

The World 445

Chapter 445 - The Capital Is Taken! (1)

Three people in the crowd started convulsing, their bodies twisting unnaturally.

I recognized one of them—Sirches, Kayla's boyfriend. His body jerked violently, but the people around him didn't even flinch. They kept clapping along with Sesillian, who stood there with his head raised like a god accepting their praise.

"What's happening?" Rose asked, though her voice was muffled from the Guardian's aura surrounding her.

"I'm wondering the same thing." I replied, trying to make sense of the situation. It didn't feel like they were just convulsing. There was something more twisted going on, but I couldn't quite figure it out yet.

Hmm?

Suddenly, I felt a surge of mana beneath me, something dark and massive brewing from below. What the hell was causing this?

Before I could react, the heads of the three convulsing men exploded, splattering blood and chunks of flesh everywhere in a grotesque display. The sickening mess spread across the floor like a bloody canvas, but even then, the crowd kept cheering, their hands clapping as if nothing had happened. Their attention was solely on Sesillian.

A rumbling shook the ground beneath us. Something was moving down there, something big enough to make the earth tremble. I scanned the room, but no one else seemed to notice—or maybe it was Sesillian's influence keeping them oblivious.

"Now, now... let's pause the applause for a moment," Sesillian's voice echoed with smug confidence, "and allow me to give you the main agenda. Tonight, we will capture the Capital. It will serve as the main catalyst for summoning our lord, the Great Darkness. The People of the Eclipse are already preparing the summoning circle as we speak. And of course, the ritual requires a sacrifice. We've already met most of the requirements. All that remains is the blood of someone from the royal family."

It didn't need to be said. That someone had to be Charlotte.

"This very place is part of the circle too," Sesillian continued. "My people have already drawn it beneath our feet without us even realizing it. Those three brave souls you just saw sacrifice themselves have provided their blood to fuel the circle, ensuring the success of the summoning. Let's give them a round of applause, shall we?"

The crowd immediately clapped, louder than before, their cheers echoing through the ballroom.

"Thank you for dying for the greater good, Sirches!" Kayla called out, her voice filled with admiration. "This is why I fell in love with you! You're so manly!"

Even though her boyfriend had just died in front of her, she thanked him with sincerity. The brainwashing had taken root in her completely.

"Ngh?!" Rose groaned beside me. I turned to see her clutching her head in pain. Even through the Guardian's aura, Sesillian's charm was starting to break through. This was bad—if Rose got brainwashed, I'd lose her completely.

I couldn't let that happen.

Without wasting a second, I used Illusion Magic to conceal myself and slipped away unnoticed. I grabbed Rose's body, flying out of the ballroom and crashing through one of the windows to escape the manor. Once we were out, I pushed us as far from the area as possible.

I'd already ordered the others to leave the manor and head away from the Capital, but I wasn't sure if they'd made it out yet. I had to get Rose into their care, and fast.

But then... I noticed something strange.

A large glowing magic circle spread out beneath me. "Large" didn't even begin to describe it—it encompassed the entire manor and stretched far beyond, like it was just one piece of an enormous puzzle. How long had they been working on this to get it this massive? I looked around and saw bodies everywhere, headless corpses littering the ground.

"The death toll must be in the thousands," I muttered to myself.

I couldn't believe Sesillian had managed to take control of so many people. His Charm ability was terrifying on a whole new level, and the fact that even I could've been affected by it made it even worse.

As I kept running, the scene only grew more disturbing. A sea of bodies, all headless, stretched out before me. Some weren't even members of the Eclipse—they were just unfortunate souls caught in the chaos, trampled underfoot. Others were still alive, crying and screaming for help, their voices.

"Amon, where are you?" I called her on the phone.

"We're just about to exit the Capital, Master. We've been delayed by a crowd of people flooding the area, but Sandra and the others fought them off. You don't have to worry about me, Ella, or Maya, Master," she responded calmly.

"I need you to stop for a bit. I'm coming your way—I've got Rose with me."

"Understood."

With that, I sped towards their location.

