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The DO-OVER
DAMSEL CONQUERS
the DRAGON EMPEROR

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The Do-Over Damsel Conquers the Dragon Emperor Vol.3

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YARINAOSHI REIJO WA RYUTEIHEIKA O KORYAKU CHU Vol.3

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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.

**ELENZIA TEOS RAVE**

First princess of the Rave Empire. Hadis's half-sister and the captain of the Neufrah 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

The **DO-OVER DAMSEL CONQUERS the DRAGON EMPEROR**

3**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."

RAW

The Dragon King. Being raised by Jill.

JILL CERVEL

The daughter of Kratos Kingdom's Margrave Cervel. Currently redoing her second life.

Prologue

“**HAPPY** eleventh birthday, Jill,” said a certain boy.

He placed a black silk ribbon on his work desk. Jill, who’d thought she was called in to discuss work matters, looked at her fiancé in shock. He used his index finger to readjust the glasses on his nasal bridge and looked away.

“You’re at least permitted to tie your hair up at the military academy,” he said.

“R-Right! I like it. Thank you so much, Prince Gerald!” Jill replied, tripping over her words.

She gingerly scooped up the silky ribbon and nearly dropped it. She was worried that she’d gripped it too tightly, but breathed a sigh of relief when she saw that it didn’t have any wrinkles. She studied the ribbon more closely this time.

He carefully chose a gift I could use even at the academy... she thought, delighted.

Soon, Jill would be attending the military academy Gerald had founded. When he decided to end her princess consort training, she assumed he’d grown tired of her awful embroidery and poorly composed poems. She never expected Gerald to take a different approach.

“You’re more suited to be a soldier,” Gerald had said. “We’ll be going to war with the Rave Empire soon. I plan to assemble a mobile squad under my direct control. Will you take up the task of being the commander of this squad?”

In terms of aptness, Gerald had made the right call. The Cervels were a family of warriors—men and women of all ages learned how to excel in combat. This was partly because they were located on the kingdom’s border and had to be wary of the opposing empire. One could only become a full-fledged Cervel when they could decimate a dragon with their magic powers.

Jill happily accepted Gerald's confidential request. She was especially overjoyed to hear the prince mutter that others wouldn't make a fuss about his fiancée should she bring back good results during the war.

"With everything that is ahead, we unfortunately can't host a birthday party for you. I'm sure the ribbon won't even serve as a consolation during these times," Gerald said.

"Please don't let it bother you," Jill said with a light shake of her head. "Though this is still highly classified information, the second princess of the Rave Empire is looking to marry into our kingdom. Whether we choose to accept or not, we'd be able to provoke the enemy if I stand before them as your fiancée."

Under normal circumstances, Jill and Gerald would officially publicize their engagement on her eleventh birthday. However, the second princess of the Rave Empire had suddenly requested to be betrothed to Gerald and even stated that she would personally visit Kratos Kingdom. This forced Gerald to reconsider announcing Jill as his fiancée.

The crown prince couldn't simply jump at the offer from their supposed enemy empire, whom they'd been at war with for many years. Currently, the Riot of the False Emperor was taking place within the territory of Rave. The uncle of the current emperor, Grand Duke Radia, also known as George Teos Rave, had accused young Hadis Teos Rave of possessing a false Heavenly Sword. George had thus declared that he was the new, true emperor.

The self-proclaimed new emperor George had requested Gerald to marry Rave's second princess, Natalie Teos Rave. Even Jill, who wasn't so keen on political matters, knew that the true goal of this marriage was to attain the support of Kratos. If Gerald didn't tread carefully, he might cause their kingdom to be embroiled in the Rave Empire's internal strife.

"What shall we do about the situation in the Rave Empire?" Jill asked.

"Grand Duke Radia has occupied the imperial capital and convinced the residing lords to side with him, but Hadis Teos Rave, who's at the center of this mess, has gone missing. The situation is at a standstill. It'll take some time before the victor is decided. I suppose I must buy some time regarding Princess

Natalie's offer until this all dies down."

"You greeted the missing emperor last year at my birthday party, didn't you, Prince Gerald? What was he like? Is he not a normal emperor, but actually the reincarnation of the Dragon God? Is he truly the Dragon Emperor?" Jill asked.

"Hadis Teos Rave is the Dragon Emperor," Gerald stated flatly. "Anyone can tell from a glance. He exudes an intense aura and spirit. If others can't tell that he's the real deal, they're either blind or have a different reason that prevents them from admitting that he's the Dragon Emperor."

Jill blinked while Gerald scoffed at the circumstances. Hadis Teos Rave was rumored to be the cursed emperor. Recently, he'd ruthlessly purged an entire family following the incident at the floating city of Beilburg, making not only the empire, but the Kratos Kingdom quiver with fear. There was a great deal of backlash within the empire, and Kratos had to remain as vigilant as ever. Even so, Gerald was adamant that Hadis was the true Dragon Emperor.

"Then Grand Duke Radia, or George, is the false emperor," Jill said.

"That's right," Gerald nodded. "He'll probably be defeated by summer. I don't know how; he might get slain, or the emperor's curse may activate again. Regardless, it doesn't concern us. It's best if we can idly wait and stand by regarding their marriage proposal. I know that I'll cause you trouble. Even Faris scolded me and said that I shouldn't make my fiancée anxious right off the bat."

"N-Not to worry. I, um, I also feel bad that my bride training hasn't gone well..." Jill trailed off.

"Since the Rave Empire is currently in a state of disarray, it'll be next year at the earliest until we can publicize our engagement. But I've already decided that you shall become my wife."

Jill's cheeks flushed as she nodded. A single light knock on the door disrupted the moment.

"Pardon me, Prince Gerald. Princess Natalie has been kidnapped," a young man said, entering the room before he was given permission to do so.

Gerald narrowed his eyes, but didn't reproach the visitor, attesting to their trusting relationship. The young man was a capable individual and was one of

the candidates to become Jill's vice commander.

"What do you mean, Lawrence?" asked Gerald.

"When the carriage with Princess Natalie crossed House Cervel's boundaries, it was attacked. The instigators timed their attack so that it would occur just when the Cervels turned the carriage over to a new set of guards."

"Any suspects?" Gerald asked.

"I pray that it's not anyone from Kratos. The main issue is the direction the culprits ran off to with the princess. If their aim was to trouble you, the next king, the location is rather easy to identify, but I fear they're transporting the princess to the King of South Kratos's residence."

Gerald slammed his fist onto his desk. With a deep inhale, he buried his anger and irritation. Only his dark eyes glimmered with abhorrence towards his father.

"Form a rescue party and search for Princess Natalie immediately. Do not, under any circumstances, allow the Rave Empire to have any sort of leverage over us. I'll do whatever I can to scope out the empire."



"Prince Gerald, um, if you may allow, I'll head back to my family's land and search for the princess!" Jill requested.

A princess from another country had been kidnapped in Kratos. Political matters aside, it would only make the situation worse if Natalie didn't return safely.

I hate to imagine it, but if her corpse is found within Kratos, it might lead to a full-blown war! Jill thought.

However, Gerald's response was as stern as ever. "No! You stay put! There's no telling what the King of South Kratos would do if he got his hands on you!"

Jill was stunned to silence by Gerald's threatening attitude. He turned to Lawrence and gave out orders. "We might be too late. Don't let the situation with your sister distract you, Lawrence. You can't afford to screw up."

"Doesn't that go for you as well?" asked Lawrence.

"You think I'd make such a foolish mistake? If anger was all it took to kill that man, I would've done so ages ago. I'll check on Faris."

With a grimace, Jill could only gaze upon her fiancé's profile as he left the room. Lawrence gently clasped her shoulder.

"You can leave this matter to him," he said.

"But I can't just sit here and do nothing while Prince Gerald is in trouble," Jill replied.

Gerald didn't refer to his biological father as the king. In public, he called his father "Your Majesty" but privately insulted him as the "King of South Kratos." The prince's father had practically dumped all his duties onto Gerald and built a private residence in the south of Kratos, where he indulged himself in debauchery. It was only natural that Gerald was repulsed by his father; a rocky relationship was a huge understatement. *A familial issue that he can only relate to with Princess Faris...*

It had only been half a year, but Jill was Gerald's fiancée. She wanted to lend her power as much as she could.

"His Highness doesn't want to put you in danger. Even more so since he's up

against the King of South Kratos," Lawrence said.

"But I can fight for Prince Gerald," Jill argued.

"You sound reliable. Then why don't you try to protect his pride as a man who wants to shield his fiancée from any danger? Even His Highness would want to act cool in front of the woman he likes."

After a brief moment of silence, smoke came from Jill's flustered face. *I-I see. I get it now. Romance is complex.*

In truth, when her engagement was approved, she was ecstatic to find her prince charming and to be treated like a princess for the first time in her life. Her respect for Gerald grew by the day, and she realized that this was her blossoming first love. But she wasn't very well-versed in romance and was always troubled, unable to find the right words.

Thus, by the time she was sixteen and nicknamed the god of war's daughter, with her marriage around the corner, she wasn't resistant to the idea that Gerald had tricked her. Because she knew that she was ignorant about love and romance, she was able to easily admit that she had gotten the wrong idea. She assumed she was used to mask the forbidden love between Gerald and his sister.

"My brother needed you and loved you as well." Faris's words plagued Jill.

Prince Gerald executed me, Jill thought. Why am I foolishly holding onto any doubts now?

Half-asleep, Jill rubbed her eyes as she got up from her bed. Her bedroom was large and equipped with a luxurious canopy. The morning sun's rays were trickling into her quarters, and she knew she wasn't in her room at the Cervel residence or the one she was given in the royal palace.

The bedroom and ceiling of the neighboring empire still felt foreign to her. Silence filled her lonesome room, but it was a beautiful day. Yet, a sigh was about to spill from her mouth, and she hastily slapped both her cheeks with her hands.

For the second time, she was able to experience her eleven-year-old self, and her cheeks were squishy to the touch. After patting her cheeks to confirm that

fact, she took a deep breath.

“Don’t worry! Just shake it off!” she told herself. “I’m not Prince Gerald’s fiancée anymore; I’m the Dragon Consort. I’m the wife of Hadis Teos Rave!”

Jill was in the imperial palace located in the imperial capital of Rahelm. The riot had come to an end, and she was in one of the Rave Emperor’s bedrooms. Neither the murder-suicide of Beilburg, where a heartless purge had followed, nor the Riot of the False Emperor, where Grand Duke Radia had an unusual death further increasing the terror of the emperor, had occurred. The damsel had fled from an engagement with Gerald and had received a do-over with her life.

Jill went to wash her face and clean herself up. Then she looked at herself in the mirror and confirmed that she no longer had the black ribbon. She was no longer tied to the crown prince of Kratos.

Instead, she had a splendid game fowl and a cute stuffed bear in a cage under her bed. Both were gifts from Hadis.

“Sauté, aren’t you a bird? Why aren’t you up in the morning?” Jill asked.

“Chirp...”

“I’ll leave His Majesty Bear in your care.”

A stuffed bear wearing a magnificent cape and crown was in the same cage as the bird. Jill hesitantly reached for the door to exit the bedroom.

That dream caught me by surprise... Am I anxious? Am I worried that my relationship with His Majesty will hit a bump in the road?

Gerald was a capable crown prince. Aside from his clear infatuation with his younger sister, he was perfect. He was thoughtful and a famous child prodigy—he excelled in both the sword and the pen. Even when facing adversity, he handled his father, the King of South Kratos, quite well. He was greatly trusted and respected by his subordinates and was popular amongst his citizens. Jill had her misgivings, but she could rely on him to finish the tasks at hand. In comparison...

“Oh, good morning, Jill. Breakfast is ready,” a young man greeted her.

The moment Jill left her room, a wonderful aroma filled her nose. It came from the large drawing room that contained a kitchen. A table was laid out near the terrace with a beautiful omelet, fried bacon, and vegetable consommé from last night's leftovers. A basket of rye bread and bagels stood in the center. They were all made by the apron-clad Dragon Emperor. He was transferring tomato sauce from his pan, using the tomatoes he'd harvested from a small garden in his backyard that morning.

"What's wrong? Why are you staring? Oh, I've got your favorite strawberry milk," Hadis said.

Jill knew that the palace was short-staffed due to the riot, and Hadis preferred to make his own food to avoid getting poisoned, but she still couldn't believe her eyes.

"Your Majesty, isn't it time for your morning meeting?" she asked.

Hadis stared back blankly. Though he was dressed in an apron, he was the emperor of the Rave Empire and was the reincarnation of the Dragon God Rave. He was the Dragon Emperor. About half of his magic powers had been sealed away, but he was much stronger than the average soldier, and he'd been trained well. Because he grew up on the frontiers, he was immature at times, but he was unexpectedly knowledgeable and intelligent.

He was by no means inferior to Gerald—in fact, he may have surpassed the crown prince in various ways. And yet...

"If I attend, people will just call in sick or ignore me," Hadis said, shrugging. "It's a waste of time. If Ristead makes a fuss, I'll start showing up."

"So, you *are* supposed to be at a meeting! You shouldn't be slacking off! You're an emperor, Your Majesty!" Jill chided.

"I mean, it's too late to say that now. Besides, my wife's breakfast is more important to me!" Hadis insisted.

Jill slumped her shoulders. She loved eating, so she had no complaints on that front, but she was filled with anxiety. What kind of emperor makes breakfast in the imperial capital using the tomatoes he harvested from his personal garden?

"I thought you'd do away with that apron of yours when you returned to the

imperial capital,” muttered Jill.

“Huh? Don’t I look good in it?” Hadis asked.

“You do, and that’s the problem! Are you *really* sure about this, Your Majesty? I haven’t seen you attend a meeting or act like an emperor at all since we’ve returned!”

“Don’t worry, don’t worry. I’ve already talked it over with Risteard and Elentzia.”

Jill fell silent, unable to fight back. *Why didn’t I know about that?! I know I’m basically a total stranger and not even recognized as His Majesty’s fiancée by people outside our circle, but still!*

She couldn’t voice her thoughts, knowing she’d only trouble the others. She’d only learned about this tidbit when she returned to the capital, but Jill, who’d received Rave’s blessing and became the Dragon Consort—Hadis’s wife—was only recognized as such in the realm of the dragons. The human residents of this world hadn’t approved of Jill just yet, so she wasn’t considered Hadis’s official fiancée. She was told to remain hidden until the bare minimum arrangements were prepared, and thus wasn’t allowed to do anything at all. Jill didn’t have a clue what her husband was up to outside of the palace.

Jill had declared that she’d make this man happy and wouldn’t ever abandon him. She’d even committed to birthing ten children with this man, but she wasn’t sure if Hadis understood the magnitude of her claims. She wanted to ask but didn’t know how to approach the subject.

“Did you decide on your present for your eleventh birthday?” asked Hadis, who removed his apron while Jill was silently drinking her strawberry milk.

Jill had turned eleven recently, but since Hadis had been taken prisoner on that day, there was no time for celebrations. The emperor, who’d learned of this fact after all was said and done, sobbed with regret, and Jill had been promised a grand birthday party at a later date to appease him. However, Hadis had also wanted to give Jill a present, and had been asking about her wishes for the past few days.

“You can have whatever you like!” he promised. “I’ll make the food, so you

can ask for anything else! Do you want dresses or jewels or flowers or castles? You can even ask for stuffed animals! How about I create Hadis Bunny to pair with Hadis Bear?"

"I can't have *whatever* I want. I asked for my own army, but you said *no*," she huffed.

"Of course I did," replied the emperor with a smile. "That's not what you want, but what you think you *need*, right?" Jill was stunned by Hadis's words as he sat across from her. "I don't want to gift you a necessity. I want to give you something you desire."

"Y-Your requests are difficult to fulfill..."

Jill stopped eating and groaned. *I want something to do as his wife, but that's also probably not what he's looking for... Romance is hard. But I have to be firm. Unlike Prince Gerald, His Majesty is...* Jill shook her head as she unconsciously kept comparing Hadis to her former fiancé. She wasn't her usual self today.

Hadis was waiting with a smile. A lithe, white snake with wings slowly emerged from his body. Rave, the Dragon God, fixated his gaze on the tart that was cooling in the kitchen. Suddenly, a thought popped up in Jill's mind. There was something she wanted that wasn't a necessity.

"Your Majesty, I'd like my own drago—"

"Dragon Consort!" a booming voice said, cutting the girl off. With a loud sound and a strong gust of wind, the creature entered the room.

Jill quickly pressed down on the table to prevent it from flipping over, and Hadis glanced towards the source, creating a barrier to block the wind.

The purple-eyed, black dragon forcibly stuck her head into the room. Dragons of the same color determined their rank based on the hue of their eyes. Gold eyes were of higher rank, and purple eyes signified a lower rank. Black dragons were the highest class of dragons after the Dragon God, and only one female purple-eyed black dragon currently existed in the world. In other words, the dragon who'd just made her entrance was the queen.

The beast, however, didn't carry an ounce of dignity as she looked to be in panic while Jill stared back.

“What’s wrong?” Jill asked. “I thought you returned to your nest.”

“Dragon Consort! He’s been born! When I returned to the nest, my mate was there!”

A small, black ball rolled from the top of the excited, purple-eyed dragon’s head and bumped into Jill’s feet. It was slightly larger than a human baby. The black ball wriggled around and spread its small wings. It shook its body and peeked its head out; Jill felt like the dragon beamed with joy when he looked at her face.

Its scales looked soft to the touch and had a beautiful, dark sheen. Its round, golden eyes stared up at the girl.

“A gold-eyed, black dragon...” she murmured.

“Rawr!” the Dragon King growled cutely, giving Jill an energetic response.

Chapter 1: On the Frontlines of Raising the Black Dragon King

THE small, gold-eyed, black dragon waddled around before tripping over himself and rolling around. This caused the clueless baby dragon to blink rapidly and constantly glance around in confusion.

“Oh my gosh! He’s so cute!” Camila squealed.

“Rawr?”

“Hey, be careful, little guy,” Zeke warned. “Don’t go over there.”

“Rawr!”

Intrigued by his surroundings, the dragon tottered around as the Knights of the Dragon Consort, Zeke and Camila, chased after him.

Gazing at the heartwarming scene, the purple-eyed, black dragon said, “He still can’t fly. Usually, dragons can fly within a day or two after their birth...”

“When was he born?” Jill asked.

“It’s been seven days since I found him in my nest.”

Under normal circumstances, the baby dragon should’ve been able to fly by now, then? Jill thought. She had moved from the terrace to the backyard. A large black dragon would attract attention, and the drawing room wasn’t large enough to fit the beast.

Jill looked at the golden-eyed, black dragon wobbling away from Zeke with glee. His wings were still small, but he looked plump and healthy. The baby energetically moved around, and didn’t seem to have any health problems.

“A golden-eyed black dragon grows in accordance with His Majesty’s heart, correct?” Jill asked.

“Precisely. The Dragon Emperor’s heart and spirit are his nutrients—the baby is the physical incarnate of the Dragon Emperor’s spirit,” the purple-eyed

dragon replied.

The implication was clear. The queen of dragons and Jill shifted their gazes towards Hadis, who was leaning on the terrace door.

“What?” he asked with narrowed eyes. “I’ve got nothing to do with that roly-poly dragon.”

“The baby sure is clumsy...” Jill replied.

The baby black dragon stumbled over a rock in magnificent fashion and rolled around, eventually bumping into a tree with a heavy thud. A few green leaves fluttered to the ground.

“M-My mate, are you all right?” the purple-eyed dragon asked gingerly.

Tears welled up in the baby’s golden eyes. “Raaaaaaar!”

“It hurt, didn’t it?” she cooed. “Come now, where are you in pain? I shall lick your boo-boo until you feel better. You’ll be good as new!”

“I told you not to run around so much, Your Majesty,” scolded Camila.

“Come on, don’t cry, little guy. Your pain will go away. It won’t hurt anymore. You’re okay, Your Majesty,” lulled Zeke.

“Hey, don’t group me together with that oddball!” Hadis protested.

Upon receiving a few licks from his mate, the golden-eyed dragon stifled his sobs into hiccups. He shuffled over to Jill’s feet.

“Rawr...”

With damp eyes, he begged to be held, and Jill picked up the baby. Hadis’s cheek twitched at the sight.

“Y-You! Stop being sly and acting all spoiled!” yelled the emperor. “I’ll be misunderstood!”

“Wow, that’s totally His Majesty,” Camila said.

“Yeah, for sure,” Zeke wholeheartedly agreed.

“I’m nothing like him! Tell these knights, Rave!” Hadis demanded.

“Nah, that’s definitely you.”

As the Dragon God agreed with Zeke and Camila, Hadis crumpled to his knees. The Dragon Emperor looked up and clung onto Jill.

"You don't think of me that way, do you, Jill? I'm not like that oddball, am I?! You, get away from my wife! Jill's *mine*! Your mate's over there! Shoo!"

"RAWR!"

"Ow! He bit me! This baby bit me! It hurts, Jill!" Hadis whined.

"Now, now, don't fight," Jill said before she had an idea. "Uh, a name! Right, we should name this baby!"

She felt it would be easier to refer to these dragons if they had names.

"Very well, Dragon Consort. But I will *not* accept 'Steak' as his name," the purple-eyed dragon said solemnly.

"Aw, you won't?" Jill pouted.

"If I didn't approve of that name for myself, what makes you think I would accept it for my mate?"

"Oh, don't worry about that. I thought of a new name for you!" Jill said cheerily. "You're a girl, and I felt it'd be better if your name sounded cute. How about Rare?"

The purple-eyed dragon blinked and repeated the name to herself. "Rare... Rare... That's fine by me. It sounds much better than *Steak*. All right, I shall go by Rare from today onwards!"

"Great! I actually had a different name in mind for a gold-eyed dragon, too. I'm so happy he was born." The baby dragon's golden eyes looked up at Jill, and she held his gaze before slowly verbalizing the name. "How about Raw?"

"Rawr..." the dragon growled to himself, most likely repeating his name. He then flapped his small wings and nodded.

"Seems like he's fine with that," said Rare, translating the baby's gestures.

"Great! Are you fine with these names too, Your Majesty?" asked Jill.

"U-Uh, Rare? Raw? Like how meat is cooked?" Hadis asked.

"Rawr?!"

Jill gave the aghast Raw to Hadis. The Dragon Emperor seemed surprised, but he held the baby in his arms quite naturally. The girl was satisfied.

“We’ve got everyone here!” Jill said cheerfully.

“What do you mean?! Like an ingredient and a chef? This baby’s my spirit, Jill!” Hadis said hastily.

“Rawr! Rawr!”

Jill ignored Hadis and the baby’s cries and turned to Rare. “Did you come all the way here to show Raw to us?”

The dragon furrowed her brows. “That’s partly the reason, but it’s dangerous to raise him in my nest. It was created with the assumption that one could fly. When he slipped into a small river and fell headfirst, my heart nearly stopped as I saw him being dragged away by the water. If the king of dragons died by drowning in a small river, it would bring us great shame for generations to come! Do you understand?!”

“Y-Yes, I suppose so. Ah, so did you come here so we could take care of Raw?” Jill asked.

Rare looked anxious, but she gave a firm nod. “That’s right. I’d like to ask you to raise the child until he’s able to fly. Since the Dragon Consort is here, I felt it was some sort of fate.”

“Rawr!”

“Don’t say that, Raw,” Rare murmured. “It’s tough for me as well. If I’m by your side, I’ll just continue to spoil you. That’s no good. Above all, the outside world is rather fun!”

Jill nodded. “You’ve been holed up for two decades guarding the egg, haven’t you, Rare?”

“Indeed. It’s been a while since I’ve spread my wings, but it’s given me quite some joy. I’m about to turn three hundred, yet I’m filled with spry and vigor! It’s a bit embarrassing.”

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” Jill told her. “I think it’s a good thing! Besides, I’ve been bored recently with nothing to do...”

The request came at the perfect time, and Jill was excited to have the Dragon King in her arms. *This work is fitting for the Dragon Consort!* She gave an eager nod.

“You can count on me!” Jill said. “I’ll look after Raw, so I hope you can enjoy your vacation, Rare!”

“Ah, you’re a big help! I’ll leave him to you, Dragon Consort. I shall return when Raw’s able to fly.”

“Rawr?!”

“Farewell, my husband! Your wife is rather busy, you see!” Rare said. With a flap of her huge wings, she took to the skies. She did an elegant loop in the air before she flew past the clouds and was out of sight.

Jill waved her hands to send the dragon off while the others stood behind her.

“A golden-eyed, black dragon thrown out by his mate, what is the world coming to?” Rave muttered quietly.

“I-Isn’t she treating the incarnation of my spirit horribly? His wife is neglecting him...” mumbled Hadis.

“Rawr...”

“There’s no time for you to be down. Flight lessons will begin immediately; I’m as strict as they come!” Jill said as she turned around.

Hadis clutched Raw tightly and stepped back as he was literally protecting his own spirit. “F-Flight lessons? Are you even qualified, Jill?” the emperor asked.

“Rawr, rawr.” Raw clung onto Hadis.

“Nope, but I was thinking we could ask Rave,” Jill said.

“Er, boy, I’m bushed! I need to rest inside of Hadis, so good night,” the Dragon God said hastily.

“Hey, you’re playing dirty, Rave! You think this whole thing’s a pain, don’t you?! B-But Jill, Rave’s gone and all, so maybe we should ask my sister, Elentzia... Or maybe it’d be safer with Risteard?!”

It was good to see the siblings on good terms, but Jill frowned.

"No, I'll look after that baby!" she insisted.

"But, um, er... Dinner! What would you like for tonight's dinner? Can you do some of the shopping?!"

"You can't change the subject like that. Rare asked me to take care of that child, and that's exactly what I will do!"

Jill puffed out her chest while Hadis and Raw looked terrified. *How rude!*

"I won't do anything dangerous. First, let's give him a gentle toss. He might be able to fly with the momentum," Jill suggested.

"That's plenty dangerous. Don't throw my spirit around!" Hadis complained.

"And we need the baby to build some muscle! That's important!" Jill exclaimed.

"What does *that* mean?! Do you think he'll become more delicious? Hey, kid, hurry up and run— Oh."

"Rawr..." Raw muttered as he fell unconscious.

"Oh my," said Camila with a hand on her cheek. "Did he faint from the mere thought of flight training?"

"That baby's just like His Majesty, all right. His heart and body must be frail," added Zeke.

Unable to come up with a comeback, Hadis trembled in silence. He wanted to toss Raw aside and claim they had no affiliation, but he also wanted everyone to treat the baby better.

"But I'm sure he can do it if he puts his mind to it! Raw's just like His Majesty, after all! I'll do my best to raise him!" declared Jill.

"It feels oddly shameful to be raised by you..." the emperor replied.

While Hadis hung his head, Raw furrowed his brows and groaned in his sleep. It was an adorable sight.

"Your Majesty, I'll be looking after this child. That's fine with you, isn't it?" Jill asked.

"B-But it's a huge task to raise a baby dragon. You'll need some help."

“I’m the Dragon Consort! I’ll be fine!”

She extended her arms, and Hadis frowned but gave Raw to her. She squeezed the baby tightly. Raw was the incarnation of Hadis’s spirit. Being given the baby was a sign of utmost trust, and she couldn’t hide her happiness.

“Don’t worry. I’ll help you fly, no matter what it takes!” she vowed.

“Don’t say that, Jill. I have a bad feeling about all this...”

Raw’s eyelids fluttered as though to agree with Hadis’s rude remarks.



“**SO** I’ve been tasked with raising a black dragon! Please and thank you!” Jill reported.

“Is Hadis an *idiot*?!?” roared Risteard.

His office was as lively as ever. Stacked papers fluttered from his desk as he leaned over in outrage.

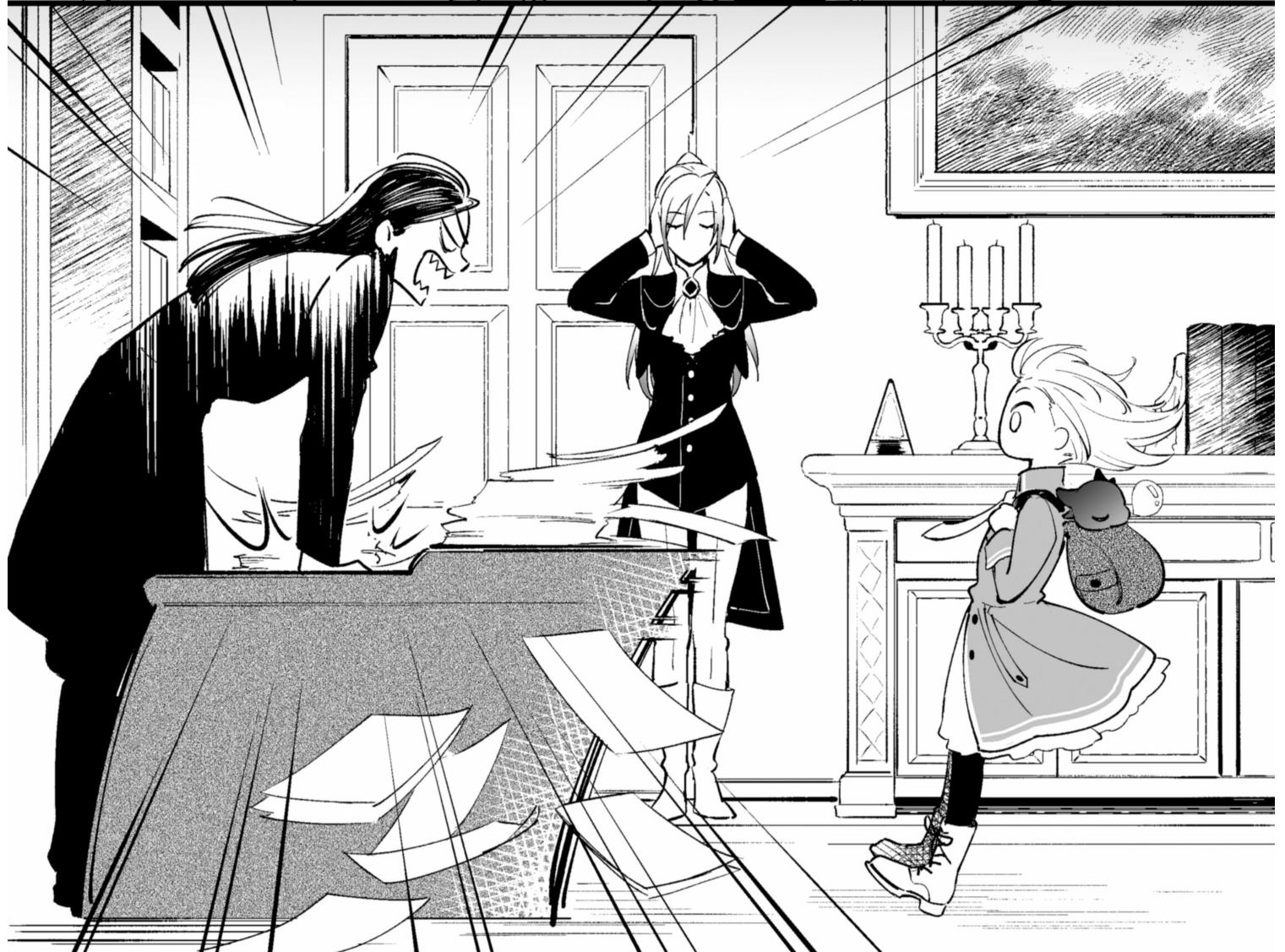
“A golden-eyed dragon?! The king of dragons?! In what idiotic world would he leave such an important task to a mere eleven-year-old child?! I don’t care if you’re the Dragon Consort! What idiot does that?!?”

“The queen of dragons and your younger brother did, Your Highness!” Jill replied energetically.

Risteard slammed his face onto his desk. *Ouch...* Jill thought.

“The morning meetings are still a huge mess, a majority of the high-ranking government officials have fled, there’s no order around here, more than half of the imperial army including the general is missing, the only ones remaining are lower-ranking people with literally nothing to show. I’m forced to be the accountant to reconstruct the imperial capital even though I’m part of the imperial family, and now you’re telling me that an eleven-year-old girl is raising the Dragon King?! Can my country fall any lower...?!” Risteard wailed.

“Now, Risteard. There’s nothing we can do if the Dragon Queen has selected the Dragon Consort to be caretaker. Jill has a good head on her shoulders,” said Elentzia. “In any case...”



The older sister of Hadis and Risteard picked up the papers on the ground and turned towards Jill's backpack. Raw had his head peeking out while sleeping. Gentle, growling snores came from his snout.

"...He's rather cute and not intimidating at all. Hard to imagine that he's the Dragon King," the princess observed.

"Right? He's *just* like His Majesty," Jill asserted. "Even though he can't fly, his clumsy walking is very cute!"

"Don't say that! It's too much for me to bear!" wailed Risteard while covering his face.

Elentzia hastily switched topics. "In any case, we need him to fly. Dragons usually learn from other dragons. Why don't you head over to the dragon stables and make him a small bed? Maybe he can watch and learn."

"I actually tried doing that earlier, but he cried and ran away," Jill answered.

"Huh? Did Brynhild do something to the black dragon?" Risteard said out of concern. He inquired about his personal dragon.

Jill quickly shook her head. "No, it seems this baby was just surprised by the others. I'm not sure if it's just because he doesn't like other dragons or not yet..."



OUT of panic, Raw ran around and bumped into various items, causing him to trip and fall. He cried loudly, and the other dragons, at first frozen out of shock, hurriedly rushed to the baby's side. The black dragon was their king, second only to the Dragon God, and so the dragons tried to protect and save the child. Raw felt overwhelmed amidst the confusion, causing him to cry out even louder —it was a hectic downwards spiral.

"This is hard to watch... I'll leave the rest to you," Hadis said while staggering out of the stables.



RISTEARD folded his arms and thought hard after hearing Jill's report of the events that had transpired at the stables. "I suppose we must keep him within

the castle grounds. Usually, we'd build a palace or two for the baby, and have someone in charge of caring for him, but our funds... Our treasury...!"

"R-Risteard, hang in there. Fainting won't help our financial predicament!" Elentzia warned.

"I guess it's not the time to be building a palace and hiring personnel," said Camila, who'd been guarding the office door. "We haven't even received our paychecks yet, Jill."

"At least we have a place to sleep and food to eat. We received clothes and weapons, too. We've gotta prioritize cleaning up the mess that the Riot of the False Emperor left behind," Zeke said, calming Camila down. "We're lucky we don't have to worry about food."

As their superior, his words were painful for Jill to hear.

"U-Um, is the funding situation that bad?" Jill asked gingerly.

"Yeah," Elentzia said with a grave nod. "The people who fled from the castle took whatever they could from the treasury. It's a blessing in disguise all those people left since it keeps our expenses low. That's the reason we delayed your engagement party as well. It's embarrassing you aren't able to walk around the castle with pride because we're short of money!"

Elentzia gave a cry of anguish, but Jill shook her head. "I-I'm fine! I'd rather give my subordinates their paychecks than have some party!"

"In addition to our money troubles, it's a huge blow that our imperial army is half-destroyed. We won't be able to protect the imperial capital at this rate. If we can find General South and his men who fled the army, we might be able to work something out." Elentzia folded her arms.

"He's nowhere to be found," replied Risteard, who managed to calm himself down. "We must slowly but surely work our way to find a lead."

"Can't you ask the dragons flying around for some information?" Jill inquired.

"Only higher-ranking dragons can discern one human from another. I'm sure General South is well aware of that fact as well. Should we obtain any information about soldiers on the run from a dragon, it would be safe to say

they are likely decoys.”

“But quite a number of people fled, didn’t they?” Jill asked. “Even if they were able to hide while traveling, they’d surely leave some sort of trace if they’d taken refuge somewhere.”

Elentzia slumped her shoulders. “Exactly. Someone’s probably sheltering them.”

“Duke Verrat, perhaps?” suggested Jill.

Within the Rave Empire, three influential families had supported the imperial family since ancient times. Duke Verrat owned the military port city, Duke Lehrsatz had the city of trade, and Duke Neutrahl controlled the fortress city. Traditionally, the Rave Emperor would take a woman from one of the three dukes’ households for his wife, and the three dukes had an intimate relationship with the imperial family.

Risteard’s grandfather was Duke Lehrsatz, and Elentzia’s uncle was Duke Neutrahl, allowing the two to receive some support from their families. The ringleader of the Riot of the False Emperor, George, had the support of Duke Verrat.

Risteard rested his cheek on his hands and sighed. “Duke Verrat has denied any involvement or knowledge regarding our uncle’s incident. Indeed, there’s no signs of the imperial army fleeing towards Verrat’s territory.”

“Then where else could they have fled?” Jill asked.

“If I were to take a guess, I’d say Radia, the city of freedom,” Risteard answered. “It’s the land our late uncle used to control as the grand duke. However, the duke’s aide has reported back with no abnormalities, though I doubt the truthfulness of those statements.”

Jill slumped her shoulders.

“I’m curious as to why the troops are fleeing as a group instead of dispersing,” said Elentzia.

“Could they have fled not because they feared punishment, but because they’re thinking of avenging George?” Jill asked.

"I think there's a good probability of that happening," Elentzia said. "Our uncle was rather popular with the soldiers of the imperial army, and General South was the vanguard for the troops."

"Don't jinx it, Sister. If another revolt were to occur in this state, I'd die from exhaustion."

Jill glanced towards the haggard-looking Risteard. In her previous timeline, when Jill had turned eleven, the revolt was led by both George and Risteard. But she couldn't imagine the prince betraying the emperor while in this state.

If I remember correctly, there weren't any other major uprisings during this period... And they hadn't gone to war with Kratos yet.

While Jill was deep in thought, Elentzia patted her shoulder. "I know we started this talk, but nothing good will come from worrying. After we publicized that the current imperial family has no blood ties to the Dragon Emperor Hadis, the three dukes have gone silent in panic for now, but we don't know when or how they'll explode. But if we always remain cautious and wary, we'll exhaust ourselves. Don't worry, I'm sure things will work out."

"Sister, as part of the Rave imperial family, we're the ones who have to *make* it work out," Risteard said out of exasperation.

Elentzia smiled. The two adults weren't related to Hadis by blood, but they decided to remain as older siblings to the emperor with his blessing.

"You two sound just like His Majesty. You three really are siblings," Jill said with a laugh. The prince and princess looked at the girl in shock. "His Majesty said that his older sister and brother would do something about the situation because they wouldn't want to die."

"Was that a threat?! And he's dumping all his duties onto us? That idiot," muttered Risteard.

"Now, Risteard. I'm sure they're words of encouragement. He's saying that if we're to remain as his older siblings, we should be able to make do with this situation," Elentzia explained.

"Is there anything I could do to help?" asked Jill.

Risteard shook his head. “I appreciate the offer, but there’s nothing you can do. In the public’s eye, you’re not even the Dragon Consort, much less Hadis’s fiancée. At best, you’re treated as a state guest. At worst, you’ll be doubted as an undercover spy. The only thing you can do for now is to stay put.”

“But I’m the Dragon Consort, and I’ve received the blessing from Rave. I’d like to do something to help out.” Jill looked down at the ring finger on her left hand. The false Heavenly Sword had sealed her powers and her magic energy hadn’t returned, but she was sure that a golden ring was on her finger, proving that she was indeed the Dragon Consort even if she couldn’t see it.

“I’ve no doubt that you’re the Dragon Consort, but that’s following the logic of dragons. Humans hold a different view,” Risteard pointed out.

“But it’d be a huge help if we could ask Jill for assistance. Why don’t we officially treat her as a guest and hasten the process?” suggested Elentzia. “I’m sure I’d be able to have her work under me, Risteard.”

Elentzia was currently in charge of the imperial army, and she had to shoulder the duties of both an active-duty general and the overseer of all the army’s affairs. Jill’s face shone with excitement at her suggestion, but Risteard cut down her hopes before she was able to voice her consent.

“We mustn’t, Sister. If she wants to truly be the Dragon Consort, she must follow the traditional process.”

“You’re as strict and honest as ever,” Elentzia replied.

“I don’t use my words without reason,” Risteard said before turning to Jill. “Lady Jill.”

She looked up upon hearing her name.

“I give you my approval, but that’s just my personal opinion. My sister is of the same mindset. Your impatience is justified, but you’re from Kratos, and people will surely probe into your background, though you may have nothing to hide. If we forcibly proceed with the process without the approval of others, your relationships with the people of this country will be strained in the future. That’s why even Hadis hasn’t just forced his will onto the others by hosting an engagement party right away. It’s all for your future.”

Jill blinked at Risteard's explanation and felt herself grow embarrassed. *I-I see. I guess His Majesty has been thinking about stuff.*

Elentzia gave a dry laugh. "Indeed, Hadis has shown a great deal of restraint."

"For now, focus on raising that black dragon. And don't attract the attention of others," Risteard ordered.

"Huh?" Jill asked with a blank stare.

The prince frowned. "But of course. You've got a golden-eyed, black dragon—the Dragon King. What would you do if a shady individual got ahold of him? And he can't even fly yet. We don't know where Hadis's enemies lie, even within this castle."

"I understand, but how do I go about his flight lessons in secret?"

"Hadis's palace is large. There's even a small river in his yard with a pond where you can place a small boat. Above all, if that dragon is truly the reflection of Hadis's heart, I've no doubt that he's a timid, frail, shut-in."

No one could rebuke those insults.

Elentzia looked away. "Well, Hadis has always disliked strangers..." she muttered.

"Don't sugarcoat the issue, Sister. Anyways, you don't have to worry about anything else. Just take care of the black dragon. You're the true Dragon Consort."

Jill reflexively saluted in reply as her eyes met Risteard's. "Understood! I shall raise this baby to become a wonderful black dragon without fail!" she declared.

"Very good. If you need anything else, feel free to let me know. I must be off to another meeting," Risteard said. He checked his pocket watch and stood up.

Elentzia sighed. "I should return to my post as well. I must train the remaining imperial army as much as I can."

"Don't go easy on them and give them the benefit of the doubt. You'll fail to uncover any undercover spies, Sister. I can't support you anymore, and so many people have tricks up their sleeves. They're giving me a headache."

"Haha! I'm sure Hadis is relying on you the most. It's ironic how the names of Duke Neutrahl and Lehrsatz are more influential than the emperor's."

"We're just using whatever we can," said a dignified Risteard.

Elentzia slapped the back of her younger brother. While Hadis was the emperor, he had no support. He only had the Dragon God and the Heavenly Sword with him; it must've been reassuring to have siblings who could make up for what he lacked.

"Rawr," cried Raw behind Jill's back.

Jill had watched the two adults leave and gave a dry laugh at the baby's keen instinct. Much like Hadis, the dragon was sensitive to subtle changes in emotion.

"I'm fine. I was just a little envious that they could be of use to His Majesty," she said.

"You've been more than helpful to His Majesty, Captain. Think about the hardships you've endured until now," Zeke said.

"That's right," said Camila with a smile. "There's always the right man for the right job. You need to rest a little, and besides, your job now is to take care of that dragon."

"I know, but I'm greedy. Since we've got the chance, I want to show you the world," Jill said.

She reached into her bag and put her hands around Raw's arms. She stared into his eyes, and the dragon's large pupils looked back at her, his gaze filled with trust. Jill wanted to live up to Raw's expectations. Suddenly, she had an epiphany.

"That's it! He doesn't need to be a black dragon!" she cried.

"Huh? Look at his scales. He's black," said Zeke.

"I have a bad feeling about this..." muttered Camila.

"Paint! Do we have any colors?!" Jill shouted.

The faces of the Knights of the Dragon Consort twitched while Raw growled

and tilted his head to the side.



