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Sarasa
Nagase
Illustration
Mitsuya Fuji

The DO-OVER
DAMSEL
CONQUERS
the DRAGON
EMPEROR

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The Do-Over Damsel Conquers the Dragon Emperor Vol.4

Sarasa Nagase

Translation by piyo

Illustration by Mitsuya Fuji

Title Design by Arbash Mughal

Editing by Elijah Baldwin

Proofreading by A.M. Perrone and Charis Messier

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YARINAOSHI REIJO WA RYUTEIHEIKA O KORYAKU CHU Vol.4

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FARIS DER KRATOS

First princess of the Kratos Kingdom.
Gerald's younger sister.



LAWRENCE MARTON

From the Kratos Kingdom and
Crown Prince Gerald's subordinate.



RISTEARD TEOS RAVE

Second prince of the Rave Empire.
Hadis's half-brother.



ELENTZIA TEOS RAVE

First princess of the Rave Empire. Hadis's half-
sister and the captain of the Neutrah! Dragon Knights.



ZEKE

Knight of the Dragon Consort. Uses a greatsword.



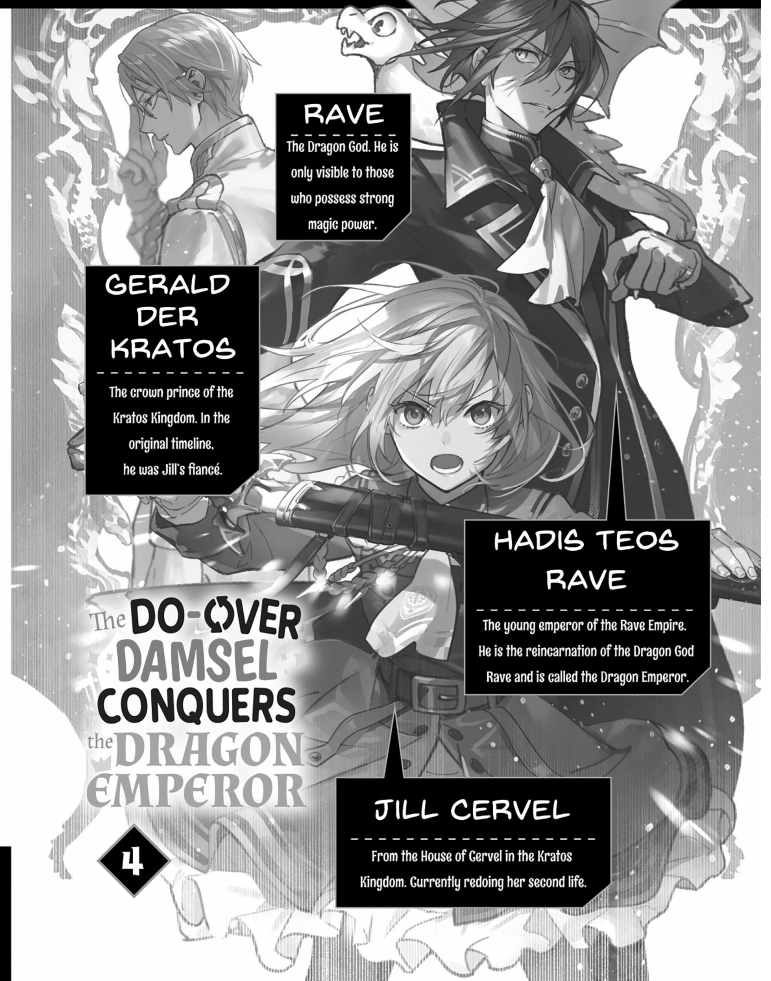
CAMILA (REAL NAME: CAMILO)

Knight of the Dragon Consort. Master archer.

~THE LEGEND OF THE CONTINENT OF PLATY~

Kratos, the goddess of love and the earth, and Rave, the Dragon God of logic and the sky, bestowed their
divine blessings onto their respective lands. The Kratos Kingdom, with which the Goddess shared her power,
and the Rave Empire, with which the Dragon God shared his power, have been embroiled in a long-standing rivalry.

CHARACTERS



RAVE

The Dragon God. He is
only visible to those
who possess strong
magic power.

**GERALD
DER
KRATOS**

The crown prince of the
Kratos Kingdom. In the
original timeline,
he was Jill's fiancé.

**HADIS TEOS
RAVE**

The young emperor of the Rave Empire.
He is the reincarnation of the Dragon God
Rave and is called the Dragon Emperor.

The **DO-OVER**
DAMSEL
CONQUERS
the **DRAGON**
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JILL CERVEL

From the House of Cervel in the Kratos
Kingdom. Currently redoing her second life.

Prologue

HANGING upside down by a vine wrapped around one ankle, the husband asked, “Hey, Jill. This is quite the predicament. How did I end up here?”

“Because, Your Majesty, you got caught in a trap, and a vine filled with magic energy is hanging you upside down from a tree!” the wife replied.

Jill’s husband shook his head, implying that she misunderstood his question. Blood was rushing to his head, and with his dirty, disheveled clothes he hardly resembled an emperor. In this state, it was quite hard to take him seriously at all.

But this man was, without a doubt, the true Dragon Emperor who possessed the Heavenly Sword of the Dragon Emperor and was the reincarnation of Rave himself. He was a handsome man, at least. He was covered in mud, yet his face was as beautiful as the moon, and his dusty, black hair and golden eyes were a lovely sight to behold. With a sigh, his eyelashes cast a shadow over his cheeks, making him seem like the epitome of beauty. Even while hanging upside down, he looked like a celestial painting.

But now wasn’t the time to be enraptured by his looks. If he stayed in this position, blood would continue to rush to his head, and Hadis’s body was frail enough as it was.

Jill, who had one leg pinned to the ground by a different magic circle on the ground, gave a “Hup!” as she ripped the magical vine.

“I shall rescue you now, Your Majesty,” she said.

“Uh, I’m fine,” Hadis replied. “I can get down by myself... That’s not the issue here.”

“Then could you please come down? You falling ill due to all the blood rushing to your head is the last thing I want,” she said.

“I came here today to ask your parents for your hand in marriage, right?”

Jill, who was now right under the hanging Hadis, gave a small, sheepish nod of confirmation.

Hadis's gentle smile fell away as he roared, "Then *why* are we doing some sort of survival test in the Rakia mountains?!"

"Well, because my house is in the middle of the Rakia mountains," Jill replied nonchalantly.

"What *is* wrong with this mountain?! None of the trails turn out to be real trails! And it's filled with magical traps! This is insane! It's worse than a trap-filled battlefield!"

"Your Majesty, you're swaying. Be careful."

As Hadis yelled with irritation, he swayed wildly. He covered his face with both hands, not caring about the movement. His semicircular canals may have been stronger than most.

"I-I did my best to clean up my appearance so that I wouldn't come off as being disrespectful to your family!" he wailed.

"You're fine, Your Majesty!" Jill assured him. "You're handsome no matter what!"

"And I even put a lot of thought into the many souvenirs I brought as gifts! I thought long and hard about everything!"

"Our main squad—Camila and Zeke—are taking a separate route with your gifts in tow," Jill reminded him.

"I can only marry you if I cross this thorny road?! What's even the point?! Are they making light of the Rave Empire, and by extension, *me*? Hey, how about I just wipe out this whole area with the Heavenly Sword?!"

"Argh! That's their tradition!" Rave growled when he heard the phrase "Heavenly Sword." He appeared from Hadis's chest. "Shut up and keep moving!"

With his long, white, lithe body and wings, the Dragon God resembled a dragon, but he looked more adorable than intimidating. Hadis had often called the deity a "fat snake with wings," but the white dragon was undoubtedly the

God of logic that protected the skies of the empire and had raised Hadis.

“Wipe out this area? How do you plan to do that with only *half* your magic energy? The Rakia mountains are near sacred grounds with magnetic fields that could cause your magic to run wild. Don’t do anything careless,” Rave ordered.

“I can do it if I put my mind to it,” Hadis said calmly, a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

Rave slapped the emperor’s head with his tail. “Don’t you dare,” the Dragon God warned. “You wanna marry Missy, don’t you? You came to bow your head to her parents, right? Then keep it together. You’re just troubling Missy.”

Getting an up-close-and-personal lecture from Rave, Hadis stopped complaining and looked down at Jill.

Jill awkwardly cast down her gaze. “I’m sorry,” she apologized. “Our house is a bit unique... We’re quite the weird bunch, aren’t we? By tradition, my marriage would only be approved if we overcome the path riddled with magical traps together. I know it’s weird...”

“N-Not at all!” Hadis cried hastily.

He flipped in the air and kneeled before Jill while caressing her hands. The vine around his ankle had vanished without a trace. He removed it so quickly that Jill didn’t even sense him use his magic. This man could do such impressive feats as easily as he breathed. Jill couldn’t hide her amazement.

“I’m fine. I’m sorry, Jill. I was just surprised because I was repeatedly caught off-guard. Let’s get to your manor together,” Hadis said.

“Really?” Jill asked.

“Mm-hm. I’ll do my best so that I can win your parents’ approval.”

“Then let’s work hard to overcome our next obstacle.”

She pointed at a large stone gate and wall blocking their path. Hadis loosened his grip on Jill’s hands and stiffened.

“H-Huh? Excuse me?” he stammered. “Why did they prepare a literal *obstacle* for us?”

“That’s no normal gate... Isn’t magic energy coursing through it?” Rave asked.

“Very astute, Rave!” Jill cried enthusiastically. “We have to pass through that gate while mirroring its amount of magic energy, or we’ll be squashed flat!”

“Squashed flat...” Hadis murmured.

“Is it tradition for the Cervels to kill potential suitors?” Rave asked.

As the Dragon Emperor and his guardian dragon turned pale, Jill shook her head.

“It really doesn’t require much magic energy. I’m sure we’ll be fine, Your Majesty!” Jill chirped.

“I mean, sure, but it feels like your family’s out for blood. I’m a little—just a liiittle scared, y’know?” Hadis said. “Like that concept is a bit...”

“What are you rambling about? We’ve only just begun!” Jill declared.

“Yeah?” Rave asked.

“Yeah!” she replied energetically as she turned to the gate. “I hear there are monsters lurking about too, and they’re pretty aggressive! Let’s go, Your Majesty!”

“Are you having fun with all this?” Hadis asked.

“This is the House of Cervel’s family tradition! Overcoming these trials represents the first activities the couple does together. I’ve always dreamed of doing this!” Jill insisted.

Hadis gave a thousand-yard stare. “I-I see... You know, I prefer our first activity together to be like cutting a cake or something...”

“Agreed,” Rave muttered.

“Cake sounds nice too!” Jill exclaimed.

Hadis was an excellent cook. The snacks he baked were so delicious they easily outclassed any average bakery. Jill smiled, but she immediately grew stern once more.

“I heard that even my parents had a bit of trouble from here on,” she said.

“Just for a point of reference, how long does it usually take to get through this?” Hadis asked.

“About two weeks on average. The record is one week. But if it takes us longer than the record, we might not make it in time for our other plans,” she said.

The couple’s main squad used the normal route from the port city located on the southernmost tip of the Cervels’ domain. They were headed for the Cervels’ villa at the foot of the Rakia mountains. Judging from the size of the squad and the luggage they carried, the trek would take about ten days. The route Jill and Hadis took was in the middle of the Rakia mountains, near the main residence. If they didn’t hurry, they would miss Jill’s parents, who would need to head out to the villa at the foot of the mountains to meet the main squad. If Jill and Hadis ended up delaying their initial plans, it would make them look quite foolish.

“We’ll be fine, Your Majesty! I’m sure of it!” Jill reassured him with a smile as she turned around. She looked up at her husband, who was now standing. “Let’s break the record! Father and Mother won’t believe it! Even my siblings would be stunned, and then they’d approve of our marriage in a heartbeat!”

Jill’s chest was filled with excitement and anticipation. She wanted the whole world to know that the man she chose was amazing. Hadis smiled as the light faded from his eyes.

“Right, let’s do our best,” he muttered. “Rave, are you positive I can’t wipe out this hellhole with the Heavenly Sword?”

“You’ve gotta get along with your in-laws. C’mon, do your best and give it all you’ve got,” Rave replied.

“The struggles of being a married man!” Hadis cried.

“Let’s go, Your Majesty! I’m sure we can do this!” Jill exclaimed as she clenched her fists and walked ahead while taking great strides.

She kicked open the enormous stone gates.

Chapter 1: The Dragon Emperor and His Consort's Marriage of Survival

“GOODNESS! So you’ve finally decided to head to the Kratos Kingdom,” Jill’s tutor said.

“Yup!” Jill replied.

“Jill, your cup. You’re holding the top with your index finger.”

“Oops.”

After her mistake was pointed out, Jill immediately tried to copy her tutor. She pinched the handle of the cup with her index finger and thumb while supporting the cup with her middle finger. It was a bit tricky, and whenever Jill let her guard down, her index finger would get caught on the handle.

The imperial capital Rahelm, also known as the city of the skies, was true to its name and located high in the sky. The imperial castle was on the top of the hill, allowing it to look over the capital. As the early summer days were growing warmer, a cool, refreshing breeze blew through when the windows were open.

Jill was currently in the emperor’s palace, which was located deeper inside the castle, past the rooms where official business and duties were conducted. Jill was given a room in the corner of this palace.

As the Dragon Consort, she would’ve normally been in the empress’s palace or would’ve received a different residence of her own. She was Hadis’s fiancée, after all. But she was eleven years old, and from the supposed enemy kingdom of Kratos. She received a room in Hadis’s palace for the time being until the political affairs settled down. The fact that she was sharing a space with the highest-ranked man in the Rave Empire made little sense since she was supposed to lie low, but Jill was in a difficult position. Above all, Hadis was in a tricky spot himself, as he was at the center of internal strife.

They had no money, no personnel, and no resources. Hadis’s older brother,

Risteard Teos Rave, wailed at the lack of seemingly everything, but Hadis's other older brother, Crown Prince Vissel Teos Rave, managed to threaten—no, *request* for support from powerful nobles. The circumstances were shifting greatly in their favor. It was a big win for Hadis when he settled the battle in Radia and took control of the imperial army. Elentzia Teos Rave, the emperor's older sister, became the interim general of the army. She was a capable woman and the captain of the Neutrah Dragon Knights, the best knights in the empire.

Hadis managed to stabilize his footing with support from his older siblings, meaning there wasn't much for Jill to do.

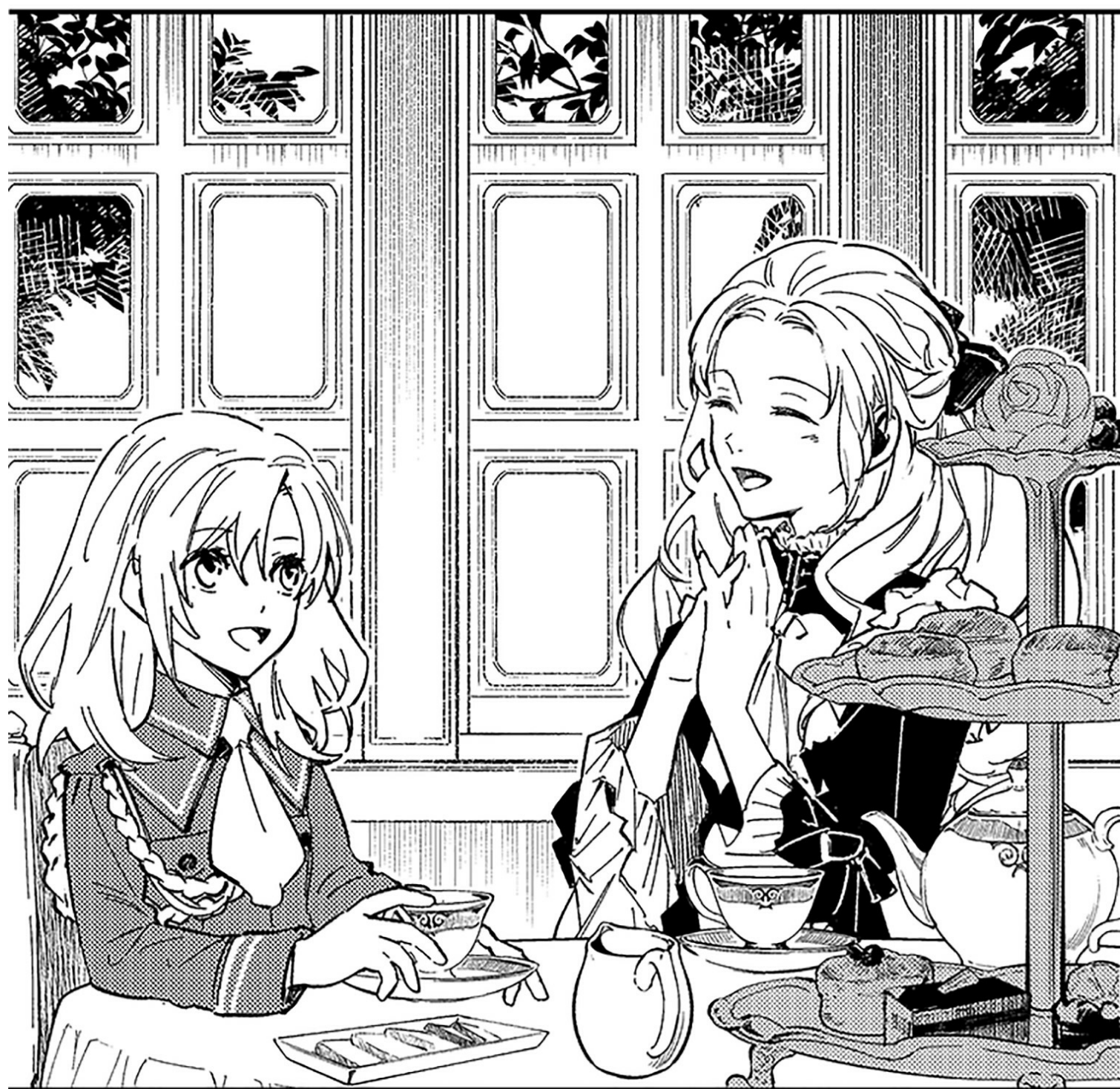
She was actually sixteen but went back in time to do-over her life from the age of ten. Formerly known as the god of war's daughter, Jill excelled at fighting. With the restoration of the imperial army, her role was slowly being taken away. And so, she had one more subject to tackle: her bridal training. From etiquette to sewing to writing poems, she had to be trained as the perfect consort. Since the imperial capital had now become much safer, a private tutor was prepared for her.

"Recently, you've been swift to catch your mistakes," Jill's tutor said.

"And it's all thanks to you, Sphere," Jill replied, setting her teacup down.

"Aw," Sphere smiled happily.

Her every movement made her seem like the perfect, elegant young lady. That was only natural, for Sphere de Beil was the daughter of a marquess and had even managed to have tea with Hadis. Her duty now was to be Jill's private tutor.



The only thing on Jill's itinerary for the day was to have tea with Sphere, but this proved to be quite difficult. Her etiquette was often corrected by her tutor, as was her choice of tea, snacks, and tableware. It seemed she wasn't allowed to choose strawberry shortcake as the snack every time. One day, Jill would have to pass Sphere's test, where it would be Jill's sole responsibility to write an invitation to her tutor and arrange the entire tea party.

Sphere's unexpectedly quite strict... Jill thought. But considering she was told the reward for passing the test would be the ability to invite His Majesty to the next party, she was raring to go. That was the power of love. Jill was eleven, while Hadis was nineteen. Due to their age gap, Jill wanted to occasionally act maturely to surprise her husband.

"And when will you be leaving?" Sphere asked.

"Sometime next week, I believe," Jill replied.

"Goodness, then time is of the essence. Have you already made the necessary preparations and contacted the other party?"

"His Majesty and his aides have everything under control. We'll first go to the Lehrsatz duchy by dragon and greet Prince Risteard's grandfather. We'll then enter the Cervels' port by ship. We should be in Kratos by the end of the month."

"Is that so? And..." Sphere glanced at the sofa by the window. A stuffed bear, a large bird that was tidying its feathers, and a baby black dragon that had his head buried under a blanket with his bum exposed were lined up. "It seems Raw is pouting a little," Sphere observed.

"Sure is. But dragons can't eat the plants growing in Kratos," Jill replied.

"Rawr!" Raw wiggled his butt as he gave a disapproving cry. Jill placed her cup down and sighed.

"How long are you going to be pouting, Raw?" she asked. "We decided that you'll stay home with Sauté and His Majesty Bear, didn't we?"

"Rawr!"

"Then go convince Rare and the other dragons."

“Rawr...”

All of a sudden, Raw’s voice turned gloomy. Before Jill decided whether to bring Raw along or not, the black dragon and Raw’s mate, Rare, flew over in angry protest. The other dragons in the imperial capital ignored the orders of humans as an act of defiance. There was nothing Jill and the others could do at this point. Raw, who wanted to tag along with Jill, acted spoiled and angry and desperately tried his best to win Rare’s approval, but to no avail.

“Over my dead body. You want to leave so bad? Kill me first,” Rare had declared.

As the baby shuddered over his mate’s serious gaze, he reluctantly chose to stay behind. The baby wagged his tail in anger and disapproval, but he would fall quiet in the presence of Rare. The purple-eyed dragon forewent her vacation and was patrolling the imperial capital with the other dragons. Their security was so tight that even the Dragon Knights paled in comparison; they were sending a clear message that Raw couldn’t possibly leave the capital. Rare was very reliable—she didn’t trust her mate one bit.

“Are Camila and Zeke going along with you?” Sphere asked.

“Yes, only makes sense since they’re the Knights of the Dragon Consort. But that’s about everyone who is going. Upon entering Kratos, my family will apparently send people to take care of our luggage. We have zero intention of starting a war, after all,” Jill said.

Sphere seemed deep in thought as Jill reached for a cream puff. One of the perks of these lessons was that she was allowed to eat delicious snacks so long as she paid heed to her etiquette.

“Then I suppose our lessons will be put on hold too,” Sphere said.

“Ah, you’re right. I’ll make sure to bring you back some souvenirs!” Jill replied.

“Thank you. But I need to prepare homework that you can do while you’re away... How about sewing?”

“Er, I’m not sure if I’ll have the time to—”

“Jill, you’ve got a smudge of cream around your mouth.”

“Oops.”

“Why don’t we at least make sure that you can sew Emperor Hadis’s name?”

As Jill was worried about the cream around her mouth, her homework had already been assigned.

“Will Hadis also prepare the souvenirs for your family?” Sphere asked.

“Uh, yeah,” Jill replied. “He seems really fired up about it too... I was also wondering about what souvenirs to give my family.”

“You’re simply visiting home. How about something that’s a bit more personal? I’m sure that would make your family happy.”

“You’re right. But at the end of the day, the best gift is His Majesty!”

Sphere gave a stiff smile at Jill’s declaration. “I-Indeed. Perhaps it’s best if His Majesty handles everything.”

“You rarely get to see the Dragon Emperor in the flesh! I’m sure they’ll be ecstatic,” Jill mused happily.

“I-In any case, it’d be great if this paves a path for peace. I wish from the bottom of my heart that both nations approve of your marriage with the emperor. That would truly bring me joy.”

Jill felt something fuzzy in her chest when Hadis’s former fiancée candidate said those words. “How about you, Sphere?” she asked. “Have you found your future husband? Is there a special someone in your life?!”

Sphere had left her hometown of the floating city of Beilburg to become not only Jill’s tutor, but to search for a husband. Sphere’s father, Marquess Beil, had shown hostility towards Hadis, and was stripped of his title as punishment. Sphere had chosen to accuse her father of his crimes. The title was still in Hadis’s hands for now, but once Sphere decided to marry, her chosen husband would be granted the rank.

“It’s still too soon, Jill. It hasn’t even been a month,” Sphere said.

“Sure, but have you not had a fateful encounter or the like yet?” asked Jill.

“It would be wonderful if such a thing happened. But he must also be

responsible enough to eventually rule over the floating city of Beilburg...”

The floating city, formerly under the control of Marquess Beil, had the closest route to Kratos Kingdom’s royal capital. Official matters usually utilized the Lehrsatz duchy, as it was near the kingdom’s border, but private, unofficial affairs usually went through Beilburg. In terms of military and political influence, the city couldn’t be treated so lightly.

“Indeed, ruling Beilburg would be quite the task,” Jill admitted. “You’d need both diplomacy and military prowess to handle Kratos, and you must be vigilant about the affairs within your city...”

“And my father is a known criminal...” Sphere added. “My thoughts aside, I must choose a person that everyone can trust. As such, I must first start by making friends.”

“Gathering information! I understand!”

Ladies were excellent at gathering intelligence and information. As Jill nodded, Sphere smiled.

“I hope I can find someone splendid, but I’m sure the Rave imperial family’s marriages will be prioritized before my own. Crown Prince Vissel appears to have a fiancée, but Princess Elentzia and Prince Risteard aren’t even engaged yet. Princess Natalie isn’t either,” Sphere said.

“I suppose you’re right,” Jill replied. “And it might be a bit too early for Princess Frida... She’s only eight.”

“With all the fuss of the crown princes dying one after another, there was no time for talks of marriage. But now, I’m sure these topics will be touched upon in the future. I assume Princess Natalie would especially be subject to potential marriage discussions. She’s of the right age and social status—her partner might be decided soon.”

Jill jolted. Natalie Teos Rave was a very determined lady who acted every bit like a princess should. She was sixteen, and of perfect age to think about being engaged to a man. And unlike her older sister, Elentzia Teos Rave, the teenager held no important posts.

Indeed, in the future timeline that Jill was aware of, the topic of Natalie’s

engagement came up when she was sixteen, and then...she died. No one knew who killed her, but she was murdered in Kratos.

Sh-She'll be okay, right? Jill worried. Natalie's murder would've already transpired by this point in time, and the person who arranged her engagement was no longer here.

"But I'm sure this will all be decided once you and Hadis decide on your wedding date. There will be much to celebrate in the future," Sphere said.

"R-Right!" Jill replied with a forced smile.

Suddenly, a small figure rushed into the room without even knocking. She threw herself at Jill and cried, "Sister Jill!"

Jill blinked. "Princess Frida. What's the matter?"

"Bad news about Sister Natalie! She's going to Kratos to marry!"

"Huh?" Jill froze in place as the normally shy Frida desperately clung to her.

"M-My brothers are talking about marrying big sister Natalie to some prince in Kratos!" Frida cried.

No matter the timeline, there was only one prince in Kratos. Gerald der Kratos was Jill's fiancé in her previous timeline, and even in her former life, there were talks about Princess Natalie possibly becoming engaged to the Kratos prince. Jill stood up and rushed out of the room without waiting for Frida's explanation. *Hadis should still be in his office right now.*

"Ah, wait! Jill?!" Camila yelped.

"What about your tea time?" Zeke asked.

The Dragon Consort ignored the two, who were standing guard for her lesson, and raced out of the palace. She took the stairs, three at a time, and rushed to Hadis.

An imperial guard barred her path and valiantly tried to stop the girl. "Y-Your Highness, there's currently a meeting in session, and no one is—"

"Move, this is an emergency," Jill ordered, immediately silencing the guard. She opened the office door loudly. "Pardon me, Your Majesty!"

Vissel and Risteard, seated on a sofa in front of Hadis's desk, turned around first and frowned as Jill barged in.

"Jill!" Hadis, the owner of the room and Jill's husband, exclaimed with a beaming face. "What's wrong? Are you hungry? We can have a snack in a bit."

Jill's face turned red at the smiling Hadis's comments. Did her constant begging for snacks make her seem that predictable?

"Y-You're wrong," Jill said.

"Huh? I am? You don't want any snacks?" Hadis asked.

"That's important too, but that's not what I'm here for! It's about Her Highness Natalie. Are you seriously going to engage her to Prince Gerald?"

"Who leaked that to her?" Vissel muttered with an annoyed look. His words implied that the engagement was indeed in the talks.

"I-I did..." Frida admitted.

She arrived with Camila and Zeke, who chased after the Dragon Consort. After the princess admitted to her actions, she swiftly hid behind Jill. Vissel clicked his tongue in annoyance and turned to Risteard.

"You can't even keep information confidential, you incompetent twerp?" Vissel accused.

"...Apologies. I'll look into it and prevent such an occurrence from happening in the future," Risteard said as he turned to his sister. "Frida, go back to your room. Your brother still has work to—"

"Wh-Wh-Why Big Sister Natalie of all people?!" Frida cried, mustering all her strength.

Risteard furrowed his brows, looking troubled at his biological sister's show of courage.

Vissel rested his cheek on his hand and replied, "It's a step towards negotiating peace. They're of similar age. It's not as though we can send Elentzia, given she's serving as the general of our army."

"B-But Sister Natalie is..." Frida murmured.

“Just so you know, Natalie suggested this herself. I was against it.”

Frida, trying her absolute best to utter her protest, froze in shock. Jill felt equally surprised at this revelation.

Vissel flashed a mocking grin at the two girls. “Did you think it was *my* suggestion? Unfortunately for you, I don’t like risky bets.”

“Why...did she...” Frida mumbled.

“Because I thought it was for the best,” a clear and noble voice rang out from the doorway.

Frida and Jill turned around to see Natalie standing proudly with Elentzia behind her, wearing a strained smile.

“What’s with all this fuss?” Natalie demanded. “I thought my brothers were fighting again, so I brought Elentzia with me.”

“It’s good that they’re not fighting, Natalie,” Elentzia said. “I’d rather happily have some tea with my brothers than having to smack some sense into them. Same goes for you guys, too, no?”

As the eldest sister glanced around the room, the younger brothers all seemed a little reluctant to admit it. Every time the brothers fought, they would receive a smack to the head before they could offer any excuses. Frida’s eyes grew damp as she saw her beloved Natalie and the reliable Elentzia make their appearance.

“Big Sister Natalie... A-Are you really going off to marry?” Frida asked tearfully.

“Not for a while. We haven’t even actually discussed any details yet. But it’s not a bad idea, is it?” Natalia replied with a grin.

Frida blinked several times. Jill was shocked by the optimistic Natalie.

“It’s Prince Gerald!” Jill shouted. “Are you sure you’re okay with *him*?”

“If we establish peace here, they won’t be an enemy nation. Besides, the rumors of him being a child prodigy aren’t just talk,” Natalie replied. “He doesn’t look too bad either.”

“But he’s the worst! A nasty sister-lover!”

Jill clasped her hands over her mouth as the words tumbled out. This was the cause of Jill’s first death. Elentzia gave her a funny look as she tilted her head to one side.

“Indeed, Prince Gerald and Princess Faris are well-known for being quite close, but I feel like your words are a bit exaggerated...” Elentzia said. “My younger brothers could learn quite a lot from them.”

“They have different standards, and so do we, Sister,” Risteard replied.

Risteard had once opposed Faris, and he offered that specific rebuttal likely because Frida was listening. However, in the future timeline, Jill was sentenced to death because she had discovered the forbidden love between Gerald and his biological sister. There wasn’t even time for the news to spread as false accusations were mounted upon Jill and she was restrained and sent to be executed. There were no guarantees that Natalie *wouldn’t* suffer the same fate.

But publicly stating this scandal would bring anything but peace between the two opposing nations. There were no obvious signs that the Kratos royal siblings currently had that sort of relationship either. How could Jill state such a groundless and ridiculous story without any evidence?

“Our future empress mustn’t speak so thoughtlessly about the neighboring kingdom’s royal family. This goes beyond etiquette; it’s just common sense. Must I explain the concept of peace to you?” Vissel replied with irritation.

Jill’s eyes wandered around restlessly. “I-I apologize for my choice of words. But those siblings are...a bit special.”

“You should describe them more accurately. The relationship between those siblings isn’t exactly wholesome. They’re like a martyr and a goddess. Prince Gerald will stop at no costs should we so much as consider laying a finger on his sister—surely, he’s willing to die for her. Even if we send a princess from the Rave Empire, he’ll kill her without a second thought, and he’d do it skillfully. He’s still young, but he’s got the power and the brains. That’s what a child prodigy is, after all.”

Frida turned pale as Vissel continued to analyze Gerald without facing Natalie.

“Which is why I’m against it. What can an average princess, who can’t even fight, isn’t particularly smart, and lacks magic powers, do in the kingdom of magic? Her death would be orchestrated for something and that’ll be the end of her.”

“We won’t know unless I try,” Natalie insisted.

“You heard her. Which is why she has some convincing to do.”

As Vissel seemingly gave up, even Risteard seemed troubled by Natalie’s suggestion. Frida gingerly took Natalie’s hand.

“S-Sister... Why?” she asked.

“Because this is a golden opportunity,” Natalie replied in a dignified voice as she raised her head. “Our empire’s internal strife has started to calm down. Our next move should be focused outside our empire. To maintain peace, a political marriage is the best course of action.”

“That...might be so. But...”

“Look at the situation; our fastest route to attain this peace is by me marrying Prince Gerald. Hadis is marrying Jill, after all.”

Jill raised her voice in shock. “Um, so you’re marrying him for me and His Majesty?”

“Don’t misunderstand,” Natalie replied sharply. “I’m doing this for myself. I thought long and hard about it. It’s not as though I can be a general of an army like Elentzia, and I don’t have anyone backing me like Frida, meaning that even if I marry within the empire, I’m still limited in my actions. There’s only one way for a woman like me to be of use, and that’s to become the crown princess of Kratos. Aren’t I amazing?”

She gave a haughty laugh and flipped her hair behind her.

“What’s more, I can silence my annoying brother, Vissel. There’s nothing better than that,” Natalie finished.

“You’ve got grandiose ideals, I’ll give you that,” Vissel replied. “The chances of it happening are one in a million, but *if* it ever does, I’ll grant you one wish—anything you desire.”

“Oh? Then that’s a promise. I’ll hold you to it, brother.”

Natalie gave a bold smile, but it would’ve been foolish to assume that she wasn’t anxious about this situation. She was a princess who was able to reflect and analyze the impact of her actions and the current affairs of the empire much better than Jill ever could. She was, of course, keenly aware of the dangers that came with marrying into an enemy kingdom that they were virtually at war with. But her eyes were calm and determined.

“I’m a Rave princess. If I were to have a use, it’d be now. Don’t misuse me,” Natalie said.

Had she really needed to be stopped, Vissel would’ve done anything within his power to do so, and Risteard would’ve surely voiced his concerns. But both men remained quiet—that was their answer. Elentzia currently served as the defense of their empire, so she was in no position to get married. Frida was too young, and she was related to the Three Dukes, powerful figures of authority within the empire. She was in a tricky position. Natalie was most suited for the role in terms of status and age. Even without Jill or Hadis, her marriage would’ve been the best solution in hope of a peace treaty.

But will she be okay? If Princess Natalie gets kidnapped and killed like in my previous timeline, peace will be beyond us. The only saving grace was that the situation was much different from what Jill knew. In her past life, Natalie was sent to Kratos through George, who was at war with Hadis. The emperor’s uncle had made this decision on his own amidst the conflict. Currently, Natalie was trying to form diplomatic bonds of her own free will. That alone would change how Kratos would treat the Rave princess. And Jill was no longer Gerald’s fiancée either.

Elentzia spoke up cheerfully, breaking the silence, “I think Natalie can do it. She’s my intelligent and adorable younger sister. I’m sure Prince Gerald will take a liking to her, and I’m positive that she can get along well with Princess Faris. Besides, we’re still only throwing the idea around. What use is there to make a fuss when the two haven’t even properly met yet? We won’t know how Kratos will react either; if they don’t agree, we can just pretend this never happened.”

“Who do you think will have to clean up that mess, you simpleton?” grumbled the crown prince.

“Did you say something, Vissel?”

“Nothing at all, Elentzia. I understand where you’re coming from. We can at least state our intentions and gauge how serious our opponent is in actually bringing peace. It’d be a good way to test how Kratos will react.”

Would Kratos accept Natalie’s proposal, or would they decline? And if they decided to turn it down, what reason would they give? Kratos’s reaction would offer an important nugget of information.

Elentzia gave a sweeping glance around the room. “Then why don’t we trust Natalie?”

“How can we trust such a mediocre princess?” Vissel muttered.

“What did you say?!” Natalie snapped.

“Vissel, is it that hard to be honest? Just admit that you’re worried about your little sister,” Elentzia sighed.

“Huh? Don’t say that, Elentzia,” Natalie replied. “The sheer idea gives me the creeps.”

“I share that sentiment,” Vissel added.

As Vissel and Natalie seemed to agree with each other for once, Elentzia looked at the two wearily. “I can’t tell if you two are on good or bad terms...” the eldest princess mumbled.

“We can’t help but be cautious, Elentzia. Should anything happen to Natalie, our relationship with Kratos would not only crumble, but our empire would blame Hadis and state that it was a foolish plan. It might prove that Hadis didn’t wish to approve of the Rave imperial family at all,” Risteard said with a groan as he leaned forward and placed his elbows on his knees. “But...I think I want to bet on Natalie too. It’s a plan only a Rave princess can accomplish, and it’s a bit vexing to have my younger sister make more progress than me, but I’m impressed. You’ve made your resolve well.”

“Wh-What are you saying, Risteard?” Natalie stammered.

“It’s the truth. We can even cover for the fact that Jill was Prince Gerald’s former fiancée, and if we attain the approval of the Three Dukes, we can ensure your safety as much as possible. It’s the best diplomatic strategy we have.” Risteard turned to Vissel. “I’ll convince Duke Lehrsatz. I doubt Duke Neutrahll will say much, and can’t you influence Duke Verrat, Vissel?”

The crown prince raised an eyebrow and gave an exaggerated sigh before he turned to the emperor. “What do you want to do, Hadis?” he asked. “Are you for it or against it?”

It was the emperor’s role to make the final decision. Jill felt nervous as everyone turned to the emperor.

“I think I should properly greet Jill’s parents first,” Hadis said with a straight face.

Silence filled the room.

Risteard groaned once more as he buried his face in his hands. “That’s...true... But don’t you...have anything more to say?” he asked.

“Well... It’s just that I think all of you are thinking a bit too far ahead,” Hadis replied as he turned to his wife. “The same goes for you, Jill.”

“Me?” Jill asked.

“You’re worried that this all might be your fault. But Natalie’s proposal will only work after my marriage with you receives proper approval from your parents. We haven’t even brought up Natalie’s plan to Kratos yet.”

“R-Right, but when I think about what Prince Gerald could do to Princess Natalie, I...” She couldn’t wave her anxiety away.

Hadis smiled at her. “When it comes to negotiating peace, do you know what it entails?”

“Um, you promise that you won’t go to war. You sign a treaty and shake hands or something,” she ventured. “I’m sure they’re pinching each other behind everyone’s backs, but on the surface, they should look more friendly.”

“That’s the *result* of peace negotiations. Before that, it’ll be like this.”

Hadis extended his left hand in the form of a handshake. As Jill tried to

instinctively shake his hand, she stopped. She noticed that Hadis was smiling with his right hand balled into a fist—he was ready to swing.

“Do you get it now?” Hadis asked.

“Uh, no?” Jill stammered.

“...You better make sure we can maintain the upper hand, Risteard,” Vissel ordered.

“...I’d like to do this peacefully, but I suppose if we’re to negotiate peace, that’s where it starts,” Risteard replied.

“Huh? I’m lost?” Jill asked in confusion.

Natalie looked on with a frown. “Wait, what? I don’t get it either,” she said. “We’re going to negotiate peace, aren’t we, Elentzia?”

“That’s what I believe. I sort of get it, but sort of don’t...” Elentzia admitted. “Negotiating on the frontlines isn’t really my strong suit. But don’t worry, should anything happen, I’ll personally come to your rescue.”

“Wouldn’t that result in a war?!”

“S-Sister N-Natalie... You...made this decision yourself, didn’t you?” Frida said softly, silencing the room. She clutched the skirt part of her dress and looked at the floor.

Natalie knelt in front of her younger sister. “Don’t worry,” she assured gently. “It’s still a ways off.”

Frida gave a pouting frown, but she nodded. “Okay... I-If this is your... decision... I’ll cheer you on.” Her voice cracked as she paused every now and then, desperately fighting back her tears, but it seemed the emotion was contagious. Natalie sniffled.

“Goodness...” she murmured. “Don’t make that face, Frida...”

“That’s right. This is a joyous occasion. We have to make it into one,” Elentzia said as she hugged her sisters tightly.

Vissel looked on coldly and murmured, “And who has to run around to make all of that happen?”

“Who knows?” Elentzia replied. “I leave all that stuff to my *intelligent* younger brothers. We’ll be eating some delicious food to regain our energy! Lady Sphere, could you kindly prepare us some of your best tea and snacks?”

Only then did Jill realize that behind Camila and Zeke was Sphere with Raw in her arms. Even Sauté was at her feet, dragging Hadis Bear in tow, defending Sphere. The lady looked surprised before offering them an elegant smile.

“With pleasure. Jill, would you please help me? This will be a perfect opportunity for you,” Sphere said.

“Ah, of course!” Jill replied. “Wait, is this a continuation of our lessons?”

“Then I’ll go too,” mumbled the emperor.

“Like hell, Hadis! Do you not see the mountains of paperwork that require your approval?!” Risteard bellowed, pushing Hadis’s head down as he tried to get up and join his wife.

“What? I hate it here. Jill, save me!” Hadis pleaded.

“Good luck, Your Majesty!” Jill replied.

“You’re awful.”

“Indeed, she really is an awful fiancée,” Vissel said as he placed another stack of papers on Hadis’s already busy desk.

Hadis gave a look of despair. Jill chose to leave before she could catch any strays, and Raw jumped into her arms, acting spoiled. Risteard left the office too, holding a few documents.

“I-I’ll be fine...Brother,” Frida said as she turned around.

“Y-Yeah. I know...” Risteard replied.

“I’ll keep an eye on them,” Elentzia vowed. “I’ll leave the other troublesome matters to you, Risteard.”

“Elentzia, I’d like for *you* to take on a few troublesome matters yourself,” Risteard replied with a reproachful glare. “You could learn a thing or two from Natalie.”

“Come on, let’s go, Natalie, Frida!”

“Don’t pull so hard, Elentzia!” Natalie cried.

Elentzia marched ahead.

“She just used her younger sisters to escape a scolding, didn’t she?” Camila whispered in Jill’s ear.

“Seems like it... I feel like Princess Elentzia dislikes internal affairs, diplomacy, and the like,” Jill whispered back.

“The same could be said for you, Captain,” Zeke chimed in.

Jill tried to step on Zeke’s foot, but he skillfully dodged the attack. Risteard watched his sisters leave before he approached a giggling Sphere.

“Lady Sphere, I leave my sisters in your hands,” Risteard said. “She may not look it, but I’m sure Natalie is feeling quite anxious and scared.”

Sphere looked shocked that she was being talked to at all, but she replied calmly, “If there’s anything I can do to be of service, I shall gladly do so.”

“I apologize. I know you’re busy as well. You came to the imperial capital to —”

Risteard cut himself short as he seemed to be at a loss for words. Even Jill whirled around at this unusual sight. Risteard looked as though he’d realized something, but Sphere blinked at him with a blank expression. But the silent moment was soon interrupted by the lady’s graceful smile.

“Is something the matter?” she asked.

“...No, nothing,” Risteard replied with a smile as he gripped his documents.

Oh? It was rare for Risteard to be at a loss for words, but it was even more unusual to see him with such a perfectly crafted smile. Jill couldn’t help but be perplexed at the sight.

“Rawr?” Raw growled as he tilted his head to the side.

“I know now isn’t the time,” Risteard said. “May I visit you at a later date to display my gratitude?”

“Huh? Oh, there’s no need for such a formality from you, Your Highness,” Sphere replied hastily.

“You’re Lady Jill’s private tutor, yet my sisters are imposing on you. It’s only natural for me to offer my gratitude. I’ll contact your residence later. Now, if you’ll please excuse me.”

Risteard turned on his heel with his documents in hand. As usual, he was quick to make decisions. Sphere was left behind as she put a troubled hand on her cheek. A prince had stated that he would personally visit her manor to give a word of thanks, after all. Her reaction was only natural.

“Sphere, are you close with Prince Risteard?” Jill asked, perplexed.

“I-I wonder... I’ve greeted him before when I was friends with His Majesty, but I don’t think we’ve talked much,” Sphere admitted.

“Oh, but during our lessons, we’ve had tea with Princess Frida, and you showed her how to sew. Maybe he wants to thank you for that,” Jill ventured.

Risteard doted on his younger sister, but Sphere still seemed confused by the suddenness of it.

“But I still feel he’s going overboard in wanting to thank me...” Sphere murmured. “I’m sure he’s a busy person.”

“It’s fine, isn’t it?” Zeke piped up. “I mean, you *did* get more work, what with the tea party and all.”

“That’s right! You should take what you can, Sphere!” Camila added.

The two knights were quite friendly with Sphere as they’d known her since their time in Beilburg. No one knew what Risteard was thinking, but they all took it positively.

“His Highness Risteard is a gentleman, so I doubt he’d do anything weird to you,” Jill stated.

“Y-You’re right,” Sphere replied with a giggle. “Been a while since I have been in the immediate presence of the Rave imperial family, so I was a bit nervous.”

“Sphere, that’s a bit rude,” Camila warned. “You greeted His Majesty pretty recently, didn’t you?”

“Ah, my apologies! B-But he was in an apron, and I think I fainted...”

“Nah, don’t worry about it. I doubt His Majesty minds either,” Zeke said.

The emperor should’ve minded that a bit more, but Jill was in no position to say so. *I must work hard too, so that I won’t be beaten by Princess Natalie!* While Hadis had disregarded the notion, there was no denying that Natalie’s proposal would support Jill and Hadis’s marriage. If the emperor and his consort could marry without worry, Natalie may not need to fret about marrying into Kratos.

What Jill needed to do first was to convince her family. When she first turned eleven, she didn’t think much about her household, but as she joined the war efforts and gained some life experience, she knew that her family was a bit unique. She wanted to leave the matters pertaining to the empire to Hadis and his aides while she had to think of a way to convince her family, which had the motto: “Strength justifies all.”

Coming from a military household that birthed powerful fighters, the Cervels blatantly didn’t butter up to authority. They didn’t care about political power, but they swore their loyalty to Kratos. Their house couldn’t have survived otherwise. If the Dragon Emperor, who appeared for the first time in three centuries, were to visit their house, the Cervels were surely raring to have a battle with him. Their excitement could even take a turn for the worse if they yearned for a war to begin to justify fighting.

And if Jill’s entire family came to fight her with all their power, she wouldn’t stand a chance. She didn’t even have the confidence to win against her family in one-on-one combat, and her magic powers were sealed right now. Hadis’s strength was peerless and knew no equal, but as he’d regained half his magic like Jill, his body was frail. If they didn’t account for his fighting capabilities against the enemy kingdom, they would lose. Even if her family was against their union, it was necessary to think of a plan to win their approval.

Suddenly, Jill remembered an old tradition that allowed her to brute-force her way to win over her family. It was known as the Path of Trials. She heard that her own parents had completed the path to become even stronger. If Jill could complete the path with Hadis in record time, even if her family was against the marriage, they wouldn’t be able to complain.

And so, when Jill had entered the Kratos Kingdom, she left Camila and Zeke with the luggage, and dragged Hadis to start climbing the mountain. It was there that she was able to once again confirm a simple fact.

“You’re so strong, Your Majesty!” Jill said with sparkling eyes as she looked up at her husband.

Hadis was sitting by the fire that illuminated his face as he turned red. “Y-You think so?”

“Yes! Your kick defeated that monster in one blow! And I’ve never eaten such delicious tomato soup with boar meat while camping before!”

The bags that Hadis always had on him were filled with convenient items for travel. He had bandages, disinfectants, and a whole first-aid kit, as well as small pots, knives, cups, and spoons. He even carried around some spices. Camila sometimes joked that the emperor was likely used to being kicked out of his house since he was so well-prepared, but Jill simply found these items reliable. Her way of thinking helped her avoid thinking about the emperor’s sad past.

“You can forage for ingredients anywhere in Kratos, so I guess food won’t be an issue,” Hadis said as he ladled seconds in Jill’s cup.

Jill blew on a steaming potato to cool it down. They were seated at the root of a large tree, its foliage layered on top of each other like a roof. It was like a secret hideout for the couple. Rave, seated beside Hadis on a log, had gauged his surroundings before letting out a sigh.

“I know we’re in the middle of the Rakia mountains, but I’m pretty shocked that there are green onions, tomatoes, and potatoes just growing in the wild,” the Dragon God said. “Did the House of Cervel plant these?”

“We’re in charge of this area, but I think vegetable seeds just fell from somewhere and sprouted on their own,” Jill replied.

The Rakia mountains split the kingdom and the empire, but their weather conditions and climates were completely different from each other. This was due to Kratos, the Goddess of love and the earth, and Rave, the Dragon God of logic and the skies, guarding each nation.

“But I think this soup is delicious because you’re an excellent cook, Your

Majesty!" Jill insisted.

"It's all thanks to you for hunting the boar. And you skinned and quartered it masterfully," Hadis said.

"I'm really good at stuff like that, so you can leave that bit to me!"

Salt and pepper had been sprinkled over the boar meat to taste before it was skewered and grilled over the fire. Jill had long since polished off each seared skewer.

"Do you know how far we've come?" Hadis asked.

"I think we're about halfway there," Jill replied. "It depends on what we'll be facing from here on, but we should get there by tomorrow or the day after. I'm sure they'll approve of our marriage then!"

"I-I see. So what was the point in me bringing souvenirs, money, and other stuff?"

