

The World 77

Chapter 77: Joint Training (4)

Titania said that with the most confident way she could muster.

Back on Earth, I was the kind of guy who'd think, 'Don't jump to conclusions just because she's always looking at you. It might not be love, could be something else.' In other words, I wasn't one to easily draw conclusions based on such signs.

Still, with Titania, it was different. It wasn't just about the subtle gestures or the intense gaze she always directed at me, practically screaming, 'I'm in love with you.' When we were together, I could feel our hearts aligning. Her confession wasn't a lie; it was genuine.

I found myself reciprocating those feelings. In my conquests, every woman I dominated ended up falling deeply for me, and in turn, I fell for them. Amon and Gabrielle, before succumbing to my dominance, first fell in love with me. Though it might be speculative, falling in love with me seemed to be a prerequisite for complete submission. As I pondered, it seemed like the natural order of things.

Even up until now, I still have no idea how my skill works.

Nonetheless, we found ourselves in unexpected territory. I hadn't even fulfilled her first requirement, and she was already like this with me. I could just declare my love for her, but... I felt that was a bit too much. After all, I hadn't revealed my true self to her yet. If she discovered that I wasn't the person she imagined, her feelings might vanish.

Even worse, she could end up hating me for life.

For now, my response had to be...

"...Thank you, Titania," I uttered with a smile.

"Huh?" She tilted her head in confusion, her hands still gently cupping my cheeks. "Why are you thanking me?"

"For confessing your love to me," I articulated.

"Bwuh?" She exclaimed in a strange manner.

Hold on, did I misinterpret? I didn't misunderstand her, did I? She did confess, right?

"W-Wait?! I said that out loud?!"

Eh? She didn't mean to voice that confession?

"Oh my gosh! How embarrassing!" she exclaimed, swiftly retracting her hands from my face to cup her own. A flush of crimson painted her cheeks as she continued, "I thought I was just having a private monologue in my mind! I didn't realize I was actually voicing it out loud!"

It struck me as peculiarly charming. Despite her usually headstrong and commanding demeanor, these moments of delightful clumsiness were oddly refreshing.

"Pft...!"

My laughter burst forth, a genuine sound emanating from the depths of my being.

She slowly uncovered her face and turned towards me, her complexion now resembling a ripe tomato. "Why are you laughing at me?! Ah...! Are you mocking me?"

She truly was a breath of fresh air.

"I'm not... Ha ha ha... It's just... I'm somewhat taken aback, that's all."

She pouted, her cheeks swelling like a bloating pufferfish.

"I see. So you just let that slip out by accident. Well then, should I pretend I didn't catch any of that?"

"Huh?! I don't l—! It's not like that!"

"It's not like that? What exactly do you mean? Was what you said earlier true or not?"

"O-Oh well, that, it's just... um—it's not like that," she stammered. "I mean, you know?"

"If it's not like that, then take it back right now," I urged. "I might get the wrong idea."

"...Um, well... It's... not exactly the wrong idea..." she admitted meekly. Despite attempting to deny it initially, it seemed she realized she couldn't talk her way out of it anymore. "...I do love you..." she confessed softly.

Her words were spoken in a hushed tone, as if they might disappear into thin air as soon as they left her lips. But I heard them loud and clear.

"Also, I, um, you know, I've been harboring these feelings for a while now," she confessed, breaking the heavy silence that hung between us. I couldn't help but wonder when exactly she started noticing, probably back in that inn the night before midterms when things almost took a steamy turn.

"To be honest," I confessed slowly. "I never thought you saw me that way. It's genuinely surprising."

"Surprising? Is that the best reaction I get to my confession? And from a princess, no less? You're so ungrateful, Leon."

I chuckled. "I'm not ungrateful. I appreciate that you see me in that light. More than appreciate, actually. It's just... I can't reciprocate these feelings right now."

"Eh?" Her eyes widened in shock, and then she lowered her gaze. "Uh, yeah... I kinda expected that. I mean, with my not-so-great personality, I doubt I'm a good match for you, Leon. I can't imagine you feeling the same way about me."

