air. Every movement she made was met with resistance, the man's grasp unyielding and immovable like the weight of a mountain pressing down upon her.

Just as it seemed there was no escape from the man's relentless onslaught, a new voice shattered the silence. It reverberated through the chaos, cutting through the tension like a blade. It was the leader of the group we had clashed with earlier, his presence casting a shadow over the scene.

"Can I beg you to spare her life?"

We all turned to face him, even the man. But as my eyes landed on him, a sense of unease washed over me. There was something distinctly different about this man compared to the one we had been battling moments ago. His presence seemed to radiate a power far greater than before. What was going on?

"And who might you be?" the man inquired, his tone betraying a hint of suspicion. It seemed he, too, sensed that something was amiss with this man.

The leader let out a sinister chuckle, his voice dripping with amusement. "Oh, come on now. I know I'm not exactly memorable after you've bested me, but completely forgetting me stings a bit, doesn't it?" he taunted. "Well, I suppose it's to be expected from someone as formidable and all-powerful as you, Mephisto."

His words sent a chill down my spine, and my eyes widened in realization. Mephisto. That name carried a weight of dread and fear.

"Mephisto? The... The one behind that catastrophic incident months ago?" Johanne gasped, his shock evident.

Yes, indeed. Mephisto was the name associated with chaos and destruction. He had slipped through the grasp of the royal knights, outmaneuvered the magic knights, and left a trail of devastation that stained the kingdom's reputation.

That's right. The name Mephisto was seared into my consciousness like a brand. He was the man with a target painted on his back, his head fetching a hefty bounty. Renowned as the master of deception, he was known to wear many faces, a shadowy figure lurking in the depths of the kingdom's darkest nightmares.

Chapter 169: King's Game, Part 2 (8)

Hereon's POV

"Huh?" I exclaimed aloud.

I found myself standin' on the shore of the island, utterly perplexed. How the hell did I end up here? I scratched my head in confusion, unable to make sense of it.

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not directionally challenged or anythin'. Sure, I might be a bit clueless at times, but I'm not completely hopeless when it comes to finding my way around. I just walked straight without a destination in mind, and somehow wound up here by sheer coincidence.

On my way here, I had a run-in with two thugs, whom I swiftly dealt with. I also overheard that there were over thirty other participants on the island. That meant my odds of victory were on the rise.

I turned and ventured into the forest. Along the way, I had been making small cuts on the trees to mark my path, but when I retraced my steps, the cuts were nowhere to be seen. Weird.

Deciding it was pointless to dwell on it, I pressed on deeper into the forest. If I ended up here by chance, maybe I could find my way back to base by chance too.

However, as I delved further into the woods, I stumbled upon somethin' shocking. A figure leaned against a tree, and as I drew closer, I recognized her immediately—Shredica, the woman with purple hair.

She lay there, her condition dire, as if teetering on the brink of oblivion. Despite the severity of her wounds, she managed to cling to life, each breath a struggle against the encroaching darkness. A gaping gash marred her chest, crimson rivers flowing freely from the wound, painting the ground beneath her in stark contrast. But she wasn't out for the count just yet, and that was a damn good thing.

"Are you okay?!?" I shouted, my heart pounding in my chest as I rushed to her side. It was a strange feeling, this urgency coursing through me, but I didn't have time to dwell on it. I needed to help her, and I needed to do it now.

As I approached, she reassured me, "I'm okay. I don't think I'll get eliminated if I can help it. But I feel like the magic circle beneath us is starting to suck me in to teleport me to the Church, so I'd appreciate it if you could fetch Mr. Leon before it's too late."

She seemed to be holding on, but her words ignited a fire of irritation within me. I knew exactly why—I couldn't stand hearing that bastard's name.

"Tsk," I clicked my tongue in frustration. "Why the hell do you need that bastard anyway?"

"I need him to patch me up," she replied bluntly.

"Why can't you do it yourself?" I demanded, my voice laced with disbelief.

"Honestly, I think healing magic is a load of bullshit. That's why I never bothered with those lessons," she explained with a shrug.

I was floored by her response. Healing magic was essential, second only to attack magic. To hear her dismiss it so casually left me stunned. Maybe this woman was even more rebellious than I'd realized.

I sighed and reached into my pocket, pulling out something and holding it out to her.

"What's this...?" she asked, eyeing the item.

"It's a healin' potion. Might help you heal up a bit. Although it won't exactly replenish your blood," I explained.

