Taro Hitsuji
Illustrated by
Asagi Tohsaka
Magic Knight of the Old Ways
V

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"The old ways
are gonna become
the new ways."

Magic Knight of the Old Ways

"A warrior living by the rules of the past"

A Knight Tells Only the Truth

Their Bravery Glimmers in Their Hearts

Their Swords Defend the Defenseless

Their Power Sustains Virtue

And Their Anger... Destroys Evil

Alvin

The prince of Calvania. Alvin trains under Sid to become a knight and inherit the throne to save his declining kingdom.

Sid

A man known as the strongest knight of the legendary era. Now resurrected in the present day, Sid mentors the collection of misfits known as the Blitze class.

Isabella

A half-human, half-fairy woman. Due to an ancient pact, Isabella offers her divine protection to the Calvania royal family and assists them as the leader of the Ladies of the Lake.

Tenko

A girl of the demi-human species called the noble-tailed people. Tenko was found by Alvin's father and grew up like a sister to Alvin.

STUDENTS

Christopher

A boy from a farming family in a rural borderlands village. Christopher excels in a strength-focused fighting style where he acts as a shield for his allies.

Elaine

A girl from a prestigious aristocratic family headed by a knight. Although Elaine's sword may be of the lowest rank, her book smarts and swordsmanship are some of the best in the school.

Theodore

A boy from an orphanage in an impoverished area. At odds with his seemingly intelligent appearance, Theodore is quite the delinquent and is skilled at pickpocketing.

Lynette

The eldest daughter of an aristocratic family that fell into ruin. An animal lover, Lynette is the most skilled horseback rider in the whole Blitze class.

KEY TERMS

Fairy Swords

Friendly fairies known as Good Fellows, who, in accordance with an ancient pact, have transformed into swords. Knights use these swords to perform all sorts of magical abilities, such as enhancing their physical strength or healing themselves.

Blitze Class

One of the classes at the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy. Prizing liberty and good conscience, the Blitze class emphasizes students' personal beliefs and sense of justice. As the class is newly established, its student culture is hard to define apart from being highly individual. The class is named after the "Barbarian" Sid Blitze.

Calvania Castle and the Fairy World

The Ladies of the Lake and titan artisans combined their ability to build Calvania Castle. The castle serves as the threshold between the material world, where physical creatures like people and animals live, and the fairy world, where immaterial creatures like fairies and monsters live.

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Prologue: The Old Knights' Days of Yore

It might have become an old legend sung by minstrels, but even now, just by closing my eyes, I can clearly remember everything.

Back then, the world was a little harsher and more severe than now. It was engulfed in chaos, full of the people's pain, grief, and wails.

And yet, while keeping the knight's code in their heart, everyone fought for their friends, families, and loved ones. Everyone's soul—their will—was burning.

Be it the people's pain, sorrows, joy, anger, or grief, back then, everything was intense.

The horizon was filled with spears and horsemen. However, to us, this battlefield full of swords, flames, corpses, blood, and ashes was what made up our youth.

"I'll make a way out. I leave the rest to you, my lord."

"Wait, Sir Sid! Are you planning to die?!"

———

"Tch, as if I'd let you get all the credit!"

"Ha ha ha! As expected of Sir Sid! Everyone, don't fall behind. Follow after me!"

"You truly are fascinating, Lightning. I, Luke Anthalo, will watch your back."

———

"Your strategies are as effective as ever, Rifis. I'm glad you're on our side."

"Hmph. And you're as troublesome as ever."

———

"I hope that one day, we can have a match using our full power, Lightning."

“Yeah, same here, Lion.”

———

“Sometimes, I wonder how you would see me if I had chosen to live as a woman instead of a knight. And whether I’d be happier with that than fighting by your side like I am now.”

“...Luke.”

“Please, just for now, call me Lucy.”

———

“Remember, Sir Sid! I only helped you for our esteemed lord! So don’t misunderstand! Hey, why are you laughing?! Are you insulting me, the Azure Owl?!”

———

“Everyone. This battle will be fiercer than any we’ve had before. If we don’t repel the invasion of the barbarian union in the west, the Kingdom of Calvania will fall. So as the king, I order you: entrust me with your lives!”

“Hah, why even ask?”

“Indeed.”

“We, the ten thousand knights of Calvania, will follow our king, even to the depths of hell!”

“Ooooooooooooh!”

———

———

—

Even now, I can clearly remember the irreplaceable days I spent with my comrades.

By any standard, it was difficult to call them happy days. Even though there were times full of joy and honor, there were also painful and sorrowful ones. Not a single day passed without one of my comrades dying, and I often fought

against people I once called friends.

Sometimes, people's cruelty and the world's unfairness made me doubt the utility of following the knight's code.

Still, even then, I could say with confidence that the days I spent running around the battlefield with my friends were fun.

...Or at least until that fateful day.

———

It happened after a war as we were busy processing the aftermath in the castle we had just captured.

"Sir Sid."

"What is it, my lord? Hmm? This girl... She isn't King Zacksale's daughter, right?"

Arthur came to me with the princess, who had been confined in one of the castle's towers.

"Yeah, she's the princess of one of the countries that Zacksale brought to ruin. She was confined to serve as a sacrifice for the dragon feast ritual," he explained.

The girl in question only hung her head silently. She was wearing a very thin robe with its hood covering her eyes. I shivered at how beautiful and captivating she was.

"I see. So that's how King Zacksale tamed a dragon. He fed it innocent maidens in exchange for using its might. As scummy as the rumors said," I spat.

"Yeah. But..." Arthur turned toward the princess. "You'll be fine now. We'll protect you. You won't ever have to suffer like this again."

"Lord Arthur..." she whispered.

"Sir Sid. Considering how her homeland is no more, I think we should bring her back with us. Is that fine with you?"

Of course it was. He was my lord, and, as a knight, there was no way I'd refuse and abandon a girl to her fate.

However, if I had to be perfectly honest, I had a bad feeling. The kind that announced the end of these harsh yet fun days—the end of our youth.

"...Princess. If you would allow it, could you tell me your name?" I asked.

"Florence," she said, opening her petal-like lips. "My name is Florence Tinbelika, sir brave knight."

Somehow, as I looked at her almost ominous, beautiful looks, I felt like her bewitching smile was sneering at me.

Chapter 1: The Winter That Announces Destruction

“I’m Elma. I’m your twin little sister, Alvin...no, Alma.”

Hearing these words, Alvin gasped. Everyone in the arena did too.

The spectators, the knights, Tenko and the other Blitze class students, and even Isabella were dumbfounded as if they couldn’t understand what they had just heard.

Only Sid stayed calm, watching Endea as if he had realized the truth.

The one who broke the silence was Alvin. “You are...my twin little sister...?” she muttered, her face full of disbelief.

“Indeed. We’re sisters,” Endea spat, having managed to hear Alvin.

“You’re lying!” Tenko yelled. She had run from the stands and was now next to Alvin.

“Tenko...”

“Don’t lie! There’s no way that you are Alvin’s sister!”

“How can you be so sure?” Endea asked, looking down at Tenko.

“How? Because the only person with the blood of King Auld is Alvin! King Auld entrusted me with Alvin! He told me that Alvin was the only descendant of the royal family! We’ve been together since we were children, and I’ve never seen you or heard of you before! So you can’t be Alvin’s sister!”

Endea stayed silent, looking both irritated and sad, then said, “Then how do you explain that our faces look alike?”

“W-Well...” Tenko was at a loss for words in front of the proof that was their almost identical faces. Because of that, it was impossible to assert that they were unrelated. “I-I know! You’re using, err...illusion magic to look like Alvin and deceive us! You’ve always been trying to deceive us, like what you did to me with the black fairy sword!”

“Seems like it’s the best your brain can come up with, Tenko.” Endea sighed, exasperated, and looked away from her.

“Don’t be so hard on her. Solving riddles and using her brain isn’t her thing,” Sid commented.

“Did you hear that, Endea?! Master is on my side! Do you give up?!”

Endea ignored Tenko, who was looking boastful for some reason, and turned toward Sid. “Sir Sid...and Isabella too, I guess. You two should know whether I’m using magic to disguise myself or not.”

The two of them stayed silent. Indeed, she was telling the truth. Sid’s spiritual senses and Isabella’s detection magic didn’t find any trace of an illusion on Endea. Instead, what they sensed was that, while it was dark, the wavelength of Endea’s mana was similar to someone they knew—to Alvin. So it gave credence to her claim.

Endea sneered triumphantly, having guessed what they thought. “There you have it. The royal family doesn’t have only one successor. This country, its throne, and its people aren’t Alvin’s only. Do you get it? They’re also mine...no.” She shook her head and glared at Alvin, the person she hated the most in the world, as if wanting to stab her with her glare. “This country...this world is mine, Alvin. I won’t give you anything! Never! You’re always the one who gets everything she wants! Even though I tried to break you by revealing to everyone that you were a woman, you still got what you wanted! That’s unfair! Really! It’s always you and never me! Why are we so different?!”

“E-Endea...?” Alvin was dumbfounded, seeing Endea throwing a tantrum like a child.

“That’s why I decided to destroy this world! I’ll destroy everything you hold dear, Alvin! I don’t need a world that isn’t kind to me! I don’t need a world that only ever favors you and never me! So I’ll destroy everything! You, this country, and this world! And then I’ll become the true king of this world! Aha ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

Alvin, who received all of Endea’s resentment and abuse, stayed silent for a few seconds, then asked slowly, “Why?”

Endea frowned.

“You’ve hated me since our first meeting, but if what you said is the truth, we’re twin sisters, right? Then that means we’re the only family left for each other. Shouldn’t we live together, hand in hand?”

Endea didn’t answer.

“And yet... Why do you hate me so much?”

“You... You really dare to ask?”

Endea’s hatred, rage, dark mana, and presence suddenly swelled up. It was so overwhelming and despair-inducing that everyone was shaken to their core.

“E-Endea?!”

“Why do I hate you...? The answer is obvious! It’s because you betrayed me and stole everything from me!”

“I...betrayed you?”

“You did! Do you plan to feign ignorance forever, Alma?!”

As if responding to her fury, dark mana exploded from her body in all directions, creating a storm that hit Alvin.

It was then that *it* happened. Exactly when she was hit, their eyes met, and a certain magic that had been cast on Alvin broke. It was a magic that had been used on her when she was young, cast by a certain Nimue—a spell to seal memories. It was concealed so well that even Sid and Isabella couldn’t detect it. Moreover, it was made sturdy enough to resist any dispelling magic.

However, Endea’s hatred was so great that it managed to put a crack in it. Once that happened, no matter how strong the magic was, it would break easily. Just like a castle made of sand, the seal crumbled, releasing the doors to Alvin’s memories...

“Aaaaaaaaaaaah!” Alvin screamed, holding her head with her hands.

“Alvin?!”

“Tenko... My head...hurts...!”

“Hang in there! Damn, what did you do, Endea?!”

“Who knows?” Endea ignored Tenko’s glare and turned back toward Flora. “For now, let’s put aside Alma, who is heartless enough to forget her beloved sister. Flora, can we start?”

“Of course, my adorable master,” Flora—the black witch of the Dark Order of Opus—replied with her usual bewitching smile. “All the preparations are done. The Anthe-Tasithe that used sacrifices from all over the world, the inverted ritual of the Holy Spirit’s Advent Festival, and this arena, dedicated to Éclair, which is a sacred ground on the border of both the material world and the fairy realm. All the conditions were met. Now you just need to wish for it, and you will be able to do as you please.”

Endea chuckled. “Thank you, Flora. You’re the only one who’s ever been kind to me. I love you.” She smiled like a child would to their mother. Then she wielded her black fairy sword, Twilight, and started to chant in Espirish. “Return, return, return, return to my flesh, to my vessel.”

“That incantation is...?!” Isabella became pale the moment she heard it. “Stop her! She must not be allowed to finish her incantation! Please, someone!”

Sid immediately reacted and used Lightning Legs. Lightning surged, creating countless paths in the sky. Then, transforming himself into light, Sid ran along one of them toward Endea with divine speed.

“Endea!”

Endea gasped, seeing Sid approaching her, but suddenly, a barrier made of dark mana appeared and protected her.

Lightning and darkness clashed violently.

The barrier had been created by Flora. She had come in between Endea and Sid to protect her master. The dark barrier coming from the tip of her staff had completely stopped Sid’s charge.

“Please, don’t be so boorish, Sir Lightning Knight.”

“Flora!”

Sid and Flora glared at each other at point-blank distance as light and darkness flickered around them.

“Tonight, we are celebrating a new birth.”

“...What do you mean?”

“The poor girl, who has been abandoned and rejected by the world, by everyone, will finally bloom as she’s born anew. We should not disturb her. Let’s just watch quietly for the moment when the true Demon King, ruler of the world and its eternal winter of death and silence—the origin of everything in the world—is born.”

“Wait, it can’t be...!”

And as Sid and Flora confronted each other...

“Thou art the king of the world, ruled by an eternal winter of death and silence! I am the successor of thy will, the vessel for thy soul! Seasons passed, and the time has come! Spring ended, summer vanished, and autumn fell into oblivion! True winter will reign over everything! Now is the time to return, oh great ancient king, oh dreadful king of winter! Thou and I shalt create an era of eternal winter! So come, now!”

Endea finished her incantation as everyone watched her, dumbfounded.

The next instant, the bell signaling the destruction of the world rang. The sound felt like it came from the depths of hell. As it spread, the ground started to shake.

“Wh-What’s happening?!” Tenko screamed, looking around.

Isabella gritted her teeth in frustration as she hugged Alvin, who was still suffering from her headache.

Sid clicked his tongue as he reached the ground and looked up at Endea.

The knights and the spectators were in turmoil. Everyone panicked as the earthquake became stronger until, finally, some people couldn’t stand anymore. Cracks appeared on the walls, the ceiling, and the floor. Soon, everything was going to collapse.

“Run! It’s gonna crumble!” someone shouted.

Chaos began. Everyone cried and yelled, only thinking about themselves, pushing each other as they tried to flee from the arena.

“Aha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!” Endea’s loud laughter resounded amidst the concerto of sounds made from the chaos and the collapse.

———

The disaster wasn’t limited to the arena. It also spread to the castle and the capital. The vibrations kept getting stronger, as if there was no limit to their intensity.

People were screaming, roaring, and throwing insults at each other. The citizens who had happily celebrated the coming of spring were no more. Now they were just trying to run away from the mayhem as fast as possible. However, as if mocking them, the vibrations—no, the cataclysmic earthquake—became even stronger until, finally, the castle and the capital couldn’t bear it anymore.

With the castle at its center, deep cracks spread radially around the capital. The buildings collapsed into deep crevices that were like dark abysses. Then the castle walls crumbled too, leveling everything. The capital, built by the first ruler of the Kingdom of Calvania, the Holy King Arthur, and its centuries-long history, was collapsing. It was being destroyed.

It was so unbelievable that it felt like a joke or a dream. The citizens of the capital looked at the epicenter of the earthquake in hope. The Calvania Castle was the symbol of the kingdom and what supported their hearts. It was the Holy King Arthur’s territory and their last hope.

However, that hope...was in vain.

A cracking sound resonated. Finally, a huge fissure ran along the walls of the impregnable Calvania Castle. The castle, which had endured the powerful earthquake until now, yielded, and an irreparable scar was carved on its majestic appearance.

And, once there was one fissure, what would follow was as natural as flowing water.

Cracking sounds resonated one after another as countless fissures spread along the castle, looking like a net.

The castle began to collapse.

The impregnable castle built by the Holy King Arthur. The symbol of peace created by the joint efforts of the Nimues, the Titans, and the humans. The main building for all the knights of the kingdom and where their pride resided.

Calvania Castle was breaking, and nobody could do anything but watch as it happened.

———

“Impossible...” Alvin groaned, still holding her aching head.

She couldn’t believe what she was seeing. The capital was in ruins, the castle was now nothing more than a mountain of debris, and crevices spread around the city like a spiderweb. The beautiful and prospering capital from a few minutes ago was unrecognizable.

“How can our ancestors’ creation fall so...easily?” Alvin muttered, standing in shock.

Fortunately, everyone who had been in the arena was fine. It was thanks to the Ladies of the Lake, who had swiftly used teleportation magic to transport everyone away from the arena and avoid being crushed in the rubble of the collapsing castle. However, was being saved really better than being buried alive when forced to see such a desperate sight?

“Endea, you...!” Alvin, who still had a violent headache, looked up at her sister, the person responsible for the destruction, and her subordinate.

“Why are you getting angry, Alma? I’m the one who’s angry.”

The two girls with the same faces sent deathly glares to each other. Only Flora looked like she was having fun watching them.

“Just saying, but it’s far from being over, you know?”

“What?!” Alvin exclaimed.

“H-How can you do worse than that?!” Tenko asked fearfully.

Endea smiled widely and said, “I told you, no? I’m going to destroy the world.”

The next instant, another abnormal event happened. Suddenly, darkness overflowed from all the crevices around the capital. They were like smoke

signals but made of darkness. Countless dark beacons rose from everywhere in the capital as if guided by something. Their destination was...Endea. All the darkness was being absorbed by Endea's body.

"Ha ha... Finally, the time has come! The time has come for me to be the true king of the world!" Endea shouted with excitement.

She was transforming. Her appearance stayed the same, but her existence was becoming something completely different. As she absorbed the darkness, giant wings of ice grew on her back. But more than anything, what changed the most was her sword. Her black fairy sword, Twilight, was evolving to a whole other level. It became stronger, more beautiful, and more sinister as its shape changed.

At the same time, another strange occurrence happened in the sky. The blue sky and the warm sunlight of spring were being blocked by dark clouds. Even though it should've been the afternoon, it was now as dark as night, and the temperature quickly dropped. It was far from just being chilly. It was painfully cold. The capital was assaulted by a midwinter freeze that nobody could endure with simple spring clothes.

But that wasn't all. As if to show just how cold it was, it started to snow, and a frigid wind blew. The combination grew stronger and stronger little by little. In a few minutes, the capital...no, the whole kingdom was being struck by a violent blizzard.

"Wh-What's happening?! That's definitely not norm—" Tenko's voice was cut off by the sound of the raging blizzard. It was so fierce that everyone had to crouch to not be blown away.

"This is...Winter Twilight?! Then she truly is..." Isabella looked around, her expression filled with both shock and despair. Everyone was panicking and having a hard time enduring the cold.

Only Sid stayed calm as he silently looked up at Endea and Flora in the dark sky. However, his sharp eyes weren't actually staring at them but someone far back in the past.

While winter befell the world, Endea had finished her transformation and had been born anew. Her appearance stayed the same, but she was now wearing

armor and had wings, both made of dark ice. Her presence and dignity made her worthy of being called the queen of winter. Her black sword had evolved in terms of majesty, style, grade, and power. It was a whole new kingly sword. She had an overwhelming amount of mana and exuded incredible pressure.

An absolute king, able to crush anyone and affect the entire world just by existing, had manifested. She was a being above even fairies—the incarnations of natural laws—who had ascended to divine spirits. In other words, she was...

“The Demon King,” Sid muttered.

“Exactly, Sir Sid,” Endea answered with a broken smile. “I heard from Flora that you already fought against the Demon King once. So, how is it? Am I stronger than the previous one?”

Sid didn’t reply. He only watched silently as Endea acted like a kid who received her first toy ever. Not caring about him, Flora hugged Endea from behind.

“Finally... Finally, we meet again, my dear master...” She was embracing Endea as if she were her lover.

“You’re doing it again,” Sid said, his voice filled with silent rage. “You plan to repeat what you did back then, Florence?”

Flora blinked, slightly surprised. “My... It seems your forgotten memories are back.”

“Thanks to you.” As he was thinking of the distant past, Sid continued calmly, “I finally remembered everything. It all came back to me when I saw Endea’s current state. You may look different from before, but your mana is the same. Florence... Are you going to do the same thing again? And this time, you’re using Endea instead of Arthur.”

“Huh?” Tenko blinked in incomprehension.

Flora didn’t answer and continued to smile at Sid.

“I won’t let you, Florence.”

“Oh? And what can you do in your current condition, Sir Sid?”

As if saying he would show her with his blade and not words, Sid drew his

obsidian iron sword and filled it with fierce lightning. However, just when he started to focus his power, readying a charge at Flora...a new pressure assaulted the world.

Sid gave up and leaped back. When he looked up, two knights had appeared before Endea and Flora.

The first one was wearing black plate armor, a black overcoat, and a black helmet with a cross-shaped mark on its visor. The design resembled a lion.

The other one was also wearing dark knight attire but their helmet had a horn just like a unicorn. The plate armor was refined and beautiful, giving off the feeling of a swift horse.

As they were both wearing full-face helmets, their identities were unknown. However, their overwhelming presence and mana were similar to Sid Blitze and Rifis Ortol, which scared everyone. With this, the answer was obvious. Just like Sid, they were knights from the legendary era.

“Th-That knight is...?!” Tenko went deathly pale the instant she saw the knight with the cross-shaped mark, and her body started to shake violently. She was hyperventilating. She tried to draw her katana with her trembling hand, but she didn’t manage to put any force into it and only caressed the hilt. Still, she gathered all the pride and determination she could and yelled, as if asking the knight to look at her, “That cross-shaped mark! You’re the knight from that time! You’re the one who—”

“Here we are, Your Majesty, Lady Florence.” Tenko was completely ignored. In fact, he didn’t even notice her presence. Just like how a dragon wouldn’t notice an ant screaming at its foot.

“I appreciate how fast you were, Sir Lion, Sir Unicorn.” Flora continued the conversation, not caring about Tenko either.

“My lord. I am delighted that you have accomplished your dearest wish.” Sir Unicorn bowed.

“Indeed. You have become quite the fine lady. You are as splendid as my previous master,” Sir Lion commented.

“You truly are wonderful, my adorable master.”

“Really?” Endea asked.

“Now you just need to stand at the top of the world as its supreme king. You will bring true peace and silence to the world and reign over it for eternity. However,” Flora, as well as Sir Lion and Unicorn, glanced at Sid, “the one responsible for stopping our dear master’s domination back then is here.”

“He betrayed us and our lord, committing the unforgivable crime of pointing a sword at him. He is the greatest sinner of all knights...”

“Sid Blitze the Barbarian.” Sir Lion completed Sir Unicorn’s sentence.

Sid didn’t reply to their accusations.

“These impudent eyes... You still intend to oppose our lord’s supremacy like back then?”

“It goes without saying,” Sid finally answered, his words filled with absolute conviction.

“Why?”

“Because of my chivalry.”

Hearing Sid’s instant reply, Sir Lion and Sir Unicorn exuded scorn from their whole bodies.

“Barbarian is really a fitting name. Dying once and being born again didn’t change anything,” Sir Lion spat.

“You are beyond saving. Just as I thought, we have to kill you. Because of our chivalry, as you so proudly said,” Sir Unicorn declared.

“Of course. Accomplish your way of the knight as you want, my past friends.”

Sid, Sir Lion, and Sir Unicorn glared at each other. The world’s three strongest knights reached for their weapons. The pressure they exuded froze the cold air even more as they created a space where only they existed and everyone else could only watch.

Tenko observed the dark knight with a cross-shaped mark—Sir Lion. His attention was fully on Sid, even though she was standing next to him. Only Sid existed in Sir Lion’s world.

He's completely disregarding me! I don't even count as an opposing force to him... It's as if I'm just some random survivor of a defeated army! Tenko gritted her teeth, frustrated.

Meanwhile, the pressure the glaring knights exuded, and their mana, gradually rose, making everyone shiver in fear at the fierce battle that was going to start.

With the collapsed capital as their twilit snowy stage, the fight between the three knights from the legendary era was about to begin. However...

"Stop, Sir Lion, Sir Unicorn," a majestic voice—Endea—said. "Tonight is my coronation ceremony for becoming the true king of the world. I won't allow you to spoil the celebrations with a boorish fight."

"...By your will."

"We overstepped our bounds."

Sir Lion and Sir Unicorn bowed then stepped back.

Maybe Sid didn't want to make matters worse, as he silently lowered his sword too. As the tense atmosphere dispersed, Endea turned toward Sid.

"I'll ask one last time, Sir Sid the Lightning Knight."

"Yeah?"

"Serve me. I'm the only one worthy of being your master. If you accept now, I'll forgive your affronts thus far and allow you to sit at the lowest seat of my black round table."

"Then I'll answer once more," Sid said solemnly. "I refuse. I have only one master in this life. The king I chose to serve to the point of breaking my oath of loyalty to Arthur is Alvin Noll Calvania and no one else."

"So that's your choice..." She closed her eyes and heaved a deep sigh.

Was the reason for her sigh because she knew from the start that he would refuse? Or was she ridiculing the fool who wouldn't listen to reason? Or was it a sigh of resignation as she realized that he would never be hers?

"In that case," she turned her back to Sid, "continue to revere your false king

and wait for death with the other foolish knights as you are engulfed in an endless winter."

Just as she finished talking, darkness suddenly hovered around her, and a door opened. It was a Fairy Road made by Flora.

"Well then, farewell, everyone," Flora said. "We will now make a triumphant return to the demon capital with our new king and proclaim our supremacy to the whole world. Just like back then, starting with the northern lands, the king of winter will reign over everything, ruling over death and stillness. That way, the world will be unified as one. This will be the beginning of a new eternal dynasty: the winter era."

Nobody understood what Flora meant or even what her objective was. However, there was something that they realized instinctively. The abnormal cold, the blizzard, and the darkness gave them a hunch. Spring, where life overflowed, would never come again. The world would forever be enclosed in a dark, cold, and deadly winter. The world—was ending.

Flora, Sir Lion, Sir Unicorn, and Endea entered the Fairy Road and were on the point of disappearing, but...

"W-Wait...Elma!" Alvin yelled, stretching a hand toward her sister while holding her aching head with the other.

Endea stopped but didn't turn back. She stayed silent for a while, then finally, "Farewell, Alma," she said. Then she disappeared into the Fairy Road.

The door closed. Then, as if there had never been anything to begin with, the darkness dissipated. However, the abnormal blizzard that was raging around them proved that everything that had happened was real.

"Elma... I...I..." Alvin couldn't finish her sentence, and, completely exhausted, she fell to her knees and lost consciousness.

"Alvin?! Hang in there, Alvin!" Tenko screamed as she ran toward her, but Alvin couldn't hear her anymore.

"Alvin!"

"Get a hold of yourself!"

“Prince!”

Not bound by fear anymore, the Blitze class students—Christopher, Elaine, Theodore, Lynette, and Yuno—rushed to Alvin’s side.

In contrast to them, Sid was silent and stared at where Endea had disappeared.

“I finally understand why I was resurrected in this world and why you tied me to it,” Sid muttered to himself as he watched the back of his right hand. “All right, Arthur. Considering how much I owe you, this is nothing. That’ll be...my last job.”

The crest on the back of Sid’s right hand, connecting him spiritually to Alvin, had become slightly fainter.

Interlude

Why did I forget until now? I indeed had a twin little sister.

It was back when I was a child, when I was still Alma and not Alvin. It was even further in the past than when I met Tenko.

As far as I could remember, we were always together. It's said that twins share the same soul split in two. That meant that my sister and I were both one in mind and body. We were both as important as ourselves to each other.

And yet, what did separate us? What did separate Alma and Elma?

One was blessed by the warm light of the sun, while the other was embraced by the cold darkness.

The cruel fate separated us.

Just why did things end up like that...?

"Alma!"

When I heard my name being called, I came back to myself and raised my head. I was in the place I always entered secretly, somewhere that only I, my father, and the head of the Ladies of the Lake knew—a secret room in a tower of the Calvania Castle. The chief priestess of the Ladies of the Lake had explained that this room was part of another dimension, so only a few people could perceive and enter it, but I didn't really understand.

In front of me, at a distance near enough to feel each other's breath, was the same face as mine.

"Elma..." I called my little sister's name.

She was my twin little sister, my other half. We had the same face, hair color, eye color, skin color, physique, and the same voice. Our everything was the exact reflection of the other. The only thing that differentiated us was that I was forced to wear boy's clothes while Elma was forced to wear shabby clothes.

I was too young to understand why, but Elma had always been locked up in that secret room. It was only furnished with a bed, a desk, a chair, a shelf for clothes, and some other things that were the minimum needed for her daily life. There was no carpet, the floor and walls were only made of cold stones. The only connection with the outside world was the small grated window from where you could see the capital and mountains far away. It was just like a prison.

I treated it as a place to perch, coming and going whenever I wanted, but to Elma, this place was like a cage. Some strange power forbade her from leaving this room. That meant that, to Elma, this cramped room was her whole world. And yet, even though a normal child would go crazy from being imprisoned here...

