

The World 221

Chapter 221: Idol Debut (4)

I vomited bile in the corner of the alley after cremating the man's remains with fire magic. Once my stomach was empty, I cleansed my mouth with water magic.

The Eclipse are one step ahead, I see. I guess that's to be expected. They wouldn't just let someone who knows their secrets get away without consequences. They cast a curse to ensure his silence, permanently. The moment he tried to reveal the cult leader's name, he signed his own death sentence. Catching this cult is not going to be easy...

Still, their method is overkill. I never thought they'd curse their members so that if they spoke out of turn, their heads would literally blow off. This cult must be dealt with.

Hmm? Wait, if that man wasn't a danger to the concert, then what was that feeling I got? Oh no...!

Panic surged through me as I sprinted back towards the concert, my heart pounding in my chest. That man wasn't the source of my intuition's warning. Someone else was. There was someone else!

When I arrived, the scene was deceptively calm. The concert was still in full swing, the music echoing through the night air, and the crowd appeared oblivious, lost in the rhythm and energy. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Was my intuition wrong? My skill had never been so unreliable as to give me a false alarm.

Or maybe the threat hadn't surfaced yet. I scanned the area, my senses on high alert. Every shadow, every unfamiliar face, every movement in the crowd was a potential danger. I couldn't afford to let my guard down. The real threat was still out there, lurking, waiting for the right moment to strike.

Leon's POV

"I already told you, didn't I? The cult leader ordered us to carry out many reprehensible acts. That included kidnapping women, and then...sacrificing them in front of the statue of their evil god. I don't know their ultimate goal, honestly. I only joined for the perks. But looking back, I think I grasp their agenda now.

Frankly, I believe they were attempting to awaken that evil god. It's mere speculation on my part."

I listened intently to the voice of a man being interrogated, the sound crackling through the smartphone speaker. His words revealed something intriguing and confirmed my suspicions about Sesillian.

I had two theories about why Sesillian didn't touch Charlotte, despite her practically throwing herself at him. It was bizarre, considering how stunning Charlotte is. She has the face of a model and a body to match—long, elegant legs and a figure that would make any man look twice. Sure, her breasts were average in size, but that was hardly a concern.

With her combination of beauty and allure, no man could resist if she made a move. And I was no exception, of course.

That's why I speculated that perhaps the reason he hadn't laid a finger on Charlotte was because he couldn't. My first theory revolves around him being the cult leader of the Eclipse. According to Gabrielle, the Eclipse had a history of kidnapping numerous women, particularly unmarried ones—who, by implication, were likely virgins.

None of these women ever returned, leading me to suspect they were sacrificial offerings to appease some malevolent deity or ritual. Virgin sacrifices aren't uncommon in this world. Just like in my world, such dark practices find their place here. That's probably why he avoided touching Charlotte—because he needed her to remain chaste.

My second speculation is... well, Sesillian might actually be gay. It's just a gut feeling I have, but there's a chance it's true.

Those are my two speculations.

Hearing this solidified my initial suspicion. Yet, I couldn't shake off the question of why Sesillian singled out Charlotte. The Eclipse had paused their kidnappings for a stretch, only to resume their operations targeting Charlotte exclusively. According to Gabrielle's intel, there had been no further sightings of the Eclipse since their botched attempt to abduct her.

What made Sesillian so fixated on Charlotte? Was it her uniqueness, or perhaps her royal lineage? I recalled that Charlotte's late mother was a former princess who perished giving birth to her. Could that be Sesillian's motive?

It was a pity, however, that Charlotte was no longer a virgin. This detail meant the Eclipse's scheme had already been foiled by me. Knowing I had outmaneuvered that cult filled me with a deep sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

After listening for a while, I heard the disturbing sound of a wet plop, as if flesh had burst. It seemed Professor Rose's captive had been killed before revealing more.

I stopped listening and stretched. Simultaneously, a woman appeared beside me and immediately took a knee. Her name is Krista, a member of the Shadows. Her skill is probably the most overpowered I've ever seen: Sensory Manipulation. Just the name hints at its strength, but if you still doubt it, allow me to explain.

Essentially, she has complete control over her senses and those of others. She wielded authority over sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste, balance, and pain, granting her the ability to manipulate them at will. She could heighten sensations to exhilarating levels, diminish them to near non-existence, or entirely erase them temporarily.

In addition, she possessed the formidable capability to shield herself from overwhelming stimuli and induce illusions that could deceive even the keenest minds. She could inflict or alleviate pain at her discretion—able to nullify suffering within herself while intensifying agony in her adversaries.

Her skill was nothing short of overwhelming and extraordinarily versatile.

However, there were limitations to her abilities. She could only affect those within a 50-meter radius centered around herself. Despite this constraint, the power she wielded was undeniable.

All the events orchestrated at Professor Rose's were orchestrated by me. I was aware that she was an agent of the Administrators assigned to investigate the Eclipse. Gabrielle provided valuable insights into the professors I targeted, aiding in gathering information about their interests and activities.

Discovering her status as an agent wasn't difficult given Gabrielle's information gathering. It bordered on stalking, but obtaining her remarkably useful skill necessitated such actions.

With thorough investigations on all concert attendees, we discovered one was a former cult member. I had Krista use her Sensory Manipulation to deceive Professor Rose into believing her Intuition had guided her. Krista then led him to the man, and the rest unfolded seamlessly. It was smoother than I expected.

Now armed with some intel, however minimal, on the cult, I await the right moment to strike and eradicate them from the kingdom. My first step is to neutralize Charlotte completely so she becomes mine.

And then, I'd bring down Sesillian, using Charlotte herself. Just the thought of it nearly made me laugh.

I glanced at Krista and motioned for her to stand up, which she did.

"Good job," I said.

"For you, Master, I'll do anything," she replied.

"Now, shall we move on to the next step?" I suggested.

"Yes, Master," she said, then vanished from sight. She likely used her skill to completely nullify her presence and slip away. That skill was seriously overpowered.

Now, all I have to do is wait. Soon enough, Rose will be mine.

Arianne's POV

The distant music was filling my ears, creating an eerie soundtrack as I closed the store with my father. The evening shadows lengthened, signaling the end of the day. We were almost done, the last few tasks dragging on, when a strange sensation made me freeze.

I ducked instinctively, my heart pounding, and felt the rush of air as something whizzed just above my head. My pulse raced, adrenaline surging through my veins. I turned back and saw them— figures silhouetted against the darkening sky, perched on the rooftop like predatory birds. Their eyes gleamed with intent, and in their hands, they held firearms, glinting ominously under the dim streetlights.

"We're the Royal Knights, and we've received intel that you two are tied to the rebel group Silver Blades! Anyone colluding with insurgents is labeled a traitor to the kingdom, and that's high treason punishable by death! So, whether you surrender or not, you're facing execution! I suggest you surrender to make it easier on yourselves!"

The Royal Knights had somehow caught wind of this? How? I was certain no one could have possibly known we were associated with the Silver Blades.

"We're not involved with that damn rebel group! What the hell are you talking about?!"

"Quit bullshitting! We've got solid intel that you're one of them! Want us to shove the evidence in your face?!"

Fuck! Did someone betray us? But who? No, dwelling on that was pointless. There was a traitor among us. I had braced myself for this moment, knowing we might be exposed sooner or later...

As I contemplated this, my eyes fell upon my father. He lay slumped over, eyes wide with shock, blood oozing from a gaping wound in his forehead. Yes, blood dripped steadily from that hole in his forehead. His eyes were devoid of life. He was dead.

Chapter 222: Idol Debut (5)

My father had been killed. I could sense his life had slipped away unknowingly. Gritting my teeth, I activated my skill and ran. Even though I wanted to confront those knights for taking my father's life, I knew there was nothing I could do. Those knights were experts at neutralizing skills and magic. They were the anti-skill and anti-magic unit.

My skill only allowed me to temporarily evade their sight, but I knew they would capture me soon enough. I wasn't going down without a fight, though. I wanted to survive, to seek vengeance against those who took my parents' lives. With my father gone, it fell to me to avenge my mother's suffering at the hands of the those who abused her. I also swore to avenge my father's killer.

To achieve that, I needed to flee for now.

"You think you can slip away using your skill, huh? Too bad we've got someone who can see right through it."

Suddenly, a chill ran down my spine as I felt eyes fixated on me. It was unsettling because once I activated my skill, I should have been completely undetectable. I was like a ghost in the shadows. But those knights had clearly done their homework. The damn traitor must have spilled every detail about us, including our unique skill, allowing them to prepare for every eventuality.

The person staring at me now likely possessed a skill that pierced through illusions and detected invisible beings. It was the perfect foil to my skill.

Suddenly, a projectile hurtled towards me with deadly intent. I twisted desperately to evade it, but my movement was too slow, too delayed. The projectile slammed into my side, tearing through flesh and causing searing pain to ripple through me.

"Kuh...!"

Despite the agony, I didn't dare to halt. Stopping meant certain death, and I wasn't ready to meet my end just yet. There were countless unfinished tasks weighing on my mind, things that still needed to be done in this world. So, with gritted teeth and adrenaline pumping, I pushed forward, racing away as swiftly as my legs could carry me.

I managed to hide myself somehow, but the knights were still hot on my tail. Blood was gushing from my wounds, and I could feel a lot of it draining away. My consciousness was fading fast. I wanted to heal myself with magic, but using mana would give away my position to the knights. All I could do was apply pressure to the wound and hope to stop the bleeding.

