

2

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The DO-OVER
DAMSEL CONQUERS
the DRAGON EMPEROR



Table of Contents

[Copyright](#)

[Character Page](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1: The Laid-Back Life and Riot of the False Emperor](#)

[Chapter 2: Infiltrating the Neutral Dragon Knights](#)

[Chapter 3: A Supply Line from Siblings](#)

[Chapter 4: The Network of Betrayal](#)

[Chapter 5: A Contract of Blood and Rescuing the Dragon Emperor](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Interlude: The Fall of the Dragon Consort in Conference Room One](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Other Series Pt. 1](#)

[Other Series Pt. 2](#)

The Do-Over Damsel Conquers the Dragon Emperor Vol.2

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YARINAOSHI REIJO WA RYUTEIHEIKA O KORYAKU CHU Vol.2

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**FARIS DER KRATOS**

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

**GERALD DER KRATOS**

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

**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 Neufrahl Dragon Knights.

**ZEKE**

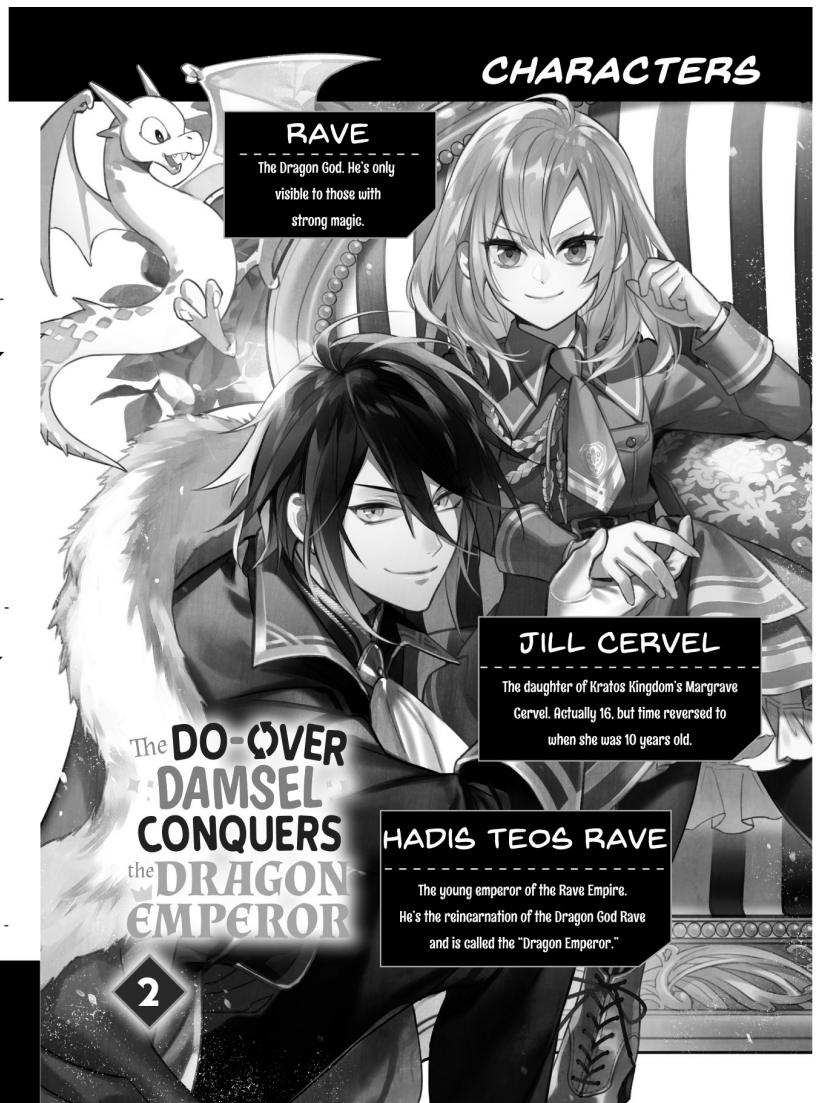
Knight of the Dragon Consort. Uses a greatsword.

**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's only visible to those with strong magic.

JILL CERVEL

The daughter of Kratos Kingdom's Margrave Cervel. Actually 16, but time reversed to when she was 10 years old.

HADIS TEOS RAVE

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

2

Prologue

THE female commander with a sword pressed against her throat couldn't hide her shock when the twelve-year-old Jill appeared on the battlefield.

"Are you the commander? Really?" the woman asked in disbelief.

"That I am. Are you Princess Elentzia Teos Rave?"

"That's right. And you are?"

"Jill Cervel. The commander of this squad."

"A Cervel, huh? If I remember correctly, you're Crown Prince Gerald's fiancée... Hmm, I see. So that's what's going on."

The female commander from the enemy empire closed her eyes to process the situation. She showed no signs of resistance, but Jill hastened the conversation.

"We'll take you prisoner. Your life will be spared, so please tell your troops to surrender. I wouldn't expect any backup," Jill said.

The plan that Gerald had entrusted Jill with went well. She had successfully lured Princess Elentzia's squad and isolated it. Even the dauntless first princess of the Dragon Knights was no match for the anti-flight magic circles. Should she show hostility, her squad's massacre was inevitable.

"Prince Gerald has commanded me not to take lives needlessly," Jill informed her.

"...Not surprised. I'm sure Vissel had instructed him to do as much. Haha, I'm so very grateful. I went along with his plan, and in the end, I..." murmured Elentzia before she was abruptly cut off.

"Enemy raid! Enemy raid!"

A warning horn blared just as a wave of magic was unleashed from the Rakia Mountains, forming a cross-like pattern. Cries of agony and anguish filled the

air.

My squad's been fragmented?! Where did the attack come from? Jill thought. Her skin crawled at the immense magical energy from beyond the border as her subordinate shouted the answer to her unspoken question.

"From the peak of the Rakia Mountains! The crimson flag! It's the Rave Imperial Army!"

"Hadis Teos Rave!" Jill said his name like it was a curse. "Did he cross the Rakia Mountains?!"

This must've been the rumored army under direct command of the Rave Emperor. Jill had no doubt he'd come to save Elentzia.

"Jill, let's take Princess Elentzia and retreat. We don't stand a chance," the cool-headed vice commander advised. But Jill couldn't believe those words.

"We're choosing to flee without putting up a fight?!" she cried.

"That blow rendered our anti-flight magic circles useless. Our squad has been fragmented. There will be too much of a delay in giving orders. They took us completely by surprise. I don't doubt that the enemy's aware of our plans."

"Impossible. Prince Gerald's plans have been foiled? How could this be?" Jill's grip tightened around her sword.

"The Rave Emperor bested Crown Prince Gerald in the past," the vice commander pointed out. "I'd like to question the emperor's sanity, but it's logical to assume that he fooled even his allies and made preparations in secret. They weren't supposed to receive any backup."

Elentzia tried to smile, but her stunned face at the sight of backup had proved this analysis correct. The vice commander directed his sharp gaze towards the Rakia Mountains.

"We defeated the Neutrahl Dragon Knights and captured their commander, Princess Elentzia," he said. "These results should be more than enough for our first battle. If the enemy recaptures Her Highness and destroys our path of retreat, all our efforts would be wasted."

"...Got it. We'll retreat! Relay the message to all troops in secret!" Jill ordered.

"You came to save me...Hadis," murmured Elentzia under her breath. A dry laugh escaped her lips.

Jill tightened her grip on her sword. "Unfortunately for you, you'll be coming with us."

"You came for me?" she continued to mutter to herself. "The person who disgracefully dismissed your plan and agreed to cooperate with Vissel? No... You... You had your suspicions from the start. You knew that this was going to happen." Elentzia staggered as she got up. She was smiling but looked like she would burst into tears at any moment. "What a foolish child. You should just toss me aside. I'm merely your pathetic half-sister, a person who can neither be friend nor foe," the princess murmured.

"Please don't move!" Jill shouted. "If you resist, I'll—"

Suddenly, something came from below, knocking Jill's sword away. *A hidden dagger?!*

Jill hadn't let her guard down, but she was intimidated by Elentzia, who remained smiling in this hopeless situation. Jill's subordinates pointed their bow and sword at Elentzia.

"We can't let you go, princess! Zeke!" Camila shouted.

"Right behind ya!"

"Wait, Camila! Zeke!" Jill yelled.

Jill, who had jumped away from Elentzia, saw the princess hold the dagger to her throat rather than brandish it towards her captors.

"What are you— Your Highness!"

"I refuse to become a burden. If I were to be captured here, you'd definitely come to save me," Elentzia said, continuing to speak to someone who wasn't there. "You were always a kind child. Yet, to protect ourselves, we rejected you, calling you cursed and a monster... We're much more monstrous and cursed compared to you."

"Camila! Fire! Stop her!"

The moment the vice commander's orders echoed, arrows pierced Elentzia's

shoulder and leg. She grit her teeth with a grin and remained standing. As though she clutched her own life in her hands, she refused to let go of the dagger pointed towards her throat.

"I'm sorry for being a useless older sister," Elentzia said.

"...Please...stop! Your Highness, we're not here to take your life!" Jill cried.

"I'm sorry that I couldn't be on your side. At the very least, from here on out, I won't be your enemy, Hadis. That's the best apology that I can offer."

With a beautiful smile, Elentzia pierced her own throat. Her silver hair turned red with her blood, and the light left her dark eyes.

Jill could only stare in shock. She never intended to take unnecessary lives in this battle. She planned on ending it with as few casualties as possible.

Jill's first battle had taught her that such a plan wasn't feasible in war. What thoughts ran through Hadis's mind when he saw the death of the half-sister he'd come to save? The absence of a follow-up attack from Hadis's army after that was telling.

He was probably sad, Jill thought. Or would he have smiled and charged forward, pretending it never happened? Jill's memory remained as vivid as ever, even bringing back the smell of blood that wouldn't wash from the hair she'd been growing out. She couldn't ask him this question, and she couldn't hear the answer.

This tragic incident would occur two years from now.

This was a story from the future to Jill, who'd gone back in time six years. *If I can prevent the Kratos Kingdom and the Rave Empire from ever going to war, I might be able to change that future.*

She was overcome with an odd feeling as she looked up at the empire's sky. *Why am I here? Why did I cross through time and the kingdom's boundaries?*

"Ah, these cabbages are wonderful! They look so fresh and green! We'll use these today," a familiar voice exclaimed.

Seriously, what am I doing right now?

"Freshly picked vegetables are the best. I'm glad I planted these. If the good

weather continues, these seeds will become big and ripe produce. I'm looking forward to— Agh?!"

Unable to restrain herself, Jill kicked the back of her husband.

"Why are you leisurely picking vegetables, Your Majesty?!" she snapped.

"Why? What else can I do? Not like I can enter the imperial capital," said Hadis after he turned around. Protecting the cabbages, he fell face-first into the soil, but he didn't seem angry in the slightest.

Hadis Teos Rave was the emperor of the enemy empire and was supposed to be one of Jill's greatest enemies. Oddly enough, he was now her husband, wearing an apron and gloves to do some gardening. Even with his less-than-majestic appearance, there was no doubt he was still certainly the emperor of the Rave Empire.

Indeed, he was the emperor. And yet...

"Do you really think *now* is the time to be growing cabbages?!" shouted Jill.

"Don't worry, I never put all my eggs in one basket. The strawberries are about to ripen," he replied casually.

"That's not the issue! You should focus on the current situation!"

"What use is there for that? Tonight, we'll be having pot-au-feu."

"Pot-au-feu..." she repeated.

"I got a large chunk of salted pork, so we'll cut it into big pieces and stew them. It'll melt in your mouth."

"Melt in my mouth..."

Jill, weak to all things food-related, envisioned a piping hot pot-au-feu filled with large chunks of delicious meat. Hadis's expert cooking made it even more appetizing. The pork would be marbled with fat and was certain to be delicious. Jill gulped, then came back to her senses.

"That's not what I'm talking about, Your Majesty," she huffed.

"The potatoes are also growing well. This region's warm even within the Rave Empire. With spring on the horizon, the garden will get the boost it needs."

“Hey! Are you listening to me?! We’re wanted people, Your Majesty! We can’t even use our magic much right now, so we’ve no time to work the fields —”

“Oi! Your Majesty, Captain! I’m back, and look! Today was a good fishing day!” Zeke called.

“Look, look, Jill! I got this large bird!” Camila yelled.

Hadis stood up with a broad smile when he heard the voices of his subordinates from beyond the half-broken stone wall.

“Let’s prepare the bird so that it can be stored. We should also sprinkle some salt on the fish while it’s fresh and grill them,” Hadis suggested.

“Oh, sounds good! There’s a river here, and the mountains are filled with beasts worth hunting,” Zeke agreed.

“Quite so! I worried what would happen to us at first, but things have been peachy thus far,” said Camila.

The subordinates nodded to each other while Jill’s fists trembled.

“Zeke! Camila! How can you two just go with the flow given *this* situation?!”

Jill’s voice echoed into the blue sky, and a baby bird she’d been looking after chirped in surprise.

Chapter 1: The Laid-Back Life and Riot of the False Emperor

JILL widened her eyes in shock at the shadow that passed over the clear blue sky of the floating city of Beilburg. The shadow had a long torso, large wings, and glittering, durable scales with a green sheen. Its legs alone were as tall as Jill, but it silently and gracefully landed in Beilburg Castle's courtyard.

"A dragon... Your Majesty, there's a dragon! Why?!" yelped Jill, looking up at her tall and slender husband standing beside her. She was caught off guard and awed by the three dragons that were lined up.

Hadis blinked his beautiful gold eyes and gave her a quizzical expression. "Why? They've come to take us to the imperial capital. I asked my older brother to send the dragons that have been in the care of the imperial family instead of a retinue to pick us up."

"Pick us up?! So we're riding *them*? We're not taking something like a horse and carriage?!"

"Ah... Right, dragons aren't native to Kratos, so they aren't used as a means of transportation there," muttered Hadis. Jill nodded.

The continent of Platy was divided into east and west regions by the sacred Rakia Mountains. Jill's homeland, the Kratos Kingdom, was to the west. It was governed by the Kratos royal family and blessed with the protection of the Goddess of love, Kratos. The region in the east was where Jill was currently—the Rave Empire. This empire was ruled by the Rave imperial family and diligently protected by the Dragon God of logic, Rave.

"I-I-I've never seen them up close before!" Jill exclaimed, clapping her hands together in her excitement. She'd battled against dragons before, dodging their flames and punching them in the head, but to Jill, that was a different kind of experience.

Hadis gave a strained smile. "You're not scared?" he asked.

"Not at all! It has always been a dream of mine to ride a dragon! I always wanted my own dragon! But I heard that they don't like magic..." she sighed.

"More accurately, they don't like Goddess Kratos's magic," corrected a serpentine beast with small wings as he slithered on top of Hadis's shoulder. This creature was the Dragon God Rave—well, Jill decided to treat him like a creature.

Hadis furrowed his immaculate eyebrows and whispered, "Rave, stay inside me for now. You'll draw too much attention."

"Come on! I gotta show myself to the dragons as the Dragon God."

"Can dragons see you, Rave?" Jill asked, lowering her voice.

To prepare for the trip to the imperial capital, most of the servants hastily helped to fit the saddles and load their bags. No one seemed to be paying attention to the trio. Besides, Rave could only be seen and heard by people with immense magic power.

Rave lowered his voice to play along with Jill. "Well, I *am* a dragon, after all. It's only humans who normally can't see me."

"Really? So, Sauté can see you too?"

Jill had two things in her backpack. One was a handmade stuffed bear that Hadis gave her with the awfully suggestive comment: "Think of that bear as an extension of me." The other was a baby chick that she'd been allowed to look after. The former was called Hadis Bear, while the latter was named Sauté. Just hearing those names would cause people to cringe, but Jill didn't mind.

Sauté, who'd heard its name and recently gotten better at jumping, stuck its head out from a gap in Jill's backpack and gave an energetic chirp.

Rave laughed. "You can see me, can't you? Hey! Don't peck me! It hurts, you baby bird! You want Hadis to sauté you?!"

"Peep!"

"Sauté, please behave in there with His Majesty Bear," Jill said before posing her question. "Um, so if they dislike Goddess Kratos's magic, that means, I'm..." she trailed off.

Because the Goddess served as a guardian for her people, humans of the Kratos Kingdom were usually born with some form of magic. Jill, who was born in Kratos and possessed immense magic power, must've been the perfect target to be hated by dragons.

She remained anxious, but Hadis suddenly scooped her up. His beautiful face approached hers and she gulped. By this point, Jill was used to being picked up by Hadis, but she could never get used to his long eyelashes, captivating golden eyes, and thin lips that called out her name.

“Don’t worry. You’re the wife of the Dragon Emperor—the Dragon Consort. The gold ring is proof that you’ve got the Dragon God’s blessing, so they understand,” he said.

“Huh, really? So I can ride a dragon?!” Jill instantly perked up in his arms.

“If you’re with Hadis, you can probably ride one no problem, Missy,” Rave said. “Dragons just tend to dislike people with Kratos’s magic, after all. Doesn’t mean you *can’t* forcibly ride one, but without a dragon’s consent, they won’t protect you and they’ll fly extra high. You’d get altitude sickness, and they won’t listen to you.”

So, I can’t ride one alone then. Jill was a little disappointed, but her excitement over getting to ride a dragon won out, and she clung to Hadis’s neck.

“I’ll ride one. Please, Your Majesty! Hurry, hurry! We can soar through the skies!” she exclaimed.

“O-Okay, okay. You can fly pretty high with your magic, right? Why are you so excited?” he asked.

“Because I’m riding a dragon!”

“Okay,” Hadis said once more, taking a step toward the dragons until a voice behind him stopped him.

“Jill, I’m done with the preparations... Huh? Dragons?! We’re traveling by dragon?! I’ve never ridden one before!” Camila cried. Her face turned pale. Camila was Jill’s knight and would obviously be joining the Dragon Consort on her journey by dragon.

Zeke, another one of Jill's knights, scrunched his face up behind Camila. "Seriously? I mean, yeah, I guess Rave royalty would use dragons for transport... Ugh, dragons..."

"D-Don't worry. Dragons are gentle creatures," said Sphere, who came out to send everyone off. Sphere was Jill's tutor and a standin for Marquess Beil. She wouldn't travel with the group but would wait for someone to fetch her once everyone else had settled in at the imperial capital.

"Have you ever ridden a dragon, Sphere?" Jill asked.

"J-Just a little in the past..." said Sphere sheepishly.

Everyone widened their eyes and Hadis laughed. "I knew that dragons liked you, but that's surprising," he said.

"An imperial princess married into the Beil household a couple generations ago, so I may have received the dragon's favor through her," Sphere explained. "Dragons are loyal to the imperial family, after all."

"Even so, their favor greatly varies from person to person," Hadis pointed out. "Some of my ancestors in the Rave imperial family were said to be loathed by dragons, apparently."

Sphere, engaged in a pleasant chat with Hadis, was clearly a frail young lady. If she could ride a dragon, Camila and Zeke's pride told them that they could as well. Thinking that their expressions mixed with determination and anxiety looked a bit funny, Jill stifled a laugh. She sat on the dragon's saddle with Hadis's arms around her waist, and her laughter changed into cries of joy when the dragon took off.

"We're floating! We're floating, Your Majesty!" she cheered.

"Really, you're fearless about everything... Hey, don't try to stand."

Jill tried to get a better look at her surroundings and shifted her position, but an arm around her stomach kept her firmly in place.

"Don't move too much. I know you're excited, but if you fall now, it'll be awful," Hadis said.

Jill looked down in embarrassment when she noticed Hadis was acting

mature, a rare occurrence. She noticed the people under her sending her off.

Sphere was waving her hands as Gard and the other soldiers saluted. Beilburg castle, where Jill and her group had stayed for a month, grew smaller and smaller below them. The city of Beilburg, surrounded by the ocean, had a blue shimmer. When the dragons circled overhead to change directions, cheers and a flurry of flowers erupted from the city. From the walls of the naval port, Hugo, the newly assigned captain of the Northern Division, and the other soldiers offered sloppy salutes. Everyone was sending off Jill and Hadis, who'd protected Beilburg from the Goddess's attack.

"I'm glad we protected the city, Your Majesty," Jill said.

"Yeah."

Hadis, greeted with the same view, gave a curt reply. But his eyes contained a warmth and kindness that tickled Jill to her core. Rave seemed to be beaming with pride on top of Hadis's shoulder, but he quickly turned away to hide his embarrassment.

"We're just getting started. Let's go home to the imperial capital, Rahelm, the city of the skies!" Hadis said, tugging on the reins to increase elevation.

Jill shrieked with joy as Camila and Zeke screamed for their lives.

"Huh?! We're going even higher?! NOOO! I'll die! AAAAAAAAHH!"

"Oi, shut up and quit squirming around!"

"Um, will Camila and Zeke..." Jill started.

"They'll be fine," Hadis replied. "The dragons will listen to me. I've tied the saddles firmly, and even if they fall, the dragons will scoop them right up."

"They're so intelligent!"

Jill was moved by this but heard the yells of, "What about falling?!" and "Just kill me now!" behind her. Hadis and the dragons ignored these cries. The magnificent beasts, finally hitting their stride or just feeling happy, increased their altitude and speed, flying over mountains and rivers in a flash.

"Wow! Amazing! Your Majesty, we're going so fast! We'll get to the city in no time, won't we?!" Jill called over the whooshing wind.

“Unfortunately, even dragons have their limits. They can’t fly for hours at a time, and to get from Beilburg to Rahelm, we’re practically going from opposite ends of the Rave Empire. Even if you’re familiar with the route, it’ll take two days. Considering those two behind us, we’ll take breaks, so it might take three days.”



"We get to ride a dragon for three days?! I'm so happy!" Jill exclaimed.

"You heard her. Guess we gotta put on a show, huh?"

The dragon, seeming to catch onto Hadis's mischievous smile, suddenly zoomed through the clouds and looped through the air. Jill squealed with joy.

"Are you having fun?"

"So much fun! You look so cool while riding a dragon, Your Majesty!"

Hadis handled these dragons far more skillfully than any Dragon Knight she'd ever faced.

Hadis looked around, flustered, his cheeks pinkening at her honest compliment. "R-Really?"

"Yep! I want to stay like this forever! Oh, but you mustn't push yourself too much."

As a vessel for the Dragon God Rave, Hadis possessed strong magic, but his body was frail. His heart was weak as well. Even the smallest incident could cause it to stop, and he was very prone to fainting if he let his guard down. Knowing this, Jill looked up at his face to check on his condition.

But Hadis hugged her from behind, trying to bury his face in her hair.

"Don't worry. Seeing you so happy fills me with energy," he said.

"R-Really?"

"Really."

The breeze and the saddle were comfortable, but Jill now shifted awkwardly in her seat. The screams from behind her had stopped, and she assumed her knights must've passed out. In fact, when they decided to stop for a rest, both Zeke and Camila were actually unconscious on their saddles, just like Jill had assumed. For the next two days, the ride went smoothly, with Jill expressing her excitement the whole time.

She was happy to ride a dragon, which she'd always dreamed of, but she enjoyed her talks alone with Hadis the most.

"So you're the middle child of seven siblings?" the emperor asked, surprised

by her family dynamic.

"Yes, I've got two older sisters and one older brother. I have twin younger brothers and one younger sister," Jill explained.

They had some time to connect during their stay at Beilburg, but there was always someone nearby except for when they slept, and Rave was usually present as well. Rave occasionally left to check on the dragons with Zeke and Camila during their flight. He might've left on purpose to give Hadis and Jill some alone time together.

"How about you, Your Majesty?"

The skies made her feel too free and open. Jill snapped back to her senses once the question left her lips. Hadis didn't have a normal life and didn't get along with his family—in fact, many fought each other for power. But Hadis didn't seem to mind the question as he kept his hands on the dragon's reins.

"I'm kinda like you now. I've got a half-sister who's older than me, my older brother Vissel, a half-brother who's the same age as me, two younger half-sisters, and a younger half-brother. I used to have more."

"...The Goddess killed many of your siblings, didn't she?" Jill responded sadly.

"Yeah. Seven or more. Though many believe my curse killed them all," Hadis said, looking indifferent.

Jill pursed her lips. *The majority must've been the Goddess's doing, but some may've been killed by others who used the curse as an excuse to pin their actions on His Majesty.*

This was the kind of political machination that happened at the heart of any kingdom or empire.

Before the Goddess turned back time for Jill, she had been engaged to Kratos's crown prince and had seen plenty of the darker side of the court there. Still, to say the siblings of the Kratos royal family were on good terms would be a major understatement. Such an understatement, in fact, that when Jill found out about their intimacy, Gerald swiftly canceled their engagement, heaped false charges onto Jill, and sentenced her to be executed.

I should stop thinking about that. I'll worry about His Majesty first.

In the future that Jill was familiar with, Hadis used civil strife and rebellions as an excuse to execute the imperial family, including his half-siblings and older brother Vissel. The older brother he'd deeply trusted actually had connections to the Kratos Kingdom, which led to the war. Tired of the repeated betrayals, Hadis went on to become a ruthless and cruel emperor.

Yet, the arms and chest of the man who supported Jill felt so kind and warm.

“I’m hated, so you might receive some of the backlash, but—”

“I’ll protect you with everything I’ve got, Your Majesty!”

Jill responded with renewed determination, and Hadis blinked in response. She’d proposed to Hadis to escape her engagement with Crown Prince Gerald, which she knew would end in failure. But with this second chance at life, she decided to make this strong yet pitiable man happy. She wanted to avoid war with Kratos and have her love finally be fulfilled. There were a number of problems that stood in her way: she was ten and he was nineteen, which was a hefty age gap. And Hadis was being pursued by Goddess Kratos, meaning that Jill becoming the man’s wife would require her to defeat the Goddess.

“I’ll snap them all!” she declared.

“H-Huh? I mean, yeah, you *did* snap the Goddess in two...” Hadis mumbled.

“Leave it to me! I’ll snap everything again!”

“Wh-Why don’t you just snap the Goddess?” Hadis stammered. “Vissel is very kind, though I don’t know if he’ll support our relationship...”

Hadis did not yet know that Vissel, the only sibling he shared both parents with, would be the biggest traitor of all.

“I won’t snap anyone who stands with you,” Jill said with an intrepid smile, hiding her implication that she’d destroy any *enemy*.

If I remember correctly, the first person who points their blade towards His Majesty isn’t his sibling but—

“Hey, we’ll see Rahelm soon,” Rave said, catching up to fly alongside their dragon.

Jill shifted her gaze to see what was in front of her. The two dragons flying behind had Zeke and Camila clinging to their saddles without losing consciousness for once.

The river running from the ocean through the calm plains below suddenly changed to a steep slope. The forest with tall trees gradually turned into a green highland and the sky was dotted with clouds. Perhaps due to the altitude, the air changed too. It was filled with the tranquility and solemnity that Jill had felt in Kratos's capital. It felt like the region was receiving protection from a god.

The clouds slowly dissipated like a fog lifting, and there it was, a city in the heavens.

"That's the imperial city, Rahelm..." she murmured.

Rahelm, the heart of the Rave Empire, was located in the northernmost region. The air was a bit cold due to the high elevation, and the city in the blue welkin carried dignity fitting to be a city of the skies.

The tall castle walls, dividing the area from the highlands, resembled a steep cliff; it seemed impossible to pass over without a dragon. Beyond the walls, the beauty of the city below was stunning. The paved pathways were white, and flights of stairs led towards the center. Vibrant roofs were decorated with chimneys letting out puffs of smoke. A clocktower with a bell stood in the middle of the city, and behind it were three spires, higher above, serving as the head of a white castle. The regal castle stretched towards the heavens.

Jill's group was flying parallel to the highlands, towards the castle walls.

"Is that...your castle, Your Majesty?" Jill asked.

"Yeah," said Hadis with a nod. He sounded nervous.

At the very least, to this day, this city and castle weren't places of comfort for Hadis. It was a battlefield. Jill put her hands over his and gave a squeeze while he clutched the reins. Without a word, he put a hand over hers as well.

A flash of light cut the moment short.

"Your Majesty?! Isn't that a magic barrier above the castle?!" Jill cried.

"Jill, don't talk, or you'll bite your tongue!" Hadis warned.

A similar trap lined the walls of the castle in Kratos as well. It kept enemies at bay. A geometric design surfaced from the invisible wall, and beams of light fired at them. The dragons dodged the condensed rays of magic in the nick of time and soared into the sky while avoiding the beams.

“Dude! Why’re we being attacked?!” Zeke shouted from his dragon.

“Rave, take the two other dragons to safety! They’re aiming at me!” Hadis yelled.

“Why?! You’re not much, but you’re still their emperor, aren’t you?!” Camila shrieked.

“Your Majesty, I’ll handle this! You go with Zeke and the others to a safe location!”

“Jill!”

Hadis sounded panicked, but running wouldn’t improve the situation. Jill dove off the saddle and flew towards the wall, avoiding the rays of light. Hadis was indeed their target—or, more precisely, the dragon he was riding was.

This is a dragon from the imperial capital sent to fetch the emperor. I get it now!

There must’ve been some sort of sign that marked this dragon as an enemy. Either way, this wasn’t the work of a sorcerer. The beams were set to automatically aim for the dragon that Hadis was riding, and the fact that none had shot at Jill was proof of this.

She unsheathed the short sword at her waist and focused her magic on the tip of the blade before plunging it into the invisible barrier. Her aim was true, and the barrier melted away.

The moment she breathed a sigh of relief, a shiver ran down her spine. Something was above her.

“Jill!” Hadis shouted.

She tried to dodge but was a step too late. Her sword, which she used to block the attack, was parried away, and a sizzling, sharp pain ran across her right arm. She intuited the difference in power—more specifically, she

theorized the power of the weapon and the trap that was laid in front of her.

“Your Majesty! Don’t! This weapon seals magic!” Jill yelled.

The weapon which tried to cut off Jill’s right arm was blocked by Hadis’s Heavenly Sword of the Dragon Emperor. But he couldn’t absorb all the impact. Shielding Jill with his body, Hadis lost his balance, and a blow was aimed towards his back.

“Your Majesty!”

The moment Jill screamed, they were blown towards the ground. Her body slid to the side, and the ground sported a deep gouge. Once everything had stopped, she opened her eyes. She felt the impact but didn’t feel pain—Hadis had shielded her with his body.

A sharp pain ran through her right arm, but she wasn’t bleeding. She gasped and jumped to her feet. “Your Majesty! Your Majesty! Are you okay?!”

There was a large slice across Hadis’s back. Like Jill’s right arm, he was wounded by the magic, but there was no bleeding. He hit his head on the ground, and a streak of blood ran from his temple.

“Your Majesty. You protected me and...”

“It’s not a major wound...” Hadis replied. “Rave.”

“**I know.**” Rave was in his Heavenly Sword form, but his voice sounded grim. Jill panicked when she saw the sword slowly fading away.

“Your Majesty, Rave is—”

“You dodged it? And you can still use your magic,” said a low, husky voice from above. “Even this sword takes a while to seal your magic. You’re a monster, through and through.”

A man was looking down at Hadis and Jill. He looked to be in his fifties. His hair and beard were peppered with gray, reminding them of his age, but his straight posture and dignified physique made him appear much younger.

His cape fluttered in the wind, the crimson color permitted only to Rave royalty flying in the sky.

“...Uncle George,” Hadis murmured. He was on his knees with Jill securely tucked under one arm.

Jill swiftly remembered him from her previous life. *The former emperor's younger brother, George Teos Rave!*

He also went by the name Prince Radia. If history went as Jill had known, he was the first person who opposed Hadis's rule. George blamed Hadis for the destruction of Beilburg, gathered all the nobles who feared the emperor's relentless purge, and raised an army, promulgating that Hadis was the false emperor. This would later be called the Riot of the False Emperor and would be the start of civil strife during Hadis's reign.

But that should come a lot later, and this time His Majesty saved Beilburg! The Beil family wasn't purged, so there shouldn't be any grounds to blame the emperor.

“If you never returned and disappeared, I would’ve spared you,” George said.

“Uncle George, what’s that sword?” Hadis asked.

“The Heavenly Sword of the Dragon Emperor—the real one,” replied George with a smirk, but Hadis didn’t even flinch. “The one in your hand is merely a fake. Aren’t I right?”

Hidis remained silent.

“You’re called the Dragon Emperor and allowed the position because of your Heavenly Sword. And that’s only because my older brother, who feared for his safety after the string of crown prince murders you orchestrated, thought that your fake was real,” George spat.

“His Majesty is the true Dragon Emperor, and this Heavenly Sword is—” Jill tried to stand up, but Hadis pulled her back to him, trying to hide her from his uncle.

He whispered, “Rave, let’s run. You can still go, can’t you?”

“**Yeah, once,**” the Dragon God replied.

“But Your Majesty...” Jill started.

“The magic sealing effect is seeping in through my wounds. The same goes for

you, right? At this rate, neither of us will be able to use magic."

Jill tried to send the magic to her fingertips, but as Hadis had said, she couldn't put her usual strength into it.

"I can only teleport once, and not far. Right now, I can teleport all of us, including our two knights and our belongings. We should use our magic to run, not to fight," Hadis muttered, staring at the Heavenly Sword in his right hand.

Jill nodded in response.

Rave could only be seen by people with high magic power. However, once he transformed, anyone should be able to see him as a Heavenly Sword. And the sacred weapon was slowly fading. This was proof that the magic power within Hadis was being sealed away.

"I've already given the official notice. You're the false emperor. You're a sham pretending to be the Rave Emperor. *You aren't the Dragon Emperor!*" George declared, raising his hand. Like an avalanche, a torrent of Dragon Knights followed his signal and rushed past the open castle gates with their military flags in the air.

The magic barrier glowed once again, showing that it had regenerated. As it fired at Hadis, he parried the beams with his fading sword. George raised his blade and clicked his tongue.

"You can still use magic?! Even you can't keep that up for long," he snarled.

"Jill, hang on. We're leaving the dragons behind," Hadis said.

"Okay!"

"Rave!"

Answering his call, Jill and Hadis floated into the air, and their bodies were pulled into a vortex of magical power. His magic must've been unstable, for they started shaking and spinning around as though they were drunk. Jill felt sick, but she clung to Hadis and endured the nausea.

"Missy, I won't be able to help for a while," Rave said. Jill was gritting her teeth and unable to provide a response. **"I'll leave Hadis in your hands."**

The Dragon God's voice faded away.



WHEN Jill opened her eyes again, she was in a nearby forest illuminated by the setting sun. Their group had been deposited in front of a house surrounded by crumbled stone.

Once they awoke, Jill left Zeke and Camila to scout out the surroundings while she tended to Hadis's wounds. The destination that he'd chosen was one of the hideouts he'd constructed in the frontier area that he was banished to as a child. He explained they were on a smaller mountain near the Rakia Mountains, away from civilization.

"If we descend the mountain, there's a fairly large town, but this place is off the beaten path. There's a dragon's nest nearby, too," Hadis said.

"A dragon's nest?" Jill asked.

Jill and Hadis could no longer see Rave, and he couldn't turn into the Heavenly Sword. But it seemed like Rave was still within Hadis and could talk through him. Hadis frowned, most likely told something by the Dragon God.

"It's a place where dragons raise their young. It's also where their eggs hatch. It happens often in the mountains near the sacred Rakia Mountains, but Rave said to never get close. You'll be killed without question, apparently. The eggs and scales of a dragon let out a magnetic field, rendering you unable to use magic."

"Can you not get close either, Your Majesty?"

"I think I'd be fine. Huh? I can't without you, Rave?"

Hadis lowered his head, perhaps scolded by Rave, but he was also hiding the pain from the wound on his head. Jill once again put a cloth with disinfectant onto Hadis's temple.

"You seem to have a lot of useful items stashed at your hideout, Your Majesty," Jill noted. The disinfectant and cloth had come from his stash.

"Yeah. I think we'll be fine for at least a few days. I never expected us to use this place to seek refuge, though."

"How's your magic?" she asked.

“I can barely use any. How about you?”

Jill dunked the blood-stained cloth into a bucket of clean water from the well. The water was cold, and she tried to use her magic to warm it up, but it didn’t rise in temperature.

“No good,” she said. “My power hasn’t returned either. Magic sealing spells usually only restrict the target for a few hours. I can’t believe we’re both still sapped...”

“The weapon that my uncle wielded must be a vessel to strengthen his magic. It looks exactly like the Heavenly Sword, but I wonder where he got it.”

“However he got it, only one place can create such powerful magic.”

Jill sighed when the name of her home kingdom, Kratos, popped into her head. *I knew it. They’re already connected with the Rave imperial family at this point.* She’d prepared herself for it, but she knew that she must remain as vigilant as ever.

“It’s powerful, but it won’t last forever. Rave said that it’ll eventually subside,” Hadis assured her.

“Really?! How long will it take for this spell to be undone?”

“About a year for full recovery?”

“That’s too long!” she cried.

Hadis rested his chin on his hands atop a crude table. “I think the Heavenly Sword will come back after half a year. I’m sure most of your magic power will return by then. There might be a way to undo this seal if we push our boundaries, but if we meddle with it recklessly, we might just prolong it. Either way, we need more information about that weapon and our current situation.”

Hadis was right.

“Judging from my uncle’s reaction, it’s safe to say that he’s already prepared the surrounding areas for this possibility. If we move around rashly, we might run headfirst into a trap. For now, we should just wait,” suggested Hadis.

“But you’re the true emperor, Your Majesty.”

“I more or less predicted my uncle’s movements. Marquess Beil couldn’t have acted alone—he’s not influential enough to stop the capital from sending an escort to pick us up from Beilburg.”

“I’m sorry. This is my fault.”

Hadis blinked, raising his head from his hands. Jill couldn’t bear to look at him.

“If I acted more cautiously, you wouldn’t have had your magic sealed, Your Majesty.”

“That’s not true, Jill. I’ve been his target from the start. Your decision and actions against the magical barrier were correct. My uncle’s weapon couldn’t have been predicted.”

“But you tried to save me, and your powers were...”

Hadis brought Jill close and kissed her on the top of her head. She was shocked into silence.

“You must’ve been scared. It’s all due to my lack of ability. I’m sorry,” he said.

“I-It’s not your fault at— Eep!”

She shrunk back when he blew on her earlobe. Jill looked at him wide-eyed, and he gave a mischievous grin.

“I’m trying to become a well-behaved man. But if my cute bride seems down, the situation completely changes. In other words, if you continue to blame yourself, Jill, I’ll have to try harder to cheer you up.”

“I-I got it! I won’t say anything more!” she vowed.

“This incident was my fault. I was beaten by that thing.”

Hearing his cold tone, Jill looked up. The sun was setting, and the awning window that wasn’t fitted with glass didn’t let much light in. His profile staring far into the distance, illuminated by the glow of the candles, blurred his beautiful features and made them difficult to distinguish.

“...Are you angry, Your Majesty?” she asked.

“I’m just thinking about what to do with him. He ruined our trip and my plans to expertly escort you.”

The edges of his thin lips curled up ever so slightly.

Jill climbed on top of his lap, stretched up, and tugged on both of Hadis's cheeks. Even a perfectly beautiful face would look odd if its cheeks were stretched out.

"Whaff are you foing?" Hadis asked.

"You were cool, Your Majesty. You've been cool this entire time. I got away with only minor cuts thanks to you."

He rubbed his cheeks, and Jill confirmed his expression was back to normal. She realized that she was so caught up in self-reflection that she'd forgotten something far more important than regretting her actions.

"Thank you for saving me," she said. "I'll work hard so that I can look all cool while saving you next time, Your Majesty!"

"...Why are you so cool?"

"Have you been listening? *You're* the cool one here."

She cocked her head to one side and was kissed on the forehead. She wasn't embarrassed because she knew that it was meant to show his gratitude, but she felt ticklish and couldn't suppress her laughter.

Hidis frowned. "Why are you laughing?"

"Because you're like a child."

"You're the child here. But if you're treating me like one, does that mean that I don't have to treat you like a child?"

He tilted his head to one side and peered at her childishly, but his gold eyes were as alluring as ever. Jill hastily shook her head.

"I-I was wrong! You're an adult, Your Majesty!"

"I want to quit being one..."

"Please don't! I'm sure you can pull through!"

"Amen to that. Your Majesty, could you peel yourself away from the captain already?" Zeke asked.

“Can we come in yet?” Camila called.

Jill and Hadis froze when they heard the voices behind them.

“If you’re gonna peek, at least ask first! Otherwise, it makes you shameless!” snapped a red-faced Hadis. He was more disappointed than flustered.

Jill had thought that he didn’t mind an audience, but he seemed to get embarrassed when someone was watching. Feeling a tingle in her heart at this new discovery, she shifted gears and exchanged information with Zeke and Camila.

They’d teleported to Neutrah, a region southwest of Rahelm. The region touched the northern half of the Rakia Mountains, which served as a boundary between the two countries. This region was the domain of Duke Neutrah. Though it had steep mountains, the town created to protect the border was surrounded by walls, had multiple military academies, and the Dragon Knights, the pride and joy of the duke, never missed their rounds.

Duke Neutrah was one of the three dukes in the Rave Empire. For generations, the Rave emperor had taken a daughter from one of the dukes as his bride, meaning that the dukes had a familial connection to the imperial family. George, the man who denounced Hadis as the false emperor, was born from a daughter of Duke Verrat.

Hadis, who became the emperor without the aid of these aristocrats, had relatives among the three dukes that were regarded as political rivals. Jill panicked for a moment, thinking that Neutrah’s people would be hot on their tails, but Hadis quickly dispelled that theory.