"What is it, Alma? You look gloomy."

She was always smiling.

"Ah! Are you tired? That must be it... After all, you're really busy trying to become...err, king, was it? I'm sorry you have to come see me every time even though you're so tired..."

She was a kind girl. Even though she should've hated and cursed the world for being put in such an unfair situation, she always worried more about me than herself. She truly was a kind girl.

"I'm fine... You have it harder than me," I said.

"Nope, I'm all right. After all, I have you, Alma," she declared with a beaming smile.

Hearing my cute little sister say something so admirable, I couldn't help myself, so I hugged her.

"Alma?"

"I'm sorry... I'm so sorry... Why is Lady Eva doing such a cruel thing to you? No matter how much I ask her to let you out, she always rebukes me with a scary face... Even Father does nothing, despite looking so sad..."

"I'm okay... Besides, you have it harder than me, no? It's horrible how you have to live as a boy even though you're a girl..."

“Elma...”

“I hate Lady Eva... She imprisoned me here and forces you to dress like a boy... I really hate her...”

“Don’t say that... I’m sure there is a reason...”

“I don’t care...”

We stayed silent for a while, embracing and comforting each other. Then...

“Let’s talk about something fun. Like we usually do,” I suggested and took my arms off her.

The time I could spend with her was short, so I couldn’t waste even a single second on a depressing subject. I wanted her to at least be happy while I was here, as that was the only thing I could do for her...as well as my only means to oppose this unfair world.

“Yes, let’s.”

“Well then, what should we talk about this time...?” I pondered.

Elma had always been imprisoned in this room and didn’t know anything about the outside world. So for her to know about it even just a little, I often talked about what I experienced outside.

However, recently, rather than hearing about me and the outside world, Elma had been far more interested in a certain topic.

“Then I want to hear about the Lightning Knight again!”

What she liked the most was talking about the legend of Sir Sid Blitze the Lightning Knight. And it wasn’t about the anecdotes of Sid the Barbarian commonly spread among the people and in books, like the ones in this room. No, what she liked were the secret stories passed on by the royal family about Sid the true heroic knight. Only the royal family knew about them, and they were passed on to me by my father. They were Elma’s favorite stories.

“Aha ha... You still want to hear about Sir Sid? You really love him, huh?”

“Yes! He’s really cool! And amazing!”

The gloomy expression she had a few seconds ago disappeared and was

replaced by a beaming smile. Thinking about it, that was natural. After all, I loved the legends about Sid Blitze the Lightning Knight too. So it was a given that Elma, who was my other half, would love them as well. And, just like how I loved Sir Sid in the stories, I was sure that she loved him too.

"Well then, which story about him should I tell today?"

"The one where he defeats that super strong and scary monster called a dragon and then saves the princess imprisoned at the top of a tower!" Elma said excitedly.

"Got it."

I used the short time we had together to talk about Sir Sid.

A long time ago, there was an evil country.

Its king controlled a giant dragon, attacked other nations, made the people suffer, and he abducted a princess.

But then, Sir Sid, the gallant knight of justice, appeared.

Per the order of the righteous king, Arthur, he swung his sword to save the people and the princess.

His sword was filled with the lightning of justice, and his dauntless and courageous way of fighting truly fit his name, Lightning Knight.

He defeated the bad soldiers and knights, the dragon, and the evil king all on his own.

And, finally, he saved the princess.

Yet, he didn't ask for a reward.

After all, he had only acted in accordance with the chivalry he believed in.

I narrated the story I had heard from my father word for word to Elma. No matter how many times I went through this story, Sir Sid truly was the coolest.

Elma was spellbound while listening to me, and I was quite entranced myself, as I had talked with more passion than usual. We had both crossed over time

and were now in the legendary era. What spread before our eyes was far too real to only be our imagination.

Elma and I linked our hands as we immersed ourselves in the scene of the Lightning Knight swinging his sword.

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"Sir Sid is so cool," Elma commented with an entranced sigh as we came back from the world of our imagination.

"Yeah, he really is a knight among knights..." I said, just as entranced as her.

"Yep, yep! Sir Sid never lies! When he says he'll do something, he'll absolutely do it! No matter how difficult it is, and even if he has to risk his life!"

"'A knight tells only the truth,' right?"

"Yes! That!" Elma squealed happily with rosy cheeks. She truly loved Sir Sid. Of course, I did too.

"If only a knight like Sir Sid existed in this era too..." I sighed.

"Yes..." Elma's excitement slowly cooled down, and she smiled sadly.

Sir Sid only existed in stories. I didn't know which was the true Sir Sid, the Barbarian or the Lightning Knight, but one thing was clear: as someone who had lived during the legendary era, he had already died long ago. He was only a story character, and it was impossible to meet him.

"If Sir Sid were here, I'm sure he would help you once you've become king. And...he would save me too..." Elma muttered.

I instinctively clenched my jaw. My excitement cooled down, and I felt lamentable. My sister's words were both her true feelings and her fate. The delusion that a miracle—that the character from a story—would save her showed just how hopeless her future was. No matter how much I tried to relieve her loneliness by frequently visiting her, in the end, it was just a drop in the bucket.

And yet, she still smiled. Even though she secretly despaired and had no hope, she smiled. So I...
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“Don’t give up, Elma.” I took her hands. “I’ll definitely become an amazing king someday! And then I’ll set you free! I won’t let anyone object! I...I’ll save you! I promise!”

Elma blinked a few times in surprise, then said, “Alma... You’re just like Sir Sid.” She smiled, her eyes tearing up. “‘A knight tells only the truth’?”

“Of course! ‘A knight tells only the truth’!” I declared.

“But you’re going to become king, not a knight, no?”

“Th-That’s fine! The king of our country is called the, err...Knight King, was it? Anyway, I’ll be both king and knight at the same time!”

Like this, we talked for a while. Our emotions were a mess, sometimes embarrassed, sometimes crying, but we were always smiling.

“Thank you, Alma... For being so kind to me.”

“Elma...”

“I’ll wait... I’ll always wait for you. For the day you’ll take me away from this prison... I’ll always wait for you, believing you’ll come...”

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I was determined. I would save Elma and become a splendid king.

I spent my days hiding that I was a girl and enduring harsh training.

In my free time, I would go see Elma, and we would comfort each other.

She was my irreplaceable other half.

However, these days came to an end far too abruptly.

“She died.”

“Huh?”

One day, just as I was on my way to secretly see Elma, the head priestess of the Ladies of the Lake—Lady Eva—announced something I couldn’t believe.

“What did you just say?”

“I said that Lady Elma died. It was from illness.”

For a few seconds, I didn't understand the meaning of her words, but it didn't take long for my brain to do its work and realize what I had just heard.

"You're lying!" I yelled in denial. "You're lying. Elma can't be dead!"

"Don't shout. Lady Elma's existence is a secret. It would be bad if someone heard you."

"I can't believe that she died from illness! Last week she was completely fine!"

For the past week, my education as a royal had made me too busy to see her. Still, there was no way that she would suddenly die in only a week. I wouldn't believe it until I saw her corpse with my own eyes.

"Elma! Elma!" I repeatedly called to her as I ran toward her room.

However, Eva caught my arm and restrained me with incredible strength.

"Don't make me repeat myself. She's dead."

"Let me go! Please!" As I pleaded, looking at Eva, I noticed something strange. "Huh? Eva...?"

Something was weird. Eva, the head priestess of the Ladies of the Lake, who was always noble and beautiful, looked unusually weak. Her breath was ragged, and her body scarily hot. It was as if she had a fatal disease and she was on the verge of death.

And yet, the power she used to grasp my arm was amazing. It was as if she was using her last strength, like a candle burning fiercely before disappearing.

"I'm glad... You are the real Lady Alma..." she whispered.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"To think I would be deceived so easily... Everything is my fault... Everything happened because I was too optimistic..." She wasn't looking at me as she spoke this nonsense. "That day, when you and Lady Elma were born... I should have made the decision as the head priestess! That we shouldn't let the both of you live! Just like the traditions say! But...because of my dear King Auld's wish...because of my unrequited feelings...I made a mistake!"

"Eva... just what are you...?"

“I have to correct that mistake...”

Eva’s beautiful face was warped by a fierce expression, as if she were possessed, and she grasped my head. She was so strong I couldn’t resist.

“Gah?!” I groaned in pain.

“You must forget, Lady Alma! You have to! Lady Elma was a calamity! She had to die!”

Then she started to mutter a spell.

The next instant, I felt mist wrap around my mind. Something similar to drowsiness quickly took over, and my sight became dark. My consciousness was fading.

“Forget everything...”

“What...are...?”

“Forget...”

I couldn’t resist anymore and lost consciousness.

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Soon after, Eva suddenly died from an unknown cause.

Because of that, Isabella became the new Nimue taking care of me.

Around the same time, my father’s illness worsened and, as if exchanging places with Tenko, who he had just brought in, he died.

It was also around then that, for the future of the royal family, the plan to create the Blitze class started.

Hectic days passed in the blink of an eye as I did my best to deal with all the changes happening.

Maybe that was why...

I had a certain worry. I was so busy going forward that I felt like I was forgetting something important. I felt like I lost something precious to me, even though it was something that should never be lost.

Since that day, I always had that faint worry.

Chapter 2: The Light in a World Without Light

It was cold. So cold that it felt like it could even freeze bones. It wouldn't allow Alvin to sleep any longer.

She woke up with a groan and raised her upper body from the bed. Looking around, she realized she was in the room of one of the royal family's villas. The red carpet, the dresser made of ebony, the luxurious desk, the chair, and all the other furnishings were refined and appropriate for a royal. However, the window was broken, a part of the wall was destroyed, and the floor had holes here and there. Cloth was used to seal the gaps and protect them from the cold, but it was far from enough. Even the fireplace that was currently lit didn't help, as the room was still freezing cold.

"Where am I...?"

"Oh, you're awake, Alvin?"

Alvin turned toward the voice and found Sid. He was sitting on the sofa, his legs crossed and his hands behind his head.

"Yes..." she muttered. Then she got up from the bed and approached the sealed window.

She removed a part of the cloth and looked outside. A cold wind blew in the room. Wind already managed to enter through the gaps, but removing the cloth even just a little made it worse. The raging blizzard outside blew fiercely through the opening.

Still, Alvin didn't care. She only silently gazed at the scenery outside. The sky was covered with thick, dark clouds, and the world was white. Completely white. The blizzard was overrunning the world, covering the half-destroyed capital in snow. Even though it should've been spring, the season brimming with life, it was as if it were midwinter. No, even midwinter wasn't that terrible. It was a deadly winter that rejected life.

Alvin silently gazed at the completely changed capital and sighed. "So it

wasn’t a dream... Elma... My twin little sister did that.”

“Yeah.” Sid nodded and stood up. “Let’s go. Everyone is waiting for you.”

“Huh?”

“First, we need to review the situation. Then you’ll have to make your decision as the king... Anyway, everything will start from here.”

Alvin stayed silent as she followed Sid outside the room, going through the half-collapsed villa’s corridor toward the reception hall.

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Once they arrived, they immediately started the meeting.

Present at the table were:

The royal court’s cabinet ministers, the substitute leaders of the three colored fairy knight orders—Burns, Aigis, and Caim.

The head priestess of the Ladies of the Lake, Isabella, accompanied by Libella and her other aides.

The instructors of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy—Kreis, Marie, and Zack.

Finally, strong squires such as Tenko and Louise were also here. The fact that not yet knighted students were allowed to be present at the meeting that would decide the fate of the nation proved just how dire the situation was.

In this room, too, the fire of the hearth wasn’t enough to repel the freezing cold. Wind penetrated through the deep cracks in the walls and the ceiling.

“Well then, let’s start,” Isabella announced the instant Alvin sat. “To be perfectly honest...the current situation is the worst. This country...no, the world is going to be destroyed.”

Everyone gasped at hearing how hopeless the situation was.

Isabella continued. “The witch of the Dark Order of Opus, Flora, and the leader of the northern demon kingdom... No, I should use her proper name. The Demon King Endea took over the ritual during the Holy Spirit’s Advent Festival and transformed the prayer to Éclair into a prayer to Opus. By doing this, they

succeeded in releasing something that was sealed in the castle and the capital. You must wonder what this something is and why it was sealed there in the first place, but even I do not know. The previous head priestess, Lady Eva, most likely knew, but she died before she could tell me about it. However, there is no doubt that Endea used this something for her forbidden spell. This is the origin of the blizzard engulfing the country—Winter Twilight."

She looked at the white scenery through the window. "The effect of Winter Twilight is simple and clear: it brings an eternal winter to the world. It's absolute and hellishly cold. Once Winter Twilight is complete, spring where new life buds, summer where life sparkles, and the fruitful autumn will forever be lost. It will be winter until the world ends. No, it will continue even after the world ends and not a single life is left. An eternal and absolute winter will dominate the world. Not only humans and animals, but even mana will also freeze, killing the fairies and spirits too. Then, finally, all the stolen lives will transform into the frozen undead, serving a single king—the Demon King, ruler of winter."

The despair in the room brought silence. The situation was hopeless, and nobody could imagine having a future ahead of them.

What killed the most people in history? Epidemics? Famines? Wars? No, it was winter. Winter's coldness rejected all life. It stole living beings' warmth, killed the crops, and easily reaped life. Some animals could resist the winter, but that was simply enduring it until the arrival of spring. No creature could live forever during winter. The only reason people could enjoy looking at snowy landscapes was thanks to the progress of civilization. Otherwise, the winter has always been a symbol of death.

"If we are to believe the legends, Winter Twilight has only just begun. Apparently, the winter still only covers the Kingdom of Calvania, and the cold is only a little stronger than during midwinter. However, slowly, little by little, it will cover the whole world and become so cold that even snow fairies and ice spirits will freeze. And even before then, the cold will be harsh enough to kill people soon. It won't even take a month for all the people of the kingdom to freeze to death. This country...no, the world is on the brink of death," Isabella explained.

“Just like the legend says... Isn’t that the advent of the Demon King?!” someone yelled.

Everyone fell silent. Indeed, it was like the legend everyone knew. The advent of the Demon King was the greatest and worst disaster of the legendary era.

Sid, who had stayed silent until now, finally opened his mouth. “Yeah. It’s just like back then.”

“Sir Sid?”

“During the legendary era, when I was a knight running around the land, the Demon King suddenly appeared one day. The Demon King is a fiend of winter entranced by Opus. He’s the agent who’s received the favor of Opus—the archenemy of our respected fairy god of light, Éclair—the fairy god of darkness who hates and wants to destroy the world. That’s why they engulf the world in a deadly winter. Because they’re an existence made to bring the world to its demise. Back then, the Demon King also used Winter Twilight, and a lot of people died because of that. Just like the legend Isabella just told.”

“And...how did you end it?” Alvin asked.

“Who knows...? I still don’t remember that part...” Sid replied, his hand on his head.

“According to the legend,” Isabella answered instead, “back then, countless clans, tribes, and nations fought for the hegemony of the continent until the arrival of the Demon King and Winter Twilight. Confronting him, they became scared, despaired, and gave up. However, the founder of our kingdom, the Holy King Arthur, was different. He scolded the people who trembled in fear, and he gathered knights to fight against the Demon King’s army of frozen undead. Then, at the end of the battle, Arthur defeated the Demon King. In our era, everyone knows that legend.”

Once again, silence ruled over the room. Isabella’s speech brought even more despair to everyone. After all—the Holy King Arthur wasn’t here anymore. The strongest knights who gathered under him weren’t here anymore. Now they were people only existing in stories.

Most people here had realized the truth. Sid was the best proof they needed.

Compared to the legendary era's knights, the present knights were...far weaker. The legendary era had many champions: The Holy King Arthur; Logass Durande, the Crimson Lion; Luke Anthalo, the Blue-eyed Unicorn; Rifis Ortol, the Azure Owl; and Sid Blitze, the Barbarian or the Lightning Knight.

There were also many other knights who had accomplished unbelievable feats and left their names in history. However, present-day people thought that they were exaggerated stories. But by looking at Sid, a knight from the legendary era reborn in modern times, they understood that everything was the truth. Just as its name indicated, the legendary era was made of legendary people. That meant that even the weakest knight from back then was as strong as the strongest knight from the current era.

The knights—humanity—had become considerably weaker. Moreover, history's greatest king was no more. Then, just how were they supposed to fight against the Demon King and the northern demon kingdom?

Just as everyone was despairing...

"There is only one thing for us to do." One person stood tall and dignified—Alvin. "As the king of Calvania, I, Alvin Noll Calvania, will raise an army and use everything in our power to strike down the demon kingdom. And then..." she trailed off for a second, her face showing anguish, before going back to a kingly expression, "we will defeat Endea...the Demon King. It's a holy war."

Everyone stirred, bewildered.

Alvin understood that it was useless to ruminate on the past. The Holy King Arthur and his legendary knights were past existences, and they couldn't count on them. Still, she also realized that with how weak humanity and its knights were, it would be almost impossible to hold their own against the Demon King and her army.

"Will you follow me, Sir Sid?"

"Wherever you go." He bowed.

"Isabella. Help me with making a strategy to conquer the northern demon kingdom."

"Yes, I will do my best." She bowed too.

“Ministers, prepare for war. Request reinforcement to the surrounding countries and...” Alvin swiftly gave order after order, but...

“That’s impossible!” a loud objecting voice resounded.

The echo died in the sound of the blizzard outside, and the room became silent again. Everyone looked at its source—Burns Durande from the Red Knights. He was the substitute leader, replacing his dead father, who had betrayed the kingdom and allied with Wolf and the empire. He was also one of the knights who had suffered a harsh defeat against Sid during the Premier Chevalier tournament.

“What is?” Alvin asked calmly.

“Everything you said! Reorganizing the army under you and attacking the demon kingdom to defeat the Demon King is impossible!”

Alvin stayed silent for a few seconds. Then she answered resolutely, “I know that you don’t want to swear loyalty to me. Because of my incompetence and my immaturity, the three dukes chose Prince Wolf, and your parents ended up dying before your eyes. Moreover, I am a woman, so I understand that you don’t want to accept me as king. However, our nation...no, the world is in danger. As we continue to argue here, we are wasting precious time. The countdown to the end of the world has already started. Shouldn’t we put our past grudges aside and join hands to defeat the Demon King?”

“There is a more...fundamental problem...” Aigis Ortol—substitute leader of the Blue Knights and daughter of the late Duke Ortol—said instead of Burns, who was groaning in despair.

“What do you mean?” Alvin questioned.

“You didn’t notice the abnormality with your fairy sword?” This time, it was Caim Anthalo, the substitute leader of the Green Knights and son of the late Duke Anthalo.

“My fairy sword...?”

Alvin grasped the hilt of her rapier hanging at her waist. She didn’t feel like anything was different, but everyone else was acting like something *did* happen, and it was the reason why they had such desperate expressions and were

hanging their heads.

What's the problem...? Alvin wondered.

"Well, you just woke up, so no wonder you don't get it," Sid started to explain. "Basically, all the fairy swords of the kingdom lost most of their power."

"Wh-What?!"

Fairy swords were fairies—the people's Good Fellows—who had turned into swords to help humanity. They gave great power to fairy knights, allowing them to enhance their physical abilities, their healing power, and the use of magic. The reason fairy knights were so much stronger than normal knights, and could fight against monsters and dark knights, was thanks to their fairy swords. In other terms, without them, fairy knights were back to being normal people.

"Is that true?!" Alvin asked, her eyes wide open.

"Yes, it is," Isabella confirmed. "Most likely, the cause is Winter Twilight. Fairies are made from mana—the origin of all life in this world—and are the incarnations of nature that govern over the earth, the ocean, and the sky. However, the world is currently dying because of the deadly winter engulfing it. While the world is dying, how could the fairies, incarnations of it, exhibit their power?"

Alvin gasped in realization. It made perfect sense. Fairies became fairy swords for people because of the ancient pact they had made under the name of the fairy god of light, Éclair. However, as time passed, people forgot about it and only used them as simple weapons, even forgetting that they were living beings. So she could understand that they wouldn't be able to exhibit their power because of the deadly winter. Still...

"I don't get it. Did fairy swords really lose their power?" Alvin drew her rapier and held it above her head.

If what everyone else said was true, her fairy sword should have lost its power too. And yet...it didn't. It was just as strong as before. Even in the middle of the deadly winter, it was brimming with life.

"I can sense power and the blessing from my sword. I should be able to fight the same as usual. Why...?" Just as she was going to mouth her doubts, Alvin

realized something. There was one difference between her and the other knights like Burns, whose fairy swords lost their powers.

“It’s thanks to Will.” Sid said what Alvin thought. “Those who use Will gather mana from the world, knead it inside their bodies, then give it to their swords. So it doesn’t matter to them if the world is dying because of Winter Twilight. They can use their fairy swords and magic without any problems. And as long as they live, their fairy swords won’t die.”

Everyone stirred.

“In simpler terms, the positions were reversed. Until now, people have been relying on their fairy swords. Now, it’s the fairy swords that rely on people. But that’s fine. After all, mutual aid is the basis of a good relationship.” Sid grinned, earning him the glare of everyone else.

Alvin smiled wryly seeing how Sid’s insolent attitude didn’t change even in such a situation. Then she refocused and asked calmly, “Is what Sir Sid said true, Tenko? Louise?”

Alvin finally understood why squires who weren’t knighted yet were present at the meeting. And, as she expected...

“Yes, Prince,” Tenko replied solemnly. “We, the students of the Blitze class—that is to say, people who have been taught Will by Sir Sid—can use our fairy swords as usual.”

“Thankfully, it’s not just the Blitze class,” Louise interjected. “I, Johan from the Anthalo class, Olivia from the Ortol class—and those who have been receiving guidance about Will from Sir Sid since the training-camp incident—can use fairy swords. It seems that Will really is the key to fighting under the effect of Winter Twilight.”

That truth was the reason for the despair reigning over the room. Indeed, thanks to Sid and Alvin, the squires of the academy had started to change. Just as Sid said, students started to understand that they couldn’t just rely on their fairy swords, and students from other classes kept coming to him for guidance in increasing numbers.

Still, even then, the number of people who could use Will was far too low. The

knights of the Fairy Knight Order and the upper-class students of the academy only swore by the rank of their fairy swords and refused to learn Will. After all, it was a technique that would change the absolute power hierarchy brought by the sword ranks. They didn't want to stop resting on their laurels, relying on the great power of their highly ranked fairy swords. And now, it was time to pay for their arrogance and negligence.

"So only a few squires can actually put up a fight right now..."

"Exactly, Prince," Burns answered with a moan while Aigis, Caim, and the other people in the room hung their heads regretfully. "It's impossible to win against the demon army with only a few squires. Even with Sir Sid, a knight from the legendary era, the enemy has multiple knights just as strong. The countless frozen undead and dark knights in the northern demon kingdom and Winter Twilight... Even if the whole world joins forces, we can't win. It's a losing battle... Everything is over..." he said in despair, wanting to put an end to the talk.

However, Alvin didn't agree. "No, it's not. The world isn't over yet. We're still alive. We must take our swords and fight. For all the people living in this country...no, in the world."

Burns, Aigis, and Caim started yelling.

"You don't understand!"

"You think we can win?! In such a situation?!"

"You think students can do something when we can't?"

"Don't be conceited! You think everything is possible as long as Sir Sid is on your side?! Stop dreaming, and face reality!"

"Sir Sid's presence is irrelevant," Alvin replied firmly. "Even if he weren't here, I'd have the will to fight, and I'd go to battle with the people answering my call. 'A knight tells only the truth.'"

Burns, Aigis, and Caim gasped.

"So? Is there anyone here who wants to fight with me?"

The first one to break the silence was...

“Do you even need to ask?” Sid boasted with a grin.

“Likewise, Alvin. Of course, everyone in the Blitze class is the same. We’re all ready to go to the north!” Tenko bravely stood up and saluted.

“Same here, Prince. No...my lord.” Louise bowed. “Sitting here, watching the people die while waiting for my own death would sully my father’s name. I could never accept that. Factions and past grudges don’t matter anymore. My sword is yours.”

Of course, Christopher, Elaine, Theodore, Lynette, and Yuno were the same.

“We’re coming too, Alvin.”

“We would not be able to call ourselves knights otherwise!”

“Well, you’re our lord, after all.”

“I-I’m scared, but let’s fight together, Alvin!”

“I’d jump in fire and water for you, Prince!”

Then Johan from the Anthalo class and Olivia from the Ortol class too.

“I’ll fight too! Take me with you!”

“Me too! As if I could stay back while the class of failures fights!”

Other students of the Blitze class, as well as from other classes, agreed too.

All of them were squires who had learned Will from Sid and were influenced by his way of life. One after another, they showed their will to join the fight, no matter how hopeless it was.

But that was all.

“See?” Burns said with a little scorn in his voice. “What can you do with that little number?! What can you accomplish?! It’s the end! Everything is over! You’re just losing your head because you’ve been too close to a legendary hero! Just what do you think you can do?!”

“We can live up to our chivalry.”

Hearing Sid, everyone fell silent.

“In the first place, knights aren’t *that* amazing. They’re just here to open the

king's path with their swords and pave it with their corpses. *We're* the eccentric ones for trying to give meaning to that. If you wanted money, honor, or fame, you could just become mercenaries or adventurers. That way you could achieve success on the battlefield, live grand adventures, and kill as many monsters as you want. It's easier to earn money and have your name passed down in sagas that way."

"Th-That's..." Burns trailed off.

"And yet, you guys chose to become knights. Even though it's not worth the trouble, you chose that way of life. Why?"

Nobody answered.

"I guess it's the flow of the times? In this era, many see things in a misplaced way. Still, they chose the foolish path of becoming knights. This is enough to know their grit and spirit. I want to believe that, even now, knights are the same as in the past."

Burns and the others stayed silent. Alvin ignored them and started to throw orders again at Isabella and the rest in preparation for the coming battle.

"Anyway, I should prepare too. Ha ha ha, taking care of young Alvin isn't that easy." Sid stood up and was going to leave, when...

"Even I...no, we would fight if we had the strength to... Just like you..."

"If our fairy swords didn't lose their power... If we had the strength..."

Hearing these whispers, Sid stopped and, his back to them, said, "You can't fight? Hmm... Do I need glasses? I'm pretty sure you have two arms and stand on the ground with your two legs. In that case, you should be able to swing a sword, no?"

They gasped.

"Being a knight is a way of life. The power of your fairy swords doesn't matter." With nothing left to say, Sid resumed his walk toward the exit.

However, just before leaving the room, he turned toward Alvin and the others.

Alvin was giving orders to Tenko, Louise, the squires who could use Will, and

the ministers from the royal faction. She spread a map of the continent on the table and started the war council with Isabella, ignoring the knights who had lost their will to fight.

There was one thing that Sid particularly liked about the current Alvin: she wasn't looking at him. Of course, that didn't mean she was ignoring him. Just that she was looking at the ones she should lead—her friends and vassals—and was focused on victory and the future. No matter how far off success seemed, as a king, Alvin stared straight at it.

And, around her were the patriotic knights who understood Alvin and had pledged their allegiance to her. A small but firm knight order made of young squires was forming itself.

"People can really change if they want to, huh?" Sid's lips twisted.

Where did the young Alvin, who was like a young chick, go? If she were still the same as back then, she would be lost and would cling to Sid and Isabella in such a situation.

Looking at the current Alvin strongly reminded Sid of a certain man. The king he had revered as his one and only master and to whom he had pledged his sword—his best friend the Holy King Arthur.

Seeing the Holy King Arthur in Alvin made Sid feel relieved from the bottom of his heart.

"The king's education is done. The knights were nurtured, and the country unified. I don't have to worry about the future anymore. In that case...the rest is my job... Sorry, Alvin... For the first time, I'll break the old knight's code," Sid muttered to himself and left the room discreetly.

———

At night, Sid left the knights' encampment and strolled around the capital. The raging blizzard covered him in white, but he didn't care. He continued to walk, the sound of his stamping on the snow washed away by the blizzard.

The world was completely white. Most of the buildings were in a pitiful state, either destroyed or full of cracks. The citizens had made tents and simple outdoor hearths and were huddled, trying to endure the cold.

The capital of Calvania—the knights' paradise that was simple yet gorgeous and full of vigor—was a mere shadow of its former splendor.

Looking at this scenery, Sid recalled a certain man and his voice...

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"Look, Sir Sid."

"This is what I...no, what we built up together. Our capital."

"Look, Sir Sid. Everyone is smiling."

"Even in such a turbulent era full of wars, pain, and sorrows...here, everyone is smiling."