"Don't think about it, Hadis," Rave replied. "Traditions are important."

"I'd love to clean myself up before I get to the manor, at least." Hadis sighed as he patted the hems and sleeves of his clothes to remove some dirt. As the bonfire flickered and illuminated his face, he looked gentle and beautiful. Jill snuck in a few sneaky glances as she sipped on her warm soup.

"I don't think my parents will mind no matter what attire you're in, Your Majesty," Jill said.

"But I mind," Hadis insisted. "I've even been worried about where to stand and position myself when I meet your parents, you know."

"What kind of worry is that?" Jill knitted her brows as she felt a shiver down her spine.

Hadis pouted as he answered, "Well, in the world of dragons, you and I are already married. We're engaged in the Rave Empire, but we're nothing in front of your parents, who I haven't even met yet. I think they'll get angry if I suddenly claim that we're married or engaged. They might think I'm being cheeky."

"Hm, I don't think my parents will mind, to be honest. Besides, you stole me

away right in front of my parents, Your Majesty. I think it's a bit too late to be worried about stuff like that."

"I know! But still, I want them to have a better impression of me."

Jill couldn't resist her tall husband when he looked up at her with those pleading eyes. She was tempted to stroke his head and spoil him. She cleared her throat to shoo those feelings away and thought long and hard. They weren't married and engaged to her parents, and she was in a relationship with a nineteen-year-old man. Calling him a lover would seem too mature for an eleven-year-old child like her. It sounded like they were playing make-believe.

"How about...boyfriend?" Jill suggested casually.

"Boyfriend?!" Hadis cried, his voice cracking. He glanced around restlessly and swiftly grabbed the large blanket they were going to sleep with and threw it over his head.

"B-B-B-B-Boyfr... I-I'm y-your b-boyfriend?!" Hadis stammered.

"If you don't like it, we don't have to..." Jill started.

"I don't hate it!" The emperor raised his head and refuted Jill's words with gusto. His face turned red as a tomato as he mumbled. "I-I like it, but m-my heart isn't ready..."

"But we came to announce our engagement," Jill pointed out.

"B-But this is totally different! B-B-Boyfriends hold hands with you and take you out on dates and stuff! We're like lovers!"

"I mean, I think engaged couples do stuff like that too..."

"It's totally different!" Hadis shouted.

Jill turned to a yawning Rave. "Is it different?"

"Probably is to this kid," Rave said. "I'm gonna hit the hay..."

"A-An engagement is a contract. But a boyfriend is different. It means we love each other! There's no sense of duty or authority involved. You can hold someone's hand and go on a date with them because you love them!" Hadis insisted.

Jill half-closed her eyes. What was this man on about? Did he still not trust Jill's feelings after all that had happened?

But Hadis covered his face with his hands in agony. "For me to be your boyfriend is so..."

"If you don't like it..."

"I like it!"

Jill sighed. It was clear that the word "boyfriend" was filled with dreams for Hadis. *But is it something to be so embarrassed about? We've been through so much. If I were called His Majesty's girlfriend...* Jill tried to finish off the rest of her soup, but she closed her mouth. She took the cup from her mouth so that she wouldn't choke on it. She felt her cheeks grow warm, but it was surely because she was in front of the fire.

"Um, Jill..." Hadis started.

"Wh-What?!" Jill asked.

Hadis was hugging his knees as he glanced at her. He knew he had overreacted and averted his gaze from Jill, unable to meet her eyes, but he tried to sneak in a few glances.

"If I'm your b-boyfriend, could I flirt with you a little?" he asked.

"Huh?"

"A-Are you cold? You are, aren't you?"

The Rakia mountains had quite the elevation and were colder toward the top, but it was currently summer. *His Majesty's pushing his luck...* But as Hadis waited in front of her like a dog waiting for a treat, she couldn't find it in her to scold him. Rave was nowhere to be seen and was likely sleeping inside Hadis. Jill took her cup and sat in between Hadis's knees as he beamed with elation.

"I'm just letting you know, but we're in a rush," Jill said firmly.

Hadis happily put his arms around her. "I know."

"We're doing this so our marriage will be approved."

"I'm starting to have my doubts on that," Hadis said. "You're having fun with

this, aren't you?"

"Can't I?" She felt the emperor tilt his head to one side behind her shoulder.

Jill pouted. "I thought I could show my family how cool you are, Your Majesty."

She felt embarrassed vocalizing her thoughts and looked down to take a sip from her almost empty cup. Hadis couldn't see her face with the way they were sitting together, anyway.

"I see," Hadis replied. His response was short and calm, in stark contrast to his nervous demeanor when he was called a boyfriend. "Then I'll do my best."

"Really?"

"Yeah. So, I need to recharge for a bit."

He gently kissed the top of her ear. *He's really pushing his luck.* Jill turned around and tried to scold him, but he smiled.

"I can't do stuff like this in front of your parents, can I?" Hadis said.

He wasn't wrong, but he was being imprudent. But the arms that wrapped around her were so gentle that Jill couldn't offer a response. Indeed, she couldn't show her blushing face like this in front of her family.



AT the end of the Path of Trials was a bell. Jill wasn't sure why the bell was there, but she stared at it as its dignified ringing echoed throughout the slope of the grassy plains. It was the same sound as the bell that was rung during wedding ceremonies. The gate for the exit may have been fashioned to resemble a church.

The sun was high in the skies as the bell rang. Jill could see the Cervels' manor, the pastures, the waterways, and the windmills below her. It had been four days since they started this trial.

"A new record! We did it, Your Majesty!" Jill crowed. She jumped and threw her arms around Hadis. The emperor staggered a little but caught her.

He smiled with his sooty face. "I-I see... Great... I honestly have no idea what

went on during the last part of the trial...”

“I was tempted to blow it all away myself as the Heavenly Sword,” Rave admitted.

“Hooray! Our marriage will be approved, Your Majesty!” Jill gushed.

“R-Really? Will things go that smoothly?” Hadis wondered.

“Well, color me surprised! If it isn’t Lady Jill!” a voice said as Jill hung from Hadis’s neck.

The citizens of the land gathered when they heard the bell. Some were wearing farmwork clothes, while others were dressed in overalls to take care of the livestock, and others were dressed in guardsman uniforms. But they were all familiar faces to Jill.

She smiled and stepped away from Hadis. “Hi! It’s been a while! How have you all been?” Jill replied.

“Doing well, y’know? Been a while, my lady. Heard ya went to invade the Rave Empire by yourself. How’d it go?”

“Oh, what? I thought she went on a foodie trip for some yummy dragon meat!”

“Nah, she said she was gonna steal a weapon in Radia. Ain’t that right?”

Jill’s smile grew stiffer as the residents let the rumors fly. “You’re all wrong,” she replied.

“Then did ya destroy the Neutrah! Dragon Knights?”

“Nah, she probably went to Lehrsatz first. You get ’em there, Neutrah! would run outta people to fight with.”

“No, no, she woulda gone to steal Verrat’s ship first, I reckon.”

Hadis was nearby, listening to all their outrageous stories. Jill turned red and shouted, “You’re all wrong! Jeez! The bell rang, didn’t it? And I’m here with a man! Isn’t it obvious?”

She pointed to Hadis behind her. Everyone stood in shock, likely stunned by his beauty. Residents who lived near the Cervel’s main residence were all older

folks who had come from the frontlines, and they all had ample magical powers. They wouldn't have been able to live in the Rakia mountains if they hadn't. In other words, they could tell Hadis's strength at a glance.

"My, my, he's a wonderful man!" a resident exclaimed in shock.

Jill crossed her arms and said proudly, "He is, isn't he? I'm going to marry him, so I'm here to meet my parents and—"

"Did ya get threatened by Lady Jill?" a resident interjected. "Ya poor thing. Here, have some water."

"Passed through the Path of Trials, did ya? Look at ya, all beat up! Where're ya from, lad?"

"Uh, well, I'm from the Rave Empire," Hadis stammered.

"My lady, ya snatched a man from the Rave Empire?!"

"Huh?" Hadis froze.

Jill hastily yelled, "No, he's my—"

"She said she likes strong men, y'know. She's an aggressive lass. Terrifying, eh?"

"Ya can't escape when she has her eyes on ya. She's tiny, but she's like a monster."

"She's even chased down a lost dragon for three days!"

"Hey, gather 'round! This is big! Lady Jill has kidnapped a man! And he's a real beauty, to boot!"

"That really *is* big! We gotta let our lord know about this!"

"Don't let the mistress catch wind of this. With this fella's body and magic, he might never be able to leave!"

The game of telephone quickly started as the news spread like wildfire. Jill didn't even have the chance to correct them.

"Wh-Wh-Why?! They assumed I kidnapped you when I simply brought you with me, Your Majesty..." Jill murmured as she stood in place, her fists trembling.

“Th-These people all seem nice and friendly! The people from your hometown sure are cheery!” Hadis said in an oddly bright voice.

Jill fell silent.

“...U-Uh, Jill? I-I really don’t mind stuff like this...”

“I’m sorry, Your Majesty. While I was under the care of the Rave Empire, it seems I’ve lost my edge.”

Even after turning back time for six years, Jill had been away from her hometown for quite a while. She cracked her knuckles, causing Hadis to shudder. Paying no heed to her husband, she lifted up a large boulder with one hand.

This was the domain of the Cervels, where strength ranked supreme. This was where Jill was born and raised.

“I’m telling you all to listen to me!” Jill roared. “I *said* I’m gonna marry him!”

“J-Jill! Calm down! Everyone will run from you!” Hadis called worriedly.

“Lady Jill’s angry again! Who’s the captain on duty today?” a resident yelled.

“Third Unit, defensive force at the ready!”

“Y-You’re going to fight?!” Hadis asked. “Isn’t she a lady?”

But no one heard Hadis’s comments as explosions rang in the air. The boulder that Jill threw was shot down with magic bullets. Amid the smoke and fire, Jill’s lips curled up. These people lived near the main residence of the Cervels. Jill was raised by these experienced people. She kicked off the ground with glee and jumped into the air as crackles of magic energy surrounded her body. She was nothing short of intimidating.

“I like your courage,” she said. “I’ll show you just how much stronger I’ve become.”

“J-Jill, wait! I can’t keep up with all this!” Hadis said, looking up at his wife with worry.

An elderly woman had concealed her presence and snuck behind the emperor. In the blink of an eye, she tied him up with her magic and threw him

into enemy territory.

“Your Majesty! Are you taking him hostage?! You cheater!” accused Jill.

“Oh ho ho ho,” chuckled the elderly woman. “If you can’t even protect your own man, you’ll be sullyng your reputation as a lady of Cervel.”

“Shoot our lady down in midair!” another cried.

Suddenly, a large boom of magic sounded, causing the air to shudder.

“Stop this at once! You’re all too loud!”

The magic circle in the air disappeared at the sound of the voice. Jill took this moment to reach Hadis’s side.

“Are you all right, Your Majesty?” she asked. “Have they done anything to you?”

“I-I’m fine. What do you mean by ‘do something to me’ though?!” Hadis asked.

“Please don’t let your guard down. This is a battlefield,” she told him.

“What did I even come here for?” he sighed. “But I think someone just stepped in to stop it...”

“What’s this? What’s with all the fuss? I can’t even train in peace like this,” boomed a burly man who emerged from the manor. His upper body was naked when Jill spotted him through the crowd.

“Father!” she cried.

The man with a towel around his neck was none other than Billy Cervel—Jill’s father and the current master of the House of Cervel. Everyone made way for the lord.

“Jill!” Bill bellowed. “I didn’t think you’d be here yet! Besides, I thought you were coming to the villa at the foot of the mountains. Was I wrong?”

“Not at all,” Jill replied. “I do have a squad headed there, but we arrived at the main residence via a different route.”

“Did *you* ring that bell? Then that means... Who’s that man with you?”

Hadis stood straight as he felt Billy's gaze. "Uh, y-yes! I, um, er..." Hadis stammered.

Jill's hands grew clammy. He came all this way—he needed to act cool here.

"Y-Your Majesty, good luck!" Jill said.

"R-R-R-Right! Right! Yes, um, pleased to meet you! I'm Jill's b-boyfriend!" Hadis declared, red-faced.

He covered his face with his hands as crickets and cold wind were the only sounds to be heard after his declaration. *I pray to every god under the sun that Hadis doesn't notice*, Jill wished from the bottom of her heart.

Chapter 2: Living as a Bride in a Potential Enemy Nation

THINGS had started off a mess, but Jill's father was a nobleman. He formally bowed his head in apology to Hadis and then guided the pair of them into the manor. At first, rumors flew that "Lady Jill has taken the Dragon Emperor hostage" or that a "different Dragon Emperor had arrived" among the residents, but they soon realized Hadis was a guest and not a fake Dragon Emperor. Billy Cervel had seen the Dragon Emperor at Prince Gerald's birthday party, and he made it clear to his people that Hadis was indeed the Dragon Emperor and not Jill's hostage.

Even after they accepted their lord's explanation, the locals remained as rude as ever. Questions like: "Why did the Dragon Emperor, who surely has no shortage of beautiful women throwing themselves at his feet, choose a child like Lady Jill?" and "This'll be a good experience for the little lady!" and "Maybe this is a marriage scam!" were tossed between the citizens.

When Prince Gerald chose me for his wife, they said that he'd be an excellent husband, so why are they treating His Majesty so differently?! Is it so weird for me to bring a man home? It was frustrating for Jill to admit, but it was likely because Gerald had all his bases covered before he publicly chose her. Meanwhile, Hadis was seen as a kind person as he tried to placate an irate Jill. He even received a head of cabbage as an apology. The whole thing made little sense to Jill, but it was a good sign that they were giving gifts to the emperor of an enemy nation. *I think. Probably.*

"I apologize for my belated visit," Hadis said, placing his hand over his chest in greeting. "As I've stated before, my name is Hadis Teos Rave. I've come here to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage."

Hadis had taken a bath and changed his clothes before he introduced himself to Jill's parents. He looked like the perfect man from every angle. His silky black hair and long eyelashes framing his gold eyes accentuated his chiseled face and toned body. Beauty and elegance defined his every gesture. Billy widened his

eyes in surprise from his seat opposite Hadis. Meanwhile. Charlotte Cervel, Jill's mother, seemed quite taken with Hadis. All the female servants present had either a hungry twinkle in their eyes or pink cheeks, causing Jill to puff up with pride.

"Of course, our marriage won't take place immediately," Hadis assured. "Your dear daughter is still eleven, and there is much to prepare. However, to express my seriousness, I have prepared a contract. I believe a draft was enclosed when I sent you the letter asking permission to visit your residence."

"And we even finished the Path of Trials together! We entered from the port town in the south!" Jill declared.

"The Path of Trials?" Charlotte asked. "From the south? Oh dear, what shall we do, darling?"

"And we made it in four days!" Jill bragged. "It's a new record, I believe! I will have you accept my marriage with His Majesty!"

"...Jill," Billy said. "Unfortunately, you took the wrong path."

"Come again?" Jill gaped at her now formally dressed father, who made a wry face in response.

"It's tradition to use the north and south routes in rotation," he explained. "Or else, the traps could be easily sniffed out by the next pair, you know? So the next official Path of Trials should be taken from the northern route."

"I-I've never heard of that before! I-I heard that you entered from the south... Why didn't you tell me?!" Jill exclaimed.

"Well, your older brothers and sisters had a higher chance of using the paths first, and I couldn't have guessed which path you'd need to take when it was your turn."

"Th-Then my marriage with His Majesty is..."

Billy and Charlotte exchanged a troubled glance—that was all the answer Jill needed.

"N-No way... His Majesty and I even made a new record..." Jill groaned.

"That's because you didn't confirm beforehand, Jill," Charlotte said. "Even in

your letters, you only ever wrote about the delicious food.”

“W-Well, that’s because there’s a lot that I can’t write about...”

“Don’t you lie to me, young lady. Your mother here is stuffed to the gills hearing about your delicious meals.”

“And you even dragged the emperor into this, you fool...” Billy murmured.

Jill deflated as she received a scolding from her parents. She couldn’t even turn to look at the emperor beside her because of her guilt.

“I’m sorry, Your Majesty. And we worked so hard, too...” Jill apologized.

“D-Don’t worry about it, Jill. I’m fine,” Hadis replied. “Uh, well, yeah, I’ve been met with one shock after another, so I won’t be surprised anymore.”

“I’m truly sorry, Your Majesty,” Billy said. “I know it’s rude to even have you come to this remote place.”

As Jill saw her father and mother bow their heads in apology, she felt even worse for causing this mess. She was the one who dragged Hadis all the way out here.

“Please raise your heads,” Hadis said hastily. “I apologize for barging into your residence like this without much prior notice.”

“It’s not your fault. I’m sure Jill dragged you along with her. Our eldest daughter—her older sister—should’ve greeted you at the southern port. Jill should’ve talked with her then,” Billy replied.

“I thought... Abby would get angry at me,” Jill admitted.

The eldest Cervel daughter, Abby, had married a merchant who used the southern port of the Cervel domain as their base of operations. Abby had kids and was running around as a merchant soldier who personally sank any pirates that had the misfortune of crossing her path. She was so formidable and terrifying that she was rumored to be a pirate herself. Should the Rave Emperor visit the Cervels from the south, it would only be natural for Abby to greet his party. Perhaps because she was raised by laidback parents, which had caused her to grow impatient, Abby was extremely strict when it came to political affairs. If Jill were to report that she was marrying the emperor of the Rave

Empire, she would surely receive a harsh lecture and be forced to write a report on the political advantages that came out of the marriage.

While Charlotte and Billy let out a sigh, Hadis seemed to be none the wiser.

“Your older sister would’ve been there? I would’ve loved to meet her,” Hadis said, his voice gentle.

“Huh? You can’t! Abby is a sucker for a handsome face! You’re much prettier than the man she married, Your Majesty, so you’ll be in danger!” Jill replied hastily.

“U-Uhhh... But I’d like to properly greet every member of your family...”

“Oh, then what about Chris? And is Matilda still missing as usual?” Jill asked her parents.

“Missing?!” Hadis yelled in shock, but Billy gave a calm nod.

“I put Chris in charge of the northern estate, but he’s a shut-in as always,” Billy divulged. “I told him about you and asked him to come to the villa at the foot of the mountain, but he only sent me a message stating that he’d kill the Dragon Emperor at first sight. I have no idea what he’s planning on doing.”

“Uh, um, what does that—” Hadis murmured.

“I see. But I’m glad to hear Chris can still converse with others,” Jill replied.

Hadis fell silent, the corners of his lips twitching.

Billy crossed his arms as he looked up at the ceiling. “I can’t contact Matilda at all. Whatever is that girl doing?” he muttered. “She’s our second daughter, yet she never contacts us unless absolutely needed. She’s a master marksman and an expert assassin.”

“A-Assassin...” Hadis murmured, his expression grim.

Charlotte giggled. “Perhaps she’s doing her work in the Rave Empire, dear.”

“Well, I hope so. Then I wouldn’t have to worry so much.”

“What about Rick and Andy, and Catherine?” Jill asked, touching upon her younger twin brothers and younger sister.

“Well, Catherine’s six years old now,” Billy replied with a nod. “She’s off

training with Master. I'm assuming she's somewhere in the Rakia mountains."

"So you can't contact her at all," Jill said. "What about Rick and Andy?"

"They're probably out fooling around somewhere, but I think they'll come back one day. They returned from their warrior training where they made a trip around the entire Kratos Kingdom, after all."

"Warrior training..." Hadis repeated.

"When you turn eight in this family, you go on a journey around the Kratos Kingdom!" Jill explained. "You earn money by working as a mercenary. I did it as well! Boy, that really takes me back."

"I-I see... Your family is really something else... I-In all sorts of ways," Hadis remarked awkwardly.

"We're a bit unique." Jill was aware of that herself. She turned toward her parents. "Then I guess we can only meet Rick and Andy at the moment."

"Seems like it," Billy replied. "We can probably call for Chris if we really try."

"N-No need," Hadis said with a shake of his head. "We forced our way here, so there's no need for you to go out of your way for us."

Billy lowered his head once more. "I'm indebted to your kindness. We were preparing to go down to the villa at the foot of the mountains, so we can't even offer you much of our hospitality."

"With Jill here, we might run low on food..." Charlotte murmured quietly.

"Mother!" Jill interjected. "I don't eat *that* much!"

"I apologize after you came all the way here, but we're planning on heading out tomorrow. What would you like to do? If you would like to head to that villa first, we'll make the preparations immediately."

"...What would you like to do, Your Majesty?" Jill asked.

Since most of their plans were now moot, she had little choice but to have Hadis decide. Hadis sat up a little straighter.

"If you don't mind, may we go along with you two?" he asked. "I believe that would also require fewer guards and make it easier for you. I will have to

trouble you until your departure, however. I apologize for that.”

“Oh, not at all,” Charlotte replied. “We don’t have anything here, so it might bore you.”

“Bored? Certainly not. I’ve always wanted to see where Jill was raised.” Hadis smiled, enthralled by his surroundings. But Jill seemed restless—Hadis had said something absolutely embarrassing.

“I know I will cause you both to go through extra trouble for me, but I’d be delighted if you would allow me to stay here,” Hadis said. “I would like for both you and the locals here to know me for who I am. If it isn’t much trouble, I would like you all to treat me not as an emperor, but as a potential suitor for your daughter. If you could see me as your son-in-law, I couldn’t be happier.”

“Well, if you say so, Your Majesty, I wouldn’t mind...” Billy replied. “What about you, Charlotte?”

Charlotte quietly tilted her head to one side. “I’d happily welcome such a wonderful son-in-law, but I wonder if that’s appropriate...”

“I don’t mind at all, Mother,” Hadis said politely.

“Oh my,” she replied, her face red. “This is nice. I’ve never had such a refined and gentle son before. Isn’t it fine to accept him, dear?”

“W-Well, if you say so...” Billy murmured. “A-Are you really sure about this, Your Majesty?”

“Of course,” Hadis insisted. “I have decided to be a man who kneels for his wife.”

As the emperor glanced back at Jill, she hastily looked down. She felt so embarrassed and shy that she was unable to even look at her parents.

“Then I suppose we’ll treat you as such until we reach the villa at the foot of the mountains,” relented Billy.

“Thank you. Then why don’t we leave the formalities for now...” Hadis started. The smiling Billy and Charlotte grew nervous for a moment. Jill was still looking down, but Hadis’s following words caused her head to shoot up. “May I hear about what my girlfriend was like when she was younger?”

“Wh-What?! Of course not!” Jill yelped.

“Oh my! Oh my, but of course!” Charlotte said, her eyes twinkling. Jill had a bad feeling about this. “I’m so moved! I didn’t think Jill would bring home such a lovely young man, and he properly wants to get to know us as a potential suitor who is actually courting her! Isn’t this just wonderful, dear?”

“W-Well, to tell you the truth, I feel Jill is a bit too young for all this,” Billy admitted. “And they have quite the age gap...”

“Oh? You said the same thing when Jill insisted on marrying our cook, didn’t you?”

“Mother!” Jill cried, pale-faced.

But Hadis smiled more brilliantly than ever before. “A cook! That’s adorable and makes me a little jealous,” he said.

“Y-Your Majesty, I was still a child back then...”

“Goodness, you’re still a child, Jill,” Charlotte countered as she spouted unnecessary information.

Hadis nodded with a perfectly crafted smile, but his eyes weren’t smiling at all. “Indeed,” he agreed. “And how many years ago was this? I’d love to hear all the details.”

“Y-Y-Y-Y-Your Majesty! Why don’t I show you around the manor? Oh, and outside! It’s so lovely, isn’t it?!” Jill stammered, desperately tugging on Hadis’s sleeve.

He glanced at his wife. “Then could you show me your room?”

“Er...”

She froze in place. Jill didn’t remember how she last left her room, but one thing was for sure: back then and even now, she hated cleaning up. Servants had likely gone ahead and cleaned her room to a certain degree while she was away, but she wasn’t sure if it was enough to show Hadis. She wasn’t sure where certain *things* might’ve gotten off to.

“U-Um... I-It’s a bit messy...” Jill admitted.

“Do you have something you can’t show me?” Hadis asked. “Oh, I don’t know, maybe something about that cook?”

“N-No! I-It’s just a bit embarrassing is all...”

“You can’t try to play it off, Jill. I won’t be fooled.”

“Huh?!” Jill snapped and shot him an angry look.

“How many times do you think I’ve cleaned up after you?” he said. “There’s nothing to be embarrassed about now, is there?”

He wasn’t wrong, but there was no need to say that in front of her parents. Billy’s eyes were wide with surprise, while Charlotte watched over them with great interest. It was as though Jill and Hadis were putting on a show for them. But Jill’s maiden heart was surely angry for the right reasons.

“That’s because you’re glued to me night and day, Y-Your Majesty!” Jill cried.

“D-Don’t say things that’ll cause misunderstandings in front of your parents!” Hadis replied.

“Misunderstanding?! It’s the truth! You idiot emperor!”

Landmines were buried throughout the Cervels’ residence. But Jill only noticed that when she dug up numerous mines and exploded the area around her house, leaving burned remains.



WHILE Hadis’s room was being prepared, Jill decided to show him around the manor. First were the fields. The blessings of the Goddess showered Kratos, allowing anything to grow freely. Grains, herbs, and numerous vegetables grew in abundance. Of course, if the plants weren’t used to the soil or climate, they couldn’t grow to the best of their abilities, but the sweet and tangy strawberries were nostalgically delicious to Jill.

Hadis and Jill were also tasked with gathering ingredients for dinner while they were walking around. This was because Hadis had volunteered to prepare dinner for the night. Jill wanted to believe that her letters, which had passionately detailed the deliciousness of Hadis’s cuisine, had been effective. *I’ll have them know all the good sides of His Majesty!*

Their initial plans had ended in failure, but Jill knew that Hadis's true strong points lay in his good looks, magic powers, muscles, and cooking. She took this opportunity to specifically request dishes that could be casually eaten outside, instead of tense, elegant full-course meals. She wanted everyone to have a taste of his cooking. Hadis had served as the head chef of the Dragon Knights and had even been a baker. Jill's parents were a bit worried, but there were only about a hundred residents in the area. If Hadis borrowed the assistance of the Cervel cooks, they could get the job done.

"What should we make?" Hadis wondered. "Since there are so many people, maybe we should make curry. There are a lot of spices here, and we can easily gather all the necessary ingredients."

"Curry! Then we need potatoes, carrots, onions, and meat! Leave that to me!" Jill replied eagerly. "Over there are the fields!" Jill rushed off while carrying a wooden crate.

"You don't have to rush!" Hadis called out as he followed close behind. "Are the Cervels managing all the crops around here?"

"That's right," Jill replied. "All the people living nearby work under us. We pay them their wages every month, but as you can see, we're more like one large family that lives on a huge plot of land."

Each family had their own home and fields in which they excelled, but crops and livestock were more like a shared resource. Oftentimes, the locals would look after another family's child, and they were more or less self-sufficient.

"There's a proper town at the foot of the mountains," Jill explained. "We have relations with other domains, and there's a larger population there. It's very different from what's up here."

"There aren't a lot of young people here. Are your defenses okay?" Hadis asked.

"We'll hold anyone back here, and the soldiers will come from the base of the mountains to surround the enemy and annihilate them. If anyone tries to attack from the town side, we'll launch a guerilla attack from here and annihilate them!" Jill proudly explained.

“Either way, it’s annihilation, I see...”

“Speaking of, Your Majesty, where’s Rave? I haven’t seen him since we got to my house. Did we push him a bit too much?”

While Rave couldn’t appear much right after Hadis’s magic energy was sealed, it seemed like the Dragon God was able to move around quite a bit more now. Still, it wasn’t wise to push one’s limits.

Hadis gave a faint smile. “I don’t think we pushed Rave much, but he’s still not in the best shape. He’s sleeping.”

“I see... I was thinking that everyone here might actually be able to see him,” Jill remarked.

“Rave said that he didn’t want to be chased around.”

“Makes sense.” Jill nodded. “But you should be careful too, Your Majesty. You mustn’t accept mock battles casually. Everyone will come at you and there’d be no end to it.”

“I know. And I know that you’re not even saying that as a threat either.”

“Right?” Jill replied before calling out to the field beside the road, “Excuse me! I’d like some potatoes, carrots, and onions, please!”

A few people emerged with great interest upon hearing Jill’s voice.

“Sure thing!”

“You’re really back, eh, Lady Jill? I guessed as much when I felt yer magic.”

“Told ya so. And that’s the man that snagged our lady through her stomach, eh?”

“Ah, the man who makes delicious meals every day, yeah?”

“Can’t help it, then. She said she was gonna marry the cook in the past!”

“E-Enough!” Jill cried. “Vegetables, please!”

“Now, now, I’d love to hear more details,” Hadis said in a low voice directly behind her.

Jill turned around. “I told you, it’s a story from when I was like five! You’re

being mean, Your Majesty... You should know how much I love you."

As she pouted and looked down at her feet, no reply came. Jill gasped and saw that Hadis had, expectedly, quietly fallen to the ground.

"Your Majesty!" Jill shouted. "B-But you were doing so well recently! Are you ill again?!"

"W-Well, I-I can hold my own if it's either just your words or expressions, but both came at me at the same time..." Hadis gasped.

"I have no idea what you're saying, but if you're pushing yourself, we should head back to the manor."

"N-No, I'll be fine. Yeah."

Is he telling the truth? Hadis took deep breaths as Jill rubbed his back, and the farmers watched on in awe.

"Huh. So I guess it's true the Dragon Emperor's got a frail body. Lady Jill always declared that she'd never choose a weak man, but I guess you've got too much magic in ya. No amount of training will help ya on that end," one said.

"Which means we can win in a test of endurance by tiring him out, yeah? We can set up a few traps and make him use all his magic," said another.

"What are you guys talking about?!" Jill demanded. "I'm going to marry His Majesty! If you try to beat him, it means you're picking a fight with me!"

"Oooh, scary!" one teased.

"Lady Jill, you've gotta protect your man," another said.

Jill glared at them, but they only laughed and teased her further. As Jill pouted, Hadis poked her cheek from behind.

"Jill, don't pout so much. I'm fine," Hadis said.

"But Your Majesty..."

"In any case, could I have some vegetables, please? If needed, I can help you harvest them." Hadis rolled up his sleeves. The farmers looked shocked, then quickly shook their heads.

"I heard you'll be preparing some mighty fine dinner for us. Can't have ya do

everything.”

“Wait here. I’ll give ya some good vegetables.”

“Please don’t worry about that. I’m Jill’s boyfriend,” Hadis replied with twinkling eyes.

He likes that word now, doesn’t he?

“You’re more like Lady Jill’s wife, ain’t ya?” a resident remarked.

“Yeah, that suits ya more.”

“Me? Jill’s *wife*?” Hadis asked.

“I won’t lay into ya, but just have her protect ya, aight? She’s strong, y’know?”

“Yep. Just make sure to feed her, and you’ll be set for life.”

“W-Well, of course, but I’m her boyfriend...” Hadis stammered.

“Gimme a sec. We’ll get ya some in a jiffy,” a farmer said before they shouted, “Hey! Could ya give some vegetables to our lady’s wife?”

As the crowd dispersed, Hadis stared blankly.

“Jill isn’t my wife? I’m hers?” he questioned.

“It doesn’t matter which,” Jill replied.

“It does... Wait... Does it? Is this fine?”

As Hadis agonized over the answer, fresh vegetables were brought to the crate. Jill tried to pick up the heavy box, but Hadis picked it up with one hand.

“We’ve still got the meat to worry about,” he said, implying that she should keep her hands free.

Jill nodded, and when Hadis extended his hand, she took it. They often walked together while holding hands now—Jill found it preferable to being carried everywhere.

“My lady is walking while holding hands with a man?! The world’s crashing down upon us!” a resident gasped.

“She’s trying her best to seduce him, is she? She’s trying too hard!” another commented.

What irked Jill the most were these comments that were spouted behind her back. If she gave them the time of day, they would only tease her further, so she decided to ignore them and walk along, but Hadis couldn't suppress a laugh. Jill glared at him.

"What's so funny, Your Majesty?" she demanded.

"It sounds like you led me on or something, but isn't it usually the opposite? This is quite something," Hadis replied.

"No, it isn't! It's rude to both me and you! I won't hold your hand anymore!" she huffed.

"Aw! Don't say that! Wait!"

The moment Jill released his hand and walked ahead, Hadis fell forward. Stunned, Jill saw the person who kicked the emperor and scolded him.

"What are you doing to His Majesty out of the blue, Rick?!" she roared.

"Uh, I thought he could dodge it... Huh..." Rick replied, cocking his head to the side, his fluffy golden hair that reminded Jill of a cat swaying with the movement. He folded his arms in front of him and knitted his brows. He was still shorter than Jill. "He's the Dragon Emperor, isn't he? Why did he get kicked?" Rick wondered. "Are you sick or something? Or are you actually *weak*?"

"There's a chance he's a fake," Andy, the youngest of the twins, emerged behind his brother. Andy looked exactly like his twin brother, but his hair was parted to the opposite side, and he was wearing glasses. While their voices sounded similar, he carried a calmer tone. "Besides, it's so weird for Sis to come home with a boyfriend instead of a hostage," he added.

"I knew it!" Rick replied. "I was about to get fooled. I hurried home for nothing then."

"What do you mean by that?! Don't kick people!" Jill scolded before she turned to Hadis. "Are you all right, Your Majesty?"

Hadis had fallen while protecting the crate of vegetables. He slowly pushed himself upright as Jill rushed over to him. "Y-Yeah, I'm okay. But by Rick, you

mean..." Hadis started.

"Yes, these goons are my twin younger brothers. The one with his hair parted to the right is Rick, and the one parted to the left wearing fake glasses is Andy," Jill said. Then she barked at her brothers, "Greet him, you two!"

"Do we have to?" the brothers complained. Rick was the first to obey.

"Hi there, I'm Rick Cervel! I'm the second-eldest son, I guess. I'm twins with this guy!" Rick said energetically.

"And I'm Andy, the third son. It seems my sister has been imposing on you."

"Nice to meet you..." Hadis replied, bowing his head. Andy's polite demeanor made him act more polite than necessary.

"And apologize! Both of you!" Jill demanded, not forgetting their indiscretion.

"Wait, why me?" Andy asked. "Rick's the one that kicked him, Sis."

"Because you didn't stop him. Besides, you probably goaded Rick into kicking him, didn't you?"

"Bingo!" Rick laughed.

Andy glared at him, but the cat was out of the bag. The calculating Andy politely lowered his head. "I apologize for my insolence. I was just curious about the man my sister brought home," he said.

"I'm sorry," Rick added. "I kicked you pretty hard, didn't I? You okay?"

The friendly nine-year-old extended his hand to the emperor, who gingerly took it and stood up. Rick walked around Hadis and sized him up.

"You're super good-looking, aren't you? How'd you shut up our sis?" Rick asked.

"Are you sure you're not being tricked by her? Are you all right? I can give you some advice. If you ask right now, it'll be free of charge," Andy added.

"U-Um, Jill, what should I..." Hadis started.

"Hey now, don't call for our sister. This is a talk between men, hm?" Rick said, stopping the emperor in his tracks.

“Indeed. We’ve got an excellent opportunity right here,” Andy said.

Hadis looked troubled, surrounded by these fearless boys. It was as though the twins were bullying an adult man for his lunch money. Jill tried to shoo them away.

“Don’t approach His Majesty. Don’t toy with him,” she chided.

“Wow, *you’re* nice,” Rick said. “But whatever. So, *this* is the Dragon Emperor, huh? Hm.”

“A picture is worth a thousand words, as they say,” Andy said. “This was very insightful. Are you carrying vegetables? Then Rick will help you.”

“Me?” Rick asked. He laughed and carried the large crate of vegetables, anyway. He used magic, so it was a cinch.

“I-It’s fine, I’ll carry it,” Hadis said hastily. “I’m an adult, and I’m, uh, your sister’s boyfriend! And I haven’t even introduced myself and—”

“Huh? We don’t care about that stuff. It’s a pain, anyway,” Rick interjected.

“I feel the same. You’re going to formally do so later, aren’t you?” Andy added. “Then it can wait until then.”

Hadis looked obviously hurt from being rejected by the twins, but Rick immediately held out his hand to him.

“Besides, you seem a little unsteady. It’s better if I held onto these,” Rick said. “So? Where to next?”

“Um, we need some meat...” Hadis replied.

“Got it, then we gotta go over there. C’mon, follow me. You won’t get caught by weird people if I’m by your side.”

Rick snagged Hadis’s hand and dragged him along with him. He loved to play tricks, but he was a good older brother who was great at looking after others. As he was being pulled along, Hadis looked over his shoulder at Jill.

“Why don’t we have them help us, Your Majesty?” she suggested.

“A-Are you sure it’s okay?” Hadis asked gingerly.

“I said it’s okay,” Rick replied. “Or what? Do you not want my help? Ouch,

that hurts.”

“I-I didn’t say that!”

“Hey, I heard you’re really good at cooking, but is that true? When I read Sis’s letters that had her daily menus, I was so envious of her. I heard we’re having curry, but what’s that like?”

As Rick smiled brightly, Hadis relaxed and started to talk about curry. It seemed fine to leave them alone together.

“What will you do, Andy?” Jill asked.

“I have to report back to Father...” Andy replied. “But once Rick goes off on his own, he won’t listen, so I’ll stick with you guys and report back later. In any case, I’m surprised.”

“What? Have you got something to say to me and His Majesty?” Jill smiled while she clenched and opened her fist, but Andy stared back coolly.

“I can’t believe you brought the Dragon Emperor here without any guards,” he said.

“It’s not a problem, is it? War hasn’t broken out yet.”

“But as always, you’re not thinking ahead enough. Sis, are you fine with letting Rick go off on his own? It won’t be weird if he gets him to blab about all the secrets of the Rave Empire.”

Jill smiled at Andy’s warning. “Are you worried about me?”

“Obviously. And you could be blinded by love,” Andy replied.

Hadis and Rick were walking ahead of them. They seemed to be getting along as Rick talked with and teased the emperor while expertly manipulating the conversation. By warning Jill about his brother’s intentions, he seemed to be trying to feel her out.

Though young, the twins had been tasked with espionage and gathering intelligence in the past. Now that they were done with their warrior training, they were likely getting involved with their real line of work. They had to report back to their father because they had likely gathered some intelligence while away.

“Then why don’t you test it out? See if I’m merely blinded by love,” Jill said.

“...You sound confident,” Andy replied.

“Of course I am. I guarantee that you guys will lose to His Majesty.”

The calculating Andy decided to end the conversation there. However, Jill’s declaration became a reality by nightfall. Rick and Andy tried curry for the first time in their lives, and tears streamed down their cheeks as they were moved by its deliciousness.

While Jill’s initial plans were a bust, the curry that was meant to deepen Hadis’s bonds with her people was a resounding success. Everyone praised the emperor for his wonderful cooking. “I can see how the little lady fell for ya!” was just one of the questionable comments Jill heard, but she felt like she could sleep soundly tonight. In high spirits, she showed Hadis to the guest bedroom.

“You did it, Your Majesty!” she exclaimed.

“Yeah, I’m glad everyone seemed happy with it,” Hadis agreed.

“I don’t think anyone will try to sneak up on you now! You can sleep safe and sound tonight.”

“Is that what you’re worried about?”

Jill frowned at Hadis’s seemingly carefree attitude. “Your Majesty, you’re in enemy territory. You’re in a kingdom that your empire is virtually at war with.”

“But it’s your hometown. I’d like to avoid that war if possible.”

“I’m happy to hear you say that, but— Ah, here it is! Your room!”

The main residence of the Cervels surrounded a courtyard. To the northwest, down the corridor of the second floor, they were in a separate building that was quite close to Jill’s room.

“There’s an iron gate in front of it,” Hadis murmured.

Jill nodded. “This room is for honored guests that we absolutely must protect.”

The tower, completely separate from the first floor and connected to the second and third floors, contained one of the guest rooms of the manor. This

room was reserved for especially important guests.

“It might not look it, but it’s actually quite comfortable,” Jill noted. “I’ve confirmed that myself.”

“A-Are you sure?” Hadis asked. “If you say so... It looks like a prison, though.”

“I requested these bars to be installed so that I can protect you at all costs! All kinds of magic are cast upon it, so you can’t even escape from the inside,” Jill stated.

“Then aren’t I imprisoned?!”

“If that’s what we need to do, then that’s what we need to do! Your Majesty, please don’t let anyone, aside from myself, into this room! No matter what! I’ve said this before, but this is—”

Hadis put his index finger on Jill’s lips and crouched in front of her. “This is your hometown,” he repeated.

As Jill couldn’t refute him, anxiety welled up from within her. Andy’s warning may not have been too off the mark.

“It’s been a short stay, but I’m glad that I came. We’ll be in the villa by tomorrow. I’m sure you’re tired too. Let’s go to bed,” Hadis said.

He stood up, his expression and gaze as gentle as ever as he looked at Jill. The emperor didn’t require Jill’s warning—he was surely aware that he was in enemy territory. And yet, he still asked to visit her hometown. Jill felt like she had to honor his wishes above all else.

“Um, Your Majesty,” she started.

“Hm?”

“Please don’t give up on me. I won’t ever give up on you either.”

Hadis staggered. He took a step, then another step, before he clutched his heart and exclaimed, “P-Please don’t say that in front of other people!”

“Ah, you’re right. Someone’s listening in on us. It’s a bit troublesome, isn’t it?”

“Oh, you noticed it too? Then your heart’s as strong as ever.”

“Of course. How else could I be your wife, Your Majesty? Here’s the key to

your room.” Jill said what she wanted and did what she needed to do. “Listen carefully. You must *never* open this door to anyone until I fetch for you in the morning,” she warned.

Hadis took the keys and frowned. “If you’re that worried, you should just let me stay in your room.”

“Then my parents would hear about it.”

“Sorry, you were just so calm that I couldn’t help myself! I have no ulterior motives, I swear!”

“Who are you spouting your excuses at? I’ll let you in...*tomorrow*.”

“Huh?” Hadis looked up as Jill turned away, red-faced.

“For just a little while!” she declared.

She turned on her heels and swiftly departed out of embarrassment. Hadis didn’t chase or call after her.

Jill returned straight to her room. She glanced around her lit room wearily. It was just as she imagined—no, it was far worse than that. But she had to do what she had to do. *I’m sure if I shove all of these things into the closet, it’ll look clean*. With that firm belief in her mind, Jill rolled up her sleeves.



THIS room, meant to protect important guests, was like a prison for him, and he didn’t think he was wrong in calling it so. Hadis, who quietly remained within the tower as per his promise with his adorable wife, looked around the room. The moment he entered the room, iron bars and a large door slammed it shut, automatically locking him inside. The lock wasn’t just a physical one either; there was a magical lock cast upon the exit. Magic could be sensed throughout the room—from the windows and every nook and cranny. Naturally, the entire room was likely wiretapped as well.

For protection, huh... What a convenient word, Hadis thought. But the room with a two-story tall ceiling seemed convenient. There was a luxurious, plush sofa and a fireplace that surely would’ve been useful in the winter. There was a bath in the back. A spiral staircase lined one of the walls which went up to a

bedroom and a study. The windows opened with ease, and as Hadis sat on the window seat, Rave appeared from his chest.

“Finally awake?” Hadis asked.

“I can’t help it,” Rave replied. “We’re in Kratos. It’s different from my usual environment, and it’s best if you don’t stand out. They might all be able to see me. And? How was your day?”

“They welcomed me. They liked my curry too.”

“Curry? I’m surprised they let you cook for them. They’re too brave.”

“I thought I did my best to display my friendship.”

Hadis made food for everyone. If it was poisoned, the Cervels and the residents knew that the lord of the family would turn a blind eye to it, blaming it on an unfortunate mishap by the Dragon Emperor. But since none of that happened, Hadis was able to gauge the leadership that the House of Cervel possessed.

Rave gave a hearty laugh. “Seeing how it’s Missy’s home, it could just be that hunger won them all over.”

“...But he’s wily and powerful like a count ought to be,” Hadis commented.

Hadis had requested Billy and his wife to treat him not as the Dragon Emperor, but as a potential suitor for their daughter. This was Hadis’s way of creating a compromise. Count Cervel and his wife had noticed this and accepted the offer. The emperor of a nation they were virtually at war with could’ve done anything: scout the area, collect information, or try to buy time for potential strategies. And yet, the Cervels were able to offer a warm reception for Hadis on such short notice without issue, speaking to their rank and status within the Kratos Kingdom.

Even for this visit, Vissel had utilized Jill and chose to send Hadis to the House of Cervel instead of the Kratos royal family. But the Cervels were neither hesitant nor reluctant to offer a reply—they swiftly sent a letter back to Hadis in a properly sealed envelope. It was as though they were prepared to exchange blows with the Rave Empire on equal footing. They could only do so because the Kratos royal family would back them.

“I guess they aren’t defending the kingdom’s borders for nothing,” Rave said. “You think they’re against the engagement?”

“I’ve already received a verbal agreement from the Kratos royal family that Jill is the Dragon Consort. After they sign the contract, which will be prepared at the foot of the mountains, it should be over,” Hadis replied.

“But it won’t be over that easily, will it?”

Rave and Hadis stared out the window. Small specks of light dotted the scenery, showing that some people were still out and about. The light amidst the darkness was a lovely sight for the eyes.

This was Jill’s hometown.

“It was more than what I’d imagined, but this is a nice place,” Rave commented. “They’re all kinda similar to Missy, I feel.”

“Everyone’s kind,” Hadis said. “They helped me chop the vegetables and slice the meat, and they ate a meal that I made. They even called it delicious. Jill’s parents and her younger brothers told me plenty of fun stories. It was fun.”

The two were gazing not only at Jill’s hometown and kingdom, but at the Goddess that was behind it all.

“I hope Missy won’t cry.”

The deity of love had tried to lay her hands on Hadis directly, but now that the Dragon Consort was present, she would surely change her tactics. The Goddess would, without a doubt, try to do something. She would absolutely try to steal the Dragon Consort away from Hadis. And that was the weakness of the consort.

“And? Can you make it in time?” Hadis asked.

“Yeah. It’s so convenient and quick with Raw here,” Rave replied. “But he’s angry for being treated as the middleman.”

“As long as it’s done. We’ve done what we could. Let’s go to sleep.”

“Right. You probably sound like a crazy guy who’s just talking to himself. The ones listening in on us are probably freaked out.”

Hadis laughed. The Cervels were surely aware of the mythos surrounding the Dragon God. The royal family had likely told them all about it. It couldn't be helped that the Cervels were loyal to the Kratos royal family. If they didn't aggressively try to steal the Dragon Consort away from him, Hadis would be willing to turn a blind eye to most acts. If all of his fears turned out to be groundless, then he was even willing to compromise.

He didn't want Jill to cry. That much was true.

I won't give up, Jill. I won't. But you might. You were raised in such a happy place with a kind family. Hadis closed the shutters, closing off his anxious thoughts with it. Rave slithered around his neck. His adoptive father, the Dragon God, was always by his side. Rave was colder than he wished, but warmer than he expected.



THERE were two possible methods to travel between the foot of the mountains and the Cervel main residence. The first method was to attempt the journey on foot with horses and monsters. Only the Cervels and their people ever attempted the journey on foot, and that wasn't because going by animal was faster. Magic would grow more unstable the higher the elevation. This would cause animals to escape or flee unless they were well-trained. Residents could easily climb the mountain by themselves, but this wasn't so for guests.

The second method was to use teleportation magic. True to their name as the Kingdom of Magic, teleporting devices were placed throughout the Kratos Kingdom. The destinations were preset, and only the Kratos royal family could use them freely. Others had to gain a permit and even pay a fee to use the devices. Only a certain number of people could be teleported, and their destinations were under strict control, but each domain within the kingdom had this device. Multiple devices would be placed based on the size or other necessities of the land.

The Cervels' domain had four of these devices. One was placed vertically to the Rakia mountains to the north, closest to the royal capital. One was in the center of the territory by the villa at the foot of the mountains, another was in the southern port city, and the fourth was in the center of the Rakia mountains,

in the main residence. The main residence served as the base and the devices were placed in a triangular formation. There were also apparently a few devices that only the royal family and the lord and his wife knew about, but that was only natural to bolster national defenses. If they used these devices, they could've gone to the foot of the mountains in a flash.

"I'm sorry, Hadis!" Billy said. "The teleportation devices suddenly broke! But traveling by monster isn't too bad, is it?"

"S-Sure..." Hadis replied. "I, uh, feel like I've seen this monster pretty recently."

"You're not wrong, Your Majesty. Look here. It's still got that bump from the time we punched it," Jill pointed out.

When one exerted a certain amount of magic, these monsters would gather around, and work as needed—they'd been trained well. And as such, the Cervels allowed them to roam the mountains freely. There was magic cast so that the monsters couldn't leave the mountains, but other than that, they had quite a bit of freedom. Since they could be used for work as well, they weren't different from normal beasts. It wasn't odd if there were monsters that Jill and Hadis had met during the Path of Trials in the mix.

"Wait, really? We met this one before?! Are we sure about this? It isn't angry with us?" Hadis asked worriedly.

"It's totally fine, Hadis. Here, hang on!" Rick said.

"Rick, don't go too crazy! His Majesty is frail—" Jill called out before she was cut off by her younger brother's cry.

"Look! A somersault!"