"She can't have gotten far with that injury. Search every corner. Shoot on sight!"

The alley was dark, lit only by sporadic flickers of firelight as the knights continued their relentless search. Whenever I sensed a lull in their presence, I'd swiftly move to a new hiding spot. Staying put would mean certain capture, especially with the trail of blood betraying my every move. I had to keep on the move, always one step ahead.

Eventually, exhaustion caught up with me. I stumbled into an alleyway and collapsed face-first onto the ground. My consciousness slipped away, slipping beyond my grasp.

"Damn it..." I muttered to myself, attempting to rise but failing miserably, crashing back down to the cold pavement. My blood flowed freely, draining me of both strength and consciousness.

Rose's POV

"Thank you all for joining us tonight and listening to our songs!" exclaimed Erica, leader of the Starry Knights, her energy infectious as she beamed with a radiant smile. "I hope you'll keep enjoying our music and supporting us. We love you all!"

It was a shame that I had spent most of the concert on high alert for potential attacks from the Eclipse, unable to fully immerse myself in the experience. Still, I suppose the fact that no attacks occurred was a stroke of luck as well.

Now that the concert is over, people are starting to leave the venue, buzzing with residual excitement. Many are still grinning ear to ear, thrilled to have finally seen the girls they admired on their smartphones perform live. Fanboys and fangirls are everywhere, reveling in the afterglow of the show.

Unlike them, though, no matter how much I liked their songs, I couldn't enjoy it as much because of this job. If it weren't for my parents forcing me to work for the Administrators to earn my freedom, I wouldn't even be doing this. No matter how thrilling being an agent might seem, there are no perks to it. It's just a fancy way of being a slave to the Administrators.

"The performance was pretty good. I'm not usually into music, but even I enjoyed it," Irene remarked.

"Yeah, I liked it too," I replied.

"Is something bothering you? I've noticed you keep looking around, like you're on guard. Is your intuition acting up again?"

"Nah, I'm not sensing anything now," I assured her. "But did you enjoy the show?"

"Well, I didn't expect to enjoy it as much as I did," Irene admitted.

"That's good," I said, grinning widely. Even though I didn't get to enjoy the concert as much as I wanted, at least Irene did. Finally, I had someone to chat about these things with. No one at our workplace seemed to care about music, or even romance for that matter. I was itching to have someone to discuss these topics with.

"Oh, I completely forgot," Irene chimed in abruptly. "I have some urgent tasks related to the materials needed for next semester, so I won't be joining you for drinks. I know you're planning to hit the bar, but I'll have to pass this time. I have more pressing matters to attend to. You should probably start preparing for the upcoming semester too, instead of just goofing off."

"Nah, I'd rather enjoy myself. My students don't need textbooks to learn. They thrive on hands-on training," I asserted.

"You really should take it more seriously. Even in martial arts, understanding the basics is crucial. Remember Professor Hericks? He skipped teaching sword fundamentals, and it led to a serious incident," Irene warned

How could she still remember something so ancient? But well, I remember it vividly too. That incident happened when we were in our first year at the academy. The fourth year students got into a brawl that escalated into a bloody battle royal, resulting in the deaths of four students. The Professor got fired because of it.

"Don't worry about that. I make sure my students never even think about that. Not with my fists around."

"Your discipline is pretty strict sometimes."

"If I don't emphasize how serious and potentially dangerous studying martial arts can be, they won't grasp the gravity of it. It's important for them to understand that martial arts isn't just a game you can play anywhere with anyone."

"Well, that was profound," Irene remarked. "I never knew you could think like that."

"I wouldn't be a professor if I couldn't," I replied.

After a while, we finally made it to the venue exit.

"Alright then, I'm heading out now. See you tomorrow. Oh, and try not to drink too much."

"I won't," I assured her.

With that, we parted ways.

The clattering of tankards echoed through the pub, accompanied by the lively music of the band playing upfront. Seated alone in a dim corner, I immersed myself in gulping down drinks and devouring chunks of meat whenever they came my way.

This was my only escape from the stress of my job. During this brief respite, there was no pressure. All I felt was pure bliss.

However, that bliss was about to be shattered.

"Hey, lady, mind if I join you for a drink?" a man with a sly grin said. From his rugged appearance, he looked like an adventurer or possibly a mercenary. "I hate to see a lady like you drinking all alone."

Just my luck—a guy ready to spoil my evening. Glancing around, I noticed several men ogling me with hungry eyes. It was clear I'd become their target.

I sighed audibly. "I prefer my own company, so no," I replied firmly.

"Aw, come on now, no need to be so uptight. I ain't looking for trouble, just some good company. What do you say?"

I could hear the sinister chuckles of the men eyeing me.

"Look, do you not understand the word 'no'? Or are you too dumb to get it?"

"You're really something else. Can't believe someone like you ended up in this dive. What luck," he sneered. "Makes me want to wipe that scowl off your face and replace it with pure pleasure."

That did it. I snapped. My right foot shot out, connecting squarely with his face. He went flying towards the band, crashing through the wall with a loud smash.

"Fuck! That crazy woman just kicked our leader! You think we're gonna let you get away with that?!"

I launched the tankard right at that asshole's face. It smashed into him with a satisfying crash, the shards scattering as he staggered back.

Before anyone could react, I was already springing towards the next target. My fist struck his face with a solid thud, sending him reeling, and then a swift kick to his gut doubled him over.

"You assholes ruined my day. Now I'm gonna make damn sure I ruin all of yours," I snarled, cracking my knuckles menacingly.

Chapter 223: Rose, The Green-haired Demon (1)

Rose's POV

Men surrounded me, their eyes blazing with fury as if I'd just slaughtered one of their own.

One of them stepped forward, cautiously closing the distance. He'd witnessed how brutally I'd taken down their leader, so his apprehension was justified. Clutched in his hand was a knife, glinting menacingly under the dim pub lights. I knew he didn't plan to kill me—not outright. The blade was a psychological weapon, meant to make me feel threatened and vulnerable.

Humans have an instinctive fear of weapons, often trembling and losing their nerve in their presence. He was counting on that fear to give him the upper hand.

Unfortunately for them, a mere knife posed no threat to me.

As he closed in, he thrust his hand forward, the knife aimed directly at me. I swiftly seized his hand, yanking him towards me with force. With a swift and deliberate motion, I used my knee to snap his arm.

"Agh!"

The knife clattered loudly to the floor. With his arm now broken, emitting a sickening crunch, I deftly maneuvered under it, positioning him behind me. In one fluid motion, I hoisted him over my shoulder and hurled him back toward his gang.

The men stared at me in shock, their eyes wide with disbelief. I grinned wickedly and beckoned them forward with a taunting gesture.

They exchanged uncertain glances before charging at me. Six of them, all at once. The first two wielded knives, the next two were unarmed, and the last two were conjuring magic.

The magic users hurled fireballs in my direction. With a swift motion, I conjured a Water Shield, dousing their flames.

"Raaaah!"

The knife-wielder seized the moment to lunge at my back. I spun around, striking his wrist and sending the knife clattering to the ground. Using my legs, I ensnared his arm, rolling to the floor and flinging him aside with a powerful toss.

"Aggghh!"

I rolled again, quickly finding my footing. As another man attempted to knife me, I grabbed his hand, yanking him toward me and delivering a brutal elbow strike to his head.

"Ghhh?!"

The man crumpled to the ground, out cold.

The magic users hurled more fireballs in my direction. With a swift motion, I slashed through the flames barehanded, dispersing them. Their eyes widened in shock. Seizing the moment, I grabbed a nearby chair and flung it at them. The first magic user took the full brunt of the chair, which shattered upon impact. The second one, stunned, quickly recovered and launched another fireball.

I snatched another chair, spinning to build momentum before releasing it with all my might. The chair flew through the air and collided with the second magic user, sending him flying backward. The chair splintered into pieces.

"Fuck, this woman's trouble," one of them grumbled.

"I know that fighting style. And that hair... That's the Green-haired demon! The one who took down a stray dragon barehanded!"

The guy who spoke clearly knew his stuff. He was spot on. I had earned that reputation. Back in my adventuring days, I faced off against a rogue dragon and emerged victorious. Though it had been a long time, my moniker, the Green-haired demon, still echoed among some circles. It was a modest nickname, but one that I had come to embrace.

"Come on, now. Don't be shy. I can take all of you at once," I taunted.

The men didn't move, just staring at me in fear. It looked like they finally realized they were up against someone they shouldn't have messed with.

"Tsk. Assholes," I muttered.

I couldn't go back to drowning myself in booze after that brawl. The taste of alcohol would just turn bitter now. So, I made my way out of the pub, leaving behind the mess. I wasn't about to pay for any of the damage. There's an unwritten rule among adventurers: whoever starts the fight foots the bill for damages, no matter who actually caused them. As far as I was concerned, I wasn't the instigator.

They were the ones who pushed me to the edge.

Stepping into the cool night air, I felt its refreshing touch against my skin, a stark contrast to the heated chaos I left inside.

"Now, where should I go? Going back home doesn't quite sit right with me." I retrieved a cigarette from my breast pocket, conjured a flame with a flick of fire magic, and nestled it between my lips. Inhaling deeply, I savored the sharp drag before releasing a billowing exhale of smoke. "I'm not ready to head back just yet. Looks like I'll need to find another watering hole to drown my troubles."

I strolled through the night, smoke billowing from my cigarette with each step. The dimly lit streets cast long shadows, adding to the somber atmosphere. As I ambled along, lost in thought, a sudden sensation washed over me.

