

The World 421

Chapter 421 - Plain To Beautiful (7)

Meanwhile, two more women were shamelessly grinding themselves against his legs, their thighs slick with their arousal. Their moans melted into the chorus of pleasure echoing through the room, each movement driven by a desperate, needy rhythm. Their skin glistened, flushed with heat, as their bodies rocked back and forth, wet and slick against his. The woman straddling him threw her head back, hair spilling like a wild curtain as she rode him, her voice breaking into breathy cries every time she slammed down onto his dick, her body quaking with pleasure.

It was a vivid, overwhelming scene, burning itself into my mind like a brand. The intensity of it—how raw and unrestrained it all felt—sent a rush of heat through my chest, leaving me breathless, my pulse racing with a mix of shock, disbelief, and something else I couldn't even begin to name.

"T-That was intense..." Miss Titania stammered, her cheeks flushed a deep red that spread all the way to her ears. She shifted uncomfortably, the heat of embarrassment still burning through her skin after witnessing something so blatantly erotic. Her breaths came a little faster, as if she were still trying to process what she had just seen.

"I never knew something like that was even possible. I mean, something that big... Does that mean he put that inside you too, Nia? Didn't it hurt?" Miss Trill's voice was barely steady, her wide eyes betraying a mix of curiosity and shock, her lips parted as she waited for the answer.

"It did... at first. It felt like I was being torn apart," Miss Titania admitted, her voice barely above a whisper, as if she was letting a forbidden secret slip. "But after a while... it started to feel good. Really good." Her cheeks grew even redder, a shiver running down her spine at the memory.

"But... seeing that, I can't help but think Leon's amazing at making a woman look like that. She looked like she was really enjoying herself," Miss Trill added.

"Well, Leon could make you look like that too, you know. When I do it with him, it's like my body isn't even mine anymore. It's like I'm floating, melting..., it really does feel that good," Titania confessed.

"I wanna experience it too... soon," Miss Trill murmured, her voice tinged with envy, a hint of longing in her eyes as she thought about what it might feel like.

But as they spoke, I was stuck, unable to shake the shock from my mind. I had seen Mr. Leon have sex with Miss Charlotte before, but this was on a whole different level. Messy, wet, obscene, and wild—everything about it was so raw and unrestrained. It was something I knew I'd never find anywhere else—not even with a male prostitute.

The next day...

I dove back into my training, but what had felt tough yesterday now felt brutal, like every muscle in my body was being pushed beyond its limit. Sweat dripped down my face, my breath came in ragged gasps, and my arms ached as if they might fall off. Even though I could feel myself improving, each session became harsher, more punishing. By the time lunch came around, I could barely stand, my legs trembling with exhaustion.

After that, it was time for speech and language training—learning to speak with a grace that I had never thought necessary. At first, I got the basics, but then it quickly became something impossible to master. Professor Gabrielle seemed intent on pounding every detail of grace and etiquette into my head, her stern voice correcting every little mistake until my head spun. By the time she was done, my mind felt as worn out as my body.

"Thank you for teaching me everything you know, Professor Gabrielle," I said, performing a careful curtsy, my legs shaking as I tried to keep my balance. It was a fundamental part of etiquette: lifting the hem of my skirt slightly with both hands, placing my left foot behind the right, and lowering myself into a bow, even as my muscles protested.

"That's good. You've become quite graceful, even in how you speak," she remarked with a nod, a rare approval in her tone.

"I'm truly grateful for your help, really," I managed to say.

"If you want to thank someone, thank Leon instead," Professor Gabrielle added with a knowing smirk. "But your lessons aren't done yet, right? You need to go see Miss Artemis now."

"Yes," I nodded.

It was still early afternoon when I finished with her, every movement and gesture drilled into me until they felt like second nature. I was grateful for her, and for Leon too, even if this training pushed me to the edge.

Now, it was time for my lesson with President Artemis.

"The art of seduction is a delicate craft," she began, her voice smooth and controlled, her gaze sharp as she watched me. "And when I say delicate, I mean even the smallest mistake can ruin it. But if you master it, you can melt even the coldest hearts, make them bend to your touch. You just have to be willing to let go of all restraints. Luckily, with the grace you've learned from Professor Gabrielle, this should come more naturally to you," she said with a confident smile, her eyes glinting with something almost dangerous.

The lesson began, and honestly, it wasn't as tough as I thought it would be. Like she said, my training in etiquette made it easier to understand the subtleties of seduction. It felt like every move, every gesture was designed to draw someone in, to make them want more. It was almost like etiquette was a hidden key, unlocking the power of seduction.

"Look at them like this, and then bat your eyelashes softly. When you accidentally meet their gaze, subtly avert your eyes, like this. And also..."

Every word she spoke felt like a revelation, a secret I was being let in on. It was like each tip she gave me was reshaping who I was. I could feel myself changing, growing more confident with every passing moment. By the time we wrapped up, it was already night, the hours slipping away without me realizing it. But I had managed to nail everything she taught me, and for once, I felt genuinely proud of myself.

Chapter 422 - Plain To Beautiful (8)

The day of the noble's party.

I'd been allowed a rare night of proper rest, waking up in the afternoon with sunlight spilling through the curtains. The moment my eyes fluttered open, a maid slipped inside, her footsteps barely making a sound on the polished floors. She bowed slightly and invited me to dine, her tone polite but firm. I made my way to the dining room, where Miss Trill and Miss Titania were already seated, waiting for me.

We ate lunch together, the clinking of silverware filling the room. But as I ate, I felt their eyes on me, like a weight pressing down on my every move.

"Why?" I asked, tilting my head, my brow furrowed as I met their gazes head-on.

"No, it's nothing," Miss Trill said, a small smile playing on her lips. "It's just that... Professor Gabrielle is really incredible for managing all this in such a short time."

"Yeah... just look at how you eat, how you hold your utensils so delicately. It's like you've become... graceful," Miss Titania added, her eyes practically gleaming with admiration. "Now I kind of want Professor Gabrielle to teach me about etiquette too. Seeing you change this much in such a short time is really something. It's like you're a completely different person."

"Is that so?" My voice came out softer than I intended, almost shy, and I could feel a flush creeping up my cheeks.

I hadn't noticed any changes physically, but I found myself paying attention to every little detail, every movement. Professor Gabrielle's training had drilled it into me, to the point that even my back was straight and my posture elegant. It was like I had been remade into someone poised, someone who could fit into this world.

"Looks like Leon already headed to the Merca estate," Miss Titania said, tapping her fingers on the table rhythmically. "Once we're done here, we'll make sure you look as stunning as possible."

"Don't be nervous when you get there, Senior Ella," Miss Trill chimed in, her smile a bit more playful. "Leon will be right there with you. He'll make sure you're covered and help with any slip-ups."