A tigerlike monster obeyed Rick's reins to twirl into the air with Hadis on its back. Jill sighed on top of a different monster. Would Hadis retain his consciousness until they reached the foot of the mountains? *I knew I should've ridden with His Majesty...*

The group was riding on three tigerlike monsters that raced down the mountains, leaping over small rivers and low trees. Monsters were created by fusing magic with animals, and they were much larger than normal. Each

monster carried two people on its back. Andy and Billy were on one, Rick—who took it upon himself to look after the emperor—and Hadis were riding on the second monster, and Jill and Charlotte were on the third.

“That looks fun. Would you like to go for a whirl, Jill?” Charlotte asked.

“No! I have to catch His Majesty if he falls off!” Jill replied.

“Oh? I thought you two were having a squabble in your room.”

Hadis and Jill looked a little awkward before they departed, and Charlotte had pointed that out.

“W-We’re not fighting!” Jill rushed out. “It’s just that we were about to depart, but His Majesty was still lazing around.”

Charlotte chuckled. “Heh, is that so? I do feel like Hadis is unexpectedly quite punctual.”

Indeed, they had plenty of time and there was no need to rush. Jill had managed to stuff all her knickknacks into a closet—if that door wasn’t destroyed from the inside, all would be well.

But Hadis had casually sat on her bed while saying, “So this is your room...” The sight caused Jill to be so embarrassed that she had to chase him out. Hadis rightfully insisted on staying because he had just entered, but Jill couldn’t stand it. It was bad for her heart. She couldn’t verbalize it well, but it just wasn’t good for her.

“There’s...just a lot of things going on between me and His Majesty!” Jill insisted.

“You love him,” Charlotte replied.

Jill’s mother had seen right through her and summarized Jill’s complex emotions in one sentence.

“Is that bad?” Jill asked with a defiant pout.

“It’s wonderful,” Charlotte replied. “I’m in love with your father every day.”

“I see... Speaking of, is it true that you had already unofficially decided on my engagement with Prince Gerald before that party?” Jill swiftly changed subjects

before her mother had the time to fawn over Billy.

Charlotte gave a slow nod. "Yes, it's true," she said. "But Prince Gerald had stated that he wanted to directly ask for your hand in marriage first. We thought that was for the best and stayed quiet... But I was shocked. I didn't expect you to propose to the Rave Emperor. It wouldn't have been odd if you were executed for your insolence back then, you know?"

Jill fell quiet and desperately tried to find an excuse. "H-His Majesty is...kind..."

Charlotte chuckled. "But I'd like to hear your reasoning too, Jill. Why was Prince Gerald not good enough for you?"

Suddenly, Jill felt something from behind her. It wasn't murderous or hostile, but there was some sort of pressure being exerted, causing her to fix her posture. Charlotte was likely aware that Jill had fled from Gerald's advances. The two ladies were currently engaged in a skirmish of sorts.

"Do you prefer Prince Gerald, Mother?" Jill asked.

"Of course. He's a wonderful prince. He's not as cute as Hadis though, I suppose."

"Well, that's probably my reason."

If Hadis was someone like Gerald, who wouldn't have thought twice about using and tossing Jill aside, she wouldn't have returned to the Dragon Emperor's side. If Hadis was as competent as Gerald, she wouldn't have become so desperate. *I'm starting to feel like His Majesty is a bit unreliable, though.* Hadis was so unstable that Jill didn't know what he'd do if he was left to his own devices. She couldn't take her eyes off him, which also meant that she didn't need to let him go.

"I fell in love with him," Jill said. "I can't help it."

"You're just like me then. That makes me a little happy," Charlotte replied. "I didn't think such a day would come for you."

"What? Are you planning on teasing me too, Mother? You all treat me like I'm the weird one."

Jill faced ahead to hide her embarrassment and saw the villa. She gripped the

reins and slowed the monster down as the beast elegantly landed on the pasture beside the villa.

“He must be a wonderful man,” Charlotte said. “Good luck, Jill.”

“Will you root for me?” Jill asked.

Jill’s mother was quiet and reserved, but it would’ve been reassuring to have her on her side.

“I’m on your father’s side,” Charlotte said as she gracefully jumped off the monster with a smile.

But her “good luck” likely implied that she wasn’t going to be against their marriage without proper reason. She was also hinting that there would be a few obstacles that barred Jill and Hadis’s path.

Their work done, the monsters dashed away while Jill supported a slightly pale-faced Hadis into the villa. Because the villa welcomed guests more frequently than the main residence, it was more akin to a fortified mansion. As the group entered through the front yard, they found a staircase leading to the entrance. When Jill looked up, she was bewildered at the sight of a person already waiting for them.

“Lawrence?!” she gasped.

Lawrence glanced back at her, closed one eye, and put his index finger in front of his lips. While Jill stood there shocked, another person walked in front of him. Billy Charlotte, Rick, and Andy all went to their knees.

“We’ve bought His Majesty, Emperor Hadis Teos Rave,” Billy said.

“Good work,” replied a regal young man.

Scowling from behind his glasses was the crown prince of the kingdom. He was wearing a blue cape, the color that was reserved for the Kratos royal family.

Billy and Charlotte, who remained kneeling, didn’t seem surprised at this guest—it seemed only Jill was out of the loop. When that realization hit her, she stiffened.

“Welcome to our kingdom, Your Majesty,” Gerald said. “And I see you’re

doing well, Lady Jill. Very good.”

As Jill struggled to respond, a large hand came to rest on her back—Hadis’s hand. The pale-faced emperor had been replaced with a calmly smiling Hadis.

“Thank you for coming all this way to greet us, Prince Gerald,” Hadis said.

Indeed, as promised, Jill and Hadis were treated well right until they reached the base of the mountains. Hadis was already wearing the mask of the emperor.

Chapter 3: Love, Logic, and National Defense

“COULD I ask you to show me around the villa, Count Cervel?” Hadis asked. “Both my wife and I are tired from the long trip.”

No one batted an eye at Hadis’s sudden change in attitude.

“I apologize for my lack of manners,” Billy replied. “I already have a room prepared for you, so I shall have my son act as your guide. Rick, show His Majesty to his room. Jill, you know where yours is, don’t you?”

“I-I’ll stay with His Majesty!” Jill insisted. With the main squad still a good distance away, only Jill could act as Hadis’s guard.

“Oh, you mustn’t, Jill,” Charlotte said calmly. “Not a girl your age. You two can’t be alone together.”

She didn’t say anything unreasonable, but Jill found it hard to take her mother’s words at face value. Andy’s critique of her lack of forethought echoed in Jill’s head, but it was too late.

“You don’t have to be so worried, Lady Jill,” Gerald said, acting reserved. “I mean no ill will.”

When Jill looked up, Gerald quickly turned away from her to look at Charlotte.

“Lady Cervel, I understand your concerns as her mother,” Gerald said. “Your little princess is simply worried about the emperor. Perhaps you can allow them to do as they please until their subordinates arrive?”

Jill didn’t expect Gerald to speak in her favor. Charlotte glanced at the stunned Jill and back at the calm Gerald before she sighed.

“If you say so, Prince Gerald...” she relented.

Gerald nodded. “I apologize, Emperor Hadis, but I’d like to borrow some of your time. I’ve decided to sign the premarital contract as well. I’d like to scan the documents and confirm their contents. I’ve even prepared the Great Seal.”

“The Great Seal? *You?*” Hadis asked dubiously.

Gerald gave another nod. “I’m the proxy for the King of Kratos. I shall take charge of your engagement and your marriage. The Cervels have already given me their approval. Our king is quite busy. If you have any complaints with this arrangement, it might take quite some time to arrange something else...”

King Rufus—the owner of the insulting nickname King of South Kratos—indulged in debauchery and pleasure while pushing all political affairs onto his son, Gerald. It wasn’t odd for the crown prince to act as his proxy—quite frankly, it was for the better. It would’ve been troublesome if Rufus meddled in Hadis’s affairs.

“I don’t mind, but why the sudden change of heart?” Hadis asked.

“It’s a perfect opportunity to put an end to our longtime squabbles,” Gerald replied simply. “I thought you’re here for negotiations with that in mind.”

“Indeed, but it’s only natural for me to express surprise by how proactive you are. A lot has happened, you see.” Hadis spoke softly, but his smile was clearly provoking. Meanwhile, Gerald remained as calm as ever.

“That goes both ways,” Gerald replied. “If it weren’t for the King of South Kratos, I wouldn’t have thought about peace.”

Jill gave a small gasp. Because she had once lived in a different timeline and saw Gerald’s actions in the future, she was able to understand his reasoning.

Gerald was causing disorder in the Rave Empire to ensure that he wouldn’t be outsmarted when he inevitably ascended to the throne. It was clear that Gerald was at odds with and vehemently opposed his father’s decisions—so much so that he tried to cut Rufus off during the incident in Radia.

“He’s been quiet until recently, but it seems the existence of the Dragon Consort has stirred him up,” Gerald confessed. “I’d like to make my move before he goes on a rampage.”

He glanced at Jill. She didn’t refute his claims. While the incident in Radia was the culmination of numerous factors, Rufus’s main goal was to find the Dragon Consort.

“So, I’ve decided that it’s beneficial for us to join forces. There’s nothing odd about that, is there?” Gerald asked. In other words, Gerald had decided to prioritize Kratos’s king over the Rave Empire. “And I’m sure you’re aware of our internal affairs,” he continued. “Your older brother from another father is extremely competent.”

Gerald didn’t hide the fact that he knew about the complex issues surrounding the Rave imperial family’s bloodline and that he was connected to Vissel. He revealed all his cards.

“The enemy of my enemy is my friend, eh?” Hadis replied.

“Logical, isn’t it?” Gerald said. “It’s what the God of logic excels in.”

His words were sarcastic, but he was stating that he would be an ally. Hadis narrowed his eyes, trying to assess the situation.

“I didn’t think a descendant of the Goddess of love would talk about logic,” Hadis said.

“I can correct my words if I’ve touched a nerve. I won’t deny that it’s an act of love to protect my kingdom.”

“Have you given up on Jill?”

Hadis’s question was straightforward and personal. Jill grew nervous, feeling that it wasn’t an appropriate question to ask. She expected Gerald to look exasperated, but he instead fell silent and chose his words carefully.

“I believe that she’s a necessary person for our kingdom,” the crown prince answered. “And those feelings won’t change.”

Jill fidgeted uncomfortably while Hadis snorted beside her.

“I can see that,” he replied. “You came all the way to the Rave Empire just to take her back.”

“And despite all that effort, it still wasn’t enough. In which case, I have no choice but to back off, right?”

Hadis went quiet, shocked by his reply. Jill gingerly looked up and met Gerald’s gaze for a brief moment before he quickly adjusted his glasses and turned away.

“As long as she’s happy, that’s fine with me,” Gerald said. “That’s why I’m here. And I’ve already told all this to Count Cervel.”

“And you expect me to trust you?” Hadis asked.

“That’s what I need you to do, if we’re to make this truce a reality.”

Jill was familiar with Gerald’s resolute face, which conveyed his firm convictions. This only made her even more troubled by it all.

“Allow me to welcome you both once more, Dragon Emperor and Dragon Consort,” Gerald said. “Welcome to the Kratos Kingdom.”

He had the face of a crown prince and of a man who had made his resolve. Jill had seen this face up close for years. *Prince Gerald’s dead serious about this.*

The prince turned on his heels and entered the villa with Lawrence in tow while Billy and Charlotte bowed deeply. If the battle between the king and the crown prince were to escalate, the Cervels, who protected the border, likely needed to be aware of the state of affairs. And Jill’s parents would likely support Gerald.

“Your Majesty, I don’t think he’s completely lying,” Jill said in a soft voice.

The relationship between the king and the crown prince was a sore topic to touch upon. Everyone knew this.

But Hadis only murmured coldly, “So that’s his move.”

“What is?” Jill asked.

“Nothing. But yeah, it seems like they’ve got a lot on their plate too.”

“I agree. I think we have time to probe their internal affairs before we decide to trust his words or not.”

That would be their first step toward their marriage and maintaining peace between the two nations. Hadis gave a nod of agreement.



NOT long after they’d arrived, Lawrence appeared to explain the contents of the premarital contract to Jill and Hadis. Jill felt a little taken off guard; she’d kept her guard up, expecting Gerald to appear before them.

“Are you relieved that I’m not Prince Gerald?” Lawrence asked as if he’d seen straight through her. He was laying out the documents on a table in front of the low sofa with cabriole legs that Jill and Hadis were sitting on.

Jill rushed to think of a decent reply; admitting the truth would be much too imprudent. “Th-That’s not quite the whole truth...” she stammered.

“Don’t worry. Prince Gerald doesn’t seem to have a clue as to why, but he’s aware that you detest him to an extreme degree,” Lawrence replied.

Jill awkwardly fell silent. It didn’t feel good hearing it put like that.

Lawrence chuckled. “Ah, I don’t mean to blame you or anything,” he added. “I do think the fault is on him for not knowing the reason behind your feelings.”

“You’re...Prince Gerald’s subordinate, and yet...”

“Then could you tell me why? As his subordinate, I think it’s best to resolve any faults of my master.”

But of course, Jill couldn’t offer a reply. It wasn’t as though the Gerald in this timeline had done anything to her. While there was the incident in Beilburg and the betrayal of George, those were all simply plans or policies that the prince had carried out against the Rave Empire—none of them were directed solely at Jill. It was only natural for Gerald to be confused by Jill’s reaction to him.

But just because Jill was redoing her life, it didn’t mean that she could forget all the past actions that Gerald had taken against her. It was difficult for her to manage her feelings.

“...We’re just not compatible,” Jill muttered.

“I see. So you instinctively dislike him,” Lawrence responded. “Then I guess it was the right move for him to back off. The probability of you liking him seems close to zero.”

Backing off. *That prince backing off?* Jill didn’t quite like the phrase; she may have even preferred to have been tossed aside.

“If Prince Gerald has given up on my wife, is there a necessity to find a reason for her feelings?” Hadis asked.

Lawrence cleared his throat. “Apologies. Then I shall get right to explaining

the contract. Using the draft that you have provided, we have added a few clauses by taking the wishes of the House of Cervel into account. For example, Lady Jill will completely renounce her claim to the title of Count Cervel. Her children and grandchildren will never be allowed to succeed the House of Cervel.”

This was only natural since Jill would marry into the Rave Empire. Currently, it was unlikely for her to have any claim to succeed her house anyways. Yet, when it was explained to her so clearly, it oddly felt like she was being chased out of her home kingdom.

“That’s only natural. I have no complaints on that front,” Hadis replied.

“With this contract, Lady Jill will officially become the fiancée to His Majesty the Rave Emperor. In the future, Lady Jill must undergo the same strict screening and approval process as Rave citizens, even if she is to simply visit her home. Is that clear?” Lawrence said.

“S-Sure...” Jill nodded.

Hadis nodded as well. As Lawrence proceeded to explain the details of the contract, it was all too difficult for Jill to follow. Each topic reminded her of how she didn’t expect to meet Gerald today. *I guess unexpected events like this will increase in the future.* Hadis was nodding to each topic that Lawrence touched upon. All of this stuff must’ve been necessary, then.

“Next is the process,” Lawrence said. “We actually found a precedent in ancient texts. Around 300 years ago, a woman from Kratos married the Rave Emperor. I believe it would be best to follow their format.”

“I now see why you’ve brought even the Great Seal with you,” Hadis replied. “But I believe that was also meant to halt the war. Do we need to go that far this time around?”

“We’re currently in a similar situation, are we not?”

Hadis sighed. He wasn’t outright against it. With the Great Seal, the contract would be firm and strong. This was a good thing. However...

“...Um, have you brought the Great Seal with you, Your Majesty?” Jill asked.

Such an important item would've surely earned a lecture or two from Ristead as he would want to keep the item safe, but Jill unfortunately couldn't remember such an argument happening.

"Yeah, I've got it with me," he replied with a firm nod.

"I expected as much. The Dragon Emperor must absolutely have the real one," Lawrence said meaningfully.

The realization hit Jill. "Is it the Heavenly Sword?" she asked.

"Yeah. You normally can't see it, but at the end of the hilt is a seal that reacts to the Dragon Emperor's blood. I always carry the Great Seal around with me, but the same doesn't go for Prince Gerald, does it?" Hadis asked.

"I'm sure the same goes for you, but we normally use a regular seal that mimics the shape of the Great Seal," Lawrence answered. "We have a mountain of documents that require the Great Seal, and we can't keep stamping down a weapon."

"Is the Great Seal of Kratos on the Sacred Spear?" Jill asked.

Lawrence shook his head. "It's on the sword that His Majesty the King has. It's a blade for self-defense that was given by the Goddess."

The false Heavenly Sword? Jill narrowed her eyes.

"I imagine it was supposed to mimic the shape of the Heavenly Sword," Lawrence continued. "Of course, the shape of the Great Seal greatly differs from the Rave Empire's. In any case, Prince Gerald has the real Great Seal, so I hope that puts your mind at ease, Your Majesty."

"Very well," Hadis replied. "Using the Great Seal drastically decreases the chance of flipping the contract's decision later. It's just a little creepy how cooperative you all are."

"Then will you negotiate with the King of South Kratos?" Lawrence smiled, causing Hadis to go quiet. Even Jill could tell during her battle at Radia that the king didn't seem like a man who was open to reasonable negotiations.

"I'm not telling you to trust us," Lawrence said. "But I think it's best for you to at least act like you're grateful. Or else, the ones in trouble will be the House of

Cervel, who's in the middle of all this."

Jill drew a sharp breath.

"Now then, if you'll please excuse me. I shall bring the revised contract later, so please confirm it. If there aren't any issues, we can stamp our seals tomorrow," Lawrence finished.

"...You're really efficient, aren't you?" Hadis said in a bored tone.

"Prince Gerald has pulled some strings. He's very quick and competent when it comes to his work, you know. Ah, and what would you like to do about dinner tonight? Will you not be present?"

Jill's family and Gerald would likely be attending—the dinner was a way to exchange pleasantries before the contract.

"What do you want to do, Jill?" Hadis asked.

Jill was waiting for Hadis to make the final decision and was shocked by the sudden question. She looked up at him and received a smile in return. It felt like she was being tested, so she sat up straight.

"We'll attend," Jill replied. "Or else, it'd be much too rude of us..."

"You heard her. Lucky you," Hadis said coldly.

Lawrence's eyebrows twitched, but he immediately formed a smile. "Noted. Then, I shall tell them that you will both be in attendance. I think this will serve as a good opportunity for us to get to know each other better. I'm quite happy to hear it."

"I guess so. It sounds fun. Send Prince Gerald my regards."

Lawrence gathered the documents on the table and stood up. "I believe your squad will be arriving soon. Are Camila and Zeke there, Dragon Consort?"

"Y-Yeah, I think so," Jill replied.

"I see. Then I suppose I shall send them my regards," Lawrence replied. "Please excuse me, Your Majesty."

"U-Um!" Jill stood up. "I-I'd like to speak with my family before dinner too... Am I...allowed to move around?" She wasn't sure if formal speech was called for

and asked her question awkwardly. Lawrence stared blankly before he gave a forced smile.

“You may do as you please,” he replied. “This is *your* villa, isn’t it? There’s no need for you to act so reserved.”

“I-I know, but I just didn’t want things to get weird later.”

“I see. But the Kratos Kingdom, at the very least, won’t mind. Prince Gerald won’t either. I suppose it’s all up to your emperor.”

Lawrence shot Hadis a meaningful glance. Jill followed suit and was shocked to see that their gazes met almost instantly. It seemed the emperor had been staring at her the entire time. *Huh? Wh-What’s going on? Did he not want to attend dinner?* Jill frantically thought back, wondering if she’d done anything wrong.

Hadis shifted his gaze down and gave a fleeting smile. “Go on.”

“A-Are you all right?” Jill asked.

“Yeah. I’ll be resting in the room. It seems the motion sickness I got from riding the monster is hitting me at a delay...”

“Then you’re not all right!”

Was he enduring his nausea and acting his part as the emperor? As Hadis quickly turned pale, Jill hastily threw him in bed.

“Maybe he can’t attend dinner,” Lawrence said with a chuckle as he helped her look after the emperor.



AROUND evening, the two Knights of the Dragon Consort arrived on horseback. They stared at Hadis, groaning in bed.

“Well, I expected as much,” Camila said. “This is His Majesty we’re talking about.”

“But to fall ill at his potential future in-laws’ house? Gutsy move,” Zeke remarked.

They seemed half-impressed and half-exasperated by him, but they were

trustworthy enough to guard the emperor. There was no need for Jill to stay by his side.

“Can I leave His Majesty to you?” Jill asked them. “We’ve got a dinner party coming up... I don’t think His Majesty can attend in this state, but I should probably be there, at the very least. Prince Gerald is also attending.”

“Huh? The four-eyes prince is? Seriously?” Zeke replied.

“Will you be okay, Jill?” Camila asked.

They looked at the Dragon Consort anxiously—this was quite dangerous. They had opposed Gerald once in Beilburg, but Jill didn’t want this past animosity to rear its head.

“I-I’ll be fine,” she replied hastily. “He didn’t make a big deal about my family and even ensured that the marriage between His Majesty and me would be a smooth process. I don’t sense any animosity from him. I think the King of South Kratos is involved.”

“Ah, the guy who destroyed half of Radia,” Zeke scowled.

Jill nodded. “I believe they thought it’d be best to join forces with us to deal with him. I’m a little confused by how well they’re treating us, but for now, it’s not an issue.”

“Fine,” Camila relented. “It’s exhausting to be doubtful about every little thing anyway.”

“But of course, I’ll remain wary. Lawrence is here too, after all,” Jill told them.

Gerald likely brought Lawrence along because the latter wasn’t of high-rank and was conveniently available. But it was also true that Gerald heavily relied on Lawrence’s competence and trusted him. Gerald had once been on the move with Lawrence as well—they likely formed an excellent team too.

Camila gave a meaningful smile. “That Raccoon Boy, huh? I must greet him, then.”

“He wanted to greet you guys too,” Jill said. “But don’t pick a fight with him, okay?”

“Now that we know what’s going on, it seems like there aren’t any issues for

now,” Zeke said. “Which means, we’re back to our usual work: looking after His Majesty.”

Zeke was a bit rough around the edges, but he always grasped the general gist of things. He flopped back into a chair beside the bed.

“Even though we’re knights...” Camila grumbled, a strained smile flitting across her lips. “But a dinner party, is it? How are things on the prep front, Jill?”

“It’s nothing formal,” Jill replied. “I think we’ll be fine. And we don’t have all our people. Our main squad is yet to arrive...”

Zeke and Camila had arrived much earlier than expected. Gerald had allowed them to use the teleportation devices. They came first to alert Jill about luggage issues and the estimated arrival of the rest of the squad.

“I’ll be fine,” Jill said firmly and slowly. “This is my home.”

Camila put her index finger on her cheek. “Well...I guess it’ll be fine? I feel like Sphere would give us a good scolding though.”

“Ugh. This is an extreme situation, so it’d be great if she let me off the hook this time...”

“Jill...” Hadis murmured, rustling out from under the blankets. His face was still pale, but he was awake now.

“Your Majesty, are you all right?” Jill asked.

“No... I’ve just started to remember that blasted trial and all those traps and I can’t take it...!” Hadis wailed.

“Wait, isn’t that all the Captain’s fault?” Zeke asked.

“We told you so, Jill,” Camila accused. “You can’t push His Majesty too much.”

“You must be so tired from the long journey!” Jill exclaimed. “Please rest well! I’ll go out and do a bit of reconnaissance!”

She quickly covered Hadis’s face with the blanket and tried to leave the room. The words “You’re horrible!” chased after her, but if she closed the door, she’d be none the wiser. As Jill started down the corridor, Camila reopened the door and stopped her.

“Wait, Jill,” Camila said. “I’ll go with you.”

“Are you sure? Can Zeke look after His Majesty alone?” Jill asked.

“He may not look it, but Zeke’s pretty good at looking after His Majesty. Besides, if Zeke walks around with his terrifying face, he’ll intimidate everyone. There’s always the right person for the right job. I’d like to greet your family too... And Jill, you’re the Dragon Consort.”

Jill didn’t expect her position to be brought up, and she stayed quiet. The astute Camila noticed her change in demeanor.

“Oh dear, have I said something I shouldn’t have?” Camila asked.

“No, it’s just...I’ve really become the Dragon Consort. It’s a bit late, but it’s all starting to sink in...” she said.

“Huh? Wait... Are you gonna dump His Majesty?!”

“Why would you say that?! It won’t bode well! No, I mean...they didn’t tell me about Prince Gerald being present.”

Rick and Andy’s roles were likely to be Gerald’s spies. Hence, the crown prince was able to smoothly welcome Jill and Hadis, even though they arrived quicker than the main squad. It was important to make the first move.

“It just hit me that I’m no longer with House Cervel...” Jill said.

“That’s because you’re marrying into the Rave Empire, Sis,” a voice came from the top of the stairs.

Camila looked up and rubbed her eyes. “Twins?” she muttered.

“They’re my younger brothers,” Jill explained. “The one with his hair parted to the right is Rick, and the one with glasses is Andy.”

“Oh, are you the rumored Knight of the Dragon Consort?!” Rick gasped. He jumped over the handrail and landed in the corridor. Then he took Camila’s hand and shook it with gusto. “Pleased to meet you!” he boomed with a smile. “I’m sure my sister has troubled you a lot! Are you a he or a she?”

Camila seemed stunned, but she quickly regained her composure. “She, please. You can call me Camila or big sister. You two really do look alike.”

“I really don’t want to be compared with *him*. My name is Andy. Our rash older sister has been in your care.”

“Who’re you calling rash?!” Jill demanded.

“You, Sis,” Andy replied as he walked down the stairs. “I heard that His Majesty fell ill. It’s because you forced him to take the Path of Trials, didn’t you?”

“That’s...uh... That’s not the only reason! He’s in a different kingdom, so he must be tired!” Jill rushed out.

“And I even heard you messed up the route and that it doesn’t count. You really should fix that bad habit of yours—you just pounce at whatever’s in front of you without properly confirming anything. But being mobile is important. You probably didn’t expect the dinner party either, did you? Mother’s calling for you. She said she’ll help you get dressed.”

“Huh?” Jill took a step back. “I-I heard it wasn’t anything too formal...”

“Have some common sense. The crown prince is with us. We’re not going with something so casual. We’ll be dressed in something tight-fitting too, you know.”

“That’s right, Sis!” Rick chimed in. “We’ll need you to be in proper attire too. Your younger brothers are getting dressed up. You’re our older sister; you aren’t allowed to flee.”

Jill was still considered a daughter of House Cervel and their older sister. Upon hearing them still refer to her that way, she felt herself breathe a sigh of relief. Andy and Rick were smiling at her with their usual, cheeky younger brother faces. She knew it all too well.

“And you even rejected the crown prince and got eyed by the king,” Andy added. “You should have some compassion for Mother and Father.”

“Yep,” Rick agreed. “Besides, why are you so popular with royalty, Sis? Did you create some kind of weird spell?”

“You two really don’t know when to shut up, do you?” Jill snapped. “Fine, I’ll be Mother’s dress-up doll.”

Charlotte loved cute things. She must've had a heavy dress that was decorated with an abundance of ribbons and frills ready. Rick and Andy cackled as they agreed with Jill's decision.

"I wondered what kind of family you came from, but you guys get along well," Camila observed with a chuckle.

Rick turned around. "And what would you like to do, Big Sis Camila? Dinner party, you in? I don't think Sis needs a guard though."

"Rick, if you're begging for a fight, I'll happily oblige," Jill growled.

"Hm, I wonder..." Camila replied. "Would it be boorish of me to intrude on a family gathering?"

"Ah, Camila, are you alone?" Lawrence said from deeper within the corridor.

Camila turned around and gave a wave. "Hiya, Raccoon Boy. Long time no see."

"...And I guess I'm stuck with that nickname. Where's Zeke?"

"Guarding His Majesty. Oh my, have you grown? Maybe you've hit your growth spurt." Camila gave a cheery smile and patted the top of Lawrence's head. The Raccoon Boy, in turn, smiled and batted her hand away.

"Excellent timing," Lawrence said. "I was wondering what to do about His Majesty's dinner. Shall we bring it to his room?"

"Ah, right..."

The two started discussing some plans, and Jill found it to be a nostalgic sight. She grabbed the handrail of the stairs where her younger brothers came from.

"Camila, please continue discussing plans with Lawrence," said Jill. "I'll go to my mother's room. Only my family and Prince Gerald will be present at the dinner party, so please don't be so reserved. Both you and Zeke are welcome to join us for the meal."

"Really? Then Zeke and I should crowd around Lawrence, I suppose," Camila replied.

Lawrence laughed. "Hahaha, I decline that offer."

“I’ll leave His Majesty to you,” Jill said as she dashed up the stairs.

When she heard the loud voices downstairs, she couldn’t help but smile. In her previous timeline, her younger brothers had been acquainted with Lawrence, Camila, and Zeke. They had all met once again on a completely different occasion—fate had its way. *I wish we could always stay like this.*

Jill knew her way around the villa. *I’ll be fine.* Her position as Dragon Consort, a Cervel, within an enemy kingdom, and within her homeland had confused her a bit. That was all. With that thought in mind, she felt her footsteps grow lighter.

Jill made her way upstairs when she saw someone emerge from the direction she was headed. “Oh...” she murmured.

As they walked by each other, Gerald looked up, shocked by her voice. He was busy reading documents and hadn’t noticed Jill. He quickly looked down and turned away.

“He’s aware that you detest him...” Lawrence’s words echoed in her head.

And that was good enough for Jill. She had plenty of reasons to loathe him. But the prince in this timeline wasn’t at fault. When she acknowledged that, she couldn’t help but call out to him.

“Um, Prince Gerald!”

There was no reply, but the prince stopped in his tracks. Slowly, his obsidian eyes turned to her. Bitterness and nostalgia welled up within Jill. Gerald was always calm and composed. He was burdened with heavy responsibilities as the king’s proxy, yet he never uttered a word of complaint. The only time he’d offer a sweet smile was towards his younger sister, whom he doted on. And yet, he’d occasionally give a troubled look, as though he was unsure of how to communicate with Jill. Even now, he had that same expression.

“I’m sorry to stop you when you’re busy,” Jill said. “If you don’t mind, would you go for a walk with me?”

He was silent for a moment. “A walk? What for?”

“I’d like to thank you.”

Jill smiled, determined not to trouble him.



ZEKE went to the bookshelf and pulled out a random book, but it was a holy text targeted at children. *Books on the teachings of the Goddess were placed in the room of the Dragon Emperor, huh? How considerate.* These minor details hinted at possible hostility and one's true intentions. Zeke returned the book to the shelf beside the bed.

"And? Why're you feigning illness?" Zeke asked.

He correctly guessed that the emperor was awake.

"I'm not faking it," came a voice from under the blankets. "I feel awful. I don't want to get up. I don't want to do anything."

"So, you're shutting yourself in? Did they do something unpleasant to you?"

"No, they're all really nice. But this is the worst outcome that I predicted. It's not ideal at all..."

So he's sick from the stress, Zeke thought.

"You're just greeting your wife's parents," Zeke replied. "This is par for the course, isn't it?"

"I prepared so many souvenirs. And I thought of so many words. I want to go back to Rave soon. I'd much rather hear the complaints of my noisy older brothers..." Hadis replied.

"Endure it for a bit longer. This is Captain's home."

"I know. As I long to go home, I now understand what relief feels like."

If his older siblings in the Rave Empire heard of it, they'd surely burst into tears. Hadis rolled over on his bed and looked up.

"In any case, were you able to meet up?" the emperor asked.

"Yeah, should arrive soon," Zeke replied. "But why're you doing this surprise attack?"

"Because the more uncertainties there are, the better. No matter what I do, this is their home territory, so they've got the advantage. If I don't surprise

them, I'll lose."

This reasoning was sound, but Zeke was simply unsure of the details. He hadn't a clue what the emperor really wanted to do.

"I hope we can make it in time for the dinner party," Hadis said.

"So, Your Majesty, are you sure about not attending the dinner?" Zeke asked. He glanced out the window and saw two people outside. He widened his eyes with shock. It was at this unfortunate timing that Hadis sluggishly got up.

"Yeah, it depends on the situation, but it's a pain to change clothes..." Hadis said before he noticed the knight's strange behavior. "What's wrong?"

Zeke gave a violent tug of the curtains, shutting them. "Nothing, just thought that the light was blinding."

"...Is something outside?" Hadis smiled, and Zeke knew that he couldn't cover for her anymore. He made his resolve and opened the curtains once more.

"Don't jump to conclusions and get mad," Zeke said firmly. "You're an adult."

Hadis stood up and approached the window. It was during these times that the emperor was terrifying as he loomed there expressionless. What was the emperor thinking? Zeke could never be sure.

"Adults...don't get angry and jump to conclusions?" Hadis asked.

"Exactly," Zeke replied. "I don't know what's going on here, but take deep breaths and calm down."

"Or else I'll be hated? How convenient."

"Hey! Argh!"

Hadis turned on his heel and swiftly left. Zeke chased after the emperor; why was it that during these emergency situations, the other knight, who was much better at calming Hadis, wasn't present? And Zeke felt like he shouldn't go to Jill much this time around. This was her hometown. She likely couldn't see this area as her enemy, and it showed. If the two nations were to actually be at peace, there first should've been talks about the Dragon Emperor and Dragon Consort fully regaining their magic energy. But none of that had surfaced. This seemed like a clear contradiction to Zeke, but Jill hadn't noticed it. A girl as

vigilant as her would've surely noted this oddity under any other circumstances.

Along with the Dragon Consort's unnatural actions, the Dragon Emperor was also acting just as oddly. He was heading out knowing that he'd be hated—it was clear that he was up to no good.

Outside the window and the open curtains were the Captain, whom Zeke respected, and the prince, who was regarded as the enemy, leisurely taking a stroll together.



JILL was far more knowledgeable when it came to navigating her way around the villa. If she went down a different set of stairs than where she came up and went around the back, she could avoid prying eyes. But she walked along the villa in plain sight, hoping to avoid any suspicion cast on her for attempting to assassinate Gerald.

Gerald quietly followed her. He was sociable and great at providing explanations, but terrible at small talk. *Is what I heard in the past*, Jill thought. *Was I told that tidbit around now, or was it in the far future in my previous timeline?*

"Thank you so much," Jill started. "I appreciate you arranging this all for us."

"...There's no need for you to thank me," Gerald replied.

And so, their conversation struggled to continue, just like it always had in the past.

"Why are you being so kind and generous to us?" Jill asked.

"It's nothing for you to be bothered—"

"I think I've been awfully rude to you, Prince Gerald. I fled at the first sight of you."

As Jill turned around under the sunlight filtered by the foliage, Gerald sighed.

"So you *did* flee from me back then," he said. He didn't seem hurt. He had simply received the answer that he was looking for. "Then could I ask you instead? Why did you run? Did you hear a bad rumor going around?"

“It’s just that we weren’t compatible, is all.”

“Compatible?”

Gerald knitted his brows, but Jill nodded with a straight face. She wasn’t foolish enough to reveal her knowledge of the prince’s forbidden love with his younger sister. Jill didn’t know when this love had blossomed, and she wasn’t keen on finding an answer to that.

“Does that mean...that you viscerally hate me to such an extent that I don’t have a chance?” Gerald asked with a frown.

He had asked a sensitive question. Jill thought for a moment before she chose her answer.

“It’s nothing like that. Um, Prince Gerald, you have a younger sister—Princess Faris—don’t you? I hear you’re very close with her.”



“...Is that what upsets you?”

“It does. I’m a very jealous woman.”

Jill felt like she should leave it at that to maintain the peace. Gerald wasn’t the type to persistently cling to Jill, and as proof, he struggled to provide a response. *But this reaction... Prince Gerald hasn’t heard anything from Princess Faris.* Jill was redoing her life—she was the crown prince’s former fiancée, and Faris seemed to know that.

“I’m not a fan of Princess Faris,” Jill confessed.

“Of Faris?” Gerald asked incredulously.

For whatever reason, this made Jill feel triumphant, and she gave a confident nod.

“Yes,” she replied. “To be frank, I dislike her very much. I think of her as an enemy. So, you see, we’re not compatible, are we?”

Gerald stared for a while with a look of disbelief before he suddenly gave a faint smile. It was Jill’s turn to look bewildered.

“I didn’t think you’d verbalize your thoughts so brazenly. You’ve got courage,” he said. His innocent smile made him look his age; Gerald was just fifteen years old. “Thank you,” he said. “I didn’t think you’d go out of your way to provide me with an explanation. I made you so considerate of me.”

“Huh? Erm, no, it’s no trouble at all...” Jill stammered.

“Either way, I now know that it’s just like what Lawrence said.”

I didn’t think Gerald was someone who’d smile like that. Jill couldn’t get over her shock.

“Has the Rave Empire done anything unreasonable to you just because you’re from Kratos?” Gerald asked gently.

“N-No, nothing of the sort.”

“I see. Then that’s fine.”

Jill had braced herself and expected him to take advantage of her somehow, but he simply nodded. This caught her off guard, and she hastily looked away

and started walking ahead.

“I just want to say that there’s no need for you to act so reserved. When you do, um, it makes things awkward...” Jill said.

“Do you mean that it’s a nuisance?” he asked.

“No, it’s nothing that negative! It’s just that it’s a bit awkward... This isn’t the first time a person from Kratos has married off to Rave, is it? I heard that it once happened 300 years ago.”

Gerald, who was slowly walking behind her, stopped. Jill turned around.

“Did Lawrence tell you that?” Gerald asked.

Jill nodded, causing the prince to narrow his eyes.

“That blabbermouth...” he muttered.

“...What do you mean? Is there something to it?”

After Jill asked her question, she realized that the Heavenly Sword had disappeared from the Rave Empire 300 years ago. She even heard rumors that the Rave imperial family had lost the bloodline of the Dragon God back then.

Gerald was quiet for a moment before he stated, “It’s not a fun story to hear.”

His words implied that there was indeed something that Jill hadn’t known about. It only made her more curious.

“I don’t mind,” she replied. “Please tell me.”

Gerald gave a deep sigh, lowering his shoulders, before he stared straight at Jill and began his story. “Three hundred years ago, as a symbol of peace, a princess from the Kratos Kingdom married the Rave Emperor—the Dragon Emperor.”

“A princess from the Kratos royal family married the Dragon Emperor?” Jill asked.

“Precisely. She wasn’t even ten when she went off to marry, and the Dragon Emperor was around twenty years of age. He even had a Dragon Consort. It was the textbook definition of a political marriage. But their marriage couldn’t even last a decade. The princess divorced him, and at the same time, the armistice

was destroyed.”

That was the precedent.

Lawrence... He purposefully touched upon that subject. Jill was furious.

“As I said, it’s not a fun story to hear,” Gerald commented awkwardly.

“I know. I’m the one who asked, but...” Jill started.

She couldn’t bring herself to say, “I’m surprised the Goddess allowed that.” There was a chance that this Kratos princess was the Goddess herself. And this series of events occurred three centuries ago—things were different now.

“Since she was in Rave, we don’t have many details, but it seems life in the Rave Empire wasn’t filled with happiness for the Kratos princess,” Gerald admitted, continuing where Jill had trailed off.

She finally understood the prince’s intentions. “Which is why you’re asking how I’m being treated there. You’re worried about me.”

“It’s not odd if people were suspicious of you and treated you as a Kratos spy.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll beat all those people up,” Jill said flatly.

“...Right. You’re a girl who can snap the Sacred Spear in two,” Gerald said as he pushed up his glasses. He hesitated for a moment before he continued, “Just one thing. I think you should understand just how worried your family is.”

His tone was serious, causing Jill to falter. She couldn’t laugh it off and wave his words away while claiming that he was exaggerating.

“Three hundred years ago, while the princess of Kratos who married into Rave was quite young, she had an impressive amount of magic energy,” Gerald explained. “And she received backing from powerful, impressive people—likely more than anything you currently have. And yet, the marriage didn’t go well.”

“But the situation is different now,” Jill insisted. “I’m marrying off as the Dragon Consort.”

“The Dragon Consort had also died amidst the messy divorce. Most women who marry the Dragon Emperor are met with a plethora of misfortune.”

“Th-That’s just a Kratos superstition, isn’t it?” Jill glared at Gerald, unable to let that comment slide.

The prince gave a look of self-ridicule before he gently shook his head. “...I’m no good,” he mumbled. “I declared I’d give up on you, and yet I can’t stop myself from talking.”

“Huh?” Jill asked.

“I suppose I’ve still got my regrets,” Gerald muttered as he walked past her. “You don’t have to worry about it. I’m simply here so that we won’t repeat the mistakes of three centuries ago. That’s all.”

Gerald walked under the sunlight peeking through the foliage. This was even more awkward for Jill as she lost her chance to offer a rebuttal. She followed behind him.

“That’s my line,” Jill said. “I’ll make sure that we won’t repeat what happened 300 years ago.”

“Then we’ve got the same goal,” Gerald replied. “And? Is that all you wanted to talk about with me?”

“...Is the king acting bizarrely? Is it so bad that you have to join hands with the Dragon Emperor?”

That was the most important piece of information that Jill wanted.

“Yeah,” Gerald replied, his back still turned. “I heard that he’s gathering weapons and soldiers.”

“Is he starting a rebellion?” Jill asked.

“The king? In his own kingdom?” Jill furrowed her brows as Gerald laughed with scorn. Indeed, a king wouldn’t rebel in his own kingdom. “Then is he planning on starting war with the Rave Empire?” Jill asked.

“It’s a possibility, but I’m not certain. If you fought in Radia, then surely you know that he always seeks pleasure and enjoyment. As long as he has fun, the rest doesn’t matter. I can’t involve my citizens in something like that.”

Jill knew Gerald’s back all too well. He was walking forward with the mindset that he was going to protect the kingdom from his father, the Dragon God, and

the Dragon Emperor. In Jill's previous timeline, Gerald had killed his father with his own hands. *But that's still in the far future, and the Cervels got involved too...* Right before that internal strife, her parents had died in battle.

It was during the war against the Rave imperial army. Jill had been told that the King of South Kratos had killed her parents. Billy Cerval had been vehemently against a reckless plan, and while he was taking on the Rave imperial army from the front, the king had slashed him from behind. Such an atrocious act of violence had stunned even the imperial army. Lady Cerval had remained to allow the rest of her troops to flee from this barbarian savagery, but she had been slain on the battlefield as well. Jill had heard this report from Lawrence after it had all transpired.

When the lord who protected the borders of the kingdom had been murdered in cold blood, the kingdom finally unanimously pledged to kill the King of South Kratos. Lives, however, weren't as valuable on the battlefield. During the war against the Rave Empire, it wasn't odd if any of them died at any point in time. Thus, it was foolish to bring personal feelings into it. Only amateurs did something like that. That was how Jill was raised. When she was notified of her parents' deaths on the battlefield, her eldest brother had simply inherited the family estate. She was sad to hear the news, but she was proud of her parents, who served their master and protected their subordinates until the very end.

As such, even if her parents were to head out onto the battlefields with the King of South Kratos, Jill wouldn't stop them by using the excuse of them being possibly killed by the king. A kill-or-be-killed mindset was normal to have during war, and it seemed pointless to warn her parents about it. But if a war never occurred, Billy and Charlotte would, at the very least, not be there to be betrayed. *If we make peace here, it's not like we can prevent the internal strife of Kratos, but if Prince Gerald can somehow keep the king in check or...*

Jill clenched her fists and answered, "I'd like to prevent war." She caught up to Gerald and walked beside him. She felt it was wrong to keep walking behind him. "And if it's help you need, I can provide that," she finished.

"Though you're the Dragon Consort of the Rave Empire?" Gerald asked.

“But I’m originally from Kratos.”

Gerald glanced at her and gave a strained smile. “You can’t marry me, but you’ll do whatever you can to prevent war, huh?” he said. “Usually, it’s the opposite.”

“...It’s just our compatibility,” she repeated with a shrug.

“I know. If Faris hears about this, I think she’ll laugh at me.”

As Gerald smiled softly, Jill agonized over her next words. *Should I talk about the Goddess...?* One wrong move, and the topic could turn into a poison that would negate all talks of peace. But even when Jill was about to be executed, she had never heard the prince’s thoughts. She wasn’t planning on forgiving him, but she couldn’t help but think about the Goddess. Who was his true partner?

“Is Princess Faris doing well?” Jill asked. She decided to start with a safe topic.

Gerald furrowed his brows as though he was trying to remember. “She’s currently in our summer house. When it gets hot, she loses her appetite and often falls ill.”

“Ah, that’s right...” Jill replied.

“That’s right?” He gave her a funny look.

“I, uh, heard about it from my parents! That Princess Faris spends her summers at that house!” Jill hastily tried to cover her slip of the tongue, and Gerald didn’t pry further. He only gave a nod.

“I see. She’s still a child, so her magic powers are unstable. As she gets older, it should level out...” Gerald unusually trailed off and fell silent as he reflected upon his words. “Ah, this must be that bad habit of mine.”

“Huh?”

“You stated earlier about our incompatibility because of how I dote on my younger sister.”

“Jill,” a voice suddenly said, intruding on the pair.

Before Jill could think, she felt a shiver up her spine. She got goosebumps, as

though the lukewarm summer breeze was blown directly inside of her body.

“Your...Majesty...” she murmured.

“You guys seem to be having fun,” Hadis said with a bright smile. “What are you two talking about?” He spoke casually as though he was asking for tonight’s dinner menu.

“N-Nothing much,” Jill replied. “Where’s Zeke, Your Majesty?”

“When I went outside, our main squad had already arrived. I’m having him help out over there. And what about you? Where’s Camila?”

“She bumped into Lawrence, so she’s talking with him. Oh, I told her to do so because I didn’t think she’d be in any danger.”

“I see.”

Hadis’s response sounded cold. Was she just imagining things?

“I thought you were ill, Your Majesty...” Jill said.

“I am,” he replied. “So maybe I had an auditory hallucination when I heard about him giving up on you.”

“You didn’t,” Gerald interjected as though he was protecting Jill.

Hadis glanced at him with a deadly smile plastered on his face. The emperor was wearing a simple shirt and black pants, but his handsome face made him intimidating. Gerald, however, didn’t flinch.

“I apologize if I created a misunderstanding,” Gerald said. “The fault is on me, not Lady Jill.”

“Um, er, I really didn’t—” Jill started.

“I see,” Hadis said, cutting her off. “Then I’m glad. Could you come with me for a bit?”

Hadis turned his back to them. Gerald knitted his brows and followed. Of course, Jill tagged along as well. She got a weird feeling about all this. Their conversation was cut short, and it made Jill uneasy.

“Do you require something from me too?” Gerald asked.

“Oh, so Jill spoke to you first,” Hadis replied, his tone darkening.

“That’s right, but—”

“I’m just confirming the facts,” Hadis said. “Don’t worry about it. In any case, I want you to look over there.”

Hadis stopped walking and moved to the side, allowing Gerald to have a full view of the sight in front of him. A round plaza was in front of the villa entryway. The main squad had luggage and souvenirs for Jill’s parents that were currently being carried inside the villa. The most eye-catching item was a luxurious carriage that was pulled by four horses. Zeke stood in front of the carriage door and held out his hand, allowing a slender female hand to slide onto his.

The carriage, donned with the gold emblem of the Rave imperial family, was initially supposed to be for Hadis and Jill. In other words, no one else, barring members of the imperial family, was allowed to board that carriage.

It can’t be... Jill blinked in shock as a lady stepped out of the carriage while borrowing Zeke’s hand. Her shimmering golden locks swayed in the breeze. And upon being told something by Zeke, she shifted her glimmering sky-blue eyes towards Jill and smiled beautifully. She gracefully approached Hadis, her elegant and classy silk dress beautifully flowing around her legs as she walked. She was a Rave princess—someone who could freely ride the same carriage as Jill and Hadis.

“I apologize for being so late, Brother,” she said.

“You’ve got perfect timing, Natalie,” Hadis replied.

“Then I’m glad.” She giggled and glanced at Gerald. The prince averted his gaze from the Rave princess and turned to Hadis.

“And this is...? She looks like Princess Natalie Rave,” Gerald said stiffly.

“I’m aware that I stole Jill from you,” Hadis replied. “And this is my way of apologizing.”

Gerald’s expression soured as Natalie pinched the hems of her dress and did a curtsy.

“I’m pleased to meet you, Crown Prince Gerald der Kratos. My name is Natalie Teos Rave. I’m honored to be in your presence.” She was the perfect princess with absolutely no faults. Natalie smiled, seemingly unconcerned by Gerald’s frosty gaze.

“Could I ask you to show my younger sister around until dinner, Prince Gerald?” Hadis asked.

Gerald remained silent.

“I’d love for you to be friendly with her,” Hadis said. “It’d be our first step in maintaining peace.”

Gerald turned expressionless, except for the hard outline of his clenched jaw, as he offered his hand to Natalie. Hadis looked on triumphantly.

Chapter 4: The Dragon Consort Withdraws from the Frontlines

JILL managed to hold her tongue until she got to Hadis's room.

"Just what is going on here, Your Majesty?!" she demanded.

"What do you mean?" Hadis asked. He sat on his bed and threw off his slippers after just leaving his younger sister with Gerald.

"You said that the engagement between Princess Natalie and Prince Gerald would come after we formed peace," Jill said. "Why is Her Highness here in Kratos then?!"

Upon pressing Zeke for answers, he revealed that Natalie had entered the kingdom a bit after Jill at the behest of Hadis. To hide her entry, only Zeke and Camila stood guard while entrusting Kratos with the carriage, which they believed only transported luggage.