"Hey, mind coming out of your hiding spot? If you're gonna radiate that much bloodlust, hiding's pointless," I called out.

The figure emerged from the alley, clad head to toe in black. From the curves, it was clear she was a woman. Though we hadn't started fighting yet, her presence exuded danger.

"Good instincts, as expected of someone working for the Administrators," she remarked.

"Who are you?" I asked.

The woman pulled back her glove slightly, revealing a half-moon tattoo on her wrist—the mark of the Eclipse.

"You've done well, uncovering one of our former members and learning about our organization," she said coolly. "Unfortunately, the Cult Leader doesn't tolerate loose ends. That's why we had to eliminate the man. And now, for knowing too much, you're next."

"I see," I replied calmly. "So, you're the one who's going to take me out?"

"That's right. Here and now, you're going to be taken out," she declared.

"Are you certain you can kill me?" I challenged.

"Unfortunately, yes," she replied confidently. "You may be called the Green-haired Demon, but I'm sure you won't be much of a challenge for me."

"And how can you be so sure about that?" I retorted. "Why don't we settle it right here, right now? Sound like a plan?"

I could see a sinister grin spread across the woman's face from beneath her mask. "Sounds like a thrill," she remarked. "I've heard tales of your god-like prowess in martial arts, but I'm no stranger to the same league. This might just be your ultimate challenge yet, don't you think?"

"You're really talking yourself up," I countered. "While your skills may be impressive, I'm unmatched. No one comes close to besting me."

I readied myself for the impending clash, my fists clenched tightly, imbued with a swirling aura of mana that drew in the energy from the surroundings. It crackled with power, a testament to years of honing my martial prowess and mastering the art of mana manipulation.

"I see you're no slouch in mana manipulation," she acknowledged with a hint of respect. "Impressive for someone known for taking down a dragon single-handedly. Yet, even with such power, you'll find it lacking against me."

Suddenly, a shiver shot up my spine like an electric jolt. The woman drew in mana from the surrounding atmosphere, her arm engulfed in a swirling vortex of energy that seemed to warp the very air around us. The sheer concentration of power was staggering, almost suffocating in its intensity. I couldn't fathom how someone could command such a vast amount of mana and focus it into a singular point.

"Now, let's see who truly reigns in martial arts."

She assumed a stance that betrayed no weaknesses, every movement precise and deliberate. A deep-seated unease settled in my veins, a foreboding sense of impending defeat unlike anything I'd ever felt before. It was a profound overwhelm, a realization that this encounter could be my most challenging yet.

The fight began with a sudden burst of speed from her. She launched herself off the ground, hurtling towards me like a bullet. Her movements were swift and calculated. As she closed in, she threw a punch aimed directly at me. Reacting quickly, I bent my body backward, narrowly evading the blazing fist. The intensity of her mana was palpable, radiating heat that singed my skin.

Was she also channeling elemental forces into her mana? This woman was undoubtedly a formidable opponent, a force to be reckoned with.

After dodging her initial attack, I seized the opportunity to counter with an uppercut. She deftly leaned back, narrowly avoiding my fist which swung through empty air. Reacting swiftly, she retaliated with a sweeping kick aimed at my feet, but I managed to tumble backward, avoiding the brunt of the blow.

Before I could regain my balance, she closed the distance in an instant, her fist poised to strike. I quickly formed an X with my arms, shielding my face as her fist collided with my defense. The sheer force of the impact pushed me back, though it didn't cause much pain. Taking that hit straight to the face would have been a different story altogether.

"Nice reflexes," she complimented.

"You too. I guess you were right. This might just be my toughest challenge yet."

With that, we both charged at each other again.

Chapter 224: Rose, The Green-haired Demon (2)

A fist shot towards me, and I dodged just in time, feeling the rush of air as it narrowly missed my face. Before I could catch my breath, another punch came at me with blinding speed. I ducked, the force of her swing passing harmlessly overhead. Seizing the moment, I reached out to grab her arm, but she swiftly retracted it, evading my grasp.

She then lunged, trying to grab my head and smash my skull against her knee, but I managed to evade her by stepping back just in time.

She charged at me with relentless speed, closing the distance in an instant. Gathering my wits, I swiftly countered with a sweeping kick aimed at her side, intending to catch her off guard. But she reacted with lightning reflexes, blocking my kick with her forearms, the impact reverberating through the air.

Not wasting a moment, I spun around, launching another kick towards her head. She anticipated my move, deflecting the blow once more with her arm. In a swift maneuver, she seized my extended leg, attempting to hurl me off balance. Digging my heels into the ground, I anchored myself firmly, refusing to be lifted.

With determination, I twisted my body, entwining both legs around her arm. Using my weight and momentum, I spun low to the ground, aiming to unbalance her and send her crashing down. Yet, she countered my effort with unwavering stability, standing firm against my maneuver.

I quickly disengaged, stepping away and resetting myself in a fighting stance. She cracked her neck with a sharp tilt, then mirrored my stance, her eyes locked onto mine with fierce determination.

We charged at each other again, our feet kicking up clouds of dust. As we closed the gap, we unleashed a relentless barrage of punches. Some were blocked, others dodged, and a few landed squarely on our faces, each hit stinging with raw intensity. But we didn't stop. Instead, our punches came faster and harder.

The sheer force of our impacts pushed us back, our feet skidding against the ground as we struggled to maintain our footing. Yet, neither of us relented, driven by an unyielding resolve to outlast the other.

However, her punches were more powerful than mine, and I realized that continuing this barrage would only end in defeat for me. Desperate, I focused all my mana into one hand, concentrating it until it became a potent force. I aimed a strike at her, hoping to turn the tide of the fight.

Unfortunately, she anticipated my move. She caught my arm, her grip like iron, and held me firmly in place. Before I could react, she swung her fist at me with incredible force. The impact was so intense, it felt like my neck was on the verge of snapping.

I managed to break free from her grip, stumbling back a few steps. Something felt wrong inside my mouth. Rolling my tongue around, I found something hard. Spitting it out, I saw a mix of blood and my tooth hit the ground. I glanced at the tooth for a moment before wiping my mouth with the back of my hand, smearing blood across my knuckles.

"You certainly hit me pretty good," I said, my voice gritty.

"You're not bad yourself," she replied, a smirk playing on her lips. "You've landed some solid punches too."

"Not as good as yours," I admitted, my body aching from the exchange.

This was bad. My vision blurred, and my legs felt like they might give out at any moment. Each punch had left a brutal mark, and my body screamed in agony. I could feel myself teetering on the brink of collapse. The will to stand still burned within me, but I knew with every fiber of my being that another exchange like that would be the end for me.

I never thought I'd find myself losing in a battle of pure martial arts. I had always prided myself on being the best. Since discovering that my skill wasn't particularly useful in combat, I had poured all my energy into strengthening my physical prowess and mastering martial arts.

I graduated in the silver class, which was a far cry from the bronze class but still a step below the coveted gold. This achievement allowed me to chase my dream of becoming a professor, the profession I truly desired. But my family had other plans. My parents were renowned magic knights, and my brother followed in their footsteps. They expected me to do the same.

It was the unspoken rule for those born into a family of magic knights.

When I failed to reach the gold class, they stripped me of my last name, erasing my identity. I was forced to serve my own family as a personal knight. My only shot at freedom was to become an agent for the Administrators, a deal I had no choice but to accept.

During my time as a personal knight for my own family, I had nothing. The salary was pitifully low, barely a silver each day. It was enough to scrape by, but it was a struggle I found hard to endure. Luckily, I had a small escape during those days — reading books, especially romance novels. They were my only solace.

Once, I had daydreamed about embodying those heroines from the books — the ones rescued by their heroes, swept off their feet by the main character. I craved for a dashing man to appear and pluck me from the depths of my family's control. But as countless days turned into months, my longing remained unfulfilled.

Gradually, I began to realize that perhaps my story wasn't meant to follow the typical damsel in distress narrative. Maybe I was destined for something different — to forge my path as an independent heroine, standing strong and relying on no one. The idea took root that I might be destined to walk this path alone.

I didn't need a man anyway. I could fight solo and live independently. At this stage, I wasn't expecting anyone to sweep me off my feet or come to my rescue. That would be too cliché, as they say.

I cracked my knuckles, then my neck, and stretched my legs.

"Looks like you can still fight. I thought you'd be down by now after that blow to your face," she remarked.

"Yeah, that took a lot out of me, but I'm far from done yet. We're just getting started!"

I dashed towards her and began by swinging my leg at her head for a kick. She seemed caught off-guard by my speed, but quickly composed herself and blocked my attack. Without hesitation, I followed up with my other leg, spinning in midair to aim another kick at her head. She managed to dodge by stepping back.

I didn't give her time to breathe. I swung my fist at her relentlessly. It was like I was attacking without thought, abandoning technique for pure aggression. By attacking this way, I kept her guessing about what would come next.

The woman countered my onslaught with remarkable poise, using her arms to shield her face from the barrage. My attempt to break through her defenses with an uppercut was met with swift adjustment, as she deftly shifted her arm to block it. With each passing moment, my confidence waned, yet I refused to back down.

Despite the mounting odds, I pushed myself to the brink, unleashing a relentless storm of punches upon her.

"Ugh, this shit's getting boring. Let's cut this crap," she muttered.

The moment I heard that, my vision suddenly shifted, and I found myself gazing at the night sky. It felt like I was floating, weightless and untethered. No, it wasn't just a feeling—it was real. I was literally off the ground. What had just happened in that blink of an eye, or even faster than that, was an idea I could not comprehend.