"Y-Yes...!"

Miss Titania and Miss Trill got to work, their hands moving swiftly over brushes and makeup. Miss Titania applied layers of makeup with precision, each stroke transforming my face. When I finally glanced into the mirror, my breath caught. The reflection staring back at me was barely recognizable—polished, refined, so different from my usual self. My plain features had vanished under the makeup, leaving behind a version of me that was elegant, almost unreal. I reached up, brushing my fingers against my cheek, feeling the silky smoothness of the makeup. It felt like a mask, cool and soft under my touch.

"I... look like this?"

"Isn't it stunning?" Miss Titania grinned, her eyes twinkling as she watched my reaction.

My heart pounded heavily in my chest, like it was trying to break free. This reflection didn't look like me at all, but I couldn't help thinking that it wasn't a bad thing. It felt strange, like I was someone else entirely, yet at the same time... I was still

me

"Now, for the final touches!" Miss Trill announced with a flourish, motioning to the wardrobe behind her. "Let's pick out a dress that suits you! Every single one of these dresses is stunning, crafted with such care. Leon really does have an eye for quality! Well, that's just what you'd expect from

my

boyfriend!"

"

Our

boyfriend," Miss Titania corrected, a smirk curling her lips as she glanced at her.

I still couldn't quite wrap my head around the whole polygamy thing. But after spending these past two days with them, I found myself not wanting to judge them for it. I was starting to see how different people's beliefs and choices could be.

While I mulled over that thought, Miss Trill finally pulled out a dress with a triumphant smile.

"This one is going to make everyone's heads turn when they see you!" she declared, her voice filled with excitement.

Leon's POV

When I looked at her, I couldn't deny it—I was

shocked

to see Ella like this. She'd always been a plain girl, barely noticeable, like a shadow that slipped through the background, unseen and forgotten. If she hadn't been following me around like some desperate stalker, she wouldn't have even crossed my mind. Hell, she was known as the weakest student in the academy—second year, maybe even the entire school.

But now, staring at her, it was like she'd stepped out of someone else's life. Her transformation was almost

unreal

—as if she'd shed her old self completely.

"Um, how is it?" she asked, her voice coming out softer, more controlled, with a nervous lilt that hinted at her uncertainty.

Even the way she spoke was different—gone was that jittery, stammering mess she used to be. Gabrielle and the others had clearly done their work, reshaping her into something new. They hadn't just done a good job—they'd done something extraordinary.

"You look beautiful," I told her, my voice carrying a hint of genuine surprise.

"T-Thank you," she replied, her cheeks flushing with a shy pink that spread up to her ears. She didn't stutter out of habit anymore; this time, it was because I'd caught her off guard.

"Now that you're here, our plan starts now," I reminded her, my voice low and firm, a subtle command beneath the words.

"Yes," she nodded, and there was a steadiness in her eyes, even if her fingers trembled slightly.

"Well then, let's go," I said, extending my hand toward her, a clear invitation.

She hesitated, just for a heartbeat, her gaze lingering on my hand before she reached out and took it. Her fingers slipped into mine, warm and soft, delicate in their newfound grace. Her touch was gentle, yet there was a firmness there—like she was clinging to this new role she had to play.

She gave me a small, graceful smile that reached her eyes, and for a moment, I found myself smiling back. Then, we turned toward the ballroom, with Amon and Maya flanking me on either side. The setup was perfect—to draw every gaze in the room, to make people look at me, and then, with Ella by my side, their eyes would inevitably shift to her.

Ella might have transformed, but underneath all that change, she was still her. The timid, plain girl was still there, buried under the makeup and the new confidence. I was sure Kayla would recognize her—if she had half a brain left after this. If she didn't, well, that was her own damn loss. But with this, Ella could finally see herself differently, stand taller, carry herself with that grace she'd been learning.

And judging by the way Kayla's face twisted in confusion, she

did

recognize Ella. Yeah, that's right.

Stare all you want.

With this, you won't be able to fuck with Ella anymore.

Chapter 423 - Let The Party Begins, Part 1 (1)

"Now, everyone!"

A sharp clap rang out from the second floor, the sound cutting through the hum of chatter like a whip. All eyes turned towards the grand staircase, leading up to a high platform where Duke Merca stood, bathed in the glow of the chandelier lights above. He held himself with the rigid posture of a man who believed himself above everyone in the room, his chin raised just a bit too high, a faint smirk tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"I ask for your attention, just for a moment! And then we'll kick off the official beginning of this annual celebration that we've held for years!"

He swept his gaze across the gathered guests, a satisfied gleam in his eye. The crowd below him was filled with noblemen and women, all decked out in their finest, each one a piece in the elaborate game he hosted every year. Duke Merca's voice, smooth yet commanding, resonated off the walls as if daring anyone to ignore him.

"We've faced many challenges—losses of comrades during the purge of those caught in their deceitful acts. Yet, here we are, celebrating again. Rest in peace to those who've left us. Like my fellow Duke, Duke Sierra. He was far from perfect, and he did things that earned him his end. But he was still an essential pillar of this kingdom—one of the most powerful dukes, alongside myself. His daughter is with us tonight because I invited her, for in my eyes, Duke Sierra remains a duke."

Duke Merca's gaze settled on Charlotte, who clutched Sesillian's arm like a lifeline, her expression unreadable under the scrutiny of the crowd.

"We're here tonight not just to mourn the dead, but to learn from our past mistakes, to make sure those incidents are not repeated. With the Empire making its suspicious moves across the continents, we need

unity more than ever. And this gathering is the perfect opportunity for that! We are the nobles of the Kingdom of Milham! We are the greatest kingdom of all, and we will not let anyone force us to bow!"

Applause erupted like thunder, rolling through the hall as the nobles raised their hands high, faces flushed with pride and wine. The energy of the room seemed to pulse, as if Merca's words had sparked a fire in their veins. I lifted my own hand, blending into the sea of clapping figures.

"I must express my gratitude to everyone who has attended this year, especially Mr. Faust."

I raised my wine glass, the liquid inside catching the light as I offered a nod.

"For those who don't know, this man is a legend. He founded the company Leonamon, the driving force behind so many of our modern luxuries. The phones in your hands, the cars that brought you here tonight, the cakes that made your mouths water, the very wine that warms your bellies this evening—all of it exists because of him. The dresses that grace many of you tonight? Yes, his influence stretches that far. Thanks to Leonamon, our Kingdom of Milham thrives, drawing merchants from every corner of the world, and making their products known far and wide. It's his vision that has made our kingdom flourish."

The applause shifted, this time directed at me. I could feel the undercurrent of resentment—some still held on to their prejudices about my humble origins. But they clapped all the same, their forced smiles barely hiding the bitterness underneath.