Jill buried her head in her hands. This was frighteningly similar to when George had single-handedly sent Natalie to Kratos during Jill's original timeline. Natalie had gone missing shortly after leaving the Cervels' domain, so they weren't on the exact same track yet. But Jill still had no clue as to why Natalie was targeted and for what reason. There was no guarantee that Natalie wouldn't meet the same fate this time around. Jill knew that Hadis didn't know all this, but she couldn't stop herself from scolding him.

"This process is all out of order!" she opined. "This is like a bolt from the blue for us too! We're not prepared! Why would you do something like this? It's like you're provoking the other party!"

"Us, you say..." Hadis refuted in a small voice as he languidly sat on the bed. "If we want to make peace, it doesn't matter if we do this sooner or later. Besides, this isn't official or anything. They are just getting to know each other. I want to know how he reacts."

“But what will you do if something happens?!” Jill cried.

“Like what? Like if we can’t get engaged if Prince Gerald and your family are against it?”

“I-I don’t think they will, seeing as we’ve come this far...”

“Huh... Then it’s not a problem, is it? If something happens to Natalie, that would be the beginning of war.”

Hadis smiled and shrugged, but Jill clenched her fists. Zeke was ordered to stay with Natalie, so he wasn’t around, and Camila hadn’t returned yet. Only Jill and Hadis were in the room. No one was there to stop her, so she had to tell herself to calm down.

“...I didn’t know about it,” Jill said. “I didn’t know that Princess Natalie would come here.”

“Well, I didn’t know if we were really doing this either,” Hadis replied.

“You’re lying. You purposefully kept this from me. Prince Vissel, Prince Ristead, and Princess Elentzia would’ve all known about this! Or else, Princess Natalie couldn’t have arrived here so swiftly!” Jill couldn’t hide her irritation at Hadis’s flimsy excuse. “Please be honest,” she demanded. “Why didn’t you tell me anything?”

“Then let me ask you too. Why are you so vehemently against it?”

Jill fell silent at Hadis’s question. Peace was at stake here; there was no way she could say that there was a chance of Princess Natalie being abducted. That would make all of this for naught. She wasn’t privy to Hadis’s thoughts, but she saw him smile.

“Are you that against watching Prince Gerald marry someone?” he accused.

“Huh?!” Jill snapped. “How’d you get to that conclusion? What kind of misunderstanding—”

“No, I get it. He’s your first love, right? I get how this must be complicated for you.”

Jill couldn’t find a proper response, but she felt her anger grow as Hadis let out a loud snort.

“That’s not what we’re talking about now, is it?!” she exclaimed.

“Then what were you talking about with Prince Gerald?” he asked.

“Just a legend about 300 years ago! That’s it!” Jill had let it slip. All too late, she realized that her words may have come at a terrible time.

“About the Dragon Consort from back then, I presume? Did he warn you or something?” Hadis asked, forming a terrifying smile as his gaze turned frigid. “I’d expect no less of that prince. I can’t let my guard down at all.”

“I-I told him that I won’t turn out like her, so—” Jill started.

“Won’t turn out like her? So you believed him, then? And then you went on a friendly stroll with your first love?”

“Wh-What’s with you?! Your jealousy isn’t cute at all!” Jill shouted.

“I don’t remember ever trying to be cute. I’m an adult. I’m simply handling the truth.”

As he spoke with a scoff, Jill found his cheeky behavior to be the opposite of anything she’d deem cute. She was tempted to punch his stomach with everything she had and put him to sleep, but as her cheeks twitched, she did her best to calm herself down.

“I didn’t think a day would come when you insisted on being an adult, Your Majesty,” she said.

“I guess I’m growing up, too,” Hadis replied.

“Then you’ve grown in a pretty unpleasant direction!”

“And what? Did you expect me to cry and cling to you, begging you not to toss me aside? *You* were the one who almost cheated on me. Why would *I* do that?”

“I’m not cheating on you! Why do you think I’ve been trying my best to be so considerate and—”

“I never asked you to,” he said brusquely as he burrowed into bed. “Why don’t you go have fun at that dinner party without me?”

Jill wanted to praise herself for holding back her raging emotions. “Fine then! I’ll do that! You stupid emperor! Keep sulking there like a petulant child for the

rest of your life!”

Jill slammed the door shut behind her with everything she had, causing the walls to groan. But her anger hadn’t subsided. *He’s always like this! He’s always trying to test me!* During times like these, meat was the remedy. After chomping down on delicious meat, she’d feel much better. A dinner party without Hadis seemed like a lovely affair.



THE Cervels’ food was simple and nostalgic, reminding Jill of home. Above all, they prioritized quantity over quality. She was grateful for this. There was plenty of chicken, thick lamb chops seasoned with salt, an entire roasted pig stuffed with spices and vegetables, and various types of grilled skewered meat. Jill grabbed everything she could and formed a mountain on her plate. Once her plate was empty, she quickly piled on more meat.

“Er...” Gerald said awkwardly as he watched Jill eating voraciously once they finished their toast. “If you eat that much, it might not be good for your health...”

“Oh, please don’t mind her, Prince Gerald,” Charlotte said gently. She sat across from him at the long, rectangular dining table. “Jill has always been like this.”

Gerald was seated as the guest of honor at this dinner, with Jill and Natalie on the left. To the right was Jill’s family.

“Nah, I think we should stop her,” Rick commented from beside his mother. He tore off a bite of bread with his teeth. “We won’t have much meat left to store at this rate.”

“Has the Rave Empire come to cut off our supply line?” Andy asked.

Natalie gave a forced smile. “W-We’ve brought a few local specialties from our cities to make up for it.”

“R-Right! You’ve given us so many wonderful gifts! Please send our regards to the emperor!” Billy said.

Jill couldn’t help herself from violently stabbing her meat with her fork at the

mention of the emperor. Everyone held their breath nervously.

“The sauce on this roast beef is also one of his gifts, isn’t it?” Jill asked coldly.

“Th-That’s right,” Billy stammered. “What’s wrong, Jill?”

“This is a sauce that His Majesty made. That pisses me off,” she hissed.

It was delicious. Jill dipped the slices of roast beef into plenty of sauce and licked three heaping platefuls clean before she set down her knife and fork.

“I’m fine for now,” she said.

“For *now*?” Gerald muttered as he gazed at the pile of plates that towered over him.

While Jill wiped her mouth, servants came out and brought a platform simply to reach up and clear the dishes away.

Natalie loudly cleared her throat and smiled. “It really was delicious,” the princess said. “I can see why you’d have a hearty appetite, Dragon Consort.”

“I’m honored to hear such praise, Princess Natalie,” Billy, the host of the party, replied. “I apologize for causing you such concern... Um, are you not troubled at all? I’m mostly worried about your food supply. Perhaps my daughter has made quite a dent...”

“His Majesty won’t allow me to eat this much!” Jill growled. “He said that overeating and overdrinking aren’t allowed! Damn it! I’m gonna eat more!”

“You really shouldn’t, Sis...” Rick said. “Even we’re appalled by this...”

“Pardon me,” a servant said at the entrance to the dining room. “His Majesty has a gift for you, Lady Jill.”

Jill, who tried to reach for some roast duck that sat in the middle of the table, widened her eyes, her cheeks flushing. “A-A gift?” she stammered. “I-Is he trying to entice me with items? I won’t forgive him unless he directly apologizes to me. I won’t spoil him.”

“H-Here it is,” the servant said.

The emperor’s gift was offered on a silver platter to Jill—it was a small bottle that was adorably wrapped. It seemed immature to reject this gift as everyone

had their eyes on her.

With a slight pout, she took the bottle and read the label: *Stomach medicine*. Jill could practically hear Hadis telling her to take care of herself, and the vein pulsing near her temple nearly burst with her fury. *Who do you think is causing me to eat so much in the first place?!*

“That idiot husband has got some nerve!” Jill rumbled.

“Jill, *enough*,” Charlotte scolded harshly.

Jill looked up and saw her mother frowning. Charlotte had stayed quiet while helping Jill dress for the dinner party.

“Your beautiful dress will be ruined,” Charlotte said. “I prepared that dress just for today. I thought that it might be the last time for us to have a meal so casually together.”

“Last time? You’re exaggerating...” Jill mumbled.

“I wonder if you really can serve as Dragon Consort.”

Jill couldn’t rebuke these claims. Indeed, her behavior today was unfitting for the Dragon Consort.

“Now, now, Charlotte,” Billy cut in with a forced smile. “This is her home. She can let loose a little.”

“He’s right, Mother,” Rick added. “The emperor isn’t here either, so we’re just sitting together as one happy family, aren’t we?”

“Well, even as just a lady from Cervel, I don’t think her behavior is suitable in front of our crown prince,” Andy mumbled.

“There isn’t a woman in the world who’s more suitable to be the Dragon Consort than Lady Jill,” Natalie said in a dignified voice that belied the casual dinner. “Our excitement grows by the day in the Rave Empire as we eagerly wait for my brother and Lady Jill to marry. It proves that she has wonderfully fulfilled her role as Dragon Consort. Which is why I’m sure His Majesty has left this party in Lady Jill’s capable hands.”

“What?” Jill started. “No, we’re just in the middle of an argu—”

Natalie stomped on Jill's foot under the table. "You know what they say, a lover's spat is proof that two people truly love each other," Natalie continued. "As his younger sister, I do have mixed feelings about it, however."

Before Natalie's graceful smile and silver tongue that emanated a terrifying aura, Jill could only hastily nod in agreement.

"R-Right!" Jill added. "We fight all the time!"

"His Majesty turns twenty this year, doesn't he?" Andy asked coolly.

Only then did Jill realize what Natalie was trying to cover for—Hadis's dignity. It was unseemly for an adult to get into a serious fight with an eleven-year-old child.

"W-We're a married couple!" Jill explained in a tizzy. "I-I know that it doesn't count in Kratos yet, but His Majesty and I are practically a married couple, so we fight every now and then like one. His Majesty has his faults at times, but I've decided to make him happy, so—"

"Princess Natalie," Gerald suddenly said as Jill took a breath. "The moon should be out in all its splendor tonight. Why don't I escort you to the lakeside? I hear it's a famous location in the Cervel domain."

"Goodness..." Natalie replied. "I'm elated about the invitation, but how could I leave Lady Jill here?"

"It must be tiring to always clean up after your older brother's messes."

Natalie remained smiling, while Gerald seemed unconcerned.

"At the soonest, Lady Jill shall officially become the fiancée of the Dragon Emperor by tomorrow," Gerald continued. "Or is the Dragon Emperor against having his consort spend some time alone with her family?"

"Not at all," Natalie replied. "My older brother trusts Lady Jill."

"Then shall we? I believe that would be more convenient for you as well."

Natalie flashed a graceful smile at Gerald's thorny tone. "Then I shall, gladly," she replied.

"P-Princess Natalie, will you be all right?" Jill whispered.

Natalie whispered back in her normal voice, "Of course. He's like a moth to a flame; this is my chance. I'll start by crumbling his prim demeanor."

Billy was talking to one of the servants, and the two ladies' hushed conversation couldn't be heard by the others.

"Then please at least take Camila with you," Jill said.

Lawrence and Camila were in a room right outside the dining area. Zeke was guarding Hadis's room, so he wasn't an option.

"What are you talking about?" Natalie demanded. "There's no way we can leave you unguarded here."

"I-I'll be fine," Jill replied. "I can fight, and this is my home."

"That's not the point here. Notice it already! It's *because* you're at home that you need to be guarded," Natalie said angrily. "Hadis will be annoyed if you continue to act like that."

"Huh? Why is His Majesty being brought up here?" Jill pulled a face, her frown deepening.

"I understand your concerns, but I'd like for you to trust me, Lady Jill," Gerald said, coming over to escort Natalie.

"Ah, no," Jill hastily replied. "I'm not suspicious of you doing anything to Her Highness."

"I see..." The prince looked visibly relieved.

Natalie promptly stepped between them. "Shall we, Prince Gerald?" she asked.

Gerald had an icy gaze, but no one could blame him. His bride was practically pushed onto him, after all. Natalie was even more impressive as she handled Gerald's cold eyes with ease. *It feels so weird to see a woman who can treat Gerald as her equal.*

"If you're gonna see them off so regretfully, why don't you make the switch?" Rick suggested while Jill watched the couple leave through the door.

"How'd you get to *that* conclusion?" Jill asked.

“Well, we expected you to get engaged to Prince Gerald, Sis. You were looking forward to it too—your eyes sparkled with joy at the time.”

This was in the past before Jill had reset her life, when she was still dreaming of her ideal prince.

“He didn’t seem against it either, so things would’ve been so much easier if you went with him,” Rick said.

“At the very least, Prince Gerald seems mentally more mature than the Dragon Emperor,” Andy quipped.

“H-His Majesty might be a bit childish, but he’s got a lot of good points!” Jill countered. “The curry! It was delicious, wasn’t it?”

“Knew it,” Rick said. “You got fished by the food.”

“You should plan your life a bit more carefully, Sis,” Andy added.

“Wh-Why’re you guys attacking me all of a sudden?” Jill demanded. “What are you guys trying to say?” Jill was about to get up, but she was silenced by her mother’s firm words.

“Jill, sit down,” Charlotte ordered.

The girl obediently did as she was told.

“Dear?” Charlotte asked.

“H-Hm?!” Billy yelped. “Me?!”

“But of course. You’re the head of our household. And Prince Gerald was even considerate of us.”

“Sure, but, er, I thought mothers should start this off! She’s my daughter... Er, it would look like I’m being jealous!”

“M’kay, then I’ll go first!” Rick said. “Sis, are you really gonna become the Dragon Emperor’s bride? Will you honestly be okay?”

Jill stared blankly as Rick glanced at Andy, who adjusted his glasses.

“Do you know what being a Dragon Consort entails?” Andy asked. “Sis, you’ll have to become the Dragon Emperor’s shield.”

“I-I know,” Jill replied. “I have to protect the Dragon Emperor.”

“Aren’t they just using you?” Rick said casually before he turned deadly serious. “That’s the kind of family we are. We protect the royal family and the kingdom—that’s our job. But this is different. You’re getting married. It’s weird for you to one-sidedly protect your spouse, don’t you think?”

“One-sided? His Majesty pro—”

“Sis, do you know about the current actions of the Rave Empire?” Andy asked. He took Jill’s silence as a no and continued, “The imperial army is currently gathered at Neutrah and Lehrsatz.”

“Y-You mean a rebellion?” Jill asked hastily.

The twins furrowed their brows as Billy quietly steered the conversation.

“No, Jill,” Billy said with a wry smile. “They’re trying to keep us—the Kratos Kingdom—in check.”

Charlotte sighed. “Keep us in check? Oh no, they look as though they’d cross our borders at any moment.”

“W-Wait... His Majesty isn’t someone who’d do something like that. M-Maybe Crown Prince Vissel is doing it out of worry for the emperor,” Jill insisted.

“And that’s a problem in and of itself,” Rick countered. “The emperor can’t even control his empire’s internal affairs.”

Jill was at a loss for words.

Charlotte’s gaze softened. “So, you didn’t know any of this, Jill...” she murmured.

“N-Not...at all,” Jill stammered. “H-His Majesty and I have no intention of going to war. Er, what’s the situation now?”

“Chris is in the north, and Abby’s keeping watching in the south,” Billy replied.

If the eldest brother and sister of the Cervels were on the move, it implied that one couldn’t let their guard down.

“We just don’t know why or what caused them to act...” Billy muttered. “In any case, how can the emperor contact his empire while he’s here?”

Raw. The baby dragon king could receive Hadis's orders. If his message was passed onto Rare, who then contacted Vissel, Hadis could transmit orders throughout the Rave Empire. In other words, this was something *only* Hadis could do—he was utilizing his power as the Dragon Emperor. A shiver ran down Jill's spine. *Why is His Majesty...?* It felt like a blade was pressed against her throat.

"Maybe they've got a signal or something," Rick suggested. "We just gotta be on the lookout."

"...Do you know anything, Sis?" Andy asked.

"No..." Jill replied with a shake of her head. She still wasn't sure if Hadis had truly acted. "H-His Majesty chose peace so that he could marry me. This must be some sort of mistake. Even if it wasn't, they definitely wouldn't invade the kingdom for no reason. There must be a reason behind it all. Please trust me."

This is weird... The more Jill voiced her thoughts, the more confused she became.

"Jill... We don't want them to invade us, of course," Charlotte said gently, carefully choosing her words. "We *want* to believe in them. But..."

"I haven't heard a thing about this," Jill said, raising her head.

Rick propped his chin up with his hand with an awkward grimace. "And that's why it's problematic. Realistically speaking, will they really back off if we approve of the engagement?"

"To be honest, it seems like they're just looking for a reason to strike," Andy added. "If there's so much as a scratch on the emperor, they could use that as an excuse to launch an attack."

Jill started, "His Majesty won't—"

"Won't do it? Can you be absolutely sure?" Billy asked sternly, cutting off Jill's declaration. "Do you *really* know and understand that Dragon Emperor? I've heard that many have lost their lives due to him. It goes without saying that many died before he became emperor, but even after he became one, people are dying left and right."

“But that’s not His Majesty’s fault!” Jill immediately replied.

“Even so. That’s what you’re being dragged into, no?”

Jill couldn’t claim that she would be fine. Worry filled the eyes of Billy, Charlotte, and her younger twin brothers.

“Are you against it then?” Jill managed to say.

Charlotte shook her head. “We can’t be, Jill.”

“You wanted this, and our country has accepted it,” Billy added. “Prince Gerald stated that he’d try to negotiate if we were against this engagement, but if we look at the situation in general, that’s a bad idea.”

“For lack of a better word, if we offer you to the Dragon Emperor, we can avoid war,” Rick said.

“It’s an extremely cost-effective move,” Andy added. “We’d be able to get the most of it and then some. We’re just struggling to nod our heads as your family.”

“But if it’s truly what you desire, then we’ll approve of this engagement,” Billy said. “Please, Jill. Tell us.”

No one was blaming her. No one was denying her. Only the worried gazes and affectionate voices of her family stood in her way.

“And you’re the Dragon Consort, of all things,” Billy added. “I haven’t a clue as to the legends of the Rave Empire, but as far as I know, they’re supposed to be the Dragon Emperor’s shield. None of them lived well, and all have fallen victim to unfortunate deaths.”

“I’m...sure a lot has happened, but—” Jill muttered.

“Can you confidently declare that they aren’t hiding anything from you because it would put them at a disadvantage? Can you state that you truly know what’s at stake?”

“But these stories are from long ago. There’s nothing like that between His Majesty and I,” Jill said.

“Can you truly, *seriously* claim that it’s all irrelevant to you two? You know

nothing, but you want us to be at ease and trust you?”

Jill fell silent and Billy followed suit.

“Jill, I heard that you swore to Hadis that you’d make him happy,” Charlotte said in a consoling tone.

“I did...” Jill replied.

“I think that’s wonderful. It made me so proud of you. It made it all worth it to raise you as a strong young lady. But there’s one more thing I’d like for you to keep in mind, my dear. This is a request from your entire family.”

Like a lullaby that the Dragon Consort had heard before, her entire family gently asked, “Will this make *you* happy, Jill?”



THE Cervel villa was created for receiving guests; there was plenty to explore. One of the most popular spots was the nearby lake. A trail was maintained so that one could walk around the lake, and the path was lit up at night. It had been a few minutes since the pair had left the balcony behind the villa and started walking to their destination.

The Kratos prince remained silent, conveying that he was reluctant to be in this situation. It was so serene that there wasn’t a ripple on the lake which reflected the brilliant moon. Natalie had grown tired of this; there wasn’t any sort of romantic mood or atmosphere to be found.

When Hadis had forced the prince to show her around, the royal had taken a similar attitude. He didn’t speak more than needed. The Kratos prince, renowned for his intelligence, may have simply been trying to gauge and see why exactly Natalie was here. Because they hadn’t made an official proposal, he couldn’t outright reject her. She could understand why he was so wary and bothered by her presence. However, this time around, the prince had invited her for a stroll.

“Can’t you be a little more attentive, you obstinate oaf?” Natalie muttered under her breath.

“Did you say something?” Gerald asked.

“Nothing at all. I simply thought you had wanted to talk with me,” Natalie replied with a graceful smile.

“Both you and I are only nuisances for the Cervel family meeting, aren’t we?” Gerald answered without turning around.

If he had expected the princess to be put off by his brusque attitude and curt explanations, she was being vastly underestimated. She scoffed.

“You simply wanted to separate me from the Dragon Consort,” Natalie said. “You didn’t want me to notice anything unnecessary.”

Gerald’s stride lost its rhythm ever so slightly, but he still refused to turn around. “Does the Dragon Emperor perhaps still have his apprehensions?” he asked. “I’m not planning on separating anyone. I’ve explained numerous times that I’ve got no issues with her marrying into the Rave Empire.”

“I heard you were giving up on her. My brother told me. Are you perhaps a bit broken-hearted about the whole affair?” Natalie asked.

“I’m glad that you understand. I would be even more grateful if you could show me some consideration about it.”

Gerald was a tough one; he wasn’t the type to be easily provoked.

“If I were to jump into this lake right this second and claim that you tried to kill me, who do you think the Dragon Consort will believe?” Natalie asked.

Gerald stopped and glanced at her dubiously. “What are you implying? If you’re trying to gain my attention by staging such a silly farce, your actions are the epitome of foolishness.”

“But aren’t you trying to do something similar to the Dragon Consort? You’re not attacking her but are *worried* for her. It’s easy for one to lower their guard when they’re met with overwhelming kindness. And if the Cervels are also cooperating, then I suppose my brother is at quite the disadvantage.”

Gerald stared straight at Natalie; he was clearly wary of her. Had she hit the nail on the head? Natalie’s smile grew broader. The Dragon Emperor, and by extension, the Rave imperial family, couldn’t be underestimated.

“Do you know why I came here?” she asked.

“To aim for the throne of the Crown Princess of Kratos,” Gerald replied. His response was concise and accurate, attesting to his sharp mind. “I’ll say it beforehand, but I don’t have any intentions of being with you,” he said. “I recommend you leave before you embarrass yourself.”

“You’re not popular at all, are you?”

“Huh?” Gerald’s eyebrows soared as his voice clearly took on a displeased tone. “Don’t suddenly change the subject. That comment is disjointed from everything else.”

The prince forgot to sound polite—perhaps he was far more emotional than initially anticipated.

“Oh, but it’s such an important topic,” Natalie replied. “I’m quite relieved. It seems like only women after your title and appearance would try to approach you.”

“Are you picking a fight with me?” Gerald asked.

“Isn’t that why women who don’t easily turn your way catch your eye? The Dragon Consort or myself, for example.”

Gerald blinked innocently several times—it seemed he wasn’t aware of it himself. *Seems like he’s got his cute sides*, Natalie analyzed calmly. It wasn’t unusual for a good-looking person of high rank who was also good at their work to have these tendencies. He was the polar opposite of Natalie, but he was fairly easy to read. Everyone was looking only at his surface—they were opposites, but they had the same worries.

“Also, your earlier answer was wrong, you know,” Natalie added. “I’m not here to become the Crown Princess of Kratos.” She was determined to carefully watch Gerald’s reaction; he would provide her with clues. “I’m here to save my no-good older brother,” Natalie finished.

For a split second, vigilance disappeared from Gerald’s obsidian eyes. He was genuinely surprised by this revelation. She gave an exaggerated shrug.

“Is that something for you to be so shocked about?” Natalie asked.

“...I was told that the Rave imperial family’s siblings weren’t on good terms.”

“We simply didn’t have interest in each other. But...I suppose without the Dragon Consort, we would’ve never resolved our misunderstandings, and our relationships would’ve been wretched. I was especially wary of Hadis and Vissel.”

“What made you stop?”

Gerald didn’t seem to be probing around for information; he seemed genuinely curious. This was a good trend. Now wasn’t the time to test each other or play tricks. Natalie made calm calculations in her head and gave an honest response.

“It’s not as though we’re currently on the best of terms,” she said. “Vissel especially tends to get on my nerves, and Hadis is as mysterious as ever. But they’re my good-for-nothing older brothers. That’s the conclusion that I’ve reached.”

“Good-for-nothing... Are you implying that they require your assistance?”

“Exactly so.”

Gerald furrowed his brows at her firm declaration. “I apologize for my impudence, but you don’t have any magic powers or a powerful person backing you. I can’t possibly imagine what you’d be able to do for them.”

“Being unable to do something and purposely not doing anything are two separate matters entirely.”

“Perhaps you’re just being used.”

“Why so? My name is Natalie Teos Rave. I’m the younger sister of the Dragon Emperor, Hadis Teos Rave. I’m not being used at all; I’m just a sister trying to do something for her older brother.” Natalie puffed out her chest with pride, and Gerald looked away, faltering at her words.

“I sympathize with a younger sister who must save her incompetent older brother,” Gerald said softly. His words were so quiet that they could’ve disappeared, blown away by the nighttime breeze. Gerald had a younger sister as well.

He turned his back towards Natalie because he felt that they’d talked for long

enough. He was quick to retreat, but he wasn't rude enough to leave Natalie behind. The princess let out a small sigh of relief—only then did she realize that she was a little nervous. *I see why even Hadis tried to use me to find his true intentions. He's quite a formidable adversary.*

Gerald was the prince of the kingdom of love. It was only natural that things wouldn't be so simple. Still, Natalie was able to make him lose his polite tone, and he wasn't expressionless anymore. The princess was no longer talking to an iron wall but a human. This was good enough. Love was a dangerously potent drug that could overcome everything. The most important bit was to never lose logic.

One must never be blinded by love.

I'm the princess from the empire of logic, after all.



JILL left the dining area and lazily gazed at the lake from her terrace. The lake near the villa was filled with happy memories from her childhood. She swam in it, traversed it on a small boat, and when it froze over in the winter, it was the ideal playground for kids. Now, it was just serenely reflecting the moon on its surface. On the other side of the lake were two people, likely Gerald and Natalie. Perhaps Jill should've gone to check on them out of worry, but she couldn't bring herself to do so.

She wanted to be alone.

And yet, three figures were currently in her room.

"Why're you guys here?" Jill asked. "Camila...and even you, Lawrence."

"I'm your guard, Jill," Camila answered. "It's only natural for me to be here, no?"

"I'm just here out of curiosity," Lawrence said.

"My, oh my! A man who approaches a lady who's lost in her thoughts is awful!" Camila smacked him.

"Can't you understand a man's feelings and position? I just can't honestly say that I'm here out of worry."

“You’re filled with ulterior motives, aren’t you?”

“I didn’t think my family would be against it,” Jill muttered. The cheery mood behind Jill died down with her words. She turned around and glared at the people there. “Are you satisfied now?” Jill grumbled.

“Huh?” Camila replied. “Oh dear, Jill. I’m an ally, you know?”

“Whose?”

“Uh, well...”

“An ally of the Rave Empire,” Lawrence chimed in. “In other words, the emperor’s ally, and not the homeland of the Dragon Consort.”

Camila gave Lawrence an uncomfortable glare. “Well, I’m a Knight of the Dragon Consort, so it can’t be helped, can it?” she replied.

“And I’m on the side of your homeland,” Lawrence said. “I’ll cooperate if it helps the Kratos Kingdom.”

“...Is it true that the Rave imperial army is gathering?” Jill asked. She knew that asking him was proof that she was at her weakest. Even so, she couldn’t resist doing so.

“It is,” Lawrence nodded. “They’re gathered at the duchies of Neutrah and Lehrsatz. I’m surprised. When did the Dragon Emperor manipulate the three dukes, I wonder?”

“Princess Elentzia, Prince Risteard, and Prince Vissel are now his allies. It’s not odd if he could do stuff like that,” Jill responded.

“I agree. You saved the Dragon Emperor and strengthened the Rave Empire,” Lawrence said. “And now, because of the King of South Kratos, we cannot fight in solidarity. And the ones who must pay that price first is your family.”

With a thud, Camila put her weight on the boy. “Your phrasing is unfair,” she pointed out. “You guys are the ones who kept picking a fight with us.”

“I’m just stating the truth,” Lawrence insisted.

“Camila, have you heard anything from His Majesty?” Jill asked.

Camila pursed her lips for a moment before she answered, “I haven’t.”

The knight's reply was likely ordered by Hadis, but she stared into Jill's eyes and gave an obvious fib—Camila had shown her sincerity and loyalty to the Dragon Consort.

Jill smiled to show she knew. "It's all right. I know. His Majesty is always full of secrets. He's always trying to test me." She turned away; she couldn't show her subordinate her pathetic expressions. "I thought that I didn't need to know about the past because what was most important is the present."

"...That line of thought isn't really like you," Lawrence observed.

Jill gripped the handrail tightly and said, "That's not true. I'm unexpectedly quite timid. Especially so when it comes to romance since I'm not good at it..."

The present was the most important. Destiny, which was passed down by silly mythology, didn't matter to her. But was she using that as an excuse? Had she acted like she was forgiving Hadis's secrets while fleeing from them? *But...I'm scared*. Jill hadn't forgotten the last time she found out a lover's secrets. Her pure, glittering love had been smashed to little pieces because she had gained knowledge of something unnecessary and ugly.

"It's still not too late," Lawrence whispered kindly. His tone was concerned.

"Do you want me to pull my bow back, Raccoon Boy?" Camila said coldly.

"That's not quite a threat," Lawrence answered. "It'll occur sooner or later anyways. The moment Princess Natalie set foot in our kingdom, we received news that someone from Rave had trespassed into Kratos. I don't know if it's a spy or an undercover agent, but either way, it's not *unrelated* to the emperor's visit, is it?"

"...We're not certain if it's under the orders of His Majesty," Jill replied.

"Do you really think so?"

"Enough," Camila said, gripping the dagger that she used to sharpen her arrowheads.

Lawrence laughed. "You're not acting like yourself either. Have I told her something unnecessary?"

"I don't think I can win against you in an argument, so I won't debate you any

further.”

“Camila, stop,” Jill ordered.

“You can’t, Jill,” Camila replied. “He’s just trying to stir you up and get you to doubt His Majesty.”

Jill knew that. And yet, she couldn’t help but lend an ear. “But you knew, didn’t you, Camila?” she countered. “I’m sure Zeke did too. Only I was...”

Only Jill was kept in the dark. Suddenly, a geyser rose from the middle of the lake, drowning out her words. Camila stepped forward and had Jill stand back.

“What is this, an enemy attack?!” the knight asked.

“Impossible,” Jill said. “No fool would do something so reckless against the Cervels.”

“Hiya there! Long time no see, Miss Dragon Consort!” a bright voice echoed through the darkness and the spray of water. “A tremendously handsome man like me looks even better when water drips down my face! I was a complete mess last time, so I decided to appear with a bit of flair today! Ah, and thanks for illuminating me. You’re so kind.”

This was the Cervels’ villa. A ray of light immediately shone down on the lake, trying to find the enemy. A number of guards swiftly rushed to the lake and surrounded him. The intruder, however, gave a nonchalant wave and a fearless smile. He didn’t seem to panic at all.

“Welcome to Kratos!”

It came as no surprise that he was so calm; this was Kratos king.

“The King...of South Kratos,” Jill murmured.

“I’ve been *dying* to meet you, Dragon Consort,” Rufus said with a smile as he stood in the middle of the rippling lake, his golden hair fluttering in the darkness.



RUFUS looked around the lake and shrugged his shoulders. “I suppose we really can’t have some time alone together ...” he sighed.

“Jill, stand back,” Billy ordered as he came out onto the terrace.

Charlotte grabbed her shoulders and gently drew her back. As Jill stepped behind them, Lawrence and Camila followed suit.

“Ah, it’s certainly been a while, Count Cervel!” Rufus said cheerfully. “You seem to be doing well. I’d love to have a match with you.”

“We’ve got no blade to point at the king, Your Majesty,” Bill replied. “And what brings you here today? Did you contact us beforehand?”

“That’s a rather improper thing to say. Heed your tongue. This is *my* kingdom. I should be allowed to appear as I please.” The king’s obsidian eyes blazed boldly like a beast’s while Billy placed his hand on his chest and bowed his head.

“Indeed, you’re correct,” Billy said. “Forgive me.”

“Don’t worry about it. The one at fault is my spiteful son. Isn’t that right, Gerald?”

Gerald rushed forward with Natalie and gave a stern glare as his father glanced at him. “...What are you here for?” Gerald growled.

“To have this returned to me,” Rufus replied.

Like a magician, the king extended his arm, and a golden, glittering object was in his hand.

What...is that? Jill wondered.

Rick and Andy approached the group from behind and shouted, “Father, the hall we were going to use for tomorrow’s signing has been ransacked!”

“The seals and the spells are all a mess! Sis’s engagement is...”

The twins noticed the king above the lake and gulped.

“The Great Seal...” Lawrence murmured with a click of his tongue.

Jill was stunned while Rufus gave a hearty laugh.

“I heard you were going to approve of the marriage between the Dragon Consort and the Dragon Emperor!” said Rufus. “I’d love to be involved in all this!”

“Lady Jill Cervel will marry the Rave Emperor,” Gerald said firmly. “It’s already been decided.”

Rufus gave a sidelong glance at his son as he twiddled the gold Great Seal in his fingers. “Oh, so you’re just giving away the Dragon Consort to the Dragon Emperor? You’re just going to back away from all this? You’re my son, and yet you’re so pathetic.”

“It’s far more preferable than having you go after Lady Jill.”

Astonished, Jill turned towards the crown prince. His words struck a chord with her like never before.

But Rufus only laughed at his son’s declaration. “I see. Unfortunately for you, my son, *I’m* the king here. Of course, if you can convince me, I don’t mind stamping the Great Seal, but...”

The smile faded from Rufus’s face. With a deafening roar that drowned out any other sounds, a storm of silver magic power suddenly rained down from the skies. Rufus gracefully flipped and landed on the edge of the lake. A golden gaze appeared from above, brightly glittering like stars.

“Your Majesty!” Jill gasped.

The emperor must’ve noticed the ruckus as Zeke came dashing out from a different direction.

“Why don’t you just stop with this farce?” Hadis said in a low voice, his gaze like flecks of ice.

Rufus grinned. “Ah, Dragon Emperor. I’ll deal with *you* next time. My work here is done.”

Rufus stood up with the Great Seal in hand as a torrent of magic came from below. He was planning to teleport. *He’s taking the Great Seal with him! This is bad!* Jill stepped on the handrail when she noticed a shadow rush to the king’s side.

“I look forward to meeting you ag—” Rufus started.

“Natalie!” Hadis shouted.

Even Rufus was surprised by the sudden appearance of the princess. He’d

already started to teleport, but Natalie clung onto Rufus's arm as she was surrounded by the vortex of magic. Hadis immediately turned pale and extended his hand towards his sister—he could still make it in time. But Natalie turned around and smiled.

"I believe in you...Brother," she said.

Hadis froze as he stopped himself from aiding his sister. That moment of hesitation was all it took. Natalie and Rufus disappeared without a trace, and everything turned quiet once more, like a calm after the storm.

"Princess...Natalie..." Jill murmured before she snapped back to her senses. "Lawrence, the King of South Kratos resides in his usual residence, doesn't he?"

"Y-Yeah," Lawrence nodded. "He should be in his palace on the Aegle Peninsula..."

"I'll head there to save Her Highness Natalie immediately! We need to retrieve the Great Seal too..."

"There's no need," a quiet voice echoed from a short distance away.

Thinking they'd misheard, everyone turned to the owner of the voice. Jill was no exception.

"Your Majesty?" she asked.

Was it because they had just been arguing? Hadis descended upon the place where Natalie and Rufus disappeared, looking like a completely different person. *I have a really bad feeling about this...* Hadis slowly turned towards Jill and gave a gentle smile as though he was being strangled by soft silk.

"Jill, come here," Hadis said softly.

"Huh?" Jill asked.

"Let's go home. Back to Rave."

"What?! What are you saying? Princess Natalie has been taken and we've lost the Great Seal! The engagement between us is..."

"Exactly. The king has rejected our engagement and has taken Natalie as hostage. This is a declaration of war from Kratos."

Jill tried to talk, but she gulped and fell silent.

“Please wait, Your Majesty,” Billy stepped in. “I believe that your decision is far too premature.”

“Who has given you permission to speak?” Hadis spat coldly, acting like the Dragon Emperor he was. He turned to his knights. “Zeke, Camila, prepare to head home.”

Without waiting for a reply from a grimacing Zeke, Hadis walked towards the villa from the lake.

Gerald raised his voice behind the emperor. “If this is a joke, I don’t find it funny, Your Majesty,” he said. “Are you planning on abandoning the princess?”

“Of course not,” Hadis replied. “I’ll save her, of course. She’s my precious younger sister.”

“Then why are you planning on returning home?! And you even said that this was our declaration of war! It’s true that the king has acted, and I’ll apologize as many times as needed! But surely, even *you’re* aware of how the king isn’t in his right mi—” Gerald stopped in his tracks and cut his own words short as he realized the truth. Hadis continued ahead. “It can’t be... Are you planning on using Princess Natalie?” he asked.

Hadis continued to march straight towards Jill.

“Are you planning on using your younger sister as the reason to start a war?!” Gerald exclaimed. “Answer me, Dragon Emperor!”

“Jill,” Hadis said, completely ignoring the prince shouting behind him. He stood in front of his consort and extended his hand. “Let’s go home. Unfortunately, we’ve got no reason to stay here.”

Jill stared at her husband’s hand. Her lips dry with nervousness, she forced herself to speak. “We must retrieve Princess Natalie and the Great Seal. This being a declaration of war is a bit too much of an exaggeration.”

It must be. It has to be. I want him to smile and say so. Hadis’s words were correct. The Kratos King had gotten in the way of it all—Jill and Hadis’s engagement was supposed to be the first step towards peace between the two

nations. In other words, the king had rejected peace. *But we can still take it all back. I'm sure of it.*

"I-I'm sure my mother and father will cooperate," Jill insisted. "And Prince Gerald will too! We just need to work together! There's no need for us to fight. So please..."

"And I'm supposed to lend a hand to solve Kratos's internal strife? You've got to be kidding me," Hadis snarled.

What was currently rustling? Was it the treetops or the confusion in her heart?

"They can fight all they like," Hadis continued. "It's got nothing to do with me or the Rave Empire. Nothing good will come out of siding with either of them. In fact, if they exhaust their resources with this conflict, I couldn't be happier."

"B-But...our engagement..." Jill mumbled.

"We can simply bring this up again with whoever is the victor, Jill. We can't give any further concessions, and Natalie's safety is at stake."

"Exactly! If we mobilize the army to save Princess Natalie, it'll..."

It'll become war. Weren't they going to make peace for her? But Hadis must've known that Jill's family was against the engagement. Only Jill was oblivious to it all and blissfully dreamed about a happy future. But if she asked these questions now, she wouldn't be able to turn back.

Jill clenched her fists and looked up. "I'm going to go save Princess Natalie! Even if I have to do it alone. And I'll take back the Great Seal and marry you! That shouldn't be a problem! Am I wrong?!"

Hadis gave a small sigh. But it wasn't his usual sigh that conceded everything to his wife and allowed her to do as she pleased—no, it was one filled with disappointment. He gave an obviously forced smile that made him look like an exam proctor.

"Are you making that decision as the Dragon Consort? Or as Jill Cervel?" he asked.

"As both!" Jill declared. "They're both me! So—"

“You’re lying.” Hadis’s cruel claims made it sound like he was certain. “You choose your homeland and family over me. I knew it. I knew that would happen.” An expression of irritation towards his dull-wittedness and contempt danced on his beautiful lips. “You’re the one who told me to become a wonderful Dragon Emperor,” he said.

Jill had wished for it. The emperor’s words were like a blade against her throat, telling her to take responsibility for her desires.

“I will not allow the Dragon Consort to be involved with this internal conflict. I won’t permit it,” Hadis said.

“I don’t mind!” Jill insisted. “Even without your approval, I’ll—”

“Then you’re no longer my Dragon Consort.”

Hadis’s declaration was abrupt. It was just a tit-for-tat exchange, but it felt like the ground had opened up beneath Jill’s feet. She felt sick, as though her world had been flipped upside down, and she couldn’t process those words. She didn’t want to. Her lips quivered. But something welled up from the corners of her eyes. She still couldn’t understand what the emperor had just said, and yet her emotions were apparent.

There was no need for a Dragon Consort who chose to protect her homeland over the Dragon Emperor. It was an axiomatic logic—logic that had no love.

That’s a lie. This isn’t it. Jill couldn’t speak. She’d forgotten how to breathe like a fish deprived of water. Hadis must’ve known. He had to have known. That was the kind of person that he was.

She wanted to believe in it, but Hadis no longer even formed a smile as he dropped his proffered hand.

“You’re no longer my fiancée,” Hadis spat bitterly. “You’re nothing to me now. This is goodbye.”

“You monster... Everything you’ve been saying is so one-sided!” Rick yelled. “*You’re* the one who dragged Sis into your mess!”

“We won’t let you leave after you’ve revealed that you want to start a war!” Andy added.

“Rick! Andy! Stop!” Billy shouted.

But the twins didn’t listen and pounced on the emperor. Zeke and Camila stepped in to protect their master. Rick threw his dagger, which grazed Hadis’s cheek. A sliver of blood trickled down the emperor’s face. Hadis closed his eyes somberly, then opened them once more.

“You raised your hand against me,” Hadis said. “That’s the deciding factor.”

In the next moment, the twins were overpowered by the Dragon Emperor’s magic and fell to the ground. Hadis raised his chin as he emanated his magic, overwhelming his surroundings with his pressure and violently forcing people to kneel. He had the gaze of a ruler. Lawrence, Billy, and Charlotte, who stood by Jill, all went down, and even Gerald, who came rushing over, went on his knees. Camila and Zeke, who remained standing, looked troubled as they froze in place. Jill watched the entire scene unfold in front of her eyes. She didn’t move an inch and she couldn’t blink.

I feel like I’m dreaming. I think I had a dream like this before. The emperor from the empire of the Dragon God who protected logic used his overwhelming power to crush love into pieces.

“I kneel to my wife,” Hadis said.

Jill had heard that phrase so many times in the past, and she still felt like she was dreaming.

“But I won’t kneel to anyone else,” Hadis claimed. “Jill, this is your last chance.”

Maybe everything until now was a dream. And if so, how cruel this dream had been.



“Come,” Hadis said.

The person she loved extended a hand towards her and smiled, yet she didn’t expect her heart to ache so much.

“I...cannot,” Jill replied.

And she had to reject his offer.

“How can I go with you when you’re practically threatening me to?” she asked. “Please release everyone right now. We can still talk this out, Your Majesty. Please!”

Hadis laughed and lowered his arm. “Zeke, Camila, let’s go. We’ll rendezvous with the others before we’re surrounded.”

“Your Majesty, we’re...” Camila started.

“You’re both the Knights of the Dragon Consort, but we’re in the middle of an enemy kingdom. If you don’t want to die, I recommend you resign within the Rave Empire.”

“You’re Majesty, wait—” Jill said.

“Don’t, Lady Jill. Don’t go. The Dragon Consorts...” Gerald said as he grabbed her wrist. His grip was weak, and Jill could’ve easily shrugged him off, but as she saw his desperation, she couldn’t look away. “In the past, every Dragon Consort has been killed by the Dragon Emperor!” Gerald shouted.

Jill whirled around and locked eyes with Hadis. For a split moment, she doubted him and tried to find an answer. That was likely her biggest mistake. It was as clear as day. Disappointment filled Hadis’s golden gaze.

“Goodbye, lady with amethyst eyes,” the emperor said with scorn as he turned on his heel.

At that moment, he undid the restraints he had on everyone else.

Gerald jumped up and shouted, “Count Cervel, don’t let the Dragon Emperor escape!”

“Andy, Rick!” Billy ordered. “Tell everyone in the Cervels’ domain! Restrain the Dragon Emperor!”

“Don’t let him return to the Rave Empire!” Charlotte shouted. “War will break out!”

Zeke jumped out at the Cervels’ orders and slashed down the arrows that flew towards Hadis’s back. Camila clicked her tongue and leaped out from the terrace. She approached the emperor’s side and turned around.

“Jill, we’re—” Camila started.

“Stop,” Zeke interjected. “Captain’s no longer the Dragon Consort. Any more than this and it’ll...be too cruel.”

Camila looked away to shake off her emotions. After she exchanged a nod with Zeke, the two stood in front of Hadis. The three suddenly floated in the air.

“They’re teleporting!” someone shouted.

“They can’t go far!” another yelled.

A spell to restrain magical powers appeared in the skies above. Angry roars and clashes of swords rang in the air as magic glimmered in the night. Jill wasn’t scared; she was all too familiar with the scene. And yet, she couldn’t move an inch. It was like her legs were frozen in place—her body refused to budge.

She could only place her hand over her heart and breathe. She felt so stupid and powerless. There were so many things that needed to be done. She didn’t think she made the wrong choice. There was a mountain of complaints that she wanted to say, but his simple “goodbye” was so cruel, so harsh, and so devastating that she felt like her heart was torn into shreds. She couldn’t do a single thing. *I told him that I wouldn’t give up. We just needed to keep our promise.*

But this was love.

She never knew.

And she wished that she had never known it.



A gravitational force suddenly surrounded her body as Natalie fell on her behind with a thud. A plush carpet had caught her fall, and she wasn’t in much pain. She had closed her eyes from the impact, and she gingerly opened them.

She saw leather shoes that were slightly dirty from the soil near the lake and a pair of slender legs.

“I didn’t think you’d come along,” a mocking, exasperated voice said from above.

The king crouched down to eye level with Natalie. The princess gulped nervously. The King of South Kratos was well-known even in the Rave Empire. He was the man who had discarded all his political duties and created a palace of gold in the Aegle Peninsula, located in the southern part of his kingdom. The king didn’t seem to care about age and gender when it came to indulging his obscene sexual tendencies within his palace. No one could’ve guessed that the slender, beautiful man in front of her had a bad reputation that was unbearable to hear. But Natalie could easily tell that one rumor held true at a glance; his dark pupils housed his cruel nature.

“Are you scared?” Rufus asked. “Then why did you tag along with me? Did you think you could gain the attention of my son with this act?”

“...That’s my line, king of the kingdom of love,” Natalie replied, trying to sound as confident as she possibly could. “What is the meaning of this? Why did you take the Great Seal?”

“I’m your elder, and a king, no less. Yet you answer my question with a question. It seems you lack discipline,” Rufus said with a smile as he stomped on the hem of Natalie’s dress. “I’m the one asking questions here, young lady. You keep up the pretense that you’re the princess of the Dragon God.”

“Oh?”

Natalie buried her fear and anxiety deep within her and used her pride to muster a dauntless smile as she peered into the depths of the king’s black pupils. Throughout her life, she was always called a dud of a princess. When it came to acting vain and proud, she wouldn’t lose to anyone in the imperial family.

“I’m the Dragon Emperor’s younger sister, dear *father-in-law*,” Natalie said.

Rufus twitched an eyebrow and refuted, “Father-in-law... I see...”

“You know who I am, do you not? And you surely know why I’m here.”

“I do. I’m the king of this country, after all.”

“Of course. You’re a wonderful actor whom even your son relies upon.”

Rufus’s smile faded completely, and only his icy gaze remained. *He looks just like that boorish prince. One could easily tell that they’re father and son.*

“If you kill me, your preplanned scenario will change, will it not?” Natalie continued. “If the Dragon Consort grows suspicious of you, she won’t be on your side. Then, at the very least, I expect a warm reception.”

“What an odd way to beg for your life,” Rufus said. “But the one who decides that is—”

A knock on the door cut the king off.

“Come in,” Rufus said, standing.

A woman hiding her face with a hood entered. She was wearing the clothes of a shrine maiden. “King Rufus, the Dragon Emperor has fled from the Cervels’ villa,” she reported.

Natalie slowly widened her eyes as Rufus glanced at the princess and grinned.

“Is the Dragon Consort with him?” the king asked.

“No,” the hooded woman replied. “Jill Cervel has remained. It seems her arrangement with the Dragon Emperor has been broken off.”

“Hahaha! That was unexpectedly quick. A little disappointing, really. And did the Dragon Emperor return home, dejected?”

“He’s headed elsewhere to mobilize the Rave imperial army. The House of Cervel is currently chasing after him.”

Rufus snorted. “Is he planning on starting a war? Is it for revenge because the Dragon Consort was taken from him? He’s unexpectedly quite small-minded—” Rufus suddenly turned towards Natalie as though he realized something.

The king was anything but a man of folly. Like the crown prince, he was sharp and intelligent. In addition, he was quite an actor. Natalie’s always sarcastic oldest brother informed her that while Rufus was still just a crown prince, he was renowned as a child prodigy. Her second brother reminded her over and

over again not to push her luck. And her third brother, who carried the weight of the empire on his back, said he was counting on her. He'd asked her to extract Kratos's true intentions.

And so Natalie calmly inquired, "What's wrong?"

"This is a bit *too* convenient for us," Rufus said. "Did you purposefully cut the Dragon Consort off? And if so, what for? As the pawn of the Dragon Emperor, perhaps you're privy to the details."

Natalie fell silent and smiled. She wasn't completely sure of all of Hadis's thoughts. But she knew that she was sent here for a purpose. Like a pebble that created a ripple across the surface of the serene water, she was there to notify the Dragon Consort of the plot that was hidden at the bottom of the lake. She wasn't there to whisper words that others wanted to hear—she was to use her silver tongue. Natalie was sure this would lead to saving her older brother, the Dragon Emperor.