"I'll protect them. I'll protect everyone."

"So, Sid... Please, continue to lend me your strength from now on."

~~~~

Sid silently recalled the former appearance of the capital, now buried in snow, as well as the nostalgic voice and face of his lord. He continued hearing the same thing again and again as he walked through the destroyed capital, the sound of his stamping on the snow washed away by the blizzard.

———

After a while, Sid arrived at the ruins of the castle. Though in ruins, it wasn't a complete mountain of rubble. Considering how some parts of the structure remained, it was more apt to say that it was only half-destroyed.

Sid went through the front gate, which looked like it could collapse with a simple push, jumped above the broken drawbridge, then entered the castle premises.

Obviously, nobody was present. Because more than half of the walls had collapsed, the interior was exposed to the wind, and the snow was piling up inside. Because of the collapsed walls and almost completely destroyed spires, Sid was forced to make a big detour. This caused him to pass through the site of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy. It was the place he had spent the most time after his resurrection, together with his students, so he had a certain

attachment to it. And yet, it had transformed into a mountain of debris and was now unrecognizable.

He silently passed the Blitze class's destroyed dormitory and entered the castle's main building. His footsteps echoed inside the blizzard. As he went up the damaged stone stairs, his surroundings changed. The more he advanced, the less destroyed the castle was. He continued to walk in the direction of the less damaged area, and he finally arrived at his destination.

While the raging blizzard outside resounded here too, this place—the temple of the Ladies of the Lake, where Sid had first gone after resurrecting and meeting Alvin—was strangely peaceful.

The temple's ritual site was still intact, made up of several stone pillars and arches with an altar at the back. And, on that altar, the idol of Éclair—the fairy god of light, revered by the people of this world—was erected.

Before it, someone was waiting for Sid—Isabella, the current head priestess of the Ladies of the Lake.

"Sir Sid..."

"Sorry, I made you wait even though I'm the one who's called you out."

"N-No... I just arrived myself," Isabella said. Then she added, somehow perplexed, "So...what did you want to talk about?"

"Considering how busy you are, let's get done fast." Sid scratched his head apologetically, then said, "However...I lied when I said I needed to talk to you."

"Huh?"

"Sorry for using you like that." Sid looked up at the idol of Éclair as Isabella was blinking in incomprehension. "No, really, I'm sorry. But right now, the only one who can serve as a vessel is most likely you, the strongest Nimue."

Sid aimed the back of his right hand, where the crest was, toward Isabella. Then, as if talking to the crest, he announced, "The time has come to fulfill our old pledge. Saint's Blood flowing in my veins, the time has come to perform your duty. Answer my call, Éclair. I, Sid Blitze the Lightning Knight, have come to fulfill our contract."

The crest on his right hand, which had been starting to disappear, glowed. The radiance illuminated the quiet and dim temple, and motes of light emanated from the crest, dancing and coiling around as they gathered toward Isabella.

“Wh-What is this?!” she exclaimed.

“Don’t worry. There’s no harm. You’ll just sleep for a while.”

“S-Sir Sid... Wh-What...is... Ah...aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah?!” Isabella screamed and crouched, holding her head, as the motes of light entered her body, changing her appearance little by little.

A flash of light dyed the world white, then the next instant, magnificent blonde hair softly spread around. Using Isabella’s body as a vessel, a dazzlingly beautiful maiden had appeared. At first glance, she looked like a young girl, but she had a mature presence. She was as lovely as a fairy and as beautiful as an angel, making it difficult to believe that she was from this world.

Before long, the light faded, and Isabella stood up, her golden eyes staring at Sid. While the body itself was Isabella’s, she wasn’t herself anymore. She was only the vessel for a far higher existence. Indeed, right now, she was the one who had fought against Opus and disappeared in the mythical era and the one who had made an oath with a certain king from the legendary era and blessed his bloodline. She was...

“Éclair.” Sid called her name, but she didn’t answer, her eyes cast down sadly. Sid didn’t mind and continued. “Sorry, I only just remembered everything. It’s embarrassing, but I had forgotten all of it... And that you’ve always been by my side.” He looked at the vanishing crest on the back of his right hand.

Éclair didn’t reply.

“What is it? We’re finally reuniting after such a long time. We should talk more. Though, well, I guess we don’t really have the time, considering the current situation.”

Still no answer.

“Jeez, cat got your tongue or something?”

Éclair finally raised her head and softly said, “I am too ashamed to face you,

Sir Sid.”

Sid stayed silent.

“In fact, it’s the same for all the people in the world. It’s my fault... Once again, because of me...” She trailed off.

“Yesterday’s grief and today’s regret and atonement are only possible if we have a tomorrow,” Sid said calmly. “So now, we must fight. And for that, your power is necessary once again.”

Éclair gasped. “Are you truly fine with this?!”

Sid tilted his head, not understanding the question.

“Just how... Just how can you talk with me as if nothing happened?! After all, I... I am the one at fault for your reputation as the Barbarian! I disgraced the pride and spirit you spent your life cultivating! I forced such a cruel role on you! You have more reasons to hate and despise me than to cooperate with me! Even if you broke our ancient pledge, I wouldn’t have the right to complain! That’s just how much I did to you!”

Sid listened quietly.

“And yet, why?! Why are you so...” Éclair trailed off, in tears.

“Because I’m Arthur and Alvin’s knight,” Sid answered readily with firm conviction.

Éclair gasped once again, and Sid smiled gently at her.

“Why would I hate you? It’s thanks to you that I managed to live up to my chivalry during the legendary era. It’s your fault I’m called the Barbarian? Ha ha, I already was a fiendish barbarian originally. You disgraced my honor as a knight? No. Just by the fact that it’s been passed down that I’m the Barbarian and Arthur the Holy King, my honor has been eternally protected. I did what I had to do. Even if everyone criticizes me, I can only feel pride for what I did. I have no regrets. Yeah, I don’t have a single regret over how I lived my life.”

“You really are...” Éclair looked down. “While I lost my influence on the world long ago, I did watch you through the crest. You never denied all the legends calling you the Barbarian. You always played the role of the evil one who went

against Arthur. Even though now that a new Demon King has appeared from the royal family's bloodline and Winter Twilight is active, you could tell everyone the truth and recover your honor..."

"That's unnecessary. Also, the truth doesn't always make people happy."

Éclair stayed silent.

"Right now, there's something far more important than my honor. If things stay like this, the world's going to perish. What I protected—along with Arthur, Rifis, Lucy, Logass, and all the people who lived in that chaotic era—will disappear."

Éclair listened quietly.

"That mistake must be corrected. However, this era's people have nothing to do with it. Even Endea, the current Demon King, is only a victim. Everything is our fault. It happened because we—the people living in the legendary era—were weak. The one who must take responsibility is...me. I'm the only one left. I can't involve this era's people, who are spreading their wings, trying to grasp a bright future."

Still no answer.

"So please, help me, Éclair. Once again, give me another sword. For the future of all the people living in this era."

Still, Éclair's expression was filled with bitterness and grief. "Even if... Even if you have to sacrifice yourself once again?"

"Yeah," Sid readily replied without any hesitation. "Hey, don't worry. The world's become independent from us. Even if we're not here, I'm sure it'll go toward a bright future. There's a king who believes, and makes people believe, such things."

Éclair said nothing.

"So what we must do is pretty simple. We're just settling things. Even children know that you must clean your own mess, no?"

"You really are determined to do it..." Éclair gave in and sighed. "It was one way for me to atone, using myself as a wedge to tie your soul with Arthur's

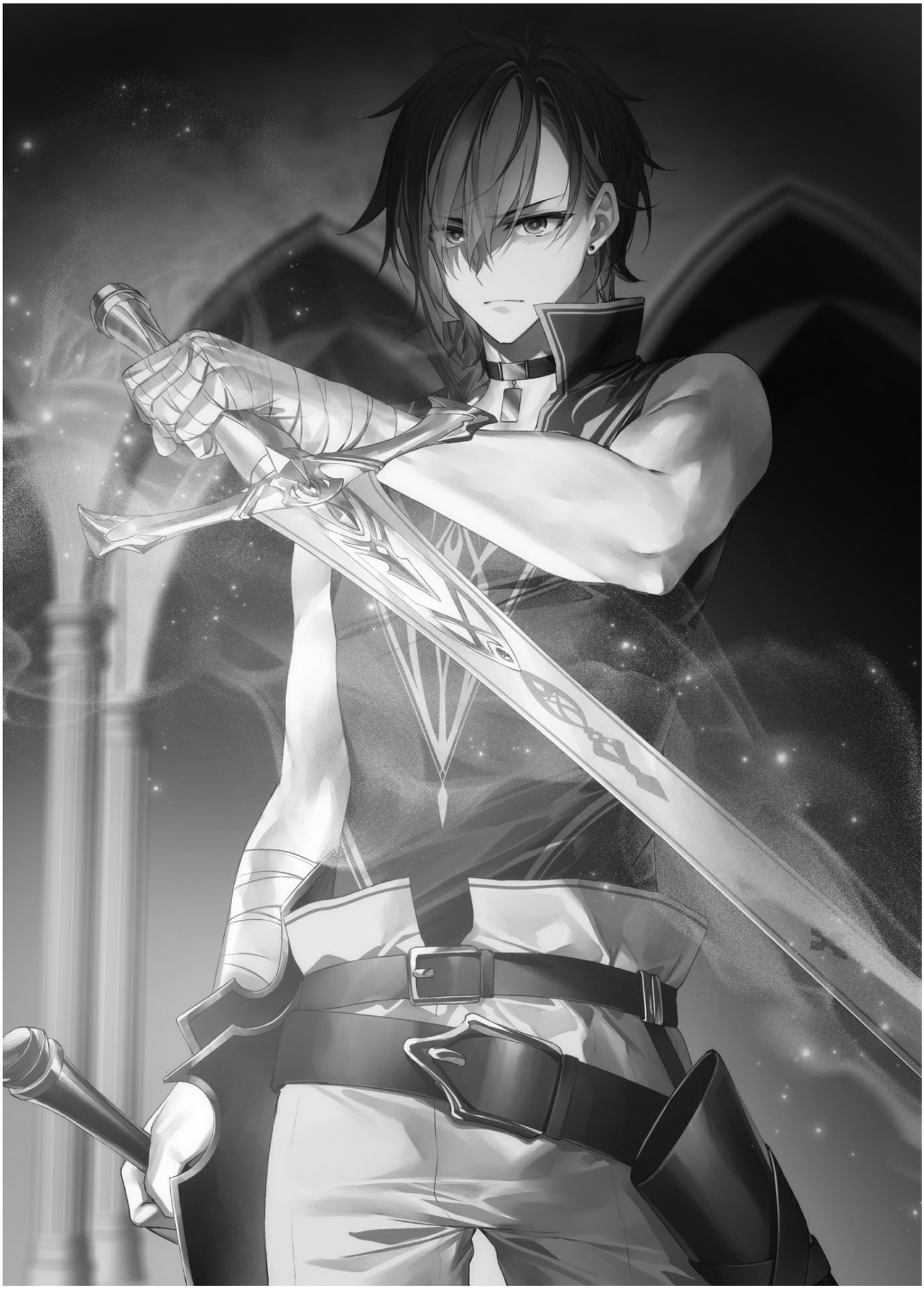
bloodline," she muttered, looking at the crest on the back of Sid's right hand. "Back in the legendary era, I forced a cruel duty on you. So a part of me hoped that, in the far future, you would be able to live a second life happily. That way, my sin would be forgiven... But there is no way something so convenient would happen. And, in the end, what I did was just commit another sin..."

"And I'm grateful for it."

Hearing this, Éclair finally regained her composure and raised her head. She looked straight at Sid and said, "Very well. We shall go together. I only have a little time left, but... I will dedicate everything—my power, my existence, and my heart—to you."

The next instant, she started to glow. It was an overwhelmingly bright and dazzling white light. After a few seconds, golden motes rose from Isabella, and she returned to her original appearance. As she fell to the ground, unconscious, Éclair's true form appeared for an instant next to her, enveloped in dazzling light. She quickly vanished, and the light started to take the shape of a sword. A beautiful sound similar to a bell rang as the light transformed into a divine white sword.

Sid grasped the hilt of the floating sword and muttered to himself, "The ancestor of all fairy swords... The fairy sword of light, *Daybreak*. It's been a thousand years since I last held you."



In his right hand was his obsidian iron sword. In his left, the fairy sword of light. Now equipped with black and white swords, Sid turned back and walked toward the exit of the temple silently.

Just when he was at the point of leaving, he turned his head toward the altar and glanced at Isabella on the ground.

“I’m really sorry. I leave the rest to you. Please... Take care of Alvin.”

Then he left.

It didn’t take long for everyone to notice that Sid Blitze, knight from the legendary era and Alvin’s first knight, had disappeared from the capital.

Chapter 3: Fighting the Decisive Battle on His Own

“Sir Sid disappeared?!”

Shock spread through the temporary royal palace while it was preparing to attack the northern demon kingdom.

“Why?! What’s happened, Isabella?!” Alvin yelled, making the vassals and knights stare at her uneasily.

“I don’t know... I truly don’t know...” Isabella answered, shaking her head feebly. “Sir Sid called me to the temple, and then he aimed the crest on the back of his right hand toward me and muttered something. The next instant, the crest glowed, and light poured on me. Then... After that, I lost consciousness.”

“T-The crest glowed...?”

The crest was the proof of the contract between Alvin and Sid. It was an ancient secret technique given to the Holy King’s descendants. Thanks to it, Sid, who wasn’t a person from this era, could manifest and stay in this world. It was proof of the bond between them. As such, Alvin had the same crest on the back of her right hand.

She glanced at her hand and...

“...Huh?” Alvin shivered.

The crest was losing its color. It was vanishing.

Sir Sid... Please, answer me! Alvin tried to summon him like she once did before, but it didn’t work. The crest had lost its power. *Wh-Why...? What’s happened...?* She felt a chill run down her spine coupled with a horrible presentiment. Something irreversible was going to happen.

As Alvin was looking at her crest, dumbfounded...

“Just where did Sir Sid go?!”

“If he isn’t here, we can’t win against the demon kingdom!”

“Don’t tell me... He became scared and ran away?!”

“How can you say that?! There’s no way master would flee in such a situation!”

“Yeah! I’m sure there’s a reason he had to go!”

The cabinet ministers and the students of Blitze class quarreled.

It was natural that such mayhem would happen. Sid Blitze was the knight famed to be the strongest in the legendary era. Disappearing before their battle against the demon kingdom was a hard blow. To say nothing of strategists, even children could understand that the reason many people decided to fight against the immense demon army and didn’t lose hope was thanks to Sid, the strongest knight, being on their side. He wasn’t only supporting them militarily but also mentally. He had become an indispensable existence to the Kingdom of Calvania.

However...

“Silence,” Alvin ordered in a firm and solemn tone. She did her best to suppress her doubts and act as a king should. It was effective, and the majesty in her voice made everyone quiet. “Everyone, let’s continue the war council.”

“B-But, Prince! Sir Sid is...!”

“If Sir Sid isn’t here, we...!”

“Whether Sir Sid is here or not, what we must do hasn’t changed,” Alvin answered her flustered vassals solemnly. “Also, you are misunderstanding something.”

“We are...misunderstanding?”

“Indeed. Sir Sid is someone from the legendary era. By some miracle, he was summoned to our era, and, by chance, he served this country until now. However, the current invasion is something happening in our era, so we’re the ones who should fight. It’s wrong to rely on someone from the legendary era. We have to win by ourselves.”

Alvin’s argument was sound, and nobody could object. Creating a kingly presence helped her to control everyone’s unrest. Ironically, having the world in

danger helped to rapidly hone Alvin's charisma and her disposition as a king.

Still... *Sir Sid...* It didn't change the fact that she was actually anxious in her mind. *Because you were always by my side, I forgot about it, but... Just who are you?* Thinking back, there were still many mysteries about him.

Sid Blitze, the Holy King Arthur's first knight and the strongest in the legendary era. While being known as the Lightning Knight, a righteous hero, he was also known as the Barbarian, a vicious fiend. Sid himself never affirmed or denied the veracity of either of them. Moreover, his death was from being executed by his lord, the Holy King Arthur. The reason being treason against the king as well as being judged for all his misdeeds and sins as the cruel Barbarian. And yet, based on the oral tradition of the royal family, for some reason, that great sinner had made a contract to protect Arthur's descendants. Thanks to that, Alvin met Sid in this era, but...

In the first place, just what is this crest...? Why did my ancestor do that to Sir Sid...? No matter how much she pondered, there were just too many mysteries.

Still, there was one thing she was almost certain of. If things continued like this, she would lose Sid forever. The vanishing crest on her right hand was all the proof she needed.

What should I do...? Just what should I do?! If she had to be honest, she wanted to immediately go search for Sid. She felt like something irreversible would happen if she didn't find him. She was certain of that.

However...

But I have my duty as king!

She had to prepare an army to face off against the northern demon kingdom. As king, she couldn't neglect her duty and go search for Sid.

"Alvin..." Tenko peered anxiously at her, having guessed what she was thinking, and so did the other students of the Blitze class.

I... Just as hesitation and conflicting thoughts were swaying Alvin's heart...

"E-Excuse me for the intrusion, but I have a report!" Someone entered the room, out of breath. It was Libella, Isabella's aide and a candidate for being the

next head priestess of the Ladies of the Lake.

“What is it, Libella?” Alvin asked without showing her unrest about Sid’s disappearance.

“Traces of a Fairy Road being opened have been discovered!”

“What?”

A Fairy Road was an old magic that used the fairy realm to travel great distances. There were a lot of restrictions and requirements, but once invoked, one could arrive at their destination many times faster than they would normally.

“Shouldn’t you be the only one able to use such difficult magic, Isabella?” Alvin asked.

“Yes,” she nodded. “Though the great witch, Flora, can do it too... Libella should be able to do it too before long, but she still can’t...”

“Then who? Also, where was it used?”

“Well... In the sacred ground of the royal family... Deep in the forest of Shaltos...” Libella answered, perplexed.

Alvin gasped. “Where does it connect to?!”

“M-most likely to the northern demon kingdom...”

Alvin opened her eyes wide. The forest of Shaltos was where Sid’s grave was. Back when she had been attacked by a dark knight, it was where she had run away and met Sid. It was where Alvin and Sid’s relationship began.

“It’s Sir Sid...” Alvin whispered, certain of herself to the point that it was practically foresight.

Just when Sid had vanished, a Fairy Road appeared somewhere related to him. In that case, it was logical to think it was his doing. She didn’t know how a simple knight like him could use such great magic, but the current situation was all the proof she needed. And...she could also guess his objective.

“What will you do, Alvin?” Tenko asked.

Alvin stayed silent with her hand before her mouth and looked around. Elaine,

Christopher, Theodore, Lynette, Yuno... The Blitze class students were watching her, waiting for her answer. Not only them, but Louise, Johan, Olivia, and the other students who had received Sid's teachings were also looking at her.

"I'll abide by your decision, Alvin. I'm sure all the people here are the same. You're the one to decide." Tenko paused. "What will you do?"

Alvin didn't reply. She already knew the answer a king should give. It wasn't the time to make a move. Even if she wanted to follow after Sid, their current military strength wasn't enough. The only ones who could fight properly were the squires who had learned Will. Even if they followed after Sid, they wouldn't be of great help. In fact, they would most likely stand in his way and die in vain. If they had more people, it would be different, but as it wasn't the case, they had to prepare perfectly before the battle. To increase their chance of winning against such hopeless odds, making preparations was the most important thing to do. And for that, the king had to be present.

Alvin understood all of that. She truly did. But...

"Prince. Your decision, please," Tenko said once again, her tone more detached and businesslike than usual.

"My objective didn't change. I..." Just as she was going to announce her decision as king...the sound of the war council room's doors being opened violently resonated.

Wondering what it was, everyone turned toward the entrance. The people standing there were...

———

"You have an incredible talent, Sid."

It was back when I was a kid and still a squire.

A small group of knights from a remote country was tasked with the suppression of vicious bandits that assaulted villages, plundered them, killed the villagers, and kidnapped the women. The group of squires I was part of accompanied them as training.

However, knights who had lost their lord joined the bandits, and what should have been an easy mission, ended terribly.

In that battle, there was no planning, nobody giving commands. Everyone was jumbled together, enemies and allies alike, screaming, roaring, and shouting insults as the sound of meat being cut resounded, followed by dreadful death throes. It was a chaotic melee, and we were in a quagmire.

There wasn't any noble chivalry or honor on the battlefield here. Everyone's only thought was that they didn't want to die as they recklessly, haphazardly, messily, and madly swung their swords.

It was a terrible mayhem where everyone, enemies and allies alike, went mad. People begging for their lives were beheaded, some were cut to pieces, attacked by three people from behind, and the ones who couldn't move because of their wounds were tortured to death. Some thrust at people not noticing they were corpses. Their screams were beastly and no longer had any human meaning.

There wasn't any rule. It was just a brutal fight. Far from being the battle of noble knights, it was more like a party of battle-crazed berserkers.

And, among them, in the hell where everyone was drunk on the scent of blood, only I was composed. I felt like it wasn't my problem. It was as if the hell before my eyes happened in another world, and I was looking at it from far above the clouds. So, to be honest, even as I was swinging my sword on the front line, I was bored. I just cut, and cut, and cut, and cut one bandit after another. Each time I did, heads, arms, and legs flew away, and I was showered in blood, entrails, and spinal fluid.

Even when a senior knight, who was too confused to be able to distinguish enemies and allies, attacked me, I stayed calm and decapitated him. In fact, I even criticized him in my head, thinking he was a pain for confusing me as an enemy.

Then, after a while, I noticed that the party of hell had ended.

The bandits were all dead, and only a few knights were still alive. All of them were deeply wounded. Some had lost limbs, and one was mentally broken. Most of them, no matter their age, were crouching, vomiting, and bawling. Even though they were alive, they were deathly pale and felt more like corpses than

the ones scattered around us.

I couldn't help but wonder why they were like that.

The only other squire who had survived said he didn't want to be a knight anymore, but I couldn't understand why.

As we camped on our way back, they were acting like defeated soldiers even though we won nobly.

I was hungry, so I caught a boar, cut it with my worn-out sword, grilled it, and heartily ate. Apparently, everyone else wasn't hungry, and I was the only one eating. For some reason, some even threw up watching me eat meat.

I continued to eat, wondering what their problem was... And, seeing me like that, my instructor said:

"You have an incredible talent, Sid."

"But it's a very dangerous one."

"You have two possible futures."

"Either you will become a fiendish barbarian or an extraordinary hero."

"Search for a lord, Sid Blitze."

"You need to find a lord who you want to serve from the bottom of your heart."

"Otherwise, you will..."

———

Then time passed.

Before I knew it, what could be considered my homeland was destroyed, and I became a wandering knight without a master.

Back then, the world was chaotic, with everyone waging war for hegemony. As such, just by wandering around, I would find myself on a battlefield created by nations, clans, or tribes fighting each other. I didn't have any creed, beliefs, or objective as I went from one to another without really thinking about it. I didn't care about which was the most righteous and just chose one randomly and fought for them for some odd money. I just focused on cutting all the enemy

soldiers and knights who appeared before me. Because the camp I fought for always won, the power balance of the world became a mess.

As for why I did that, well, it was the only way I knew to make a living. But more than anything...it was the only thing I could do. After all, if you took my sword from me, nothing would be left. I didn't have any objective—a raison d'être—in my life. I could only kill people on the battlefield, piling up corpses and making money off them as I honed my sword with their blood and bones. If I stopped that, what would I do? I had nothing else.

In other words, before I realized it, I became what my past instructor had feared: a hopeless and irredeemable fiend, the Barbarian.

I completely went off the track of a proper human. My life was worthless and boring, as I had no other merit than being good at killing people. In fact, wouldn't the world be a better place if I didn't exist?

I had such thoughts, but I knew I wouldn't last long anyway. Someday, somewhere, I would die shamefully and pointlessly on a random battlefield. So, at least, I wanted to continue being the Barbarian until the end.

However, one day, as I casually wandered the world, a certain knight appeared before me.

"So you're the rumored Sid Blitze the Barbarian?"

He was a man completely different from me. He wore a beautiful mantle and luxurious armor as he mounted a sturdy warhorse and had a divine fairy sword at his hip. But the greatest difference was his eyes. They weren't like the muddy, rotten eyes that I would see each time I looked at the surface of a lake. They were silently burning with passion as he looked at something far away.

"I'm Arthur Calvania. I'm...well, just a normal guy. For now, at least."

"I know it's sudden, but I want to duel you."

"If you're a knight, you won't flee, right?"

"My reason and objective? It's because I want you, of course."

"After my victory, you'll become my vassal. Understood?"

"You'll become a loyal knight to me, your king."

“Then, I promise I’ll show you something wonderful. I won’t let you get bored, and you won’t have to swing your sword disinterestedly ever again.”

“...What if you win? You can do as you please with me. After all, that would mean I was the kind of man who couldn’t make it further than this.”

That man—Arthur—grinned like a mischievous kid. His eyes glittered, full of a light I didn’t have.

For some reason, a sort of premonition illuminated my empty heart—that my gray world would regain its colors.

“Okay, you’re on.” I accepted.

It was the first time I ever thought that something was kinda interesting. And so, to ascertain the premonition I had, I drew my twin obsidian iron swords and charged at Arthur, fiercely swinging them.

Even now, I clearly remember my fight with Arthur. Even after crossing eras and losing my memories, it was something I would never forget. I could reproduce the fight from start to finish without a single difference. That was how intense the fight was and how much my soul was on fire.

We crossed swords 187,324 times and fought three days and nights without resting or sleeping. And, at the end of our fight, which felt like an eternity, after reaching our utmost limits, Arthur and I...

———

The piercing cold and biting blizzard brought Sid out of his nostalgic reminiscence and back to reality.

He slightly opened his eyes and looked around. He was on the tallest cliff of a certain grand canyon. Everything was pure white, covered in snow and ice by the fierce blizzard, and below him, in the ravine, was a ruined city with an old castle standing like an ominous giant at its center.

It was the northern tip of the Alfeed continent, north of Calvania, a vast land of permafrost surrounded by steep, towering mountains entrapped by hellish freezing air, snow, and ice. This was where the demon kingdom Dachnesia, ruled by the Demon King, was, and below Sid was its capital, the demon capital Dachnesia.

Naturally, nobody *lived* here. Its citizens were all frozen *undead*.

"Is there a problem, Sir Sid?" the sword at his hip—the fairy sword of light—sent her thoughts directly to Sid's mind.

Motes of light appeared next to the sword, and a shining girl appeared—the avatar of Éclair—made only of light and with no substance.

"...I was just remembering the past," Sid answered with a smile as he sat on a boulder.

“The past?”

“Yeah. The moment I became the Lightning Knight and stopped being the Barbarian.”

Éclair listened quietly.

“That fight was really close...” he grumbled but kept smiling gently. “I just needed one more swing. Yeah, just one, and I would have won against Arthur. But...it’s exactly when I was going to do it that my right sword broke.”

Éclair stayed silent.

“But it’s thanks to that defeat that I started as a knight. I, who was empty, finally found meaning in my life. You really can’t know how life will turn out.”

Still no reply.

“The Lightning Knight might be a little too much of a title for me. Still...it’s my pride.” He stood up and looked down on the ruined city. “Time to go back to being the Barbarian... Just like back then.”

“Sir Sid...”

“It’s just like when I betrayed Arthur and everyone, rebelling all alone. Yeah, I’m just doing the same thing. So...” Sid drew his obsidian iron sword. “Tonight, I’m not a knight. I’m the Barbarian, a fiend who exterminates all the enemies standing before him and destroys everything. To fulfill the ancient pledge I made...and to do what I must do, I’ll go back to being the Barbarian.”

Sid grasped the hilt of his sword with both hands and raised it overhead. He took deep breaths to use Will—deeper than usual. Then...

“I am the child of the savage lightning god...”

As if hearing Sid’s yell, a streak of light fell from the sky, tearing the world ruled by darkness in two. A thunderous sound reverberated, so strong that it felt like it could split the heavens and shake the ground. Lightning fell from the faraway sky, tearing the darkness and the blizzard before reaching Sid’s sword. Through Sid’s blade, heaven and earth were connected with a pillar of lightning.

“...His outrageous wrath and violence...”

Still connecting heaven and earth, the lightning pillar burst fiercely, clearing away the darkness with its light as it slowly grew. The intensity of the light raised almost limitlessly and was overwhelming, dyeing the frozen dark world in dazzling white.

Then finally...

"...Will become the sword of the fiend that will cut the world in two!"

It was a giant sword made of lightning. It wasn't something a person should be able to swing. Only a Titan would be able to use such a long and huge sword. And yet, Sid, a mere human, raised it above his head, then after a single breath, swung it down.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

The giant sword of lightning descended from the sky to the ground, slashing toward the horizon, as if trying to bisect the world in two.

The world shook, and an incredible sound from a great impact resonated. The intensity of the vibrations moved the world up and down a few meters. The earthquake most likely reached even the southern tip of the continent. The blow was such that it could only be called a natural disaster.

Sid's lightning sword had cut the mountains, the canyon, and the demon capital in two. It leveled the impregnable natural fort that was the mountains, destroyed the ramparts that were considered an absolute defense, and created a path to the Dachnesia Castle in a single blow when it would normally take half a month.

"Phew... Well, I guess that's it," Sid said, his sword still aimed down. "Even with my current strength, I thought I could at least half-destroy the castle, but I guess that's impossible."

Sid glanced below once again. A deep fissure ran from where he was to what seemed like the end of the world, cutting the ruined city in two, but the Dachnesia Castle at its center was completely fine.

"You might have regained your memories and former abilities to some degree, but to think your current imperfect body could use that much power..." Éclair muttered, impressed. *"Why would the heavens give such a strong power to a*

single human...?”

“Ha ha ha, *you’re* the god. Don’t ask me.” Sid laughed cheerfully.

“Truly...I am glad that such power was given to a knight like you.”

“You should thank Arthur, my first lord.”

Éclair didn’t reply.

“Anyway, it’s time to fight, Éclair. Just like back then.”

She straightened up with a serious expression.

“Man, it really takes me back. Everything is just like back then.” He paused. “Let’s go, Éclair. Let’s fulfill our old pledge and do what we must do.”

“...Yes. I leave it to you, Sir Sid,” she said. Then she transformed back to motes of light and returned inside the sword hanging at Sid’s hip.

“I am the Barbarian. After a thousand years, the fiend has come once again!”

Sid transformed into a streak of lightning and ran toward the castle using the path he had created.

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A severe earthquake and a fierce sound that felt like they could destroy the world shook Dachnesia Castle.

“Wh-What’s happening?!” Endea yelled, jumping from the throne she had been sitting on, bored. She was on the highest floor of the castle, the throne room. “What was that sound?! And that impact?! What’s happening?!”

She rushed out on the terrace. The piercing cold and the fierce blizzard assaulted her body, but she didn’t care. She put her hands on the railing and bent her body to look down. She immediately noticed something abnormal.

