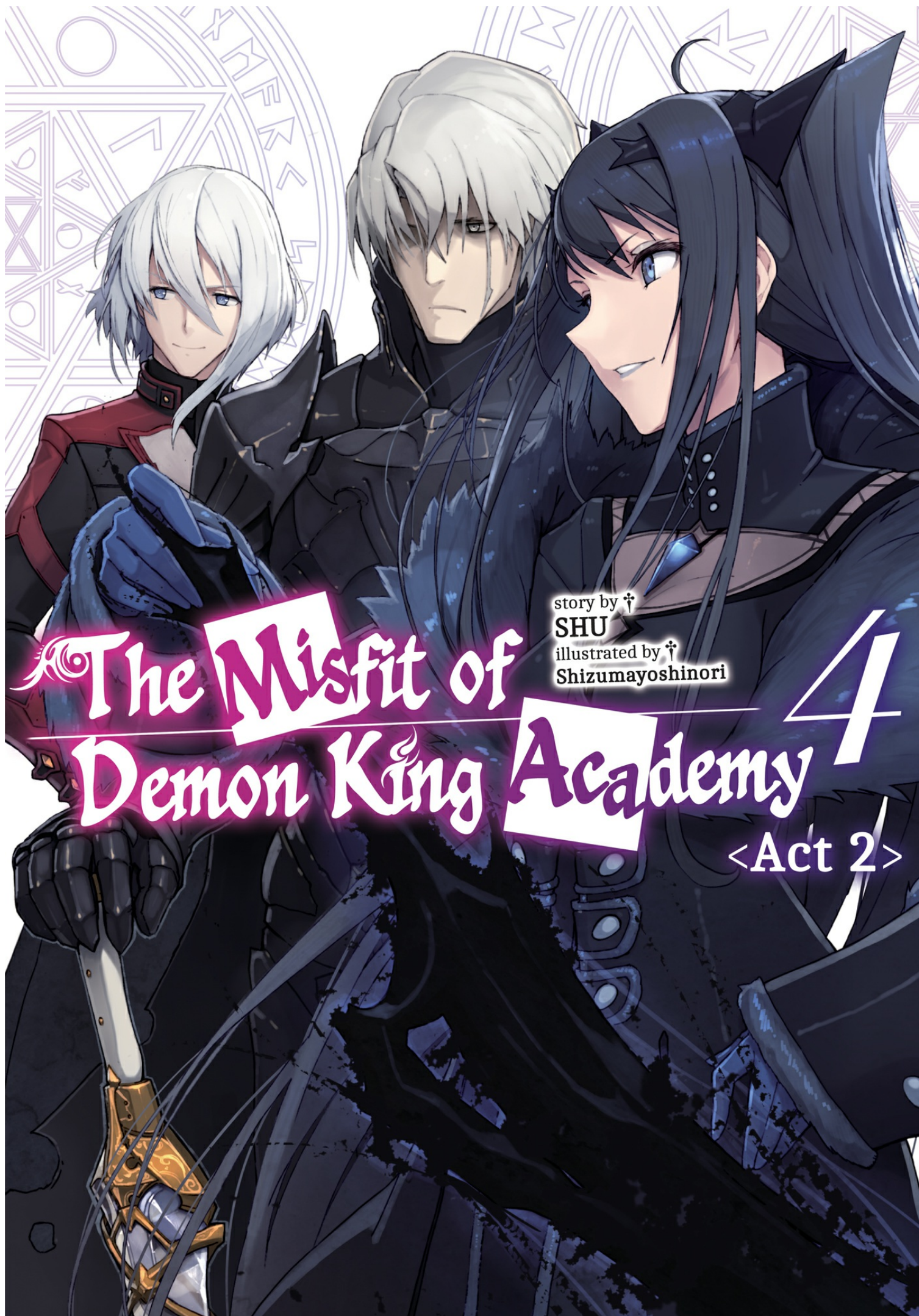


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The Misfit of Demon King Academy 4

<Act 2>



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The Misfit of Demon King Academy

4

<Act 2>

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THE MISFIT OF DEMON
KING ACADEMY

Keywords

Spirits

Beings formed of rumors and legends. As long as their lore is remembered, they are unable to die unless they act against those stories.