ASIDE from his golden eyes, Raw was considered the highest-ranking dragon after the Dragon God due to his black scales. He simply needed to be a different color to not be conspicuous.

“Look, Raw,” said Jill. “Those are the training grounds. Big, aren’t they? The imperial army’s training there.”

“Rawr!” Raw cried with glittering eyes.

His scales were covered in a cute pattern of black, red, green, and orange dots, putting the dragon in a good mood. Camila followed behind them, looking pale.

“A-Are we allowed to do this? The paint isn’t waterproof, and this is a black dragon,” she muttered.

“You’re the one who gave him a polka dot pattern, saying that you couldn’t leave the dragon to me and Captain,” Zeke countered.

“Because you’d make the dragon look like garbage if I left it to you two! I just wanted to make him look a bit cuter... Besides, does this golden-eyed baby not have any pride in his black scales?! What is this country coming to?!” Camila lamented.

“A bit late for that, don’t you think? Besides, Li’l Raw is the manifestation of the Dragon Emperor’s spirit. Just accept it,” Zeke argued. “This is our home country.”

Camila turned expressionless. “Right. The Dragon Emperor’s in an apron, and the Dragon King’s decorated with polka dots. That’s my home country.”

“Nice to be a part of an open-minded empire, huh?”

“I guess I’ve still got a ways to go,” Camila said. “Hehe, fine then! I’ll give you a cuter pattern next time, Raw! Just leave it to your big sister here!”

“You hear that, Raw? You can play around in style!” Jill exclaimed.

The baby dragon wagged his tail with excitement. Jill had expected Raw to

offer some sort of resistance, but he was enamored with the paint and immediately stuck his forelegs into it with glee. Jill had to stop him from painting his face as well.

He'd looked at himself in the mirror and checked his back before leaving the room. Raw had apparently taken a liking to painting himself, and it seemed like he was interested in being fashionable.

"But he doesn't look like a patchy dragon at all. He looks more like a new variant, and he might stand out even more," Zeke warned.

Jill looked down at Raw in her arms. "Right. His face is still black, after all. But I don't think anyone will see him as a black dragon."

The baby's face and legs were unpainted, but his back to the tip of his tail was decorated with colorful dots. Taking a huge liking to himself, Raw huffed with pride every time people glanced his way.

"That's because you're reckless by nature," Camila opined. "You're allowed to push ahead with your crazy ideas because you're the Dragon Consort, Jill. And no one else knows that."

"Yeah, most people wouldn't want to believe you did what you did to him," quipped Zeke.

"Then there's nothing to worry about. We're not causing a fuss so far," Jill remarked.

The soldiers they passed in the hallways would pause for a brief second before going about their business. Jill felt it was important to believe that these soldiers must've thought that the dragon was black before realizing that it was a patchy variant.

"Hey, did you hear about the imperial army? A large chunk of them quit again."

Jill suddenly stopped in her tracks as she heard voices from the barracks.

"Again? I guess it's only natural. I heard a lot of them just up and deserted."

"I'm thinking of quitting too. The Rave imperial family isn't really *the* imperial family, and that Dragon Emperor's no good."

"He's not even allowed at the military meetings. What are the higher-ups thinking?"

"Raw, you don't have to listen to this," whispered Jill, facing the dragon. She fell silent when she saw the baby's gaze.

"But didn't the Dragon Emperor decide to keep us? We didn't get fired."

"Can't say much about the emperor, but Her Highness Elentzia is a good commander. The imperial capital is in good hands with her."

"Besides, we've got nowhere to go. We have to survive here."

Raw quietly stared straight ahead while listening to the conversation. He didn't seem sad and looked as calm as ever, causing Jill to change her words.

"Everyone's got their own issues. But don't worry. There are good people out there, and I'm by your side," she murmured.

Raw looked up and nodded in reply. His response made Jill happy. *But as I'd thought, people are talking badly about His Majesty.*

Hadis had prepared breakfast and lunch for Jill every day and worked while being scolded by Risteard before returning in the evening to prepare dinner. Jill could only imagine her husband in an apron, but she knew that the emperor had been suffering in silence.

Yet, Hadis always prepared Jill's meals with a smile. Every time he did so, she thought that the emperor was kind, sensitive, and incredibly strong. It was frustrating that these traits hadn't been conveyed to others.

"You better learn how to fly soon. I need to prove that my emperor is super strong and cool," Jill encouraged the little dragon.

"Rawr?!"

After Raw looked astonished, his eyes swam and he hid his face in embarrassment.

"Do you need to be nursed too?" Zeke asked, looking exhausted.

"It's His Majesty's spirit, after all. Come on, be strong. Do you need some water, Raw?" asked Camila.

The baby dragon shook his head and jumped from Jill's arms. He was determined to walk by himself.

"Whoa," Jill said, moved by Raw's actions. "I'm proud of you, Raw! You can walk by yourself, can't you?"

"Rawr!"

"Maybe you can fly if I throw you from the rooftops!"

"Rawr rawr!"

The baby dragon dashed ahead, displaying his aversion to the idea. Jill groaned as she lost sight of the small, painted back in an instant.

"He can't fly, but he sure runs fast! His Majesty's spirit is amazing!" Jill cried.

"If you've got time to be impressed, chase after him!" urged Camila.

Camila snapped the girl back to her senses, and Jill took off running.

"Let's split up," Jill ordered. "I'll continue chasing this way! Camila, Zeke, go in a different direction."

They parted ways and Jill chased after the baby's footsteps. The trail led to a thicket before it disappeared.

"Raw? Raw!" Jill called out.

She didn't receive a response as she walked through the secluded area of trees. *Maybe he's in the backyard. Where am I?* The imperial castle was vast. Jill wanted to quickly become familiar with the area, but she was still treated as an outsider. She shook her head, dispelling any gloomy thoughts. Raw was her priority.

"I don't think he'd stumble into danger, but he's clumsy..." she muttered.

"Rawr!"

A loud cry rang through the area, and Jill hastily headed towards the direction of the voice. She cut through the thickets and came to a clearing. Trees surrounded a large pond. She swiftly looked around and found the baby dragon.

"Rawr!"

Jill would never know how the dragon climbed the large tree. Raw was desperately clinging onto a branch that drooped over the water. It looked as if it would snap at any moment.

“Raw, maybe you can try flying from there! You can do it!” shouted Jill while she approached the dragon.

“Rawr rawr!” Raw shook his head with gusto, and his furious shaking had broken the branch.

“Ack!” Jill said.

“Rawraah!”

The dragon let out an odd cry as he splashed into the water. Jill clicked her tongue and plunged into the pond. Raw was splashing around at the surface of the pond, but he’d sink at any moment. As she’d predicted, he sank before she could get to him. She took a deep breath and dove underwater, desperately swimming towards the baby’s side. She clutched the dragon in her arms and immediately popped up towards the surface.

“Hey, Raw! You all right, Raw?” Jill said, tapping the baby’s soft snout.

“Rawr...” came a feeble response.

She breathed a sigh of relief. Raw hadn’t drunk much water either. A wave of exhaustion accompanied her reassurance. She’d jumped into the water with all her clothes on, and only had half her magic powers. If she continued to dawdle, her stamina and body temperature would be sapped away by the cold water of the spring season. She wanted to dry off Raw as well so that he wouldn’t catch a cold.

His Majesty put me in charge of this child, so if something happens to this baby... I’d be a failure as the emperor’s wife. She once again shook off any negative thoughts and headed to shore before running to a heat source.



“I heard you fell into the pond. Are you okay?!” Hadis asked, returning to the palace before the sun had set.

Jill stood up. By her feet was a wooden box Zeke had brought in filled with

soft pillows from Camila. Raw was happily jumping about.

“What about your work, Your Majesty— And why are you in an apron?!” Jill cried.

“I went shopping for groceries for a bit!”

Jill’s cheek twitched when she heard that the emperor went out shopping in an apron. Hadis, however, paid no heed and approached his wife.

“Whatever, that’s not the point. Are you okay? Are you injured?” he asked.

“Raw is fine and well! Please be at ease, Your Majesty!”

The baby was bathed in hot water and properly dried to warm him up. He wasn’t injured and seemed to have a hearty appetite. Jill reported back energetically, but Hadis frowned.

“I’m talking about you too. Did you get into a warm bath and dry yourself off? You sure you’re not neglecting your own well-being?” Hadis asked.

“I’m fine. I won’t catch a cold just because I fell into a pond.”

“That’s not the point.”

Jill jolted at his firm response.

“You tell her, Your Majesty,” said Camila. “Jill’s been feeling responsible about the whole pond incident.”

“The one who escaped is at fault, isn’t he?” said Zeke. “Want an apple? Good boy.”

“Rawr!”

“I-I’m fine, Your Majesty! I can take care of Raw,” Jill asserted. She looked up and saw Hadis quietly watching her as though he knew that she was acting tough. She dropped her gaze and muttered, “I did think that perhaps I’m not good at childrearing, but I’m really fine. I can do it. Please don’t take Raw away from me—”

Jill was hoisted in the air before she could finish her plea and was quietly carried and placed onto a sofa. Hadis kneeled in front of her.

“I won’t take him away, but this is pretty unusual for you. What’s wrong?” he

asked.

“Th-That’s not true...”

“You are careful not to push yourself when it comes to areas that you don’t excel at. You won’t hesitate to rely on others. But it looks to me like you’re trying to do everything yourself when it comes to Raw.”

Jill fell silent. Hadis placed his hands gently on her knees and looked into her eyes.

“Did something happen? If so, I’d love for you to tell me.”

The emperor was rather astute when it came to subtle changes in demeanor. He’d seen through the feelings that Jill desperately wanted to keep hidden. It was a tough pill to swallow, especially because she was aware of her own feelings. She’d grown anxious, and the dream she had only strengthened those thoughts. Jill twiddled her thumbs before she gave a sheepish response.

“I’ve started to lose confidence in my position and my feelings...”

“I see. And why is that?”

Hadis’s voice and gaze were filled with understanding; he didn’t want to cast Jill’s feelings aside, and he certainly didn’t want to force her to feel a certain way. This allowed her to voice her thoughts clearly.

“I might not actually love you, Your Majesty...”

Jill was so overwhelmed with trying to express herself that she failed to notice that her subordinates and Hadis’s smile froze in place. She didn’t even notice the apple fall from Raw’s claws and roll onto the floor.

A long silence filled the room.

“...Huh? Wait, what? Did I mishear you?” Hadis asked.

“I used to like someone before you, Your Majesty,” Jill confessed.

“Huuuuuh?!”



“I realized that this person was taking advantage of my feelings of affection, and I asked for your hand in marriage to flee from this person. I didn’t have any regrets then, and I don’t have any now. My promise to you is sincere, and I don’t intend to take any of that back. But I recently realized that I may have misunderstood his intentions of taking advantage of me.”

Like a dam had burst, she couldn’t stop once she started. A torrent of words filled with anxiety gushed from her mouth as she gripped her hands tightly.

“No matter how much I love you, I might just be getting the wrong idea. I-I’m not experienced with romance at all. I don’t want to get the wrong idea with you, Your Majesty, but if I am, then there’s no way our relationship will last! Besides, I don’t get you at all! I can’t tell if you’re strong or weak or cute or cool! You’re smart and good at cooking, and your muscles are wonderful, and your magic powers are splendid!”

“S-Stop, Jill! That’s too much information to process! I can’t keep up!” Hadis interjected.

“Oh, uh, sorry.”

Hadis grabbed Jill’s arms and brought her back to reality. He took deep breaths while his subordinates called out with worry.

“Hang in there, Your Majesty. Calm down and act like an adult,” urged Camila.

“Organize the information and think of a plan. Don’t screw up,” advised Zeke.

“Er... So, you think you like me, right?” Hadis began. “Then it should be fine... Right?! Shut up, Rave! You were taken advantage of? But you were only around ten when we met! How could you be embroiled in something so toxic so young? Easy for you to say, huh, Rave?! And the person you liked before... We’ll leave that aside for now! You’re wondering about whether you actually like me or not, right?!”

“That’s right. Oh, but I know why I like you, Your Majesty!” said Jill.

“Too much information!” Hadis cried.

“I-I’m sorry!”

Jill reflexively apologized as Hadis raised his voice while cupping his face, but

the emperor quickly shook his head.

"N-No, I'm sorry for shouting. I couldn't help myself. I'll listen, so you can continue," he said.

"First off, I like this part of you!"

"Huh?" He gaped at her.

"You always listen to what I have to say and ask about what I'd like to do. And I've always liked your muscles and face! I like strong and handsome men! I really love that you can make delicious food! But the biggest reason is that you didn't take advantage of me. You could've used me as bait to defeat the Goddess, but you didn't."

Jill counted using her fingers, and Hadis cupped his face once more.

"Too...much information. Too much... My heart won't last...!" he groaned.

"What farce is this?" said Zeke.

"Quiet! Don't stick your head in other people's love lives," warned Camila.

"But I might only like you because I'm comparing you to my last love. I don't have any other standard to go by. The person I used to like was very reliable, and I didn't have to worry about him at all, but that's not true for you, Your Majesty," Jill said, her voice growing smaller as she felt guilty for comparing Hadis to another man while feeling anxious. She was being rude to Hadis, and it came as no surprise when her subordinates groaned while cringing.

"So this time around, I thought that I must be more reliable so that our relationship won't end up like my last one," she admitted. "I don't want that to happen. I want to properly fall in love with you and be your wife, Your Majesty. But there's nothing I can do at the moment to support you, so I was feeling antsy."

Jill slumped her shoulders, disappointed in herself. When she finally managed to verbalize her thoughts, she knew that her actions were selfish.

"I don't think my heart can take all this information," said Hadis in a tired tone with a straight face.

"I-I'm sorry. I know my words only furthered your troubles."

"You're fine. I think I cooled off. Thinking about all this is a pain, so I'll tell you what I was able to glean from your words."

He sighed and Jill gulped while growing tense.

"Do you understand my feelings, Your Majesty?"

"Yeah. I understand very well that you like me."

After a moment of silence, Jill yelled with flushed cheeks. "That's not what I said at all, is it?!"

"That's *all* you've been saying! There's so much I want to ask you, but in conclusion, you like me! I'm right, aren't I, Raw?!"

"Rawr!"

The dragon gave a firm cry of agreement, and Jill panicked as she faced the confident duo.

"W-Wait. I'm not confident if I'm handling this relationship well," she said.

"I heard. You didn't want to repeat your mistakes, and you were anxious about your future with me, causing you to feel impatient, right?" Hadis replied.

"Huh? R-R-Right. B-But I'm scared that my feelings for you are some sort of misunderstanding."

"I get that. But it's because you like me that you have these fears. You're afraid of misunderstandings because you love me."

Huh. I see... Jill was shocked by this revelation.

"Besides, you've had your answer the moment you wished to be in a proper relationship with me and to truly become my wife," Hadis concluded.

"Th-Then I'm not making any sort of mistake? Can I continue to be with you? Am I liking you properly?"

"Yep. No need to be so anxious. You can be as you are. We love each other."

"That's a relief! Whew, thank goodness—" Jill breathed a sigh of relief before she realized that not everything was well.

H-Huh? So did I just tell His Majesty that I... Her face turned redder than an

apple as her vision grew blurrier. Hadis hastily caught the staggering girl.

"I-I... Wh-What did I just... I..." she stammered.

"J-Jill, calm down. Are you okay? Did you catch a cold?" Hadis asked.

"So... I like you a lot, Your Majesty."

Midway through her sentence, she locked eyes with Hadis. He was wearing a headkerchief and an apron, looking nothing like an emperor. It was easy to treat him with scorn. But Jill knew she would feel proud and blessed if he continued to fight against unreasonable situations while staying strong and kind and loving her with a dazzling smile.

Even now, his long eyelashes blinked with worry while his thin lips called out her name. When she saw herself reflected in his golden eyes, nothing was dearer to her.

The same thoughts swirled in her head when it came to Raw. The small dragon was the physical form of the emperor's spirit. Jill had wanted to raise the baby alone without anyone's help. Her feelings were nothing short of the desire to monopolize him. Her entire body came to a boil the moment she came to this realization.

"Eep!" she screamed.

"Huh?! Hey, Jill!" Hadis called out to her.

"Your Majesty, don't touch me for a while! Don't come near me! Don't look at me! I'll go cool my head! I'd like to redo this entire series of events, so I'll start by diving back into the pond!"

"You're starting from there?!"

She kicked open the palace door and ran with all her might. No one went after her. Jill trusted that even if Hadis tried to give chase, the thoughtful Camila would stop him.

Ugh! I'm so embarrassed I could die! I can't look at his face anymore! I need to find the pond! She couldn't remember where it was and ran through the garden at breakneck speed. Without a clue as to where she was going, she climbed up a tower, ran through a passageway, and climbed down the stairs before running

into a garden.

She found a small pier and boat floating atop a large pond that glittered with the sunset. It looked smaller than the pond that Raw had fallen into, but that was the least of Jill's worries. She needed a pond to hide from her shame.

Jill kicked off the ground and dove headfirst into the pond. She closed her eyes and sank into the water, cooling her entire body. Just as she was about to swim around for a short while, someone grabbed her arm.

"Hey, don't be so foolish as to commit suicide!" a voice scolded her.

Jill blinked as she peeked her head from the pond. A rope tied to a large tree could be seen on the surface of the water, and a weighty dress was tossed near the base of the tree. Someone had removed their unnecessary garments and dove into the pond with the rope.

The arms that supported Jill's body were slender. The unknown girl's untied golden hair glimmered on the surface and her clear, blue eyes glared at Jill.

"If you're suffering so much that you want to die, stab the root of your suffering first before you kill yourself," she said.

Jill had never heard the girl's voice before but recognized her face. She had seen a black-and-white photo of her in the newspaper and other documents when news spread of her death.

"The second princess saved you, so I guess you can't try to die so easily anymore. How unfortunate for you," the girl declared.

"Y-You're, uh..." Jill murmured.

"Are you playing a prank on me? I told you that I'm the second princess, Natalie Teos Rave. You better etch the name of your savior into your memory." She smiled with arrogance while clutching onto Jill's body and used the rope to swim to safety.



"SHOULD I chase after her?" Hadis asked.

The knight shook her head. "You should probably give her some time to cool off. She was clearly flustered."

“Right...”

Hadis nodded while still kneeling in the same spot. Zeke stayed silent as well, implying that this was the right choice.

“Quite honestly, I’m a little confused myself. She’s said all sorts of things and I feel left behind,” Hadis admitted.

“Yeah, I mean, Captain confessed a whole bunch of unnecessary stuff.”

“Shhh! Stupid Zeke.”

“Oh yeah, she did talk about liking someone before me. Wait, why are you two running away?” the emperor asked.

The two knights had turned around and were ready to leave, and they could only provide awkward responses.

“Er, I thought I’d get Raw a new apple,” said Zeke.

“That’s right. You want one, don’t you, Raw?” Camila cooed.

“Rawr?”

“You don’t have to worry. I know who it is,” Hadis said.

Zeke and Camila turned around in surprise. Hadis stood up and brushed off the dust from his knees before speaking clearly so that Rave could hear.

“Since Jill could compare me with this person, we’re probably of similar rank, and that man could take advantage of her. What’s more, she was forced to leave Kratos to prevent it from happening. Only one person comes to mind that fits these conditions.”

“You really are sharp when it comes to stuff like this,” Camila said.

“Well, I also had my suspicions about that prince when he chased after Captain,” Zeke added.

“It seems their engagement had already been unofficially decided before I took Jill from him,” Hadis mentioned.

The two knights hadn’t heard this bit before. Zeke stared back blankly while Camila whistled.

"You go, Your Majesty. You two eloped," she said.

"But will things turn out all right? I'm sure Captain's family won't take all this without a fight," Zeke pointed out.

"Yeah. That's why I'm very busy. Back then, I just wanted a Dragon Consort, but now, my feelings have changed. I need to create a space for Jill," Hadis said with a sigh. He folded his arms while Zeke and Camila looked at each other. "You two can continue to protect Jill. And treat my spirit with care, too."

"Wait, Your Majesty. I can tell that you're all fired up, but are you okay? Jill had a man she liked. Can you just leave it at that?" asked Camila gingerly.

Hadis shrugged. "I pity him. He's nowhere near my level."

"Hey, Hadis! I told you to report to me when you return! Why are you in an apron again!?" bellowed Risteard. He stormed in through the open door and grabbed the emperor by the scruff of his neck before dragging him away.

"Brother, what's with your sudden arrival? You haven't told me what you need yet," Hadis said.

"Zip it. We've got a meeting right now," the prince turned to the knights. "You two, where's Lady Jill?"

"She's currently getting some exercise in to cool her head. It'll be dangerous if you get close to her right now," replied Camila.

"Huh? Why is she— Never mind. Maybe it's for the best she isn't here. Things will get complicated."

"What's up, Your Highness?" asked Zeke.

Risteard frowned at Zeke's casual attitude, but he stopped in his tracks. "I just received a report from my Dragon Knights, who I tasked with investigating around the imperial capital. Vissel is apparently on his way here."

"My older brother?" asked Hadis, his whole face lighting up.

"Yeah," Risteard nodded, not even trying to hide the bitter look on his face. "If things go smoothly, he should enter the imperial capital by tomorrow. He even kindly brought an army from Duke Verrat, funds, and quite a few civil servants, thinking we'd be short-staffed."

"Wait, isn't Duke Verrat the aristocrat who supported George?" Camila asked.

"So, what, he's giving us money and an army to prove his allegiance? Are they really our allies?" Zeke chimed in.

Hadis stared at Risteard, who clenched his fists in vexation. The emperor usually found his brother to be a pain, but things were oddly different this time. He was worried *for* Risteard.

"We'll be fine, Risteard. We've received funds and personnel. Their help is more than welcome, right?" Hadis asked.

"But they might try to manipulate the people in the palace. You don't have many allies as it is," Risteard replied.

"Vissel is our ally. We should get along since we're all siblings, okay?"

Risteard stayed silent at Hadis's remark. Only Raw gave a cute growl of agreement.

Chapter 2: The Logistics of the Siblings

THE pond that Jill had jumped into was apparently near a detached palace where Princess Natalie resided. Once the two returned to Natalie's residence, the ladies-in-waiting panicked upon seeing the drenched princess, but she gave out orders in an efficient manner. Jill took a warm bath and even borrowed some clothes.

"I'm fine, but it'd be an inconvenience if a child like you were to run around and dirty the palace," Natalie had said. "Warm yourself up and change your clothes. I don't want to get sick if you catch a cold."

She's a good person. A little clumsy with her feelings, but she's nice, Jill thought.

Jill wracked her brain to remember any details about this princess. If her memory served her correctly, Natalie was sixteen. While deep in thought, Jill took notice of the black dress she was wearing. It sported puffy sleeves and a ribbon around the waist. The lower half of the dress flowed freely, with lace peeking out from the hems. A white apron had also been prepared.

"Um, are these clothes for your maids?" Jill asked Natalie.

"What? Do you have a problem with them? I only have servants' clothes that'll fit your size. Or did you want me to lend you one of my dresses from when I was little?" Natalie said with a glare.

Jill shook her head. "No, that's not what I meant at all. I was just surprised that there were servants working within the palace that are around my age."

"What are you talking about? You were brought here because you're younger than fourteen, correct?"

Jill's cheek twitched at the familiar mention of the age limit. Natalie's tense eyebrows and expression softened.

"Well, I can't blame you for wanting to die. You came to work, but you were

instead selected to be a potential plaything for the emperor who's into little girls."

Jill did her best to suppress her desire to shout out "What are you talking about?!"

"The three dukes are all no good. They said that they were looking for girls to work in the empress's palace, but they're all just offerings for the emperor. At first, there were merely rumors that he was into little girls, but then during his speech the other day, he went ahead and publicly declared that he'd married an eleven-year-old. Ever since, little girls have been gathered and..." Natalie trailed off upon noticing Jill's demeanor. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm just at a loss for words..."

Risteard had been bemoaning about the lack of finances; there was no chance that Hadis and the others would permit hiring new ladies-in-waiting. However, if the empress in *her* palace was receiving aid from her family to fund the venture, it would be outside Hadis's jurisdiction. The dukes were most likely using that excuse to get girls younger than fourteen into the imperial castle.

I see. His Majesty had already publicized his requisite of a girl younger than fourteen, and I really became his Dragon Consort, so he's seen as a little girl lover...

The age requisite was necessary to combat against the Goddess, but since he had Jill now, he didn't need to look anymore. Jill could poke holes in this rumor all day, but the emperor was always going around the castle in an apron and now had a little girl fetish tacked onto him. That was the final blow; no dignity was left in the emperor's name.

Jill's mental exhaustion showed on her face, and Natalie, perhaps pitying the younger girl, brought her a chair.

"Now, why don't you have a seat? I'll pour some tea. I've already had some snacks prepared," said the princess.

"Really?! Thank you so much!" cried Jill.

"You guys can leave now." Natalie sent away her ladies-in-waiting and sat beside Jill before whispering, "If you insist, I can help you."

"Help me?" Jill whispered back.

"Well, it wouldn't sit right with me, you know? I just went through all the trouble of saving you. I can employ you here. Adding another employee shouldn't be an issue. I'm a princess, after all. I can enter the empress's palace as I please."

Natalie raised her chin and Jill gave a vague nod. She then realized that she hadn't introduced herself yet. From Natalie's perspective, Jill was a girl who came to work in the empress's palace, only to realize that she was going to be used as the emperor's plaything and had thus tried to drown herself in the pond.

"U-Um, Princess Natalie, I—" Jill started.

"Natalie, may I come in?" said a soft voice. It sounded like the chirp of a small bird, and Jill fell silent as she turned around.

The door opened ever so slightly, and a small girl peered into the room. She had soft, golden curls and bluish-purple eyes. She was clutching a large stuffed animal of a white tiger with a long tail.

"What's wrong, Frida?" Natalie asked. "Please, come in."

Jill recognized the name—Risteard had mentioned his younger sister on several occasions. Frida was still eight years old and was the third princess. She was Risteard's biological sister with a timid personality who feared Hadis. Natalie beckoned over Frida, but she shook her head and gave a fearful reply.

"A stranger..."

"Ah, are you talking about me?" asked Jill.

Frida jolted and hid behind the door. As Risteard had stated, she was terrified of strangers.

"Don't worry, Frida. This child will be working for us soon," Natalie soothed.

"R-Really?" The child shyly looked up at Jill, making it hard for her to deny Natalie's claims.

"Ummm... We're just talking about it for now," Jill replied.

"We've got snacks. Come now, don't be so shy," Natalie urged. "You're a princess."

Frida knitted her eyebrows and slowly entered the room. She remained wary, like prey being targeted by a predator, making Jill nervous just watching her. The third princess cautiously tip-toed to the seat farthest from Jill and sat down without making a sound. Frida sat neatly, ensuring her plushie's tail wouldn't drag on the ground.

"So, what's wrong?" Natalie asked. "What brings you here alone?"

"M-My brother...asked about having tea with the Dragon Consort... It's unofficial business," Frida murmured.

Jill gasped and looked up, but Natalie didn't seem to notice. She gave an unfriendly reply.

"My answer remains the same as the countless times before: I decline. I don't care if it's unofficial. I won't accept the invitation. No way."

"But he's already asked five times... My brother is troubled... He wants you to get along with her, but you feigned illness so many times..."

Risteard had apparently tried to arrange for Jill to meet the princesses behind the scenes.

I had no idea. People have been looking out for my best interests without me ever knowing it.

Natalie had apparently been pretending to be sick to decline these invitations, but it was hard to blame Frida for bringing it up when she looked so troubled as the go-between. Yet, the second princess acted high and mighty.

"Tell him that I suddenly came down with a chronic illness. I've told you before, the timing is too premature. Risteard knows nothing about the terrors of the empress's palace," Natalie said.

"But... Elentzia said that the Dragon Consort is a good person and is reliable..." Frida tried again, speaking slowly.

"I don't really care if the eleven-year-old Dragon Consort is a good kid or not. You get it, don't you, Frida? Neither Risteard's naïve sincerity nor Elentzia's

muscle-brain attitude will work at the empress's palace!" Natalie nibbled on a cookie and caught her breath.

"Uh," Jill interjected. "Um, is there anything wrong with the empress's palace?"

"You should remember this well. The empress's palace is currently hypervigilant thanks to that little girl lover," Natalie said in a scandalous whisper. Jill barely stopped herself from defending her husband from slander. "The emperor's consort usually maintains the empress's palace. But since the emperor doesn't have one right now, the consorts of my father—the previous emperor—are running the inner palace. And they're all opposed to the current emperor."

"Is that because numerous crown princes died due to the emperor's curse?" Jill asked.

"That's the main reason," Natalie said, pausing before continuing to say, "One of my older brothers died due to the curse. My other older brother abdicated the throne and fled the castle with my mother, leaving me behind."

Jill's memories had finally linked together. *That's right! There was a prince who used the incident with Natalie as a shield to seek asylum in Kratos! He said he still had a claim to the throne and had requested Prince Gerald's aid! Huh, so he shared the same mother with Natalie. The second princess may one day rebel against Hadis, then.*

Jill chose her words carefully. "Are you still in contact with your older brother and mother, Your Highness?"

"Of course not. My mother feared the curse and wished that I would die in her son's stead. She left me, her only daughter, at the imperial castle as a sacrifice." Jill couldn't hide her astonishment, but Natalie laughed dryly. "It was inevitable, really. My mother came from a household with ties to Duke Verrat, but she was an aristocrat from the countryside and didn't have much to call her own. When her eldest son happened to have a claim to the throne and became the crown prince, she exuded an inordinate amount of happiness. However, the curse had crushed her dreams. She couldn't bear to lose her second son as well."

"But you're also her child, Princess Natalie. You're a princess, too. This all seems so unfair," Jill said.

"You think so? I lack the might to command a squad of Dragon Knights like Elentzia, and I don't possess ample magic powers like Frida. I don't have an influential figure backing me either. I've got no talent; I've got nothing. And now, my blood has no ties to the Rave imperial family. I'm a princess in name only; I'm a total dud."

She insulted herself in a comical fashion, and Jill couldn't find her words.

"What?" Natalie raised an eyebrow at her silence. "I'm not bothered by the fact that I'm useless anymore. My mother abandoned me three years ago, so it's been quite a while."

"It's *only* been three years. You can't ignore your troubles like this," Jill replied.

Natalie gave a troubled look.

"Natalie has me by her side... She's my precious sister..." Frida said timidly.

Frida was a kind girl, and Jill felt her eyes sting as she understood why Risteard doted over his sister.

Natalie laughed and tried to lighten the mood. "Come now, let's end it there. That's not what we were talking about."

"R-Right. I apologize for my imprudence," said Jill.

"All I'm saying is that this kind of thinking isn't uncommon within the empress's palace," Natalie said. "The consorts all wanted to make their child the emperor and were fighting amongst themselves, but since the current emperor has that crazy weapon, the Heavenly Sword, they've all banded together. They're more unified than ever since they learned that the previous emperor had no blood ties to the Dragon God Rave. And to top it all off, an eleven-year-old Dragon Consort makes her appearance."

Jill advertently put a hand over her chest once the topic shifted to her.

"If that child officially becomes the consort and enters the empress's palace, it'd be bad news for the other consorts," Natalie finished.

"An official consort would put the other ladies at risk..." Jill murmured.

"Exactly. Which is why they're being hypersensitive to the Dragon Consort's movements. It seems the Dragon Consort is currently staying quiet inside the emperor's palace and won't come out, but if we take her side, the other consorts will surely go on a rampage and might even kill some people."

Jill looked stunned. "Huh. So the consorts of the empress's palace are physically strong enough to kill each other."

"Why'd you come to that conclusion?" Natalie asked, exasperated. "They will resort to poisoning others, dragging others down, hiring assassins to make murders look like accidents, and slandering others to encourage an execution. That's their bread and butter."

"They're not going to fight each other using their combat prowess?" Jill asked.

"They'll be fighting all right, but it'll be for the emperor's affection. Those consorts relish kicking people down with a smile."

"Relish... I didn't know that the empress's palace was so terrifying."

These explanations would make anyone paranoid and distrust other people. In a sense, it was more merciless than a war zone. *Ugh, I had no idea... Kratos doesn't have any of that. I wonder if I'll be okay.* Thinking that all this could be resolved with a few punches, Jill decided not to ponder it any further. Her priority was to become a proper Dragon Consort.

"The soldiers who fled from the imperial army are also an unknown factor. We have to first solidify the little-girl-loving emperor's foundation. We absolutely cannot provoke the empress's palace right now by trying to create a place for the Dragon Consort. Since they're still gathering young ladies-in-waiting, it means they're trying to find a way to eliminate the Dragon Consort using official means...for now," Natalie said.

"By official means, do you mean giving His Majesty girls younger than fourteen?"

"That's right. Can you imagine what would happen if we started to act chummy with the Dragon Consort? Some impatient fool will act in the most shortsighted manner possible. Even an unofficial tea party will somehow reach

the ears of the empress's palace."

"But... The Dragon Consort is all alone... She might feel lonely..." Frida replied softly, squeezing her stuffed toy tightly.

Natalie remained firmer than ever. "This is for the Dragon Consort's good too. She's still just eleven, isn't she? It's still a bit too soon for her to be assassinated."

The atmosphere turned gloomy, and the facts had started to sink in for Jill. *Wait, so I'm a target for assassination! Makes sense. She's worried about me.*

Should Natalie become friendly with the eleven-year-old Dragon Consort, the latter may be killed before she rose to power. The second princess was carefully keeping her distance out of worry for the Dragon Consort. *Hmmm... Then I shouldn't reveal my identity.*

As Natalie had stated, it wasn't ideal to earn the ire of the empress's palace yet. Jill was confident that she wouldn't be assassinated, but the two princesses in front of her might become the next targets. In her original timeline, these two had actually been assassinated, after all.

The second princess, Natalie, was killed in Kratos. The third princess, Frida, was murdered in Rave.

I'd been told that Princess Frida had disappeared shortly after the Riot of the False Emperor. Prince Risteard was involved in that uprising, so she might've been used as a pawn to threaten him, Jill thought.

Risteard had accepted Hadis as the Dragon Emperor before they even patched up their relationship. A wise man like him wouldn't have willingly participated in a revolt. Jill surmised that something must've happened to his sister, and that the empress's palace had been involved somehow.

If I remember correctly, the King of South Kratos, a man who was all for instigating war, had apparently targeted Princess Natalie.

The nickname for the king was given when he relinquished his duties to the crown prince and created a palace in southern Kratos to live his days in leisure and immorality. When Princess Natalie died back then, the truth of her death had never come to light. If even Gerald couldn't catch the culprit, then all signs

pointed to the King of South Kratos. Natalie's death had indeed caused a greater rift between the Kratos Kingdom and the Rave Empire, ultimately resulting in an all-out war.

The situation has been steadily changing, but there's still a potential trigger lurking about.

Hadis still hadn't dealt with the missing imperial soldiers, which could ignite a problem at any moment. Even Jill was unable to predict the future here. Following the Riot of the False Emperor in the previous timeline, Hadis had massacred the imperial army and completely restructured it. Hence, there was no need for the emperor to worry about this trigger—he only had this issue now because the future had changed.

While Jill was deep in thought, Natalie finished her cookies and giggled. "Despite all I've said, we're still quite peaceful. You can work here without fear."

"Huh? Oh..." Jill murmured. *Right. I've been invited to work under her.* "Well, to tell you the truth, I've been tasked with raising a dragon."

"A dragon? Is it a gift for the emperor? I'm shocked that you were able to find a baby dragon. Did its parents die, or is it lost or something?" Natalie asked.

"Something like that, yes! I mustn't cast aside my duties..."

Jill was curious about Natalie and Frida's affairs, but she wasn't about to abandon Raw.

"Then all the better. I can't ride a dragon, but I believe I'm knowledgeable enough about them," replied Natalie.

Frida whispered in Jill's ear as she processed the surprising news. "Natalie...is studying about dragons..."

"I'm a useless princess, so I should at least be knowledgeable about something."

"R-Really? Then do you perhaps know how to train a dragon to fly?" Jill asked.

"It can't fly? That's pretty unusual, but there have been cases before. If you're that worried, bring your dragon to me. I'll take a look. You better be grateful."

Jill felt like she saw a glorious light behind Natalie. The second princess looked like a saint in the girl's eyes.

"Th-Thank you! I was really hoping to get some advice!" Jill exclaimed.

"You like dragons, don't you?"

"I do!"

"Me too."

Natalie was a good person, and Jill had no doubt that she was a splendid second princess.

"Thank you so much for your help!" Jill said energetically. She bowed her head with gratitude.



"**YOUR** Majesty! Your Majesty!" Jill called out.

"Welcome back, Jill. Wait, why're you dressed like a maid? What happened?!"

"Raw might be cured!"

Jill was out of breath as she rushed into Hadis's palace. The emperor was in the middle of preparing dinner. He exited the kitchen while wiping his hands.

"Cured? Were you sick?" he asked Raw.

"Rawr?"

The baby dragon tilted his head to one side while playing with a ball with Sauté. The bird took that chance to kick the ball away. Raw hastily rushed after the toy, with Sauté following close behind. The two were playing around happily.

"Please listen! You see, I—" Jill started, but cut herself off when she remembered that she'd run out of the palace because of her grand confession.

"What's with that outfit? You look cute, but did you actually dive into a pond?" Hadis asked.

"I understand! I'll go back to the pond and wash away my memories!" Jill proclaimed.

“Dinner’s ready.” Hadis’s words stopped Jill, who’d spun around clockwise and remained frozen in place. “Tonight’s main dish is grilled lamb chops. There’ll be a fruit salad and consommé with egg as well. On the side, you’ll have a whole steamed potato with some butter.”

Jill spun towards Hadis upon hearing the details of the luxurious meal.

“All the dishes are freshly made, so it’ll be delicious,” Hadis smiled.

“I-If that’s the case, I guess I can make some time!” Jill decided.

“Good. There’s so much I’d like to ask you as well. Like about the man you used to like.”

“Maybe I’ll take a trip to the pond, after all!”

“Ah, I need to take out the rusks from the oven. They’re for our dessert.”

“You’re playing dirty, Your Majesty!”

Jill’s stomach growled faster than she could provide an answer, and she covered her face in shame. Hadis easily lifted her up.

“Then let’s have dinner. I’d like to talk with you,” he said.

“If you’re going to be mean, Your Majesty, I refuse to talk with you! But I’ll have that dinner!”

“Vissel is coming home.”

Jill stared back blankly as she was lowered into a chair, and Hadis encouraged her to eat first.



AFTER a hearty dinner, Raw was facing the ceiling while sleeping peacefully among the cushions within the wooden box. Sauté still wanted to exercise and had repeatedly kicked a boulder in the garden bordering their bedroom terrace. Even though Sauté looked more like a bird by the day, it didn’t look like any normal bird.

Its kicks had created a crack in the boulder, and Jill sensed that the rock would crumble soon. While seated on her bed, having thoughts about her bird, Hadis sat behind Jill with a comb in hand.

"You can do as you like regarding Natalie and Frida," he said.

"R-Really? Wouldn't it be a problem later if I got too friendly with them?" asked Jill.

"I'd feel at ease if you cared about my younger sisters. I don't think I'll be able to keep an eye on them in the near future. There'll be more people in the imperial castle, and I won't be allowed to move around as freely either." He combed Jill's hair as she'd been fresh out of the bath. "I'm sure Vissel won't approve of you, so you becoming friendly with my sisters is a pretty trivial matter in comparison."

Jill was troubled by Hadis's carefree attitude. "I-I didn't think you'd be so direct that he wouldn't approve of me."

"He always told me to choose my consort carefully and to think about who was supporting her. A lot has happened between my brother and me, but he treats me very well. I'm sure he's angry that I chose something so important like a Dragon Consort all by myself."

"He's been trying to bring you back ever since you'd been chased out to the frontiers, right?"

"That's right. We've always exchanged letters, and he's a little overprotective of me."

Jill was uncomfortable when she heard how thoughtful Vissel seemed to be. She knew that Vissel was the person who leaked information to Kratos. However, she wasn't sure about the relationship the two siblings shared.

"And he's on bad terms with Risteard," Hadis said. That bit was easier to imagine. "I'm pretty sure they'll start fighting. It won't be pretty."

In Jill's previous timeline, both Risteard and Vissel had been executed by Hadis's hands. When the emperor had left the imperial capital to fight against Kratos's army, Vissel had taken over the capital. The emperor's brother was consequently executed for that sin. This incident was set to happen three to four years in the future.

Jill couldn't call Vissel a coward for using such a tactic. It was Gerald's plan to misdirect Hadis's attention elsewhere, and the squad who fought against the

emperor's army at that time was led by none other than Jill, who'd started to gain the reputation of being the god of war's daughter.

But back then, I don't think His Majesty had turned into a terror just yet. Jill gritted her teeth, thinking about the emperor's strength—he could completely destroy entire battle plans with ease, but he was still an enemy she could respect.

Shortly after Vissel's execution, Jill and Hadis reunited on the battlefield, but he'd turned into a cold-hearted, cruel emperor who decimated everything in his path by then.

Prince Vissel must be really important to His Majesty... Jill glanced up and locked eyes with Hadis, who was putting the comb down.

"What is it?" he asked.

"N-Nothing. So, those two will fight often. What should I do?" stammered Jill.

"Well, you see," Hadis whispered as though he was telling a secret. He inched closer to Jill, and the girl closed the distance in turn with a serious demeanor. "I want to make baby food."

It took Jill a few seconds to try to decipher Hadis's words. "Pardon?"

"I'm talking about childrearing. We'll have ten kids, after all... Wait, did you forget about your promise the other day? You said you'd give birth to ten of my kids!"

"Huh? Uh, right! Right, I said that. I remember!"

Hadis looked more panicked than Jill before he heard her swift response. He breathed a sigh of relief and smiled.

"Great. But if you're to give birth to ten kids, it'll take at least ten years, right? It'll cause a great deal of strain on your body, so I thought we should get a jump on things."

"U-Uh, sure."

Jill had no idea where this conversation was going, but when she was met with Hadis's seriousness, she could only offer weak replies.

"So, at the earliest, parenting will start when you're around sixteen or seventeen, right?" Hadis asked.

"I-I suppose so..."

"And I want to make baby food."

"You already said that."

"And I want to make cute baby clothes, change their diapers, and cradle them to sleep."

"S-So you want to do some parenting."

Jill was sure the emperor would be suited for the job and would excel at it, but the conversation was going off on a huge tangent. *Is he talking about Raw? Does he actually want to take care of the baby dragon?* Jill couldn't predict the outcome of this discussion as Hadis continued to voice his resolve.

"Of course, I'll be your assistant while you're pregnant," he said.

"Th-Thank you? Um, Your Majesty, I'm not sure where this is going..."

"Which means I have to make sure that I can do my duties as an emperor on the side within five years!"

Jill stayed silent for a bit before giving an awkward nod at the emperor's conclusion.

"R-Right. You'll be an emperor on the side..."

"Exactly. I have to take the most efficient route possible to stabilize this empire and make peace with Kratos. It's tough, but I've decided to do my best so that I can be a good parent!"

"*That's* your reasoning?!"

"Is that a problem?"

Jill struggled to provide an answer when met with his earnest question. *But I mean, it's much better than wanting revenge, right?* Risteard would probably faint on the spot if he heard, but Jill gave a firm nod.

"I-I think that's a good and levelheaded reason!" she said.

"It's going to be a bit tough from here on out, but I want you to trust me."