“Duke Neutrah is far more chivalrous compared to the other two dukes. In terms of political power, the Neutrahls often take a stance of neutrality. It seems they do this so that no one can comment on how to manage their territory or defenses. They don’t really aim for the throne.”

“So will they take your side?” Jill asked.

“Hmm... The empress who came from the Neutrah family lost her son, the crown prince, so...” Hadis sounded nonchalant, but Jill grew tense.

“Does that mean it’s blamed on the curse, and by extension, you?” she

ventured.

“Yep.”

“...Seems like we shouldn’t ask them for help,” Zeke concluded.

Camila furrowed her brows. “Wait, are there actually any aristocrats that you *could* turn to for aid, Your Majesty?”

“Can’t think of any. My mother was a commoner—I think she was a dancer or something,” Hadis replied with a shrug.

He may not have had the noblest of births, but no one expected his mother to be a mere commoner. This wouldn’t have been tolerated under normal circumstances, but the previous emperor had numerous successors.

“How about your older brother, Vissel? He’s the crown prince, isn’t he?” Camila suggested.

“My brother is supported by my uncle. My uncle has a daughter, and she’s engaged to my brother,” Hadis explained.

“So, his friend’s enemy would be his enemy! Your friends are your enemies now!” Zeke yelled.

Jill was tempted to add what she knew to this conversation, but she restrained herself. At the very least, Hadis believed in his brother, and she didn’t want to tear those two apart with her words.

“Aside from the Goddess’s curse, you’re the emperor because the previous one abdicated his throne, and you have the Heavenly Sword of the Dragon Emperor,” Jill said.

“The Heavenly Sword is the biggest reason of all. Normal people can’t see Rave, and if the authenticity of my Heavenly Sword is put into question, it’s easy to push me off the throne. My uncle took the best course of action. The politics of the imperial capital will continue without me as long as Vissel is there,” Hadis explained.

“Then we’re screwed,” Zeke said, scratching his head.

“That’s not true,” Hadis replied.

Zeke blinked, and Camila turned a questioning gaze on the emperor. Even Jill tilted her head in befuddlement.

“Do you have a plan?” Jill asked.

“My uncle’s Heavenly Sword won’t last long. It’ll eventually break, so we can just wait until then.”

“Break? Oh, you mean the recoil after sealing magic?” Jill guessed.

It was clear that George’s fake Heavenly Sword harbored immense power. After sealing Jill and Hadis’s magic, an ordinary weapon would eventually break, unable to contain it for long.

“If Jill and I regain our magic, it means the fake Heavenly Sword is losing its own,” Hadis finished.

Zeke thought for a moment. “I think I get it now. Then waiting does seem to be the best option here.”

“It’ll be infuriating if we panic and fall into their trap,” Camila added.

“We should prioritize safety for now and take it easy. We’ll eventually find a way to fight back.”

Hadis’s words were convincing, and Jill even felt a sense of pride when she looked at the relieved faces of her two knights. So much so, that she let her guard down.



ARE we truly, seriously not going to do anything?!

Ten days passed as they tended to their wounds and secured a safe area. Half a month went by while they tried to live in comfort, and it soon turned into a month of Jill waiting for some sort of change or order.

In the meantime, Hadis was able to harvest some cabbages and potatoes that he’d been carefully raising. The wound on his back had healed completely, and Jill was tempted to kick him while he was tending to his cabbage.

“Come on! Let’s! Do! Something!” Jill declared at the dinner table with a bowl of pot-au-feu, unable to contain herself any longer.

Hadis sat in front of her, still wearing his apron as he tilted his head to one side. “Like what?”

“We should think of a plan to take the imperial capital back! Your Majesty, you’ve just been raising vegetables for a month!” she fussed.

“That’s not true. The strawberries are almost ready too.”

“No! That’s not what I mean! Ugh, Camila, Zeke! What do you guys think?!”

“Living in the countryside isn’t too bad, I guess.”

“I love fishing.”

Camila and Zeke were adapting to their new lifestyles. As Zeke stabbed a bit of pork with his fork, he felt a little bad when he saw Jill’s look of despair and proceeded to try to reason with her.

“What else can we do? I’m sure wanted posters have already made their rounds. We’ve got a dangerous face with us—one step into the town, and we’ll be reported.”

“A dangerous face?! Who could that—” Hadis furrowed his brows. “Hey, why are you three staring at me?!” Even in his apron and headkerchief, he still looked as beautiful as ever, and Jill couldn’t deny that they’d be reported on the spot.

Still, she refused to back down. “I understand that His Majesty can’t go outside, but we should be able to do something...anything.”

“I mean, sure, if you’ve got something for us, we’ll do it. Do you have anything in mind?” Zeke asked.

“Uh, I-like digging trenches or something in case of enemy attack...” Jill weakly suggested.

“If we start doing that, we’ll look even more suspicious,” Camila pointed out.

Jill couldn’t argue with that sound logic, but she continued to push the group. “But it’s already been a month!”

“Only a month. Our magic powers haven’t even returned yet,” Hadis said confidently.

Jill glared at him. “Are you planning on just taking it easy for the next six months?”

He swiftly looked away, and she leaned forward, closing the gap between them.

“There’s no way you can just do that! You’re the emperor, aren’t you?! Combined with your stay at Beilburg, it’s been three months since you came back from Kratos. An imperial capital without its emperor for that long is just bizarre!”

“Huh? Can’t I stay here...? Isn’t it fine like this? It’s not like anything good will come from returning, and it’s a huge hassle... And it’s fun living here...” mumbled Hadis while poking a potato with his fork.

Jill slammed the dinner table with her palm. “Your Majesty.”

“Yes?” Hadis said, fixing his posture while Jill glared at him.

“At Beilburg, you were toying around with a plan to take the imperial capital back, weren’t you? Don’t you actually have a plan to turn the tables?”

He was silent for a moment. “My bride’s scary.”

“Don’t fool around! I saw this being blown by the wind today, so I picked it up.”

She removed a folded piece of paper from her pocket. It was most likely being passed around the town at the foot of the mountain. It was a newspaper dated half a month ago, stating that the captain of the Neutrahl Dragon Knights had finally returned from the countryside.

“The captain clearly returned to search for you!” Jill asserted, waving the paper around. “While we’re growing vegetables, hunting for meat, and eating delicious pot-au-feu, we’re slowly being backed into a corner! What will we do if we’re discovered tomorrow?!”

“Why don’t we think about that when that happens?” Hadis said dismissively. “It’s not like we can do anything right now.”

“Man’s got a point there. We’ve got no money, no friends, and no information. We have nothing, so we’ve got nothing to do,” Zeke said.

"We haven't even gotten our salary yet," Camila added.

"I understand," Jill said, her aura silencing the dry laughter that had gone up around the table. She remained expressionless, and the tone of her voice lacked inflection. "Then at the very least, I'll go out and work. According to this paper, the Dragon Knights seem to be lacking manpower, and they're looking for new recruits. As long as you have the skills to pass the recruitment trial, they don't care about age, gender, or family. It seems like tomorrow's the trial, so I'll go. Don't worry, I'll definitely pass."

"But Jill... Your magic..." Hadis started.

"I'll be fine. Some magic for my muscle power has returned."

"Magic for muscle power? What does *that* mean?" Zeke asked.

"Magic power comes from muscle," she said firmly, coldly glaring at the adults around her, who wore strained expressions. "Besides, I've been well-trained for this. Even without magic, I won't lose to those who are of the same age as me. I'll even get on the track to promotion, so that I can get some money, network, and obtain information. There are no complaints, are there? Then it's settled."

"J-Jill, are you angry?" Hadis stammered.

She stabbed a potato with her fork in answer. "You don't have any complaints, do you, Your Majesty?" she said, a warning edge to her tone.

"But it's dangerous..."

"I'll be fine. I just need you to make breakfast, lunch, and dinner and wait for me here."

"That won't do."

"Then we'll divorce."

"I'll do it!" Hadis quickly nodded. His heart didn't stop so easily anymore. Perhaps because his magic had been sealed, he was feeling better, or the comfort of living in the mountains had given him a stress-free life.

That was good. Jill could go out and work without worrying about him.



THEIR one-story cabin was in the middle of the mountain. Upon entering, there was a huge living room, and to the left were a kitchen, bath, and other rooms that required water. Deeper inside, to the right, were two bedrooms.

Jill and Hadis occupied one, while Camila and Zeke took the other. The two knights put some cushions and blankets over a chest and made a temporary bed, agreeing to take turns using it. Considering rank, gender, and relationships, this was the best solution. However, though Jill was the Dragon Consort, Zeke couldn't completely agree to this arrangement as her knight.

"Oi, Your Majesty. There's nothing we can do now, but when you return to the imperial capital, you'll be sleeping in separate rooms from the captain," he said.

"Separate? But why?" Hadis asked.

The emperor had enough sense in him to change in the living room apart from Jill, but he stared at the knight with a quizzical look when it came to this topic. Zeke felt even more concerned after hearing his response.

"You're in bed with a ten-year-old. It's like...barely okay."

"But we're married."

"...Not everyone will view it that way."

"You're already thinking about our return," Hadis said with a smile.

Zeke frowned. "What, you think we can't, Dragon Emperor?"

"We can." Hadis's curt retort implied that he'd been thinking of a plan to overcome this situation, as Jill had stated. "Anyways, I'll leave Jill in your care starting tomorrow. She's smart, but she lacks information about our empire, and she's still young."

"You're not stopping the captain?" Zeke asked.

"In general, I don't intend on getting in Jill's way. I don't want her to hate me."

Was he trusting her?

Am I the only one who thinks that he's testing the captain? Zeke thought while

he stared at Hadis.

Hadis turned around in the middle of changing. "Do you enjoy watching a man change clothes?" He arched an eyebrow at the younger man.

"You're well-built," Zeke said simply.

"Not as much as you."

"And you're used to a frugal lifestyle."

"Well, I had a less-than-royal life out on the frontiers all this time."

Hadis dipped a cloth into a tub of warm water and prepared to wipe his body. He didn't seem uncomfortable or repulsed by bathing himself.

Hadis's belongings included tools to light a fire, pots, portable food, maps, linen cloths of various sizes, medicine, disinfectants, a first aid kit, and various types of currency. These were clearly meant to be used in case of an emergency and weren't the normal belongings of an emperor. Hadis was plainly used to being tossed out quite often.

"Hey, something smells weird. What did you just put in?" Zeke asked.

"Essential oils. It's refreshing, and it gets rid of body odor. I recommend perfumed oils for your hair," replied Hadis.

"What are you? A young maiden?!"

"Jill said that she liked this scent and that it helped her sleep. Besides, I want to be clean in front of the woman I like."

Zeke sighed, unable to process the situation. He turned away and laid down on the makeshift bed.

"Well, I don't care as long as I get paid," the knight huffed.

"Then you need to protect Jill."

"You don't have to repeat yourself. It's my job, so of course I'll do it."

Zeke closed his eyes and felt comforted by the scent of the essential oils. *I hope I'm not smelling something with hypnotic effects.*

Everything about this emperor was shady, and he couldn't blame the nobles

for denouncing Hadis as a false emperor.

"Worst case, just offer me to my uncle," Hadis said.

Zeke opened his eyes and sat up. Hadis had finished wiping his body and was putting on his pajamas as he quietly smiled.

"If you want to protect Jill, you better be prepared to go that far. Am I wrong, Knight of the Dragon Consort?"

Zeke unclenched his fist, which he'd unconsciously put his strength into. He pulled a thin blanket over his head and squeezed his eyes shut. *That means the captain and I would be betraying you.*

Even if they could escape their situation, there was no way that Hadis wouldn't feel hurt. *Or does he not feel hurt because he doesn't trust us? I've no idea what he's thinking.*

But if one thing was clear, it was that Jill mattered to Hadis.



UPON entering the west gates, a large, paved road that ran to the town's center greeted visitors. Shops and buildings of different heights lined the street, and the brick walls were painted in vibrant colors. Many people traversed the main street, and the smaller roads to the side were littered with small stalls. People were trying to attract customers, and energetic kids ran towards the fountain square under the early spring sun.

Jill, who'd entered the town with Zeke, stood in awe at the amazing sight.

"It's a really big town!" she said in shock.

"Well, it's a city surrounded by a rampart, under the direct supervision of Duke Neutrah," Zeke replied.

She expected the town to simply be one of the areas under the duke's control, but this city seemed to be Duke Neutrah's home base.

"Wait, that means the Dragon Knights are..."

"Also under direct supervision of Duke Neutrah," Zeke finished.

Realizing that she was going against the best of the best, Jill let out a groan.

"No wonder... I thought that the applicants we'd passed by looked stiff and fired up."

"It's a gathering of people who are truly trying to become a Dragon Knight. Age, sex, and origin didn't matter because they're confident that they could sniff out anyone suspicious," Zeke explained.

Since the knights served directly under Duke Neutrah, Jill would be that much closer to the heart of politics, the imperial city of Rahelm. She was basically diving headfirst into enemy territory.

"Plus, George Teos Rave has already gathered the three dukes and other powerful lords to show off the power of the Heavenly Sword. And he's ordered the three dukes to search for the false emperor, Hadis Teos Rave. I knew that this would happen, but His Majesty really is a wanted man," Zeke said.

With a newspaper and a wanted poster that he found on his way in hand, Zeke sighed.

"We're in luck that there's no picture. He's so good-looking that this portrait looks nothing like the real thing. The description reads, 'black hair, gold eyes, and a beauty that you'll never forget once you lay your eyes on him.' You can't get any more accurate than that."

"I think whoever wrote that description is a genius..." Jill said.

The fact that Hadis would get reported if he was ever seen really started to sink in for Jill.

"One more thing. It says that he's traveling with a young, blonde girl," Zeke mentioned.

That was obviously Jill. George remembered the girl Hadis had protected.

"I'm sure some people have gone to look into things in Beilburg," Jill said.

"But there's only mention of you two. There's no information about Camila or me, though I feel like he's just trying to sweep that under the rug."

"Will Sphere be all right?"

"We've just gotta believe in her. The higher-ups probably have more information anyways. We're already here, but what do you want to do? Should

we go back?"

Jill shook her head. "We've gotten this far without anyone growing suspicious of us. Let's proceed."

"Well, we might not get reported immediately, and even if we do, a blonde girl isn't so rare."

"And His Majesty prepared lunch. We can't go back without eating it."

Jill was carrying a backpack filled with food and a thermos that Hadis had prepared early in the morning. He looked a little lonely when he sent them off, and she was determined to bring back results worthy of causing his loneliness.

"...Why don't we just eat the lunch and head home?" Zeke suggested.

"But we've got stew for dinner! His Majesty's delicious food is waiting for us after a day of hard work!"

"Got it. I understand that you don't want to return, but can you pass without using magic?"

"I'll be fine. I may not look like much, but it's in my blood to love to battle."

"Love to battle, eh?" Zeke murmured while he followed her.

To get to the Dragon Knights' barracks, they had to go straight on the main road and turn left once they saw the office by the square. The soldier by the gate had given them those directions. Since today was when squires would be selected, Jill had a white cloth tied around her right arm showing that she was an applicant, and that was enough to let her through the gates. She wasn't willing to miss this opportunity.

"Are you confident in passing, Zeke?"

"Well, if I were signing up to just be a knight, maybe. But I've got no idea about Dragon Knights, since it rides on whether or not dragons like you. Camila's better at passing these things."

"Ah, yeah, I can see that. She'd pass by piercing an arrow through an apple on someone's head or something."

During undercover operations, Jill was often saved by Camila's skillful

maneuvers and competency. Jill smiled when she remembered those future events, but Zeke looked at her with suspicion.

“...You sound like you’ve seen it in person.”

“Huh? No, um, she just seems good at stuff like that, you know?”

“Yeah, sure. Hey, there’s some commotion in the square.”

Zeke, unbothered by the conversation, pointed towards their destination. Jill shifted her gaze there. At the square, where the roads intersected in a cross-like pattern, a crowd had gathered.

The path to the left was blocked by people with a white cloth tied around their arms, proof that they were applicants looking to become Dragon Knight squires.

“An issue? So, what’s gonna happen to the trial?”

“I came from the distant countryside! I thought this was my chance.”

“The Dragon Knights are currently away, so please wait here,” a soldier said.

“How long will that take?!”

“Just wait here.”

Perhaps due to nervousness, the applicants were all on edge. Their tone gradually grew more accusatory as they repeated their questions. A few young men in their knight attire were blocking the path towards the barracks.

“Are they part of the Dragon Knights?” Jill asked.

“Probably. I guess we just have to wait and see what happens,” Zeke replied.

“I wonder what the issue is?”

Jill glanced around. Townspeople stared at the applicants from afar. They probably heard the ruckus and gathered around. Zeke assessed the situation and clicked his tongue.

“Probably not good to stay where we might attract attention.”

“...How much time do we have until the trial?” Jill asked.

“Huh? I think it’s about time—”

The bell ringing noon answered the question. For a moment, everyone fell silent as though they had forgotten the current situation. Suddenly, the sound of wind and wings drowned out the echoes of the bell. A large shadow loomed over the square. Everyone shouted in surprise.

“A dragon! It’s a dragon!”

“D-Don’t look so surprised. We’ve got the Dragon Knights to take care of them...”

“Damn, they couldn’t land the final blow?!”

A dragon with green scales crushed the fountain square underneath its feet, silencing the shouts of the Dragon Knights. No one was riding it, meaning that it wasn’t under anyone’s control.

“Eek!”

“I-It’s a wild dragon!”

“Everyone, calm down and evacuate!” a soldier bellowed.

A wave of panic from the applicants and the orders from the knights rushed through the square. With a scream, everyone started to flee at once. Cries of anger and terror echoed in the air as people trampled over each other. The Dragon Knights’ orders wouldn’t reach the townspeople at this rate.

“Hey, Captain. What should we— Argh, I knew it!”

Jill rushed ahead, hearing Zeke’s voice behind her. The agitated dragon stomped its feet, shaking the ground with each impact. With a roar, the dragon swung its forelegs down towards a knight who tripped in front of it.

In the nick of time, Zeke received the blow with his greatsword. Jill slid beneath it and dragged the Dragon Knight away.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“Y-Yeah. And you are?” the Dragon Knight replied.

“Don’t worry about that now. Evacuate the townspeople immediately! The south street is open, so guide people over there!”

Because everyone fled at once, the east and west main streets were packed.

The dragon swung around and glared at Jill. Without hesitation, she unsheathed a longsword from the Dragon Knight's waist. *Ugh, it's heavy! If I had enough magic, I could take out that small dragon in one punch.*

"You can't! A normal sword won't work against the dragon's scales!" yelled the Dragon Knight.

"Just shut up and leave! You're in the way!" roared Jill, and the Dragon Knight nodded, silenced by her intimidating aura.

Though the dragon was small, it was still taller than a two-story house, and the beast unleashed a sea of flames. Jill dodged the attack and dashed towards it, aiming for the soft underbelly and its inner legs.

"Zeke, support me!"

"Roger!"

He lunged forward as the dragon raised its foreleg to stomp Jill. She couldn't use magic, but her courage remained. While the dragon was preoccupied with Zeke, Jill rushed towards the beast and slashed at its back legs. She could only deal minor cuts without her magic. Still, it was enough to surprise the dragon. Jill was able to dodge its foot, which swung down and crushed the stone pavement, but she was now on the ground. The dragon whipped its tail towards her.

"Captain!" Zeke yelled.

If she couldn't dodge it, she needed to receive the attack using all the magic she currently had. But the moment she tightened her grip on the sword, the dragon froze.

"...Huh?" Jill muttered.

A woman's voice clearly rang out. "Stop! The test is over."

As though its strength had left its body, the dragon slumped towards the ground. Jill, crushed by the tail that slowly fell, crawled out from underneath it.

"Hey, you all right?!" Zeke asked, running over to her.

"Y-Yeah."

She took his hand and stood up. Another dragon's shadow loomed above them, but someone was riding it. A woman called out to them from up in the air.

"Your moves were excellent. I wouldn't have guessed that you were a child. You, over there, without magic. Your power and bravery against the dragon were commendable as well."

Jill and Zeke stared in silence.

"Both of you have passed. Some others have also displayed excellent moves. This was a sudden test that was unlike anything we've done before, but we've got some great finds," the woman said.

"What do you mean?" Zeke asked.

"...Everything, including the blocked passage, was part of the test," Jill answered with a sigh.

Zeke frowned. True to her words, the Dragon Knights started to skillfully give out orders, as though the panic they'd displayed moments ago was a dream. The Dragon Knight that Jill and Zeke saved locked eyes with them and gave a thumbs up.

The townspeople, who were supposed to have fled, came back to survey the situation. They were in on this test as well.

"So, everything was a sham?! How about the fountain?!" Zeke exclaimed.

"We were planning on decommissioning it soon, so this test was a perfect opportunity to crush it," the woman replied.

"And the dragon?!"

"Belongs to us, the Dragon Knights."

Zeke groaned and fell to his knees. "Thinking back, it only attacked the Dragon Knights and the applicants..."

"Smart dragon, right? But you'll need much practice and a deep bond with one to give precise orders like that. New recruits shouldn't try to copy what we just did. You all must first make sure that they won't attack you."

“...What about when the dragon froze?” Jill asked.

She couldn’t make out the woman’s expression due to the backlight, but the woman repeated Jill’s question with a tone of confusion. “Froze? This dragon? Maybe it’s not in peak condition.”

“...Um, and you are?” Jill asked.

“Ah, apologies for my belated introduction.”

The woman gracefully jumped off the saddle. The dragon flew away, leaving a gentle breeze behind. She whipped her long, ashy-silver hair behind her, and assessed Jill with her black eyes. She wore the uniform of the Dragon Knights, but she also donned a crimson cape, a color reserved only for the imperial family of Rave.

“I’m Elentzia Teos Rave, the first princess.”

The woman who had killed herself in the future. Jill was immediately struck with memories of her first battle, but none of that had occurred yet.

“Perhaps I should’ve said that I’m the captain of the Neutrah Dragon Knights. I’ve been officially put in charge of the region. Pleased to meet you,” Elentzia said, offering her hand in a friendly manner.

Jill hid her restlessness and the knowledge of her future as she took the woman’s hand.

“Pleased to meet you,” Jill replied.

If given another chance, would Elentzia accept Hadis’s support and choose their side? *Speaking of, earlier, His Majesty must’ve—*

That thought triggered another, and Jill yelled, “My lunch!”

She quickly opened her backpack and saw the sorry sight of her destroyed three-layer sandwich, which Hadis had diligently made. She crumpled to the ground as though she’d failed the test.



“**SHE’S** totally standing out. Are you fine with that, Your Majesty?” Camila asked, looking up from a telescope.

The town surrounded by thick walls had a tall watchtower on each of its four corners, allowing for a clear view of the area. Hadis put a hand to his chest as his heart fluttered.

“I knew it. My wife is too cool...” he murmured.

“Yep, yep, you’re so right. Don’t faint again.”

“And she’s cute. I should prepare a feast tonight to celebrate her passing the test. I’ll go and procure ingredients before I return.”

Jill, who was glumly clutching her lunchbox, looked absolutely adorable to him.

Camila sighed. “We can’t go shopping. You know that, right? You should really keep in mind that you’re a wanted man.”

“I thought you’d go buy it in my stead. Isn’t that what subordinates are for?”

“Whoa, you’re suddenly acting like an emperor. Well, whatever, fine... Did you stop the dragon earlier, Your Majesty?”

“Yeah. But keep it a secret from Jill. Also, don’t let her know that I tagged along today either.”

Hadis knew that dragons would be used in the trial. He came to watch from afar, knowing that he could offer some support should anything happen.

“Jill’s honest and proud, so she might get angry, thinking that this was cheating. Even if I didn’t pressure the dragon, I’m sure my half-sister would’ve stopped it,” he said.

“Makes sense. If the Dragon Emperor appeared in front of the dragon, there’s really no point in even holding the trial. But isn’t Jill the Dragon Consort? Doesn’t she receive protection or something?” Camila asked.

“She *did* receive a blessing from the Dragon God, but dragons are divine messengers and extensions of Rave. Since they serve the Dragon God, they’re of the same rank, and above all, Jill has the Goddess’s magic, which dragons dislike. It’s probably hard to have them follow her orders... Rave’s too lenient and hasn’t disciplined the dragons enough.”

Rave started to shout in Hadis’s head, making him frown. The Dragon God

protested, stating that dragons were sacred creatures and shouldn't listen to humans so easily. When Hadis pointed out that Rave simply felt that the dragons who served under him were too cute and wanted to allow as much freedom as possible, the Dragon God fell silent. Hadis had hit the nail on the head.

"Besides, in general, Dragon Consorts are there to ward off the Goddess," Hadis said.

"You'll make Jill angry at you with that phrasing."

"I already explained it to her. She said, 'Then next time, I'll grind her into sawdust!' and I couldn't stop laughing. I almost got bronchitis."

"So that's why you were out of commission for a bit. That's so typical of Jill."

"Will the Goddess turn into sawdust?" He covered his mouth with his hand as he tried to suppress his laughter.

It was a shock to see Kratos broken, but if she turned into dust, Hadis might never stop laughing. It seemed Jill thought that the black spear was the Goddess's true form, but in truth, she was a young, beautiful, and graceful maiden who charmed anyone who laid their eyes upon her.

Best I keep that part a secret, Hadis thought.

When Jill had fought against the Goddess, she looked reliable but a little terrifying. Hadis felt restless, thinking that she might've been a bit jealous, but he knew that verbalizing these thoughts would end in him being snapped in two instead. He and Rave decided to stay silent on the matter as they came to the conclusion that prizes show their true value when they're idle yet still desired.

"I'm surprised to see the dragons still listen to you without the Heavenly Sword, Your Majesty," said Camila.

"They will to an extent, but powerful or highly intelligent dragons will probably only listen with that weapon."

"Then couldn't you take back the imperial capital by using these dragons?"

The knights that Jill had selected were intelligent, but within the smiling Hadis was the kind Dragon God who'd raised him.

"As I said earlier, dragons are divine messengers of the Dragon God. It's one thing if the citizens of the empire use them to fight amongst themselves, but it's another for dragons to knowingly harm the people the Dragon God is supposed to protect. That would go against logic. If we go too far, Rave will lose his divine rank, and losing that would mean weakening the protection over this empire."

"...So he's totally weak against internal strife."

"But as dragons are allowed to protect themselves, the situation will differ if the Dragon Emperor, and by extension the Dragon God, is in harm's way. If I were to use the dragons to purge enemies and protect myself, that would be logical. It doesn't matter if my enemies include the citizens or the Rave imperial family."

The quick-witted Knight of the Dragon Consort understood Hadis's implication. Camila lowered her neatly trimmed brows.

"That means *you* can use the dragons and quickly wipe out the rebellious imperial capital, right?" she asked.

"That's my last resort. Neither the Rave imperial family nor anyone else fully comprehends how terrifying it is to hurt me. Even to this day, the only person who has come close to that..."

"Is mE."

Hadis widened his eyes and sharply glanced around. He was sure that he had heard the Goddess's voice just now.

"What's wrong, Your Majesty?" Camila asked.

"Nothing. Maybe I'm imagining things..."

For a moment, Hadis tried to disregard the voice, but he thought back. If Jill was by his side, the Goddess couldn't follow him around. Her prior fight against Jill had used much of her energy, and it would be difficult to just move around. But if there was a vessel, it'd be a different story. Seeing as George had procured a fake Heavenly Sword, this was a possibility.

Hadis had never felt more displeased. Yet, oddly enough, this aggravating situation didn't put him in distress. In fact, he felt slightly delighted. Because he

had been told that he'd be protected, was asked to live, and was promised happiness.

But...

Will you really love me, no matter what? Jill hadn't noticed Hadis's dark obsession.

Chapter 2: Infiltrating the Neutrahl Dragon Knights

“I’M heading out!”

“Have a good day!”

Jill accepted a kiss on the cheek and a lunch bag from Hadis before jogging towards Zeke, who was waiting in front of the stone wall for her.

Sauté, who’d grown so much that only the top of its head resembled a baby chick, clucked loudly. The intelligent baby bird had come to send them off.

“Sauté, don’t eat His Majesty’s garden! Camila, I leave His Majesty to you,” Jill said.

“Yeah, yeah,” Camila replied.

“Zeke, let’s race to the main road!” Jill challenged.

“Come on, let’s hurry,” Zeke said unenthusiastically.

Contrary to his bored tone, he ran down the mountain with Jill. It’d been ten days since they joined the Knights, and they’d gotten used to the mountain trails. They hopped across some rocks to traverse a small river glittering in the spring sunlight. Once they arrived at the road leading to the city gates, they slowed down.

“Zeke, you can pass me if you like, you know. No need to hold yourself back.”

“That won’t do. I’m your knight, after all. You’re as energetic as ever, Captain.”

“Today’s lunch apparently comes with dessert!”

With work, a delicious lunch, and dessert, today was already looking promising. Above all, Jill was happy that she got her paycheck. Her base pay was low since she wasn’t called into work often, but she received a bonus as a welcome gift, and it was more than enough to make ends meet. The Neutrahl Dragon Knights were generous.

I was even able to buy a present for His Majesty! It's nice to make my own money!

Jill was twirling around town in high spirits, earning a dubious look from Zeke.

"Have you forgotten why we put ourselves in such a precarious position and joined the Dragon Knights?" he asked.

"Of course, I remember."

"Then that's fine. Just keep a low profile, Captain. It might be a bit too late for that, but don't stand out any more than you need to."

"You're one to talk, you've been standing out more than me! You got first place during the newcomer mock battle last time. I'll never get over the fact I lost in the quarterfinals."

When Jill was feeling down about the results, Hadis promised to make jam just for her from the strawberries he harvested. She now looked forward to her jam-filled future.

"It's weird enough for someone of your physique to make it to the top ten. You bested me all the time back at Beilburg. Are you really that bothered by it?" Zeke asked.

"Even without magic, I can't believe I lost a training match against a newbie," Jill groaned.

"It's great that you're ambitious, but many of the newcomers who joined the Dragon Knights were former soldiers or knights. Most have experience, and the inexperienced are all men older than you. You're the youngest, Captain, and you're the only girl." Zeke jabbed his index finger in front of her nose. "Understand your position. The captain of the Dragon Knights may be a woman, but the order is dominated by men. And there's gonna be a lot of boys among the new recruits. They might try to get comfortable. I'll be on guard, but some people will do stupid stuff just 'cause you're a woman."

"Stupid stuff? Like what?" Jill asked.

"Uh... Ask Camila about that." He hesitated to state any specifics and looked away.

Jill grinned. “Don’t worry. I’ll aim for their *vital* area, should anything happen.”

“Got it, my bad. Let’s change the subject. I feel the emperor might cut me down.”

“His Majesty? Why? You’re just looking out for me. There’s no reason for him to get mad.”

“Even so. That’s just how men are. Keep that in mind.”

As if to end the conversation, he tousled her hair. Jill combed her fingers through her hair to tidy it as they passed through the gates. They’d gotten accustomed to the hustle and bustle of the morning market, and even recognized some familiar faces.

“Jill, make sure to work hard today too! Here’s something as thanks for last time. I’ve got one for you too, young man.” A fruiterer threw some apples to them.

While Jill and Zeke were making rounds around town for their job, they saved the fruiterer from an argument following a collision with a horse carriage. They even helped him clean up the store.

“Thanks,” Zeke said, biting into the apple. “We’ll drop by to shop here on our way back, so give us a discount, sir.”

“Well, that depends on how great of a Dragon Knight you become. Isn’t today the Dragon Christening?” Jill and Zeke stared back blankly, and the fruiterer laughed. “What, you didn’t know? Go to the training grounds. Miss Elentzia and the dragons are there, doing the traditional Dragon Christening for all the new recruits. It tests your aptitude with dragons.”



WHEN Jill and Zeke rushed to the training fields, there was already excitement in the air. The new recruits weren’t allowed near the military stations and stables where the dragons were kept. They were required to first show their skills and adaptability and receive lectures about dragons while taking care of them.

Jill didn't expect they would be able to even touch the dragons anytime soon, but as the fruiterer had said, Captain Elentzia and the rideable dragons were waiting for them, making Jill's eyes twinkle. The new recruits were ordered to stand in a straight line, but everyone stared at the dragons.

Elentzia looked at the newcomers with a strained smile and raised her voice. "Today, you shall make contact with my dragons! I don't want any misunderstandings here. I'm not telling you to fight them. Just lower your head and say your greetings. We'll check your compatibility. Rosa is the name of my dragon, and she's close to the highest rank. Look at her scales."

Elentzia stroked the red scales next to her, and the dragon rumbled with delight, its purple eyes fluttering shut.

"A dragon's rank is determined by the color of its scales. From the highest, it goes silver, black, and red. It's often also referred to as day, night, and sunset. Gold eyes are ranked above purple eyes. This might seem like red dragons are third and the lowest rank, but the only silver, golden-eyed dragon is Dragon God Rave."

A memory of Rave, cackling without an ounce of dignity, flashed in Jill's mind. The Dragon God was indeed a shimmering silver with gold eyes. *So Rave really is the Dragon God... I knew that since he turned into the Heavenly Sword, but still.* Knowing that for sure was both a relief and a little disappointing, given Rave's personality.

"Because silver is the color belonging only to Rave, there aren't any other silver-bodied, purple-eyed dragons. The next in line would be black dragons with gold eyes, but they're also legendary in status. One legend states that it was the color of Rave while he was still the Dragon Emperor. Thus, many people in the Rave imperial family are born with black, gold, or purple hair or eyes. Indicative of the dragon ranks, in fact, my eyes are black as well."

Hadis had beautiful black hair and glittering gold eyes. This was the same color scheme as the legendary Dragon Emperor, and there seemed to be no question once he had the Heavenly Sword in hand. Still, it was possible to say that his eye and hair color were a coincidence since he was born into the imperial family.

“Back to the subject at hand. Black dragons with gold or purple eyes rarely show themselves in front of people. If a silver dragon is a god, the black dragons are like kings and queens. They’re as intelligent as humans and can even talk. Some state that the color of their scales come from living for centuries, regrowing their scales before ultimately settling on a dark color, while others claim that these dragons are simply born with black scales. The truth is unknown, but again, they are rarely spotted. With that being said, surely you can understand why Rosa is realistically one of the highest-ranking dragons,” explained Elentzia.

Rave was the only silver dragon, and legendary dragons were black. This meant that the highest-ranking dragon that humans could ride was the third-in-line reds.

“This may also be the reason why red is the color reserved for the Rave imperial family. White and black weren’t used to pay respect to the Dragon God and the legendary dragons, and so the imperial family chose red. Regarding the other colors, from the top, the ranks go orange, yellow, and green, like a rainbow. Others include brown, gray, and patchy patterns, which are dragons that can’t fly fast. The Dragon Knight badges also display the same color scheme. Squires, the lowest rank as new recruits, have a light-blue armband. Dragons don’t have scales of that color.”

Squires got an armband instead of a uniform. Jill looked at the one around her arm and confirmed the light-blue color. Her superiors, assigned to watch the squires, wore green armbands.

“Knights who can ride red dragons aren’t given armbands of that color because it’s reserved for the imperial family alone. Instead, they’d wear purple armbands in accordance with the color of the dragon’s eyes. I’m a part of the imperial family, but I’m no exception to this rule.”

Elentzia proceeded to show her armband as proof. Gold, the other possible eye color, wasn’t an option out of respect for the Dragon God.

“Also, there’s a legend about why there aren’t any aqua or blue dragons. The legend states that Goddess Kratos took that color for herself when she wanted the sky. The Goddess mistook a blue dragon for the sky and reserved the color

for the Kratos royal family.”

Jill thought back to the tale she had heard about Kratos’s color. *I think I was told it was proof that the sky didn’t just belong to Rave. But here in the Rave Empire, it’s referred to as the color of the dragon that was mistaken for the sky.*

The different interpretations were interesting, and this difference applied to the reserved color of crimson as well. Elentzia had stated that red was chosen to show respect towards the dragons, but in Kratos, the legend went that the Goddess Kratos protected humans from the dragons and had provided the color of blood.

“Going up in rank in the Dragon Knights basically works inversely to how dragons are ranked. You can learn all about that in your lectures,” Elentzia said. “Now, onto the main topic for today. Dragons have a clear hierarchy, and it helps to ascertain your compatibility with them. Put simply, if humans are approved by higher-ranking dragons, lower-ranking dragons will also naturally approve of the same people. We’ll bring in orange, yellow, green, and patchy dragons later, so don’t worry if Rosa gives you the cold shoulder.”

Elentzia gave a smile. “If Rosa gives you a greeting in return, you can surely ride the best orange dragon in the Dragon Knights. If she allows you to touch her, you might be able to ride a red dragon one day, and you’ll be on the path to promotion. Well, most of you will be ignored, but it’s good to have grand dreams, don’t you think?”

A loud cheer rose up in response, and Jill clenched her fists in front of her with sparkling eyes.

The order in greeting Rosa was decided by where a person ranked in the previously held mock battle. Zeke was up first, and the crowd fixated on him. With a grimace of clear discomfort, he approached the dragon and kneeled as Elentzia instructed. A display of obedience was how one greeted a dragon. Everyone held their breath as Rosa glanced at Zeke. She breathed onto Zeke, blowing him to the ground. He stared up in confusion, and the dragon turned away like he was a bug she didn’t want to look at.

Everyone stared in confusion, but Elentzia let out a hearty laugh. “Great! She just told you to get out of her sight!”

"Huh?! Is she picking a fight? How the hell is that great, uh, ma'am?" Zeke started off strong, but remembering that he was talking to a captain, he quickly cleaned up his language.

But Elentzia didn't seem to care as she smiled. "She didn't ignore you, but teased you instead. That's good. Green dragons might greet you. Besides, if Rosa greeted you right off the bat, you'd crush the pride of your senior knights."

The other Dragon Knights, who came to watch, laughed.

She's got a good thing going on. The best knights are properly trained, Jill thought.

Once Zeke stood up and moved out of the way, Elentzia clapped her hands.

"Just to let you know, green dragons are also respectable for Dragon Knights, and you can be among the best of the best. Most Dragon Knights ride brown or patchy gray dragons, after all. No time to be discouraged. Next!"

The new recruits, all fired up, approached the red dragon, but Rosa stomped her feet in intimidation or glanced at them and did nothing more. No one had managed to make the dragon bow down in greeting, and it was soon Jill's turn.

She stepped forward and Elentzia gave a profound smile.

"Ah, you. I wonder what response you'll get," Elentzia said.

"I'll do my best!"

Jill closed her eyes and kneeled in front of Rosa with her head down. *I hope we can be friends! I want my own dragon! I want to ride one all cool like His Majesty. If I had a dragon—*

A gust of air blew towards her. It was far too powerful to be playful—it gave off a murderous intent. Jill instinctively jumped back from the beast. The large, sharp talons scratched her, tearing her clothes from her shoulder down to her chest. Searing heat and pain ran across her body, informing her she'd been slashed.

"Rosa?! What are you doing?!" Elentzia yelled.

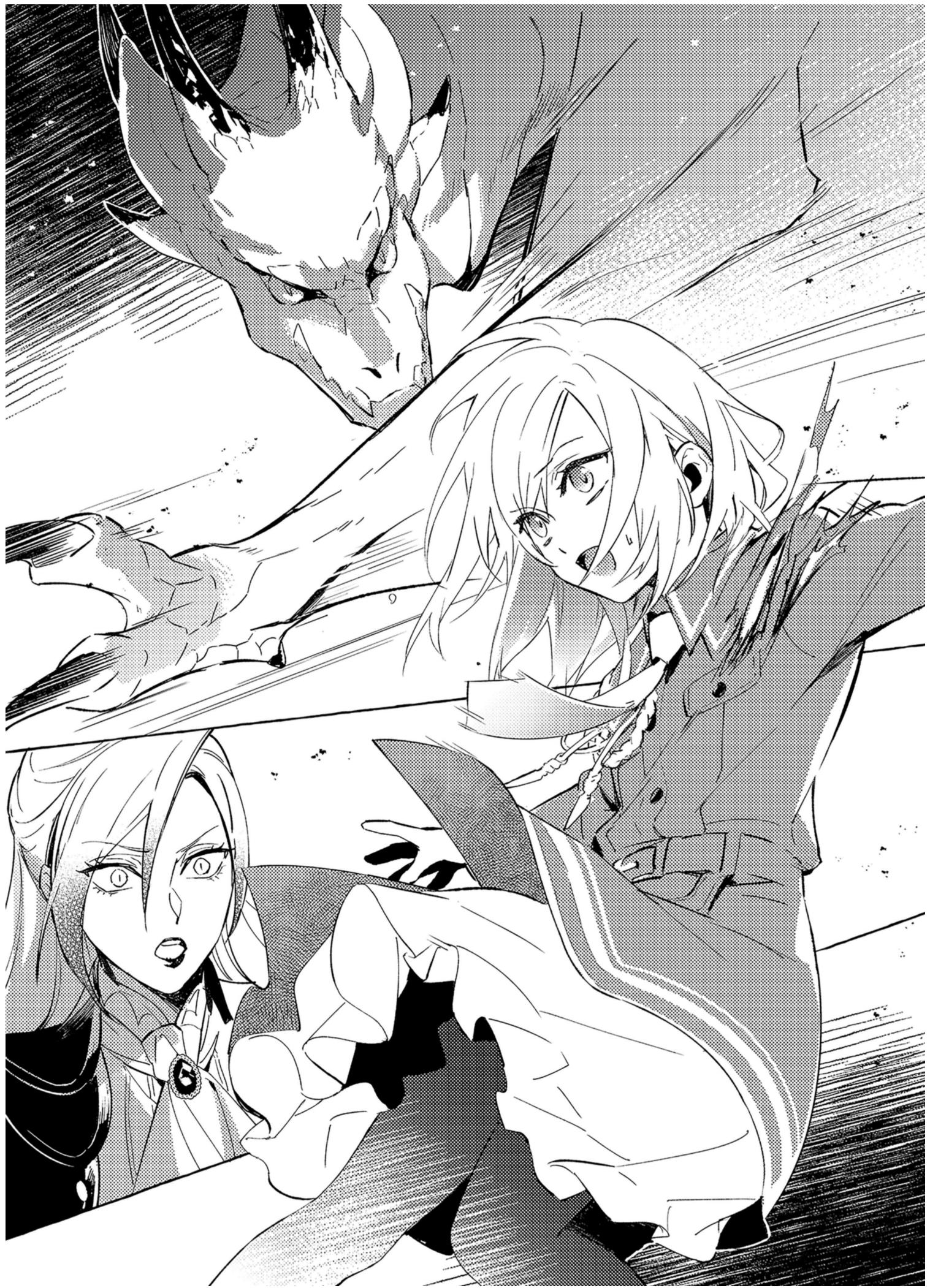
The dragon roared, ignoring the captain's orders. She spread her wings and glared at Jill, her purple eyes glittering with hostility.