Rufus gave a throaty chuckle. "Very well. Though it's by mistake, you're a guest who has arrived here. It would annoy me to no end to take you hostage or kill you, just as the Dragon Emperor desires and claims."

"I thank you for your wise decision, Your Majesty," Natalie replied.

"Make no mistake. You *will* die. Don't forget it. No one knows what the King of South Kratos will do, and it's not odd if he takes his anger out on you."

"Is that the scenario that you've written? You love your son, don't you?"

The king gave a hearty laugh at Natalie's honest thoughts. "Indeed!" Rufus cried. "Very much so! You're the first person in my life to ever understand me. It's truly a pity... I would've wanted you to call me 'Father' one day."

"Oh? But you never know. We don't know what the future holds."

"Oh, but I do. The Dragon Consort is no longer the shield that protects the Dragon Emperor. She is now instead the sword that teaches him about love."

Rufus turned on his heel and left, leaving a shocked Natalie behind. Once he disappeared from view, Natalie placed both hands on the ground. Her back was drenched in sweat. The fear had just hit her as her body started to tremble.

There's something else. Something that we don't know yet about the Dragon Consort... Natalie thought.

Was that the reason behind her brother's gamble? Would Jill be all right? Would she notice this ploy? Natalie wasn't sure. *But we'll be fine.* She clenched her trembling hands in front of her chest.

"Frida. Elentzia. Risteard... Vissel. Hadis," she recited her dear siblings' names.

The princes wouldn't wait. They made a promise. She would come home safe, and they would definitely come to save her. Her siblings had sworn it. And because of that promise, Natalie could still fight.

Chapter 5: Fighting Alone, One Must Choose

WHEN Jill awoke, everything had changed. It was only a continuation of the day prior, but it felt like her time until now had disappeared into thin air. Or had she simply returned from the land of dreams to reality?

“We’ve received confirmation that Princess Natalie is in the King of South Kratos’s palace,” Lawrence said. “If the king releases her during his audience with Prince Gerald today, we should be able to resolve this problem. Have we confirmed the exact location and status of the princess?”

“Rick said we should figure it out soon,” said Andy.

“I see. Then let’s confirm a few things beforehand. This is the most recent palace blueprint.”

Lawrence unfurled a diagram on top of the large desk. Sweat trickled down his neck. They were currently at the entrance to the south of Kratos, which had been blessed with long periods of sunlight. It was sweltering. It was currently summer, and even the magic air conditioner did little to ease the heat. A more luxurious inn would’ve had more equipment to keep the room cool, but they were currently trying to infiltrate a royal palace. Blending in with the crowd was prioritized over comfort.

“Our route may change a little based on the information that Prince Gerald brings, but I want you all to remember the route of infiltration and escape, as well as the location of the Great Seal,” Lawrence said, tapping the garden in the center of the palace.

The garden had no ceiling, but it had a large magic circle that acted as a roof. Jill had seen it for herself before.

Andy grimaced. “We’re having Rick confirm the location, but are we sure that this isn’t camouflage?” he asked. “The magic circle is just so flashy and blatantly out in the open. I can only think that it’s a trap.”

“It’s not at all odd. The King of South Kratos absolutely loves flashy things like

that, according to Prince Gerald. And just because it's in plain sight doesn't mean that we can break it easily. That's what I've heard, at least," Lawrence said.

"The Parrying Dagger of the Goddess is its core, after all," Andy replied.

Commonly known as the false Heavenly Sword in the Rave Empire, this weapon was called the Parrying Dagger of the Goddess in Kratos. Jill had no idea. The weapon had never been used for ceremonies and hadn't taken center stage since it was often overshadowed by the Sacred Spear of the Goddess. Even in Kratos, the Parrying Dagger wasn't widely known. It was similar to the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, a weapon which many had doubted existed.

This parrying dagger had been created from the Sacred Spear of the Goddess. Its power and origins were worthy of its title as it could easily protect the Goddess. Jill had personally experienced it herself.

"Even Prince Gerald might not stand a chance," Lawrence said. "In that case..."

"The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort would be able to beat it," Jill muttered.

Lawrence and Andy stopped their conversation and turned towards her. Propping her elbow on the chair's armrest and leaning her cheek against her hand, she continued, "His Majesty has the Heavenly Sword. In other words, only myself or His Majesty will be able to fight it. Am I wrong?"

She looked down at the golden ring glimmering on her left hand.

"I don't know when they'll strip me of this power," Jill said. "It's best to act while I can still use the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort."

"Sis..." Andy was uncharacteristically at a loss for words.

Jill forced a smile. "I phrased that poorly, I suppose. My apologies. But it's the truth."

She had become the Dragon Consort upon receiving the blessing from Dragon God Rave. It was a completely one-sided arrangement that didn't require her

approval. This also meant that her power could also be taken away at the God's will.

"Quite honestly, I'm not sure if I'm even the Dragon Consort right now," Jill explained. "It's all up to His Majesty."

"The Dragon Emperor hasn't been found yet," Lawrence replied calmly. "There are no signs of the Rave imperial army acting either. If you can talk with the Dragon Emperor once more before the army is mobilized, there's a chance that you can still get engaged as originally planned and return to the Rave Empire together. I think you can worry about that stuff later."

Jill couldn't help but chuckle. "Later, huh? This is rare. You're terrible at providing others with solace."

"I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't stomp all over my thoughtfulness."

"But His Majesty won't get caught. He's a master of fleeing and hiding."

Andy and Lawrence made funny faces at that revelation. Jill found their reactions a little humorous.

Currently, they were split up into two teams. Billy and Charlotte were searching for Hadis, who disappeared from the Cervels' villa. Jill's oldest brother and sister were carefully checking for any signs of movement around the border. Meanwhile, Gerald, Jill, and Lawrence used Andy and Rick as their liaisons to try to find a way to deal with the King of South Kratos and retrieve the Great Seal.

If they could take back the Great Seal and confirm Natalie's safety before Hadis contacted the Rave imperial army to start a war, Jill would win. She'd get engaged with Hadis as originally planned and all would return to normal. *Will it?* she thought.

"Sis... Putting the war and the King of South Kratos aside, are you really planning on marrying the Dragon Emperor?" Andy asked. When no reply came, he glanced at Lawrence. "Even if Sis returns to Kratos right now, she won't be called a rebel, will she?"

"Of course not," Lawrence replied. "And I doubt Prince Gerald has any intentions of labeling her as one. Personally, I'd warmly welcome her if she quit

being the Dragon Consort. I think it'd be fun to work under Prince Gerald with you, Jill."

Jill's gaze flicked back to the gold ring. "Even if I wanted to quit, I don't think I could," she said. "Maybe...even His Majesty can't do anything about it."

This theory made the most sense to her. She was told that the ring would never come off.

"The Dragon God... It's a contract between you and the God of logic," Andy said. "I don't think the God will allow you to turn your back on your promise."

"Jill... If there was a way to get rid of that ring, what would you do then?" Lawrence asked.

Until now, Jill was absentmindedly engaged in the conversation. It was all a bit fuzzy for her, as though there was a thick piece of glass between her and the rest of the room. But when she heard Lawrence's words, she blinked several times. *A way to quit being the Dragon Consort? A way to get rid of the gold ring. If such a method exists...*

"The Kratos Goddess?" Jill asked.

"The Goddess could do it," Lawrence agreed. "And our current situation presents the perfect opportunity. We're closing in on the Sacred Spear of the Goddess and the Parrying Dagger. I'm guessing that we could overturn your contract with logic."

Currently, the Parrying Dagger was sealing the Kratos Great Seal in an exaggerated manner. It was right in front of her.

"I did some research," Lawrence confessed. "When you gained the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, I looked a few things up about the consort. That's when I found out about your predecessor 300 years ago... And how the Dragon Consorts before you have all died."

"The Goddess seems to be awfully concerned with the Dragon Consort," Jill said.

"Sis, you shouldn't switch the topic at hand. It's pitiful to see," Andy chimed in.

“I see,” Jill smiled. “Do I look pitiful? I’m sorry. I’m just not used to stuff like this.”

“Since so many things happened, you’re just tired, Sis. You should rest a little. Once Prince Gerald and Rick return, I’ll call for you.”

“Then why don’t I prepare something delicious for you?” Lawrence suggested, trying to sound as cheerful as possible. “I’m sure now will be the only time where you get to relax a little.”

Jill accepted his kindness and nodded. “I’d be grateful for that, I suppose,” she said.

“We’re in the south, so we should enjoy their specialties. Fruits are especially delicious,” Lawrence said before turning to Andy. “Would you like anything, Andy?”

“Anything will do for me,” Andy replied. “To be quite honest, the Cervel domain doesn’t really produce the best crops.”

“Makes sense. The area around the Rakia mountains doesn’t have arable land suited for crops, and combined with that magnetic field...”

“Is that so?” Jill replied. “I never knew.”

Andy frowned. “You didn’t know? That’s because you haven’t been listening to your lectures, Sis. Our domain only has lush greenery because we’ve received the protection of the Goddess. The weather around the Rakia mountains is unpredictable.”

“In the Rave Empire...His Majesty produced excellent crops,” she countered quietly.

“Are you talking about the Neutrahl duchy? That’s at the foot of the mountains, and you were probably there during the best time of year,” Lawrence explained.

“I see...” Jill murmured. “It seems I haven’t been studious enough. I should probably start studying.”

“Sis... Are you really okay? I can’t imagine you having your nose in the books.”

“How rude. I’m just reflecting on my actions, though I may not look it. I’ve

been ignorant towards everything, and yet I became the Dragon Consort.”

Andy and Lawrence frowned as though they’d touched on a sensitive topic.

“I didn’t have enough resolve,” Jill continued. “I truly believe that.”

“Um...” Andy started. “I know it’s weird for me to be saying this, but you’re still only eleven, Sis. I think it’s normal. In fact, I think people were expecting too much from you, and I’m sure everyone else feels the same.”

“I’m not part of your family, but I agree,” Lawrence added. “And...you can still turn back.”

“Yeah... You’re right. I can still go back. I thought I truly understood, but I guess I didn’t,” Jill said as she looked outside the rectangular window. There were no dragons flying in the Kratos skies. She shifted her gaze as though fleeing from the blue welkin, pulled her legs atop her seat, and clutched her knees. “His Majesty is a wicked man,” she said. “I’ve been fooled. It’s frustrating.”

“Sis, then—”

“Either way, my task at hand won’t change. I must retrieve the Great Seal and shatter the magic circle made by the Parrying Dagger. I’ll rescue Princess Natalie. And I have to do both before His Majesty does anything.”

Even while she was hugging her knees, she was aware of what must be done.

“I’ve got my pride too,” Jill said. “And whatever happens afterwards... happens.”

She wouldn’t worry about any unnecessary stuff until then. The other two in the room nodded, looking relieved. *Seems like I was able to successfully form a smile.* Her thoughts were detached from her feelings. She was like a broken-hearted little girl, devastated by her loss.



“I’M glad to see you’re living in comfort,” Gerald said sarcastically.

“And it’s thanks to you,” Natalie said casually, ignoring his biting tone.

They were at the library within the palace of the King of South Kratos.

Numerous books filled the walls, and the shelves seemed to reach the ceilings. Genres included entertainment, education, and even scripture. It was a perfect place to kill some time.

Natalie was a bit reluctant to sit on top of the carpet while leaning on a cushion. She was used to sitting on chairs. A cool breeze passed through the hem of her skirt, making her feel uneasy. Her posture was indeed unladylike and shameless, but she was currently in the palace of the King of South Kratos. So what if she showed her legs in a place that wasn't her bedroom? She had to stop caring about the little things and show some courage, or she felt like she'd lose. And...she didn't mind seeing the prince carefully avert his gaze from her silk stockings.

"I've received permission from the King of South Kratos to take you out of here," Gerald said.

"Oh, is that so?" Natalie replied. "Thank you for your concern. But I'm sorry, can you wait until I finish reading this?"

"...Until you finish?"

"I'm currently reading a collection of folktales about the Goddess Kratos. It's a long series—32 volumes in total, to be exact. And I'm currently on the third volume, where the Dragon Consort has made a shield out of magic. Our differences in interpretation are laudable. The Dragon God rejected the Goddess's blessing to punish the humans, you say? We see it as your Goddess cursing us and our land, preventing even grass from growing."

"Are you taking that attitude with me while knowing the situation you're in?"

"I'm much more comfortable than the time the Rave imperial army took me as a prisoner for being regarded as a rebel."

"Is becoming a hostage a hobby of yours?"

It was almost addicting to see this prince continuously frown. *He's got such a beautiful face, yet he has a permanent wrinkle between his brows*, Natalie thought. Feeling pity for the prince, she closed her book.

"These differences pile up and create history and fate, I suppose," she said. "I feel for Jill. She must have it tough."

“If you feel that way, why don’t we quickly leave this place so that you can put her mind at ease?” Gerald asked.

“No. That would only raise your reputation, wouldn’t it?”

“That’s...not my intention,” Gerald said, suddenly trailing off awkwardly. But he managed to quickly take a deep breath and compose himself—this was one of his strong points. “I already have a plan to win back the Great Seal. There’s no reason for you to stay here. Unless you purposely became a hostage for the Dragon Emperor, who wants to start a war. In other words, I’ll have to determine this entire series of events as a farce.”

“Can I ask why you’re on such bad terms with your father?” Natalie asked.

“Why do you keep abruptly changing topics?!”

He’s clearly angry, but he immediately held himself back. I think that’s one of his good points too.

“At the very least, I feel like your father cares for you,” Natalie said.

How odd. As though he suddenly lost all emotions, Gerald recoiled from her accusation.

“You must be kidding me,” Gerald said.

For whom was the scorn that formed on the corners of his lips directed towards? Natalie wasn’t sure.

“I understand that you don’t want to come with me,” he said. “I’ll tell Lady Jill that you staged a false kidnapping as the Dragon Emperor’s accomplice. Is that fine with you?”

“You may do as you please,” Natalie replied.

“You’ll regret it.”

“You sound like a sore loser. Could you lend me a hand? I must return to the guest room.”

She brushed the hem of her dress and stood up. Gerald knitted his brows, but he didn’t ignore her. Instead, he grabbed her shoes and laid them on the floor. He took the book from Natalie and placed it down. He lent the lady his arm and

shoulder and helped her wear her shoes. His actions were fluid and perfect.

“Thank you,” Natalie said. “You’re a kind young man.”

“Why do you say that so abruptly?” Gerald asked.

“You’re used to this. Me, I’m not used to it at all. You’ve been very helpful.”

“I don’t quite understand you. You could be killed, you know.”

“By you?”

Natalie meant to joke around, but she trembled as his gaze squarely met hers. A chill scraped its way down her spine. Was this an odd feeling of déjà vu? Or something else?

“I’ve got no reason to kill you,” Gerald said simply.

If he had a reason, would he kill her? His dull, obsidian eyes were hard to read, and Natalie couldn’t find it in her to ask. With a clack of his shoes, Gerald left the library first. *I might die soon...from the nervousness*, Natalie thought.

The princess picked up the book and clutched it to her chest as she returned to the guest room that she was given. She had refused to be served tea, but she was sure that she was under strict surveillance. Natalie had thought that she wouldn’t be killed just yet, but she was still required to hone her senses when she simply cracked open a book.

She was just at the part where the first Dragon Consort was about to die. To protect the Dragon Emperor, the consort had stepped in front of the Sacred Spear. Once the consort had covered for the Dragon Emperor, he had pierced her from behind with his Heavenly Sword.

The poor consort had been used by the Dragon Emperor as his shield. There was a description explaining that this was because the Dragon Emperor couldn’t understand love.

“...It must be a lot,” Natalie murmured.

A piece of paper fell from between the pages. She made sure to keep her features schooled as she picked it up. She knew that it wasn’t a bookmark. There were no words, just a marked diagram of the palace and a time. It indicated midnight. At a glance, it seemed like an invitation to a secret

rendezvous, but the paper was still new. This was clearly a message. Natalie felt a little relieved; help was on its way. *But why would they choose the King of South Kratos's private room? Why was this place specifically selected? Did they think they could catch him off guard if she was right under his nose?*

Natalie then remembered that Gerald had touched the book when he was assisting her with her shoes. This wasn't a rescue plan; it was a trap.

"That's more like it," she murmured.

It was apparently decided that it wouldn't be odd if Natalie's corpse was in the King of South Kratos's private quarters. *So much for having no reason to kill me. What a liar.* Gerald was wary of Natalie. He knew Jill wouldn't abandon her, which meant the Dragon Consort wasn't his yet. *I won't let things go your way.*

I'll be okay. She trusted Hadis and her siblings to come save her. Natalie was sure of it. She placed the scrap of paper between the pages and let it stick out so that anyone could see it, even if the book was closed.



EVERYTHING was going well. There were no delays with the plan. Prepared for every possible contingency, it was his job to corner them one step at a time.

The room within the building with stone walls, located in the back of the narrow alleyways, was under the shade. Magic was used to blow cool air into the room, but it was still hot. He removed his mantle, which had shielded him from the sun, and settled down. His excellent subordinate brought in a glass of water. The first floor of this narrow, tall building was occupied by a kitchen and a dining table. No one else was present and he freely took a sip of water.

"How is Lady Jill?" Gerald asked.

"She's sleeping," Lawrence replied. "Her younger brother is looking after her, so please be at ease. Is it going as planned?"

"It is."

As planned, the prince had come back with some information. Upon hearing Gerald's implications, Lawrence brought two chairs over. They faced each other at a corner of the rectangular table and confirmed their plans.

“First, we’ll take the Great Seal,” Lawrence said. “And you will rescue Princess Natalie. This is how we’ll proceed.”

“Fine by me,” Gerald replied. “I’ve made the necessary preparations all according to your script. I find you to be a bit too meticulous, however.”

“It’s vital to act the part. What will you do if the Dragon Consort prioritizes Princess Natalie?”

“That won’t happen. She’s an excellent soldier raised by the Cervels. If she knows that the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort is the only item that can definitively retrieve the Great Seal, she will undoubtedly head there. Or has she voiced any objections? Is she starting to grow suspicious?”

“No, that’s not the case. She seems to agree with the plan as well, but...” Lawrence trailed off awkwardly.

“Things are going a bit too well,” Gerald finished.

“Correct,” Lawrence agreed. “And it’s mostly thanks to the Dragon Emperor. But to see them follow our scenario so closely is a little...”

“Indeed, it makes you a bit uneasy.”

The two had expected to use more time and resources, but the Dragon Emperor had easily tossed the Dragon Consort aside, progressing this plan to an almost absurd degree. Something felt off. The result was that everything had gone *exactly* as planned, but that made them anxious.

“The unfortunate thing is that we lost sight of the Dragon Emperor,” Lawrence noted. “If even the Cervels can’t capture him, there might be a chance that he’s returned to the Rave Empire...”

“No, he’s definitely still within this kingdom. Half his magic power is sealed. Combined with the magnetic field of the Rakia mountains, it’s impossible to think that he could simply teleport back to Rave.”

In peak shape, the emperor could’ve teleported himself, but he even had the two Knights of the Dragon Consort to worry about. Since the emperor had taken the knights with him, it was unlikely he was planning on teleporting back to Rave.

“Which is why his people will come for him,” Gerald continued. “There’s no way that the trespassers that simultaneously entered from the south and north are unrelated to this matter. The Dragon Emperor should get in contact with either of them.”

“I’ve received news from the north that they’re about to capture this intruder,” Lawrence said. “The one in the south is running around the ocean on a boat and has shown no signs of docking. It apparently has some large cargo onboard.”

“A diversion, or they plan on staying at sea until they can meet with the Dragon Emperor... Either way, the biggest problem is that we have to split the Cervels’ forces. Does Lady Jill know anything?”

“No... It seems like she really doesn’t know anything about anything,” Lawrence said grimly.

Gerald grimaced as he remembered how haggard Jill looked. “It’s what the Dragon Emperor does,” he said. “He will never understand the feelings of the Dragon Consort...and love. As usual.”

“I don’t really like to rely on that concept much, but I’ll leave that be for now,” Lawrence said. “The Dragon Emperor’s current actions are all nothing but logical, after all.”

To put matters into perspective, the Kratos king had interrupted the exchange just as they were about to negotiate peace. It was impossible to remain peaceful in this situation, and with the abduction of the Rave princess, it was foolish to naively believe there was no animosity present. Yet, despite these obviously unfair circumstances, the Dragon Consort chose to believe in her home kingdom. It was logical for the Dragon Emperor to cast her aside. He had made the correct decision.

However, Gerald and Lawrence had expected the emperor to endure it all for the sake of his adorable Dragon Consort. They had assumed that Hadis would tolerate it until he’d hit his absolute limit and had ample evidence on his side. Meanwhile, Gerald and Lawrence would destroy the couple’s relationship to the point where there was no turning back. They could never get back together. This was the scenario that Lawrence had envisioned, and he never expected

Hadis to cut off Jill so easily.

“Maybe it’s because I came into contact with them in Rave,” Lawrence said. “That emperor doesn’t fit my vision of the Dragon Emperor—the embodiment of logic. He glared at me with everything he had when I fooled around with Jill. That’s emotion, not logic.”

“Both marriages and engagements are contracts,” Gerald replied. “It’s reasonable to glare at a man who tries to go after one’s bride.”

“Ah, so that’s how you interpret it. Hm... I don’t quite understand the difference between love and logic,” Lawrence mused.

“Wait, what *did* you do to Lady Jill in Rave? You better not have done anything insolent.”

“Oh, and that reaction is love, then?” Gerald glared at Lawrence, who sighed. “I’ll stop. If I keep thinking about the concepts of the Gods, I can’t win. I’m just a lowly human working with the information I’ve got in front of me. Currently, our plan is proceeding smoothly. But don’t let your guard down.”

“I agree... And is Lady Jill still planning on being the Dragon Consort?”

“She’s still confused and trying to come to a decision, but I think she’ll quit. I’m not sure if she’ll quit first, or if she’ll be forced to quit before that. That’s logical, isn’t it? Since she’s been rejected by the Dragon Emperor, she can’t go back.”

Gerald agreed. “Then that’s more than enough.”

“Oh, but you should still act like a man who has given up on her. Don’t speak ill of the Dragon Emperor. Even if we’re planning on taking advantage of her broken heart, timing is everything.”

“Is that how things work?” Gerald asked.

“It is. We should go about this carefully. Oh yeah, when you told her about the Dragon Consorts being killed by the Dragon Emperor, that was some superb acting on your part.”

Gerald knitted his brows even more. For some reason, Lawrence’s words left a bad taste in his mouth. “I only told her the truth,” he said.

Lawrence paused for a moment. "I see. Well then, that's also good."

"Prince Gerald! Lord Lawrence! May I speak for a moment?!" Rick called as he jumped in from the window without making a sound.

The older brother of the twins had been tasked with guarding Gerald by his family. He had the role of claiming that he found where Natalie was, but he made his appearance much sooner than expected.

"Is something the matter?" Lawrence asked.

"It seems like someone's here from the Cervels," Rick explained. "I thought I'd stop by...but did you see anyone?"

Gerald furrowed his brows. Before he could ask, the door opened with a clatter.

"My, oh my. Rick, you noticed me, didn't you?" said a soothing voice.

Gerald and Lawrence grew tense as Charlotte Cervel entered with a smile. The prince rose from his seat out of surprise.

"I believe you were searching for the Dragon Emperor with Count Cervel," Gerald said. "Has something happened?"

"I thought I'd help you out here," Charlotte replied. "You don't even have anyone to prepare your meals, do you?"

"Meals...?"

The lady's comments were so detached from the current situation that Gerald was at a loss for words. Charlotte smiled and showed them the goods that she'd been carrying.

"I even already did the shopping," she said. "Why don't I make you all dinner?"

Rick ran his hand through his hair and sighed while Lawrence froze with a smile plastered on his face. All the while, Charlotte placed the groceries on the table in the kitchen.

Gerald clicked his tongue. "Lady Cervel! Do you understand the situation we're in?!"

“That’s no good, Prince Gerald,” Charlotte noted. “You’re nervous. You’ll lose to the Dragon Emperor at this rate.”

The lady’s scolding tone was calm as she laid out the ingredients on the table. Gerald once again knitted his brows.

“If you’re talking about Princess Natalie, there are no issues in her rescue,” the prince replied.

“That’s not who I’m referring to. Your heart aches when you see Jill looking so hurt.”

Gerald was confused for an entirely different reason this time. Charlotte smiled.

“I’m worried that you’re coddling her,” she went on. “Andy, Rick, and even Billy have a tendency to do so.”

“I apologize, but I haven’t the faintest clue what you’re on about,” Gerald remarked. “It’s as clear as day that she’s deeply hurt by the recent series of events. I’m not like the Dragon Emperor, who doesn’t bat an eye upon seeing her look so devastated.”

Lawrence placed a hand on Gerald’s chest, signaling that the prince said too much. Gerald frowned but backed down without a word. Anything he said now would sound like an excuse.

“If you’ve got any apprehensions, it would be doing us a great service if you’d let us know,” Lawrence said, quickly shifting the conversation.

Charlotte offered a faint smile. “Such complicated matters are far beyond me. Now then, Jill. Come on out. Stop your hiding. Andy, you too,” she said toward the staircase, surprising the others.

Andy shrugged. “I wasn’t hiding,” he insisted. “Sis woke up, so we tried to go downstairs, but we saw you, Mother. And since you guys were talking about some complex issues, I didn’t know when I should jump in.”

“Mother, why are you here?” Jill asked.

The Dragon Consort hadn’t heard much of Gerald and Lawrence’s conversation. She walked down the stairs and seemed more curious about her

mother's presence.

Charlotte smiled at her children and said, "You're trying to outwit the King of South Kratos, aren't you? I'm sure you're anxious by yourselves, and it didn't seem like I'd be of much help back home."

"But Father is chasing after His Majesty," Jill replied. "He needs your strength."

"Oh yes, I almost forgot. We found a lead on the Dragon Emperor's location."

Jill's eyes went wide, and Gerald gently clenched his fists. *This is a bit too quick... I thought we could give her more time to make a decision... Or maybe this is for the best*, he thought. Gerald had wanted to give Jill plenty of time for her to find reasons to quit being the Dragon Consort. That would ensure that her decision would be more resolute, and above all, she'd become accustomed to being surrounded by her family. Humans were creatures of habit and preferred familiarity. However, in terms of strategy, it was also effective to pressure her *because* she was wavering.

Charlotte gave him a knowing look as if she saw through his hesitation. "To be precise, we have a lead on a different squad we believe will come into contact with the Dragon Emperor," she said. "It's the intruder from the north. It's not odd if they've already met with the emperor, and my husband is currently preparing to surround the area."

"In contact with a different squad..." Jill muttered. "What about the Rave imperial army?!"

"They haven't moved yet. Don't worry." Charlotte gently stroked her daughter's head. Jill breathed a sigh of relief. "It's a race against time," she said. "Prince Gerald said he found Princess Natalie's location."

"Is that true?!" Jill exclaimed. "Then we'll carry out the plan..."

"Yes. We might need a bit more confirmation, but by tonight, it should all be... What do you think, Prince Gerald?"

Gerald knitted his brows, but upon seeing everyone focused on him, he sighed. At the very least, it seemed Charlotte felt that they should act quickly. While there was no reason to agree with her idea, there was also no reason to

be vehemently against it. And if he was working under the pretense of having no ulterior motives, he would undoubtedly act in this situation.

Gerald felt like he understood why Charlotte had her misgivings. She was telling him not to lose sight of his goal by caring for Jill. There was no right answer for this situation.

“Then let’s do one final confirmation,” Gerald said. “It’s vital to be wary, of course, but if the Dragon Emperor has been found, that’s all the more reason to quickly rescue Princess Natalie. It will be troublesome if she’s used as a reason to start a war.”

“Prince Gerald...thank you,” Jill said.

“I’ve done nothing to receive your gratitude.”

It was a curt response, even by his standards. But as Jill raised her lowered head, a faint smile flitted across her lips.

“That reply is very in character for you,” she said.

For a split second, Gerald felt like something had passed between them, but Charlotte quickly clapped her hands, shattering the moment.

“Now that that’s decided, it’s time to fill our stomachs,” she said. “Prince Gerald, Lord Lawrence, would you please come up with the final plan? Meanwhile, Andy, Rick, help me make dinner. I don’t mind where you go, Jill, but you mustn’t come near the kitchen.”

“Why not?!” Jill demanded.

“Because you’ll be sneaking in some bites.”

Everyone laughed at Charlotte’s response, and even Gerald felt the corners of his mouth tug upwards before he immediately became stern once more. If they were to act tonight, he would have a mountain of work to do. *I don’t know what plan would win her favor.*

Indeed, there was no right answer. How could there be in a play of plundering another’s love?



IT was only insurance. The Cervels' security was tight and firm. It would've been difficult to break through, and the area was filled with traps. It wouldn't be odd if someone betrayed him again either. But Rave had loudly nagged that they were going to meet at a certain point and rushed him, while Zeke and Camila headed there as though that was their only plan. It became a pain to think about it all, so he just tagged along. And so, he never thought about who would be meeting him.

"As I'd expected, you look awful," Risteard said immediately upon meeting Hadis.

The dense foliage fluttered under the refreshing breeze. There was something oddly mystical about Hadis's older brother. His mere presence eased the tension, and even within the dimly lit mountain environs, he felt like a bright light.

"I'm glad I came," Risteard grumbled. "Look at this sorry mess you're in. Did you eat properly? Have you taken any breaks?"

"Goodness..." Camila sighed. "Prince Risteard looks like a god of salvation to me."

"Yeah..." Zeke agreed. "I thought I would die from suffocation, but it's like a heavy weight has been lifted off my shoulders."

Camila and Zeke had remained silent until now, but they spoke in an exhausted manner. Risteard scowled and turned to his subordinates behind him—his Dragon Knights—and ordered them to make preparations to take a break. It was only then that the emperor realized that they had barely eaten or drank anything since they fled from the Cervel villa. He felt Rave breathe a sigh of relief inside of him. When he blinked several times, Risteard glared at him.

"What's wrong?" his brother demanded. "This battle has progressed just how you expected. You should look more confident."

"You never said a word about coming...Brother," Hadis replied.

"You need someone to slip through the defenses of Chris Cervel, welcome you—a handful of an emperor—and serve as your adviser. Only I could do something like that."

Hadis felt a hint of irritation when Risteard spoke so arrogantly, but his cheeks couldn't move. He'd been thinking about what he needed to do this entire time.

"I...didn't ask you to," Hadis mumbled.

"Hmph," huffed Risteard. "Then why are you looking down? Look up."

Hadis fell silent.

"Good grief. You made this decision, so you should be a bit more confident about it. This is a bad habit of yours," Risteard scolded.

"I...can't believe you can say that to me right now." Hadis meant to say it with hatred, his voice dripping with sarcasm. And yet, his older brother didn't look at all offended.

"Don't hesitate. You're in the right," Risteard said frankly, his words piercing Hadis's chest. "You didn't get involved in Kratos's internal conflict with Lady Jill as your excuse. To protect the lives of the citizens of the Rave Empire, you didn't try to win the favor of the Dragon Consort. You weren't swept away by love, and you didn't forget logic. You're a splendid Dragon Emperor."

"...It's not like I couldn't act as Jill wished," Hadis said. "I could've not mobilized the army, pretended not to notice anything, and be used by Prince Gerald. I could've ruined the King of South Kratos and..."

"And be treated with disdain as a convenient Dragon Emperor who would do anything to win over the Dragon Consort? You must be joking. This won't be a one-time thing, and you know it. Undoubtedly, this will affect our future, and it will be a much more wretched battle than what we have right now. Lady Jill would've suffered even more, stuck between her home and you."

"But we're all just assuming things. To see everyone as the enemy? I might just have a persecution complex," Hadis muttered.

"Don't be a fool. Even Brother Vissel and I had our concerns. I'm sure of it. The King of South Kratos is obviously our enemy, but so are Prince Gerald and the Cervels. They're all against us," Risteard said firmly. His confidence was astounding. "You didn't try to fool Lady Jill. It might've been cruel to have her choose between her family and you, but as the Dragon Consort, it's a necessary decision to make. How you interact with her family can be discussed after she

makes her choice.”

Who did he think he was, acting so hoity-toity? Hadis was growing more ticked off by the second.

“But...since you started this series of events, you drew the short end of the stick,” Risteard mumbled. He sighed as though he understood what Hadis was going through. “It must’ve been tough for you,” he continued. “You did well, enduring it all.”

He even went as far as extending his hand and patting the top of Hadis’s head.

“We’ve set up the tents!” a knight reported, causing Risteard to turn his back towards the emperor.

“You should rest for now. Ah, Frida had me bring some cookies for you...” Risteard started before he yelped. “Ow!”

“You piss me off! You talk all high and mighty! You don’t even know how I feel!” Hadis shouted, headbutting Risteard’s back over and over again while expressing the embers of discontent that were in his heart. “Jill’s so stupid! I worked so hard! But she chose her family!”

“That hasn’t been decided yet—” Risteard growled. “Ow! Ouch, stop that! Don’t take it out on me, Hadis!”

“Shut up! I never really had a family to begin with, so I don’t understand what it’s like to have one anyways! Hmph!”

“Wh-When you say that, it’s *really* difficult for me to refute—”

“I won’t believe in her,” Hadis grunted as he headbutted his brother’s back with everything he had. “I won’t ever expect her to run after me or understand what I’m going through! She chose her homeland over me. She doubted me. She looked at me as though I had fooled her. I won’t forgive her.”

“...Uh, can I ask about the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort and the ring?”

Hadis fell silent.

“I’m your older brother,” Risteard said. “It’s no use for you to act like you can

endure it all— Ouch! Okay! Okay! You won't trust Lady Jill, understood! Stop accurately headbutting me in the same exact spot!"

"The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort can be dealt with later," Hadis said. "That weapon can't be pointed towards me, after all."

It was made from the Heavenly Sword, a weapon to defend the Dragon Emperor. Logic wouldn't allow the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort to hurt the emperor. If she still foolishly decided to point her weapon towards Hadis without even figuring that out, he would simply crush the Sacred Treasure into pieces in front of her eyes. What kind of face would she make? Would she be hurt or happy to be freed? It didn't matter to Hadis. As Jill had wished, he wouldn't give up on her. *You get what you deserve for toying with my heart*, Hadis thought.

His forehead still pressed against his older brother's back, Hadis scoffed, "I've already given Raw the signal. Jill can't save Natalie. We'll be the ones that rescue her."

"You better shower Natalie with praise when we return to Rave," Risteard said. "Without her, we would've just slowly lost this battle."

"I know. Why do you think I'm going this far? I've even mobilized the dragons."

"It should be more than enough to keep them in check. With the Dragon Emperor, dragons can even fly over the skies of Kratos."

Indeed, they had to let the Kratos Kingdom know. The Rave Empire was no longer split into pieces. Should they try to do anything funny, the empire would see to it that Kratos would be in a world of pain.

"This is a sight to behold," Risteard said. "We'll be showing that the Dragon Emperor is here... Hey! Why're you punching me while I'm talking?! What are you dissatisfied about?!"

"Your very existence, Brother."

"Good grief! Stop acting spoiled and— Hey! Don't kick my shins!"

Risteard fell to the ground on his knees. Hadis looked down at him and

laughed through his nose.

“Resting is fine, but we’ll be surrounded in a few hours,” Hadis said. “I need you to think of a plan. We’ve only got a handful of people, and we need to break straight through the Cervels’ defenses.”

“I’m aware of our situation,” Risteard replied. “We need to let Natalie and the others escape.”

“...You should fear me a little. Like Jill.”

“Why must an older brother fear his younger brother?”

Hadis, frustrated by this nonchalant reply, kicked Risteard in the shins once more for good measure. He ignored Risteard, who roared angrily with tears in his eyes, and looked up at the dragonless sky. He’d come this far. *Everything is within the palm of my hand. I can do this.*

“Yeah,” Rave simply said in his head.

See? Even the God of logic had claimed that Hadis was in the right.



THE paradise of the south that the King of South Kratos had created to fulfill his hedonistic desires was bright even at night. The well-paved and well-maintained corridors were equipped with gas lamps equidistant from each other. Even the lamps that hung under the eaves of the bars and casinos that opened at night illuminated the back alleys.

Perhaps due to the afternoon heat, the bustling crowd was equal to or even larger than what was seen during the day. Some streets were lined with stalls, and it was as though they were claiming that night was when they made the most money. Night and day were flipped here—it was the city that never slept.

I can’t see any stars, Jill thought atop the palace walls as she narrowed her eyes. She had arrived a bit earlier than scheduled for Lawrence’s plan. She was currently in a place where she could look over the city.

If they wanted to act in secret, it was better to move during the warm day. However, tourists and merchants who wanted to act discreetly would start to move at night, which allowed Jill and the others to blend in with the crowd. No

one could fault them even if they didn't look familiar. In fact, many chose not to look at others because they didn't want their identities to be exposed either. Many entered and exited the palace even at night, and they could easily pass through if they bribed the gatekeeper. Furthermore, if Jill and the others identified themselves under the guise of Gerald's subordinates, they could easily go deeper into the palace.

While bright lights dotted the area, it was still night. The palace, which glimmered brilliantly within the city, created a darker shade that obscured the trespassers. Assisted by Rick and Andy, Lawrence somehow managed to climb the wall and show up at the designated meeting point.

"Can you see the magic circle that protects the Great Seal?" Lawrence asked her.

An outer wall surrounded the inner court, but this was no ordinary wall. Four round towers erected in the four cardinal directions served as the core, which deployed a magic spell—a wall made of magic. If necessary, the towers could likely cast anti-flight magic circles, which explained why they were so tall, allowing them to look over the palace.

The palace was constructed in a cross shape. The center was an open-air courtyard that had no roof. That was the precise area where the Parrying Dagger was apparently stored. A pillar of light extended towards the sky. At night, one could mistakenly assume that the light was made from magic. But upon closer inspection, a translucent magic circle could be faintly seen within the pillar.

"Indeed, that's the magic circle of sealing," Jill replied. "I can't tell if it's protecting the Great Seal, but I can see that the Parrying Dagger is in the center. How is Prince Gerald faring?"

"As planned, he's having a father and son talk with the King of South Kratos. To be precise, the prince won't let the king leave unless he's open to talking," Lawrence said.

"How unexpected. The King of South Kratos listens to Prince Gerald?"

"In truth, he's probably excited to know what his son is planning and is playing along for now."

“What’s Mother doing?” Jill asked.

Andy furrowed his brows at the surprising question and replied, “Didn’t we tell you? Mother will make her move when she finds it appropriate, so that she can lend us a hand when necessary.”

“Yep,” Rick added. “Since Mother will only appear when we need her, we won’t count her as part of our forces.”

“Are you saying that the seal might be too strong for you?” Lawrence asked.

Jill shook her head. “That’s not it. But our main problem starts now.”

“Right. This plan isn’t too complex...for now.”

First, Gerald would enter the palace and guide Jill, Lawrence, Rick, and Andy inside. That was the stage they were currently at. From here, Gerald would need to keep the King of South Kratos’s movements in check and rescue Natalie. Meanwhile, Jill and Lawrence would receive the aid of Rick and Andy in retrieving the Great Seal while breaking the spell from the Parrying Dagger.

Jill touched her pockets. She felt a bit of paper—the engagement contract that was folded up inside.

“The most dangerous part is when we leave,” Jill said. “Rick, Andy, you’re both going to be protecting Lawrence as we leave, correct? How far can you two go?”

“What? Are we that unreliable to you?” Rick grumbled. “Listen, we’ve finished traveling around the Kratos Kingdom as part of our training, and we’re already doing jobs for the family.”

“Mother told me that she leaves you in our hands,” Andy added. “Normally, Rick would be more than enough, but even I’m sent out here for you, Sis.”

Jill smiled wryly at her brothers’ displeased remarks. “You’re right,” she said. “It’s unnecessary for me to worry about you. But we’re up against the King of South Kratos, aren’t we?”

“We just need to leave him to Prince Gerald,” Rick replied.

“If we just need to escape, I’m sure Mother will assist us if necessary,” Andy assured. “I think we’ll be fine.”

Charlotte was the strongest of them all and would be able to assist in case of emergencies when they made their escape. No one knew where she was currently lurking, and Lawrence, Rick, and Andy didn't seem to be keeping any secrets. *As I'd thought, Mother is the toughest one to deal with*, Jill thought.

Lawrence checked his pocket watch. "It's almost time," he said.

Jill took a deep breath. She then circled behind Lawrence and knocked him off his feet. As Lawrence went down on his knees, she grabbed his arms and pinned them behind his back.

"Wha—" Lawrence gasped.

"Sis?!"

"You're too slow," Jill murmured.

She was aware of the distance between her younger brothers. They were too far away to help Lawrence, and they knew how much stronger Jill was than them. But above all, they were shocked by her sudden action and offered no resistance. Even Lawrence looked at her stunned—it was only natural.

Her expression twisted with love and pain, Jill curled her lips. "You're all underestimating me a bit too much. Prince Gerald, you guys, and even His Majesty."



THE King of South King, despite being infamous for his unusual tendencies, wasn't one to let others into his room. A complete amateur like Natalie had been able to make it to his bedroom by hiding behind objects, but she wasn't so carefree and optimistic to chalk it up to pure dumb luck. And it wasn't a coincidence that she happened to overhear a rumor that the king had fled to the detached palace to escape an interrogation from his son and that the crown prince was currently keeping the king put. But the only thing Natalie could do was take the bait and play along with their little scheme as well as changing the meeting time a little.

Natalie breathed a sigh of relief as she safely snuck into the king's bedroom. She didn't expect any trouble until now, but she was still nervous. She was worried that the bedroom may have been locked, but by sheer coincidence, the

servant who cleaned his room just so *happened* to drop the key. Whoever was writing the script for this was very meticulous.

The sun had long set. Light from the gas lamps and the city spilled in through the large window, but this vacant bedroom was dark. Natalie had considered turning on the lights and acting the part of a foolish, careless princess, but she thought that was a bit too forced. It was better for her to stay hidden and act like she was waiting for her allies.

The reason she was brought here was quite simple. *They're gauging my reaction to check and see if a spy...or someone helping me has snuck in here*, Natalie thought. And even if she was killed, she was in the King of South Kratos's bedroom. It wouldn't become Prince Gerald's responsibility.

The king and the prince had quite a reputation for being on awful terms, but that likely wasn't all. Feelings between a parent and a child are complicated. It wasn't like she *didn't* understand that herself. When Natalie had been left at the imperial castle as a sacrifice by her mother and older brother, she still couldn't feel detached from them—no, her emotions simply weren't that clear-cut.

Jill must be experiencing her fair share of emotional confusion, too. The Dragon Consort's inner turmoil was only amplified precisely because she'd been raised lovingly. With these thoughts in mind, Natalie shuffled her feet across the room, ducking away from the windows that let in the light from outside. Her hands against the wall, she felt her way across the room until her hands touched something different. She noticed that she was touching the spines of books—bookshelves lined the walls.

"All these books in the bedroom of the King of South Kratos..." Natalie whispered under her breath.

"Surprised?" a cheery voice replied.

Natalie didn't expect a response. She hastily turned around and accidentally knocked over a chair that was nearby. She staggered and her back loudly bumped into the bookshelf. Fortunately, no books had fallen from the shelf, but the falling chair had bumped into a writing desk, causing books and a desk clock to fall to the ground. Papers fluttered in the air.

“Books are collections of knowledge. That was the wisdom bestowed upon me by my predecessors. There’s no reason *not* to learn, but perhaps it was uncouth of me to spell that out to a princess from the nation of logic?”

“Your...Majesty...” Natalie murmured.

From deep within the bedroom, she saw someone move. She couldn’t see his face, but she was certain that this voice belonged to King Rufus. The chair that had been knocked over moved on its own and gracefully floated over to Natalie.

“Have a seat,” Rufus offered. “We don’t need to talk while standing, do we?”

Natalie peeled her back away from the bookshelf and sat on the chair.

“And what questions might you have?” Rufus asked. “Why am I here when I’m supposed to be under my son’s surveillance, perhaps? You noticed that I care about my son. Maybe you can figure this one out too.”

Natalie was silent for a moment before she spoke. “This whole Great Seal fuss is a sham orchestrated by your son. Perhaps the Cervels are accomplices in this farce too. It doesn’t matter where you are, so long as the Dragon Consort doesn’t see any contradictions.”

“If you know that much, then surely you knew that the note was a trap. Why did you come here? Is help on the way, or are you just being reckless?” Rufus asked.

“If you came here to ask that because you couldn’t figure it out, I’m honored,” Natalie smirked. “It means that I’m leading both the Kratos king and crown prince by the nose.”

“I’m shocked. Really, I am. Even now, you’re gathering intelligence. You’re a capable and brilliant young lady. I heard that you were a dud amongst the Rave imperial family members, but that was quite wrong. You’ve got guts.”

Natalie clenched her fists, drenched in cold sweat, atop her lap. She was honored to receive such praise, but she was desperately clinging on for dear life. Watching the shadow of Rufus simply sit on his bed had made her want to flee.

“Then you know you’re about to be killed right now,” Rufus said. “Do you

know why?”

“...Because I noticed that both the House of Cervel and the royal family have joined hands with the King of South Kratos to cook up this act. It’s safer to get rid of me right now before I say anything funny to the Dragon Consort,” Natalie replied, keeping her voice as calm as possible.

“And do you know why you haven’t been killed until now?” Rufus prompted.

“Because I could’ve received orders from the missing Dragon Emperor or had some information to share. I don’t have any magic powers. Even if I ran free for a spell, so long as I don’t come into contact with the Dragon Consort, I’m hardly what you could call a nuisance... Which means, you found Hadis. Then I suppose the Dragon Consort will come save me. But you won’t let her make it in time. Since Hadis abandoned me, I shall die. That’s the scenario that you’ve written,” Natalie supplied.

Rufus gave a slow clap. “Wonderful. Indeed, you were the only unforeseen actress that had been cast in this play. You may have had nothing to you, but we couldn’t help but be wary, and we’d have to change our script as needed. Above all, we can’t get rid of you easily with the Dragon Consort trying to save you. But confusing the Dragon Consort is what the Dragon Emperor is after. At least that’s what I believe, as the Dragon Emperor’s standin.”

“Standin?” Natalie repeated.

Rufus nodded. “Precisely. The kings of Kratos have all been standins for the Dragon Emperor. Each substitute may have had their own feelings towards the real Dragon Emperor, but surely, you’d be curious about the real deal, no? And I’m no exception. So, I tried to act as the Dragon Emperor and think about how to move you around.”

Rufus stood up and approached Natalie. The light spilling in from the large window illuminated his handsome face.

“You’re the bait for the Dragon Consort, and you’ll be killed—a disposable pawn,” Rufus said.

The eyes looking down at the princess were of a different color, but as she noticed a dangerous light flickering within, she saw that his calm smile indeed

resembled her older brother's.

"You don't even bat an eye," Rufus observed. "Have you been prepared for this from the start?"

"That's one way to see it," Natalie replied. "But I told you before: I'm the Dragon Emperor's younger sister."

Above all, both Rufus and Gerald were still misreading Hadis's intentions. Natalie wasn't a disposable pawn—far from it. She was a precious metal. By throwing her into Kratos and forcing them to change their script, she could uncover the truth. Natalie had to drag this out to the absolute last second and lure them out, gathering as much information as she could. Hadis would definitely rescue her. Natalie was sure of it.

"The Dragon Emperor sure is popular," Rufus remarked. "I'm not surprised. A true monarch doesn't take lives. Like a moth attracted to light, a monarch has people offering lives to him of their own volition. On that end, I suppose I'm nothing more than a substitute. No one will risk their lives for me."

"Then why don't you offer the Kratos Kingdom to the Dragon Emperor? If you're a standin for the emperor, that means you're ruling over Kratos in his stead, aren't you...*Father*?" Natalie sarcastically called out to Rufus, who widened his eyes in surprise. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Now *that's* a novel idea," the king said. "It really is such a shame... You don't have a future where you'll call me 'Father.'"

"Oh, but I believe that a bit too hasty of a conclusion," Natalie countered. "You don't know why I'm here yet, do you?"

"Oh dear, are you still trying to confuse me? Then help *is* on its way, perhaps? Your strong demeanor is a tad too troublesome. You've got a nasty personality. No wonder Gerald can't decide whether to kill you or let you live... Or maybe he wants me to decide."

Rufus stood pensively before his lips curled to form a mischievous grin.

"Okay then," he said. "Why don't I create a reason that makes it necessary to kill you?"

Rufus's smile only widened as Natalie tensed. The hands of the clock that had fallen onto the ground still didn't indicate the time on the note yet.



“COULD I ask for an explanation, Jill?” Lawrence asked calmly. “If there are any misunderstandings, I'd like to clear them now.”

The twins snapped back to their senses upon hearing the voice of a levelheaded Lawrence.

“He's right,” Rick insisted. “What are you doing, Sis? Aren't we going to take back the Great Seal?”

“And we have to rescue Princess Natalie,” Andy said. “We can leave your engagement with the Dragon Emperor on the back burner for now.”

“Then let me ask you this, Lawrence. Are you sure we don't need to save your older sister, who's also trapped in the palace of the King of South Kratos?” Jill replied coldly. The twins held their breath. Jill didn't loosen her grip on Lawrence's wrists. “You screwed up your setting.”

“...I think that there's a time and place for everything,” Lawrence claimed. “Now isn't the time to be worried about my older sister.”