A few minutes later, I caught up with them. I handed Rose over to Bernadette.

"Master," Amon said, looking up at the sky. "Something feels off... Look at the moon."

I glanced up. The moon had turned blood red. "Yeah, I didn't think Sesillian could pull off something this big, but I guess I've been underestimating him."

"Are you coming back?" she asked.

"I am," I said, meeting her gaze.

"Take care," she replied softly, pulling me into a hug. Her breasts pressed against me, the warmth of her body making me just a little too comfortable.

"Yeah, I will," I assured her, returning the hug.

While I was at it, I gave the others the same kind of affection. Ella blushed, her face turning red as she watched. Robyn, clearly uncomfortable, got a head pat instead, like I'd given to Bernadette.

"Shadows," I addressed them, "I want you to protect as many civilians as you can after you've ensured everyone else's safety. But if things get too dangerous, prioritize yourselves and escape. I don't want any of you dying on me."

The Shadows all knelt before me, though Robyn was a bit slower, still getting used to this kind of command. But she knelt all the same.

"And after all of this," I continued, "I'll take all of your virginities. So make sure you make it back."

Chapter 446 The Capital Is Taken! (2)

Five out of seven of them had their eyes light up with determination. The thought of losing their virginities to me seemed to excite them, and somehow, it empowered them too. Sandra, despite having already lost hers, was excited as well. Aegis and Robyn, though? Well, they didn't seem ready.

Aegis looked pissed.

"I don't want anything to do with you, and I sure as fuck don't want to be tied to this nonsense. Take whatever you want from them, I don't care. Just keep your fucking hands off me. I'm not even part of your little crew, so you've got no right."

Her voice dripped with venom. Yeah, she wasn't exactly my biggest fan. Not that I planned on touching her anyway—Aegis gave off serious "I'll bite your dick off" vibes if she ever went down on someone.

Then there was Robyn...

Her face flushed bright red, hands trembling as she tried to cover it. "I-I'm not ready yet!"

I let out a soft chuckle and said, "If you don't want to, that's totally fine. I'm not here to force anything. You make your own decisions, just like everyone else. But whatever happens, stay safe, okay?"

The five original Shadows nodded eagerly, clearly wanting it.

"Alright," I said, giving them a nod, "I'm heading back now. Take care of the others, and save as many civilians as you can."

"Yes, Master!" the five Shadows responded in unison.

"Y-Yes!" Robyn added, a little late.

Aegis didn't say anything—she just crossed her arms over her chest.

With that, I turned and headed back toward the center of the capital.

The Capital City was drenched in death. Headless corpses lay strewn across the streets like discarded dolls. Their lifeless bodies wore the Eclipse's signature hooded robes, but among them, there were civilians too—people who'd been trampled underfoot by the wave of brainwashed bodies that flooded the city. A mother lay crushed in the street, her body twisted at a terrible angle.

"Mama! Wake up, Mama!"

A child knelt beside her, shaking her cold body with tiny hands, tears streaming down her face. Her cries echoed in the empty streets, cutting through the heavy silence. I glanced down at the mother—her lifeless eyes stared blankly at the bloodstained ground.

"I'm sorry," I murmured softly, crouching down to his level. "But your mom... she's already—"

I couldn't bring myself to finish the sentence. Telling him she was dead felt like kicking a puppy.

The kid screamed louder, shaking her body harder, like she was trying to pull her back from the dead, like if she just cried enough, she'd wake up. But she wasn't asleep. She wasn't coming back.

My fists clenched at my sides, nails digging into my palms. Rage boiled beneath my skin. Sesillian's fucking madness—charming people, brainwashing them, and sending them to their deaths. Innocents like this kid's mom got caught in the crossfire, trampled by the chaos.

This wasn't just a war—it was a massacre.

I pointed toward a nearby building. "Listen, go over there, okay? Someone will come to help you. Just wait over there, alright?"

"B-But Mama!"

I shook my head softly. "I'm sorry, but I don't think your Mama can go anywhere anymore. She's... going to sleep forever."