"And let's not forget to thank the gods for blessing my daughter with good health! And for guiding those who preserve our world. Now then, I suppose I've said enough. Let's get this party started! Cheers!"

Duke Merca raised his glass high, the deep red of the wine swirling with the motion, and the crowd mirrored him, their glasses catching the light in a hundred different flashes.

With that final toast, the night's party officially roared to life.

Gabrielle's POV

The entire room was a harsh, unrelenting white, almost blinding, forcing anyone inside to squint as if the brightness itself was a weapon. In the center of that stark space, a woman was bound by chains that dug into her skin, each link humming with an eerie power. She was completely immobilized. Those chains weren't just any metal—they were forged from the strongest material on this planet, and more than that, they pulsed with power-dampening runes, snuffing out any abilities she might try to muster.

The woman's appearance was pitiful—skin clinging to her bones, eyes sunken and ringed with deep shadows, her cheeks hollowed from starvation. She hadn't tasted a bite of food during her entire time here, her body left to wither away while the chains held her fast.

"Angelica..." I said, stepping closer with a tray of food in my hands. Her response was immediate—sharp, hate-filled eyes glaring up at me like she wished they could burn through my skull. But I met that gaze with cold indifference. "Glaring at me won't do you any good."

"You're delusional. You're so damn delusional, woman! You don't know a thing! You don't know a damn thing!" Her voice broke into desperate shrieks, each word laced with a crazed edge, like she was clinging

to a lifeline made of lies. Her mind was shattered beyond repair, twisted by whatever brainwashing had taken root inside her.

"I'm not here to hear you ramble on with your madness," I shot back, voice hard as iron. "Not from someone who slaughtered the innocent."

"You're wrong! You're fucking wrong! You have no idea! You know nothing, you bitch!"

She lunged, or at least tried to, but the chains pulled her back, leaving her thrashing uselessly against her restraints. With a sharp kick, she sent the tray flying, the food splattering across the pristine floor, leaving stains on the blinding white. The plate shattered into jagged pieces, the crash reverberating like a gunshot in the silence.

"You don't know anything! You're wrong! Our Lord is... Our Lord is...!"

"If you're going to kick away your food, then starve. Suffer in your hunger until it drains the last bit of strength from you. Starve to death for all I care." I spun around, my words cutting through the air, then headed toward the door.

"You don't know anything! YOU KNOW NOTHING! YOU KNOW NOTHINGGGGGGGGG!!!" Her voice tore through the room, desperate and raw, like it was trying to claw its way back to sanity. But I ignored it, walking out and slamming the heavy door behind me, cutting off the sound like a knife through flesh.

"Guess there's no saving her now," I muttered, my voice echoing in the empty hallway as I shook my head. It was almost tragic—she'd once had a soul worth saving.

Now, though, the Eclipse and the horrors she'd committed—whether by her own will or because of the poison in her mind—had sealed her fate. Her death was inevitable.

"May you rest in peace, I suppose..." I whispered, the words barely audible, then turned and walked away, leaving behind the silence and the shadows of a lost mind.

Chapter 424 - Let The Party Begins, Part 1 (2)

Leon's POV

The entire ballroom was alive with laughter and chatter, the air thick with mingling voices and clinking glasses. It felt like a typical party, buzzing with energy, but there was a dissonance in my mind. This was supposed to be a

noble

gathering, yet it felt no different from any ordinary celebration. Fancy clothes, elegant décor—but the vibe was the same as any other party I'd been to. Guess that even in other worlds, some things don't change.

"Are you okay, Ella?" I leaned closer, catching the subtle tremble in her hands. She held herself together well, not letting her nervousness slip through the mask she wore. But I noticed. I could see the tension in her shoulders, the slight strain in her voice. Gabrielle must have drilled this composure into her. But I could read her like a book.

"I-I'm fine... It's just... having Miss Kayla's full attention on me makes my body tremble," she confessed, her voice barely above a whisper.

Yeah, that fear was burned into her, all thanks to that bitch. But I could tell Ella's efforts weren't wasted—Kayla was seething, her eyes practically throwing daggers. The venom in her gaze was almost palpable, like a cold shiver against my skin. For a moment, her eyes met mine, and she quickly averted them, hiding behind her mask of superiority.

"You don't have to worry about her," I told Ella, letting my hand find its way to her head, ruffling her hair gently. "Not yet anyway."

"O-Okay..." she stammered, her voice still trembling, but a bit more at ease.

"Why don't you enjoy the party more?" I suggested, giving her a small nudge. "Have as many drinks as you want, and try everything on the food menu. You deserve it."

"Is that really okay?" she asked, a hint of doubt in her tone.

"Well, you're the one by my side right now, aren't you? So yeah, it's fine," I said, flashing her a reassuring grin.

Meanwhile, I kept my eye on Sesillian from across the room, a knot of unease settling in my gut. What the hell was he planning to do tonight? I couldn't get any intel on him—he was too damn secretive. For now, I'd just observe. If he didn't make any moves during the party, then no problem. But I had a gut feeling he wasn't here just for the wine and hors d'oeuvres.

He'd mentioned earlier,

"I'm planning on a grand entrance to show the world the greatness of the Darkness, but a little detour like this won't hurt."

Those words still echoed in my head, like a ticking clock in the back of my mind. Yeah, he was definitely plotting something. I just needed to find out

what

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Ella's POV

I slipped away to the bathroom, knowing full well that a confrontation with Miss Kayla was coming. I'd told Mr. Leon I could handle it alone, and despite the risk, he allowed me to go—with one of his Shadows tailing me discreetly, just in case.

As I walked through the corridor, I noticed Kayla's shadow in my peripheral vision, trailing behind me. My heart pounded like a drum in my chest, but alongside the fear, a strange rush of confidence surged through my veins. The fear that used to paralyze me seemed distant, replaced by a steady resolve.

"Ella!" Kayla's shrill voice cut through the empty hallway as we left the crowded party behind.

I kept walking, letting her words roll off my back.

"Ella! You bitch! I know that's you! How dare you ignore me like that!" Her voice rang out, echoing against the walls.

She kept shouting, but I stayed focused, moving forward. At first, her voice made my skin crawl, just like it always had. But now, all the lessons from Miss Titania and the others came flooding back, grounding me. The fear that once wrapped itself around my chest, squeezing tight, began to loosen. It was as if those chains she had bound me with were finally breaking.

"Hey! I'm talking to you, damn it!" she snapped, her voice turning shrill as she grabbed my shoulder, spinning me around to face her.

I met her eyes without flinching, cold and unyielding. Gone were the frightened eyes of a girl who would quiver like a leaf in the wind, like a dog that cowered with its tail tucked between its legs. I met her with the same icy, detached look that Professor Gabrielle had perfected.