“What...the...?”

Her base, the demon capital, was torn in two. From somewhere in the distance—up to the castle’s entrance—the mountains, the valley, the buildings, everything had vanished, creating a straight path. Dregs of lightning remained on the ground, crackling and making the path look like a bridge of light.

Faced with such an abnormal sight, Endea could only blink, her mouth open.

“This is... Ah, this must be Sir Sid.” Flora, standing next to Endea, smiled in amusement, looking at the scenery below.

“What?! Sir Sid did *that*?!”

“Indeed, there is no doubt,” Flora answered. “Most likely, Sir Sid recovered all of his memories as well as his former power. Though, I guess he can’t use it all with his current body...”

“That man is crazy!” Endea struck the handrail furiously. “Stupid! Idiot! There’s a limit to how nonsensical and absurd your strength can be! You idiot, idiot, idiot!” she shouted hysterically, her emotions a mix of shock and irritation, while continuously striking the handrail. “In the first place, just how did he get here?! That should be impossible!”

“I see... So that’s how... *She* helped him...” Flora muttered hatefully.

“Did you just say something?!”

“No, nothing.” Flora feigned ignorance.

As they talked, lightning was bursting in the distance. Endea used magic to see farther and stared at it.

What she saw was...Sid, his body filled with lightning, running straight toward the castle. He was so fast that it was as if a bolt of lightning was running parallel to the ground.

“It seems Sir Sid came for the kill all alone.” Flora chuckled.

“Huh...? To kill...? Who...?” Endea asked, dumbfounded.

“Hmm? Isn’t it obvious, my adorable master?” Flora pressed her mouth close to Endea’s ear and said, with a hint of derision, “Sir Sid came to kill you, the Demon King.”

Endea gasped as shock ran through her, as if she had been struck by lightning. Thinking about it, it was natural. She was the Demon King, trying to destroy the world, while Sid was the heroic Lightning Knight. If he was just as she had heard from Alvin’s stories in the past, without a doubt, he would overcome any difficulties to slay the Demon King and show the whole world what noble and

righteous justice was.

That was the Sid she knew. A righteous knight who protects everyone and has deep loyalty toward his king.

“S-Sir Sid...came to...”

It was natural. Such an outcome was truly obvious. She should have known from the start. She knew, and yet she rebelled against the world. She wanted to destroy the world that hadn’t been kind to her. Still...

“Sir Sid came to kill me...?!” Endea moaned as she remembered the past.

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“Then I want to hear about the Lightning Knight again!”

“Aha ha... You still want to hear about Sir Sid? You really love him, huh?”

“Yes! He’s really cool! And amazing!”

“If only a knight like Sir Sid existed in this era too...”

“If Sir Sid were here, I’m sure he would help you once you’ve become king. And...he would save me too...”

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I knew that would happen. I prepared myself for it. I did everything knowingly. So... Endea thought as she wept. *Why can’t I stop crying? Why do I feel so sad and frustrated?*

On the side, Flora let out a low chuckle in amusement as she lovingly looked at Endea.

“Alma!” But Endea didn’t notice and struck the handrail again. “Alma! Alma! I won’t forgive you! I! Will! Never! Ever! Forgive! You! Never!” She kept hitting the handrail furiously. “I hate you! Yeah... I hate you *both*! I’m gonna kill Sir Sid! Then I’ll shove his head in your face, Alma! I swear I will!” Then, glaring at Sid in the distance, she yelled, “Are you stupid?! How foolish to come alone! I’m the Demon King! The true ruler of the world, the Demon King Endea! Here, in the demon capital Dachnesia, 500,000 frozen knights from the legendary era are under my control! I have the authority to mobilize them all just by moving my

finger!”

That was one of the reasons why the Demon King was unrivaled. The demon kingdom Dachnesia was the land that was the most corrupted by Opus during the legendary era. Opus was the one who had enclosed it in an eternal deadly winter. Hence, the frozen souls of all the victims were tied to this land, fated to loiter in the endless winter for eternity. Moreover, they completely submitted to the Demon King, and because they were already dead, they didn’t fear death, making them the strongest and the most fearsome army to exist.

“They’re not like the weaklings I sent to the kingdom last time! Only the best are here, protecting this land! All of them are knights of the legendary era, just like you! And yet, you think you can win?! Don’t get conceited just because you cut my capital in two! Don’t think you can win all alone!” she shouted hysterically.

Then she spread her arms, and with an imposing air, making her worthy to be called the Demon King, she declared, “It’s an order! Listen, frozen knights slumbering on my territory! You pitiful souls frozen for eternity! I’ll be merciful and give you amnesty! I’ll release the one who will fulfill my wish from this frozen hell! Answer my demand! Take your swords and form troops! Ready your spears and prepare to attack! Kill him! Kill Sir Sid! Kill that hateful Sir Sid!”

Endea’s voice rode the fierce blizzard and spread through the demon capital, echoing strangely.

The next instant, an unusual phenomenon happened. Cold bluish-white will-o’-wisps appeared everywhere in the capital. Their number rose quickly, easily surpassing hundreds of thousands, and their form changed. They transformed into dead knights. Swords in hand, they were wearing black rags, and inside their hoods weren’t faces but an infinite abyss. They were knights from the legendary era who had died in this land. They were all strong and skilled warriors. And they were the slaves of the Demon King, who had entrapped their souls in an eternal frozen prison.

These strong men filled the demon capital. All the bluish-white flames made the city look like a starry sky. They gathered, formed troops, and took formation. Then they marched toward Sid like a giant wave.

“Aha ha ha ha ha ha! What do you think, Sir Sid?! This is my army! 500,000 knights from the legendary era! No matter how absurd your strength is, alone, you won’t be able to...” A lightning strike interrupted Endea’s words.

Sid charged straight at the first battalion of the frozen army.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaah!” he roared, swinging his obsidian iron sword.

Lightning struck at the center of the first battalion, and then it burst in all directions, running over the battlefield and dominating everything. In an instant, the first battalion was blown away.

“...Huh?” Endea let out an idiotic voice.

Of course, it didn’t reach Sid. He was already on his way toward the second battalion that was waiting for him in a V formation to attack him from both sides. However, Sid transformed into a flash of light and zigzagged between them, knocking away everyone on each side of the formation, and easily broke through it.

Then the third. They were in the phalanx formation, but Sid just ran straight into them. The flash cut the battalion in two, sending both sides flying away.

Then the fourth, fifth, sixth, and so on. Sid didn’t flee or try to move aside. He ran straight without stopping, easily cutting through the enemies’ formations like paper as he advanced, gradually approaching the castle.

“What the... What the hell is this?!” Endea screamed at the sight before her, which seemed like a joke. “No matter how absurd his strength is, there should be a limit... Just how are we supposed to stop him?!”

“As expected of Sir Sid.”

“...Indeed. This is how it should be.”

Contrary to Endea, both Sir Lion and Sir Unicorn were still composed.

“Why are you so calm?! He’ll soon be here! Can you win against *that*?!” Endea shouted.

Sir Lion and Sir Unicorn suppressed laughter but didn’t answer.

“What’s with your attitude?!”

Flora chuckled and explained. “You are underestimating your power as the Demon King, my adorable master.”

“...I am?”

“Indeed. You still are trapped in humans’ common sense. You aren’t one anymore. You are the Demon King. He might be a hero, but he’s only a mere knight, a human. Your true power is equal...no, far surpasses his. This is the kind of existence the Demon King, as the enemy of the world, is. You shouldn’t be agitated just because he can easily beat small fries.”

“I...see...?” Endea tilted her head, not fully understanding.

“But it’s true that Sir Sid isn’t someone we can underestimate.” Flora glanced at Sid, who was dominating the battlefield. “Indeed... The worst can happen... Just like back then,” she muttered without her usual composed smile.

“Back then...?”

“...No, it’s nothing.” She smiled, feigning ignorance. “Anyway, you should ask the undead army to continue their attack on Sir Sid, my adorable master.”

“I-isn’t that useless? I don’t think even 500,000 knights can defeat him...”

“They don’t need to. There’s meaning in just having them fight him continuously.”

“There is...?”

Flora smiled sweetly, as if certain of their victory, and said, “Indeed. After all, he doesn’t have much time left.”

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Sid was fighting alone against an army made of hundreds of thousands. Though the difference in numbers was absurd, Sid didn’t hesitate or flee.

He ran straight and sent the enemies flying away with each lightning burst from his swinging sword. The strong, heroic light mowed down the disgusting undead.

It was a reenactment of a battle from the legendary era—of a heroic tale—in the present day. If anyone were to watch it, they would be brought to tears,

entranced.

But at the same time, some might have noticed that Sid's brilliance and the way he intensely fought were just like how a candle burns fiercely just before dying.

Chapter 4: Old and Modern Knights

We always did our best to choose the most righteous path, heading toward a bright future by following Arthur, who was our light. He gave firm meaning and righteousness to our chivalry. That was how I went from Barbarian to Lightning Knight, and my life as a fiend, who could only kill, gained a meaning I could be proud of.

And yet...

When did it start? When did that unwavering light start to dim? When did we, the ones supposed to fight for the people and walk the righteous path, start to stray from it?

Just what was the beginning of this change?

"...I refuse," I said. "Sorry, but I can't obey that order, Arthur."

The other knights at the round table were astounded and couldn't believe my words. In particular, the three great knights showed strong reactions.

"Sir Sid, you...!" Rifis Ortol shouted, striking the round table furiously as he stood up. "You dare go against the order of our lord?! Aren't you supposed to be a knight who pledged his loyalty to our king?! There's a limit to how disrespectful you can be!"

"You disappoint me, Sir Sid. To think a man like yourself would say such a thing."

"Indeed. Did you lose your mind?"

Logass Durande and Luke Anthalo added, looking at me with contempt. The other knights did the same.

Everyone here fought together, standing next to me on the battlefield. They were my friends. Our bonds were strong, and our friendship thicker and hotter than blood...or at least, it was supposed to be. Right now, the knights at this

table didn't look like my friends at all. The air was strained with rage and irritation, and it felt like, at any moment, someone would draw their sword and create a bloodbath.

"Wait, everyone. Calm down," Arthur said, soothing them with his usual gentle smile. Then he looked straight at me and asked, "Why, Sir Sid? Why do you refuse to obey my order?"

"I can't find any meaning in using my sword here," I answered flatly. "You want to capture Dachnesia in the north? The only peaceful region in this turbulent era? True, it's blessed with bountiful lands, and the mountains around it act as a natural fort. However, there's almost no reason to go out of our way to take control of it. The people there already live in peace. Why would we trample on that and wage war with them? Weren't you fighting for the future of everyone in the world, Arthur? I just can't find any meaning in this fight."

Then I stared back at Arthur, trying to infer his intentions. "You've been weird recently. Not just you, everyone in the knight order too. There's been a lot of meaningless wars recently. What's happened? This wasn't supposed to be our objective."

The next instant...

"Sir Siiiiiiiid!"

"How insolent!"

"You barbarian! Know your place!"

"It's outrageous to doubt your king! That's intolerable as a knight!"

"Our king! That impudent man isn't needed in the knight order anymore!"

Everyone roared with rage. Were they really the noble and righteous knights of the order I was proud to be part of? They were all calling me a barbarian. Even Rifis, Logass, and Luke. They were all wonderful knights who I respected from the bottom of my heart, and yet, now they were...

"You three are weird too... Just what's happened...?" I repeated.

"Stop your nonsense, you barbarian!"

"Let's duel! Come outside!"

“I will kick you out of the knight order!”

As things were starting to take an irreversible turn...

“Wait, everyone.” Arthur’s calm and gentle voice stopped them. “Please, don’t blame Sir Sid so much.”

“B-But...”

“I’m sure he’s just a little tired. After all, he’s been fighting with me without rest since the beginning. He’s my longest-serving knight.”

Everyone was silent.

“I’m sorry, Sir Sid. I guess I have overworked you a little too much.”

“You’re wrong, Arthur. I...”

I never thought what he made me do was too much, impossible, or reckless. For him, I would fight on any battlefield, no matter how hellish they were. I wouldn’t hesitate to stake my life for the world he aimed to create. But recently, he...

“This time, we’ll fight without Sir Sid.”

However, my feelings didn’t reach him.

“Everyone, please, lend me your strength to bring true peace to the world! So that our kingdom prospers forever!”

“Ooooooooooooh! Long live the Holy King Arthur!” the knights around him cheered.

I gazed at what should be my irreplaceable comrades as if they were strangers.

“Tell us the strategy we will use this time, Florence.”

“Certainly, my dear master. Capturing Dachnesia will definitely be of great help to your cause,” Florence—who had used her intelligence to get close to Arthur—answered with a smile and explained the plan.

They completely forgot about me as they excitedly prepared for war.

I turned my back to them and headed toward the exit. But, just before leaving,

I took a glance back, and—Florence was watching me with a bewitching smile.

Strangely, it left a big impression on me, and it wouldn't leave my mind.

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The sound of Sid's panting resonated in a dark, cold, and silent place.

"Phew... Even I would get tired after all that." He put his breath in order as he looked around him.

He had broken through the army of 500,000 knights and was now in the entrance hall of Dachnesia Castle. Countless pillars were lined at fixed intervals. It was probably a different dimension, as, contrary to what it looked like from the outside, the inside was immense, and it seemed like it expanded indefinitely. It was so deep that he couldn't see anything, as if it were an abyss.

"I completed the barrier." Motes of light danced next to Sid and took the appearance of Éclair.

He turned back and, indeed, a giant magic circle made of light was blocking the entrance. Éclair had used her divine power to prevent the rampaging dead knights from entering the castle. But, at the same time, that meant that Sid couldn't retreat either. He could only move forward. It was a one-way trip to hell.

However, to Sid, being unable to return wasn't a problem. After all...he knew that he *couldn't* go back anyway.

"Thanks, you're a great help, Éclair," Sid said while stroking the hilt of the fairy sword of light hanging at his hip.

He still hadn't used it. They didn't have much strength left, so he preferred to save as much as possible for his confrontation against Endea.

"All right, let's go," he said, his breath now in order. "Still, aiming for the highest floor together with you... Ha ha, it's just like back then." He laughed as he stood up.

As he started to walk, Éclair asked anxiously, *"Are you...really fine with it, Sir Sid?"*

"Yeah, it's no big deal," he answered calmly. "The moment Winter Twilight
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was invoked, my time was ticking away. Yours too. Whether I win or lose, it's over for me. That's the kind of oath we made." He showed the back of his right hand. The crest had become even fainter.

Éclair hung her head sadly.

"Well... I do feel bad for not explaining everything to Alvin and the rest, but considering the situation, it was inevitable. Can't waste even a single second, after all. Heck, even right now we're—" He stopped himself, sensing a presence in the distant darkness. "Well, yeah, of course they wouldn't leave me alone."

Sid drew his obsidian iron sword and took a stance while Éclair transformed into motes of light and returned to the fairy sword of light.

They heard the sound of countless armored knights walking in their direction from deep within the darkness. Then, finally, they appeared. They were all robust knights wearing black armor and black mantles. They formed troops, holding either spears or swords, and encircled Sid, filling the entrance hall. Their formation was so tight that it felt like even a mouse wouldn't be able to flee.

"Dark knights from the Dark Order of Opus?"

Nobody responded to Sid's question. However, their silence and bloodlust were enough of an answer.

Normally, it would've been a desperate situation, but...

"Stop it. Sorry, but you guys can't do anything to me." Sid was composed. "My business is with the Demon King Endea and her aide, the great witch Flora. I don't care about the rest. I'm going back to being a fiend, so if you don't want to die, leave," he said calmly.

The next instant, fierce bloodlust violently emanated from Sid, making the armor of the dark knights tremble and creak. They were all overawed by Sid and took steps backward, reflexively opening a path for him.

However...

"That's not like you, Barbarian. For a man such as you to haggle like that."

"It seems that you have even less time left than we thought."

The grave and intimidating voices of two knights echoed in the hall.

Hearing them, Sid immediately put himself on guard.

New footsteps resonated from the darkness, behind the crowd of dark knights. The air was vibrating as they approached because of their overwhelming mana. The wall of dark knights separated in two, as if in low tide, creating a path. The two knights calmly walked through it until arriving in front of Sid.

“Sir Lion and Sir Unicorn. No... Logass Durande and Luke Anthalo.” Sid called their names, narrowing his eyes.

“It’s been a while since our last confrontation, Sid Blitze,” Sir Lion—Logass Durande—said.

“I have been looking forward to our reunion,” Sir Unicorn—Luke Anthalo—added.

With Sir Owl—Rifis Ortol—they were his old friends with whom he had served the Holy King Arthur. But now...

“It’s deplorable, Logass, Luke,” Sid said, sadly. “To think great knights like you would become *this*... I truly respected you from the bottom of my heart. You’re not like me, the empty Barbarian, the mad dog who can only live up to the chivalry he was given by someone else. No, you guys chose your own chivalry, one you truly believed in. You’re knights among knights. Your way of life was nobler than anything, and your appearance as you swung your sword was more beautiful than the prettiest princesses in the world. And now...look at yourselves. You fell into darkness, lost yourselves, and are clinging to a transient life and the remains of your old king. And you still call yourselves knights? Shame on you.”

Angered by Sid’s merciless words, Logass reached for his longsword on his back, but...

“Wait, Logass.” Luke stopped him.

He stepped forward and removed his unicorn helmet, revealing the beautiful face of a woman with a scar on her forehead.

“Luke?” Sid asked.

“Right now, I am talking to you as Lucy,” he—no, she—said, and Sid fell silent. “Let us forgive and forget what happened in the past, Sir Sid.” While her tone was flat, somehow, it felt like she was imploring him. “True, our paths diverged back then. You betrayed the Holy King and us. Though, I guess that from your perspective, we were the ones who betrayed you first.”

Sid kept quiet.

“Back then, we served the same king and stared at the same goal. We had the same dream, and we did our best to realize it. I still remember the days we spent fighting together... Even now, to me, those days are more precious than anything.”

Still no answer.

“I hate you. I hate you for sullying our glory and destroying everything. Still... I did not forget those glorious days we spent running through the battlefield together. No, I *cannot* forget them.”

Sid listened silently.

“So, Sid Blitze, would you not like to get them back? Our ideal days?”

He didn’t reply.

“True, it will be completely different from back then. But we are different from the knights who die over time. The era where we can forever chase after our ideals as knights is coming. After all, Winter Twilight’s death and stillness are eternal.”

“Moreover... *He* will soon be back,” Logass interjected. “Reconsider it, Sir Sid. Do you really think you can do anything alone? You don’t have much time left, no?”

Sid didn’t answer.

“It’d be regrettable to lose a knight such as you. Also, we still didn’t settle things between us. And the incoming era will be boring if someone as strong as you isn’t here. So, reconsider it, Sir Sid. Come back to us, and let’s devote ourselves to perfecting our skills together forever!” Logass’s loud voice resonated as if spreading through the darkness.

After a few seconds, it faded and silence fell. For a while, the only sound was from the raging blizzard outside, but...

"...Pff." Sid broke the silence. "Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!" He burst into laughter.

Sid, the man who was always calm and composed, was laughing merrily and innocently like a child who had found a fun toy.

"Great! Really, great idea! It would be awesome if we could do that!" He continued to laugh for a while, then suddenly stopped and solemnly said, "But I refuse." He stared straight at the two dark knights. "Wake up already, Lucy, Logass. Our era's already ended. It's over."

"Sir Sid...!"

"True, the way it ended is hard to accept. For me...and for you guys too. I never expected that our dream would end like that. I thought only glory and a bright future were awaiting us under the Holy King Arthur. Even if we boast that the knights of the legendary era were heroes using false legends and truths, in the end, we were wrong and didn't succeed. That's all there is to it. We can't regain something that's already over."

Sid sighed.

"You're clinging to something that's already over, unable to give up, trying to forcefully make something wrong right, wanting to show proof to the world's history. You sacrificed that poor girl for the ego of people who're already in the past? Even going as far as to deprive this world of its future? Just how much disgrace do you need to bring to yourselves until you're satisfied? Please, stop disappointing me more than you already have."

The two dark knights gasped.

"Hold your heads high. No matter how frustrating the result and how ugly the truth is, that was our utmost and the best we could do. So we should hold our heads high with pride, even if future people criticize us," Sid declared, calmly yet firmly.

"Not everyone is as strong and able to see things objectively like you! We cannot accept everything and reach enlightenment like you!" Luke shouted,

enraged. “I... I am not done! I do not want everything to be over!”

“Lucy...”

“Even I understand that we are in the wrong! From the start! Even now, I do not know why we have ended up like this! Still, I will not stop, I *cannot* stop! My heart, festered with darkness, wants it! I cannot restrain that urge! If it were not for you, Sir Sid... If you were not here, I...!” Tears formed at the corners of Luke’s eyes as she stared at Sid.

She was his past friend, a woman who had been deprived of her happiness as a woman and became a knight as a man—Sir Unicorn, Luke.

“I only had the battlefield where I could be with you... It was all I had...”

By a strange quirk of fate, the new lord that Sid was serving in this life was a girl who had been forced to live as a man to become king. Just what did Luke think of this? And what kind of feelings did she have in the past?

Sid didn’t say anything. It would be meaningless, and he didn’t have the intention or the right to speak.

“Let’s stop the discussion here,” Logass said, putting his hand on Luke’s shoulder. She was hanging her head, trembling. “Our law is extremely simple. If we don’t agree, all that’s left is to talk with our swords.”

“Yeah, simple and clear,” Sid agreed, drawing his obsidian iron sword and taking his usual reverse-grip stance.

Logass drew his longsword, and Luke put on her unicorn helmet and prepared her spear.

“This is unbecoming of knights, but it’ll be two-on-one. We absolutely can’t let you pass, after all.”

“Do not think badly of us, Barbarian.”

In front of the two dark knights, raising their bloodlust and fighting spirit...

“Bring it on.” Sid smiled boldly, deepening his breathing used for Will.

They glared at each other, raising their mana endlessly. The dark knights around them held their breath, thinking about the fight between knights from

the legendary era that was going to start.

The air strained to the point that it felt like it would explode, and, when it reached its limit...both sides yelled, charging at each other with extreme speed. They were so fast that they created shock waves.

Sid stopped Logass's overhead blow with the sword in his right hand, and he warded off Luke's sonic thrust using his left hand like a sword.

The pressure created by the collision of three knights from the legendary era was immense. It couldn't be contained in one place, and it exploded in all directions, sending the spectating dark knights flying like leaves in a storm.

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It was a fight beyond imagination, the perfect example of a battle between knights from the legendary era.

Sid exchanged blows fiercely with Logass and Luke. Logass, with his longsword, was on his right, and Luke, with her spear, on his left. Each blow sent out shock waves, blowing away the surroundings, and Sid blocked them either with his sword or his left hand. Earsplitting sonic booms intermittently spread through the infinite darkness.

"What's the problem, Sir Sid?!" Logass shouted, swinging his longsword down.

Sid caught it with his blade, but it burst into flames, burning his body.

"The way you react is quite unlike your usual self!" Luke yelled, swinging her spear like a whirlwind. The wind around it transformed into blades and assaulted Sid's body.

"Tch," he clicked his tongue, encircled by flames and wind, and swung his obsidian iron sword horizontally in a black slash.

"Not enough!" Logass knocked it with his blade, and Luke appeared behind him, thrusting her spear.

Sid gasped, caught off guard, and leaned his head to the side but couldn't avoid the attack entirely, and it grazed his shoulder. Using the opportunity, Logass immediately swung his sword again, so fiercely it might've even torn

space apart.

Sid gritted his teeth. He focused Will in the back of his left hand and blocked the blow. However, it wasn't enough, and he was sent flying away like a kicked ball, bouncing a few times on the ground and rolling on the floor.

"Take that!" Luke, who had chased after him, thrust her spear at Sid's prone body from above.

Sid hit the floor with his left hand, dodging to the side. Luke's attack opened a large hole, shaking the castle, and...

"Die!" Logass was waiting, his blade ready.

"Haaaaaaaaa!" Luke immediately followed Sid, taking him into a pincer attack.

Right at that instant, Logass and Luke were sure of their victory, and the spectating dark knights were certain it was the end.

But...

"Don't get cocky."

A flash burst.

Lightning leaped fiercely, repelling Logass and Luke and blowing them away.

Dark knights screamed as they were also blown by the aftershock.

In the center of everything was Sid, both his sword and left hand aimed down, with dregs of lightning crackling around his body. Nobody had seen what he had done in that desperate situation. However, they could somehow guess he had probably...rotated his body.

"Your blows are too light," Sid declared solemnly. "Your past self would be one thing, but as you are right now, fighting against both of you isn't a problem. You're just like Rifis. Falling into darkness only made you stronger and nothing else. You were *far* stronger in the past."

Though he looked calm, the pressure he exuded was overwhelming. Seeing his incredible strength able to overpower the two strongest of the Dark Order of Opus, all the dark knights in the hall stiffened, holding their breath. Nobody tried to do anything even though Sid's back was wide open.

However...

“...Oh? I expected nothing less from you, Barbarian.”

“You are the same as back then.”

Logass and Luke stood up as if nothing had happened. Sid’s fierce attack didn’t even leave a single wound on them.

“To be able to fight us... ‘Stronger, and nothing else...’ You’re still the same incomprehensible man,” Logass commented.

“There’s nothing strange about what I said,” Sid answered. “Mana and skill aren’t the only things giving weight to the sword. The most important thing is the feeling put into it. Even more so here, a place that is half in another dimension. In this era, there’s a knight called Tenko Amatsuki. You should try following her example.”

“...Hmph, nonsense.”

“There is nothing for us to learn from the weak knights of this era.” Logass and Luke spat, readying their weapons. “Also, you say our weapons are too light, but the same can be said about yours.”

“Honestly, I’m disappointed, Sir Sid. It’s a fight we must absolutely win, so we were ordered to fight together against you, but...it seems it would have been fine even alone,” Logass said.

“Back in the legendary era, you would have already decapitated us.”

“...Stop joking. Even back then, I wouldn’t have been able to take you both at the same time,” Sid denied.

“The way you always want to have the last word did not change either...” Luke muttered, annoyed.

Logass continued. “Still, the lightness of your sword is real, Sir Sid. Where did your extraordinary strength from back then go? Do you really think you can win against us like this? Don’t tell me you can’t fight seriously against your past friends?”

“Or is it that you have even less time left than we thought?”

Sid didn’t answer Luke’s question.

“Things never go as we want...” Logass complained, a little disappointed. “I always wanted to fight seriously against you. But back then, we never had the chance, and our positions didn’t allow it. Even now, the situation and the time you have left won’t let us.”

“Yeah... It seems fate really doesn’t like us,” Sid agreed.

“But if the world is ruled by darkness, these restrictions will disappear, Sir Sid.”

“Stop being so insistent. Sorry, but I don’t even feel like competing against you. You’re just enemies I must defeat.”

Logass frowned. “You truly are a stubborn and hateful man.”

“Talking is meaningless, Logass. We must kill him for our lord. This man will never do as we hope. This is the kind of man Sid Blitze is. And this is the reason I...” Luke trailed off, somehow sadly, and readied her spear.

Logass did the same with his longsword, and Sid lowered his stance.

Silence fell in the hall. They didn’t have anything to say to each other anymore.

“Sir Sid...” the fairy sword of light hanging at Sid’s hip sent her thoughts to him. *“I know you have your pride as a knight, but... These two are strong. It would be one thing if it were one-on-one, but against the two of them, your current self is... You should know that already, right?”*

Yeah... I know, he answered in his head.

“You have far less time left than we thought you would have. The previous fight against the undead exhausted you more than expected. At this rate, you will...”

...What will be will be. He smiled. Then he focused on the enemies before him.

From there on, the fight between the three knights became even fiercer.