"Come on, that's not true," I retorted, the tension hanging in the air like a storm about to break. Her personality grated on me a bit, like navigating a minefield with a girlfriend on the verge of leading us into a bad ending. Yet, amidst the irritation, there was an odd cuteness to her quirks, especially since she was actively working on changing herself. It was a slow burn, this growing affection.

"Right now, there are a few loose ends I need to tie up, so dropping a solid 'yes' or 'no' is off the table."

'Not with the way things are,' I said in my mind.

A girlfriend who demanded constant presence and disapproved of my darker inclinations? Navigating those waters would be like threading a needle during a tempest. If she ever glimpsed the true me, not the polished Academy facade, her feelings might take a nosedive. It was a gamble, but maybe that's the litmus test.

If she stuck around after seeing the real me, the answer would be a resounding 'yes.' For now, this approach seemed like the safest bet.

"I get that it's not an easy pill to swallow," I admitted, "but it's the best answer I can muster right now."

"I see... I understand." Titania nodded, her expression surprisingly calm. No anger, no disappointment. A weight lifted off my shoulders as I realized she took it better than expected. "Haaa..." she sighed deeply, the air thick with the weight of her confession. "My heart's pounding like crazy right now."

Never thought I'd spill my guts like that... I must be out of my mind, blurting it out like that." Her eyes, still brimming with affection, locked onto mine. "I'm head over heels for you, Leon. No denying it. I'm cool with waiting for your response." A hopeful smile played on her lips.

The next day, the whispers of me and Titania being an item echoed through the corridors. How did I find out? Well, subtlety wasn't a strong suit for the students, who openly discussed the rumors circulating about us. Denying it seemed pointless.

Denying it? Nah, it felt like a pointless game. We had better things to do with our time than engage in that kind of nonsense.

Day two of joint training kicked off, and my groupmates and I navigated back to yesterday's training spot. The forest, thick and mysterious, seemed to hold secrets within its embrace. Navigating our way through the dense woods was a breeze, thanks to the knife cuts we'd etched into the bark, creating a trail back to the spot.

After a while, we finally made it back to the spot. Switching into our training gear, we kicked off with warm-ups. Then, I sparred with Titania for a solid hour before it was time for a breather.

I scooped up a handful of river water, splashing it on my face. Taking a sip, it was surprisingly refreshing, the kind of crisp and clean you'd expect from river water.

As I drank, I couldn't shake the feeling of countless eyes on me. It was only natural, given the rumors circulating about me and the Princess of Bethlan. Their stares didn't bother me much, except for Zeruel's gaze. She had been watching me for a while now, and it made me uneasy. I decided not to dwell on it too much.

Afternoon rolled in swiftly, and we found ourselves having a meal at the training spot. Post-feast, we headed to the river for a bath. The females sported swimwear, but that didn't stop them from flaunting some tempting skin. Naturally, our male comrades couldn't resist stealing glances as they cleaned up. Personally, I was occupied with something else – a chat with someone from my group.

She weaved her spell around us, a mystical dance of magic that turned us into shadows within the forest, much like chameleons in their natural habitat.

"My Mirage skill won't make us vanish entirely, but it should cloak us well enough," Artemis explained.

"Just to be on the safe side," I said. I added a layer of Illusion Magic, a subtle enchantment to further obscure our presence. It wouldn't render us invisible, but it was a shroud against prying eyes.

As the magical aura enveloped her, her eyes widened in realization. "Is this Illusion Magic? Where on earth did you pick up that spell?"

"I had a mentor guide me," I replied nonchalantly, masking the fact that I crafted it myself. Her interest was piqued, undoubtedly stirred by that elven thirst for magical knowledge. Elves were often dubbed creatures of mystique and profound wisdom, forever hungry for the secrets of magic. "Sorry, no time for a deep dive into the intricacies of Illusion Magic."

"I-I'm not exactly itching to learn it," she stammered, cheeks flushing with embarrassment.