

The World 651

Chapter 651 - The Village Of Flui (1)

"They are a group of bandits who attempted a raid some time ago," Sister Lily began, her voice calm yet weighed down by a bitter edge. "It must have been three months already since that incident occurred," she added. "Since then, every week without fail, they return to extort money from the villagers. I tried to reason with them and I told them I would personally hand over the money they demanded. Although I feel guilty towards the kind souls who donated that money to us, I still chose to give a portion of it away. It was the only way I could protect the villagers... and the children under my care."

"We are eternally grateful to Sister Lily," said one of the villagers, his voice filled with deep emotion. "Because of her sacrifices, we have managed to preserve a shred of peace. However... we never imagined they would go so far as to attack and attempt to violate Rita."

A heavy silence fell over the area. Several villagers had now gathered in a tight circle around the captured bandit. The man lay sprawled on the dusty ground, completely unconscious, a faint line of blood trailing from the corner of his mouth. His chest rose and fell shallowly, the only sign that he was even alive.

"I believe it would be wise to seek help from the kingdom," one of the villagers suggested after a long pause, his voice low with worry. "If things continue as they are, we will lose even the fragile peace we fought so hard to maintain."

"But we lack the money needed to hire adventurers or mercenaries," another villager pointed out, his hands balled into tight fists. "Sister Lily has already given away the funds she received from those anonymous donations, has she not?"

"Perhaps we could all pool our money together and hire them," someone else suggested, a sliver of hope in their tone.

"Adventurers and mercenaries do not come cheap," another replied immediately, his voice hard with reality. "We would have to gather an enormous amount of money just to hire them for a mere hour. Do you really think we could afford to keep them here long enough to ensure our protection? It is simply not feasible."

"Then what are we supposed to do?" someone asked desperately, their voice cracking under the strain.

"We have already sent a letter to the capital explaining our plight," another villager said. "It is only a matter of time before the Magic Knights respond and take action."

"I doubt it," another countered bitterly. "The King holds no sympathy for remote villages like ours. He does not care enough to lift even a finger to protect us. Since we have no one else to rely on, why don't we take matters into our own hands and fight for ourselves?"

The villagers looked around at one another, uncertain, lost. Fear, anger, and helplessness swirled among them like a thick fog. For months, they had endured the tyranny of the bandits. Now, the realization that part of the money I had donated—money meant for the orphanage children—was ending up in the pockets of these filthy bandits ignited a deep rage within me.

And it seemed the capital would offer no aid. Asking them for help was like pleading with a drunken father who refused to even acknowledge your existence.

The anger simmered in my chest, burning hotter with each passing moment. I had donated that money to ensure that the children could have an easier, happier life. And these worthless thugs thought they could just waltz in and steal it?

I would not forgive them.

"Sister Lily," I called out, my voice cold and steady. "Where is the hideout of these bandits?"

She turned to me with alarm in her eyes. "What are you planning to do, Leon?" she asked cautiously.

"I intend to negotiate with them," I replied smoothly, though the storm brewing inside me said otherwise.

Sister Lily stared at me, her expression torn between disbelief and worry. It was natural for her to react that way. She had no idea of the strength I concealed. I had never shown her the true extent of my power, and so to her, my declaration must have sounded like sheer madness.

"It is all right, Sister," Rose interjected, stepping forward with a confident smile. "Leon is strong. I will accompany him to ensure he comes to no harm."

Her reassurance was welcome, even though, truth be told, I did not need it. Still, it was the only way to ease Sister Lily's heart.

"Very well. Please be careful," Sister Lily said finally, her voice trembling slightly as she gave us her reluctant blessing.

Just as we were about to leave, someone timidly raised their hand.

"May I come as well?" a soft voice asked.

It was Alice.

I turned my gaze toward her, studying her for a long moment. Then, without hesitation, I gave her a small nod.

The three of us advanced toward the dense, shadowy forest where the bandit camp was hidden deep within its embrace.

"Leon, you are not seriously considering negotiating with them, are you?" Alice asked, her voice tight with worry, eyes flickering with a hint of fear.

"There is no negotiating with a horde of thugs who trample over others simply because it benefits them," I replied, my tone sharp and cold as steel. "I despise their kind—those who prey upon the weak just to sate their selfish desires. That is why I will crush them, grind them down until not a trace of their existence stains this world."

"You... do not sound like the Leon I once knew," Alice murmured, her voice barely above a whisper, her head drooping low.

Rose, who silently accompanied us, only cast a fleeting glance our way. Her green eyes flickered with curiosity, but she chose to remain silent. She must have sensed the tension simmering between Alice and me, yet she respected our space and kept her thoughts to herself.

After what felt like an eternity of cautious steps, we finally arrived at the clearing where the bandits had established their stronghold. The camp itself was eerily silent. There was no guards patrolling and there was no sounds of idle chatter or clanking weapons as well.

Yet I could feel it.

The oppressive sensation of countless hostile presences lurking just beyond sight.

Thousands of them.

The sheer number was staggering, far beyond anything I had anticipated.

"Leon," Rose whispered, her voice taut with tension, signaling that she too had picked up on the overwhelming mass of enemies surrounding us.

I gave her a slight nod, acknowledging her silent warning.

Slaughtering a thousand bandits would be simple enough. But to charge in without thought would be suicidal.

Suddenly, a sharp whistling sound tore through the air.

An arrow.

I reacted instinctively, activating my Guardian just in time. The projectile struck its surface and ricocheted harmlessly away, the Guardian's surface not even so much as shuddering under the impact.

Then came another. And another.

A storm of arrows rained down upon us.

Alice countered immediately, weaving magic through the air as tongues of fire erupted from her palms, incinerating the arrows before they could reach her. Rose moved with inhuman grace, deflecting the projectiles with swift, decisive strikes of her martial technique.

But the assault only intensified.

More arrows filled the skies like a black swarm of death.

Without exchanging a word, we sprinted forward, weaving and ducking between the deadly hail. The sharp hiss of arrows passing inches from our bodies filled the air, but we blocked and dodged every single one.

From the shadows, bandits charged toward us, their faces twisted into masks of malice and greed. Weapons gleamed wickedly in their hands, but it made no difference.

We carved a bloody path through them.

With swift, brutal efficiency, we dispatched those who dared stand before us. They crumpled like puppets with their strings severed, their bodies hitting the forest floor with dull, lifeless thuds.

"What the hell!?"

"What's happening!?"

"Intruders! We're under attack!"

Panic spread through the camp like wildfire as the bandits scrambled into disorganized action.

Alice unleashed torrents of fire upon the archers, their screams piercing the night as flames consumed them. Rose wove through the chaos like a phantom, each movement ending with a broken enemy lying at her feet.

As for me, I moved faster than their eyes could track, Ayuru singing through the air with deadly precision. One slash, and heads soared from their bodies, blood arcing through the air in crimson sprays. Another step, another strike, another life extinguished.

They did not even have time to raise their weapons properly.

They simply fell, like wheat before the scythe, their corpses piling at our feet.

Time seemed to stretch and blur as the massacre continued. The ground grew slick with blood, the iron scent thick and cloying in the air.

One by one, their numbers dwindled.

Thousands became hundreds.

Hundreds fell to mere dozens.

Their morale shattered like brittle glass.

"Iiikkk! Please, have mercy!" one screamed, his weapon clattering uselessly to the ground.

"Nooo! I beg you! I am sorry!" another wailed, trying to crawl away.

"Aghhhh! Aaahhhh!" The desperate cries for mercy echoed, but they fell on deaf ears.

There was no forgiveness for those who had shown none.

This was the law of the world—the natural retribution for their cruelty.

I showed them no mercy and no hesitation. I butchered them all, their pleas washing over me like meaningless noise, unworthy of acknowledgment.

Among the wreckage of bodies and blood, one man dropped to his knees, trembling violently. Others had already fled, abandoning their brothers-in-arms in terror, running like cowards with their tails tucked between their legs.

I approached the cowering figure, my shadow falling over him.

"Are you the leader?" I asked, my voice calm and emotionless.

The man sobbed, his body quivering like a leaf in the wind.

"I-I am sorry! Please spare me! I swear I will return the money I stole from the village! Just spare me!" he begged, tears streaming down his dirt-streaked face.

"I see..." I murmured coldly.

Before he could utter another word, Ayuru flashed through the air—a clean and precise cut.

So fast that the man likely never even saw it coming.

His head toppled from his shoulders, rolling across the blood-soaked ground, his body slumping over lifelessly.

Chapter 652 - The Village Of Flui (2)

After making sure we had cleaned ourselves, we headed back toward Flui Village.

We could not very well return there while still drenched in blood and reeking of death. So before that, we had gathered the corpses of the bandits we had slain, piling them up like broken dolls at the edge of the clearing. Then, with a wordless nod, Alice set them ablaze using her fire magic. The dry crackle of burning flesh and the rising stench of smoke filled the air, but none of us flinched. It had to be done.

Afterward, we moved to the river to wash away the grime and blood clinging stubbornly to our skin.

"It has been a long time since we last bathed here, has it not, Leon?" Alice asked, her voice carrying a gentle warmth, almost wistful.

"Come to think of it, you are right," I replied, my own tone softened by memories.

When we were children, this river had been our little haven. We used to come here together, splashing around as we bathed, laughing as we cleaned our laundry under the bright sun. The image was so vivid in my mind that it almost hurt. I had not expected her to recall it so clearly either. It was... strangely heartwarming.

"Now that the bandits are gone, we can return here again for our laundry, can we not? They made it impossible before. I could not even do such a simple task properly," Alice said, letting out a small sigh of relief.

"Well, now the river is ours again," I said with a smile. "Now that the bandits have been slain..."

"Yes..." Alice murmured, her gaze drifting toward the gentle flow of water.

Though Alice had assisted us during the battle, she had not taken a single life herself. It was Rose and I who had delivered the final blows. Even in a fight for survival, she had chosen to help without crossing that final, grim line. That spoke volumes about the kind of person she was... kind, even in bloodshed.