“You think so? The you I know would think of a plan to save his older sister no matter the circumstance,” Jill said. “At the very least, you'd make a request or two—you'd put in even more effort towards that than rescuing Princess Natalie.”

In the future that Jill knew, Lawrence had prioritized his personal feelings of saving his older sister amidst the quickly intensifying discord between Rufus and Gerald. Ultimately, Lawrence couldn't make it in time, but back then, his sister had been in even more imminent danger, and there was little leeway for him to rescue her. Still, he had taken action. It seemed impossible for him to set his sister aside and focus on the matter at hand. There was only one explanation for this phenomenon: Lawrence had already saved his older sister. Which meant...

“Prince Gerald and the King of South Kratos are working together,” Jill concluded.

The stealing of the Great Seal and this current situation—all of this had been staged. Clearly, the Cervels, who served Gerald, were in on this plan. Jill's family were accomplices.

“And that's why you aren't desperately trying to save your sister,” Jill continued. “There's no need to anymore. A simple inference, I think. I'll at least congratulate you. It's all thanks to me becoming the Dragon Consort. You're welcome.”

One miserable future had been changed for the better. If Billy and Charlotte were able to cooperate with the King of South Kratos, the man directly responsible for their deaths in the future, perhaps they wouldn't be killed by him this time either. This was good news...if they hadn't been aiming for the Dragon Consort.

Lawrence gave a bitter laugh and sighed. “Speaking of which, you did have an odd ability, didn't you? It's as if you know what I'm going to do before I do it.”

“Lord Lawrence, we're not working with the King of South Kratos,” Andy rebuked.

Lawrence gave an amused laugh. “Sure, but it makes no difference to her. We'll be cooperating with the king until we defeat the Dragon Emperor. I might sound like a sore loser, but I had my concerns. Jill, you didn't strongly press to rescue Princess Natalie. You would usually try to save human lives instead of going for the Great Seal. Though I did assume that you just weren't thinking clearly because you had your heart broken.”

“Don't worry, I'm still really hurt about it. This time around, His Majesty didn't count on me at all. I'm sure he has a plan for Princess Natalie too.”

“Huh, so I guess it *was* true that the Dragon Emperor cast you aside and—Ow...”

Jill used even more strength as she twisted his arm back, and the mouth that was rubbing salt into her wound stopped yapping. Her younger brothers turned pale at the information they heard.

“Sis, why?” Rick asked. “It's not like you're communicating with the Dragon Emperor, are you? Why're you doing this now? We haven't made any moves

that would put you at a disadvantage!”

“Even if you and the Dragon Emperor decide to marry, we still need the Great Seal. There’s no need for us to be at odds right now,” Andy said.

“You two are smarter and more astute than me. You know the answer yourself, don’t you?” Jill asked with a self-deprecating smile. “I don’t *need* the approval of Kratos for His Majesty and me to marry, much less the Great Seal.”

Only I didn’t understand, Jill thought.

“His Majesty conceded as much as he could because of my wishes,” Jill said. “He agreed to play along as long as it was all amicable... You guys knew this and used me as bait against His Majesty. If you were lucky enough to have His Majesty and the King of South Kratos trade blows and end the battle as a tie, Prince Gerald would be the sole winner. There’s zero chance of you guys incurring any losses.”

It would also mean that the Rave Empire would use its resources for the Kratos Kingdom’s internal conflict. This would all be well and good if the former were thanked for their efforts, but the citizens would likely deem it as an invasion. What would happen to the empire if they were attacked from the inside while they were pouring their resources outside their nation? Lawrence and Gerald surely would know. And, of course, Hadis had caught onto their plan as well. So, he sent Natalie into Kratos as a statement that they could use her to start an invasion. It was the emperor’s way of getting back at Kratos.

“You all used His Majesty’s feelings for me to get your way,” Jill mumbled. Yet, she had failed to notice and doubted Hadis for a moment, all according to Gerald and Lawrence’s plan. “...I can’t blame him for being disappointed in me and wanting to cut me off.”

To the Rave Empire, the Kratos Kingdom was an enemy nation. Her homeland was the enemy, and Jill had said so numerous times. But she hadn’t actually understood the reality that she would be forced to deal with. Jill looked down, and even her younger brothers looked hurt. They weren’t acting, though it would’ve been infinitely better if they were.

“The same goes for our family,” Jill continued. “I was being a bit too optimistic and carefree. I didn’t even know that our domain couldn’t persist without the

protection of Kratos.”

The Cervels’ domain was large, but starvation had never been a pressing matter. That was all due to the Goddess’s love, and it was something that the Dragon God of logic couldn’t provide. And yet, Andy, Rick, and her parents didn’t tell her to fall into line for them.

This was why she couldn’t properly separate herself from them

“...But that’s not your fault, Sis,” Andy whispered gingerly.

“You’re right. It’s not *just* my fault,” Jill agreed firmly, causing her brothers to stare back blankly. “I’m sure His Majesty is currently thinking something along the lines of, ‘See? I told you so.’”

This was why Hadis hadn’t told his consort anything. Hadis expected Jill to fall for her family’s sympathy and betray him. That man was trying to find ways to greet her parents properly and seemed excited to be called a boyfriend, all the while, he kept his doubts about Jill.

“He’s laughing at me, thinking this is the extent of my feelings,” Jill growled. “He’s underestimating me too much, that idiot husband!”

“Ugh,” Lawrence gagged.

Jill tightened her grip on him and twisted a bit more.

“Now, he treats me like I’m part of the mob!” Jill shouted. “Surely, I should be allowed to be furious about this. I’ll see to it that I’ll *never* turn out how His Majesty expects me to!”

“Th-Then Sis, you don’t need to fight us,” Rick said.

“The same goes for you guys!” Jill bellowed, causing her younger brothers to tremble. “You tried to make me out as a pitiful girl who was being fooled by His Majesty. Don’t screw with me! I’ll never become someone like that! Like hell I will! I already said that I’d marry His Majesty, damn it!”

“I feel like you’re just saying it out of defiance...Sis,” Andy said.

“It doesn’t matter how stubborn you are,” insisted Rick. “That Dragon Emperor can’t make you happy.”

“You don’t know squat. You guys are using me with your worry as a freakin’ pretense. His Majesty...is the only one who hasn’t used me this time. He never has,” Jill replied. Her lips curled up as her left hand continued squeezing Lawrence’s arm. “This is wonderful. What an absolutely wonderful, strong man! I’ve fallen in love with him all over again! He just makes me absolutely livid!”

She’d realized that a simple goodbye was all it took for her to freeze, unable to move a muscle. At the same time, she saw Hadis’s strength in being able to bid her farewell. Hadis had chosen to leave the woman he loved and was prepared to hurt, lose, and be hated by her. Could anyone else have done so of their own volition? *His Majesty is a fool!* He could’ve tried to lie his way out or make excuses, but that man never did anything like that.

“I understand your mindset,” Lawrence said. “But the situation still won’t change. Is there any meaning in taking me hostage?”

“I’ve told you before: don’t underestimate me,” Jill replied. “What secrets does that barrier have? What were you all planning on doing with me, the Dragon Consort?”

Lawrence had likely planned on taking Jill by using her family’s sympathy and claiming the cruelty of the Dragon Emperor ever since he had seen the battle in Radia. If all went well, they’d be able to claim the power of the Dragon Consort and her Sacred Treasure without mobilizing troops. If their plan hadn’t succeeded, it was imperative to have a plan that stripped the Dragon Emperor of the Dragon Consort, who wielded an immense amount of power. Or else, this entire scheme would’ve been far too risky.

Both Gerald and Lawrence were brilliant men. They wouldn’t have discarded the possibility of Jill choosing Hadis. Even if she didn’t choose the emperor, there must’ve been a plan to neutralize her role as the Dragon Consort—there had to be. *But I don’t know what that plan is, and I doubt His Majesty does either.* Hence, Hadis hadn’t tried to bring Jill along with him. *That has to be the reason!*

“Answer me,” Jill demanded. “I’m guessing it’s something troublesome that uses the ancient legend. What’s the deal with that barrier?”

“It’s odd, really,” Lawrence said after a moment of silence. “I don’t think I’ve

ever underestimated you or the Dragon Emperor. Yet, every time, the unexpected occurs, without fail.”

“I don’t have time, Lawrence. I have to stop His Majesty before he starts a war,” Jill said.

“Will the current Dragon Emperor listen to you, I wonder?”

“Flip your way of thinking. I’m the Dragon Consort precisely *because* I can make him listen to me. I doubt you guys would want a war right now either.”

If it wasn’t the case, Natalie’s corpse would’ve already appeared somewhere. Kratos would only start a war once they either had the Dragon Consort’s power or managed to negate her abilities. Hence, they were currently in limbo, waiting for either scenario to happen. Suddenly, Jill thought she heard Lawrence snicker.

“Why don’t I clear up one misunderstanding first?” Lawrence said. “I don’t like any of this. Love, logic, gods—I don’t like creating a plan based on such mysterious, incomprehensible powers. Maybe I resent it so much because I wasn’t blessed with much magic. But I suppose now, there’s nothing I can do. I’ll let the past Dragon Consorts handle you.”

“Huh? What are you—”

The twins quietly moved. The moment they took Jill’s attention, she felt a shadow looming behind her. She turned around, looked at the sky above, pushed Lawrence away, and jumped back. Her stance low, she smiled at the shadow that looked down on her.

“...So you realized my intentions, Mother,” Jill smirked.

“Well, you’re my daughter, after all,” Charlotte replied. “You won’t sulk just because someone didn’t grant your wish. If they can’t grant you your wish, you just need to do that yourself.” She spoke in her usual, gentle, calm tone as she smiled. “Besides, you don’t prefer to be on the receiving end. You like to grant the wishes of the person you love, don’t you? Just like me,” Charlotte finished.

However, her usually loose, flowing hair was tied in a tight ponytail on the top of her head and she’d discarded her usual, restrictive dress. Now she elegantly stood atop a steeple on her tiptoes like a soldier.

“Father is against my marriage with His Majesty, isn’t he?” Jill asked.

“Of course,” her mother replied. “We might go to war with them in the future, but if he was openly against it, he’d make you sad. He was caught between a rock and a hard place as he tried his best to hide his feelings. Also, on a fundamental level, I don’t think he’s very compatible with Hadis.”

“Ah, I get it. Father likes people with a good heart.”

Billy liked Gerald, who may have seemed cold on the surface but was actually diligent and earnest. Hadis seemed kind on the outside, but he was actually twisted and mysterious. Count Cervel couldn’t get along with someone like that.

“I hope Hadis isn’t being clobbered right now,” Charlotte said as she gave her daughter a sidelong glance.

Jill grew tense but flashed a fearless smile. “There’s nothing to worry about since His Majesty is stronger. Mother, I think you should go save Father.”

“Oh, you seem composed. I suppose I shall once I take care of you.”

“I won’t hold back, even for you, Mother. I’ve got the Sacred Treasure too.”

“How terrifying!” Lady Cervel gasped before she lowered her voice. “But remember this well, Dragon Consort. The Cervels don’t fear dragons, the Dragon Emperor, or the Dragon Consort!”

Charlotte flashed a bewitching smile as she took out two whips and tugged on them with both her hands. At the same time, the twins flanked Jill from outside her peripheral vision and pounced. She gracefully flipped in the air and went behind her younger brothers. She delivered a kick with each leg on both of their backs and slammed them to the ground before she grabbed her mother’s whip, which came from the side.

“It seems like you need to train Rick and Andy from square one,” Jill grunted.

“You’re one to talk,” Charlotte replied. “You couldn’t move a muscle when a man broke up with you, you little brat.”

Jill’s blood boiled as her mother had astutely hit a sore spot. As she used her strength to grip the whip, she saw sparks fly from her palms, which was followed by a sharp pain. *Ugh, magic!* Jill instinctively released the whip, but it

wrapped itself around her as though it was alive. She tried to brace herself to rip free, but her brothers had grabbed onto each of her ankles, and she was thrown into a wall. Another whip wrapped around her neck, and she was flung in a circular arc, her back slammed against the wall of magic.

Jill gritted her teeth as the taste of blood filled her mouth. The magic that rejected trespassers and her mother's magic powers had depleted Jill of her own. She was just being slammed down again and again. Her vision grew hazy as she saw Lawrence looking down at her from atop the wall.

"The Cervels really don't hold back," he said. "Now we just need to bring her to the sealing barrier and—"

Lawrence's sentence was cut short not because of Jill; it was her family. Smoke and explosions rang in the air. Andy grabbed Lawrence and gained some distance while Rick, unable to dodge the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, which had transformed into a whip, crashed to the ground. As the tendrils danced in the air, only Charlotte was able to parry these attacks with her own whips. Jill, who had freed herself from the wall of magic and Charlotte's powers, flew straight towards her mother.

"You're able to parry the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort!" Jill exclaimed. "I'd expect no less from you!"

"Why would I lose to my daughter who's using the same weapons as me?" Charlotte asked. "I'm surprised that you can still use that Sacred Treasure. I suppose your relationship with the Dragon Emperor doesn't affect it."

"What are you talking about? His Majesty left this Sacred Treasure for me. Are you not aware of what this means? I didn't expect you to be so obtuse regarding the subtleties between a man and a woman."

"Oh, you seem rather confident. But your way of thinking is a bit too simplistic and optimistic."

In this instant, Jill knew that her mother had the upper hand when wielding this weapon. Charlotte's skills surpassed her daughter's. Jill could only defend herself against the whips that came at her ferociously.

"Am I wrong?" Charlotte continued. "The Dragon Emperor has deemed you a

failure of a Dragon Consort. That's reality. Should you chase after him and beg him to marry you, will he believe you, I wonder?"

"Shut up!" Jill yelled. "I was indeed cast aside by His Majesty, but I know that he won't give up on me!"

"Of course. The Dragon Emperor needs to use the Dragon Consort as his shield and use her until she breaks."

"Exactly!"

A new Dragon Consort couldn't be found so easily. With that in mind, Hadis would continue to make Jill the Dragon Consort. Charlotte scowled as Jill freed herself from the whips and flew into the air.

"You won't deny it?" Charlotte asked. "As your mother, I don't think I could recommend a guy like that for you."

"Then you don't have to," Jill replied. "Once His Majesty mobilizes the imperial army and storms into the Cervel domain, I guarantee that he'll try to take me for his bride!"

"And in exchange, you'll form peace. You're just part of the spoils of war. Are you fine with that?"

"Of course not! That's why I'm trying to stop him!"

Jill would still use the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort—a sliver of hope that Hadis had left behind.

Jill thought she heard the emperor's voice echo, "See what happens? I told you so. But despite it all, if you still won't give up on me..."

"This is a fight between me and His Majesty!" Jill bellowed. "Don't get in my way!"

She transformed her Sacred Treasure from a whip into a sword and aimed a chunk of magic power squarely at Charlotte. Her mother's whips were split in two as the weapons gouged out the roof and walls of the palace. Jill had dashed in with that attack and swung her sword at Charlotte's chest. Charlotte couldn't dodge the attack from this distance.

And her daughter had no hesitation. That was how she was raised.

As time seemed to stand still, Charlotte closed her eyes. “I see... So you really did go off to marry him,” she murmured.

Jill shuddered and changed the direction of her blade.

“Prince Gerald, if you will, please,” Charlotte said.

“I know. It’s a shame...Lady Jill.”

A black spear flew at Jill without a sound, and the Dragon Consort had barely managed to block the attack. She wasn’t able to fully absorb the impact and had been blown back into the air.

“You should’ve been convinced by your family,” muttered Gerald as he flew past Jill and swung his spear down at her. She widened her eyes in shock as she saw the weapon glittering under the night. *The Sacred Spear of the Goddess!*

Swiftly changing her Sacred Treasure into a shield, she took the spear’s attack head-on. *I’ll be fine.* He was above her, but she wouldn’t go down without a fight. Jill was wielding the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort. Even within the realm of the Kratos Kingdom, it wouldn’t break so easily.

“The Dragon Consorts of the past, now’s the time to be released,” Gerald murmured within the vortex of magic.

The spear sunk into the shield with a sickening squelch. Jill was stunned at the sight.

“Wh-Why...?” she managed to utter.

The shield didn’t crack, and it didn’t look damaged. Such a sound wasn’t heard. But still, the spear penetrated her shield.

“The Goddess won’t forget your sadness. The Goddess understands your love,” Gerald continued.

The spear continued to plunge deeper and deeper as though the Sacred Treasure was accepting the Goddess’s weapon. Simultaneously, Jill felt the presence of magic behind her—the barrier of the Parrying Dagger. But that wasn’t all. The barrier and the Sacred Spear of the Goddess linked their magical powers. A massive magic circle with the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort sandwiched in between them emerged.

“The time has come. May the Dragon Emperor, who knows not of love, atone for his actions,” Gerald declared.

The spear pierced through the Dragon Consort shield, and at that moment, the golden ring came undone as it disappeared. Within the palace’s courtyard, Jill’s back plunged into the center of the barrier created by the Parrying Dagger.

... No... She felt her entire body creak and groan in pain. The impact of the fall had knocked the wind out of her. She only saw the blessing she received from the Dragon God slowly fizzle and float away like bubbles in the wind. The golden specks of magic were absorbed into the Sacred Spear of the Goddess as though they were blessing the weapon in Gerald’s hand.

“The Dragon Emperor won’t accept you anymore,” the prince smiled from above with the Sacred Spear. “But I’m different. I’ll accept you, Lady Jill. Even if you’re no longer the Dragon Consort—no, precisely *because* you are no longer the Dragon Consort.”

Jill’s vision dimmed as her senses were being shut down. This was the effect of the barrier. She should’ve been in excruciating pain, but the strength had left her entire body. Too late, she noticed that her magic powers had been sucked away.

“Will Sis be all right?”

“She won’t be able to move much with the effects of the barrier, but she should be fine. We were able to strip her away from the powers of the Dragon Consort too. Don’t try to forcibly move her. Return the Parrying Dagger of the Goddess to the King of South Kratos.”

“What should we do now, Prince Gerald? Especially about the Dragon Emperor.”

“There’s no need for us to buy time now. Kill him. If we throw the King of South Kratos with the Parrying Dagger against him, we might have a chance. Mobilize the army. Even if war breaks out, if we can do damage to him here, it’ll work in our favor later.”

The voices were slowly growing farther away. Jill’s vision was fading. The only thing she could see were the golden bubbles floating higher away. It was the

power of the Dragon Consort—a power used to save him.

“Wait... Your...Majesty...” Jill gasped.

She managed to extend her trembling left hand to grab at the small bubbles, but together with the golden flecks, her consciousness fizzled and floated away.

Chapter 6: The Contradictory Conspirator

HE would create a reason to kill Natalie. She was struggling to respond to his declaration when Rufus hit her with a ridiculous follow-up question.

“Have you studied the pedigree of the Kratos royal family?” he asked.

Natalie furrowed her brows but nodded. Ever since she’d suggested marrying into their family, she studied everything she could within the Rave Empire.

“It’s good that you’re studious,” he replied. “It’s very important to note how the royal family and the related aristocrats are correlated to the government. Do you know about Gerald and Faris’s mother?”

“Queen Isabella...the daughter of a duke. She was childhood friends with you,” Natalie answered.

“The spies of the Rave Empire are quite capable.” He almost sounded impressed.

“I heard that she passed away due to complications shortly after giving birth to Princess Faris... And at the same time, your younger sister, Princess Laura, passed away due to illness...”

It happened a long time ago, but Rufus had lost his wife and younger sister in one go. Princess Laura was a frail and sickly woman, as all the princesses of Kratos were apt to be, and she was told that she wouldn’t live long, but it must’ve been painful to lose her and his wife one after the other.

“I know it’s a bit too late for me to say this, but my condolences to you,” Natalie said sympathetically.

“You don’t have to worry about it,” Rufus replied. “It’s already in the past. And what are your thoughts on this matter?”

“What do you mean? You don’t mean to say you kept them alive with magic or something, do you?” She couldn’t understand where he was taking this

conversation. She tried to speak sarcastically to regain control of their exchange, but Rufus only laughed.

“They’re both dead, without a doubt,” he said. “I was the one who killed my wife, so I’m sure of it.”

Natalie jumped to her feet, knocking her chair over in the process. She felt the corners of her cheek twitch. “Is there a rule that states that the queens of Kratos must be killed by their kings?”

“Of course not. We’re not the Dragon Emperor, who always uses the Dragon Consort as his shield. But we’re alike in a sense. Ultimately, Kratos and Rave are like mirrors facing each other, trying to show the other love or logic.”

“Don’t try to shift the topic by sounding enigmatic. Does Prince Gerald know about this?” Natalie asked.

“You’re worried about my son? That makes me happy. He knows. He saw it happen right before his eyes, after all.” A dark shadow loomed over Rufus’s face as he smiled. “Gerald is desperate because he doesn’t want to become like me,” he explained.

“Well, of course he doesn’t! Who wants to be a father who kills his wife in front of his son?!” Natalie shouted.

“It had to be done,” Rufus said, unfazed. “My wife tried to kill the Goddess with her own hands.”

Natalie’s rage all but chilled. *Kill the Goddess?* she thought. No normal person would’ve ever thought of doing that. Her older brother apparently had the Dragon God living inside of him. Jill claimed she saw the god too. If there was a Dragon God, there would certainly be a Goddess as well. Still, how could a normal person try to kill the Goddess?

“Isabella had always been a strong woman,” Rufus went on. “She said she was fine, but I’d been fooled. She hadn’t even considered what would happen to this kingdom if the Goddess was killed.”

This act was akin to killing the Dragon God in Rave and making sure that dragons couldn’t be used again. A bitter smile danced across Rufus’s lips.

“If she was weak, she should’ve just said so,” he said. “I wouldn’t have trusted Isabella’s strength and done my duty, just like what Gerald is trying to do right now. But that’s also a mistake. That child doesn’t understand. We may be the guardians of the Goddess, but we’re nothing more than the Dragon Emperor’s standins.”

“Y-You speak so abstractly that you’ve lost me here,” Natalie said. “In any case, you shouldn’t push your belief of taking the role of a standin onto your son. All the more reason not to if he’s trying his best to prevent that from happening.”

“Even if it’s simply the truth?” Rufus asked.

“Even so. You’ll be reducing his potential. The same could be said for you too.”

Rufus looked befuddled and Natalie glared back at him bitterly.

“Of course you’ll turn into a ‘mere standin’ if you keep telling yourself that. I know that feeling all too well. Instead, you should keep telling yourself what you *want* to be. You didn’t want to be this standin either, did you?” Natalie finished.

Reminding oneself of something that they’d begrudgingly become was nothing more than self-harming behavior. If Rufus had cursed his son to suffer the same fate, then the king would undoubtedly experience the pain that he had caused to the prince.

“Or will you feel relieved if your son’s fate ends up the same as yours?” Natalie asked before she answered for him. “You won’t, right?”

Natalie didn’t understand what Rufus had been trying to tell her, but she was able to glean one tidbit. Rufus didn’t want his son to experience the same pain he had, while Gerald shouldered a similar title to him. Rufus was called many names: the Kratos King, the hedonistic King of South Kratos, the guardian of the Goddess, the standin for the Dragon Emperor. Among these titles, there was one more he couldn’t toss aside: father.

Rufus looked down. For whatever reason, Natalie had become indescribably angry—so much so that she felt like crying.

“...You’re just like Uncle George,” Natalie said. “You’re trying to protect something and you’re willing to sacrifice yourself to do it.”

“Ah... You mean the false emperor who was slaughtered by the Dragon Emperor,” Rufus murmured softly. Natalie looked up in shock at how quiet his voice had become. “He must’ve been happy.”

Rufus’s face was obscured by the shadows, but the princess could tell that he was smiling.

“He was able to die while entrusting everything to the Dragon Emperor, no?” Rufus asked. “His mistakes were pierced by logic. That must’ve satisfied him. The Dragon Emperor has that strength; a powerful judgment that can correct any mistakes and never understand love. Ah, I see... I’m living in an era with a real Dragon Emperor. I don’t like this; I never wanted to realize it.”

As usual, Natalie didn’t have a clue about Rufus’s ramblings. But his voice dripping with envy made her shudder.

“Hey, what are you on about—” Natalie started.

However, her question was immediately cut off by a loud explosion as the room shook violently. Natalie staggered and fell off her chair as the bookshelves behind her tilted. Books started to fall above her head, and with a small shriek, the princess covered her head and crouched. But not a single book had touched her. She was being enveloped in soft, golden magic. Astonished, Natalie immediately looked up towards the owner of this magic, but Rufus wasn’t even glancing her way.

“An attack by the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort... I guess we couldn’t claim her. You opined about your beliefs, but in the end, standins or substitutes can’t be victorious against the real deal. And my son is more like a substitute in-training,” Rufus said, looking a little sad.

Natalie had her hands on the floor as the king looked down on her...and smiled.

“All right, since we’ve got the chance, why don’t we have a little bet?” Rufus suggested. “Can I kill you right now or not?”

The princess stared back at the king, wide-eyed. Rufus made his way to the

sofa by the window without a care while the explosions and shaking continued in the background. He snagged his jacket, which he'd messily tossed aside, wore it once again, and grabbed a spear that was leaning against the wall.

"To show my respect to you, I would've loved to use the Sacred Spear of the Goddess or the Parrying Dagger, but this is all I've got with me right now," Rufus said.

The point of the spear twirled in the air, reflecting the light that spilled in from the window. Natalie instinctively closed her eyes at the brightness. When she opened them again, the king was standing right in front of her in the darkness.

"I should've done this from the start," he said. "If the Dragon Emperor has some sort of plan in the works, you won't die. I was unnecessarily overthinking this. I can't mock Gerald then, can I?"

"I thought...you were going to have Prince Gerald kill me."

The hands of the clock that was on the ground still hadn't struck the promised time. There were still a few minutes left.

"I've changed my mind," Rufus confessed. "I thought that my son didn't have enough resolve, but apparently, I didn't have enough to defeat the Dragon Emperor either. You're the Dragon Emperor's younger sister, so this method of killing will be far too rude. At the very least, I should show you my sincerity."

Rufus approached the books and documents scattered onto the ground between them, and picked up a bundle of papers that was tied together with a string.

"To think this would be here, of all things..." Rufus muttered. "This must be fate."

"What's that book?" Natalie asked, trying to buy time.

"It's not a book. It's my wife's diary. She jotted down her feelings for a year—from a little before she decided to kill the Goddess until her death. It's sealed with a spell that requires a code of sorts." Rufus stroked the cover of the diary endearingly, causing the string to glow, undo itself, and melt away. "It was a secret code that we made together when we were kids," he continued. "She

should've known that her seal would be undone if this made it into my hands. Or did she think I would've forgotten? I would never."

The diary floated in the air and rested above a writing desk before the magic string appeared once more and tied the papers together again. What remained in Rufus's hand was a single sheet of folded paper.

"This is what caused my wife to despair," he said. "Oh, it's nothing much. It's just the true family tree of the royal family. It lists my grandfather, my father, myself, and all the royals of the past generations."

"...Has the bloodline been infiltrated like the Rave imperial family's?" Natalie asked.

"Quite the opposite, actually. It has the curse of the Dragon God which has continued for years, a curse towards the Kratos royal family called logic."

Natalie had never heard of such a thing before, but Rufus didn't give her enough time to ask any questions.

"Now then, let's make that bet," the king said. "Will you die or live? Will you live and become the next queen of Kratos as you keep insisting?"

Under the moonlight streaming in from the window, Rufus opened the folded sheet of paper.

"If you win, I'll go fight the Dragon Emperor for my son. If I kill the Dragon Emperor, my son won't turn out like me. It's simply logic; hardly what you could call love."

He pointed the paper towards Natalie and released it from his fingertips. Like a leaf falling from its branches, the paper fluttered in front of her while Rufus clenched his spear. Natalie didn't have any magic, but even she could feel the terrifying power that emanated from the king. He was planning on piercing Natalie, paper and all.

The explosions and shaking had stopped, and Natalie grew oddly calm within the dark room. It felt like time was standing still. *Is it because I'm about to die?* she wondered. Yet, she couldn't tear her eyes from the paper falling in front of her.

The pedigree table illustrated on the paper looked unusual to her. A family tree, true to its name, usually branched out in several places and grew wider and wider. However, the paper in front of her maintained the same hourglass shape throughout the generations. Were her eyes deceiving her because the paper was falling in an awkward manner? Regardless, she was able to see one part clearly: names.

She first found Gerald's name. Next to him was Faris's. Above their names was Rufus. While there were minor changes in spelling and pronunciations because of dialects in some regions of Kratos and Rave, they generally spoke the same language. Natalie wasn't misreading anything. Hence, next to Rufus should've been his wife's name, Isabella. But the princess saw something else.

In Isabella's stead was Laura, Rufus's younger sister.

Above those two were the names of their parents—also siblings. Natalie remembered the names of their predecessors, so she was sure of it. Gerald and Faris were Rufus and Laura's children. And in turn, the king's parents were also siblings. In other words...

It can't be... Natalie thought. Had this gone on for generations and generations? As she stared, stunned by this revelation, she saw the point of the spear pierce through the paper. She saw sparks of magic fly as the center of the chart started to burn. An amateur fighter like Natalie had no means of dodging even a normal spear.

It was an attack that the Kratos King, the guardian of the Goddess, had used his magic for. Suddenly, a white shadow wielding a longsword stopped the spear. The effect of the magic removed the white veil, revealing long, silver hair that had been tied behind her.

"Sister Elentzia!" Natalie cried.

"The older sister of the Dragon Emperor, I see! So, you've come to save her, after all!" Rufus yelled with a grin, parrying Elentzia's sword that pressed upon him from below. "It's quite a clever scheme, and you're the suitable candidate for this role. But this will only create two corpses. It's the Dragon Emperor's loss!"

"Rosa!" roared Elentzia, calling for her dragon.

The windows shattered as fire filled the room. A dragon's fire could even burn magical power, and the walls were also blown away. Rufus jumped back and furrowed his brows.

"How can a dragon be here..." he muttered before the realization hit him. "Has the Dragon King hatched?!"

"Natalie, let's run!" Elentzia shouted.

"Hey!" Natalie exclaimed.

Elentzia carried Natalie away without waiting for a response, and the latter, trying to desperately grab onto something, had clung onto Queen Isabella's diary. It was a complete coincidence, but it felt like a twist of fate, and Natalie locked eyes with Rufus for a split moment. With a smile, she could see his thin lips move to say: *"You win."*

Natalie had been forced to learn how to read lips by her older sister, but she only had the basics down. Still, she thought she heard the king speak those words.

Elentzia leaped onto the dragon saddle with Natalie, and Rosa once more expelled a gush of flames and flapped her wings. They ascended while gazing down at the corner of the palace that was bathed in fire.

"Don't worry. There was no one else around there," Elentzia reassured. "I don't think there'll be a scratch on the King of South Kratos either."

"Elentzia..." Natalie murmured. "You were in disguise. I knew it."

Elentzia was wearing a white garment similar to the clothes of a shrine maiden. It was the attire that Natalie had seen numerous times within the palace.

"You were that servant who came in to report to the king, weren't you?" Natalie asked.

"Oh, you've got a sharp eye," Elentzia replied. "I thought I disguised myself quite well."

"You did. I'm shocked. I didn't think you could act like a spy, Sister."

"I promised you, didn't I? I vowed I'd come save you no matter what, little

sister.”

Elentzia spoke as though she only did what was normal, but Natalie rested her forehead on her older sister’s reliable back. If Natalie didn’t keep her eyes wide open, she felt like tears would spill out.

“We’ve even got people waiting for us,” Elentzia added. “While Hadis and the others are drawing the Cervels’ attention in the north, we’ve been told to flee on a ship from the south.”

“I’m surprised Rosa can fly above Kratos,” Natalie remarked. “She won’t be able to eat or drink here.”

“She’s a red dragon. She can last a day or two. And we’ve got the Dragon God, the Dragon Emperor, and the Dragon King on our side, further increasing the protection of the dragons. Still, she can’t stay here for long.”

Rosa flew above the clouds to avoid detection as the city grew farther away.

“What about Jill?!” Natalie suddenly cried. “Isn’t there some sort of battle going on?!”

“Yeah, but I don’t sense her magic anymore,” Elentzia admitted. “The presence of the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort also disappeared.”

Natalie felt her blood run cold. “I can’t believe it... D-Did Jill lose?!”

“I don’t know. Prince Gerald teleported with the Cervels somewhere using that magic device. I’m not sure if Jill’s with them...but I’m guessing the prince and the Cervels are going after Hadis.”

“I think the King of South Kratos will also go after Hadis.”

“*For my son,*” Rufus’s words echoed in Natalie’s head as she remembered his expression back then. *Is he prepared to die for him?* she wondered. She quickly shook her head, trying to stop herself from overthinking.

“If the King of South Kratos is on the battlefield, I wouldn’t be surprised if this escalates into a full-blown war,” Elentzia noted.

“Sister... Do you think Jill is our enemy?” Natalie asked.

“Who knows? But if she’s on our side, she should’ve headed north with Hadis.

Vissel and Hadis said as much to you, didn't they?"

If Jill had chosen Hadis over her homeland, she wouldn't be at the Kratos king's palace right now. Natalie's older brothers had told her that before they enacted this plan.

"But this is Jill we're talking about," Natalie insisted. "She might be here while continuing to be on Hadis's side."

"Natalie, we're in Kratos. Rosa can't move like usual, and I can't have her push her limits," Elentzia replied, her voice and face stern.

Natalie's older sister took on the face of a soldier, but Natalie still tried to make her appeal. "If Jill's on our side, the Rave Empire will lose the Dragon Consort because we failed to act," Natalie said. "Even if she's our enemy, I think it's still worth it to see what's happened to her. Prince Gerald, the king, and the Cervels have left the city. It's our last chance. Can't we do something about this?"

Elentzia faced forward for a while before she whispered, "Rosa, can you do it?"

Rosa gave a curt growl. Her response was a clear, "Yes."

With a sigh, Elentzia gripped the reins. "If we're surrounded by anti-flight magic circles and Rosa falls, we'll be done for. We can only go for a short while, all right?"

"You'll do it?!" Natalie replied joyfully.

"It seems like something unexpected has occurred, and both you and I have been spared by Jill in the past. We owe it to her. Even if we run into a problem, my younger brothers are intelligent. They can probably do something about it."

As Elentzia threw all her responsibilities to the side, Rosa turned her head and flew in a beautiful arc as she changed directions. Seeing how the dragon seemed to fly faster, Elentzia was likely worried about Jill as well.

Amidst the smoke billowing in the skies, Natalie and Elentzia saw Jill lying unconscious in the middle of the palace courtyard.



JILL thought that she had made a sound. It was what she'd tried to do.

"What's wrong? You've been quiet," said a voice.

Jill tried to raise her head, but her line of sight remained low, contrary to her wishes. *Huh? I was sandwiched by the Sacred Spear of the Goddess and the magic circle of the Parrying Dagger and...* Jill thought.

"It's been seven years since she's married over from Kratos. Why don't you free her from imprisonment?"

Jill didn't expect to hear any of those words come from her mouth, but the exchange went on while she was still unable to grasp her situation.

"Release the Goddess's descendant?" scoffed a voice coldly.

Jill felt relieved by the response, but she wasn't sure why.

"I'm not telling you two to become a happy couple. I'm sure, as the Dragon Emperor, you have your logic that you cannot budge on, Your Majesty. But the princess is a very gentle soul. If you continue to treat her coldly for years, it shall negatively affect your reputation."

"Her voice is pleasant like the chirps of the birds, her smile is gentle like the sun in spring, and her words are kind like a crown of flowers, was it? I think some poet wrote that about her without realizing that they were tricked by the Goddess."

"The Kratos princess isn't someone like that."

"I only agreed to this if she was a vase. A decoration, and nothing more."

"The princess isn't even sixteen yet, Your Majesty. Why don't you properly meet her once? If you do so, I'm sure..."

I'm sure you will change your mind. What bubbled up wasn't innocent hope. The emotions were filthy and dirty, filled with envy and jealousy.

"That's not necessary."

Truth be told, Jill was relieved by that response, but she acted sad—she was a benevolent Dragon Consort.

"I understand that you'd want to avoid a war. But it's troublesome to have

such a spineless Dragon Consort.”

“That’s not what I mean, Your Majesty. It’s simply that being firm would earn the anger of others. Even more so since the current Rave Empire is stable, all thanks to you.”

“For now. We still don’t have an heir.”

“I believe the third queen has conceived a child.”

Once again, something filthy rose up from within her. This feeling was stronger than before, and she grit her teeth discreetly. But Jill had only felt someone grit their teeth—indeed, *she* hadn’t done anything at all.

Am I...inside someone? Jill thought.

“Ah, so you’ve finally noticed,” a reply came.

Jill was surprised to hear a response, but the conversation continued.

“It’ll be great if an heir is born,” the emperor said.

“I agree. I wish I could lend you my aid.”

“Your job is to protect me from the Goddess. You should leave matters pertaining to my heir to the consorts... Unless...have they said something to you again?”

“Oh, nothing like that at all.”

Even if the Dragon Emperor had spent nights with her, all she had done was act as a mere guard. The emperor hadn’t treated the Dragon Consort like a woman. *Indeed, we’re much more loved. The Dragon Emperor isn’t willing to create a child with the Dragon Consort. I understand it’s to maintain military might, but even so. Is there a problem, perhaps? How old are you, Dragon Consort? Surely, you should almost be of the age where you can no longer conceive a child.*

“Don’t heed her words, I’ll silence her immediately. I won’t forgive anyone who disrespects my wife.”

“...I know. I understand that you treat me preciously, Your Majesty.”

“Thanks to you, I’m able to sleep in peace.”

She wasn't a consort. She was just a soldier, a shield. The emperor knew that the Dragon Consort was being called as such, and yet...

"Thank you. I love you."

Jill tried to press her hands against her mouth, trying to suppress the love and hatred that welled up from deep within. But of course, she couldn't move at all and simply smiled so as not to disappoint the man she loved.

What is this? Jill wondered.

"My memories. From 300 years ago. I'm your predecessor," came a reply.

As Jill tried to glance around, the scene changed with her movements.

"I'm sorry, it seems like His Majesty is still wary of you..."

"Please don't be, Dragon Consort. I knew this would be the outcome the moment I married him," a woman replied.

The backlight made it difficult to see, but a beautiful woman was sitting on a simple stone chair. The sky could be seen between the iron bars, hinting that they may have been in a tower.

"You look pale, Dragon Consort. Perhaps you've been pushing yourself..."

"I'm fine. Thanks to you, our battles with Kratos have decreased."

Had the two royals met, perhaps there would have been no need to think of unnecessary things. Little by little, small holes were poked in her heart.

"Besides, I'm the only one who can protect the Rave Empire...and His Majesty. I'm a woman who possesses no cute qualities, with only my powerful magic abilities being my strong point. In which case, I have to at least be useful on that front."

"Please don't belittle yourself. You're an adorable person, Dragon Consort." A warm hand wrapped around the consort. "You're like an older sister to me. I would love to be of use to you."

"Don't think that. You're in a much worse position than me. You've been trapped here for many years." A voice of superiority mixed with pity came from the consort's mouth as she tried to remain gentle and kind. "I'm sure His

Majesty will understand one day if I keep telling him.”

“I agree. They’re the words from the Dragon Consort, after all. But please don’t push yourself. The emperor’s younger brother has also been worried sick.”

The visage of an extremely kind young man flashed across the consort’s mind. Her brother-in-law would always worry and call out to her. They had quite an age gap, but perhaps feeling timid in front of his older brother, he always came to her for help. Every time he did, her heart felt warm and fuzzy. But of course, such a memory didn’t exist within Jill’s mind.

Is this what happened three centuries ago? That woman I just saw was the Kratos princess who married into Rave... Jill thought.

Once again, the scene changed. The shrill cries of a baby could be heard.

“It’s an heir!” someone said.

Cheers of celebration rose in the air as everyone was in a congratulatory mood. Amidst the elated atmosphere, he smiled with joy. “You’ve done well,” he said. He had thanked a different woman. It wasn’t the consort.

Watching from the shadows, she felt utterly pathetic and instinctively rushed out. Someone had grabbed her arm, but it wasn’t her husband.

“Sister! Are you all right?” her brother-in-law asked.

“I’m not!”

Would things have changed if she said that she was back then? Were these feelings of regret?

“I’m not all right at all,” the consort spluttered. “I’ll...be going back to Radia tomorrow. To defend the borders. To protect his child that a different woman carried for him! Is there anything more miserable?!”

“C-Calm down. I don’t think of you like that.”

“Don’t make me laugh! You do, don’t you? You also see me as just another soldier. I’m not a consort or even a woman! I’m just a meat shield!”

“I don’t see you like that at all! I’m not like my older brother! I...love you!”

Her mind went blank. Her quiet, kind younger brother-in-law hugged her tightly, and she found herself unable to breathe.

“Let...go...” she muttered in a hoarse voice.

“I know! Even I know that I’m doing something ridiculous here!”

She had never known such warmth before.

“I don’t stand a chance against my brother,” he said. “But if you’re just going to be unhappy, I’ll steal you from my brother!”

She had never thought that such a cold, logical love would burn her like this. If she claimed that the Kratos forces were making shady movements, her husband wouldn’t grow suspicious even if she stayed a month or two in Radia. He’d simply say that things would get lonely and see her off. Even if she repeatedly secretly met with the emperor’s younger brother upon her return to the capital, no one had noticed. The situation was so humorous that it was refreshing for her. The princess of Kratos was the first to notice this change. She had lent her aid, stating that she only wished for the happiness of the couple.

Impossible... This is horrible. Everyone will be unhappy, Jill thought.

“Do you think so? I feel like I was at my happiest back then. I was loved and I loved in turn,” the consort of the past replied.

But the consort had trembled when she found out that she was pregnant. The child most certainly didn’t belong to the Dragon Emperor. And a Dragon Consort’s betrayal would never be forgiven. Who was it that first suggested fleeing? Coincidentally, divorce was being brought up between the Kratos princess and the emperor. Things were getting heated near the border, and Kratos had been taking some suspicious actions. But none of that mattered to the consort. She felt it was her duty to protect the life that was growing inside of her—even if she had to do it by herself. She was no longer alone, after all.

“How dare you, descendant of the Goddess!” the Dragon Emperor roared with fury.

Even when everything had been exposed to her husband, the Dragon Consort didn’t feel fear. She didn’t care if there were claims of the Kratos princess seducing the emperor’s younger brother or that she was used as a decoy while

the princess and the younger brother escaped. In any case, she wasn't sure if the Dragon Emperor's claims were true.

"I'm impressed. I was naïve to think that you were powerless without the Sacred Spear! How dare you! How dare you!" the emperor bellowed.

Jill wanted to turn away, but she was unable to do so. She was forced to face the memories of her predecessor.

"Please let me go!" the Dragon Consort begged. "I want to give birth to this child. I've devoted my entire life to protecting you! Please! I need nothing more!"

"How dare you betray me, Dragon Consort! And I loved you..."

Ah, so this man will never change, even until the bitter end, the Dragon Consort realized. This was when she had felt absolute despair. *You never loved me in the first place.*

First, her legs were sliced. Then, her arms. Finally, the womb she was trying to protect was pierced through by the Heavenly Sword.

I hope you're cursed, the Dragon Consort thought. It was then that she noticed something lurking within the consort's ring. *I hope you're cursed, Dragon Emperor.*

She was resonating with the band around her finger.

Suddenly, Jill was thrust into darkness. The Dragon Consort and the Dragon Emperor were nowhere to be seen. She didn't know where she was, and she wasn't even sure if she was standing or floating. Scenery that looked like paintings simply rotated around her. None of these were a part of Jill's memories, but she was able to guess that these paintings all belonged to the memories of the previous Dragon Consorts.

She saw a thin body placing a barrier on the Rakia mountains. Could that have been the first Dragon Consort? The consort had been pierced from the front by a spear and stabbed from the back by a sword.

"What? I thought the first Dragon Consort used the Heavenly Sword to personally seal the Goddess..." Jill murmured before she stopped herself.

She had heard this story from Camila, but Rave never mentioned it himself. Indeed, the Dragon God had never claimed that the first Dragon Consort had stabbed herself with the Heavenly Sword. In fact, the deity had planned on cutting Jill down, Goddess and all, with the Heavenly Sword. Was that the correct answer? As though to show Jill the truth, a voice suddenly echoed from the scene in front of her.

“Your Majesty, now’s your chance! Please cut me down while I’m suppressing the Goddess and get us both!”

“...I understand. You have my gratitude.”

Jill immediately tried to cover her ears, but it was no use. She had heard it all. She had heard the Dragon Consort yell, using herself as a shield to protect the Dragon Emperor.

“I have to find a new one.”

Was she just a replaceable tool? As she was about to die, was she simply just a broken item?

“How pitiful,” a voice echoed in Jill’s head as she clenched her chest in pain. *“How pitiful. All because she loved that man. She ended up with the same fate as me.”*

Jill opened her eyes with a gasp. She had heard the voice of the Goddess. As the flame of her life was being snuffed out, the first Dragon Consort had noticed it as well—the being that had tried to take her life was crying.

“How pitiful. We’re the same, aren’t we? We loved the same man, and we were betrayed by him.”

At the very end, they realized that her husband’s logic wouldn’t try to spare her.

“I’m sorry that I can’t save you.”

This was the Goddess’s deep love. Like a tense string had just snapped, the laments of the Dragon Consorts echoed.

“I hope you’re cursed.”

“You didn’t understand our love.”

the Dragon Emperor of your own accord.”

“I...” Jill started.

“It’s not a sin. It’s far too much for a human to bear anyway. Don’t worry, there’s no need for you to fight anymore. I shall take care of the rest and receive it all, including the sorrows of the Dragon Consorts.”

The young girl promised with the gentle smile of the Goddess. It was tempting to cling to her benevolence.

“I shall shoulder everything that he’s done,” the young girl stated.

It would’ve been much easier for Jill if she had gone on her knees. But she was arrogant. With clenched fists and a smile, Jill repeated her previous declaration.

“I told you to never lay a hand on my husband again!”

The hand of salvation had been kindly offered to her, but Jill forcibly ripped it away. The swarm of black hands were burned by her magic powers and vaporized. However, other hands soon took their place, trying to grab onto Jill. She had no idea where they were coming from, but she knew that if they latched onto her, she needed to rip them off. Voices entered her mind.

“Don’t you understand? You’re being fooled by the Dragon Emperor.”

“We just want to save you.”

These thoughts weren’t her own, and Jill yelled loudly to rid herself of these voices.

“Wake up, Dragon Consorts! You’re all making a huge mistake! The Goddess is —”

“Goddess Kratos lent these ladies her aid, wanting to truly spare the Dragon Consorts,” the young girl replied first, cutting off Jill’s shouts.

Jill clicked her tongue in annoyance. “I guessed as much. But she’s wrong! We’re all different, aren’t we?” She kicked the ground below her. She couldn’t see where she was, but she knew she had stable footing. “Dragon Consort from three centuries ago! You saw, didn’t you? The Dragon Emperor had cried when he tried to kill you!”

A dark hand grabbed Jill's arm and locked her in place. Another hand grabbed at her ankles, causing her to trip.

"First Dragon Consort!" Jill roared, unwilling to give up. "You heard the Dragon Emperor's trembling voice, didn't you?!"

"Shut up," a voice echoed in Jill's head. *"Shut up! Shut up! I won't be fooled anymore!"*

"That man hurt me without even giving a passing glance as I died!"

"You sure he just couldn't bear to watch his wife die?! He didn't want to be left behind! Are you sure that he didn't have those thoughts?!" Jill asked. She felt the hands around her ankles loosen out of confusion. She stood up and bellowed, "Just to be clear, I agree that the past emperors were all the worst! They're the shittiest people I've ever come across! I can't believe you married them! I'm really no different though. I was almost made into bait, and he doesn't trust me, and he always tries to test me! We're currently in the middle of a fight, you know! I swear I'll punch him!"

"Then why don't you also—"

"Right, so you guys should've punched him too!" Jill insisted. "Punch your Dragon Emperor! You have to do it with your own hands! If you don't, you won't understand how much you hurt yourself when you punch him!"

Their own pain was mixed with the pain of others, further supporting the idea that they were all the same. As their differences were stripped away, they would push their own battles onto others.

"My Majesty is different from the other Dragon Emperors!" Jill said. "Did your emperor wear an apron?!"

The hands stopped moving. It seemed like no other Dragon Emperor had worn an apron before. After a loud, awkward sigh, Jill placed her hands on the ground and slowly lifted herself back up.

"Try to remember," Jill said. "You're all forgetting something that you mustn't ever forget."

"And what would that be?" the young girl wearing a flower crown asked in

the darkness.

Jill took a deep breath before she answered, "Remember how gallant you were when you protected the Dragon Emperor from the Goddess."

It was a feat that Jill was still unable to accomplish.

"The Dragon Emperors by your side all looked happy," Jill said. "You have my utmost respect. As the current Dragon Consort, I'd like to do the same."

Between the girl with the flower crown and Jill, the other Dragon Consorts squirmed awkwardly. They were uneasy being told that Jill had wanted to follow in their footsteps, and they were troubled with finding a reply. It was easy to look at them with pity at their transformation and laugh at them with scorn. But Jill knew that it wasn't right to do so.

"Please. Let me go to His Majesty," Jill said with a sharp gaze.

"The power of the Dragon Consort has already gone to the Goddess. Even if you were able to leave this barrier, you no longer have the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort. You no longer have your gold ring. You've lost your power and position as Dragon Consort," the young girl replied.