"Rosa, I'm telling you to stop! You— Jill, was it? Hurry and back away and seek medical attention!"

Jill didn't need a lecture on dragons to understand what had just happened. Rosa was clearly threatening her. Jill was stunned as Zeke carried her away.

"You all right, Captain?" he asked, his tone concerned. "How are your wounds?"

"I-I'm fine. My clothes just ripped, and I only have a few scratches," Jill replied.



“We’ll go to the first-aid station, just in case.”

“But why? I’m the Dragon Consort,” she muttered, confused. “I’m the Dragon Emperor’s wife...”

Zeke stilled for a moment before he quickly resumed and took long strides towards the first-aid office with her in his arms.



WHEN Jill came home looking glum, she was greeted with a sweet and sour smell. Hadis was stewing strawberries in a pot to make jam.

“Oh, you’re back early. Welcome back... Jill?”

Hadis, still wearing an apron, turned off the heat and tilted his head to one side. Jill was wearing a bulky military jacket. She stood at the entrance and pursed her lips. She couldn’t bear to look at him.

“I’m home... There was a small accident, and I got hurt. I’m going to lie down,” she said in a rush.

“Hurt? New recruits shouldn’t be actually fighting yet, right? Did *you* get hurt during training?” Hadis asked.

“It’s just a scratch, so don’t worry. It’s been treated.”

Jill stepped past Hadis and headed deeper inside towards her room. She wanted to be alone for a bit. She shared this bedroom with Hadis, so it might’ve been a tall order—the room didn’t even have a lock.

She placed her backpack on a small wooden table and threw her body onto the hard bed. There was no dust, and the bed smelled like the sun because Hadis cleaned it every day.

I’m useless. Cowardly thoughts inadvertently filled her mind, and she quickly hugged Hadis Bear. Not only was her magic sealed, but Hadis’s magic was taken when he tried to protect her. She joined the Dragon Knights to gather some information, but a dragon displayed animosity towards her. Rosa quickly calmed down, but she only showed such hostility towards Jill. If the red dragon were to act so aggressively, there was no doubt that the other dragons would do the same.

No one had said anything yet, but a person who attracted such anger from dragons would surely be unable to become a Dragon Knight. If so, Jill's plan would be over before it hardly started.

I guess dragons can sense it even if my magic is sealed. But I'm the Dragon Consort... Her left hand was reflected in her eyes. Her ring finger no longer had a glowing gold ring. The moment she couldn't see Rave, the ring had disappeared as well.

Without magic, I'm practically useless to His Majesty... Hadis had wanted a girl younger than fourteen with immense magic energy. At first, she was suspicious that he was a pervert who liked little girls, but she now feared these conditions for a different reason.

During these times, Jill chose to sleep. Her mind was racing—she wouldn't have to think about her lack of magic or dragging Hadis down while she was sleeping.

"Jill, I'm coming in," Hadis said.

She heard the door open and took shallow breaths, pretending to be asleep.

"I heard from Zeke... A dragon injured you." Hadis quietly approached her and didn't even seem to realize she was feigning sleep. He sat down on the bed. "I just talked it over with Rave and— Shut up, we talked it over. I gave you a choice, didn't I?" Hadis continued his internal argument with Rave.

Jill pretended to sleep, thinking it was unfair that he consulted with the Dragon God when she couldn't.

"Besides, I'm not the one choosing, Jill is. So, Jill, this might be painful for you to hear, but I want you to listen to me."

Pretend to sleep. Jill remained silent, telling herself to continue her act.

"Grill, stew, steam, broil. Which would you like?"

"What kind of choice is that?!" Jill blurted, bolting upright in bed.

Hadis gave a faint smile. "Hm? I'm talking about the red dragon that didn't know its place— Shut up, Rave. I'll kill that dragon. I'll definitely kill it. I promise I'll kill it. That's my declaration as the Dragon Emperor. You can only choose the

cooking method and seasonings.”

“Wait, you can eat dragons?! Are we allowed to eat them?!”

“Of course, we can. I said shut up, Rave! Dragons have meat on their bones, so they must be edible! That dragon hurt Jill! The only mercy it deserves is to be made into a delicious meal!”

Jill panicked as she thought she heard Rave’s voice saying, “How’s that mercy?!”

“Your Majesty! I-I’m fine!” she insisted. “It’s only a scratch, and I was just a little surprised!”

“But Zeke said you didn’t eat your lunch! Isn’t that all the dragon’s fault?! I made that lunch with all my love! I even added dessert— Shut up! Jill’s cuter and more important to me than the dragon! Huh? Dragons might die if the Dragon Emperor even thinks about killing them? You’re on the dragon’s side, aren’t you? Then I’m on Jill’s side!” he argued.

“I’m fine, so please calm down, Your Majesty. Don’t argue with Rave,” she pleaded.

“I chose Jill as my wife. I won’t accept any complaints, even from you, Rave!”

Jill, trying to find the right timing to interject, felt her mind go blank. She suddenly felt ashamed. *Ugh, I hate that I’m so simple.*

Hadis was too wrapped up in his argument that he hadn’t even noticed what he just said.

“Who cares about the trials of the Dragon Consort! They’re like mean in-laws! If anyone dares to bully my wife, they’ll become dinner! If you don’t like that, why don’t you find a different vessel, you fat, snake-wannabe—”

Jill hugged Hadis, stopping his insults mid-sentence. She spread her arms out and tackled him, but he didn’t budge an inch. She lacked strength without magic. Even so, he felt more reliable than ever for being able to withstand her full-strength glomp.

“Your Majesty.”

“Y-Yes? What is it, Jill?”

“I love you!”

She looked up and stared straight into his beautiful eyes. After a few beats of silence, steam started to come out of Hadis's head as though something had exploded.

“Wh-What? What’s with this sudden declaration?!” he asked.

“I’m fine! Even if I can’t get along with them, I can punch them!” She raised her fist and jumped off the bed, no longer sounding defeated.

Just because I’m redoing my life, doesn’t mean everything will go as planned. That’s normal. I shouldn’t get conceited.

She mustn’t lose sight of her goal. She wasn’t here to become the Dragon Consort; she was here to make Hadis happy. Becoming the Dragon Consort was just a way to achieve this objective.

“I’ll try my best so that I won’t get fired from the Dragon Knights. Oh, I’m hungry. I’ll have that lunch! What’ll we be having for dinner?”

“U-Um, vegetable and minced meat pie...”

“Really? I’m looking forward to it!”

“H-How are your injuries?”

“I’m fine. I feel so much better thanks to you!”

She raised her hands and balled them into fists while Hadis glanced around, his face beet red.

“Y-You sure? I’m glad to hear that, but before, you were...”

“If you’re referring to the dragon, I’m fine. I’ve got a goal now.”

She looked up at Hadis, who was sitting on the bed. His black hair and stunning gold eyes were breathtaking. Jill was always tempted to show her husband off to the world.

“I want a gold-eyed, black dragon,” she declared.

Hadis put a finger to his jaw and thought hard. “A gold-eyed, black dragon. Even I’ve never seen one before... Where are they, Rave? You won’t tell me? I won’t make them into dragon stew, so— Hm? Rave’s asking why you want one

in the first place."

"Because with those colors, it will resemble you, Your Majesty! That's the one I want to ride!" Jill leaned forward and saw only herself reflected in his eyes. She was always happy when she noticed this. "I'll do my best to make that happen! So cheer me on, Your Majesty!"

With her mind made up, she had no time to be lethargic. She decided to think about the future while getting in practice swings with her sword. She took her lunch with her and energetically left the bedroom.

Hadis stared after her retreating back in a stupor. He was glad that she seemed to have her energy back, but...

"She said she wanted to ride one that looks like me." He crumpled on his bed and covered his red face with his hands. "I know, Rave. I know that that's not what she meant! Don't laugh! I'm not imagining anything! That dragon will really become stew! Argh! You dragons are all heartless..."

Hadis closed his eyes and took deep breaths to calm himself down while Rave shouted in his head. *But it's weird. Even if the Dragon Consort won't be easily accepted by other dragons, how could anyone not be charmed by such a lovely Consort? But I'm glad, he thought.*

She never disappointed him. A rumbling laugh rose up from deep in his throat as he imagined Jill soaring through the skies with a commanding aura before he started choking.



ONCE Jill felt better, she was able to get a better perspective on the situation. Zeke would most likely be accepted to become a Dragon Knight. If he was compatible with the dragons, he'd be able to visit the dragon stables and grow closer to the magnificent beasts. On the other hand, Jill would probably become support for the Knights and be assigned odd jobs. Since they'd have different roles, they'd naturally be split up.

This was a perfect opportunity to gather more information. Jill was happy, but Zeke stood firm.

"Then I'll become support as well. I'm your knight, after all," he insisted.

“I’m His Majesty’s wife. I’m sure the Dragon Knight squires will be tasked to search for him soon. We’ll be able to gain info about the strength of the Dragon Knights and the imperial capital.”

“Listen. I’m. *Your. Knight.*”

“I’m. His Majesty’s. Wife. So, I’ll leave it to you. Worst case, if our cover is blown, you’d be in a more dangerous position, Zeke. You’re infiltrating the Dragon Knights.”

Zeke folded his arms and thought for a long while. After much contemplation, he finally relented and scratched the back of his head. “Fine. But don’t push yourself. There will definitely be idiots who look down on you because of what happened yesterday. People might think that you have some skill, but you’re not suited to be a Dragon Knight. They’ll treat you differently.”

Zeke’s worried predictions came true in the following days.

“Do I need to make my rounds today?” Jill asked.

“Yeah, you’ll be patrolling the town,” said her instructor.

“Yessir. Does that mean I won’t be able to participate in the training?”

“That’s right. A different squad will be waiting at the fountain square. Make sure to follow their instructions. Keep an eye out for their armbands.”

Once people were determined to be incapable of becoming a Dragon Knight, they were unable to take part in any training.

They’re teaching people who are more likely to become Dragon Knights how to get used to dragons first. Makes sense.

The army had everyone undergo strict training to instill the importance of coordinating as a group. Jill pursed her lips, understanding that the Dragon Knights had a different process.

“I’ve been duly appointed! I shall go patrol immediately,” Jill said.

“Return by noon so that you can make it to your afternoon lectures,” the instructor added. “Next!”

When the next person in line was called, they jolted, and their face turned

pale. Like Jill, this person most likely didn't receive a good reaction from the dragons. Jill shook her head towards Zeke, who seemed tempted to say something, then headed towards the training grounds.

Since she was still allowed to attend lectures, she wasn't fired yet. But she felt that some people might not return by noon.

I'll leave the Dragon Knights to Zeke. I should gather some info in town.

She was curious about what was waiting for her at the fountain. The squad there was most likely comprised of similar people who weren't compatible with dragons. She didn't expect the elite knights to do pointless bullying or have a section of good-for-nothings, but no organization was completely innocent from top to bottom. There was always a group given no real job.

Squires didn't receive uniforms. Only their armbands differentiated them from the masses. When Jill arrived at the fountain square, she looked around and blinked. There was someone sitting on the edge of the destroyed fountain, reading a book. He had the same color armband as Jill.

"Excuse me," Jill said.

The person looked up. He had pale skin and platinum-blonde hair. Because he was wearing a simple shirt, his eyes, with a touch of blue, shone as brilliantly as a jewel. He seemed too young to be a young man, but his mannerisms were too mature to be called a boy. His gentle smile didn't seem as daunting as a knight's, but his quiet gaze was sharp and thoughtful.

"Ah, you must be the girl who joined the other day. I've heard rumors about you. You're quite skilled for your age," echoed his slightly high-pitched voice.

Jill knew that she couldn't let her guard down. She knew those intelligent eyes very well—six years in the future, she'd learn all about his gaze.

"I'm Lawrence. Nice to meet you," he said.

Jill shook his outstretched hand. She never asked why he was here.

"I'm Jill. Nice to meet you."

"Jill, huh? That's a nice name."

It wasn't odd for him to have an inkling of her identity, but he smiled

innocently. Jill knew very well that Lawrence could easily act subtle when necessary. He was Jill's future vice commander and should currently be Crown Prince Gerald der Kratos's subordinate.



JILL met Lawrence Marton shortly before she entered the military academy Gerald had built to fight against the Rave Empire.

After becoming Gerald's fiancée, Jill had received some training to become his wife, but after six months, the crown prince told her, "You're more suited to be a soldier than a lady." She immediately switched to becoming an officer. Gerald had wanted a squadron specialized in raids that possessed exceptional magic power and was directly under his control. He asked Jill to become the commander of that squad, and he'd also given her Lawrence, his direct subordinate, as a possible candidate to become her vice commander.

Jill and Lawrence entered the academy together and trained for a year before they were sent to serve. This process was expedited because Gerald had predicted that they'd go to war soon.

Thinking back, Lawrence was probably instructed to keep an eye on Jill. He always kept others at arm's length, and as Gerald had correctly guessed, war broke out within a year of their graduation. As they survived perilous situations together, Lawrence had truly become Jill's vice commander.

Lawrence was a decent swordsman, but his magic prowess was below average, making him an underachiever in Kratos. What he lacked in magic, however, he made up for in knowledge and wisdom. Because he always hid his true thoughts behind a calm smile, Zeke or Camila had nicknamed him the Raccoon Strategist. Six years in the future, Jill was certain that Lawrence had chosen her over Gerald. That only occurred because Jill and Lawrence had developed a deep bond of trust in the future.

At this point, he was undeniably Gerald's subordinate. If he was in Rave, it meant only one thing.

He's an undercover agent too?! He's around the same age as Prince Gerald, so he's about fifteen or so, isn't he? Argh, I should've learned more about his time as Prince Gerald's subordinate... My squad accepted anyone, regardless of

circumstances...

Jill only recently learned about Camila and Zeke's past and how they originated from the Rave Empire. Human resources were poorly managed during the war. But she didn't have any regrets. Lawrence had always been a secretive man, and she couldn't imagine that a cunning person like him would tell her the honest truth if asked.

"Jill, what a coincidence. That's the same name as the daughter of Margrave Cervel. Did you know that?" he asked.

"I-Is that so? I had no idea! Um, where are the others?"

Lawrence smiled as Jill glanced around. "Ah, I joined around a month ago, but people stopped coming recently. And how about you? Are there others joining us?" he asked.

"I did see some people being called, but... Uh, are they weeding us out?"

"You're astute for your age. It's not quite what you think, however. Anyway, it's time we headed out, so let's go patrol." He stood up with a book in hand and started to walk ahead. As Jill chased after him, he matched her stride and continued to talk. "New recruits who are compatible with dragons start by taking care of them. Those that are deemed incompatible patrol the city to get used to the land," Lawrence started.

"Get used to the land?"

"This is just my theory, though I may have to lecture you a bit to fully explain. Dragons exist because this is the Rave Empire. They're only born and raised under the skies that are protected by Dragon God Rave. They dislike magic because, according to the myths, many citizens of the enemy kingdom of Kratos possess powerful magic, and the dragons react instinctively. This means that dragons become attached to people who strongly believe that they want to protect this empire and this city."

"Huh, I see. So that's why we patrol the city."

If incompatible people grew accustomed to the city and felt attached to the residents, there was a chance that dragons would learn to accept them.

“I’m just guessing, so take it with a grain of salt,” Lawrence added.

“No, that was really easy to understand. In short, it’s a matter of patriotism.”

If this was true, it was only natural that Lawrence, who came to this empire as a spy, wouldn’t get along with dragons. *So, am I hated because of that too? I’m not planning on invading the Rave Empire or anything, but if my previous future also counts, I’ve got plenty of baggage they could sense.*

Jill had punched many dragons and invaded the Rave Empire. She’d conquered this city when it was in a state of panic about finding a successor once Elentzia died and had battled the Rave army when they came to reclaim the city. None of this had occurred in her current timeline, but the memory remained fresh in Jill’s mind.

“This is hard...” Jill murmured.

“So, you really want to become a Dragon Knight?”

“Well, I want a gold-eyed, black dragon, to be exact.”

Lawrence widened his eyes and laughed. “That’s something else. It’s probably hard to find. I’m not sure if even the Rave imperial family has ever met one.”

“Speaking of, I heard there’s some ruckus going on at the imperial capital.” Jill innocently snuck in a topic to gain some information. Lawrence nodded without hesitation.

“About Hadis Teos Rave being the false emperor, right? Apparently, his Heavenly Sword is fake and all that. The various lords are searching for Hadis Teos Rave to figure out the truth, but in actuality, I’m sure they’ll just pick sides when they find the right opportunity.”

“Huh, really?” Jill had thought that they were all controlled by George, but Lawrence flashed a wry smile.

“Everyone’s concerned about whether or not George, the former emperor’s younger brother, will end up dead on Hadis’s twentieth birthday.”

“Ah...”

The same curse that had supposedly killed a crown prince every time Hadis turned a year older. In truth, this was the work of the Goddess to isolate Hadis,

but everyone thought that his curse had caused the slew of deaths.

"I'm not aware of the specifics, but people can't forget that fear so easily. Which is why no one's willing to take sides until the end of summer, and are planning to ride it out until then," Lawrence explained.

Jill wasn't even aware that Hadis was born in the summer, and she realized just how little she knew about him. *I see. People are reserving judgment until summer. Should I be happy about this? It seems as though the Goddess is protecting Hadis...* Jill wasn't just angry about this. She felt a murderous intent towards the deity.

Her irritation must've been apparent since Lawrence, who was walking a little ahead, gave her a funny look when he turned back. "What's wrong? Why are you making that face?"

"Oh, it's nothing. I understand now. Makes sense why people aren't aggressively searching for the emperor even though there's a lot of wanted posters making their rounds. I'd thought that I'd be sent to assist the search efforts."

"Many people here take a neutral stance in terms of politics, so they may be passively searching for him. That's precisely why we need the elite Dragon Knights to protect the city."

This implied that they weren't looking for more people to search for Hadis, but for more Dragon Knight squires to increase their strength and protect their stance of neutrality.

We're the ones who defeated the Dragon Knights and backed them into a corner, though! Thinking back, Lawrence was probably knowledgeable about dragons because he was a spy here.

Lawrence had used the dragon's habits and nature to his advantage to wipe out some of Elentzia's Dragon Knights. According to him, Jill was the odd one, for she preferred to punch the dragons.

"The Dragon Knights require excellent support. That's what the supply squad's for," Lawrence stated.

"Ah, so that's why people don't get fired even if they aren't compatible with

dragons,” Jill summarized.

“Yeah. Even if dragons won’t pay any attention to you now, if you gain knowledge and are able to take care of them well, it’s not odd for you to immediately be appointed as a Dragon Knight. There are many stories about former supply soldiers becoming a knight who could tame a dragon that no one else could. That’s why we’re not fired but instead assigned here. Those who aren’t sharp enough to determine their compatibility or are stupidly honest usually give up.”

“It’s meant to weed us out, but not really. Why don’t you tell the others this?” Jill asked.

“At the end of the day, it’s just my theory.” Lawrence shrugged. “Besides, it must be humiliating to watch your peers take care of dragons while you’re patrolling the city. You will often be casually mocked by those who become Dragon Knights for taking an odd jobs sort of role in the city.”

“Both are necessary roles. How foolish to create a sense of superiority,” Jill responded.

However, this must’ve been the norm for the squires. Even in the military academy, there was pointless bullying. People later realized their silly pride and powerlessness before they became full-fledged soldiers.

“Uh, Sir Lawrence?”

“Just call me Lawrence. We joined at practically the same time, after all, Jill. Truth be told, there’s a rumor going around.” He gave a gentle, meaningful smile that made Jill take a step back.

I know this look! This is when he tries to hook his prey!

“Rumors prevent me from gathering accurate information, so I don’t need to hear it!” shouted Jill, covering both ears.

Lawrence looked shocked before he smiled again and worked to pry her hands off her ears.

“What are you doing?!” Jill shrieked.

“Come on, don’t say that. Listen. There’s another rumor going around

regarding why Duke Neutrahl, and by extension, Captain Elentzia, won't mobilize the Dragon Knights."

"I won't listen, and I can't hear you!"

"Do as you like. There's actually a certain person from Kratos who's—"

A huge shadow suddenly appeared above them. With a huge flap of its wings, the wind and shadow swept above them. Jill, seeing her chance, changed topics. She couldn't see the eye color, but she was able to make out the scales.

"It's a red dragon. Is it Elentzia's?" she asked.

"No, she should be guiding the new recruits towards the dragon stables."

Jill was tempted to ask how he knew that, but she felt it was best to let sleeping dogs lie and continued the conversation. "Then it must belong to one of the Dragon Knights. I guess there's unexpectedly quite a few red dragons."

"Not at all. Only the Rave imperial family and the three dukes have access to them," Lawrence said.

"Hey, you two!" a voice barked from above.

Someone jumped off the dragon and gracefully landed in front of them.

He's got a good physique and...high magic power even by Kratos standards. This was rare for someone from the Rave Empire, and Jill analyzed the person as he nonchalantly brushed some dust off.

"You two must be Dragon Knight squires," the young man said, glancing at their armbands.

Before she could respond, a loud cry echoed through the air. The young man furrowed his trimmed brows and raised his voice towards the air. "Brynhild. Sorry, but could you head to the stables first? I'll visit there later."

The dragon gave a cry of dissatisfaction, but stopped circling around and flew towards the instructed area. Once he saw her off, he turned towards the two apprentices.

His perfect, deep purple hair fluttered in the wind as he narrowed his eyes on Lawrence and Jill. His gaze was intimidating, like he was trying to ascertain their

quality, but it was oddly elegant and not unpleasant.

“I’d like to make an urgent request for assistance from Her Highness Elentzia. She’s currently the captain of the Dragon Knights, is she not?”

“Pardon me, but who might you be?”

The young man furrowed his brows for a moment at Lawrence’s superficially polite question, but he quickly shook his head and put a hand over his chest.

“Apologies. My name is Risteard. Risteard Teos Rave.”

Lawrence raised his eyebrows, indicating that he’d never heard of such a name. Jill knew of Risteard but wasn’t familiar with his appearance as she’d never met him on the battlefields like she had Elentzia.

“You can say that I’m the second prince of the Rave Empire. We have different mothers, but I came to see my older sister. You won’t deprive me of that, will you?”

Because he’d be dead before the war.

Risteard would voice his complaints about his half-brother Hadis’s methods, lead a revolt, and be executed.



JILL escorted Risteard to Elentzia’s office, and once she tried to leave, she was stopped by the captain herself.

“Ah, could you stay?” Elentzia requested.

“Me? Are you sure?”

The captain nodded, looking slightly pale. “I’d like your help, and I need to talk to you later. Above all, this guy talks too much.”

“How rude, Sister. Are you saying that I’m a nuisance? Is that why you never replied to the many letters I sent you? Was that on purpose? I don’t want to think that Her Highness Elentzia, the first princess, would do something so cowardly.”

“See? Noisy, isn’t he? I can’t handle him alone.”

Elentzia looked to Jill for agreement, but the young girl could only force a

smile. Jill felt bitter towards Lawrence, who bowed and took his leave, since his presence wasn't required.

He backed down way too quickly. Does he have a wiretap? No, Her Highness Elentzia and His Highness Risteard would've noticed that.

She didn't want to leave Lawrence to his own devices. Unlike Camila and Zeke, the young man was an aristocrat from the Kratos Kingdom. He had enough connections and talent to become Gerald's direct subordinate. Because she spent so much time with him, she knew more than anyone else that he'd be tricky to deal with as an enemy. Even so, the current situation was a priority. Jill decided to act as their servant while examining her surroundings, but Risteard casually took some items from a cabinet and poured himself a cup of tea. He sat down on the sofa and took a sip before he spoke.

"As always, your tea tastes awful."

"You helped yourself to some, and that's all you've got to say? It's fine if it's drinkable. This isn't the inner palace—it's the office of the Knights," Elentzia replied curtly.

"I give my Dragon Knights the best tea possible."

This kind of casual banter was proof that they trusted each other and interacted often.

Seems like His Majesty's siblings get along well. Was His Majesty left out...?

Like a guard, Jill stood at the door while she gazed into the distance.

"I'll be blunt. Sister, whose side will you take?" Risteard asked.

"You... Even though she's a squire, Jill is here, you know. Be wary of your surroundings," scolded the princess.

"If your squire can't even keep a secret, I recommend you let her head roll." He glanced towards Jill, who quickly inclined her head to show her allegiance. He was clearly being literal and not metaphorical. "Besides, I'm not asking anything that you don't want to be heard. Uncle has claimed himself as the new emperor, and every citizen in Rave is aware that that idiot was thrown out of the imperial capital after being called the false emperor. The papers have

caused a stir with headlines about the false emperor. The three dukes, the lords, and our uncle are waiting with bated breath to see which side you'll be on. Will you choose Uncle or that idiot?"

Does "idiot" refer to His Majesty? Risteard's scolding tone didn't sound like he viewed Hadis as a legitimate threat.

"Then let me ask you. What side will you be on?" Elentzia asked.

"I can't decide because that idiot's gone off and disappeared!" Risteard said, slamming his fist onto the table. "Uncle George has ordered all hands to search for him, but no one's willing to make a move! Everyone's worried since going out to search means supporting Uncle. Which shouldn't be an issue in the first place. That idiot and Uncle George should stand on equal footing and talk it out!"

"You're being unreasonable," Elentzia said. "And what about you? Between Uncle George and Hadis, who has the true Heavenly Sword of the Dragon Emperor?"

"Hah! The Heavenly Sword, which had disappeared for three hundred years, was brought back from the frontiers by that idiot. And now you're telling me that was a fake, and our uncle has the real deal? The Rave imperial family's priceless treasure doesn't just conveniently produce a fake like that alongside the discovery of the 'real' one."

"You sound like you already know who has the real one," Elentzia said with a wry smile, taking the wind out of Risteard's sails.

"...He's a country bumpkin, and we're polar opposites, but he is without a doubt the Dragon Emperor."

Jill's eyes widened and Elentzia nodded.

"Yeah, I agree. That child is the Dragon Emperor," Elentzia asserted.

"Just to be clear, it's not like I approve of him. How could I accept an idiot who feigns ignorance and disappears while the imperial capital is occupied?! If he's not planning on acting appropriately, he should give the throne to me!"

"You're the same age as Hadis, aren't you? In terms of seniority, it would go

to Vissel."

"I'm two months older. Besides, when you take status into account, I'm the most sensible choice... If I was there, that idiot of a younger brother wouldn't have been wrapped up in this crown prince or emperor mess without any support after being brought back from the frontiers!"

Jill was impressed by Risteard, who rambled on with a frown.

His phrasing is a bit harsh, but he's a good person! You do have people on your side, after all, Your Majesty!

Elentzia's tone also made it apparent that she harbored no hostility towards Hadis. If the situation was properly explained, these two might become his allies. Then Hadis wouldn't have to diligently grow vegetables all day. Jill ignored the fact that the emperor himself seemed to be enjoying this lifestyle and decided to pry further.

"Did you hear that idiot got married?! He doesn't even have proper support, he married an absolute stranger, and she's a child, to boot! How much more of an idiot can he be?! Just the thought that he might prefer little girls makes me feel so disturbed and disappointed..." Risteard wailed.

"Yeah... Even I doubted my ears when I heard the news... Let's just hope it was some sort of mistake," Elentzia murmured.

Jill reconsidered and chose to remain silent as it seemed difficult for her to interject into the conversation now.

"Either way, neither of us can be on Hadis's side," Elentzia said firmly.

Risteard raised his eyebrows. "Even if we're aware that the idiot is the Dragon Emperor?"

"Don't make me say it, Risteard. My mother is from Duke Neutrahl's family, and your mother is from Duke Lehrsatz's. Our uncle can't touch us so easily because we have Duke Neutrahl and Duke Lehrsatz behind us."

"Indeed. Unlike that idiot, we're from the noble lineage of the Rave Empire's dukes. All the more reason why we can't turn a blind eye to our uncle's riot."

"But neither Duke Neutrahl nor Duke Lehrsatz will approve of Hadis. Both

have lost a crown prince—a grandson—our older brothers.”

Jill had heard about this from Hadis, but she felt like the small ray of hope she had was crushed. *I should've snapped that Goddess once more!* It was irritating to think that the Goddess was out there, laughing amidst the chaos.

“...Uncle George is growing impatient since Hadis hasn’t been found,” Risteard said. “We received a threatening message as well. Our uncle isn’t as soft as that idiot. He’s a stern man who won’t hesitate to make some sacrifices for legitimacy. Once summer comes and that idiot’s birthday is over, this situation might become a huge, muddy mess. Of course, there’s a chance that Uncle will die before summer ends due to the so-called curse.”

“Maybe it’s thanks to that Heavenly Sword, but it seems our uncle is confident in living beyond summer. If not, he wouldn’t have made his claims now,” Elentzia pointed out.

“Then why didn’t he declare himself the true Dragon Emperor and take his claim to the throne as the crown prince before that idiot became emperor?” Risteard countered. “The other crown princes were dying one by one due to the curse. Uncle George is using dastardly methods.”

Elentzia narrowed her eyes and rested her chin on her hands at Risteard’s firm statements. “...I understand how you feel, but look at reality. We can’t take Hadis’s side. The imperial castle has your mother and sister.”

Despite the surrounding circumstances, the imperial capital was in George’s hands. Should Risteard publicly go against George, his mother and sister wouldn’t go unscathed.

“I understand what you’re getting at,” Elentzia continued, trying to calm Risteard, who tensed his jaw. “You’re saying that we should, at the very least, help Hadis so that he can make a public appearance. My family generally holds a stance of neutrality, but I could make some claims. Unlike you, I have no one left at the imperial castle. My older brother and mother died ages ago, and I have no other siblings who share the same mother.”

Risteard’s expression softened upon hearing Elentzia’s self-deprecating remarks.

"That's not what I mean. But if you decide to side with Hadis, then I'll..."

"I won't be his enemy," Elentzia stated. "That's all I can promise."

These familiar words tore at Jill's heart. Elentzia had said something similar as her final words before she chose to kill herself.

"Jill," Elentzia suddenly said.

"Huh? Yes?!" Jill said with a jolt.

"I apologize for making you listen to this long conversation. I wanted to talk to you about yesterday regarding Rosa. First, let me apologize. I'm sorry about Rosa. I'm glad that you didn't sustain any major injuries."

Jill was flustered by the shift in topic, but she shook her head. "No, I, um, should be the one to apologize for the inconvenience. I wasn't compatible with the dragon."

"Don't worry about it. Even I was surprised. I didn't expect Rosa to threaten you."

"...Threaten? Rosa?" asked Risteard, who furrowed his brows and glanced towards Jill. "Is this true, Elentzia? The red dragon threatened this child, instead of giving her a warning?"

Jill blinked, realizing that Risteard seemed oddly surprised. "It seems dragons don't like me. Ah, I'm a big fan of them, though!" she added.

"It's a red dragon," Risteard countered. "It's normal for them to ignore people. You might kick an odd-looking rock you found on the road, but you wouldn't intimidate it, would you?"

"I would not..." Jill agreed.

"It's the same thing."

Humans were like rocks on the road to red dragons.

"Um, so what does this mean?" Jill asked.

"A lot of squires might get the wrong idea, but Rosa intimidated you because she sees you as an equal or a threat," he explained.

Jill's jaw dropped and she pointed at herself. Elentzia nodded to show she

agreed with his assessment.

“A red dragon reacted unusually towards a human. Our logistics support squad, which specializes in research, will want to do some further testing. Rosa might attack you, so I won’t force you to do anything, but could you cooperate with them if asked?” she requested.

“Elentzia, are you—”

Elentzia raised her hand, cutting Risteard off. “Of course, I’ll be there as well to control the situation should anything happen. What do you think?”

“...Sure, I’m happy to do it if it’ll help,” Jill said.

“Thank you. I’ll personally call on you when we make this request—”

“You don’t have to go out of your way to do all that. I’m here. Why don’t I look after her?” Risteard, who looked glum earlier, stood up gallantly.

Elentzia scowled as she half-rose in her seat. “This girl belongs to the Dragon Knights,” she said.

“So? I haven’t given up on convincing you, my sister. And while I’m here, you must give me a guard or servant. I obviously haven’t brought any myself.”

“Quite bold of you to say that openly. You probably shook off your subordinates and flew out here on your own. I’ll have a dragon fly immediately to request a retinue to take you back.”

“But no matter how quickly you act, it’ll take at least two days. During that time, I’ll have her take care of me.” Risteard didn’t even glance at Jill, who let out a surprised gasp. “Regarding that testing you mentioned, you’ll kill two birds with one stone if I’m there. Brynhild is a red dragon with gold eyes, a rank higher than Rosa. Surely, you’d have no complaints.”

“Risteard, stop trying to twist the situation. Just what are you scheming?”

“Scheming? Nonsense, I’m just a younger brother trying to help his busy older sister. Or would that perhaps foil some sort of scheme you’ve cooked up?”

For the first time, Elentzia made her irritation apparent as she glared at Risteard. He looked back at her coolly, chin raised. He seemed prideful as he looked down at her. Elentzia shifted her gaze away first. She clicked her tongue

and sat back in her chair.

“...Do as you like,” she muttered.

“You have my gratitude, kind sister,” Risteard said before turning to Jill. “I’ll be in your care.”

“Huh? Uh, right!” Jill straightened her posture and bowed.

Risteard nodded in satisfaction and left the room without hesitation when Jill opened the door for him. He was used to having people serve him.

“Please excuse me, Captain Elentzia,” Jill said.

“Yeah. I’m sorry, Jill, but I’ll leave my brother to you.”

Jill looked up, feeling the gravity in the captain’s words, but Elentzia was smiling calmly. Jill bowed to her and then chased after Risteard.



“**YOU’RE** a new recruit, right? Then you aren’t familiar with the territory of the Dragon Knights just yet. Follow me,” Risteard said, leading the way.

I-Is this okay? I feel like he’s the one escorting me.

He was even walking slowly to match Jill’s stride like a true gentleman.

“Your Highness, are you familiar with this area?”

“I joined the Knights once for about a year or so.”

“Even though you’re a prince?”

“I needed to gain knowledge to make my own personal Dragon Knights. The Neutrahl Dragon Knights are the best of the best within the Rave Empire, so it’s an ideal place to learn. Thanks to that, I was able to make many comrades that I can call friends. My current vice commander was my former colleague from the Knights here.”

“...Does that mean you took some Dragon Knights with you...?” Jill muttered. Risteard turned around and grinned.

“I’m sure I taught a great lesson to the Neutrahl Dragon Knights. Hahaha!”

After headhunting their knights, he still had the audacity to show his face

around here again. It was hard to harbor a grudge when he was this bold. As Risteard passed some Dragon Knights he was familiar with in the halls, they all gave forced smiles. Others gazed on with clear suspicion and hostility.

“Why’s that kid with His Highness? Shouldn’t she be patrolling the streets?” The knights asked each other.

Once Jill and Risteard walked outside to head to the dragon stables, Jill realized that she’d misunderstood the situation. The looks of suspicion and hostility were directed towards her.

A few squires who were carrying straw gave Jill a thorny look. “Why’s that kid with His Highness Risteard? She should be out patrolling.”

Zeke stopped his work and raised his voice. “Who cares. Just work.”

But the whispers and giggles wouldn’t stop.

“Was she scouted into the Lehrsatz Dragon Knights?”

“Like hell. Must be a candidate to become His Highness’s maid.”

“Well, she *is* a girl, after all. With a bit of charm, she must get so much work.”

Suddenly, Risteard raised his voice, silencing the people around him.

“You squires over there, if you’ve got something to say, why don’t you come up here and say it to my face?” He turned around, leveling a harsh gaze on the squires. “I asked her to show me around. If you’ve got any complaints, you should give them to me.”

Everyone fell silent.

“What’s wrong? Don’t act scared just because I’m the second prince.”

“Uh, then could I say something?” said Zeke, nonchalantly raising his hand.

Jill shook her head, desperately signaling that she was all right, but Zeke stood in front of Risteard.

What are you planning, Zeke?!

Everyone held their breaths as the two men faced each other.

“If you plan to use her as a servant, just a fair warning: her tea is inexplicably

revolting, so please be careful," Zeke warned.

A different kind of silence ran through the crowd, and Risteard, who had his guard up, blinked in surprise.

"...I see," said Risteard. "And you're her...?"

"Colleague. That's it. Don't be fooled by the lunch she has. This girl really can't sew or do any housework. I know that for a fact. She's the most unsuited for taking care of others, so I just thought I'd let you know."

"I-I see. I understand, I'll keep that in mind. Thank you for your warning."

Jill looked down as a faint smile turned up the corners of her lips. *Tonight, I'll have him eat the food I make.* She, of course, would eat Hadis's delicious meals.

"But she's extremely skilled with the sword. It's best if you don't take her lightly," Zeke added in a low voice before returning to work. The last statement was meant to help Jill.

What's his deal? Well, the atmosphere did change though.

The new recruits went back to work as though nothing had occurred. Risteard put his hand on his chin and sized Jill up.

"A diversion and a warning... Are you two really just colleagues?" he asked.

"Huh? Yes. As you can see, I've had my troubles because of my appearance, and he often looks after me," Jill replied.

Risteard breathed out from his nose and turned on his heel. "No matter. Let's go."

"Um, Your Highness! Thank you for covering for me back there."

"I've only done what was expected of me. I haven't done anything worthy of your gratitude."

He walked forward but continued to match his stride to Jill's. She smiled broadly, knowing that he was a good man.

In the future that Jill was familiar with, she heard that Risteard would be executed for trying to stop Hadis. Elentzia, unwilling to become a burden for Hadis, would choose to take her own life.

Both of them seem like they'd become good siblings for His Majesty.

But these feelings never reached the emperor. Nothing had occurred yet, but Jill couldn't help but feel dispirited about the situation. Was there anything she could do? No, there *must* be something she could do.

"Brynhild," said Risteard.

While Jill was deep in thought, they'd reached the dragon stables. Brynhild was in front of the stables having her saddle removed. The red dragon slowly turned around and looked at Jill with its golden eyes.

"You know how to do a greeting, don't you? Go on," Risteard urged.

"Ah, right. Pardon me," Jill said, hesitantly stepping forward. She didn't mind the dragon attacking her. Risteard would be able to stop Brynhild, and even if Jill didn't have any magic, she could at least dodge.

But to be threatened isn't a normal response... Are they perhaps suspicious of me?

Jill stopped in front of Brynhild and looked up. The beast's intelligent gold eyes gazed down at her. She wasn't sure what the correct course of action was, or how to prevent the dragon from threatening her. As the Dragon Consort, she had to think about the best way to do so while keeping her identity hidden to protect Hadis.

The next moment, Risteard raised his voice.

"Hey, what's going— Hild?!"

Brynhild stretched her wings and took to the skies. She averted her gaze and flew away.

"...I've been ignored," Jill muttered with a sigh of relief.

She was sure that Rosa's previous threat was just the dragon being in a bad mood or some odd coincidence. Her hopeful eyes met Risteard's intense glare, and she stiffened.

"Wh-What?!" Jill yelped.

"No, she ran away," Risteard noted.

“Huh? Yeah, I guess she did.”

“That’s right. Brynhild, a gold-eyed, red dragon, fled at the sight of a mere human.”

For a high-ranked red dragon, humans were like rocks on the road. There was no need for them to flee.

Wait, this might be worse than being threatened, Jill realized.

“...I’ve seen Brynhild have this reaction once before,” Risteard muttered. He furrowed his brow like never before and closed the distance between them with one big stride. Jill, in turn, felt cold sweat run down her back, and she took a step back with a faltering smile.

“U-Um, it’s almost lunchtime, and I’ve got my lectures, so if you’ll excuse me...” she stammered.

“Hadis Teos Rave. When my dragon met my failure of a half-brother, Brynhild fled.”

“Will you look at the time! Well, if you’ll excuse me!”

Like a scared hare, Jill pretended not to hear anything and ran away. Risteard followed closely behind, kicking up dust.

“Like *HELL* I’ll let you go! Who are you and what are you hiding?! Answer me!” roared Risteard.

“AAAHHH!” Jill screamed and ran full speed ahead.

But she was just a child drained of her magic, and her opponent was an adult. She couldn’t shake him off so easily. The game of tag at the stables of the Dragon Knights continued until Elentzia put an end to it.