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The battle went on and on. The intense exchange between the three knights destroyed the pillars in the hall, making the castle shake.

Even against Logass and Luke, two of the strongest knights, Sid didn't back down at all—far from it. He was the one forcing them back, overwhelming them.

However...it didn't last long. Little by little, the situation reversed.

Sid became sluggish, as if he had run out of breath. Naturally, Logass and Luke didn't miss the opportunity and assaulted him incessantly.

Sid, who had no problem blocking their attacks until then, was starting to get hit. Of course, he still managed to avoid lethal blows, but slowly, he was piling up wounds.

Still, Sid continued to fight and didn't retreat.

But his movements only became worse as he got more injured, and...

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"...How deplorable, Sir Sid. That's all you can do after that big talk?"

Sid, who was covered in blood from all the cuts on his body, stared at Logass and Luke but didn't answer.

"Do not say that, Logass." Luke dismissed Logass's disappointment. "It is evident that Sir Sid is currently weakened. His power has been plummeting since the start of our fight. Just as we thought, he does not have much time left."

Sid stayed silent.

"Or rather, in the first place, no matter how strong Sir Sid is, it is not normal that he can still fight. Fighting alone against an army is an extraordinary feat. He must have been quite exhausted, and yet, he immediately fought against us just after that. Even if we cannot quite say that we are fighting evenly, it is abnormal

to be able to do so much."

"...Come to think about it, you're right." Logass sighed. "So, Sir Sid, do you still want to continue? No matter how unparalleled your strength is, you should understand the current situation."

"...Yeah," Sid replied, shrugging his shoulders as if to say he was at a loss. "I'd expect no less from you two. You're strong. I guess I was a little too stubborn and got too fired up when I talked. Of course it'd be impossible to take the two of you at the same time. Would have been different one-on-one, though."

"Hmph, I wonder. If you were at your best, then..." Luke trailed off.

"...Things really never go as we want," Logass muttered regretfully. "Even though I finally got the chance to cross swords with you after a thousand years... And yet, it ends in such a disappointing way..."

"That's how the world works," Sid replied with a self-deprecating smile.

Nobody said anything for a while. Then...

"This is the last time I will ask," Luke started. "Won't you serve a new king with us?"

Sid's answer was to silently take a stance with his obsidian iron sword.

With this, they realized that talking would be useless until the end. All they could do now was fight for their beliefs. No matter who the opponent was, they would cut them down.

Man... Sid complained in his mind, *I didn't expect my body to weaken so fast.*

"Sir Sid..." Éclair sent her thoughts to Sid, anxious. *"What will you do? We don't have much time left..."*

Sid readied himself and put his hand on Éclair's hilt. She blinked in surprise, understanding his intention.

"...Are you going to use me?"

Yeah, it's not the time to keep up appearances anymore.

"B-But didn't you say that using me would exhaust you instantly and you wouldn't be able to accomplish your objective?"

Yeah, so I want an extension.

“An...extension...?”

To get power, you need to pay the price, right? Like how I give you my time to use your power. Then to use you without losing my time, I need to pay with something else. Am I wrong?

“...You can’t possibly mean...”

I’ll give you my soul—my existence. That’s possible, right? Sid grinned. *No need to hold back, take everything away, Éclair.*

“Wait! Please wait!” she screamed in opposition*. “I am already imposing a terrible fate on you, and now, you want me to also sacrifice your existence?! Do you understand what that means?! Nothing will be left, and you will never be able to reincarnate again! You will disappear from the cycle of life of this world! This is... This is...!”*

I don’t mind. Contrary to Éclair, who was on the verge of crying, Sid was completely calm. *If it allows me to protect the future, it’s a cheap price. Or, rather, it’s an unexpected honor for me, the Barbarian, to be able to do that.*

“Sir Sid...! I... I...!”

Finally...

“Sorry, Logass, Luke.” Sid grasped the hilt of the fairy sword of light with his left hand. “I didn’t want to use it against you, but...I don’t really have a choice. Gonna cheat a little. No hard feelings.”

Logass and Luke gasped and immediately put themselves on guard.

Sid took a slower and deeper breath than usual to use Will. The air in the hall strained, and the castle started to shake. Sid’s presence swelled bigger and bigger, to the point that it felt like a joke. Then, finally, just when he was going to silently draw the fairy sword of light...another light filled the hall, dyeing it white.

“What?!”

“What is this?!”

Not having expected something like this to happen, Sid, Logass, and Luke reflexively put themselves on guard.

As they wondered what the light was and what was happening, a gate suddenly opened in the air, an overwhelming amount of light overflowing from it. And it wasn't only light...

"Draw your sword, everyone! Charge!"

"Oooooooh!" many voices answered.

Countless knights rushed into the hall and took formation. They were...

"Sir Sid!"

"Master!"

Alvin and Tenko.

"Jeez, our instructor is so cold!"

"He truly is!"

"Well, we know you're that kind of man, but..."

"But we can't let you go alone!"

"We can't!"

Christopher, Elaine, Theodore, Lynette, Yuno, and the other Blitze class students joined.

"Hmph! I won't let you hog all the glory, Sir Sid!"

"You say that, but you were super worried..."

"You're really not honest with yourself, Louise..."

"Sh-Shut up!"

Louise, Olivia, Johan...

"Even if we can't do much, we'll fight, Instructor Sid!"

"That's what we learned from you!"

And all the other students who were taught Will by Sid came one after another from inside the light.

And they weren't the only ones.

"You guys too...?" Sid muttered, truly surprised.

"Tch... Weren't you the one who said we could swing our swords if we had two arms and legs?"

Burns, Aigis, Caim, and other fairy knights who had lost the power of their fairy swords appeared and took formation behind Alvin and the students.

The fairy Knight Order of the Kingdom of Calvania opposed the Dark Order of Opus. The dark knights faintly trembled from seeing all these new enemies suddenly appear.

"Who are they...?"

"How did they come here...?"

Even Logass and Luke were surprised. And Sid felt exactly the same.

"It's reverse summoning," Isabella said, appearing from the light. "Because you refused to be summoned by Alvin, we decided to do it the other way and summon ourselves to your side. This is possible by using the crest on both your right hands. Though, it is a very complex and difficult spell, so it took time to make all the preparations." She smiled sweetly at Sid.

"Ha ha ha... You've got me there. Didn't expect that. But I guess I should have, considering how great of a woman you are." Sid joked and shrugged his shoulders.

Alvin walked next to him. "Going alone to fight the enemy on your own might be glorious for a knight. However, disobeying the order of your king is a grave sin, Sir Sid."

"...Forgive me, my lord."

"I won't. If you want me to, then achieve even greater feats."

"...Yes," Sid replied, scratching his head awkwardly.

"I...somehow understand that you carry a great burden. But..." Alvin muttered in a voice faint enough that only Sid could hear her, "please, never do something like this again."

The anger and sadness in her tone made Sid unable to say anything.

“Master! Leave this place to us!”

“Yeah, go ahead with Alvin and defeat the Demon King!”

Tenko and Christopher said something unbelievable.

“...Don’t talk nonsense. You may be far stronger than before, but there’s no way you can fight against Logass and Luke. I should be the one to—”

“It’s not about whether we *can*. We *have* to! Because... Because we’re knights!”

Sid blinked, taken aback by Tenko’s words.

“Why do you try to do everything alone? Even though you’re an abnormally strong monster who basically gave up being human, that’s way too arrogant!”

“We do not know how you are connected to this battle, but you are misunderstanding something. This is also *our* fight!”

“We’ll grasp our future ourselves. That should be obvious, no?”

“We’ll be fine! E-Even I became...kinda...stronger! I-I might die, but...I’ll still do it! Let me try!”

“We’re not baby chicks that will need your protection forever!”

“Instructor, please go defeat the enemy’s boss with Prince Alvin!”

Christopher, Elaine, Theodore, Lynette, Louise, and Yuno each said their piece.

Seeing his students—who had been fledglings until recently—like this, Sid was deeply moved, and he realized something.

Aah... Our era’s really over. Since long ago.

“Lady Isabella! Everyone from the new Knight Order of the Kingdom of Calvania is here!”

“Good work, Libella.”

As knights gathered in the vast entrance hall, the light that was illuminating it gradually dimmed until the gate connecting the royal capital to the demon

capital closed.

“Leave them to us, Sir Sid,” Isabella whispered to him. “You don’t have much time left, right?”

Sid gasped, surprised that Isabella had seen through him. She probably understood because she had examined the crest on Alvin’s hand.

“...I’m really no match for you.”

“Please... I leave Alvin to you.”

“Yeah. And I leave the students and this place to you.” Sid turned. “Excuse me, my lord.”

“Whoa?!”

Sid took Alvin in his arms, like a princess, and...

“Gonna go all out.”

“Huh? Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah?!”

Sid transformed into a streak of lightning and passed between Logass and Luke. He went straight for the center of the crowd of dark knights, cutting their ranks in two, and reached the other side in an instant.

However, knights of the legendary era weren’t going to let their target flee so easily.

“Trying to escape, Sir Sid?!”

“We won’t let you!”

Logass and Luke turned to chase after Sid, but...

“Haaaaaaaa!” someone cried, and a crimson slash assaulted Logass.

“What?!” he exclaimed, reflexively blocking it with his longsword.

“I won’t let you go!” Tenko shouted. “I’m your opponent! Look at me, knight with the cross-shaped mark!” She leaped back and took a deep, low stance with her katana.

“You brat...” Logass clicked his tongue, annoyed, glancing at Tenko.

Luke sighed, just as irritated. “Do you not know the phrase ‘knowing one’s

place’?” she asked, looking at Christopher, Elaine, Lynette, and Theodore, who were circling her.

“Heh heh... We’re your opponents,” Christopher said.

“Do you think you can win? Even as poorly skilled as you are, you should understand the difference between us.”

“My, knights from the legendary era only fight people they can win against and flee when they cannot?” Elaine provoked her.

“I see that you love sarcasm as much as your teacher,” Luke replied and rotated her spear before taking a stance.

That was enough to cause a little whirlwind that almost blew away the Blitze class students. Their expression tensed as they prepared themselves for a deadly battle unlike any they had before.

“Will users, at the front! The Ladies of the Lake will support you!” Isabella gave instructions, leading Libella and the other Nimues behind her. “As long as the undead outside aren’t here, we outnumber them! Attack each dark knight in groups! A knight’s honor can be damned. Only think about victory! For our lord and her first knight!” She commanded Burns, Aigis, Caim, and the other knights who had lost the power of their fairy swords. “The fate of our country and the world depends on us! Charge!”

“Ooooooooooooooooh!” The Knight Order of the Kingdom of Calvania answered Isabella’s order with a war cry and rushed toward the Dark Order of Opus.

Chapter 5: Ancient Truth

Thinking about it, there was a fierce blizzard back then too. The world was being dyed in white, approaching its demise, because of the winter invoked by a certain man.

Who could go against him? That man was the frightening master of the north, the Demon King—the greatest king ruling over the world and leading the strongest knight order.

I heard the sound of my steps on the snow as I walked in the dead capital under the fierce white sky. It was the city built by the only man I ever revered as my lord. I walked alone inside the capital, now engulfed in snow and ice, until I reached my destination.

In front of me was a collapsed fairy temple. And, in the shadow of its destroyed idol, was a fairy girl crouching and crying. She was half-transparent, and motes of light fell from her body as her existence became fainter. She was dying.

“The world...is done... Everything is over...” she lamented, in tears. “Everything I did, and took great care to nurture, will come to nothing... Why... Why does she hate me so much...?”

I listened to her quietly.

“Everything is over... Now that she has taken control of the person I gave my blessing to, I can’t do anything anymore... I can’t interfere with this world anymore... Everything is truly over...”

“No, it’s not,” I said, firmly. “True, the eternal winter brought a lot of deaths. But not everyone is dead. Many people, animals, and fairies are still fighting against the cold to survive. They’re doing their best to endure the winter, believing it will end and that spring will come. And you, of all people, plan to abandon them?”

She gasped and raised her head, her eyes wide open as she looked at me for

the first time. “You are... Sid the Barbarian...?”

“I’ve finally found you. It was hard, you know? I think fairies hate me because I reek of blood.” I grinned, then continued. “Anyway, it’s not over. Leave your complaints for later.”

“What do you even think you can do?!” she yelled at me, angry.

“Curse me,” I declared boldly.

She widened her eyes in shock.

“I’ll give you my soul, my fate—everything. So curse me,” I repeated as she still looked at me with wide-open eyes, immobile. “I heard that there is an ancient technique that allows fairies to curse people and take hold of their fate. In exchange for giving their fate to a fairy—or, said another way, in exchange for being under the control of a fairy—they can receive all of her power. Considering fairies are higher beings than humans, it’s not that weird that they can do that.”

The girl listened silently.

“However...you didn’t like that. So you made a new pact, a new technique, and created fairy swords, a way for humans and fairies to be in an equal relationship where they would depend on each other. Thanks to that, they’ve lived with humans as their Good Fellows since then. For that, as the representative of humanity, I thank you. But...that’s not enough.”

She still kept quiet.

“The ruler of the northern demon kingdom—the Demon King—is cursed by the world’s strongest fairy. Meaning that his power is also the strongest, which is how he engulfed the whole world in winter.”

She stayed silent.

“For me to win against him, I need to be cursed by a fairy who’s just as strong... You.”

“Will you fight against the ruler of the north? Can *you fight against the Demon King?” she finally replied.*

“...I will. Because of my chivalry,” I answered confidently. “Even now, I’m still

Arthur's knight. So, until the end, I'll act as his knight. Even if you curse me."

"...Do you even understand what it means to be cursed by me?" she said, as if testing me. "You will be tied to me forever and become my vassal. Even after your death, your existence will be bound to me for eternity. You will become a tool that I can conveniently use whenever I want, and you won't be able to continue with your next life."

I said nothing.

"You might not be able to imagine it, but this world is only one branch of the many composing the Dimension Tree that unites all the possible worlds. In other words, various worlds other than this one exist. For example, there is one where sorcery replaced magic and even one where neither exists and instead, they have science. There is even one where, while having advanced science, the Curtain of Consciousness collapsed, reviving ancient beings and completely changing civilization. Anyway, what I want to say is that you are abandoning your chance to live a new life in one of these wor—"

"Right here, right now," I interjected.

She blinked, hearing my sudden words.

I looked straight into her eyes and repeated, "To me, everything is right here, right now."

She gasped.

"I have no regrets. The days I spent in this world after meeting Arthur are entirely worth the price. I'd never regret it. So, please, curse me, Éclair."

"...Fine." The girl—Éclair—stood, resigned. "In this deadly winter, I am putting a curse on you. But, at the same time, it is also a blessing. I, Éclair, give you, Sid Blitze the Lightning Knight, the highest curse and blessing. Your life is mine, and my death is yours. And, in exchange, my everything will become your power. Use it, and...slay the Demon King, no matter what," she declared, and light wrapped around her.

She transformed, and when the light faded, a sword appeared before Sid. It was the strongest fairy sword, the same one the man once called the Holy King had used.

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“...r...d”

I heard a voice in the darkness.

“Wake...Si...id...!”

The more I heard it, the more my consciousness emerged from the darkness, from the dream I was having.

“Sir Sid!”

Yeah, I shouldn’t be sleeping. Not when I still had something to do.

I slowly opened my eyes...

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“...Sir Sid! Wake up, Sir Sid!”

Sid opened his eyes and saw Alvin’s frantic expression. She was on the verge of crying.

“...Alvin?” Sid said, raising his upper body.

He shook his dizzy head and looked around. He was on a stone ground, and the place was cold and dark. He guessed they were in a passage of the Dachensia Castle. It seemed like it went on endlessly, like an abyss. He didn’t feel the presence of people or the sound of battle around them. The only thing he heard was the raging blizzard outside that was getting stronger and stronger.

“I’m so glad, Sir Sid... You finally woke up!” Alvin exclaimed, peering at Sid’s half-asleep face with tears in her eyes. “You suddenly collapsed when we were running... What happened?! Are you all right?! Are you injured?!”

“No, I’m fine,” he answered and tried to get up, but...he was unsteady and fell on one knee. His legs were shaky. “Come on... That’s way too fast,” he whispered and stopped trying to stand up.

“Sir Sid...?” Alvin asked, perplexed by Sid’s unusual condition.

“You were too reckless,” a voice said suddenly as motes of light rose from the sword at Sid’s hip, and a girl appeared.

“Éclair...” Sid called her name.

“Huh? Éclair...? The fairy god of light...? Huh?” Alvin blinked her eyes, dumbfounded by the sudden appearance of the girl and her name.

Éclair sent a side glance to Alvin and put her hands together as if praying. Motes of light appeared in the air and flowed into Sid’s body. Then, after absorbing everything...

“How are you?”

“Should be able to walk now. Thanks.”

“...No, this is nothing.” Éclair took a relieved breath, seeing Sid getting a little better. Then she turned toward Alvin and bowed her head. *“This is the first time we meet in person...”*

“Huh? Ah... Umm... Yes...”

“I watched over your family for generations. Of course, that includes you.”

“...Err...?” Alvin didn’t understand what was happening.

“Unfortunately, my power is reaching its limit. Now, the only one who can save him is you. So, please... Take care of him,” Éclair said and bowed once more before transforming into motes of light and returning to Sid’s sword.

“...Was that really Éclair? *The* Éclair?” Alvin asked, confused.

“...Let’s go, Alvin. If we don’t hurry and reach Endea as fast as possible, the situation will be irreversible,” Sid declared. He walked slowly, one step at a time, dragging his heavy body while using his hand on the wall to support himself.

“Sir Sid!” Alvin caught him from the side.

“Alvin?”

She ignored Sid’s surprise and put his arm around her neck, supporting him with her shoulder.

“It should be easier like this,” she said.

“Yeah... Thanks.” Sid smiled bitterly.

“Even if I try to stop you, you won’t stop, right?”

“...Yeah.”

“Then I’ll go with you.”

“Hah. If you’re a king, at least say that *I’m* going with *you*.”

They bantered as they usually would and slowly walked through the dark and cold castle.

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Two pairs of footsteps sluggishly resounded in the silent castle. Slowly but surely, they were heading toward their destination.

For a while, both Sid and Alvin stayed quiet, but, unexpectedly, the first one to break the silence was Sid.

“...Not gonna ask anything?”

“Honestly, there’s a lot I want to ask,” she answered with a faint sigh.

“Of course there is.”

“Why did you go alone? Why did you become so weak?”

Well yeah, Alvin’s a Will user. Of course she would notice that something’s happened to my body. Sid smiled bitterly.

“There’s also the thing about Éclair and the fairy sword hanging at your hip. Also...about who you really are.”

Sid didn’t reply.

“I have tons of questions. But...it’s not like you would answer them, right?”

Sid stayed silent.

“I know why. ‘A knight tells only the truth.’ Because you can’t lie, you say nothing.”

“Sorry.” Sid looked down. “It concerns everything that makes me a knight. I can’t talk about it.”

“Aha ha, I don’t mind. After all, who you really are doesn’t matter. I’m the king, and you are my knight... That’s all I need.” Suddenly, Alvin’s eyes moistened. “You won’t disappear... Right?”

Sid realized that Alvin had somehow perceived that something irreversible was happening to him.

She looked at Sid imploringly. “This time, something is completely different than usual. I have a horrible presentiment, and that makes me anxious. I feel like once everything is over...you will disappear, Sir Sid.”

Sid stayed silent.

“You are weakened, but it’s only temporary, right? You won’t leave me... Right?”

Sid still said nothing.

“After all... Sir Sid, you are my knight and...and my...”

The more Sid’s silence continued, the fainter Alvin’s voice became. Then, finally, she stopped looking at Sid imploringly and cast her eyes down. She knew the truth. Everything that had happened until now was a miracle. She was living in the present, and Sid died in the past. Their meeting was nothing short of a miracle. So, vaguely, she had always known that, one day, this miracle would end.

However... Sid put his hand on her head and said, “‘A knight tells only the truth.’ I’ll always be with you, Alvin.”

She gasped and raised her head in surprise. “Y-Yes!” She smiled brightly, tears in her eyes.

“Anyway, we should focus on our mission for now.”

“Yes. We have to stop Endea and Flora. But...” Alvin trailed off anxiously. “I wonder if everyone will be fine.”

“Um?”

“I mean... Everyone is risking their lives for us, no?”

Sid listened silently.

“They’re having the hardest fight against the strongest enemies they’ve ever faced... I wonder if they will be fine...”

“Who knows? That’s something nobody can predict,” Sid said indifferently, “The battlefield is a place where no matter how strong you are, you can die from something unexpected. It happened a lot in the legendary era. They’re fighting against the strongest knights, so even with Isabella’s help, I don’t know how much they’ll be able to do...”

Alvin’s expression darkened hearing this, but Sid continued. “But... I don’t know why, but strangely, I’m not worried at all.”

“Huh...? Why?”

“Because *they*’re true knights.”

Alvin tilted her head, not understanding Sid’s ambiguous words.

———

A fierce fight was happening in the hall.

A noble-tail girl was dancing in the air, leaping around at great speed.

“Take that!” Tenko yelled, drawing her katana from its scabbard. The blade created a silver slash, followed by a trail of crimson flames as it assaulted Logass.

“Hmph!” He snorted, easily blocking it with his flaming longsword. His fire was much stronger than Tenko’s, absorbing it before exploding.

Tenko cried in pain as she was sent flying.

Logass planted his sword on the ground. Immediately after that, a pillar of fire gushed from the floor below Tenko, trying to burn her to the bone. She was going to be swallowed by the fire when...

“Learn to take care of yourself!” Louise shouted, swinging her twin swords.

She created a fierce freezing wind and somehow managed to weaken the pillar of flames. Tenko used Will to strengthen her defense and endured the fire without being burned. The moment she landed, she sheathed her katana, took a deep breath, kneaded her Will, then sprung.

“Haaaaaaaaa!” Using Louise’s wind as a cover, she rushed toward Logass at extreme speed and drew her katana.

A red flash crossed Logass.

He gasped, surprised that he wasn’t able to react and block the attack. His black armor had been burned and slit. However...only a faint cut was visible on his skin.

“Damn it! Even with that, I basically didn’t hurt him?!” Tenko complained while leaping back next to Louise.

“That’s amazing in itself. Considering the difference in strength between us, it wouldn’t be weird if you actually didn’t hurt him at all,” Louise commented as she took a stance with her twin swords, cold sweat dripping from her brow. “Still, Tenko, even if it’s only a little, it seems your sword is fast and sharp enough to reach a knight from the legendary era!”

“Yes! In that case, I just need to repeat cutting him again and again! Be it thousands, tens of thousands, or hundreds of millions of times!” Tenko sheathed her katana and took a deep low stance once again.

Still, no matter how optimistic they sounded, they were actually feeling quite desperate. They were the two strongest squires of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy, and Louise, using an ice fairy sword and ice fairy magic, was the perfect counter against Logass’s fire. And yet, even using their full power together, they didn’t sway him. It was like trying to fight a mountain or a giant. It really made them understand how strong knights from the legendary era were, as well as how amazing Sid was to be able to fight against such a monster.

And yet...

“We have to do it!”

“Until Sir Sid and Alvin defeat the Demon King Endea... Even if we can’t beat him, we must at least halt him here!”

Tenko and Louise regained their resolve while putting some distance between them and Logass.

“...I finally remember now,” he suddenly said. “I thought I had seen your

swordsmanship somewhere... You, the noble-tail girl, you're just like that woman back then."

Tenko frowned, her fox ears standing up and her fangs bared. "You finally remember? I'm a survivor of Tenkagekoku, the country you destroyed... The daughter of Tenki Amatsuki, the warrior you killed!"

"I see... You're the child from back then..." Logass muttered with a distant look.

"Yes. I went through hell after that... It was scary and painful, and I wanted to run away from everything many times. Still... I'm here, standing before you as a knight!"

Logass stayed silent.

"You're the foe of my mother and my homeland. I absolutely hate you and will never forgive you. However, right now, more than that, I must accomplish my duty as a knight! So, come, heretic knight! As the knight of the righteous Alvin, I'll judge your heresy with my sword! Prepare yourself!"

Hearing Tenko's words, Logass remembered the past.

"I am Logass Durande! Remember my name as you go to hell, you scum oppressing the innocent! As the knight of the righteous Holy King Arthur, I'll judge your heresy!"

"Just how did we come to this...?" he whispered.

"What?!" Tenko exclaimed, baring her fangs.

Logass observed her. She was straightforward with burning pride for her duty. She wasn't a fanatic or a savage but a courageous girl who had surmounted her fear. And it was the same for Louise. There was something she would never budge on, and to protect it, she would even face an enemy in a hopeless situation.

The two girls in front of Logass—Sid's disciples—were true knights. Far more than him.

“How ironic. We struggled because we didn’t want our chivalry to die, but in the end, it’s thrust in our faces that it’s already been dead for a while... Well, it’s a little late to realize that.” Logass readied his longsword. “Fine. You might be righteous, young knights from the new era, but nobility, justice, and chivalry aren’t what you use to talk with on the battlefield. No, what you use is your sword! You might be able to speak of righteousness with your mouth, but what happens on the battlefield?!”

Tenko and Louise prepared themselves.

“I am the dark knight, Sir Lion—Logass Durande! I am cruel and inhuman, unfit to be a knight! However, when it comes to talking on the battlefield, nobody surpasses me! So come and try to prove your chivalry and your righteousness with your swords!”

“Of course—”

“—we will!”

Tenko and Louise yelled, fiercely charging at Logass from the right and left.

———

“Hmph!” Luke snorted while creating a whirlwind with her spear.

“Haaaaaaaa!” Christopher, Elaine, Theodore, and Lynette were sent flying like leaves.

“Damn it, he’s way too strong!”

“No matter what we do, we cannot get close!”

“Then we’ll just try as many times as we need!”

“We’ll do our best!”

“Yeah... Remember everything our instructor...everything Sir Sid’s taught us!”

The Blitze class students readied their fairy swords, determined to fight against the huge wall before them.

Luke looked at them silently. For some reason, she never attacked them and only waited for the students to come at her and warded them off.

Seeing how she intended to repeat the same thing, Christopher clicked his

tongue. “Why don’t you take us seriously? You looking down on us? Or you think you can take care of us whenever you want, so you’re taking your time?”

“Well, it would not be strange if that were the case.”

“It’s great for us, though. To make it easier for Alvin and Sir Sid, we should do our best to at least land a blow... Even if it kills us.”

“I-I’m scared, but if it’s for our instructor...!”

Suddenly, Luke laughed faintly.

“Wh-What’s so funny?!” Christopher shouted.

“No, excuse me, I was not making fun of you. Just that...I was a little envious.”

The Blitze class students frowned, not understanding what she meant.

Not minding them, Luke removed her helmet and threw it to the side. The students held their breath, seeing how pretty she was. If it weren’t for the scar on her forehead, she would be the perfect picture of a beautiful princess.

“...In the past, I also received Sir Sid’s teachings. Indeed, like you, he was my instructor.”

They gasped.

“Sir Sid must have really worked you hard. I can feel it in your swordsmanship and the way you move. You earnestly trained under him. You might still be fledglings, but you are not bad. And, more than anything, you are knightly. I cannot help but be envious of that...”

They listened silently.

“Not only did you inherit his swordsmanship but also his spirit as a knight. You truly are dazzling... Even more so considering how I am right now... And yet, I wanted to be with him. I wanted to be able to stand next to him on the battlefield, the only place where we could be together, forever.”

The students didn’t know what to say.

“Excuse me for telling you this. Well then, let us begin.” Luke readied her spear. “I am the dark knight, Sir Unicorn—Luke...no, Lucy Anthalo. I will never accept that our era has ended, nor the passage of time. Even if that means the

world must be engulfed in a deadly winter, I wish for eternity. I wield my spear to immortalize the era of good old knights. If you are against it, then take your sword to strike the old and create a new era. This is how we have always done things."

"I don't really get it, but—" Christopher started.

"—we will show you that we can do it!" Elaine finished his sentence.

Thus, the fight between Luke and the Blitze class students truly began as they clashed head-on.

———

As the Blitze class students and Louise were fighting the knights from the legendary era...

"Ooooooooooooooh!"

"Take thaaaaat!"

The Fairy Knight Order of the Kingdom of Calvania and the dark knights clashed fiercely.

"Everything is going to be all right! If we unite our strength, we won't lose! Compared to being beaten up by our instructor, they're nothing!" Yuno shouted, leading the best Will users among the First Squires of the Blitze class.