"Oh? Leon, look," Rose said, pointing excitedly toward the water.

My eyes followed her gesture, and I saw them. They were sleek shapes darting through the river's crystal-clear depths.

"Oh. Fish..." I muttered in mild surprise. "I did not expect to see fish here... I hardly remember finding any back when we used to bathe here as children."

"Well, it is summer after all," Alice explained, crouching down to observe the river closer. "Sometimes, the waters where they usually live become too hot, so they migrate here."

I nodded thoughtfully. That did make sense. Nature had its ways of surviving.

"Since we are already here, why do we not take a proper bath?" Rose suggested with a bright smile. "And perhaps catch some fish too. You know, for lunch or even dinner."

"That sounds like an excellent idea," I said. Turning to Alice, I asked, "Is that acceptable to you?"

"Yes," she said, returning my smile with a nod. "I am feeling quite hot myself. If not for the smell of burned corpses lingering in the air, this would have been the perfect time. It would be even better if everyone else were here with us."

"That is true," I said, glancing toward the dense forest beyond. "Unfortunately, the forest is far too soaked in blood to let the children enter."

Exposing them to the aftermath of battle with the scorched bodies and the thick scent of blood still hanging heavy in the air was something we could not allow. It would be far too graphic for their innocent eyes.

"Well, for now, we can enjoy it ourselves," Rose said cheerfully. She stepped forward into the river and dipped her feet into the water, letting out a soft sigh of satisfaction. "Ahh... The river feels so cool against the skin..."

"Did you not soak in the bath just last night?" I asked with a slight chuckle.

"That was at night," Rose said, splashing a little water with her toes. "It is much more refreshing to soak your whole body in a running river under the sun than it is to sit in still bathwater, right?"

I had to admit, she had a point.

Following her lead, I stepped into the river as well, letting the cold water envelop my tired feet. A slow, almost intoxicating relief spread through me as the river's current massaged the ache from my muscles. It was a simple pleasure, but one I had missed.

"Now then," I said, beginning to strip off my clothes.

Without hesitation, Rose did the same, peeling off her garments with an ease that spoke of familiarity and confidence.

As I pulled off my shirt, a small, flustered gasp reached my ears. I turned just in time to see Alice staring at me, her crimson eyes wide, before she quickly averted her gaze, her face flushing a deep crimson.

"You really have changed, Leon..." she mumbled, her voice barely above a whisper.

"You truly have no sense of tact, do you?" Rose teased, casting me a sly glance. "Casually undressing in front of a lady without so much as a warning... Then again, considering how often you have shamelessly removed your clothes before them, I suppose such behavior has become second nature to you."

Though her tone was playful, there was truth beneath her words. I could only laugh awkwardly, accepting the jab.

"Well, that is indeed rude, huh? I'm sorry, Alice."

"No. It's alright. I was just surprised at how much you have muscles. I would have never expected you to have such a good body even though when you are clothed, you are so lean." said Alice. She looked really surprised... and embarrassed.

When we finally made it back to the village, I wasted no time. I gathered the villagers around, feeling the heavy weight of their expectant stares pressing down on me.

"The issue regarding the bandits has already been taken care of," I announced clearly, my voice cutting through the tense air like a blade. "For now, I don't think those bastards will dare try anything stupid around here anymore."

"Really?" a doubtful voice piped up from the crowd.

The villagers exchanged uneasy glances, their faces etched with both confusion and suspicion.

I couldn't blame them, honestly. It sounded way too easy, even to me. Problems like bandits didn't just vanish overnight.

"You don't have to worry," I added, trying to sound more reassuring. "I managed to drive them off. They won't be coming back to mess with the village again. Not now, not ever."

Even though my words were firm, I could still see the lingering hesitation in their eyes.

But when Alice stepped forward and calmly explained the situation herself, it was like a switch flipped. The tension in the air loosened.

She was someone they trusted deeply, and her presence alone seemed to soothe their fears.

It felt damn reassuring having her next to me, especially in moments like this.

Several villagers even came up to me afterward, smiling warmly as they recognized me.

They commented on how much I had grown.

Hearing those words from faces I hadn't seen in years... it stirred something deep inside me.

It was a bittersweet kind of warmth, seeing them all again, older now, weathered by time just like I was.

"For now..." I said, clearing my throat as I shifted gears, "can I take this bandit with me?"

One of the older men furrowed his brows deeply. "What exactly are you planning to do with him?"

"I'm going to hand him over to the authorities," I lied without hesitation, keeping my voice steady.

The truth was, this bastard didn't deserve anything resembling mercy.

He had almost raped one of the villagers here—if we hadn't shown up in time, who knows what would've happened?

He deserved a hell far worse than any jail cell.

Right now, he was still out cold, completely unconscious.

We'd messed him up badly, enough to knock him into dreamland for who knew how long.

Still, I wasn't about to let him enjoy a peaceful sleep.

No... he wasn't getting off that easy.

Dragging his limp body away from the curious eyes of the villagers, I set my plan into motion.

First, I secured a noose around his neck, the coarse rope digging into his skin harshly.

I threw the other end over a sturdy tree branch, tying it off with a cruel tightness.

Underneath his feet, I conjured a thick, solid block of ice, giving him just enough surface to stand on... just enough to delay the inevitable.

I wasn't done.

I bound his hands tightly behind his back, making sure he couldn't free himself no matter how much he struggled.

I shoved a gag deep into his mouth too, preventing him from biting off his tongue to escape the fate waiting for him.

There would be no easy way out today.

Only slow, creeping terror.

Grabbing a battered bucket of freezing cold water, I dumped it over his head, the water soaking him instantly, jerking him awake with a violent shiver.

"Hello," I said with a chilling calmness, watching his eyes snap open wide with panic. "Well, not much of a hello, I guess. More like... a goodbye."

I crouched down in front of him, my voice low and steady.

"Right now, you're going to die. Why'd I bother waking you up? Simple... it wouldn't really be a painful death if you stayed asleep, would it?"

His gagged cries filled the air. It was muffled, desperate and pathetic.

"H-Huh? Waiff... Whafff?" he whimpered, tears already pooling in the corners of his eyes.

He twisted and pulled against the ropes, but there was no escape.

His hands were bound too tightly, the noose was snug around his neck, and the block of ice he stood on was already melting under the brutal heat of summer.

Slow at first... but for him, it must've felt terrifyingly fast.

Every small drip of water was a countdown to his death.

I stepped closer, my voice barely above a whisper now.

"The magic circle on your neck... once you die, it'll ignite. It'll burn you up, reducing you to ash," I said.

"That way, no one will have to see just how pathetic your end really is."

Without sparing him another glance, I turned on my heel and walked away.

"W-Whhhaif... Pweast! Whhaif!" he tried to scream, tried to beg, his body jerking helplessly.

I didn't stop.

I didn't look back.

I just kept walking as the sound of his strangled gasps faded behind me.

And soon enough... he died.

Chapter 653 - The Village Of Flui (3)

It had been two full days since we settled into the village. In all that time, we hadn't really done anything significant aside from wandering around, taking in the sights, and letting ourselves simply exist in the moment. Every day, without fail, we would visit the orphanage, playing with the children and handing out little gifts, watching their faces light up with innocent joy.

Thanks to us saving the village, the owner of the rental house we were currently staying at had given us an incredibly generous offer. It was a fifty percent discount on the lodging. She was unbelievably kind, going out of her way to accommodate us at every turn. Honestly, I felt like I didn't really deserve such generosity, like I was taking more than I should. But refusing her offer would've just been rude, so I accepted it with a grateful smile.

"It's really nice here. Kinda feels like I'm on vacation," Trill said, her voice lazy and relaxed as she basked under the blazing sun. She was stretched out on a lounge chair, wearing nothing but a thin swimsuit that shimmered slightly under the harsh sunlight. Her glossy white skin seemed to almost sizzle from the heat, turning faintly pink where the sun kissed her the most.

Titania was sprawled beside her, also soaking up the sunlight without a care in the world. Meanwhile, I stood nearby, manning the small grill as I prepared barbecue for everyone, the rich, savory smell of roasting meat filling the air. Yr, true to form, was passed out somewhere in the shade, sleeping like a rock. Rose, on the other hand, was doing the same as Trill and Titania, but there was something different about her. Something softer, I guess? She lay there quietly, her eyes closed, her chest rising and falling slowly as if trying to drink in every bit of peace she could. Given how much chaos and responsibility she'd dealt with before, I figured she must've truly been craving this kind of slow, quiet life.

"We only have two weeks left before the second semester starts, huh?" Titania said, cracking one eye open and turning her head toward me. "You planning on entering the academy, Leon?"

"It's been a while since I last stepped into that place," I replied, flipping a piece of meat over the flames and watching the grease hiss and pop. "If I'm remembering right, I stopped attending right when the first semester kicked off. Honestly, I'm just relieved I wasn't expelled because of it."

"I heard Professor Gabrielle pulled some serious strings to keep you from getting expelled. Even Professor Irene got involved," Trill chimed in with a mischievous grin. "I heard that they even teamed up, working together just to make sure you stayed."

I blinked, momentarily stunned. Gabrielle and Irene... those two couldn't stand each other, yet they'd actually collaborated to save my academic record? That was... honestly kinda touching in a weird way.

"We're gonna stay here for a while longer," I said casually, brushing the sweat from my forehead as the heat from the grill and the sun combined into a sweltering wall. "I'm also planning to head into the city soon. Gotta meet with one of the high priests."

"Want anyone to tag along with you, Leon?" Titania offered, her voice laced with casual concern.

"Nah. I'm good going solo," I said, flashing her a reassuring smile.

None of them seemed particularly worried about the fact that I'd be meeting someone so influential on my own. Honestly, I preferred it that way... It was less fuss and less pressure.

As I continued manning the grill, I caught a glimpse of someone approaching from the corner of my eye. It was... the girl who had almost been raped by a bandit not too long ago. She walked toward us slowly, a gentle, shy smile blooming on her lips. Her name, if I remembered correctly, was Rita.