"Well, I guess it's better than nothing. Can you bring the vial closer to my lips?" she requested.

I blinked in surprise. "Can't you do it yourself?"

"Seriously? Do you honestly think I can?" she retorted, her tone incredulous. "I can barely move with all these injuries."

She was right. Considerin' her injuries, it was honestly impressive that she hadn't been eliminated yet. Typically, if you sustained anything beyond a mild injury and it escalated to severe, you'd be whisked off to the Church for healin'. Her injuries were definitely in the severe category now. It was absurd that she was still holdin' on solely through sheer willpower.

But as much as I admired her resilience and wanted to help, I couldn't just bring the vial to her lips like she asked. What if my fingers accidentally brushed against her lips in the process?

"What are you waiting for? Just do it already," she urged impatiently.

"Alright," I agreed, pushing aside my hesitation. What was I even hesitatin' for? And so what if my fingers accidentally brushed against her lips? I didn't know what was holdin' me back, but it didn't matter. With a determined nod, I brought the vial to her lips and let her drink its contents. In no time, she was healed.

Myrcella's POV

Johanne helped me up, my pants drenched with pee clinging stubbornly to my legs, smeared with mud and filth.

"Sorry about that, Johanne," I muttered as he gripped my pee-soaked pants.

"It's no bother," he replied with his usual gallant demeanor. "I'm your knight, and you're my Princess. I promised to stand by your side through anything, didn't I? So something as trivial as this doesn't faze me."

What he said and the way he said it might have swept many women off their feet, but it had no sway over me. To my eyes, Johanne was nothing more than a younger brother, and to him, I was simply his sister. Besides, Johanne's demeanor wasn't a deliberate act of charm; it was just his natural demeanor.

"Anyway..." I began, diverting my attention to the tense scene unfolding before us. "This looks bad..."

The man who had seemed to be the leader in our previous encounter now stood face-to-face with Mephisto, while Mephisto himself held the woman who bore an uncanny resemblance to me in his grasp.

"You claim we've crossed paths before, but your face doesn't jog my memory. Who the hell are you?" Mephisto's voice sliced through the air like a sharpened blade, carrying with it an icy chill that sent shivers cascading down my spine. It felt as though his words emanated from the depths of the abyss itself, leaving behind an unsettling aura of foreboding.

"Who I am doesn't matter right now. What's important is whether you'll spare her or not," the man declared. "Depending on your answer, I might be forced to take action that you won't like."

"What do you mean?" Mephisto demanded, his grip tightening on the woman's neck.

"I've got a bomb planted somewhere," the man revealed, his tone chillingly matter-of-fact. "Care to take a guess?"

Mephisto remained silent, clearly not amused by the man's attempt at humor. He tightened his grip on the woman's neck.

"Well, I guess not," the man remarked, his voice tinged with a hint of amusement. "How about I offer you a riddle instead? I am a place where children roam, Without parents, they find a home. In me, memories endlessly flow, A town where roots and love both grow. What am I?"

The riddle's answer was simple: "Orphanage."

At that, Mephisto's demeanor shifted abruptly.

"You... How did you know that?" he demanded.

"Hahahaha! I'm not just getting stronger to face you again, Mephisto. I've been investigating you, planning how to take you down," the man declared. "I'm hell-bent on defeating you."

With those words, darkness consumed the man, revealing his true form. But it wasn't a man at all—it was more apt to call him a boy. He stood at the height of a 10-year-old, yet his presence commanded respect far beyond his years. Despite his youthful appearance, there was something about him that screamed danger. His smirk spoke volumes, confirming his prowess and the darkness that lurked within him.

I knew him. This man is...

"Moriarty?" Johanne interjected, finishing my thought before I could speak.

That's it. Johanne's words confirmed my suspicion. He was indeed the man I had feared—the one renowned as the strongest in the world, capable of bending reality to his whims. The man whose very presence exuded an aura of darkness. This man was James Moriarty, the former Prince of the Principality of Moriarty.

"Yeah, that's right. You've got it, knight. The one and only, Moriarty," Moriarty affirmed with a graceful bow, his demeanor oozing with confidence and power. Moriarty fixed Mephisto with a sly smile, his eyes gleaming with mischief. "Surprised I'm still standing?" he quipped, his tone dripping with insolence.

"Well, they say a bad grass can't be easily trampled.

I've got the devil himself watching over me, you know?"