"W-What's with that look?" she stuttered, her bravado cracking. She'd never seen this side of me before. The expression on my face was different from the terrified girl she used to torment—cold, unafraid, and completely out of her grasp.

"Ha! Look at that face you've got now. Way different from that timid little look you had back at school, huh?" she sneered, her words laced with venom, her lips curling into a twisted grin. "What, shacking up with that rich, filthy commoner suddenly gives you a backbone? You really think things are going to change for you? You're still just a fucking commoner! Know. Your. Place!" Her voice dripped with disdain, each word like a lash meant to strip away my confidence.

But I just met her glare with my own, my eyes cold and unyielding, like ice that refused to crack.

"You're not scaring anyone, Ella," she barked, her frustration bubbling over, her voice trembling with anger. "You think this little tough-girl act is gonna work on me? Dream on! You're just a fucking commoner! You belong beneath me! Lick my feet like you always do and press yourself down on the floor! You're nothing!" Her voice grew sharper, desperate, like she was trying to claw back the control she felt slipping through her fingers.

"For someone who's supposed to be above me, you seem incredibly small in my eyes," I replied, my voice steady, cutting through her rant like a knife.

"Huh?" she blinked, her confident sneer faltering as my words hit her, confusion flickering in her eyes for a brief moment.

Her supposed superiority only made her seem more pathetic, more insignificant, like a shadow trying to blot out the sun. She couldn't see that her desperate need to look down on others just made her sink lower, further beneath those she thought she towered over.

Chapter 425 - Let The Party Begins, Part 1 (3)

"You really piss me off!" Miss Kayla spat, her voice trembling with rage. She pulled her hand back, then swung it towards my face with all the force she could muster. But I didn't flinch. I didn't even blink. I simply raised my hand, intercepting hers before it could land, the sound of the impact muffled between our palms.

Fury flashed in her eyes as she recoiled, then immediately came at me again, this time with her other hand. But just like before, I blocked it with effortless precision, my expression unmoved.

"Just... just what are you...!" she stammered, her voice cracking under the weight of her frustration.

"You must've realized something, and that's why you're so agitated," I replied, my tone cool as ice. I held her gaze, watching the flickers of doubt dance in her eyes. "I planned to ignore you for the rest of this party, but knowing your personality, I knew that wouldn't work. So, I came here so that you and I could settle things. Didn't think you'd resort to slapping me, though."

"You... You're not... Ella, are you?" she asked, her eyes wide with disbelief.

"No." I shook my head slowly, letting each word sink in. "I'm still the same Ella. The same Ella you bullied, the same Ella you made suck your toes like I was sucking my mother's teats, the same Ella you made lick your feet clean with my tongue, the same Ella you treated like your little lackey. That's who I was, and that's who I will always be."

"T-Then..."

"Why did I change, you ask?" I let out a bitter laugh, my lips curling into a smirk. "I don't even fully understand it myself. Maybe I got tired of enduring the humiliation you put me through. Or maybe I just

couldn't stand being the same anymore. Whatever the reason, I don't know. But when someone finally reached out a hand to me, when I was drowning, I grabbed it. Isn't that what anyone would do?"

"You really have become a bitch..." Miss Kayla hissed, her face twisting with disgust. "You should've known your place all along, wagged your tail for me like a good dog. If you had, maybe you'd be in my circle now!"

"I don't see why I'd want to be in your circle, Miss Kayla," I shot back, my tone sharp. "You don't hold the same power... as my friends."

"Y-You have friends? You think I'd buy that? You think some weak, timid, stupid little bitch like you could actually have friends? As if!"

"Oh, I do. One even calls me her senior. You know, back then, even the first years never called me that. They'd just walk past without so much as a glance. I don't blame them, though. My appearance was plain, and I was invisible to their eyes. I even used a skill to make myself less noticeable. That was on me. But now, I have people I can genuinely call friends. They helped me face my flaws and pushed me to do things I never thought I could. Because of them, I broke past my limits."

Without Miss Titania and Miss Trill, I'd still be struggling with that wall, too afraid to even try climbing it.

"But you? You've stayed exactly the same. You never tried to overcome your weaknesses. You just parade them around for everyone to see. The wall blocking you isn't even that high, but you don't bother to try and get over it. You haven't changed at all."

"You seriously piss me off..." Miss Kayla snarled, her voice dropping into a low, dangerous growl. "I'm gonna fucking mess your face up!"

With a feral scream, she lunged at me, her face twisted with rage, eyes burning with hatred. Her movements were wild and desperate, like a cornered animal. If it were the old me, I'd have flinched, my body betraying the fear surging through me. But that was then.

I stood my ground, watching her reckless charge, her footsteps echoing like thunder against the polished floor. When she got close enough, I stepped aside with a quick, fluid motion, letting her momentum carry her past me. Then, I casually extended my foot, tripping her up. She tumbled forward, slamming into the ground nose-first with a satisfying thud.

"Ack!"

She scrambled to her feet, only for blood to spill down her face, splattering against the cold floor like crimson rain.

"E-Eh? Nghhh...! Hnnng...?!" Her voice trembled, confusion twisting her features as she cupped her hand beneath her nose, trying to catch the stream of red. Realization struck her like a punch, eyes widening as she touched her nose, now bent at an unnatural angle. "AAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH! MY NOSE! MY NOSE! MY NOSEE!! MY NOSEEEEEEEEEE!"

I watched her with a detached stare, my expression icy as she desperately pressed her fingers against her face, failing to stanch the bleeding, her attempts to force her nose back into shape clumsy and frantic.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!! MY NOSE! MY NOSEEEE! MY NOSEEEEEEEEEE!"

"You'll never change, Miss Kayla," I said, my voice cutting through her screams like a blade. "And I doubt anyone will ever reach out to help you change. That's just who you are, and it's who you'll always be."

"You bitch! This is your fault! This is your fault! You ruined it! You ruined itttttttt!!!" she shrieked, her voice cracking with desperation as her face contorted in wild fury, veins bulging in her neck, every word dripping with unhinged rage.

She kept howling, her screams reverberating in the space between us, but I remained unmoved. Her rage had no power over me anymore. I wasn't scared—those days were over.

"You brought this upon yourself. This is your own ruin," I replied, my words laced with finality.

With that, I turned away and walked forward, leaving her to scream into the emptiness behind me. Her desperate, incoherent shrieks faded into the background, a distant echo swallowed by the silence. I didn't look back, not even once.

Chapter 426 - Let The Party Begins, Part 1 (4)

Leon's POV

It looked like Ella finally had her confrontation with Kayla, and from the way she carried herself afterward, it was clear she came out on top. When she returned from excusing herself to the bathroom, there was a renewed confidence in her stride, like a fire had been lit inside her that couldn't be ignored.