"Good day," she said, her voice soft and a little hesitant, both hands clutching a basket close to her chest.

"Good day to you too," I replied warmly, stepping away from the grill for a moment.

"I... I wanted to give this to you. As thanks. For saving me," she said, her cheeks coloring faintly as she held out the basket toward me.

Inside, I could see it was filled to the brim with fresh fruits and vegetables, all neatly arranged and probably picked with great care.

"Thank you," I said, taking the basket gently from her hands.

The moment my fingers brushed against hers, she turned a deep shade of red, her eyes darting downward before she gave a small, bashful bow and hurried away with a radiant smile.

"Leon, seriously, you've gotta stop charming every woman you meet. It's getting on my nerves," Rose muttered, shooting me a glare that was only half-serious.

"Hahaha... Leon really is like a woman magnet. They just can't seem to resist him," Titania said, laughing lightly, her voice carrying a teasing lilt.

It wasn't like I was trying to attract anyone, but somehow, women seemed to flock to me naturally... like bees to a particularly tempting flower. Not that I minded the attention all that much.

After I'm done cooking, I announced.

"I'm heading to the orphanage for a bit," I said, grabbing a cloth to wipe the sweat off my neck. "There's something I wanna check out first."

I eventually made my way to the cemetery, the soft crunch of my boots against the dirt the only sound breaking the heavy silence.

The village's graveyard stretched before me, rows of simple stone markers standing solemnly under the bright afternoon sun. The air here felt different. If I have to say, it was heavier and thicker, as if the land itself remembered every sorrow it had ever witnessed.

When I arrived, I spotted Sister Lily already there, kneeling before one of the graves, her head bowed in silent prayer. I knew, without a doubt, that she must come here every single day, rain or shine, to pay her respects.

I pulled up her domination requirements in my mind.

Her second requirement still hadn't cleared yet. I hadn't visited the orphanage once a week for eight consecutive weeks, and because of that, the counter stubbornly remained frozen at one out of eight.

Reaching this place in a single swoop—by sprinting across the land and soaring through the skies—would only take me about an hour or two at most, and honestly, it would be almost laughably easy for me. Normally, though, if one took the conventional route, along the winding paths without any

shortcuts, the journey would stretch out to a grueling three days, assuming no delays. Realistically, though, considering the inevitable need for rest, the unpredictable terrain, and the wear and tear of travel, it would usually take about a full week or more to finally arrive here.

That was one of the main reasons why I hadn't really been able to dedicate myself fully to dominating her.

Honestly... I had thought about giving up on the idea altogether. It's not like I was particularly desperate to make her my woman or anything. It was just... a lingering feeling inside me whispered that maybe it wasn't right. After all, wouldn't it be kind of messed up to do something like that to a nun?

While I was lost in my tangled thoughts, she must have spotted me.

"Oh, Leon," she called out warmly, her face lighting up with a bright, genuine smile that seemed to chase away the heavy silence of the graveyard. "You're here to pay your respects to Sister Eli?"

"Yeah," I answered, my voice softer than usual, almost reverent.

There was no way I would make this long trip and not visit. Paying my respects to Sister Eli—the only mother figure I had ever known in this world—was something sacred to me and something I could never neglect.

I stepped forward quietly, lowering my head, and pressed my hands together in a silent prayer. The air around the grave was cool, almost unnaturally so, as if the world itself stood still for just a moment, honoring her memory with me.

Sister Lily's voice broke the silence, gentle but carrying a playful tone.

"Sister Eli would probably be quite mad at you, you know... having several girlfriends, Leon."

A low chuckle escaped my lips, a small smile tugging at the corners of my mouth. "Yeah, I'm sure she is," I said. "That's why I made sure to apologize to her in my prayer."

"Fufufu... That's good then," Sister Lily said with a soft laugh, her eyes crinkling with affection. "Well, I'll leave you to it. I already told her she shouldn't be too hard on you, since it seems like you're loving all of them equally."

She gave me one last warm smile before turning away, her figure slowly disappearing between the rows of gravestones. I watched her go for a moment, the silence settling back around me like a comforting blanket.

I stayed there for a while longer, the world shrinking down to just me, Sister Eli's grave, and the whispering wind. Closing my eyes, I offered one more silent prayer from the depths of my heart before I finally straightened up and turned to leave.

Chapter 654 - The Village Of Flui (4)

That night...

I was soaking myself in the bath of the rental house, the warm water embracing me like a soft, heavy blanket. I could feel the heat sink deep into my muscles, soothing the day's exhaustion, each breath of

the cool outdoor air contrasting deliciously with the steamy warmth enveloping my skin. The open night sky above, the gentle rustle of leaves, and the faint scent of fresh earth made everything feel perfect.

I let out a relaxed sigh, leaning further back into the tub, when the wooden door creaked open.

Turning my head lazily, I saw Yr standing there, her slender figure illuminated by the faint lights around the bath. She held a towel in her hand, clutching it in front of her with a sleepy, almost careless grip. The fabric wasn't wrapped around her. It simply hung there, barely covering the important parts. Her body, delicate and petite, was laid almost completely bare to my eyes.

She wasn't voluptuous or curvy. She was actually far from it. Her frame was slender, and her breasts are small and unassuming. And yet, in that moment, something about her innocence, her exposed vulnerability, stirred a raw desire deep inside me. It was strange... but incredibly arousing.

She looked unbelievably cute that it was almost sinful.

"Oh, Leon..." she murmured, her voice soft and drowsy, the syllables melting together as her sleepy eyes met mine.

"You're gonna take a bath too, Yr?" I asked casually, my voice low and welcoming.

"I forgot to take one earlier... got too sleepy..." she mumbled, rubbing her eye with the back of her hand like a child.

"Well, come here then," I said, stretching out both my arms toward her invitingly.

At that, she simply let the towel fall from her hand without hesitation, exposing every inch of her petite body to me under the gentle light. My eyes traced her form hungrily. Her smooth skin, small budding breasts, a slim waist barely tapering into delicate hips. She was small, almost fragile-looking. If anything, Yr could easily be considered as a loli type.

Yet, the sight of her completely bare, trusting and vulnerable before me, ignited a burning need inside my chest.

Without saying anything more, she slipped into the water, the surface rippling around her slender body as she waded toward me. She nestled herself into my arms and sat delicately on my lap, her small butt pressing right against my cock, sending a jolt of heat through me.

Her tiny frame leaned against me fully, soaking in not just the bathwater, but my warmth too. She clung to me quietly, her breathing slow and soft. There was something unusually sweet about the way she behaved tonight, like a subtle clinginess that was hard to ignore.

"Yr... you're horny, aren't you?" I asked.

"Mm..." she nodded faintly, her cheeks tinged with a slight rosy hue.

That was Yr for you, I guess... She was always honest when she was like this. I knew the signs by now. When she wasn't horny, she would just drift off to sleep without a care in the world. But when she was... she became adorably clingy, seeking warmth, touch, and attention.

"Do you want to have sex?" I asked, watching her reaction carefully.

"Mm..." she nodded again, a little quicker this time, her hands clutching weakly at my chest.

At her silent confirmation, I let my hand drift down into the water, sliding between her legs.

"Ahh... Ah..."

The moment my fingers made contact with her pussy, she gasped lightly, her body trembling against mine. Even through the water, I could feel how soaked she already was. Her heat and stickiness was standing out vividly against the bath's warmth.

With deliberate slowness, I slipped a finger inside her, feeling her walls tighten instinctively around me. At the same time, my free hand found one of her tiny breasts, cupping it gently and teasing her nipple between my fingers.

"Ahh, haaa...! Haa~...!"

Yr's moans floated into the air, soft and high-pitched, making my cock throb harder beneath her. She arched slightly, pressing her chest against my hand as she was craving more.

Leaning closer, I caught her ear between my teeth, biting down just enough to make her shudder.

"Fuaaaah...~!"

Her entire body writhed in my grasp, her voice becoming more desperate and needy with every passing second.

"Aaah... Ahhh... Ahhhhh... Ahhhhhhh~!!!"

Without warning, she arched her back fully and pressed herself tightly against me, her orgasm crashing through her small frame. Her inner muscles fluttered wildly around my finger as she came, panting heavily against my chest.

"Haa... Haa..."

I held her for a moment, letting her catch her breath... but my own hunger wasn't about to wait. With an almost possessive need, I lifted her easily in my arms. She whimpered softly, still sensitive, but didn't resist as I positioned the head of my cock against her small, trembling slit.

"Haaannnnnnnn~...!! Ahhhh, ahhh...!"

With a firm thrust, I parted her folds and buried myself deep inside her, feeling her walls squeeze tightly around me until I was pressing up against her cervix.

She shook in my arms, a tiny gasp leaving her lips, her legs an M-shape as I lifted her ups and holding up her legs. I gripped her firmly and began thrusting upward, slow at first, savoring the incredible heat and tightness that enveloped my cock.

"Ahnn, ahh, ahh, haaannn, ahhh, ahh, ah, ahh...!"

Yr's voice was pure music, a chorus of sweet, high-pitched cries that spurred me on. The wet slapping of our bodies echoed against the water, mixing with the soft splashes and the indecent squelching of her juices.

Because of her petite frame, I could move her so easily... like lifting her slightly, slamming her down onto me again, making her take every inch.

Her pussy clung desperately to me, parting and squeezing as I drove into her again and again, her insides feeling almost greedy in how tightly they hugged my cock.

"Ahh... Ahhh...!"

Yr cried out softly, her head thrown back, her entire body quivering as I pounded into her, pushing her toward another inevitable climax.

"Ahhh, ahhh, ahhh, ahhh, yaannnn, ahhh~, ahhnnnn~!!! Ahhhhhh!!!"

Then, she came.

Yr's small body trembled violently, and her love juices spilled out from her vagina, coating my cock and dripping into the water below.

While I was still holding her like that, the door suddenly burst open with a loud clack.