"I don't remember you," Mephisto retorted, his voice cold and indifferent.

"Ouch, that's a low blow," Moriarty chuckled, though there was an edge to his amusement. "I was practically counting down the minutes to our little reunion. Can't you at least try to jog your memory?"

"Enough," Mephisto snapped, his patience wearing thin. "Answer my question. How did you know?"

"The orphanage? Didn't I mention I'm a collector of secrets?" Moriarty replied with a smirk, his gaze flickering with amusement. "You're quite the puzzle, Mephisto. Hard to believe something as simple as that slipped your mind."

What was unfolding before my eyes, I pondered. The sight of two formidable wanted figures standing before me sent a wave of dizziness washing over me, leaving me momentarily disoriented. The air crackled with tension as they faced off, their mere presence casting a shadow over the surroundings. It was a surreal moment, as if time itself had frozen to witness the clash of titans.

"Let's bail while we still can," Johanne suggested.

"I agree."

And with that, we made our escape from the scene.

Chapter 170: King's Game, Part 2 (9)

Leon's POV

I recalled the name vividly. It was a name Gabrielle had once mentioned to me: James Moriarty.

James Moriarty, the former prince of the Principality of Moriarty, which had fallen due to annexation by another country. The Principality had been wiped off the map entirely.

His name bore a striking resemblance to that of a fictional character from Sherlock Holmes. Upon delving deeper into his persona, I discovered that his demeanor closely mirrored that of the fictional character. It was almost uncanny how similar they were. He was like the true Napoleon of crime.

An incredibly intelligent individual, Moriarty was hailed by Gabrielle herself as possessing a mind of the highest caliber. He was a mathematical and scientific prodigy with a notable academic background. However, Moriarty's insatiable thirst for power led him down the path of criminality, ultimately resulting in the downfall of his Principality.

I had squared off against the man in the past. He proved to be a formidable opponent, skilled in magic and adept at wielding his powers—a mystery that still puzzled me to this day. Though now he appeared as a child, during our battle, he had been a fully grown adult. Did his transformation to a child enable him to survive my onslaught back then? Or perhaps he used it to regenerate himself.

Currently, he stood before me with all his limbs intact, indicating he had indeed regrown them somehow. It was truly astonishing that he had managed to survive, considering I had unleashed all my most powerful spells in a relentless barrage.

"Oh, don't give me that look," Moriarty chimed in with a jovial child's voice. "I'm not here to pick a fight. Can't exactly unleash my full potential in this pint-sized form, you know?"

His words were difficult to trust, but I sensed sincerity in his tone. Moreover, the thought of risking the orphanage's safety in a confrontation with him made me hesitant to challenge him further. Reluctantly, I conceded that it was best to heed his words for now. I couldn't bear the thought of Alice coming to harm, especially given our strained relationship after that incident.

"What's your game then?" I demanded.

"All I ask is that you spare that woman," Moriarty replied. "She's been naughty, I know, but let me handle her punishment. I promise not to harm the orphanage if you comply."

With a reluctant sigh, I slowly released my grip on the woman, allowing her to slump in my grasp. She coughed and wheezed for air.

"Grr..." she growled at me.

"Come here," Moriarty commanded.

Like a dog, the woman obeyed, her form still resembling Princess Myrcella. However, the real Princess Myrcella seemed to have escaped from this ordeal. It was a wise move on her part, as even someone as composed as her would surely be shaken by such this situation.

"Well then, Mephisto. Let's see each other again, although I doubt it'll be anytime soon. You're a busy man, after all," Moriarty remarked.

"What's your plan?" I couldn't help but ask, breaking my silence. He was a powerful individual with extensive connections. It wouldn't be surprising if one of his allies was among my ranks. I had no leads at the moment, but I planned to investigate further after this.

In response, he simply smiled—a smile reminiscent of a child who had just found a coveted toy. "Just like what you're trying to accomplish," he replied cryptically, offering no further explanation. But I knew immediately what he meant, what he intended to do.

Like me, he wants to own this world.

"Are you the puppeteer pulling Prince Julius's strings?" I demanded, my suspicion lacing each word.

"Ah, come now, why would I dabble in such affairs?" he retorted, a sly smile playing on his lips, though his tone betrayed his involvement. Despite his denial, I could practically taste the deceit in the air. "But even if I were, it seems you're not inclined to take my word for it. Understandable, of course. Trust is earned, not forced."