Hadis's straightforward words struck Jill right in the heart. He wrapped a shawl around her pajama-clad shoulders and rearranged the pillows to prepare for bed.

"I haven't recovered the other half of my magic powers yet, and I can't summon the Heavenly Sword for prolonged periods of time," he said. "I can't brute force my way through either, so there might be times when I get annoyed. And I won't be able to spend much time with you either."

"Y-You won't be able to see me much anymore, Your Majesty?"

"Probably. But I'm set on marrying you. It's all part of our happy family plan, right?"

Jill suddenly understood why Raw had hatched. *He's really trying to become the Dragon Emperor.* Hadis couldn't fly just yet. He was clumsily fumbling around and running into things and was quick to flee. Yet, he was standing on his own two feet and determined to take his first steps forward.

"I'm going to make you my Dragon Consort. I'm not doing it just for show, and I don't want just internal approval. I'll make you into a true Dragon Consort." As he took her hand in his and swore this to his wife, his expression remained as dignified as ever before.

"I love you, Your Majesty," Jill said. She was unable to suppress her feelings.

Hadis couldn't hide his shock. "Wait, can we go back to that topic?"

"It's fine. I love you so, so much. I'm glad I fell in love with you."

Jill felt a sting as she tried to hold back tears. Hadis had accepted everything Jill had to offer. He'd accepted her feelings, which had been taken advantage of before, and had reciprocated in turn.

She outstretched her arms and tackled her husband, squeezing him tight.

"I-I'll definitely marry you, Your Majesty. A-And I'll become a true Dragon Consort... Waaah!" she sobbed.

"Wh-Why are you crying?! Calm down, Jill."

“I-It’s because you suddenly became cool, Your Majesty!”

“That shocked you so much it made you cry?!”

Hadis looked at Jill in astonishment as she pounded her fists into his broad chest. “That’s right! You made me fall in love with you again! My husband’s soooo cool! I love you! I’ve stopped caring about Prince Geraaald!”

“Ah, I knew it...” Hadis said in a slightly colder tone.

With a troubled look, he rubbed gentle circles into Jill’s back as she cried. Once she calmed down, they turned off the lights and got into bed together as usual, but Jill became embarrassed, and Hadis was also unable to meet her eye. Yet, they refused to be separated, and for the first time, the two fell asleep with their backs turned against each other.

Jill had never felt so nervous when sensing the presence of another person’s back before. As she shifted ever so slightly in bed, Hadis jolted in surprise. She was unable to say anything and took shallow breaths. Had she pointed it out, she would grow oddly conscious of him.

If Jill grew up into a proper adult and the future that Hadis had predicted became a reality, what would she do? Knowing that these worries were part of a happy relationship, Jill felt reassured and fell asleep.



“I-I was so nervous that I couldn’t sleep a wink...” Hadis muttered.

“In some ways, you are the same old Hadis. But hey, you haven’t fainted yet, so that’s an improvement,” said Rave, floating above the emperor.

Hadis glared at his adoptive parent. “You dragons are so heartless. Did you not see how cute Jill was this morning?!”

“I looked away. What was with that innocently intimate atmosphere? She couldn’t look you in the eye and dropped a plate the moment your fingers touched! Is that the style of beauty that humans exude? I didn’t create logic just for you to jump through all those hoops.”

“That’s not all. Jill—that Jill—even asked to give me a goodbye kiss! She said it herself!”

With her cheeks flushed pink, Jill had shyly brought up the topic. Due to her overwhelming adorableness, Hadis almost ascended to the heavens and blessed the world with another day of peace. In the next moment, she looked up with vigor and said, “I’ll become a good wife for you, Your Majesty! I must gain more battle experience in romance before then!”

Hadis had wondered if his wife was an assassin. He had no idea what “battle experience” meant, but he knew it surely implied something good.

“I might be killed by Jill before she becomes an adult...” Hadis murmured.

“Yeah? Good for you,” Rave said dryly.

“Recently, I’ve been thinking it’d be best if we slept in different rooms, but doing so would be so blatant! I don’t have any nefarious thoughts, I’m just trying to be the grown-up here! But I want to continue sleeping by her side forever! Is that bad?! What do you think?!”

“Don’t know, don’t care.”

“I’m being serious here! I want some real advice, so listen to me!”

“And I don’t want to. Don’t you see this is a one-sided conversation?!” Rave yelled.

Hadis looked over his shoulder at the Knights of the Dragon Consort behind him and then returned his gaze to Risteard, who was walking in front. The hallways were quiet except for the reverberation of the group’s footsteps and Hadis’s voice.

“That’s because no one else can hear your voice, Rave,” he pointed out.

“No! It’s because no one else wants to get involved!” Rave shot back.

“You don’t have to worry, Hadis. You can continue chatting with the Dragon God Rave. It’s an important part of your duties as the Dragon Emperor,” said Risteard, sounding unusually calm.

Camila and Zeke nodded. Hadis needed some help today, so Jill had sent her two knights with the emperor.

“You don’t have to worry about us, Your Majesty. Go talk with Rave,” said Camila.

"He needs to take responsibility for raising you," Zeke added.

"Damn it! They're saying whatever they want because they can't see or hear me! I've had enough! I'm going to sleep! Good night!" fumed Rave.

"Sure, but you'll get fatter if you keep sleeping," replied Hadis.

"Shut up, I'm saving my energy! We don't know when we'll need the Heavenly Sword."

Hadis gently touched the Dragon God on his shoulder. It was a familiar feeling for him. Having to use the Heavenly Sword usually meant a situation was dire, but it'd become his trusty weapon. It was proof that he was the Dragon Emperor. The blade would no doubt make him into a monarch.

"Yeah, I'm relying on you," said Hadis.

The quiet Risteard stopped in front of the double doors to the meeting room. "Are you ready, Hadis?"

The emperor turned towards Camila and Zeke. "You two can stay here. It's a pain to explain the titles and stuff, and now's not the time for that."

"Roger that. Now's not the time for that. Good luck, Your Majesty," Camila replied.

"We'll be here, so call us if you need anything. We'll be there in an instant," Zeke said.

After receiving words of reassurance, Hadis faced the door and nodded. Risteard put his hand on the knob.

I'll make Jill the Dragon Consort, no matter what, Hadis thought.

He first had to discern if the person waiting was a friend or foe. Everything started from this distinction.

"I'm back, Hadis."

A young man stood up from a seat at the edge of the room with a serene expression. He had soft, ashen hair and cool, pale eyes like a moon obscured by the clouds. Hadis had always thought he didn't resemble his brother, and he had only recently learned that they had different fathers. Vissel had surely been

notified of this as well.

Since Vissel had been engaged to George's daughter, he may have known this fact before Hadis.

"Welcome home, Vissel," said Hadis.

Without another word, Rave's lithe figure disappeared into the emperor's chest, and Hadis puffed it out with pride. He entered the meeting room containing his older brother, and the soldiers and civil servants he'd brought with him.

To Hadis's left was a long desk where Risteard and Elentzia would be seated. To his right were seats for his older brother's numerous subjects, with Vissel taking center stage. In the middle, at the very back of the room, was a single desk tying the two sides of the room together. It was the seat of the emperor, Hadis.

The seating perfectly displayed the current power structure within the empire.

A few moments later, the door closed and Risteard followed the emperor inside. Verrat's soldiers appeared from either side of the meeting room and surrounded Risteard with their weapons raised. Elentzia, who was already present, stood up, kicking her chair back.

"What's the meaning of this?! Is Duke Verrat planning to revolt?" shouted Elentzia.

"Let's not jump to conclusions, Princess Elentzia," said Vissel. "There's no rebellion here. The soldiers that I've brought will create a new imperial army, after all. The current imperial soldiers remaining at this castle will be dismissed. There are orders for their arrest, and to dispose of them if they show any signs of resistance."

"Huh? I-I haven't heard of this, Hadis!"

"It's a first for me as well," the emperor replied.

Elentzia looked astonished and growled in anger. "You can't reconstruct the imperial army without the emperor's consent! How imprudent!"

"The soldiers here have turned their blades against Hadis once. There could be a spy amongst them. It's asinine to leave them be and foolish to keep them close to the imperial castle," Vissel replied.

"These soldiers have remained by our side even in this hopeless situation to protect our empire! Above all, there's no reason to point your weapons at Risteard!" Elentzia shouted.

Vissel turned towards his brother. "Hadis, I must first give you an unfortunate report. The land under Grand Duke Radia has been occupied by the insurgents —the former imperial army that fled from this area. They'll eventually have an insurrection."

No one on the right side of the room seemed surprised, implying that they must've been notified of this beforehand. Only Hadis and his siblings in the castle had been left in the dark.

"Your Highness Second Prince of Rave, Risteard Teos Rave. You're under suspicion of assisting those soldiers in claiming the land of Radia," the crown prince declared to the second prince with an icy stare.



JILL frowned while she entered the back courtyard with her backpack on. Raw was snuggled inside. *There aren't many guards here. They must really be lacking personnel...* Thanks to this unfortunate situation, she was able to enter the terrace to Natalie's room on time without being spotted. Though Jill was in her work clothes, she was clearly taking a shady route.

"Good morning!" Jill called out.

"Why'd you come from the terrace?!" Natalie cried.

"I was confirming the security of this area. It's very important."

"I-Is that so?" The princess cocked her head at Jill's confident reply and opened the doors to her terrace for her.

Frida was in the room as well, and she stared at Jill blankly. There were no other servants around. They were certainly lacking people, but many were most likely sent off to welcome Crown Prince Vissel.

"And I've brought the dragon I'm currently raising!" Jill said.

Raw was in high spirits, with a floral pattern painted on his back today. "Rawr!"

"What's with that color and pattern? Is it a new variant? I-I've never seen it before," Natalie murmured.

"He's a patchy dragon!" Jill claimed. "The pattern on his back looks like flowers. He looks so cute, doesn't he?"

"Rawr!"

Raw gave his firm agreement to Jill's statement. The pattern on his back had been painted by Camila, who'd gone along with this farce. She was very proud of her work.

Natalie looked at Raw with doubt and took him in her arms for closer inspection, but she didn't suspect that he was the Dragon King. No one would ever dream of someone having the audacity to ornately paint a gold-eyed, black dragon.

Frida quietly approached the dragon, and Raw looked up at her with his large eyes.

"...What's his name?" she asked.

"Raw!" Jill replied.

"He's very cute. And the pattern is fashionable..."

Raw blinked and squealed. "Rawr..." Looking embarrassed, he hid his face.

Frida reached out to touch his wings, and he fidgeted shyly. Jill smiled at the wholesome scene, but Natalie watched them with suspicion.

"Is he *really* a patchy dragon? He seems to understand human words," she muttered.

"He is! Look at these scales! They're yellow and brown and red!" Jill asserted.

Natalie was the first to give up. "Whatever. You sure are energetic for someone who tried to kill themselves just yesterday. Did something good happen?"

The second princess was only trying to initiate small talk, but Jill remembered her resolve and fixed her posture.

"Yes. Last night, I affirmed my love was mutual with my partner!" Jill confessed.

Natalie dropped the baby dragon from her arms, and Frida's stuffed animal also fell to the floor. Raw blinked up at them.

"My husband is so cool!" Jill swooned. "I've decided to pursue the path of becoming a suitable wife for him, and I've just strengthened my resolve!"

"Your husband? You're a *wife*? Wait, how old are you?" Natalie asked.

"I'm eleven."

"Y-You're...m-married?" questioned Frida.

"Oh, we haven't had the ceremony yet. But I'm sure we will in the future! It'll be a grand wedding!" Jill exclaimed.

A stunned Natalie seemed to snap back to her senses. "O-Oh, so you just made a promise. W-Well, a child's promise is nothing to take seriously."

"I'll have him take responsibility. He's a twenty-year-old man, after all," Jill stated.

"Cut ties with a man who's into little girls! Leave him immediately!" Natalie turned pale while Frida fidgeted bashfully.

"The same age as my brother... Is he handsome...?" Frida asked.

"Absolutely! I fell in love with him all over again yesterday!" Jill replied.

"A wife... I'm envious..." Frida said softly.

"You're very cute, Princess Frida," Jill assured her. "I'm sure you'll meet a good man soon enough."

"No, wait, you're being totally tricked!" Natalie said before turning to her little sister. "You shouldn't be with someone like that, okay, Frida?!"

"But my brother is a wonderful man... If he's like my brother, then it's fine..." Frida said.

"That's because you two are siblings! That's different from marriage!" Natalie shouted.

"Rawr." Raw was shyly covering his face while slapping the floor with his tail.

Natalie noticed the dragon and sighed while putting her hands on the table. "We'll talk about this later. For now, let's focus on the baby," she said.

"Ah, please do! I want to raise this child wonderfully and then get married!" Jill announced.

"Let's table that topic, or I'll go mad. This baby has gold eyes."

Realizing that he was now the center of attention, Raw looked up from between the space in his claws. Natalie crouched down and examined the baby dragon.

"His scales look a little off, and his downy hair appears a bit rough... B-But no matter. He doesn't seem injured. Can you spread your wings?"

Raw proudly expanded his small wings. Natalie looked over the dragon with narrowed eyes.

"Yeah, this baby is a bit too intelligent to be a patchy dragon..." she concluded.

"He has gold eyes, so maybe he's smart amongst the patchy dragons!" Jill supplied.

Natalie went silent for a moment before continuing her examination. "The patagium looks good too. The balance with the size of his wings and his body seems a bit off though..."

"Wh-What do you mean? Is that bad?" Jill looked on with worry.

The princess shook her head. "It's really nothing to worry about. He's still a baby, after all. But if I were to give an assessment..."

Jill gulped while Natalie's expression turned stern.

"He has a big bottom," the princess declared.

"His bottom is big?" Jill asked.

"Bottom..." murmured Frida.

“Rawr?!”

The three girls scrutinized Raw, who immediately tried to hide his big butt with his claws.

“To be precise, I’m talking about his hind legs. But his tail is a little thick too, and his entire body seems a little plump,” observed Natalie.

“He does seem quite fatty. He rolls around quite a bit,” Jill added.

“Rawr?!”

“This baby will grow up to be big,” Natalie said. She lifted Raw with her slender arms and placed him on the table. “There’s a late bloomer every now and then. They don’t fly because they don’t have the need to. These dragons tend to become really strong. Special dragons mature differently than normal ones.”

“Huh...” Jill murmured.

“I’ve heard legends of a black dragon, also known as the Dragon King, growing by using the Dragon Emperor’s spirit as its source of nutrition,” Natalie explained.

“W-Wow! You’ll grow up strong, Raw! Isn’t that great?!” Jill felt that his cover may have been blown, but she turned to Raw in an attempt to play it off.

“If you’re worried, try considering that maybe he can’t fly because his bottom is too heavy,” Natalie said brusquely.

“Rawr!” Raw cried with dissatisfaction as he raised his tail and shook his bum at them. “Rawr rawr!”

He was trying his best to prove that he didn’t have a big butt. He shook with everything he had, but his actions were cute and nothing more. Natalie burst into a fit of giggles, and Frida broke out in a dopey smile.

“So cute...” Frida murmured.

“Rawr rawr!”

“I-I got it, Raw. You’re fine. Uh, you’re well-toned,” said Jill. *Well, His Majesty is.*

Raw unhappily looked up at Jill.

Natalie had finally managed to stop laughing and provided some advice. "He seems healthy to me, so we don't have to force him to fly. I think we can just watch over him as he slowly matures. Hm?"

Raw had started to nuzzle against Natalie, expressing his gratitude for not being forced to fly. Jill put her hands on her hips in exasperation.

"Raw, you just don't want to train!" Jill huffed.

"Rawr rawr!"

He tried to give an innocent whistle and jumped from the table to hide behind Frida. Jill felt the strength leave her body; the baby was acting *exactly* like Hadis. The third princess smiled happily.

"Raw, this is my friend... Do you want to eat cookies with us?" She introduced her furry plushie to the baby dragon, and Raw joyfully followed her.

"Rawr!"

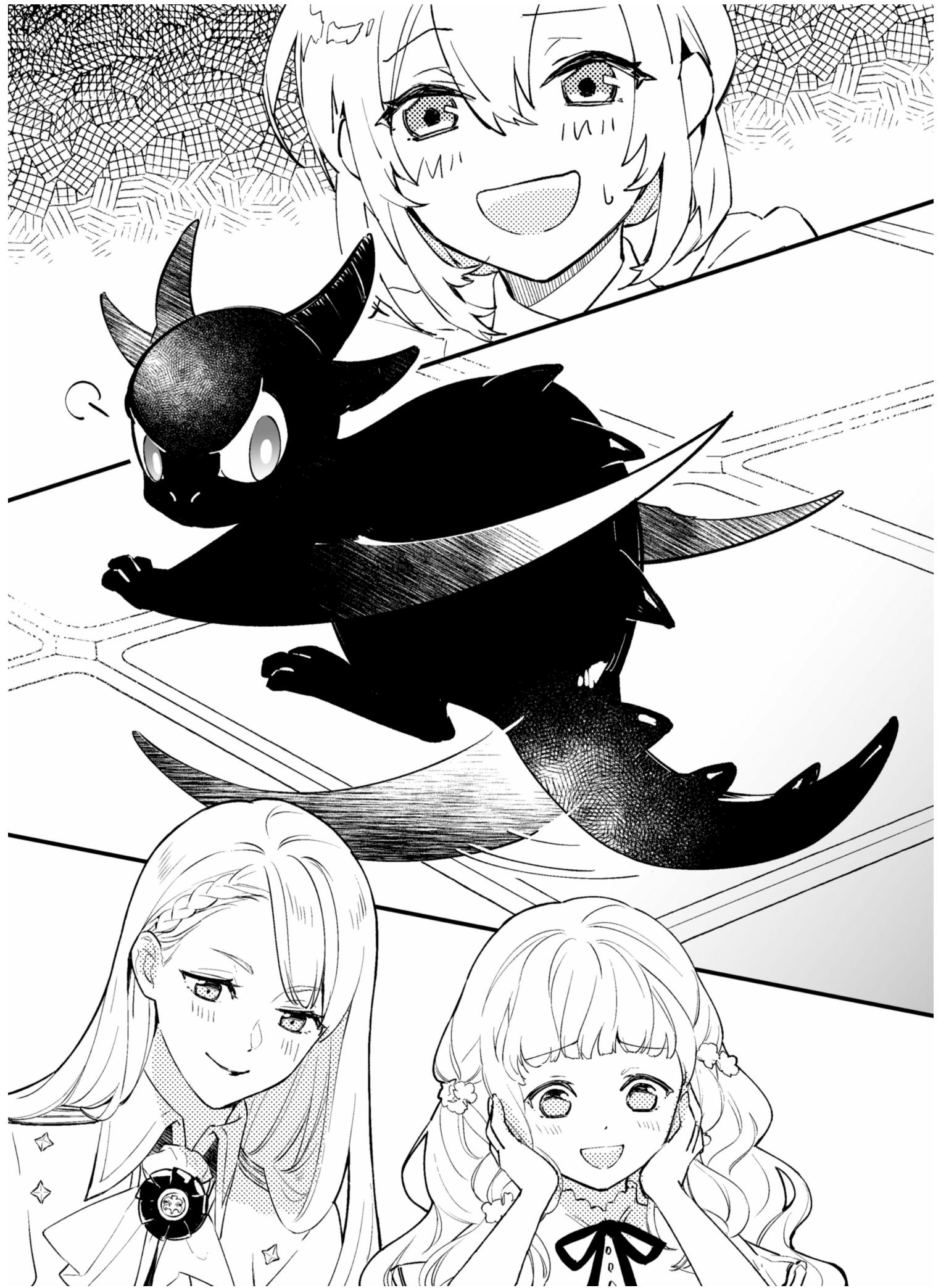
I guess this is fine. Raw's just interacting with the emperor's younger sisters. I wonder how His Majesty would react if he found out. Jill committed her intention of reporting today's events to memory. Hadis had formed a wall between his younger siblings, believing that they feared him. Hearing news about the princesses's friendliness with Raw might put his mind at ease.

"These cookies... They recently started magically appearing in front of the door to my room..." Frida said softly.

"Huh? Isn't that kind of dangerous to eat?" Jill asked, worried for the girl.

"My older brother said it was safe... These treats have appeared in front of Natalie's room, too. They're delicious." With a smile, Frida took out a fashionably wrapped transparent bag.

Natalie folded her arms. "Those cookies really are delicious, but it's so shady. None of the servants claimed to have left them either. At first, I thought it was poisoned, but it seemed like such a stupid method that I stopped being suspicious of them."



"I'm sure it's the cookie fairy. I've never eaten anything so delicious," Frida said, handing a baked good to Raw.

The baby dragon huffed with pride. Thinking this behavior was odd, Jill glanced around as a theory popped into her head. *Maybe I'll know if I eat one.*

"M-May I have a cookie too?" she asked.

"Here you go," Frida said.

Jill understood everything with one nibble. The cookie had the perfect sweetness with a pleasant crunch before exposing its dense and soft insides. The granules of sugar sprinkled on top had given it a nice texture. *This is His Majesty's cookie.*

There was no doubt in her mind. Not many people could earn the approval of Risteard, and she realized that the emperor had placed these treats in front of his sisters' rooms. Hadis, in his own way, was trying his best to make amends. Jill felt tears well up in her eyes, touched by her husband's clumsy earnestness.

"I-If you ever meet the person who baked these cookies, please treat them kindly," Jill said.

"What's with you?" Natalie asked.

"Do you know the cookie fairy?" Frida asked, tilting her head to one side.

"By the way, what's your name?" Natalie asked. "I don't think you've introduced yourself."

Jill jolted at the second princess's indifferent question. In the next moment, a sharp glimmer caught her eye from outside the window. Jill moved reflexively. "Look out! Duck!"

Numerous arrows shattered the glass window. Natalie and Frida shrieked as the terrace door was kicked down. Thunderous footsteps thudded into the room, and guns were pointed at the three girls.

"Lie down with your hands in the air! If you resist, I'll shoot!" a man ordered.

"Wh-Who are you?!" shouted Natalie while hugging Frida tightly to her. The badge on the soldier's uniform caught the second princess's eye. "You're from

Verrat's army?!"

Duke Verrat had proclaimed his innocence, but he was the duke who supported George. Had he decided to raid the imperial capital?

"Princess Natalie and Princess Frida, I presume. How convenient. I'll have you two come with us," the soldier said.

"What's with all this ruckus?! Has Duke Verrat— No, is Vissel behind this?!" Natalie yelled.

"Let's make one thing clear. We're no longer Verrat's army. We're now— Gah!"

Before the soldier could reach Natalie, Jill jabbed her elbow into his stomach. The other soldiers shrank back with fear as they saw their comrade crumple to the floor.

"Wh-Who is this brat? Isn't she just some servant?!"

"Be careful! She might be a magic user from the remnants of the imperial army!"

"Take Raw and run! If you can, go to His Majesty or the imperial army for safety!" Jill yelled, delivering a spin kick to a soldier's neck from behind, slamming him into a wall. She used her right arm and aimed for the man's stomach.

Her blows, however, weren't powerful enough to be devastating; she hadn't recovered even half of her magic yet. It was difficult for her to take on multiple soldiers at once. There were no signs of the enemy rushing from the hallways of the castle. There was a chance that enemies were standing guard within the castle, but if Jill didn't stop the soldiers outside, the girls would have nowhere to flee.

"B-But what about you?" Natalie asked.

"You're in the way! Go!" Jill roared back.

Jill was certain that Hadis would notice the commotion within the castle. With a gulp, Natalie scooped up Raw, took Frida's hand, and ran ahead.

"Chase after the princesses! Don't worry if they get injured a little!" a soldier

yelled.

“I won’t let you!” Jill kicked the back of the man who gave chase. She stood in front of the door where Natalie and the others had fled. “You dare point your weapons at a princess? Have you all become rebels?”

“Rebels? That’s my line, soldier from the imperial army. Or should I say, *former* imperial army?”

Jill furrowed her brows in confusion.

A soldier on the terrace took on a condescending tone. “She might have some magic in her, but she’s just a child. I’ll leave her to you. Make it quick. We’ll head to the other areas.”

“Capture and protect the princesses if they’re found.”

The soldier in front kept his gun pointed at Jill while more than half of the troops started to retreat. They decided to leave their fallen comrades to pursue the princesses.

What’s going on? Didn’t Verrat’s army arrive to raid the castle? What should I do? No, stop! Don’t overthink this! These men had suddenly attacked her, and Natalie and the others had fled out of fear. These reasons were more than enough to treat them as enemies. They attacked first; there was no need to try to justify their actions. If there was an explanation to be heard, Jill would hear them out after she defeated them all. The ones on the attack were responsible for providing their reasoning—Jill was just fighting in self-defense.

I just can’t kill them! I’ll punch them all into submission!

It’d been a while since she got some exercise. Jill rotated her arms before she kicked off the ground.



VISSEL slowly raked his gaze across the room as he quietly made his accusation.

“Why don’t we start from the top? First, the imperial soldiers who fled the castle took over the land of Radia. There’s no firm declaration yet, but it’s only a matter of time before they revolt. It’s pathetic how you’ve done nothing but

watch from the sidelines.”

Elentzia clenched her fists at Vissel’s harsh words, and Risteard remained silent. This situation was quite predictable. Radia was the territory that George had taken over in lieu of a lord—it was the land ruled over by an insurrectionist. Hadis and the others had been cautious about the region as it was a prime candidate for the former imperial army to take shelter.

George’s aide had been temporarily allowed to rule over Radia, but he reported no unusual activities. Hadis and his two other siblings hadn’t taken this report at face value, but Radia was a special place, and they couldn’t make a reckless move.

Elentzia refuted Vissel’s claims with a stern tone. “But why is Risteard under suspicion of revolting? If there’s any indication of a possible revolt in Radia, it’s only natural to suspect Duke Verrat first, for he was supporting George!”

“Why do you think Duke Verrat lent me his army, his personnel, and his money? He didn’t want to be under suspicion,” the crown prince replied.

Hadis was impressed. He finally understood why he’d received an excessive amount of support and help. Aristocrats always had their bases covered—it was the only way they could survive in this world.

“But the matter is not so simple. Unfortunately, I’ve received intel that the Kratos army has taken residence in the Lehrsatz duchy,” Vissel said.

“The Kratos army?! Are you saying they’re attacking our empire without a declaration of war?” Elentzia asked.

Hadis cut in, silencing his sister. “Lehrsatz is the city of trade. Kratos soldiers often accompany merchants and traders as bodyguards. It’s a bit unreasonable to accuse someone of rebelling based on just that, Vissel.”

To the north was the floating city of Beilburg, and to the south was Lehrsatz, the city of trade, which allowed the Kratos Kingdom to strike trade deals. This was all common knowledge.

Vissel’s face softened as he smiled. “You’re as naïve as ever, little brother. You know that the land of Radia borders the northern territory of Lehrsatz. And Duke Lehrsatz has recently been lending a massive amount of food and

weapons to Radia. What if he intended to send the Kratos army in his land to Radia as well?"

For the first time, Risteard's laugh echoed throughout the room. "So, you're saying that the rebelling imperial soldiers of the anti-emperor faction fled from the imperial capital and captured Radia, where my grandfather, Duke Lehrsatz, seems to apparently be supporting them. Since I'm backed by Duke Lehrsatz as well, there's a chance that I'm involved with these events."

"I appreciate your swift thinking." Vissel quietly walked past Hadis. The new imperial army provided by Verrat made way for the crown prince. Hadis was finally able to see Risteard's fearless smile as he was surrounded by soldiers.

"I'm shocked by how you can obtain such information. I'm not sure who your source is, but you were engaged to the daughter of Uncle George and he supported you. I hope you haven't forgotten about that," Risteard said.

"Of course I remember. But I tried to stop Uncle and was chased out of the imperial capital after they discovered my correspondence with Hadis. Perhaps you can confirm this with the residents of the empress's palace or your sister, who were trapped with me? But I'm sure you've already done so, Prince Risteard."

"Aside from Hadis, you still treat the rest of the imperial family, even your siblings, so formally. You're as unpleasant as ever, Crown Prince," Risteard said, his tone oozing with sarcasm.

"I'm sorry. I've always been constantly pressured by the Rave imperial family not to misunderstand that we were equals. I suppose I'm unable to kick the habit. You approving of me as the crown prince is a first though."

"S-Stop arguing semantics, Vissel, Risteard!" bellowed Elentzia.

"Ah, yes. To prevent any further misunderstandings, I'll say that the information regarding Duke Lehrsatz's movements was provided by Duke Neutrahl," Vissel added.

Elentzia gulped at the mention of her uncle.

"Though you only lent Grand Duke George a hand for a short time, Duke Neutrahl was desperate to make up for that blunder. It's nothing for you to feel

guilty about, Princess Elentzia.”

Elentzia looked down when she heard his sarcastic remarks.

Risteard raised his voice. “My sister has nothing to do with this. Had my grandfather truly been scheming something nefarious and Duke Neutrahl had gotten wind of that, it’s his duty to report any suspicions to the Rave imperial family. She has nothing to be embarrassed about.”

“Risteard...” Elentzia murmured sadly, calling out her brother’s name.

Vissel narrowed his eyes. “Very good, Prince Risteard. It seems you fully understand your position. Now, I’d like to suggest two things to you.” The crown prince raised two fingers in the air. “First, I can restrain you until Duke Lehrsatz clears himself of all suspicion. The same goes for Princess Frida.”

“Are we hostages? If you’ve made a mistake here, you’ll be turning Duke Lehrsatz against you,” Risteard warned.

“If that happens, I shall request an explanation from Duke Neutrahl, who was the source of my information. That’s the process of things, is it not?”

“Are you planning on turning Duke Lehrsatz and Duke Neutrahl against each other?” Risteard sounded disappointed.

“Not to worry. Duke Lehrsatz will have an opportunity to explain himself. That brings me to my second suggestion. Prince Risteard, I’d like for you to undertake the role of hearing him out.”

“Are you telling me to go to the Lehrsatz duchy to absolve myself from suspicion?” Risteard asked in a low voice.

Vissel nodded. “However, Princess Frida shall remain at the imperial castle. You’re not completely free from suspicion.” There was no need to explicitly state that Frida was a hostage. “Whichever suggestion you choose, the Dragon Knights who work under you, and any personnel under your care will be relieved from duty, away from Hadis. They’ll be gone along with the former imperial army that currently resides within this castle. The people I’ve brought with me are excellent, so there’s no fear of political affairs stagnating. In fact, it’ll go smoother than ever before.”

"You really have planned it all out. I'm a little shocked—I didn't think the crown prince would find me so talented. Unfortunately, I'm not planning on leaving the imperial capital. It goes without saying that I don't want to live in confinement either."

"Well, you heard him, Hadis. What shall we do?" Vissel asked with a smile.

As attention shifted to Hadis, he stated his frank opinion. "Well, I'm surprised. I'm suddenly popular amongst my older brothers."

Vissel froze in place, his smile twitching, while Risteard looked exhausted.

"What are you talking about?" Vissel asked.

"Well, this is about which brother I should have by my side, right?" replied Hadis.

"You're not wrong, but read the room! You're always—" Risteard began.

"You're so noisy, Brother," Hadis complained.

"Don't cut me off with a complaint before you listen to my lecture! Listen! You're the one making me noisy!" Risteard nagged.

"So, you've started to call Prince Risteard your brother, Hadis," Vissel said quietly, silencing Risteard.

With his feet pointed towards his own seat, Hadis asked, "Is that bad?"

"No, I'm just a little shocked. You know you've got no blood ties with him, yet you regard him as your brother."

"So, you knew about that and stayed quiet to protect me, Vissel. Thank you, Brother." Hadis pulled out his chair and sat down. Once he did so, Elentzia jogged over.

"What'll we do, Hadis? What can we do about Radia, Duke Lehrsatz, and Risteard?" she asked in a small voice.

"Hm, it'll be bad if the insurrection in Radia happens. That's the city of freedom, which is traditionally under the rule of the Dragon Consort," replied Hadis.

A person from the imperial family could act as a lord on behalf of the Dragon

Consort only if she hadn't been decided yet. Thus, Hadis couldn't choose the next lord of Radia once George was killed. Doing so would imply that the emperor had made a public declaration that Jill wasn't the Dragon Consort.

I wanted to muddy the waters and leave that matter unsettled until Jill had a sure course in becoming the Dragon Consort, Hadis thought.

"You can't do that. This is Radia. There's a chance that the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort has manifested," Rave said from inside the emperor.

The Dragon God had claimed to have gone to sleep, but it sounded like he was wide awake and listening. It was all very troublesome. Hadis had the logic of dragons pushed upon him while he had to worry about the logic of humans as well. If settling these two matters made him the Dragon Emperor, he had no choice but to take the challenge.

"But I have a Dragon Consort. Isn't it best to ask for her decision first?" Hadis asked.

The people in the room exchanged glances and Vissel gave a strained smile. "Are you proposing that we should send your Dragon Consort to Radia and quell any rebellions? I suppose that *is* the proper flow of matters."

"Yeah, that's a good idea."

Hadis beamed as he gave a nod. He knew that Jill could handle the task, and if she was sent as the Dragon Consort, no one could voice their dissent or deny her title.

Vissel's smile faded, contrary to the other people in the room who didn't believe that anyone was capable of such a mission. The crown prince wasn't laid-back. He was astute and seemed to catch on.

"Hadis, I've heard that the Dragon Consort was Crown Prince Gerald's fiancée," he said.

"What?! I've heard of no such thing, Hadis!" Risteard yelled.

"I-Is this true? How did you bring Jill here?" Elentzia asked.

Hadis tilted his head to one side. "Did I not tell you guys? Prince Gerald did ask for Jill's hand in marriage."

Elentzia seemed at a loss for words, and Risteard turned pale.

“But Jill never accepted his proposal since she fled. It was a completely one-sided proposition, so I think it’s weird to call the prince her ex-fiancé,” Hadis said.

“You’re just splitting hairs, Hadis,” said Vissel. “There’s a high possibility that she’s an undercover agent of Kratos, and if she isn’t, there’s a good chance that she might become one in the future.”

“W-Wait, Vissel. If that’s true, I can understand your suspicion of Jill. I’m surprised as well. But Jill was always by Hadis’s side, even after he was chased from the imperial capital. Hadis is currently here with us thanks to her. Doubting her despite what she has done is a little...” Elentzia tried her best to cover for the girl amid the confusion.

Vissel gave her an icy gaze. “What if her plan was to become the Dragon Consort, manifest the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, and take it back with her to Kratos? If she willingly goes along with the offer to subdue the muddled Radia, that could be her true goal.”

Much to Risteard’s dismay, Vissel was good at twisting things to his advantage. It’d become difficult to send Jill to Radia as the Dragon Consort.

“Radia is currently occupied, and the Kratos army is trying to enter. Can this be cast aside as a mere coincidence? Is she truly uninvolved in all this? It’s absurd to have a Dragon Consort from Kratos in the first place,” Vissel said.

People around the crown prince gave their voices of agreement. Elentzia bit her lip, knowing that she was at a disadvantage. What could they do next? Vissel impatiently raised his tone when he saw Hadis deep in thought.

“Even as we speak, she could be proceeding with—”

Suddenly, a warrior’s voice rang throughout the room, accompanied by the shattering of a glass window. “Raaaaaaaaah!”

Hadis’s adorable wife flew in through the window with a fabulous kick. *Ah, I’m sure Vissel will be even more wary.*

He had a few plans thought out, but they were all quashed by this moment.

But Hadis loved seeing Jill run about with great energy and freedom. She looked impossibly cool in his eyes. The emperor, who rested his elbow on the side of his chair, inadvertently tugged the corners of his mouth upwards.



JILL had just kicked the last man into a random room and landed atop a long desk. In front of her was Hadis, and Elentzia was at his side. A great number of important-looking men with a grave expression were seated around the table.

Oops! Did I interrupt something important?! Jill thought.

The imperial castle was so massive that she wasn't familiar with the place just yet, and it had worked to her disadvantage. Her first instinct was to report in, and she saluted in front of Hadis. Wherever she may have been, she knew that Hadis was the man of highest rank.

"Please forgive my sudden entrance, Your Majesty!" Jill said. "I was currently restraining some rebels. But please be at ease! He's the last one that I know of! I've defeated everyone else! I may have missed a few, but I stopped counting after eight hundred, so I'm not aware of the specific number."

"E-Eight hundred?! Hey, how many soldiers were sent into the imperial castle?" a man asked.

"F-Four thousand. We have another ten thousand on standby outside the imperial capital. H-How can Verrat's army be subdued by one little girl?!" another answered.

"You're kidding!"

Jill panicked as her surroundings started to murmur in shock. "U-Um, but they're all just unconscious! I broke a few bones here and there, but they should all heal up cleanly. I'm telling the truth, Your Majesty. We were suddenly under attack, and I had to fight back."

"I know. You justifiably acted in self-defense," Hadis said kindly, allowing Jill to breathe a sigh of relief. "But you shouldn't push yourself. Are you hurt, Jill?"

"I'm fine. And— Huh?! What are you doing, Prince Risteard?" Jill found Risteard surrounded by soldiers, and she noticed that they were wearing the

same clothes as the men she'd just defeated. She took a fighting stance. "Your Majesty, it looks to me like His Highness Risteard has been captured! Did you allow the enemy to enter?!" she asked.

"Hm, what do you think?" Hadis gave a mischievous smile.

He seemed to be enjoying himself, unfitting for the atmosphere of the room. Jill felt guilty since she'd made her sudden appearance.

"Why do you seem so happy, Your Majesty?" she asked.

"My wife is so cute and cool and reliable."

"F-Flattery will get you nowhere! You'll only get your welcome home kiss once this is all over!"

"H-Hadis, Jill... You really need to read the room," groaned Elentzia.

Risteard's laugh reverberated in the air. "Don't worry. I'm not captured, Lady Jill. I won't allow it."

"Huh? Then what are you all doing?" Jill asked.

"Oh, we've just been talking with Crown Prince Vissel about our empire's future."

Jill was surprised upon hearing that name, but she was familiar with his face. His ashen hair and serene eyes, like a moon obscured by the clouds, didn't make him seem suitable for fighting. Dressed in a long robe, he looked more like a priest than a crown prince.

"I've decided, Hadis. I'll go to the Lehrsatz duchy. If needed, I'll even eradicate the Kratos army within our lands. There'd be no complaints then," Risteard declared with a refreshed smile.

Vissel narrowed his eyes. "You're planning on leaving the imperial capital and Princess Frida behind?"

"That's right. That's what you want, is it not? Then I'll accept your terms. Frida is a splendid princess, and Hadis will be fine. Am I wrong?"

"That's what I've been saying. You're such a worrywart, Brother," Hadis said.

"Then the discussion about my suspicion is over. Who do you think I am? How

unpleasant! Stand aside, if you're planning on calling yourselves the imperial army!"

A soldier lowered his spear at Risteard's glare. With a smile of satisfaction, he stared straight at Jill.

"I leave the Dragon Emperor to you, Dragon Consort."

"R-Right!" Jill replied.

She didn't understand the situation, but protecting Hadis was her intention from the start. Jill fixed her posture and gave an energetic response. Content, a smiling Risteard turned on his heels and exited the room.

Wh-What's going on? The imperial army? Is he referring to Verrat's army? Jill had assumed these men were rebels, further confusing her.

"Go after him. Don't let him go alone," Vissel ordered the men.

"Y-Yes, Your Highness!" A handful of soldiers chased after Risteard.

Hadis stood up and scooped Jill into his arms. She felt this was improper, but she was unable to process the situation, and allowed herself to be held.

"Here's the wife that I chose. She's my Dragon Consort," Hadis declared.

Silence spread throughout the room. It seemed everyone needed some time to process. Jill decided to put on a confident façade, thinking that it was necessary to bluff.

"By the way, didn't this soldier quit the imperial army the other day? He looks familiar," Hadis said, looking at the soldier lying on the ground.

Elentzia blinked and approached the unconscious soldier. "Indeed. I've seen him before. I didn't think he would transfer to Verrat's army."

"Huh? Th-Then this might be bad, Your Majesty! I told Her Highnesses Natalie and Frida to rely on the imperial army!" Jill said.

Had someone acted like they were part of the imperial army, no one would be able to tell if they were friend or foe. Hadis still had a pale Jill in his arms as he looked at Vissel.

"First order of business is to search for Natalie and Frida. I hope that's okay

with you, Vissel? We'll continue this later."

"Fine. Your wife was completely outside of my expectations as well. I'll have to rethink some of my plans," said Vissel, giving Jill a meaningful glance. He silently left the room as if he was gliding on air.

His otherworldly stride resembled Hadis's.



"HUH? Restrain the remaining imperial army?! D-Doesn't that mean they'll be disposed of as rebels?!" Jill cried.

"Correct. And Verrat's soldiers, whom Vissel brought, will become the new imperial army, apparently," Elentzia replied.

"B-But..." Elentzia glanced at a nearby soldier, gesturing for Jill to lower her voice. "But if you do that, people will lose trust in His Majesty and the empire. If people are treated as rebels without a reason, no one will risk their lives to protect the empire or His Majesty."

"Precisely. A person who governs a country must never turn their backs on soldiers who fought with their lives. If the land of Radia is truly being controlled by the fleeing imperial army and about to ignite a revolution, a certain degree of suspicion must be employed, but this method is far too unreasonable and borders on tyranny."

"Is Prince Risteard truly planning on leaving the imperial capital in this situation?"

Risteard was the foundation of Hadis's small base. The prince had been greatly helpful to the emperor—a type of support that Jill couldn't provide. She couldn't suppress her worries.

"Probably. Hadis approved of it... And I'm sure Risteard decided to bet everything on you," Elentzia said with a sigh.

"Huh...?"

"We've found Princess Frida!" a voice rang out.

Jill and Elentzia ran toward the voice. The imperial army—the former imperial army, according to Vissel—and Verrat's soldiers were fighting over the princess.

Frida staggered out from the storage room.

“E-Elentzia!” she cried.

“Frida! Thank goodness! You’re not injured, are you? Where’s Natalie? Is she not with you?”

Vissel and the other soldiers, feeling uneasy about surrounding such a young girl, backed away. Elentzia rushed to Frida and hugged her. Jill, wanting to avoid any further confusion, watched from afar. *Raw isn’t here. Is he with Princess Natalie?*

Raw was a gold-eyed, black dragon. When push came to shove, he could take care of himself... *Or so I’d like to believe.* Jill knew that her best course of action was to allow the two princesses to flee with him, but she couldn’t hide her anxiety. As though to affirm her worries, Frida muttered softly into Elentzia’s arms.

“N-Natalie... W-Was taken by the imperial army...”

“As a hostage?!” yelled Elentzia.

“Gather a search party and pursue her immediately. She should still be within the imperial castle,” Vissel sighed.

“No!” screamed Frida as she broke out of Elentzia’s embrace. She stood in front of Vissel and outstretched her small arms as wide as she could. “I-I won’t... let you pursue. Natalie said that if w-we gave chase, she’d die.”

Everyone held their breaths while Frida looked up with dignity. Lightning crackled at her feet; Frida was using her magic powers.

“Under the order of the third princess, Frida Teos Rave, I command you not to give pursuit! You must negotiate! Th-The imperial army is protecting Princess Natalie from the rebels—Verrat’s army!”

Elentzia turned pale and Vissel raised his eyebrows.

“Did she become a hostage to allow the imperial army to flee?” he asked.

“I-I won’t let you do as you please, Vissel! Neither my sister nor I will allow it!” Frida yelled.

Her body was trembling, but the soldiers could only exchange glances. It should've been easy for them to push past her small physique and move forward, but she exuded an aura of might, preventing them from doing so.