"Ah! I knew it! The moment I noticed Yr wasn't on her bed, I knew she was here, taking advantage of being alone with you, Leon!"

It was Titania, standing there with a smug, victorious grin on her face.

"Ahhh..."

Yr gasped faintly, still dazed, her cheeks flushed and her breathing erratic.

"Yr looks like she's been fucked good..." Trill said, stepping in behind Titania, her voice dripping with mischief. "Look at her eyes... they're all dazed and dreamy... And her mouth's parted and her lips hanging open like she's begging for more... So cute. Honestly, seeing her like this makes me wanna mess her up even more."

"Fuee..."

Yr whimpered incoherently, her eyes glazed over, her body still trembling slightly. It was clear the two had already made up their minds that they were going to have their fun with the still-dazed Yr.

"Come on, Leon. Fuck her good and make her cum her brains out," Titania urged eagerly as both she and Trill kneeled down in front of us, their faces closing in on the spot where I was still buried deep inside Yr's twitching pussy.

Without any hesitation, they stuck out their tongues.

Titania started first, gliding her wet tongue slowly across Yr's exposed vagina, licking up the overflowing juices.

"Hueeehhh~!!!"

Yr snapped out of her daze with a loud, broken moan, her whole body shuddering at the sudden sensation.

"W-What...?"

She looked down with wide, confused eyes—only to see Titania and Trill kneeling before her, their hungry gazes fixed on my cock still lodged deep inside her.

Without missing a beat, they began gliding their tongues over us with Titania licking along the shaft and the junction of her pussy, while Trill started teasing my balls with slow, deliberate licks.

"Fuuaah....! Ahhh, ahhh... Hnnn, n-nooo~...!"

Yr's voice turned into high-pitched, desperate cries as the intense stimulation returned full force.

I tightened my hold on her and began thrusting upward again, fucking her small body relentlessly as the two girls continued their lewd assault.

"Uoooo... Uhhh, uhhh, nghhh, nnn, nnn, fnbbb, fnnnghhh, nnnn, mnnnnn... Ahhhnnn, ahhh!"

My cock pistoned inside her mercilessly, forcing her body to bounce up and down in my grasp. Yr could barely get a strangled cry out between the relentless pleasure.

With all the stimulation assaulting her at once with my cock pounding her insides, Titania's tongue teasing her pussy, Trill's licks sending shocks through my balls and occasionally Yr's vagina, Yr was subjected to a torturous ecstasy far beyond what she had ever experienced.

Her body shivered uncontrollably, her mind overwhelmed, and finally, her eyes rolled up to the back of her skull, surrendering completely to the mind-breaking pleasure.

Chapter 655 - The Village Of Flui (5)

Lily's POV

The warm water splashed softly against the plates as I worked alongside Alice, the two of us quietly cleaning up after dinner. The comforting clatter of ceramic and the faint scent of cooked meat and fresh vegetables still lingered in the air. Meanwhile, the children were starting to settle down, their sleepy voices echoing faintly from the nearby rooms.

"S-Sister..." a small voice called out hesitantly behind me.

I turned, wiping my damp hands on my apron, and found myself looking at the girl Leon had brought with him to the orphanage. She stood there clutching the hem of her dress, her eyes wide and uncertain. She was clearly younger... maybe four or five years below Leon and Alice in age. Her little sister, who couldn't have been more than two years her junior, clung quietly to her side.

"Um..." she started, her voice almost a whisper.

It was clear she was trying to say something, but the shyness made it difficult for her to get the words out. Her cheeks flushed a soft pink as she nervously shifted her weight from foot to foot.

"I-I want to give this to the brother who helped me and my sister..." she finally managed, raising a small, woven basket she was carrying with both hands. "But I don't know how to get there... And it's also dark already..."

The basket was filled with food with warm bread wrapped in cloth, small pieces of roasted meat, and some steamed vegetables. It was the dinner I had lovingly prepared for everyone earlier. Judging by the contents, she must have packed it herself with a lot of care. Even though I was pretty certain Leon and the others had already eaten, I couldn't bear the thought of disappointing her after all the effort she had put in.

I crouched down to her level, giving her a gentle smile, a teasing glint lighting up my eyes. "So you helped me with the cooking earlier just so you could give it to that big brother?" I asked, my voice playful.

The girl lowered her head, her hands tightening slightly around the handle of the basket. "Yes..." she mumbled, her voice barely louder than a murmur.

How adorable. Leon really had a way with girls, didn't he? Even someone as young as her couldn't help but be drawn to him. It made me chuckle inwardly.

"She's honest. Unlike someone else standing right next to me," I said with a smirk, casting a quick side glance at Alice.

"Did you say something?" Alice asked, her tone casual but her ears clearly catching my comment. She didn't look at me, just continued diligently scrubbing the plates, her sleeves rolled up and her focus sharp.

"Nothing at all," I said sweetly, trying to hide my amusement.

Of course, I knew exactly why the jab stung a little. Alice had feelings for Leon. Anyone with eyes could see it. And from what I could tell, Leon felt the same. Their connection was obvious, like a string gently pulling the two closer every time they spoke or even glanced at one another.

Which was why I had been utterly floored when Leon showed up here... not alone, but with multiple women by his side. His lovers. Lovers. Plural. Even now, I could hardly believe it.

I had always thought that Leon and Alice would end up together someday. They just seemed... right.

But then again, I knew it was never really possible. Alice had chosen the path of the priestess, a path paved with strict rules and heavier expectations. To be a priestess meant maintaining purity, upholding celibacy without question. No love, no romance, no sex, nothing that could taint the "purity" demanded of her by the Church.

The High Priest often preached that sex was the ultimate stain, the act that made someone "dirty." That it stripped away holiness and led to spiritual decay.

But honestly? I didn't buy into that nonsense.

I believed that sex was a beautiful, sacred act. Even if I, bound by the same vows, had never—and could never—experience it, I still saw it for what it truly was. A miracle. Sex created life. It brought new souls into this world. How could something capable of such beauty ever be considered dirty?

That was how I viewed it. It wasn't shame. And I didn't feel any disgust. Only wonder.

"Give it to him, Sister. I'll handle the rest of the dishes," Alice offered softly, her voice pulling me out of my thoughts.

"Alright," I said, smiling warmly at her.

I carefully took the basket from the little girl's trembling hands and made my way toward the rental lodging where Leon and his group were staying. The night air was cool against my skin as I walked, the soft crunch of gravel under my sandals the only sound accompanying me. The sky overhead was sprinkled with stars, and the gentle chirping of crickets filled the otherwise quiet village.

Their lodging wasn't far from ours, but it still took a few minutes of walking under the dim light of the scattered lanterns. The houses around were mostly dark now and everyone were already tucked in for the night.

Eventually, I reached the modest building they were renting.

"Leon!" I called out, standing near the doorway.

There was no answer. Only the distant sound of the wind brushing against the trees.

I tilted my head, puzzled. "Hmm... Maybe they're already asleep...?" I muttered to myself, feeling a small pang of guilt. I didn't want to wake them just to deliver a basket of food.

Maybe I should just leave and store the food for tomorrow morning.

But just as I was about to turn away, something caught my eye—the door was ajar, hanging open slightly.

My chest tightened. That wasn't normal. That wasn't safe at all.

Even if Leon had managed to make the bandits retreat for now, this village still wasn't exactly free from danger. Leaving a door open at night was just asking for trouble.

My instincts urging me on, I cautiously pushed the door open wider and stepped inside.

The interior was dimly lit by the moonlight streaming through the windows. Shadows danced along the wooden walls, giving the whole place a slightly eerie feel. I walked carefully, my footsteps light, ears straining for any sound.

The lodging wasn't big—just a few rooms, and it was barely furnished—but as I moved from one to another, I found no sign of them.

But then, breaking the silence—

"Ah...!"

"Hm?" I froze instantly, heart skipping a beat.

That sound. It was unmistakably a voice.

Someone was here after all.

I carefully placed the basket down, gently moving it away from my hands for the moment.

However...

When I turned toward the direction where the sound had come from, my gaze fell upon the outdoor bath's door, left ajar. It creaked slightly with the evening breeze, inviting and foreboding at the same time. My heart thudded against my ribs as I hesitated. Against my better judgment, I stepped closer, my curiosity tightening its grip around me. I cautiously peeked through the gap—

And what I saw inside slammed into me like a thunderbolt.

"Aahh, fuahhhh, ahhh, ahhh, ahnnn, ahhh...!"

W-What...?

It felt like the very air was knocked out of my lungs. I stumbled back, my feet scraping noisily against the floor as I slapped a hand over my mouth to muffle the gasp that almost escaped. My mind reeled violently, struggling to process the scene that unfolded before me. What was happening right now? No—no, deep down, I already knew exactly what it was. Even if I hadn't experienced it firsthand, even if my body remained untouched, I understood the fundamentals well enough.

Leon... he was having sex with the girls.

Three girls... at once... Three of them, all together...

The world around me lurched violently, tilting sideways like a ship caught in a raging storm. No—maybe it was just my vision, spinning wildly out of control. I couldn't even tell anymore. My balance teetered on a knife's edge, the ground beneath me feeling unstable. I was losing it. Oh Goddess Jeanne, I was truly losing it.

And yet... despite the chaos erupting inside me, my body moved on its own, drawn toward the scene like a helpless moth to a roaring flame. I tried—desperately tried—to force myself to turn away, but I couldn't. I couldn't stop. Heat began coiling in my stomach, low and heavy, spreading outward until my entire body felt like it was burning. My breaths came shorter, quicker, ragged and shallow.

It was as if my mind was slowly dissolving into molten heat.

I didn't know... I didn't understand what this feeling was.

Almost as if caught in a trance, I drifted closer again, pressing my back against the wall, inching myself carefully toward the slightly open door. My fingers brushed against the rough wood as I leaned forward, peering through the narrow sliver left ajar.

And then, I saw it. I saw them.

Leon was holding Miss Yr tightly in his arms, her bare legs spread into an M as he thrust into her with raw, desperate force. Meanwhile, Miss Titania and Trill were positioned on all fours before them, their flushed faces buried intimately close to Miss Yr's exposed thing.