Then, my body crashed violently to the ground, and a sharp pain shot through me as if my bones were being crushed under a heavy weight.

"Gaaaaaaaaah!"

What had she just done to me? I couldn't comprehend it. The attack was executed with lightning speed, leaving me no time to react or even see it coming.

"It's way too easy. And here I thought you would put up more of a fight, being the skilled martial artist you are. You're a disgrace to martial artists," she taunted. "No martial artist would lose composure like you, or make rookie mistakes like that."

She approached me with a predatory calm, her grip on my chin firm and unyielding as she stared into my eyes.

"I had hoped for more fight from you. What a disappointment," she uttered coldly. "Oh well. Time to die."

I shut my eyes.

It was dark. I felt weightless, as if I were flying. Was this the sensation of dying? Or was I ascending to the place where the dead rest?

I slowly opened my eyes and saw the night sky above me, moving. No, it was me who was being moved. Someone was carrying me. That someone... resembled the dashing prince I had always hoped would sweep me off my feet.

Chapter 225: Rose, The Green-haired Demon (3)

Did he just save me? It seemed so. He was leaping effortlessly from roof to roof, carrying me securely in his arms. I looked up at his face: youthful, with black hair and intense red eyes. His features were strikingly handsome, almost mesmerizing. The longer I stared, the harder it became to look away.

My heart pounded loudly, echoing in my ears, and I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks. What was this feeling? It was so strange and overwhelming.

He glanced down at me while we soared over the rooftops, "Don't worry. If you're being targeted by the Eclipse, that means I'm your ally," he said, his voice steady and reassuring.

He knew about the Eclipse, and he declared himself my ally. Did that mean he was actively battling them?

As I thought about it, his face struck me with familiarity. Suddenly, it clicked—he was the student who had come to Charlotte Sierra's rescue and fought off the Eclipse members.

It was Leon, the skillless academy student from Milham Academy.

"Let's get somewhere safe where she can't find us," he suggested. "You're unlucky to have someone like her as your enemy. She's the worst adversary you could face."

That's right. It hadn't occurred to me until now, but that woman had clearly been toying with me. She hadn't been fighting at her full potential at all. That's why when she launched her final attack, I was so stunned. It was then I realized she hadn't taken me seriously at all. Somehow, that left me feeling disappointed.

After what seemed like an eternity, we reached what appeared to be an abandoned church. He gently lowered me to the ground. As I stood there, no longer cradled in his arms that had unexpectedly brought me comfort, a pang of sadness washed over me. I couldn't fathom why I felt this way.

"She won't find us here," he said, glancing around the old church. He then looked at me. "Let me heal you."

"O-Oh. Thanks," I stammered.

He began to heal me with his magic, and the pain rapidly dissipated. His skill with healing magic was impressive, and the way he concentrated his power showed just how proficient he was.

"I didn't think you had the guts to face off against someone of that caliber, Professor Rose," he remarked. "Considering your martial arts skills, it's no wonder you've caught the eye of such a powerful Eclipse member. But you should dig deeper into their background. Many of them are lethal."

"You seem well-informed about that cult," I countered, studying him with suspicion. "And judging by your rooftop acrobatics earlier and your escape from that formidable woman, you're no stranger to physical prowess either. You're not just a skilless student, are you?"

"Believe me, Professor," he said with conviction. "I am about as skilless as they come."

"Then why are you tangling with the Eclipse? I've received credible reports that you faced off against Eclipse members who were kidnappers and rescued Charlotte Sierra. I've got solid evidence of that incident. My source is rock solid. If you don't clarify your connection with the Eclipse, I'll take this straight to the Administrators.

They could strip you of your Milham Academy student status, and worst-case scenario, you might end up in cuffs. If you want to avoid that fate, spill everything to me."

I had no intention of following through with my threat. It was merely a tactic to uncover his true motives. I couldn't bring myself to betray someone who had just saved me from certain death. I wasn't that heartless. Besides, if I did report him, it wouldn't just be expulsion and handcuffs awaiting him.

The Administrators didn't afford any special privileges to the skillless—they viewed them as less than human, mere insects. Even those with seemingly useless skills were treated as inferior. I shudder to think what might happen if I turned him in. He could face execution for all I know.

"I don't really have any deal with them," Student Leon said quietly. "One of the girls they kidnapped used to be a close friend of mine, that's it. I just want to find her, or if she's gone, I want to make them pay."

His words hit me hard. I never expected such a revelation from him. Part of me doubted his sincerity, but his eyes showed raw emotion. I felt a pang of remorse for questioning him in the first place.

The chances of the girl he was searching for being alive after all this time were slim to none. The Eclipse used females as sacrifices to feed the evil god they worshipped, making survival nearly impossible for them.

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said.

"Don't be," he replied. "It's only natural for you to ask."

His reassuring smile somehow tugged at my heart.

"Anyway, it seems like the Eclipse have their eye on you now," he remarked, his voice tinged with concern. "I doubt that woman will come after you again so soon, and she's probably not the type to sneak in and assassinate someone in their sleep, so you should be safe for the time being."

"You're worrying about the wrong person," I retorted. "You should focus on yourself. What can a skillless guy like you do against those powerful Eclipse members?"

"I think I can handle myself just fine," he responded.

I closed the distance between us, gripping his collar with urgency. "Are you absolutely certain about that? Your words sound like they belong to someone who's willing to risk it all for vengeance," I pressed, my voice edged with concern. "You need to value your life more."

"I'm not planning on throwing my life away," he retorted firmly.

"Even so, you must tread carefully. You're young. You can't afford to fixate solely on revenge," I insisted, my grip tightening slightly. I couldn't shake the fear that gripped me, a sense that if I didn't impress upon him the importance of caution, something terrible might befall him.

"Well, if you really feel passionate about it, then I will be careful."

"Good," I replied. It was then I realized just how close my face was to his. I immediately let go of his collar, stepping back. "A-Anyway, I didn't expect you to have such physical prowess. And judging by your physique, you're no slouch either. I can tell you're practicing and training your body well."

"Well, I've been at it since I was a kid, but martial arts never quite clicked for me. Swords and magic were more my thing," he explained.

I studied him intently, taking in his demeanor. "Is that so?" I replied, my gaze assessing his form. "Alright then, I'll take you under my wing and train you in martial arts. Consider yourself lucky; I don't usually take on disciples."

"Uh, thanks, I guess," he stammered, clearly taken aback. "But isn't this a bit sudden?"

"What? Better to start now than later. You're still young, full of potential. Give it five years, and you'll be just as good as me, guaranteed."

I saw real potential in this young man. He had the physique for it, and I could envision him reaching the caliber of a Sword Saint. Skilless though he was, skills only contributed so much to a person's strength—more like quirks than true strength. Real strength came from physical, mental, and magical prowess. Skills were just perks of that.

We lingered inside the decrepit church for what felt like an eternity, but no signs of pursuit emerged. It appeared that the woman had truly abandoned her chase. Perhaps she had deemed us unworthy of further effort.

With a sense of relief, Student Leon and I exited the derelict sanctuary. Despite the absence of immediate danger, weariness weighed heavily upon me. My body yearned for the numbing embrace of alcohol.

"Well, Professor," Leon remarked, "I guess I'll see you next semester."

"Yeah," I said. As we started walking in opposite directions, something compelled me to turn back. "Hey, Student Leon."

He stopped and turned around.

"Mind joining me for a drink?"

I hadn't a clue why I blurted that out or why I'd ask a student to share a drink with me. It seemed absurd.

"You know what, never mind," I said, turning away.

"I want to go with you," he said, his voice firm.

"Huh?"

"I want to have a drink with you, Professor," he repeated, his eyes locking onto mine.

For some reason, my heart started pounding in my chest, a rhythm so intense it felt like it might burst. The world around me seemed to blur, everything narrowing down to just the two of us. It felt surreal, like I was caught in a dream, and the intensity of it was almost overwhelming. My emotions surged, nearly compelling me to cry.

This was unlike anything I had ever experienced before, and I couldn't explain it.

We went to a nearby pub from that old church and settled in with a few drinks. The conversation started with martial arts, which we both were passionate about, but soon shifted to romance novels. I couldn't help myself; I blurted out everything I knew about them, excitedly recommending all my favorite titles. To my surprise, Leon listened intently the entire time.

Normally, my coworkers would tune me out whenever I started talking about romance novels, but not Leon. He was genuinely interested, even sharing some of his favorite novels with me.

He was a breath of fresh air.

Chapter 226: Rose, The Green-haired Demon (4)

Leon's POV

Making Professor Rose mine was a straightforward mission. First, I needed to get her interested in me enough for her domination requirement to become apparent.

I orchestrated a scenario earlier where Krista and Rose engaged in a fierce fight. As Professor Rose neared defeat, teetering on the brink of being seriously injured, I intervened swiftly to rescue her. The intensity of the moment wasn't lost on me, and I wasn't certain how far this bold move would take me. However, it proved effective as it ignited her curiosity and interest in me.

I knew it was pretty fucked up to set that up, but I didn't hesitate. I needed the skill Rose had, and I'd do whatever it took to get it.

I managed to catch Professor Rose's interest, and her first requirement was for us to share a drink.

I had no clue how long this would take, but I was resolute. I would make her mine, no matter what.

Rose's POV

I finally managed to pour myself a drink, and it felt damn satisfying. Having a conversation with someone who shares your interests is always a blast, especially over drinks. It was hands down the best drinking session I'd ever had.