"S-Sleep?" The child stammered, her eyes wide with confusion.

"Yeah," I said gently, trying to soften the blow.

"Can't she wake up?"

I looked at her, swallowing hard before answering. "No. She can't. But she's going somewhere nice. Somewhere peaceful."

"Can't I... go with her?" she asked, her voice trembling as a snot bubble formed under her nose.

I wiped her face with my sleeve. "Not yet. You have to wait until it's your time. But one day, you'll see her again. In a paradise where she'll be waiting for you."

"How long?" she asked, her voice breaking.

"A long time. Years, maybe. But I promise you, you'll meet her again, okay?"

"...Okay..." she whispered, her small voice barely audible.

She turned and ran towards the building I had pointed to for her to hide in. I watched her go, her tiny figure disappearing inside. I gently picked up her mother's cold, lifeless body and carried it over, laying her down inside too. Maybe it'd bring the kid some comfort, so she wouldn't be so scared.

"Wait for the seven big sisters," I told the child softly. "They're going to take you to safety."

She nodded, wiping her tears. "Un..."

Leaving her behind, I turned and walked away. The Shadows would be there soon to get her out. That girl's heart would be scarred forever, the trauma etched deep, both physically and mentally. But I'd put her in Filia's and Natasha's care. If anyone could help heal her mind, it'd be them.

I headed straight back to the manor, where the party was still in full swing. Inside, it was like a completely different world. Laughter, clapping, music, dancing—none of them seemed to have a fucking clue, or care, about what was happening outside. Their attention was locked onto the woman on the platform at the center of the room, her body entangled with three men behind her, swapping kisses like it was the only thing that mattered.

They took turns, mouths moving from her lips to her neck, and she was loving every second of it.

It went without saying, but that "woman" was Sesillian. To everyone watching, she looked like a gorgeous woman, and I could tell those men thought the same thing. But the truth? He was a man, disguising himself with his deadly Charm ability. His power wasn't just a trick—it was dangerous as hell. Rose had warned me that his Charm was strong enough to pull everyone in a certain radius towards

him, forcing their focus on him like moths to a flame. His voice carried the magic, but it wasn't just that. His increased mana and whatever pills he'd taken had amplified his power to frightening levels.

While I stood there watching, his eyes suddenly locked onto me, a slow smile spreading across his lips.

"Mr. Faust! I've been looking for you! Where have you been?" His voice was sickeningly sweet, dripping with false warmth.

"I've been here the whole time," I replied.

"Well, come here then!" he said, waving me over.

I walked toward him, taking a seat next to him on the platform. The men who had been fawning over him, massaging and licking his body, were quickly dismissed. He waved them away like they were nothing, leaving just the two of us in the spotlight.

Chapter 447 - The Capital Is Taken! (3)

"You know, Mr. Faust," Sesillian purred as he glided toward his chair. He sat down smoothly, crossing his legs with a smirk. "I like men like you. So docile for someone with power. Is it because you were born a commoner? That would explain this submissiveness, wouldn't it? Quite a delightful bonus, I must say."

His finger trailed over my chest, like he was savoring the contact. He dragged it up to my shoulder, grazing my neck, and finally settling beneath my chin. His intentions were clear—this was seduction. His movements, the lingering touches—it was all designed to throw me off.

When his hand was under my chin, he leaned forward, his lips so close I could feel his breath. His appearance was disturbingly feminine—long hair, slender waist, those breasts... but I knew better. If I let him close the gap, to anyone else, it would just look like two men kissing. And that wasn't happening.

I pulled back. His eyes shot wide open, like he couldn't believe what had just happened. It was like he'd never been rejected in his life. The shock on his face was almost comical.

"What...?"

His voice trembled with disbelief. He couldn't understand why I'd pulled away, especially since he thought his charm had already done its job.

"I'm sorry," I said with a calm, unwavering voice, "but I don't kiss men."

The look on his face was priceless—his eyes widened even further, jaw slightly dropping. For someone masquerading as a woman, hearing me call him a man had to be a punch to the gut.