Chapter 656 - The Village Of Flui (6)

"Ahnn, ahh, ahhh, ahhh...!"

Leon's fingers dug deep into Miss Yr's soft, petite thighs, his grip tightening with each relentless thrust upward. His hips moved in sharp, powerful bursts, slamming into her with an almost primal rhythm. Her body trembled above him, back arched in pleasure, legs quivering with every impact. Meanwhile, Miss Titania and Miss Trill had their faces buried in the messy union between Leon and Miss Yr, their tongues hanging out as they lapped hungrily at the fluids dripping down from that connection.

"Fuuaah, aahhh, ahhh... C-Cumming... Cummiiinggggggg~...!"

The cry that tore from Miss Yr's throat was beyond lewd. It was purely unrestrained.

Her face was nearly unrecognizable.

No trace of her usual sleepy, distant expression remained. In its place was an entirely different woman who was utterly consumed by lust. Her eyes were unfocused, rolled so far back that only the whites showed, and her mouth hung open in a perfect 'O' shape, tongue limp and dangling from her lips. Her flushed cheeks, drenched in sweat, and the drool dripping from the corner of her mouth made her look completely undone. It was hard to believe this was the same girl who often looked half-asleep during the day.

"How many times has she been cumming?" Miss Titania asked, tilting her head with a playful curiosity, her lips glistening.

"She's already cummed so many times... Just look at that face," Miss Trill replied, her eyes locked on Miss Yr's dazed, blissed-out expression. "She looks like she's hit her absolute limit... but damn, she's really cute like this. Seriously, really cute."

"She does, does she?"

With that, Miss Titania stood up and softly pressed her lips against Miss Yr's. The kiss was tender but deep, as if she was savoring the trembling girl's exhaustion. I watched as Miss Yr's face melted even more with her limbs going limp, moaning into Miss Titania's mouth. Then, as if sharing the taste of that ecstasy, Titania turned and kissed Leon, tongue sliding into his mouth while he continued to thrust hard into Miss Yr's twitching body without pause.

Watching all of it unfold, I felt my thighs instinctively press together. A tingling warmth spread across my crotch, bubbling up from deep within. My body stiffened. I could feel it... this strange, rising pressure, this wet, aching sensation that pulsed with each breath. My breathing grew faster and shallower. It felt dangerous. Like I was standing at the edge of something I wasn't ready to face. But I couldn't look away.

And then, the scene twisted even further into something... something beyond my comprehension.

Leon began switching between the three girls, rotating from one slick, open body to the next, and he was never stopping. One moment he was buried inside Miss Trill, the next he was thrusting into Miss Titania, then back to Miss Yr. It was endless. A cycle of moans, gasps, and wet slaps filling the outdoor bath like music. And all three of them... they adored it. They welcomed every inch of him, every thrust. Their faces—each one flushed, glazed, mouths open and drooling—were filled with mindless bliss. It was hard to imagine these were the same girls I had spent so many normal days with. They looked like... sex-drunk goddesses.

Eventually, Leon had them all kneeling before him in a line. His hand gripped his throbbing thing tightly, stroking it in steady pumps while he aimed at their faces. They were dazed, lips parted, eyes glazed over with anticipation. Like obedient pets waiting for their reward.

And then it came.

Thick ropes of white liquid shot out from Leon's private part, painting their beautiful faces in bursts of sticky release. It splattered across cheeks, dripped from noses, clung to eyelashes, and spilled over open mouths. They didn't flinch. Instead, they smiled.

Licked.

Then tasted.

"Thanks for the meal..." the three of them murmured together, voices dreamy and satisfied.

That was the moment I knew I had to leave. If I stayed a second longer, I really would lose it. My legs were trembling as I turned around, my steps unsteady and my breath ragged. There was a dull, aching heat between my legs, and it was insistent and maddening.

As I walked away, my hand hovered over that spot, brushing against it through the fabric of my garb. The contact sent a jolt up my spine. My chest was rising and falling with every desperate breath. When I finally reached the orphanage, the building had gone completely still. It seemed everyone had already gone to sleep. Even Alice had probably gone to bed by now.

But I couldn't.

There was no way I could just lie down and sleep. Not with this feeling growing inside me... this suffocating pressure in my chest, this warmth that refused to fade.

If I didn't do something, I might really break.

Inside my tiny quarters, I quietly closed the door behind me. Unlike the others' rooms, mine was barely a box. Just a bed, a closet, a small shelf, and the statue of Goddess Jeanne perched in the corner like a silent observer.

Without hesitation, I began undressing.

First came the garb, slipping off my shoulders and pooling at my feet. Then I reached for the garters, unclipping them one by one from the stockings attached to the belt at my waist. Once they were undone, I rolled the stockings down slowly, peeling them from my legs. Finally, I hooked my thumbs into the waistband of my underwear and pulled them down.

That's when I felt it.

The heavy weight. The clinging dampness.

My panties were soaked... completely drenched.

I didn't know why...

But they were very, very wet.

I also noticed that my nipples were stiff and bulging sharply against the inner fabric of my bra. A quiet heat pulsed through my body, spreading outward in waves, rising slowly but surely. Down below, the slickness between my thighs had become undeniable, wetness seeping and trickling so much that the moisture was now beginning to trail down my inner thighs and pool lightly onto the floor.

It was then that I...

That I...

I stepped toward the bed, my legs trembling slightly beneath me, and lowered myself onto the mattress. The sheets were cool at first, but the warmth of my skin quickly consumed them. My fingers trembled slightly as I brought them between my legs, brushing gently against my private part. I didn't insert them yet. I just let them glide over the sensitive entrance, the soft outer folds already flushed and swollen with need. The moment I made contact, an electric jolt rushed up my spine.

My body reacted instinctively, arching faintly as shivers traveled through me.

And even as I touched myself, I couldn't stop my thoughts from drifting... to him.

To Leon.

That rugged, commanding frame... sculpted muscle over hardened strength... Nothing at all like the boy I remembered from before. The way he dominated each of those three women, the way he had sex with them with raw intensity... it haunted my mind, burned into my memory, and it refused to leave.

I knew it was wrong.

I knew I had sworn myself to Goddess Jeanne, given my devotion and my purpose.

But I couldn't stop.

"Ah...!"

A gasp escaped me before I could contain it. My lips parted on their own, my voice trembling. Was this what moaning felt like? It was unfamiliar, but intoxicating.

I kept tracing my fingers along my entrance, but the ache inside only deepened. Eventually, I couldn't take it anymore. I pushed one finger into my pussy. It slid in easily, coated in wetness, and I began thrusting it in and out—slowly at first, then gradually faster.

It felt... so different. So much more intense than merely rubbing the outside.

"Ahhh...!"

Another moan spilled from my lips, louder than before. My mind was slipping, clouded by the heavy fog of pleasure. I was falling deeper, sinking into the sin I swore to resist.

With my other hand, I reached upward and grasped my breast, squeezing it through the fabric. The pressure only magnified the sensations. I slipped my fingers under my bra, pinching my hardened nipple. That simple touch sent another wave of heat crashing through my body.

"Ah... Ahhh!"

My finger down below started moving faster, the slick squelch of wetness growing louder with every motion. It was obscene, shameless... but I didn't care.

"Ahh, ahh...! Hhnnn, ahhhh!!!"

Something was building. It was an overwhelming wave that gathered tighter and tighter with every motion. Something heavy, primal, and impossible to resist.

It was coming.

I could feel it.

I was going to fly.

What is this feeling...? What... is this...? What is this!?

It feels good! It feels good!

It feels good! It feels good! It feels good! It feels good! It feels good! It feels good! It feels to goooooooooood~!!!

I was drowning in this indulgent sin, unable—no, unwilling—to escape.

And then, just as the rising heat reached its peak, I grabbed my pillow tightly and bit down hard, muffling the cry that erupted from deep within me.

My back arched violently.

"Mnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn~!!!"

That sensation... it was like I had burst through the clouds, soaring into the open sky.

It felt incredible.

It felt... so good.

But—

Would it feel even better... if something thicker than my finger was buried deep inside me?

Chapter 657 - A Meeting With The High Priests (1)

After that night, I made up my mind that it was time to return to the city. Not just any city, but the Holy City of the Kingdom of Milham. Once hailed as the jewel of the kingdom, it had been considered the most breathtaking among all its cities. Well, that was before the wave of modernization swept across the land, changing skylines and rewriting identities. And yet, even without the glitter of modern design, the Holy City still held onto its timeless beauty with an almost stubborn grace.

As the car rolled through the cobbled streets, my eyes wandered across the scenery. Towering cathedrals and age-worn buildings lined the horizon, their facades carved with intricate patterns that whispered of long-lost eras. The gothic spires reached toward the heavens, casting elongated shadows that seemed to cradle the city's soul. You could practically feel the weight of history pressing down on you just by looking at them. The past was alive here with the every brick, every archway, every stained-glass window told a story.

I sat in the passenger seat, arms folded loosely, while Rose drove us through the winding streets. The engine purred gently beneath us, occasionally rumbling as we passed uneven cobblestone patches. Today, I had a single goal in mind. I planned to have a serious talk with the high priests who were the gatekeepers of this city's traditions. My aim was to push through the idea of modernization, whether they liked it or not.

If the city kept clinging to its antiquated ways, it was going to stand out in the worst possible way. And not in a charming, quaint kind of way either. No, it'd look obsolete. Out of place. Trade routes wouldn't thrive here, and the archaic roads would make driving a logistical nightmare. That, in turn, would hurt vehicle sales. Without modern roads, cars couldn't operate efficiently. And without that, the entire economic model I had in mind would falter.

But this wasn't just about commerce or aesthetics. Modernizing the Holy City was an integral piece of a much larger puzzle and it was the conquest of the world. The city's location was a golden point on the

map, one that could become either an unshakable stronghold or a gateway for expansion. Reinforcing it with updated infrastructure would elevate its defensive potential tenfold.