Teardrop Blossom

Flowers that bloom from the tears of the Mother of Spirits. If the flower develops into a fruit instead of wilting, a legend or rumor somewhere in the world will become a spirit. Not even the Great Spirit Reno herself knows what will be born.

The Hidden Art of a Sword

A concealed ability that can be drawn out of a demon sword or holy sword. Different swords hold different hidden arts, but the abilities can only be used by becoming one with the sword.

Reincarnation

The act of using the source spell Syrica to be reborn as a different being. If the caster is inept at source magic, memories and skills may be lost in the process. Awareness of one's own reincarnation may be delayed until those memories are awakened.

Demon Castle Delsgade

The Demon King's residence during the Mythical Age. The castle itself is a three-dimensional magic circle used for casting Venuzdonoa. The Demon King Academy currently uses the castle as its campus.

Venuzdonoa, the Abolisher of Reason

The Demon King of Tyranny's strongest ace, capable of destroying reason itself and rarely drawn even two thousand years ago. Those who have seen its blade should have all been destroyed. However...

Designed by Suzuki Toru

§ 39. Escape from Aharthern

My vision turned red, and I was swallowed by darkness. The magic body I'd sent to Delsgade burned up in flames, leaving only the sight of the Spirit King's castle before the eyes of my main body.

"A barrier went up," Misha said.

I turned my Eyes to Delsgade in the distance and found Midhaze shrouded in darkness. It was magic I'd never seen before, but as Misha had said, it appeared to be a type of barrier. Not even my Eyes could see into the city now, and anti-magic was preventing me from sending another magic body.

"Hmm. This is certainly fitting for a spirit born of my own legend. What overwhelming power."

"Lord Anos!"

I turned in the direction of the voice to see the fan union girls running over from the door. The fact that every girl was accounted for probably meant that Gennul had let them pass untested.

"About what you just sent through Leaks..."

I had just transmitted the magic broadcast to them via Leaks, so they had a general idea of what was going on.

"Did Misa turn into the phony Demon King?" Ellen asked worriedly.

"She hasn't turned into anything," I replied. "She was Avos Dilhevia all along. Half of her existence was founded on the legend of the Demon King."

Solemn looks fell across the girls' faces.

Lay opened his mouth. Even he was having trouble smiling. "If the legend disappears, Misa will die. If the legend sticks around, Misa is destined to remain as Avos Dilhevia—as the Child of God born to destroy Anos." With a grim look in his eyes, he gritted his teeth as waves of an indescribable emotion flashed across his face. "If only I hadn't created a fake Demon King..."

“What’s done is done. Now is not the time to dwell on the past.”

Lay raised his head. When our eyes met, he nodded.

“Avos Dilhevia must be defeated as soon as possible,” I said. “Many of the Demon King of Tyranny’s rumors are spread by humans and Royalists. If Misa’s personality is formed from those rumors, she won’t be the kindest king, I’m afraid.”

Judging by Avos Dilhevia’s speech, it was easy to imagine what we were in for. The hybrids would probably be first to fall victim.

“The Sword of Three Races may be key to defeating Avos Dilhevia,” Lay said in a heavy tone. Hero Kanon had defeated the Demon King of Tyranny with that very sword. The legend had spread among humanity, making Evansmana the Great Spirit Avos Dilhevia’s greatest weakness.

“But won’t Misa die if you defeat Avos Dilhevia?” Eleonore asked.

Zeshia frowned. “That would be sad...”

Sasha put a hand to her head and pondered with a serious expression. “Misa’s half spirit, right? Avos Dilhevia is half of her existence, so she won’t be able to live if that half disappears.”