"You should definitely catch a theatre adaptation of Romeo and Juliet. It's really something. Well, you won't see exactly what I saw back then, but every theatre group that's taken on the play so far has been absolutely stellar! I don't think there's a new adaptation coming soon, but when it happens, I'll be sure to let you know so we can go together," I suggested enthusiastically.

"Sure, I've got no problem with that," he said with a relaxed grin.

"Oh, and you should definitely check out 'The World in the Future.' It's not a romance novel—more like science fiction, if anything—but it's so damn good. It delves into what our world might look like in another hundred years. It's a fascinating read, painting vivid pictures of future possibilities and advancements.

Honestly, it's thrilling to dive into something that feels like a glimpse into what could actually happen down the line."

I kept rambling on about novels, diving into every detail and plot twist I could recall. I knew so many stories that I felt like I could talk forever. Then it hit me—he might be getting bored. We'd been drinking and talking about books the entire time.

"Ah, I'm sorry. This is probably boring you now, right? Me going on about novels and stuff?"

"Nah, not at all," he said, leaning back with a curious look in his eyes. "Actually, I'm pretty intrigued that you're into this kind of stuff, Professor. I've always seen you as the strict one, the one who delivers the harshest lessons to your students. It's surprising—and kind of fascinating—to see this side of you."

"Ugh. So you think of me that way too, huh? My evaluations that the student wrote on me was always that, that I was strict and my lessons were too hard." I said.

"Well, even though I've never taken a class with you myself, I've heard tales about how strict you can be—so strict that you've even ended up injuring your students. It sent a shiver down my spine when I first heard about a professor like that, especially since you're known for teaching second to fourth years. And then there's your infamous nickname—Green-Haired Demon.

Just the mention of it sends chills down my spine."

"Now you're just teasing," I pouted, feeling a flush of embarrassment. Back then, I didn't mind earning that nickname and being recognized by it. But strangely enough, hearing it from him makes me feel a bit embarrassed.

"Seriously, it's a bit intimidating," he continued, his eyes sparkling with amusement. "But seeing you here, all passionate about novels and just... human, it's kind of fascinating. It's like discovering a hidden side of you that no one gets to see."

I blushed, taking a sip of my drink to hide my face. "Well, even demons need a break," I said with a smirk. "And talking about books is my way of unwinding."

He chuckled, the sound warm and genuine. "I can see that. It's refreshing, honestly. Makes me look at you in a whole new light."

I found it hard to tear my gaze away from his charming laughter, the way his eyes sparkled and his smile lit up his entire face. It was captivating, and I felt a warmth spread through me that wasn't just from the alcohol.

We finally stopped drinking and decided it was time to head home. As we stood up, the world around me seemed to sway. I felt incredibly lightheaded, my legs unsteady beneath me. I was too drunk. Somehow, I'd managed to drink far more than I intended. I'm not usually a lightweight with alcohol, but getting lost in such a great conversation had me knocking back drinks faster than I realized.

"Watch your step, Professor."

The night air hit me like a splash of cold water, but it did little to clear the fog in my head. My thoughts were jumbled, my movements clumsy. I stumbled slightly, feeling the ground tilt beneath my feet. The combination of booze and laughter had me far more intoxicated than I should have been.

"Are you okay, Professor?" Leon asked, his concern evident.

"I'm fine. You might not know this, but I'm a strong drinker," I replied, trying to sound confident.

"You don't move or sound like one right now, though."

"Don't mind me!" I said, waving him off. "How about you? Are you sure you're okay?"

"I honestly feel lightheaded myself," he admitted.

"You're still weak with alcohol," I teased, giving him a playful nudge.

At some point, I stumbled and crashed to the ground.

"Ouch."

"I told you to watch your step."

"Ugh, my hips. I think something's broken," I grimaced.

"Do you want me to use healing magic on it?"

"Nah, it should be fine by tomorrow. It's not that bad. But I do need you to carry me on your shoulders," I said.

Leon gently wrapped his arm around my waist and effortlessly lifted me onto his shoulders, supporting me with ease.

"Anyway, do you want to come to my place for some coffee?" I asked, breaking the silence. "Coffee is good after drinking, you know?"

"I don't think coffee is great to drink after we've had alcohol," he replied, a hint of skepticism in his voice. "But, well, I like the idea."

With that, we headed towards my home. The cool night air brushed against our flushed cheeks, making the world feel a little more real despite the alcohol in our systems.

However, when we actually got there, coffee wasn't the first thing that happened. Before I even realized what was going on, I found myself on top of him. I had no idea how it happened. When I snapped out of it, I was already straddling him. Did I black out somehow?

"Wanna do it?"

Those words slipped from my lips, tinged with a hint of seduction. Truth be told, I'd never been sexual with anyone before. I'd masturbated to some books, but that was the extent of my experience. My knowledge of sex was limited to what I'd read in novels. Besides that, I was completely inexperienced.

"What?" Leon exclaimed.

"Fuck."

My mind was pretty much blacked out, and I wasn't sure if I was in the right state of mind anymore. That word I had just blurted out was something I picked up from books, and it was the last word I intended to use in this situation. Plus, I wasn't prepared for this yet. But my mind was too blank to think clearly.

"I don't think that's a wise idea, considering our position," he said.

That sounded like a good reason. A very good reason to not continue. But...

Suddenly, my vision started swirling, and then I vomited abruptly before blacking out.

In the present...

I'm trying to piece it all together. I think that's what happened. I think we didn't go through with it. Yeah, that's right. I'm almost certain we didn't. Because if we did, that would be a complete disaster!

I mean, if it actually happened, then I just slept with a colleague. That could destroy my professorial career! It would ignite a massive scandal. And I doubt the Administrators would let me keep my job after that. It would mean my parents might force me back into being their personal knight. I absolutely don't want that.

Just think that nothing happened. Absolutely nothing. I just passed out from the alcohol, and in my stupor, I ended up vomiting all over our clothes last night, which is why we woke up naked. The soreness in my lower half is just from stumbling and falling last night, nothing more. Nothing at all happened. That's a relief.

"Thank god I blacked out at the last moment," I muttered to myself. Although, deep down, there was a twinge of disappointment...

Chapter 227: Rose, The Green-haired Demon (5)

I carefully slid out of bed, making sure not to make any noise that might wake Leon. As I stood, I noticed that I wasn't entirely nude; I still had my panties on. I tiptoed to the closet, opened it quietly, and grabbed some clothes. Quickly, I pulled them on.

He might have seen me naked last night when he helped clean up after I vomited, but the thought of being seen like that still made my cheeks burn with embarrassment.

From behind me, I heard Leon groan as he began to stir awake.

Thankfully, I was fully dressed now.

"You finally awake?" I said, rubbing the sleep from my eyes, still feeling groggy myself. "Want some coffee or something?"

Leon blinked, his eyes still heavy with sleep.

"Sure," he replied with a faint smile.

"You've really dug deep into this, huh?" Leon remarked, his gaze fixed on the chart filled with information I had meticulously compiled about the cult. The chart detailed sightings, descriptions of key figures, and maps pinpointing their recent activities.

The information detailing how he had saved Charlotte was prominently displayed.

"You can't look at that," I cautioned him while busy preparing our coffee.

"Why not?"

"I still can't read your mind," I said. "For all I know, you could be an enemy."

"Surely, you wouldn't drink with an enemy or share a bed with one."

"T-That was just..." I stuttered, feeling heat rise to my cheeks. "You have to forget about that. And what I said last night, forget about it too!"

"You know, there's no way I can forget something that steamy, even if I have to work hard for it."

"How about I kick you in the head so you won't remember it permanently?"

"That's just violence, Professor."

Ugh. That was embarrassing. I can't believe I said some embarrassing things last night. Honestly, those words slipped out because I was too drunk to think clearly. If I'd been sober, they wouldn't have even crossed my mind. I got caught up in the moment, and being tipsy only intensified those feelings.

"Anyway, I won't be your enemy, Professor. I have one goal: to annihilate the cult. They're the filth of this kingdom," he declared. "If we let them roam freely, this kingdom will collapse, and countless will suffer. After what that cult did to me, I won't stand for it."

"Is that why you saved Charlotte Sierra?" I inquired.

"You should pay more attention to her, Professor," he retorted. "She might hold the key to this seemingly unsolvable problem."

"Hmm? Charlotte Sierra? Why?"

"Don't you think it's strange that after being silent on kidnappings for years, they suddenly come back and go straight for Charlotte Sierra? And then, after failing, they didn't attempt to snatch anyone else. Doesn't that clearly show they're after Charlotte Sierra specifically?"

"You might be onto something," I replied. "But it's still not concrete proof."

I picked up two steaming cups of coffee, one in each hand, and approached him, offering one.

"I don't think we should throw around accusations without any proof. Maybe I'll dig deeper into her background since you brought it up, but she's not my top priority," I said.

"You're right," he agreed. "But if you hit a dead end in this operation, come talk to me, Professor. I may not be powerful, but I'm damn good at gathering information. I can dig deep in the underground."

"The underground? You've been there?"

"That's where people hungry for information dwell, Professor. It's where those who know everything and trade secrets thrive," he explained knowingly.

The underground society is a den of criminals. It's the criminal underworld, where the lowest of the low thrive. I haven't set foot there myself, but from what I've heard, death is a daily occurrence. Killing and dying are so commonplace that stumbling upon a dead body on the streets doesn't even raise an eyebrow. People there are used to hauling corpses and disposing of them like it's routine.