Together with them were Johan, Olivia, and the other Second Squires who had learned Will from Sid. They were the Kingdom of Calvania's main force, fighting on the front line with veteran knights as their support.

However, the ones who held the most importance were the Ladies of the Lake, led by Isabella.

"Oh, gentle water, heal this wound!"

"Tie them, sleeping thorns!"

"Red petals, dance in fire!"

They used magic from the back to help the Fairy Knight Order of Calvania and oppose the dark knights. Thanks to being in the entrance hall of the castle, a restrained space, they managed to be a match for the enemy even while being

outnumbered.

“Lady Isabella! We’re on par with them for now! We’re not losing!” Libella reported.

Isabella nodded. “...In hindsight, this is all thanks to Sir Sid.”

As she calmly observed the battlefield and used magic, Isabella pondered.

When Sid disappeared, she had felt like all hope was lost. The fight against the northern demon kingdom was going to be extremely difficult, so how were they going to manage without Sid?

At first, she was sad, thinking he had abandoned them. Then she felt anger, wondering if the legends were just legends and if he really was the Barbarian. However, after calming down a little, she realized the truth. Everyone did.

Indeed, Sid went to fight alone.

She didn’t know why, but he had decided to fight on his own. It was unknown how a knight like Sid could open a Fairy Road to go to the northern demon kingdom, but he wasn’t one to admit defeat and run away. So she gathered as many people as she could, and as soon as the preparations were done, she used Sid’s crest to reverse-summon everyone.

Everyone in the Fairy Knight Order of Calvania has been moved by your words, Sir Sid. This is why I could gather them so quickly.

However, she still couldn’t understand why Sid had gone alone, especially considering how he usually acted. Still, there was one thing she knew.

You are a knight among knights, Sir Sid! I do not know why you went alone, but there must be a reason, right?! She shouted in her mind as she used magic against the dark knights. While the person in her thoughts wasn’t there to reply, she continued. *Once this fight is over, I will have you answer all my questions! I have always wanted to know more about you! So...leave this place to me! And, please, take care of Alvin!*

Sid had his duty, and she had hers. Understanding this, the head priestess of the Ladies of the Lake focused on the fight before her.

———

Damn it! Gato, a Second Squire of the Durande class, cried in his mind. He was lying on the floor, his body in tatters.

Many other knights were just like him. They might have been robust, but still being alive was quite the miracle now that they couldn't use their fairy swords. Even with the Ladies of the Lake helping them with magic, they were basically normal men fighting against dark knights. But they had been given the role of supporting the Will users, even at the risk of their lives, and so they did.

I'm so pathetic...! Gato had always thought he was special, a chosen one. But the truth was that, without his fairy sword, he was useless.

Could someone lying on the floor, looking at the ceiling, really be called a knight?

As arrogant and thoughtless as he was, Gato was a knight. With the country being in peril, he knew he had to do something. But the fact was that...he couldn't do anything. At best, he could only be a meat shield.

Compared to him, though outmatched, the Blitze class and the students who had learned from Sid could fight against knights from the legendary era and the dark knights. They had the minimum strength necessary to accomplish what they needed to and live up to their chivalry. The way they continued to fight, drenched in blood, without giving up was...

Damn... They're so cool! Thinking back, Gato admired knights like that. He aimed to become a knight because he wanted to be like them. However, with time, he lost these feelings. It was all the fault of the sword ranks. He felt inferior to people who had a better sword rank but superior to those with a lower one—all because the knight order gave such importance to the sword rank. That was what caused Gato to rot and become like he was now. Even though he wanted to fight on the front line more than anyone, he couldn't and had to leave that role to other people.

Damn it... Damn it...! He cried, frustrated. But he didn't stop there. *Even if I'm rotten, I'm still a knight!* He used his powerless fairy sword as a crutch to get up. *I'm a knight... As long as I can still move, I can't sleep on the floor... Even if that means dying, I don't want to be even more shameful than I am now!* he shouted in his mind.

Gato, a mere soldier who couldn’t become the main character, threw himself into the battle once again.

———

The battle, sparking many feelings, continued. Everyone fought the enemy for their own reasons. For their country, and for their king, the knights of the Kingdom of Calvania were in high spirits and matched the dark knights, thanks to being in a restrained space.

However, that didn’t change the difference in power and number, and their resistance wouldn’t last long.

As such, everything would be decided by Sid and Alvin. The fate of the country and the world rested on their shoulders.

Chapter 6: The Fated Twins

Far from the tumult in the entrance hall, in the silent throne room at the top of the Dachnesia Castle, Endea was quietly sitting on her throne, her chin on her hand, looking at nothing.

She could feel the battle getting closer and knew it would decide everything, but she was engrossed in her thoughts.

Why...? Why did things end up like this...? She sighed and closed her eyes, remembering the past.

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"It's already time to go..." Alma said sadly, closing the book in her hands.

"Thanks, Alma! It's always so fun to hear about Sir Sid's stories!" Though I was reluctant to part with her, I smiled brightly.

We always spent time together in this secret room.

Because I didn't understand the concept of unhappiness, I didn't feel like my situation was unfortunate. I might have been confined in this cage, but the time I spent with Alma was truly happy.

However, sometimes I heard a voice.

"You are unhappy, Lady Elma."

"By being imprisoned here your whole life, you won't ever learn about true happiness or love."

"Aah, you are so pitiful. So, so pitiful..."

It was the voice of the sword inside me. It was awfully unpleasant, and...

"Is there something wrong, Elma?"

I gasped, hearing Alma's voice. She was peering at me. "N-No, it's nothing!"
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“Really...? You look pale, and your expression was really grim...”

“I’m fine! Don’t worry! No problem at all!” I hastily denied, shaking my head.

I didn’t want Alma to know about the sword’s voice. I was scared that it would disgust her and she would stop coming to see me.

I was going to spend my whole life here anyway, so might as well hide it until I die.

“I have to go back, Elma,” Alma said.

I panicked a little, being brought out of my thoughts. “Ah, umm... S-See you next time, Alma!”

“I have to go out with Father tomorrow, so I’m sorry, but I won’t be able to come for a while...”

Hearing this, I felt loneliness, and...a little thorn of jealousy pricked my heart, envy toward Alma for being able to freely walk outside. I quickly pushed these ugly feelings away and smiled.

“I’m fine! So do your best!”

“Yeah... Say, Elma... Don’t you feel lonely? Isn’t it difficult for you?” she suddenly asked.

“Nope! I’m totally fine! After all, I have you!” I replied, smiling as usual.

———

A few days had passed since Alma’s last visit.

It was winter, and I could see the snow falling outside from my grated window. The blizzard and the crackling of the fire in the hearth were the only sounds I could hear as I was alone in my bed, thinking.

I was fine with living all my life in this lonely room. As long as Alma could spare some time to be with me, I would be happy. However, recently, the number of times she visited me had been decreasing little by little.

At first, I was fine with it. She was preparing to become king, so of course she would be busy. But, gradually, a certain fear started to grasp my heart. That, maybe, one day, she would stop coming to see me and forget about me.

“Of course she will.”

“The only reason she comes to see you is to feel superior.”

“By seeing how miserable you are, she can feel how blessed she is.”

“This is the kind of existence you are to her.”

Shut up.

“If she did not exist, you would be in her place.”

“Just like her, you would be walking freely outside.”

“You would become the king, and the country would be yours.”

“You would not be alone but surrounded and loved by everyone.”

...Shut up.

“Aah, you are so pitiful. So, so piti—”

“Shut up! Just shut up already!” I shouted, violently striking my pillow.

Thankfully, that was sufficient to stop the sword’s voice for today, but that didn’t calm me.

“Haa...haa... Alma...” I called my sister’s name, panting and crying.

I’d been hating myself a lot recently. My feelings were slowly starting to become like the sword’s voice. Were Alma’s true feelings like the sword said? If she weren’t here, would I be free and happy?

Fear and ugly feelings grew inside me day after day, and I couldn’t stop them.

I’m happy. I’m happy. I’m happy.

I kept telling myself that I was happy when suddenly, I heard rushing footsteps outside my room.

“Is that...Alma? Did she come to see me...?”

But then, I realized something was strange. Alma’s footsteps weren’t that noisy, and from the sound, there was more than one person.

As I blinked, wondering what was happening, the door was violently opened by a woman with a bloodcurdling expression.

“Eek!” I yelped in fear. That person was... “L-Lady...Eva...? And Alma too...”

Eva, the head priestess of the Ladies of the Lake, stepped into my room along with Alma. She stared at me with a very angry look, and, for some reason, Alma looked at me sadly.

“U-Umm... Did something happen? I-I’ve been a good girl,” I said, perplexed by how different from usual they were acting.

And then...

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The sound of old wood being scraped together resonated in the throne room, bringing Endea back from the past to the present.

The immense entrance door was being pushed from the outside. When it finished opening, two people stood on the other side: Alvin and Sid.

“...You’re finally here, Alma,” Endea muttered.

Alvin walked resolutely toward her and didn’t answer. Sid was beside Alvin, accompanying her as a knight should.

Seeing them like this, Endea, still sitting on her throne with her chin on her hand, couldn’t help but smile ironically. “It’s just like back then.”

Alvin cocked her head, not understanding.

“Back then too, it was a winter night with a raging blizzard outside...”

“What are you talking about?”

“Isn’t it obvious? About the day you betrayed me, Alma,” she spat, sending a hateful glare at her sister. Then she pinched the edges of her dress and made an elegant curtsy. “Welcome to the castle of the Demon King who will destroy the world, successor of the Holy King, the righteous King Alvin, and her first knight,
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Sir Sid the Lightning Knight.”

“...I’ve come as promised, Endea,” Sid said, moving forward. He was unsteady, still in a poor condition.

Then, finally, for the first time, he drew the sword at his hip—Daybreak, the fairy sword of light. Strangely, it had the same name as Alvin’s fairy sword. Its divine light wiped away a part of the darkness in the room.

Endea looked at him silently. She was frustrated and sad that the knight she always admired was pointing his sword at her. But in the end, she resigned and said, “...I knew it would come to this. But that’s fine. I *am* the Demon King, after all.”

Endea held her hand toward a pool of darkness to her side and took a sword from it. It was the blade that had obtained a new power and appearance when she awakened as the Demon King—the strongest fairy sword. Its mere existence was enough to crush everything around it with its overwhelming mana.

“Come! I’ll bring an eternal deadly winter to this world and rule it forever! If you stand in my way, be it Sir Sid or you, Alma, I’ll cut you down!” Endea declared, readying her sword.

As expected of the Demon King, her body was filled with otherworldly mana.

Sid silently took a stance with both his blades, but...

“Please, wait, Sir Sid.” Alvin stopped him. “I want to talk with Endea...no, with Elma.”

“Is there even something to talk about?!” Endea shouted. “I’m the Demon King, the one who wants to destroy the world! And you’re the knight and his king, who want to protect it! In that case, the only thing to do is kill each other!”

“...Is it fine with you if we talk, Sir Sid?” Alvin asked imploringly, ignoring her sister.

“Of course, I’m not the one who decides.” Sid grinned. “If you want to do that, then I can only obey.”

“Thank you.” Alvin turned toward Endea. The fated twin sisters faced each

other. “I...I remember you now, Elma.”

“Great for you,” Endea said, deadpan.

“I know I’m just making excuses, but...magic has been used on me to alter my memories. Lady Eva sealed all my memories of you.”

“...And?”

“The reason you were imprisoned in that secret room was because of *that*, right? The royal family’s oral tradition...”

The royal family passed down a certain prophecy, only told to the Holy King Arthur’s direct descendants and heirs to the throne, as well as the Ladies of the Lake head priestesses. It was a prophecy of ruin and the royal family’s curse.

One day, twins will be born.

One of them will receive Éclair’s blessing and become the new righteous Holy King, and the other will receive Opus’s curse and become the new evil Demon King.

As such, the latter must be killed.

The new Demon King must be killed.

Otherwise, an eternal winter of death and stillness will once again befall the world.

“Exactly. That’s why I was imprisoned.” Maybe Endea finally felt like talking, as she continued with a snort. “Even if our ancestor, the Holy King Arthur, said to pass it down to his descendants and the Ladies of the Lake, that was far in the past. As time passed, they stopped taking it seriously, wondering why the Demon King would even be born from the Holy King’s family. After all, how could the Holy King and the Demon King, two opposite existences, be blood-related?”

“You would think it impossible, yeah,” Alvin agreed.

“Exactly. Everyone made light of the prophecy...until our birth.” Endea showed off her sword. “The black fairy sword, Twilight... Well, now it’s the fairy

sword of darkness, but anyway... The thing is, I was born with it, the same sword as the Demon King."

Alvin gasped.

"Everyone immediately realized that the old prophecy was true. Considering that the kingdom's history proves that all the other prophecies are true, it's stupid to think that the twins one would be an exception. So everyone decided to kill me. In particular, Eva, the head priestess of the Ladies of the Lake back then, really feared me and absolutely wanted me dead. However, one person objected. Our father, King Auld."

"Father..." Alvin muttered.

She remembered her late father. He was a talented politician and warrior. Even though the current era was a difficult one for the royal family, he had brilliantly governed the kingdom and was loved by the people, earning him the title of Wise King. Still, in the end, rather than acting as a king, he had acted as a father.

"Father couldn't bring himself to kill me, his newborn daughter, so he implored Eva to let me live."

"Father..."

"Even the obstinate Eva couldn't resist our father's entreaty and gave in. The condition was that I would be imprisoned in a special room, sealed inside it for my entire life. That secret room was the tiny world where we could be together. It was my everything," Endea said with a distant look, probably remembering the past. She looked somewhat nostalgic.

The two sisters stayed silent for a while, staring at each other. The only sound was from the raging blizzard outside.

"Is that why, Elma?" Alvin broke the silence. "You hate the world for imprisoning you, and you hate the royal family and the kingdom for denying your existence. Is that why you want to destroy everything?"

"...What?" Endea's nostalgic expression changed to intense rage after hearing Alvin's words. "What are you saying, Alma? Don't tell me you seriously think that?"

Alvin reflexively stepped back, overawed by her sister's threatening attitude.

Endea continued. "I was fine as long as you were with me! I didn't mind being imprisoned in that room for my entire life as long as you were with me! Just being with you and talking about Sir Sid's stories made me happy! I never thought about destroying the kingdom or even hated the world!"

"Huh? Th-Then, why...?"

"Why do you even ask, you cowardly traitor?! Did you forget what you did to me?! Or did you just oh so conveniently remember everything but that?!"

"Elma... Sorry, but I really don't understand what you're saying! You said I betrayed you, but I don't get it. True, I couldn't get you out of that room... I was powerless! But I swore to do it one day..."

"Enough of your nonsense!" Endea shouted, striking her sword against the ground.

It created a deadly cold shock wave that flew toward Alvin. Normally, that would be enough to kill anyone instantly, but Sid stood silently and protected her.

Seeing this angered Endea even more, and she hatefully spat, "You're really stealing everything from me! Satisfied yet?!"

"I...I really don't get it, Endea..."

"Still feigning ignorance? Or you really forgot? How heartless! But, fine! I'll talk then! I'll tell you everything and make you remember what you did to me that day!"

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That night, as a tremendous blizzard was blowing outside, Eva and Alma suddenly came to my room.

"U-Umm... Did something happen? I-I've been a good girl," I said, perplexed by how different from usual they were acting.

"Are you sure, Prince Alvin?"

"Yes... I saw her..."
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Eva and Alma talked about something seriously.

“D-Did something happen, Alma? Y-You look scary...” I asked, trying to understand what was happening.

Eva ignored me and opened my wardrobe, searching for something inside, violently throwing away my previous clothes.

“S-Stop, Eva! Why are you doing something so cruel?!” I hurriedly clung to Eva’s arm. “Alma! Stop Eva!”

However, Alma didn’t do anything, and, after a while, Eva found something and took it out, thrusting it before my eyes. It was a handkerchief I had received from Alma. But, for some reason, a disgusting pattern was drawn on it with what seemed to be blood. Just looking at it made me feel sick.

“What...is this? It’s scary...” I muttered.

“Do not feign ignorance, Lady Elma,” Eva said hatefully. “This is forbidden dark magic, the Seal of Varja. You used it to curse King Auld with illness, right? No wonder we could not find the source of the curse. Who would think it was here?”

“Huh...?” I blinked. It was so sudden, I couldn’t understand anything.

“Even though King Auld had the kindness to let you live, you have returned his favor with evil! How shameless! You truly are destined to become the wicked Demon King!”

“I-I don’t know anything about it! What... What is this Seal of Varja thing?! I’ve never heard of it!” I yelled, shaking my head.

Eva quickly waved her wand and recited an incantation. Countless briars sprouted from the ground and coiled around me, binding my limbs. Their thorns stabbed me, making my whole body bleed.

“I-It hurts! Stop! Please stop!” I cried.

“You are the one who should stop lying! The only one who can use the dark side’s magic is you, the one who was born with a black fairy sword!” Eva declared, putting her hands around my throat to strangle me. Her expression was furious, and tears spilled from the corners of her eyes. “Moreover, Lady

Alma said that she saw you use your blood for the Seal of Varja!”

“A-Alma did...?”

“And the final proof is the seal found in your room! Unfortunately, I was too late! The curse progressed too much, and his illness cannot be cured anymore... King Auld is going to... This is your fault! How could you do that?! How dare you?!” Eva shouted, having gone mad.

I always thought she was a scary person, but the hateful glare full of rage she was sending me wasn’t that of a sane person. She would never listen to anything I would say.

Why did this happen?

“A-Alma... H-Help...me...!” I implored.

However, what I saw was Alma, looking at me with a cold, jeering smile. Then I understood—I had been set up. She had betrayed me.

“I told you, no?”

“To Alma, you are nothing but a nuisance.”

The sword’s voice spoke triumphantly in my head.

“Alma has a fairy sword too, so she noticed your true power.”

“Her sword is far weaker than yours.”

“So she realized.”

“If, by any chance, people learned about you or chose you instead of her, she would lose the throne.”

“Scared by the possibility, she decided to deal with you while you were still weak.”

N-No way...

“You should realize the truth, now.”

“The reason she was so kind to you was to get on your good side.”

“She has always been scared of you.”

No! Alma would never...!

Still, as much as I wanted to deny it, it was the only way to explain the current situation. I was being strangled to death, and Alma was only looking at me silently with a cold smile.

“A...Alma...” I barely managed to mutter, as Eva’s fingers kept pressing on my throat.

A merciless creaking sound resonated, and, finally, after letting out a last groan, my sight darkened.

I was losing consciousness, and I felt the grip of death trying to take me. As anger and sorrow faded from my mind, I sent one last imploring look to Alma.

There, I saw it. Without uttering a single sound, her lips moved, and she mouthed: FARE. WELL.

Something broke in me. Something decisive broke inside me along with my cervical vertebrae, and I fell into despair.

At the last moment, I searched for something—anything—to depend on.

“So, what will you do?”

I heard the voice...and I accepted it. I took the sword that I always repressed inside me and released its power.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

While internally cursing everything and wishing for it all to be destroyed, I swung my sword.

It was so...easy. Just by putting my heart into it, my fairy sword overcame the power of the room that was sealing it. It was so easy. I wondered why I didn’t do

it earlier.

And then—the world was dyed in darkness.

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"When I swung my sword in desperation, I inflicted a deadly curse on Eva and destroyed the boundary between the material world and the fairy realm. Then I fell into its deepest layer: the frozen world," Endea explained.

Alvin listened silently.

"Everyone thought I died, but I didn't. I spent hellish years trying to come back from the frozen world. I didn't have any equipment, just my young body as I wandered around, freezing. I ran away from dreadful monsters as I suffered from hunger and the cold, spending days so painful and scary that I almost hoped to die. If I didn't have Twilight, I would have died. But I didn't...even though it would have been better that way. I struggled to the point of spitting blood, groveled on the ground, and I managed to return to the material world. Do you know how, Alma?"

Endea sent a hateful glare full of rage toward her sister and spat, "Because I couldn't forgive you! So, did setting me up and killing me satisfy you?! The one threatening your position disappeared, and you even got to monopolize your ideal knight! You were accepted by everyone and obtained the kingdom! So, satisfied yet?! However, *I* don't accept it! I'll destroy everything precious to you, the people you want to protect, and the things you've obtained! I'll destroy everything! That's the reason I survived and crawled out of hell!"

Alvin stayed silent.

"Now, take your sword! I'm a nuisance, no?! You don't want me to make a mess of the kingdom and comrades you've finally obtained, right?! Hmph! Then the only thing left is for us to kill each other!" Endea declared, readying her sword.

The atmosphere was strained. The time for discussion was over. And yet...

"What...? What are you talking about?" Alvin muttered, dumbfounded.

"...Hah?" Endea raised an eyebrow.
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“I betrayed you? I set you up with the Seal of Varja? I instigated Lady Eva? I don’t know anything about what you’re saying...”

“Hmm... So you’re still feigning ignorance, huh? Well, whatever. You can continue until your death.” Endea laughed scornfully. “Though, I guess considering your current position, you have no choice but to pretend you don’t know anything. After all, you’re selling yourself as a noble and righteous king. There’s no way you can acknowledge my words!”

“I really don’t know anything! There’s no way I would do that to you!” Alvin shouted.

Endea faltered seeing her sister’s firm denial.

“You’re my only sister! We’re family! Why would I do something so cruel to you?! Please, tell the truth, Elma! What happened in your past?!” Alvin asked.

“Just how much are you going to make a fool of me, Alma?! I really hate you!” Endea yelled.

They glared at each other furiously.

“...Ah, I see. I get the gist.” Sid suddenly cut into the conversation.

“Sir Sid?”

“Hmph! What do you understand? You’re unrelated to us. Outsiders don’t have a say in the matter. It’s our problem.”

“True, I’m unrelated. But that’s exactly why I got it.” Sid shrugged his shoulders. “Basically, you’ve been fooled, Endea.”

“...What?”

“You were born as the Demon King’s successor, but for Alma...for Alvin, you refused that role. You were ready to stay in that cage and seal its power inside yourself until your death. However, that wasn’t a good thing for a certain person awaiting your awakening, so they had to make the situation such that you would accept the sword’s power of your own volition.”

“Wh-What kind of idiocy are you saying...?”

“There’s a huge contradiction in your story,” Sid declared.

“Huh?” Endea blinked, not understanding.

“The Seal of Varja is a forbidden magic from the dark side. How could Alvin, someone from the light side, even use it?”

“...Huh?” Endea’s eyes widened. “Th-That’s... I don’t know! Err... Maybe she had someone else use it...?” she said hesitantly.

“Pretty lame explanation. You should have realized how unnatural that was. I’m like a hundred percent sure that the Alvin you saw back then was an impostor.”

“Th-That’s...” She looked aside for a few seconds, then glared at Sid once again triumphantly. “That’s impossible! Considering how discerning she was, Eva should have noticed if Alma was an impostor! The fact that she believed her means that it was the true Al—”

“You had gaps in your hearts,” Sid interjected with a sigh. “The Line Between Lie and Truth is an ancient magic that can manipulate people’s memories and feelings. In your case, Endea, your dissatisfaction toward your situation, your jealousy toward Alvin, and the faint doubts you had were used. As for Eva, probably her hidden feelings toward King Auld? Anyway, these feelings were amplified to the point that you weren’t able to notice the contradiction even though you normally would.”

“No... That can’t be true...” Despite her words, Endea couldn’t hide her agitation and bewilderment.

Sid ignored her and looked above. “The way you do things didn’t change.” Sid’s usually calm tone was filled with anger. “Be it back in the legendary era or now... How many people do you plan to trick? Just how far do you need to go until you’re satisfied? Answer me, Flora...no, Florence.”

A cheerful chuckle resounded. “My, my, my... I truly do not understand what you are saying, Sir Sid.”

Darkness coiled and squirmed in the air and transformed into a woman who slowly descended in front of everyone. It was the great witch of the Dark Order of Opus, Flora.

“Don’t play dumb. You’re the one who did it, no? You used the Seal of Varja,

took Alvin's appearance, and sent Endea to hell, right?"

"Ah..." Alvin realized something. "Flora, didn't you use The Line Between Lie and Truth to infiltrate our class...? Don't tell me...?!"

"Yeah. She's the kind of woman who loves to play roundabout tricks on people." Sid glared sharply at Flora, who was smiling widely. "The fact that you've shown up now means that you don't even care about hiding the truth anymore. So how about revealing your true nature now? I'm fed up with this charade."

Then, suddenly, Endea started to laugh loudly as if ridiculing him. "Aha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! What are you saying?! Are you stupid?! There's no way Flora tricked me! Even if I were to admit that the Alma back then was an impostor, it's impossible that it was Flora!" she asserted confidently and hugged Flora from the side. "Flora isn't like my heartless sister and father! She's my only ally! When I was despairing at the bottom of the fairy realm in the frozen world, she's the one who saved me! She taught me how to use my sword! And she promised to make me the true king of the world and that she would help me to wreck that hateful Alma and everything she holds dear! She's always been with me! Always by my side! She listened to all my wishes, no matter how selfish they were! She's been more of a sister than Alma ever was! And yet, you say she tricked me?! That's impossible!" She turned toward Flora with a broad smile full of trust. "Right, Flora?!"

However...

"What? Of course everything was my doing, my adorable master." Flora easily confessed with a gentle, delighted smile.

"...Huh?"

Flora giggled. "Well, my adorable master completely believes in me, so I could easily deceive her with a random lie, but we are reaching the final stage of my plan, so time to come clean♪," she hummed with another chuckle.

"Y-You're...lying, right...?" Endea asked, her voice trembling as she stepped back from Flora. "Say you're lying!"

Suddenly, Flora's appearance warped like an illusion, changing to something

else. What appeared before everyone was...

“It’s not a lie, Elma. I deceived both you and Lady Eva. Your hearts were so full of gaps. It was really easy. I’m sorry,” the young Alma from Endea’s memories said.

Endea paled, looking at her in a daze. Flora returned to her original appearance and smiled at her.

“...Why...?” Endea muttered.

“I have a wish, and for it to be granted, I need you to become the Demon King.” Flora walked up to Endea, who was still trembling, raised her chin, and peered into her eyes. “Do you understand why destroying the capital and the Calvania Castle was necessary to get back all of your powers as the Demon King? Because they worked as a seal. Indeed, they were sealing the soul of a certain mighty and fiendish king deep inside the fairy realm. By breaking it, you, the current Demon King, regained your power.”

Endea listened silently, still shivering.

“And, at the same time, *that person’s* soul returned to you too. Now, the only thing left to do is to change the ownership of your body. Then, finally, my *dear* master will truly be resurrected. Indeed, I will finally be able to meet him again,” she declared with an extremely bewitching smile.

Endea felt an intense chill run down her spine and immediately thrust Flora away. “Ah... Aaaaaaaah! No... No!” She screamed and tried to run away, not caring about how shameful she looked.

However, Flora snapped her fingers, and a magic circle appeared and covered the whole throne room. Thick darkness sprouted from it and captured Endea.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” she shrieked.

“E-Elma!” Alvin yelled, reflexively running toward her sister.

“Stop. If you get near...it’ll absorb you too.” Sid warned her with a grim expression. He placed himself before Alvin and protected her from the darkness by using Will to burn all the light mana in his body and create a shield.

“I told you that we were reaching the final stage of my plan, no? The

preparations are done, my adorable master...” Flora announced.

“Aaaaah! No! Something is coming from inside me!” Endea screamed.

Darkness kept gushing out and covered Endea’s body. As it did, she felt like her soul was being frozen and her sense of self was collapsing.

“No! No, no, no! Don’t defile my body! Don’t steal it! Aaaaaaaaaaah!” Endea screamed in dread.

“It will be fine. You just need to accept it. You are the vessel I prepared for this purpose. It took so long... Truly, it took such a long time for the royal family to birth twins...” Flora complained.

“Why are you so cruel, Flora?! I believed you! I trusted you! Did you lie when you said I was important to you?!”