Without a word, I reached out and ruffled her hair. My fingers tangled through her soft locks, feeling a gentle warmth spread from my hand. Ella's cheeks flushed a deep red, her eyes widening for a moment before she quickly averted them, biting her lip to suppress a smile.

But while Ella's challenge was over, mine was just beginning. Too many loose ends still hung around me like chains, weighing me down.

I caught Rose's eye across the room for a brief moment—a silent exchange—before slipping out of the ball. I navigated through the dimly lit hallways until I found a secluded spot. The air was cold, pressing against my skin as I waited. Rose arrived not long after, her steps light, but her expression was serious.

"What do you want, Leon?" she asked, her voice cutting through the quiet.

"I've got a favor to ask you," I replied, keeping my tone steady.

"Favor?" Her eyebrow arched sharply. "It's not a dirty favor, is it? If it is, I'm out. I don't want to have anything to do with you anymore."

"Relax, I'm not asking for that," I said.

"Then what is it?"

I pulled out my phone and played the recording I'd captured earlier. Sesillian's voice crackled through the speaker.

"I'm planning on a grand entrance to show the world the greatness of the Darkness, but a little detour like this won't hurt."

"Don't mind the 'little detour' part," I muttered.

"Is that... Sesillian's voice?" Her eyes narrowed, studying me. "How the hell did you record that?"

"I have my methods," I answered. "Sesillian's up to something, but I haven't nailed down exactly what. I think he's planning to introduce his cult to the world. I've already spread some information about the Eclipse, but it hasn't hit the world hard enough. People still aren't grasping how dangerous the Eclipse truly is."

"Well, that's no shocker, considering most of the Eclipse's victims are in rural areas," Rose replied, crossing her arms. "Wait, you've been spreading information about the Eclipse? How? Oh, right—you're the owner of Leonamon."

A silence stretched between us.

"So then? What's your favor?" she asked, breaking the quiet.

"It's nothing difficult," I said, locking eyes with her. "In fact, it's something only you can do."

"Hm? And what's that?" she asked, curiosity sparking in her gaze.

"Tell your father you're going to marry me."

Her face twisted instantly, disgust flashing across her features.

"Huh?" She recoiled like I'd slapped her, her lips curling in revulsion. "What the fuck do you mean by that?"

"I want to test Sesillian's limits," I explained, holding her stare.

"Limits?" Her eyebrow arched higher. "Wait, explain why you're even asking me to do this in the first place."

I laid out everything I knew about Sesillian's true nature. As I spoke, her expression shifted rapidly—confusion melting into shock, then twisting into something unreadable, finally settling on disgust.

"I never thought Sesillian's feelings leaned more toward men..." she mumbled, almost to herself. "So that's why he didn't keep up his engagement with Irene back then. Now it makes sense."

"His target tonight is me. I think he's planning something big, and whatever it is, he's looking to catch me. I don't plan on letting that happen, but it seems like letting him catch me might be the only way to find out where his base is."

"Do you really think this will work?" she asked, her skepticism clear.

"It will. Or if not, it's worth a shot. The best thing we can do right now is to make Sesillian impatient. Since I'm his target, he'll do whatever it takes to make me his."

"That's a pretty terrifying thought, don't you think?"

"Are you going to get jealous if he manages to get his hands on me?" I shot back with a smirk.

"Do you want me to kick you in the balls?" she snapped, her voice dangerously low.

I flinched, instinctively covering my crotch as a cold sweat formed on my back. Even though she hadn't moved, I could feel the threat hanging in the air.

"I don't know if this will actually help us against Sesillian. Personally, I'd love to bash his skull in, watch him bleed out under my hands. But I also don't want to get executed for killing a noble bastard like him. That's not how I plan to waste my life. Sure, I'd rather handle things my way, but..."

"If so, then do you want to take it?" I asked, extending my hand towards her. The space between us seemed to stretch, heavy with unspoken tension. If she grabbed it, she'd agree to do what I asked—swallowing her pride for this partnership. If she refused, well, it'd just confirm that she'd rather burn than help me.

Rose's gaze dropped to my outstretched hand, her expression flickering between doubt and determination. She studied it like it might bite her, brows furrowing as she weighed her options. The silence between us was thick, the kind that wraps around your throat. Her fingers twitched slightly, then stilled, as if fighting against the decision.

Finally, she reached out, her grip firm as her fingers wrapped around mine, squeezing like she was sealing a pact with the devil himself.

"Alright. I'll do you this favor. But after this, we're done. I don't want anything to do with you ever again. Understand?" Her voice cut through the air, sharp and bitter, each word landing with the weight of a final warning.

"Got it," I replied, a smirk tugging at the corner of my lips, hiding the relief that threatened to spill out.

Even if she hated my guts, Rose's drive to bring down the Eclipse meant she'd play along, even if it meant holding hands with someone she despised. There was something almost admirable in that cold, unyielding resolve—willing to endure anything to reach her goal.

Chapter 427 - Let The Party Begins, Part 1 (5)

"Father," I addressed him. He was surrounded by aristocrats, nobles, and several court officials from the castle—people with a lot of influence and power. "I need to talk to you for a bit. Is that okay?"

"And what does the ungrateful woman want now?" he shot back, bitterness lacing his voice. It was because of our earlier argument—I'd told them all they were scum. And now, here I was, approaching him again like none of that had happened.

I was honestly pissed that Leon had even suggested I do this, especially after he'd witnessed up close the mess that went down between me and my family earlier.

"I just want to discuss something," I continued. "Figured you should hear it, since, you know, you're still my father."

He let out a harsh snort, turning his back to me again. "I don't remember my wife giving birth to you, and I definitely don't recall ever creating you." He dismissed me like I was nothing, his focus shifting back to the faces around him.

Acting like he didn't know who I was now. I'd really misjudged just how deep his stubbornness ran.

I let out a slow, frustrated sigh. "Well, whatever. I'm saying it anyway. I'm getting married," I said .

He spun around, finally paying attention, his gaze sharp. "Married, you say?"

"Yes," I said, meeting his eyes head-on.

"Keh. I bet it's just some lowborn man," he spat, like he could taste the bitterness on his tongue. "If you hadn't strayed from the path I laid out for you, you could have had a good life—good family, good connections. If you'd just made yourself the woman of Lord Deckes, or Lord Singt, or Lord Mackal, or any of those I introduced to you, you might've had a chance to be my daughter again. But no, you threw it all away. Every single opportunity I handed to you, wasted. If you'd just married the ones I picked, you might still belong to this family. But you ruined it."