“She’d get spiritosis,” Misha mumbled.

“It’ll be fine,” I said. “You need only concern yourselves with figuring out a way to defeat Avos Dilhevia. That may seem impossible, but as you know, the impossible has never stopped me.” I turned to face Lay.

“Two thousand years ago, all I ever did was give up,” he said with a look of resolution. “This time, I won’t do that.”

Just then, a tremor shook the Spirit King’s castle. Actually, no—it wasn’t the castle that was shaking—it was the Great Tree of Learning himself. Countless branches reached into the castle, covering the room like a cocoon.

“Are you trying to keep us here, Ennunien?” I asked the Great Tree.

“I’m afraid I cannot allow you to bring harm to the child of the Mother of Spirits,” he replied in his hoarse voice. “You shall all remain here in Aharthern.”

I attempted to cast Gatom but found myself unable to connect to any other space.

“Unfortunately, there is no way out of the remedial cocoon. It is my last resort for failing students who refuse to study. You cannot leave without completing supplementary lessons.”

All spirits were allies of the Great Spirit Reno. It was only natural for them to take the side of her child, Avos Dilhevia, as well.

“I understand how you feel, but that doesn’t mean I shall comply.”

I drew a magic circle in front of me and poured my magic into it. A black sun soared out of the circle and struck the wall of the cocoon.

“It’s no use. Violence is not permitted within this cocoon of learning.”

Sure enough, the wall was slightly charred but had taken no significant damage.

“Oh? But this isn’t the extent of my brutality.”

I drew another magic circle, this time forming one hundred shots of Jio Graze. The jet-black suns struck the exact same spot on the wall with a single deafening boom, fiercely shaking the cocoon.

“I said it’s no use!” Ennunien called. “Using force is pointless!”

Black flames rose with a mighty roar, consuming the entire cocoon.

“What?!”

The bursts of Jio Grazes had broken through the wall, leaving behind a huge hole.

“Your power may be great when it comes to education—so great as to trap even those with more magic than you,” I said. New branches reached out to cover the hole, but the black flames spread to consume those as well. The exit was growing wider before our eyes. “But understand this, Ennunien: forcing a passing student to take supplementary lessons isn’t education—it’s corporal punishment. And in a match of violence, I won’t lose.”

“Urgh...”

With that, I'd turned his own legend against him. Even for the sake of the Great Spirit Reno, spirits couldn't act against their own lore. As Ennunien faltered, I stepped past the now unmoving branches.

"Let's go."

At my words, my followers accompanied me out of the Spirit King's castle. The clouds around us immediately gathered to block our way.

"Don't be afraid. Just jump," I said, leaping through a rift between the clouds. Lay, Misha, and Sasha leaped after me, followed by Zeshia and Eleonore. The fan union girls jumped last. The sight of the Great Tree we'd climbed streamed past us as we fell. Just before we reached the trial room, I cast Fless on the fan union girls to set them safely on the ground. The others, too, landed without a hitch.

"Who are they?" Misha suddenly asked, looking over at a group of demons gathered ahead of us. All of them possessed far more power than the demons of this era. They were my subordinates from two thousand years ago. The Netherworld King must have succeeded in retrieving them.

But there was something strange about them.

"Anos Voldigoad." One of the demons stepped forward, drawing his sword. His name was Nigitt, and he was the most skilled swordsman out of my former followers after Shin. "By the order of my liege, your source will be mine."

At Nigitt's signal, the demons charged all at once, but the next moment, a crimson spear came flying out of nowhere, aimed straight at his body. Nigitt blocked the spear with his demon sword and leaped back. The demons with him paused in their advance.

"What a mess. This is why I warned you not to underestimate the gods."

The man standing before us—the one who had thrown the spear—was Aeges, the Netherworld King.

"The Child of God has commandeered your former subordinates," he told me. "Half of them have already moved to Delsgade, along with the god in the Conflagration King's body."