I can't believe Leon would venture into such a dangerous place.

"Leon, don't go back there," I pleaded. "As easy as it might be to gather information, it's just as easy to end up dead."

"There's no other way to gather intel on the Eclipse except from the underground, Professor."

He was spot-on. All the crucial leads I've pieced together have come from those shady underground sources. Without them, my investigation would have hit a dead end.

"I'm not about to give up hunting the cult just because you say so, Professor," he retorted.

"I can't stop you there, but you've gotta tread carefully. Danger lurks in those depths, you know? Our deaths aren't written in the stars; we never know when it's coming. You could bite the dust today or right after this conversation. That's why I'm urging you to stay vigilant."

"Well, I'm not planning to die anytime soon, so I'll just trust your advice."

"Good," I grinned at him. "I don't want to lose my first protege before I've had a chance to teach him something. If it comes to it, I'd rather you meet your end at my hands."

"That's violence again, Professor."

After we finished our coffee, Leon finally decided to leave my place. Before he walked out, he said to me,

"Professor, I think it would be more beneficial if we teamed up. It's too risky to go solo, especially with so many Eclipse members out there. What do you say?"

I pondered his suggestion. Working together with Leon to take down the cult did seem advantageous. It would increase our safety and leverage our combined understanding of how to handle them. Plus, knowing I had someone like Leon watching my back bolstered my confidence, especially now that the cult was aware of my investigation. But accepting his proposal wasn't easy.

Leon was still young, six years my junior. If I put him in danger or, worst-case scenario, got him killed, it would haunt me forever. Moreover, it was my duty as an agent to protect citizens from the shadows. Bringing him into this would only expose him to danger.

While I pondered over this, Leon reassured, "Don't worry about me, Professor."

His reassurance instantly eased the lingering worry in my chest. Even though his words weren't entirely comforting, somehow, my fears of him ending up dead lessened, no, disappeared completely. I couldn't explain it, but I felt like I could trust him.

"Okay," I nodded, "I'm in, Leon. Let's do this."

"Sure thing," he replied with determination.

Despite my reservations, I knew hesitating wouldn't get us anywhere. It felt like stepping into the unknown, but standing still wasn't an option either. Sometimes, you had to take a risk to make any headway.

Leon's POV

I left Professor Rose's place, stepping out into the open air, when the familiar chime of metal echoed through my mind. Checking my mental checklist, I noted that I had successfully completed two out of the ten requirements needed to fully dominate her. The first was sharing a drink with her, and the second was gaining her agreement to assist in her investigation of the Eclipse.

With each step, I was slowly gaining control over her. The third requirement didn't seem overly challenging, but it remained out of reach for the moment.

Now that I'm collaborating with Professor Rose, I'll feed her as much intel about the cult as I can, but I'll hold back enough to keep crucial details hidden. It's crucial she doesn't discover Sesillian's role as the cult leader too soon, because I need to use him to gain dominance over Charlotte. If Sesillian gets exposed prematurely, I'll lose my opportunity to dominate Charlotte completely.

Just like how it would be impossible for me to dominate Artemis if she loses her virginity early on, not having been deflowered right before her mother, dominating Charlotte would also be out of reach without Sesillian.

I had to handle this situation with utmost care.

"Now then..." I muttered as I checked my phone. Artemis had just sent me a message. "I guess it's time for me to make my next move on her."

Irene's POV

I walked along the path to Rose's house, feeling uneasy. I'd messaged her several times but got no response, which had me worried. I had breakfast and something to ease a potential hangover ready for her.

Rose had a knack for pushing things to the limit; she could drink herself into oblivion without a second thought. She had a reputation for letting loose, and it wouldn't be unlike her to end up in a brawl. She had a quick temper, the kind that could result in broken bones for anyone who crossed her.

I'd known her since our first year at the academy, witnessing firsthand how she could escalate from zero to a hospital visit in no time. It wouldn't be out of character for her to end up in a brawl last night, possibly sending someone to the hospital.

As I approached her house, what—or rather, who—emerged from it shocked me. I knew him well. He had consumed my thoughts for months, a man I couldn't forget. Yes, he was the one I slept once, the one who took my innocence and then never thought of me again. Now, he was leaving my best friend's house.

Chapter 228: To The Great Forest (1)

Leon's POV

It was less than a week before the second semester started, and Artemis and I were gearing up to head to the Great Forest together. The Great Forest sprawled across a vast expanse of the human continent, a land inhabited by demi-humans like dwarves, elves, and more. Renowned as the largest forest in the world, it earned its name—the Great Forest.

Artemis had told me we would visit the Kingdom of Elves before summer vacation ended. With only a week left, now was the time to go. I had my reasons for wanting to go, primarily to fulfill her requirement of deflowering her just before her mother.

Artemis's mother was the queen of the Elves, and Artemis herself was the princess. Currently, the Elven Kingdom faced a critical issue: they had no male elves left, posing a serious threat to their population. While humans and elves could conceive children through cross-racial breeding, it was challenging and fraught with difficulties.

The animosity between humans and elves ran deep; humans viewed elves as mere objects of pleasure, while elves harbored resentment towards humans for their history of kidnapping their kind. This was why Artemis disguised herself as a human—to avoid these prejudices and dangers.

The Great Forest lies far from the Milham Kingdom, a journey we'll undertake on foot.

"It's safer to travel by foot. Humans and Demi-humans have a deep-seated animosity towards each other. If we were to approach in a carriage, those from the Great Forest might see it as a threat and attack," Artemis explained.

I had anticipated such a response. If the inhabitants of the Great Forest caught sight of a carriage heading their way, hostility would likely follow. I was certain of it. Despite their shared past, humans and Demi-humans had become bitter enemies. That reality wouldn't change. Despite their geographical proximity, their enmity persisted.

"By the way, Leon. Why are you bringing someone with you?" Artemis asked, her curiosity piqued.

I glanced at the figure walking alongside us. She was no longer in her maid uniform; instead, she wore a hooded cloak that covered most of her body, even hiding the horns on her head. Despite the cloak, her voluptuous figure was impossible to conceal. The sight was undeniably erotic, much like nuns in habits that cover everything except their generous curves.

It was no wonder priests often lusted after nuns for that very reason.

Maya would be coming with us on this journey for two specific reasons. First, since we're venturing into the Great Forest, I figured it was a good opportunity to bring her along because one of her conditions for

submission was to see her clan again. Second, considering the long trip ahead with no brothels in sight, it was only wise to bring one of my women.

It's like having an onahole with me to avoid getting pent up during the journey. It's a messed-up way of thinking, but Maya actually enjoys being treated like an onahole. She's both a masochist and a sadist, after all.

Why didn't I bring someone who could fight, you ask? Someone like the Shadows, perhaps? Well, the Shadows are currently deep in their mission, gathering crucial information about the cult. Besides, Maya is perfect for this environment, having spent most of her life in the Great Forest.

She's well-versed in its terrain and accustomed to the nomadic lifestyle of her clan, who are known for their constant travels.

"Oh well, considering there won't be a brothel in sight, I figured I'd bring her along," I told Artemis bluntly, not bothering to disguise my intentions.

She gave me a disbelieving look, as though questioning my sanity. "You really brought someone along on this perilous journey just for that reason? Are you serious?"

"Listen, going on a trip for a week without any release is going to be hell for me, you know? It would drive me insane."

"What a ridiculous weakness," she scoffed.

That was just my inner young man bursting with energy speaking, not a weakness but a vital part of who I am. Without this high libido, conquering women would be a challenge. I thrived on this drive.

"Well, if I hadn't brought her along, would you have been the one to satisfy me?" I teased.

"T-There's no way I would do that!" she blurted out, her cheeks flushing deeply. Still in disguise, her ears lacked their usual pointed tips, but I imagined how adorable it would be if they were exposed, turning red to the tips. "B-But if it came down to it, would giving you oral get the job done?"

"I don't think so," Maya remarked coolly. "Master has such an insatiable appetite that one shot wouldn't even scratch the surface. Master have surpassed every limit of what men can cum. Your mouth would be overflowing with cum, and your jaw would ache if you tried to keep up with just blowjobs."

Her smile was gentle enough, but the way she spoke sent a chill down my spine. To be fair, Maya had firsthand experience with my almost limitless libido. She had lost count of how many times she had lost consciousness during our intense fucking sessions.

"Well, I kinda get that..." Artemis remarked, her tone tinged with a mix of curiosity and disbelief. Having witnessed me fucking two women and still being eager for more, she couldn't help but wonder aloud. "I'm still somewhat confused why he brought you along on this journey, though."

"Well, think about it this way. I came with him because I love being dominated by him in sex. And I'm glad he picked me," Maya replied, her smile hinting at a playful satisfaction.

"Whatever," Artemis sighed, seeming to reluctantly accept the situation. She then turned to me, her gaze serious. "If you're gonna do it, just keep it far away from me. I don't want to hear anything."

"Roger that," I nodded knowingly. Deep down, though, I knew Artemis's curiosity would likely get the better of her. Her desire to peek and satisfy her intrigue always outweighed her initial reservations.

We finally arrived at Knowledge City, often hailed as the city of libraries. Everywhere we looked, towering structures dedicated to libraries greeted us, each boasting an impressive collection of books unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

But Knowledge City wasn't just about its vast libraries; it was a hub of learning for various professions such as alchemy, architecture, engineering, craftsmanship, and more.