"W-What do you mean? I

am

a woman! Can't you see my body?! Look at these breasts! My long hair! This sexy waist!"

"Yeah, I can see all of that. But that's just what my eyes are showing me," I replied. "The truth is, you're still Mr. Sesillian Quinn, right?"

His expression hardened, teeth grinding together as he realized the jig was up. "So, even under the charm, you can see through it, huh? Fine. Yes, I am Sesillian Quinn. I'm the one who was talking to you earlier. The body you're seeing, it's just an illusion, but without it... well, I'm the same man you met before. Don't you think this body is exquisite, though? I created it based on how I imagined myself if I became a woman. A perfect form, wouldn't you agree?"

"You can see it too?"

"Of course I can see it," he replied with a sly grin. "It's my creation, after all. But even with this body—these curves, this sensual form—you still see me as a man? You're a handsome man, Mr. Faust, but I don't appreciate your rejection."

"I'm just being honest," I said. "I don't judge anyone's preferences. If you're into men, that's your business. But I can't reciprocate because I love women."

"Is that so?" His voice dropped an octave, anger bubbling just beneath the surface. His calm demeanor was cracking, veins bulging slightly at his temples. "Well, I can't fuck you right now, anyway, seeing as the Ordeal is about to start. It's a shame, though—I really wanted to fuck the man known for revolutionizing this world. But since you're going to die here, I suppose it doesn't matter anymore."

Before I could respond, the cold, unmistakable

click

of a gun echoed behind me, and in a split second, I felt the brutal impact. My head slammed forward, cracking against the table as the shots rang out. Bullets ripped into my back, each one forcing my body further down. The gunfire was relentless, each shot vibrating through my bones, until the deafening clicks signaled an empty chamber.

They were reloading, when—

"That's enough," Sesillian's voice cut through the chaos like a blade. His tone was icy, detached. "It's truly unfortunate to kill someone as useful as you, but... well, that's the way of the world, isn't it?"

So, after brainwashing me, Sesillian planned to put me to use. Probably to further his schemes. But now, with me "dead"—at least in his mind—those plans were scratched.

"Now, now, everyone!" Sesillian clapped his hands, a sharp, echoing sound that cut through the air like a whip, demanding attention. His lips curled into a sinister grin, eyes gleaming with madness. "The time of the Ordeal is upon us! The day has come for darkness to consume this world once again! With all but one requirement fulfilled, the light is about to fade, leaving only darkness to reign supreme!"

"Darkness! Darkness! Darkness! Darkness!"

The crowd roared.

Sesillian's grin widened as he soaked in their hysteria. "We need only one final sacrifice," he declared, voice booming, as if speaking to the heavens themselves. He spread his arms wide. "A virgin with royal blood!" His gaze snapped to Charlotte. "And that is you, Charlotte!"

"E-Eh?" Charlotte's voice cracked.

"Yes! You!" Sesillian's tone was sickeningly sweet, dripping with sadistic pleasure. "You will be the sacrifice! The key to resurrecting the eternal darkness! The end of light! The final piece to complete this world's true fate! Charlotte Sierra, be thankful! You've been chosen for a once-in-a-lifetime event!"

Charlotte's eyes darted around the room, panic setting in. She was clearly struggling to process what she'd just heard. Somehow, the sheer shock of being singled out as the sacrifice must have broken the mind control. She blinked, confusion and terror swirling in her eyes.

"P-Professor...?" Her voice was barely audible, trembling with fear.

"Huh?" Sesillian's triumphant expression faltered for a moment. His eyes narrowed. "What's this? Why are more of you breaking free from the Charm?! How dare you see me?! This is unforgivable! Unforgivable! UNFORGIVABLE!" His shrieks echoed through the ballroom, growing more unhinged with every word. "I crafted this perfect body—a flawless form, every curve, every sensation! And yet all you see is the man I'm trapped in?! This is unforgivable!"

Sesillian was losing it, his composed mask slipping away. He hated that she could see through his illusion, that they saw the man in women's clothing instead of the "perfect" female form he projected. And now, Charlotte was staring at him, eyes wide in disbelief.