I sighed again, the sound heavier, filled with all the frustration boiling inside me. He just kept going, like a broken record, hammering in how I'd supposedly destroyed my own future, when all I saw was a desperate man trying to control me. He wanted me as his pawn, a way to marry into power, to wrap his fingers tighter around the kingdom's influence. It made my skin crawl—knowing he'd use his own daughter like a bargaining chip. I never wanted any part of it. And the men he was talking about? They were the same ones he was schmoozing with right now, all of them already in their sixties.

I knew exactly what he was aiming for. He wanted me married to some old man on his last legs, counting on the moment he kicked the bucket. Once I became a widow, the wealth, lands, and assets would technically be in my name. But we both knew the truth—it wouldn't be mine. It would be his. And then, he'd have me marry another old fool, waiting again for the clock to run out, and claiming everything they had for himself. I was still young, after all, so by the time my first husband kicked the bucket, I'd probably be in my mid-thirties, still prime for another marriage. Basically, I'd have no freedom at all.

But luckily, I wasn't about to fall for it. Thanks to my sister, Grace, I'd seen the truth for what it was. I'd rebelled, fought back until they finally severed me from the family. And honestly? That was the best decision I'd ever made.

"My fiancé wants to introduce himself to you," I said, my voice firm but with an edge, making sure it carried over to where Sesillian lingered nearby. He didn't acknowledge me directly, but I caught the subtle shift in his posture—he was definitely listening, even if he kept his gaze averted, pretending to be disinterested.

"I don't care. I don't need to know who your so-called fiancé is, considering you're no longer my daughter, you ungrateful woman," he spat, his tone sharp and cutting like a blade. His eyes narrowed, face twisted in disdain. "Now, get out of my sight. I have no intention of ever seeing you again, and I don't want you anywhere near me, ever again."

His words hit like a slap, but honestly, I'd grown numb to them over the years. Kindness from him? That was a foreign concept. Even as a child, I never knew what it felt like. Did he ever cradle me when I was born? Did he ever sit by my side when I cried out in the dark? I couldn't remember those early years—newborn memories are foggy at best—but the absence of warmth was a constant. It was almost like he wasn't my father at all, just a stranger with a familiar face.

"Rose," Leon's voice cut through the tension behind me, smooth but deliberate. "Did you finish talking with your father already?"

The air shifted. Suddenly, all eyes were on us. My father's gaze locked onto Leon like he couldn't believe what he was seeing. His eyes widened, looking as if they might burst from his skull.

"Ah, I apologize for not introducing myself earlier." Leon took a graceful bow, his movements fluid, yet there was an underlying sharpness. "I didn't realize you were Rose's father. Now that I think about it, it should have been obvious with your shared hair color. My mistake for not recognizing it sooner."

"M-Mr. Faust, what... what is the meaning of this?" My father's voice stumbled, his usual haughty demeanor momentarily shaken. "You wanted to introduce yourself... to me?"

Leon's lips curled into a slight, calculated smile. "Well, yes. Rose mentioned there was a bit of... tension between her and the family. But still, you are her father, and as her future husband, it's only proper I introduce myself and formally ask for your blessing in taking her hand."

Leon was weaving his web expertly, each word a thread pulling tighter around my father. The air grew heavier, the room practically buzzing with anticipation. Sesillian, who had been pretending not to care, was now openly watching, his eyes glued to us.

Leon's smirk deepened, his expression unreadable, yet there was something devilish in his eyes. He had planned all of this perfectly, and the night was playing out exactly as he wanted. His control over the situation was absolute.

He looked every bit the devil he was.

Chapter 428 - Let The Party Begins, Part 1 (6)

The five of us—my mother, my sister, Leon, and me—sat around a round table, tension thick in the air, with no one else daring to interrupt. Still, a few were clearly trying to catch bits of our conversation from a distance. Sesillian, especially, was lurking nearby, his sharp gaze boring into me like a blade, eyes narrowed with jealousy that practically oozed from him.

He'd been watching me earlier with those jealous eyes, hadn't he? Now that I knew he swung towards men, it all clicked into place. He was after Leon. And when he found out about my engagement to Leon, that jealousy turned into a seething glare that drilled right through me. Was I just taking the heat for Leon here? It sure felt like a bullet with my name on it. But the way Leon carried himself, that confident smirk playing on his lips, hinted that he had something up his sleeve.

"Um, Mr. Faust, am I right in hearing that you're planning to marry our... uh... daughter?" my mother's voice wavered, a momentary crack of uncertainty slipping through.

Leon's lips curled into a smile—charming, sure, but it never touched his eyes. "Well, yes, I do, Madam."

My sister shot him a glance, her gaze darting toward a woman seated a few tables away. The woman sat elegantly, flanked by two other graceful women, like they were her entourage. "Um, aren't you... already involved with someone, Mr. Faust?" my sister asked.

Leon chuckled softly. "You might not like my answer, but I'm not really a believer in monogamy. I think that when a man has many women by his side, it makes him stronger. And being able to make them accept each other, to get along... well, that's what makes a man a good husband."

His words made my skin crawl. It wasn't just what he said—it was the self-assured way he said it, like he was preaching some twisted gospel. He wasn't lying when he claimed he didn't believe in monogamy; he had a whole parade of women around him, after all. Watching them fawn over him earlier only made that belief of his crystal clear. But honestly, that wasn't my problem.

"I-Is that so? Well, some of the men I know also keep women around, but they don't go so far as to marry them. They just keep them as concubines. Are you... planning to take her as your first wife?" my father said.

Leon leaned back. "I don't intend to rank them—who's first wife, second, or whatever. I want all my wives to see themselves as my equals. Even though Rose isn't the first, I plan to treat her the same as those who came before."

My mother blinked, clearly taken aback, struggling to wrap her head around the concept. "I... I never realized there could be something like that. I guess your thinking is part of why you're so successful," she admitted, sounding almost dazed.

Leon nodded, his smile widening just a touch. "Well, yes. It's nothing to brag about, but if not for the women by my side, I wouldn't have gotten anywhere close to where I am now."

"I-I see..."

They sat there, staring at Leon, his words leaving them speechless, scrambling to understand this strange philosophy. It was like he was speaking a different language, one that clashed with everything they knew.

Leon's expression softened, but his eyes remained as calculating as ever. "I never really had the chance to say this properly, but since you're Rose's family, I ask that you allow me to take your daughter's hand... even if I already have other women by my side."

The sheer audacity of his request hit like a punch to the gut. Claiming someone's daughter while being involved with others—it was downright scummy. If I were the one he was asking, I would've slapped him across the face.

But my family was anything but ordinary. If they thought there was something to gain, they'd grab it without a second thought.

"She's yours," my father replied, not even a hint of hesitation in his voice.