Among these prestigious institutions, the Milham School of Magic stood out prominently. It was an exclusive school for women, renowned for its rigorous training in magical arts. Often seen as a stepping stone to the renowned Milham Academy, which functioned like a college, this school was where young women honed their magical prowess before advancing to higher education.

"I think we can't push on any further with night closing in. Let's rest here," Artemis suggested, her voice carrying a hint of practicality.

Maya and I nodded in agreement.

We found an inn and secured two rooms. One was designated for Maya and me to share, while Artemis opted for the other. She seemed to anticipate our sexual activities, hence suggesting separate rooms. Well, she wasn't wrong.

Once alone in our room, Maya and I wasted no time. She immediately dropped to her knees and sucked my dick. Her tongue had improved significantly. Where once she was clumsy, now she left no inch untouched.

Her eyes locking with mine as she slobbered on my cock was incredibly lewd. Maya was exceptionally skilled. When she took me deep, I could feel her nose tickling, her tongue flicking the underside of my balls. She slid me effortlessly down her throat, impressively without gagging. Her gaze, begging for dominance, drove me wild.

Unable to resist, I gripped her horns and guided her head, thrusting into her throat with rhythmic force.

Her throat cradled the head of my dick like a warm, inviting embrace. Despite her eyes pleading for domination, tears welled up, adding a vulnerable yet eager intensity to her gaze. But she didn't yield; instead, she seemed to revel in the power exchange.

After what felt like an eternity of building pleasure, a surge of ecstasy rippled through me, starting from my toes and culminating in my groin. With a primal groan, I gripped Maya's horns firmly and pulled her head back, then thrust forward forcefully, releasing my hot, sticky cum deep into her eager esophagus.

The intensity of the release caused some of the thick fluid to spill out of her nose and trickle from the corners of her mouth, yet she welcomed it without flinching. Her eyes rolled back, only the whites visible, framed by streaks of my cum tracing down her flushed cheeks and nose.

"Ah..." I sighed as I withdrew my dick from Maya's mouth-pussy. She kept her mouth open even after I pulled out, a sign of her submission, showing me that every drop of cum had been swallowed, including what had spilled from her nose. I gently rubbed her head, acknowledging her effort, which she clearly enjoyed.

"Master," Maya looked up at me with those eager eyes. "I think I'm ready for an ass-fuck."

Chapter 229: To The Great Forest (2)

The moment those words hit my ears, my dick twitched involuntarily, aching with desire.

"You sure you're up for it?" I asked, my voice thick with anticipation, eyes locked on her.

Maya didn't bother responding with words. Instead, she stood up, a slow, deliberate movement that sent a thrill down my spine. She began to undress, peeling off her clothes with an almost torturous slowness, revealing her voluptuous body bit by bit. Her curves were perfect, a tantalizing blend of softness and firmness, with just the right amount of plumpness to drive a man wild.

Every inch of her screamed temptation. Finally, she stood before me in nothing but her lingerie—a wickedly sexy set that clung to her body, emphasizing her ample breasts and the seductive curve of her hips.

The sight of her like that was enough to make any man lose his mind. The lingerie, delicate and lacy, barely concealed her most intimate parts. Her breasts strained against the thin fabric, nipples visibly hard and begging for attention. The panties hugged her hips, accentuating the inviting swell of her ass and the slight outline of her pussy.

She met my gaze with a look that was both sultry and submissive, her eyes silently pleading for domination.

She didn't need to say a word. She simply turned around, presenting her ass to me. That enticing, round ass, with her ram tail just above the garter of her black underwear, looked like an invitation I couldn't refuse. Below that, lace connected her panties to her white stockings, creating a sight that drove me wild. She knew exactly what got me going, and she was flaunting it shamelessly.

I approached her, my breath hitching with anticipation. My hands landed on her butt, feeling the perfect roundness and fullness. Her skin was soft yet firm, springing slightly under my touch—a testament to the luscious plumpness of her ass.

Pressing my dick against her butt, I started rubbing it against her cheeks. The heat of her body and the friction from the soft fabric of her panties sent shivers down my spine. I squeezed her cheeks together, creating a tight, pleasurable pressure around my cock as I slid it between them.

The combination of her soft panties and the natural elasticity of her ass felt incredible, heightening my arousal.

"Hnnn~"

Her breath hitched as I intensified my movements, her body reacting to the pleasure she was giving me. My hands roamed over her ass, exploring every inch of that inviting roundness, feeling the heat and softness under my fingers. Her ass was a perfect playground, and I intended to take full advantage of it.

I licked my forefinger, then slid her panties aside to get a look at her asshole. Her little cherry-pink hole was twitching, almost as if it was anticipating my intrusion. Since this was Maya's first time, I needed to prepare her properly, to make sure it wouldn't hurt. After thoroughly wetting my forefinger with saliva, I aimed it at her ass.

"Have you ever put anything in your butthole, Maya?" I asked, my voice low and husky.

"I... T-To be honest, I wanted to stay pure for you, Master," she stammered, her voice trembling with anticipation. "But Lady Amon said it was better to prepare myself beforehand so I wouldn't trouble you with how tight it is. So, I practiced by using my fingers."

Hearing this, my excitement grew even more. I pressed my wet finger against her tight hole, feeling the warmth and slight resistance as I slowly pushed inside.

"HnnnnnggG~!"

Her body tensed for a moment, but then she relaxed, letting out a soft moan as my finger slipped in deeper. The tightness was incredible, and I could feel her inner muscles contracting around my finger.

"Good girl," I murmured, pushing my finger in and out, gradually stretching her out. Her breathing became heavier, and she started to push back against my hand, eager for more.

"Nnnhhh~!"

I added a second finger, scissoring them inside her to widen her further. Her gasps and moans grew louder, her body trembling with a mixture of pleasure and anticipation. The way her ass tightened and twitched around my fingers was intoxicating, making my dick throb with need.

As I continued to stretch her, I couldn't help but imagine how amazing it would feel to finally thrust my cock into her tight, eager hole. Her willingness to prepare herself for me, her eagerness to be dominated, made this moment even more thrilling. She was ready, and so was I.

I couldn't resist any longer. I needed to be inside her. I pulled my fingers out, earning a disappointed whimper from her. I lined my dick up with her twitching hole, rubbing the head against her entrance.

"Are you ready to lose your anal virginity?" I said to her.

"Yes, Master." she replied.

I pressed forward, the head of my dick pushing past the tight ring of muscle. The sensation was almost overwhelming, her ass squeezing me so tightly it felt like she was milking my cock. I slowly pushed deeper, inch by inch, until I was fully seated inside her. She let out a long, low moan, her body quivering with pleasure.

I started to move, pulling out slowly before thrusting back in, setting a steady rhythm.

"Ahhh, hhnggg! Hnnn...!"

Each thrust elicited a gasp or moan from her, her body responding eagerly to every movement. The way her ass clenched around me, the heat and tightness, was driving me wild.

I picked up the pace, thrusting harder and faster.

"Ahhh, fuaah, nhhh, ahhh!"

Maya was practically incoherent now, her moans and gasps turning into cries of pleasure. Her hands gripped the sheets, her body rocking with each thrust.

"Fuck, you're so tight," I groaned, feeling the familiar pressure building in my groin. "I'm gonna cum in your ass, Maya."

"Yes, Master," she cried out, her voice trembling with pleasure. "Cum in my ass, fill me up."

With a final, deep thrust, I came, shooting my load deep inside her.

"HnnnnnnNnnnnNN~!!!"

The feeling was almost too intense, waves of pleasure coursing through me as I emptied myself into her. Maya let out a satisfied moan, her body trembling as she felt the warmth of my cum filling her.

After I emptied myself in her ass, I pulled out slowly. Her hole remained stretched wide, the thick, white cum flowing out and dripping onto the floor. The sight of it made my still-hard dick twitch with desire.

Without wasting a moment, I positioned myself at her pussy, pressing the head of my dick against her slick entrance.

"Hng~?"

Maya, still lost in the throes of her orgasm, gasped at the sudden intrusion. Her body shuddered, and she squirted almost immediately, her juices mixing with my cum on the floor.

"Fuaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh! Ahhh...~!"

Her reaction only fueled my hunger. I thrust into her deeply, feeling her walls tighten around me, each movement sending waves of pleasure through both of us. Her pussy was wet and hot, gripping me perfectly as I pounded into her.

I held her hips firmly, controlling the pace, driving in harder and faster. Her moans and cries of pleasure filled the room, a symphony of raw desire that urged me on. The way her body responded to every thrust, the way she squirted again and again, drove me wild.

"Fuck, Maya," I groaned, feeling the pressure building again. "You're so fucking tight."

"Yes, Master, fuck me harder!" she begged, her voice breathless and desperate.

Finally, I couldn't hold back any longer. With a deep, guttural groan, I came hard, filling her pussy with my cum. The sensation was overwhelming, pleasure coursing through me in waves.

"AhhhhhhhhhhhhhhHhHhHnnnnNnnnn~!!!"

Maya cried out, her own orgasm triggered by the feeling of my cum filling her. Her body convulsed, her pussy squeezing me tightly, milking every last drop from me.

I collapsed onto the bed beside her, both of us breathing heavily, bodies slick with sweat and cum.

I held her close, feeling her warmth against me. Her body still quivered with aftershocks, her breathing uneven.

"Master," Maya moaned softly, her voice a sweet, satisfied whimper.

I rolled over, positioning myself on top of her again, my dick still hard and ready. She gazed up at me with those lust-filled eyes, biting her lip in anticipation.