Well, this just got a whole lot more interesting.

Chapter 448 - The Capital Is Taken! (4)

Charlotte's POV

Something snapped me back to reality, like a cold slap across my face. Maybe it was that woman's voice—ordering me to die, telling me to be grateful for the chance to be her sacrifice. That jolted me out of whatever haze I was in. And then I saw him—Professor Sesillian—standing on a platform, draped in women's clothes.

"P-Professor?" My voice cracked, barely above a whisper.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The man I'd loved for so long—the only one I ever loved—was standing there dressed like a woman. My mind reeled, trying to make sense of it.

"Why?" Professor Sesillian's voice quivered with restrained fury as he lowered his head, his fists clenched so tight I could see his knuckles whitening. "Why do you only see this body I'm trapped in? This

man

? Can't you see the

woman

that I truly am, Charlotte?!"

I stood there, frozen. I didn't understand. I

couldn't

understand.

"Why do you still look at me like this?!"

His voice exploded in a shout, raw and seething with anger. The rage in his eyes burned, and every bit of it was directed at me, scorching me with its intensity.

"You know what? Never mind." His voice grew colder. "I won't waste my anger on someone who's about to become the key to my answers... the resurrection of darkness. Otherwise, I might kill you right here."

"P-Professor, w-what are you saying? S-Sacrificing me? You're joking, right? T-Tell me this isn't real. Please... you don't actually want me dead, do you? Please, tell me this is all some twisted joke!"

"What?" His eyes flickered with amusement. "Of course you should die—for the sake of my darkness, for my sake, and for everyone who desires the return of darkness."

"B-But...!"

"What? Did you really believe I cared about you? That I would

love

someone like you?" He spat the words out. "The only reason I ever got close to you was to turn you into a sacrifice! Why else would I bother with you? I don't even love women. I love

men

, Charlotte!"

My legs buckled beneath me, my entire body trembling. It felt like the ground had fallen away, like everything I believed was crumbling into nothingness. All those moments we shared, the feelings I thought were real, shattered in an instant.

"Do you know how revolting it was to touch you? To hug you?" His words hit me like physical blows. "How much I cursed you in my mind every time you asked me for comfort? Every. Single. Time. I hated it—probably cursed you hundreds of times."

I tried to block it out, tried to shut his voice out, but his words slithered into my soul, tearing at it, gnawing away at whatever was left of me. The pain was unbearable.

"It's a lie..." I whispered to myself, desperately clinging to some hope, trying to escape this cruel reality. My mind refused to believe it, refused to let it sink in.

"It's fine," Sesillian said, his lips curling into a twisted smirk. "At least you'll finally be useful. Maybe then,

maybe

you'll be someone I can tolerate. Doubt it though, because I

hate

you, Charlotte."

The tears came then, burning hot as they streamed down my face. Each one felt like a piece of me breaking, shattering beyond repair.

"Well then, I guess it's time to begin the Ordeal. Grab her."

The crowd tightened around me, their faces blank, eyes filled with nothing but purpose. I didn't even bother to resist. My energy was drained, completely burned out. There was nothing left in me to fight with.

"Let's head to the plaza. The ritual's about to start. Finally, I'll get to see it!"

Leon's POV

After a moment, I let out a sigh, raising my head, which had slammed into the table from the bullet impact. The bullet that had been lodged in the back of my skull rolled off, clinking softly onto the floor as I straightened up, blood trailing down the sides of my face. I blinked a few times, then chuckled.

"Hahahahaha! That was

priceless

. Watching Charlotte's spirit break when she found out her beloved man had been into men all along—absolutely

hilarious

"

I couldn't give enough credit to both Charlotte and Sesillian. Their whole dramatic little scene had me struggling not to burst into laughter. But even then, I couldn't keep the smile off my face. It was just too damn funny.

"Well, the situation's getting pretty intense, so I guess it's time to stop holding back." I reached into my suit, pulling out the faceless mask I always carried. This was it. I was going to become Mephisto now.