“No, you are precious to me. You truly are like a little sister to me. I might seem heartless, but I did love you from the bottom of my heart, my *adorable* master. Unfortunately, there is someone I love even more...”

“Ah... Aaaaaaaaaaaah!” Endea cried.

“Do not worry. My *dear* master and I will achieve your wish in your place. You hate Alma, the kingdom, and the world, right? Then we will destroy everything. So do not worry. Please surrender your body to him, and enter an eternal slumber.”

“No! I...I didn’t really want to do that! But I didn’t have anything else...! So I...!”

“I know, my adorable master. You are so adorable and easy to manipulate... I truly loved you.”

“A...aaah...”

“Should I sing you a lullaby? Please, sleep until the end of the world. And even after it. Forever.”

“Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!” Endea cried, full of grief. She had been betrayed and lost everything. And, when she was going to lose even herself, what she depended on was... “Alma! Sir Sid!” She stretched her arm toward them in tears. Even though she knew that she had lost that right long

ago, she couldn’t help but do it. “Help me... Please, help me!”

“Elma!” Alvin shouted, and Sid watched silently.

Then the darkness coming from the magic circle covered the entire world.

Chapter 7: The Lightning...

Darkness covered the world, and shock waves blew the walls of the throne room in all directions, exposing it to the raging blizzard.

The top of Dachnesia Castle was the closest place to the heavens. And there, a king was standing, owning the place. Though the body was still Endea's, the one inside was someone different. They clasped and opened their hands, checking their body. Then, after a while, they glanced at Sid with a smile.

"It's been a while, Sir Sid," they said.

"...Arthur," Sid replied with a grim expression.

"Huh? Arthur? My ancestor?" Alvin blinked in surprise.

"Indeed. It feels quite odd to be reincarnated as a girl, but I am Arthur, your ancestor. It's been a while since I've been alive. Around a thousand years, I think... A lot of time has passed since the day you betrayed me, Sir Sid..." The person now in Endea's body called himself Arthur as he spoke to Sid. Then he looked at Flora, who was overcome with emotions next to him, and gently said, "You released me from that seal, right, Florence? Thank you."

"Lord Arthur... My dear master... I have impatiently waited for this day to arrive!" Flora exclaimed and hugged him.

Self-proclaimed Arthur accepted her embrace with a smile.

"Huh? ...Huh? What is happening...?" Alvin sent an imploring look at Sid, but he didn't answer. Instead...

"Your oath as a knight may be important, but considering the situation, there is no need to hide the truth anymore." Éclair materialized next to him.

"Wh-What do you mean, Éclair...?"

"Simply put, the one feared as the Demon King in the legendary era was none other than Arthur himself."

Alvin was speechless, her eyes wide open from learning the truth.

“Of course, that was not always the case. At first, he was a righteous king who fought for the people. Unfortunately, before we could notice, he had been corrupted by darkness. Nobody could do anything against his darkness and the winter he created, and the world yielded. However, there was one person who resisted, a single knight—”

“It’s a story from the past,” Sid interjected. He calmly, but determinedly, walked toward Arthur as he drew and readied his obsidian iron sword in his right hand and the fairy sword of light in his left. “But there’s something I can tell you. The reason I made a contract with Éclair and was resurrected in this era is to defeat the Demon King Arthur.”

Alvin gasped.

“And now, finally, the time has come to fulfill my promise to you, Arthur.”

However, the one who replied wasn’t Arthur.

“Right... Even though almost everything goes as I want, you always surpass my expectations, Sid Blitze.” Flora, who had been rejoicing until now, looked at Sid with faint displeasure, then moved her gaze next to him. “You imposed quite the cruel duty on a single knight, Éclair.”

Éclair didn’t reply.

Alvin wondered what their relationship was as they glared at each other. After a few seconds, Éclair transformed into motes of light and returned to the fairy sword of light in Sid’s hand. Seeing this, Flora also transformed into motes of darkness and was absorbed into Arthur’s fairy sword of darkness.

The Demon King and a knight faced each other.

Alvin shivered, thinking about the fierce battle that was on the verge of beginning.

“I’m sorry, Alvin,” Sid suddenly said, his back to her. “We’ve ended up involving this era’s people with the problems from the past. But I want you to know that they didn’t wish for that. It’s just that...everyone was a little too weak, and they had the gaps in their hearts filled with darkness. It’s something that everyone has and nobody can erase. That’s why the old knight’s code was created... So that people discipline themselves and become even a little

stronger.”

“And that’s why you’re so abnormal, Sir Sid,” Arthur commented with a dark smile. “Even though everyone has darkness in their hearts, you didn’t. Your heart...was empty. That’s why Florence couldn’t charm you.”

“Can’t deny that. That’s why I’m the Barbarian, after all. And that’s exactly why I was chosen for this role. My life might have been hollow...but it wasn’t bad. Be it the past one or the current one,” Sid declared and took a stance.

The atmosphere stirred from the presence he exuded.

“...Your last order, my lord?” Sid calmly asked Alvin.

Alvin immediately realized what he meant, and her expression warped in sorrow. She looked at the almost entirely vanished crest on the back of her hand, and a terrific presentiment hit her. Most likely, in this battle, Sid was going to...

“It’s not something you should worry about,” Sid gently said. “*This* is the reason I received a second life and why I’m standing here. So don’t worry. Carry out your duty as king. You just need to bare your heart and give word to your feelings. Now, your last order, my lord.”

Alvin wiped her eyes and declared resolutely, “My beloved knight, Sir Sid. Slay the Demon King who threatens our country and the world! Save Princess Elma, my dear little sister! Those are my orders!”

“Yes, my lord,” Sid answered, his resolve made. However, just as he was going to take a step forward...

“Also, I forbid you to die without my permission,” Alvin continued. “You must return to my side after defeating the Demon King.”

“Alvin, that’s...” Sid became speechless upon hearing the added orders.

“‘A knight tells only the truth.’ You told me that you would always be with me. Do you intend to break your promise and the knight’s code?”

Sid smiled ruefully. “...Understood. I’m really glad I’ve got to meet you in this life.” Then, with a refreshed expression, Sid walked toward Arthur.

All the while, Alvin continued to watch his back.

———

As the winter engulfing the world intensified, a knight and the Demon King clashed.

The first one to make a move was the knight. His twin blades were filled with fierce lightning that blew the blizzard and darkness around him. The sword in his right hand was held vertically in the vom Tach stance, and the one in his left horizontally, forming a cross made of light, carving itself into the darkness.

The Demon King, on the other hand, had his sword clad in cold and darkness so thick it almost overwhelmed the dazzling lightning. He swung his blade diagonally, from the lower left to the upper right, and blocked the cross attack, covering the twin swords in darkness.

A metallic clang resonated, and sparks burst like fireworks. The world stirred from the pressure created by the impact.

Then, like tornadoes, they both rotated their bodies. The knight to the right, and the Demon King to the left. They rotated so fast it created whirlwinds, and they used the impetus for their next move.

They exchanged blows, swiftly yet fiercely slashing at each other in a boisterous sword dance. They were repeating the exact same moves as their first fight long ago.

The grand battle between the knight and the Demon King had truly begun. In a single instant, they exchanged countless terrific blows as light and darkness clashed.

“You’re so cruel, Sir Sid,” Arthur said as they fought at point-blank range. “You still intend to betray me? Like back then?”

“Yeah... I’m the Barbarian, after all,” Sid replied with a bold smile as he swung his swords.

They moved like tempests, their blades clashing dozens or hundreds of times between each word they spoke.

“Why? If I became king, I could make the ideal world.”

“Your ideal world is one of death and stillness? Frozen undead loitering around the world for eternity is what you think humans should be?”

“...Yeah.” Arthur grinned. “Death is equal to all. It gives serenity and is eternal. The peace and harmony we worked so hard to establish won’t collapse, and nobody will need to fear war or starvation. Nobody will have to suffer anymore.”

Sid stayed silent.

“In such a world, chivalry will be eternal. You should understand, no? In a peaceful world, knights wouldn’t be needed. We would lose our raison d’être.”

Sid listened quietly.

“However, in a world where I reign as the Demon King, it would be different. Knights wouldn’t lose their raison d’être and would be able to fight forever. And, no matter how much you fight, nobody would be sad, so you wouldn’t have to restrain yourselves. If that isn’t the ideal world, then what is?”

Sid swung his swords with all his strength, countering Arthur’s attack. The immense impact blew them away, but they immediately closed the distance again and continued to exchange blows.

“...Is that really the world you wanted to show me?” Sid asked, making Arthur gasp. “That’s not it, right? There’s no way I’d be happy with that. The ideal world you aimed for was warmer, nobler, and more dazzling than that. So much that even I, the Barbarian, admired it. I really wanted to see your dream come true.”

Swords clashed, and metallic sounds rang continuously. Sid fiercely swung his twin blades incessantly at Arthur.

“Is that why you’re betraying me? Like back then?”

“I’m not betraying you. I’m correcting you,” Sid declared while launching a counterattack. “People make mistakes. Kings are people, so they can make mistakes too. In that case, it’s a knight’s duty to correct their king.” Sid pushed down Arthur’s sword, closed in, then slashed at him. “Even more so considering that the one you are right now is both Arthur and not.”

Arthur hurriedly blocked the blow.

“Just like what happened to Tenko, you’re the darkness inside Arthur’s heart, amplified and controlled by Florence. Same for Rifis, Logass, Luke, and all the other knights who served you... Everyone who lived in that era did their best, but with time, they got exhausted. That’s how the darkness in your hearts got exploited.”

Arthur swung his sword, slashing at Sid countless times in an instant. “...Of course everyone would get tired when fighting for so long for something they can’t see the end of.”

With lightning speed, Sid blocked all of them with his twin blades. “I know. I was the odd one for not getting tired. Just like you said, I was empty. But that’s why I’ll end you. Because that’s something only I, the Barbarian, can do. I’ll purify your darkness just like I did back then.”

The way they talked casually almost made one forget that they were fighting at such speed to render them invisible to a normal person. In fact, Alvin, who was watching them, couldn’t perceive what they were doing. Their battle was of such a high level that the thought of trying to help Sid didn’t even occur to her.

Suddenly, a voice said, *“Just so you know, Sir Sid, the method you used back then will not work anymore.”* A half-transparent Flora appeared behind Arthur, hugging him. *“Letting yourself be hit by Arthur’s sword to have him purified by the Saint’s Blood you obtained from your contract with Éclair is useless.”*

“She is telling the truth.” This time, Éclair appeared behind Sid. *“As a precaution for the surprise move you had used, she put a really strong magical protection on Arthur this time.”*

“Well, yeah, of course she would.”

“To defeat Arthur, you will need to plant me into his body so that I can directly inject your blood into him.”

Sid glanced at the fairy sword of light in his left hand. It was currently absorbing his blood and converting it into dazzling light mana.

“However, by doing this...” Éclair trailed off.

“Endea, who’s acting as his vessel, will die too,” Sid deduced, making Alvin grimace. He continued to swing his swords at Arthur and paid no mind. “Well then, what to do? I don’t know why, but I’ve never been able to win against Arthur... That’s why I had to use the blood trick last time. Oh well, what will be will be.”

“It won’t. Do you know how much time you have left?” Arthur swung down his sword in a black flash.

Sid instantly crossed his sword above his head and blocked the attack. He pushed Arthur back and leaped backward, but Arthur immediately pursued him like a storm.

“Winter Twilight is the magic of the end. It’s cornering the world, leading it toward death and stillness little by little. That means that even now, every second, your fairy sword of light is heading toward its death and losing its power.”

Sid frowned, blocking another blow.

“In other words, as you’re tied to this world by your contract with Éclair, you’re also heading toward your death every second. On the other hand, the more the deadly winter spreads, the stronger my fairy sword of darkness becomes. After all, this sword governs death!” Arthur swung, the strike stronger and sharper than any since the beginning of the fight.

Sid blocked it, but he was pushed back and slid on the floor. Arthur immediately pursued him, as fast as lightning.

“Seems so...” Sid admitted, his breath rough as he parried Arthur’s attacks one after another. His complexion was pale, and he clearly was in a very bad condition.

“There’s nothing you can do anymore. Just obediently watch as the world is engulfed by winter. Watch as my true kingship leads the world.”

“I won’t. As a knight who’s served him, I can’t let you wrong his kingship.” Sid used Will to knead a large amount of mana. “I don’t care if people hate me as the Barbarian for eternity... However, I’ll never allow the name of the Holy King Arthur to be sullied no matter what!” He filled his twin swords with mana and,

with a yell, charged at Arthur with lightning speed. However...

“How weak,” Arthur said, easily repelling Sid’s full-strength attack by swinging his blade sideways. Sid landed a few meters away, and the battle abruptly stopped. “If you had your strength from the legendary era, it would be one thing, but you can’t do anything against me in your current state.” Arthur slowly walked toward Sid, his sword still pointing down.

Who was winning was as plain as day. On the one hand, Sid was completely exhausted and panting heavily just from fighting a little. On the other hand, Arthur was composed and didn’t even sweat.

“You understand, no? You can’t win against me.”

Sid didn’t reply.

“Be it our first battle when we met or the second after I became the Demon King, I won and you lost.”

Sid stayed silent.

“The second time, I only lost because of your Saint’s Blood. I was winning the fight itself. And it’ll be the same for this third battle. Even more so considering the state you’re in.”

“Really?” Sid finally spoke, smiling boldly as he lowered his twin blades. “True, you’re strong, Arthur. You always had a strength I didn’t, and that’s why I admired you. However, I don’t really get it myself, but I feel like that by reincarnating in this era, I kinda earned the same strength as you.” He sent a glance at Alvin. “Back in the legendary era, I was empty. But now, I feel like a lot of precious things are filling the void in me. I guess it’s because I did something out of character by becoming an instructor at the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy. Thanks to that, even as empty and weak as I am, strangely, I don’t feel like losing. So don’t underestimate me, Arthur. The man staggering before you might be the weakest Barbarian, but he’s also the strongest Lightning Knight,” he declared firmly and took a stance with his swords, kneading his mana with Will.

Seeing Sid recovering from his exhaustion and brimming with energy, Arthur faintly widened his eyes. “You still have that much strength...? No, that’s...” He

glanced at Alvin a little ways away behind Sid. She was grasping her right hand, where the crest was, and doing the Will breathing technique.

“Sir Sid...!” she said as if praying.

“I see... She kneads mana and sends it to you via the crest. She doesn’t even care about the cold and is sending everything to you without protecting herself. That’s how you can still fight even though you’re so exhausted.” He observed Alvin’s feet, which were freezing little by little and nodded with a grin in understanding. “No... It’s not just about mana, right?”

Sid didn’t reply.

“Your students and your comrades who are fighting below us... They’re the new bonds you have made in this era... They’re what’s supporting you, right?”

“Who knows?”

“Ha ha ha... You being called the Barbarian is a joke. You’re a knight by nature, through and through. But now, I know that overwhelming you with strength alone isn’t enough. After all, knights are people who can exhibit power beyond reason when they have to protect something... We both know that very well, don’t you agree?”

“Yeah. After all, the legendary era was full of them.”

“Right. Well then... I guess I should start with there to break you.” Arthur brandished his fairy sword of darkness and chanted, “Along with light, thou rule over creation and origin. Thou art the dark twilight governing the death of all existences.”

The next instant, darkness and cold waves spread over the world. The raging blizzard became even fiercer, and the temperature, which was already quite cold, lowered even more, stealing the heat from everything. No, it was more apt to say that it was stopping everything as it headed toward absolute zero.

“Th-This is...King Arthur’s...no, the Demon King’s Greater Incantation...?!” Alvin exclaimed.

“Step back, Alvin,” Sid warned. Even he couldn’t stop Arthur, as he was surrounded by hellish cold. Just getting near him would be enough to stop the

mana from flowing inside his body and freeze Sid.

“Thou hate this world, and thou hate the unseizable light. Thus, to show thou my love, I will grant thou thy wish.” The Demon King continued to recite his imperial order to the world, which responded by increasing the harshness of the cold.

Everyone understood instinctively that once the incantation was over, the world would fall. The countdown toward the world’s demise had begun, and yet Sid and Alvin could only watch silently, unable to do anything.

“I will kill the unreachable spring, and we will bring forth an eternal winter of silence and tranquility to the universe together!”

The instant the Demon King finished his Greater Incantation, even more intense darkness and cold burst from his sword in all directions, spreading shock waves and earthquakes all over the world.

With Arthur as its center, tremendously cold waves of darkness scattered around. The overwhelming darkness froze everything, covering the world completely. It denied all lives, as if living was a crime. It was a great cataclysm.

The Greater Incantation was in effect, and the world was transforming. It was the arrival of the winter era—a frozen hell.

“S-Sir Sid?!”

“Alvin!”

Sid burned all of his Will and protected her as everything froze. The snow that had been piling on the ground crystallized and transformed into giant blocks of ice.

As the winter deepened, the world changed into a frozen hell.

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

Thanks to Arthur’s loud laughter, Alvin came back to her senses. Apparently, the shock had made her lose consciousness for a few seconds. She shook her head to wake up her half-conscious mind and looked around. What she saw was...

“Wh-What is this...?!” she shouted.

Until now, she had witnessed the dreadful but miraculous phenomena brought by the Greater Incantations of her different enemies a few times, and yet...this time, it was on a whole other level. It was hard to believe that this one was also part of the Greater Incantation category.

The world itself had been changed.

Hell spread before her. No matter how far she tried to see, all that entered her sight was a dead world filled with bulky blocks of ice. Be it the buildings below or the mountains far away, everything had been submerged in a sea of ice. Dachnesia Castle was no exception. Only the throne room wasn't affected, and more than half of the castle had been completely imprisoned in ice. That meant that everyone that was in the entrance hall...

"I'm sure everyone is dead now," Arthur proudly said, aggravating Alvin's unease. "With this, your comrades became my vassals—frozen undead."

Alvin gasped in terror.

"And it's not just them. The whole world has been enclosed in winter. All the lives in this world have been imprisoned in snow and ice. They submitted and swore their allegiance to me. This world...is dead."

"N-No, that's..."

"As proof..." Arthur aimed his eyes toward Sid, who was protecting Alvin. The fairy sword of light in his right hand was full of cracks.

"Ah..."

"Éclair is the incarnation of this world. If it dies, she dies too. Of course, that's also the case for the fairy sword."

Alvin was speechless.

"So, Sir Sid, can you still hear her voice?" Arthur asked.

Sid didn't reply, but that, in itself, was the answer. Even now, the blade continued to crumble, fragments of it falling to the ground.

"Without this sword, you can't defeat me. And, this time, your Saint's Blood won't work on me. My victory was decided from the start. Éclair's death means that..." Arthur stared at Sid once again.

Motes of mana started to spill from Sid's body. The countdown toward his disappearance had begun.

"Aaaah... Sir Sid... Sir Sid!" Alvin yelled, her expression full of despair.

"So, still want to continue?"

Sid didn't respond to Arthur.

"When will you finally give up? You don't have any time or power left, and your sword is unusable. Your chivalry ends here."

Silence.

"Isn't that enough? You did a good job. Be it in the legendary era or now. Back then, you did your best to help me create my ideal world. But you know, such a world would collapse as easily as a house built on sand. So what's the point of risking your life and crying for it when it'll all amount to nothing?"

Sid stayed silent.

"On the other hand, by imprisoning the world in winter, we can easily reach the eternal peace we so earnestly desired."

Sid kept quiet.

"Come with me, Sir Sid. Let's extol our everlasting glory as knights in the new world—the eternal paradise where everyone is equal as frozen undead—that we, people from the legendary era, created."

To Arthur's invitation, Sid slowly sheathed the fairy sword of light and...

"Hard pass," he declared firmly. "The fact that you can say such things proves that you're not the Holy King Arthur anymore. You're the Demon King, the enemy I must defeat as a knight."

"Sir Sid?" Arthur questioned.

"True, the world of winter you want to create would have everyone be equal. Nobody would starve or grieve, as death would bring eternal peace to everyone equally. However... There would be no light, no warmth, and no hope, Arthur."

The Demon King gasped.

"Back then, when I followed you, I could imagine a world where everyone

smiled peacefully. It was full of warmth, just like spring. *That* was the light the empty Barbarian saw. The first dream I ever saw. I loved how you chased after that light and that dream, talking about them like a kid. Because you tried to do something I could never do, I decided to become your knight and your sword. For you, I was ready to lose my life. Even if that meant that I'd lose my honor as a knight and ruin my reputation in the future, I didn't mind. Yeah, I didn't care at all!"

Sid took a stance, holding his obsidian iron sword in a reverse grip in his right hand, then continued. "So if you deny my hope and light, then you can't be Arthur. You're just the Demon King. I'm a knight, so I'll never serve the Demon King. I'll only ever be the sword of the righteous king who shows that light."

Silence descended on the room for a few seconds. Then, "Alvin!" Sid called without turning back as Alvin stood in a daze. "Which one are you aiming for?!"

Alvin gasped.

"Which one is your kingship?! Do you want to create an eternal world of winter where death and tranquility reign?! Or an ephemeral world of spring where there's suffering and grief and no eternity?! A spring like a house built on sand where everyone walks forward, enduring pain and shedding tears as they protect it?! Which one?!"

Naturally, Alvin's answer was already decided. "Spring!" she shouted in tears. "True, this world is brimming with suffering and grief! But I don't want to flee toward such an easy eternity! We'll endure the pain and the sorrow as we live! I'll guide and protect the people! And then, we'll be succeeded by the new lives that will be born...by the next generation! *This* is the kind of eternity I want! *This* is my kingship!"

"Well said! Then watch me fight my last battle! My sword and soul will always be together with you, the Holy King Alvin!" Sid declared as he used Will...no, as he converted his own existence into mana. His obsidian sword was filled with lightning that glittered in the darkness.

"You really are..." Arthur muttered, squinting his eyes at Sid as if looking at something dazzling. "Ha ha ha, it seems the past me was someone incredible to be able to earn the allegiance and sword of a man such as you."

“...Let’s resume the fight, Arthur. In this battle, I’ll use everything. It’ll be the culmination of Sid Blitze’s chivalry.” Sid announced and charged toward Arthur at lightning speed, his body overflowing with lightning.

“...Come,” Arthur replied and ran toward Sid.

The next instant, their swords clashed, the impact resonating all over the world.

“Ooooooooooooooooooooh!”

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

They exchanged blows with exquisite technique at unbelievable speed. Each one was fiercer than the last, and when their blades met, lightning and dark cold waves burst, devastating their surroundings.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

The knight and the Demon King crossed swords, trying their best to kill each other. It was truly a reproduction of the legendary era. The revival of a myth.

“Sir Sid! Sir Sid...!” Alvin kept calling his name. She could only watch, as it wasn’t a fight she had the power to intervene in.

In the world’s highest place, lightning and darkness fought each other. There weren’t any beliefs or ideals in this battle anymore. Only obstinacy. They each had something they couldn’t concede, so they swung their swords.

Would an era of winter, where death and tranquility reigned, arrive next?

Or would it be an era of spring, where hope resisted suffering and grief?

The result would soon be decided.

Unfortunately, stubbornness had its limits. There was a barrier that couldn’t physically be overcome.

“Your time has come!” Arthur yelled.

Sid groaned as the Demon King’s sword started to hit him, gradually freezing

his body.

“You’re reaching your limit! Your existence is on the point of collapsing and disappearing! The outcome has been decided! This third battle will end with my victory once again!”

“Not yet! I’m still here! My heart and soul are still alive! So I can still swing my sword!” Sid proclaimed.

“But...until when?!” In an instant, Arthur struck a thousand times with his blade.

Cuts covered Sid’s body, accelerating the collapse of his existence.

“Sir Sid!” Alvin prayed with all her heart as she burned her Will, sending the kneaded mana to Sid via her crest.

However, it was far from being sufficient. The mana Sid lost from having his existence collapse was overwhelmingly superior to what Alvin sent him. At this rate, his disappearance was a matter of time.

“You’re at the end of your rope, Sir Sid!” Arthur shouted, slashing at Sid even faster.

Sid was entirely on the defensive. Each time he was cut, mana spilled from him and his existence weakened. It was clear to anyone’s eyes—the victor was already decided.

“I win!” Flora rejoiced, appearing behind Arthur. *“I finally won against you, Éclair, my* dear sister*!”* she exclaimed, deeply moved.

Then Éclair appeared behind Sid and shouted, *“Opus! Do you hate me* that *much?!”*

“I hate you!” Flora...no, Opus, who always had a composed smile until now, finally bared her rage. *“We are the first two spirits of this world—its gods! However, you were given everything related to light, and I, everything related to darkness! You and all the lives who received your blessing are always brimming with warm light, and you are loved by them! Whereas, I, on the other hand, was thrust away in the gloomy, cold, and lonely darkness, avoided, shunned, and hated by everyone! Why are we so different?! I am envious of your light, your*

love, and your warmth! I am so jealous of everything! And this is why I hate you! I always hated you!"

Éclair gasped.

"So I transformed into a human and acted behind the scenes! I will never forgive you for being the only ones to be given light and warmth! I will spread suffering and grief all over the world! I will make everyone the same as me! Then I will take over the world from you, Éclair, and rule it! I will make everyone the same as me! That way, nobody will be envious or jealous anymore! Because everyone will be equal!"

"Opus... You are...!"

"So, how does it feel to have the king you loved and gave your blessing to stolen from you?! And how does it feel to have your chosen knight be defeated by me?! Just so you know, the despair I went through in the depths of the cold darkness is nothing next to this!"

Éclair was speechless.

"But this is it! Everything is over! I and my beloved Demon King Arthur will conquer the world and bring an end to everything! This will be the beginning of a new era, of my ideal world!" Opus proclaimed.

Éclair didn't know what to say. After all, what Opus had just said was on the verge of becoming true. Sid was still vehemently fighting against Arthur, but he was losing. He looked as if he could disappear at any moment. Even Alvin, who was sending him her mana, was reaching her limits, as she didn't keep any to protect herself and was gradually being frozen, her lower half already partially enclosed in ice.

"Is there no hope...? Is the world going to be engulfed by darkness...? Is a hopeless world ruled by the stillness of death the way it should be...?" Éclair muttered and disappeared, hanging her head.

Seeing her sister like this, Opus laughed delightedly. Strangely, her laughter clearly resounded even in the middle of the raging blizzard.

And then, finally...a metallic sound that brought even more despair resonated.

Sid gasped as Arthur's fierce strike broke his obsidian iron sword.

"Sir Sid!" Alvin cried.

Sid opened his eyes wide, surprised by the sudden development, and clicked his tongue.

"It's just like our first fight!" Arthur gloated. Then, using the momentum from breaking Sid's blade, he elegantly spun and launched the final strike.

Naturally, having lost both of his swords, Sid had no way to block it.

"Sir Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiid!" Alvin screamed.

"Aha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!" Opus laughed.

And...

"This is it, Sir Sid!" Arthur declared, pouring all of his mana and cold into his sword as he fiercely slashed at Sid.

The world was dyed in darkness.

The thick and overwhelming darkness surged from the strike and instantly covered the world.

Silence. Darkness. Tranquility.

The world had ended.

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Or at least, it should have.

A faint but reliable light still existed in the world that was engulfed by darkness and silence.

It suddenly burst, spreading and wiping away the darkness all at once.

“Wh-What?!” Arthur exclaimed and Opus gasped, their eyes wide open. They had been so certain of their victory, and yet...

Sid, using his right hand like a sword, had stopped Arthur’s blade. The faint yet strong light of mana shone around his hand.

Arthur and Opus were shocked that such a light could repel the overwhelming darkness that was covering the world.

“Impossible! You shouldn’t have that much mana left! What’s happened?!” Arthur screamed.

“This should not be possible! Your existence was on the verge of disappearing... Where does all that mana come from?!” Opus shouted.