There were even underground routes beneath this place. These were routes so secretive that only the high priests knew how to navigate them. They were designed as emergency exits, a means of fleeing in the event of a full-scale invasion. But what if those tunnels could be used for more than just escape? What if they became arteries for something greater... something more ambitious?

That was why this city needed to be modernized, no matter what. It wasn't just a whim or a fancy project. It was a necessity, and I intended to make the priests understand that. But first, I had to face them.

As the car turned a corner, Rose broke the silence.

"You know," she began, eyes fixed on the road, "it's honestly amazing how much your company has done for the kingdom. I mean, here I am, in the Holy City—probably the least modernized place left—and even here, I can see your fingerprints all over everything. It's crazy."

She had a point. The contrast between this place and the other cities we had touched was jarring. It was like stepping through time, like watching a relic from the past exist in the middle of a rapidly changing world.

"If you actually manage to transform this city," she continued, glancing at me, "then I think it's safe to say you'll end up reshaping the entire kingdom. Its culture, its image—everything, Leon."

A small smirk tugged at the corner of my lips. "Are you excited for when that happens?"

She let out a soft scoff, but there was a faint blush tinting her cheeks. "I don't know. But considering I'm your woman now, I guess I don't really have much of a choice, do I?"

"You say that like you regret it."

Her fingers tapped the steering wheel rhythmically, but her voice softened. "I like being with you, Leon. Honestly... I don't think I'd feel the same thrill I'm feeling now if I wasn't."

That caught me off guard, in a good way. From Rose, those words felt different. There was no sarcasm and no deflection either. They were just genuine affection. She meant it.

Warmth swelled in my chest, and without thinking, I reached over and let my hand rest on her thigh.

"Hey, Leon!" she snapped, her voice high with alarm. "Don't do that while I'm driving!" She threw me a flustered glare, her face blooming in a deep, embarrassed red. Adorable.

"You know," I said with a grin, "you reacting like that just makes me want to do it more."

She groaned, eyes fixed firmly on the road, clearly trying to keep herself from looking my way. "Can you at least please control yourself? Save that for an inn or something!"

I leaned in slightly, my voice dipping low. "So that's a green light for later?"

Her entire body tensed, and her hands clutched the wheel like she was trying to squeeze the leather off. Her cheeks were burning now, and I could almost hear her heart pounding.

"Guh... I've been had... I can't believe I actually fell for that..." she muttered, voice laced with both frustration and bashful defeat.

Well, judging from her reaction, it didn't seem like she was totally against the idea of a little rendezvous later. Quite the opposite, in fact.

After a while, we finally returned to Leonamon.

The moment I stepped out of the car and into the central courtyard, a wave of motion surged ahead of me.

The workers, already assembled, moved in unison. Heads bowed low, their voices rang out in perfect harmony.

"Welcome, Lord Mephisto."

Their tone was solemn, almost reverent, like they were greeting a divine figure. They stood aligned in two flawless rows with fifty on each side, nearly a hundred people in total. I walked between them, each step echoing faintly on the polished stone pathway, the sheer formality of it all pressing down like a heavy mantle on my shoulders.

"This... makes me feel a little weird..." Rose whispered beside me, her eyes flicking toward the long lines of people bowing to us.

"You'll get used to it," I replied with a small shrug, my voice calm. I didn't say it to reassure her. I said it because I had already resigned myself to this role. This life, in particular.

Once inside the building, I headed straight to my private quarters. I needed to change... not just my clothes, but my identity. I swapped my attire for something sharper, more refined, then moved to the mirror.

My fingers swept through my hair, the black strands now fading back into rich white. With that transformation complete, I was no longer Leon.

I had become Christopher Faust.

A persona I had carefully crafted... one of influence and mystique. The public face of Leonamon. The man behind the empire.

I stepped out and turned to Rose, giving her a half-smile.

"How do I look?" I asked, adjusting my collar with subtle flair.

She narrowed her eyes, clearly unimpressed.

"You look very fancy... and not in a good way," she said bluntly. "I liked your hair black better."

I chuckled, but my gaze lingered on her.

Rose was dressed to kill—tight, form-fitting business attire, her long hair pulled back into a high ponytail that highlighted the sharpness of her jawline and the confidence in her eyes. She looked like a woman who could run a boardroom and slice a man in half with a single glare.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked, catching me staring.

"You just look... insanely sexy right now. And beautiful," I said, my voice dropping lower, almost reverent.

"I... I see..."

She quickly turned her head away, a flush blooming on her cheeks. It stunned me every time with how someone as composed and mature as her could react with such innocent embarrassment. It wasn't fair. It made her all the more dangerous.

Once we were both ready, we headed back to the car. Rose took the wheel again and started driving toward our next destination. I had already sent word ahead, requesting an audience with the High Priests at the Church. Their response had been a surprisingly swift yes. Not that they had much of a choice—after all, I wasn't just some merchant. I was the man behind one of the most powerful enterprises in the Kingdom.

"Are you sure this is going to work, Leon?" Rose asked, her hands steady on the wheel, though her voice carried an edge of concern.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the High Priests aren't exactly accommodating," she replied. "Sure, they're treated like they're the Goddess's own messengers, but they're far from pure."

I tilted my head slightly. "Sounds like you've been hearing some rather scandalous rumors."

Rose exhaled, eyes never leaving the road. "I've heard more things than I care to remember back in my days as an adventurer."

She wasn't necessarily wrong. Nobody was truly pure. Not even those who proclaimed themselves as the most devout followers of the Goddess Jeanne. Even the ones who looked the cleanest had shadows lurking beneath. It was just that... their dirty laundry hadn't been aired for the world to see—yet.

Those kinds of rumors were dangerous. After all, where there's smoke, there's usually fire.

Chapter 658 - A Meeting With The High Priests (2)

After what felt like a long and silent drive, the vehicle finally rolled to a halt in front of the towering gates of the High Priests' headquarters. The sheer presence of the structure was intimidating. It was an old, towering cathedral-like building adorned with massive stained glass windows and looming statues that seemed to judge every step we took. Yet, despite its sacred, religious aura, what caught my eye the most wasn't the architecture... but the absurd number of guards surrounding the place.

Calling them guards felt odd. Each of them was dressed in the ceremonial garb of a typical priest with flowing white robes, ornate sashes, and crosses embroidered with golden thread. The contradiction was jarring. It was like watching monks try to act like military men. The sight alone made something twist inside me. It felt wrong.

"For a church, this place is way too heavily guarded," Rose muttered beside me, her eyes scanning the robed figures cautiously.

I didn't respond verbally, but I met her gaze and gave a subtle nod. She was absolutely right. The excessive security made no sense. This wasn't a government building or a top-secret lab. It was supposed to be a place of worship. The vibe was completely off. It was more like entering a fortress than a church.

As if on cue, our car came to an abrupt stop, tires hissing slightly against the stone pavement.

A man stepped forward from the cluster of robed guards, his stance straight and his presence firm. He looked through the tinted window before tapping on it lightly. Rose rolled it down halfway.

"I must ask the both of you to step out of the vehicle and clearly state your business here," he said, voice flat and professional, but with an unmistakable edge of skepticism.

Rose leaned forward, unbothered. "Haven't you already been informed that the owner of Leonamon is arriving today?"

He narrowed his eyes, clearly unimpressed. "The owner of Leonamon, you say? Huh... That's strange. Because the leader of Leonamon is already inside the Church. If you two are just pretending to be someone you're not, I'd highly recommend leaving now—unless you're hoping to walk away with your hands still attached."

The leader of Leonamon... already inside? That made no goddamn sense. I was the owner, after all.

"Leon," Rose said, her voice quiet but firm, turning to me.

I gave her a look of calm assurance before nodding, then unlatched the door and stepped out into the open.

The guard immediately barked, "Hey! I said get lost!"

I didn't flinch. Instead, I met his gaze with mine.

"I don't think so," I said coolly. "I've already told you, I have a scheduled meeting with the High Priests."

The moment our eyes locked, I released a fraction of my presence—barely a sliver of my pressure.

He dropped like a stone.

With a choked grunt, his knees buckled beneath him, his arms trembling as if the weight of the sky had suddenly descended upon his shoulders. The air around him rippled with invisible force, like gravity had turned cruel and malicious in just a second.

"Ugh...!"

I didn't even touch him. That was just pressure. And yet, the man looked like he was being slowly crushed under an unseen mountain.

"I've already been invited," I said with venom laced in my voice, "so don't fucking stand in my way."

My words rang with finality, echoing faintly against the quiet tension in the air.

I wasn't here for games. I wasn't here to pick fights with gatekeepers. I had come to speak with the highest authorities of the Church—to negotiate, to discuss, and maybe even strike a compromise. Nothing more. But I wasn't about to be treated like a common thug.

Then—

"Stop that."

The words came like thunder. It was deep and rich. Ancient, even.

I turned.

Emerging from the entrance was an old man unlike the rest. His beard flowed like a silver river, long enough to be tied multiple times to keep it from dragging across the floors. His posture was erect, regal, and he radiated an undeniable aura of presence.

If someone told me this man was a grand wizard, I wouldn't have even questioned it.

He was garbed in the same traditional white robes as the others, but his bore intricate embroidery and sacred runes stitched with gold and silver threads. He wasn't just another priest—he was something more. This was clearly a High Priest.

"I was the one who instructed the guards to be cautious," he said calmly, his gaze landing on me without fear. "There have been far too many impersonators and swindlers around here lately. In times like these, we must stay alert."

I nodded, meeting his calm composure with my own. "And you are?"

"I am High Priest Vertigan Hollar," he said with reverence in his voice.

Vertigan Hollar... Out of all the High Priests, he was known to be the most righteous. The cleanest among them. The least corrupt.

"And you must be the one behind that massive economic empire that surged through the world like a storm—modernizing, transforming, shaking the very roots of society... Leonamon," he said, watching me closely.

I straightened my posture and offered him a respectful, noble bow.