Sesillian's POV

Everything was coming together. After years of planning, orchestrating every detail, it was all about to come to fruition. The excitement bubbling up inside me was almost too much to contain. My plan, after so many years, was finally about to be completed. Naturally, I was ecstatic.

The only thing left was to lay Charlotte on the altar and offer her blood to Lord Xyroskhaal. Once He drank, He would reign supreme over this world once again, and my wish would finally be granted.

With the Magic Knights stuck outside the capital, blocked by the thousands of people filling the streets, there was no one left to stop us.

"Chant it for me!" I commanded, my voice booming across the plaza.

"In the shadows, we find truth, and in the darkness, we are reborn. The world will bow to our will, for we are the harbingers of the Eclipse, where light meets its end, and our power begins."

The crowd joined in, their voices blending into one.

"In the shadows, we find truth, and in the darkness, we are reborn. The world will bow to our will, for we are the harbingers of the Eclipse, where light meets its end, and our power begins."

Again, their chant filled the air, growing louder with each repetition, feeding into the tension that was building around us.

I grabbed Charlotte from the man holding her, walking slowly up the steps toward the altar, the ritual site prepared by the members of the Eclipse. Each step felt heavier than the last as I approached the platform. Once there, I laid her down on the cold stone surface, her body limp beneath my hands.

I picked up the knife from the side of the altar, its blade gleaming wickedly under the pale light. I raised my eyes to the sky, feeling the energy swirling around me.

"Our Lord! With this sacrifice, you will be reborn! Bless us once again, cover this world in your darkness, and reign supreme!"

Chapter 449 - The Capital Is Taken! (5)

Angelica's POV

"The Eclipse will blanket this world in darkness once more, and Lord Xyroskhaal will finally bless us with his return!"

That word echoed in my mind, and with it, every memory of what they'd done to me to bring me to this point. I never would've imagined I'd fall into something like this. But here I was. I never even thought something so massive existed in this world—until they brainwashed me into joining them.

The right side of my head was throbbing in pain. One of my eyes had exploded, and I could barely think straight.

The right side of my head throbbed with a relentless, burning pain. My eye had exploded, and the world was a blurry mess. I couldn't think straight, my thoughts scattered like glass shards.

Somehow, when my head blew apart, it shattered the brainwashing too. The control they had over me faded, and I barely managed to stop myself from dying through sheer force of will. Maybe my mind fought back, resisting just enough to save me from that final, fatal moment. Or maybe it was dumb luck. Either way, I broke free, no longer a mindless slave to their fucked-up devotion. I didn't want to live like that—blind faith in something I didn't understand, something evil.

But none of that mattered now. I had to get to the castle. Commander Lilia had to know what was happening. Yeah, she tried to kill me before, but the safety of the entire kingdom, maybe the whole world, was at stake. No time for grudges. No time for fear.

Oddly enough, being brainwashed worked to my advantage. The people who were brainwashed as well at the Capital weren't watching me like a threat, not after what I'd been through. I slipped past them, unnoticed, making my way toward the main plaza. If I didn't stop the leader of the Eclipse, it would all be over. I couldn't let that happen.

The pain was unbearable, every step felt like fire ripping through my body, but I pressed on. I had to. Finally, after what seemed like hours, I reached the castle.

"State your business! What are you doing here? If you remain silent, we'll arrest you!"

A crowd had already gathered. I wasn't the only one they had brainwashed. The people standing in front of the royal knights were like me—once innocent citizens, now twisted into hollow puppets, mindlessly loyal to the Eclipse. The knights stood in formation at the entrance, spears ready, but the crowd didn't move. They just stared, vacant, unblinking.

"I said state your business!" the knight captain shouted, stomping forward. His voice cut through the tension like a blade, his patience clearly running thin.

I knew what I had to do. I stepped out of the crowd, my body screaming in agony, each movement a brutal reminder of what I'd endured. Limping forward, I made my way toward the captain.

"I'm going to tell you... exactly what their business is. But I need to whisper it, so don't attack."