"All right. Let's send a messenger to the imperial army. Is that all right, Vissel?" Hadis said, emerging from the end of the hall. He'd heard Frida's voice.

"Y-Your Majesty!" the princess widened her eyes and clutched her stuffed toy in fear.

Jill glanced at her husband's profile and saw Hadis's gaze was very kind. His eyes were filled with affection towards his sibling.

"Hadis, negotiating is a bad move. We should give chase immediately," Vissel insisted.

"This is an order from your emperor."

Vissel was left stunned. Frida blinked, and Hadis tilted his head while smiling at the young girl.

"You two are just alike. You're just like my brother, Ristead," he said.

For the first time, the princess looked straight into Hadis's eyes.

News of the imperial army soldiers who managed to evade Verrat's army reached everyone's ears in a flash. They'd left the imperial capital with the second princess, Natalie.

Chapter 3: Codename “Baker”

WITHOUT his master around, the room was peaceful. The empty room felt even more spacious without the baby dragon rolling around like usual. With nothing to do, Zeke reluctantly tended to his sword when he heard a complaint for the umpteenth time.

“Haven’t we been totally useless since we returned to the imperial capital?” Camila said. She was hugging her knees in a corner of the room, facing the wall.

Zeke sighed, annoyed by her gloomy demeanor. “What else can we do? Even our captain is on a leash because of politics and stuff.”

He boldly sat in the middle of the emperor’s personal chambers while polishing his greatsword. Only Camila was present. Zeke’s actions were nothing short of insolent, but fortunately, the emperor hadn’t visited the room much as of late. The only ones to frequent these chambers were their tiny captain, whom they held in high esteem, a stuffed bear that could decimate an entire forest if activated, and a bird that was building up enough power to split a boulder with its legs.

“Yeah, but we can’t even protect Jill. What *are* we doing?” Camila asked.

“Take your complaints to Crown Prince Vissel.”

Currently, Vissel and the personnel he’d brought from Verrat were running the Rave Empire. Second Prince Risteard, who’d been supporting Emperor Hadis’s political affairs for a while, had been sent away from the imperial capital to clear Duke Lehrsatz of any suspicion of supporting a rebellion. First Princess Elentzia had been removed from her post as commander once the army was reorganized. The emperor had no intention of opposing the crown prince’s reforms, either.

Crown Prince Vissel now held an unchallenged position regarding political and military affairs. Members of the former imperial army who’d remained at the capital were labeled rebels and were being pursued. The soldiers of Verrat’s

army now called themselves the imperial army.

Both Zeke and Camila were under the negative impression that the army that had remained at the capital following the Riot of the False Emperor consisted of soldiers with nowhere to go. However, Vissel's methods were far from ideal, and the two knights took issue when soldiers suddenly appeared out of nowhere and called themselves the imperial army. But there was nothing they could do about it.

A princess who'd never held a weapon before risked her life to allow the old imperial army to flee. A child clutching a stuffed animal stood in front of the crown prince to stop him in his tracks. Yet, Zeke and Camila, adults who were masters of their chosen weapons, could do nothing but watch. This was beyond vexing.

"Well, we're just common soldiers at the end of the day. We can't do anything to oppose a crown prince who has money, power, and support," muttered Camila. "He's even the reigning emperor's older brother, and intelligent to boot. We can't brute force our way through. He's running the political world skillfully and brought the necessary funds. Even if a revolt breaks out in Radia, the new imperial army can fight back. I guess everyone's cheering for the crown prince..." She approached Zeke and sat down while leaning against Zeke's back.

Zeke frowned at the weight but didn't complain. He instead gave a murmur of regret. "Remember that kid? If we were going to return him to Kratos without killing him, we should've kept him as an ally."

"Right, that boy. He'd probably be useful in times like this. I wonder if he's doing well."

"I wish he'd plot something against our crown prince."

This was wishful thinking, but Camila gave a small chuckle. "Do you want them to crush each other? I like that. Messy but resourceful."

"We've just gotta do what we can. We're different from that kid."

"Right. Ugh, I can't believe a brute like you cheered me up. I'm done for," Camila lamented theatrically.

“I’m gonna punch you if you say another word. Also, you’re heavy.”

“How rude. But you know, I had an inkling that we’d be met with hardship from the start.”

They were knights of a Dragon Consort who originated from Kratos—a kingdom the empire had been engaged in an agelong fight with. In addition, the Dragon Emperor was notorious for his curse, didn’t receive any backing from others, and stood without a sturdy foundation. Camila knew that the road ahead wouldn’t be smooth.

“Yeah, I’m done. I’m done thinking about it. It’s all that handsome crown prince’s fault,” she said.

“You’re praising his looks?”

“He’s the mysterious type—I like it. I think he’s got a few skeletons in his closet. He’s had his own troubles, and he’s twisted to the core. We wouldn’t be boxed in this badly if that wasn’t the case.”

“Are the Knights of the Dragon Consort here?” a voice suddenly sounded.

This phrasing made it clear that the person on the other side of the door was an ally. Zeke looked up as the door opened in front of him and Camila stood up.

“Ah, Your Highness Elentzia,” she said.

“Camila, right? And Zeke, I haven’t seen you without Jill since you were a Dragon Knight apprentice,” Elentzia said.

For a short while, Zeke and Jill had been a part of the Neutrah Dragon Knights, where Elentzia had been their captain. He owed the princess a favor since he received a paycheck from her, so he bowed his head.

“Where’s Jill? Is she out?” Elentzia asked.

“Yeah, she said she was worried about Princess Frida and went to see her,” replied Camila. “Since the Dragon Consort technically doesn’t exist right now, we’re not supposed to be her knights, right? So, we can’t even act as Jill’s guards.”

Elentzia was a military person to the core and was unpretentious. She wasn’t offended by Camila’s casualness or Zeke’s brusqueness.

"I see. Then could I ask for some of your time?" Elentzia requested with a smile.

"Are we allowed to get involved?" Zeke asked.

"I'm a princess, and I've still got the title of general. It's a waste to see you guys rot in here, and sometimes you have to force what you want to come true. I should be a little defiant, anyways."

"What's wrong? It's rare for you to take the seditious route, Your Highness," Camila said.

Her blunt remarks were impertinent, but Zeke secretly agreed with this sentiment as well. The princess always tried to avoid conflict and to preserve the people around her. One could call her compassionate. This was also why she was well-trusted and believed in.

"When I see my younger siblings doing their best, I can't be idle as their older sister," Elentzia said, looking slightly downcast. The princess was just as nettled as Zeke and Camila, if not more. She was a princess, a commander, and an older sister. "But I can't really think of a plan to overcome this situation. However, I believe I can at least make some preparations. How about it? Will you help me out?"

"Oh, I love it when people are all fired up! It makes me want to lend a hand!" Camila exclaimed.

"But we can't cause trouble for the Captain," Zeke warned.

"Of course. I'll take care of that. We'll be okay... I think," Elentzia said.

She trailed off unconfidently, worrying the knights. They knew that Elentzia wasn't suited for evil plots or preparing for them, so they decided to refrain from making a comment. They wanted to get the ball rolling.

"So, what are we gonna do?" Zeke asked.

"Right. So, Jill defeated eight hundred of Verrat's infantry. Even with her current magic powers, it's estimated that she can at least knock out a thousand," said Elentzia. The knights grimaced, but the princess's eyes were sparkling. "My Dragon Knights are a squad of about thirty, but they're very

efficient. If I stand in the front and go all out with Rosa, we can take down about two thousand.

“Currently, Verrat has five thousand men stationed at the imperial castle. Vissel hired an additional five thousand mercenaries outside of the imperial capital. The imperial army that fled with Natalie as hostage has around three hundred men. It’s rumored that around three thousand soldiers of the former imperial army are hiding in Radia. We’re still waiting for a report about Kratos’s army, but they should have, at most, around five thousand men.”

“What are you trying to say, Princess Elentzia?” asked Camila.

“It’s a rough estimation, but we’d be up against an army of ten thousand at most during a single fight. Jill could take on a thousand, and the Dragon Knights and I will knock out two thousand, for a total of three thousand.”

It was absurd that one person was assigned a thousand soldiers to take on their own, but the knights were too stunned to rebuke the claim.

“That’s where you come in, handpicked knights of Jill,” Elentzia said. She remained as serious as ever. “If each of you can handle a thousand people, we’d have the combat ability of five thousand. We should be able to fight against ten thousand.”

“They’ve still got twice our fighting abilities. Your calculations are absurd!” Zeke shouted.

“Of course, I’ll polish my skills like never before! We might be able to decrease the gap in fighting prowess.”

“P-Princess Elentzia, your thought process is exactly like Jill’s...” Camila said with a shudder.

Cold sweat ran down Zeke’s back, but Elentzia gave a hearty laugh.

“I’m not telling you to go out there and beat a thousand soldiers without a plan.”

“Your calculations are completely illogical!” Camila complained.

“You both will use dragons. You need to be able to ride dragons. It’s settled,” Elentzia declared, leaving no room for debate.

Zeke and Camila's cheeks twitched. They were truly begging for the inconsiderate Raccoon Strategist to return to them.



FEELING a shiver skate down his spine, Lawrence Marton shuddered while glancing around.

"Have you caught a cold? You better not have brought it back from the Rave Empire," said Crown Prince Gerald der Kratos in a curt manner. He was swiftly taking care of the documents on his desk.

Lawrence tilted his head to one side. "I did run around a forest... My body may have finally started to feel the ramifications and the exhaustion of it all."

"Then rest before you get worse. Thankfully, we've got no urgent matters right now. We're just waiting for a report about Radia."

The talented crown prince was thoughtful towards his subordinates. Unfortunately, reality wasn't so forgiving.

"Regretfully, I cannot do so. The King of South Kratos has apparently gone on a vacation to Radia," Lawrence replied.

Gerald furrowed his brows and rested his elbows on his desk. "When did he... Did he hear about the Dragon Consort?"

"Most likely. But plans for creating civil strife within Radia have been going smoothly. Crown Prince Vissel has control of the Rave Empire, and if we give him an excuse to suspect a revolt, he'll work to exterminate the imperial army that defied the Dragon Emperor. If that *animal* were to go on a rampage during a battle, His Highness could act like it was collateral damage amidst the chaos and confusion. That animal likes to mock the living and has no interest in the Sacred Treasure. We've returned the false Heavenly Sword as well, so I believe no one will get in our way. We can let things play out."

"This situation is a bit messy for your standards, is it not?" Gerald asked. "There's a chance he might get carried away during his rampage and start a war."

"Well, there's a number of indeterminate factors out of my control... I can't

properly gauge the power of that stuffed animal or the bird," Lawrence mumbled.

Gerald frowned. "A stuffed animal and a bird?"

"It's nothing. I'm just at a loss since we released a big fish."

"...Jill Cervel."

Gerald once again knitted his brows. It was a pitiable sight; he was only fifteen, but he had a constant frown on his face due to his work. Many worried that he'd soon have a permanent wrinkle between his eyebrows.

"Precisely. She's an absolute ally of the Dragon Emperor and a capable warrior. She protected the emperor during the riot that Grand Duke George had instigated. The Dragon Emperor himself has half his magic sealed away, but he still has the Heavenly Sword on his side. I'm sure they can flee from the imperial capital controlled by the crown prince if they wish," Lawrence said.

"Even if they fled, they've got no money and no army. Unless they can somehow forcibly procure these resources, of course," Gerald said.

"Her weakness is that she can't use her might to thoroughly suppress people. In short, she won't rule with fear. It's wonderful that the Dragon Emperor has also received her influence and has refrained from going on a reign of terror, but the Dragon Consort is much too strong... Indeed, just what has a prince of your caliber done to let her go? She seemed to strongly despise you," Lawrence said, his statement laced with his complaint.

Gerald glared back at him. "How should I know? I've done nothing. The engagement procedures were going smoothly as planned."

"You don't *remember*. That must be the heart of the issue."

"I barely even talked with her! I'm the one who wants to know her reason the most!"

Lawrence blinked when Gerald uncharacteristically raised his voice. It seemed the prince was unexpectedly bothered that he was so loathed by Jill. *What a sinful girl... The Dragon Emperor's infatuated with her, while Kratos's crown prince is trying to woo her. I suppose she's already in hell*, Lawrence thought.

“But if that wild animal—the King of South Kratos—is truly headed for Radia, it’d be convenient if he crosses paths with the Dragon Emperor and the Dragon Consort,” Lawrence said. “If we’re lucky, our two enemies will crush each other.”

“And what about the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort?” asked Gerald. “The claims that it’s already manifested in the temple in Radia is probably credible, but I doubt that Radia’s aide is capable of carrying it out alone. He’s an idiot who cried and begged for us to send out our army to divert the attention of the former imperial army in Radia and take the treasure ourselves. As I’d expected, Duke Lehrsatz is suspicious of his movements now.”

“That aide is a useless opportunist. He’s not trustworthy at all. I’m sure George had his fair share of troubles with him. I understand why he left an impression on the soldiers who idolized him.”

When Lawrence was an apprentice of the Neutral Dragon Knights, he made Radia’s aide an ally on the condition that they’d only join forces when George died. The aide was a source of information, but possessed no talents at all.

Gerald sighed loudly. “If possible, I don’t want the Dragon Consort to get ahold of that Sacred Treasure... I don’t want to increase Faris’s burden,” he said.

It’d been a while since Princess Faris returned from the Rave Empire, but she was still bedridden. She’d recovered the Sacred Spear of the Goddess and had been tormented by the Goddess’s magic powers, which had been recovering by the day.

“I know. But why don’t we change our angle, Crown Prince Gerald?” Lawrence suggested. He smiled meaningfully upon receiving a questioning look. “First, let’s recapture the fish we’ve released.”

Gerald stared blankly. *Was he so shocked at being rejected that he never even considered winning her back?* Lawrence thought in shock.

“Recapture her? But how?” the prince asked.

“I’m surprised by how pure you are. Were you that upset over being rejected? Were you actually looking forward to that engagement?”

“No, you’re wrong. It’s just that she’s the type of woman who would never

waver once she makes up her mind on something.”

Lawrence knew he'd hit the nail on the head regarding the prince's feelings, but didn't pry further. “As you say, being forceful would have the opposite effect. We need to win her over first.”

“How?”

“If a battle does break out in Radia, the emperor, who doesn't have an army, has a slim chance of winning. Plus, it'll be a clash on their soil. Even if he wins, he'll deplete his own empire's resources; it's a lose-lose situation for him.”

“Since that man's heading to Radia, he'll bring chaos to his heart's content.”

Lawrence gave a faint smile as Gerald no longer referred to the current king as his father. “This time around, instead of being the opposition, we should pull back and make her into the Dragon Consort,” he said. “If we can claim the Dragon Consort at a later date, the Sacred Treasure is as good as ours.”

Gerald thought for a moment before catching on to Lawrence's plan. “You have a horrible personality,” the exhausted prince said.

“I hear that a lot.” Lawrence smiled.

Gerald sighed, signaling his approval.

But this plan hinges on them taking care of that feral animal somehow, Lawrence thought. He needed Jill's group to work hard so that his side could be triumphant in the end.



WHEN Jill entered Frida's room for the first time, she noticed its cute décor and many stuffed animals. The wallpaper was cream-colored with a floral pattern, and matching curtains finished the look. A tall-legged sofa was lined with round cushions and a small stuffed rabbit. There were ribbons and frills adorning the room, elegantly blending in without looking tacky.

Jill gazed around with a large basket in hand. “Your room is lovely. There are so many stuffed animals, too...”

Frida, who remained stern towards the soldiers who solemnly stood guard at the entrance, softened. “My brother always gives me stuffed animals whenever

he leaves the imperial palace so that I won't get lonely. My collection has been growing... But this time, because he had to leave so suddenly...I didn't get anything."

Jill had stepped on a landmine the moment she sat down for their tea party. She froze, thinking that she'd been rude for treating Frida like a child. She brought some tea to her lips. Frida had prepared the tea and had been waiting punctually for Jill to join her.

"Is it...good?" she asked.

"Yes, very!" Jill said energetically. "Thank you for hosting this tea party, Your Highness, Princess Frida."

"Thank you for attending...Your Highness, Dragon Consort."

Though a bit hesitant, Frida was able to properly voice her reply. She was the princess who'd stopped Vissel, after all.

"I'm terribly sorry for my late introduction. My name is Jill Cervel. I'm from Kratos. I've promised His Majesty my hand in marriage." A soldier gave a grimace, but Jill paid him no heed as she continued, "I'm not knowledgeable about the Rave Empire, and I might trouble you quite a bit, but I hope for your patience. No, I must first apologize for keeping quiet about my identity."

"That's all right... I feigned illness, too... That makes us even."

"Thank you for your forgiveness. I want to get along with His Majesty's siblings! And you're extremely cute, Princess Frida!"

Frida blinked and looked sheepish. "That's...not true..."

"Above all, you were splendid the other day. Your strength when voicing your concerns to the crown prince greatly moved me."

The princess shook her head. "Natalie...is the truly amazing one. I hope she's okay..."

"I'm sure she's fine. Princess Natalie is a precious hostage. They can't mistreat her."

"I wish...I could do something to help my older brother too..."

Jill almost furrowed her brows when she saw the pained expression on the young girl's face, but she forced a smile.

"You have nothing to fear. Prince Risteard is a wise and talented man. I'm sure he'll handle his business and come home in the blink of an eye. He might even bring home a new stuffed animal friend for you!"

Frida gave a happy smile in response.

"Right," Jill said, suddenly remembering her friends. "There's someone I'd like to introduce you to, Your Highness."

She set her cup aside. Then she placed the basket on the table and opened the lid so Frida could peer inside. Sauté and Hadis Bear emerged from the basket while saluting.

"This is Sauté and His Majesty Bear," Jill said.

"A-A bird and a bear?" Frida stammered.

"Chirp!"

Frida jumped at Sauté's reply, but continued to stare out of interest. She was timid but curious.

"The bird kept quiet this whole time... Very intelligent," she murmured.

"Sauté is a game fowl. And His Majesty Bear is a stuffed animal that can fight! I received both from His Majesty, and they're my priceless treasures!" Jill said with pride.

"His Majesty... The emperor..." Frida's face fell, displaying her rocky relationship with Hadis.

Jill smiled brightly. "Yes, he's my wonderful emperor! Look at His Majesty Bear!"

She picked up Hadis Bear and brought him to Frida, who was sitting across from her. A fearful gaze watched her from the door. A soldier had inspected Jill's belongings before she entered the princess's room. When Sauté and Hadis Bear were being inspected, the former had delivered a roundhouse kick to the soldier.

“...He’s cute,” Frida murmured.

“Isn’t he?!”

When Frida was handed Hadis Bear, she gazed at it intently before smiling. “The bear is made very well.”

“I agree! His Majesty handmade this for me. He’s very good at sewing.”

“His Majesty... The e-emperor...h-handmaking a stuffed animal?” Overwhelmed by this startling fact, Frida gave a groan as though she was ill.

“Oh, you don’t have to overthink it!” Jill said quickly. “Please calm down. I just wanted to say that we’re alike.”

“A-Alike?”

“His Majesty gave me this so that I wouldn’t get lonely. Just like Prince Risteard gifted you your stuffed animals. His Majesty is at the imperial castle, but I’m not able to see him,” Jill said sadly.

Since Natalie had been kidnapped and Radia might break out into a riot at any moment, it was imperative to strengthen the security around the emperor. Hadis had been moved from the palace, where he woke up with Jill every day. They ate and slept separately. While it was true that security needed to be increased, Vissel had wanted to separate Hadis from Jill all along.

“They’re not even engaged. Why should they sleep together?” Vissel had said. No one could argue with his sensible logic.

Surprisingly, Hadis didn’t seem opposed to the idea, and had restlessly said, “We can try it out. But even if I’m dead, I can’t allow Jill to sleep in a palace that’s not mine.” After the emperor had given his approval and made a mysterious request, Jill continued to stay in Hadis’s inner palace while the emperor left for a different part of the castle.

A few days had passed since then, and the couple hadn’t seen each other at all. It was easy for them to find a hole in the security and meet up, but they were careful not to do so unless the matter was urgent. Should anything happen to the Dragon Emperor, Jill would surely hear of it, and Elentzia had reported that Hadis was doing well.

Even Rave didn't appear before Jill, implying that Hadis had something up his sleeve. The emperor had correctly predicted that their time together would be drastically cut.

Jill hadn't expected to be completely unable to see Hadis. Thus, she couldn't help but vent some of her true desires.

"I know I'm being selfish, but I wish he was here with me instead of the bear. So I think you and I are alike, Your Highness," she said.

Frida had recovered from the revelation of the handmade bear and mumbled, "I-Is it because y-you like His Majesty?"

After a moment of thought, Jill cupped her cheeks with her hands and felt her skin grow warm. "P-Please keep it a secret! If I spoil His Majesty, he'll get carried away!"

Infected by Jill's embarrassment, a red-faced Frida nodded her head.

"Could you also keep my thoughts a secret from my brother? H-He'll treat me like a child..."

"I get treated like one too! We have a lot in common!"

Frida gave a cheerful smile and squeezed Hadis Bear. The stuffed animal suited her very well. Feeling relieved, Jill stated the reason for her visit.

"If you don't mind, would you please hold on to Hadis Bear for me until Prince Risteard returns?" she asked.

"B-But this is...your important bear, Dragon Consort."

"You can just call me Jill. I'm sure His Majesty Bear will protect you, Princess Frida. I can't move around much, so this is the only way I can protect you."

The princess had directly opposed Vissel. Should anything happen, Frida would be captured as a hostage to rile up Risteard and be treated mercilessly. Jill truly had no idea what would happen in the future and wanted to hand a good luck charm over to the princess.

"You can also take Sauté with you if you'd like. They're two peas in a pod."

After thinking for a moment, Frida raised her head and looked at the soldier

standing guard by the entrance.

“Stand down. This is an order from your princess,” she said sternly.

“I mustn’t...” the guard started.

“You, what’s your name? Where are you from? Tell me.”

The soldier flinched at the princess’s relentless questions. He’d lost. Perhaps wanting to still look like he was keeping guard, he left while keeping the door open. Vissel had ordered the soldiers to keep track of Jill’s movements, but there was some leeway in his commands. Even so, the princess had skillfully managed to send the soldier away without raising a finger.

“That was amazing, Princess Frida!” Jill gushed.

“N-Not at all... Natalie and Elentzia are more amazing... And my brother is even more so...” the princess stammered before switching topics. “U-Um, Jill...”

Jill froze for a second when her name was called so gracefully. Frida’s adorableness was destructive. “Y-Yes?” she replied.

“I have to apologize...about Raw,” Frida mumbled.

Jill couldn’t hide her concern when she heard his name. The princess looked down and continued in a soft voice.

“Natalie tried to give him to me... She said that he was the king, so he needed to be kept safe...”

Jill gasped, wondering if Natalie realized that Raw was a gold-eyed, black dragon and the Dragon King from the start. Frida nodded, answering Jill’s unvoiced question.

“I didn’t notice at all... And I was surprised... So I immediately said, ‘You should take him with you, Natalie. Y-You might be protected by the Dragon God Rave.’ I-I was worried about her.”

Hearing her voice tremble as her body quivered, Jill immediately went to the princess’s side.

“Princess Frida,” Jill said softly.

“I-I knew that I might get in trouble if my brother found out... But... But I-I

couldn't leave my sister all alone... I hid in the storage closet and said that I wouldn't take care of him if he was left behind... Natalie isn't at fault. It's all on me! I'm so sorry!"

Frida squeezed her eyes shut, desperate to hold back her tears. She shook like a leaf, waiting for a barrage of blaming remarks.

Jill quietly asked, "When Raw was taken away by Princess Natalie, did he resist at all?"

Frida opened her eyes and shook her head. "He...stayed still."

"Then that means that child decided to go with Natalie." The dragon was very quick to flee. Though he couldn't fly, had he truly wanted to escape from the situation, he would've done so without fail. He was Hadis's spirit. "It will be fine. That baby will protect Princess Natalie. He's a king, after all."

Jill gave a firm nod towards Frida's anxious and hopeful gaze. Frida sniffled.

"Um... Erm... W-Will my brother feel the same?" she asked.

"Prince Risteard? Of course he will!"

Frida shook her head. "I-I was wondering if my other brother... If Hadis... would be mad."

Jill was overcome with more joy than before when Frida referred to Hadis by name and as her brother.

"There's no way he's mad!" Jill said, clasping Frida's shoulders. "Please call him by his name the next time you see him! You'll be able to eat all the cookies in the world!"

"C-Cookies?"

"Your time with her is over, Princess Frida," a serene voice said.

Frida stiffened when she heard the voice from the doorway. Jill turned around and saw a smiling Vissel.

"Lady Jill Cervel, please return to your room," he ordered.

Frida clutched Jill's sleeve, but she smiled and untangled the princess's hands.

"I'll be fine, Princess Frida. I'll leave Sauté and His Majesty Bear with you."

Frida looked anxious as she locked eyes with Jill, but nodded while clinging onto Hadis Bear. She glanced at the tabletop and saw Sauté puff out her chest with pride.

Vissel stood by the door and shrugged. “I get the stuffed animal, but you’re giving her a bird as well? I’m baffled by the warrior household of Kratos.”

“I made a request before today’s meeting. Is there an issue?” Jill asked curtly.

“None if you return to your room quietly, my lady.”

Vissel gave a mysterious smile as he closed the door to Frida’s room.



“**YOU** seem to have become fast friends with Princess Frida. I expected as much,” Vissel said.

They entered the halls, and Vissel commanded a soldier to stand guard by Frida’s room as he walked in front of Jill. He was escorting Jill to her room, it seemed.

“Do you think I’m trying to deceive Princess Frida?” Jill asked.

“I’m not very compatible with her pedigree. I feel the same towards you. It’s not hard to guess that you two would get along well.”

He implied that it wasn’t odd for people he conflicted with to band together. Jill frowned at his roundabout phrasing and verbalized her honest thoughts.

“Why don’t you say that in simpler terms?”

“Ah, was it difficult for a person from a warrior household to understand? The people of the court are quite confident in themselves, you see.”

He really pisses me off. The moment these thoughts entered Jill’s mind, she decided to be truthful.

“I see! I suppose your personality becomes all twisted when you stay at the court for too long!” she huffed.

“I’m glad that you understand, I suppose.”

“But some people of the court grow up to be honest, straightforward people. Prince Risteard is a great example!”

"You're right. Hadis grew up on the frontiers, but he's twisted."

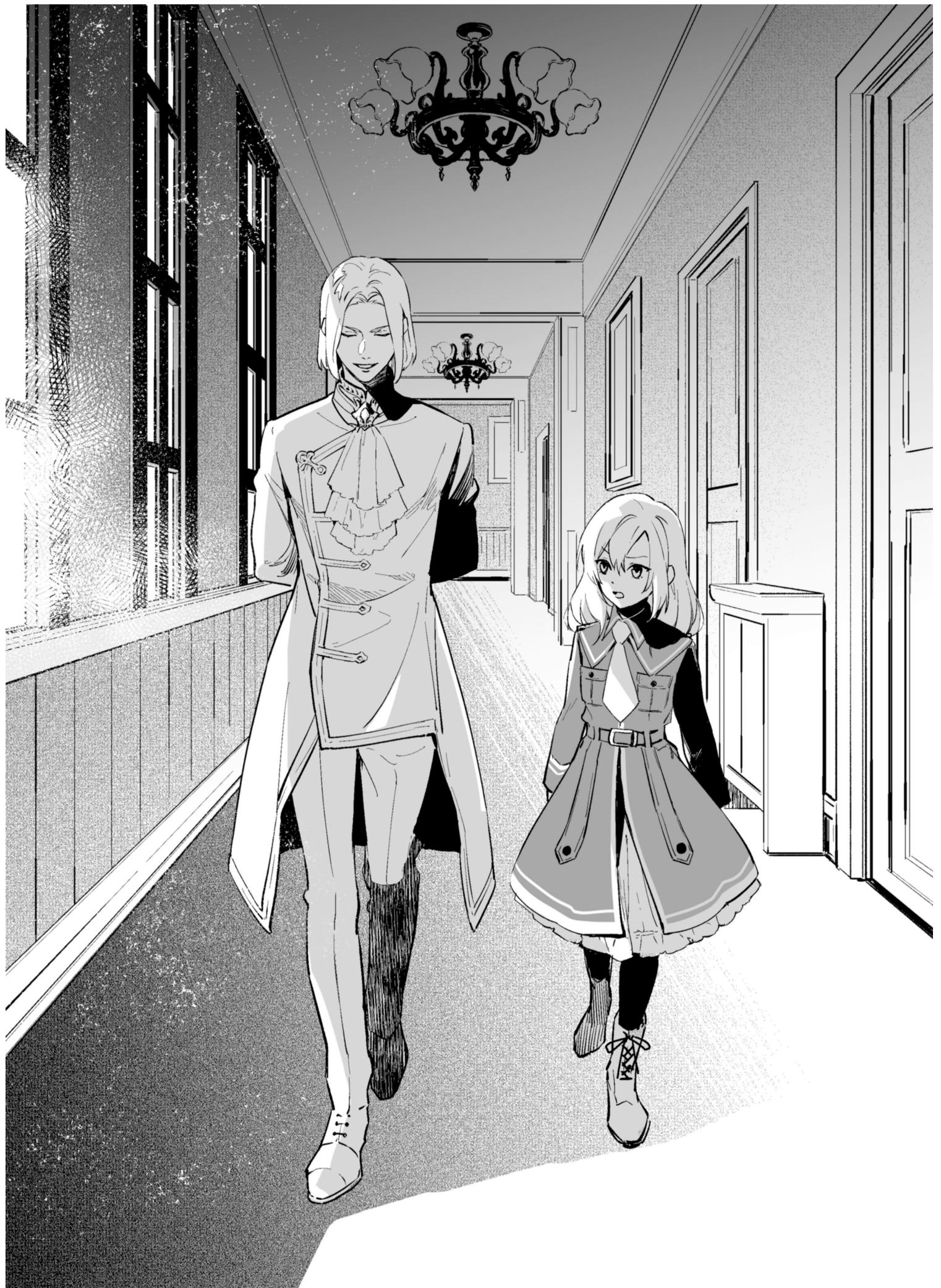
"He's sincere!"

"Sincerely twisted indeed."

Jill pursed her lips, unable to argue that one. Vissel gave a small chuckle. He was a man who was hard to read, and Jill couldn't understand how this conversation invoked any sense of pleasure.

"I received word that Prince Risteard has safely arrived at the Lehrsatz duchy," Vissel said. "He visited Duke Neutrahl first and amended their relationship before heading to his destination. That man maneuvers himself very well."

Jill furrowed her brows once again. "Why are you telling me this?"



"Hadis calls you his 'wife' without providing details on the kind of person that you are. I'm just confirming that for myself. I like to reserve judgment on people until after observing them with my own eyes."

He was provoking Jill and gauging her reactions. She had plenty of questions on her mind. Be it deliberate or by nature, Vissel's stride was slow, and there was plenty of time before reaching Hadis's palace.

"How are negotiations with the old imperial army that kidnapped Princess Natalie going?" she asked.

"As you saw, I've received an imperial order to carry them out. I sent a messenger, of course. I've no idea if they're open to negotiations, however."

"I can't imagine they won't accept our offer in this situation."

"Unfortunately, it's not that simple. They might've been able to kidnap the second princess and leave the imperial capital, but they're a disorderly herd of cattle. I suspect there isn't a commander keeping them together, and I've already been told that some soldiers have deserted. They can't possibly have a unified intention."

"But Princess Natalie is with them," Jill pointed out.

"Certainly, but her role is to be a damsel in distress. She doesn't wield the power to bring an army together."

Jill looked down upon hearing his reasonable comments. If Vissel's words were true, the old imperial army lacked order. Natalie could only do so much with her limited combat prowess.

"If the soldiers head to Radia, things could become rather troublesome," Vissel stated.

The army in Radia was made up of soldiers who followed George's orders, and they had friends in the old imperial army. With nowhere else to go, the fleeing soldiers might head to Radia and join forces against the emperor.

So, it all depends on the number of courageous soldiers willing to protect the princess. I guess it'll be a way to screen people. The main issue was that Natalie's life was at stake. Jill was also concerned for Raw's safety as well.

“Princess Natalie’s biological mother is an aristocrat with ties to Duke Verrat. At this rate, His Grace may claim that Hadis had abandoned the princess to her fate. This is a perturbing situation,” Vissel said, sounding genuinely exhausted.

“Weren’t you on Duke Verrat’s side?” Jill asked.

“Me? You jest.” He snorted. “I’m on Hadis’s side first and foremost. I’m honestly quite shocked and troubled by recent events. He let Marquess Beil live and allowed the imperial army to escape without purging them. That child, without a doubt, was thinking about transforming the floating city and using this opportunity to reconstruct the imperial army to fight against Kratos in the future. His policies have shifted before I noticed it.”

“He realized that no one would be on his side if he went down that road, so he chose a different path,” Jill said.

“True. He even made you the Dragon Consort. I didn’t think he’d touch that topic this late in the game. He really refuses to give up.” Vissel gave a dry laugh, but he spoke without turning around, making it difficult to discern his expression.

Perplexed, Jill decided to convey her thoughts. “I figured you wouldn’t approve of His Majesty as the Dragon Emperor, much like Grand Duke George hadn’t. Am I wrong?”

Jill had doubted the crown prince, assuming he wanted to become emperor as well. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have made sense for him to leak information to Kratos. But Vissel scorned Jill’s uncertainty.

“Absolutely not. Hadis is the genuine Dragon Emperor. That’s why the numerous fools who alienated Hadis and fraudulently claimed to be the crown prince died.”

“That was the Goddess’s—”

“Precisely. It’s not Hadis’s fault. They received justified retribution.” Vissel’s words were firm without an ounce of doubt, making Jill fall silent. “The Rave imperial family was aware of this more than anyone else. Hence, my father pathetically abdicated the throne and begged for his life, while my uncle transformed into a horrific monster. Neither were truly part of the imperial

family, yet they were vanquished personally by the Dragon Emperor's hands. They were lucky until the end."

The story about George being consumed by the false Heavenly Sword and turning into a monster had been kept under wraps. Vissel, who wasn't present during the ordeal, knew the truth and didn't try to hide it. He treated it like a trivial matter.

Did he actually cooperate with Kratos for His Majesty? I hate to believe it's possible... It could mean that the crown prince willingly became a double agent.

This was a spine-chilling realization. An odd sense of anxiety bubbled up within Jill. It was as though the future she feared was being revealed right in front of her eyes. Vissel's words sounded exactly like what Hadis would've said in the future when he stood alone.

"But the truth about the Rave imperial family should've been kept a secret," Vissel remarked. "There was a smarter way to utilize that knowledge, and we could've made a spectacle with those two."

"M-My emperor will never do such a thing!" Jill declared loudly, trying to disrupt the eerie premonition that she was having. "He forgave Grand Duke George and Princess Elentzia's betrayals! He was also able to accept Prince Risteard and his other siblings, which only attests to his strength. He's the emperor whom I love!"

Vissel turned around. His hazy, lunar gaze glimmered with a ghost of a smile. "Your Hadis might be so, but *my* Hadis is different."

Jill instinctively clenched her fists.

"Do you truly think that child will forgive anything and everything? If so, your expectations are horribly incorrect," he hammered home.

"What are you trying to say?"

"When his dimwitted and unsalvageable mother called him a monster and slit her own throat, what do you think that pitiful child did?"

Jill knew that if she didn't stand tall and listen to his words, she'd be running away from the truth. She stood firm without covering her ears.

"He *smiled*," Vissel said slowly, revealing a side of Hadis that Jill had never known. "I will not forgive anyone who hurts him."

"I feel the same," Jill said just as strongly.

"But you force him to forgive those who hurt him."

"I do. His Majesty is capable of that!"

Vissel laughed with contempt. "I don't want my cute younger brother to do such a thing. So you see, we aren't very compatible, are we?"

This was easy to understand. Jill took a deep breath and smiled back. "I can see that very well now! I hate you!"

"Good. I hate you as well. You're not suited to be the Dragon Consort."

Jill was about to snap at his carefree smile and assertion. *I thought I only felt this way towards the Goddess, but are they cut from the same cloth?* She finally comprehended the root of her feeling of uneasiness. Vissel wasn't acting out of hatred or disdain, but love. He loved Hadis and had been trying to protect his pitiful younger brother.

"Your annoying phrasing and laughter are just like His Majesty. That only makes me angrier!" Jill yelled.

Vissel stared back blankly. "We're alike? Hadis and me? That's impossible."

"Prince Vissel! I've got a report!" a soldier said, jogging over from the end of the hallway.

Jill closed her mouth and Vissel turned towards the soldier. "Very well. Speak," he ordered.

"The messenger we've sent to the old imperial army has returned...as a corpse."

Jill swallowed hard. Negotiations had failed; the soldiers of the old imperial army were clearly rebels.

"I see. As I'd thought, it was a waste of time," Vissel said. He chuckled with ridicule.

Jill gasped and looked up. "You did something to the messenger—"

“Cease your absurd speculations,” Vissel snapped. “We don’t have time. Prepare the troops immediately. We must save Princess Natalie.”

“Yessir!” the soldier said.

“Wait, the emperor won’t allow a dispatch of troops!” Jill shouted.

Vissel looked back at her with an icy stare. “That matters not anymore. At this rate, it’ll look like Hadis has abandoned the second princess. Or would you rather leave the princess to fend for herself?”

“That’s—”

“Her shallow plans are nothing short of what a child would’ve done.”

That may have very well been the case. Even so, Jill couldn’t allow Natalie and Frida, who’d risked everything to save the imperial army, to be tossed aside as a mistaken choice.

“If you insist, you may go and save her yourself. You’ll be leaving Hadis behind, of course,” Vissel sneered.

In exchange, Jill would be deemed a Kratos spy for assisting the rebels, and the humans wouldn’t approve of her as the Dragon Consort. *There’s still one thing I could use to go and save her. I just need to coincidentally run into her while I go to suppress the fuss at Radia as the Dragon Consort. But I can’t leave His Majesty here.*

Vissel was obviously baiting her. Jill mustn’t go along with his remarks. Just as she was about to shake her head, the soldier gingerly raised his voice.

“Umm, about His Majesty—”

“What? If he opposes my decision, I’ll convince him,” Vissel said.

“H-He’s gone missing.”

“Huh?” Jill and Vissel said together.

The terrified soldier hesitantly continued his report, “He left a letter.”

“About what?!”

“H-He stated that he’ll be off to train and become a baker in Radia! We believe it’s some sort of code, and we’re currently working to decipher it!”

They were probably mistaken on that front.

Vissel, who remained frozen, was the first to snap back to his senses. “Chase after him immediately! Don’t let our courier dragon rest; have it fly as swiftly as possible! We’ll be able to arrive at Radia by tomorrow!”

“U-Unfortunately, we’re unable to use any of our dragons at the moment. We’re trying to capture them, but they’ve been fleeing from us!” the soldier said.

Hadis must’ve ordered the dragons to do so, making it difficult for others to pursue him. Only the Dragon Emperor could do such a thing. Jill felt the corners of her mouth tug upwards as Vissel spun towards her.

“What’s so funny? Did you—”

“Nope. I didn’t know about this. Nothing. Nada,” Jill said. “I’ve always been of the mindset that His Majesty’s safety should always be ensured so that he is never too far from me while making delicious food to his heart’s content. He’s a prize, after all.”

“A-A prize?”

“He’s a precious prize to be won when I snap the Goddess in two. Now you’re telling me that His Majesty has gone off to a city where an army opposing the emperor has gathered, just to learn how to make bread? What’s the meaning of this?” Vissel shut his mouth, overwhelmed by Jill’s intimidating aura. “How dare he do such a thing while I’m using every last fiber of patience to behave and become the Dragon Consort the way he wants...”

So this is His Majesty’s answer? Fine. Jill couldn’t help but laugh. She clenched her fists as magic energy emanated from her feet.

“That *idiot* of a husband! I’ll tie a rope around his neck and drag him back!”



HADIS ducked when a pillar of magic energy erupted from the imperial capital for a brief moment. Sensing some kind of danger, the green dragon that carried the emperor flapped its wings frantically.

“I’ve got nothing to do with this,” the Dragon God said miserably.

Hadis munched on some bread while smiling at the Dragon God on his shoulder. “But isn’t this kind of fun? I’m playing tag with my wife.”

“Tag? Hardly. You’ve prevented her from using dragons.”

“I’ve only done so to the dragons in the imperial castle. She’ll figure out my trick if she assesses the situation. Jill’s smart, and I’m sure she’ll chase after me.”

“Those words will take a few years off your life later.” Rave sighed and took a bite out of Hadis’s half-eaten bread. “Delicious. Is this a new flavor?”

“Yeah. Do you think I can become a baker?”

“Sure, probably. Good luck. I don’t really care anymore.”

“You sure are a downer. It’ll be hard work. Bakers have to wake up early in the morning, you know.”

“You best prepare yourself so that you don’t get killed by your wife first.”

“Should I have written, ‘Dear Jill, I love you,’ on that letter?! Everyone was bound to read it, so I got embarrassed and chickened out.”

“You were right to keep that part out. It would’ve only made her angrier. Hey, look.”

Guided by Rave around his neck, Hadis looked down and narrowed his eyes. Some soldiers were hiding behind rocks, not far from the imperial capital. They were presumably part of the army that kidnapped Natalie and fled before Vissel had the chance to do anything. *There aren’t many left*, Hadis thought.

The remaining people were either unable to move or protecting Natalie, who’d risked her life to help them escape. Hadis wished there were more of the latter.

“Are you not gonna rescue them?” Rave asked.

“There’s no point. Raw’s there, so they should be receiving protection from the dragon. If they’re imbeciles who can’t even notice that, they’re not suited for the imperial army anyways. They just need to endure a bit more.”

“Because Missy will come to save them later?”

"Yeah, to make them part of the army to save Radia. Jill's kind."

The best method to settle this situation was for Jill to head to Radia as the Dragon Consort and suppress the sparks of rebellion. Jill was surely aware of this, but Vissel would never give such a command.

A military person to the core, Jill would never choose to leave Hadis, her most important person, at the imperial capital, unless explicitly given an order.

"If I leave the imperial capital, Jill can move as she pleases," Hadis said. "I'm the biggest reason she's shackled, after all." He trembled at the thought and gave a spellbound sigh. "I'm the one chaining up the strong and cool Jill... What *is* this feeling? It makes my heart flutter and my body quiver. Am I starting to catch a cold? I should be careful."

"Oh, you're catching something all right. It's called a desire of perversion. There was a time when I was young and innocent, where I believed that I may have misdiagnosed you once Missy grew older."

"Why are you acting like I'm some kind of pervert? I don't want to drag Jill down. I like to see her being all cool when she's free."

Thus, Hadis had chosen to leave the imperial castle. He wanted to see her freely soar through the skies as the Dragon Consort.

"I'm sure my brother will change his mind when he sees the cool Jill."

Because Vissel knew that Jill was troublesome to deal with, he had plans to prevent her from making a move. He was more skilled at doing so than she was. It was only natural for Hadis to make up for the areas that Jill lacked.

"Also, I recently realized that I like to be tied up rather than tying someone else up," Hadis confessed.

"Stop. You're somehow making this all worse," Rave replied.

"I'm being a good-mannered man. But I won't be tied up so easily."

Rave stuck his head into a bag and took out a loaf of bread to chomp on. "Well, Missy's a bit of an oddball too. You guys are well-suited for each other...I think."