"More," she pleaded, her hips arching towards me. "Fuck me more, Master."

I slid back into her, her pussy welcoming me with a wet, tight grip. The sensation was electric, sending shivers down my spine. Maya's moans grew louder as I picked up the pace, thrusting deep and hard.

"Ahh... ahhh... ahhh!" she cried out with each thrust, her hands clutching at the sheets. "Yes, yes, yes!"

Her pussy was soaking, the wetness making each movement slick and smooth. I could feel the heat building between us, the tension mounting with every thrust.

"Fuck, Maya," I groaned, the intensity of our fucking driving me wild. "You feel so fucking good."

"Master... oh, Master!" she moaned, her body writhing beneath me. "I'm gonna cum... I'm gonna cum again!"

I pounded into her harder, the sound of our bodies slapping together filling the room. Her moans turned into screams of pleasure, her pussy tightening around me.

"AhnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnNnnNNnnNnnnn~!" she screamed, her entire body convulsing with the force of her orgasm.

The sensation of her cumming pushed me over the edge. I thrust deep into her one final time, releasing another hot load of cum into her.

She smiled, her eyes half-closed in bliss. "I love being your little fuck toy, Master. Do me more," she moaned. Her words ignited a primal desire in me, and I couldn't stop myself from diving back into her. We fucked all night, exploring every hole, every crevice she had to offer.

I kept switching between her tight asshole and her wet pussy, occasionally fucking her throat to feel the sweet constriction. I filled her up with cum, leaving no part of her untouched—mouth, asshole, pussy. I used her until my insatiable libido was finally sated.

As the night wore on, I could hear panting from the other side of the room. Artemis was clearly listening and masturbating to our debauchery. Too bad she chose to have a separate room; if she had been with us, it could have turned into a steamy threesome. Of course, I wouldn't penetrate her—her defloration was reserved for a special moment when we reached the Kingdom of Elves.

For now, hearing her lustful sounds was enough to fuel my desires.

Chapter 230: To The Great Forest (3)

The next morning, we resumed our journey.

We had left the vast libraries of Knowledge City behind and entered the bustling Sword City, renowned for its warrior culture and endless training grounds. Maya and I felt refreshed, a testament to our vigorous night. Maya, though showing slight signs of fatigue, was still glowing with satisfaction. Artemis, however, looked like she hadn't slept a wink, dark circles prominent under her eyes.

"You seem tired," I remarked, unable to suppress a smirk.

"And whose fault is that?" she retorted, her glare sharp enough to cut through steel.

Because our lovemaking had stretched until just before sunrise, Artemis hadn't gotten any sleep. She had spent the night masturbating to the sounds of our passion. Complaints flooded in about the noise, disrupting the sleep of many guests. Even people on the bottom floor were eyeing us, probably because we had forgotten how thin the walls of the inn were.

Most of the looks directed at me were mixed with both respect and envy.

"You know," I teased, "instead of rusting in your bed, getting yourself off to our sounds, you could've just joined us."

"There's no way I would do that!" she snapped, her face turning crimson. "Wait, how'd you know that I was...?"

Her embarrassment was palpable, her eyes darting away as she stammered. The truth was obvious from her flushed cheeks and the way she couldn't meet my gaze. She might deny it, but her curiosity always seemed to overpower her reason.

"Master has enough drive to take us both at the same time, and we'd still be left panting," Maya said with a mischievous grin.

"I don't want to hear anything about that," Artemis snapped, her face flushing with embarrassment and annoyance.

After a while, we finally reached the imposing gate that marked the boundary of the kingdom, leading into the vast expanse of the Great Forest. Tall, sturdy walls loomed overhead, manned by vigilant guards.

As we approached, a group of guards stepped forward to halt us. Their armor gleamed in the sunlight, and their eyes were sharp and probing.

"What business do you have outside the kingdom?" one of the guards barked. His voice was commanding, and his muscular frame was evident even beneath his armor. This was a man who had seen countless battles and emerged victorious.

I stepped forward confidently, meeting the guard's piercing gaze. "I have business in another country. I'm a merchant."

The guard raised an eyebrow, skepticism clear in his eyes. "A merchant? Where's your carriage?"

"It's being repaired in the Capital City," I replied smoothly. "And since we're traveling through the Great Forest, we left it behind. It wouldn't have made it through the dense terrain."

"The Great Forest, huh?" The guard's sneer deepened, his eyes flicking to Maya and Artemis. "And what could a puny guy like you possibly do to survive in the Great Forest with nothing but two women by your side?"

"Ah, one of our companions is a slave who knows the terrain well," I explained. As I spoke, Maya lowered her hood, revealing herself as a Demi-human.

"A Beast woman," the guard assessed her with a slow look from head to toe. He couldn't hide his smirk, clearly appreciating her beauty and figure. His eyes, and those of the guards behind him, lingered on her suggestively. "And what about her?" he asked, turning his attention to Artemis, who was still disguised.

"She's my wife," I replied calmly.

Artemis shot me a shocked glare, her face flushing. I ignored her reaction; it was crucial for the guard not to grow suspicious.

"Wife?" His eyes narrowed suspiciously, trying to gauge the truth in my words. "You've snagged yourself a fine-looking wife," he remarked, a sly grin spreading across his face. His gaze lingered on Artemis with an unsettling hunger, hinting at nefarious intentions once we were out of sight beyond the kingdom gates.

"Very well, you may proceed," the guard said, his smile revealing a hint of malice. "But I suggest you watch your backs. Travelers heading through the plains toward the Great Forest have a way of, you know, meeting unfortunate ends."

"Is that so?" I replied evenly. "We'll certainly keep that in mind."

"Good," he nodded, his tone ominous. "Stay safe out there."

We passed the gate, and then finally left the Kingdom. We could still feel the eyes of those guards lingering on us.

The stretch of grassland leading to the Great Forest was a sea of green as far as the eye could see, with only the distant outline of the forest visible on the horizon.

"From the looks of it, we're about two days away from reaching the Great Forest on foot," Maya remarked, her voice carrying a tone of certainty. With her Perfect Eyesight skill, she could discern details even from afar, making the distant forest appear vivid and within reach for her.

"Is it really a good idea for us to trek all the way there on foot?" I voiced my concern. "If it takes us a solid three days to reach the forest, and the same to get back, we'll barely have a single day to enjoy our time there."

Since summer vacation is winding down, we'll soon be making our way back to the Academy for the new semester. It would have been a lot easier and quicker if we had taken a carriage.

"Your words don't hide your true intentions," Artemis shot back sharply. "Enjoy our time? This isn't a casual outing. And if by 'enjoy our time' you mean you and I fucking, then you can forget about it. It's not happening."

She's really on guard right now. I can't even find a way to break through, I thought to myself.

"Master," Maya interjected suddenly.

"Yeah," I responded.

We were finally well outside the kingdom, with the same guards who had blocked us earlier now following us all the way from the gate to this point. Once we were far enough that the kingdom gates were no longer in sight, they finally made their move and approached us.

Finally, after a while, they appeared.

"Why are you blocking our path? Could you explain what's happening here?"

The guard who had spoken to me at the gates stepped forward, dagger in hand. "Didn't I warn you about the dangers of traveling to the Great Forest? There have been numerous rumors about what happens to people who journey here. Some are killed and robbed of their belongings. If there are women in the group, rumors suggest they're violated before being killed. Among other atrocities."

"Let me guess, those rumors suggest you're the one behind all this. Am I right?"

The guard chuckled darkly. "Guarding that damn gate is a tiresome job, you know? The pay's decent, but it's never enough. Sure, we visit brothels, but there's something about taking what's not freely given. It's more thrilling than bedding a worn-out whore. Taking someone's wife, now that's the real rush."

Seeing the husband helpless, pinned down, screaming while you have your way with her—now that's something else."

He glanced at Artemis, his eyes lingering with a predatory gleam. My earlier mention of her as my wife had marked her as their target.

"Boss, can we have the beast woman?" asked one of the guards eagerly.

"Yeah," the leader replied with a cruel grin. "But she's mine first. The rest of you, pin the man and restrain both women. After I fuck the Beast woman, you can have your way with her. Then I'll take the wife." His command dripped with malice and intent.

The guards encircled us, twelve in total, weapons glinting ominously in the dim light—swords, daggers, and spears poised for action.

"I'm sorry, whoever you are, but your wife and that slave of yours look so damn appetizing, I just gotta have a taste, you know?" sneered the leader. "You gotta understand."

"Oh, I understand perfectly," I retorted calmly.

"Huh?" The leader blinked in disbelief, clearly taken aback by my composed response amidst the tension and danger that surrounded us.

"I mean, Artemis is perfect. Sure, her figure isn't as seductive as Maya's, but she's breathtaking, with a stunning proportion that outshines other girls. So, I understand perfectly why you want a taste of her. I want a taste of her too." I glanced at Artemis, who glared back at me, her cheeks flushed with a mix of embarrassment and anger. I almost chuckled at her reaction.

"What? So you mean even after marrying her, you still haven't tasted her yet?" the leader said, surprise coloring his tone before he burst into raucous laughter. "So she's a virgin, huh? That's a fucking jackpot, man! I love deflowering virgins!" His eyes gleamed with a twisted excitement.

"That's something I can't allow," I asserted firmly.

"Huh? You think you're in any position to say that right now? Just give up those girls and watch them get fucked by many men so you won't get hurt," sneered the leader.

"I can't let that happen," I stated resolutely. "I own Maya, and I'll be the one to take Artemis's virginity. No one else will have her."