"That's right, that's right. You're no longer the Dragon Consort."

"We're no longer the Dragon Consort..."

Jill felt like she heard the voices of the Dragon Consorts, huddled together and withering away.

She laughed. "Don't be stupid. Did you think the Sacred Treasure and the ring had made you into a Dragon Consort? You're all wrong, then. We wanted to protect the Dragon Emperor and wished for his happiness. *That's* what made us into Dragon Consorts."

Surely, the previous Dragon Consorts had all been the same. If they weren't, they wouldn't have hated the Dragon Emperor to such an extreme extent. There was only a thin line between love and hate.

"The Dragon Emperor may not see you as the Dragon Consort," the young girl said.

"Well, no one else can be a Dragon Consort for His Majesty, and I won't let

that happen either,” Jill replied as she turned to the darkness. “Aren’t I right?”

The dark hands were nowhere to be seen. They were hiding within the darkness, but every now and then, a bubble would be expelled as though they were in the water. But they were listening.

“I’m the one who has to protect him and make him happy,” Jill said. “That’s what you all thought too, didn’t you?”

Silence was the only reply. She felt a pitiful gaze as though they agreed with her words and empathized. It was like they were looking at their past self.

“Undo this barrier,” Jill said. “I don’t have time. I have to stop His Majesty.”

The barrier was created so that Jill’s power as the Dragon Consort could be given to the Goddess, as the Dragon Consorts of the past had wished. In other words, this space was being controlled by the Dragon Consorts.

“You don’t need our power?” the voices inquired.

Jill nodded without hesitation.

“You might turn out like us.”

“Sure, but you guys didn’t need it either.”

“We’re different from you... We were saved by the Goddess.”

“About that... Let me give you a word of warning,” Jill said. “That woman over there who saved you is no saint either. She’s the one who killed me, you know.”

Jill thought she saw the girl with the flower crown smile.

“Ah, so you knew it was me,” the girl said.

“Aren’t you the one who told me that I was going to cast His Majesty aside?” Jill retorted. “I don’t forget my enemies... Though I don’t know why I’m here.”

“The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort was connected to the Sacred Spear of the Goddess ever since the first Dragon Emperor had delivered his judgment with the Heavenly Sword. The Dragon Consorts’ resentment and the love that had been shattered by logic were slowly mixed together. After a thousand years, the fragments of love had accumulated and became the Goddess’s power on this day.”

Jill had already guessed as much—she wasn't surprised.

"You're saying that the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort and its power already belongs to the Goddess," Jill replied. "Got it. Then I'll be a good sport and leave all that behind. His Majesty hates the Goddess, after all. Are you satisfied? Let me leave, Dragon Consorts."

"...*To fight?*" the consorts asked gingerly.

Jill smiled. "That's right. And I'll win. I'll at least take home a victory for you guys."

Like specks of snow, part of the darkness peeled away. They were letting her leave.

"How you all spoil the most recent Dragon Consort," said Faris with a laugh.

Light trickled in from the darkness that was fading away.

"...Are you letting me go too?" Jill asked her.

"Let you go?" Faris replied. "My goal has already been fulfilled. They will defeat the Dragon Emperor with me. As they've wished, they'll supplement the Goddess's powers that have been lost."

"I see. I said what I needed earlier, but those Dragon Emperors were awful... Even if they're barking up the wrong tree, I can see why they'd want to let loose. I guess there's nothing I can do about that. I'll fight everyone head-on."

If the consorts were going to throw the pain of their shattered love and their rage at Hadis, Jill had to try her best to shield him from that.

"Come at me with everything you've got," Jill declared.

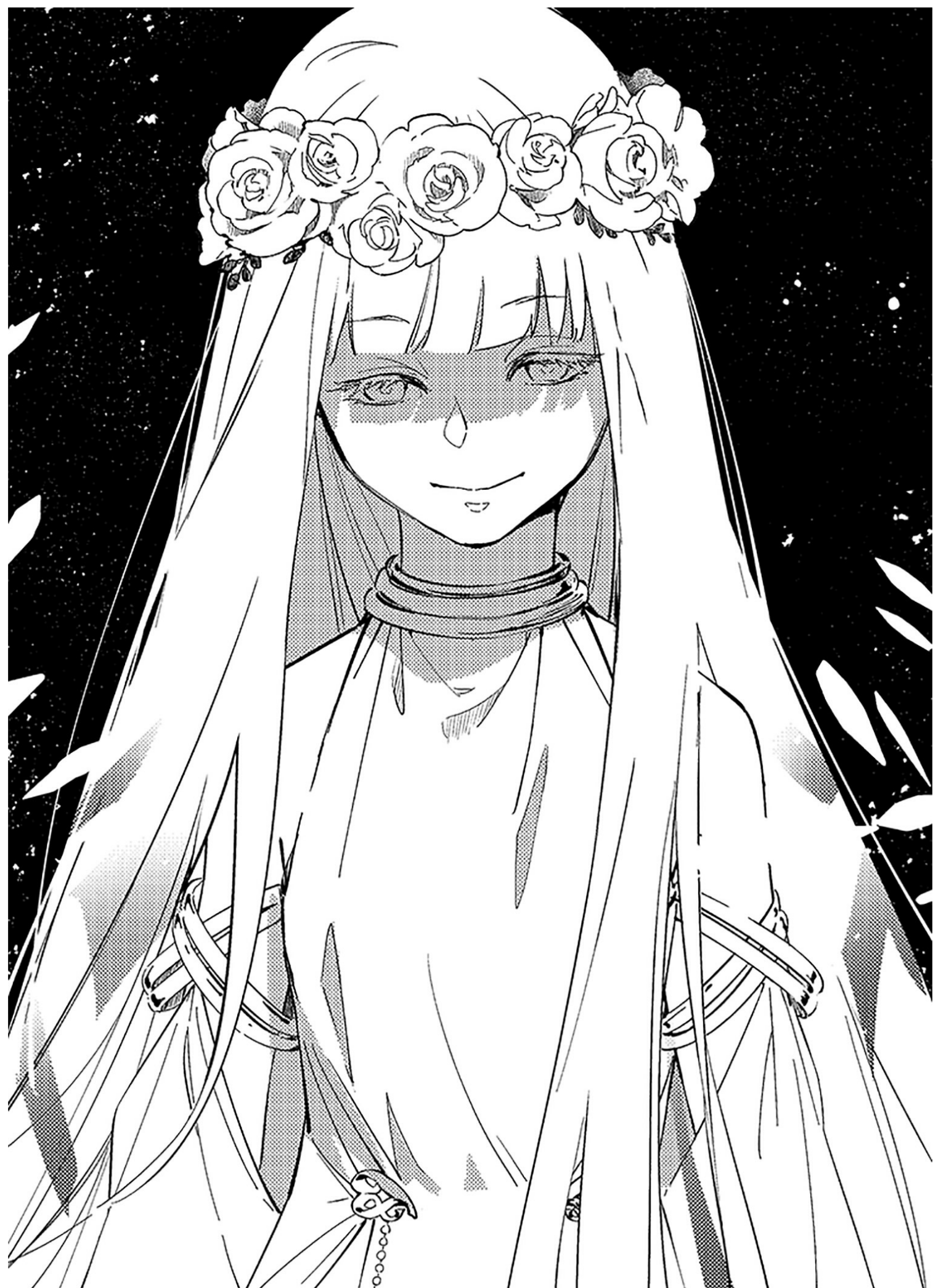
Faris giggled. "Oh, you sound so valiant. I didn't think you'd stick by the Dragon Emperor even after knowing the fates of the Dragon Consorts. I thought you'd toss him aside, like you'd done to my brother."

"His Majesty hasn't betrayed me yet, unlike Prince Gerald. Don't you dare try to compare the two."

"You don't change, do you? You're like the merciless Dragon God that lives with logic."

“Princess Faris, just what has the Goddess...” Jill started, but she quickly shook her head and stopped herself. Her question was a foolish one to ask. “No, never mind. If you try to harm His Majesty, you’re my enemy.”

“That was a wise decision. I shall see you again later in the real world.”



Faris turned her back as light poured in all at once. Jill blinked. These were her own eyes. She heard the sounds of explosions ringing in her ears and the wind was almost dizzying. At once, she had regained consciousness.

“Are we under enemy attack?!” Elentzia cried.

“Sister!” Natalie cried. “Jill woke up!”

“I can’t turn around right now, so we’ll tend to her later. Rosa, fly higher! We’ll throw them off!”

Magic circles fired at the group from behind. Jill realized that the blinding light she had just seen was from these attacks. She tried to move her neck to get a better view, but she realized that she couldn’t move as she wished. She was seated between Elentzia and Natalie, atop the small back of a dragon. *It’s cramped! What’s going on here?!* Jill thought.

The desert was below. She managed to crane her neck and look behind her as she saw the lights of the city growing farther away and the magic circles taking aim. *Did we just come from the palace of the King of South Kratos?* Jill skillfully stood on the saddle between the two princesses.

“I’ve gotta confirm this, Jill!” Elentzia shouted while clenching the reins. “Are you friend or foe? If you’re the latter, I’ll throw you off!”

Clearly, Jill had little choice in the matter, but the question was fitting for a soldier. A ray of magic grazed the area right above Elentzia’s head.

“I’m a friend!” Jill replied. “Can you shake them off?”

The red dragon steered by Elentzia was dodging the rays of the anti-flight magic circles and fleeing. That was all Jill could glean. Elentzia had rescued Natalie, and for whatever reason, they had also grabbed Jill while they were on the run.

“I can,” Elentzia replied. “King Rufus and Prince Gerald aren’t there right now.”

“Did King Rufus and the others use the teleporting device to head to His Majesty?!” Jill asked.

“Precisely. That by itself isn’t an issue and is within Hadis’s calculations. But

we're currently flying in a completely different direction! We can't meet with our allies at this rate."

"Are you talking about the ship wandering around in the south sea?" Jill asked.

"Yeah. But we're currently headed for the north. We'll be flying above Kratos."

Jill remembered the map and frowned. "That's bad. There are anti-flight magic circles against dragons there! And it's not just in cities and the capital, it's everywhere! There are ones that attack automatically based on size, altitude, and the dragon!"

"I knew it. I've heard that flying through the skies of Kratos was like walking through a minefield. What if we change our direction and head to the sea?!"

"That would be even more dangerous! The desert is much better, but we'd need to fly between the clouds to not get caught."

"Ahaha!" Elentzia laughed manically. "It's a beautiful, clear night! You can see the moon and the stars very well!"

"I know! Ugh, why'd you try to attempt such a reckless escape?! We've even got Her Highness Natalie onboard!" Jill griped.

"H-Hey! We went out of our way to save you!" Natalie shouted back.

It was then that Jill realized that the two princesses had saved her, which got them into this situation.

"Didn't His Majesty tell you not to save me?" Jill asked.

"H-He did, but..." Natalie mumbled.

"I knew it! His Majesty truly didn't rely on me this time around!" Jill huffed.

"What?! Why're you so angry? Are you really an ally and the Dragon Consort?!"

Jill went silent and looked down. The ring finger on her left hand was bare—there was no gold band to be seen.

"The Goddess stole all my power as the Dragon Consort, Sacred Treasure and

all,” Jill admitted.

“What?!” Natalie cried.

“I’ll explain later. We must stop His Majesty first. We should meet up with him. Rosa would know where he is, wouldn’t she?” Jill asked.

“What are you planning?” Elentzia asked. “You’ve lost Hadis’s trust, and you’ve even allowed the enemy to steal the Sacred Treasure from you. We can’t let you approach Hadis so easily.” Elentzia made it clear that she was still wary of Jill. The Dragon Knight captain couldn’t be faulted for her stern question. Jill’s reply, however, was even more simple.

“That’s right. I’m currently fighting with His Majesty. So, I’m gonna go and win!”

“Huh?!” yelped Natalie. “All the more reason to keep you away from him. Are you stupid?! What are you planning to do anyways?!”

“The King of South Kratos is with His Majesty, isn’t he? The king should have the Parrying Dagger of the Goddess with him.” Jill showed the two princesses the engagement contract that she’d been carrying. “I’ll have Kratos stamp the Great Seal onto here, have my family celebrate this occasion, and marry His Majesty!” she declared. “There’s no way I’ll allow war to break out here and become a prize for His Majesty to earn!”

Natalie widened her eyes in shock. Elentzia gave a hearty laugh while still gripping the reins.

“I see!” Elentzia roared with laughter. “So that’s the fight you’re having with him! If you win, we can just barely avoid the war... I’m in!”

“Sister, you agree too easily!” Natalie cried.

“But we’ve got three problems,” Elentzia said. “One, will Hadis accept you, even after you’ve lost the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort? Two, can you truly fight against your family who are trying to stop you? Hadis cannot be chased away by the Cervels; he must return triumphantly. Do you understand me?”

Indeed, Hadis was to return from Kratos, but his matter of return was vital. If

it looked like the Cervels had managed to successfully drive the Dragon Emperor away, they would only grow stronger and more aggressive. But if the famous Cervels were instead defeated, Kratos would lose steam.

“That’s the position your home is in this time around,” Elentzia explained. “Perhaps it’s the fate of the count who protects the border. This was inevitable.”

“I’m fine,” Jill replied. “In fact, His Majesty should have explained that to me from the beginning.”

The explanation of peace that Hadis had given in the past, where he extended his left hand while making a fist with his right, finally started to make sense. Jill pursed her lips.

“He should’ve told me that I might have to fight with my family a little based on the situation,” Jill said. “I would’ve properly thought of a plan then—an efficient plot that would leave damages to a minimum.”

“I pray those are your true thoughts,” Elentzia replied.

“I admit that I lacked resolve. It’s only natural for His Majesty to be a little dubious of me. But our—I mean the Cervels’ family motto is that strength is justice. If we lose, that won’t be a source of calamity. I’m sure they’re currently playing rock-paper-scissors to see who will fight His Majesty.”

“What kind of household is that?” Natalie asked with furrowed brows and a small laugh.

The southern city was already far away, and they had managed to escape from the anti-flight magic circles. Everything was quiet and it felt like the panic from earlier was all a dream.

“I think His Majesty didn’t know...” Jill murmured. “Even in a fight between family, it won’t always end with the opposing parties simply hating each other. He’s never experienced it before.”

“R-Recently, I think Hadis has learned what a quarrel between siblings is like, though,” Elentzia hastily added.

“Which was why if I fought, he thought that it would either end in me killing

my family or being unable to do so,” Jill finished. “He only had two choices in his mind, that fool...”

“Hadis didn’t want to choose a path where you would have to kill your family,” Natalie said casually.

Jill felt her chest tighten while Elentzia gave a dry laugh.

“Yeah, I agree,” Elentzia said. “He didn’t admit it himself and gave excuses about the Dragon Consort and whatnot.”

“He just didn’t want to be dumped by Jill, I bet,” Natalie added. “And he even chose to take on the role of the villain so that it’d be easier for her to return to her family. That brother is really...”

“A troublesome kid,” Elentzia finished. “Don’t you agree, Jill?”

Receiving the meaningful gazes of the two princesses, Jill’s face turned red.

“Th-That might not be the case!” she insisted. “This is His Majesty we’re talking about! He might’ve just tried to test me again... B-Besides, even if it were to ever come to that, he’s still being selfish! I’ll definitely punch him!”

Elentzia laughed. “So, you’ve made your resolve, have you? Then I’ve got nothing more to say...but our last problem is Rosa. We won’t get there in time unless she flies with everything she’s got, and she can’t go against Hadis.”

Should the dragon find Jill to be an enemy, Rosa wouldn’t let Jill approach Hadis. Red dragons were intelligent, and they could easily fly slowly to gain some time. Jill placed a hand on Elentzia’s shoulder and flipped in the air before sitting at the very front.

“Rosa, go as fast as you can and take the shortest route. I need you to take me to His Majesty,” Jill ordered, gently stroking the beast’s neck. But Rosa didn’t respond and ignored her words. “I want to save His Majesty. I’m not telling you to save me. You just have to bring me there.”

Elentzia and Natalie waited for an answer with bated breath.

“Rosa, please,” Jill said.

But the dragon didn’t respond.

Elentzia sighed. “I guess it’s a no. A dragon can’t see you as the Dragon Consort without the ring...”

“Or else, I’ll make you into a chunk of meat right now,” Jill finished.

“Grar?!” Rosa yelped.

Jill smiled and put strength into the hand that was gently stroking the dragon’s neck.

“If you don’t see me as the Dragon Consort, then I’m a person of the Cervels, your enemy,” Jill said. “I wonder what we’re called in your world. I think our family is the global leader when it comes to defeating the greatest number of dragons.”

Perhaps wanting to ask Elentzia for help, Rosa tried to move her neck, but Jill stepped down and grabbed the dragon’s head with one hand, locking the beast in place.

“Make your choice. You can pick whichever you prefer. Take me to His Majesty, or become a chunk of roast meat.”

“Gr... Grawr...”

“You’ll be fine. You’re saving the Dragon Emperor. There’s no issue at all, is there?” Jill lulled in a low voice while slowly tightening her grip on Rosa’s head. “Don’t tell His Majesty anything. Keep it from Raw too. Or else, you’ll die despite carrying me on your back.”

Rosa nodded furiously, spread her wings wide, and flew at an incredible speed. With a look of satisfaction, Jill turned around to see Elentzia and Natalie trembling.

“It seems like she’s accepted me as the Dragon Consort!” Jill declared proudly.

“R-Right, totally!” stammered Elentzia.

“I’m so happy for you!” quipped Natalie.

The two princesses agreed as their voices rose an octave. The only one left was that stubborn, obstinate oaf of a husband. The glimmering stars slowly started to fade over the horizon of the skies in the northeast. Day was about to break.



“WE’VE been separated,” Rave said.

“Yeah, but that’s not a problem,” Hadis replied as he looked up at the dark skies. “In fact, this makes things easier.”

They had traveled in a small group, but Hadis had been expertly isolated from Risteard and the rest. The strategy of attacking and pulling back, which had begun in the middle of the night, was likely to isolate Hadis from the rest.

“Has Natalie been rescued?” Hadis asked. “Was Rosa able to meet Elentzia, who’s been hiding in the palace of the King of South Kratos?”

“Nah, I’m not receiving a reply. Seems like things got a little sticky for them too. I’m surprised these guys haven’t gotten serious yet. I expected the Cervels to just pounce on you or something.”

“Yeah, but the only ones attacking are the Cervels’ personal soldiers and not the royal army.”

Hadis suddenly realized that Kratos had likely not been aware that he could give out instructions to the Rave Empire through Raw. They believed that if Hadis was stopped, the Rave imperial army wouldn’t move. And this also meant...

“Missy kept quiet about that. Although, they’ll find out if they see Rosa.”

“...I won’t believe in anything. She probably just wanted to avoid war or something. She isn’t on my side.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever you say. I hope Missy isn’t caught in anything weird, though.”

“Wh-What do you mean by that?”

Hadis sat down while clutching his knees when Rave appeared from his chest.

“These plans were to make you out as the villain while roping in Missy. If this is a plan to strip the Dragon Consort of her power, it’s a pretty poor one, and an emotional one at that. It’s par for the course for the Goddess, but I just feel like there’s something more. The Goddess has repeatedly lost to the Dragon Consort, so I wouldn’t be surprised if she had a plan already.”

“Well, Jill probably wants to quit being the Dragon Consort, so it’s fine. Whatever.”

“You really should stop trying to be oddly stubborn during these times.”

“I’m not. I’m being calm and trying to face reality...”

Suddenly Hadis stopped. Since they were just on this subject, it made them all the more conscious about the consort. Rave also noticed, and the Dragon God turned in the same direction that Hadis was facing—to the south, in a place that was far away from their current location.

The presence of the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort had disappeared.

“Hadis...”

Had something happened? Or did the Dragon Consort manage to remove the ring of her own accord?

“...I’m not bothered by it. That’s not what I should be worried about right now.”

“But if the Goddess did something to Missy...”

“Ring or not, I’m the one who decides the Dragon Consort.”

Hadis stood up, and Rave, who watched in astonishment, gave a forced laugh.

“...I see. You’re right. Yeah, I think that’s fine.”

“Why do you say it like that? Come on, get yourself prepared. He’s coming.”

“Ah, so it’s finally my turn.”

“It’s the perfect opportunity to tell my brother where I currently am, and I’ll be facing my father-in-law. I’ll be respectful, of course.”

Rave wrapped around Hadis’s right arm and transformed. As though waiting for the moment Hadis gripped the glittering, silver Heavenly Sword, magic rained down upon him. It was an impressive amount—it looked like all the stars of the night were falling on Hadis.

I expect no less from the Cervels, Hadis thought with a smile. He jumped in the air and used the hilt of his blade to parry the fist that was aimed squarely at his back. Usually, his opponent would be slammed to the ground by that, but his

foe didn't even flinch as they immediately followed up with a powerful kick. Hadis managed to dodge it and gain some distance.

“Who would normally try to fight against the Heavenly Sword with their bare hands? He’s got way too much courage,” Rave said wearily.

“You were able to dodge my attack. I’m impressed by your reflexes,” said a cheery voice. Billy Cervel stood smiling, just like when he had first welcomed the emperor into his manor. But the count no longer looked like a burly gentleman.

“I-Is that Missy’s dad?! Doesn’t he look a bit too different?!”

Billy had been shorter than Hadis, but he was now much taller and much more muscular. He had enhanced his body using magic. His muscles and bones had likely been strengthened too.

“I’d like to ask, just to be sure,” Hadis said. “Are you Billy Cervel, the count of the frontier?”

“I am indeed, Your Majesty the Dragon Emperor. This isn’t our first meeting.”

Hadis tried to detect the presence of others as he faced Billy, his lips curling up to form a smile. “Are you alone?” the emperor asked.

“I am. The others wanted to join in, but we’re facing the Dragon Emperor, no less. We fought a little to decide who would be allowed to face you, and I must say, it had become a little bloody. Some had volunteered despite their old age, while the younger ones were out for blood and out of control. Unfortunately, I’m the only one here to give you a warm welcome, but I beg for your understanding.”

“No need to be so reserved. I’ve wanted to talk with you once more, so this is perfect.”

“Oh? And what did you want to talk with me about?”

“We couldn’t speak about how we really felt up until now, so I’d like to ask you one thing.”

With a smile, Hadis thrust his blade while Billy braced himself, his muscular upper body showing no openings. And so, Hadis voiced something very

important.

“Please let me marry your daughter.”

“No.”

Billy’s instantaneous rejection was almost refreshing as the two forces of magic clashed against each other.

Chapter 7: The Absolute Line of Defense of the Dragon Consorts

TO Billy Cervel, Jill was an adorable daughter. His first and second daughters were beloved to him too, of course, but since her youth, his oldest daughter had stated, “I don’t want to marry a musclebrain like you, Father. I’d like to marry a handsome man!” Billy’s second daughter, who fell in love with sniping, had muttered curtly, “You’re in the way of my training.” The eldest son hardly appeared in front of his father, much less locked eyes with Billy.

But Jill had run up to him, asking, “How can I throw punches like you, Father?!” She was a little angel. She was never against training with him. When she had said, “I’d love to marry a strong man like you, Father!” Billy was so moved by her words, he’d likely never forget that moment.

However, Billy still had his fair share of worries about her. Jill lacked the formidability of his eldest daughter and the thoughtfulness of the second eldest. Case in point, Jill could easily be lured into things by delicious food, and Billy worried that she’d be tricked by a nefarious man one day. In a sense, this premonition came true. But he never expected her to say that she wanted to marry the Dragon Emperor, Hadis Teos Rave.

“Since when have you been dating Jill?!” Billy asked.

Sparks flew in the air as his brass knuckles made contact with the Heavenly Sword. The emperor didn’t make any useless movements and used his powerful magic to its fullest extent. He’d no doubt undergone rigorous training. He was well aware of how to move his muscles and magic. Indeed, Billy had no complaints about him when it came to pure strength.

“Since Crown Prince Gerald’s birthday party,” Hadis answered.

Even now, he speaks politely. How cheeky—I mean, well-mannered, thought Billy.

“I see!” Billy replied. “How did you trick her into liking— No, there’s no need

for me to ask that. Through cooking, wasn't it?"

"Fortunately, I'm quite good at it," said Hadis. "Did my cooking not suit your tastes?"

"Oh, nothing like that at all! Your food was delicious! And I got to see my daughter's growth."

Jill, whose mind was filled with nothing but food, helped the apron-wearing Dragon Emperor cook and followed his orders. It was quite a shock for Billy to see. When the emperor had fed her to taste test, Billy had crushed the bundle of spoons he was holding. Everyone around them didn't seem to mind, meaning that the emperor and Billy's daughter had done these acts daily.

"I think it was worth it to have my daughter go to Rave alone for some training!" Billy claimed.

"I'm happy to hear those words from you, Father," Hadis replied.

"Who're you calling *Father*?! I won't allow you to marry my daughter!"

The Dragon Emperor dodged Billy's fist of fury, crouched low, and closed in on him.

"Then I suppose I must hurt the Cervels a little until you offer your daughter to me," Hadis said.

The Dragon Emperor looked calm—not even a twinkle of sweat glistened on his brow. He was so handsome and beautiful that Billy knew all his daughters would fall in love with his face. That was the first thing that had irked him. Jill had stated that a man was nothing without his muscles—Billy was secretly sulking about how different her taste in men had become.

"Die," Hadis said.

Above all, those mysterious gold eyes that transformed in the blink of an eye crept Billy out.

"Don't take me lightly, boy!" growled Billy.

He circled behind the emperor and kicked him in the back. As Hadis flew towards the ground, Billy outsped him and used all his magic to deliver a blow to Hadis's stomach. But Billy's wrist was grabbed right after. Try as he might, his

arm wouldn't budge an inch. The Dragon Emperor raised his head and grinned.

"Though it was only for a split moment, I'll praise you for making me use all my power," Hadis said.

He twisted Billy's wrist and threw the count to the ground. Billy immediately tried to stand up and regain his posture, but the Dragon Emperor's shoe landed squarely on his face. Billy's body sank into the ground as a crater formed from the pressure of the emperor's magic.

So this is the Dragon Emperor... Billy thought. If he were to die here, he'd have no regrets. The admirable power of a God made his hair stand on end.

"My lord!"

"No! Stay away!" bellowed Billy.

The Dragon Emperor stomped on the count's chest as though to silence him. Billy grabbed the emperor's ankle, trying to shake his leg off, but Hadis wouldn't move. With a single swing of his Heavenly Sword, the surrounding trees would be knocked down, and the citizens who tried to help Billy would be blown away. As the winds of the emperor's magic hit Billy, he saw the face of the young man.

The man had an icy gaze as though he realized he was stepping on an insect. His eyes were filled with the cruelty and the benevolence of a God.

"Goodbye, Count Cervel," Hadis said.

Against the brightening sky where the stars were fading, the Heavenly Sword glimmered brighter than anything else, dimming even the first-magnitude star. The magic glowed silver and overwhelmed anything in its presence. It was merciless. But Billy knew that by the emperor's feet was the endless abyss that one must never peer into. He couldn't let his daughter be dragged down there.

"I won't hand my daughter to you!" Billy yelled as he coughed up blood.

The Heavenly Sword swung down...before it stopped right in front of his eyes. Billy held his breath and blinked, but the divine blade never hit him. In fact, he felt the pressure on his chest being relieved. The Dragon Emperor had removed his foot.

"If you don't want to die, stay there," Hadis ordered, standing on the edge of

the crater he created.

Billy tried to get up but realized he couldn't. In that moment, when he was facing imminent death, he had used up all his magic. And yet, he was still alive and breathing, able to move his mouth.

"Why..." Billy murmured. "If you had killed me, the Cervels would've lost. Jill would've been your prize."

"No reason, really," Hadis replied. "I had just won too easily and got bored, is all."

"...Are you perhaps worried about my daughter's feelings if I'd been killed? After all that's happened?" Billy's words were meant to provoke and mock Hadis, but he noticed the Dragon Emperor's back trembling. Billy was flabbergasted as he continued to stare at Hadis's back.

"...I don't mind being hated," Hadis sniffed. "I always have been, so I'm used to it."

"You seem to *really* mind..." Billy remarked.

"Do you want to be killed? I'm telling you that you're misunderstanding—"

As Hadis glared at Billy and let off a murderous intent, a powerful ray of magical powers illuminated the emperor's profile. A large mass of magic was headed straight to this area.

"And now the King of South Kratos?" Hadis muttered. "They come at me one at a time. They never learn."

The Dragon Emperor created a barrier and repelled the magic attack. He glanced at Billy for a moment before kicking off the ground and leaving the area.

Did...he just leave so that I wouldn't get wrapped in the fight? Billy thought. This young man was a mystery. He had tried to kill Billy one moment before stopping the next. Indeed, what an enigmatic man Hadis was.

"My love! Are you alive?!" a voice shouted.

"Charlotte... You're alive too... Ugh..." Billy groaned.

The rush and the adrenaline that Billy felt during the fight had subsided. His wife, who emerged from the thicket, lent him her hand and helped him up. He felt a sharp pain throughout his body. A few bones were broken.

“Goodness, you’re all beat up,” Charlotte noted. “Jill will laugh at you.”

“Speaking of, where is she?” Billy asked. “Is she breaking up with the Dragon Emperor and coming back home?”

“No, as I’d thought, I couldn’t convince her,” Charlotte replied with a smile.

After a moment of panic, Billy hastily said, “A-As you’d thought? Did you really try to convince her— Ugh, ouch.”

“Oh dear, your leg is bent in a weird way. I’ll get you a stretcher, so just sit tight here.”

“B-But the Dragon Emperor’s squad is still here, no?”

“Chris is keeping them back. I think it’ll be a good learning experience for him. Prince Risteard is an excellent commander, so Chris is having a bit of trouble,” Charlotte said.

“That’s not good at all! If the Cervels lose, it’ll affect our morale in the future!”

“It might take some time, but Chris will win in terms of strength. And Prince Gerald has lent us his capable strategist. Rick and Andy are heading there too, and His Highness will personally lead the army. The King of South Kratos will kill the Dragon Emperor.”

This implied war. Billy smiled bitterly, understanding the outcome of events.

“I see...” he chuckled. “I had prepared myself for it since the Dragon Emperor appeared.”

“It can’t be helped,” Charlotte said. “Let’s just be glad that it didn’t happen when our children took over.”

“You’re awfully calm.”

“Oh, but I’m still a little down, you know. Jill aimed for my heart without hesitation.”

Even Billy knew what this meant. His daughter had chosen the path of the Dragon Consort.

“We were able to steal the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort as planned, but I don’t think that child will abandon the Dragon Emperor,” Charlotte finished.

“W-Wait! There’s still a chance that the Dragon Emperor would cast Jill aside!” Billy insisted.

“Dear, do you think Hadis will abandon Jill?”

It didn’t seem likely. If he was willing to toss Jill aside, the emperor would’ve taken the easy victory and taken Lord Cervel’s head before returning to the Rave Empire victoriously. As Billy fell silent, his wife took that as his answer.

“It’ll get lonely,” Charlotte murmured. “She’s already going off to marry.”

“Impossible... Jill... M-My Jill won’t go to such a perplexing man!” Billy wailed. She was only eleven. Just thinking about it made tears spill from Billy’s eyes.

“You wouldn’t be happy no matter who she married,” Charlotte pointed out.

“Exactly! Also, I don’t think I can get along with that son-in-law!”

“Hmmm... Okay, then. If Jill miraculously manages to settle this situation, why don’t we all go for a vacation to the Rave Empire?”

“I doubt that welp of an emperor would allow us to do so! He seems so narrow-minded!”

“Oh, but you never know. He didn’t kill you, did he?”

Billy couldn’t refute it as he was hoisted onto a stretcher. He saw the sky above him. They were near the peak of the Rakia mountains, and he thought he saw the Dragon Emperor’s magic powers’ glimmer dim a tad. Hadis must’ve used quite a bit of magic during their battle. The King of South Kratos seemed to have the upper hand.

A short distance away, Billy’s son seemed to have finally shown his true abilities. Someone must’ve given him concise orders. If Gerald took control of the army, they would be victorious. The Rave imperial army wouldn’t make it in time. War would start with the Kratos Kingdom leading with a beautiful victory.

The Dragon Emperor had half his magic sealed and had lost the power of the Dragon Consort. This was the perfect opportunity to destroy Dragon God Rave. The two nations weren't quite enemies just yet, but the emperor had caused his empire to fall into peril with a childish move of wanting approval of his marriage from a simple aristocrat. If the incompetence of the Dragon Emperor was cast into light, internal strife would occur in the Rave Empire.

But would Billy's daughter approve of this?

Though it was foolish, the Dragon Emperor had naively visited the Cervels as a suitor because Jill had asked him to do so. Even Billy was aware of that. To make up for this decision, Hadis required the head of Lord Cerval, but he hadn't chosen that route either.

Another explosion rang through the air. It wasn't unusual to hear these sounds on the battlefield. But while the Cervels' anti-flight magic circles were giving chase, Billy widened his eyes in astonishment at the fleeing beast.

"Dear," Charlotte said, clenching his hand as she tried to leave the battle and tend to his wounds.

The Rakia mountains boasted a high elevation, and the sun rose more quickly there than in the rest of the kingdom. Amidst the slowly brightening skies was a dragon. It parried and dodged the attacks of magic tracking rays without ever once turning back as it flew straight ahead. And the people riding that dragon could be clearly seen.

"My, oh my," Charlotte said with a hint of weariness and admiration. "It seems like Jill has made it in time."

The citizens roared with joy as they saw their princess, and Billy sighed with a strained smile. His daughter had made her decision and there was no convincing her otherwise. Realizing that the Dragon Emperor was going to take his daughter away, tears spilled from Billy's eyes for the second time.



"THE Cervels' anti-flight magic circles are impressive!" Elentzia shouted, gripping Rosa's reins with one hand while parrying the magic rays with the sword in her other hand. "But my Rosa is even more impressive, isn't she?"

“She’s the best! I’d expect no less from her!” Jill exclaimed.

Rosa gave a proud cry at the praise she received from Elentzia and Jill and upped her speed. Once the dragon had braced herself, she had nothing to fear about the skies of Kratos. It was a battlefield, and she just needed to fly in a straight line. Rosa had been flying at top speed for a few hours while flying straight towards the anti-flight magic, dodging every attack and knocking a few circles down along the way. As she was worked to the bone, fear and hesitation had been stripped from her. Her brain had awoken her instincts and ordered her to press forward. Adrenaline pumped through her veins, keeping her in top shape.

Meanwhile, Natalie fainted and was tied to the saddle.

“I feel like even I could snap the Sacred Spear of the Goddess in two!” Elentzia roared.

“I love to hear it!” Jill replied. “But I won’t hand that role to you! That’s my job!”

“A pity. All right, Rosa, we’re at the last magic circle! Let’s plow ahead!”

A magic circle glowed to their right, emerging from the north of the Rakia mountains, near the halfway point. Smoke billowed in front as Hadis’s older brother cleverly used the terrain to his advantage, expertly fighting back against the Cervels’ surprise attacks. They weren’t on home ground, but they still managed to hold their own, speaking to the high capabilities of Risteard. From above, Jill spotted Lawrence and felt a terrifying aura of magic lurking within the thick foliage.

“Seems like I should go help out Risteard,” Elentzia said, noticing the situation as well.

“Please be careful. My brother’s strong!” Jill warned.

“Don’t worry. I’m strong too!”

Jill nodded and faced forward as she saw the magic powers clash against each other. She wasn’t far from Hadis’s battlefield now.

“This is far enough, Princess Elentzia,” Jill said. “I wish you luck!”

“I wish you luck, Dragon Consort!” Elentzia replied sincerely.

Elentzia looked resolute. Jill no longer had the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, much less the gold band around her finger, but the Captain of the Dragon Knights believed in the girl. Jill grinned and jumped off Rosa’s sturdy back.

Hadis and Rufus were fighting in front of her—just like when she saw them in Radia. But their magic powers were glowing brighter than back then, and even the skies seemed brighter as though the sun had already risen. Hadis had recovered a bit more of his magic than the last time, but the King of South Kratos was going all out, unleashing his murderous intent.

It feels different from before... Prince Gerald should be here somewhere, Jill thought.

If they fought two against one, Kratos would win—Gerald would never miss this perfect opportunity. Jill glanced around and then let out a gasp. Gerald was high above the skies, above the battle between the Kratos King and the Rave Emperor. The crown prince raised the Sacred Spear of the Goddess, its point enveloped in a brilliant gold glow, and hurled it straight at the monarchs fighting below.

“Stop, both of you! Your Majesty! King Rufus of South Kratos!” Jill roared.

Hadis noticed her first. He widened his eyes innocently, causing Jill to become angry. The Sacred Spear of the Goddess was headed straight for him, and he was in the middle of a battle—how could he freeze simply because Jill had entered his field of vision? He reminded Jill of herself, when she stood frozen as Hadis had cast her aside.

“Dodge, you idiot!” Jill bellowed.

She used all her magic and flew straight to the emperor, using both legs to kick her husband’s back. The King of South Kratos got wrapped up in the mess and was slammed to the ground along with Hadis.



CAMILA gave a strained smile as she hid in some thickets atop a hill. She was surprised by how well they were holding up. Zeke was behind her, hiding his

presence as well.

“How are our enemies?” he whispered.

“They’re not moving,” Camila whispered back. “How’s His Highness Risteard? You’d think he’d get annoyed and would try to launch an attack.”

“Nah, he’s just intercepting their attacks. I didn’t expect this.”

“Me neither. I’m a little surprised by how patient he is.”

Risteard stood out as he acted haughty like a prince. Camila had underestimated him, viewing the man as lacking experience in battle and as just a rich boy who knew nothing of perseverance. But the prince had commanded their forces well.

In terms of land, numbers, and supplies, the enemy had the upper hand. The Dragon Emperor had shaved off some of the Cervels’ private soldiers, but the Kratos forces had an overwhelming advantage. However, Risteard knew the point of this battle—it was to buy time until Natalie’s safety was assured, and then retreat. Hence, he never launched an attack and chose to flee every chance he could, trying to minimize the damage as much as possible. He had especially been wary of Chris Cervel, the eldest son, noting Chris’s every move and running before the Rave forces were captured.

In addition, Risteard had properly scouted the area and knew the terrain, speaking volumes about how capable he was. He was lucky to have Chris as his opponent. Chris had never fought against an opponent that simply fled without attacking—he struggled to give out precise orders, causing miscommunication in his ranks.

“We could’ve won if we could use dragons,” Zeke muttered.

“If we were in it for the short-term, maybe,” Camila replied. “But we’d lose if we took our sweet time. Ugh, I wanna hurry up and go ho—”

Camila, who’d been using her binoculars to look around, gulped as she caught a glimpse of the Kratos headquarters. She quickly put her binoculars away and started to move.

Zeke had followed her and asked, “What’s wrong? Were we spotted?”

“No,” she replied. “But I saw that Raccoon Boy. I’m positive he’ll try to do something.”

“Seriously? Damn, this’ll be troublesome...”

Zeke’s voice was interrupted by magic circles suddenly appearing in the skies. These were the anti-flight magic circles that had apparently been placed all throughout Kratos. All at once, they started to fire towards the ground.

“Wh-What’s going on?!” Zeke yelled. “They’re just coming down on us!”

“They’re planning on skunking us out!” Camila replied. “We’ll meet up with Prince Risteard!”

Camila dashed forward and Zeke followed with a click of his tongue. They were being attacked a short distance away. The ground rumbled, but the attacks never made contact with them—they were firing willy-nilly without a specific target in mind, after all. Since Kratos had no idea where the Rave soldiers were hiding, they decided to attack randomly and cause the forces to move. They completely ignored cost efficiency—this quantity-over-quality plan could only be done because they had an absolute advantage in terms of resources. And it was clear who instigated this plan.

“I knew we should’ve killed that kid!” Zeke shouted.

“Totally!” Camila cried upon returning to their camp. “Prince Risteard, they’ve changed commanders!”

Risteard turned around with a stern expression. “I knew it. No wonder the flow of this battle changed so abruptly. They’re planning on skunking us out.”

“What’ll we do?” Zeke asked. “Should we back off?”

“Indeed, but we’ve got our limits. We can’t distance ourselves from Hadis much more.”

“I finally found you,” muttered a low voice from the trees.

Risteard raised his head and held his spear. “Everyone, head to the place where they just launched their attack!” he ordered. “Anti-flight magic circles can’t attack in succession without cooling down first!”

“Ah, so you *are* a smart guy,” the voice murmured again.

A blade filled with magic fell upon them and Risteard parried the attack with a swing of his spear. Camila pulled her bow back, trying to hit the target, but her attacks wouldn't land.

“Chris Cervel?!” Risteard yelled.

“So what? I hate smart people... Whatever, I've found you now.”

Chris's muffled voice could be heard, but no one could sense his precise location. Risteard, Zeke, and Camila put their backs against each other when they saw a shadow suddenly fall upon them.

“Zeke!”

The weapon moved through the air so quickly that no one was able to see it, but Zeke blocked the attack with his greatsword and was blown back. Camila had her arrow at the ready, but her arms were sliced up. Risteard thrust his spear, but the shadow immediately disappeared like a magic trick before it loomed over them once more.

The blades once again approached the group. They were twin shortswords, and they aimed straight for Risteard's head.

“If I kill you, the rest of the group will turn into disorderly chaos,” Chris said.

Damn! I won't make it in time! Camila thought. When she believed it all to be over, powerful flames burned the ominous future she'd envisioned.

“Risteard, are you alive?!” a voice bellowed from above.

Risteard shouted in disbelief, “S-Sister, why are you here?! Did you just try to burn me alive?!”

“Rosa wouldn't make such a mistake!”

“But my bangs are singed— Sister! Above you!”

With a sharp clang, Elentzia's spear parried Chris's twin blades. Finally, the Cervel was in full view. Enveloped in black attire from head to toe, he was like a dark shadow. Between his long, messy bangs, a purple eye widened in astonishment.

“He's fast, but his attacks aren't strong enough,” Elentzia said as she swung

her spear, sending Chris back.

He did a somersault in the air and landed on top of a tree branch. Elentzia leaped off Rosa.

“Risteard, I can handle this,” Elentzia said. “I need you to reorganize the troops and take care of Natalie.”

“Natalie?!” Risteard cried. “Why’d you bring her here, Elentzia?!”

“A lot of things happened. Jill’s with us too. She declared that she’ll marry Hadis.”

Upon hearing those words, Camila felt her body relax. Only then did she realize that she’d been nervous this entire time. She wasn’t fearing for her life, but she was dying to know the decision her small master would make. Zeke also let out a loud sigh before he jumped up and rolled his arms around.

“Which makes me your youngest sister’s husband’s older sister,” Elentzia said to the shadow. “What would you call me?”

“Huh? You’re not a woman,” Chris muttered atop the tree.

Risteard froze in place while Camila gasped at the extremely unusual sight.

Chris was mumbling, but his voice could be heard clearly. “I can’t believe it. I was going easy, but you blocked my attack with one arm. You can’t be a *woman...*”

“...I see...” Elentzia rumbled, cracking her knuckles. Camila’s cheek spasmed as even she realized the landmine he’d just stepped on. “What a very valuable opinion to hear. I’m not like a princess or a woman, you say? I’m used to being called a muscular idiot behind my back, but I didn’t think there was someone so reckless about their own life to tell me that to my face.”

Princess Elentzia was known for her indecisiveness and kindness. She was big-hearted and rarely became truly furious. But it seemed like she had her limits; she was capable of feeling anger.

“I like your courage,” Elentzia growled. “Let me teach you how damn weak you are.”

“Ah, I know. You’re not a human. You’re a gorilla,” Chris added.

“E-Everyone, we’re leaving!” Risteard ordered. “Retreat!”

The prince didn’t need to give out his order to notify that everyone present was in danger. Camila ran as fast as she could, and she felt a torrent of Elentzia’s magic behind her. Attacks were still raining down on them.

“Why does this always happen to us?!” Camila wailed. “We’re a mess!”

“Hey, since we’ve got the chance, why don’t we go for the ringleader?” Zeke suggested.

“Huh?! Did you not hear Prince Risteard’s orders? We’re—”

“The Knights of the Dragon Consort.”

Camila was stunned by Zeke’s quick response, but she formed a smile. Indeed, he spoke the truth. He’d been quiet for a while, but perhaps he’d been a bit down too.

“Right,” Camila replied. “Let’s go for that Raccoon Boy, shall we? He fooled Jill splendidly.”

“They probably need a reason to retreat too,” Zeke added. “If he dies here, that’s that.”

After a quick talk, the two knights switched directions. They heard loud explosions in the distance, but they didn’t care—they were just the sounds of their master fighting.



MISSING its mark, the Sacred Spear decimated the side of a mountain. But no one was dead yet. The King of South Kratos was a good distance away, wiping blood from his forehead as he stood back up. And of course, Gerald, who had launched the attack, was uninjured.

“Lady Jill... Why are you here?” Gerald asked, looking down at the scene.

Jill glared up at him. “I’m here to have you stamp your Great Seal onto my engagement contract with the Dragon Emperor.”

“...You’re stepping on that Dragon Emperor right now.”

“Not to worry. His Majesty has always said that he’s willing to be stepped on

by his wife.”

“I said kneel!” Hadis wailed. “I didn’t say stepped— Ow!”

Jill stomped on her husband once more to silence him before she smiled. “It seems like we’ve had a very fruitful military exercise, Your Majesty,” Jill said, turning to the Kratos King.

“A military exercise?” Rufus asked.

“That’s right. When I came here to announce my engagement, you decided to use this as an opportunity to do a military exercise with the House of Cervel. Things just got a little out of hand, is all.”

They could still rewrite history here.

Rufus patted the dust from his knees as he said, “I see. That’s a very interesting idea, but I think it’s a bit too late. Neither me, my son, nor the Dragon Emperor would agree to that.”

“Do you want to go to war that badly?” Jill asked.

“I’m talking about protecting the honor of my kingdom. We’re going to war anyway. Then we might as well gain the advantage here.”

“You were almost killed by your son moments ago. Are you fine with that?” Jill asked.

“If that could kill the Dragon Emperor, I would gladly offer my life. It’s the dearest wish of Kratos.”

It seemed Rufus had agreed to this entire series of events. Jill clicked her tongue, removed her foot from Hadis, and stood in front of him.

“Then why don’t I be your opponent until you’re satisfied?” Jill offered. “But if I win, this exercise will end.”

“Stubborn, aren’t you?” Rufus replied. “You’re no longer the Dragon Consort, are you? You don’t have the gold ring.”

“He’s right...lady with the pretty amethyst eyes,” Hadis murmured as he stood up behind Jill.

Ugh, I hate this, Jill thought with clenched fists.

“What did you come here for?” Hadis asked. “You’re no longer the Dragon Consort. Did you think I’d be happy with your return?”

Jill hated how he could lie so easily. She hated how she let him lie to her. Made him lie to her.

“You’ve even lost the power of the Dragon Consort,” he went on. “Did you think I’d accept you?”

She knew it all, yet she felt herself cower. She hated how weak she was.

“Why don’t you go back to your kind family, young lady?” Hadis suggested. “Though you may be offered as my prize upon finishing the war.”

“Lady Jill...” Gerald said, approaching her and grabbing her arm. “I said it before. If you’re worried about your position in Kratos, it won’t be a problem. You’ve been deceived by the Dragon Emperor. Everyone will understand your —”

Jill shook her arm and freed herself from his grasp before shouting, “I will dedicate the rest of my life to making this man happy!”

Jill hated how weak love made her—she couldn’t even turn around to see what face Hadis made. But her heart had decided on logic, and she was confident that she had received the strength to press on.

“I’m so moved! You really are the Dragon Consort!” Rufus shouted, swinging down the Parrying Dagger of the Goddess.

Jill immediately grabbed a sword lying on the ground to parry the king’s attack, but she was thrown into the air.

“To show you my respect, I won’t hold back,” Rufus said before turning to his son. “Gerald, kill the Dragon Emperor!”

“But of course,” Gerald replied.

“I won’t let you!” Jill bellowed.

She regained her posture in the air as a second strike fell upon her, snapping her blade in two. *Damn it! The quality of our weapons is far too different!* Even her magic powers couldn’t cover this vast gap between the two. But she was on a path of no return.

“Why don’t you try to defend the Dragon Emperor, Dragon Consort!” Rufus goaded.

Jill dodged the Parrying Dagger that was aimed at her neck and delivered a kick to the king’s side. He grabbed her ankle, locking her in place.

“Above all, don’t give me despair,” Rufus said gently as he swung his Parrying Dagger.

From behind him, Hadis swung his blade and blew Rufus away. The emperor grabbed Jill by the waist and left the area.

“You’re in the way,” Hadis said simply.

“Huh?!” Jill yelled. “Do you want to get stepped on again?!”

“But it’s true. You don’t have the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, and you even lost the ring.”

Jill couldn’t deny those claims. When Hadis pointed it all out, anxiety filled her. *Why does love always make me so timid?*

“Yet, you called yourself the Dragon Consort and came to save me,” Hadis said, hugging her tightly, dispelling any negative feelings she had. “You’re an idiot.”

“So are you, Your Majesty. You said goodbye to me,” Jill replied, wrapping her arms around him and hugging him back. “Now it just seems like you’re saying that you love me.”