"Right?! We're like a match made in heaven! We'll be the ideal couple and

execute the happy family plan!"

"Glad to see you look so happy. Anyways, it's been a while since we've been alone."

Hadis took the other half of bread from Rave and blinked. "I guess so. There's always been someone around recently. We're all alone now. It feels a bit weird."

"It's not a bad thing. Just be careful about your magic powers. You're only able to exert half of the Heavenly Sword's full power. Don't fight anyone who's related to the Goddess. I don't think there'll be any, but we're headed to Radia..."

"If we run into anyone of the sort, we have to fight. It's the perfect opportunity."

Rave slithered around the emperor's neck and looked at him with uncertainty, but Hadis faced forward.

"Might as well do whatever I can. I'll make Jill into the Dragon Consort."

He had to make Jill claim some glory for herself while she got her hands on the Sacred Treasure. Rave went limp and he leaned onto Hadis's neck.

"But your methods and ideas are always extreme..." said the Dragon God.

"But that will make me into the 'cool emperor' that Jill sees in me."

"Probably not," the Dragon God said rudely, unable to understand love with his logical mind.

So Hadis hurled Rave into the blue skies.

Chapter 4: Breaking Out in Pursuit of the Dragon Emperor

FOR better or worse, there weren't many wounded imperial soldiers, but they were mentally drained. They'd been suddenly treated as rebels and were forced to flee without any preparations. They were relieved when they left the imperial capital and managed to hide, but they were now overcome with anxiety that was exponentially worse.

Without dragons or horses, they were unable to get far. They weren't under attack, but there were no signs of a messenger for negotiations either. Only their concerns about taking Natalie hostage remained. They were better trained than civilians, but their emotional turmoil was psychologically exhausting.

The ragtag group didn't even have a captain, much less a general to keep command. Three hundred soldiers had left the capital together, but many had fled alone, believing they had a better chance of escaping if they split off. Less than a hundred men remained with Princess Natalie.

Fewer men were certainly easier to keep in check, but they lacked the manpower to fight if it ever came to that.

"Stay strong. Here's some water," Natalie said, cheering up the troops. She'd discarded her heels long ago and was handing out water while wearing large, leather shoes. She made her rounds to every soldier.

"Thank you, Princess Natalie," a soldier said.

"You have my deepest apologies for dragging you into all this."

"You should be," she quipped. "So you have to be strong to make it up to me. If a negotiator comes, we'll have zero leverage if you guys look so weak."

Everyone smiled and nodded back at Natalie, but their smiles were growing fainter by the day. Many had internally given up all hope. They simply wanted something to latch onto in this hopeless situation before they were killed.

Even Natalie, despite her cheery demeanor, was filled with anxiety. However, she couldn't possibly express it—she was a princess.

Thinking back, her luck had run out when she fled from Verrat's army and bumped into the confused imperial soldiers. She realized that Vissel was trying to take over the imperial army to control the court, and Natalie was desperate to thwart his schemes. But the biggest reason she took their side was that she also saw herself in these soldiers, who were thrown aside because they were deemed useless.

I'm stupid, even by my own standards, she thought.

They'd been able to leave the imperial capital with Natalie as a hostage, but problems arose from there. Only Natalie was able to take command of the troops and make all the hard decisions. The one thing she knew for sure was that she disliked Crown Prince Vissel more than the little-girl-loving emperor.

From the conversations she overheard from the battling soldiers, she pieced together that the soldiers who'd sided with her stupid uncle were hiding in Radia. Because of this, the remaining imperial army was treated as rebels.

It's the correct decision to make, but what will the people think of the Rave imperial family with this command? Natalie wondered.

But any sort of pride proved to be worthless in the face of reality. What could she do? She couldn't think of a plan to save the soldiers around her. *Perhaps none of them will live to see this through.*

“Rawr.”

Natalie looked down when she heard a cry by her feet. There she saw the small dragon that the timid Frida had adamantly refused to accept. With his front claws, he offered a fruit that he'd found somewhere.

“Thank you, Rawr.”

“Rawr!”

Seeing Natalie pass out water, Raw mimicked the behavior and foraged for food and fruits to hand out as well. The soldiers weren't Dragon Knights, but one of the conditions to enter the army was to ride a dragon. They

remembered some of their dignity as they watched over the baby.

The only blessing that barely allowed the group to stay alive in this state of despair was Raw. Natalie and the troops were hidden near a dragon's nest, an extremely dangerous location. However, the dragons didn't attack, and instead brought fruits and food to Raw. They had ample water only because Raw had found a water source. The dragons would occasionally drop by for a drink, but they only glanced at the humans and did nothing more.

The small, gold-eyed dragon had a curious pattern on his back. The paint had been chipped away by the wind and rain for the past few days, slowly revealing the true color of his scales. Thinking that outright stating their thoughts would cause them to lose protection from the dragon, no one dared to speak of his true identity.

But everyone had noticed it.

The Dragon King. A gold-eyed, black dragon.

Every time these words flashed through her mind, Natalie thought back to the young girl she had met. Natalie had pitied the Dragon Consort. She'd caught the child-loving emperor's eye, resulting in her being snatched from her homeland and whisked to a different country.

Natalie had unknowingly made contact with the Dragon Consort, who was young but bold. Indeed, she was brash enough to paint over a gold-eyed, black dragon. Laughter bubbled up from within Natalie as she found the situation humorous. Her wobbly legs regained their strength.

"Raw, do you know of a fishing spot?" Natalie asked.

"Rawr?"

Finally finished with distributing food, the baby dragon turned around and made an adorable, thoughtful expression. A short distance away, an older soldier laughed. He had apologized to the princess numerous times before.

"Fishing, huh?" the soldier said. "Sounds good. Fruit is a boon, but fish will entice your appetite in a different way."

"Should we go hunting?" another suggested. "It might take our mind off

things..."

Suddenly, the soldier with binoculars, who'd been requested to keep watch, cried loudly. "D-Danger! An army from the imperial capital is headed this way!" He practically rolled down the hill at great speed.

The somewhat relaxed atmosphere grew tense in an instant.

"They're headed here?! Not towards Radia?!"

"I thought we'd get a messenger!"

"How many soldiers are there? Do they have dragons? If they burn us from above, we're finished!"

"Th-There's only the cavalry and the infantry. No dragons," answered the soldier with binoculars. "But there's ten thousand of them! It'll take around half a day for them to get here, I think."

"Even so, we're done for!"

"Damn it! We shouldn't have held out hope for negotiations!"

"Quiet down!" bellowed the older soldier, who'd discussed fishing just moments before. "We must protect the princess and flee as far as we can. That's the only thing we can do."

Confusion and panic ran through the crowd of soldiers.

"That's crazy! The princess is just dead weight at this point!"

"I-I'm gonna run by myself! We'll get caught if we escape in a group! You guys do whatever you want!"

"What? If we abandon Princess Natalie, we'll really just be rebels!"

"She saved us, you ungrateful fools!"

"Say what you will! It's not like we asked her!"

"We're all considered rebels, anyway! What use is there to swear our loyalty? Our fate was sealed the moment Crown Prince Vissel set his sights on us!"

Natalie bit her lip, unable to quell the chaos that ensued between the soldiers. She couldn't say anything when she thought that she was the cause of

all this discourse. Raw approached Natalie, and she scooped him up.

“Why don’t we just offer them Princess Natalie?” a voice suddenly suggested.

No one knew who was the first to say these words, but the troops fell silent at this suggestion. Once the pebble of malice had been thrown into the water, a ripple of agreement slowly spread outwards.

“That’s right. We were tricked by Princess Natalie. We can appeal that to Crown Prince Vissel.”

“You damn imbecile! We were able to survive until now thanks to her!”

“We can offer that dragon with her, too!”

The soldiers were now fixated on the princess with the dragon.

“Something is off about that dragon. That much is obvious.”

“R-Right. H-He’s a gold-eyed, black dragon...”

“You dolt! Why would you point that out?! We’ll lose his protection!”

“W-We should use him as a shield. He’s the Dragon King. Crown Prince Vissel won’t dare to attack us!”

Natalie struggled to breathe when faced with such blatant animosity. She looked down and saw Raw in her arms. He watched the chaos with an icy gaze, as though he was mocking their utter lack of resolve and honor. He assessed them with the same eyes the emperor had when he watched puny humans bicker.

A shiver scraped down Natalie’s back; she knew that she’d be deserted. Abandoned. She’d lose the dragon.

A few soldiers stepped forward and spread their arms, hiding the hostility from Raw’s cold gaze.

“Don’t be stupid! Cool your head!”

“That’s right! If he’s really the gold-eyed, black dragon, we should *protect* him, not use him as a shield!”

“We must protect him with Princess Natalie!”

“Don’t be absurd! Princess Natalie doesn’t have the blood of the Rave imperial family!”

“Just take them! We can use the gold-eyed, black dragon to threaten the other dragons and run!”

A soldier took out a knife and Natalie screamed.

“No, stop! I’ll leave if that’s what you want! I won’t ask you to protect me! So please—” she pleaded.

“No, you must flee, Your Highness!”

“You’re acting like a princess even now?! You’re insane!”

“Grab the gold-eyed, black dragon!”

Pandemonium broke out, and no one could tell who was friend or foe. A severed arm flew towards Natalie, causing her to scream and fall to the ground. Raw was about to roll from her arms, but she hastily clutched him tightly, using her body to shield him from the chaos.

“You’ll be fine. Everything will be fine,” she murmured.

She felt Raw’s frigid gaze, as though he was saying that nothing was fine. However, Natalie mustered everything she could to smile into his eyes, telling the dragon that beautiful things existed in this world.

“You need to be protected,” Natalie said. “You don’t have to worry about anything—”

Someone pulled on her hair, tugging her backwards, and Raw looked at her in silence. He wouldn’t forgive a single lie. He was searching with his eyes, trying to determine if these people were worth protecting.

“We’ve got her! Slash her legs so that she can’t run!”

“Capture the black drago—”

“Run, Raw!”

Natalie bit down hard on the soldier’s arm. The surprised soldier slammed her to the ground.

In the next moment, the small dragon kicked off the ground and flew into the

air.

“Rawr!” With an adorable roar, he whipped his tail and swung it at the soldier attacking Natalie.

He let out a gush of flames from his mouth, burning a line on the ground and dividing the soldiers protecting Natalie from the others. The mystifying wall of flames towered in the air, splitting the two factions.

As Natalie and the others gaped in surprise, Raw puffed out his little chest with pride and shook his tail at the soldiers on the other side of the wall.

“Rawr! Ra-ra-ra-ra-rawr!”

No one could tell what he was saying, but he was obviously taunting them. The black dragon slapped his butt in mockery, angering the astounded soldiers.

“Y-You little...!”

“It’s just fire! Run through it!”

“Rawr?!”

Raw was stopped in his tracks as the soldiers protected their faces and ran through the flames. Natalie snapped back to her senses and reached out to the dragon to protect him just as another arm shot out.

Raw turned around slightly and stared in shock at the newcomer. A small arm had wrenched a wrist away from him, and the dragon jumped in glee towards her.

“Rawr!”

“Listen well, Raw. Show these fools no mercy,” a golden-haired girl declared, fanned by the hot wind from the flames. She narrowed her dangerously glimmering amethyst eyes and kicked the soldier who ran through the fire, sending him back.

“Annihilate anyone you see. Don’t let anyone escape. Got it?”

“Rawr!”

“Jill, I think you might be a bad influence on him...”

“You shouldn’t say another word to Captain. She’ll kill you.”

The small girl was accompanied by an archer in a tree and a soldier with a greatsword who stood at the trunk. There were only three of them, but Natalie knew what they were called.

They were the Dragon Consort and her Knights.

“Princess Natalie, I’m glad to see you safe. Please give me a moment. I need to take out the trash,” the golden-haired girl said as she gracefully rushed through the flames.



AMIDST the confusion in the imperial castle, where the dragons wouldn’t listen and the emperor going missing after leaving an enigmatic code about becoming a baker, Jill chose to steal horses. She grabbed hold of Zeke and Camila, who were training at Elentzia’s place, threw them onto her horses, and told them to come along. She didn’t even have time to threaten the dragons, who kept out of reach by circling high above the castle.

Jill hadn’t thought about how her disappearance might raise suspicion, causing others to treat her like a spy. Her intentions were simple and straightforward: she was angry at her husband, who left without a word and knew what she had to do.

The horses ran as fast as they could before reaching a small village along the way. The three had then asked around to find where Natalie and the soldiers had been hiding. Hadis had disappeared three days ago. He’d long since arrived at Radia and may have already started a bakery.

“A horse sounds good for a birthday present. I’d like a swift one,” Jill said while walking back towards her group. She’d defeated all the soldiers who audaciously chose to sacrifice Natalie and Raw for their escape. “I want one that can fly and kill a dragon.”

“Does that kind of horse even exist?” a quiet Zeke asked.

She ignored her knight’s statement and looked around. “How many are left?”

“Twenty-nine, excluding Princess Natalie. None of them seem to be gravely injured,” Camila said. She assessed the situation while Jill was letting off some steam under the guise of defeating the enemy.

"With me included, we can make five groups of six. We'll form a line and carry on," Jill decided.

"W-Wait, where are we going?" Natalie asked.

"To Radia, Your Highness."

A tattered Natalie stared in shock. An elderly soldier stepped forward to protect the princess. He was the first to suggest defending Natalie and Raw.

"Thank you for saving us. But who are you?" he asked Jill.

"I'm the Dragon Consort. My name is Jill Cervel." The remaining troops murmured at this revelation, but Jill paid no heed and shifted her gaze over each soldier. "Time is of the essence, so I won't beat around the bush. You all are aware that your former comrades are hiding in Radia. I'll have you head to Radia as my army."

"But we're just a small group. Why would we do that?"

"If you save Radia from the rebels with the Dragon Consort, you'll all be part of the imperial army once more. Simple, isn't it?" The soldiers gulped and looked at each other while Jill folded her arms and continued coolly. "I'm giving you this offer out of the kindness of my heart. Truth be told, I'd like to handle this solo and suppress the chaos in Radia immediately."

"S-Solo, you say..."

"That's right. In any case, you lot don't have a choice. Unless you'd like to stay here and be brutally murdered by those phonies who claim to be the new imperial army, of course," she said, ice in her voice.

"W-We've got Princess Natalie with us..."

"The messenger—our negotiator—returned to us yesterday, dead," Jill informed them.

A wave of panic rushed over the troops. "Wh-What?! But we didn't receive anything!"

"At this point, it doesn't really matter who did it. The army has left the imperial capital. You will be slain as insurrectionists. Isn't that enough reason for you to make your decision? You can either die while aiming to right the

wrongs with me or die a meaningless death as rebels. That's all."

"Dragon Consort," the older soldier said, kneeling before Jill. "I'd like to ask one question. Will you promise to protect Princess Natalie?"

Jill stared back, but the soldier was serious. The troops behind him wore the same expression as well.

"Princess Natalie spared my life. If you promise to spare her, I shall give you my life, whether you're the Dragon Consort or not."

"M-Me too!" another soldier said.

One by one, the troops stepped up and pledged their allegiance, much to the shock of Natalie. It seemed her feelings had finally borne fruit. Jill couldn't suppress her smile.

"You have my word," she vowed. "She is to become my sister-in-law. I'll have her return to the imperial castle protected by my personal knights. She should be safe if she's under Princess Elentzia's protection."

"B-But I can't return alone and abandon these people!" Natalie protested.

"They're soldiers, Your Highness. They can only recover their former glory by bringing back excellent results," Jill explained.

"But they didn't do anything wrong! And yet they were branded as rebels!"

Natalie tried to say more but was stopped by the older soldier. "You're exactly right, Princess Natalie. We've done nothing." The princess fell silent at the soldier's meaningful words. "Discontent and distrust were rampant in our army. Hence, we were used then tossed aside."

"It's not your fault for being used! My idiotic brothers are to blame for this!" Natalie replied.

"Do you truly believe that? Even if we were rebels, we would be foolish to call the Rave imperial family or the emperor traitors. We never swore our allegiance to them."

Betrayal only happens if trust is broken. A stunned Natalie was met with a kind smile from the elderly soldier.

“But you made us remember our loyalty. Please return to the imperial capital, Your Highness. You’re a member of the Rave imperial family, and a princess that we must protect.”

Natalie looked up. She’d spent her entire life berating herself as a dud of a princess.

“Quite honestly, I know nothing about the emperor,” the soldier continued. “But he’s accepted you as part of the imperial family, and a girl who calls herself the Dragon Consort has come to save you. That’s all we need to call ourselves the imperial army once more.”

“But... I haven’t done anything...” Natalie murmured.

“As such, I’d like to save my comrades as well.” He glanced at Jill. He stared at the ground for a brief moment before facing the Dragon Consort. “The troops at Radia are the same as us. General South, who commands these soldiers, had especially admired Prince George. I feel he’s lost sight of what to protect. Everyone strongly desires to protect the Rave Empire.”

“I’ve heard from Crown Prince Vissel that they’ve gathered at Radia to instigate a rebellion,” warned Jill. “If they’re planning on fighting to avenge the insurgent, I can’t let them be.”

“But there’s room for negotiations before the uprising occurs, correct?”

Had things been that simple, no one would be troubled. Still, Jill provided a response. “I understand. I’ll try to advise His Majesty. However, this is only if we make it in time.”

“Noted. If possible, I’d like to convince them.”

“Very well. We’ll mull over the details on our way there. Princess Natalie, please return to the castle.”

Natalie caught on to the conversation. “I-I’m so sorry. In the end... I couldn’t do anything at all.”

“That’s not true, Your Highness,” Jill said, staring straight at the princess and silencing the soldiers. “Without you, I wouldn’t have confronted these men like this. They would’ve also died while cursing the Rave imperial family.”

Natalie bit her lip and looked back at Jill. “Even if they go to battle, there’s a way for them to return safely, isn’t there?”

“I’ve received these troops from you, princess. I won’t allow them to die for naught.”

“The same goes for you. We haven’t had our tea party yet,” Natalie said quietly.

Jill smiled at her unexpected response. “You’re right. I must confess that I’ve already had one with Princess Frida.”

“She’s a shrewd child. That’s exactly what I told her not to do.”

“She’s very worried about you. Please leave this situation to me and return to her side.” Jill squeezed the princess’s hand. Natalie did the same, her cheeks a little dirty.

“If you insist, I will return to the castle. Are you sure I can borrow your knights?” the princess asked, turning to Camila and Zeke.

Camila waved back with a smile. “Yep. Jill has now become the Dragon Consort who saved Princess Natalie!”

“Things’ll get complicated if she leaves it to someone else. And if you don’t return safely, this entire plan will be ruined,” Zeke added.

“I leave Her Highness to you, Camila, Zeke. Escort her safely to Princess Elentzia,” Jill ordered.

The two knights saluted, and the remaining twenty-nine troops did the same.

“Since that’s settled, please give us your orders, Dragon Consort.”

“We’ll go with you. I can’t deny that I’m a little desperate.”

“U-Um, what shall we do about the b-baby dragon?”

Jill smiled as one of the soldiers raised the issue. “You’re talking about Raw, right? We’ll bring him along. You’ll come, won’t you, Raw?” she asked.

Raw, who was hiding behind Natalie, twitched his tail. The intelligent baby dragon had probably noticed that Jill was infuriated with Hadis. She was livid beyond measure.

“Go on, Li’l Raw. His Majesty screwed up, so it’s fate that you get dragged into this mess,” Camila said.

“If you run from Jill, it will just make things worse. I wish you luck!” Zeke encouraged.

“I’m not planning on scolding Raw for His Majesty’s grave error.” Jill sighed at her knights for getting the wrong idea. “I’m glad you’re safe. I was so worried. Princess Natalie, thank you so much for protecting Raw.”

“I-I didn’t do much. In fact, he protected me...”

“Is that so? You’re amazing, Raw. You did well.”

Raw peeked out from behind Natalie, and Jill crouched down while outstretching her arms.

“Come on, Raw,” she urged.

“Rawr!”

He excitedly leapt into Jill’s chest, and she squeezed him tight. The dragon breathed a sigh of relief.

“And? Just how much information do you share with His Majesty?”

Raw jolted and sheepishly raised his face while in her arms. He put his hands under his chin and gave a cute cry with his glittering, round eyes. “Rawr ☆”

“So you *are* aware, aren’t you?! You’re connected with His Majesty somehow! Or is it because of Rave?!”

“Rawr rawr!”

He swiftly hid behind Natalie once more. The princess, a little troubled by the situation, raised her voice.

“Hey, I don’t know what’s going on here, but this dragon is just a baby!”

“Please don’t stop me, Your Highness. This is a matter between a married couple. Raw, don’t run from me!”

“Rawr!”

“Quit it already, Dragon Consort and Dragon King!”

Jill and Raw, who were running around Natalie, jolted and froze in place. The infuriated princess pointed her finger only an inch away from Jill's nose.

"Listen, our emperor is into little girls! He has no dignity as it is already!"

"I-I believe you're misunderstanding. His Majesty isn't into little girls at all," Jill murmured.

"Look at yourself in the mirror! Him marrying *you* is proof he has a thing for little girls!"

Unable to say another word, Jill and Raw meekly stood next to each other.

"And look at you two! If the Dragon Consort and the Dragon King also don't show an ounce of dignity, you'll be setting an awful example for others!"

"Yes, Your Highness..."

"Rawr..."

"And you're saying you're headed to Radia, are you? That land is ruled by the Dragon Consort. If you aren't standing regal and firm, no one will trust you!"

"Um, may I ask a question?" Jill interjected sheepishly. "What do you mean by it being ruled by the Dragon Consort?"

Natalie went stiff and everyone fell silent.

With a sigh, Camila put a finger on her forehead. "Right, no one gave her an explanation. At the very least, I didn't," Camila said.

"I didn't either. I'm not much of an expert on these things," Zeke said.

"Wait, so you don't know? Then why're you going there?" Natalie asked.

"Well, if the land is supposed to be ruled by the Dragon Consort, it's only natural that I head there with an army and suppress any troubles. I believe His Majesty had wanted to give out this order, but was unable to do so. It would've been better if he could have gotten Prince Vissel to give the order, but yeah..." Jill trailed off.

Jill's blunder was defeating Verrat's troops. Had she not done so, Vissel may have underestimated Jill and willingly sent her off with a simple army to remove her from the imperial capital.

"I'm not very good at thinking up genius plans," Jill said. "But I know what to do if you ever get caught in one. You need to harass and provoke the enemy!"

Vissel had wanted to restrict Jill's movements. She didn't want to make a move if Hadis was in the imperial capital, but he was no longer there. So, she left. She didn't care what consequences her actions would bring; she was satisfied as long as Vissel was unhappy about it.

Jill confidently stated her knowledge while clenching her fists, but an awkward silence spread throughout the crowd.

"Do you think that Raccoon Boy taught her that?" Camila whispered in Zeke's ear.

"Wouldn't shock me..."

"And that's why I'm going to Radia to suppress the riot. That's all," Jill finished.

She realized that Hadis had left the capital for Radia to give her a chance to act. Jill's heart tingled and throbbed at the thought, but she couldn't forgive him for disappearing without telling her. *He might've really gone off to become a baker. This is His Majesty we're talking about!*

Hadis had recovered nearly half of his magic powers, but this implied that his body was growing frailer as he contained more energy. Jill was worried sick and the temptation to put a leash on him crossed her mind. Love is very complicated.

"Then you're not aware of the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, are you?" Natalie asked.

"The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort?!" Jill shouted. Her eyes glimmered with excitement at the electrifying words. "What is that?! It must be related to me since there's Dragon Consort in the name! There's a Sacred Treasure for me?! I absolutely want it! Is it in Radia?!"

From afar, Zeke turned away. "I kinda get why no one told her. We must've unconsciously but instinctively avoided it."

"I wouldn't put it past Jill to rush into Radia alone," Camila said.

“Y-You really don’t know anything?” Natalie asked. Jill nodded vigorously. “D-Don’t look at me with those sparkling eyes. I don’t know if it’s manifested yet, and I’ve heard there’s a seal on it.”

“A seal?! That sounds like the real deal, all right! What kind of seal is it? Is it made from magic?” Jill barraged the princess with questions.

“Th-That’s right. I’ve heard you can’t undo it unless you have someone like Goddess Kratos.”

If the Goddess was there, the seal could be undone. And there were rumors that the Kratos army was headed to Radia. *What if their goal isn’t to start a war, but to retrieve the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort?!*

“That explains why His Majesty went to Radia to apprentice at a bakery!” Jill said.

“Sorry, what? Bakery?!” Natalie asked.

“Never mind that! But Radia’s definitely the answer!” Jill shouted and raised her fist towards the sky. “Let’s get that Sacred Treasure, put a leash on His Majesty, and, as a bonus, suppress the city!”

“His Majesty’s become a side mission. And suppressing the city is now a total non-issue,” Camila said.

“That’s our Captain,” Zeke added.

“Rawr...” Raw sighed as though he was saying, “Good grief!”

Behind him was Jill. She had a smile plastered on her face and she spoke her next words slowly. “Of course, we’ll be using that Sacred Treasure to put a leash on His Majesty.”

“Rawr?!”

“You’re a smart dragon, Raw. Do you know what I want you to do?”

The Dragon King gingerly looked up at the Dragon Consort’s face. Like Hadis, the baby had a black-and-gold color scheme.

“The dragons won’t fly right now because of His Majesty’s orders,” said Jill.

“Rawr.”

“But you can probably send me to Radia on a dragon, can’t you?”

“Rawr.”

“If you help me, I’ll be so happy that I’ll give you a good morning and good night kiss.”

“Raaawr!”

Hadis’s spirit stumbled as soon as Jill promised to spoil him.



THE Rave Empire had three territories that touched the international border known as the Rakia Mountains. From the north, there was the Neutrahl duchy, the city of Radia, and the Lehrsatz duchy arranged together to form a line of defense. Radia, which stood in the middle of this formation, didn’t border the Rakia Mountains much, but it was an important foothold that held the power to mobilize armies from both duchies. Because the first Dragon Consort had used Radia to defend the empire, it became a city under direct control of the later consorts.

However, a Dragon Consort could only exist if a Dragon Emperor was born. Thus, it was common practice for members of the imperial family to control that land in her stead. Until recently, George had been tasked with ruling over Radia. In this city, which was used to fight against Goddess Kratos, was the Temple of the Dragon Consort. The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort was enshrined within.

Even Natalie wasn’t aware of the details. The only tidbit she knew was that the Sacred Treasure wouldn’t appear unless a Dragon Consort had been chosen, and it remained sealed and immovable within the temple. The treasure couldn’t be used without the Dragon Consort’s ring. Since there were quite a few restrictions, it was hard to obtain any further details.

The ring must be the golden ring, right? And if it’s meant to fight against the Goddess, it must be a weapon! Jill thought. She couldn’t see it because her magic had been sealed, but the golden ring she received as a part of Rave’s blessing remained fresh in her memory. Jill’s footsteps grew lighter as she found the information to be credible.

"Is it a sword? A spear? Brass knuckles? An ax would be cool too!" she exclaimed.

"Rawr..."

Raw sat in front of the jovial Jill and looked as though he had something to say. The dragons formed a beautiful formation as they flew about the clouds. The imperial soldiers were all experienced with dragons, and it'd been four days of flight since Raw had gathered some stray dragons. The trip went smoothly.

But we had to take a lot of breaks, and we can't go too fast... I'm about ten days behind His Majesty.

Luckily, Vissel was unable to use the dragons in the imperial capital. Jill was unsure just how long the dragons would obey Hadis's commands, but the crown prince, at the very least, couldn't pass her.

Jill had parted ways with Zeke and Camila so they could guard Natalie. The Dragon Consort trusted her knights and was sure they could slip through Vissel's soldiers and safely deliver Natalie to Elentzia.

Their plan so far had gone well. The Knights of the Dragon Consort had saved Princess Natalie, and the Dragon Consort was headed to Radia with the imperial soldiers who protected the princess to quell the uprising. If Jill could rendezvous with Hadis and collect the Sacred Treasure, she'd have no complaints.

"If there was something that precious, His Majesty should have told me sooner..." Jill muttered. "Oh, maybe he didn't tell me because the gold ring isn't back. Wait, so that might mean that the Sacred Treasure hasn't been summoned! I won't be able to tie up His Majesty!"

"Rawr?!"

"Captain," a soldier said, mimicking Zeke's mannerisms. He was flying on a dragon next to Jill. "We should arrive at Radia soon. It'll be difficult to keep these wild dragons tied. I recommend we descend right on the outskirts and proceed on foot."

"Right. Raw, could you help us out?" Jill asked.

With an adorable cry, Raw had the other dragons lower their altitude. Oohs

and aahs erupted from the troops.

“Awesome. I feel like I’m a first-rate Dragon Knight,” said one.

“I thought everyone in the imperial army was experienced with dragons,” Jill said.

The soldiers laughed. “We’re all infantry and none of us have our own dragon. We were also usually stationed near the rear.”

“I see. Well, it’s not good to rely too much on dragons,” Jill advised. “In my household, you can only become a full-fledged member of the family if you can take down a dragon by yourself.”

“Hahaha, a splendid joke—” a soldier started to say before being interrupted by the sound of an explosion.

Raw twitched and raised his head, forcing the other dragons to come to an abrupt stop. Jill grew tense as she felt an unusual presence. *What was that?! I just felt an immense amount of magic energy!*

Magic circles appeared in the skies of the distant city of Radia. Right in front of their eyes, magic attacks bombarded the city. Smoke billowed into the air.

“Why are they under attack?!”

“Wasn’t that a Kratos magic circle?! Did they start their invasion?!”

“That can’t be...” Jill started, but she immediately closed her mouth.

This battle wasn’t in the timeline that she came from. Even if it was, it would’ve occurred much later, when the Kratos Kingdom and the Rave Empire had gone to war—more than a year into the future. A declaration of war hadn’t been sent, much less actually starting one. However, Jill had changed much of history already. It wouldn’t be odd if a battle she wasn’t familiar with had suddenly broken out.

“Captain, a military flag! Above the Temple of the Dragon Consort!”

As though to affirm her apprehensions, a flag was raised on the east side of the city, cutting through the smoke. It was the flag of the Rave Empire; she’d seen it many times when they were enemies. The crimson crest of the dragon was embroidered onto a black cloth. A large “X” was drawn over it.

The flag was hoisted above a majestic building as smoke rose into the skies.

“A...revolt?!” a soldier murmured.

“Grr... Raw, they’re coming!” Jill said through gritted teeth.

“Rawr?!”

A soldier screamed as the dragons made a quick ascent, but Jill paid them no mind. The magic circles that were surrounding the city had switched targets to them.

“Rawr, rawr!”

The baby dragon closed his eyes in deep concentration, trying his best to dodge the magic lasers that were flying at the group in every direction possible. He was likely giving the wild dragons some orders, but none of them were trained to have people on their backs.

A dragon twisted its body to dodge the lasers, causing a soldier to fall. Jill clicked her tongue and ripped off the safety rope tied to the saddle. Before she could jump off to save the man, a Dragon Knight scooped him up and flew around, dodging the other attacks.

“Get away from the city and gain some distance! These are anti-flight magic circles made to fight against dragons! They won’t fire if we’re out of their range!” a regal voice roared.

Jill turned around in astonishment and saw a squad of Dragon Knights flying in a neat formation. At the head was a familiar face.

“Aren’t you all imperial soldiers?! Fly with your own skills instead of relying solely on the dragon!” he bellowed.

“Prince Risteard?!” Jill cried.

The prince looked stunned for a moment when he heard his name, but he quickly composed himself and gave orders.

“Change of plans! Retreat for now! We’ll descend to the ground,” he barked.

“Are we going to abandon the city?!” Jill asked.

“No, but we have to be careful. The men you’ve brought aren’t Dragon

Knights, and they'll become easy targets!"

Risteard's prediction rang true. The men who were falling were all soldiers whom Jill had brought. The dragons could dodge the attacks, but the human riders couldn't match their movements. They were imposing a heavy burden on Raw as well.

"If my conjectures are correct, we still have some time. We'll be in a deadlock until Vissel brings his army from the imperial capital," Risteard added.

"Wh-What do you mean?" Jill asked.

"They need to be under the impression that a revolt is happening within the Rave Empire. Just look at their flag," Risteard said. Jill followed his gaze. "And that's not all. I've received a letter from Kratos."

"Huh?! From Kratos?! But why?!"

"It's a long story. We should exchange information."

Jill nodded as the group flew out of range of the city. She took a deep breath and looked over her shoulder. The city, surrounded by magic circles, was growing smaller and smaller in the dance, and she knew that Hadis was inside.

"Rawr," Raw said, nuzzling Jill's side. No longer needing to give out swift orders, he tried to reassure the girl.

She gave a wry smile and gripped the practically useless safety rope as she tried to keep herself together. *It'll be fine. His Majesty will be fine.* He'd left on his own. She wouldn't forgive him if he wasn't fine. What she needed was the strength to believe in him.



WHEN Natalie returned to the imperial castle, she didn't receive a "Welcome home" or an "I was worried." Not even a scolding.

"You've done well," Elentzia said.

Natalie's clothes were tattered. She was dirty and hadn't bathed for days, but Elentzia didn't hesitate to hug Natalie close to her. The young princess felt something well up from her chest and forced herself to act nonchalantly to ignore these feelings.

“Y-You’re exaggerating, Elentzia. I was only captured, nothing more.”

“That’s not true at all. You’ve done very well. I couldn’t have done the same. You should’ve seen the look on Vissel’s face when you and Frida bested him!” Natalie was a bit curious about the look on his face. “You’re an extremely courageous child.”

Elentzia was supported by Duke Neutrahl, a well-known, influential figure in Rave, and she was also the head of the elite Dragon Knights. Natalie was embarrassed to be so openly praised by such an accomplished person. While she was fidgeting and trying to offer a reply, her half-sister tumbled from the hallways.

“N-Natalie!” the girl cried.

“Frida.”

“I’m so glad...you’re okay! So, so glad...!”

Overwhelmed by her emotions, Natalie kneeled in front of her sobbing sister, who was clutching a stuffed bear. “I told you I’d be fine. Don’t cry, Frida,” she said.

“B-But you’re crying too...Natalie!”

“Huh? Really?” Natalie quickly brought her hands to her cheeks, and felt her fingertips grow damp. No wonder her vision was blurry. She gave a strained smile. “Even so, you mustn’t cry. We’re princesses.”

Frida hiccupped and raised her head, her eyes wet with tears. Unable to find the words, Natalie hugged Frida with all her might, and she felt small hands hug her back.

Elentzia turned towards the Knights of the Dragon Consort. “Thank you, Zeke, Camila.”

“No worries. It was an honor to escort the princess,” Camila said.

“And we didn’t need to ride a dragon. We arrived by horse,” Zeke added.

“What happened to Jill? Where’s Raw?” Elentzia asked, now speaking in a lower voice, fitting her role as a military commander. Frida and Natalie stayed quiet.

"Raw is with Jill. They flew towards Radia," Camila explained.

"So the Dragon King *can* control other dragons. I knew it," Elentzia said. "The dragons within the castle are still giving us the round around."

"It'll be impossible to catch up to Captain now. I'm a bit curious about what Verrat's army is up to, though." Zeke refused to refer to Vissel's troops as the imperial army. "They headed straight south without looking for their supposed rebels. What's going on?" he asked.

"Ah, that's because they're headed for Radia," a gentle voice said, causing everyone to turn around. "Welcome back, Princess Natalie." His tone was one reserved for a vassal.

Natalie straightened up and gave a ladylike bow. "I've returned, Crown Prince Vissel," she said.

"You may call me Vissel. You have issues with me as both your brother and the crown prince, no? You even became a hostage to get in my way, after all." Her half-brother sounded kind, but his icy glare was enough to make her blood freeze. "However, matters will be different if you ever decide to hinder the emperor. Do be careful in the future."

Frida hid behind Natalie, and Elentzia stepped forward with a sigh. "Vissel, why did you send your army to Radia?"

"Ah, I've dispatched them to handle Radia should the city start a rebellion. We must protect the emperor at all costs. Since we can't use dragons, I've decided to send the army out a bit earlier because we'd need more time to get there," Vissel said.

"It's best to be prepared, but there's no guarantee that a revolt will occur in Radia."

Vissel gave a mocking laugh at Elentzia's stern face. "Naïve as ever, I see. A revolt *will* occur in Radia, without fail."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because he's behind it all. Am I wrong?" Natalie accused.

Vissel didn't bat an eye at Natalie's interruption and smiled. "You are. This is

Uncle's plan." The crown prince gave a patronizing smirk, amused by Natalie and the group's shocked faces. "Prince George had given out orders to the imperial army on the off chance that he'd be defeated by Hadis. The imperial soldiers gathered at Radia are following his orders."

"Impossible..." Elentzia said.

"How else could the soldiers have traveled to Radia so easily? Someone needed to have given orders beforehand."

Vissel's theory made perfect sense.

"Wh-Why did our uncle...give those orders?" Frida stammered from behind Natalie.

Vissel gave a bored response. "Who knows? I was ultimately sent away by Prince George. But I can make a decent guess. We simply need to think about what he tried to protect, and the movements of the imperial army in Radia."

"What he tried to protect?" Natalie narrowed her eyes.

Vissel laughed in ridicule. "You're not even aware? Prince George's efforts have truly been unrewarded! He tried to protect the very empire you're in, of course."

Natalie and Frida gulped while Elentzia clenched her fists.

"Prince George tried to save this rotten empire for you all while you were claiming to be a part of the imperial family under false pretenses. He tried to protect you from Kratos and Hadis," Vissel continued, suddenly turning expressionless. "He was naturally thinking about the future if he'd been killed. It's so crappy that it can hardly be called a plan, but the imperial army is acting in accordance with his dying wishes. They're quite loyal, aren't they?"

"Then what are his troops doing in Radia? They must stay in the imperial capital if they want to protect the Rave imperial family," Elentzia pointed out.

"I don't know, and I don't care."

The crown prince gave a rough response, but Elentzia wouldn't let it go.

"Surely you must have a theory about it. You probably know what they're doing in Radia as well."

Vissel gave a tiresome look, but he reluctantly opened his mouth. “Well, I’d guess that they’re protecting the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort. They don’t want to give that to Kratos.” Before Elentzia could speak, he continued, “There’s been rumors of our uncle’s aide in Radia having connections with Kratos. Once he died, Uncle was certain that his aide would try to butter up Kratos to flee from Hadis’s punishment. The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort is probably a suitable gift.”

“I-If that’s true, then the imperial army isn’t revolting at all!” Elentzia shouted. “Yet you—”

“They gathered in Radia, occupied the city, and took their weapons to fight Kratos of their own accord. They won’t listen to our orders, and if we let them be, they’d likely request the autonomy of Radia or establish a military regime, insisting on their need to be prepared for war with Kratos. It’s not much different from a revolt, really.” Vissel shrugged.

“Even so, if they want to protect the empire, they are surely open to negotiations!” Elentzia argued.

“They swore their allegiance to our uncle, not Hadis,” Vissel said drolly. Elentzia was unable to refute, and everyone fell silent. “Besides, in their eyes, Hadis is the sworn enemy who killed their leader. And I’m sure they’ve been told time and time again by Uncle that I will absolutely *not* forgive any army who points their blades towards Hadis. Hence, they left the capital. They’re not much to write home about.”

“I thought you were on good terms with Uncle. Isn’t that why he had arranged your engagement with his daughter?”

Everyone shared the same sentiments as the stunned Elentzia, and Vissel laughed in reply.

“Indeed. The fiancée I’ve never met, much less held an ounce of interest in, is our uncle’s daughter. What nonsense. I wanted Duke Verrat’s power for Hadis, and our uncle wanted me so that he could prevent Hadis from moving on his own. We had mutual interests, is all.”

Natalie squeezed Frida’s hand.

Elentzia could only quietly pose her question. “Does Hadis know? Does he know why the imperial army is gathered at Radia?”

“I’ve told him,” Vissel replied confidently.

Elentzia looked relieved. “So that’s why Hadis left the imperial capital.”

While Vissel uncharacteristically struggled to give a response to that, a soldier approached the group.

“Crown Prince Vissel! We received a courier dragon from Duke Neutrahl! A guest from Kratos has arrived in Radia! The rebellion will occur at any moment!”

The crown prince remained calm. “I see. And how many days will it take for our dispatched army to reach Radia?”

“We’re planning on borrowing Duke Neutrahl’s dragons, which are on the way, Your Highness. Half a day should be enough.”

“Can the dragons from Neutrahl fly?”

“Most certainly! They’ll try to flee if we approach them, but they have no problem carrying people from Neutrahl.”

“Very well. Then I shall meet them there as well. Good day, Princess Elentzia, Princess Natalie, Princess Frida,” Vissel said, glancing at each woman’s face before lowering his voice in a threatening tone. “Please refrain from making more enemies for Hadis.”

“I’m on Hadis’s side,” Elentzia replied.

Vissel scoffed. “I pray you’re not just spouting empty words, kind Princess Elentzia. If you’ll excuse me.” He turned on his heels and quietly left the castle.

Elentzia sighed. “Among my younger brothers, he’s the most troublesome.”

“Oi, you’re treating that crown prince as your younger brother? He’s clearly an enemy,” Zeke said.

“We can’t say for sure,” Elentzia shook her head. “He—”

“Both he and the little-girl-loving emperor had no one to back or protect them. Not our Uncle or anybody else,” Natalie said, realizing this fact for the

first time.

No one said another word. To protect Natalie and the rest of the Rave Empire from Hadis and the Kratos Kingdom, George had laid out plans to go into effect even after his death. Neither Vissel nor Hadis had been included in this protection. A smart move, perhaps, considering those two were enigmatic and had horrible personalities. However, Natalie and the others' parents were the first people to treat the brothers as their enemies.

"If we focus on just the outcomes, he's going around crushing the emperor's enemies," Natalie said. The only issue was that Vissel had shown no mercy.

"That's right," Elentzia said, her eyes downcast. "Methods aside, Vissel has been on Hadis's team far before we've ever been."

Even the Knights of the Dragon Consort had nothing to say.

"But the emperor isn't planning on one-sidedly disposing of the army in Radia, is he? That's why he left the capital by himself," Natalie deduced.

Elentzia nodded. "Most likely. Hadis has changed. But Vissel can't approve of that. He's gone through his fair share of hardships before Hadis came and after he arrived."

Around the brothers were enemies wearing the masks of allies. One slip-up, one small opening, and they'd immediately get betrayed. Amidst all this, the younger brother took the crown, and the older brother took his position as crown prince. Natalie and the others couldn't even begin to imagine the conversations, conflicts, and bonds that the two shared. But even so...

"We can't abandon them," Natalie said.

Elentzia raised her head at those words. The inability to trust and rely on someone were feelings that Natalie was well acquainted with. She was the princess who lost all protection and support as well, abandoned by most of her family. Had Frida or Elentzia not been by her side, she could've very well turned out like their brothers. She was overcome with an inexplicable sense of anger when she came to this realization.

"Elentzia, head to Radia," Natalie urged.

“I’d love to, but if I leave, you guys will be alone,” Elentzia replied.

“We’ll be fine. Right, Frida?”

Frida peeked out from behind her and nodded. “We’ll be fine... Jill gave me some protection...”

“Isn’t she holding Hadis B—”

“Look the other way, Zeke! We saw nothing!” Camila called out.

Natalie ignored the rowdy knights and looked up at her sister. “It’ll be a greater hindrance if they start a sibling squabble. My older brothers are both stubborn and won’t back down.”

“That’s true, but I don’t know if they’ll listen to me,” Elentzia replied.