"We can't let someone suspicious get any closer! Don't even try it!" the captain growled, his hand gripping his weapon.

"I

am

," I said, voice steady but strained. The crowd behind me seemed oblivious, but if they caught wind of what I was doing, they'd tear me apart. I reached inside my cloak, feeling the cool metal of my insignia, the only proof I had of who I was.

I pulled it out, showing him the symbol that marked me as a magic knight. At first, the captain stiffened, ready to strike, but then his eyes widened as he realized who I was.

"You're...?"

"I am," I confirmed, my voice low. "I'll explain everything, but you need to keep quiet. These people are innocent. Don't kill them."

"S-Still, it's possible—"

"I haven't stolen it," I shot back, my voice low and sharp. "Do you seriously believe some random person could just steal an insignia from a magic knight? Do you really think a magic knight would be that dumb?"

"N-No, I don't, but..."

"I graduated a year ago, served as a knight for that time, and was promoted to captain. If you're that desperate for proof, check the records yourself."

The captain blinked, his composure faltering under the weight of my words. "T-Then... what is their intention?" he asked.

"They're trying to keep the royal knights and magic knights busy so they won't realize what's going on in the Capital," I explained. "Something big is about to happen. Something

awful

."

"A-Awful?"

"Yes. I almost became one of their pawns. These people behind me? They've been mind-controlled to distract us, to keep the knights from realizing the danger. This is a setup, and we're running out of time," I said.

"W-What...?"

"The Capital is in a dangerous state right now. That's why I need you to let me in to speak with the Commander," I continued.

"C-Commander?" His eyes widened.

"Commander Lilia. She's the only one who might be able to undo this mind control. She could order them to stop," I said. Commander Lilia's ability was powerful, almost like brainwashing itself. If anyone could break the hold over these people, it would be her.

"But... Commander Lilia and the Vice Commander are both on a mission," the captain said.

"What?!"

Of all times for her to be away, why

now

? My heart dropped into my stomach. This was the absolute worst-case scenario.

"Is there anyone else inside? We need to act immediately! The Capital is already compromised, and if we don't stop the leader of the Eclipse, his goal will be realized!" My voice was barely a whisper, but the intensity of my words hung in the air like a storm waiting to break. My mind raced, the horrific image of corpses lining the streets by dawn flashing before my eyes—if we even survived until then.

"I-I'm not sure I understand what you're talking about, but—"

My frustration boiled over. I reached for his neck, but my hand collided with the cold steel of his armor. Fuck. I grabbed his shoulder instead, pulling him closer, my grip tight with desperation.

"What the hell are you doing?!"

The other knights stepped forward, spears raised, their eyes narrowed as they pointed their weapons at me.

"If we don't act now, there will be even more victims! The leader of the Eclipse spoke of some kind of Ordeal, and it's going to happen

soon

We're out of time! Get your ass inside, warn the others, and get them ready before it's too late!"

Chapter 450 - The Capital Is Taken! (6)

"Can you please tell me everything?" a voice broke through the cold silence.

I turned in the direction of the voice, and there stood Princess Myrcella. She was dressed in soft, flowing loungewear, the loose fabric clinging to her form under the moonlight. The cold night air curled around her, but it didn't seem to faze her one bit. She must've overheard us somewhere in the castle.

"P-Princess, it's cold and dangerous outside! You shouldn't be out here!"

"I'm not some little princess anymore, so I'll be fine." Princess Myrcella's voice carried a calm but sharp edge. Her eyes narrowed on me, her presence more commanding than ever. "You... you're Captain Angelica, right? I remember seeing you back then. When I noticed you, I came straight here. And then I heard everything you said. So, can you please explain to me exactly what's going on?"

Myrcella's POV

Captain Angelica. I knew her face from back then, back when she was still one of the rising knights appointed to lead. I was at her promotion ceremony, but now, her once proud and confident expression seemed almost broken, as if she had been through hell. Still, I could recognize her—barely.

"So then, will you tell me what's really happening?" I asked.