WHEN Jill came home exhausted, her husband, tending the garden with the sun on his back, greeted her. As she staggered home, even Sauté made way for her.

“I’m home, Your Majesty...”

“W-Welcome back. Where’s Zeke?” Hadis asked.

"We've got different posts, so we're moving separately."

Jill walked into the garden and fell onto Hadis as she hugged him. He blinked and caught his wife. She inhaled the nice scent of the sun and dirt and felt relaxed before she expelled her thoughts.

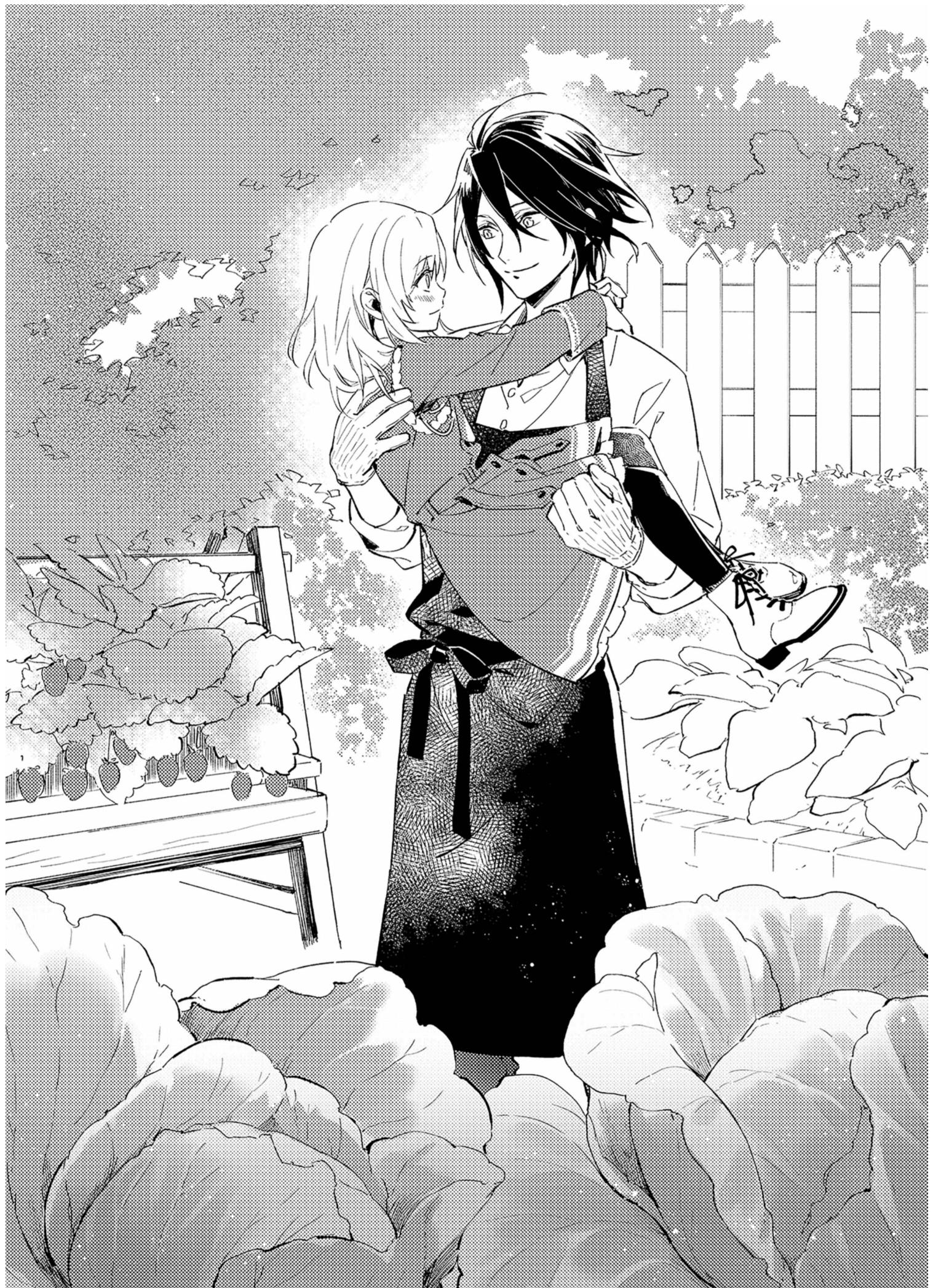
"Your Majesty, I love you..."

"...You must be tired. Got it, I'll make a delicious dinner." Hadis lifted Jill into his arms, and she wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly.

Risteard backed down when Elentzia scolded him, saying, "Don't chase a little girl around, even if she is a squire with the Knights." Still, he continued to constantly monitor her a short distance away, even during her lectures. It was exhausting to be on the receiving end of his gaze, which seemed to be trying to find any tiny slip-up in every action she took. Everyone around Jill would whisper and avoid her, which didn't help. She was even followed on her way home. She managed to elude him this time, but she didn't want this to turn into a daily routine. Zeke looked away when she turned to him for help.

"Right, you don't have to make Zeke's meal today. I'll just feed him cabbage I plucked straight from the garden," Jill said.

"Huh? Sure, okay. Here, Jill."



A delicious, sweet, and slightly tangy strawberry touched her lips.

“I want another, Your Majesty...”

“Oh, you want to be spoiled today, do you?”

She nestled her head into his neck and continued to eat the strawberries that were harvested from the garden. Finally regaining some energy, she slowly opened her eyes and sighed.

“Seriously, I wanted to hurry home so I could see you, Your Majesty.”

“Th-That kind of surprise attack won’t affect me so easily anymore. Even I’ve gotten used to it. A-And, I-I also w-wanted to s-s-see...”

“I guess it’s true that you yearn for your loved ones when you’re tired,” Jill said profoundly, and Hadis clutched his chest.

“It’s okay. I’ve gotten used to it. I’m used...to it...” he chanted.

“If you had your magic, you might’ve fainted, Your Majesty,” she pointed out.

“That might...be true.”

As Hadis’s gaze wandered, Jill jumped onto the ground from his arms and took a basket that was on the garden ridge.

“I’ll help you out. Where’s Camila, by the way?” she asked.

“Hiya, I’m over here. Keep that in mind before you start flirting,” Camila called out with a dubious tone. She was sitting on a wooden box in front of the house, where she had a complete view of the garden.

Jill blinked at her. “I’m sorry that I didn’t notice you. I was so focused on His Majesty.”

“Ugh...!” Hadis grunted.

“Your Majesty, give it your all and stand firm. Jill, don’t unleash a barrage of surprise attacks on him,” Camila tutted at her.

“I found you, Hadis!” a man bellowed, making Sauté cluck and flee.

Camila readied her arrow, and Jill stood in front of Hadis.

“Your Majesty, prepare to run,” Jill said in a low voice.

"No, this voice..." Hadis murmured.

The thickets rustled loudly, and just as Camila was ready to fire, Hadis raised one hand in the air to stop her.

"Your Majesty?"

"I didn't know where you ran off to, but to think you were hiding here..." the man said, aggressively emerging from the thickets.

"Prince Risteard?!" Jill shouted.

She thought she eluded him, but Risteard had apparently continued to persistently give chase. However, all his aggression faded when he got a clear view. His mouth agape, he stood there in stunned silence.

"...What are you *doing*?" Risteard asked.

With a straight face, Hadis gave an even more foolish reply. "I'm harvesting vegetables."

Risteard stayed quiet and continued to look Hadis up and down. His expression said it all—he wanted to eloquently state how he simply couldn't believe it. Jill felt a little bad.

I'm already used to it, but His Majesty is wearing an apron...

It was important not to forget that this man in the apron was the emperor of the Rave Empire.

Risteard's face turned whiter than a sheet, and he stammered as though he was gasping for air. "V-Vegetables... Our emperor... In this dire situation..."

"Uh, would you like some?" Hadis offered timidly.

Something clearly snapped inside Risteard.

"Cut it out, you idiot! And here I was, thinking you were preparing to stop this revolt, but you're out here doing *this*!?"

"Why say it like that? People die if they don't eat, you know," replied Hadis.

"That's *really* not the point here! Come on, let's go see Elentzia!"

"Huh? No."

“No?! Do you expect me to accept that answer?!”

“I’m home. Huh, wait, what’s going on? Wait, isn’t that...?” Zeke gaped as he approached Camila and Jill, who were watching Hadis and Risteard argue.

“He’s here for His Majesty,” Jill told him, her eyes narrowing. “It seems he tailed me, and I let my guard down.”

Camila was silent for a moment before speaking. “Jill, did you purposefully let him follow you back here?”

“Not at all. But if we *were* to get caught, I thought he’d be the best person to catch us.” Jill gave a strained smile, using that as an excuse for her clumsy footwork. “He’s a prince, but he doesn’t have any soldiers with him, and he came to find His Majesty all on his own. I don’t think he’s our enemy.”

Zeke frowned and sighed. “Well, we weren’t gonna live like this forever.”

“But it’ll get a little lonely. I was happy that His Majesty waited for me at home while I was out working,” Jill said.

“Jill...” murmured Camila.

“NOOO!” shrieked Hadis, clinging onto a nearby tree, tearing apart any sentimental feelings that Jill had for him. “I won’t go! I’ll never go! I’ll make food here every day and wait for my wife to come home! I’m going to be a normal house husband!”

“A house husband?! Like hell you are! You idiot!” roared Risteard.

“Say what you will! Besides, you guys chased me out of the imperial capital! If you want me to return so badly, maybe if you beg, I will.”

“Why do you sound so high and mighty when you just got exiled?! I don’t think I will ever get used to this side of you!”

“Then go home! If you insist on staying, I’ll make this land right here the imperial capital. I’m the emperor, so I should be able to do that.”

“Screw that!”

Zeke and Camila stared at them while voicing their deep concerns.

“...Can we really say goodbye to this lifestyle?”

“We need to convince His Majesty first...”

Jill slumped her shoulders and stepped forward to try to convince her husband.

Chapter 3: A Supply Line from Siblings

IN the middle of the night, Hadis and the others were snuck into the office of the Dragon Knights.

"I thought I warned you to leave them alone, Risteard," Elentzia said.

"I happened to find them, so what else could I do?" replied Risteard with a look of nonchalance.

"You *went* to go find them, didn't you?" Elentzia countered. "Don't play dumb."

"You were also suspicious of this girl, weren't you?" Risteard shot back. "Child or not, if the Dragon Emperor marries someone, she becomes the Dragon Consort. That's the only explanation I could think of for why a red dragon sees her as an equal."

Elentzia glanced at Jill beside Hadis and rested her chin on her hands. "I decided to look the other way. Besides, the man in question seems rather unhappy."

Because Risteard was busy scolding Hadis the whole way back to town, Jill hardly had any time to talk to him. Since they'd already been discovered, Jill and her knights convinced Hadis to at least be open to talking, getting him to unwillingly tag along. Like a child, he turned the other way when he'd been addressed.

"Your Majesty," Jill murmured, tugging on his sleeve.

"...It's not like we can do anything," he finally said. "Elentzia commands the Dragon Knights, but she's backed by Duke Neutrahl, who won't side with me. Risteard's in the same boat. They might backstab me while acting as my ally."

Risteard furrowed his brows and scowled while Elentzia gave a strained smile.

"No one will move until summer ends anyways. It's best to wait until my magic recovers," Hadis concluded.

"So, it's true that your magic has been sealed?" Risteard asked.

"Yeah. If you want to finish me off, now's your chance." Hadis smiled and stared back at his siblings. "There's a possibility that Uncle will shoot himself in the foot before that, though."

"What do you mean?" asked Elentzia, interjecting into the conversation between her brothers.

Hadis shifted his gaze upwards, his expression one of boredom. "You can't falsify the Heavenly Sword of the Dragon Emperor in this empire. The Dragon God won't forgive you. That's all."

"Elaborate."

"I'm not that kind," Hadis replied. "Everything will resolve itself if we just let it be. I'm leaving."

"You can't just leave, Your Majesty," Jill said.

Hadis narrowed his eyes with a cold and expressionless gaze that he sometimes gave. "I'm a man who kneels to his wife, but I have no intentions of backing down on this matter. It won't work even if you try to set me up as a hero like at Beilburg."

Hadis ended the conversation and turned on his heels. Jill promptly swept his legs out from under him and stepped on his back after he lost his balance.

"Your phrasing irks me sometimes, you know. What's with you?" Jill challenged.

"Don't act like you don't also mistreat me sometimes! I said I'll kneel to my wife, but I never gave you permission to kick or step on me!"

"Then who would you give permission to do so, Your Majesty?"

"Don't make it sound like I enjoy being kicked and stepped on!" Hadis shouted.

"Your actions deserve getting kicked and stepped on," Jill insisted. "Quit complaining. I'm not asking you to gather soldiers and march against the capital. I'm just saying that you should talk with your brother and sister while you can."

Still on the ground, Hadis blinked up at her. Jill removed her foot from his back and folded her arms.

“Prince Risteard went searching for you on his own two legs without the help of soldiers. He was worried about you,” Jill told him softly.

“Worried...? About me?” Hadis murmured, shooting his half-brother a hopeful and anxious look.

Risteard frowned until creases formed between his brows. “Hey, don’t make it sound so disgusting. I just thought that war would break out if this goes on—”

“Your Highness, you chased me around so diligently to look for His Majesty. Stop making silly excuses! You’ll only make this more complicated!” yelled Jill as she turned around, forcing him to close his mouth. “And please speak a bit nicer when talking to His Majesty.”

“What did you say?” the prince asked.

“He’s always wary of those around him! He’s like a dog who isn’t used to people!” Jill insisted.

“A dog?!” Risteard cried. “Can’t you use a better word to refer to our emperor?!”

“Dogs are cute! In any case, please talk to him like you’re talking to a child, like me! Please tell him that you were worried sick!”

Risteard looked at Jill and Hadis, then knitted his brows before offering a hand to his brother.

“...First, get up.”

Hadis stared at the outstretched hand and didn’t move. He wasn’t hesitating but analyzing the situation. Risteard’s cheeks twitched.

“Uh, well, you know. I knew you’d be fine, but...I’m glad to see you are well,” he said awkwardly.

Hadis was silent.

“...Say something,” Risteard said.

“I can’t believe you’re talking to me so normally,” muttered Hadis.

“You...”

“You’ve got a younger sister in the imperial castle, don’t you? It would be foolish to oppose our uncle. Thank you.” Hadis got up on his own, and Risteard blinked in disbelief, staring at his empty hand. “Thank you for turning a blind eye to Jill, Elentzia,” Hadis said to his sister.

“No idea what you’re talking about. Jill is one of our promising squires. I’ll act like all of this never happened,” the princess replied.

“Sister!” Risteard shouted.

“You do the same, Risteard. Hadis is right.” Elentzia turned back to Hadis. “But I’m happy to see you are well, little brother. I’ve no idea why you’re wearing an apron, though.”

Risteard opened his mouth to speak, but grimaced and stayed quiet. He was so intent on dragging the reluctant Hadis that he’d forgotten to give the emperor a chance to change clothes.

“It’s all thanks to you, Jill. You have my gratitude,” Elentzia said with a smile.

“Speaking of, you! Is it true that you married this *child*?!” Risteard bellowed.

Hadis gave an exasperated look. “You said yourself that Jill’s the Dragon Consort.”

“But I never said I’d approve of it! A child?! What are you thinking?! You didn’t threaten her or make some sort of deal with her, did you?!”

“Thank you for your concerns, Prince Risteard,” Jill intervened, speaking on her own behalf, her head held high. “I chose to marry His Majesty of my own free will. Please put your mind at ease as well, Princess Elentzia. It’s my duty as his wife to protect him and make him happy.”

Risteard looked conflicted as he stayed silent. Elentzia gave an awkward nod, her eyes blinking a few dozen times as she tried to process the girl in front of her.

“I-I see. Hadis, you okay? You look kind of pale,” Elentzia commented.

“I-I’m okay... I’m used to it... I’m already used to it...!” Hadis wrenched out.

“Come on, drink some water. Here ya go,” Zeke said.

“Over here, Your Majesty. We’ll take care of you,” assured Camila.

Risteard watched Zeke and Camila help Hadis onto a sofa. “Right, and who are they?” he asked.

“They’re my subordinates. I was told the Dragon Consort could have her own knights,” Jill replied.

“...I see. No wonder he tried to keep me in check.”

“Anyways, our talk here is over. It’s already late, so all of you return from whence you came,” Elentzia said. It was clear that she planned on idly navigating through this situation.

Her analysis of the situation and decision weren’t wrong, so it was difficult to convince her otherwise. Risteard seemed to want to say more, but he couldn’t find the right words. Respecting everyone’s societal positions had led to the future that Jill had experienced.

Hadis stood up once he felt better and offered Jill his hand. “Elentzia wants to end it here, so let’s go home, Jill,” he said. When Jill didn’t respond, he repeated her name. “Jill?”

Drastic measures needed to be taken to change the future. Jill stepped forward without taking Hadis’s hand. Elentzia cocked her head to one side as she noticed her gaze.

“Do you need something from me?”

“I’ll be frank with you, Princess Elentzia and Prince Risteard. Please lend His Majesty your assistance,” Jill requested.

“Jill,” Hadis murmured with an objecting glare.

Jill ignored him and continued, “You two are His Majesty’s siblings as well as lieges of this empire. I doubt it’s in your best interest to keep the false emperor on the loose.”

“That’s correct.”

“Risteard, don’t reply so carelessly,” admonished Elentzia. “That statement is

true in the sense that even a child could assess the general situation correctly. But as Hadis said earlier, we have our positions to consider. Reality punishes the naïve.”

“Your Highness, I believe you might be the naïve one here. What do you think will happen if I publicize that I was here with His Majesty? Will this region truly remain neutral?”

Elentzia’s expression visibly changed as she slowly reached behind her for a weapon. Jill mustered as much magic as she could to blitz Elentzia before she could strike.

“Zeke! Camila!” she yelled.

It may have been naïve on Jill’s part to expect her knights to understand her intentions by just calling out their names, but Camila instantly raised her arrow to block the exit as Zeke pointed his blade towards Risteard.

“What’s the meaning of this?!” Elentzia yelled.

It only took a few seconds for Jill to grab Elentzia’s head, twist her arms back, and press her onto her desk. Jill kicked away her dagger and it hit the wall. Her only regret was that she had to resort to violence to resolve the situation.

“If you really wanted to end this peacefully, you should’ve tied me up and used me as a hostage for His Majesty,” said Jill.

“Elentzia! Hey, what’s going on, Hadis?!” Risteard shouted.

“Oh my, please don’t move, Prince Risteard. My hands might *slip*.”

Risteard glanced at Camila with her bow at the ready and clicked his tongue.

Zeke pressed his blade onto the prince’s throat and said, “Don’t make a fuss, and don’t use your magic. I’ll lop off your head before help arrives.”

“Please choose, Princess Elentzia. You too, Prince Risteard,” Jill said, glancing at him. Risteard gulped, overpowered by her intensity. “Will you be on His Majesty’s or the false emperor’s side?”

An answer was all she needed. Sweat beaded Elentzia’s brow as she said, “And what if I decline?”

"I'm not as kind as His Majesty. I won't let either of you go," Jill replied coldly.

"But what about Hadis? He doesn't want to be backstabbed, right? Coincidentally, both Risteard and I have been thinking the same thing. We don't want to be betrayed by the emperor either."

"My emperor is not so weak."

Jill didn't look at her husband, for she believed her statement from the bottom of her heart. She put more strength into restraining Elentzia, not allowing a moment of silence.

"Answer me—"

Suddenly, a loud bang was heard from beyond the door, followed by a shout.

"Captain, are you awake? It's an emergency!"

For a split second, everyone's attention turned towards the door. Elentzia used that opening to twist herself out of Jill's grip. She grabbed a letter opener and pointed it towards Jill.

"Tell your subordinates to stand down," Elentzia ordered. "Come in!"

"Camila, Zeke! Hide His Majesty!" Jill commanded.

"Sorry in advance!" Camila said, pushing Hadis behind a long curtain that hung from the ceiling. The two knights stood in front of Hadis, forming a wall before the soldier came in. Jill breathed a sigh of relief.

Risteard looked conflicted as he was suddenly freed, but he remained silent and watched on. Elentzia straightened her slightly crooked collar before shifting her gaze towards her subordinate.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Prince George— I mean, the imperial army has apparently burned down the nearby villages!" the soldier reported, stifling their trembling voice.

Elentzia's eyes rounded. "But this is Duke Neutrah's domain! How could they do that?!"

"There was word that we've been hiding the false emperor. That's all we know for now."

A loud booming sound suddenly slammed open the terrace window, cutting the report short. Strong wind blew into the room, and the wingbeats and cries of the dragons could be heard. Risteard looked outside, and his eyes bulged at what he saw.

“Brynhild?! Why are you...?! And there’s Rosa and the other dragons!” he said.

“I’ll go,” Hadis replied curtly, stepping out from the curtains. He’d called the dragons.

“Your Majesty, I’ll go too!” said a flustered Jill.

“Wait, Hadis,” said Elentzia, stopping him in his tracks.

The soldier looked shocked when they heard his name. Hadis narrowed his eyes and turned around. Even Jill felt her palms grow sweaty when she felt a hint of hostility from the emperor.

“Are you going to restrain me?” he asked.

“No, I’m going with you. This is our land, after all,” Elentzia said.

“I’m coming too! I won’t let you two go off by yourselves!” added Risteard.

For a moment, Hadis looked perplexed by his half-siblings, but he quickly turned away before saying, “Do as you like.”



ELENTZIA and Risteard mounted their personal dragons and followed closely behind. Hadis and Jill were riding on a green dragon, who gingerly showed up behind the red dragons. Still, once the Dragon Emperor sat on top of it, it proudly took the lead, gallantly flying ahead of the rest. Neither Rosa nor Brynhild, though higher in rank, made any efforts to fly at the front.

Elentzia and Risteard were surely convinced that Hadis was the Dragon Emperor because they’d seen a similar sight many times in the past.

“These fires aren’t your fault, Your Majesty,” Jill said after a few minutes of silence.

Hadis dropped his gaze to her and shook his head. “I know. This is a warning

to the realm, notifying them of the consequences if they hide me. It's a conventional technique used to lure me out... I knew he'd do something like this one day."

"But it's still not your fault, Your Majesty," Jill repeated. "The blame is on whoever did this."

"You see, I've been thinking about what you said to my sister."

Jill remembered that she'd threatened Elentzia. "I-I'm sorry for acting so brashly. I threatened your older sister..."

Jill had no regrets, but she was feeling a little anxious. She knew it was too late—much too late, in fact—but she was worried that Hadis might be disappointed in her for using violence to solve her problems.

"But, um, if you stopped me, I would've stopped!" she added.

"I know. It's because of me you acted in such a way," said Hadis, letting go of the reins and stroking Jill's hair to soothe her. The dragon still flew straight ahead. "That's not what I'm getting at. You said that I wasn't weak."

"Yeah, what about it?" Jill looked up at Hadis with confusion.

"My siblings have their own affairs that can't be solved by personal feelings alone. They're being pulled in so many different directions. I'd like to be on good terms with them, but backstabbing isn't an expression of sarcasm or a metaphor. It's simply the way of the world for us."

Hadis talked slowly to sort out his thoughts, and Jill listened intently.

"But since you're the one making the request, I feel like I could try to get along with them. What do you think?" Hadis asked.

Jill felt slightly shy about having her opinion requested, but she knew that she couldn't answer irresponsibly. "I'm not sure if you can get along with everyone," she told him truthfully. "As you said, this isn't just about you, but about their circumstances too."

"Yeah, you're right... People tend to keep their distance from me," he said sadly.

"But if your efforts aren't rewarded even after you tried your best, I'll stroke

your head, Your Majesty.”

It was a bit uncomfortable, but she outstretched her hand to pet the top of Hadis’s head, and the emperor, who lowered his head for her to reach, laughed softly.

“Aren’t you comforting me a bit too soon?”

“Just a bit of encouragement. Don’t lose so easily. You’re *my* emperor, after all.”

As Jill conveyed her trust and expectations, Hadis fell silent for a moment and laughed.

“...It’s scary to be liked and needed by someone, isn’t it?” he said.

“You’re the one who kept asking me to fall for you. You can’t be scared and back down now.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” Hadis gazed towards the glowing red fire ahead of them. “Over there.”

Behind him, Risteard shouted, “I’ll go and support the north side. Elentzia, extinguish this fire!”

“I’ll take care of the flames,” Hadis said. “Rave, lend me your strength.” He called out to the Dragon God inside him and patted the green dragon’s neck. “You’re needed on behalf of the Dragon God. I’m relying on you.”

The green dragon opened its jaws wide, and a blue flame was expelled from its mouth towards the fire. Risteard turned pale.

“Hey! What are you—” the prince started.

“No, this is...water breath?!” Jill shouted.

As though to prove her words right, the blue flame extinguished the flames rising from the village. The water, acting like rain, subdued the flickering demonic red blaze.

Risteard looked stunned as he mumbled, “A dragon...expelling a breath of water...”

“This must be the Dragon Emperor’s power,” Elentzia said.

Hadis neither affirmed nor denied her assessment as he continued to fly around until he put out the fire.

After he circled around twice, the fire was gone. From there, Elentzia and Risteard ordered their Dragon Knights to rescue the villagers and assess the situation. Hadis and Jill went to a discreet location where they wouldn't be a nuisance and held hands as they stared at the scene that unfolded in front of them.

Things finally settled down as dawn started to break. Risteard was the first to approach them. "I've been asking around. The army that arrived at the village raised a crimson flag with the insignia of a black dragon," he said.

This flag belonged to the Rave imperial army. Furthermore, a black dragon symbol meant that the army was under direct control of the imperial family. Normally, only Hadis was able to mobilize these troops, but for whatever reason, it was clear that the imperial army had fallen into George's hands.

Hadis looked expressionless as he waited for Risteard to continue.

"...They set fire to the area, asking for you," Risteard reluctantly informed them.

"Any casualties?" Hadis asked.

Risteard seemed stunned by this curt response. He shook his head. "Many were injured, but they noticed the commotion and were able to flee in time because the army demanded they hand you over before setting the fire. No casualties were had. Should the people despise you, the cause of this, or should they despise our uncle, who ordered the action? He placed you in an awkward position."

"I'm glad no one's dead, at least. Oh, but the fields were razed. Guess not everything's okay..."

As the sky started to grow brighter, the state of the village came clearer into view. Houses were reduced to ashes, and injured villagers were being treated. Things weren't fine and dandy just because there weren't any deaths.

If the fields were burned, there wouldn't be a source of food. Without food, the villagers would either starve to death or be forced to relocate to unknown

lands.

"Elentzia is currently working to shelter these villagers within the fortress city of Neutrah...” Risteard said.

"Which might be our uncle's true aim," Hadis said.

The city would accept these villagers who were suspected of hiding the emperor. Hadis was implying that George might use this as an excuse to launch his next attack.

Risteard grimaced. "Will he go that far? Then again, he attacked this village with flimsy excuses in the first place... We should keep that in mind. I'll go back and try to convince Elentzia."

Hadis released Jill's hand and chased after his brother. Jill stayed back, knowing that Hadis was trying his best in his own way.

"Risteard," he said.

"I told you to add 'Brother' to that," Risteard quipped. "I'm two months older than you."

"I'm the Dragon Emperor."

Risteard turned around with a serene expression. "I know. You don't have to say it. I can only command my own Dragon Knights, but if you're all right with that, I'll be on your side."

Hadis stopped dead in his tracks as though someone had slapped him. Risteard laughed.

"What's with that face? I'm not so far gone that I'd stay silent after witnessing this travesty."

"...You'll be going against your grandfather, Duke Lehrsatz," Hadis pointed out.

"What a foolish thing to say. House Lehrsatz is here to protect the empire. If we can't even do that, we're better off destroyed. Besides...what happened to my older brother is not your fault."

Hadis truly seemed to be at a loss for words, but Risteard kept his back to the

emperor, shielding his face from being seen.

“My brother was the final crown prince who died by this so-called curse of yours before you returned from the frontiers. While others abdicated the throne and left, he remained. He stated that it was his duty as a member of the Rave imperial family. And I’m extremely proud of my brother,” Risteard said, his voice trembling. He couldn’t hide his grief. “That’s why I can’t, and I *won’t* forgive you unless you become a great emperor that surpasses my brother’s potential. These are my true feelings, and it’s best that you remember them.”

Hadis agonized over the response he could give before he nodded and said, “Okay.”

Risteard smiled faintly while looking at his good-for-nothing younger brother. Despite Jill never meeting him, it was as if Risteard embodied his older brother in that moment.

“In any case, the first problem is our older sister. These are just rumors, but I received some curious intel...” Risteard started.

“Hadis, Risteard,” Elentzia called to them as the sun shone behind her. She looked tired, but she still stood tall. “We’ll leave the rest to the others. We need to talk.”

“Elentzia, I— No, even if I’m the only one, I choose Hadis’s side. I’ve already made my decision,” Risteard declared.

Elentzia grimaced and sighed. “I knew you’d say that. I’d like to follow suit, but only under a certain condition, Hadis.”

Hadis stood silent, urging Elentzia to continue. Taking heed of her surroundings, she approached the two men and lowered her voice. “I’ve got someone I want you to meet. Just before our uncle started this whole false emperor fiasco, there’s someone who came to me and has been here ever since.”

Elentzia hesitated for a moment and gave Jill an apologetic look. Jill stared back blankly and only understood Elentzia’s intent when she revealed the identity of the person.

“The person staying with me is Faris der Kratos.”

"Elentzia, that's...!" Risteard yelped.

"Yeah, the first princess of Kratos," Elentzia supplied. "As a means of making peace, she's, well, asking to be engaged to you, Hadis."

If Jill had sustained any sort of psychological trauma, it would be because of Faris. Jill stiffened when she heard that name. *Engaged? To His Majesty?*

"What a funny joke," Hadis replied with clear disdain.

Elentzia scowled, and even Risteard seemed at a loss on how to respond. Jill couldn't move. She knew that Hadis wasn't on board with this idea, but she was unable to grab his hand again.



JILL had only met Faris der Kratos a few times in the other timeline when she was Gerald's fiancée. Faris was a bedridden and frail girl for most of her life.

Still, she was an angel that could charm anyone who glanced her way, and the entire kingdom was infatuated with her. When Jill first met the girl, she was struck by Faris's beauty. When the princess had called out, "Jill, my older sister," Jill was overcome with the urge to protect the sickly girl. When Gerald had prioritized his younger sister, Jill felt lonely but also understood why he would.

This resulted in a forbidden love between brother and sister, however.

So, why's she asking to be engaged to His Majesty? Is she hoping to camouflage her true love with her brother like she did with me? Jill clenched her fists. She couldn't imagine Gerald would forgive this union, and Jill was absolutely unwilling to let it slide either.

After returning to Neutrahl, Jill and her group took a short nap and made some preparations. When the sun was high in the sky, they gathered at Elentzia's office next to the military barracks of the Dragon Knights.

Hadis, seated on the long sofa, had dressed in formal attire after taking a bath. An apron wasn't suitable attire for who he was about to face. Elentzia had gone to retrieve the person in question.

"What are you planning to do?" Risteard asked, sitting next to Jill.

"Nothing. Jill is my wife, and no one is more worthy than her to be the Dragon Consort," Hadis replied indifferently.

"You can have a concubine, can't you? If the princess of Kratos marries into the imperial family, you can't have this little girl carry the title of Dragon Consort, which puts her above the empress. Granted, the princess of Kratos can't become the Dragon Consort. It's one thing if she was just a Kratos witch, but she's the biggest witch of them all." Risteard glanced at Jill. She could only give a blank look seated between the two men. "You're also from Kratos... How old are you?" he asked.

"I'm ten. Her Highness Princess Faris is two years my junior," Jill replied.

Risteard folded his arms and sank into the sofa. "That age gap isn't odd for a political marriage, but still... In any case, Hadis, are you seriously considering marrying this girl?"

"Consider? We're already married," Hadis stated. "She's already received Rave's blessing."

"Wait, I haven't heard about that. What *is* that?" Risteard asked.

"Well, you've never really listened to me, have you?" Hadis shot back.

Unable to offer a rebuttal, Risteard growled, and a knock was heard at the door. Zeke and Camila, who were guarding the entrance, glanced towards Jill. She nodded in reply, and the two opened the door.

"Sorry to make you wait," Elentzia said, pushing a wheelchair as she entered the room.

A girl younger than Jill was seated on top, and Risteard audibly gasped. Jill stole a glance at the girl too. Her soft, neatly trimmed, flaxen hair flowed elegantly behind her. Her long eyelashes fluttered like the wings of a butterfly, and her pale, supple skin only added to her beauty.

Because of the lack of space in the room, she remained seated in her wheelchair. She remained calm, put her hands over the blanket on her knees, and smiled gracefully.

"I was told not to force myself and took the kind offer of a wheelchair. I'm not

ill, so I hope that puts your mind at ease. Pleased to meet you. My name is Faris der Kratos.”

Her young yet angelic voice slipped from her plump, pink lips. Her large, azure eyes glanced around at the figures in the room.

“You must be Elentzia, Risteard, Hadis, and Jill.”

Her name called last, Jill inadvertently shifted her gaze towards Faris, who smiled back innocently and dispelled her suspicions.

“I’m aware that my brother was adamant about getting engaged to you. It seems you fled from his grasp,” Faris said with a giggle. Her mature gestures and songbird-like laughter made her only cuter.

Jill frowned. “You’re not angry?”

“It’s a good wake-up call for my brother. He tends to think that he can do anything he wants.”

“Were you not against my engagement to Prince Gerald?” Jill couldn’t help but probe further.

Faris flashed a charming smile. “Heavens, no. I heard that you were close to me in age, and I was looking forward to getting an older sister. It’s a pity, really.”

True enough, while Gerald and Jill were engaged in the other timeline, not once had Faris voiced complaints. In fact, she seemed to warm up to Jill, and was a cute, kind, and intelligent child. Even now, Faris didn’t show a hint of maliciousness towards Jill. The princess’s understanding of the situation and mannerisms were far beyond the scope of an eight-year-old. It was only natural that people commended her for being an excellent princess—as such, Jill, who was now aware of the Goddess’s existence, knew the potential of this girl more than anyone.

The princess of Kratos is the most likely candidate to become the Goddess’s vessel.

Hadis had a weak constitution. The immense magical power of the Dragon God took a toll on his body. Faris was frail as well. This wasn’t a simple

coincidence or a stroke of luck.

"If I marry Hadis, may I call you my older sister?" Faris asked.

Jill clenched her fists on her lap, refusing to be swept away by the young girl. "I..." she started.

"You will absolutely *never* become my wife," Hadis spat as he sat next to Jill. His face had an obvious expression of repulsion, making Elentzia panic more than Faris.

"Hadis, at least hear her out," Elentzia chided.

"That child is fully aware of the reason why," Hadis hissed. "A descendant of the Goddess Kratos, and the one most likely to become the Goddess's vessel, will marry the Dragon Emperor? What kind of joke is this? We're practically walking into Goddess Kratos's hands."

"...I knew it," Faris said, looking down.

Hadis closed his mouth and Risteard frowned.

"What are you talking about?" Risteard asked.

"I'm a vessel for the Goddess Kratos, just like how Hadis can see the Dragon God Rave," Faris murmured matter-of-factly.

Risteard didn't understand what she meant, but he felt that he shouldn't interrupt and kept silent with a taut expression. Elentzia's silence suggested she might have had a vague idea of Faris's identity.

"No one around me would tell me anything, so I was never certain about it," Faris said sadly. "But I understand now. I'm the vessel for the Goddess, and when I turn fourteen, I'll either be manipulated or be fated to lose my sense of self, just like the princesses before me."

Jill had her guard up this entire time, but Faris's words made the strength leave her body. She was gradually starting to understand Faris's situation.

I see, just like how Rave and His Majesty have different personalities, the Goddess and her vessel must be different too. Even if Princess Faris is a vessel, if she doesn't agree with the Goddess, she loses herself.

Faris would become the Goddess at fourteen. Because Jill had seen Rave and Hadis coexist, she never guessed that other vessels might lose their sense of self. The Goddess was already capable of controlling women older than fourteen.

Gerald was overly protective of his sister and raised her so dearly, not just because she was frail, but because she was also Kratos's vessel. Faris's phrasing made it sound like Gerald was aware of this and was hiding it from her.

If so, that added a new perspective to the forbidden love between siblings. *I only found out about it once Princess Faris turned fourteen, after all.*

Was Gerald with his sister or with the Goddess? Jill gulped, considering this possibility, as a fragile Faris was reflected in her eyes.

"I only have six years left," Faris said. "I'd like to end this long-lasting feud between Kratos and Rave before then."

"Is that why you, the princess of Kratos, want to marry Hadis?" Risteard asked, putting the conversation back on track.

Faris nodded. "I believe this is the best solution. Otherwise, war will repeat itself."

"But judging from the way you're speaking, it sounds like you came to this decision by yourself." Risteard was still confused by the story of the Goddess's vessel, but he made sure to keep the conversation going to extract any new information.

"It is as you say," Faris conceded. "I left my kingdom while my older brother was away. I left a few days after my brother went to Beilburg to chase after Jill. I'm sure he's currently searching for me."

"You're so sickly and young. I'm shocked that you did all this by yourself." Risteard commended her, but he was actually trying to see if she had any other motives. Faris, perhaps having nothing to hide, didn't flinch.

"You're right. As you've guessed, I did receive some help. You know of this person as well, Elentzia, and I'd like to properly introduce them in the future."

The face of her former subordinate flashed in the back of Jill's mind. *Wait a*

sec, Lawrence should still be Prince Gerald's subordinate...

Quite honestly, Jill had no idea just how much of Faris's story was true. Was the sickly girl in front of her truly shouldered with the sorrowful fate of being the Goddess's vessel? Or was she conspiring with the Goddess to take the Dragon Emperor?

"If you agree to this arrangement, I will most definitely convince my older brother. In fact, we just need to create a scenario where he'd have no other choice but to accept this outcome. For example, we can first publicly state that Hadis and I are engaged," Faris said, slowly outstretching her hands. "At the very least, George, who's working with Kratos, will certainly panic. If we use that moment wisely, we might be able to prevent needless bloodshed, and he might capitulate the castle without spilling a drop of blood."

"If so, Hadis might be vilified for being an emperor who sells out their empire to an enemy country," Risteard pointed out.

"We'll be good neighbors, Risteard. We'll just become neighboring countries."

"I'll be frank with you since you seem level-headed," Risteard started. "I'm suspecting that Kratos—your brother—might be involved in this series of events involving my uncle. It's just a guess, though."

Jill internally agreed with this comment, and Faris simply concurred with his apprehensions.

"I believe so as well," she said.

"Then this makes even less sense. Are you planning on going against your brother?" Risteard questioned.

"Phrasing is important. I'm here to stop him. I'm not sure just how involved my brother is in this affair, but if he fanned the flames for George, then he'll certainly stop if I get involved. My brother will never allow me to become engaged to a defeated man. In other words, he'll see to it that Hadis will never lose."

It was a tough pill to swallow, but Jill understood these implications. Before Jill was scheduled to be executed, Gerald always moved with his sister in mind. Not sullying the name of Faris was his utmost priority. Should Hadis and Faris

become engaged, Gerald would make sure that her fiancé wouldn't lose.

"If my brother is supporting George as you suspect, Prince Risteard, he'll immediately cut ties with your uncle," Faris claimed.

"...And what if Prince Gerald and the Kratos Kingdom weren't backing my uncle?" Risteard asked.

"Then my brother will crush George. He'll be doing so for none other than me, his sister."

Risteard seemed perplexed as Faris talked with a smile.

"More importantly, Uncle George won't be able to come on as strong. He'll lose the definitive advantage of numbers," Elentzia pointed out.

"That's...true..." Risteard relented.

"If Hadis is willing to accept Princess Faris's proposal, I'll happily side with him," Elentzia said. "This will allow the least number of sacrifices."

"You don't have to answer right away. I don't have all the time in the world either, but it seems the situation is more impending for you all. But..." said Faris, taking a breath and looking around the room with a commanding aura. "Judging from both of our circumstances, I believe this is the best way to resolve the future. If I, the Goddess's vessel, marry Hadis, the Dragon Emperor, we might be able to settle this amicably. You're aware of that, aren't you, Hadis? The Goddess's true targets are the Dragon Emperors—in this case, it's you, and you alone."

Hadis pursed his lips and looked away without offering a response.

Faris didn't seem to mind as she carried on, "I understand why you can't trust me. Our countries have shed far too much blood by fighting each other. But that's why we must put a stop to this. Or else, this will never end."

"But, er... You're still much too young. Are you fine with this political marriage?" asked a troubled Risteard.

The princess didn't falter. "Love isn't necessary. My happiness doesn't lie there."

No one could believe that these words came from a princess who received

protection from Kratos, the Goddess of love. Perhaps Faris was able to state her intentions so clearly because she was the Goddess of love, after all.

"I guessed as much. This is stupid. I'm leaving," Hadis said.

"Hey, Hadis!" Elentzia said, but she was unable to stop him.

Hadis stood and scooped Jill up in his arms.

Faris quietly posed her question. "Then what will you do now, Hadis?"

The emperor ignored Faris and tried to leave the office. Camila and Zeke glanced towards Jill to await her instructions, but she couldn't process everything either.

Putting aside whether we can trust Princess Faris, this isn't a bad idea.