Leon's/ Christopher Faust's POV

"You really are scummy, you know that, right?" Rose's voice was sharp, slicing through the tension like a blade. Her eyes narrowed into dangerous slits, glinting with a fury that made my breath hitch. It was like staring into the eyes of a storm, and for a split second, I felt a cold chill run down my spine. But beneath that intensity, I couldn't help but notice how cute she looked when she was pissed off. That scrunched-up expression, her furrowed brows—it all had this weird charm. God, I almost wanted to reach out and pinch her cheeks right then and there, but I knew better. One wrong move and she'd knock me straight into Tuesday, and I wasn't up for a mid-week concussion.

"This all fits into my plan," I said, managing a smirk despite the electric tension in the air. "With this, Sesillian's just going to get even more frustrated."

Rose's eyes sharpened further, skepticism radiating from her. "Oh yeah? And how do you know that?" Her arms crossed tight against her chest as if she was daring me to make sense.

"I know for a fact that Sesillian's got a possessive streak a mile wide. He wants to keep whatever he desires all to himself," I explained. "So if something he wants is already owned by someone else, what do you think he'd do, with that possessive nature of his?"

Rose paused, her expression shifting as she mulled over my words. For a second, uncertainty flickered in her eyes, then she gave a half-hearted shrug, clearly stumped. "I don't know, honestly."

"Think about it this way," I pressed on. "If you were a compulsive shoplifter, and there was something in your friend's house you wanted so badly... what would you do?"

Rose paused, her expression shifting as she mulled over my words. For a second, uncertainty flickered in her eyes, then she gave a half-hearted shrug, clearly stumped. "I don't know, honestly."

"Think about it this way," I pressed on. "If you were a compulsive shoplifter, and there was something in your friend's house you wanted so badly... what would you do?"

"Steal it, I guess," Rose replied after a moment, realization slowly dawning in her gaze. Her eyes widened, the pieces falling into place like a puzzle she hadn't even realized she was holding.

"Exactly."

It was satisfying to see the lightbulb go off for her, like she'd finally cracked a code she didn't know she'd been struggling with. I'd swapped "possessive nature" for "shoplifter" to make the comparison hit home, but it was all the same in the end.

Chapter 429 - Let The Party Begins, Part 1 (7)

"He's planning to... steal you?" Rose's voice softened.

"Yeah. Away from you," I confirmed. "He'll probably try to lock me up somewhere. I don't know exactly where, but I'm betting it'll be at their base."

"And you're seriously going to risk that?" she asked, a mix of disbelief and worry creeping into her tone, her eyes scanning my face for any hint of hesitation.

"Well, it seems like the best chance to get a lead on at least one of their bases," I told her, meeting her gaze head-on. "It's a gamble, but it might be our only shot."

"Are you seriously betting everything on a gamble like this? For all we know, you could end up getting killed." "Oh, are you worried about me?" I shot back, a teasing grin curling my lips.

Her response was a cold, unamused glare that sent a chill down my spine, the kind that said she wasn't in the mood for jokes, and I knew I'd pushed a little too far.

"Okay, okay, I'm joking," I said, raising my hands slightly in mock surrender, the grin fading as I shifted to a more serious tone. "Look, if that happens, then I guess that's just how it'll go. But for now, we need to play it safe, watch every step, and keep an eye out for any reckless moves from Sesillian." I glanced toward the doorway. "I'm heading to the ballroom. What about you?"

"I'm... going to stay here for a while," she murmured, her voice softer than before.

There was something in her expression that I couldn't quite pin down—an uneasy mix of worry and an emotion I couldn't fully decipher. It lingered in her eyes like a shadow.

"Alright," I replied, turning to leave.

But as soon as I turned my back, I felt a soft, warm pressure envelop me. Her big breasts pressed into my back, their warmth radiating through the thin fabric of my shirt, and I froze. Rose had wrapped her arms around me, pulling me into a sudden embrace.

"Please, be careful," she whispered.

"I will," I promised.

Her arms loosened, the warmth of her body fading as she slowly let me go.

Charlotte's POV

"Um, Professor?" I asked cautiously, watching Professor Sesillian as he stood before me, his eyes darting across the room like a predator searching for prey. "Are you looking for someone? You've been glancing around for a while now."

He snapped his gaze toward me, blinking as if he had just remembered I was there. "Ah, don't worry about it. It's nothing." He tried to cover up the distraction with a smile, but it felt thin, almost forced. "So, Charlotte, are you enjoying the party? I know it can't be easy, given your situation."

"It's not that being here with you isn't enjoyable, Professor," I replied, trying to keep my tone light even as the weight of the stares in the room pressed down on me. "But I guess I am struggling with all the looks aimed my way."

Professor Sesillian's smile widened, but the warmth never seemed to reach his eyes. "You don't have to worry about them. Just be yourself tonight; that's more than enough."

"How about you, Professor?" I asked.

"Huh?" He blinked, momentarily thrown off by my question, like it had caught him off guard. "What do you mean?"

"Are you alright?" I pressed, watching his expression closely.

He had been on edge, almost frantic, like a caged animal with nowhere to go. It wasn't a side of him I was used to seeing, and it made my skin crawl with unease.

"Oh. Is it that obvious on my face that I'm not feeling great?" he muttered, rubbing the back of his neck like he was trying to knead the tension away. "I'm sorry, but this crowd... it's really not my thing."

"I-Is that so? Would you like me to help you back to your room?" I offered.

"No, don't worry about it. You've been invited by the Duke, haven't you? You should be here, making connections. It's your chance to regain some footing in society. Your former mother's family is here too; maybe they'd consider taking you back in if you asked."

"That's already impossible," I said, the words slipping out more bitterly than I intended. "She... wasn't my birth mother, and she severed all ties with me. Her family would do the same."

"It's okay..." I whispered, my voice fragile as glass. I tilted my head up, meeting his gaze, and for a moment, I got lost in the intensity of his eyes. They had this magnetic pull, an almost hypnotic allure that made it hard to look away. Because of his height, I had to rise onto my tiptoes to reach him, leaning in with the intent to brush my lips against his. But just as our faces drew close, the sound of footsteps interrupted the moment.

"But she still raised you, didn't she?" Professor Sesillian asked, his voice softer now, but with a sharp undertone, like he was trying to pry open an old wound.

I forced a bitter smile, feeling a twist in my chest. "Well, she said before cutting ties that her goal was my family's wealth back then." The words tasted bitter as they left my mouth, and a wave of sadness bubbled up. Digging up that memory felt like ripping open a scab—more painful than I'd expected.

Without warning, Professor Sesillian pulled me into a tight embrace, his arms wrapped around me with surprising warmth. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to put so much pressure on you."