"It's the Eclipse," Captain Angelica began. "It's a cult that's been silently kidnapping people from the outskirts, far from prying eyes. They didn't want anyone to notice too many people disappearing at once. The cult's led by one man, but the members... they're mostly innocent. People who were brainwashed and forced into doing horrible things, like kidnapping others."

"The Eclipse, huh?" I muttered. "So this article about the cult... it's all true then?"

"Article?"

I pulled out my phone and showed her the article that had been circulating for weeks. It talked about the Eclipse—this dangerous cult that had been behind a series of kidnappings across the continent. The targets were only women. People speculated it was just human trafficking, women being sold into prostitution rings. But I didn't buy it. Not after the bombing at Leonamon. That kind of thing wasn't random, and I knew deep down it had to be connected.

"Y-Yes, it's all true. The kidnappings, the killings, everything. I know because... I've been part of it." Angelica's voice faltered, but she didn't shy away from admitting it.

"I see..." I murmured. "And what about you? Was everything you did because of your own will, or was it the brainwashing?"

"It's the brainwashing..." Angelica said. "But at the same time, it feels like I was acting on my own too. Like I wanted to do it. The lines between reality and the brainwashing have blurred so much I can't even tell what's real anymore. But I'm not going to claim innocence. Brainwashed or not, I've done terrible things. I know I deserve to be punished for it. But now's not the time for that."

"And the people outside the castle? They're like you, right? Brainwashed too?" I asked.

"Yes," she confirmed, a heavy nod accompanying her words. "They're just like me. Innocent people forced to commit horrible acts."

I couldn't believe something like this had been happening right under our noses. A cult this large, this organized, and yet no one had done anything to stop it. The knights, the soldiers... all of them in the dark, not even aware of the danger surrounding us. It was maddening. Whoever was behind this had been doing it for a long time without getting caught. Then again, it made sense—magic knights and royal knights weren't allowed to use smartphones on the job, so this kind of thing could easily slip past them.

"I've seen reports online about what's been happening in the Capital City, but what confuses me is why no knights are taking any action."

"They're keeping the information from reaching the knights," Angelica explained. "The citizens are suffering as we speak. All of this... it's going exactly as he planned."

"He?"

"The Leader."

"Can you tell me who exactly he is?"

Angelica's face twisted in pain, her hand shooting up to clutch her forehead. "It's... Ugh!" She staggered, almost collapsing under the weight of whatever was tormenting her.

"A-Are you okay?" I asked, rushing toward her as panic shot through me.

"I'm sorry, but I think... something's preventing me from saying his name," she said through gritted teeth. "If any member of the Eclipse speaks his name, their head will explode. Mine almost did earlier because I broke one of the rules. But I stopped it... barely, by sheer will."

"You don't have to say it," I quickly cut in. There was no way was I letting her head blow up right in front of me.

Angelica's eyes met mine, appreciation flashing briefly in her pain-filled gaze. She straightened herself, her hand still trembling as she let out a shaky breath.

"So... the real issue is how they're deliberately cutting off the flow of information to the knights, right?" I asked, trying to refocus.

Captain Angelica nodded grimly. "Yes. The people across the Capital City are working to block any information from coming in or going out. It's like the entire city has been sealed off. Although, in a way, the people

are

the information. But what they're truly hiding is what's happening in the plaza. That's where the leader will be conducting his ritual... to accomplish his goal. Something beyond anyone's comprehension."

"What kind of goal are we talking about?"

Angelica's eyes darkened. "He wants to blot out the light. All of it. His plan is to cover the sun, to make sure its rays never touch this world again. He'll plunge us into eternal darkness."

I stared at her, dumbfounded. "He wants to... cover the sun? How does he plan to do that?" The idea sounded utterly insane. But one look at Captain Angelica's deadly serious expression told me this wasn't a joke. This was real.

"He's only hours away from finishing it. Everything he's been doing leads to this one moment. And once he completes the ritual... that's it. We'll be living in darkness forever." Her hand tightened into a fist. "There's just one piece of the puzzle left. We have to stop him... or it's over."