If the princess was to be devoured when she turned fourteen, there was room for sympathy. This wasn't about the Goddess, but the girl in question. It seemed like Hadis was treating Faris as the Goddess and overreacting, ultimately clouding his judgment.

Or is he scared that something will change if he accepts Princess Faris?

Jill shook her head, chasing away these thoughts that slowly emerged in the back of her mind. She looked back, still being carried in her husband's arms, and saw Elentzia getting up, but was stopped by a quick glance from Faris. The princess who received protection from the Goddess of love was smiling like a blooming flower, as though she was forgiving Hadis for fleeing. This irritated Jill to no end.

"Your Majesty," Jill said, trying to stop Hadis.

In the next moment, the door opened before they could get to it. Camila and Zeke instinctively raised their weapons, and the visitor widened his eyes and put his hands in the air.

"I apologize. I should've knocked. Your time's up, so I'm here to retrieve you, Princess Faris."

"Lawrence..." Jill murmured.

He squinted his eyes and smiled. "Hi. I guess my intuition *was* right, Jill

Cervel."

"Who are you?" Risteard asked, rising from the sofa.

"This is my servant who I mentioned earlier, Prince Risteard," said Faris. "Is it time already, Lawrence?"

Lawrence calmly nodded, but Risteard continued to look stern.

"You're a squire with the Dragon Knights. Why are you a servant to the princess of Kratos?"

"Princess Elentzia was kind enough to allow me to learn about dragons," Lawrence replied nonchalantly as he walked behind Faris's wheelchair.

Risteard glared, knowing that he shouldn't use the word "spy," but he shot Elentzia a look. "I thought you learned your lesson with me, Sister."

"Don't say that. Kratos will naturally try to search for Princess Faris. By allowing him to roam freely around as a squire, he could easily detect any suspicious people," Elentzia replied.

"Are you done talking with the princess?" Lawrence asked.

Elentzia nodded. "I think we're finished here. I apologize for taking your time."

"Then I shall take her back to her room," Lawrence said, then before leaving, he added, "Ah, by the way, we received some messages from the imperial army. They're asking if you're covering for the false emperor. They've even declared plans on the time and location of their next burn target."

Elentzia jumped from her chair and even Risteard blanched.

"Is this true, Lawrence? If Prince George continues to raze villages, he'll surely receive backlash," Faris said grimly.

"Funny thing about these situations is that all the criticism will be directed towards His Majesty the Dragon Emperor for hiding. No one's ever the bad guy in their own story. And the lords who have their lands targeted will start to desperately search for the missing emperor. It's not a bad plan. As time goes on, public opinion will weigh more heavily in their favor," Lawrence said, clearly goading Hadis and the others with the way he worded his response to Faris.

But he's right, Jill thought. We're already on the defense. If we step back any more, the outcome won't be good even if we end up winning this.

So what if her ex-fiancé was taken away from her? It was all in the past. Jill was the only person that could persuade Hadis, who was clearly repulsed and rejecting Faris with his entire body. This role was more than enough for her.

"You sure have a way with words. You think I'll just nod my head—" the emperor started.

"Your Majesty, let's accept Princess Faris's proposal," Jill interjected, cutting Hadis off.

Hadis dropped his gaze to her in astonishment. Jill leaped from his arms and looked at Elentzia.

"You'll mobilize your Dragon Knights then, won't you?" Jill asked her.

"Y-Yeah. Of course," Elentzia stammered.

"Then it's decided," Jill declared. "This is the only plan we've got to keep the bloodshed to a minimum."

Elentzia and Risteard were exchanging glances with the silent Hadis, but Jill turned towards Faris and sounded resolute.

"I leave the rest in your hands, Princess Faris," she said.

"I'd also like to thank you for your wise judgment, Jill. Now, Lawrence, let us make haste and return home to immediately draft up an engagement contract —"

"...Jill?" Hadis's voice sounded kind, but it was filled with such hatred and scorn that even the calm Faris froze. "Are you going to sell me out to this girl? Are you that worried about us being at a disadvantage?"

Jill continued to face forward, feeling a tingling intensity creep down her spine. She couldn't falter. The moment she did, she was certain that Hadis would snap her neck.

"The Dragon Emperor doesn't need a Dragon Consort who sells him out to the Goddess. Don't you agree?" he seethed.

"What are you so angry for?" Jill challenged. "You simply don't have to accept the engagement, Your Majesty."

The terrifying pressure she felt subsided as Hadis fell silent to process her plan.

"Why not let Princess Faris freely try to woo you, Your Majesty?" Jill suggested.

Faris widened her eyes and blinked. For a princess who sat in a plush chair that others provided for her without hesitation, Jill's suggestion made no sense. Only Lawrence seemed to understand Jill's implication, and he smiled faintly.

"Are you planning on ending this by just using Princess Faris's name?" Lawrence asked.

"I'm just saying that we should explain the situation as it is. Princess Faris came to Princess Elentzia to ask for assistance in improving the relations between their countries. And while she was here, the false emperor incident occurred. The two women happened to encounter His Majesty, who was coincidentally hiding in the Neutrahl duchy, and requested his aid for fear of war. It's only natural that rumors of an engagement would spread from this agreement," Jill said with a calculating tone.

Faris calmly assessed Jill. This beautiful eight-year-old girl was like an angel who must be protected and loved. She truly was a descendant of the Goddess.

But Lawrence was Gerald's subordinate, meaning that her actions would be relayed to the crown prince. Not once had Faris said anything to antagonize Gerald. The thought of her brother going against her didn't even seem to cross her mind either.

Jill knew the future. In six years, Jill's execution occurred so quickly because people had been working behind the scenes for a while. It was very likely already planned before Faris turned fourteen.

"If life were like a fairy tale, His Majesty and Princess Faris would be drawn towards each other and become engaged," Jill said with a smile, standing in front of Hadis. She was determined to take fate into her own hands. "But I won't hand His Majesty to you, Princess Faris."

For a split second, the corner of Faris's lips curled up. "I understand. I suppose that's fitting for the Dragon Consort."

Her expression was unfitting for a girl who was called an angel. But her squinty-eyed smile was as refined as ever, and she almost looked gorgeous despite her age.

"You must love Hadis very much, Jill," Faris observed.

"I do," Jill answered at once. "That's why I'll take you head-on and won't back down."

"How wonderful. Now *this* is like a fairy tale." Faris clapped her hands together in acknowledgment. "I was unfortunately dragged into the chaos of Prince George's revolt, and Hadis protected me. Even this fact alone could draw Kratos onto your side. The only issue is whether my brother would get angry since I'm held hostage..."

"Of course, you'll persuade him for us, won't you?" Jill flashed a wicked grin. "That is, if you truly wish for the peace of both countries and are serious about your engagement with His Majesty."

Faris met Jill's grin and pressure with an angelic smile. "Of course. Lawrence, please make the necessary arrangements."

"Certainly," Lawrence replied.

"Then I shall be taking my leave. Jill, please allow Hadis to rest. He's been lying on the floor for a while," Faris noted.

"Huh?! Since when?!" Jill said, turning around.

Hadis was writhing on the ground. Zeke, already used to this, was rubbing the emperor's back. "I thought you were used to this. Breathe. Come on," Zeke said.

"B-But that was a surprise attack... She said she wouldn't hand me over...and that she'd fight head-on... S-So embarrassing in front of so many people!" Hadis gasped.

"Yeah, yeah. Ah, stay where you are, Jill. His Majesty's heart might stop," Camila said.

“Oh right, his usual attacks.”

Jill stood still, leaving the emperor in Camila and Zeke’s capable hands. Faris passed by this scene with Lawrence pushing her wheelchair. Jill and Lawrence’s eyes met for a moment, but neither said a word.

Once the princess and her servant left the room, everyone relaxed. Camila gently clasped Jill’s shoulder.

“Good work, Jill. It was very cool how you handled the situation.”

“You were cool, but it’s not like I’ve accepted any of this!” Hadis whined. He’d recovered and was using the sofa as a wall to hide behind while he stole peeks at Jill. “I don’t want to be engaged to Princess Faris, even if it’s just a rumor.”

“What are you saying, Your Majesty? That’s my line,” said Jill, approaching Hadis. She stood tall and firm. “She matches your conditions, doesn’t she? A girl younger than fourteen who can see Rave.”

Jill’s detection skills were dulled, and she couldn’t be certain, but it wouldn’t be weird if Faris could see Rave. Hadis looked up at her in shock.

“Princess Faris can be my replacement,” Jill provoked.

“No, but she—”

“The same goes for the story of being taken over by the Goddess when a girl turns fourteen. In fact, I’m at a disadvantage. I only have four years left where I know for sure that the Goddess can’t manipulate me.”

Hadis was stunned into silence. He didn’t even think about that possibility. Jill glared at him.

“Don’t get close or talk to Princess Faris without proper reason.”

Hadis maintained his silence.

“If you cheat on me, I’ll wrap you up in a blanket and hang you outside from the bedroom window.”

She cracked her knuckles, and Hadis hastily nodded his head. Jill vented her frustrations on her husband, who was childish, selfish, and didn’t understand the intricacies of a woman’s heart. She huffed and turned around.

"I'm going to do some work for the Dragon Knights. Let's go, Zeke," she called.

"In this situation?" Zeke asked.

"We need to work precisely *because* we're in this situation. I'll continue working while hiding my identity as the Dragon Consort. It's easier for me that way."

"Jill," Hadis called. She glared at him, and he averted his gaze but continued, "I'm planning on being with you even after you turn fourteen."

"So?"

"Huh?! U-Uhhh... I won't cheat on you. Ever."

"And?"

"A-And, um, er... S-See you later. I'll be waiting."

"You're only saying the obvious, Your Majesty."

Hidis bit his lip at Jill's sharp retorts and said, "T-Tonight's dinner is chicken fried with butter and garlic, steamed potatoes and carrots glacé, and baked pudding with whipped cream for dessert!"

"I love you so much, Your Majesty!" Jill exclaimed. "I'll work extra hard today!"

"Is that all it takes...?" Zeke muttered.

"It works for them," Camila replied.

Jill walked out of the room with some pep in her step as she internally stuck her tongue out. *He said he'd be with me even after I turn fourteen!*

This was a huge step forward for Hadis, who despised the Goddess. But Jill chose not to spoil him and hid her slightly flushed cheeks.



AS Hadis's half-brother entered the barracks' kitchen, he said, "I'll stop being opposed to it."

Hidis tilted his head to one side, puzzled by the sudden claim. Ristead looked

at him with a bitter expression but didn't reprimand him. "I'm talking about your marriage with that child, Jill. I don't remember ever accepting such a thing."

"You like to do useless things, don't you? Your acceptance doesn't change anything," Hadis replied honestly.

Risteard pressed a finger to his furrowed brows and remained silent for a while before rephrasing. "I worded that poorly. I'll support you guys."

Hadis stopped what he was doing and looked at his half-brother. He was honestly surprised. "Really? Why?"

"That child takes good care of you. Truth be told, I'm still a little on the fence about it. How could an emperor be taken care of by a mere ten-year-old child?! But thinking back to the ordeal with Kratos's princess, I'm having trouble categorizing things as of late. What defines a child and an adult?"

"Seems like you have it tough," Hadis said indifferently.

"And whose fault do you think *that* is?! In any case, I'll support you two, so be thankful."

"But why?"

"You... Are you really that clueless?! That child is from Kratos and doesn't have anyone backing her," Risteard pointed out. "The imperial family isn't so kind as to accept her with just your favor."

"But Jill will win despite it all. I'm sure of it."

Risteard gritted his teeth without a retort. He held himself back because he knew how tough Jill was. Still, Hadis could understand his half-brother's anxiety.

Hadis didn't know what to do when he was told to become engaged to a girl who was practically the Goddess. If Jill had gotten his hopes up just to toss him away, he would've snapped her slender neck. But his worries were premature—Jill had given a response that far exceeded his expectations.

My wife is amazing! he thought.

"Boy, are you on cloud nine," a rude voice spoke from within him. **"All's well that ends well, but Missy only does things that take years off my life."**

“Do you even have a lifespan? You’re a god,” Hadis muttered.

“Hey, you’re talking with me right now,” Risteard said, lightly jabbing Hadis’s head and snapping him back to reality. The prince furrowed his brows. “I don’t care whether you can actually talk to the Dragon God Rave or not, but—”

“I also don’t care what you think,” Hadis interjected.

“Let me finish. I’m just saying that you shouldn’t do that when you’re talking with others. It’s rude.”

Hadis stood wide-eyed, never considering that before.

Risteard folded his arms and scolded his half-brother. “If you must add him to the conversation, you should translate what he says for us.”

“...Yeah, right. I see,” Hadis replied.

Rave was in silent agreement and even seemed a bit happy about it. Risteard, not having the faintest clue, gazed at Hadis sternly.

“It’d be great if you could act a bit more like an emperor. Even just changing your appearance would be fine,” Risteard nagged.

“Isn’t it best if people don’t know who I am right now?”

“Even so, what emperor is the head chef of the Dragon Knights?! And the Dragon Consort is still hard at work as a lowly squire... Ugh, how far has our empire fallen!?”

Hadis stared blankly at the lamenting Risteard.

Even if it was just for show, Hadis had received his siblings’ support, but it’d take some time before they could mobilize an army. Elentzia had told George that she was confirming the specifics and was buying them time while strongly criticizing her uncle for burning down innocent villages. She then contacted the lords who were scheduled to have their territory razed and gathered materials and soldiers under the guise of giving them a “warning.”

The situation would deteriorate if Hadis was discovered in Neutrahl while this was going on, but Risteard strongly opposed returning him to that hidden cabin in the mountains. Hadis still needed to be out of sight, so there was a compromise.

The emperor would live in the barracks of the Dragon Knights and would hide his identity while working there. Luckily, the Dragon Knights had just welcomed new recruits, and since the city had accepted the villagers whose homes were destroyed, food needed to be supplied. Risteard strongly opposed this idea as well, but Jill gave an odd reason.

"His Majesty might be able to change the public's opinion with his fantastic cooking skills!" she'd said.

In the blink of an eye, Hadis became known as a chef with skills as good as his face. He started by helping to distribute food, and the head chef, who'd worked for the Dragon Knights for many years, said, "I'll retire and leave the rest to you." Hadis had swiftly climbed his way up to become the head chef in charge of the Dragon Knights.

Risteard grimaced every time he visited the kitchens, and Hadis handed him a small plate to taste test while stirring a pot of daily soup.

"I think it tastes good," Hadis insisted.

"I know! That has been proven time and time again! Everyone in the cafeteria is waiting with wicked eagerness for today's lunch! Good for you!" Risteard snipped.

"Then what are you dissatisfied about?"

"...Nothing much. I just didn't know that you liked cooking so much."

"That's not the full truth. Well, I *do* like cooking, though." Hadis noticed Risteard staring at him, waiting for him to continue. The emperor tasted the soup and put a lid over the pot. "If I laze around all day, Jill might grow suspicious," he supplied.

"Huh? Of what?"

"Of me cheating." Hadis stared straight at Risteard. "I'm working hard here. If Jill knows that I'm always around others, she won't suspect me of doing anything nefarious. It's not like the frail princess of Kratos would deign to visit this place."

"That's...true."

"I don't want to make Jill anxious. The other day, she was clearly j-j-j-jealous."

"Here, water."

As Hadis's heartbeat grew irregular, Risteard handed him a cup, his eyes half-closed. After the emperor took a sip and a deep breath, Risteard gave an exaggerated shrug of his shoulders.

"I get it. Or I should say, I'm starting to get it. I'm going back to work," he said.

Risteard ordered his Dragon Knights to come to Neutrah, using joint training as an excuse. He was overseeing the knights and things were getting busy.

Should an actual war break out, Risteard would stand as the vanguard and command the Dragon Knights. Realizing this fact, Hadis was motionless for a moment before he rustled through a lower cabinet.

"Here," he said.

In his hand were cookies he intended to give Jill. From chocolate chip to nuts to jam-filled, a variety of cookies filled the container. Risteard froze before accepting the treat.

"I'll take it," he said gruffly. "If my younger sister were here, she'd be ecstatic."

"I-I see. She likes sweets, then. But..." Hadis fell silent, remembering her fear-ridden eyes. Risteard opened the bag of cookies and took a bite of one.

"Frida's a timid girl," he said.

Frida was Risteard's younger sister from the same set of parents in the imperial capital. She was around seven years old.

"It's not just you. She's afraid of anyone she's not familiar with and usually hides," Risteard explained.

"I-I see..."

"Plus, her first time meeting you was in the audience chamber with our father. It'd be tough for any younger sibling, including Frida, to not feel intimidated."

The image of his father falling from the throne and begging for his life flashed

through Hadis's mind. He didn't remember how he answered and only knew that he kept a frigid smile on his face.

"You're their older brother. It can't be helped, so let it go," Risteard advised.

For his entire life, Hadis used the words "It can't be helped" to cope. But Risteard's words seemed to carry a different meaning.

Ah, it's not because I'm a monster, but it's because I'm their older brother. That's why it can't be helped. The words clicked in place, and Hadis voiced his thoughts.

"I get it now. In that case, I guess it can't be helped," he said.

"There you guys are. Hadis, Risteard! I've got some good news!" called Elentzia, popping into the kitchen.

Risteard sighed. "The Rave imperial family is meeting in the Knights' kitchen? Just what kind of pathetic situation is this?"

"Hey, were those made by Hadis? Sure look tasty. Gimme some," demanded Elentzia.

"Sister, you've already taken some before you've asked," Risteard groaned.

"Sharing is caring. Here, have one, Hadis."

Hadis looked puzzled as he received a cookie that he'd made. He was a part of the sibling banter for once.

"And what's the good news?" Risteard asked.

"I got in contact with Vissel." Hadis looked up when he heard his oldest brother's name, and Elentzia gave a firm nod. "He's worried about you. He's hoping to persuade our uncle. If that's not possible, he'll at least try to leak us some information. Risteard, Frida's safe."

Risteard's eyes bulged. He must've been worried sick about his sister, for his stern demeanor softened. "I see. I hope she's not too scared... How are our other siblings, my mother, and the other consorts?" he asked.

"The imperial family is safe. They're restricted from having any contact with the outside world, but our uncle has put Vissel in charge. We might be able to

reach them, but we shouldn't push our luck."

"If Uncle George finds out that we were in contact with them, we won't be able to save them should anything happen," Hadis said.

Elentzia nodded. "Exactly. We need to secretly finish our preparations and then decide this battle in one blow. Vissel's on board with this idea, and I hope you both are too."

Before Hadis could nod, Risteard sternly said, "I'm against relying on Vissel." He was munching away on the cookies with irritation. "He's engaged to our uncle's daughter and is related to Duke Verrat, who supports Uncle George."

"That's because Vissel needed backing as a crown prince. Even you can understand that, can't you?" Elentzia reasoned.

"Hmph, who knows. I don't like him just as much as— No, I dislike Vissel more than Hadis."

"Are you planning on claiming that you should be the crown prince right now?" Elentzia accused.

"Based on the circumstances, it's the most appropriate option! Besides..." Risteard glanced at Hadis before turning away. "Never mind. Well, this is an emergency. We better use what we can."

"Just be honest and say you'll cooperate. Hope that's okay with you, Hadis?"

The emperor nodded, and Elentzia smiled and slapped his back.

"Good," she said.

The slap hurt a little, but it wasn't unpleasant at all. In fact, he felt something warm and fuzzy inside. *I wish we could stay like this*, Hadis thought.

"Yeah," Rave replied with a nod.

Hadis knew deep down that it wouldn't be easy due to his ties with the cackling Goddess, but he didn't want to deny himself the possibility.



"HEY, you're doing laundry instead of training?"

Jill took the hot water she'd just received and poured it into the metallic

washbowl. She glanced at the owner of the voice, who entered the laundry area, before returning her gaze to her work.

"Weren't you at the training area too, Lawrence? Didn't you see what happened?" Jill asked.

"You caught me. Is Zeke not coming? He's your subordinate, is he not?"

I never explicitly said so, but he's sharp, Jill thought as she shrugged her shoulders.

"Zeke's training. Isn't that obvious? He's a Dragon Knights' squire," she replied.

"So are you. Forcing women to do the laundry is a common bullying tactic. I can't believe they're doing this to a little girl, though."

"I'm sure I'd get harassed even if I was a boy." She suppressed the rest of her sentence as she thought back to the time when both she and Lawrence were bullied at the military academy.

Lawrence approached the laundry in the shade and gave Jill a bar of brand-new soap. "Use it. The people who forced laundry duty on you tried to hide it," he said.

"Ah, so that's why I couldn't find the soap. Thank you. You're a big help."

"You sound unconcerned. Don't you think they're horrible?" Lawrence asked.

"I think it sucks that I can't train because my body will get out of shape. But laundry is also very important."

"But you're the Dragon Consort."

"I'm just the wife of the Dragon Emperor."

Lawrence gazed at the girl in wonder before forcing a smile. He took out a small knife from his pocket and shaved off a few slices of the soap into the washbowl. "If you do this, you could save yourself some trouble. Does that basket have all the laundry?" he asked.

"Are you going to help me? What about your training?"

"I'm aiming for logistics support, so this is also part of my training."

Jill, having had enough of Lawrence's quibbles, stirred the bowl with her fingers. The weather was warm, and because of that, the water was still hot to the touch. If she were to do laundry with it, she'd damage the clothing. She did some stretching exercises while waiting for the water to cool. Lawrence leaned on the trunk of a large tree that had its branches stretching over the laundry area.

"My older sister is in His Majesty's—the King of South Kratos's—southern residence," he confided.

Jill had heard about his sister when they'd attended the academy. The current king of Kratos had left the majority of his duties to Crown Prince Gerald and spent most of the year in the southern region. Many citizens had taunted the king, calling him the "King of South Kratos" instead of "His Majesty," and even Gerald was struggling to keep his father's insolent attitude in check. An unofficial residence of the king was created by His Majesty himself in this southern region, composed of money and lust. Lawrence's beautiful sister, who had raised him like a mother, was sold off to this residence by her family.

Rumors circulated that once a person set foot inside, they could never leave. Lawrence became Gerald's subordinate to save his older sister. Gerald wanted to fix the current king's rotten misrule, rebuild the royal castle, and drag his father off the throne as quickly as possible.

But why did he tell me this story now? Is it because he knows I'm from Kratos?

Jill furrowed her brows in suspicion, and Lawrence smiled. "You know something, don't you?" he asked.

"Huh?"

"When I tell people this story, they usually have one of two reactions: look impressed without understanding what's going on, or sympathy. You did neither. You were waiting for my reaction, wondering what I was trying to find out by telling you." He tilted his head, probing for more information. "You know me, don't you?"

"I-I don't... O-Oh! Maybe from Prince Gerald's birthday party..."

"I didn't attend that party. Prince Gerald isn't foolish and incompetent

enough to reveal his hand to you. In other words, there's almost no chance you knew of me in Kratos."

Cold sweat ran down Jill's back as he pressed for an answer.

He said "almost," didn't he? Does that mean there's a chance I could've... No, I shouldn't say anything unnecessary. Yeah. She'd be forced to commit to her statement, and future Lawrence had taught her not to go against an opponent she couldn't win against.

"So, how did you know that I was Prince Gerald's subordinate, not Princess Faris's?" he asked.

Jill looked up and realized by Lawrence's gaze that she had been tricked.

"Dear me. Please, don't look at me like that," he said.

"Your rotten personality never changes!" Jill retorted.

"Oh? 'Never changes,' you say? What does that mean?"

"Argh! If you've got something to say, give it to me straight!"

"I'm interested in you. You rejected Prince Gerald's proposal and grabbed the heart of Rave's emperor."

Jill's doubtful face finally crumbled at his straightforward response. "...Are you also into little girls?" she asked, repulsed.

"That's quite rude of you. I'm not like Prince Gerald or the Dragon Emperor." After insulting the two in a roundabout manner, Lawrence continued, "How can I explain this? Right, we were able to get in contact with the other lords as well as Crown Prince Vissel. Once we get enough soldiers, we'll reveal the locations of the emperor and Princess Faris, and our plan is to force George to surrender. What do you think?"



“...Everything will be ruined if Crown Prince Vissel betrays us,” Jill stated.

“Are you doubting your brother-in-law? I’ve heard that the emperor is on good terms with his brother from the same mother.”

“I haven’t met Crown Prince Vissel, and first and foremost, I’m on the emperor’s side.”

Jill prayed for Vissel to be an ally, but she knew that not everything would go so smoothly.

“Because you’re the emperor’s ally, you’re doubting Crown Prince Vissel. No, you doubt Princess Elentzia and Prince Risteard as well. Is the possibility of betrayal always on your mind?” asked Lawrence.

“I’m not doubting everything. I’m just by His Majesty’s side so that betrayal won’t happen.”

“Exactly. It looks to me like you *know* it’s going to happen. And that’s what I’m interested in.”

Jill jolted and Lawrence gave a smile. No longer wanting to be on the defense, Jill grinned back. “I can tell you if you become my subordinate,” she said.

Lawrence balked. Then he rubbed his chin. “I wasn’t expecting that response.”

“You can’t, can you?” Jill said. “Then we shouldn’t pry into each other’s affairs any further. You must return to Kratos for your sister. So, let’s leave it at that.”

He stared in wonder before he moved his hand near his lips. “Are you perhaps letting me go? I didn’t mean for this to happen, but this feels a bit embarrassing. I didn’t think a child like you would be so concerned for me.”

“But if you lay a hand on His Majesty, I won’t show mercy.”

After Jill gave Lawrence a warning, he narrowed his restless eyes.

“If you accept Prince Gerald’s proposal, I can become your subordinate,” he said.

“I decline!” Jill turned down the offer with a snarl.

He gave a puzzled laugh. “I didn’t think you hated him so much. What a huge

mistake on the prince's part. But if you return to Kratos, I suppose there's still a chance... Hm, how'd you like to be my lover?"

"Huh? I want to make you *my* subordinate. I'll never view you as my lover, even as a joke."

"I *did* mean it as a joke, but it still hurts when you decline me so firmly. What about that emperor do you fancy?"

"His delicious cooking!"

Lawrence's face twitched as Jill replied with gusto. "...Huh? That's it?" he asked.

"Isn't that more than enough? All right, talk's over. I'll start doing the laundry, so could you please bring me the basket? There isn't much, so we'll finish in a flash."

Jill dipped her fingers in the water, and it was comfortably warm to the touch. She took off her shoes and waited for the clothes as Lawrence went over to grab the basket, looking unsatisfied. His expression suddenly soured.

"...These are undergarments. Men's," he noted.

"Yeah. So?" Jill replied.

He looked more serious than ever and asked a question he already knew the answer to. "And they're telling you to wash these?"

"Yeah."

"You know what this means, right? They're—"

"Perverts exist everywhere you go. Come on, hurry and dump them in. I don't have time to make a fuss about this."

"No, we definitely should! Come on, now! This isn't just bullying!"

For the first time since their reunion, Lawrence shouted while looking flustered. Shock colored his features as he stared at his hands, deep in thought.

"Who would do such a thing to a little girl?!"

"Do you want to find out? Seems like there's a few people involved, looking at how many undies there are," Jill said drolly.

“Not really...” groaned Lawrence with a scowl.

Jill grabbed the basket of clothes and dumped them into the washbowl.

“Don’t worry, I’ll put all my strength into it, so they’ll fall apart on them later,” she said wickedly.

“Before that, you should absolutely say something about this to the emperor. If that makes you uncomfortable, tell Princess Elentzia... I’m even willing to lay the groundwork for you.”

“Don’t be silly. If His Majesty finds out, it’ll be a huge mess.”

“Sure, these men will be fired if they anger the emperor. But that’s how it should be. You probably don’t want to make him worry, right? I still think you shouldn’t hide stuff like this. Don’t keep secrets.”

“You’re wrong, okay?” Jill said, facing Lawrence with her chest puffed out. “If His Majesty finds out that I’m getting harassed, he might become devastated and start crying! He might start a reign of terror or run the empire in a completely different direction. Either way, it’s a huge pain to calm him down!”

“...Seriously, what’s so great about that good-for-nothing?”

“His delicious cooking!”

Lawrence gazed up towards the sky after Jill’s second declaration. “Am I being played for a fool? Fine. Then I’ll do the laundry.”

“Huh?”

“If I’m going to invite you back to Kratos, I should at least earn some points with you.”

Jill wasn’t sure if he was joking or being serious, but Lawrence crouched down, rolled up his sleeves, grabbed a washing board, and started scrubbing. In the end, Jill was only allowed to change the water, and she couldn’t lay a finger on the clothes.

Right, he was always gentlemanly about stuff like this... she thought.

Afterwards, Lawrence even called for Zeke, identified the owners of each article of clothing, secretly lured them out, and took care of them. What Zeke

did in the shadows is anyone's guess.

In any case, Jill was relieved. She was planning on kicking their butts if they tried anything, but she disliked cleaning up after such incidents. She thought the worst-case scenario would occur if the emperor found out.



THAT night, Jill left her hideout and secretly visited Hadis's room to report about her day and say her greetings. His room was in the barracks for senior officers, where Elentzia and Risteard were staying. She found her husband seated in the corner of his room, hugging his knees.

"What's wrong with His Majesty?" Jill asked.

Camila shrugged next to him. "Boy, am I glad to see you, Jill. Come on, Your Majesty. Jill's here. I told you that you'd be fine. It's just a rumor."

"A rumor?" Jill tilted her head to one side.

Hadis skillfully maneuvered himself as he turned to face his wife while still sitting and hugging his knees. His gaze was filled with doubt.

"I heard that you were dating a boy, a Dragon Knight squire," he pouted.

"Huh?!" Jill choked.

"I-I heard about it in the cafeteria," Hadis stammered meekly. "People were threatened by him and were told not to lay a finger on his lover... A-And I asked Zeke, and he confirmed that's what the boy did...!"

"Wh-What's going on?!" Jill asked, at a complete loss.

"Yep," Zeke replied casually. "I was told that this was the fastest way to keep those harassers in check, Captain. And I was like, well, he has a point..."

"Wait, by lover, do you mean Lawrence?!" Jill asked.

"Yeah, yeah, I think that was his name," Zeke confirmed. "I couldn't act as your lover, but he's fifteen, so I thought he could pass as one."

"No way he could! I'm still ten! Besides, why did it even come to this?! Is this that idiot's way of harassing me?!" Jill cried.

"So, you know him..." Hadis said slowly in a low voice.

Jill stiffened. Camila sighed and Zeke innocently whistled.

"I-I didn't want to make you anxious, so I b-became a head chef, but you're horrible. Y-You're ch-ch-cheating on me!" Hadis accused.

"You've got it all wrong, Your Majesty! Please calm down!" Jill shouted.

"You're fine with any man if he's good at cooking, aren't you?! That's what I heard!"

"From who?!"

"Well, that's kind of who you are, though, Jill," Camila quipped.

"Lawrence claimed he was pretty good at cooking, too," Zeke added.

The moment Jill tried to scold her subordinates for being a hindrance and making light of this situation, tears welled up in Hadis's eyes.

"Y-You ate another man's cooking?!" her husband cried.

"Well, of course I have... I mean, no, Your Majesty, I love your cooking the most!" Jill declared.

"So, you only want me for my cooking!"

"My god, you are a pain!"

"A pain?! Did you just call me a pain?!"

"Sorry, I couldn't help myself there. I'll explain everything to you properly, okay?"

"No! I don't want to hear your excuses!"

As his tears glittered and flowed behind him, Hadis fled to his bedroom. Jill, stunned by his devastated maiden-like exit, came back to her senses a moment too late. She pounded on the bedroom door.

"Your Majesty! Why are you holing yourself up?! This won't solve anything!" she shouted.

"Goodness, the drama," Camila noted.

"Yeah, between a ten-year-old and a nineteen-year-old. Crazy stuff," Zeke said.

"Stop spectating and help me convince the emperor— Wait, the door's unlocked..." Jill fell silent, realizing that Hadis was playing around.

Camila twirled her hair. "You can't be half-baked towards someone who's putting their heart into the game."

"Once the situation becomes more complicated, you'll suffer the most, Captain. Besides, it's your fault for not coming to us for help," Zeke chided.

Her subordinates hadn't explained the full story to Hadis and were messing with them as a form of retaliation for Jill's lack of communication. One should never keep secrets.

Jill regretted her actions, and slowly opened the bedroom door. Hadis had his head under the sheets and was curled into a ball on top of the bed. Only the bedside lamp illuminated the room.

"Your Majesty." The round ball under the sheets reacted to her voice. "I really don't have anything going on with Lawrence. This all started because I was being harassed for stupid reasons," Jill started.

"Harassed?" Hadis popped his face out from under the sheets and looked at her with worry.

Jill finally became aware of the problem. If the roles were reversed and Hadis had been harassed, no matter how silly the method, and he went to a different woman to think of a solution, how would she feel? She would be grateful to this woman for helping Hadis, but that wasn't all. Jill wanted to be the one to help him. She wanted to be relied on first, and she knew that these selfish feelings would bubble up within her. She would feel even worse if, to stop that harassment, a rumor went around that Hadis was dating this woman.

"...Your Majesty, you can tie me up and hang me from the window," Jill said.

"Wait, what?!" Hadis yelped. "Why?!"

"Because I'd hang you if I was in your position! I'd swing you around!"

"Th-That sounds kinda fun... I mean, what about the harassment?!"

"R-Right. About that. I thought about if you were in the same position as I am..."

If Hadis was forced to wash women's undergarments...

"I think the only solution is to kill them, right?" Jill asked herself.

"Wait, Jill, your face is scary! It's even more terrifying since I'm totally lost here! I-I understand that you're regretting your actions. I'm also sorry for acting immature and making a fuss."

Jill, surprised by Hadis suddenly sitting upright, shook her head. "You're not at fault, Your Majesty! I failed to report to you!"

"No, I was being a bit mean here. I can deal with another man however I wish."

What does he mean by that? Jill was lost in her thoughts when Hadis scooped her up.

"I always act spoiled around you. That's not good at all," he said.

Jill was sitting on Hadis's lap in a dimly lit room, and his gold eyes looked down at her as he smiled. He could captivate anyone who laid their eyes on him. His eyes were beautiful, and it was easy to be ensnared by his gaze.

"I'm sorry. Please tell me everything, I'll listen," he said in a kind and mature tone, unexpected from his usual self.

Jill's self-regret and her anger towards an imaginary foe went elsewhere, and she was left with an awkward sense of embarrassment. She could only press her face against Hadis's shoulder to hide her expression.

"I-It's really nothing, okay?" she said.

"That's not true at all. You were rumored to be with another boy."

"That's...true. I'm sorry about that. Why don't we do this over? Let's start from the part where you were crying in anger when you suspected me of cheating on you."

"Why? I'm currently being well-mannered to not trouble you."

The man with an innocent smile knew that Jill was agitated, and he feigned ignorance. Jill gritted her teeth and tried to get back at him in her own way.

"Um, if you do so in moderation, you can act spoiled towards me any time."

“I thought that you didn’t want to spoil me,” Hadis replied.

“I-It’s a change of plans.”

“Your flexibility is a sign of your excellence. But Jill, your opponent won’t always go along with that. The reasoning for your change is that you think you’ll lose at this rate, after all.”

Bullseye. She couldn’t rebuke his claims.

“So, I want to listen to what you have to say,” he said.

“Ugh... I-If I’m honest with you, will you continue to be a well-mannered emperor?”

“Of course. What happened?”

Tormented by the polite foe who wouldn’t agree to her change of plans, Jill told her story. This wasn’t an interrogation, but it felt like torture. The only saving grace was that Hadis came to the same conclusion as Jill.

“I think the only solution is to kill them, right?” he concluded.

It was wonderful to see that the couple had a similar train of thought.

Risteard, who took away Hadis’s kitchen knife, scolded Jill for keeping quiet about her situation, and Elentzia apologetically requested for the dreaded written report to be turned in.

“Rules are rules...” Elentzia had said.

Jill had faced a series of unreasonable events.

It wasn’t long after this incident that Crown Prince Vissel notified them of the time and location of his secretly dispatched reinforcements.

Chapter 4: The Network of Betrayal

VISSEL designated the forest northwest of Neutrahl as the exchange point for his troops. The exact location would be above a river, near a dragon's nest. He dispatched these troops under the guise of searching for Hadis, but he was unable to provide dragons or Dragon Knights, for their numbers were strictly controlled. Jill and her entourage could blend in with the troops on their back to Neutrahl. Thus, Vissel had requested they refrain from using dragons as a means of transportation.

Their biggest weakness in this scenario was their lack of mobility.

Should George catch wind of this exchange, he could use a dragon to send a message to his armies, wiping out everyone present. This was the pressing fear that everyone had.

"Then I should go too," Hadis said at once.

The first person who voiced his objection was, to no one's surprise, Risteard. "I've told you many times to be aware that you're the emperor! You can barely even use magic," he scolded.

"But even in this state, I can hold the dragons at bay," Hadis countered. "I think I'm most suited for this mission."

"Then I'll go. I'm a member of the Rave imperial family as well! I may not be as good as you, but I can control dragons to a degree. That's that." Risteard haughtily made his decision, but Hadis shook his head.

"No, you can't be trusted—"

"Did I mishear that? Yep, I must've," Risteard said, cutting him off.

"Your Majesty, Prince Risteard is worried about you," Jill said, tugging on Hadis's sleeve as she sat next to him in the meeting room.

Hadis stammered in surprise, "I-I see. Then how about you become my

adviser? Would that satisfy you?"

"Don't ask me!" Risteard shouted. "Give me an order or a plea!"

"We're in the middle of a meeting," Elentzia drawled. "Let's give our sibling squabbles a rest. I can't leave—even more so if Uncle George has warned Vissel about his suspicions of me. However, Risteard is here because of 'joint training.' Even if he's caught with his subordinates, he has a good excuse. His name carries more weight than Hadis's when it counts too. It's a good idea for Risteard to tag along," she suggested with a forced smile, getting in between Hadis and the angered Risteard.

Everyone had gotten used to the bickering, and the meeting continued despite it. They finally managed to form a small squadron to head to Vissel's designated location. They would go by horse, and the squad contained less than ten people.

"It'll take around two days by horse to get there. Don't get hasty and become reckless. Each one of you should carry the bare minimum amount of food and money. Understand, Hadis, Risteard?" Elentzia said.

"I get why you need to point this out to Hadis, but why must you call me out too, Sister?" Risteard asked.

"Because you both lack common sense. Hadis, don't make Risteard angry, you hear?" Elentzia stroked Hadis's frowning cheek before gently tapping Risteard's head. "And you. Don't bully Hadis, all right?"

"Since when have I ever bullied him? How rude," Risteard replied.

"If you're his older brother by two months as you claim, I'm telling you to act like one. Listen up, both of you! Be nice to each other no matter what, got it? And come home safe."

Elentzia stretched her slender arms as wide as she could and hugged Hadis and Risteard. As the mature older sister, she was sending off her two younger brothers. The brothers silently accepted the hug. Jill couldn't suppress a smile at this sight.

"I suppose even you can't go against your older sister, Your Majesty," she said.

"That's not true," Hadis said, acting like a petulant child.

"Jill," Elentzia said, finally facing her after giving Hadis a hard slap on the back. "I know I shouldn't be saying this to a child, but I leave my two brothers in your care."

"Leave them to me," Jill responded.

They exchanged handshakes, and the covert squad slipped out of Neutrahl before dawn broke. The trip wasn't luxurious or easy, but it was going smoothly, barring one little problem.

"Heya, Lawrence, are we going right or left here?" Camila asked.

"Left," Lawrence replied curtly while staring at the map. He was tasked with providing directions. "This route might take some time, but there's an old road ahead. If we're trying to be as discreet and safe as possible, this is the best route. Just in case, I had Zeke scout it out and..."

"Oi, there wasn't anyone on that route."

"Why did you come from the right, Zeke? I believe I requested for you to scout the left route."

"Oh, my bad. Guess I got confused or something," came Zeke's unconcerned reply.

Lawrence fell silent with a deadly smile. He needed time to process that his words fell on deaf ears when it came to Zeke.

Camila gave a troubled sigh. "I'm sorry, Lawrence. He's an idiot who can't follow basic scouting orders."

"Shut up. The left route's packed with people. Quite the rare sight over there. We should head right. We can probably get to our destination if we go in vaguely the correct direction," Zeke said.

"That's such a careless mindset... We've got our lodgings to worry about, too," Lawrence replied.

"Don't you think we can blend in with the crowd? Why not head to the left? I'm curious about this rare sight you mentioned," Camila said.

Lawrence laughed dryly. “Haha, it’s good that you are having fun, but we won’t decide on a route with such a flimsy reason.”

“Will those three in the front be okay? I’m especially worried about Princess Faris’s servant,” Ristead said, sounding exasperated.

Jill looked over her shoulder while riding on the same horse as Hadis. “It’ll be fine. I think they’re being rather friendly with each other despite how it looks.”

This was a nostalgic sight for Jill: Lawrence was charting the course, Zeke didn’t really care about it, and Camila was stirring the pot.

“Routing’s important, but where are we staying tonight?” Zeke asked.

“I already told you about our lodging many times, haven’t I?” Lawrence replied.

“Yeah? But you’re just using the map, right? That can’t be reliable.”

“Hm, so why don’t you go ahead and do some scouting, Zeke?” Camila chimed in.

“Huh? You go.”

“Hold on, if we have Zeke run ahead again, we’ll be stuck in the same situation as before. We should—”

“Well, I’m not going either,” Camila snipped, cutting Lawrence off.

“Ugh, damn it. You’re useless. All right, let’s go.”

“Huh? Wait, are you dragging me with you? Hey!”