As our conversation unfolded, I sensed the subtle shift in the atmosphere, the approach of three distinct presences. Moriarty, ever perceptive, seemed to share in my awareness, a knowing smirk dancing across his features as he cast a sidelong glance in my direction.

"Let's have a little test," Moriarty proposed, his voice laced with malice as he leveled his gun. "Who will you protect first: the woman with the purple hair, or the woman with Clairvoyance? These bullets move faster than light itself. You might manage to intercept one, but I doubt you'll have time for both. So, Mephisto, the choice is yours."

With a flick of his wrist, he aimed the gun toward the oncoming figures. In an instant, two forms materialized at opposite ends: Shredica and Hertrude. It was as if time itself slowed, and in that moment of clarity, realization struck me like a thunderbolt. So that was the reason... that's why I chose to save Hertrude instead of the Princess.

It all fell into place, the pieces of the puzzle clicking together with alarming clarity. This meant the future Hertrude had sought to prevent was now unfurling before me.

After a split-second of decision, the man fired his gun, then swiftly aimed in another direction. Without hesitation, I moved toward Hertrude, who was in the path of the oncoming bullet. Reacting instinctively, I summoned my Guardian skill to shield her. Hertrude stared at me in shock, bewildered by my sudden action.

But as the realization dawned upon her that the vision she had foreseen was unfolding before her eyes, she resigned herself to her fate.

Once I had shielded her, she spoke urgently. "M-Miss Shredica is targeting the Princess. You must act quickly and—"

"I know," I interrupted, cutting her off. While Miss Shredica was indeed targeting the Princess, her true target wasn't the Princess herself, but rather the woman who bore her likeness.

"Gaaah!" A pained scream echoed through the air, followed by the sickening sound of a blade piercing flesh. I turned to see the woman who bore the Princess's appearance, a blade protruding from her chest as Shredica stood behind her, driving the weapon deeper into her body. "Y-You...?!"

"Even if you change your appearance, you can't mask the stench of your mana," Shredica declared, a hint of pride in her voice. With a swift motion, she withdrew her blade, and the woman collapsed to her knees before slumping to the ground.

As this unfolded, Moriarty chimed in with a comment.

"She managed to deflect that bullet with her blade. Are you truly confident she'll emerge unscathed, or do you simply give zero fucks about her?"

He directed the question at me, but I remained silent, merely staring back. Truth be told, I wasn't all that confident that Shredica would emerge unscathed from that ordeal. The future Hertrude had foreseen played a significant role in my decision to side with her instead of Shredica. But if I hadn't been aware of such a future, would I have chosen to save Shredica?

Part of me entertained the idea of abandoning her to her fate, but strangely enough, another part of me felt compelled to intervene and save her.

"Oh well..." Moriarty shrugged when he realized I wasn't going to respond. "Guess this is it then. I'm out. Until next time, Mephisto," he declared.

Suddenly, darkness enveloped the surroundings, and in the blink of an eye, Moriarty vanished, along with the woman.

Shredica looked bewildered by the sudden turn of events, and then a man emerged behind her. It was Hereon, confirming that he was the third presence all along. Meanwhile, Hertrude appeared stunned by the unfolding chaos, still unaware that the woman stabbed by Shredica wasn't Princess Myrcella.

I cast a Mist Magic spell, allowing the smoke to cloak me as I vanished from sight, taking Hertrude with me in my arms. Once I set her down, I revealed the truth: the woman Shredica stabbed wasn't Princess Myrcella, but an imposter who had copied her appearance. Hertrude breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing this revelation.

"Thank the heavens the Princess is safe," she exclaimed. "But now I understand... changing the future won't be so simple."

That's right. Today, I learned that fate isn't something you can change. It's fundamentally the law of the universe. Fate, or destiny, is predetermined. We used to think that by taking actions that could lead to various outcomes based on our behavior, we could alter it. The Law of Attraction, for instance, suggests that focusing on what we desire can attract it into our lives.

We believed that if fate is flexible, and we focus enough on our desires, things would go our way. However, that wasn't the case. Fate seemed unchangeable.

"But hold on..." Hertrude interjected, a realization dawning on her. "If the Princess didn't die here, then what could possibly cause the future I saw, where Prince Julius murders the entire royal family?"

There was an answer to that, of course. Prince Julius was being manipulated by Moriarty. That meant that the reason the entire family gets murdered in the future she saw was Moriarty's doing.