Then she and Arthur noticed. A little ways away, Alvin was holding up her right hand, where the vanishing crest was. And, atop her hand...were other hands.

“W-We’ve made it in time!”

“Tenko?! And everyone?!”

Tenko, Christopher, Elaine, Lynette, Theodore, Yuno, Louise, Johan, Olivia... The students Sid had taught Will were here, burning their Will and kneading mana.

“Sir Sid! Take our mana!”

“Are you not the legendary era’s strongest knight?!”

“There’s no way you’re gonna lose here, right?! Get a grip!”

“D-Do your best, instructor! We’ll fight with you too!”

Christopher, Elaine, Theodore, and Lynette encouraged Sid.

“You guys...” Sid smiled gently, seeing how strong his students had become.

Arthur, on the other hand, was dumbfounded. “That’s impossible... How could Logass and Luke lose against the likes of you?! There’s no way...”

“There is! The fact that we’re here proves it!” Tenko proclaimed triumphantly.

“...Hmph. Well... I don’t really agree with the way it ended...” Louise said with

a sour look, unable to be happy about their victory. “But a win is a win. And, anyway, I’ll only be able to feel regrets if there’s a tomorrow! He let me keep my life, so I have to use it!”

———

At the same time, in the entrance hall of the castle, at the bottom of the sea of ice, Logass and Luke were sitting back to back. They were in tatters, their existence crumbling.

As dark knights, the ice prison created by their master didn’t have any effect on them.

Hence, the reason they were perishing was simply because they had lost.

“How unsightly, Lion.”

“Can say the same to you, Unicorn.”

They both spoke with a self-deprecating tone.

“Why did you lose?” Logass asked.

“As you just said, I can ask the same to you,” Luke answered with a shrug. “It seems like, truly, the knights of this era are not to be underestimated. They remind me of our younger selves.”

“Yeah. Still... The difference in strength between us was like heaven and earth. Even considering affinities, the truth is that we were alone against many, that fighting against Sir Sid exhausted us, and that they were helped by the Ladies of the Lake. And yet... Why are we looking so deplorable?”

“We both know why, no?”

Silence descended between them, and they recalled the young knights they had fought a few minutes before. They remembered their upright, glittering eyes as they stood against despair.

“Yeah... These youngsters shouldn’t be imprisoned in winter,” Logass said. His tone was calm, as if something that had been possessing him forever had finally disappeared.

“Indeed... Our era has been over for a long time...” Luke smiled ruefully. “And

yet, it took so long for us to realize it...”

“Ha ha ha. Yeah, that’s quite ironic. Looks like even after having our souls taken over by darkness, we still couldn’t let go of our pride and dignity as knights in the end.”

“...One way or another, I suppose that means we were knights through and through,” Luke commented.

“It’s like we were having a long nightmare...”

“Indeed. The Holy King Arthur and Sir Sid... The path they created, running ahead and guiding us, was truly distant and dazzling. We admired them and wanted to follow them forever.”

“However, we forgot that the way they were headed would lead to the end of the era of knights. That’s why we clung to the foolish concept of eternity and listened to Opus.”

“We were truly immature and naive... I am so ashamed...”

As they talked, they were both gradually vanishing.

“Well then... Time to die,” Logass said.

“Yes.”

“Old soldiers eventually disappear... It’s a truth that exists no matter the age.”

“Indeed.”

“It’s pretty obvious, but the new era should be left to the new young knights.”

“Yes... And yet, it took so long for us to realize something so natural... Way too long...”

Like this, Logass and Luke silently vanished.

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“Logass. Luke. You guys really were knights among knights. Thanks,” Sid said as if he understood what had happened.

“What...? Just what do you mean by that...?” Arthur asked, confused.

“Do not pay attention to his words, Arthur, my dear master!” Opus yelled in

irritation. *“There could be hundreds of these weak knights banded together, and yet it would not change the outcome! Ignore them, and quickly deliver the coup de grâce to Sir Sid!”*

“...You’re right. Anyway, with this...” Arthur moved at divine speed—no, it was superior to that. It was devilish speed, and he closed the distance between him and Sid. Then he swung his sword. “It’s the e—”

However...

“No, it’s not the end, Arthur.” Sid once again used his hand like a sword and stopped Arthur’s blade. And, this time, he put more power into it.

“...What?!” Arthur exclaimed. Then he immediately raised his blade and struck again. He slashed down, up, in all directions. Each blow was mortal and accompanied by cold waves. And yet...

“Ooooooooooh!” Sid yelled, repelling all of them. Each time he did, he was pushed back a little, but he still barely managed to continue to ward off everything.

“Wh-Why...? How...?!” Arthur screamed, getting impatient, as he couldn’t beat down Sid.

“My students entrusted me with everything... If I don’t live up to their expectations, I’d be a failure as an instructor...no, as a knight!” Finally, Sid started to counterattack.

Arthur reflexively blocked Sid’s punch with the flat of his blade.

From then on, the battle wasn’t one-sided anymore. Arthur was still on the winning side, but Sid started to counterattack more and more. Sometimes, Sid’s precise blows even managed to surpass Arthur’s erratic strikes.

“Alone, their Will might be too weak, but... To think that just by adding them all together, you would be able to fight back!”

“I’m just as surprised!” Sid replied while evading Arthur’s sword and launching a counter. “I guess we can’t predict the growth of youths around that age!”

“That’s...! In that case...!” While still fighting Sid, Arthur decided to change plans. “I just need to deal with the source of your strength!” He released the

power of his sword, pushing it past its limits.

Darkness and cold gushed out of it, and the temperature of the world lowered even more. The extremely violent blizzard hit everything in the surrounding area. It felt like just breathing could kill by freezing the lungs.

“How’s that?! You shouldn’t be able to resist the ice prison! To survive, you either have to stop sending your mana to Sir Sid to protect yourselves, or you have to run away!” Arthur shouted.

However...

“As if we would!” Tenko screamed. “Master! We won’t run away, so just focus on the fight!”

“What kind of king would abandon their beloved vassal?! Sir Sid! I’ll see your fight to its end! Even if that means dying here!” Alvin declared.

The other students were just as determined. They nodded, not moving an inch. They ignored their bodies being frozen and didn’t stop kneading their Will and sending mana to Sid.

“Impossible! Why...? Just why are you willing to go so far?! It should hurt and be painful! Why are you not giving up?!” Arthur asked, astonished.

Each student answered one by one.

“‘A knight tells only the truth!’”

“‘Their bravery glimmers in their hearts!’”

“‘Their swords defend the defenseless!’”

“‘Their power sustains virtue!’”

“‘And their anger...destroys evil!’”

Arthur opened his eyes wide. “That’s... That’s the old knight’s code that was forgotten with the flow of time...”

“No,” Sid said, continuing to fiercely strike with his hand like a sword. “The old ways are gonna become the new ways.”

Arthur gasped.

“People from old eras don’t need to do anything for the world to be eternal. Everything is transmitted and inherited from generation to generation... *This* is eternity. Be it pain, suffering, and grief, or happiness, peace, and hope, everyone should bear them together. From the start...there wasn’t anything for us to fret about.” Sid struck with all his might, drawing a flash of light, and pushed Arthur back.

Impatience painted Arthur’s face, as this blow from Sid was clearly stronger than any so far. Little by little, Sid was forcing Arthur back.

“As if I could accept something so illogical!” Opus appeared from Arthur’s sword. *“Stop hindering me and my wish!”* she yelled and prepared to chant a spell toward the students, but...

“This is what we should say!” a voice said as countless sacred holly leaves rushed at Opus. Their prickles stabbed at her body, then burst into flames.

Opus screamed in pain. As an existence from the dark side, she was burned by the holiness of the holly leaves. It wouldn’t kill her, but the pain was enough to stop her from acting.

And the one who used that magic was...

“Isabella,” Sid called.

“Yes, I have arrived! On the Ladies of the Lake’s pride, I swear I will not let a single student be harmed! I will use all the ancient secret techniques I learned to stop Opus!” Isabella announced, wielding her wand while preparing a new spell.

Sid smiled, seeing how reliable Isabella was. “Then I have nothing to worry about anymore. Let’s settle this, Arthur.”

“Sir Sid...” Arthur muttered as Sid drew the fairy sword of light from its scabbard.

Though it was worn out, Sid burned the last of his Will, his existence, as well as the mana he received from his students, and put everything in the sword.

“Please, do not mind me, Sir Sid.” Éclair appeared next to him. *“Do it with all your strength.”*

“Yeah, I won’t hold back.” Sid took a deep, low stance, holding the sword in a reverse grip.

“Sir Sid...” Arthur also readied his blade.

They both sensed it—that the next exchange would be the last.

“So far, I lost twice to you,” Sid said.

Arthur didn’t reply.

“Third time’s the charm. Let’s do it.”

And then...

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Sid dashed. His body was filled with lightning, and he charged at Arthur. It was the fastest he had ever been. It was faster than lightning speed, faster than divine speed, faster than devilish speed—it was absolute speed. “Ooooooooooooooooooh!” He closed in on Arthur with a spirited yell.

“Sir Sid... I...!” Arthur raised his sword overhead and swung it down with a scream.

Overwhelming dark, cold waves gushed from it. It was as if it tried to cover the world in darkness again—no, in fact, it did. Black and cold covered the world as if trying to sink it into the abyss, freezing everything.

However, a streak of lightning cut through it and advanced. Even though mana spilled from his body, his existence faded, and his body crumbled, Sid made his way through the darkness.

He kept advancing, and, finally—

“Arthur!”

“Sir Sid!”

They clashed.

A tremendous shock wave burst, and a sound similar to glass breaking resonated all over the world.

Sid's fairy sword of light and Arthur's fairy sword of darkness collided. They were a match for an instant, but immediately after, the Demon King's blade broke.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" Opus's terrific shriek echoed all over the world.

And then...

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As if acting in accordance with Opus's scream, the violent blizzard ravaging the world weakened until it completely stopped.

Silence descended upon the world. And, as if blessing it, light started to fall from the sky on Dachnesia Castle, still enclosed in darkness. First, it was only a single line going through the thick, dark clouds. But gradually, it became stronger and stronger. Then, after a while, it rapidly covered the world.

With Dachnesia Castle at its center, the dazzling light purified the darkness covering the world.

And, together with the light, a warm wind blew. It was just like daybreak or the coming of spring. The sky cleared, the ice melted, and the snow disappeared. Dachnesia, the kingdom forever enclosed in snow and ice, was no more. Instead, what appeared was a vast land of abundant nature from the past that nobody in the present knew.

The winter that engulfed the world was now over.

"Wh-Where is this...?"

"What happened to us...?"

In the entrance hall of the castle, Burns, Aigis, Caim, Gato, and the other knights woke up one after another.

"I... I'm alive...?" Gato muttered.

Just until a moment ago, they all had been imprisoned in a sea of ice, and yet...they survived. Not understanding what had happened, they looked at each other's faces, confused.

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Next thing they knew, a warm wind was blowing. Daybreak could be seen all over the horizon from the top of Dachnesia Castle. The view was so wondrous and beautiful that it almost brought tears to the eyes.

Together with the fight between the knight and the Demon King, the long, long night ended, and dawn broke.

"Thinking about it..." Sid said. "Back then it was twilight... And now, it's daybreak."

"Yeah. And...it's my loss," Arthur admitted.

"Yeah, I won." Knight and king talked, back to back. "Still, it was pretty close. You're really damn strong. As I would expect from the king I chose."

Sid looked at the fairy sword of light in his hand. It was silently crumbling and vanishing.

We didn't get the time for parting words, but... Thanks, partner. Sid watched as the sword entirely disappeared.

"With that last attack, I slayed Opus and separated you from Endea's body," Sid explained.

"Seems so..." Arthur said as Endea's body collapsed like a puppet that had its strings cut. Arthur himself was still standing, his body translucent. It was the appearance of the Holy King from the legendary era. He was back to normal, and his expression was peaceful. "I caused you a lot of trouble..."

"Same here." Sid smiled ruefully.

"No, I caused way more. Back then, after you woke me up from being the Demon King, my most pressing matter as king was to restore a world in ruins. Even my death wouldn't excuse what I did to you. And yet, in that situation, I had no choice but to say that I was the one who defeated the Demon King."

"Right. After all, it would be a nuisance if future people knew I was the one

who did it. We couldn't let the legendary era have a hero greater than you." Sid smiled gently. "I know why you did that. I mean, I'm the one who asked Éclair to tell you to do that."

"Sid..."

"I was sure that you would make me a villain and protect my chivalry."

"I...I...! I did so much to you!" Arthur hung his head, trembling.

"Don't worry about it. It's my fault for doing things halfway. I tried to purify you with my Saint's Blood, but I only managed to purify half of your soul. The other half still contained the Demon King."

"And the Ladies of the Lake cut it and sealed it below Calvania Castle. However, that didn't change the fact that I had become the Demon King and had been cursed by Opus. As long as she lived, the curse would never break. Meaning that, one day, my successor as the Demon King would appear. Twins share a single soul divided in two, so the day some would be born, one of them had a high chance of becoming the new Demon King."

Sid listened silently.

"In preparation for that, I followed Éclair's revelation and made a contract to tie your soul to my bloodline. I arbitrarily decided what would happen to you after your death." Arthur finished his explanation with an apologetic look.

"No need to apologize." Sid continued to smile gently. "Thanks to that, I had a really nice dream and met great people. I'm really grateful. Just as you promised, you showed me something wonderful."

"Sir Sid... Aah, you really were my greatest knight..." Arthur said before melting into the daybreak's dazzling light.

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"Well then..." Sid turned back after parting with his irreplaceable best friend. "Jeez... Don't make such faces." He smiled at his students. "We've won. Your chivalry helped to defeat the Demon King from the legendary era. You should be glad and proud, not making faces like that."

"We didn't do anything... We left everything to you!" Alvin said, in tears. She

looked at the back of her hand, and...the crest connecting her to Sid had entirely disappeared.

And, just like the crest, Sid was disappearing, motes of mana slowly spilling from his body.

“Must we...really part here?” Alvin asked.

“The contract was for until defeating Opus,” Sid replied while patting her head. “And now that Éclair and Opus aren’t here anymore, your true era will finally start.”

“But that’s...” Alvin trailed off.

“Master... I... I still have a lot of things I want you to teach me! I don’t want you to go!” Tenko appealed, weeping and sniffling.

“Same here, instructor... There’s still a ton of stuff I want to learn from you...” Christopher moaned, wiping his eyes.

“As they say...you truly are irresponsible...” Elaine’s tears overflowed.

“You came suddenly, and now you go just as suddenly... You’re really selfish...”

“Waaaaah! Don’t gooooo!”

“I-I swore I’d defeat you! I won’t forgive you if you quit while you’re ahead!”

Theodore, Lynette, Louise, and all the other students were in tears too.

Sid looked at them one by one with a gentle smile.

“Sir Sid!” Alvin called. “Don’t go... Please, don’t die!” She threw away her dignity as king, not caring about appearances, and she became a simple crying girl. “I’m too anxious if you’re not with me! We still need you! If you’re not here...just what are we supposed to aim for as knights?!”

Sid didn’t reply.

“Please, stay with us! Teach us more! Show us the way! Please, Sir Sid...!”

Sid, still smiling, answered, “I’ve nothing to teach you anymore. You’ve all graduated.”

With these last words, he melted in the light of the daybreak and vanished, leaving nothing, as if nobody had ever been there.

“Ah...” Alvin looked at the empty space for a while, dumbstruck. And then... “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” she cried.

Her sorrowful wailing echoed in the dazzling dawn.

Far and wide...

Epilogue: A Knight...

I walked silently in the glaring light.

Slowly.

One step at a time.

I walked through the white world.

I didn’t have any worries. I just continued to walk, guided by my soul.

I didn’t have any regrets. I did everything I wanted. Of course, it’d be a lie to say I didn’t have any lingering feelings, but...there was nothing to worry about.

So, with peace of mind, I continued to walk in the light, aiming for the final destination.

I walked.

And walked.

And continued to walk.

And then, suddenly...a gentle wind caressed my cheek. The wind carried green grass and flower petals, flying toward the clear blue sky.

The warm light of the sun shone on me, and it smelled like spring. Looking around, I was standing on a nostalgic green grassland.

And there...

“Sir Sid.” Arthur was waiting for me.

“Hah... Finally here.” And Logass.

“We got tired of waiting.” And Luke.

“Hmph, late as usual.” And Rifis, with a sour look.

But they weren’t the only ones.

“Sir Sid... It’s been so long!”

“Yeah, since the Rakia War! Though, I guess it’s my fault for falling there...”

“I’ve been wanting to see you for so long, Sir Sid!”

“Sir Sid!”

They were all the knights who had fought together with me during the legendary era. They all had been waiting for me at this promised place.

They were the same as when I admired them—when I was the empty Barbarian. They were knights among knights, who I respected.

Everyone had come to pick me up.

“I...I wanted to see you guys too... My friends...” I said, reflexively staring at the sky as my eyes became unusually hot.

Everyone gathered around me.

“Sorry for entrusting everything to you...”

“Our hearts were weak...”

“Sorry, Sir Sid. I really was unlike myself back then...”

“Why did we even get charmed by that fake eternity...?”

“I feel so pathetic...”

Everyone apologized to me.

“Hey, stop... We’re friends, no?” I said, overwhelmed with emotion. “I got to meet you guys again... That’s enough for me to not have any regrets.”

Yeah. For them, I could do anything. I feared nothing. Pain and suffering were trivial.

As I renewed old friendships...

“Sir Sid...” A girl came before me. It was Éclair. In her arms was Opus, sleeping as if she were dead. “Thanks to defeating Opus, all the knights who had their souls imprisoned in darkness have been released.”

“I see...”

“And the curse on the Calvania royal family’s bloodline has been lifted. There won’t be any new Demon King successor. That means you are free too.”

“That’s great.” I smiled. “And? What are you going to do now, Éclair?” I asked.

“I will take her and leave this world,” she said while sending a glance at Opus in her arms. “We are the fairy gods of light and darkness, the incarnations of this world. We were born because the lives in this world wished for it. Since then, we have always been here, giving our blessings. Light and darkness are inseparable. Just like I protect lives by blessing them with light, she has to embrace them with darkness. After all, if she did not, my blessing would lose its effect. However... It was a role too painful for her.”

“A role, huh...? That might be the kind of existence you two share, but I guess you have it hard,” I commented.

“Indeed. But now... This world has become independent from us. Even without our blessings, it will overflow with lives, fairies will be born, and everyone will live together, joining hands. From now on and forever.”

I said nothing.

“We will watch over the future of this world from the outside. And, this time, I will stay together with her,” Éclair announced.

“I see... Well, she might have done a lot of stuff, but I guess she did have some sister issues,” I joked.

Éclair smiled ruefully and disappeared together with Opus.

After seeing them off on their new journey, I started to walk.

“Well then, Arthur. Let’s go,” I said, aiming for the distant light on the horizon. “This time, it’s truly the end. Our distant and nostalgic knight adventure is over. So let’s go together and leave the rest to the youngsters of the new era.”

However...

“...Arthur?” I stopped. For some reason, Arthur stood before me. “What is it?”

He stared me in the eyes. Then, after a while, he started to laugh, a little embarrassed. “Aha ha ha. The truth is, I have a last request for you, Sir Sid.”

“...A request? Wait, again?”

“I promise it’s the last one!”

I shrugged my shoulders. “So, what is it?”

“Well...” Arthur smiled mischievously and thrust his hand before me and opened it.

Atop his palm was something I thought had completely vanished—a fragment of Éclair.

———

“Alma! Hey, Alma! What are you doing?! Everyone is waiting!”

I could hear someone scream and run outside the room. Then suddenly, the door opened violently, and Tenko jumped in.

“Hello, Tenko,” I said.

“I knew you were here! Jeez, you’re always glued to Elma!”

We were in Calvania Castle, in a normal *room allotted to Endea—to Elma. I sat on a chair next to the canopy bed where Elma was half-lying. The moment she saw Tenko, she smiled widely and spread her arms.*

“Ah! Tenko! I was talking about Sir Sid with Alma!”

“I-I see...”

“No matter how many times I hear about his legends, I’m always amazed! When my health is back to normal, I want to become a knight! Isabella said it won’t take long, so I should be able to go to the academy and become a knight like you and Alma! That way, I can give my strength to Alma, just like you, Tenko!”

“Huh?! Th-That’s how you see it? That’s kinda embarrassing, aha ha ha...” Tenko scratched her cheek, embarrassed.

After that fateful fight, Elma lost her memories. Or, to be more precise, she lost her memories from the moment Opus took advantage of her until the final battle.

Because of that, her mental age regressed to that of a child. And because of the special environment she had grown in, her mental growth was lesser than a

normal child.

As such, even though she was physically my age, inside she was still a child.

"I feel a little conflicted..." Tenko whispered to me as she watched how innocent Elma was. "I wonder if she will recover her memories one day."

"Who knows? But...the way she's now might be for the best..." I commented.

After all, in a way, that was her salvation.

There had been a lot of trouble over how to deal with Elma. But, in the end, she avoided capital punishment.

As proven by the magical examinations she went through, she didn't have any memories of when she was the Demon King or of Flora. Her mental age was that of a child. As such, it was concluded that she was only a poor victim controlled by the great witch.

As for why such a miracle happened...

I'm sure it's thanks to you, Sir Sid… *I thought, pondering the knight who wasn't with us anymore.*

I looked at the back of my right hand, but...nothing was there.

"Anyway! Let's hurry, Alma! The graduation and knighthood bestowal ceremonies are going to start! Christopher, Elaine, Theodore, Lynette, Louise, Isabella... Everyone is waiting for you! Yuno and our other juniors are also eager about it!" Tenko explained.

"Ah, yeah."

"And after that, there's your enthronement! You're going to be the Kingdom of Calvania's first queen, *and everyone is looking forward to it! So get a hold of yourself!"*

"Aha ha... Kinda feels like a dream..." I said.

"It's not! But don't worry, I, Tenko Amatsuki, your second *knight, will support*

your kingship and protect you my whole life!”

“Whoa, you’re so cool, Tenko! I’ll quickly become a knight and help Alma too!” Elma declared.

“Thanks, you two. Well then, let’s make it a success.”

“Yes! Let’s go!”

“Do your best, Alma, Tenko!”

We left the room, sent off by Elma.

———

The days after that were pretty busy.

The people were excited about the coming new era and to have a new ruler. They also had high expectations for the new knight order that was formed.

There were festivals all over the country celebrating the beginning of the new era, and I paraded in the streets.

After overcoming terrible hardships, the Kingdom of Calvania was rejoicing in the coming of spring.

And...

———

Amid these hectic days, I went to visit a certain place away from the castle—the forest of Shaltos.

Unlike the active capital, it was a quiet and peaceful holy ground with luxuriant trees and clear air. It was a place that felt sacred and inviolable.

“...Tenko is going to be angry again about me being on my own...”

I walked slowly through the forest.

I suddenly felt like doing it today. Really, just a passing feeling.

I silently made my way through the forest and, finally, I arrived at a clearing.

In front of me was a small hill illuminated by warm sunshine. And, atop it, were broken and scorched stone fragments—what had once been Sid Blitze the Lightning Knight’s tombstone. It was just like how it was when I first met him.

“Sir Sid...”

I climbed the hill and spoke to the stone fragments.

“I came today to report everything that’s been happening. Though, I guess I should have come earlier than that...”

For a while, I talked about what had happened the past year.

About how we had been knighted and how I had become king.

I talked and talked about things that were now fond memories.

However...

Silence descended on the place as I finished my report.

The spring breeze quietly blew.

The sunlight gently shone.

And, the next thing I knew...

“Liar...” I let out, surprising even myself. But now that I had started, I couldn’t stop the words from flowing. “You... You said that you would always be with me! You’re a liar... You’re so cruel, Sir Sid! I... I...!”

Of course, nobody answered. Stones were stones. They didn’t talk. The only things they could convey were the words carved on them.

Our first meeting had been a miracle. But now, there wouldn’t be another one.

“Aha ha ha... Sorry for showing you such a miserable appearance... I didn’t intend to...”

I wiped my eyes and turned my back to the stone fragments, as if trying to show my resolve and part with him.

“...I’m fine. There will be a lot of troubles in the future, and it’ll be difficult, but...I’m fine. I...no, we will protect this country and its people. No matter what. So, please... Please, watch over my kingship...” I said and descended the hill.

However, just when I was leaving...

“But you won’t mind if I watch over you by your side, right?”

Suddenly, words resonated in my head. And...

“It’s hot?!” I moaned in pain and reflexively crouched, holding my right hand. Its back was burning.

Then a fierce wind arose, filling the whole clearing.

When it stopped, I finally noticed.

“Huh...?”

There was a crest on the back of my right hand. The same nostalgic one as before.

“Wh-Why...?” I blurted, dumbfounded.

And then, from behind me...

“Jeez, Arthur is such a doting parent... Or rather, a doting ancestor?” I heard a voice. One that I shouldn’t have been able to hear anymore. One that I’d been wanting to hear again but wasn’t supposed to be able to anymore.

“Ah... Aaaaah...” I stood up, trembling.

“Oh, well. I guess it could be fun to enjoy life one more time. Also, I made a promise.”

Tears spilled from my eyes.

I prayed for it not to be a dream or a hallucination as I fearfully and slowly turned back. I couldn’t stop myself.

And, sure enough, it wasn’t a dream or a hallucination.

The dear person I so wanted to see was standing atop the small hill.

Because of the glaring spring sunlight, it was hard to see, but there was no doubt he *stood there.*

He *showed me the back of* his *right hand, which had the same crest as mine.*

“Yo, my lord. What a coincidence to meet here. You’ve been fine?” he *said*

casually.

Why? How?

I was speechless, but it seemed like he *understood my questions.*

“I told you, no? ‘A knight tells only the truth,’” he *declared with the same bold smile I remembered.*

The next instant, my body moved on its own. I ran up the hill straight toward him*, panting and not caring about the light blinding me.*

And then...

I shouted the name of my beloved person.

———

The prospering and glorious days of the Kingdom of Calvania, which would later be called “the spring era,” began.

It was a peaceful era protected by a strong, wise queen and her mighty knight order.

It was an era of happiness.

The rule of Queen Alma the First, who always took the initiative and led everyone, started there.

In this world where dregs of winter remained, when dark clouds appeared, the noble and kind queen stood on the front lines to disperse them and become the people’s hope, making her shine even more.

And, next to the lofty queen, there was always a certain knight.

His name was...

Afterword

Hello, I'm Taro Hitsuji.

Magic Knight of the Old Ways: Volume 5 has successfully made it to print! A big thank you to my editor, all the people involved in the publication process, and all the readers!

With this fifth volume, *Magic Knight of the Old Ways* comes to an end.

Finally, the truth about the legendary era and its consequences become clear. And, crossing over a thousand years, Sid reinstated the old knight's code—the old ways—that had been forgotten with time, making it the new one—the new ways—and creating a bright new era. With this, I wrote everything I wanted to!

Considering the publication recession we currently are in, I'm truly glad to have been able to write everything until the end! And it's all thanks to you, the readers, for supporting me!

Truly, I want to express my eternal gratitude to you for reading everything!

Still, I might be done with this story, but I have many other ideas I want to write, and even as I write this afterword, I'm thinking about plots for a new series.

I can't help but be glad to have become a writer, a job that allows you to release all your wild ideas to the world.

Anyway, what should I do next? It seems that I'm rather good at making series about the way these protagonists do their jobs, so after doing a magician, a king, and a knight, maybe I should make a pirate or a ninja next? Ha ha. And this time, instead of being a teacher, it might be nice to have the protagonist be a student.

At any rate, I'll continue to fill my head with wild ideas as I prepare for my next work.

Well then, let's meet again in the afterword of the new series I'll write! (Though you might see me in *Akashic Records*'s afterword first if you read it, ha ha.)

Also, I post status and life updates on Twitter, so if you send words of encouragement or opinions about my work there, it would make this little sheep very happy and work harder. My username is @Taro_hituji.

With that said, thank you very much!

Taro Hitsuji

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Illustrated by
Asagi Tohsaka
Magic Knight of the Old Ways
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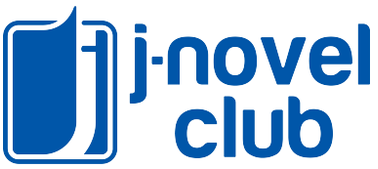

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Magic Knight of the Old Ways: Volume V

by Taro Hitsuji

Translated by Boris Lecourt Edited by Drew Fitzgerald

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Ebook edition 1.0: July 2023

Premium E-Book for faratnis