Zeke slapped the butt of Lawrence’s horse, and it ran ahead. Zeke followed behind.

“You’ve got a good physique. You’re also pretty skilled, aren’t you? Don’t try to cut corners, you sly raccoon,” he said.

Lawrence laughed. “A raccoon... I see, a raccoon...”

“Goodbye, Raccoon Boy and Bear Man,” Camila said with a wave, sending the two off.

Jill tightly squeezed her horse’s reins; she was only holding onto them for

show.

Raccoon... This feels so weird. It's like we're back to the old times... No, I mean we're back to our future selves.

"Those three became friends in no time," Hadis said. Jill came back to her senses and looked up at him as he flashed her a brilliant smile. "They look like a fun bunch. You don't have to hold back, Jill. Just say the word if you prefer them over me."

"Y-Your Majesty, are you still bothered about Lawrence?"

"Bothered? Not at all. Not even one iota. Why would I be bothered by the fact that you specifically requested him to be our guide? I'm not the slightest bothered by it. I don't even care how he brazenly greeted me with a 'Forgive me for my insolence, Your Majesty.' Why would I be bothered?" His smile never faltered, but his unfocused eyes told a different story. Jill felt overwhelming pressure emanating behind her back.

This was the biggest problem for this trip. Jill, Zeke, and Camila were obviously going to tag along with Hadis to receive the soldiers, but Jill had also requested Lawrence to be added to their ranks. Even if she was feigning ignorance, she couldn't let Lawrence, Gerald's spy, roam free. Princess Faris had already decided to stay in Neutrahl, and she wanted to separate them when she could.

I don't know how Princess Faris will fare on her own, so it might be useless to split her from Lawrence, but it's worth a shot...

But Hadis was still bothered by Lawrence spreading the rumor about him being Jill's lover.

"I've told you many times, Your Majesty. That rumor was a lie to keep the others in check," Jill explained.

"Yeah, I know. Lawrence told me the same thing with a suggestive smile. 'There's no way the Dragon Emperor is bothered by a kid like me, right?' he'd said. He's very brave, isn't he?"

Lawrence was clearly provoking Hadis. Jill bit her tongue, wishing she could throttle the boy.

"I'm not doubting you, Jill," Hadis said. "You chose him with some kind of purpose in mind, didn't you?"

"Th-Then you don't have to get so mad."

"I'm not. I'm just not very pleased," Hadis said in a low voice as he let off a terrifying aura.

Jill gave a small shriek and held her back uncomfortably straight. Risteard stopped his horse beside them and lightly slapped Hadis's head.

"Stop that. You're being immature. Hold your head up high and be more confident, like an emperor should be," he chided.

"If you're saying that I should act like an emperor, you're not very convincing. I'm currently just a chef!"

"Aren't we already done with that ruse? Whatever. In any case, you'll probably just look the part when the time calls for it."

Hidis blinked at his half-brother's nonchalant assessment. Jill was impressed.

Prince Risteard's getting better at handling His Majesty. Until recently, only Rave or I could treat him that way... Huh?

Jill felt a sharp pain in her chest, and she craned her neck to look at Hadis. The emperor, whose gaze had been reserved for her, was in the middle of arguing his point but was expertly silenced by his half-brother.

This was good. It was a prime example of what brothers should be. So why was she feeling so uneasy?

"There aren't many, but some of my subordinates are watching. Don't look so pitiful," Risteard said, slapping Hadis's head one last time before moving ahead. He asked Camila to switch places.

"He doesn't have to hit me that many times, does he?" groaned Hadis before he keenly realized Jill's change in demeanor. "Jill?"

"I'm glad you're getting along with His Highness."

"Huh? Yeah. Wait, what? When did you get angry?"

Jill knew that it wasn't good to keep secrets. She puffed up her cheeks and

leaned onto Hadis's chest.

"I'm sorry for phrasing it like that. I never expected I would be the jealous type, Your Majesty," she admitted.

Hadis remained silent, then it was as if his heart exploded. Camila swiftly caught the emperor, who'd staggered off his horse.

"I thought it was about time," muttered Camila.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Jill.

"About time that you screwed up, Jill. Stay with us, Your Majesty. You have Jill to think about."

"C-Camila! My wife's so cute! What should I do?!"

"We'll figure it out after we get to our lodging. Leave stuff like that to me."

"Hold on, Camila. You're planning on teaching something awful to His Majesty, aren't you?" Jill accused.

"But it's your fault, you know?" Camila thrust her finger toward Jill's nose, making her flinch. "Just who is that Raccoon Boy? Do you know him from Kratos?"

"N-Not necessarily..."

"That kid's always sneaking glances at you whenever he gets the chance. He's totally interested in you." Camila sat up straight in her saddle after helping Hadis and rode alongside his horse. "It's clear that he split from the princess for you, Jill. You knew that, and yet you specifically requested him. What kind of relationship do you have? How could you keep secrets during a time like this? It's only natural that His Majesty's angry."

Jill glanced up at Hadis, who looked visibly happy that Camila was taking his side. Seeing his delighted smile made Jill a little vexed.

"Ah, so you were just suspicious of Lawrence. You weren't jealous or anything," muttered Jill.

"Ugh... Th-That phrasing is a bit unfair!" Hadis replied.

"Come on, Jill. Don't corner His Majesty like that. I won't be fooled. Zeke may

be willing to go along with whatever his captain says, but I'm different. And I'm sure His Highness is in the same boat as me." Camila pointed towards Risteard in the lead. "It seems like he's letting this play out since the boy's a source of information on Kratos, but what are your thoughts, Jill? This exchange of soldiers might be a trap, but you're allowing a suspicious individual to tag along. Are you unable to tell us because you can't trust us?"

Secrets won't do anyone any good. Perhaps Lawrence had warned her about that because he foresaw this situation. *It's a possibility. He's needlessly quick-witted about stuff like this.*

In other words, he didn't mind if the truth came to light.

"...If my memory serves me right, he isn't Princess Faris's subordinate, but Prince Gerald's," Jill said, hoping they would assume that she happened to see Lawrence somewhere in Kratos.

Camila looked up at the sky, signaling that she was prepared to give the scolding of her life. "Jill, why did you keep quiet about something so important —"

"But I don't want you to do anything about it," Jill said, cutting Camila off. "He has an older sister. She was taken to southern Kratos to live in the king's residence."

"You mean the King of South Kratos?"

"So, that moniker is famous here, too," Jill said wryly. "That's right. The king is relatively harmless if we leave him be, but we don't know what he'll do if we agitate him. Lawrence became Prince Gerald's subordinate to rise in the ranks and save his sister."

"I sympathize, but we have our own circumstances to consider," Camila said. "Princess Faris snuck out to make peace with us, right? Whether that's true or not, we're still just dancing in the palms of Prince Gerald. What's worse, that prince might be supporting the enemy."

"But that's all the more reason why he'll try to survive and make it back home," Jill pointed out.

Camila's stern expression melted away.

"Lawrence is a competent man who knows what Prince Gerald might be thinking. Cling onto him and drag him into whatever you can. I guarantee that Lawrence will do anything to survive."

"Goodness... So that's how we should use that boy, then?"

"And then we should return him to Kratos."

"That's your true intention, isn't it?"

Jill couldn't respond to Camila's question, for she knew that in the future, Lawrence would ultimately be unable to make it in time for his sister.

But that's not a good reason to stop him when he's desperately trying anything he can.

He still had a few years left. Since Jill was here right now, Lawrence would never become her vice commander, and they wouldn't walk the same path as before. This meant that there was a chance that the outcome might change. Jill pursed her lips when Camila's index finger suddenly poked her cheek.

"I get what you're trying to do. But Jill," Camila said, twisting her finger into Jill's soft cheek. "You should tell us about stuff like this sooner, okay? Your big sister here will get angry if you don't."

"I-I'm sorry. I thought you and Zeke would understand even if I didn't say anything!"

Camila and Zeke had indeed kept their eyes on Lawrence the entire time. Camila, known best for her attentiveness amongst Jill's former subordinates, removed her finger from the girl's cheek.

"Then I'll forgive you. But communication is important, okay? I understand where you're coming from now," she said.

"Ah, Camila, how are Sauté and company?" Jill asked.

"Fine. They're right here." She tapped a bag dangling from the horse's saddle, and Sauté, who no longer resembled a chick, poked her head out. A stuffed bear could be seen at her feet.

"You can use them when needed," Jill said.

"I know— Wait, huh? I can use Sauté too? Really?"

"Make sure not to stimulate His Majesty Bear, Sauté. It'll be awful if you start it up, so be on standby for now."

Sauté chirped and went back into the bag. Jill felt like they'd made progress with being able to converse recently. After Camila glanced between the bag and Jill, she guided her horse to the rear, looking tired. She went to confirm if anyone was following them.

"My wife is amazing. She thinks about all sorts of things," Hadis murmured while gently resting his chin on Jill's head.

She raised her head ever so slightly. "You don't really seem to want to stop me either. Why's that, Your Majesty?"

Jill didn't think her actions were what Hadis wanted. The beautiful, gold-eyed Dragon Emperor always looked at her so dearly and seemed to examine her every move. Hadis nonchalantly affirmed her worries.

"Well, a big factor is that I like to watch you work... But I also don't want to restrain you," he said.

"Aren't you anxious that I might be making the wrong move?"

"Nope. No matter who betrays me, I'll be standing in the end."

He wasn't talking about his resolve or fate, but simply stating the truth. Indeed, that was exactly what had occurred in the previous timeline. The emperor stood alone until the very end.

"...Your Majesty, do you think someone will betray you in the future?" Jill asked.

Hadis didn't reply and only gave a smile. That was his answer.

It's not who, but when. His Majesty assumes that someone will betray him.

Jill pressed her lips together in a tight line. She couldn't forget that she was here to make sure that this man wouldn't be standing alone.



BEFORE Camila and Zeke joined the Northern Division, they were mercenaries

and had ample experience guarding aristocrats on their journeys. Camping outside and guarding through the night was bad for her skin, but because Camila was used to it, she was in her comfort zone.

We've got it good this time around, probably because the food is so delicious. Isn't His Majesty a bit too talented, though? Camila thought.

The emperor was able to swiftly find edible plants and had brought seasonings and tools for the road. He could make even weeds into a delicious meal, further proving that he'd been through some tough times.

"Zeke, you can rest first... Oh, what's wrong, Lawrence?" Camila asked.

"I just couldn't sleep," the target Jill had asked Camila to keep under surveillance said with a smile.

Camila looked around. The night was still young, and she saw Ristead's subordinates laughing together a short distance away. Zeke tossed some branches into the fire and turned around.

"How's Captain's tent?" he asked.

"I put Hadis Bear at the entrance. Sauté is also sleeping with them," Camila replied.

"What's the deal with that stuffed animal? And that wannabe bird. They are really conspicuous," Lawrence said, justifiably concerned.

A bonfire was good for warding off beasts, but it could also alert one's location to others. Thus, everyone had set up their tents away from the flames in a hidden spot between the trees. Still, if there was a cute stuffed bear and an odd bird decorating the area, it was sure to attract attention.

They were traps, but Camila couldn't possibly say so to this boy, who wasn't a total ally.

"They're both important good luck charms that Jill received from His Majesty," she said.

"Then shouldn't she be hugging them in her sleep? I've heard that the Dragon Consort is also raising that chicken, but why a bird, of all things?" Lawrence asked.

"Don't make us say it. Can't you tell from its name? Captain actually named that bird," Zeke said.

Lawrence wisely kept his mouth shut before averting his gaze. "What a dynamic person... Do you guys have plans for a second or third dish?"

"Don't count on it. Everyone's doing their best to avoid that possibility."

"Right. I hope we can meet up without anything happening." Camila added her testing statement to scope out the boy's response.

Lawrence casually responded, "If you're asking if it's a trap, I say our chances are fifty-fifty. Even if it is a trap, there's a high chance that Crown Prince Vissel isn't an ally. Or Prince Vissel could be an ally, but George knows that and is using him. There's a lot of possibilities, so all we can do is move forward. I think we've got the best hand to fight against that."

"You *think* we have the best hand? We've got His Majesty with us, and you're still unsure?"

Lawrence took a branch meant for the bonfire and drew a square on the ground. "Let's assume that this whole thing is a trap, and Prince Risteard had left this in Princess Elentzia's hands. If I was in the enemy's shoes, I'd act as an ally until I reach Neutrah and infiltrate her defenses."

"...That'd be terrible. They'd launch an attack from the inside, and we'd be wiped out," Zeke muttered.

"But what if the emperor came? We have a small squad, so the enemy would try to capture him. He's their primary target, after all. With the emperor captured, both Princess Elentzia and Prince Risteard will surrender. No one will fight a losing battle for the emperor, barring the Dragon Consort."

Camila couldn't deny Lawrence's callous claim. Zeke rested his chin on his hands and listened intently.

"The emperor knows that and decided to come with us. If he's confident that he can flee, this formation will allow him to see through traps as soon as possible and leave damages to the bare minimum. It's the best we can do. He's quite smart," Lawrence finished.

“So are you,” Camila added.

“Did you hear about me from the Dragon Consort?” Lawrence asked.

“She asked me to return you to Kratos unscathed because you’ve got an older sister to worry about.”

Lawrence blinked and gave a forced laugh. “Really, now. Is she serious? I know it’s not good to keep secrets, but still.”

“Are you fine being here with us? What about your sister? Is she safe?” Zeke asked.

Camila was grateful for Zeke’s insensitive attitude during these times, but Lawrence answered without looking offended.

“I still receive letters from her. She’s doing fine. She told me not to worry about her, and the king—the King of South Kratos—doesn’t seem to be interested in her and is leaving her alone. I’ve got some time.”

“Left alone? Even though she was dragged into his inner court?” said Zeke.

“My family sold out my older sister to get on the king’s good side. And the King of South Kratos seems to currently favor young boys.”

Zeke stuck out his tongue in disgust. “Ick. Yeah. I’d want to free my older sister too.”

“It’s kind of weird hearing that. A lot of people in Kratos just tell me to give up,” Lawrence said.

“Well, we’re not really involved, after all,” Camila said.

Lawrence smiled and wrote something on the ground. Camila peered at his writing, and Zeke narrowed his eyes in realization.

“Oi.”

Lawrence used his other hand to put his index finger to his lips before pointing up. Zeke and Camila looked towards the sky. Camila’s greatest advantage as an archer was her good eyesight. She was the first to spot something glimmering in the night sky above the smoke of the bonfire.

Dragon Knights! And the one in front is a red dragon! Do they belong to one of

the three dukes, or are they part of the Rave imperial army?!

Three Dragon Knights formed a neat triangle as they headed in the direction Hadis's retinue came from. They might've been headed towards Neutrahl, the fortress city. Judging from the speed of the dragons, they would get there by tomorrow morning.

"Stay quiet. We don't have to make a fuss now. We won't make it in time even if we head back right now, so we'll just report this to everyone tomorrow," Lawrence advised.

"Do...you even know who they are?" Zeke asked.

"No, but the city should be fine. As long as Princess Faris is there, they can't be too aggressive, no matter who they are. That's why I left her behind. I didn't want to owe the Dragon Consort too big a debt when we'll eventually end up as enemies."

Camila's expression shifted, and Zeke looked troubled as he scratched the back of his head. Lawrence, seemingly undisturbed by their reactions, proceeded to scrawl something on the ground with the branch.

"There were far too few people to call that a squad. It must be a messenger or a scouting group... They might be trying to convince the Neutrahl Dragon Knights again. No, we should consider other possibilities. Then I guess we should go here," Lawrence mumbled to himself before pointing to a spot on the ground where he drew a map. "This area should be the best rendezvous point should anything happen. There's a dragon's nest nearby, and most wouldn't want to get close. At the very least, I'd flee here."

"...Are you serious?" Zeke asked.

"I am. There's a chance we might get surrounded, but they can't launch a full-scale attack out of fear of riling up the dragons. It's the ideal area should we need to flee temporarily. Please share this intel with the Dragon Consort."

Lawrence used his branch to point to a location a little east of the rendezvous point, on the edge of the Rakia Mountains.

"If the Dragon Emperor and the Dragon Consort escape, it might be safer. I don't really believe in myths, but protection from both the Goddess and the

Dragon God exists, doesn't it? Then it's not a bad idea to pray to the gods," he said.

"Sounds like you think we're walking into a trap. What are you gonna do? You're just an underling," Zeke said.

Camila and Zeke were well aware that the lowest-ranking people were the first to be sacrificed. If they didn't run into Jill at Beilburg, they would've discarded the place they called home to survive.

Lawrence stared at them before forcing a smile. "You sure are kind. But I'll be fine. I was a dropout in Kratos because of my lack of magic power. Prince Gerald seems to have high expectations for me, but I can't hope for a promotion unless I take on difficult tasks and bring back good results. Please don't be so wary of me. I've determined that saving you all will work in my favor. I need you guys to win for my future."

"I'm terrified to think what'll happen after we win," Camila murmured.

"But we gotta win first. We haven't even received our paychecks yet," Zeke said bitterly.

Lawrence erupted into laughter. "That's a serious problem, isn't it? What a waste. She doesn't have any supporters here. Even if she didn't marry Prince Gerald, with her potential, she might have been revered as the god of war in Kratos."

It was all too easy for Camila to imagine Jill becoming someone of that status, but it didn't sit right with her as she stared at the tent guarded by a stuffed bear.

"But that might not equate to Jill's happiness," she said.

"You've grown attached to the Dragon Consort, haven't you?" asked Lawrence.

"The same could be said for you," Zeke chimed in.

"Oh, can you tell? But aren't you curious? Why is she here? Why does she fancy that emperor so much?"

"You shouldn't think too deeply about that, else you'll fall down a weird

rabbit hole," warned Camila from the bottom of her heart.

Lawrence nodded solemnly with a childlike expression. "I'll be careful. Either way, I don't think the Dragon Consort would toss the emperor aside and return to Kratos... And I presume you both will stick by her side."

"I don't want to abandon that emperor whether the captain's there or not," Zeke added. Lawrence gave him a surprised look. Zeke stared at the fire as he continued, "He told me with a straight face to offer him to the enemy if it meant saving the captain. It pisses me off, you know?"

Even Camila frowned, but Lawrence gave an unconcerned reply. "That's an effective play to protect the Dragon Consort. I see... I suppose she can't leave him alone when he says stuff like that."

The three surrounded the fire in silence, and the crackling sounds echoed in the air. Lawrence tossed the branch in his hand towards the fire and stood up.

"If all goes well, we'll get to the designated area by tomorrow. I'm heading to bed. I hope you both don't push yourselves too much," he said.

"Thank you. Good night," Camila said.

"See ya tomorrow," Zeke said.

Lawrence entered his tent for the night. Camila put both her elbows atop her knees and rested her chin on the back of her hands. "He's a good kid. I hate myself for wanting to get rid of him while we can," she said.

"Don't do it. I'm sure he knows your intentions," Zeke advised.

She slapped his head for no particular reason and ignored his loud scolding as she stared at the stuffed bear sitting in front of the tent.

If they arrived at the designated spot tomorrow and it really was a trap, as Lawrence feared, their relatively safe and not-so-critical situation would take a turn for the worse.

Then at the very least, I hope you can rest easy tonight, she thought.



THEY were camping outdoors, but Hadis hugged Jill tightly to sleep as usual,

and she ate his prepared breakfast like any other day. Even lunch came and went as usual.

Both Hadis and Jill were silent, and she thought that was impressive.

His Majesty probably knows just how tough it is to seem normal. And he knows the difficulty of maintaining appearances.

After they passed through a dense forest, they came out to a barren, sunken rocky terrain. While Jill was baffled by this sudden change in landscape, Lawrence, who was leading the way, turned around to explain.

“There apparently used to be a large river around here. But once a dragon’s nest was made upstream, a dam was built, and this area dried up. We won’t know what happened to the water from the river until we reach the nest. It’s mystical, isn’t it?” he said, acting like a tour guide.

Risteard frowned. “Even the Rave imperial family can’t enter a dragon’s nest so easily. It’s a sacred place. It’s great that you’re studious, but I find it unwise if you’re planning on getting close to a nest like you’re on a tour.”

“I know. We’ll now go up this dried river, towards the dragon’s nest. Our designated meeting spot is past that, so we should hurry. There isn’t much cover, so I recommend you walk by the bank of the stream while under foliage as much as possible.”

The group rode their horses per Lawrence’s instructions. The path started to grow steeper, indicating that the dragon’s nest was in an elevated area.

Jill leaned back onto Hadis and whispered, “Rave told you that you can’t go near a dragon’s nest either, right, Your Majesty?”

“I’m the Dragon Emperor, so it shouldn’t be a problem, but Rave’s a worrywart. I just want to try out a new dish,” he replied.

“I support that, but I suppose Rave won’t see it that way...”

“He said you should never go near one either. I guess we’re alike.” Hadis smiled, making Jill do the same.

“I guess I need to bear with it if I’m the same as you, Your Majesty. I suppose I won’t be jumping into a nest in search of a gold-eyed, black dragon anytime

soon."

"Yeah, Rave's been noisy this entire time, saying that we aren't ever allowed to get close..." Hadis abruptly looked up at the sky. A moment later, the trees wavered, and a large shadow loomed over the group as the leaves danced in the wind.

"A dragon... Princess Elentzia?!" Jill cried.

Everyone stopped at her voice. Elentzia turned her Dragon Knights around and landed upriver, a short distance away. Jill had received a report that a small flock of dragons flew towards Neutrahl last night. Her squad grew tense, assuming that something had gone wrong.

"I thought we weren't using dragons as messengers, so we won't stand out. They've got a whole group of 'em," muttered Zeke.

"Which means they were in such a rush that standing out didn't matter. Maybe she wants to tell us not to go to the meet-up spot," Camila replied in a low voice.

Risteard dismounted his horse. "The horses will get intimidated by the sight of these dragons. We should leave them behind and proceed."

"Camila, Zeke, Lawrence, watch after the horses. Your Majesty, stay with Prince Risteard. I'll go and hear her out," Jill said.

They didn't have anything to hide behind, but Jill's voice couldn't be heard by Elentzia from this distance. Jill jumped off Hadis's horse and ran up the slope.

The pea-sized Elentzia grew larger as Jill swiftly approached her. Dragons were lined up behind the princess, blocking the path up the river. The slope leveled out until only the blue sky could be seen behind her.

As Jill had guessed, Elentzia had her brows furrowed. Jill stood tall.

"Is something the matter?" Jill asked.

"Yeah. Sorry about my sudden appearance," Elentzia replied.

"No worries. I heard that dragons flew towards you yesterday. Are we walking into a trap or some—"

Quick as a flash, Elentzia grabbed Jill's arm and picked her up. While Jill was still in shock, an arm coiled around her throat, and a long blade was pressed against her flesh.

"Wha—?!" Jill cried out.

"Jill?!" Hadis yelled.

"Don't move, Hadis, Risteard!" Elentzia warned.

The group had only realized that Jill was taken as a hostage when a large number of cavalry knights emerged from the trees behind Elentzia's dragons.



They were surrounded.

Jill grabbed Elentzia's arm and tried to use her magic, but it was deflected with a crackling sound. The princess was a member of the Rave imperial family. She had magic and was well-versed in martial arts. Jill wouldn't be able to shake her off unless she took the woman by surprise, as she'd done before.

"Your Highness, what's the meaning of this?!" Jill shouted.

"I'm sorry, Jill. I'm truly sorry. But I..."

"Whatever are you apologizing for, Elentzia? You've done the right thing," a person said, walking past them.

Jill widened her eyes in stunned silence. *George Teos Rave! So last night's red dragon was his?!*

A crimson cape fluttered behind him in the wind, and George flashed his silver sword. The false blade brimmed with silver-colored magic. It was so breathtaking that it could easily be mistaken for the real Heavenly Sword.

He swung his blade down and bellowed, "All troops, charge! Capture the false emperor Hadis, who plagues this empire!"

"Your Majesty!" yelled Jill.

The moment her cries left her lips, the soldiers roared loudly and rushed towards her small squad. Jill tried to reach forward, but was dragged away by Elentzia, who climbed atop the saddle of her dragon.

"Be quiet, please! I don't want any unnecessary bloodshed," Elentzia begged.

"Your younger brothers are down there! How could you?!" Jill snapped.

"My uncle said he'd convince Risteard! He won't be killed!"

"And what about His Majesty?! What happens to him?! Or is this some kind of convoluted plan?!"

Elentzia bit her lip. Her gestures and eyes were more than what Jill needed to see to know that the woman had betrayed them.

"I'm sorry," Elentzia bit out.

“What’s...going on?! Sister!” Risteard bellowed.

The prince’s cries were drowned out by the torrent of roars that erupted from the charging soldiers. Zeke unsheathed his sword and clicked his tongue.

“This is beyond bad! This is awful! What are we gonna do? Did the Dragon Knight Captain betray us?!” he roared.

“We should prioritize fleeing! Let’s enter the forest so that the dragons won’t chase after us,” Lawrence advised.

“So our rendezvous point will be as we planned earlier. But what about Jill?!” Camila asked.

Hadis looked up and saw a restrained Jill being wrestled onto a dragon by Elentzia. She would most likely be sent to the imperial capital as a hostage. A smile curled onto his lips. His kind half-sister apparently had high hopes for Jill.

“Prince Risteard, let’s run! They far outnumber us, and we don’t have any dragons!” a subordinate said.

“I’ll be fine. They probably won’t kill me. You lot take Hadis and run!” Risteard ordered, jumping onto a horse and unsheathing his blade.

Hadis, who was still just standing there, shot his half-brother a befuddled look. “You didn’t betray me, Risteard?” he asked.

“You easygoing little...! I’m going to ask our sister what’s going on! I’ll do something about Jill, so run! You all must protect Hadis, no matter what!” he ordered his men. “That’s an order!”

“...No,” muttered Hadis.

Elentzia’s dragon took to the air. Jill was desperately resisting while looking down at the scene that unfolded in front of her. Admirably, she seemed more worried about everyone than anxious about herself. Even in this situation, she was fretting over Hadis.

“Everyone, leave me behind. Take Jill and run,” Hadis commanded.

“Wait a second, what are you planning, Your Majesty? You can’t,” said Camila.

“That’s right, you’ve gotta run too!” Zeke added.

“I’m ordering you to do as I say, Knights of the Dragon Consort.”

He glanced towards the pair, his gaze piercing their hearts. Risteard was desperately yelling something while he was held back by his subordinates. That was more than enough.

They haven’t betrayed me yet. What a miracle, thought Hadis.

The magic that coursed through his right hand made him feel numb, and he couldn’t summon the Heavenly Sword. He unsheathed his longsword and smiled.

“You ready, Rave?” Hadis asked.

“We don’t have enough magic to go against that false Heavenly Sword. Be careful.”

“Just who do you think you’re talking to? My current state is enough.”

At the very least, he’d be able to take Jill back.

Like a geyser, immense magic power surged from the Dragon Emperor, creating a whirlwind. The soldiers around him screamed as they were blown away.

Jill, who was watching from the dragon, wrenched her body towards him.

“Your Majesty!” she cried.

“Rosa?! What’s going—” Elentzia yelped in surprise.

Elentzia’s dragon had turned her back toward Hadis and flew for the clouds, but then she froze. While keeping her elevation, she mechanically turned around.

Hadis, surrounded by soldiers on the ground below, smiled. “Did you guys use dragons in the presence of the Dragon Emperor as an act of mercy?”

“No, Rosa! Don’t be controlled by Hadis!” urged Elentzia.

“Don’t falter! He shouldn’t have much magic now! Pile onto him!” commanded George.

The uncertain dragons, incorrectly gauging their distance, still managed to breathe some fire. The infantry with spears and the cavalry on horses charged

towards Hadis.

“Your Majesty!” Jill shrieked.

Hadis took a low posture as he cut down the people around him. He kicked an enemy and ran ahead. He used the soldiers’ heads as stepping stones to jump up and slash the dragons’ wings. Cries of agony could be heard as the soldiers were defeated by one man.

“He’s alone! What are you all doing!?”

“Y-You monster...!”

Jill knew their assessment of the situation was wrong. Even if Hadis was stabbed in the thigh with spears or had his shoulders slashed by swords, he moved forward without flinching. This was because he was strong. The glittering magic that dripped from the tip of his blade indicated he only had a little left. But he wouldn’t stop.

This was the beautiful, silver magic she’d seen before. It was magic meant for protection.

The unstoppable, stardust-like magic power was rushing straight towards Jill.

With a jolt, Rosa suddenly decreased in elevation, and Elentzia held Jill tightly. At first, Jill thought that the princess wasn’t willing to release her no matter what, but she realized that she was being protected from the wind.

“Don’t talk. You don’t have the protection from a dragon. You’ll bite your tongue,” advised Elentzia.

Jill gasped.

“...My brother’s strong. No, I suppose he’s not my younger brother...” muttered the princess.

Her statements filled with self-ridicule, and her eyes drowning with resignation were a familiar sight for Jill. She’d seen it in the future. Elentzia wore the same exact expression before she plunged a knife into her own throat, adamant about not becoming Hadis’s enemy. Elentzia didn’t draw her weapon, despite knowing that Hadis was headed straight for her.

“You monster!” George roared with a large swing of his sword.

Hadis dodged the attack, kicked the man's back, stepped onto a nearby green dragon, and leaped into the sky. He stepped onto the descending Rosa's head, blood running down his longsword, before slashing straight for his older sister's head.

"You can't kill her, Your Majesty!" Jill shouted.

Hadis's blade sliced through a lock of Elentzia's silver hair before it came to a halt. The wind blew the strands of hair away. Hadis's eyes were still filled with murderous intent.

"Why, Jill? This woman's a traitor," he murmured.

Jill felt a twinge of pain in her chest, noticing that Hadis didn't refer to Elentzia as "sister." She reached for him.

"It'll be fine, Your Majesty. You don't need to kill her just yet," she said.

Hadis remained silent.

"You're a bloody mess, and you're covered in wounds," Jill said softly. "If you fight anymore, you might be bedridden for days. Don't worry. I'm here."

The moment her fingertips touched his bangs, he staggered and fell like a puppet with its strings cut. Elentzia swiftly reached out to catch him.

"Hadis!" she cried.

"Your Majesty?!"

The moment Elentzia and the unconscious Hadis were within Jill's reach, she felt someone grab the nape of her neck and toss her off the dragon. For a brief moment, she saw the cold-hearted George above her.

"If we've got Hadis, then we don't need you anymore," he said.

"Uncle George, that's not what you promised! Jill!" Elentzia reached out while carrying Hadis, but she couldn't grab her in time.

Jill's small body was whipped away by the roaring winds.

If I fall, I'll die, Jill thought.

Hadis was able to leap up into the skies using dragons because his magic power far exceeded Jill's. Needless to say, his magic recovery rate was much

quicker than hers as well. Jill didn't have enough magic to land on the ground and soften the impact.

His Majesty's so strong...

But...

I have to save him.

Seeing her husband motionless in Elentzia's arms, Jill reached out. Her hands were so tiny. *But I have to save him. I have to protect him. That's what I decided.*

She was here to change his isolated, lonely future.

"Die," George ordered, his red dragon's maw agape.

The flame of judgment closed in on the little girl. Knowing that her hands wouldn't reach her husband, she clenched them tightly.

"I'd like to see you try! I'm the goddamn Dragon Consort!" she yelled.

Her vision turned red. The flames that radiated towards the earth burned the air, ground, Jill's body, and her consciousness to a crisp.



A dragon's flame didn't even leave dust in its wake. The soldiers, frozen by Hadis's charge, suddenly cheered loudly. Hearing these cries, Zeke tugged on Risteard's shoulder.

"Come on, Your Highness! Let's leave while we can!" he urged.

"Y-You! That girl! That small child!" stammered Risteard.

"His Majesty made that whirlwind and allowed us to flee! Are you planning on putting his efforts to waste?! Hurry before they notice us!" Camila pressed.

Risteard, who had been blown away onto a plateau, had watched the whole series of tragic events without moving. With a look of agony, he took a few steps backwards before he ran ahead. His subordinates followed close behind. Lawrence chased after Camila and the rest.

Lawrence knew his question was foolish, but he couldn't help but ask. Even he didn't want to believe that Jill was burned in that fire. "What are we going to do

once we flee? The Dragon Consort is..."

"You heard Jill say it herself! She's the Dragon Consort! She must be alive! His Majesty is, too!" Camila shot back.

Lawrence widened his eyes in astonishment.

"They won't die just like that. How could the Dragon Emperor and Dragon Consort lose to a dragon?!" yelled Zeke.

These were foolish hopes—they were all plainly praying to the gods. This kind of trust was absolutely illogical, but the boy didn't dislike it.

"Nice. I like that. Then I'll act with that in mind," Lawrence said.

"We found them! They're—"

Before Zeke could swing his blade, a small knife flashed through the air and hit a soldier in the temple, rendering them unconscious. The worst thing that could happen now was making a loud fuss.

"Let's head to the place we decided beforehand. We'll worry about the details later," Lawrence said.

"You're good," Camila said.

"Thank you. You're an archer, and Zeke uses a greatsword. Neither are suited for battle in a forest."

"Hey, did you just say something rude?!" scolded Zeke.

"I'll have you listen to my instructions," Lawrence said. "In exchange, I'll ensure we all escape. This way!"

The moment Lawrence switched directions, an arrow whizzed through the air, striking Camila's backpack. It seemed they were discovered, and Zeke furrowed his brows with an "Ugh."

"Did they get hit?!" Zeke asked.

"Y-You're all right, aren't you, Sauté? You're alive—"

"Chiiirp!" a bird cried, cutting Camila off.

The cute birdlike creature gave a shriek of anger. It grabbed the stuffed bear

and flew out, hurling the item towards the enemies.

“Crap! Hurry and run!” Zeke yelled.

“Your Highness Risteard, over here! Shield yourself from Hadis Bear’s view!” advised Camila.

“Wh-What’s going on?” Lawrence asked.

He’d inadvertently caught the bird with both his hands as it had its chest puffed out. The bear flipped in the air, landed on the ground, and stood up. Its cape, which had been shot through, fluttered in the air.

Huh? It stood up? Lawrence thought.

That day, Lawrence discovered that the stuffed bear was stronger than anyone present.



JILL felt something drip on her cheek, and her eyes flew open.

“Your Majesty!” she cried.

She was lying on top of a cold rock. After blinking several times, she took some time to assess her surroundings and patted herself down. She was uninjured. Her clothes weren’t burned either.

I thought I was burned alive...

She provoked the enemy, but it was weird that she was unscathed. Where was she?

She could hear a waterfall in the distance, and she was surrounded by white rocks with several fault lines and layers which led deeper inside. Numerous white rocks stood tall like stalagmites, and her first impression was that she was in an underground cave. But the space seemed far too large, and it was bright inside. She followed the slivers of light that formed a trail of circles on the ground before she looked up in surprise.

At first, she thought it was the sky—a blue sky that was far above her. She then thought it was water. It looked as though the water was floating before she realized that the water was simply not falling.

The red sunset was illuminating the area, its light peeking through the tall ceiling of water.

"Is this magic? But it feels different... What's going on?" Jill wondered aloud.

"I teleported you here because you said you were the Dragon Consort."

With a gasp, Jill turned around, and the ground shook, making her stagger. With a knee on the ground, she stared at the figure causing the intermittent rumbling.

The creature had shiny black scales, and sharp claws that dug into the ground. Its head seemed to be as big as Jill herself. It went without saying that its entire body was much larger, and its glaring pupils were purple.

She was faced with a purple-eyed, black dragon.

"You're still a child. What is the current Dragon Emperor thinking?"

Jill was shocked that the dragon talked. Sweat ran down her back. She smiled, trying to school her reaction. Then she remembered what Elentzia had said. If a silver dragon like Rave was the Dragon God, black dragons were like the kings and queens of dragons. Considering this, Jill had only one thing in mind.

If I get it on my side, I can help His Majesty.

She was the Dragon Consort. As she clenched her hands into tiny balls, the black dragon looked askance at her with its clear, purple eyes.

Chapter 5: A Contract of Blood and Rescuing the Dragon Emperor

“I don’t even see the gold ring, nor do I sense much magic power. No, it seems like both of those have been sealed. That must be why the red dragon was confused. It doesn’t change the fact that you don’t have them,” the dragon said in a low, sonorous voice.

Its words didn’t match its mouth movements, and Jill guessed that the dragon wasn’t talking, but somehow conveying its intentions.

“I’ll commend your courage for not panicking at the sight of me. But that’s not enough to make a decision.”

“Did you save me?” Jill asked.

“Do not pose a question without my permission. No matter, I shall answer: yes. The red dragon requested for me to teleport you.”

Jill had learned in her lectures that red dragons were as smart as humans. George’s red dragon might have breathed fire to mask the fact that she’d been teleported. Either way, she must show her gratitude. She hadn’t learned proper manners towards dragons, but she stood up, put a hand on her chest, and bowed.

“Thank you very much for saving me. Pardon my insolence, but may I request your name, black dragon?”

“You may call me black dragon. I’m essentially the only one of my kind in this world.”

The dragon implied there was no need to call its name to differentiate itself from others. Jill thought this sounded a bit lonely, but the hierarchy of dragons was absolute. Being called a black dragon may have been just as honorable as the title of Dragon God.

“I apologize for not introducing myself. I’m Jill, the Dragon Consort.”

“I told you that you lack what is necessary to be called as such.” With a loud rumble, the black dragon took a step closer and narrowed its frightening purple eyes. “How unfortunate for you, child. Since you aren’t the Dragon Consort, I can’t return you alive.”

“Even though you just saved me?”

“Your time of death was merely delayed for a few moments. This is a dragon’s nest. A normal person can’t set foot in here!”

The black dragon widened its eyes and expelled a blue flame from its jaws. It lunged forward, gouging the ground, and Jill focused all her magic to her feet to dodge the attack. The dragon changed directions and destroyed a bit of the wall as it chased after her.

“Why don’t we talk this over?! His Majesty, the Dragon Emperor is in trouble!”

“And what about it?”

“It’s the Dragon Emperor!”

“Then why hasn’t a gold-eyed, black dragon come forth this generation? Why hasn’t the egg hatched?!” the dragon thundered.

Jill furrowed her brows at that new information as she ran for her life. The rocks behind her, going up in flames, indicated she didn’t have time to ask for details.

“And this little girl is the Dragon Consort?! The Dragon Consort is the only one who can be a shield for the Dragon Emperor and twist the Goddess’s love using logic and reason! A powerless human isn’t fit for this role!”

When Jill went behind the dragon, it swung its large tail with great force. Jill ducked, dodging the attack by a hair’s breadth, and hid behind one of the boulders.

I’ve got a lot of questions, but what should I do? Jill wondered. Should I flee? But I can’t survive without magic. And the dragon’s nest has eggshells and scales, creating a magnetic field. If I use magic recklessly, I might misfire or be unable to use it at all. Damn... Is there anything I can do?

She looked around from her spot behind the boulder. She only saw more boulders and a ceiling of water that was out of her reach. A few small rocks were rolling on the ground with the dragon's heavy footsteps, and she also saw a thin, glasslike object resembling a dragon scale. Jill looked down as her foot bumped into something.

Upon closer inspection, she found that what she thought was a scale was a fragment of an eggshell. She felt her magic being sucked by it ever so slightly when she touched it. *I might be able to use this.*

"In any case, you haven't been able to protect the Dragon Emperor!" The black dragon's critique echoed throughout the cave, and Jill recalled the moment Hadis fainted in front of her. "I've already heard all the details from the red dragon. Why did you stop the Dragon Emperor? You should've beheaded the enemy and fled with him."

Jill didn't think she was wrong in stopping Hadis from killing Elentzia. However, the black dragon's rage was justified. In that moment, Jill had put Hadis, who risked life and limb for her, and his actions to waste.

"Did you sympathize with a traitor? How could you protect the Dragon Emperor with your naivete?"

Jill stayed silent.

"As it is, the Goddess has sealed away your magic. Such a blunder is unfitting for the Dragon Consort! Rave has grown soft!"

"Wait, what did you just say?" asked Jill, stepping out from the boulders.

"I'm saying that Rave has grown soft. Ever since the Dragon Consort died by sealing the Goddess using logic, he has lost his divinity and even his throne as the Dragon Emperor."

"No, not that. That sounds important too, but I'm more curious about what you said before that. The Goddess is sealing my magic?"

"Indeed."

Jill inadvertently clutched her shoulder. Her wound had healed, but the magic that had entered her body through that injury still remained. She knew that the

kingdom of Kratos was capable of creating such an intricate spell, but there was something different about the material used to make the false Heavenly Sword.

“Was that blade...made of the Sacred Spear of the Goddess?” Jill asked.

“That’s the only thing that could seal the magic of the Dragon Emperor,” the black dragon replied quietly. It no longer attacked, and it posed a question. “Why are you smiling? Have you gone mad, child?”

“It’s hard not to admire my foe. She’s a Goddess, but she’s dedicated enough to sacrifice herself.”

“So you’re saying you understand the Goddess’s love? Truly, you’re not suitable to be the Dragon Consort.” The black dragon heightened its vigilance and murderous intent as if looking at something deadly. But Jill stood firm and faced the black dragon.

“I’m going to go save His Majesty. Move,” she ordered.

“I cannot let a human leave a dragon’s nest alive. And the strong don’t listen to the weak. That’s logic.”

“I don’t care. I’m the Dragon Consort, and His Majesty’s wife!”

“You jest! If you really are the Dragon Consort, why can’t you handle a dragon like me?”