“Then punch them and make them listen. You’re the oldest of us all, so you must rule with an iron first,” Natalie insisted.

Elentzia, kind and merciful to anyone around her, was actually quite powerful. At the very least, if she put her mind to it, both Vissel and Risteard would be easily overpowered. Elentzia blinked at her half-sister’s extreme remarks. She stared at her fists while opening and closing her hands.

“Hm... You’re right. That might be what I lack,” she said.

“That’s right. Give them a good smack for us, too!” Natalie said, clutching her half-sister’s hand.

Elentzia smiled. “Got it. But the dragons won’t fly because of Hadis’s command. I won’t be able to fly there.”

“If these orders have made it all the way down to the lower-ranking dragons, they can’t be too complicated to understand,” Natalie said. “Lower-ranking dragons can’t remember places or anything similarly difficult. There’s no way the emperor can command them all not to head to Radia. And the dragons from Neutrahl are willing to fly. There must be some sort of loophole... Could you explain the dragons’ behavior to me?”

Elentzia hummed as she tried to remember. “Hmm, if we try to ride the Dragon Knights’ dragons, they run away from their stables.”

“How about the freight dragons that merchants use in town?”

“They can fly. However, they’ll flee at the first sight of a Dragon Knight or soldier.”

“Then they’re allowing civilians to fly on their backs. But how are they differentiating between the two?”

As Natalie racked her brain, Camila chimed in.

“Hey, the messenger from Neutrahl is a Dragon Knight, isn’t he?”

“Probably, yeah,” Elentzia answered. “There aren’t many humans or dragons who can fly around all night.”

“Then maybe they’re differentiating by military uniforms. The uniforms of Neutrahl’s Dragon Knights don’t look like the imperial army’s attire, so they’ll allow the same soldiers to ride them if they’re in different clothing.”

“Then it wouldn’t make sense for them to flee from me or you guys. None of us here are wearing military uniforms of the imperial army, and the soldiers that Vissel brought haven’t all received their uniforms yet.”

Natalie agreed. Uniforms differed in size and looked slightly different based on rank. Dragons wouldn’t be able to notice these minute details. *But I think that’s the right angle*, she thought. She looked at Elentzia and then the Knights of the Dragon Consort. She wasn’t searching for differences, but for similarities. With a gasp, Natalie found the answer.

“That’s it! The crests on your arms! The imperial army’s emblem!”

The dragon insignia was used on flags and armbands, which were temporarily handed out to Elentzia, Zeke, and Camila. Vissel’s troops, who hadn’t gotten their uniforms yet, received this armband instead.

“Even lower-ranking dragons will remember the rough shape. What if they were ordered not to let anyone with these crests ride on their backs?” Natalie suggested.

“So, if we take these armbands off, we should be able to fly,” Elentzia surmised. “Let’s test it out. Follow me, Camila, Zeke.”

“Wait, us too? We can’t fly yet! You saw how atrocious we were!” yelled

Camila.

"It's called hands-on training! If you think you'll die if you don't fly, you'll be able to fly!"

"You can't be serious!" Zeke groaned.

"It'd look bad on you guys if the Knights of the Dragon Consort aren't at Radia!" said Elentzia.

Not taking no for an answer, she grabbed Zeke and Camila's collars and dragged them away. She moved swiftly once she put her mind to it. Before she left, she stopped and turned around.

"Thank you, Natalie, Frida. I'll be off. I'll leave the rest to you."

The two girls glanced at each other and sent their half-sister off with a smile.

"Goodbye. Leave this place to us."

"Return home safely...with everyone."

"Of course," Elentzia said confidently. She disappeared into the castle, dragging the two rowdy knights behind her.

Natalie sighed and remembered how awful she looked. "Goodness, I must take a bath and get changed!" she said. "I'm a princess, but look at my slovenly appearance!"

Walking hand-in-hand with Natalie, Frida asked quietly, "Did something good happen...Natalie?"

The second princess frowned. "Good? Not at all! It was awful! But I gained a little bit of confidence. I guess I can be a proper princess too."

Frida widened her large eyes and smiled. "Mm-hm. You're wonderful, Natalie."

"Thank you. Then I must do what I can. I'll begin preparations immediately so that I can have a tea party with the Dragon Consort upon her return."

Frida beamed and nodded enthusiastically.

"And what protection did you receive?" Natalie asked.

“U-Um... A stuffed bear and a bird...”

“Huh? That Dragon Consort’s really unpredictable.”

All the more reason for Natalie to help the Dragon Consort and her older brothers. She held her head high and walked with a little more pride while holding her younger sister’s hand.



“I heard that the imperial army was filled with elite soldiers, but I didn’t expect the temple to fall so easily,” a regal man muttered.

He gallantly walked down the stone corridor. The temple was small. It was well-maintained but didn’t give off an air of magnificence. Several stone pillars supported the tall ceiling, and that was all. Priests and shrine maidens rarely visited the place, and there weren’t any security guards either. With the soldiers in the city, the temple had in fact received more protection than ever before. The corpses and blood of the imperial soldiers added a vibrant splash of color to the plain floor.

“Indeed, we’ve been preparing very well for this day,” a slouched man said in a creepy tone. He followed close behind.

The dignified man walking ahead didn’t remember the slouched man’s name. If memory served correctly, the latter was the aide to Grand Duke George. He was a traitor who sold out his country—he wished to seek asylum in the Kratos Kingdom in exchange for the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort.

Unpleasant. How awful, the sovereign man thought. In the next moment, he decided to kill the aide. With a swing of his right arm, the grinning traitor’s face was elegantly sliced in half, and rolled onto the floor.

None of the other soldiers batted an eye when the aide suddenly lost his life. This man was well-known for his spontaneous actions, and the soldiers only posed necessary questions.

“We’ve raised the flag with an ‘X’ on it over Radia. What else shall we do?”

“We’ll wait for the Dragon Consort, of course,” the noble man replied. “I came to meet her. I don’t mind catching a glimpse of the Dragon Emperor, either. I

wanted to see him as well.”

“We’ve received notice that the empire’s crown prince is, in fact, controlling the imperial army. Will they be arriving?”

“Not to worry. I’ll leave if I get tired of waiting. Externally, we made it seem like a rebellion started within the Rave Empire, and my capable son should have no complaints. Ah, I’ll leave you to take care of the small fry.”

Without even glancing at the corpses, the man approached the altar and sat down on a podium with a smile.

“Besides, that boy is at fault as well. He kept the Dragon Consort a secret.”

“Is she the real deal?” a soldier asked.

“That’s why I’m here to confirm it with my own eyes. Worst case, we can just start the war. It might be a burden for my son, but a son’s role is to clean up after his father’s mess.”

That was what this man had done himself, after all. As he laughed, the hooded sorcerers kneeled in front of him.

“Your wish is our command, Your Majesty, King Rufus der Kratos.”

“I’m traveling incognito. Just call me the King of South Kratos.”

The king crossed his legs, shifted his golden bangs with his fingers, and looked up at the ceiling. Rave, the Dragon God of logic and the sky, ruled this empire.

Rufus grinned as he enveloped himself in the color that had been stolen from the skies.

Chapter 5: A Baker's Guide to Win Back Radia

HE was lucky to find a bakery that was hiring on his first day. The imperial army was in Radia, leading to more mouths to feed, so demand for food and staffing in the food industry within the city of freedom skyrocketed. Thanks to that, Hadis was hired by an old-fashioned, small bakery run by an old woman with a hunched back. Lodging was fortunately included.

The imperial soldiers were popular with the locals, for they came to protect the city and the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort from Kratos. But because they consumed vast quantities of food in their castle—their base—the residents of the city experienced a shortage. Many went hungry.

The elderly baker had poor eyesight and was ready to retire, but she believed she could be of some help by providing bread to the city. Her kindness had allowed her to hire Hadis as well, and she trusted him to do the work. “Hadis dear, your bread is delicious!” she’d say with a smile, causing the emperor to put his heart into the work.

On his second day of peddling his freshly baked bread across the city, he gained a reputation as an “Indescribable beauty who sold bread,” and by the fourth day, he no longer had to leave the bakery; a huge line had formed in front of the store. The old lady’s mouth was agape when she saw the daily earnings, and she had given half of her profits to Hadis to keep.

He received a request from the army on his fifth day.

“I’m sure the soldiers would love to eat your bread, dear,” the old woman said cheerfully, sending Hadis off.

He left his recipe behind and arranged to hire a different person in his stead before he hastily headed to the imperial army’s castle, carrying bread for three hundred people.

“We were able to get here quicker than I thought,” Hadis idly muttered to Rave.

“If you came as the emperor, you could’ve come right in on your first day here,” the Dragon God wearily said inside of Hadis.

“Yeah, and I’d go straight to prison.”

“So, you aren’t oblivious to the circumstances. Then be careful. Don’t be that weird guy who mumbles to himself.”

Then don’t talk to me, Hadis thought in response.

He was guided by a single soldier once inside the castle. Several soldiers were training or chatting away in the plaza. The scene was rather serene. However, Hadis was escorted past the area to the backyard and was loaded onto a cart. He cocked his head to one side in confusion.

“We want you to deliver the food to the Temple of the Dragon Consort,” the soldier explained. “There’s a lot of men working tirelessly there, and our general wishes to present them with some good food.”

“The general... Um, would that be General South?” Hadis asked.

He vaguely remembered the brawny man with a stern face, fitting for a man in the military. Rumors had gone around in the city that South was responsible for organizing these troops. He was older than forty, and was surprisingly gentlemanly as a soldier, making him popular with the ladies.

“Affirmative. As long as he’s here, Radia won’t fall. Don’t fret,” the soldier replied.

The other residents riding the cart with Hadis started to laugh and chatter among themselves.

“He came because he was ordered by the previous Duke of Radia, didn’t he? We’re so grateful.”

“Since Prince George is gone, who knows what that aide of his is up to. We’re relying on the general.”

“I don’t want conflict to start with Kratos, but that aide clearly favors their kingdom. Anyone can see it.”

“I’ve heard that another guest will be arriving from Kratos. What are the higher-ups doing, leaving this aide to do as he pleases?”

"I've heard that the emperor has a fetish for little girls, and he was planning on leaving this city in the hands of an eleven-year-old girl!"

"That'll be awful! Then we should remain as-is!"

They looked at each other and laughed. They had a favorable impression of General South, believing that he brought the imperial army to protect the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort.

This doesn't bode well. Even if the imperial army successfully defends the Sacred Treasure from Kratos, I'll be forced to dispose of them. They acted of their own accord, and their funds were probably stolen from our treasury, Hadis thought.

Judging from the atmosphere of the city, if the army were punished accordingly, the imperial family would receive immense backlash. Vissel's idea of treating the army as rebels to get rid of them suddenly seemed logical and enticing. But Hadis knew that approach wouldn't make Jill happy.

"It's tough being a married man..." Hadis mumbled to himself.

"We're here. Don't glance around too much, or people will suspect you are a spy," the soldier warned.

The people on the cart nodded and entered the temple. There didn't seem to be too many imperial soldiers inside, but the temple was small, making it seem heavily guarded. The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort was under a powerful magic seal, and no one could touch it, much less carry it out of its enshrinement. Since they couldn't transfer the treasure to a different location, they could only increase the number of personnel guarding the area.

The treasure had been left to its own devices until now because it was under such a hefty seal that even the Goddess couldn't carelessly approach it, and it wouldn't have appeared without a Dragon Consort. The title of Dragon Consort couldn't be in name only either; it required a blessing from the Dragon God Rave, approving of the Dragon Emperor's wife. The empire would be lucky if a consort appeared once a century, and many doubted the existence of the sacred treasure. Even Hadis was uncertain about it.

"Of course the treasure exists! At the very least, there was one about three

hundred years ago!" Rave angrily roared inside Hadis.

Hadis refrained from talking aloud and relayed his thoughts to the Dragon God. *"But information from that long ago is unreliable. Besides, didn't you say your memory of those years is pretty hazy?"*

"Could you blame me? I lost my divinity, and unlike the Goddess, I'll enter a deep sleep if there isn't a Dragon Emperor vessel. I can only hear about what occurred during my slumber from other dragons..."

"It's a bit weird that the Dragon God can't recall any details of how or why he lost his divinity."

"That's logic, all right? Got a problem with that? Bring it up with the Goddess. She's usually the cause!"

"And? Has the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort manifested?" Hadis narrowed his eyes towards the depths of the temple, trying to confirm its presence. He felt an aura similar to his Heavenly Sword.

"Yep. The golden ring has disappeared from Missy, but the Sacred Treasure is there."

However, if Jill didn't recover her magic powers and reclaim the golden ring, she might not be able to use the sacred treasure. But if Kratos stole the treasure instead, it would be an issue. The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort was created from the Heavenly Sword, making it a weapon of the gods. The Goddess of Kratos had a nasty personality, but she was still a deity. If she got her hands on the treasure, no one could begin to imagine the destruction she could cause with it.

Besides all that, should Jill return with the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, people would have no choice but to admit that she was worthy of her title, just like how they approved of Hadis as the Dragon Emperor with his Heavenly Sword.

"We'll still have a wedding, of course! I want her to make a public debut with the official engagement announcement, too!"

"Open the temple immediately! Prepare to welcome our guest from Kratos," said a man with a shrill jeer, shattering Hadis's rosy daydream.

The emperor narrowed his eyes towards the voice. The man emitted an obvious air of aristocracy as he used his cane to hit and push the confused soldiers out of the way. Chasing behind him was a middle-aged man with masculine features, whom Hadis recognized very well—General South.

“Sir, we mustn’t do this. We can’t invite a person from Kratos into this temple!” South protested to the aide.

“Don’t be stupid. He insisted on this visit,” the aide replied. “Do you expect me to chase him away? Plus, he’s only got twenty men, including his bodyguards. It shouldn’t be an issue.”

“Kratos is a kingdom of magic. A single, high-ranking sorcerer can destroy an entire battalion.”

“Then all the more reason not to earn their ire! Matters would be different if we were at war, but Kratos is currently not our enemy. We must show them our hospitality and send them back in high spirits. That’s what diplomacy is all about! You numbskulls know nothing of political affairs.”

“But Prince George had predicted that the Kratos Kingdom would target the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort.”

“Prince George, you say?! He’s a rebel, and nothing more!” South fell silent, and the aristocratic aide huffed loudly as the soldiers went quiet. “You better not forget that you’re all fugitives. Who do you think helped you stay in Radia?”

“...We’re very grateful to you for secretly accepting our request.”

“That’s right. You better not forget it. Without me, the imperial army would have raided this city. Now that you’re aware, back off and leave this temple.”

The aide gave a leering grin, but South stood tall.

“That, I cannot do,” the general said.

“What did you just say?!”

“We’re part of the imperial army. Our duty is to protect this empire!”

“Imperial army, my foot, you wannabe rebels!”

In a fit of anger, the aide swung his cane. The surrounding soldiers tried to

jump in to help, but South blocked the attack with his right hand while standing firm.

"I will not comply, no matter what you say. This is the final order we've received from Prince George," South said.

"Then why don't you appeal to the crown prince?! I doubt he'd hear you out. Crown Prince Vissel has already chased away the rest of your friends from the imperial capital and is currently constructing a new imperial army!"

"Even so, we should— No, we, at the very least, must stay strong."

"Quit your daydreaming! You lot have nowhere else to go—"

"Hello, hi there. Let's take a second to calm down, okay?" Hadis said, cutting between the two as he grabbed the aide's cane.

South's stern demeanor turned to one of surprise, and the aide widened his eyes in anger.

"Wh-Who are you, suddenly barging in like this?!" the aide stammered.

"I'm a baker in this city," Hadis replied.

"A-A-A baker?"

Hadis nodded with a smile, hoping to ease the aide's anxiety. "It looks to me like you've both got your own reasons. Let's stop fighting, okay? Why don't we all go to the emperor right now and apologize?"

"Huh?!" Everyone in the room raised the question in unison.

Hadis lifted his index finger. "I'm sure the emperor wants to protect Radia. The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort is here, and above all, the emperor is infatuated with the Dragon Consort. Have you seen her before? She's still eleven, but she's super cute and cool!"

No one dared to speak, allowing him to continue.

"If you kneel and vow to protect Radia for the Dragon Consort and swear your allegiance to her, I'm sure the emperor would reconsider his punishments and treat you with fairness. In fact, I think the emperor's heart would flutter with joy if you kneeled!" Thinking this was a splendid idea, Hadis gave a wide smile.

"So why don't we all go and apologize to the emperor? Then everything will be solved! How about it?"

After a few beats of silence, the aide's lips trembled with fury as he bellowed, "Th-Throw this baker out at once!"

"Y-Yessir!" a soldier said after a quick salute.

It only took a few seconds for Hadis to be tossed out from the temple, and he clutched his knees while sitting as he hung his head.

"Why did this happen? I thought they'd listen to me if I was a baker and not the emperor..." he muttered.

Rave appeared from his back. "You can't be serious, you idiotic emperor."

"Well, Jill listens to me when she eats delicious bread! Maybe my bread didn't suit their palate."

"They didn't even touch the bread yet. That's not the point!"

"Hey, Baker!" a voice suddenly called out to him.

Hadis turned around and fixed his posture. General South was approaching him. Rave swiftly disappeared.

"Here's the fee for your bread. I heard you weren't paid yet," South said.

"Ah, thank you. Sorry for the trouble..." replied Hadis.

"I need to thank you for saving me as well. You have my gratitude. It's a bit shameful for a general to be saved by a baker, though I was up against an aristocrat." The general handed a bag of money to Hadis, who stood up to accept it. He then squinted his eyes as though he was looking at something bright and smiled. "I can understand why your face is popular with men and women of all ages in this city. But your bread is just as good. I actually had a bite while I was chasing after you. I ended up polishing off the loaf in a few seconds. You're quite skilled."

"Did it make you want to apologize to the emperor?" Hadis asked, hopeful.

"You're a funny baker, I'll give you that. We know that we're rebels, but we must follow our sense of justice—"

“But it’s not good to lie to the citizens of this city.”

South closed his mouth, unable to refute. The citizens believed that the orders left by George, the Grand Duke of Radia, were approved by the empire. No one had guessed that South and his army had become rebels. They were protecting the city, and there was no reason to raise suspicions.

“If a battle really does break out, how will you evacuate everyone? Can you prepare an area for the people to seek refuge, or are you planning on dragging them into it?” Hadis asked.

“Duke Lehrsatz and Duke Neutrahl are nearby. I trust that they can handle the people, and since they’re not from Kratos, I’m sure Crown Prince Vissel won’t abandon them either.”

“You won’t kneel to the emperor no matter what?” Hadis pushed.

“That’s correct. We didn’t side with Prince George on a whim.”

“Why are you willing to go that far?”

South was quiet for a moment before he gave his answer. “When Prince George was much younger, he saved me during a battle. It’s been peaceful for the past two decades, but there were quite a few skirmishes about colonizing the land back then. The battles destroyed many homes, and George gave those people a new home, a new purpose.”

“He saved your lives,” Hadis surmised.

“Right. Whether it be our lives or our future, Prince George had saved us all. He was someone I knew had my back and was worthy of entrusting my life to. I’ve been moved countless times by his resolution to protect the Rave Empire. I don’t want to believe that he wasn’t from the imperial family. Hence, I cannot kneel to the Dragon Emperor. The moment I do so, I feel like I’d be admitting Prince George’s defeat.” Hadis furrowed his brows, but South laughed. “You don’t understand, it seems. I’m just being stubborn, is all. But we’re happy. We were able to meet a person we could bet our lives on, and we still have orders to carry out. I pity the soldiers who remained at the imperial capital.”

“Do you feel the same, even if your actions are causing chaos and confusion within the empire?” Hadis asked.

"For us, Prince George *is* the Rave Empire. When I accepted that I couldn't fulfill his other dying wish, I realized that George was our home, our shelter." Hadis was at a loss for words, and South pushed his back. "Your bread was delicious. If you don't mind, would you visit us tomorrow and bring some more?"

South smiled as Hadis left for the day.

"This is complicated... Such a pain," the emperor muttered.

"Don't say that. Do your best," Rave said. It was easy for the Dragon God to say; he always popped out whenever he pleased and was all talk.

South's parting words weren't flattery but his earnest wishes, and Hadis had been called to bring bread to the temple the following day. Though his speech had left much to be desired, Hadis had left a good impression in the soldiers' hearts for protecting their general. He was called "Baker" and had gotten familiar with the troops in the temple.

"This is getting kind of weird. How do they not know that you're the emperor?" Rave asked.

"They basically kept a wide berth around me when I was," Hadis replied cheerfully.

"Don't say that with a smile. This is hard for me to watch. So... What are you gonna do with this situation?"

Hadis thought hard about Rave's question, searching for a solution. Jill could arrive at the city any day now, and though there might be a quarrel between her and General South in regard to the claim of the Sacred Treasure, Hadis was sure that she would be victorious with the least number of casualties. If Jill stopped the rebellion in Radia and collected the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, Hadis's goal would be fulfilled. He didn't really care about the fate of General South, who swore his allegiance to George.

However, that thought was slowly shifting.

"If they swear their loyalty to the emperor, they might be saved," Hadis murmured.

“What, that again?” laughed a soldier he’d become friendly with. At first, Hadis’s words had made everyone freeze, but they were used to his claims by now and let it slide with a hearty laugh. “It’s too late. A new imperial army has been formed, right?”

“We’ve decided to only listen to Prince George’s orders. We made that decision with General South,” another chimed in.

Hadis frowned at this reply, but the soldiers were all smiling.

“Off topic, but your bread is good as usual.”

“Save some for General South. Once he’s done escorting the guest from Kratos with that aide, he’s gonna come asking for today’s bread.”

“Huh? So a guest from Kratos will enter this temple after all?” Hadis asked.

He now understood why he wasn’t sent to the temple today, but instead to the castle to provide the bread.

A soldier grimaced and nodded. “Yeah, that aide got his wish yesterday. But they only have twenty-four people, all told. We’ve got an army of three thousand here, so it shouldn’t be anything to worry about.”

“Who’s the guest from Kratos?” Hadis wondered.

“Who knows. But he must be an aristocrat. He was dressed all fancy, and his guards were all sorcerers—”

An explosion reverberated through the air, shaking the castle and cutting the soldier off mid-sentence. Hadis raised his head as he felt the pulse of magic energy.

“Hey, Hadis. This magic must be—” Rave said inside of Hadis.

Before Rave could finish, a commotion broke out in the castle.

“What was that?! An earthquake?! ”

“The floor’s glowing!”

Drawn by the fear-ridden voices, Hadis looked down. Magic energy rose from the floor, multiple layers of magic circles appeared on the ground, and two sorcerers emerged.

Restraining magic...

In the next moment, everyone let out blood-curdling cries as though lightning had struck. Some lost consciousness immediately. A high-level spell was cast, surrounding the entire castle. Only those with some resistance towards magic could retain their consciousness, but the restraining magic on the floor left their bodies paralyzed, rendering them motionless.

Hadis narrowed his eyes and took a step forward, his foot touching the glowing lines of the magic circle. With a crackle, the magic circle was destroyed, and a scream rang through the air. The sorcerer who cast the circle had the magic repelled towards him, causing great agony.

Hadis immediately borrowed a sword from a nearby soldier and lunged forward. After stabbing the sorcerer in the chest, he pulled out his blade and threw it towards another who was trying to flee. The sword sliced through the sorcerer's head, killing him in an instant.

"B-Baker, are you—" a soldier started.

"We're being attacked by Kratos," Hadis declared. Everyone gulped as Hadis stepped on a puddle of the sorcerer's blood and asked a nearby soldier, "How many other sorcerers are here instead of the temple?"

"I-I think those two were all. Th-The rest are at that temple."

"General South should be at the temple as well. Anyone who's confident, follow me," Hadis commanded. "A handful of you should become support. Help and treat the wounded. I'll confirm the situation first."

The soldiers exchanged glances at Hadis's orders, but a few had decided to accompany him.

"D-Did that guest launch an attack? There's only twenty or so people on their side!" a soldier cried.

"A sorcerer from Kratos can undoubtedly handle several people simultaneously, and an elite, high-ranking sorcerer can single-handedly decimate a battalion. General South said so himself."

"Hey, look!"

As Hadis and his group headed outside, they saw smoke billowing from the temple. Not only that, but a military flag also caught their eye. No one knew if General South brought it himself or if it was already at the temple, but it was the Rave imperial army's—a black cloth embroidered with a crimson dragon. As though to deny its existence, it had been crossed out in a conspicuous fashion.

"Wh-Why isn't it the Kratos military flag?!" a soldier cried.

"Because the guests from Kratos are not military," Hadis replied.

"A-Are they making it seem like we've started a rebellion in Radia?!" a soldier asked in a quavering voice, about to burst into tears.

"What'll we do? The imperial army will arrive and try to suppress this revolt, even though we're under attack by Kratos!"

Magic circles appeared in the sky, cruelly shutting out the soldiers' mayhem and the panic that followed. Remembering the spell from earlier, everyone stood still.

"Wh-What is that?!" a soldier asked.

"M-Magic again? Are they going to attack the city?!" another yelped.

"Rave, prepare yourself!" shouted Hadis.

Before the Dragon God responded, he transformed into the Heavenly Sword in Hadis's hands. He propelled himself forward, thrusting out his blade. A countless number of lasers intermittently rained down on the city. Each attack wasn't too devastating, but it covered a wide area. Hadis let an attack past him, hitting an area of the city. He clicked his tongue and increased the area of his barrier.

"Hadis, this is just a threat! Don't use too much of your energy!" Rave warned.

The emperor was aware of this, but if he couldn't suppress this attack, it would lead to decreased morale in the city. In the next moment, the attacks suddenly ceased. The magic circles changed their insignia, seemingly finding a new target.

It shifted to anti-flight circles! Hadis thought with narrowed eyes. The circle

started to attack outside the city and continued to face in that direction as though it was chasing a different enemy.

“I feel Raw’s presence,” Rave said, still in the shape of the Heavenly Sword.

Hadis grinned. “My adorable wife is here, then?”

“No clue. He’s panicking right now. His hands are completely full with trying to fire commands to the other dragons. Best not to bother him right now.”

“She brought other dragons along, too? My wife’s awesome.”

But there was no tear-jerking reunion to be had. Hadis descended upon the city that was filled with chaos and fear.

“A-Are you all right, Baker? I-I didn’t think you had magic powers,” a soldier said, looking distraught.

Hadis nodded while staring at the magic circles that were gradually losing their luster.

“Yeah, just a little. One of the attacks hit an area in the city, didn’t it? Could you go help them?” Hadis asked.

“R-Right! I need some of you to come with me!” a soldier said to the others, running off in the direction of the destruction.

“Hey, Baker. What are those magic circles attacking? Is there something outside?”

“It’s using its anti-flight magic to attack the dragons outside the city,” Hadis replied. “The circles are growing fainter, so they’ll disappear over time, but I’m sure the sorcerers will launch another attack.”

The soldiers cried in despair.

“We’ll be wiped out if they attack us with that!”

“But it takes quite a bit of magic energy to summon a circle on that large of a scale. The sorcerers who made that spell should be exhausted for a few days,” Hadis added.

Had they wielded an inordinate amount of magic energy like Jill and Hadis, matters would’ve been different, but most people hit their limits much sooner

than those two.

"Twenty-four came from Kratos, right? We took care of two at the castle, and a third will be out of commission once that spell fades. That leaves us with twenty-one to go," Hadis said.

"T-Twenty-one to go? You don't mean..."

"Don't worry, we can take care of them. We've got numbers on our side."

Aside from one person, Hadis thought to himself. He smiled at the soldiers and thought back to the explosion of magic power that he felt from the temple. That magic was in a completely different league from everything else going on. He decided to keep this to himself for now; the soldiers were already faltering with the sudden attack, and he didn't want to further instill unnecessary fear.

"In any case, we should meet up with General South. When fighting against sorcerers, one should force them to use all their magic or close the gap for close combat. If we have a well-coordinated plan, we should be able to win—"

A shrill voice abruptly interrupted Hadis.

"We've occupied the temple!"

"Wh-What now?!" a soldier shouted.

"A bird! A bird's talking! Is this also Kratos's magic?!" another claimed.

"Surrender! Surrender! You have twenty-four hours to decide!"

All birds, including the little birds atop trees, the doves lining the fences, and chickens inside coops, screeched loudly in unison.

"Drop your weapons and surrender, imperial army! We've captured General South!"

"If you do not surrender within twenty-four hours, we will burn down the city! All the citizens will be massacred!"

The soldiers started to panic. The residents on the main road connected to the castle gates started to grow hysterical.

"Surrender, rebels! You have nowhere to flee! No one will save you!"

"You can't leave the city! If you don't surrender, you will all be killed!"

Teeheehee!"

Following a blood-chilling laugh, the birds' heads blew up. Screams filled the city and the children started to cry over the headless animals. The soldiers couldn't hide their anxiety and confusion.

"G-General South has been captured?!"

"W-We've got to save him! We need to form a rescue mission!"

"How?! Th-The people of the city should be evacuated first!"

"We can't leave," Hadis said. "Look, they've just used a new spell."

The soldiers followed Hadis's gaze with bitter expressions. The anti-flight magic circles had disappeared, but a wavering, invisible membrane that surrounded the city took its place. It was a wall made of magic. Hadis picked up a pebble and threw it towards the barrier. The rock crackled and was reduced to dust. No one was willing to suffer the consequences of trying to leave.

They're very efficient and experienced in sowing seeds of anxiety and doubt. At this rate, either the locals would take up arms against the soldiers, or the army, having lost General South, would turn on the citizens. The temple with the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort had already been occupied.

"S-So they'll start attacking again if we don't surrender in twenty-four hours?!" a soldier yelped.

"What'll we do?! We don't have General South with us! At this rate—"

"Quiet down!" roared Hadis, silencing the army. With a sigh, he turned around and faced them. "First, evacuate the citizens to the basement of the castle, or shove as many as you can in the basements of their houses. They'll be protected from the magic attacks from above. Next, we need combat prowess. Gather any soldier who can move to the castle, and make sure to bring weapons."

"B-B-But Baker, you're..." a soldier started.

"Do you have time to dawdle? We've only got twenty-four hours. We're not even sure if they'll wait the full twenty-four either."

"B-But General South isn't here. We'll be acting without his permission."

"You boasted that you'd protect the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort from Kratos. Was that all a lie?" Everyone gasped at Hadis's cold words. "George, South, and you men are all bark and no bite."

Anger started to show in the soldiers' faces. It seemed they had the energy to defy those words. That was more than enough for Hadis.

The emperor sighed and rested his hand on his hip. "What are your feathers all ruffled for? We just need to recapture the Temple of the Dragon Consort and remove that flag before the army arrives from the imperial capital to kill us."

"D-Don't act like you know about our situation, Baker! Do you know how—"

"And we've got help nearby," Hadis said over him. "The anti-flight magic circles are proof of that. Or will you surrender to spare your own lives? I believe that General South is still alive, but I suppose this will end with him being declared the ringleader of the rebels at this rate. All according to Kratos's plans."

"W-We won't let that happen!"

"That so? Then use your time and brains to utilize your lives to the fullest extent. You don't want that emperor you guys hate so much to call you idiots while he disposes of you with a smile on his face, do you?"

The soldiers looked stern, challenging Hadis's smile. They shouted with great energy, eager to protect the city. Some may have yelled out of an act of desperation, but they needed to maintain this good morale. With only half of his magic powers, Hadis had to protect the city and the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort.

I'll personally make Jill into a Dragon Consort with my own hands. This plan would be for naught if the city and the treasure were trampled over by Kratos before Jill had the chance to do anything.

"I need someone to be a messenger," Hadis said. "We need to communicate with the people outside, who will assist us."

"B-Baker, what is this outside help that you speak of?"

"The Dragon Consort and the second prince, Risteard, probably."

Surprise spread like a wave through the soldiers.

“Wh-Wh-What do you mean?” asked the soldier Hadis had become friendly with.

“We need to confirm that first. I can synchronize my magic energy with the barrier and let some people out, but you might come under attack after you leave. In short, it’s a suicide mission.”

“Huh?!”

“I’ll do my best to protect you, but I can give you no guarantees. So, who wants to be the first to die?” The soldiers nervously gulped as Hadis flashed them a wicked smile. He looked at everyone and clicked his tongue. “You guys are all useless. If you’re all going to get in my way, just die here. I’ll kill every single one of you myself.”

“L-Let me do it!” a soldier piped up.

“No, I will!” said another.

One by one, the soldiers raised their hands, causing Hadis to shrug. If they were going to volunteer, he wanted them to do so quickly and without hesitation. Hadis thought hard, trying to find a way to best use these men.

“B-Baker, I-I’ve been a bit curious for a while now, but where did that sword come from...*sir*?” gingerly asked the soldier he knew.

Hadis had his Heavenly Sword out the entire time, so he decided to play dumb. “Not a clue. I think I picked it up from somewhere,” he said.

“Hadis, you bastard! This is where you reveal yourself as the Dragon Emperor!” Rave roared angrily in his head.

“I’m just a baker.”

The familiar soldier shuddered at Hadis’s ghost of a smile and gave an awkward nod of acknowledgment.



RISTEARD had the dragons descend in a village a short distance from Radia. The villagers were welcoming when they saw Brynhild, a gold-eyed, red dragon.

They lent the group an entire brick building. Both the soldiers and the villagers were anxious about Radia, but they were forced to rest to regain some stamina.

Within a simple room with just a large table and chairs, Jill read the letter Risteard had received from Kratos, and then they shared what they knew with each other. The second prince had almost fainted when he heard that Hadis had gone to Radia to become a baker, but he pushed through the shock to fill her in on what he'd done since leaving the capital.

"So, you're saying it's true that the Kratos soldiers entered the Lehrsatz duchy while guarding an aristocrat who wanted to tour Radia," Jill said, organizing the information. "And it's true that Duke Lehrsatz had sold a vast quantity of food and weapons to Radia."

"Precisely. However, my grandfather, Duke Lehrsatz, had been using merchants to acquire information about Radia," Risteard replied. "It's been confirmed that the imperial army led by General South is in Radia, but all the residents of the city claim that they're here to protect the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort from Kratos. And a Kratos army has indeed entered our lands."

This was a puzzling development. Duke Lehrsatz didn't want to thoughtlessly generate confusion and had kept the matter to himself until he had further details. Duke Neutrahl, who'd also been closely observing Radia, had found Lehrsatz's actions to be suspicious.

"To compound these issues, Duke Neutrahl had been secretly receiving complaints from the aide in Radia," Risteard added. "Saying the city had apparently been taken over by General South, and Duke Lehrsatz had been providing support, preventing the aide from taking action. The aide is an infamous opportunist, and no one generally lends an ear to his words, but Duke Neutrahl, much like Elentzia, is a good-natured man and believes in the best of others."

Seeing the troubled aide, Duke Neutrahl decided to file a report to the imperial capital to be on the safe side, which was then transmitted to Vissel and led to the consequent capture of Risteard.

"When I went to Duke Neutrahl to explain my household's actions, he seemed

surprised,” Risteard explained. “He promised to cooperate with Duke Lehrsatz and me to clear ourselves of suspicion. Duke Lehrsatz is known for his cunning, and the fact that Duke Neutrahrl was able to notice the shifty behavior attests to his keen instincts, but traditionally, the Neutrahls have been absolutely awful at maneuvering themselves.”

“But two days ago, the Kratos soldiers suddenly left the Lehrsatz duchy because of this letter,” Jill said, dropping her gaze to the letter on the table.

Risteard sat across from her and sighed with a nod. “The Great Seal is stamped on this letter, so I highly doubt it’s fake, but I wanted to confirm with you just in case. Can you tell if this is truly the crown prince’s handwriting?”

“I believe the signature is his. The contents of this letter are written by Lawrence, however.”

Jill could easily deduce the familiar handwriting of both men. The details of the letter were rather simple. The Kratos army staying in Duke Lehrsatz’s duchy of the Rave Empire were to return immediately. Under the orders of Crown Prince Gerald der Kratos, once the letter had arrived, the soldiers who returned home without the absentee would be pardoned.

“By absentee, he’s referring to the aristocrat who’s sightseeing in Radia, isn’t he?” Jill asked.

“Most likely. And this is what we received as well,” Risteard said, pulling out a second sheet of paper from underneath.

The letter stated that once the Kratos army had left, the Kratos Kingdom had absolutely nothing to do with anything that occurred in Grand Duke Radia’s duchy. Dragon Emperor Hadis Teos Rave and Dragon Consort Lady Jill Cervel were free to do as they wished towards anyone involved.

“And once you read this, you thought that the Kratos aristocrat who’d been left behind while touring Radia would cause trouble and rushed to the city,” Jill said.

“That’s right. This letter is clearly warning us that an uninvited guest is planning something in Radia. So, this letter was written by that attendant we met... He anticipated this situation and laid the groundwork for a

countermeasure before we even noticed anything.”

During the Riot of the False Emperor, Risteard and Lawrence had worked together, and the prince was aware of Lawrence’s cunning. He was the type who’d pretend to aim for one objective while discreetly aiming for more.

Jill nodded. “They probably planned to cause a rebellion in Radia and shave off our national resources, but they guessed that this plan would be seen through and decided to cut off this visitor to be on the safe side. I assumed they’d go for the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort... Do you think they gave up on that?”

“There must be something more to it. This letter is clearly provoking us,” Risteard replied.

“Is it?” She tilted her head.

Risteard furrowed his brows and pointed to a line on the second page of the letter. “Do you not see it? They refer to you as the *Dragon Consort*.”

“Um, I see that...”

“The Kratos Kingdom has approved of you being the Dragon Consort. The Rave Empire can’t ignore this.”

“Huh?” Jill gave a dimwitted response.

“The Kratos Kingdom has accepted *you* as the Dragon Consort. That’s what this means.”

“Really? W-Wait, so I can become a Dragon Consort now?!”

“*Become*?! You’re already one! Hadis chose you, and you received a blessing from the Dragon God Rave! It doesn’t matter if you originate from Kratos anymore!” Risteard uncharacteristically raised his voice in anger. He glared at the letter in vexation and tapped it with his finger. “And now *they’re* acting like they’ll approve of you?! Who do they think they are?!”

“Ah, I get it now. So that’s the issue here...”

“Listen well. We need the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort so that we can send them a message that we couldn’t care less if they approve of you or not! Whoever holds the Sacred Treasure must be accepted as the Dragon

Consort in Rave, after all.”

If a Dragon Consort appeared only after obtaining approval from Kratos, it would be like throwing egg on the Rave Empire.

“Which means the issues at Radia must be resolved by the Rave Empire,” Jill said.

“Exactly. And if, for whatever reason, the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort disappears, it’d look like Kratos gave *us* a Dragon Consort!”

Even Jill, who was dense when it came to political affairs, knew that the pride of the empire was at stake. She slumped her shoulders.

“Lawrence probably planned for this, didn’t he?” she asked.

“It’s very likely. We’ve been forced to clean up any troublesome issues. If we can’t, he can laugh at us and say that their country had sent us the Dragon Consort. He’s clearly harassing us!”

Lawrence had certainly lived up to his reputation. His principle was to always take the initiative when it came to conducting matters that his opponent disliked.

“But at least it’s easy to pinpoint our tasks at hand,” Jill said. “Let’s win back Radia. I can’t even begin to imagine what would happen if Prince Vissel ever caught wind of this letter.”

“Precisely. He might try to get rid of you, claiming that anyone from Kratos is not suitable to be the Dragon Consort. We’ve got problems inside and outside of the empire!”

“Most importantly, we can’t even dispose of the people in Radia by claiming them to be rebels.”

Risteard calmed down with a sigh and nodded. “We’re being used. I’m not sure how Hadis will react.”

“I’m sure His Majesty will understand if we talk it out.”

“But depending on the situation, he might go with Vissel’s methods. Vissel always maneuvers everything to Hadis’s advantage. That’s why the cautious Hadis will never doubt his older brother.” Risteard looked down, venting his

frustration. “Those two share something special. And it’s something that I don’t understand.”

“Your Highness...”

“But I doubt it’s anything worthwhile.”

Risteard forced a smile so that Jill wouldn’t worry. She looked down and remembered Hadis’s questioning eyes, asking what they knew of him. His voice had blamed others. It was a tough pill to swallow, but Vissel resembled Hadis in the future she knew.

“I kinda get what you’re saying, Your Highness,” Jill said. “But did you know that His Majesty often talks about you?”

“I can imagine. He probably complains all the time.”

“That’s right. He talks about what you did and how noisy you are. In fact, that’s all he talks about. Until recently, His Majesty had never even dared to speak of his siblings.”

The prince widened his eyes with shock.

“Your Highness, you’re a good older brother to His Majesty. You’re just like Prince Vissel in that regard,” Jill told him.

Risteard furrowed his brows and gave an exaggerated sigh. “I didn’t think you’d put me in the same boat as him. But I suppose that’s a comparison I just have to accept, eh?”

“That’s right. That’s the sort of person your younger brother is. He went off to Radia to become a baker, after all.”

Even Vissel had been shocked by this news. Risteard looked exhausted. “That’s right... What goes through that brain of his?”

“But he’s changed. Perhaps he wants to save the soldiers in Radia—”

“Prince Risteard, Dragon Consort! We’ve received two messenger soldiers from Radia!” a voice suddenly cut in.

Jill and Risteard stood up at the same time.

“Are they really from Radia?!” Risteard shouted.

"We've confirmed their identity with the soldiers that came with the Dragon Consort! They've claimed that the messengers are indeed from the former imperial army under General South. He even said he had a message from Baker..."

No one doubted the credibility now. Risteard fell onto his desk and groaned. "S-So that idiot really became a baker in Radia?"

"But now we know they're from His Majesty! Bring them over immediately!" Jill ordered. "We'll hear them out!"

The soldier saluted and left.

When the messengers notified the duo of Hadis's plans, both Jill and Risteard felt like banging their heads on the table.



"**LET** me confirm our plan one more time," Hadis said.

They only had ten hours left of the twenty-four Kratos had given them. Hadis, having completed the necessary preparations, glanced around at the soldiers who gathered in the darkness of the night.

"The plan will commence in three hours. The magical barrier will start attacking the dragons that will try to enter this city. We'll use that as our cue to raid the temple. It's a small temple, so hammer the entry and escape routes into your heads. We'll form four units. The first unit will rescue your precious General South," Hadis said. He raised a second finger. "The second unit will protect the castle and the city. The enemy might be distracted by the outside forces at first, but they'll immediately start attacking the city once they notice the temple being raided. Don't panic even if you get attacked by magic. Hide behind objects and whatever you can find! The residents have been evacuated underground, so there's no need for you to protect the city from destruction."

Human lives were to be prioritized; no one had any complaints.

"Let's review a bit on how to fight against sorcerers. They will always be hiding somewhere to launch an attack on a wide scale. They know that they'll lose if they're surrounded. Thus, even when you're under attack, remain calm and maintain teamwork and close communication to find the sorcerer. Don't

forget that they'll never move alone."

This was how sorcerers worked in Kratos. Their guest was an aristocrat. Even a bodyguard would've received as much training as a soldier. When the restraining magic had been cast over the castle, it was the work of a pair of sorcerers as well.

"Judging from the number of people they brought, I believe they're moving in pairs," Hadis explained. "There must be a sorcerer maintaining the wall surrounding the city, and another who's tasked with assisting or protecting. Don't rush out by yourself, even if you find one. Gather your unit and attack them all at once! Keep attacking with no hesitation! We've got numbers on our side, so as long as we can find their locations, we should be able to win."