Now that Melheis had sided with Avos Dilhevia, Nosgalia was able to abandon his post mid-expedition. The Great Spirit Avos Dilhevia was born from the legend of the Demon King of Tyranny and possessed the order of the Child of God. It wouldn't be strange for Nosgalia to ally himself.

"This isn't the time to be standing around. Go." The Netherworld King lowered his center of gravity and pointed his magic spear at my former followers. "I shall handle this. Out of consideration for your soft self, I shall even refrain from destroying them."

"It seems you've grown a little soft yourself, Netherworld King."

"As I said earlier, our objectives just so happen to coincide," Ages replied without turning around. He gripped his crimson spear that could cross dimensions and thrust it downwards, but it didn't pierce the floor under his feet—it opened a hole beneath my feet instead. The staircase could be seen through the hole.

"Be careful—my subordinates are strong," I said.

"Your concerns are unwarranted. I haven't been sitting around idly for the past two thousand years."

As spear clashed with spell beside us, we jumped into the hole. I was about to return the same way we'd come when I came to a halt.

"Hmm. The path has changed."

On the way there, Rina and I had followed a complex, mazelike path. Of course, I still remembered that path, but those memories were no use now that the maze was different.

"Anos!"

I turned at the sound of my name to see Rina standing there.

"You're leaving, right? I know the way!" she said.

Ages must have told her to stay after saving her from the Spirit of Hiding. For a man called the Netherworld King, he sure was attentive to detail.

"I'm afraid we're in a bit of a rush. Can you show us the fastest way out?"

“Sure! I know where to go—follow me!”

With that, Rina broke into a run. She weaved her way through the complicated maze without any sign of hesitation. We followed close behind her.

After some time, the maze before us transformed. New paths and dead ends were rapidly forming before our very eyes.

“Hey, what is this?” Sasha asked.

“It’s okay! Just follow me.”

Rina pushed on through the ever-changing maze. Towards the end, the floor began heaving like a wave, throwing us all off-balance.

“Wah!” Rina exclaimed, tripping over the floor. A single white flower fell from her breast pocket. The wall of the maze immediately absorbed the flower. Rina cried out again, reaching for the flower, but she was too late. She froze on the spot and stared at the wall, unmoving.

“We’ll be trapped here if we don’t get going,” Eleonore said.

Rina pulled herself together and nodded. “R-Right, sorry,” she said, but I grasped her shoulder before she could resume running. “Huh?”

I touched the wall with my finger and channeled my magic inside. The wall warped beneath my touch, revealing the white flower within. When I beckoned to it, it flew towards me, and I caught it in my hand.

“This is important to you, isn’t it?” I asked.

“I think so. Thank you.” Rina accepted the flower and slipped it back into her pocket. She then resumed running.

After making our way through the warping maze, we stopped before a door. Rina opened it, and the vine-covered entrance to the Great Tree came into view. Sunlight streamed through the trees of the forest. We’d escaped the Great Tree Ennunen, but I still couldn’t use Gatom until we’d escaped the forest.

“Is there a way out of here?” I asked.

“Aharthern’s exits are sealed right now, so you probably can’t leave the

normal way,” Rina said, glancing around the area. “Titi, are you here?”

She’d called out to the titi, tiny fairies of the forest, but there was no response.

“We want to get out of here. There’s someone I have to visit.”

“They have pretty carefree personalities and all, but the titi are spirits too, no?” Sasha wondered aloud. “Will they even be willing to help us?”

But a moment later, new voices filled the air.

“Troubled?”

“Someone’s troubled?”

“It’s Rina.”

“Rina’s troubled.”

A fog gathered around us, and the fairies emerged from within.

“Thank goodness. Titi, we want to leave this place. Can you help us out?” Rina asked.

The titi danced around her.

“*He* told us not to let him out.”

“The Demon King and his friends must stay.”

“Avos Dilhevia’s awakened.”

“We have to protect Reno’s child.”