It once again dug its claws into the ground while breathing blue flames. Jill put all her magic into her feet and ran across the wall, kicking up dust behind her. She flipped in the air, right below the ceiling of water, and landed on top of the black dragon’s head.

“Logic! You lot are all about logic and splitting hairs! You admonish others, but you don’t want to save His Majesty and the Dragon God?!” Jill yelled.

“You talk about love with emotion. I suppose you’re a servant of the Goddess after all, you Kratos witch!”

“*This is why you guys can’t win against the Goddess!*”

Jill outstretched her arm and stabbed herself with all her strength using the eggshell she’d picked up. As she’d guessed, magic power ran through her right hand.

"Wha—" the dragon yelped.

"A poised woman who risks her life and fights head-on versus a dragon who is complacent! Without adding logic or love to the equation, you must know who'll be victorious!"

A dragon's eggshell nullified magic. If one were to try to use magic while being sealed, the eggshell would absorb the seal that would activate. With a crack, the fragment Jill had stabbed into her arm crumbled away, but it would take a bit of time before her magic would be sealed again. One punch was all she needed.

How many dragons do you think I've punched?!

"If you don't want to be my dinner, shut up and listen to my orders, black dragon!"

Jill aimed dead center, between the dragon's wide eyes. She held nothing back and used all her strength as she swung her fist. The black dragon's massive figure staggered before falling backwards.

Jill managed to stumble onto the ground. She stared at her bleeding right arm and hand, which had lost all its strength. She tried to clench a few times, but she couldn't muster the strength to do so.

Argh, if His Majesty saw me like this, he might cry.

She had to hurry. With these thoughts in mind, she noticed a small hole in the stone wall, next to the unconscious dragon. Thinking it was the exit, Jill hobbled over to the hole. A bright light shone from deeper within. Straining her eyes while assuming the light was from the outside, she soon found out she was wrong when she approached the area.

"Is...this...a dragon egg?" she murmured.

Inside the stone cave, surrounded by straw, was a single, large, shimmering egg, the likes of which she'd never seen before. The shell was black, but a golden light seemed to be glowing from within. Jill blinked in wonder as her mind went blank for a moment. It was warm to the touch, proof that it was still alive. She remembered the dragon complaining about an unhatched egg.

"Wait, could this be the gold-eyed, black dragon..." she whispered.

"That's right," the black dragon said suddenly, poking its head into the hole. A large bump was between its purple eyes, no doubt created by Jill.

"Whoa!" Jill yelped.

"A gold-eyed, black dragon's egg will also appear when a Dragon Emperor is born. This egg, born a king, will grow using the Dragon Emperor's mind as sustenance. It tends to hatch within about ten years, in connection with the young emperor's growth... And yet look at the state it's still in."

Jill didn't sense any hostility from the dragon anymore and continued to talk normally. "Does Rave know about this?" she asked.

"Of course. But the Dragon Emperor doesn't seem to be interested at all. I cannot forgive that."

"Is it bad if that egg remains unhatched?"

"For us dragons, a few decades are within the margin of error. But should the Dragon Emperor die without the egg ever hatching, his dead spirit would become the egg's nutrients, and a monster will be born. Perhaps the Dragon Emperor wants that to happen, to curse the world after his death."

Jill thought back to Hadis six years in the future. He cursed, hated, and destroyed everything in his path. She wondered if the gold-eyed, black dragon hatched in the catastrophic future.

"It'll be fine. His Majesty is still alive and well."

"But..."

"I understand your concerns. His Majesty still has his heart closed off to everyone, right?" Jill said with a sigh as she gently stroked the egg.

It was fine. It was still warm.

"I'll save you, Your Majesty. Please wait for me," she murmured. She thought that she could feel the egg throb beneath her touch. "And I need you to hatch soon, little one. I want to ride a gold-eyed, black dragon because you'll be the same color as His Majesty."

An unmistakable movement was felt from the egg. Jill was shocked, and the excited black dragon put its snout up close.

"It moved! It moved, didn't it?!" the dragon asked.

"Y-Yeah, I think so..."

"No, it moved. It *definitely* moved. I'm glad... It's still alive. I see..." The black dragon seemed to truly be relieved.

"Are you this egg's parent? Is that why you've been protecting it?" Jill asked.

"No, I'm his mate."

Mate... Mate... Jill took some time to understand the dragon's words.

"So you're this egg's wife?" she asked.

"I am. A gold-eyed, black dragon must have a black dragon for its mate."

"I hope I'm not being rude, but how old are you?"

"Still only three hundred years old."

Still? she thought. Jill now understood why a few decades was indeed not too big a deal.

"If so, you must've been lonely," she said.

The dragon widened her eyes in shock before scowling and furrowing her brows. The area between her eyes must've hurt.

"Ah, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to punch a girl," Jill apologized.

"Whatever are you saying? You mustn't treat females and males differently. And I was the one who was irritated by this unhatched egg and lost my cool. I apologize for my careless words. But you've opened my eyes. I haven't done anything. I've simply been watching over this egg for a few decades, all while feeling gloomy."

"Don't say that. It'll do you no good."

Waiting was exhausting. Jill stood before the black dragon and invited the beast to the best of her ability.

"Let's save His Majesty together. You should go outside too."



“But the egg...”

“It’ll be safe here. If we don’t need to keep it warm, we can just visit it every now and then.”

She thought she saw the egg jolt but kept her back turned and ignored it.

“This egg shares the same mind as His Majesty, right? Then it definitely shouldn’t be spoiled and attached to your hip all the time.”

“A-Are you sure? The egg has been glowing oddly for a while...”

“It’s listening in on us, meaning that it understands its surroundings. But it still remains unhatched because you’re here. It’s acting spoiled.”

“But it’s glowing really brightly as though to disagree. Are you sure?”

“It’s good that it’s energetic! We should prioritize saving His Majesty first. Let’s go, shall we?”

“But the egg’s jumping right now! Isn’t it objecting?!”

“If it doesn’t want to be left behind, it should just hatch.”

As Jill turned around, the egg jolted and stopped glowing. She stood by the black dragon’s head. “I’ll be taking her with me to save His Majesty.” Jill turned to the dragon. “Is that all right with you?”

The beast’s purple eyes silently assessed her before she looked down once. “Very well. I shall leave! I’m tired of waiting!”

“That’s the spirit!” Jill encouraged.

“If you don’t like it, I urge you to chase after me. You’re a gold-eyed, black dragon, and above all, my mate! I’m the queen and ruler of dragons after the Dragon God Rave!”

Jill clapped, and the black dragon huffed through her nose, looking refreshed. But her purple eyes gazed kindly at the egg. “Now then, I shall be off, my husband. Climb onto my back, Dragon Consort.”

Jill gulped, her eyes sparkling at the unexpected invitation. “R-Really?! Can I ride on your back alone?!”

“Only the Dragon Consort and the Dragon Emperor can ride me.”

As the dragon flashed a fearless smile, Jill hurriedly left the hole and used the beast’s neck to clamber onto her back. She gazed up towards the ceiling.

“But how will we get out of here?”

“Fear not. If you hang on tightly, it’ll be over in a moment.”

The dragon pulled her head from the hole and flapped her wings while fixing her posture. She plunged headfirst into the water ceiling. Jill unconsciously held her breath, but opened her eyes when she couldn’t feel any pressure from the water. She could breathe. She could see her surroundings and saw the water glimmering under the sunset. A school of colorful fish was swimming around. Red corals lined the rocks, and a carpet of green algae covered the ground.

With a loud sound and a spray of water, the two swiftly flew to the surface from the water’s floor. From the skies, Jill realized they came from a large lakebed at the top of a cliff with a crashing waterfall.

“Wh-What’s going on?! Does the water not overflow?” asked Jill.

“A portion of the waterfall flows underground. A dragon’s nest will change its surrounding terrain to a degree. Now, where shall we be headed, Dragon Consort?”

The dragon flew around and straightened her wings. Jill looked up. The wind and the elevation should’ve been hard on her body, but she didn’t feel short of breath and was able to ride the dragon. She was familiar with this feeling, for she had ridden with Hadis and Elentzia. This must’ve been the protection of the dragon.

“I’d decided on a place to meet with my friends beforehand. I’d like to go there. It shouldn’t be far,” she said.

“Understood.”

“And could you call me Jill? I’ll call you by your name too.”

“I have no name.”

“Then I’ll give you one. How about Steak?”

The dragon soaring through the sunset-colored sky gave a hearty laugh.

“I decline,” the beast answered calmly.



A waterfall could be heard in the distance, but everything else was calm. The area grew dark, but no signs of foreign light sources appeared. Hiding within the gouged stone walls, Lawrence breathed a sigh of relief.

“Seems like we’ve lost them,” he said.

“A more correct statement is that we were able to run from that stuffed bear,” Risteard said coolly.

Lawrence sensed the conversation was going off course, but he couldn’t help but agree. “It’s probably taken out half of the enemy forces. I didn’t think it could shoot hot lasers from its eyes...”

“The forest was getting blown up. They had no choice but to retreat.”

“What even is that? It’s not a stuffed bear; it’s a weapon,” Lawrence declared.

“No idea, but I only know one person who can make something so idiotic. That idiot Hadis...!”

Lawrence almost sympathized with the groaning Risteard, but he prioritized confirming his surroundings. Everyone was covered in mud and dirt, for they fled desperately, but no one was gravely injured. The Dragon Emperor’s initial quick wit and the stuffed bear had allowed them to escape safely.

“Sauté isn’t with us... Damn!” Zeke muttered.

“The bird stayed with His Majesty Bear, after all... I want to go searching, but I wonder if they’re okay,” murmured Camila.

“Should we just pray for them?” Lawrence asked.

“We should prioritize human lives,” Risteard asserted. “Besides, that bird lookalike is definitely alive. It was handling that bear pretty well.” Risteard had panicked at first, but seeing the bear punch away countless soldiers made him lose focus on reality and calmed him down.

“We can rest here for tonight, but what’ll we do from there?” Lawrence

asked.

“...Well, if my sister betrayed us, then we should assume we have no allies moving forward,” Risteard stated plainly. “We can’t return to Neutrahl to get our dragons either.”

“But we need a dragon to turn the tables,” Lawrence pointed out. “I don’t think they’ll kill red dragons, so it’ll be ideal if you can call for them. Can you?”

Lawrence wasn’t taught this in his lectures yet. There were some things red dragons could do while green dragons couldn’t. Risteard put his back towards the stone wall and sat down, sounding uncertain.

“If a person has magic, dragons can seek them out. But speaking from experience, dragons will only come to me if they can hear my voice. I doubt they’d answer my call from this distance, and if they’re in a bad mood, they won’t come whether they can sense me or not.”

“...Huh. I guess dragons and humans surprisingly don’t have a master-servant relationship,” Lawrence mused.

“Of course we don’t. Didn’t you learn about that in your lectures? Never forget that a dragon is *allowing* you to ride on their backs. Without protection from a dragon, humans will die from a lack of oxygen. Besides... Brynhild might be disposed of.”

“Wait, isn’t she a red dragon?” Zeke butted in out of shock. “And gold-eyed, to boot. Isn’t she a precious dragon of the highest rank that humans can ride?”

Risteard grimaced, and his subordinate answered in his stead.

“They’re precious and smart. All the more reason why they’re difficult to tame. There’s a good chance that Brynhild won’t allow anyone else to ride her aside from Prince Risteard. That by itself isn’t an issue, but if she finds out about the betrayal... Dragons have their own way of doing things, so while she might not attack other dragons, they will obey a red dragon. And Rosa only has purple eyes.”

“The dragons might break away from the Dragon Knights...” Zeke concluded. “If so, it’s easier to dispose of the red dragon. I see.”

"Probably not dispose of but banish from the area," the subordinate corrected.

"But our voices still won't reach her... Seems like this plan's a bust," Zeke sighed.

"Then we simply must think of a new plan," Lawrence chimed in.

"Oh? Do you have something in mind?" Camila asked.

"I just thought it'd be easier if we had a dragon," Lawrence said. "There isn't much we can do with our numbers. Our biggest concerns are the time we have until His Majesty gets executed, and the safety of the Dragon Consort."

Everyone fell silent. Until now, the group was focused solely on fleeing, but now that they were safe, shadows of anxiety loomed over them.

"For now, let's get some light. We need to eat." Zeke placed a small bag from his belt on the ground. "The smell might attract Captain, don't you think?" he said with a straight face,

"Yeah, you're right," Camila agreed with a nod.

The ever-serious Risteard furrowed his brows, but he started unpacking as well. "Indeed. We've still got the preserved foods that Hadis made. No reason to go out and hunt."

"Oooh! His Majesty's so thoughtful! Then I'll make the fire. There should be branches around here," Camila said.

"I'll go find some wood," said Lawrence as he stood up.

He carefully stepped out from the stone wall, and his eyes widened in surprise. Even in the faint darkness, he could see an ebony dragon staring straight at them.

"Everyone—" Lawrence hastily said, trying to warn the group, before a familiar voice cut him off.

"Lawrence! Everyone! Are you guys okay?!"

Lawrence turned around to find the owner of the voice, and the group preparing to eat swiftly peeked out from the stone wall.

“Jill!” Camila yelled.

“I haven’t even opened the emperor’s food yet, and you’re already back?!” Zeke gaped.

“What do you mean by that?” Jill said before greeting everyone. “Zeke, Camila, Lawrence, and Prince Risteard! I’m glad you guys are safe!”

Jill hopped down from the black dragon, who gracefully landed on the ground without kicking up much wind.

“I’m sorry for being late,” Jill said.

She was covered in dirt and dust, but had an invigorating smile on her face. Risteard was more shocked than moved as he saw the beast standing next to the girl. He turned from pale to white as a sheet.

“Wh-Wh-Why are you riding a black dragon?!” he stammered.

“A lot of things happened. I’ll explain later. Ah, speaking of, I brought Brynhild, Your Highness.”

“Huh?!”

As the astonished prince looked towards the sky, a couple of red and green dragons descended upon the group. The dragons were part of Risteard’s Dragon Knights, and everyone cheered at the sight of the beasts.

“Brynhild! How?!” Risteard rushed over to his red dragon, who nuzzled her face against him, acting spoiled.

Jill looked up at the black dragon by her side. “When I told her about you, Your Highness, the black dragon called for them.”

“No need to thank me,” the black dragon rumbled.

Upon hearing her voice, everyone froze for a moment, but Risteard quickly regained his composure and kneeled in front of the dragon.

“You have my deepest gratitude, black dragon,” he said.

“Seems like you know your manners,” the black dragon replied.

“It talked... Right. It’s a black dragon, after all,” Camila said, putting a hand over her chest to calm herself down and giving her thanks to the dragon.

Everyone else followed suit. The beast huffed from her nose in satisfaction.

“It looks like everyone’s safe. Can you fill me in?” Jill asked.

Zeke stepped forward to explain, treating the bird and the stuffed animal as casualties. “Well, you see, Captain... Sauté and His Majesty Bear are...”

“Sauté! His Majesty Bear!” Jill cried joyfully.

A birdlike creature peeked out from the thickets with an adorable chirp, carrying a tattered stuffed bear on its back.

“You’re...not hurt. Good. You even brought back His Majesty Bear! Good job!” she praised.

“Chirp!”

“His Majesty Bear fought until he got all beaten up...”

“The enemy was beaten up even worse, though,” Zeke muttered.

Jill stood up, clutching the stuffed bear and the bird in her hands. “I need His Majesty to fix the bear.”

For a moment, Lawrence thought he saw a grown woman clutching a stuffed animal and facing forward with a courageous face. He blinked, and the image was gone.

“We must save His Majesty. Lawrence, think of a plan,” Jill ordered.

“Got it,” he replied with a nod, shocked by how naturally he responded to this command. He was almost tempted to let out a loud laugh. *How interesting*, he thought.

The girl had returned. Her mere existence had dissipated any feelings of anxiety. Lawrence couldn’t help but think that her talent was wasted here. Had she stayed in Kratos and gotten engaged to Gerald, she wouldn’t have been known as just some young lady but as the god of war, and Lawrence would’ve gladly braved the battlefields with her.

“Leave it to me. I’ll take back the emperor even with this small group,” he said.

He needed her to win so that he could rid himself of these regrets. So that

when they one day became enemies, he wouldn't hold back.



HADIS felt like he was dreaming about a kind future.

But in reality, he was in a dimly lit jail cell. He was riding a horse carriage cast under strong magic created specifically to escort the worst criminals in the empire. He couldn't hear anything. With their vision and hearing completely nullified, a normal person would turn insane under the isolation. It was a movable barrier made of iron. However, Hadis had the Dragon God within him, allowing for some company and sanity.

Just a bit more until the imperial capital, he thought, calculating the time it'd take to reach there from his captured location. He hadn't recovered enough magic and stamina since he'd rescued Jill. Should the execution take place immediately, he could only do his best to flee.

Worst case, if the Goddess's vessel is present, the royal capital might be damaged.

"Hadis, are you awake?" a voice asked.

He felt the magic weaken ever so slightly as the curtain covering his cell was raised. Hadis, focusing on regenerating his stamina, opened his eyes.

"You haven't eaten? What'll you do if you become ill?"

"You're telling a person about to be executed to eat?" Hadis spat.

Elentzia, who had urged him to have a meal out of concern, fell silent as though someone had slapped her. She stopped her encouraging hand and clenched it in front of her chest.

"...You're right. I'm sorry. But Vissel and I are trying to convince Uncle George. At the very least, we'd want you to live somewhere like a normal person."

"I'm the Dragon Emperor, no matter how hard you try to deny it."

He gazed at her, and she seemed to be trembling ever so slightly. She knew that his words were true. The fact that she used this cell instead of dragons to transport him proved she knew who the true Dragon Emperor was.

"I wonder why Jill told me not to kill you," he wondered out loud, not expecting an answer.

But Elentzia looked away with a forced smile, and answered, "Because she pitied you. Your older sister betrayed you, and then you were about to kill her. That sight was just too pitiable."

"I don't think I am. I've never thought of you as my older sister anyways," he said coldly.

"...I don't think I should be forgiven. But at the very least, I should be killed by Jill."

"Are you begging for your life?" Hadis arched an eyebrow.

"I'm just atoning for the fact that I couldn't be your older sister." She smiled, but looked like she was about to cry.

Hadis couldn't sense a lie in those words, and a question he'd never considered bubbled up out of nowhere. "Why did you betray me, Sister?"

Elentzia blinked incredulously, and it seemed she was holding back tears. "... You're not at fault. It's all on us. You haven't done anything wrong."

Hadis stayed silent.

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry for being such a horrible sister."

She said she wasn't his sister one moment before apologizing for being a horrible one the next. Her words were confusing, but Hadis knew that he had to ask. Even if this exchange was purely verbal, he had to know her reasoning for her betrayal, for she clearly loved him very much.

"We're under attack! Princess Elentzia, we're being attacked!" a voice rang out.

"From where?!" she asked.

"D-Dragons! His Highness Risteard and...a black dragon is attacking us!"

Both Elentzia and Hadis looked stupefied.

Focusing on regenerating, Rave said, **"A purple-eyed, black dragon—the highest rank of dragon that currently exists. Seems like Missy won her**

approval.”

Hadis smiled as though he expected nothing less. Jill was the Dragon Consort. She was handpicked by him and received the Dragon God’s blessing—she was the wife of the Dragon Emperor.



A black dragon, ranked just below the Dragon God, could order wild dragons to allow Camila, Zeke, and Lawrence on their backs. If there were only a few of them, they could also fly in a simple formation.

Lawrence had correctly guessed that Hadis wouldn’t be escorted by dragon, and that Princess Faris would be transported separately to avoid any complications of dragging her into a battle.

But even if we’ve got dragons, we’re overwhelmingly outnumbered, and we don’t have anything to counter the false Heavenly Sword, Lawrence thought.

It was a race against time.

“Listen, our objective is to save the emperor! Our only advantage is our mobility, but if the imperial capital sends reinforcements, we don’t stand a chance!” Lawrence yelled as he guided the group after listing the possible routes the emperor might take. “Dragon Knights of His Highness Risteard, please turn your dragons around and try to lure out as many soldiers as possible. We’ll head to the emperor and see if we can take him back. Everyone else, I wish you luck!”

In the next moment, arrows flew from below. Risteard’s Dragon Knights were well-trained. Brynhild and the other dragons twisted their bodies, dodging the projectiles as they breathed fire onto the enemy and circled them.

Jill was the first to catch up to the emperor’s cell, and she gave orders while looking below. “Black dragon, aim for the largest horse carriage over there!”

“Understood!”

The black dragon breathed fire onto the soldiers, scattering them away while heading straight for the large carriage. Suddenly, someone kicked off the roof of the carriage and leaped into the air.

“Princess Elentzia!” gasped Jill.

“I heard that you died from my uncle, but I knew you’d be alive, Jill.”

While the black dragon flew to the ground, Jill was pushed back by the impact of her opponent’s blade and rolled off the beast’s back.

“Don’t mind me! Take the carriage, emperor and all, and run!” she commanded.

“I can’t fly while carrying it. The iron box has an anti-dragon spell cast on it! It must be from the Goddess’s kingdom, and we’ve got no choice but to destroy it! It’ll take some time!” roared the dragon.

“Camila, Zeke! We need to buy the black dragon time! Don’t let any soldiers near her!” Lawrence said, giving accurate orders.

Elentzia didn’t seem flustered. Jill calmly tried to back away from the princess and pointed her unsheathed sword towards her enemy. Jill hadn’t recovered her magic fully, and her injury from fighting the black dragon hadn’t healed. Even so, she wouldn’t back down.

“Please move aside, Your Highness,” Jill ordered.

“I cannot. For my family and siblings, I must stand here.”

Jill knitted her brows while Elentzia smiled elegantly. In the next moment, the princess swung her blade with impressive speed.

“Ugh!” grunted Jill.

“Your magic powers are sealed, and yet you can still receive this blow. As I thought, you’re a dangerous person.”

The second blow chipped Jill’s sword. Every time she tried to gain some distance, Elentzia relentlessly closed the gap. When Jill dodged the sword thrust towards her face, a sliver of blood ran down her cheek.

She’s strong! Jill hadn’t taken her opponent lightly, but after crossing blades, she knew her calculations were off. She hadn’t even recovered half of her total magic powers yet, and didn’t know how far she could go.

“Retreat, Jill. We won’t chase after you if you turn back! I’ll save Hadis’s life!”

Elentzia shouted.

“Then why did you betray us?!” Jill yelled back irritably. She couldn’t stand Elentzia’s selfish statements, and even if she was being pushed back, she wouldn’t lose in a battle of willpower. Jill wasn’t going to retreat. “If you want to save His Majesty, why aren’t you on his side?!”

Elentzia, who seemed to have the advantage, flinched for a moment, her face in pain. But she still used all her power, and Jill was blown back towards a rock and fell silent. A flash of silver flew towards Jill. She remained focused and parried the blade.

“I’d like an explanation as well, Sister,” said Risteard, rotating the glimmering point of his spear, ready to throw.

Elentzia lowered her sword slightly. “Risteard...”

“Why did you betray Hadis? I understand that you weren’t on our side from the start. But you’re a sympathetic person. You’re someone who won’t leave behind her half-siblings or family. That’s why I trusted you and thought you’d be a reliable ally. I don’t want to think I made a mistake. No...” Risteard paused before bellowing, “I still don’t think I made a mistake!”

Elentzia remained levelheaded. She took a deep breath and drew her shoulders back, head held high. “Then come to my side, Risteard.”

“I’ve approved of Hadis being the emperor!” Risteard declared. “Turning my back on this would be turning my back on my way of living!”

“Even if your younger sister’s life is at stake?!”

Risteard widened his eyes before he shouted, “I’m disappointed in you, Sister! You *know* that you can’t use that threat against me!”

“No, I...” Elentzia tried to explain before she stopped.

She was the first to notice his presence. Before Jill could move, Elentzia grabbed her and Risteard and brought them to the ground. A menacing burst of magic power ran through the skies.

“Why are you dawdling, Elentzia?”

“Uncle George, I...”

With a clang of his heavy armor, George swung the false Heavenly Sword. Far behind him were military flags. The imperial army was quickly approaching in formation.

Damn! How are Lawrence and His Majesty?! Are we unable to buy them time?! Jill thought.

In the distance, Risteard's subordinates were also surrounded. The dragons couldn't attack much anymore, and their battle was at a standstill.

Elentzia quickly looked up and yelled, "Please leave this place to me, Uncle George! I'll convince Risteard!"

"It clearly looks to me like you're the one getting convinced," George replied.

"Perfect timing. I'm getting nowhere with my kind sister," Risteard said, slipping past Elentzia, who tried to cover for him. He stepped forward. "Hadis is the Dragon Emperor. There's no changing that. I've no idea what you told my sister here, but I'd like you to stop this meaningless battle!"

"Are you saying Hadis is fit to be the emperor?" George asked.

"He's much better than a man who burns down innocent villages!"

"That was necessary."

Jill dug her fingers into the ground at George's reckless claim. Elentzia bit her lip, and Risteard looked furious.

"Such words are unfitting for the imperial family! Uncle George, I declare you're not even suitable to be part of the Rave imperial family!" Risteard roared with rage.

"Risteard!" Elentzia shouted.

He shrugged off his half-sister's grip and leaped towards George, but a swing of the false Heavenly Sword blew him back.

"Your Highness, are you okay?!" Jill called after him.

"Ugh, is that Heavenly Sword really a fake?!" Risteard asked her.

"It is, but its power is real, so you mustn't be too reckless!" Jill said.

If the weapon was really made from the Sacred Spear of the Goddess, it

would be as powerful as a divine weapon. It couldn't be underestimated.

Elentzia once again stood in front of Risteard and Jill and shouted, "Uncle George! I'll convince these people, so please leave this to me!"

"You're too naïve, Elentzia," George shook his head, disappointed. "Hadis's transportation took this much time because of your cunning tactics, am I wrong? Did you plan on letting him escape somewhere? He should already be at the imperial capital, but look how pathetic you are now, ambushed by the enemy."

"That's..."

"Risteard, you said that I wasn't suitable to be part of the Rave imperial family. But what about you? Are you truly a member of the imperial family?" George leaned forward as Risteard narrowed his eyes.

"I've no idea what you're talking about," Risteard replied.

"Elentzia wasn't aware either, so I suppose it's only natural that you were kept in the dark as well. I'm talking about Hadis's mother."

"After all this time, are you planning on saying that Hadis isn't fit to be an emperor because his mother was a commoner and a dancer?"

"That woman fell in love with one of the guards shortly after she gave birth to Vissel. She knew that she was out of the emperor's reach. She must've been stupid as well, for she created this situation."

Jill and Risteard stared blankly, puzzled by George's monologue. They had no idea what he was getting at.

Elentzia looked pale and shouted, "Uncle George! Risteard doesn't need to hear this!"

"Oh no, I believe he does. This puts the entire Rave imperial family in crisis, after all."

"Just what are you talking about? What are you trying to say?!" pleaded Risteard.

"Hadis is not my older brother's child," said George coolly.

Everyone stopped breathing for a moment. George's eyes gleamed with insanity, and his stare seemed off.

"Do you understand what this means, Risteard?" he asked.

Jill slowly gulped, understanding George's implications.

His Majesty is the Dragon Emperor. He's without a doubt a part of the Rave imperial family. But if he's not the son of the former emperor, that means the current imperial family is...

Risteard, realizing the truth sooner than Jill, fell to his knees. Elentzia closed her eyes and clenched her fists.

"We cannot accept Hadis as the emperor," George declared.

Approving of Hadis, who had no blood ties with the current Rave imperial family, would mean that the family wasn't descended from the Dragon God Rave.

"He's the only man who cannot be the Dragon Emperor," George added.

The descendants of Goddess Kratos ruled over the Kratos Kingdom, while the descendants of Dragon God Rave controlled the Rave Empire. No one on this continent doubted this.

Even Jill needed to take a few deep breaths to calm herself down. She finally understood why the Rave imperial family didn't accept Hadis in the future.

This must be the cause of all the messy infighting!

If Hadis was the Dragon Emperor and the emperor of Rave, the Rave imperial family would lose its legitimacy and *raison d'être*.

"Since...when? When did this..." Risteard murmured.

"Who knows. The most likely candidate is three hundred years ago, when we once lost the Heavenly Sword," George replied indifferently, perhaps already accepting the truth.

Risteard put both hands on the ground and trembled. He was prouder than anyone to be part of the Rave imperial family. His shock was immeasurable.

"But then we've been...fooling the citizens for centuries!"

"Quiet, Risteard! We're the Rave imperial family. We *must* keep it that way," George yelled.

"But that would mean..."

"Then why don't you offer your head to the citizens? Claim that you're a child born from infidelity with no ties to the previous emperor."

Risteard gulped. This would be the likely outcome, for he'd falsely assumed he was a part of the imperial family. Jill bit her lip.

The citizens followed the family because of their bloodline. The family members' intentions didn't matter—if there was a shred of doubt about their legitimacy, it would lead to war. Since Hadis carried the true bloodline, fighting seemed inevitable.

"Now you know my reasoning. So, Risteard, capture the girl," George ordered.

Risteard's shoulders jolted, and Jill clenched her fists.

"Riesteard! Do you want your older brother's death to be mocked and be told it was all for naught?! Your older brother died magnificently like a crown prince should, did he not?" George shouted.

Risteard's fingers dug into the ground. As he gripped the soil, Jill looked on as though she was praying. Was there nothing she could do?

In the end, must Hadis kill everyone who's part of the current Rave imperial family?

"My brother...was a splendid crown prince," Risteard said. "While the cowards all resigned the throne, he became a crown prince knowing that he was walking towards his death. He said that it was his duty as a member of the Rave imperial family."

"Exactly," George nodded. "And to protect his honor is your—"

"If my brother were here, he wouldn't tell me to continue to lie about my bloodline! Even more so if I'm a part of the imperial family!" Risteard's blood-streaked face crumpled as he shouted. Elentzia took a step back, overpowered by his aura. "We should publicize this! We should let the people come to a decision regarding the imperial family! If our existence is a mistake, we must fix

it!"

"Then you're prepared to let your younger sister be executed as well, I take it?" George threatened.

Risteard, unable to respond, punched the ground with his fists. He was on the verge of crying. Elentzia quietly wrapped her arms around his shoulders.

"Do you get it now, Risteard? Hadis doesn't know yet. We can still protect him without causing a huge fuss. We just need to agree with Uncle," Elentzia murmured.

Jill finally understood why the princess had betrayed them. She had heard this story from George and switched sides to protect her younger siblings, who were kept in the dark.

But this is too much for them to bear...

No one would be saved. Risteard, curled up into a ball while shaking, Elentzia hugging his shoulders, and Hadis, chosen as a sacrifice, would all be led to their doom.

"We just need *her* to die. If neither of you can finish the job, then I suppose I must," George said, shifting his gaze towards Jill. She looked up and braced herself for the false Heavenly Sword emanating immense magic power. "We need to kill this girl, who's falsely claimed herself as the Dragon Consort."

"Wait! If this is our reason for fighting, we can talk it out with His Majesty, can't we?" Jill shouted.

"Who will talk with a man who curses and kills the imperial family?" George argued. "That boy's evil! That's my conclusion. He's an unforgivable existence who shakes the foundations of the Rave Empire. He should never have been born!"

"You have no right to say that!" Jill roared.

"His birth has brought nothing but pain and suffering!"

George raised his false Heavenly Sword when he suddenly stopped, looking terrified. Jill turned around, feeling an intense presence behind her back.

This is the worst!

"Your...Majesty," she murmured.

"What an interesting story. Even Rave's shocked by the truth," Hadis said.

The black dragon had successfully opened the cage. Hadis grinned widely as he stepped closer and closer.

"I understand. I truly, really understand," he said. His creepy smile incited fear in them all. "As you say, there's nothing to discuss. I decide who gets to live or die."

The color drained from Risteard and Elentzia's faces. Only George pursed his lips.

"But even so, I had a plan. I called it the happy family plan. Even if I was told that I was cursed, I felt that one day, we'd all be able to get along," Hadis continued.

"Hadis, I..." Elentzia started.

"Silence, traitor."

Elentzia froze at Hadis's steely gaze. He laughed.

"Everyone, here's a dirty rebel!"

"You scoundrel who falsely claims to be the Dragon Emperor... I'll kill you right here!" George yelled, gripping his sword. With a strong gust of wind, he released immense magic power. Hadis simply looked up, and the attack exploded and disintegrated in front of him.

George took a step back. "You... I thought your magic had been sealed..."

"Yeah. Maybe the Goddess is getting a kick out of this situation. I can't stop laughing myself."

Jill glanced back, where she could see only the chalky white spire. She remembered that Princess Faris had already been taken to the imperial capital via a different route.

Is she controlling how the magic is sealed through the false Heavenly Sword?!

George's mouth twitched, and he roared, "You've caused us to suffer, and yet you dare laugh? You monster!"

“If I’m a monster, what does that make you all?”

Hadis’s dangerously glittering gold eyes were filled with anger and murderous intent as he smiled. He didn’t seem to be looking at anything in particular, and he certainly wasn’t looking at Jill.

“You planned to have me executed? Don’t make me laugh. I’m not the one on the chopping block. It’ll be you guys!” Hadis said with glee.

A tremendous surge of magic power welled up from beneath Hadis’s feet. Everyone shuddered at its unearthly intensity. A rumbling sound reverberated through the air as the ground below cracked.

Everything up to this point was according to the Goddess’s plan. Jill launched herself off the shaky ground, desperate to grab the attention of the golden eyes looking elsewhere, his teary face failing to produce a laugh.

“Your Majesty, no!” she yelled.

She used her entire body to cling onto Hadis’s waist, hugging him with all her might, but he continued to shout. The corners of his eyes started to sparkle.

“What did I do?! What exactly did I *do*?! And what have you all done to me?! You kept me at a distance, blaming everything inconvenient on my curse!”

“Your Majesty, stop! Look at me! Come on!” Jill cried.

“You are the ones who should’ve never been born, not me!”

His magic overflowed like a flash of lightning as a whirlwind formed around him. Jill was about to be blown away; she still hadn’t recovered enough of her magic. But she still clung on.

I gotta hang in there! So what if the Goddess sealed my magic?! I’ll snap that seal in two, too!

No way was Jill losing to love. She gritted her teeth and tried to push back the man who was headed towards despair. She felt like her entire body was enveloped in flames, but she never tore her eyes off him. She looked up at Hadis.

“I’ll kill you all,” he murmured. His face was filled with delight and despair, just like the time he ordered a massacre. “I’ll make you regret ever being born!

Just like I have!"

"I'll give birth to ten of your children!" Jill shouted.

The magic flowing around Hadis stopped in an instant. The fear-filled atmosphere suddenly disappeared as everyone went silent.

"...Huh? What?" Hadis replied coldly.

Jill kept her arms wrapped around his waist. "I'll make sure to have ten kids with you, Your Majesty!" She was finally reflected in his golden eyes, and Jill continued to rattle on. "Don't worry! My family has a lot of kids! I have six other siblings myself, and my older sister has already given birth to three!"

"...Jill, I've no idea what you're..."

"Then let's have one of our daughters marry Prince Risteard!" Jill suggested. "He'll become our son-in-law!"

"Huh?! Wait, wouldn't that age gap be ridiculous?!" Risteard exclaimed.

Shocked by what Jill had just said, the prince couldn't suppress his dull-witted question. She ignored him and pointed to Elentzia.

"And if one of our sons marries Princess Elentzia, she'll be our daughter-in-law!"

"I-I'm a part of this too?! How many years in the future will this be?!" Elentzia stammered.

"And everyone will be a part of our family!"

Hadis widened his gold eyes in shock, and Jill puffed out her chest.

"How's that? Perfect, right? This will be our happy family plan, Your Majesty! We'll do it together!"

Please, don't give up here, Jill pleaded internally, burying her face in Hadis's relaxed body. "I'm not related to you either, Your Majesty. But we can still become a family."

Jill was well-aware that the legitimacy of a bloodline could shake a country. She didn't want to minimize that issue, but Elentzia and Risteard seemed like good siblings. As Hadis's older brother and sister, they should be able to call

themselves a part of the Rave imperial family.

There's a solution to this, and I'm sure His Majesty is aware of that.

Judging from George's statements, Hadis only shared half his blood with Vissel. Hadis felt bereaved by this fact, stripped of the excuse of biological family, leaving him sad and angry. If he looked at the situation with a cool head, he should be able to find a solution as well.

"Dragon Emperor... Two red dragons are requesting your forgiveness," the black dragon said, bringing along Camila, Zeke, and Lawrence from the sky. She must've heard everything as she landed behind Hadis. "I shall attest to what I saw. That princess tried to save the Dragon Consort, and that prince entered the battle to save the Dragon Emperor. If there were any lies here, the red dragons wouldn't have cooperated."

Hadis remained silent.

"Indeed, there are many in the family who are part of the three dukes that diverged from the Rave imperial family long ago," the black dragon continued in her sonorous voice. "I think the princess and prince here have more than enough potential to be a part of the imperial family."

"Rave, what do you think?"

Elentzia, Risteard, and even the black dragon seemed nervous about Hadis's question. But Jill knew Rave would've tried to stop Hadis's rampage.

"You don't mind. I see..." the emperor muttered. He'd expected this response. With a sigh, Hadis crouched down and kneeled in front of Jill. "Ten?" he asked teasingly. His smile was filled with resignation and anxiety.

Jill reached out and stroked his head. "We can have more if you like. I want a lot of kids, and you get lonely easily, Your Majesty."

"I see. I'm sure our kids would be happy to have an uncle and aunt to play with."

His words implied that he acknowledged Risteard and Elentzia as siblings. Jill's eyes sparkled with joy as she was lifted into the air.

"You can barely even use magic, and you tried to stop me. You're reckless,"

he said.

"That's because you were being immature and got all angry," she pointed out.

"You're right. But still, you're amazing. I thought it'd take another two to three months." Hadis swung his empty right hand, and the Heavenly Sword appeared.

"Hey there, Missy! Long time no see."

"Rave!" Jill cried.

"The Goddess's seal has grown weaker, Uncle— No, Traitor George," Hadis said. He pointed his glittering Heavenly Sword towards a stunned George and loudly declared, "You must atone for your sins. You deceived my older sister and brother, and falsely claimed yourself as the Dragon Emperor. Should you surrender now, I will give you an execution worthy of a member of the Rave imperial family. It'd be a better death than holding onto that fake blade."

"Wh-What do you mean?" George stammered.

"You not only claimed yourself as the Dragon Emperor, but you even falsified the Heavenly Sword of the Dragon Emperor. That act will incur the wrath of the Dragon God. You'll soon be cursed by the God and your whole body will rot as you die."

So that's why Hadis said we just needed to wait, Jill thought.

George's pale face quickly turned red, and he shook his head.

"No, even so. I can't believe you. I must...make you disappear. I just need to seal your magic once more! I just need a bit more time!"

Hadis furrowed his brows, and Risteard took a step forward.

"Uncle George, just stop already! Hadis is trying to accept us as part of the Rave imperial family, and you're stepping on his kindness—"

"Where's the proof of that?! How can we trust him and know he won't betray us in the future?!"

Risteard scowled in frustration, and Elentzia quietly stood up.

"...I'll trust him, Uncle George," she said. "No, we *should* trust him. We're the

ones who made the first move, trying to protect ourselves. Hadis, who pardoned us for that, is a splendid emperor. What we need is the strength to believe in him.”

“What can you protect with that naïve thinking?! You... Y-You...”

George suddenly put his hand over his mouth. His bulging eyes twisted impossibly as he stared at the false Heavenly Sword he’d raised into the air. His right arm swelled up in an instant.

“Wha—”

The transformation happened in an instant. His right arm spilled out from his armor. His shoulders, neck, and entire body continued to expand, snapping his armor off his body. His skin turned dark, and his bubbling body started to increase in volume. His legs, arms, and head were submerged in a pile of flesh as he grew larger still. The mass of meat started to talk.

“We mUsT...eRaDiCaTe. LeAvE...DrAgOn EmPeRoR. Or wE gEt kIILeD...”

Overwhelmed by the shadow of the rapidly growing George, Jill cried, “Your Majesty, is this Rave’s curse?!”

“No,” Hadis replied. “That false Heavenly Sword is swallowing my uncle alive.”

“My dAuGhTeR, mY bRoThEr, mY fAmIY, mY nEpHeW, mY nIeCe, aNd eVeRyOnE eLsE...wIIL bE pUnIsHeD bY...tHe DrAgOn EmPeRoR.”

Risteard and Elentzia gulped, staring at what was left of their transformed uncle.

“SaVe. SaLvAgE.”

“Uncle George, stop! Please let go of the false weapon! We’ll make sure that the future you feared won’t ever happen!”

“...Even if we’re disparaged as fools in the afterlife.”

The siblings begged their uncle, but the false Heavenly Sword sank into the lump of flesh that was George. He sprouted new arms and legs and went on all fours as blue wings burst from his back.

He was an aberration—a monster that was an imitation of a dragon.

“I wIIL pRoTeCt! PrOtEcT! PrOtEcT! DeStRoY! KiLI! KiLI eVeRyOnE! I aM tHe dEsCeNdAnT oF tHe DrAgOn GoD! I wIIL fIgHt aGaInSt tHe GoDdEsS!”

Bloody tears streaked from his single eye. His mouth torn in a diagonal line let out an ear-splitting shriek. Everyone covered their ears from the supersonic cry, and the black dragon breathed her flames. The monster that was George flapped its wings and took to the skies. It flew towards the imperial capital with great speed.

Cries could be heard from the army headed towards the emperor as they suddenly saw a monster.