"I am," I declared. "Christopher Faust. The leader of Leonamon."

He studied me for a moment, then stroked his long beard slowly, thoughtfully.

"You carry yourself with impressive nobility," he said. "And your attire speaks of power and grace. Yet... I cannot simply take your word for it. Even with your presence, even with all your elegance—I still hold my suspicions."

My brows furrowed slightly, but I kept my tone even. "And what must I do to earn your trust? To clear those doubts?"

He didn't flinch.

"Prove to me that you are who you claim to be," he said slowly. "Without proof, I cannot allow you past the gates of our sacred Church."

"Well, I could throw the same accusation right back at you, couldn't I?" I said, voice calm but sharp. "For all I know, you might not even be the High Priest. You could just be another smooth-talking impersonator draped in robes to fool people. It's not like I've ever seen one of the High Priests with my own eyes before, so how can I be sure? It's only natural to question what I can't confirm."

We locked eyes with his gaze unwavering and piercing, like a honed blade that had weathered countless years of war without losing its edge. Despite his age, there was a fire in his stare with no dimming and no fatigue. He was the type of man who had stood in this role for decades, and yet, it clearly hadn't dulled his passion in the slightest.

"And if you really are High Priest Vertigan Hollar," I continued, slowly stepping forward, "then your ability should make this simple. Just look into me. If what they say about you is true, you'll see everything you need in my eyes, won't you?"

The old man didn't respond right away. He studied me in silence for several seconds—long, weighted moments where time seemed to stretch. Then, without a word, he gently closed his eyes. The atmosphere felt like it thickened, as if something invisible was passing between us. And when he opened them again, that same sharp gaze met mine, but there was a shift. An understanding.

"Very well," he said at last, voice like a deep drum rolling through the cathedral-like stillness. "You may proceed, Master Faust."

Just like that, the barrier vanished. He allowed me inside.

He had said earlier that he needed proof—but this was the proof he was looking for. That unique ability of his—one that allowed him to see whether someone was lying—was doing the work now. On paper, it might sound like a weak and mostly useless power. But in moments like these, when the truth was everything, it became dangerously effective.

That was the very reason why he was chosen to be one of the High Priests. His ability wasn't meant for battles or grandeur, but for judgment. He could sense guilt, falsehood, deception—traits no trial could prove but he could sniff out like smoke. He was a walking lie detector in robes, and in the hands of someone in power, that skill was terrifyingly useful.

I moved toward the stairs, each step echoing beneath my feet as I ascended, the heels of my shoes tapping against the marble like a countdown. Rose followed silently beside me, keeping a respectful distance. Right now, she was doing more than just being a companion—she was assuming the quiet role of a bodyguard. Not that I needed one... but honestly, having her at my side didn't hurt either. If anything, it was comforting.

Eventually, we reached the threshold of the Church itself. The grand doors opened before us, revealing a space that exceeded all my expectations. The moment we stepped inside, I was struck by its majesty.

The ceiling towered overhead like the heavens themselves were watching. Elaborate paintings graced every inch of the high dome, each brushstroke meticulous, the kind only an artist of divine caliber could create. The walls carried a timeless weight, and the scent of incense hung in the air like an ancient whisper. Every inch of this place screamed devotion and power.

"You've come here for a meeting, haven't you, Master Faust?" the High Priest said, his tone now laced with formality and respect. "Then follow me. The meeting room awaits us... and we shall continue our discussion there."

Chapter 659 - A Meeting With The High Priests (3)

We stepped into the room.

It immediately struck me how closely it mirrored the church's grand interior with the same holy architecture and same somber palette, but it was noticeably scaled down. The ceiling wasn't as high, the stained-glass windows weren't as large, and the light filtering in lacked the divine brilliance of the main cathedral. The holy aura tried to linger, but here it felt more forced... manufactured rather than natural, I guess.

Dominating the center of the room was an enormous table, carved from dark, aged wood with intricate engravings that tried to project authority. Two men were already seated on the opposite end. Judging by their placement and demeanor, I guessed they were high priests as well, though that assumption was purely based on context, not presence.

Because unlike Vertigan, these two didn't carry themselves with even an ounce of regal grace just like he did. They lacked the dignified composure, the commanding stillness, and the magnetic aura that Vertigan naturally possessed. Their robes looked ceremonial, yes, but they wore them like props rather than symbols of power. If someone told me these two were just ordinary priests—or worse, impostors—I wouldn't argue. Hell, I'd believe it on sight.

What I saw sitting across from me weren't holy men. They looked like crude, bitter frauds draped in stolen cloth.

"You may take a seat here, Master Faust," Vertigan said, gesturing politely to a chair beside him. His tone was formal, yet warm. "Your... bodyguard may also sit, if she wishes."

Rose shook her head. "No, I'm fine. Thank you, High Priest," she replied, her voice steady and composed. She stood directly behind me, silent and protective. There was something endearing about the way she chose to remain vigilant. It was subtle, but she was doing her job well, and honestly, she was kinda cute about it.

"Has there been any proper verification that this man is truly the owner of the Leonamon enterprise?" one of the seated high priests asked, his voice soaked in skepticism as he turned toward Vertigan. "I find it hard to believe that someone with such a demeanor, and at such a young age, could possibly own and control an empire of that scale. It feels... like a contradiction."

"I share those doubts," said the other priest, his tone just as patronizing. "And to be frank, he doesn't exactly radiate the wealth or refinement of someone in such a position. The way he carries himself... well, it doesn't impress."

So, there it was. The two were already casting judgment and letting their contempt seep into the air. I hadn't even opened my mouth and they'd already decided I didn't belong. What a pair of insufferable scumbags.

"I've already confirmed with my own eyes that this man is indeed the owner of Leonamon," Vertigan interjected, his voice unwavering and resolute. "I do not believe further authentication is necessary. My judgment, I believe, should be more than sufficient."

Despite Vertigan's vouch and clear affirmation, the two continued to glare at me with narrowed, suspicious eyes. Their expressions screamed distrust, and it was clear their doubt wouldn't dissipate anytime soon.

"You must understand, Master Faust," Vertigan said, turning slightly to address me. "This is not meant to be an insult. High Priests Riolan and Sendron simply find it difficult to evaluate credibility without concrete, formal verification. They are cautious by nature."

"I understand," I replied evenly, offering a calm smile. "And I won't hold anything against the church for that."

If anything, that should've earned me a sliver of goodwill. But instead of relaxing, their eyes sharpened. Their hostility somehow deepened. I couldn't for the life of me figure out why these two seemed so personally offended by my presence.

"Now then, Master Faust," Vertigan continued, bringing the meeting back on track. "Shall we begin with your purpose for requesting an audience?"

"I'll be direct," I said, locking eyes with the three of them. "I'm here to propose something."

"Propose?" asked the priest to the left—likely Riolan—his eyebrows twitching upward. "What is it that you wish to propose?"

"Modernization."

The moment the word left my mouth, it was like a lightning bolt struck the room, and a very heavy silence fell afterward.

Sendron reacted first, his chair screeched violently against the floor as he shoved himself upright, both hands slamming onto the table. His face twisted into something close to rage, eyes wide with disbelief.

"Modernization!?" he barked. "You've got to be mad! To come in here and propose such a thing—you must've lost your damn mind!"

Riolan immediately joined in, his voice no less venomous. "Do you even comprehend what you're saying, boy? Do you understand that allowing your so-called modernization—just like what those other corrupted cities did—would desecrate everything we've built here? You would ruin the sanctity of this place and smear filth on the legacy of our ancestors! That's an offense so grave, not even your life would be enough to pay for it!"

Their words pounded against the walls like thunder. Their voices rose together in heated unison, as if I'd committed heresy by simply opening my mouth. To them, change wasn't progress—it was blasphemy.

But all I could see was fear. Not fear of me—but fear of change. Fear of losing control.

"If you think I'm here to bulldoze centuries of heritage, then you've misunderstood," I said, keeping my tone calm and measured. "I'm not talking about destroying the past. I know exactly how important the traditions of Milham are. I know the significance of what our ancestors built—and the legacy of Goddess Jeanne, who led us to victory."

They stared at me for a long, tense moment, their glares cold and unflinching, like sharpened blades pressed against my skin. Suspicion lingered in their eyes, as if my very presence was an offense to their beliefs.

"But preserving heritage doesn't automatically mean you're actually protecting it," I said, my voice steady but laced with conviction. "That's exactly why I'm proposing something different. I'm not here to tear down your beliefs or rewrite history, but I'm here to offer change that allows us to preserve the legacy you hold dear, while adapting to the present. You want to protect the traditions passed down through the centuries? Then allow me to help you reinforce them, not bury them."

It sounded like a fair compromise to me. I could bring the blueprint of modernity to this city, widen the roads, update the infrastructure, make the city more accessible so people could travel with ease. A smoother, more organized trading route would bring a richer variety of goods, attract more merchants, and elevate Milham into something stronger and more sustainable.

"We refuse!" Sendron suddenly erupted, slamming his palm against the table with a loud crack that echoed across the meeting room. "Your modernization is nothing more than a thinly veiled excuse to grasp everything in your hands! That's the truth, isn't it?!"

He wasn't exactly wrong.

The roads, the system, the enterprise I was proposing, it was all a mechanism, designed for me to strengthen my grip. Leonamon was a tool for leverage. And Milham? It was the first step and the foundation. Before I could aim for something grander, I needed to lock this place down, bring it under my influence, and reshape it into something that would stand strong under pressure.

"We don't need your modernization crap trampled under our feet, whoever the hell you are!" Riolan spat, his tone dripping with venom.

The contempt in his voice didn't match the robes he wore which were supposed symbols of grace and wisdom. These two high priests had tongues far cruder than the titles they carried.

"I understand that neither of you trusts me. And I'm not asking for blind faith," I replied calmly, meeting their hostility with unwavering eyes. "But this isn't just for my benefit. This is about securing the city's future. I'm not doing this to line my pockets. I'm doing this because if we sit idle like this, if we keep pretending that the world isn't changing around us, then when the enemy comes knocking, this city will be the first to collapse."