"It's okay..." I whispered, my voice fragile as glass. I tilted my head up, meeting his gaze, and for a moment, I got lost in the intensity of his eyes. They had this magnetic pull, an almost hypnotic allure that made it hard to look away. Because of his height, I had to rise onto my tiptoes to reach him, leaning in with the intent to brush my lips against his. But just as our faces drew close, the sound of footsteps interrupted the moment.

"I'm sorry I'm late!" a voice rang out, jarring us back to reality.

We both turned toward the sound.

"Sirches?!" Kayla's voice was full of surprise. As she stepped closer, I noticed a bandage plastered across her nose—something I hadn't caught before. Did she have that injury earlier? I must not have been paying attention.

Sirches offered an apologetic smile, scratching the back of his head. "Oh, Kayla. Sorry, sorry. There was some crazy traffic all the way here. What happened to your nose?"

While everyone focused on the unexpected arrival, I missed the shift in Professor Sesillian's expression.

"Traffic?"

"Yeah," Sirches replied with a casual shrug. "People are blocking all the roads coming this way. It made getting here a real pain."

People blocking the roads? What the hell could that mean? The thought barely had time to settle before Professor Sesillian suddenly released me, his grip loosening and he pulled away.

Chapter 430 - Let The Party Begins, Part 2 (1)

"Professor Sesillian?"

He vanished, just like that, leaving behind an empty space where he'd been standing moments before. His warmth still lingered from where he'd hugged me, but now he was gone, as if the air itself had swallowed him whole. How did he manage to disappear so quickly?

"I'm really sorry, Kayla. I messed up big time, I know, but it's not entirely my fault. Those people are really blocking my way."

"Can you shut up for once? It's because of you that I'm in this mess!" Kayla shot back, her voice sharp and venomous. Her finger jabbed toward her nose, now crooked and wrapped in a thick bandage. Bruises darkened the skin around her eyes. "If you'd just shown up a bit sooner, my nose might've been fine! But no, you didn't!"

"I told you, didn't I? It's not my fault those bastards blocked the road, keeping my car stuck there for hours! It's their fault for being there, not mine!"

Their argument kept escalating, their voices a harsh clash amidst the murmurs of the crowd. As this heated exchange unfolded, Leon, who had slipped out of the ballroom earlier with Professor Rose after speaking with her family about taking her as his wife, made his way back into the room with confident, unhurried strides.

"Oh, looks like the real party is finally starting," he remarked, a smirk playing on his lips.

A sharp, resounding clap echoed through the room, cutting through the noise. It came from the upper platform. At the top stood a woman, her curves accentuated by the fitted dress she wore, the fabric hugging her voluptuous figure. Her white hair shimmered under the lights, framing a face so striking it commanded the attention of everyone present. Even I couldn't tear my gaze away.

"Hello, everyone!" she called out. "Sorry to interrupt the festivities, but I need your attention for a moment."

"Huh? Who's that?"

"No clue."

"Another new face? Why's a party for nobles bringing in outsiders like her?"

"Maybe she's like the owner of Leonamon?"

People murmured, trying to figure out who this mysterious woman was. She seemed almost otherworldly, making it difficult to place her.

"Wait, doesn't she look like Sesillian's sister?"

"You mean that lunatic one?"

"Yeah. Sara, if I remember right."

"What the hell is she doing here? Where's Sesillian? He should keep his little sister from making a scene."

Suddenly, everyone's eyes were on me. I flinched under their stares, but I just shook my head. I had no clue where Professor Sesillian had gone—he just disappeared right beside me.

"Everyone, please. I want all of your attention on me. Can we please stop the chatter and nonsense noises for a moment." With a clap of her hand, the woman managed to catch all the people present in an instant. "Good." she said with a smile on her face.

"Everyone, please. Focus on me. Can we stop the chatter and pointless noise for just a moment?" With a snap of her fingers, the woman's voice took command, silencing the room in an instant. "Good," she said, a faint, unsettling smile curling on her lips.

"Now then, you might be wondering what I'm doing here, and why I'm addressing all of you instead of letting you enjoy the party. I do apologize for the interruption, but let me ask you something first." Her expression darkened, her grin spreading into something wicked and teasing. "Have you ever wished that the light would just... disappear?"

"Huh?"

"What is she talking about?"

"I have no idea."

"Light? Disappear? What does she mean by this?"

Another sharp clap broke through the murmuring, demanding attention once more. "I'm speaking metaphorically. If you had to choose between what's good and what's not, what would you prefer more—the light or the darkness?"

Silence fell over the room, her question hanging in the air, heavy and cryptic.

"Come on, this is as simple as choosing between day and night!" she coaxed, her voice lilting like she was playing some twisted game. "It's an easy one!"

The crowd shifted uncomfortably, exchanging uncertain glances. Soft murmurs spread like ripples, everyone trying to figure out what to answer. Oddly enough, the question wormed its way into my mind too, making me ponder.

Which would you prefer, light or darkness?

If I had to make a choice, I'd go with darkness. Sure, light has its place, but darkness? Darkness is where you find rest, where the world grows quiet, and shadows stretch long across empty streets. It's that comforting weight that settles in, letting you shut your eyes, knowing the only thing that pulls you back is the return of daylight. Most of the people here probably feel the same—drawn to the night more than the morning. They despise the jolt of waking up to another grind, counting down the hours until the sky dims. Even as they go through the motions, the thought of night lurks in their minds, urging it to come quicker so they can finally unwind. Her question was so simple, so obvious.

"Of course, I prefer darkness," Sirches declared, his voice carrying through the space. He looked up at the woman on the platform, his grin mirroring the wicked twist of hers. "It's calmer, quieter in the dark! When the light's around, it's full of people, and those self-righteous assholes always flock to it!"

"That's right! A brilliant young man, right there!" the woman said, clapping her hands together with a sharp, echoing snap, her smile widening into something almost predatory.

Voices started to rise from the crowd, each adding to the swell of agreement.

"It's better in the dark! I can focus without all the noise and bullshit!"

"I prefer darkness!"

"Sometimes, I just wish the light would fuck off for good! I'd rather sleep all damn day!"

The room filled with a chorus of answers, each one leaning towards the shadows. Not a single soul dared to pick light.

And before I knew it, I found myself speaking up, "I like the darkness. It's way better than being out in the light! It's calm, it's quiet, and I hate dragging my ass out of bed every morning, just to wait for night to come again! I wish the night would stay forever, and the light would just disappear."

The words tumbled out, raw and unfiltered, and I didn't even know why they came so naturally. They felt like they slipped through some part of me I didn't fully control.

As the answers filled the air, one man just stood there, silent amidst the rising murmurs. His eyes were shadowed, his expression unreadable, like he was seeing something the rest of us couldn't.

"Be careful what you wish for."