“Is he planning on attacking the capital?! Rosa!” Elentzia yelled.

“Come, Brynhild! We must stop our uncle. Rally the soldiers over there, Sister!” Risteard shouted.

The two jumped onto their dragons and flew away.

“Lawrence, Camila, Zeke! Evacuate the citizens of the capital to safety! Your Majesty... Huh?!” Jill cried.

She was slowly lowered onto the ground, and she stared at the emperor blankly. Hadis, showing kindness unfitting for this strained situation, stroked her cheek with his large hand.

“I’ll be off. Black dragon, I leave the Dragon Consort to you,” he said.

“Understood,” the dragon replied.

“Let’s go, Rave.”

“Aye aye!” said the Dragon God.

Jill tried to call out to him, but he already leaped from the ground. Hadis flew at shocking speed, making it seem like he’d catch up to the monster headed towards the imperial capital in mere seconds. Jill hastily asked the black dragon to follow them.

The monster let out a supersonic shriek as it had done before, destroying the magical barrier and the castle walls in an instant. Cries of terror erupted within the imperial capital. Agonizing screams coupled with explosions rang out, and smoke billowed in the air as buildings were destroyed. A bell echoed, perhaps

indicating that the capital was under enemy attack.

The emperor outsped the monster and stood before it, floating above the imperial capital. He held the Heavenly Sword, shimmering silver, confirming that it was indeed the weapon of the Dragon Emperor.

The blade shone as beautifully as ever when in front of the monster, emanating its magic with an irritated scream.

“Your journey ends here, Uncle George. You were brilliant. You tried to save your family and this empire from me,” said Hadis in a merciful yet pitiable tone. “So, here’s my parting gift to you.”

A blinding flash of light ran through the skies, seemingly splitting the heavens in two. The tremendous magic energy and the roar of an explosion created an enormous blast, dyeing the skies of the imperial capital a shimmering silver. The clouds, the smoke, and the ugly monster were being purified.

“You don’t have to worry. I’m sure I’ll—” Hadis said.

Jill couldn’t hear the rest of his statement, but she smiled as she saw the mid-afternoon sky glimmering like silver stardust from his magic.

Who could have a shred of doubt after this view?

He was unquestionably the emperor who protected this empire. He was worthy of the Dragon God’s protection. He was the Dragon Emperor.

Epilogue

“JEEZ, you twat! Why are you always like this?! Stand tall! Shoulders back! Look the part!”

“Ow! Owww! I’ll shrink if you press down on my head like that, Risteard!”

“Come now, Risteard. Don’t be too harsh. We just fixed Hadis’s hair, and you might mess it up again.”

“Sister! Tell Risteard to get off of me!”

“Stop being so casual with me! Call me your older brother!”

A welcoming parade was to be held in the afternoon, and the three siblings—Elentzia, Risteard, and Hadis—were making a big fuss. Jill watched them from a corner of the needlessly luxurious waiting room. Camila and Zeke were standing against the wall, forcing a smile.

“I’m glad those three still get along,” Camila said.

“Feels very superficial, though. They’re probably pushing themselves,” Zeke added.

“And that’s just fine. They have to act the part first,” Jill noted.

Jill, dangling her legs off her chair, wouldn’t be attending the parade. She protested, wanting to be with her husband, but Risteard lectured her about traditional processes and steps to take. Elentzia had also stated that Jill wouldn’t be given special treatment, and Hadis’s engagement announcement was thus pushed back.

This was logical, of course. The empire was divided because of the false emperor incident, and a monster had attacked the imperial capital. It was imperative to first announce the emperor’s return and display the solidarity of the Rave imperial family to put the citizens at ease.

“But you seem to be dissatisfied, Jill,” Camila observed. “Did you want to

attend the parade?"

"Well, I was told I shouldn't attend because I'm still small and I'd be difficult to see... And I'd look lame if His Majesty carried me on his shoulders..." she whined. Jill wanted to grow taller. If her memories served her right, she would reach her growth spurt soon. "Plus, I won't even be able to attend the dinner party! I can't eat the grand feast!"

"You're most upset about that bit, aren't you, Captain?" Zeke asked.

"Now, now, hold yourself back. Those three are the only members of the imperial family attending, right? If there was a small girl stealing food from the sidelines, you'd stand out like a sore thumb, and it'd be hard to guard you," Camila explained, finding humor in the situation.

Zeke crouched next to the chair that Jill was sitting on and agreed. "In fact, I want you to skip it. I'm not a fan of dinner parties."

"That kid seems suited for the job, though..."

Jill knew Camila was referring to Lawrence, but she kept her mouth shut and stared down at her feet. After the monster that was George was slain, Ristead, Elentzia, and Hadis triumphantly returned to the imperial capital. The citizens joyfully welcomed them, calling them heroes for saving the city.

In contrast, the people of the imperial castle were a lot sneakier and quieter. Many nobles and government officials fled the area, claiming they were going to "Return to their land." The people who remained had nowhere to run. The whereabouts of most of the imperial army, including the general, who followed the commands of George, were unknown.

Members of the imperial family who resided in the castle were more or less unharmed, but perhaps tired of living under confinement, or simply avoiding Hadis, all needed time to recuperate and rest. Vissel, Hadis's brother and the man Jill was most wary of, apparently earned the mistrust of George when the crown prince tried to dispatch soldiers to Hadis. Vissel was sent to the duchy of Duke Verrat, where his fiancée resided, and wasn't at the imperial castle.

Jill felt the strength leave her body. *The crown prince was suspected by his uncle, huh? I wonder how true that is.*

Though Princess Faris was captured, it was a stroke of luck that she was treated as a guest and was unharmed. The trip from Neutrahl to the imperial capital had taken a toll on her, and she could only meet with everyone briefly. But it seemed like she celebrated Hadis's return from the bottom of her heart.

In other words, everyone's actions came off calculated and suspicious.

People immediately came from Kratos to take their princess back, and Princess Faris's departure to return home was soon decided. It felt like a waste of time to be wary of her, so Jill simply saw the princess off without another word. It went without question that Lawrence left the imperial capital to escort Faris home.

...Is it about time for them to leave Beilburg? Prince Gerald was supposed to pick them up, I think.

Gerald had returned from the Rakia Mountains.

The black dragon stated she would see Princess Faris off to keep her eye on them, and then take a look at her nest. There were no reports since the dragon flew off, meaning their international guests had left the Rave Empire without a fuss...for now.

Jill glanced back at her husband and saw him being scolded by Risteard as Elentzia kept a forced smile plastered on her face. It was a wholesome moment, but they seemed to be having a bit too much fun.

As Zeke had said, they were likely forcing themselves to act friendlier than usual. Hadis was to publicize that the previous emperor wasn't a descendant of the Dragon God during the parade. He'd use the ancient tradition of marriage arrangements with the three dukes as a shield to maintain the current state of the Rave imperial family, but there would surely be some backlash. There might even be people who'd start claiming that they were the true members of the Rave imperial family. The Kratos Kingdom might support these people, as Jill had seen in the future, but she still thought this was the best decision.

She hopped off her chair.

Neither Jill nor Hadis had fully recovered their magic yet, but ever since Hadis summoned the Heavenly Sword, she was able to see Rave again. It was tough

for the Dragon God to maintain his snake-like form for long periods of time, but he rested on the emperor's shoulder, happily watching Hadis fooling around with his siblings.

Risteard and Elentzia couldn't see Rave, but Jill thought that the Dragon God seemed the most pleased by this scene.

Hadis noticed her approaching and shouted, "Jill, Risteard's being so mean to me!"

"I told you to stop being so casual with me!" Risteard roared.

"We shouldn't force him, should we, Risteard? We're in no position to do so..." Elentzia started.

"Even so, we mustn't act so reserved! We were personally approved of by the black dragon and the Dragon God as members of the Rave imperial family, after all!"

Risteard proudly puffed out his chest while Hadis had a disapproving look. Elentzia's cheek twitched.

"Ugh, he's quick to bounce back, isn't he?" Rave said, looking exhausted.

That attitude was par for the course with Risteard, but even Jill could only offer a begrudging smile.

"Besides, you can't mix kindness with irresponsibility, Sister!" Risteard added.

"R-Right. Sorry," she replied.

"Treating him like a swollen injury is the most infuriating! If we truly are his siblings, then we should treat him like our younger brothers and sisters! We shouldn't fear him just because he's the Dragon Emperor! At the very least, we shouldn't be so scared." He said the last bit quietly, and Elentzia's grin faded.

"I see. You're right," she said thoughtfully.

"You heard them, Your Majesty," Jill said.

"Seems like they're a step ahead of you, Hadis," Rave said, amused.

A shocked Hadis sat up straight before he slumped his shoulders. "So that's why you were so loud and annoying..."

"Did you say something, Hadis?" asked Risteard.

"You're so high and mighty even though we're only two months apart, Brother."

Risteard's eyes flew wide open while Hadis turned away as though to say, "Are you satisfied?" The emperor's cheeks turned slightly red, and he looked adorable.

"Heh... Heh heh heh... You finally approved of me as your older brother now, didn't you? That means I'm above you!"

"Risteard... It was so nice and heartwarming until that last part. That part of you is no good..." Elentzia muttered.

"Whatever are you saying, Sister?! Come on, Hadis! Call me 'brother' one more time!"

"No," Hadis replied.

"Both of you annoy people by having them repeat stuff over and over again. You and Prince Risteard are more similar than I thought, Your Majesty," Jill observed.

"Agreed. You're quite astute, Jill," Elentzia nodded.

"Princess Elentzia, I'll leave His Majesty in your hands today," Jill told her.

"Of course. You can't attend, after all. I'm sorry to say, but you won't be seen atop the carriage parade with your height..."

"I suppose it can't be helped. I've turned eleven, so I think I'll hit my growth spurt soon..."

It was like lightning struck the room—everyone, including the Dragon God froze while Jill blinked back innocently.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"J-Jill... I-I thought you were ten...?" Hadis stammered as he trembled.

"Oh," she replied, turning to him. "Did I not tell you all? I've turned eleven!"

"When?!"

"Uh, when you were captured and taken away, Your Majesty."

The air turned ice cold as Jill tilted her head to one side. Suddenly, Hadis fell to his knees and crumpled onto the floor.

"Th-That's like more than ten days ago... D-Did I miss my w-wife's first birthday together?!"

"You're exaggerating. We had Princess Elentzia's betrayal and all that to deal with, so it wasn't the time to be talking about birthdays," Jill said nonchalantly.

"Ugh... I'm so sorry, Hadis!" Elentzia apologized.

"S-Sister, calm down. Keep it together," Risteard said.

"Are you serious, Missy?" Rave looked solemn as he transferred himself to Jill's shoulder. Jill nodded apologetically, not expecting this reaction.

"Yeah, I turned eleven..." she said.

"Oof, we've screwed the pooch on this one," the Dragon God replied.

"Let's cancel the parade! We have to host a huge birthday party for Jill!" Hadis cried.

"You idiot, we can't do that!" Risteard scolded.

"You're all awful! I'll quit being the emperor! I don't want to be emperor if I can't celebrate my wife's birthday!" As Hadis started to whine with everything he could, Jill realized she had revealed this fact at the worst possible time.

"Look at that," Camila said, approaching Jill. "You need to be careful of these things, Jill."

"I'm sorry... I didn't think he'd be this upset," Jill apologized.

"I wasn't even by her side! How could this be?! All because you betrayed me, Sister!" Hadis wailed.

"I-I can't refute that... I'm so sorry, Hadis, Jill," Elentzia said, looking glum.

"I-I'm totally fine!" Jill replied hastily. "Everyone had their own matters to attend to."

"No, I deserve this... I didn't think I'd have to face my sins in this way,

though..." the princess muttered.

"Come on, Your Majesty. Don't cry. We'll all celebrate later, all right?" Zeke consoled.

"We'll all think of something after the parade, Hadis. How about that?" Risteard suggested.

Jill crouched in front of Hadis. "I'll be fine, Your Majesty. Once things have calmed down after the parade, could you celebrate my birthday with me?"

"But..." Hadis started.

"I'll be much happier if I can celebrate with you all." Hadis stared blankly at her heartfelt words, and she spread her arms as wide as possible. "I want my cake to be *this* big! With plenty of strawberries!"

"G-Got it. Yeah. Right. Let's make the best preparations possible. I'll use the entirety of the Rave Empire to make the cake and gather the best food I can! It'll be the largest festival ever!"

"Really?!"

Jill's eyes twinkled with delight as Hadis stood up and balled both his hands into fists. "Yep! I'll use my powers as an emperor properly!"

"...I don't think that's the proper way at all, but if you'll do something about the lack of personnel and everything else, I'll look the other way for birthday parties and festivals," Risteard said with a sigh.

"We shouldn't be so strict precisely because we're in this situation, Risteard. The more fun, the better. We need to prepare a present for Jill," Elentzia said with a smile.

"Good for you, Missy," said a grinning Rave perched on her shoulder.

"Ah, Your Majesty! Could I ask for a favor?" Jill asked.

"What is it? Just say the word. I'll do anything to fulfill a request from you. I even missed celebrating your birthday, and it'll be far into the future before we announce our engagement!"

"Could I borrow Rave for a short while?"

Hadis and Rave shared a similar expression as they blinked at her.



THE port of Beilburg was the first place in the Rave Empire that Jill had set foot on. She thought it was enough to just count the memories from this timeline. She stepped onto the wharf, feeling nostalgic when she caught a whiff of the sea.

“Thank you for teleporting me,” she said.

“Well, we’ve recovered a good chunk of our magic, you know. But what business do you have in Beilburg? You said you needed to talk with Miss Sphere, but you left everyone else behind,” Rave said.

“I’m sorry, that was a lie.”

“A lie?!”

The Dragon God looked shocked. A single, large visiting ship was docked at the harbor, its mast painted with the crest of Kratos. Rave glared.

“You’re not planning on attacking them by yourself, are you?!” he asked.

“No, but could I ask for you to turn into the Heavenly Sword? I want to make it home in time for His Majesty’s speech.”

Rave seemed to have some concerns, but he swiftly transformed into the weapon. Jill grabbed the hilt and waited for a girl to turn around.

One by one, luggage was carried onto the ship as the wharf prepared to undock the vessel. The hurrying people and their voices seemed to slip through this young girl.

It was as though the girl in the wheelchair, who turned around, didn’t exist.

“Why, if it isn’t my older sister, Jill. Are you going to come with us to Kratos?” the angelic girl asked, cocking her head to one side. She sounded like she was waiting for Jill’s arrival.

“No, I’m here for a send-off,” Jill replied.

“Are you perhaps looking for Lawrence? He’s currently talking with my brother.”

“I’m here to send you off, Princess Faris.”

The young girl gave a saintly and beautiful smile, her cheeks flushed red. “My, for me? I’m so happy. I wanted to properly say my goodbyes to you as well... I couldn’t voice my condolences regarding George either.” She looked down and smiled in an act of self-ridicule. “George, who was once at odds with Hadis, decided to face the beast terrorizing the imperial capital alongside the emperor. But I heard that he died during the battle... It’s truly a pity, when the two seemed to finally be getting along.”

Faris continued to spout lines that Lawrence had left as a parting gift—a script to write down in the annals of history.

“I’ve heard rumors that this monster originated from Kratos with the help of magic. It’s a bit troubling to hear, but I suppose it’s not a major concern. Like the calm after the storm, I’m sure the Rave Empire is more unified than ever. Absolutely splendid,” the princess finished.

“But Prince Gerald had given Prince George the false Heavenly Sword. Either you or the Goddess made it or prepared it beforehand,” Jill said.

Faris maintained her flowery smile.

“I won’t ask about the machinations of war between countries,” Jill said, her head held high. “I’m just here to confirm if you transformed Prince George into a monster.”

“And why do you think that?” Faris didn’t even try to hide that she knew George was turned into a monster.

“Neither His Majesty nor I have completely rid ourselves of the seal on our magic. In other words, the false Heavenly Sword that was used as a vessel is still hidden away somewhere. I presume you had Prince George fuse with the false Heavenly Sword to conceal that fact.”

“Wonderful. You’re absolutely correct.” Faris clapped her hands together casually, letting the truth slip so easily.

George was an enemy. Even if he didn’t turn into a monster, he harbored such animosity that he would’ve been executed anyways. Still, Jill remembered his final words and clenched her fists.

“Why did you construct such an elaborate scheme?! I understand why Kratos sided with Prince George and His Majesty—it was to weaken the Rave Empire—Prince Gerald’s usual tactic. But what did you come here for? You weren’t truly willing to become engaged to His Majesty, were you?!” Jill accused.

“You’ve already stated the correct answer yourself. I had to collect the false Heavenly Sword. You snapped the Sacred Spear of the Goddess and sank it to the ocean floor.” Jill fell silent, surprised by Faris’s words, and the princess continued in a levelheaded manner. “It’s already weak enough as it is. If we don’t have a vessel made from the same material, we wouldn’t be able to search for it. But my brother had already planned for the weapon to be passed onto George. And I’m a frail person. If I were to call for the spear a great distance away without a vessel, I’d be bedridden for days.”

“...So you did all this to get closer to Prince George?”

“That’s right. Of course, George wouldn’t simply return the weapon to me at my request. He was extremely wary of Kratos, after all. Even when he turned into a monster, he tried to slaughter the Goddess at the imperial capital. I thought the fastest way to retrieve the weapon would be to get captured so I could be closer to him.”

Hence, Faris tried to have Hadis as her ally, entered the imperial capital from Neutrahl, and collected the false Heavenly Sword when she was given the chance.

“I mustn’t rely on my brother for everything,” Faris said with an innocent smile, standing up from her wheelchair.

She opened her small right hand, and black fog rose into the air. Jill was familiar with this feeling and recognized the fog in front of her. It was the Sacred Spear of the Goddess, a divine weapon of Kratos that Jill had snapped in half. It was a beautiful, jet-black spear that resembled the night sky.

Faris gave an elegant smile as she held the black spear that was more than twice her height. “Are we done looking for answers?” she asked.

“Everything’s crystal clear now,” Jill said with a smile, trying to hide her cold sweat as she gripped the Heavenly Sword tight.

When Faris had the Sacred Spear of the Goddess in her hand, Jill finally noticed her immense magic power. *This is Princess Faris's magic. It's the real deal, and she has just as much as His Majesty! She's really the Goddess's vessel!*

However, the Dragon Consort couldn't be overpowered by this young girl just because she was the Goddess's vessel.

"I get that you're my enemy," Jill finished.

Faris giggled. "You finally became the Dragon Consort. Do be careful so that you don't get executed *this* time."

The princess's words made it apparent that she retained her memories from the other timeline as well. She was just like the Goddess. Jill wasn't sure if Faris was consumed by the deity, but at the very least, the frail girl was currently standing alongside the Goddess of her own free will, just like Hadis and Rave.

"What's your goal? Is it His Majesty?" Jill asked.

"Indeed. That Dragon Emperor must become mine. For my brother."

Jill widened her eyes while Faris gave a perfect bow of gratitude, fitting for a princess.

"Thank you, my older sister. My visit to the Rave Empire has been very edifying."



“Wait, what do you mean by you’re doing this for your brother?”

“Are you *still* worried about my brother?” Faris replied mockingly, making Jill shut her mouth. “Are you going to save us, even though you couldn’t do so before? I suppose I can tell you, though it would be to the chagrin of my brother. I’ll do anything for him, of course. However, do you have the same resolve? You’re but a pawn in this game of chess, don’t you agree?”

“A pawn, you say? I became the Dragon Consort of my own free will!”

“Heh heh, I see. Is that because of love?”

“That’s right. His Majesty needs me, and I’ve decided to support him!”

The reincarnation of the Goddess of love chuckled. “My brother needed you and loved you as well.” This revelation dumbfounded Jill. Faris laid out a prophecy. “I’m sure you’ll leave the Dragon Emperor, just like you tossed aside my brother. By your own free will.”

Jill had jumped from the castle walls, claiming that she’d left Gerald, not the other way around. *Prince Gerald needed me, and I’m going to leave His Majesty too?*

The Heavenly Sword jolted in Jill’s hand, reminding her not to be swayed by love. She mustn’t forget logic. She’d promised to make Hadis happy.

“...I apologize. As you say, asking about the circumstances of a man I left is foolish,” Jill said. She wouldn’t change her course of action. “So, I’ll accept your challenge.”

Jill clenched her fists as she stood in front of the princess, who had an icy smile. The ocean breeze brushed against Faris.

“I won’t hand His Majesty to you! No matter what your plan is, I will snap it in two! I’ll break everything: your spear, your cool gaze, and your troublesome love!”

The corners of Faris’s lips curled up, and Jill witnessed the princess’s true smile for the first time. It was the smile of a benevolent Goddess, feeling contempt towards everything in her path.

“You insolent fool who speaks of love. Run and start over from square one.”

Faris swung the spear to her side. She wielded her weapon effortlessly as it danced in the air. In the next moment, an overpowering aura of magic power struck Jill's face. Rave clicked his tongue.

"This is bad. We're returning to the imperial capital, Missy!"

Jill didn't protest, but she strained her eyes.

Faris was back in her wheelchair and Gerald approached her from behind. The two were about to leave—it was a scene that Jill had seen many times in the past. She didn't think she could butt in between them, but...she no longer wanted to chase after him either. This was the correct answer for her.



"HOW could you be so reckless?!" Rave nagged.

"I'm sorry... But you're teleporting me *here*? That's a bit much, isn't it?"

"Like hell it is! Reflect on your actions!"

Rave had reverted from his sword form and was scolding Jill, who was hanging from a cone-shaped roof. She looked down and saw the large city of Rahelm, the city of the skies, and a balcony where the emperor would show himself off to the public. She'd been transported to a spire of the imperial castle.

"But if I fall from here, I'm going to die!" Jill wailed.

"Reflect on your actions."

"I will."

Rave flapped his wings in front of her and sighed. "Well, whatever. We'll just call that my birthday gift to you."

"...Then I wish you would've teleported me to a better spot— I mean, nothing."

"I think I'm going too easy on you for this punishment. It's the best place to listen to Hadis's speech."

Jill looked down and gazed at Hadis's back as he was out on the balcony. He spoke eloquently about matters beyond her scope of understanding. She gave a

forced laugh.

"I wonder if Prince Risteard wrote the speech. It doesn't suit His Majesty," she said.

"Let's tease him about it later. All the more reason why I need you, Missy," Rave said, slithering onto her shoulder while looking sincere. "You brought me along, so I won't say anything further, but don't ever do that again. I had an inkling when you said you knew the future, but it seems like you're related to the Goddess in some way."

"Apparently so. I'm not really familiar with the details, but uh, I'd appreciate it if you refrained from telling His Majesty and the others."

"Yeah, yeah, I'll keep it a secret. I've got a lot of questions myself, but it sounds like you don't have the answers, Missy. And Hadis may not look it, but he's good at keeping secrets. The same goes for me, of course. So, this makes us even. But you should be aware that you, Missy, made all of this possible."

Jill looked down once more. Hadis, reciting his speech to the citizens in the square, looked confident and mighty. Risteard and Elentzia, standing by the emperor's side, were beaming with pride.

"Thanks for choosing him," said the Dragon God.

"Rave..."

"I'm sure he'll become a great emperor and Dragon Emperor."

As Jill was about to put a hand over her chest and wholeheartedly agree, the booming voice of Hadis echoed through the air.

"I actually have one more announcement to make!" His voice, which passed through a sound diffuser, suddenly sounded different. Jill and Rave stared blankly, looking at Hadis on the balcony. "I married an eleven-year-old girl the other day!" Hadis shouted.

The people in the city square were too stunned to utter another word. Rave scowled, calling him an idiot.

"My wife is really, *really* cute and cool! We're planning for ten children, so the Rave imperial family will continue to grow. There's really nothing to worry

about!"

"That idiot... I told him to reveal that later! And his phrasing could cause misunderstandings!" Risteard muttered.

"We'll be happy for the rest of our lives, so I hope for your support!" Hadis boomed.

Risteard foamed at the mouth, his face turning pale, and Elentzia could only let out a dry laugh. Without hesitation, Jill jumped off the roof.

She was certain Hadis would turn around to catch her. He wouldn't ever leave her behind. He would make her the happiest girl in the world.

"Your Majesty!"

"Jill?!" cried Hadis.

She wouldn't ever let him go.

An audio cue sounded, and as the trumpets blared, white doves and paper confetti danced in the air. Cheering and applause erupted from the audience as the Dragon Emperor hugged his wife.

She wouldn't lose her path to her one and only future.

Interlude: The Fall of the Dragon Consort in Conference Room One

JILL and Zeke had started their job at the Dragon Knights. Meanwhile, Hadis requested Camila to be his bodyguard and assistant as he diligently did the housework. He prepared the meals, cleaned the house, did the laundry, tended the garden, procured food supplies, prepared Jill and Zeke's lunchboxes—he had much to do.

If work didn't run late, everyone would have breakfast and dinner together. Hadis was getting used to this lifestyle when he posed a request one day.

"I'd like to talk with you guys about something, is that okay?" Hadis said, calling to the Knights of the Dragon Consort as he finished cleaning up the dinner table.

Camila and Zeke, who were engaged in some friendly banter while seated at a plain, large, rectangular table, looked at the emperor.

"An emperor wants to consult a nobody like me? I don't mind given the situation, I guess," said Zeke.

"What is it? Something you want to keep a secret from Captain?" asked Camila.

Hadis had suddenly spoken up the moment Jill went to take a bath. He gave a solemn nod towards the perspicacious Camila and sat down.

"I received a present from Jill because she apparently got her paycheck from the Dragon Knights. Did you guys receive something, too?" he asked.

"Ah," Camila said, rustling around her chest pocket. "I did receive something. She said it was in lieu of our paychecks. I got a handkerchief."

"And I got a towel. I think she got it from the same store," Zeke added.

"Really? She didn't do the same for me..." Hadis muttered.

"Why are you so negative? Captain went out of her way to go to a different store just for you, Your Majesty. Don't make me say it," Zeke griped.

"How do you even know that?" asked Camila.

"I tagged along when she went to the store. She said she might ask me for advice."

Silence filled the room.

"Why are you glaring at me?" Zeke said awkwardly. "I just did my job as her guard."

"Huh? But you went on a date with Jill. No fair! Right, Your Majesty? Isn't it unfair that he went shopping with her?" Camila said, looking to the emperor for agreement.

Hadis followed suit and tilted his head as he replied, "Totally."

"Are you two best buds or something? Drop the act. Get on with the story. Isn't this about the present that His Majesty received?" Zeke said.

"Oh, I received this," Hadis said, swiftly removing the hair clip that held back his bangs. He placed it on his hand preciously. "Jill gave me a clip, saying that I could pin my hair up while I'm cooking or doing housework."

"Awww, that's so sweet! Are you dissatisfied because you didn't receive a cloth like us?" Camila asked.

"Not at all. I'm really happy. It's convenient, and I can tell that she thought about me. And when she handed it to me, saying she couldn't buy much with her scant paycheck, she was soooo cute! I looked at myself in the mirror so many times!"

"Then nothing's wrong. All right, talk's over, later," Zeke said.

"But...why does it have a flower decoration on it?" Hadis asked.

A small pink and yellow flower decorated the cute hair clip. Camila and Zeke looked away, but Hadis needed confirmation.

"Isn't this for girls?" he asked in a whisper.

"...I-I think the others were sold out or something, yeah," said Zeke.

“D-Don’t be silly, Your Majesty! In this day and age, we don’t care about gender roles! We’re so open-minded these days, you know?”

“But Jill told me that she thought this would suit me because it was cute. What does that mean?” Zeke and Camila once again averted their gaze, reaffirming Hadis’s fears. “It’s weird, right?! Does Jill not see me as a man or something?!”

“Aw crap... Guess the cat’s out of the bag...” Zeke muttered.

“Don’t be bothered by it, okay, Your Majesty?” consoled Camila.

“Of course I’m bothered! Jill and I are married!”

“Yeah, you’re Captain’s wife,” said Zeke.

“At least you’re not her younger sister or something!” quipped Camila.

“I can’t even be her younger brother?! Ugh... Did I treat her wrong or something?” Hadis said, slumping his shoulders. He stared at the hair clip. “I don’t hate cute things, and I like whatever Jill gives me. I’m happy when she praises me. I like it when she calls me cute and pets my head. She lends me her lap as a pillow, and she squeezes me tight, and when I act spoiled, she kisses me on the cheek while saying, ‘Oh I guess there’s no helping you.’”

“Oi. What the hell, Your Majesty?!”

“You’re taking advantage of her way too much, Your Majesty.”

Hadis was reminiscing about his sweet and happy memories, failing to hear the voices of his subordinates.

“She acts a little shy, which makes her so much cuter. But maybe I messed up. I thought Jill would run away if I tried to woo her using normal methods, so I thought it best to act spoiled and lower her defenses. When she gets used to me, I’ll trap her before she realizes what happened. It’s the perfect plan,” he rambled.

“Oi. Wait a sec. Seriously, what the hell, Your Majesty?!”

“Please don’t increase the secrets we must keep from Jill, Your Majesty.”

“Huh? But if she doesn’t want to leave, she won’t notice that she’s being

trapped, will she? Isn't that the basics? I lose if she ever feels like she wants to flee from me."

"I'm gonna report you to the Dragon Knights. Seriously."

"Officer, this man right here!"

"Where did I go wrong?" Hadis said, resting his face on his hand as he gazed at the cute hair accessory. He wasn't dissatisfied with the present, but he was anxious. "I wish she saw me as a man..."

Camila and Zeke exchanged glances, and possibly sympathizing, sat up straight to advise the emperor.

"Why don't you show off your strength? You've been building your muscles, haven't you, Your Majesty?" suggested Zeke.

"If I try to show off my strength, I guarantee that Jill will try to compete with me. We'll head in a completely different direction. I'm sure of it," Hadis groaned.

"This *is* Jill we're talking about... Even if you want to act cool and escort her somewhere, you're a wanted man right now," Camila pointed out.

Hadis sighed and threw his upper body onto the table. "I guess I just have to recapture the imperial capital."

"That's your reason for wanting to take back the city? Not because, oh I don't know, the empire's facing a national crisis?" Zeke asked.

"But you definitely look cooler in a uniform than you do in an apron, Your Majesty," Camila advised.

"I can try, but I wonder if I could hold back," muttered Hadis.

"Oh, but Jill's surprisingly dense towards stuff like this. If you want to get noticed, you should be a bit over the top..."

Camila trailed off as Hadis got up and narrowed his eyes with a provocative smile. It would be bad if Jill became wary because he went overboard. He knew he was good-looking, and it would be hard for him to find the fine line.

Zeke was deep in thought, not paying any attention to the silent battle that

Hadis and Camila were having. He slapped his knees.

“Yeah, all right. Why don’t you strip?” he suggested.

Hadis turned straight-faced at this outrageous idea. “Huh? Wait, why?”

“You know, beautiful muscles and all. I’ll allow you to only take off your top on very rare occasions. Just a little bit.”

“You meathead. That’s too much for a ten-year-old girl— Wait. Jill might actually be happy with that,” Camila said.

Hadis’s cheeks flushed as the two knights appraised him. “J-Jill’s still young, and we should do stuff like that in the far future! I’m already lamenting the fact that our first kiss was a bit of a bust. I wasn’t thinking of her feelings back then. I’m trying to find the right timing so I won’t fail like that again!”

“What have you been innocently imagining while vigilantly waiting for your chance? What the hell?” Zeke balked.

“Even I can’t forgive you for that. You act so pure, yet you’re not, Your Majesty. But that’s not the point. This is so that she’ll see you as a man. We’re telling you to use healthy methods and show your manly body off every now and then!” Camila urged.

Zeke gave a firm nod of agreement. “And Captain might be more wary of you after that. Her entire mind and body will be aware of what you are,” he said.

“Ohhh! You say some smart things sometimes, don’t you? That’s good. Special hyper-vigilance towards His Majesty.”

“Huh? W-Wait. But Jill and I just managed to close our distance. Wouldn’t that pry us apart?” asked Hadis.

“That’s right. Social distance and all that,” said Zeke.

“Even married couples must have some distance socially and physically! Also, psychologically!” declared Camila.

“Wouldn’t that just make us complete strangers, then?! Ack! Are you guys serious?!”

The two knights leaned close to Hadis, and he could see their ulterior motives

written all over their faces, saying: “Make Jill so aware of you, she avoids you.” Hadis tried to shrink back, but he was up against two capable soldiers, and he couldn’t use his magic.

Wait, but maybe this is a worthwhile method, too. I wonder... Hadis thought about it, and curiosity won him over. He stripped off his apron and unbuttoned half his shirt, when...

“I’m out of the bath—” Jill announced from the hallway. Everyone froze in place.

Hidis raised his head, but it was too late. Jill went wide-eyed, then the light vanished from her pupils.

“Wh-What are you guys doing?! His Majesty looks like a wife who’s getting assaulted by an adulterer while her husband’s out of the house!” she yelled.

“That’s an oddly specific example! You’re wrong, Jill! We can explain all of this!” Camila hastily said.

“R-Right. His Majesty asked us for advice! It was something he could only ask us!” added Zeke.

As the two knights panicked, Hadis rethought his strategy and clung to Jill with his eyes cast down. “Jill! I was so scared!” he wailed.

“Your Majesty! It’s all right now,” Jill assured.

“Your Majesty! You bastard!” Zeke accused.

“You heartless emperor!” Camila shrieked.

“Let’s go to our room, Your Majesty,” Jill said soothingly before glaring at her two knights. “You two, details, later.”

Jill didn’t have any magic, but she still let out an intense aura, silencing Camila and Zeke. She took Hadis’s hand and led him into their room.

“Don’t get carried away and tease my subordinates too much, Your Majesty,” warned Jill as they entered the room.

Hidis had a regretful smile. “Oh, so you knew. I thought you were genuinely angry.”

"If I let you guys be, that buffoonery would've spiraled out of control. So, I stepped in."

She sounded irked, but Hadis noticed Jill wouldn't look in his direction. He stared at her intently, and looked up to see her ears were bright red.

"I'll go scold those two, so hurry up and fix your clothes," she said.

He looked down at his immodest appearance and hugged Jill.

"Y-Your Majesty!"

"Could you fasten my buttons for me, Jill?" he requested, acting spoiled. He gave a carefree smile, fitting for an adult.

"Y-You can do that yourself, can't you?! You're not a kid!"

"I can't. Could you please button them?" He brought her small hands towards his neck and wondered if he'd gone too far. He didn't know where the fine line was. "Please, Jill?"

The moment he thought his whispers might've been too alluring, Jill slipped out of Hadis's grasp with amazing power and speed. She must've used all her magic, at least the little she currently had.

"You idiot! You pervert!" she bellowed, her face beet red as she disappeared into a different room.

"What's wrong?"

"What did he do to you, Jill?!"

The cries of her subordinates could be heard, but Hadis was trying his best not to erupt into laughter.

"Don't overdo it," the Dragon God said within him, sounding exasperated.

I know, Hadis replied, and he didn't receive a response.

The Dragon God had raised him and knew him quite well.

But Jill gets extremely angry like a cat. This might take a while.

He'd cry if she told him she wouldn't sleep with him anymore. He had no choice but to fasten his own buttons and adjust his collar.

I'm not a dangerous man. I'm a pitiable, troublesome, cute, weak man. Spoil me. Be nice to me. Protect me. I'll continue to feed you my well-mannered lies until you grow older and expose everything about me.

Afterword

HELLO, or long time no see. My name is Sarasa Nagase.

Thank you for picking up my work. Thanks to everyone's support, I've been able to continue the story of a tomboyish young girl soldier and a Dragon Emperor who diligently does housework in an apron. I've added and revised a few parts from the web version, and I'd be delighted if you enjoyed this book.

Good news! *The Do-Over Damsel* has started a manga serialization in *Monthly Comp Ace*! It's being handled by Anko Yuzu, who also did a wonderful job with the manga serialization of my previous work, *I'm the Villainess, So I'm Taming the Final Boss!* Please check out the manga, where an energetic Jill dashes around gallantly saving the day! The manga's first volume will be released soon, and I'd appreciate it if you could check the official website for more announcements!

Anko Yuzu has done such a wonderful job with the manga, I can't thank them enough. Truly, thank you so much! I leave Jill and the others in your capable hands.

Now for some acknowledgments.

Mitsuya Fuji, thank you so much for the beautiful artwork you provided despite your busy schedule! Hadis and Jill look so cool, my heart won't stop racing when I see them. To my editors, thank you for your constant support. I know I'll continue to trouble you in the future as well. I'd also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the proofreaders, the editing department, the designer, the marketing team, everyone from the printing office, and everyone involved in making this book.

Thank you to those who supported my web release and commented on Twitter. You've been a constant encouragement for me.

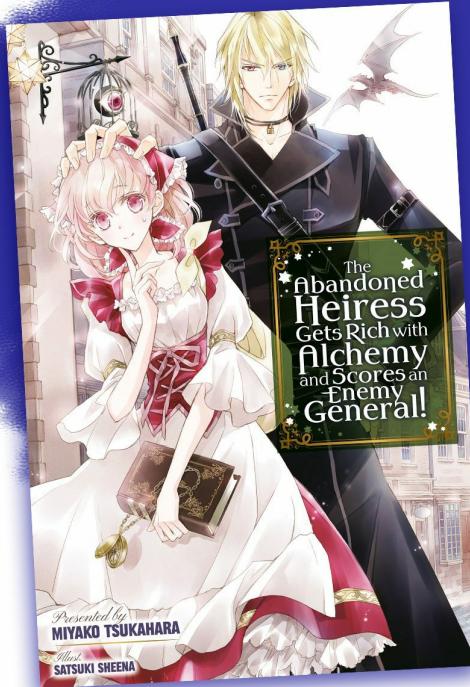
Lastly, thank you to everyone who read this book. I've been able to write about Jill and the gang's story this far because of you. I hope you'll continue to support the series.

I hope to see you again.



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THE ABANDONED HEIRESS GETS RICH WITH ALCHEMY AND SCORES AN ENEMY GENERAL!

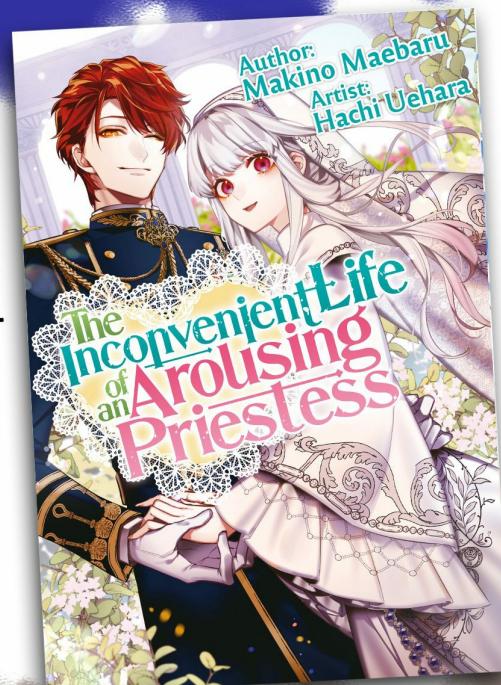
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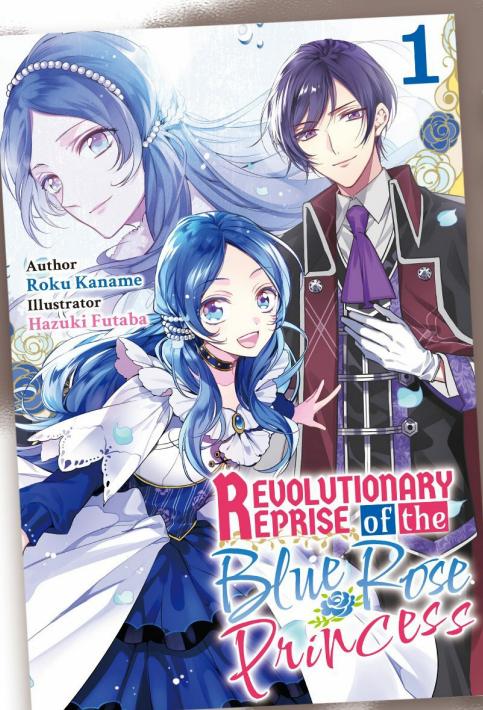
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REVOLUTIONARY REPRISE OF THE BLUE ROSE PRINCESS

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AFTER REINCARNATING, I WILL
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STORY BY: YU SAKURAI
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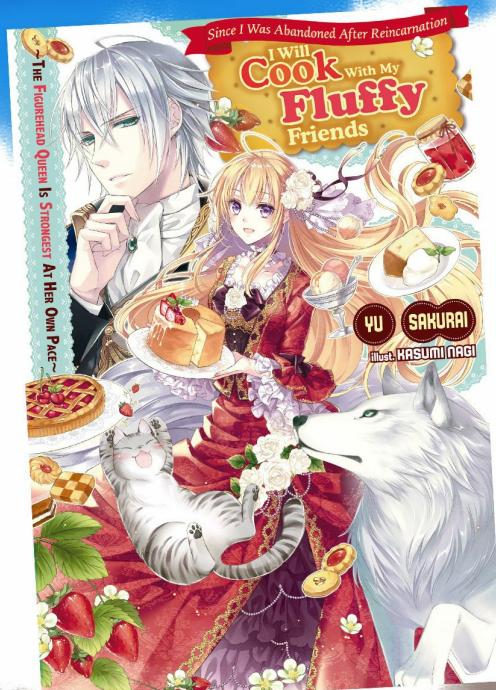
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ILLUSTRATION BY: HINANO CHANO
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