There was no trickery in this plan. Hadis wanted to overpower the enemy using sheer numbers. He knew this plan wasn't as gallant as he liked, but he pressed on and raised a third finger.

"The third unit will be supporting from the rear and escorting the citizens outside once the magical barrier fades. If help from the outside comes, follow their instructions. Oh, and if General South is able, the first unit can follow his orders, too."

Hadis raised the fourth and final finger.

"The fourth and last unit's job is to take out the trash. People in this unit have the highest chance of dying."

The soldiers no longer protested or showed any signs of anxiety. They'd already steeled themselves. This was a good change, and the residents of the city hadn't caused a fuss when they saw the resolute soldiers.

"You'll enter the temple with me, defeat their boss, and take down that stupid military flag. That's all. Simple, isn't it?"

The soldiers energetically roared in agreement.

Hadis gave a fearless smile as he looked at the troops. "Excellent response. Then let's all work hard, shall we? You lot are wonderful soldiers who protect this country. At the very least, may you all have a valiant death."



“WE Dragon Knights will break past the magical barrier surrounding Radia and save the citizens!” Risteard bellowed.

He stood in a clearing next to a bonfire as his Dragon Knights lined up in front of him. The same knights had assisted Jill and her group during the Riot of the False Emperor, allowing her to rescue Hadis. *I've been constantly indebted to them*, Jill thought as she stood next to the prince.

“We'll also act as bait to allow the Dragon Consort and her unit to enter the temple!” said Risteard. “Fly around as long as you can and deplete the enemy's magic power as much as possible! We'll be up against the anti-flight magic circles of Kratos, a fitting test for our skills. Don't get shot down!”

“We'll take a small detour and enter the temple from the back to collect the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort. I'm relying on you, Raw,” Jill added. Raw cried back while in her arms. “Prince Risteard, I know that this is a dangerous mission, but I'll be counting on you.”

Jill's unit could only fly with the help of Raw, so their roles would naturally be split.

The prince huffed and looked down at the girl. “Don't underestimate me. I'll show Kratos with this fight that the Neutrahl Dragon Knights, commanded by my sister, aren't the most elite knights of the empire. It's *my* unit!”

The two shook hands at his declaration, and Jill left the village with the baby dragon. Since Raw had to use wild dragons, he had to call for them outside this area.

“E-Excuse me!” a voice said as Jill stepped outside the stone walls surrounding the village. The two messenger soldiers who rode on horse approached her, and she stopped in her tracks.

“Are you sure you don't need to be resting?” she asked.

“W-We're fine. We only traveled a bit by horse, and we can't possibly take a rest in this situation,” a soldier said.

“Is it possible for us to enter your unit, Dragon Consort?”

Jill frowned and faced the two. “You haven’t approved of the Dragon Emperor, which means that I’m not your Dragon Consort.”

The soldiers had purposefully not referred to Jill as “Your Highness.” They drew their heads back.

“To you guys, I’m the cause of your ruin,” she said.

The two couldn’t respond.

“We’re not here to save General South,” she told them. “We’re here to destroy the people who are trying to steal the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort. Worst case, we may abandon him.”

“I’m well aware!” a soldier replied. “But our comrades are still in Radia, trying to fight!”

“And quite honestly, I’m a bit curious to see how Baker’s doing!” another replied.

Jill’s cheek twitched. Raw cried in her arms and tilted his head to one side.

“When we were panicking after General South had been captured, Baker commanded us and let us go seek help,” one added. “He should be standing at the vanguard of our army even as we speak. We soldiers can’t flee while a mere baker stays to fight!”

“General South is ready to die for the greater good. But Baker is different,” said the other. “We can’t rely on him and then watch him die without providing any support... We will truly become rebels if that happens!”

“General South must be furious as well. He’d taken a great liking to Baker, who bravely told us to kneel to the emperor.”

Jill’s cheeks kept twitching at the mention of a baker, but the two soldiers were dead serious.

“We can ride dragons, and we won’t be inferior to Prince Risteard’s Dragon Knights!”

“Many people in your unit aren’t used to handling dragons, Dragon Consort. But we can control wild dragons, and we’ll surely be of use to you!”

In truth, Jill had no hesitation about using them. The more help she could get, the better. Both she and Hadis only had half their magic powers, and she was unsure if she could fight the Kratos aristocrat in the temple.

"...Fine," she relented. "However, you *will* listen to my orders! If you show any disobedience, I'm sure you know of the consequences."

The two soldiers saluted in response.

"And I've got one more condition," Jill added. "If you cannot accept this, I can't allow you to tag along."

"A-And what would that be?" a soldier asked.

"That baker you talk about is the Dragon Emperor."

The two soldiers looked back at her completely dumbfounded. Jill could understand their feelings, but she couldn't suppress a smile. The baker was the Dragon Emperor, the emperor of the Rave Empire.

"If you'd still like to go save him, follow me," she said, turning to leave.

The two soldiers started to panic.

"W-Wait, what?! Baker's the emperor? Why's he baking bread?"

"I-I-It must be a joke! But I do remember seeing a Heavenly Sword-like blade..."

"Wh-Why did none of us realize it?! He's our sworn enemy and the one who ruined Prince George!"

"Who'd expect the emperor to be a baker?! And his bread was delicious!"

"It was! Is it because he's the Dragon Emperor?!"

The conversation was going off on a tangent amidst the confusion, but Jill felt that those two soldiers would tag along to save Hadis. A smile tugged up her lips as she walked ahead.

"My Majesty is really cool, isn't he?" she murmured.

Rave had said that Hadis was born a Dragon Emperor; Jill felt that this statement was correct.

“Rawr!” said Raw, acting oddly prideful.

This baby was also born a Dragon King. Several dragons had already been waiting for him.

Neither Hadis nor Raw could choose the circumstances of their birth, but this was what they were destined to become.

After throwing a saddle on the green dragon’s torso, Jill hopped on while carrying Raw. The plan Hadis had given Jill was plain and simple. She was to retrieve the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort and save the city from the magic of Kratos.

“I’ll make you into the Dragon Consort,” Hadis had once told her.

Hadis would follow through with his vow. The two soldiers from earlier were conversing with their acquaintance while preparing to leave. Suddenly, two dragons came from the sky. The shock and devotion that glimmered in those two men’s eyes would surely be pointed towards Hadis in the near future.

“But I’m still mad. So, I’ll smack His Majesty with the Sacred Treasure,” fumed Jill.

“Rawr?!”

Just you wait, Dragon Emperor!

“Let the operation commence! Our target: The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort!” she shouted, looking up at the night sky.



THE sound of explosions echoed in the air. Rufus rose from a plain bed in the temple and yawned. He’d been waiting in anticipation to witness the development of this situation, so he had no need to change clothes.

An attack from outside. Did Duke Neutrahl make a move after noticing an emergency? He moves quick, the king thought.

However, the elite Dragon Knights under Princess Elentzia were at the imperial capital. Duke Lehrsatz needed to keep his eyes on the Kratos army that Rufus had brought into his territory and shouldn’t be able to make a move. Rufus expected his sorcerers and the magical barrier to be more than enough;

he'd only become bored if he stood on the front. He decided to go back to sleep and fixed his sheets.

Before he could crawl back into bed, the barrier that was set around the temple as a safety measure was destroyed. The magic power that he sensed allowed him to quickly shrug off any drowsiness. The entire temple shook, causing the king to fall from his bed.

"King Rufus, they've decided to fight, it seems. The soldiers have already entered the temple. What shall we do?" a guard asked, opening the door to his bedroom.

"I'll head out," Rufus replied.

The guard couldn't hide his misgivings while cloaked under a hood.

"Couldn't you tell? Someone incredible's out there," said the king.

"I'm terribly sorry. I couldn't detect anything at all. I'm aware that the barrier has been destroyed, however."

"Not to worry. He's quite the foe. Even I didn't notice until now."

The owner of this magic energy must've foiled the restraining magic and protected the city from the initial attack. Since Rufus was up against the imperial army, he guessed that some soldiers could fight against magic, but the person in question had remained hidden until now. For a split second, as though to show off his power and invite the king outside, he unleashed an immense surge of magic energy.

He must be an arrogant man. I can finally meet the true Dragon Emperor, it seems. Rufus's mouth twisted into a conniving grin.



THE first blast blew away two sorcerers as it shook the ground and destroyed the massive door, barrier and all. With a deafening roar, an avalanche of soldiers from the first unit flooded the basement where General South was being held. The fourth unit rushed to the center of the temple behind Hadis.

"All units, charge! Find the sorcerers first!" Hadis ordered.

Even if the army didn't have magic, if they couldn't handle a handful of

sorcerers, they had no right to call themselves members of the imperial army. With these thoughts in mind, Hadis shouted before he felt himself grow dizzy. The soldier he was friendly with caught his staggering body.

“A-Are you all right, Baker, sir?” the soldier asked with worry.

Feeling that his words and actions were mismatched, Hadis waved his hand. “You don’t have to be polite with me. I’m fine. I’m just a little tired because I used magic without sleeping.”

“Y-You didn’t sleep... Th-That’s true, but can you even sleep in this situation?”

“I can’t because you guys are all useless,” Hadis replied, unable to hide his true feelings. “And your meals aren’t good for digestion. I didn’t even drink any medicine either.”

“Y-You sure you don’t want to rest?!”

“Everyone will die if I do.”

As though to affirm Hadis’s words, a booming explosion sounded from beyond the walls. Screams filled the temple as several soldiers were crushed by the debris. Hadis clicked his tongue, but before he could swing his sword, a soldier spotted the sorcerers.

“Up there! They’re on the walls and on the roof! After them! Don’t let them escape!” the soldier yelled.

“Don’t falter! Keep attacking!” said another.

“Trust Baker!”

It was great that the soldiers were listening to orders, but he was a little disappointed when he heard the last comment. While Hadis was being supported, a well-built soldier called out to him.

“What’s wrong, Baker? Did you get attacked?”

“No, just a little tired,” the soldier offering support said before turning to Hadis. “I’m sorry for relying on you so much.”

The burly soldier was slack-jawed by the response, but he walked around and helped Hadis from the other side.

"I'm sorry, but I need you to bear with us for a bit longer. If you fall, it'll affect our morale."

"Not really. You just need to listen to my previous orders," Hadis replied. "Once you find General South, my role is over."

"That may be so, but we need you right now."

Hadis stared back blankly as the well-built soldier looked around before speaking once more. "It's a waste to keep you as a baker. Why don't you join us?"

"Don't say that," the other replied. "He's in the emperor's faction."

"Yeah, yeah. Right. But you've been helping us out even though we're against the emperor. You're a good-natured guy."

Hadis had never been told that before, and he tried to find an excuse for his actions. "Well, I'm indebted to that old lady."

The old lady, who'd realized that Hadis was off to battle, worriedly squeezed his hand and handed him a piece of bread to eat. Hadis loved this bread; it had a simple flavor, but it couldn't be copied.

"And the people of the city were worried about us..." he continued.

The sorrys, thank yous, pleases, and good lucks that Hadis had received from the people flashed in his mind along with the explosions underground. He felt that those lives shouldn't be harmed by that booming sound.

"And if I abandon you guys, my wife will be disappointed in me," Hadis muttered.

"You've got a wife?! Then you really need to make it home."

"Y-You'll be fine! We'll risk our lives to ensure you get home safely."

The emperor was bewildered by these soldiers who were assisting him and even pledged their lives to bring him home.

"We've gravely injured seven sorcerers! The locations of the others have been confirmed, or we're currently in hot pursuit!"

"Seventy-six injured and twenty-nine dead in the fourth unit!"

Hadis received these reports and raised his head after a short moment. "Have the injured fall back immediately. We still have enough forces," he ordered.

"Yessir!"

"We've found General South! He's safe!"

Cheers rose from the soldiers, and Hadis breathed a sigh of relief before pushing the backs of the two soldiers who propped him up.

"Then this is as far as I'll go. The fourth unit should also retreat to the city under General South's orders," Hadis said.

"As far as you'll go? What are you going to do, Baker?" a soldier asked.

"The troublesome one still remains. Retreat quickly, or you'll die," he warned.

"Baker," a voice called.

Hadis turned around to see South calling out to him.

It hadn't even been a day, but South had grown a stubble and he looked horribly exhausted. He was borrowing a soldier's shoulder, but he could walk on his own. However, he was missing his right arm.

"I heard what happened. Thank you for saving me and my army," he said.

Hadis had nothing to say. He, along with the other troops, glanced at the missing arm, causing South to give a dry laugh.

"The first blast got me. I'd stayed vigilant, but we were up against a big shot. The five hundred soldiers at the temple all became corpses in the blink of an eye. That was the King of South Kratos."

The excited air died down in an instant, but Hadis motioned towards the exit with his chin. "You should hurry and get that treated. If you contract tetanus, it might endanger your life," the emperor said.

"You don't falter even upon hearing his name. Why did you save us, Baker?" South asked.

Hadis frowned, but South made a fist with his left hand and raised his head after making his resolve.

"You're the Dragon Emperor!" the general declared.

“That’s exactly right! You *are* the Dragon Emperor!” a voice boomed as a magical ray of light fired from above, aiming straight for South.

Hadis pulled the general’s shoulder back and blocked the attack with his Heavenly Sword. The scattered magic power shot through the pillars and walls of the temple, causing the ceiling to crumble. South and his soldiers fell to the ground as they looked on in awe.

“Th-The Heavenly Sword...” South murmured.

“Hurry and run!” yelled Hadis.

“Wh-Why did you save us?!”

Hadis refrained from clicking his tongue but couldn’t hide his irritation at the trivial question amidst the clamor of despair.

“Just shut up! This is *my* country! What’s wrong with defending it?!” Hadis roared.

“Very good! A true king should be able to discern what to destroy and what to spare!” the voice spoke again.

The intensity of the attacks increased, and magic energy exploded in front of Hadis’s eyes. He was able to dodge a direct hit, but a sliver of blood dripped from his cheek as the shrapnel grazed his face.

“B-Baker!”

“Shut up and retreat!” Hadis yelled. “You’re in the way!”

Before he could finish his orders, an attack came from his blind spot. He couldn’t stand firm, and he was blown through the wall of the temple and thrown into the air. Immediately after, another blow came from above. Unable to land, the impact slammed him against the wall of a building, and he slid down.

“Hadis, you’ll lose if you’re bothered about involving others,” Rave said.

Hadis knew this, of course, but the residents of the city hadn’t evacuated just yet. He wanted to keep collateral damages to a minimum until Jill retrieved the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort to defeat the enemy.

It really is tough being a married man, he thought. He had much to do. He spat out some blood from his injured mouth and stood back up.

“That was an excellent performance you displayed earlier. This country is your plaything,” the unfamiliar man said. He was floating in the air against the sky of dawn. A well-dressed, middle-aged man; his elegant face resembled a certain prince’s. He placed a hand over his chest and gave a graceful bow. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Dragon Emperor. I’m honored that we’re able to meet. Do you know who I am?”

“I’m not interested,” Hadis said curtly, clenching his Heavenly Sword.

The man laughed and smugly ruffled his bangs. “Hm, I suppose the real deal acts differently from the others. But it’s a bit lonely to be treated so coldly. We were tied together by fate from the moment we were born.”

The man’s black pupils hidden under his golden bangs glimmered dangerously. The eldest prince of Kratos was born with golden hair like the moonlight and obsidian eyes. He flipped the color scheme of the Dragon Emperor and was the Goddess’s guardian.

“Treat me kindly. I’m the Dragon Emperor’s replacement, a pitiable fake who’s been tasked with dedicating myself to the Goddess in your stead.”

The smell of blood permeated the air. His dark hair fluttering in the wind, Hadis narrowed his golden eyes and raised his Heavenly Sword.



“YOU don’t have to die with me.”

South looked up at the sky in awe as he saw the silver glow of magic clash against each other and remembered his previous master’s words.

“No matter what, this empire will remain. I fear most for Radia right after I lose. If the Dragon Consort has really appeared, the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort will appear at the temple. After I pass, Kratos may use that as an opening to steal it. I’m not even sure if we can give the treasure to the rumored Dragon Consort.”

South didn’t want George to talk as though he expected to lose, but because

he understood the risks, he divulged his reasons for revolt to his general. The current Rave imperial family may not be worthy of its name. The Heavenly Sword he possessed was a fake that he secretly obtained from Kratos.

Even so, George Teos Rave stood up to fight and protect the present and future of the Rave Empire. He was prepared to be called a fool by future generations. Moved by George's unwavering heart to protect his country and his family, South and his men decided to follow his orders. George was their Dragon Emperor and their home. With these thoughts in mind, they stuck by his side.

"If I lose and the Dragon Emperor is victorious..."

South didn't want to hear those words.

"If a day comes where you find that Dragon Emperor to be worthy of becoming the Rave Emperor, and you feel the urge to protect him..."

Such a thing would never happen.

"Endure the embarrassment and hear the mocking laughs of those who call you a rebel while swearing your allegiance to him. The new Rave Empire and a place you can call home will be there."

Don't ever let a day like that come.

"General South, that baker..." a soldier muttered.

Don't believe it to be true. Don't be tempted to kneel.

The power that South saw was dazzlingly bright, like the break of dawn, as a single tear rolled down his cheek. It was the power that protected them. It was the sign of defeat, mourning, and hope.

"You must be General South," a young girl's voice said, snapping South from his daze.

The general turned around and saw the girl look surprised for a split second before turning stern once more. Her golden hair shimmered like the sunlight and her amethyst eyes proudly stared ahead. She was an adorable child, but she had no openings and was prepared to fight. Introductions were unnecessary; he knew that he was standing before the rumored Dragon

Consort.

"I will retrieve the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort to save His Majesty," she said without fear while faced with South's needling gaze. She instead seemed to challenge him. "What will you do?"

"Why do you ask? We know our position well enough," South replied.

The girl assessed him before she broke out into a charming smile. "My Majesty is cool, isn't he?"

His jaw dropped to the ground. A baby dragon growled from behind her and popped his head out, causing the soldiers to fall on the floor.

"A-A gold-eyed, black dragon!"

"S-Seriously?! Why does the Dragon King look like that?!"

"Raw, are you going to stay here? I'll go on ahead," Jill said.

"Rawr!"

The girl nodded and turned away.

"H-Hey, are you going to leave him here?! It'll be dangerous!" South hastily called out.

"Then protect him. He can't fly, you see."

South and his men couldn't hide their shock at her short reply, but she didn't turn around and rushed straight towards the temple. The flightless baby dragon wobbled over and pointed its large eyes at the soldiers.

He's still so young... South thought. That girl and the emperor must be young as well. If they didn't receive protection, they'd die. The general's missing right arm tingled. He couldn't fight as a soldier anymore—this battle would be his last on the frontlines.

"We still have the military flags of the Rave Empire, don't we? It's not enough to just bring their foolish flag down," he said.

His troops saluted, ready to do their job. South felt like the gold-eyed, black dragon by his feet smiled.



JILL was running toward the temple depths while feeling the intense battle that ensued behind her. Oddly enough, she didn't get lost. Even without the gold ring, she was able to find her destination.

She hadn't fought much during her flight here, and she was overflowing with stamina and magic energy, but she sensed that she couldn't win against her enemy. Even Hadis could only try to immobilize the foe.

Any mediocre weapon would get me killed in a flash, she thought as she approached the altar. In the depths was a marble statue of a woman carrying a dragon with its outspread wings and a sword. An unusually colored gem was fitted in the hilt of the sword that the woman carried.

Red and blue? Was the light playing tricks? The colors didn't mix but were intertwined with each other. The jewel of condensed magic was red as blood and blue as the sky with a spectacular glimmer.

"This is it..." Jill murmured.

The moment she outstretched her left hand, she was repelled. The magic seal had rejected her, perhaps due to the lack of her ring. A dull pain coursed through her fingertips. She took a deep breath and faced the statue once more —time was of the essence, and it wasn't enough to just protect this treasure. If she didn't use this weapon, she wouldn't be able to save Hadis.

I'll brute force my way through the seal! Jill once again extended her left hand, but a powerful gust of wind pushed her away.

"WhO is It?"

A voice echoed directly in Jill's head, causing her eyes to grow wide with shock.

"WhO is It? WhO arE yOu?"

Her left fingertips started to burn from the magic. Gritting her teeth through the pain, Jill yelled back, "I'm the Dragon Consort!"

For a moment, the wind died down before a black substance grabbed her left wrist.

Huh?!

“The Dragon Consort. The DrAgon ConsOrt! The DrAgon ConsOrt! The DrAgOn COnsOrt! A nEw DrAgon ConsOrt, a nEw sacrifice, a pAwn to prOve IOve to the empEror!”

Jill stood firm, trying not to fall, but she was slowly dragged in. She felt the reddish-blue jewel grow larger as the magic swelled up, trying to swallow her whole.

“Wh-What’s going on?!”

“I should’ve never loved that man.”

The black despair expanded in front of her eyes until all she saw was darkness.

Chapter 6: The Happy Family Plan of the Dragon Emperor and His Wife

A girl was crying.

A girl wearing a flower crown was crying. She was crying before her shattered love.

A girl who had accepted the consort's crown was crying. She was crying from the pain of the love that had pierced through her.

"Who are you? Did you fall in love with him again? You never learn, do you? That man doesn't even understand love."

That's not true. His Majesty said that he loved me. He's changed.

"Gods don't change. You're only a shield so that he can flee from love."

No! His Majesty didn't use me as a shield. I have to save him.

"But you don't have the gold ring. Are you still going to protect him? He can only protect logic."

I don't care about the ring. I promised him. I promised him that I'd never abandon him. That's what I've decided.

"I see. Of course, that's what love is. If you give up, that would be logical. Hang in there, new 'me.' And please...don't ever forgive that man's love."

Jill's eyes snapped open. She'd apparently lost consciousness for a short while. *What...was that dream?* She got up while rubbing her temples. The rumbling ground and booming explosions snapped her back to reality.

"Where is it?!" she cried. "Where's the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort?!"

She looked up, but the statue was no longer there. It had vanished as though it never existed in the first place. However, she felt something in her clenched fist. Jill gingerly opened her palms and found a small, reddish-blue jewel inside.

“The Sacred Treasure...of the Dragon Consort.”

It was a beautiful gem. That much was easy to see, and it was obviously no ordinary stone. But Jill was at a loss.

“Wh-What am I supposed to do with this?! It’s not a sword or a spear or... Wh-Whoa!”

The gemstone glowed, silencing her. It shifted and melted before enlarging itself into a sword, then a spear—the weapons looked exactly like how Jill had envisioned in her mind.

“Th-This is awesome! Can it transform into any weapon I desire? The Sacred Treasure’s amazing!” she said with glee.

Moved by the spectacle, Jill stood up and leapt onto the partially destroyed roof of the temple. Half of the magical barrier surrounding the city was gone, proving that the attacks were successful.

“Jill!” a familiar voice yelled.

“Camila? Zeke?!” she called back.

“Hop on!” Zeke shouted.

She grabbed onto her subordinate, unstably riding a patchy dragon, and was lifted into the air.

“Why are you guys here? You can ride dragons?!” Jill cried.

“Princess Elentzia dragged us out here and then ordered us to charge in!” Camila replied.

“We can only float, fall, or go forward! That’s it!” Zeke said.

“Which means you guys can be my footing,” Jill remarked. “That’s more than enough!”

“That’s your train of thought?!”

The dragons were flying around, luring the attacks of the enemy, and the residents were being evacuated through the holes in the barrier. Rescue dragons had arrived as well.

Hadis noticed an attack headed for the people and deflected it, leaving his

back wide open. He was slammed to the ground. Jill narrowed her eyes on the profile of the man chasing after the emperor. She recognized his face. From the letter and the magic aura, she knew that he wasn't a normal person.

"The King of South Kratos!" she gasped.

"Wait, you mean *the* King of Kratos, right?! Why's he here without an army?!" Zeke groaned.

"You guys, go rescue the people in the temple," Jill ordered. "Raw's there too." The jewel within her hand transformed into a glowing, golden bow. "I won't let you get near him!" she roared.

She fired an arrow towards the insolent man trying to hurt Hadis. A barrage of magic arrows rained from the sky as dawn was breaking.



THE attacks from the magical barrier were intense. It was aware that it'd be destroyed if it allowed help to arrive from outside and sensed that it couldn't allow the residents to flee.

Because Risteard had arrived on the pretext that he was investigating the area, his unit of Dragon Knights was small. His men were forced to continuously dodge the alternating magic attacks. As time progressed, the skills of the Dragon Knights and the stamina and abilities of the dragons themselves started to show. A dragon's cry sounded from afar. It belonged to a green dragon. The brown and patchy dragons had already been shot down.

"Number three has fallen! I'll go and support!" a knight said.

"Don't get shot down!" warned Risteard.

The majority of the dragons that remained were green; the prince didn't know how much longer they could keep this up. Even Risteard's reins were slippery with his sweat, and his personal dragon growled with worry while carrying him on her back.

"Don't worry, Brynhild. As long as we are still standing, it won't be a loss!"

Another scream pierced the skies. A Dragon Knight was blown from the impact and flew off a green dragon. Unfortunately, the lasers redirected their

focus of attack on the falling knight. Brynhild sensed Risteard's slight movements and flew straight to the plummeting victim, allowing Risteard to catch the knight. However, this left the red dragon's side defenseless; a beam of magic flew straight towards her. She had no time to dodge.

Brynhild can endure the attack! Risteard thought.

She was a powerful gold-eyed, red dragon. The prince clutched his reins and braced himself for the impact, but a torrent of fire burned the magic beam and negated the attack.

The fire came from a dragon that was forming a neat formation. With a composed face, it wiped out the magic attacks. Shocked, Risteard looked up at the sky, the relentless attacks faltering for a brief moment. A squad of Dragon Knights flew in a neat line, and the prince couldn't hide his surprise at the person in front.

"S-Sister?! H-How?!" he stammered.

"You've still got a long way to go, Risteard, if you've got your hands full with a simple magical barrier like that," Elentzia said with a fearless smile.

Risteard couldn't help himself from refuting. "You make it sound easy, but those are Kratos's anti-flight magic circles."

"And what of it?" The usually waffling Elentzia was unwavering on the battlefields. "You take charge of rescuing the residents. Vissel's army will be here in a bit. Hurry! I'll show you newbie Dragon Knights how it's done."

Risteard wanted to argue, but the magical barrier started to glow again. Elentzia didn't flinch. She looked joyful as she unsheathed her sword.

"Neutrah Dragon Knights, let's go! Disperse! Increase your altitude!"

The Dragon Knights, in a crescent formation, spiraled upwards. As the attacks of the barrier aimed towards its target passing through the clouds, the beams started to coalesce into one huge ray. Elentzia's red dragon, Rosa, flying at the apex, did a somersault in the air before taking a nosedive. She flew dangerously close to the magical barrier. A gush of flames expelled from Rosa's mouth, wiping out half the attack with its fiery blaze. The entire scene unfolded within minutes.

Risteard swallowed the lump in his throat and regained his composure. “Leave the rest to them! Prioritize evacuating the residents!” he ordered in a booming voice.

“A-Are you sure? The magical barrier is still—” a knight started.

“I’d be ecstatic if she was shot down!”

His sour grapes were met with dry smiles from his knights. Realizing that he’d been inadvertently biting his lip, he relaxed his mouth.

Things were just getting started. This empire and everyone within it were going to get stronger. As though to promise this future, a shower of golden arrows rained from above.



BEHIND the clash of blades, the man with dark eyes smiled.

“Ah, I forgot to introduce myself. I’m the King of Kratos, Rufus. Just Rufus is fine, though. My brilliant son forced me into retirement. I’m still in my thirties, but I’m leading a retired life. Isn’t that awful? But I’ve lived a gloomy life, anyway. I didn’t mind waiting for my time to end, but I was told that the Dragon Consort had appeared! I just had to meet her, so I came here.”

What a talkative guy, Hadis thought, swinging his Heavenly Sword up from below. “I’ve said it before. I’m not interested.”

“I see, I see. So that’s how you think and talk. It may be hard to believe, but I was once a contemplative lad in my youth. The life of a Kratos king is nothing but playing second fiddle to the Dragon Emperor. It’s only natural that I was curious about the expressions, thoughts, smiles, sobs, and fighting style of the Dragon Emperor!”

Rufus swung down his blade. It looked very similar to the Heavenly Sword, and not a crack could be seen even when they crossed swords. Hadis had, in fact, recognized the weapon—it was the false Heavenly Sword that his uncle had wielded, created from the Sacred Spear of the Goddess.

None other than the King of Kratos wielded this weapon, the man tasked with being the substitute for the Dragon Emperor by becoming the Goddess’s

husband. He could unleash as much power as the Heavenly Sword, and Hadis only had half his strength at the moment.

"That's what that woman decided on her own. It's got nothing to do with me," Hadis replied.

"So that's how you talk! It's fun getting answers!" Rufus cackled with delight. "This trip was all worth it!"

"Cool. Then hurry on home."

Rufus's lips curled up in a smile at Hadis's cold words. "I can't do that! I haven't met the Dragon Consort yet!" The emperor narrowed his eyes while the king licked his lips. "Our fight only matters if the Dragon Consort is here."

"What do you mean?"

"Ah, so you don't know. The Dragon God of Logic is certainly logical. He immediately forgets anything inconvenient to retain his rationality!"

Hadis lost his balance as his sword was parried, and he received a blow of magic energy in his solar plexus.

"I pity her, you see," Rufus said. "I pity our Goddess of love, who falls while remembering everything."

The king scattered his magic, causing Hadis to reflexively spread his arms and create a barrier.

"You choose to protect the city. Then I'll take your kind offer," Rufus said with a smile, swinging his sword down. His physical attack transformed into one surrounded by magic energy.

Hadis was unable to stand firm, and he plunged to the ground on his back. He coughed up blood, but immediately stood back up. If he stayed down, he'd die. As he'd expected, Rufus followed up on his attack from above.

"Show me your true nature, Dragon Emperor!" Rufus shouted, reflecting Hadis in his dark eyes.

As the king turned around to swing his sword, a flurry of arrows rained down on him, stopping him from finishing his attack.

“Rave,” Hadis muttered.

“Yeah. That’s Missy.”

Hadis saw the light from the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort. Like a shooting star, a girl descended in front of him.

“This is the end of the road for you, Your Majesty, the King—no, the King of South Kratos,” she said.

Rufus defended himself from the magic arrows and landed on the ground before turning to face her. “You know of me? Of course, you were a lady from the Cervel household. You must be the Dragon Consort.”

“That’s correct.”

She changed the golden bow into a golden sword and pointed her blade towards the king. Her small back and figure were dazzlingly beautiful, fitting for the god of war’s daughter. Hadis reached for her.



HE looks awful, Jill thought while looking at her husband. He was standing, but he was covered in lacerations. *No doubt he’ll need three whole nights of rest*. She couldn’t bring herself to punch, tie up, or hang him outside using the Sacred Treasure when he was in such a frail state.

“No, Jill. You can’t win. Stand back,” he said.

She didn’t expect much from him, but she wouldn’t have imagined Hadis saying those words to her. She snapped, grabbed his outstretched arm, and threw him over her shoulder. She grabbed him by the collar and yanked him up to her face as he just lay there on the ground, stunned.

“What did you just say, Your Majesty?” she hissed.

“U-Um, even if you have the Sacred Treasure, you can’t w-win... J-Jill, I can’t breathe.”

“After all this time, those are your first words to me, my idiot husband?!”

She was tempted to choke him out. A shocked Rufus was behind her, but she didn’t care as she proceeded to threaten the emperor.

“Isn’t there anything else you have to say?! You left on your own to become a baker!” she yelled.

“S-Sorry, but leave this fight to me. Jill, you should—”

“Are you still talking back?! Do you know how worried I was?!”

Hadis fell silent. Jill wiped the sweat around her eyes with her arm. *Sweat! It's sweat! I'm not that weak!* She turned towards Rufus.

“You must be the man who wounded My Majesty,” she said.

“You’re more or less correct. I heard that you were a small girl, but I didn’t think you were really a child,” Rufus replied.

“It’s immature to fight against a child, don’t you think? Do you have any intentions of retreating?” she ventured.

“None. I’m very, *very* curious about you. You’re the substitute for the Goddess—in other words, we’re in a similar position. But that doesn’t mean a single thing if you’re not strong. I find it a bit lacking to go against a Sacred Treasure without the gold ring, but I’d like to request a match.”

Jill briefly glanced at her left hand. Indeed, she had no gold ring since her magic powers hadn’t fully recovered. The ring was proof of the Dragon Consort, and it was only natural that the strength of the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort would also change in tandem with one’s magic power.

“But you’re still a lady hailing from the Cervel family. Surely, you’d be able to make this entertaining!” Rufus said.

“Jill! Ugh!” Hadis hadn’t learned his lesson and tried to step forward but was kicked back by his wife. He was in the way.

“Wow. You run quite the tight ship with a submissive husband, don’t you, Dragon Consort?” Rufus laughed.

“You’ve no time to be distracted!” Jill roared.

She clenched her sword and swung it at the king. Rufus easily received the attack and gracefully parried her blade, shoving her to the side. Jill tried to regain her posture, but her back was wide open, causing her to receive a blow from the hilt of a sword from behind.

Hadis stood up and yelled. “Jill! Stop, I’m your opponent!”

“Hm, is that all? I expected a bit more from you,” Rufus said, sounding disappointed.

Jill twirled around and landed on the ground, but the king slashed from above. The intensity gouged the ground in a circular shape, and Jill used both hands from below to push back the attack with her golden blade. She was being pushed down.

He’s strong! She’d figured as much since even Hadis was being pushed back, but she never expected such a difference in power. His magic powers and weapon obviously trumped hers.

“I’m disappointed, Dragon Consort. Perhaps he should get a new one?” Rufus guffawed while pushing down from above.

Jill was on one knee as she groaned. “A...new one, you say?”

“Precisely. If I kill you, the Dragon Emperor will search for a new consort. That’s logic, after all.”

Jill gritted her teeth and raised her head. Her left ring finger still remained empty—she didn’t have enough magic energy. The glow from her golden weapon started to dim as Rufus narrowed his eyes with pity.

“Did you think you were special? Don’t be fooled; this is the extent of the Dragon Emperor’s love. Your love isn’t nearly enough. In front of logic, even the Goddess of love couldn’t reach him.”

The words, *“I should’ve never loved that man,”* swirled around in her head. Was it a dream she’d seen earlier? Her imagination? *No, that was definitely a fragment of truth related to that good-for-nothing myth. And so what? I’m not in love with the Dragon God or the Dragon Emperor!*

Her love wasn’t a misunderstanding. She needed her willpower to push through this. She put her strength in her legs and stood up, causing her golden weapon to glow strong once more.

“There’s absolutely no way that my love for His Majesty isn’t enough...!” she bellowed. Rufus widened his eyes in shock as he was pushed back by her. “In

fact, I've been holding back!"

Jill swung her sword to the side, changing the blade to a spear. She aimed for Rufus, who was blown diagonally from her, and brandished her golden spear. She threw her weapon straight at Rufus, who caught the weapon right before it pierced him. The Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort then transformed into a whip, entangling the king. The end of the whip connected to the ring finger of Jill's left hand as a golden band appeared.

"Tell the Goddess that I love His Majesty more than she ever could!" she yelled.

She grabbed the whip while in the air and threw Rufus onto the ground. With a rumble, the king sank into the earth, and the impact crumbled the destroyed buildings. Finishing its role, the whip disappeared. Suddenly, as though a huge weight was placed on her shoulders, Jill became exhausted. She'd used too much of her magic energy.

She fell from the sky and Hadis flew towards her, catching his wife in midair.

"Jill! You're being far too reckless! How can you use the Sacred Treasure without the ring?!" Hadis scolded.

"Y-Your Majesty... Look..." With haggard breath, Jill spread her left hand. The gold ring had returned. The middle of the band was fitted with a small reddish-blue jewel and had taken on a new form. "Look... I got the ring back... I haven't recovered all my magic energy, though," she murmured.

Hadis blinked and said shyly, "Y-Your love is really amazing, huh?!"

"Of course... I'm *your* Dragon Consort, and no one else's!"

She hugged Hadis's neck, and he hugged her back.

"Yeah. You're the only one for me. I only need you as my Dragon Consort," he replied.

He always returned Jill's feelings, just like she wanted.

"My wife's so cool. I wanted to see you, Jill," Hadis replied, knowing he sometimes pressed her buttons.

"What are you talking about? You left *me* behind! And you got all beat up

while I wasn't here!" she raged.

"Huh? S-Sorry. B-But..."

"Enough with your excuses! Give me a moment! Once I recover, I'll smack you around with the Sacred Treasure!" she vowed.

"Me? You're mad that I'm injured, but you're going to hit me too?!" Hadis squealed.

"It's fine if I do it! Do you know how worried I was?!"



Jill tried to scold Hadis, but cries of joy drowned out any complaints she had.

“...Your Majesty.”

Above the temple, the flag had fallen. The sun was rising. Amidst the rays of the early morning sun, another flag was raised in its stead—a flag with no “X” symbol. The crimson flag with black embroidery of a dragon was the unmistakable mark of the Rave imperial army’s flag. Camila and Zeke, along with the rest of the Rave imperial army, were waving under it.

They’d won.

“We did it,” Jill said. Relief and other ineffable emotions bubbled up from within her, causing her to lose the will to scold her husband.

Hadis nodded coolly. “Yeah. Oh, Risteard and Elentzia are here too?”

Someone rang a bell to notify others of their victory as dragons soared in the skies, giving their blessing. The magical barrier that surrounded the city had disappeared.

“Does Risteard know about the whole bakery thing?” Hadis asked.

“I told him, of course,” Jill replied.

“Urk... He’ll be noisy again.”

Jill tried to laugh and tell the emperor that he was getting what he deserved, but she tugged on his sleeve as they descended towards the ground.

“Your Majesty,” she murmured.

General South and his army had gathered beneath them.

“Are they planning on fighting me? This’ll be a drag...” Hadis muttered.

With a sigh, Hadis touched the ground with his wife still in his arms. The Heavenly Sword was in his other hand, and he stood in front of the soldiers. South, who greeted the couple and stood in front, shouted as loud as he could.

“Salute His Majesty, the Dragon Emperor and Her Highness, the Dragon Consort!”

The soldiers all lined up and gave a beautiful salute. Jill was about to burst out

laughing when she saw her husband's shocked face up close.

I sort of expected this, she thought. She'd been able to anticipate this development, but Hadis looked genuinely taken aback and he started to become flustered.

"Huh? What? Wait, huh?" he stammered.

"If it's not too late, I'd like permission for us to protect you," General South said with a bandage over his right shoulder. He took a step closer to stand before a panicked Hadis. "I cannot prove my worth as a soldier anymore, but my subordinates would surely be of use to you, Your Majesty. If I could beg for your consent, I'd like for you to allow us to call ourselves the imperial army once more."

"Wait, stop. That's not what I want to ask. I thought you guys hated me," Hadis said. He couldn't hide his thunderstruck expression.

South smiled. "You've saved us, Baker. Thank you."

"Uh, sure?"

"You're our savior, and our new home."

Hadis's eyes grew wide with shock. He was covered in wounds and dirt; his unkempt appearance was nothing like his usual composed and beautiful exterior.

"That's all I have to say," South said.

"...Okay," replied Hadis. Despite it all, the emperor's eyes shone brilliantly and didn't lose to the dazzle of the sun.

"Rawr!"

A baby dragon hopped onto Hadis's head. Jill jumped onto the ground since Hadis had lost his posture.

"Hey, don't do that! That's dangerous!" the emperor scolded the baby.

"Rawr! Rawr!"

After running around Hadis's back, Raw leapt into Jill's arms, acting spoiled. She gave a forced laugh and petted his head.

“You worked hard, didn’t you, Raw? You were so cool,” Jill said.

“Rawr!”

“But didn’t you just come from above?”

Raw swiftly looked away, but she grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and glared menacingly.

“Hey, are you able to fly now?”

“R-Rawr!”

“Hey, don’t run! Wait!”

Raw wriggled from Jill’s grasp and ran away. He bumped into Camila’s leg before clinging onto Zeke’s.

Exasperated, Jill looked over at Hadis. “Raw’s exactly like you, Your Majesty,” she said.

Hadis attempted to deny the claim. “That’s not—”

“Hm, what a wonderful blow of love,” a voice came from behind, putting a damper on the mood.

Jill reflexively grew tense, and everyone else followed suit as they prepared for battle.

“Rufus der Kratos!”

“You can still fight?!”

“Of course I can. If I died in one hit, I’d just look like a fool. Take a look,” the king said casually, indifferent to the fact that he was completely surrounded. He raised his cracked monocle in the air. “It’s been a while since someone managed to crack these. Heh, you’re not fighting with the Goddess for the Dragon Emperor’s love, but you’re competing for the amount of love you have *for* him. Very interesting, Dragon Consort. I can see why Gerald wants you. I’ve grown rather fond of you myself.”

“Huh?” Jill replied.

“I’ll make you mine. We’re both mere replacements, so I think we’d make a perfect couple.”

Suddenly, a shadow loomed over his creepy smile. Hadis pounced and slashed with his Heavenly Sword, cutting Rufus's long hair and shattering his monocle. Rufus took to the air.

"I'll kill you," Hadis growled quietly.

Rufus flew in the air with a gleeful smile as Hadis's gaze penetrated his body. The king proceeded to put his index and middle finger on his lips.

"The wrath of the Dragon Emperor, yum. I want you even more now. I'll definitely come fetch you, Dragon Consort," Rufus said. He blew Jill a kiss, causing her entire body to shudder with disgust.

Hadis widened his eyes with rage and swung his Heavenly Sword down. Before the blade could ever reach Rufus, he disappeared.

He can teleport too... I can see why Prince Gerald has trouble with him, Jill thought.

She gave a thoughtful frown, but Hadis's lips were curled with fury as his eyes looked unfocused.

"I swear I'll kill him!"

"Your Majesty, please calm yourself down," Jill said. "The enemy has already retreated."

"Retreated? He said he'd make you his. He's clearly declaring war on me."

Jill thought on it for a moment and finally realized the root of Hadis's anger. "H-He's not being serious. He's just trying to provoke you," she said frantically before being cut off. "Ugh! What is it, Your Majesty?"

Hadis silently crouched down and wiped Jill's face with his sleeves. "His breath or something from that last gesture might've touched you somehow," he said.

"I-I'm fine. Nothing's on me. You're a worrywart, Your Majesty."

"I shouldn't have let you fight him. Take off your clothes. I'll wash everything."

"Huh?! W-Wash?! Calm down, Your Majesty! I'm fine!"

"But I'm not! If I see him again, I'll kill him!"

"Hadis! Now's not the time to be fooling around!" Risteard bellowed from above. "Vissel's army is coming!"

Everyone had stayed silent during Hadis's eccentric behavior, but they all grew stiff and swallowed nervously. Even the emperor raised his head.

That was sooner than I'd thought.

There was no longer a rebellion in Radia. However, there were clear traces of a battle having occurred; if force was employed to claim everyone here as rebels like at the imperial capital, all would be for naught.

"What should we do?" Jill asked.

Hadis sighed and stood up. "Don't worry. I'll talk to my older brother."

"I'll come along."

"I can handle it myself. South, follow the orders of my sister, Elentzia, and clean up the aftermath."

Jill clung onto Hadis's sleeve as the emperor gave out prompt orders. Hadis must've surely been exhausted, and she wanted to tag along with him. But he slowly released himself from her grasp.

"We won't fight anymore. Don't you worry," he said. "You've done your part very well. It's time for me to do mine."