I let those words linger in the air for a moment before continuing.

"You do realize, don't you?" I continued, voice low but firm. "The Empire has already begun its conquest. Country after country, they're swallowing lands whole, one invasion after another. Their sights are set on global domination. That's not a maybe. That's a certainty."

If Rodonia gained control of the Holy City, then it wouldn't stop there. This place—this proud, stubborn bastion—would become the staging ground for a far greater invasion. One by one, the surrounding regions would fall. Cities would crumble, their people enslaved or killed, and Milham would be nothing more than a ghost of its former glory—another name in the Empire's endless list of conquests.

"The Empire of Rodonia will use this place as a launchpad. Once they have it, they'll sweep through the kingdom like wildfire," I said. "And when that happens, the first ones they'll drag out into the street and execute... will be the high priests."

Riolan and Sendron froze, the blood draining from their faces. Their shoulders stiffened, and for the first time since I walked into this chamber, their bravado faltered. They didn't speak. Couldn't speak at all, in fact. The fear in their eyes betrayed them.

The only one who remained composed was Vertigan. He didn't look away. His piercing gaze met mine. He was listening—really listening—not with suspicion, but with understanding. For the first time, I saw the glint of someone who might actually be considering what I said.

Chapter 660 - A Meeting With The High Priests (4)

"All of what you just said... is nothing but lies!" Sendron snapped.

His words struck with a sharpness that momentarily broke the rising tension. Out of the two, he was the first to regain his composure, though the barely suppressed rage in his eyes said he was far from calm.

"Do you honestly believe," he continued, voice rising with barely checked fury, "that the Kingdom of Milham would just roll over if the Empire dared to invade? Are you that delusional? We have Magic Knights, damn it! Those warriors are the elite! Do you really think a bunch of dirt-smeared savages from some backwater empire could ever make it past our fortified walls while they stand guard?"

His conviction echoed through the chamber. And truth be told, he had a point. Magic Knights weren't ordinary soldiers. They were warriors forged through relentless training, their potential scouted and honed within the halls of the Academy. They were handpicked from the very best, trained in brutal conditions, and shaped into lethal weapons of war. Their power wasn't just rumored... it was seen, felt, and feared already.

They weren't just a defense force. They were practically the living, breathing backbone of Milham's military dominance. A symbol of strength. Of pride. Of unshakable resolve.

"I don't disagree with you, High Priest Sendron," I replied, my voice calm yet firm. "But let's be realistic. No matter how skilled a Magic Knight is, even they have their limits. You think a handful of them can take on a few thousand? Maybe. But tens of thousands? Hundreds of thousands? Millions? You and I both know not even the full force of the Magic Knights—no matter how fierce or how gifted—could hold back a wave of that size."

The truth hung between us like a blade, poised to strike.

Every year, the Academy selected only a hundred individuals and those were the ones who managed to climb their way to the top-tier Gold Class. Only they were deemed worthy to join the ranks of the Magic Knights. It was a long-standing, ironclad tradition. One that prided itself on quality over quantity.

But that tradition, while noble, came at a price.

That's why Princess Myrcella was pushing to dismantle it. She wanted to open the gates wider, to allow more than just the elite to wear the mantle of the Magic Knight. If she succeeded, the number of knights graduating each year would increase fourfold. It would be an enormous shift in Milham's military structure.

But such a change wouldn't come easy. Centuries of tradition don't just crumble overnight. It would require persistence, influence, and a battle against rigid ideals. But if she pulled it off, it would be a game-changer. It would be a bold new future for the kingdom's defense.

"Stop spouting bullshit!" Riolan growled suddenly, his voice bursting with contempt. "An empire with a million soldiers? Are you hearing yourself?! No country has that kind of manpower! Not even the

damned Empire! You expect us to believe they've got that many trained fighters just waiting in the wings?!"

His jaw clenched, his hand balled tightly into a white-knuckled fist. His eyes locked onto mine with venom, like a cornered beast daring me to come closer.

"You're just throwing out scare tactics," he accused, lips curling into a sneer. "Trying to rattle us. Trying to worm your way into our heads so you can get whatever the hell it is you want. But you're wasting your breath. We, High Priests, aren't fools. You won't break us that easily."

I didn't flinch.

Instead, I met his glare with one of my own and spoke, my tone as steady as stone.

"But what I'm telling you, High Priest Riolan... is the truth," I said, emphasizing each word. "The Empire didn't just wake up one day and decide to flex its muscles. They've been preparing for this—silently and methodically—for years. Building their numbers, investing their wealth, expanding their influence. They've poured their entire national treasury into military growth."

My voice echoed slightly, like the room itself was listening.

"They've earned their title as the most militarized country in the world, not just because of what they have—but because of how far they've gone to get it. And it's not just soldiers. They've been forging alliances, throwing money at mercenary groups and adventurer guilds. Most of those organizations have their roots in Imperial soil. You know what that means."

I paused for a moment, letting the weight of my words settle into the room like dust after a storm.

"They can be hired. Bought. Manipulated. Mercenaries don't care about flags—they care about gold. Adventurers don't pledge loyalty—they pledge to whoever offers the best rewards. The Empire has both the coin and the connections. They're not just building an army—they're building a war machine."

I didn't dance around the facts. I shoved them right in their faces. These were truths they already knew in the backs of their minds—truths they chose to ignore because they were too inconvenient and too terrifying to acknowledge.

But you can only ignore the truth for so long.

Everything I said was verifiable. Real. Harsh. And most of all—undeniable.

Eventually, when the truth is staring you in the face, it becomes impossible to look away.

Riolan and Sendron suddenly stiffened, their bodies involuntarily trembling as if a sudden chill had passed through the room. Their faces contorted, eyes slightly widening. It seems that finally, they were starting to get it. The truth I had laid out so clearly was beginning to sink in.

But even now, they didn't seem ready to concede. The fire of resistance still burned in their eyes.

"Hah... no matter..." Riolan muttered, forcing a laugh that barely masked the tension crawling up his spine. It was a dry, hollow sound—like he was trying to convince himself more than anyone else. "Even if the Empire does have that many soldiers, there's no way they'd be able to invade us so easily."

He tried to maintain some dignity, but it was clear I had shaken him, at least a little. Still, it wasn't enough. I hadn't broken him. That didn't surprise me. Riolan was notoriously stubborn. He was a man built more like a mountain than a man, and just as immovable when it came to his convictions. Sendron was no different, his jaw clenched tightly as he refused to accept the shifting tide.

I turned my gaze to High Priest Vertigan.

Unlike the others, he had remained silent since the beginning of my argument. Not a single word and even a flicker of emotion. He was still, like a statue carved from stone, giving away nothing. I couldn't tell if it was because he refused to entertain the thought or because he was taking everything in with quiet consideration.

Either way, I had to confront it.

"What about you, High Priest Vertigan?" I asked.

He lifted his eyes to meet mine. There was something deeper in his gaze—not fear, not defiance... but thought. And after a long moment of heavy silence, he finally spoke.

"Frankly," he said, his voice calm and even, "I agree with the modernization project you're proposing."

The room ignited.

"Vertigan! What the hell are you saying!?" Riolan exploded, his face reddening with disbelief.

"Have you lost your goddamn mind, Vertigan?!" Sendron barked, his voice almost shaking with anger. "You're seriously okay with this man tearing down everything our ancestors and the Goddess Jeanne worked so hard to build?!"

Vertigan raised a hand, quieting them.

"No. I'm not saying any of that," he replied with clarity. "But Master Faust is right. If we don't align ourselves with the natural progression of the world, if we keep turning our backs on change, we'll become weak and vulnerable. Everything around us is evolving at an incredible pace. And if we cling to outdated traditions while the rest of the world surges forward... we'll be left behind. Worse—we'll be crushed by it."

"But...!" Riolan tried to interject.

"I'm not saying I fully support it," Vertigan said, cutting him off before he could build any momentum. "I understand what the Leonamon Company has done. It has completely reshaped the kingdom—for the better. But it's also introduced things that many of us, from a previous era, can't fully comprehend. This technological boom we're seeing right now... it's real. It's massive. But that doesn't mean I can offer my full support. Not without the King's approval."

"T-That's right!" Riolan latched onto that thread. "Nothing can move forward if the King doesn't approve it!"

"Exactly! Vertigan's right! You heard him!" Sendron snapped. "So now that you get it—piss off!"

Both of them lunged at me with their words, emboldened by Vertigan's condition.

But they didn't know I had one final trump card hidden up my sleeve.

A quiet smirk tugged at my lips. I let their outbursts roll past me like wind brushing against stone. Then I calmly spoke, my voice cutting through the noise like a blade through fog.

"What if I told you I could get that approval—right now? From someone in the royal family. Would that be enough to give me the green light?"

The room froze.

Their eyes locked on me again, but this time, panic flickered beneath the surface.

"Quit lying!" Riolan shouted, desperation lacing every syllable. "There's no way you've got royal approval!"

"Yeah! You're lying through your fucking teeth!" Sendron snapped. "There's no way in hell you can pull that off!"

They were practically frothing now, disbelief and fear bleeding into one another.

Without saying another word, I turned to Rose, who had been standing quietly at my side like a loyal shadow. I reached into the leather bag she carried and pulled something sleek, metallic, and unfamiliar to their eyes.

I set it on the table with a solid thunk, the sound alone drawing their attention like a slap in the face.

Then I opened it.

The soft glow of a screen lit up the room. A laptop—cutting-edge, compact, and powerful—its design was clean and minimalist, modeled after the sleek lines of a smartphone but equipped with far more functionality. It was a symbol of the future and it was something they clearly didn't recognize.

The three of them stared at it with wide eyes, confusion etched across their faces like they had just seen a creature from another world.

I didn't wait for them to snap out of it.

"I'm going to call Princess Myrcella right now," I said coolly, my fingers already moving across the touchpad. "And ask for her approval. You'll be witnesses."