“I’m so sorry to be the third wheel here, but I can’t let you two go!” Rufus yelled, catching up to them. He slashed at the couple with his Parrying Dagger, but Hadis parried the attack with the Heavenly Sword. The Sacred Spear of the Goddess hurtled in front of Jill’s eyes. Suddenly, the spear changed direction as though it was hit by something and returned to Gerald’s hand.

“Wh-What was that?!” Jill shouted.

“It’s the magic shield of the Rakia mountains.”

Jill gulped as she noticed the sharp summit of the mountains under her. They were already at the peak. The magic shield of the Rakia mountains rejected the Goddess. The Goddess Kratos was likely with Faris, but the Sacred Spear was a

part of the deity of love. According to legends, the Goddess had to change her form and be carried out by a certain person to enter the Rave Empire. This had caused the thrown spear to be repelled, and the protection from the Dragon God only grew stronger near the Rave Empire.

“Your Majesty, if we enter the Rave Empire, we might have an advantage—” Jill started, but she cut herself off as something wrapped around her left wrist.

She was peeled away from Hadis’s side and the magic restraints tugged at her body.

“Jill!” Hadis yelled.

“I’ll be fine! Focus on the King of South Kratos!” Jill shouted back.

Hadis clicked his tongue and clashed his blade against Rufus’s Parrying Dagger. Meanwhile, Jill’s left hand was glued to the invisible wall. *What is this?! Is this...the magic shield of the Rakia mountains?!* Right under her was the sharp peak of the Rakia mountains. Gerald floated in front of her, matching her eye level.

“You’re the former Dragon Consort,” Gerald explained. “It seems you’re being treated as a part of the Sacred Spear of the Goddess.”

Was it because the Goddess had absorbed the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort? The magic shield had apparently ignored the effects of the Sacred Treasure and still acted as repellent towards the Goddess.

“Just give up and come back to Kratos...is what I’d like to say, but I suppose it’s meaningless,” Gerald said.

“Obviously!” Jill replied.

She tried to use her magic to rip the restraints from her body, but she suddenly grew dizzy. She couldn’t control her powers well.

“You shouldn’t push yourself,” Gerald said. “We’re near the divine precincts. Even you can’t use your usual power, especially since you’ve lost the Sacred Treasure.”

I’ve heard about the magnetic fields for magic in the Rakia mountains, but I guess this is it, Jill thought. It was the middle of summer, but she breathed puffs

of white.

“Well, I won’t know unless I try...will I?!” Jill shouted.

“You really do hate me. But I feel a little relieved that you won’t take my hand,” Gerald replied with a wry smile. “It doesn’t suit me at all. I can’t act like I’m backing away to win the favor of a woman.”

“I agree. You’re not the type who does stuff like that.”

“You understand me quite well. Maybe that’s why I feel calmer when you hate me. If you liked me...it would’ve been tough to bear. I would’ve made incorrect decisions to have you like me.”

Gerald raised the Sacred Spear in the air. The view and the location were all different, but that blizzard night flashed across Jill’s mind. The prince approached her with the spear in hand; Jill’s left hand was still restrained. She had to stop the attack using just her right.

However, the point of the spear stopped just in front of her. Hadis had grabbed the Sacred Spear with his right hand. A powerful blast rang in the air as the two magic powers clashed. Amidst the wind, Jill smelled the scent of burning flesh—Hadis’s hand was burned by the Sacred Spear’s magic.

“Your Majesty!” Jill yelled. “Behind you!”

As Hadis stood motionless, Rufus didn’t let this opportunity slip by. From the left, he swung the Parrying Dagger, but Hadis gripped his Heavenly Sword with his left and blocked the attack.

“The Dragon Emperor protecting the Dragon Consort?!” Rufus bellowed with a loud laugh. “This is hilarious! If the Dragon Emperor drowns in love and bends logic, the Dragon God will lose his divine rank!”

Jill realized that the Goddess of love would lose to the strength of love while the Dragon God of logic would lose to the righteousness of logic. The Dragon Consort was the being who protected the Dragon Emperor, not the other way around. Reversing these roles would go against logic.

“...Rave taught me to treasure my wife,” Hadis muttered, protecting Jill with his back turned towards Rufus and Gerald. “He said that as the Dragon God, he

couldn't give me love, which was logical. But everyone told me that if the Dragon Consort loves me, I shouldn't give up. Which is why..."

Hadis looked up, his magic powers glimmering. The silver shimmer was the glow of the Dragon Emperor.

"Rave won't lose his rank! It's logical to protect my wife whom I love!" Hadis declared.

"Enough babbling, Dragon Emperor! You don't even understand the Goddess's love!" Rufus roared.

Hadis was up against both the Sacred Spear of the Goddess and the Parrying Dagger. He was clearly distressed by this battle, but he wouldn't budge from Jill's side and continued to protect her.

Move, my left hand! Why?! Jill had expected the magic shield of the Rakia mountains to protect the Dragon Emperor from the Goddess.

"That's right," a voice sounded in Jill's head. She gasped and looked at her left hand; her ring finger was enveloped in a golden light. "My Dragon Emperor liked to hear me sing lullabies. But he was completely tone-deaf. I thought that was so funny."

"Oh?" said another voice. "My Dragon Emperor was a bookworm. He would forget about eating and keep his nose in a book. I always scolded him for it."

"My Dragon Emperor liked to draw. I was so tired of him using me as a model," said another.

I see... Jill thought as she touched the magic shield with her left palm. Even though the Sacred Treasure had been stolen from her, she was trying to confirm the meaning behind the shield, which had always been protecting the Dragon Emperor.

"You've made me remember. Thank you," one of the Dragon Consorts said in Jill's head. Jill had thought everything was taken from her by the Goddess, but she realized that she still had something left. "The Goddess understood me, so I entrusted it all to her, but that would make things a bit too unfair, wouldn't it?"

The magic shield of the Rakia mountains would only be activated once the

Dragon Consort appeared. It was the power of the first Dragon Consort who protected the Dragon Emperor from the Goddess. Even if she was swallowed by anger and sadness, it had never disappeared.

“Newest Dragon Consort, do you understand our feelings? Can you understand these feelings that can’t be entrusted to the Goddess?”

Jill felt like someone had gently pushed her back. Her left hand was freed, and a golden ring, condensed with a thousand years’ worth of the Dragon Consorts’ unbreakable love and the logic that they followed until their end, appeared on her ring finger.

“I understand,” Jill said.

Hadis was the first to realize that the situation had changed. He looked on in astonishment.

“I will carry on your love and logic,” Jill vowed.

For a moment, Gerald and Rufus faltered. Jill wouldn’t let that moment slide.

“I don’t care who you are, Goddess or not! Don’t lay a finger on my husband!” Jill bellowed.

Her words encapsulated the true thoughts of the Dragon Consorts—a feeling that couldn’t possibly be entrusted to the Goddess. She thought she heard the Dragon Consorts let out a laugh. These women were terrifying. They entrusted their enemy, the Goddess, with their rage while encouraging their newest consort to fight against her. Indeed, these ladies wouldn’t go down without a fight. No one would expect any less from a Dragon Consort, the women who had defended their Dragon Emperor until the very end.

Jill grinned as the golden Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort appeared in her hand.

“Impossible!” Gerald exclaimed as he backed away. “How?!”

She transformed her Sacred Treasure into a sword and flung the Parrying Dagger of the Goddess away before kicking Rufus back. Gerald swung the Sacred Spear. Jill grabbed the Parrying Dagger in the air and hit the point of the spear with it, catching Gerald off balance. She delivered a powerful punch into

his stomach and snatched the Sacred Spear of the Goddess from his hands.



“And why don’t *you* just twinkle in the distance!” Jill shouted as she did a windup and flung the Sacred Spear of the Goddess as far as she could.

She transformed her sword into a whip and grabbed a stunned Gerald before slamming him into the ground. With her other hand, she clenched the Parrying Dagger and swung it down towards Rufus, who was also falling into the dirt.

The countless numbers of blades of magic gouged the ground and cut down the trees. She even threw a blow towards the battle in the far distance and finally took a deep breath.

“The military exercise is over!” Jill shouted, drawing attention to herself. “It seems the King of South Kratos will personally stamp the Great Seal onto the engagement contract between me and His Majesty! Prepare the signing ceremony immediately!”

“No one will accept such a stupid story, Dragon Consort,” Rufus said. Even after all the damage he sustained, he stood up. “It doesn’t matter if the Dragon Consort’s ring or the Sacred Treasure has been returned to you. The situation hasn’t changed. If the Dragon Emperor chooses to flee back to Rave, however, it’s a different story.”

But the match had already been decided.

“What are you on about? Kratos and Rave are friendly nations,” Jill replied before turning to the prince. “Are we not, Prince Gerald?”

The Sacred Treasure in her right hand tied Gerald up and raised him in the air. He couldn’t free himself from the weapon with his bare hands. As Jill used a bit of her power and tightened her grip, he started to have difficulty breathing.

It would’ve been a lie if Jill claimed that she wasn’t surprised by how pale Rufus looked when he saw his son taken hostage. In her future timelines, the king had lived in infamy, but it seemed he could still act like a father. It was clear who held the upper hand here.

“He wants to study abroad in the Rave Empire,” Jill claimed. “Isn’t that right?”

Gerald, still motionless in the air, looked humiliated as he glared at her. “Are you planning on taking me as a hostage?” he asked.

“A hostage? What a dangerous phrase,” she tutted. “Unless you’re planning on admitting defeat to me.”

Gerald clicked his tongue in annoyance. *Serves him right!* Jill thought.

“You’re unexpectedly quite smart, Dragon Consort,” Rufus muttered bitterly.

“I’m not at all. Anyways, you need this to stamp the seal, don’t you?” Jill replied in a low voice, smiling at Rufus. She raised the Parrying Dagger in the air, but she didn’t show any openings. “If you don’t want this to be snapped in two, stamp the contract immediately.”

Rufus clenched his fists and contorted his face in vexation, but couldn’t offer a response. That was his answer.

Jill looked at Hadis coolly and said, “Your Majesty, do you have any complaints?”

“None at all...” the emperor replied.

“Then I win this fight.”

Jill gave a triumphant smile as the fight on the mountain stopped. Everyone looked at her. As she had desired, everything had been solved in a relatively amiable manner. She wouldn’t hear any complaints.

“What do I do, Rave?!” Hadis wailed to the skies as he covered his face with his hands. “My wife is so cool!”

Jill puffed out her chest in pride as though to say, “Of course!”



THE following day, after the “military exercise” had finished in the Cervels’s domain, Rufus der Kratos and Hadis Teos Rave arranged the marriage between Lady Jill Cervel and the Rave Emperor. They did so in the middle of the Rakia mountains, at the residence of now-Marquess Cervel. In an unprecedented turn of events, the engagement contract had been stamped by the Great Seals of the two nations.

In addition, to further deepen the bonds between the two nations and to conduct negotiations, Crown Prince Gerald der Kratos would study abroad in the imperial capital, Rahelm. Kratos voiced its concern over the sudden loss of

their crown prince, who'd handled all administrative duties in lieu of the king. While citizens were worried about the internal affairs of Kratos, King Rufus seemed quite nonchalant about it all.

"Boy, am I glad you returned at least the Parrying Dagger to us," Rufus said brightly. "I try to remain young, but once the Parrying Dagger is gone, I can't just use my willpower to bring it back again. That's impossible, even for me."

Political confusion seemed inevitable, but the king was laughing without a care. Jill had been wary even during the signing, but it was creepy to see him look so happy.

"I see," Jill said.

"You're so curt, Dragon Consort," Rufus replied. "You came here to send me off."

"I'm here to keep you under my watch."

Rufus was to return home via the teleporting device in the Cervels' residence. The destination was set to the royal capital, but these devices were under the jurisdiction of the Kratos Kingdom. There were no guarantees that's where he'd go, but she was happy as long as he got out of her family's domain pronto. But he couldn't be left to his own devices, so Jill had been by the king's side with Zeke and Camila to make sure he didn't try anything funny.

"Ah, can I meet my son one last time?" Rufus asked. "Or has he already been sent away? Where is he around now?"

"You know I'm not going to tell you, don't you?" Jill replied.

"You're so cold. It's rare to see my son look so frustrated. I'd love to see him looking humiliated."

"I asked Crown Prince Gerald about meeting you, but he said he'd rather die than do so."

Jill hated how she understood that feeling all too well. Rufus gave a dry laugh before he blinked quizzically.

"Oh my," he murmured.

Natalie was running towards them.

“Princess Natalie, please stand back. It’s dangerous,” Jill warned, frowning at the girl.

“I know,” Natalie huffed. “Just a moment, please...”

The princess didn’t know how to call out to the king, so she instead handed Rufus a bundle of papers that she had been clutching near her chest. It was tied with a string and looked like a book.

“Here,” Natalie said. “I accidentally grabbed this, and I thought I should return it to you. It’s important, isn’t it?”

“Oh?” Rufus replied. “You didn’t hand it over to your brother and sister?”

“It’s sealed, anyway. They wouldn’t be able to read it even if they took it.”

“Hm, I feel like the Dragon Emperor would be able to brute-force it and break the seal... No matter. I’ll have you keep it for me.”

“Why?”

Both Natalie and Jill looked shocked. The item emanated an air of magic and clearly seemed to be of great importance or contained some sort of secret. Yet, Natalie had been entrusted with it.

“I feel like you’d be careful when handling that item,” Rufus went on. “If you like, you can open it with my son.”

“Why?” Natalie repeated.

“What, you can’t? You boasted that you would call me your father.”

Natalie knitted her brows and fell silent, feeling hesitant. As though to encourage the lady, Rufus spoke in a voice so kind that everyone who heard it was surprised by how gentle he sounded.

“I’ll entrust it to you,” Rufus said. “It’s tempting to have the Dragon Consort as my daughter, but it seems interesting to have you as my daughter-in-law as well.”

Natalie pursed her lips but clutched the book tightly. “Fine,” she relented. “I’ll just hold onto it. One day, I’ll return it to you.”

“Do your best. Position yourself so that you won’t get killed.”

Natalie gazed at Jill, silencing the Dragon Consort who was about to speak up, and glared straight at the King of South Kratos. “I won’t get killed,” Natalie said firmly. “Don’t underestimate me.”

“Well, you sound reliable,” Rufus replied. “Then I suppose I’ll be off. Uh, Lawrence, was it?”

“Correct,” Lawrence replied, a bandage around his right wrist. “The preparations have been made, Your Majesty.”

Lawrence served directly under Gerald, but now that the crown prince would be studying abroad, the king had set his eyes on this young man. Lawrence must’ve been overcome with a myriad of emotions, but impressively, he didn’t let it show. He had injured his right wrist when Camila and Zeke had been allowed to get close to him and chaos ensued. Jill’s final attack had blown Lawrence away, causing him to trip and twist his wrist. No one could tell if he was lucky or not.

“Take care of yourself, Raccoon Boy,” Camila called out with a grin. She looked triumphant.

“You were discovered first, and you were about to be backed into a corner,” Zeke pointed out.

“Shut up, you old bear. You were able to approach him because I was bait.”

“Whatever,” Zeke said, turning to Lawrence. “You should probably train or something. You’re too weak when it comes to close combat.”

“Let me just say that both of you were lured out by me,” Lawrence retorted, not backing down.

“Stop it, you guys,” Jill said, ending the verbal debate. “I can’t keep up. King Rufus, it’s almost time.”

“What a pity,” Rufus replied. “Tell the Dragon Emperor to take care of himself. Oh, and tell me how much ransom money you’d like for my son. Make sure to take utmost care of him. I’m sure he’ll be costly.”

His words implied that he still hadn’t given up on invading Rave. Jill narrowed her eyes in suspicion.

“Just know that this isn’t the end, Dragon Consort,” Rufus said with a smirk. “We *will* need to end this one day. From the Kratos’s side, this won’t end until the Dragon God atones for his sins. From the Rave’s side, this won’t end until the Goddess gives in. That’s how things are.”

With that, Rufus entered the teleportation device with Lawrence behind him. Natalie was the first to turn on her heel and leave.

“Princess Natalie, what did you receive from the King of South Kratos?” Jill asked gingerly as she saw Natalie clutching the book close to her chest.

“It’s nothing much,” the princess replied. “But could you keep this quiet from Hadis and the others? It’s not something we should uncover easily through curiosity and conjectures... When the time comes, I’ll tell you all about it.”

As Natalie stared straight at Jill, the Dragon Consort felt the princess’s determination and nodded.

“I understand,” Jill replied. “But if anything happens, please tell us. We’re all worried about you.”

“I know. I’ll consult you all. Thank you.”

“Speaking of, I think it’s time for you to depart. Where’s Princess Elentzia—”

“Natalie!” Elentzia yelled with rage. “There you are! Let’s go home! Prepare to leave!”

Natalie sighed. “*You* were the one who wasn’t ready to leave, Sister. Are you all right with Chris Cervel?”

“Huh?! He was *never* all right with me! What is that man anyway?! Until the end, he kept telling me to be trapped in a cage! He didn’t treat me as a human, much less a princess! Jill!”

“Yes?!” Jill shouted back, reflexively fixing her posture as a soldier.

Like a commander, Elentzia yelled, “I hate to tell you this, but your older brother is the worst! He sucks! Cut ties with him!”

The usually mild-mannered Elentzia looked furious as she grabbed Natalie and walked ahead. The two princesses were to return to the Rave Empire using their previously planned route. One could only hope that Elentzia’s mood would

improve during her return trip.

Jill went the opposite direction, towards the Cervels' manor. Zeke and Camila walked beside her.

"I don't see your older brother at all, Captain," Zeke said. "Is he still around the main residence?"

"Chris doesn't like to be around others," Jill replied.

In fact, she couldn't believe that Chris had talked to Elentzia at all. The man hadn't even shown his face to Jill yet.

"I think he just thought it was rare to see someone that could fight toe to toe with him," Jill explained. "And that person was also a woman."

"Oh my, does that mean romance is in the air for Princess Elentzia?" Camila murmured before she quickly denied it. "No, I don't think so."

"Yeah, after those two fought, the area was burnt to ashes," Zeke added.

"But since we're in Kratos, the greenery will grow back again in a flash, won't it? The protection of the Goddess is so convenient. It's so different from the Rave Empire."

"But in exchange, we can use the skies," Jill said.

Risteard had borrowed Rosa so that he could deliver Gerald to the Rave Empire as quickly as possible. It wouldn't be odd if they were at the imperial capital already. It wasn't much, but it made Camila give a meaningful smile.

"Yeah, you're right," she said.

"And? How's our emperor faring?" Zeke asked.

"His fever has gone down, so I think we can head back soon," Jill replied.

"Jill, why don't you come on over here?" Charlotte called as she popped out of the kitchen the moment Jill had set foot in the manor. "Once Hadis wakes up, bring him some tea and a simple meal."

Jill immediately headed to the kitchen and saw some sandwiches, sliced fruit, tea, and snacks laid out on a platter which was handed to her. Inside the kitchen were her twin younger brothers, who were supposed to be taking care

of Hadis, casually drinking some tea.

“Hey, why’d you two leave His Majesty alone?” Jill demanded.

“Father chased us out,” Rick replied. “Right, Andy?”

“Huh?! Why didn’t you stop him?!” Jill snapped.

“It was by the order of the lord of this house. If you’re that worried, why don’t *you* be glued to his side?”

“I’d love to, but I can’t! Why do you think I asked you guys in the first place?!”

“Don’t worry, Jill,” Charlotte assured. “We all know that Hadis isn’t the Dragon Emperor but your husband. We’ll only plot a few assassinations and the like.”

That didn’t sound reassuring at all.

“I wish he’d cook for us again,” an ill-mannered Rick said while popping a cookie into his mouth. “You think we can get him to if we call him big brother?”

“It’s a possibility,” Andy agreed. “He’s oddly soft when it comes to stuff like that.”

“Stop thinking of weird plans!” Jill exclaimed. “Mother, stop them!”

“But it sounds like so much fun,” Charlotte replied. “Ah, I’ve already applied some medicine to Hadis. His biceps are really quite impressive...”

“You were supposed to treat his palms! Why are you touching his arms? I’ll get angry!”

With a glare at her smirking mother, Jill left the kitchen. The Dragon Consort declined Camila’s offer to hold the platter and stomped down the corridor.

“I’ve told Mother, Father, and everyone that I won’t forgive them if they touch His Majesty! Good grief!” Jill grumbled.

“You can’t really speak for others when you’ve continued to stay here as though you’re just visiting home, Jill,” Camila pointed out. “Are you sure we can go back with Princess Elentzia?”

“Of course. His Majesty is still recovering from an illness, and we can call for a dragon to pick us up.”

A single dragon could fly over the Rakia mountains with just Hadis and Jill on its back. It was better for Camila and Zeke to return with Elentzia, who was preparing for departure via land and sea.

“It’ll be fine,” Jill assured. “I talked this over with His Majesty and we decided on it together. Plus, he can contact Raw.”

“True,” Camila agreed. “You’re just waiting for His Majesty to recover. He fainted as always, but I’m surprised people like Prince Risteard even allowed this trip to begin with.”

“And who could go against Captain back then?” Zeke asked. “Even a mere hint of complaining and we’d get a whip flying at us.”

Jill heard the rude remarks of her subordinates behind her, but she decided to ignore it all for now. Hadis was the priority, and Camila opened the door of the guest room. Hadis was sitting up in bed and Jill saw her father’s back as he talked to the emperor.

“Having a frail body must be tough, Hadis,” Billy said. “You may be strong, but I can’t believe you fainted after a small skirmish. And you’re still so young.”

“Father, what are you doing?!” Jill demanded. She placed the platter on the table, put her hands on her hips, and emanated an intimidating aura. Billy gave a childish huff.

“What do you mean?” he asked. “I heard he woke up, so I thought we could train.”

“Of course he can’t!” Jill exclaimed. “He’s still recovering.”

“So am I, Jill. Some absolute nobody rudely crushed my body into bits! I’ve already recovered though. Perhaps I’m just built differently.” Billy shot Hadis a mocking look.

“That must’ve been quite the experience,” Hadis said, pretending to care. “I wonder just *who* could’ve done something so terrible to you.”

“Are you serious?! Jill, dump this man at once!”

Billy was still vocally against their marriage, and Jill was tired of it.

“Are you still going on about that?” she asked wearily, grabbing her father’s

shoulders. “You signed the contract too, Father.”

“Well, yeah!” Billy replied. “You were cracking that whip of your Sacred Treasure behind me. You really shouldn’t use a whip. You’ll remind everyone of your mother and cause them all to tremble.”

Jill knew that all too well.

“Just give up already, please,” Jill said. “What happened to our family motto where strength is justice?”

“That was a military exercise! The Cervels haven’t lost yet, and your father here hasn’t either!” Billy complained.

“I heard you were crushed by His Majesty,” Jill retorted.

“Listen well, Jill. When you marry, you can also divorce. Never forget it.”

How could Billy say that with a straight face? Jill tugged her father’s arm, stood him up, and pushed his back out of the room.

“Enough!” she said. “Please leave, Father! You’ll negatively affect His Majesty! Camila, Zeke, please stand guard so that Father won’t enter this room.”

“No, Jill!” Billy cried. “I won’t allow you to be alone with him!”

“If you’re that bored, train Camila and Zeke so that they can unleash their magic! If anything happens, I’ll call for you!”

Jill shooed her surprised knights and her father from the room and shut the door. She moved a nearby chest in front to keep the door sealed shut. It really didn’t do much as a line of defense in this house, but it was better than nothing.

“You’ve got a nice dad,” Hadis murmured.

Jill didn’t answer and sat beside the bed. Silence fell upon the two, but it felt a little different than before. She thought that their relationship had changed slightly since their first major fight as a couple, but she didn’t feel awkward beside him. Some things didn’t change—Hadis was glued to her side as though he couldn’t endure it any longer...and he looked quite pathetic, sprawled there hugging Jill’s waist.

“Your Majesty, if it makes you anxious when you vocalize it, you should just

not say anything,” Jill said.

“Well, you didn’t immediately go, ‘But I’ll marry you, Your Majesty,’ or something to that effect and make me feel at ease!” Hadis wailed.

“You know I will. I don’t need to say it.”

“I know... At this point, of course I know.”

Hadis frowned as he sluggishly got up.

“Is Rave still asleep?” Jill asked.

“Yeah,” he replied. “I dragged him around quite a bit this time and we can’t relax until we return to Rave. We’re all alone right now.”

“You know that someone might be watching from somewhere. You’ve realized that already, haven’t you?”

Hadis gave an obviously angry puff of his cheeks while Jill chuckled and rested on his chest. The huge difference was that she had learned to lean on him. She’d realized that love wouldn’t always remain the same.

“You can’t relax yet, Your Majesty,” Jill said. “Mother said that she wanted to tour the imperial capital.”

“Huh? Doesn’t that mean she’s planning on having a squad rescue the crown prince or launch a surprise attack on the imperial capital?”

“I believe so. What shall we do?”

“Hmmm...” Hadis muttered as he knelt down and undid Jill’s shoelaces. He removed her shoes. It wasn’t unusual for him to do so, but it made Jill a little embarrassed, as though this action suggested what the two were about to do.

“I think my brothers would be against it,” Hadis said. “But you want your family to visit, don’t you?”

“I do. I want to show them how awesome you are!”

“You always say that, don’t you? I feel like you’ve been pushing more reckless tasks onto me these days.”

“But you can do it, Your Majesty.”

“You say that so easily. I don’t want to fight like this again, you know.”

“I’ll gladly accept any fight. I’ll win either way.”

“Really? Well, I wouldn’t want to always be on the losing end.”

Hadis scooped Jill up as she wrapped her arms around his neck. Suddenly, Hadis fell onto his bed as though something had pushed him down. He was doing this on purpose, of course. Jill knew that.

“Then let’s think about it together,” Hadis suggested.

Surely, some things will change in the future. His hands, which gently combed her hair, and their entwining passionate gazes might change as well.

“You should’ve said so the first time, Your Majesty,” Jill said.

“I’m reflecting on my actions.”

“I am too. There were a lot of things I had to reflect on.”

“You’re not at fault,” he said.

“Don’t lie to me, Your Majesty. You were angry at me, weren’t you?”

“...Well, like...just a little,” he admitted.

“See? It’s a bad habit of yours. You always make everything your fault and try to spoil me.”

Jill got up and looked down at Hadis. There was one thing she had to make clear.

“You didn’t trust me, Your Majesty,” she said. “But I also lacked resolve. You were right, but I wasn’t wrong either. So, we’re even. You can’t try to muddy the waters and make it all your fault. We need to make sure we don’t repeat the same mistake.”

Through effort, they had to maintain their relationship and deepen their bonds. They had to work together and gently stoke the flames of love—it couldn’t burn too brightly, and it couldn’t cool down. They had to ensure that their feelings wouldn’t take on a depressing shape.

“...I understand that you love me, far more than I anticipated,” Hadis said slowly.

How could Jill let her guard down around a man who said such things? She turned away.

“My condolences,” she replied. “I won’t hate you so easily.”

“But I also love you so much. Far more than *you* anticipate.”

Jill widened her eyes before she slowly looked back at her husband. She expected to see him smiling, but he looked more serious than ever before. He looked a little troubled and pouted while his cheeks turned pink.

“What do we do when we love each other so much?” he said in a husky voice.

His voice was enchanting as though he was brushing against her back with his fingertips. In a flash, Jill’s cheeks turned red, and she looked down, trying to hide her face.

“I-It’s simple, isn’t it?” she mumbled.

“Is it? What do we do?”

Hadis’s fingertips stroked Jill’s lips before they touched her cheek. Such a simple gesture clearly conveyed both of their feelings. Love was amazing. Hadis sat up and placed his forehead on hers, sharing the same body temperature.

“I don’t know what to do,” Hadis whispered. “Could you teach me?”

You liar. Jill knew that he was aware of how she couldn’t tear her eyes away from his lips. But if she retorted with, “Don’t ask an eleven-year-old child such a silly question,” their relationship would remain the same. The only difference was that they were at her home.

“...This room is being wiretapped. I’m sure of it,” Jill said.

“I can take care of that easily,” Hadis said.

The moment he smiled, the sound of something exploding reverberated throughout the room as the magic that had been cast upon the guest room was destroyed. It seemed he had no intention of acting overly kind towards Jill’s family and her hometown. This was a welcome change, but he was a bit too quick to act defiant.

Jill wearily warned him, “Father has likely noticed and will come flying in.”

“Then why don’t we test and see who’s quicker?” Hadis said with a mischievous smile.

Jill found him adorable. Everything felt a little different than usual. Hadis’s lips slowly approached her forehead, and he kissed her gently.



One... Two... Three... Jill counted before Hadis drew back.

“Can you keep this a secret from your parents?” he asked.

“Of course,” Jill replied. “I can keep my husband’s secrets.”

The moment of seriousness was gone, and the two chuckled happily. In the next moment, the door to the guest room was demolished, and as they had expected, Billy stormed in with his magically enhanced physique. But Jill was fine. She had already made her resolve and knew which side to take.

“Goodness... What’s with the sudden appearance, Father?” Jill asked with a straight face.

As though nothing had happened moments before, Jill stood in front of her husband and faced her father.



IT had been a while since he’d approached the throne. It had been a few years since he’d abandoned it, and his uptight son wouldn’t sit on it even as a joke. And so, the throne stood solemnly without anyone coming near it. It had been maintained, but it stood alone in an empty space that was reminiscent of a ruin.

Rufus narrowed his eyes when he saw a small figure sitting atop it confidently.

“It has been a while, Father,” said the girl.

“Ah, Faris. Long time no see. It’s been about five years, hasn’t it? You’ve grown.”

“Has it only been that long? It feels like ten to me.”

“That’s a bit of an exaggeration. You aren’t even ten years of age.”

The girl, who sat on the throne despite the king being in front of her, tilted her head to one side and giggled. Indeed, this girl wasn’t fourteen yet, and still not the Goddess. Rufus glanced at the black spear in his daughter’s hand while she held it like a scepter. It was the Sacred Spear of the Goddess. The Dragon Consort had thrown it somewhere during their battle, but it seemed it had

returned to Faris's possession. That wasn't odd in and of itself—the true wielder of the Sacred Spear was the Kratos princess.

“Are you feeling well?” Rufus asked. “Aren't you usually at our summer resort during this time of year?”

“I'm fine,” Faris replied. “The Dragon Consort's power has expertly adjusted the Goddess's power for me.”

“I see. That's great to hear... You aren't surprised that I know about your present situation. Gerald would probably be furious,” Rufus said.

“I've matured, you know.”

It was adorable to hear such a young girl say those words, but Rufus couldn't crack a smile as he walked up the stairs towards the throne.

“Now, Faris,” Rufus said. “Why don't you get off from the throne? There's no need for you to shoulder this much responsibility.”

“You're right,” she replied. “I didn't need to...until now.”

“What do you mean?”

“Give me the throne, please,” Faris said casually as though she was asking for a new toy. “Brother will likely be against it, so I need you to make me queen while he's gone. You can do that, can't you, Father?”

“...Is that a request from the Goddess?”

“It's a wish from both me and the Goddess. We must destroy logic and we don't have much time. We must settle this matter before Dragon God Rave loses his divine rank in the future and disappears again.”

“In the future? Again?”

This seemed like a silly prediction to make, but his daughter gave a firm nod.

“I'm not sure why one would lose their divine rank,” she explained. “I've done my best to ensure that we won't be in the same situation, but what I know for sure is that now is the time to act. We must make our move now when the Dragon Emperor, the Dragon King, and the remains of the Dragon God Rave have assembled—else, we won't be spared.”

“This is a bit different from how I understand this,” Rufus admitted. “Even if she isn’t tied with the Dragon Emperor, I thought we would win if the Dragon God Rave disappears.”

“That *wasn’t* enough,” Faris said confidently as though she knew the future. “I don’t know what the correct answer is, but the Goddess doesn’t have enough power to start over again.”

Rufus shifted his gaze down and stepped away from the stairs.

“This nation belongs to the Goddess,” he said. “I’ve got no complaints. It’ll take some time to pull the strings though.”

“Please hurry,” Faris replied.

“Can I confirm one thing? Are you my daughter or the Goddess?”

The memory of a small girl who cried, terrified of the Goddess and being swallowed alive, refusing to become a vessel, flashed across his mind. Where had that girl gone? He had killed his beloved wife and yet, his son had still desperately tried to protect his daughter. Where was that girl?

“I’m both, Father,” Faris said, putting a hand on her chest and standing from the throne. “Indeed, I’ve lamented about being the reincarnation of the Goddess and followed the logic of fate without understanding love. I was a foolish girl who made my brother and father unhappy. But I’m different now.”

Her dignified gaze was akin to the power of the Goddess.

“I am Faris der Kratos, the one who shatters logic imposed on us by the Dragon God. I am the one who will transcend fate.”

Rufus knelt on the marble floor. His son would surely be furious about this, but this was the correct form to take.

The Dragon Consort and the Guardian of the Goddess were mere supplements. From the beginning, this was a battle between the Dragon God Rave and the Goddess Kratos.

“Your wish is my command, Goddess.”

But whatever fate it was, Rufus knew that he would die an unpleasant death. He was so certain of it, he found it a little humorous.

Epilogue

ON a clear, sunny day, a single black dragon flew over from the Rakia mountains.

“Rare! Thank you so much for coming for us!” Jill said, spreading her arms wide in welcome.

The Dragon Queen looked a little embarrassed as she descended upon the wide pastures. “I didn’t have much choice,” Rare replied. “Only I can welcome the Dragon Emperor and Dragon Consort home.”

“How is Raw?” Jill asked.

“He’s fine. I told him that I would kill myself the moment he stepped outside the imperial capital.” Her purple eyes were dead serious.

Raw’s got a tough wife... Jill thought pensively.

Rick and Andy grew all excited when they came to see the couple off and spotted the dragon.

“Whoa! It’s really a black dragon! And it talked, didn’t it?!” Rick shouted.

“There really aren’t any records of black dragons,” Andy said. “Could we ride on its back a little?”

“Of course not. You two are from Kratos,” Jill said before Rare could glare at the brothers.

Rick and Andy looked at each other.

“Well, yeah, but this is a request from your cute little brothers!” Rick pleaded. “Can’t you use your Dragon Consort powers to let us?”

“It’s precisely because I’m the Dragon Consort that I can’t allow it so easily,” Jill replied. “If you gain permission from His Majesty, it’s another matter entirely.”

“Yes! Then I’ll ask hi—” Rick excitedly turned around to look for Hadis when he caught sight of the emperor and lost his enthusiasm.

Andy slumped his shoulders. “Seems like we shouldn’t go there for now.”

“Ah, Hadis! So, you’re finally leaving, are you?” Billy exclaimed. “Oh, I’ll be so lonely! I know you’re riding on a dragon, but it still will be a tough trip home! You can leave my daughter here and leave by yourself, you know!”

“Thank you for taking care of me, Mother,” Hadis said politely, ignoring him.

“You don’t have to act so reserved,” Charlotte replied. “You can stay here for as long as you like. You’re good with your hands, and I can trust you with all the mending and darning. You’re wonderful at cleaning—our kitchen is sparkling! Whatever shall we do for dinner tonight without you, Hadis?”

“I’ve already prepared your meal for tonight,” Hadis said. “I’ve even made some dishes in excess that will keep for a while. The sauce I made can also be stored for several days, so please use that with your vegetables. I think you can save quite a bit on food expenses this month, so you can use that to resupply your emptied food stores.”

“Hey, Charlotte!” Billy demanded. “Why does he know about our financial situation?!”

“Oh, you’re so reliable!” Charlotte squealed. “Can I send you a letter if I have some more concerns?”

“Of course,” Hadis replied. “I’ll let you know once I arrive at the imperial capital.”

“You’re both ignoring me?!” Billy shouted. “I’m even shaking your hand right now!”

Billy was practically crushing Hadis’s hand rather than shaking it, but the emperor calmly let it slide.

Hadis gave a weary sigh and said, “I would like for you all to visit the imperial capital one day.”

“Oh, you said it, didn’t you?!” Billy trumpeted. “Then I definitely will! I’ll take back my daughter!”

“Then I guess I’ll have the Neutrah! Dragon Knights welcome you.”

“Wouldn’t that start a war?” Rick asked with his hands folded behind his head. He sounded exasperated with them.

Andy stood beside him and said quietly, “I guess this is goodbye, Sis.”

“Why are you acting like we’ll never see each other again?” Jill asked.

“You’re always so optimistic.”

“Optimistic? Not really,” she said. “We’ve got a mountain of sparks that could ignite the flames of war, and I know that we can’t avoid a battle. Besides, you guys seem busy.”

While Hadis was recuperating, Andy and Rick had frequently left the Cervel residence. The reason for their departure was unknown; they could’ve been making preparations to rescue Gerald, or there might’ve been some political confusion and uproar to deal with. And of course, no explanations were provided by Jill’s family. That wasn’t an issue—prying further would’ve caused another confrontation. In any case, it was clear that Kratos had no plans to bury the hatchet for now.

“But I feel like he’ll be able to handle it one day,” Jill said. “He’s My Majesty.”

“You’re smitten,” Andy replied with his eyes half-closed.

She nudged him to hide her embarrassment.

“Let’s go, Jill,” Hadis said curtly.

He may have been exhausted by Billy, who kept trying to pick a fight with him.

Jill nodded. “Okay. Let’s do our best!”

“Sure... Wait, what? Do our best? For what?” Hadis asked.

Rick sighed and shook his head. “You don’t get it, do you, Brother? You think *we’d* let the Dragon Emperor just leave, no questions asked?”

“Everyone, get in position!” Andy ordered.

The citizens of the Cervel domain emerged and surrounded them.

“We’re sending off the Dragon Emperor and his wife!” Billy shouted.

Hadis froze in place, forcing Jill to grab his hand and jump onto Rare.

“Hurry, Your Majesty!” Jill yelled. “Or they’ll shoot us down!”

“Why?!” cried Hadis. “What’s the point of the contract then?!”

“They let you recuperate, so let’s allow them to let loose a little. It’s on us!”

“That makes no sense!”

Hadis seemed displeased, but Rare immediately took to the skies. The half-baked magic spells were ripped to shreds as though she was swatting away a spiderweb, and she beautifully looped around and dodged the magic circle that appeared in front of her.

“Hmph, this was nothin—” Rare started before she stopped in the air.

Charlotte’s whip had grabbed the dragon’s tail, and Billy leaped into the skies with clenched fists.

“Remember this well, Dragon Emperor,” Billy warned. “Once war breaks out, this fist will kill your citizens and your family.”

Hadis blinked before he smiled and summoned his Heavenly Sword. “That’s my line.”

With a single swing, the Heavenly Sword blocked Billy’s attack and sliced the whip that had wrapped around Rare. The emperor had held back and simply shown off his power. Billy gracefully landed atop the manor while cries of admiration could be heard from below.

“It’s the Heavenly Sword!”

“Didn’t think I’d get to see it in my lifetime!”

“Next time I visit, I’ll greet you with the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort!” Jill bellowed.

She didn’t want to be forgotten. Cheers rose from beneath her, and everyone wildly waved their hands with joy.

“And this is fine?” Hadis asked wearily.

“Of course,” Jill replied. “It seems you don’t understand the Cervels well enough yet.”

They suddenly rose in elevation, flying above the clouds with a flap of Rare's wings.

"How long will it take until we arrive in the imperial capital?" Jill asked.

"Usually, it takes four days or so," Hadis replied.

"If I fly at full speed with no breaks, I'll make it by tomorrow," Rare said. "We can't leave Raw on his own! Let's go!"

Only a black dragon could brute force their way back. True to her word, they saw the mountaintops in an instant, but the presence of magic along the border was no more.

"The magic shield of the Rakia mountains is gone..." Jill murmured.

Hadis silently nodded. She sighed and rested her back against his chest.

"So the Goddess can now enter Rave as she pleases again..." she said.

"I guess so..." Hadis replied. "Um, Jill, if—"

"If you say something like I can still turn back, I'll kick you off Rare and return to the imperial capital by myself."

Hadis fell silent, proving Jill's guess to be correct.

"Come on now," Jill said. "I feel like a fool for worrying about the future."

"The future? Like after we return to the imperial capital?"

"That's right. We've got lots to do. First, we should visit the grave of the first Dragon Consort." Jill extended her left hand and the gold band on her ring finger shone under the sun. "And what shall we do about Radia?" she asked. "I'm the grand duke, aren't I? I can't use my age as an excuse and leave everything to you, Your Majesty. That would be unfitting for the Dragon Consort... Your Majesty?"

Hadis rested his forehead on Jill's shoulder.

"You're growing up so quickly that I can't keep up..." he muttered.

"Well, of course. I'm trying to catch up to you, you know. I can't be growing at the same rate as you."

“You chose me over your home. That’s more than enough for the Dragon Consort. You’ve done a bit too much as an eleven-year-old,” he said.

“You’re being too naïve, Your Majesty! It’s not like everything’s peaceful just because I’m the Dragon Consort! The Goddess is dangerous, of course,” Jill said as she balled her fists. “But I have to make sure I can defeat any woman that tries to get close to you!”

“There really isn’t a woman who can win against you.”

“That’s not the issue! Remember the Dragon Consort of three centuries ago?”

It was a huge mistake to believe that everything would be all right so long as Jill had the power to fight.

“That could just be a made-up story by the Goddess,” Hadis scoffed. “Rave doesn’t remember any of it, so it’s not worth taking into account.”

“Sure, but I don’t think it’s all a lie,” Jill replied. “And it’s true that the Dragon Consorts were so hurt that the Goddess had an opening to utilize.”

“But if Rave doesn’t remember, it means he must’ve lost his divine rank then,” Hadis said calmly, surprising Jill with a novel viewpoint. “If the Dragon Emperor turns his back on logic, the Dragon God will, of course, lose the rank of divinity. Rave barely remembers any of the final moments of the Dragon Consorts. He only really knows the first Dragon Consort’s. He might only remember because he was the Dragon Emperor himself, but a majority of the deaths of the Dragon Consorts are unknown.”

“Which means the emperors turned their backs on logic. Do you think it’s because they lost their Dragon Consort?”

“Who knows? The Goddess could be involved somehow. But if the death of the Dragon Consort from 300 years ago is true like you saw...” Hadis trailed off as he hugged Jill from behind. He muttered bitterly, “I’m guessing it’s a really troublesome form of logic. It means the Dragon Emperor failed somehow after losing their Dragon Consort, so it’s highly possible that I would follow in those footsteps.”

“But it doesn’t seem likely that every Dragon Emperor would turn away from logic.”

“If I mess up, Rave will lose his divine rank and disappear.”

Only then did Jill realize how cold Hadis’s hands were. She bit her lip and put her hands over his. It wasn’t a topic she should’ve touched on so casually. Jill wasn’t directly involved, but for Hadis, this was a terrifying subject that could very well occur in the future—he was only acting like an emperor. She remembered their discussion, which Hadis had kept secret from even Rave. The emperor was trying his absolute best to act the part so that his adoptive parent wouldn’t disappear. The moment he made the wrong decision as an emperor, Rave could very well fade from existence.

Hence, Hadis couldn’t make any mistakes, not even one. He couldn’t turn his back on the logic of the Dragon Emperor.

And he felt the same about this incident too... It might actually be dangerous to form peace with Kratos, Jill thought, annoyed with herself that she’d noticed this too late. Still, she was glad that she was able to realize it at all.

“You’ll be fine, Your Majesty,” Jill said, wrapping her arms around Hadis.

She was irritated by how small her hands and body were—if she were larger, she could properly hug Hadis, and envelop him and his worries.

“You’re not alone,” she continued. “If the Dragon Consort is the trigger, it means I’m involved somehow too. And you’ve got your brothers and sisters and so many people on your side. They’ll all make you into a splendid emperor.”

“I hope so,” Hadis murmured. “I’m not very confident.”

“Don’t be so timid. It’s frustrating to admit, but I’ve fallen in love with you all over again. I’m awed by your strength.”

Hadis blinked. Jill was so close that she could see the tips of his eyelashes and she pouted.

“It seems like you’d be just fine if I bid you farewell, so— Your Majesty!” Jill gasped, quickly supporting Hadis who’d teetered.

They were only holding the reins; Rare would fly on her own. But they were in the skies, and if Hadis fell from the dragon, he’d plummet to the ground below. He took shallow breaths, his face pale, as he slowly opened his eyes.

“I-I feel like I heard words that declared the end of the world...” Hadis said.

“...You’ve misheard,” Jill replied. “It was all a dream.”

“I knew it! I thought my heart would stop...”

This man could dish it out, but he couldn’t be on the receiving end of those words. Jill couldn’t say goodbye to Hadis either, so it seemed they were on equal footing. *I guess we’re alike in that sense.* She had come to a peaceful conclusion, but she couldn’t stop herself from sighing.

“What?! What was that sigh?!” Hadis cried. “I feel like you want to throw me away right now!”

“How easy it would be if I could...” Jill muttered. “Argh! Your Majesty!”

“Yes?!”

“You’re forgetting our happy family plan, aren’t you?!”

Hadis sat up straight upon being called, but he widened his eyes in shock.

Jill glared into his gold eyes and declared, “We’ll complete that plan together. We absolutely will.”

This happiness didn’t just encapsulate the couple. Hadis’s family, which still had some seeds of discord, Jill’s homeland, which was technically their enemy, and even the gods could attain happiness. It was a grand plan, but Jill was determined to complete it for everyone.

Hadis seemed stunned for a moment before he laughed, causing Jill to frown and raise her fist.

“I’m serious!” she yelled. “I’ll hit you, Your—”

The moment the emperor’s arms wrapped around her, she thought that his thin lips had brushed against hers. Jill froze in shock, but Hadis didn’t seem to be bothered and continued to hug her tightly.

D-Did I just imagine that? I-I thought we just... Jill didn’t have the courage to confirm it as her heart thudded loudly.

“Jill, you’ve grown taller,” Hadis said teasingly.

“Huh?!” she replied. “Well, I’d like to think that I have...”

“You have. Compared to the time when I first met you, you’ve matured too. Little by little, you’re no longer just cute.” Hadis sighed as he rested his chin atop her head, but he seemed to be enjoying himself. “I feel like I understand where the Dragon Emperors of the past went wrong,” he muttered.

“You do?!” gasped Jill. “What is it? I’d like to know.”

“It’s a secret because it’s embarrassing.”

“Huh?!”

“Whoa there, another fight so soon? You guys need to take it easy...” Rave said as he emerged between Jill and Hadis.

Jill shut her mouth, but Hadis seemed indifferent.

“And what about you?” the emperor asked. “You’ve been lazing around all day.”

“You’re the one who made me use my powers in Kratos!” Rave yelled. “You had me stay as a Heavenly Sword, had me relay messages to Raw, and even protect Rosa! We’ve just returned to Rave, so give me a break!”

Jill looked behind her and noticed that they had already crossed the border. The peak of the Rakia mountains was fading from sight, and she could no longer see her homeland.

“I won’t return you,” Hadis murmured above her head.

“You’re still going on about that?” Rave asked, exasperated. “Missy chose you, didn’t she?”

“Shut up, it’s about my feelings here.”

“Yeah, yeah,” the Dragon God said before he turned to the black dragon. “Rare, are you tired? You okay? Raw’s worried, you know.”

The God moved towards Rare’s head, and Jill took that as her chance to lean against Hadis’s chest. She felt like she could hear his heartbeat too.

“I won’t go back,” Jill said.

“Okay,” Hadis replied. “But you can return to your family home every now and then, and you’re free to invite your family to the imperial capital.”

“You’ve become so tolerant all of a sudden.”

“This is our happy family plan, isn’t it? Between you and me.”

Jill laughed happily before she stretched up and whispered in Hadis’s ear.

“Ten kids, right?” she asked.

“Yeah, let’s do our best,” Hadis replied. “We’ll keep it a secret from Rave too.”

The current Dragon Emperor and Dragon Consort planned on laying out a new type of love and logic—one that wouldn’t be burned by the flames of love or be frozen by cold logic.

The happiness they promised each other was beyond that. They were sure of it.

Afterword

HELLO, and for the newcomers, nice to meet you. I'm Sarasa Nagase.

Thank you for reading this book. Thanks to all of you, we've made it to the fourth volume with Jill and the gang. I did my best to revise some sections and add a bonus story, so I'd be delighted if those who read the web version and those who haven't enjoyed this volume.

Now for some acknowledgments. Mitsuya Fuji, thank you so much for the splendid illustrations. I think they look especially cool in this volume, so I'm truly thankful. Thank you to Anko Yuzu for the ongoing effort with the manga version. I also want to thank the editors in charge, the rest of the editing department, designers, proofreaders, everyone from the printing office, and everyone who was involved in making this book. You all have my heartfelt gratitude.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the readers who decided to check out this series. I'll do my best to keep writing an enjoyable story, and I'd be thrilled if you could continue to cheer Jill and her friends on.

I hope to see you all again!

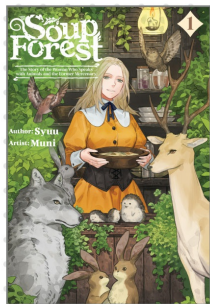


Let's Get to Villainessin': Stratagems of a Former Commoner

By **Hiironoame**

Illust **Misumi**

Would you become the villainess to save your beloved baby sister? Mio agrees to do just that! Survive three years at an elite academy where the progeny of tycoons and moguls roam, and in return, the real villainess will cure Mio's terminally ill sister. What lengths will Mio go for her sister?



Soup Forest: The Story of the Woman Who Speaks with Animals and the Former Mercenary

By **Syuu**

Illust **Muni**

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The Former Assassin Who Got Reincarnated as a Noble Girl

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