"B-But you worked hard too, Your Majesty. I want to support you," she insisted.

"All I did was leave you and the imperial capital behind."

Jill knew this wasn't true. When she witnessed South and the others kneeling before the emperor, she knew he'd done far more. However, if she were to deny his claim, she wouldn't be able to scold him for leaving by himself. While Jill held her tongue, Hadis had apparently seen right through her thoughts.

"You wait here with Raw," he said calmly.

"I'm your wife. Or is there something you're hiding from me?"

Jill could only give a childish excuse, but Hadis blinked and laughed.

"I might be. Vissel knows me very well and understands me, too."

“B-But I want to know more about you, Your Maje—”

Hadis crouched down and put his finger over her lips. “But I want to act cool in front of you. Can’t I do that?”

That question was too sly. Now she couldn’t argue.

“I’ll have my older brother accept our happy family plan,” Hadis said with a smile under the sun’s rays. His glittering expression was breathtaking, and Jill could only frown.

She wasn’t told that he’d become this cool. Like a collar that ensnared her affectionate heart, her proof of love glimmered on the ring finger of her left hand.



HE’D had a bad feeling about it ever since he reached the Neutrahl duchy.

Risteard clearing himself of suspicion was within his predictions. Vissel’s half-brother was backed by a duke and was a capable man. He couldn’t be disposed of easily. However, Hadis leaving the imperial capital was outside his calculations. Should the Dragon Consort head to the city as well, the rebellion in Radia may truly be stopped.

He’d made haste during this trip, but the smoke in Radia that melted away under the morning sun’s rays had the Rave imperial army’s flag raised. It was difficult to claim that a revolt had occurred.

“Crown Prince Vissel, something’s flying this way,” a soldier said.

“It must be Hadis. All soldiers, halt,” Vissel ordered atop a horse.

Only he stepped forward. His younger brother in the skies, basked in the sunlight, was all tattered and dirty. No doubt he was injured as well. But he was beautiful, eclipsing the brilliance of even the Heavenly Sword in his hand. The infantry and the cavalry all stopped as a dragon landed in front of Vissel.

Once the crown prince got off his horse, Hadis dismounted his dragon and approached him. The former first confirmed the situation.

“What happened to General South?” Vissel asked.

"He said he'll obey me. He lost his right arm, so he won't be able to fight on the frontlines anymore, but I still want him to be in charge of military affairs," Hadis replied.

Vissel gave a cold nod. Soldiers liked powerful people. Many soldiers would be charmed by the sight of his younger brother soaring through the skies while wielding the Heavenly Sword. There was a fine line between awe and fear, and many would've felt the former.

"And are you going to forgive him?" Vissel asked.

"Yeah. He willingly kneeled before me."

"He'll betray you soon enough. They easily betrayed us by using loyalty as their excuse. We can't trust them."

Vissel reached out and wiped the dried blood from Hadis's face, and the emperor gave a forced smile.

"I still think that's fine," he said. "Jill said I'd be able to handle it."

Vissel's brows furrowed at the sound of her name. He'd found it most unpleasant.

"Do you fancy that little girl that badly?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"That's a source of weakness. She might hurt you one day. Do you still want her?"

"She protected me using the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort. That's more than enough." The unselfish Hadis continued to talk as though he'd gotten his hands on a priceless treasure. "Risteard and Elentzia, my siblings, also sided with me."

"They can all change their tune at the drop of a hat if the three dukes ever wish it to be so. Have you forgotten, Hadis? Have you forgotten what the Rave imperial family has done to you? To us?"

Hadis hadn't turned five yet when he summoned the Heavenly Sword and was thrown out of the imperial castle. His family sent him to the frontiers, never allowing him to unleash his true potential. They stubbornly refused to admit

that he was the Dragon Emperor, and the crown princes lost their lives by walking straight into the Goddess's traps. Consequently, Hadis was called back, berated as a monster, and a horrible battle resulted to get rid of the young boy. Their foolishness was limitless.

"To hide the issue of the bloodline, your biological father and your relatives were all killed," Vissel said. "This is a tainted country that will condone these acts without batting an eye."

"You're right."

"You're a strong kid who can look out for himself. You'll only hurt yourself if you have allies."

Vissel remembered very well the first time he received a letter from Hadis. He'd spent his days relentlessly ridiculed for being at the tail-end of the princes while others put pressure on him. And it was during that time that he had received the letter. He'd heard that the boy hadn't received a proper education, but the letter was written with neat handwriting, explaining logical ideas about the present and the future. Vissel didn't take every word at face value, but he was proud of his younger brother, who was growing up splendidly. He was ecstatic that he was called an "older brother" and was looked up to. That someone relied on him.

At the same time, he was pained by his younger brother's innocence, who hoped to one day meet his father and mother. Even if the young boy was trampled upon, he was strong enough to laugh, surrender, and forgive.

Even though you're not at fault for any of it, Vissel thought. He was determined to get rid of anyone who hurt his younger brother. This resolve had gotten him this far. He wouldn't allow Hadis to have unnecessary hope. The emperor wouldn't be seeing rosy dreams. These thoughts were all poisonous and would eat away at his beautiful younger brother. Yet, his brother continued to wish for this optimistic fantasy.

"Are you sure you don't want to annihilate everyone? You actually hate this empire and the Dragon God, don't you?" Vissel asked. He'd had a sneaking suspicion that his younger brother had these thoughts, but for the first time, the crown prince dared to pose this question.

Hadis closed his eyes before opening them once more. "Brother... No..." The emperor slowly and silently raised his Heavenly Sword towards the crown prince. "Vissel Teos Rave. Kneel before me."

Vissel had wished to see this one day. When he'd rounded up his younger brother's enemies and destroyed the empire and the Dragon God, he would've happily offered his head. Now was not the time yet. This needed to occur in the far future.

"If you don't, I shall treat you as a rebel and cut down you and your army," Hadis declared.

"Can you rebuild the imperial army with just the soldiers in Radia? Surely you can't fight against Kratos with that naivete," Vissel replied.

"I'll make peace with them."

Vissel widened his eyes, and Hadis gave a faint smile at his brother's expression.

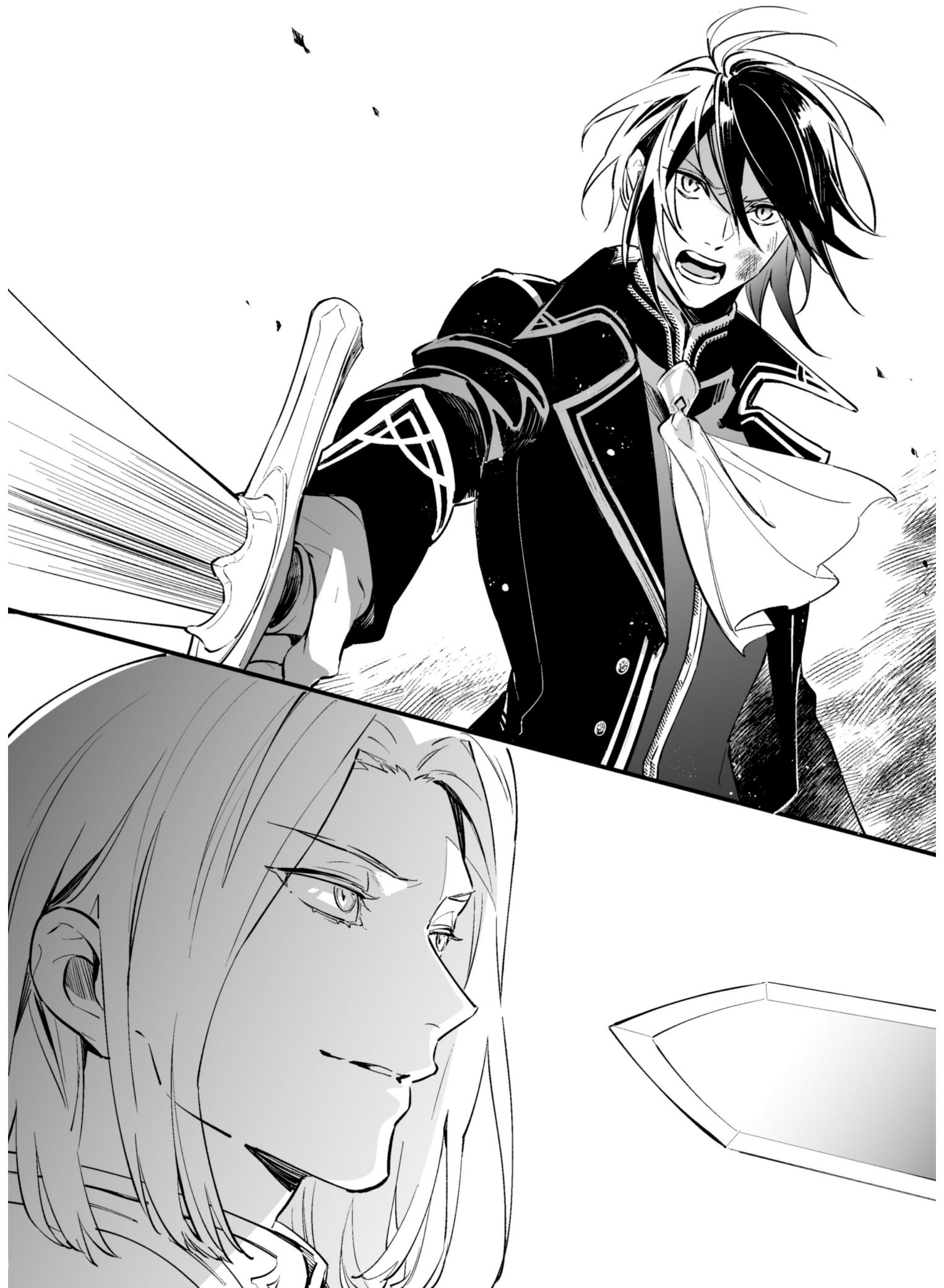
"We've signed a truce, and we're not at war anyway. I'll create a peace treaty."

"...Is this all to marry that girl?"

Hadis gave a dry smile, and Vissel, out of shock, couldn't stop himself from asking more questions.

"Are you not going to defeat that Goddess? You hated and despised her."

"I still hate her. She makes me sick. But since Jill will protect me, I'll choose a future that'll make her smile. This..." Hadis trailed off for a brief moment. He was fighting with himself. He hadn't forgotten and forgiven everything. But he was finally able to point his blade straight at his older brother and declared, "This is *my* country. And I'm the emperor, Hadis Teos Rave!"



Hadis's face was dirty, and his hands were covered in scratches, but the emperor chose his future without backing down.

"If you can't follow my orders, I'll cut you down with my Heavenly Sword. It's my tribute to you," he said.

Hadis had done the same to his uncle. Realizing this, Vissel looked towards his feet.

"Do you not need me anymore?" he asked.

"I do," Hadis replied immediately.

Vissel raised his head, but the blade unwaveringly remained pointed towards him. However, the corners of Hadis's mouth seemed to tremble as though he was holding something back.

"You treated me preciously, Brother," Hadis said. "It was truly important for me to become a paragon Dragon Emperor, and though you disliked how weak I was in contrast to your ideals, I was happy that you were by my side at all. But I don't want you to shoulder my weakness anymore. Those are *my* ideals as the Dragon Emperor."

Vissel was truly at a loss for words. He had to say something—anything. He needed to calm Hadis down, convince him, and have him reconsider. Yet, he was unable to utter a sound. Suddenly, someone kicked him from behind.

"You made your brother spill his feelings! 'I understand' is the only choice here. Some big brother you are!"

"P-Prince Risteard!"

"Say 'yes' right now! Are you going to make Hadis cry?! How can you call yourself his older brother?!" The crown prince's irritating half-brother grabbed Vissel by the collar and shook him violently.

An equally annoying young girl stepped in to stop the fuss.

"We followed His Majesty in secret! You've ruined it now..."

"Jill..." Hadis called out to the young girl. She jolted and turned around. "D-Did you hear everything?"

"Huh? I-I haven't heard anything at all!" she said.

"R-Really? Are you sure? Are you positive?"

"Y-Yes! I didn't hear about you trying to make peace with Kratos for me!"

Her face turned red, and Hadis, perhaps affected by this, flushed red as well. They both covered their faces with their hands, apparently embarrassed. *What farce is this?* Vissel thought.

"Hey, are you listening to me, Vissel?!" Risteard shouted.

"Stop it, Risteard. You've ruined everything," his half-sister said, peeling the prince away from Vissel. "Have you finished your sibling quarrel? You must already have your answer," Elentzia said. She was generally indecisive, but she looked dependable when it counted.

Vissel pursed his lips. *The ideal Dragon Emperor... Shouldering his weakness... I didn't think he thought of me like that.* His wishes and his younger brother's—their ideals—had differed without the crown prince noticing. This revelation made him feel a bit lonely, but...

"If Hadis wishes it, there's nothing I can do. He's my younger brother," Vissel said.

"Really? You won't force Hadis to do as you desire?!" Risteard asked.

"I've never done such a thing. Ah, by the way, Prince Risteard. Did you know?" Vissel smiled and pointed his finger at the second prince, making him falter. "I'm older than you by a year and four months."

Elentzia let out a loud snicker while a red-faced Risteard tried to counter him. "S-So what? I won't—"

"Ah, rest assured. I'm not planning on acting like your older brother. I'm very incompatible with your bloodline, you see. Just thinking about your older brother makes me nauseous."

"Y-You know nothing about my older brother!"

"I don't. He came all the way to talk to the tail-end of the princes who was holed up in the library. While he had a fine younger brother who he shared a biological mother with, he naïvely declared me as his younger brother as well."

He claimed that if he were to die, Hadis would be called back, and he entrusted the rest in my hands before he passed away. I know nothing of an idiot like him,” Vissel finished.

Risteard struggled to give a response, but Elentzia narrowed her eyes.

“He left the Rave imperial family, your natural enemies, to you,” she said. His half-sister, who unexpectedly was keenly aware of her younger brothers, was a natural enemy as well.

If I could relish in killing these fools, it would've been much easier. Hadis wouldn't have wavered, either. Vissel hated the Rave imperial family. He wanted to trample over the empire that denied him and his younger brother. Hadis had surely wished for the same thing; he'd wanted everyone to be his enemy.

“Hadis,” Vissel said.

The emperor was crouched on the ground, poking his index finger into the dirt, and he looked up when he heard his name. Immediately, a little girl came from the side and faced Vissel in an attempt to shield the emperor. She was his younger brother’s wife and his sister-in-law. *Cheeky kid.*

“Fine,” the crown prince said. “If that’s what you wish—if that’s what will make you happy, I’ll follow your orders.”

Immediately, Hadis gave an expression of joy and delight just like he’d done as a child. *Some things never change.*

“R-Really? Will you be all right with this, Brother?” he asked.

“I am. I just wanted to become a brother fitting for a Dragon Emperor like you.” His younger brother fell silent, caught off guard, and Vissel crouched down to match his eye level. “I’ll work hard by your side,” he said. “If you want to make peace with Kratos, I’ll do so. If you want me to suppress the three dukes and conquer the empire, I’ll do that as well.”

“Th-Then what about my marriage with Jill?! Will you approve of that?!”

“He doesn’t need to, Your Majesty. I have the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, and I’ve reclaimed the gold ring. He can’t deny that I’m the Dragon

Consort," the girl said, clearly displaying her distrust.

The crown prince was to be the mature one in this situation. He'd do it all for his adorable younger brother.

"Of course, you have my approval. It's an issue that an emperor doesn't have a consort. We'll immediately make preparations for the wedding once we return to the imperial capital. We haven't seen a Dragon Consort for three hundred years; the reception will surely be grand. Ah, and she'll need to perfectly embroider the gloves for the Dragon Emperor for the wedding ceremony."

The girl next to Hadis turned pale. Vissel smirked, knowing that his hunch was correct. "Etiquette, dancing, embroidery, poetry, education for a consort, and training to be the ideal bride. I won't let you say you can't fulfill these tasks," he said.

"Y-You're a mean brother-in-law— Your Majesty?!" The girl caught Hadis's falling body.

Vissel's younger brother trembled as he clung to the girl.

"I-I felt relieved and... I-I'm so cold! My body temperature! I'm going to die!" Hadis wailed.

"H-Hang in there! Rave, go inside Hadis and warm him up from inside! A stretcher, please!" the girl yelled. She was able to see the Dragon God.

Well, I suppose that's a given as the Dragon Consort.

Risteard, Elentzia, and other people gathered to save his ailing younger brother. They all assembled even without Vissel's orders. Wanting to stay and watch, yet also needing to look away, Vissel left the area and gave orders to clean up the aftermath.

Vissel was swamped with work: he had to restore Radia, reconstruct the imperial army, work with the three dukes who weren't definitively on Hadis's side, and negotiate with Kratos. His policies had done a one-eighty, but he would be busier than ever before. There would surely be traitors against Hadis in the future; he still had the same tasks to do.

Ah, but maybe I should see my fiancée; I never did meet her since I planned on disposing of her.

The sun rose and fell as usual. The world was still unchanging. *But there are some things I can change with my own hands*, Vissel thought as he stared up at the sky.



THE people of Radia were strong-minded and kind. Once they found out that Hadis had fainted, they cleaned up the best room in the castle, tidied it up, and prepared a bath and a meal. Half of them still believed that Hadis was merely a baker, and though some were confused when they learned that he was the emperor, the night was calm and serene. No one could guess that a battle had broken out that morning.

Jill quietly descended on the balcony of Hadis's bedroom and gently put her hand on the door. The lock was silently lifted and undone with her magic. Without making a sound, she entered the empty room. She furrowed her brows over the lack of security, but there was a severe lack of personnel, and she knew that everyone was exhausted by the recent events.

Which is why I said that I'd stay in the same room as His Majesty. That idiot of an in-law!

Though her engagement had been approved, she hadn't officially tied the knot with Hadis yet. Vissel insisted that this was to prevent any mishaps, and everyone around him had voiced their agreement, separating the couple. Hadis, who held the decision-making authority, was out cold, and Jill's protest was magnificently shut down.

"I said it was okay. This isn't right," she grumbled unhappily.

She felt there was a greater issue in leaving a practically immobile Hadis alone. She crept towards his bed.

Hadis was fast asleep. Jill couldn't see Rave, and she guessed that the Dragon God was inside, trying to get some rest as well. The emperor's breathing was stable, and he looked healthy, but when her fingertips brushed his cheeks, she noticed that they were cold. She'd made the correct decision by arriving in her

pajamas.

Careful not to wake her husband, Jill slowly picked up the ends of the bed sheets and snuggled inside. She emerged from where there was a pillow and noticed that a blanket was slightly askew. As she lifted her body to straighten it, she locked eyes with a pair of gold ones.

“What are you doing, Jill?” Hadis asked.

“Your Majesty?! My apologies, did I wake you?” Jill asked.

“I’m fine. I was asleep all afternoon. What brings you here? It’s night, isn’t it?”

“I wanted to warm you up. Let’s go to sleep together.”

Hadis turned stiff before covering his face with his hands and rolling over, turning his back towards the girl.

“M-My heart’s not ready!” he wailed.

“What are you talking about? We’ve been sleeping together from the start.”

“Yeah, b-but, um, it’s the first since th-that night.”

Jill thought for a moment and immediately realized that he was referring to the night before Vissel had arrived; they’d slept with their backs turned against each other. Jill’s accusatory glare shifted as her face grew hot.

“Th-That was a while ago! And we *did* sleep together that night too!” Jill said.

“Then are you going to cling to me as we sleep?!” Hadis asked.

“W-Well, yes. I came to warm you up.”

She found it meaningless if she didn’t stick to him while sleeping, but as Jill mumbled, struggling to voice her thoughts, Hadis once again covered his face with his hands.

“I can’t do it,” he said.

“W-We’ll never be able to sleep together if you continue acting like this!”

“D-Do you really want to sleep with me that badly?”

Hadis gave a look of anticipation as he covered the lower half of his face with the sheets. Infuriated yet embarrassed, Jill’s face turned red once more.

"You're the one who wants to sleep with *me*, Your Majesty!" she said.

"I've never said that!"

"Raw did! After he was lovingly cared for by the others, he wouldn't let go of me and tried to sleep with me!"

"That stupid dragon...!"

Raw was fast asleep in his cage with a blanket over him. Camila and Zeke were in the vestibule, ready to jump in should anything happen.

"I thought you were lonely, so I came, Your Majesty. Or..." Jill paused, suddenly overcome with anxiety. Unable to form her words, she looked down and clenched her clothes atop her knees. "W-Was this one-sided? Am I the only one who wanted to see you...and be with you?"

An awkward silence filled the room, causing Jill to regret her words. Suddenly, Hadis got up, surprising her.

"Your Majesty, you shouldn't move around."

"I'm back, Jill."

His voice was warm and sweet as it echoed deep inside her. She felt her anxiety melt away as her voice rose an octave.

"W-Welcome back, Your Majesty."

"I'm exhausted this time around. I lost count of how many times I wished to see you again."

With a loud sigh, Hadis leaned his head onto her shoulder. Jill felt oddly embarrassed, which made her frown, but she knew that he'd worked hard; she made sure to gently stroke his head.

"Then you should've just come back to me," Jill said.

"Then I'd look lame. I started this whole mess anyways."

"I don't mind if you look lame, as long as you only do it in front of me."

Hadis continued to lean on her as he chuckled. "I can't do that. If you're the only one who continues to be cool, I'd be in an untenable position. I'm your husband and an adult."

“A-Adults are just older children.”



Hadis's long fingers played with the ends of Jill's hair that rested on her shoulders. She was unable to maintain her cool.

"Yeah. Which is why I'm acting spoiled with my wife right now."

Contrary to his words, his passionate gaze and husky voice were anything but a child's.

My husband's so sly! Not a surprise to me, though! Whether he was cool or lame, childish or mature, Jill was always at his mercy. Annoyed by this realization, she grabbed a nearby pillow and pushed it into Hadis's face, pushing him down on his bed.

"You won't fool me! You're not allowed to leave without telling me ever again!" she demanded.

"That depends on the situation... H-Hey, Jill! I can't breathe!"

"You said it yourself! I'm supposed to protect you from the Goddess." She released the pillow, and Hadis stuck his face out from underneath. She straddled his chest and refused to falter in front of his gold eyes as she pointed her index finger an inch from his nose. "If so, then you must always remain by my side, Your Majesty, so that I can protect you."

After a moment of stunned silence, Hadis covered his mouth with his hands. "M-My wife's so cool! I can't!"

"All right then. Let's go to bed, Your Majesty. You still have a fever."

"Why did you turn cold all of a sudden?!"

"I'm relieved that you're lame as always."

"You're horrible! Even I have—"

Jill put her hand over Hadis's noisy mouth and placed her lips on top. She was the first to make the move. Her heart was about to explode, but when she saw the gold eyes that were so dear to her widen like a full moon, she felt triumphant.

"Do you have any complaints?" Jill asked.

She released him from her grasp, but she was tugged inside the sheets and

nestled inside Hadis's arms.

"Of course I do. What will you do if I die?" he asked.

Jill laughed and wrapped her arms around his back. She thought she felt Hadis grow warm, and guessed that he was just as nervous as she was.

That would make me so happy.

It felt like they were truly in love.

"Maybe we *should* sleep in separate bedrooms," Hadis muttered under his breath.

"Your Majesty? Did you say something?"

"Nothing. Good night, Jill."

She had plenty to talk about and a mountain of problems, but when he used his kind voice and planted a kiss on her forehead, she reflexively grew sleepy.

When morning came, Jill would be woken up with a good morning kiss.

Epilogue

THE needle once again attacked and pierced her fingertips. Jill glared at it as though she was looking at her sworn enemy.

“You’re cheeky, just like the person I’m giving this to...” she muttered.

“Jill, it’s time!” Camila called out.

“You’re battling against that needle again?” Zeke asked.

Camila and Zeke entered the waiting room, dressed in their tailor-made uniforms suitable for the Knights of the Dragon Consort. Jill was sitting on a fluffy sofa as she glanced up at the pendulum clock in the room.

The sun had already set, but the imperial capital was bright today. The imperial castle stood at the head and lit up even the unused rooms. Today was a happy occasion; there hadn’t been an event as auspicious since Hadis had taken the throne.

“Yep. What’s the crowd looking like?” Jill asked.

“We’ve got a full house,” Camila replied. “Everyone’s interested in the Dragon Consort, who’s to make her first public debut!”

“I’m talking about the security for His Majesty. Is there anyone suspicious?”

“That’s not for you to worry about,” Jill’s brother-in-law said, opening the door. He was dressed in a muted gray color, but his formal attire for the evening party was fitting for a crown prince. “You should be more worried about following the correct procedures. There’s still some time for your needlework.”

He took the cloth that Jill was practicing on from her hands and chuckled. “Is this a new type of magic from Kratos?”

“Why do you say that? It’s clearly His Majesty’s name,” Jill replied.

“Ah, a type of curse that looks like his name, perhaps?” While Jill quaked with

anger at his rude remarks, he returned the cloth. “I pray the day comes when you unlock your needleworking potential. Or else, the sewing set that I sent you will be turned into tools that make curses.”

As usual, Vissel rubbed Jill the wrong way. However, he was the one who made the arrangements for this evening’s party so that Hadis’s fiancée could finally be formally announced. Jill had received this sewing set from him as an engagement gift, but she knew that he was trying to be ironic.

“Where’s Li’l Raw?” Zeke asked. “He’s not playing with Sauté and Hadis Bear, is he?”

“He ate his fill and is fast asleep in Jill’s room. He doesn’t try to fly at all, does he? Maybe he doesn’t understand that he’s a dragon?” Camila murmured.

“Jill, are you ready?” Hadis said, popping into the room.

Vissel frowned. “Hadis, you must do your own preparations too. What about your clothes? Where’s Risteard? He can’t even take care of you, yet he calls himself your older brother? How useless. What’s he here for?”

“I can *hear* you! Stop being so quick to badmouth me! Hadis, don’t run around,” Risteard said, grabbing the emperor by the scruff of his neck. He turned to Jill and frowned. “You should hurry up and get ready, too. Hadis is restless. Frida and Natalie are already done.”

“Wait, really?” Jill asked, hastily leaving the room.

Natalie and Frida were just leaving the dressing room. Natalie’s crimson dress resembled numerous flower petals layered on top of each other, giving an air of elegance fit for a princess. In contrast, Frida was in a cream-colored dress, cutely adorned with frills and bows. The crimson flower arranged in her hair gave off the impression that she wasn’t just sweet and timid.

“You haven’t finished getting ready?” Natalie asked Jill before turning to Hadis. “Let me guess, you haven’t either, Brother?”

“Huh? Yeah, right, yes,” Hadis replied with an awkward nod. He wasn’t used to being called ‘Brother’ by Natalie just yet.

“You’re the emperor, so be more responsible. Your looks are good, at least.

The same goes for you as well, Vissel. You're my brother and the crown prince, are you not?"

Like Hadis, Vissel wasn't used to being addressed in such a friendly manner by Natalie, but he remained expressionless and quiet. With a triumphant huff and smile, Natalie turned back towards Frida.

"Let's go. Elentzia's running around trying to keep the security together, and we need to be responsible as princesses... Frida?"

The third princess fidgeted. Hadis gasped and raised his head while taking out a bag of cookies from his pocket. In turn, Frida gasped and looked up as well. While everyone was watching, Hadis gingerly made his way to the midway point between the princesses, placed the bag of cookies on the floor, and quickly turned back. Frida then slowly approached the cookies, grabbed the bag, and immediately hid behind Natalie once more. Hadis clenched his fist victoriously while Vissel looked absolutely fed up with this farce.

"Are you feeding a wild animal or something?" the crown prince asked. "Do you always keep a bag of cookies in your pocket?"

"Frida, it's bad manners to pick stuff up from the ground... And Hadis, hand the snacks over to her with pride," Risteard added.

"P-Placing the snacks in front of her is the best I can do!" Hadis protested.

Frida nodded in agreement from afar. Natalie gave her sister a withered look as she pushed her back and made their way towards the party venue. A scowling Risteard dragged Hadis away as well. They were short on time, and Risteard held back his scolding. Vissel guided Jill into the dressing room to get changed.

I guess it'll take a bit more time for His Majesty and Princess Frida to warm up to each other.

The ladies-in-waiting were all lined up and efficiently worked on Jill. They applied coats of toners and moisturizers before adding makeup to her face. This may have been a bit too much for a child, but she needed to look even the slightest bit more mature for her debut. She wore high-heeled shoes for this occasion as well. It was essential for Jill to look more like a lady, for she was the

Dragon Emperor's fiancée. She couldn't be scorned.

"And here is Lady Jill Cervel!"

The doors of the great hall opened, revealing an impossibly high ceiling with a glittering chandelier hanging from above. The flames of the candles were reflected by the polished marble floors. Flowing dresses surrounded her like colorful flowers, and the violinists following the conductor were harmonizing a waltz for the steps. The melody was light and cheery, encouraging others to dance.

The heel of a military boot reverberated throughout the room as it clacked on the floor.

With the advice of Natalie, Frida, and Elentzia, they thought up a design—a formal attire for the new Dragon Consort. The crimson dress decorated with black ribbons and laces allowed some functionality and mobility. The black mantle and military cap made it look like an army uniform, much to Jill's delight. The buttons and cuffs were gold like Hadis's eyes, secretly making it one of her favorite details.

"She's still a child."

"But she saved Radia by commanding an army with His Majesty..."

"I heard that Her Highness the Dragon Consort advised the emperor to forgive the traitor General South and his imperial army."

"She's already been inaugurated as the Grand Duke of Radia, and she's immensely popular."

It was publicized that the rebellion in Radia was planned by Radia's aide, who attempted to steal the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort, while Kratos's involvement remained a mystery. To make peace with Kratos, the entire incident with Rufus was swept under the rug. There was concern that the residents of Radia would voice their dissatisfaction, but they detested the aide who was famous for siding with Kratos, and many simply chalked it up to his poor actions.

The fact that the Dragon Emperor and Dragon Consort had personally arrived to save Radia worked in their favor. Many residents were elated, claiming to

have witnessed a historical moment when the Dragon Emperor commanded the army while the Dragon Consort used the Sacred Treasure. This drowned out any anxiety, allowing them to accept an eleven-year-old girl as their Grand Duke. They were filled with expectations, stating that their land and this era were special.

The girl had obtained the Sacred Treasure of the Dragon Consort and had been welcomed with open arms as the Grand Duke of Radia. She may have been a bit young, but time was the easy solution to this. Jill paid no mind to the brows furrowed at her appearance or the curious gazes and whispers behind the fans. She was able to move forward with pride.

In front of her were a few rows—levels with seats. First were the seats filled with beautiful women—the consorts of the previous emperor who stayed in the empress's palace. They refused to attend at first, but Vissel had said, "Do as you please. You can just go back to your hometowns," forcing the majority to attend with gifts in hand. Jill's brother-in-law was quite skilled at these matters.

The second row was the seats of the other consorts—biological mothers of the princes and princesses and chairs for the three dukes. It looked far more dignified than the first level. Jill couldn't recognize any of the faces, but she'd heard that the three dukes were in attendance; their true thoughts aside, it seemed they'd accepted Jill as the Dragon Consort.

The third row was reserved for Emperor Hadis's siblings. Risteard sat with excellent posture. Beside him was Frida. Her cheeks were slightly flushed from nervousness, but she was well-mannered. Next to a scolding Natalie was Elentzia, who hastily took her seat. It seemed she'd just returned from checking on the security.

Above them was Vissel, quietly seated. This level was generally reserved for Hadis's children, but the crown prince was there for now. *I'll knock you a row lower soon*, Jill vowed to herself while walking past him to go to the last level.

At the very top, seated on the imperial throne, was the emperor of this nation; he'd officially become Jill's fiancé from tonight on. From here began the troublesome greetings and answering questions, a part of aristocratic etiquette. Jill couldn't quite understand these procedures.

Uh, I think I should start off with an introduction, right? If asked, I'll say that His Majesty just asked for my assistance for Radia's rebellion.

While Jill was going over her lines in her head, Hadis stood up and kneeled in front of her.

"I've decided to kneel for my wife," he declared.

Jill stared back blankly. This wasn't in accordance with standard procedure.

"My dear amethyst, my princess with beautiful eyes. Please make me happy," the emperor said. His familiar phrasing and mischievous eyes made Jill burst out laughing.

"Yes. I shall dedicate my entire life to making you happy," she replied.

"Then I'll make you my wife. You won't say that you're messing with me, will you?"

"I won't. I love you, Your Majesty," she replied in a voice so faint that only he could hear.

"Me too," he whispered back before raising his voice. "Now then, let me introduce you all to my fiancée. The Dragon Consort has appeared for the first time in three hundred years!"

The moment Hadis scooped her up, Jill poured some magic into the ring on her left hand, showering the venue with golden light. Presentation was important—it was a blessing from the Dragon Consort. Vissel was the first to rise and give a round of applause. Elentzia smiled, Risteard looked stern, Natalie looked a little tired, and Frida's eyes were sparkling. The rest of the venue followed suit as applause and cheers filled the room.

"Congratulations on your engagement. May the Dragon Emperor and Dragon Consort be blessed for years to come!"

"A toast to the Rave Empire!"

The bells of celebration started to ring, and fireworks brightened the night sky. The entirety of the imperial capital broke out in a celebratory mood. On this day, amidst the light and celebratory fireworks that dotted the night sky, many citizens of the floating city of Rahelm cheered, claiming to see a

magnificent purple-eyed, black dragon flying around with her mate, a gold-eyed, black dragon, but when the Dragon Emperor and Dragon Consort were pressed for answers, they gave strained smiles while refraining from further comments.



WHILE this was indeed the public announcement of an engagement, it was mostly a social activity. No eleven-year-old would be able to stay at this venue for long, but immediately taking her leave would damage her reputation. Once Jill waved in response to the cheers, she went to the edge of the venue, which was hidden by a thick curtain. On the other side was a table and sofa. Jill spent the rest of her time there, surrounded by Elentzia, Natalie, and Frida. Hadis acted like an emperor and received greetings from others while being supported by Risteard and Vissel.

Jill had never seen Hadis in a social event before. She was a bit anxious for him, but he splendidly took care of the introductions he received from others. He maintained his dignity of being an emperor while not being intimidating and exuded an air of elegance. When he smiled, a young lady who was lined up next to her father stared back at him, lovestruck by the emperor.

“She’s aiming to be his mistress,” Natalie whispered to Jill from behind.

The girl was surprised. “D-Didn’t we just announce our engagement today? Doesn’t she move a bit too quickly?”

“That’s how it is. The dad would probably request for his daughter to be used as the Dragon Consort’s lady-in-waiting. That’s their excuse to get their foot in the door.”

“They’re very strong-minded.” Jill was impressed.

Natalie gave her a weary look. “At least be a *little* anxious about it. How boring.”

“Jill and Hadis get along very well... Everyone said they were e-enamored with each other... They’ve always been sharing a room too...” Frida said, fidgeting with her fingers and missing her stuffed animal.

Elentzia, who had a light meal brought to the table, sat in the seat facing Jill

and crossed her legs. “While we’re on that topic, Jill, why don’t you use your own bedroom starting tonight? The imperial soldiers have returned, and our security has been increased. You and Hadis may be engaged, but you’re not married just yet. You haven’t made the official announcement to Kratos just yet. You should be a bit more worried about your reputation.”

“Prince Vissel said the same thing, but I cannot comply,” Jill replied. “Security is so lax that I can infiltrate His Majesty’s room by myself.”

The moment they returned to the imperial capital, Jill was given a luxurious room as Hadis’s fiancée. Because she couldn’t easily take her eyes off Hadis, and she defeated the guards every night, the security around the emperor’s room was greatly strengthened, but it was still just as easy for her to enter.

“Don’t be unreasonable,” Elentzia said. “We’d need an entire division to take you down. General South—Adjutant General South, rather—has been greatly troubled. He keeps saying that the Dragon Consort has gotten past them again.”

“It’s good practice. And it’s decent exercise for me before I go to bed,” Jill replied.

“But Hadis is stronger than you. You don’t have to protect him to this extent.”

“I know. But I’ve decided to never let His Majesty leave on his own again. If he flees again, I’m the one who has to give chase and drag him back.”

Jill gave Elentzia an exhausted look, silencing the princess. As Frida looked back and forth between Elentzia and Jill, Natalie nibbled on a cookie and gave her two cents.

“It’ll have the opposite effect, won’t it?” she said.

“What will?” Jill asked.

“You’re chasing around Hadis so that he won’t leave. That’s rather childish. You’re not supposed to be chasing after *him*; *he* needs to chase after *you*. That would be most ideal, wouldn’t it?”

Jill was enticed by the princess’s words, but she couldn’t nod her head in agreement. “But I can’t leave... I want to be the kind of wife who welcomes His Majesty back home.”

"You don't have to actually leave. It's just a simple negotiation between a man and a woman."

"I-I see... But I'm not quite good at stuff like that."

"What are you saying? Don't say that you've let your guard down after you got engaged. Even if you become a married couple, it's a wife's duty to lead her husband around by the nose."

The conversation was taking a completely different turn, but Jill couldn't hide her excitement while Frida also listened intently with curiosity. Natalie lowered her voice, noticing her sisters' interest.

"Fine, I'll teach you a thing or two. Why don't you try saying..."

Hadis gently pushed aside the thick curtain. "Jill, Vissel told me that you can return to your room... Huh? What's going on?" He stared blankly as he noticed everyone's eyes were on him.

Elentzia stood up and clasped his shoulder. "Good luck. Women are scary. Rather, our younger sisters are terrifying."

"O-Okay? Jill, are you going to stay here? I can send you back right now if you want."

"I-I'll return to my room, Your Majesty!" Jill said, hastily getting on her feet.

Natalie gave a mischievous grin as Frida clenched her fists in an effort to cheer Jill on. After some brief words, Hadis scooped up the Dragon Consort and exited the room. Jill wasn't worried about how this made her look childish; she was too busy carefully reviewing the words that Natalie had said to her.

"I have to head back," Hadis said, lowering his fiancée in front of her room. "I'll be back late today, so you can go to sleep without me. I might not even return to my bedroom..."

Recently, Hadis hadn't adamantly insisted on sleeping with Jill. When Vissel gave his candid advice to split their sleeping quarters, the emperor didn't resist.

"I think we can have the security rest a bit for today. I'm sure you're tired too," Hadis added.

His words seemed to continuously push Jill away. He was confident and

trusted that she'd never leave his side, making her a bit happy.

"Ah, you can wait in my room too, of course," he said.

But for whatever reason... *I don't really like this at all.*

"I understand. I'll just sleep in my room then," Jill replied. "I won't visit your bedroom anymore, Your Majesty."

Hadis panicked at his fiancée's declaration, making it almost comical. "D-Did you have to say that so curtly? U-Until yesterday, you broke through security and declared that you wouldn't listen to Vissel and would sleep with me."

"After some thought, I think it's immature of me to always be so angry at my brother-in-law. We're engaged now, so I thought that this was the perfect opportunity. Let's sleep in separate rooms."

"W-Wait, Jill! Did I do something wrong?!"

She didn't want to make him anxious, so she hugged him with all her strength, silencing the emperor. "I'll keep the lock to *my* terrace open, so that you can visit *me* at night."

As Jill used the words that Natalie had taught her, Hadis stood stiff as a rock. Jill smiled, overcome with an odd sense of superiority, and she quickly opened the door to her room. Before she closed the door, she peeked through the crack to see Hadis still frozen in place.

"Don't keep a lady waiting, Your Majesty."

After she closed the door, she felt something warm bubble up from the tips of her toes. This was a game between a man and a woman—she'd be waiting for her fiancé to sneak into her room tonight. *My romance expertise must've increased!*

Unable to sit still, she jumped into her bed, which she'd never used before. Just remembering Hadis's face made her flail. She was shocked by the power of love, which completely paralyzed a beautiful, clueless man like him. Jill was determined to raise her romantic fighting capabilities in the future.

"I won't ever let you go," she said.

What would Hadis do? Raw was in her room, so he must truly want to sleep

with her, but sneaking into her room was rather childish for him to do. Just imagining his actions made Jill excited, and she rolled around while clutching her pillow.



“RAVE,” Hadis muttered.

“I’m the Dragon God of logic and the skies. You figure this out yourself,” came a reply.

“I will, I will! But that was so unfair! Did you see her face?!”

He put his hand over his mouth as though to hide his now beet-red face while he sank to the ground. That smile and that invitation should be illegal. The words “visit me at night” were destructive to his ears. Had Jill noticed that whenever she hugged him, he could feel her grow a bit taller as her head slowly approached his heart? Before she closed the door, she looked beautiful and mature. *How many more years must I wait? Three? Four, at the earliest?*

He didn’t even know what she meant when she told him not to keep her waiting. He’d been waiting this entire time. Unable to process the situation, he felt dizzy.

“Ugh, I need to keep her in my grasp,” he murmured.

Was the correct answer to sneak into her room tonight? Maybe another night?

Hadis stood up. He was headed to a secret that only the two of them would share—it couldn’t be solved by love or logic.

Afterword

HELLO, or for some, long time no see. I'm Sarasa Nagase.

This is the third book about a young lady and her doting husband, the Dragon Emperor. I've added and revised a few parts from the web version, and I'd be delighted if you enjoyed how it turned out.

The story this time focused on Hadis working hard on his own—in a good way! He's still a little shaky by himself, but his improvements are a compilation of Jill's efforts. I never minded comments about the heroine dating back to my web novel days, but people kept saying that the emperor should be arrested, or how Jill is technically a small girl in this timeline. Even so, I'd be happy if you could follow Hadis on his journey to become a wonderful hero. He's a hero! He's a hero, all right?! (I'm writing it twice because it's important!) There are a few other lovely bonuses this time, and I'd be elated if you could check the official website for more details.

Anko Yuzu has been working on the manga adaptation in Monthly Comp Ace. The first volume is available now. Yuzu-sensei's manga is truly wonderful. Please give it a read if you can! I'll forever be indebted to Yuzu-sensei. Thank you so much.

Now for some acknowledgments.

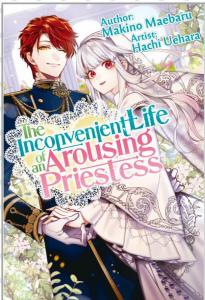
Mitsuya Fuji, thank you once again for the splendid illustrations! When I saw Raw on the cover and on the other illustrations, he was so, so, so cute that I was at a loss for words.

To my editors, thank you for always making the necessary adjustments. I know I'll continue to trouble you. I'd also like to extend my deepest, heartfelt gratitude to the proofreader, the editing department, the designer, the marketing team, everyone from the printing office, and everyone involved in making this book. The comments I receive on the web novel serialization always cheer me up.

Lastly, thank you to everyone who reads this book. Thank you for always

cheering Jill on. I'd love to continue writing this story.

I hope to see you all again!



The Inconvenient Life of an Arousing Priestess

By Makino Maeburu Illust Hachi Uehara

What adventures await a priestess with the inconvenient power to rouse the baser instincts of others and the imperial prince who's unaffected by her?!



I Guess This Dragon Who Lost Her Egg to Disaster Is My Mom Now

By Suzume Kirisaki Illust Cosmic

A gender bender fantasy series about a betrayed adventurer who ends up not only turning into a girl, but being raised by a powerful dragon too!



Revolutionary Reprise of the Blue Rose Princess

By Roku Kaname Illust Hazuki Futaba

She was a queen who died during a revolution. Now she's gone back in time. Her first course of action? Changing her fate by winning over the revolutionary mastermind!



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