The titi, too, seemed unwilling to negotiate, but Rina pleaded once more.

“Please help us, titi. I won’t ask anything more,” she said earnestly.

The titi gathered together and stared directly at her.

“Maybe if it’s secretly.”

“We’ll help if you keep quiet!”

“Don’t tell anyone.”

“Not a word.”

Rina nodded, smiling brightly. “Yep, I promise.”

The fairies set off into the forest.

“This way.”

“Over here, over here!”

We followed the fairies into a thick fog. As it grew thicker, it obscured the foliage around us.

“What do you see?”

“I see something.”

“I see grass, maybe.”

“It’s the plain!”

A familiar scene appeared before us.

“Bye-bye, Rina.”

“See you later!”

“See you later, Rina.”

“Let’s meet again!”

The titi vanished. As we left the Great Spirit Forest, the fog gradually faded, and we stepped out onto the Lysaris Plain.

§ 40. Infiltrating Midhaze

“Hmm. I can teleport us to the outskirts of Midhaze. From there, it’d be fastest to make the rest of the journey on foot.”

I stared into the distance and observed the areas around the city. The barrier of darkness was beginning to seep outside, but it hadn’t been able to spread very far in such a short amount of time.

“Most demons won’t be able to defy Avos Dilhevia’s order,” Lay said. “They’ll be waiting for you to show up.”

“No doubt.”

“Defeating them won’t help. If we can, we should avoid combat.”

Taking on anyone other than Avos Dilhevia, Nosgalia, or the Spirit King would be a wasted effort. We couldn’t kill anyone either. Although taking care of the Royalists would normally be like taking candy from a baby, my former subordinates were now among them.

“However, the other side will be aware of that. We can’t give them too much time. Depending on how the situation develops, we may have to charge in head-on,” I said.

At that, Rina raised her hand. “Um...can you take me with you?” she asked.

If Shin was the Spirit King, who was the amnesiac girl trying to meet him? The simplest answer was probably the Great Spirit Reno, but I wasn’t quite convinced. According to the lilan, a spirit could resurrect, even if their source was destroyed, as long as their lore still existed. However, I recalled nothing from them about memory loss and indistinct facial features. Plus, the titi had said they’d never see Reno again. Did that mean she was gone for good?

Although Avos Dilhevia’s identity had been revealed, a number of mysteries remained unsolved. Something had happened two thousand years ago when Avos Dilhevia was created, and it would be an incredible coincidence if Rina was unrelated. Perhaps the Spirit King or Nosgalia had sealed her memories.

“Let’s go together. You seem to be the same as us,” I said.

“The same?” Rina asked, looking up at me.

“You, too, have unfinished business from two thousand years ago.”

A look of recognition crossed Rina’s face, and she nodded. “I think so too.”

She accepted my offered hand. Lay and the others also linked hands, and I cast Gatom on everyone.

The world turned bright white for a brief moment, then a path appeared before us. It was the road to Midhaze. I could have teleported us a little closer, but the guards would have tightened the city’s defenses if they had detected our approach. This was the more appropriate spot.

We advanced down the road, taking the time to avoid being detected by our enemies. The city walls eventually came into view, the barrier of darkness visible behind them. The gates to the city were shut.

“How should we get in?” Lay asked.

“We could barge our way in while no one’s looking,” Sasha suggested, but Misha shook her head.

“Someone’s coming,” she said, casting her Magic Eyes over the gate. The barrier of darkness prevented us from seeing anything within, but the flow of magic inside could be faintly detected. A large number of demons were indeed headed our way.

“Time to hide,” I said, using Lynel and Najila to blend us into the scenery.

Not long after, the city gates opened and armored demons equipped with demon swords stepped out. Their faces were familiar—it was the Midhaze army that had served as the vanguard in the last battle with Azesion.

Demon Lord Elio stepped forward and raised his voice. “The misfit that threatens Demon King Avos Dilhevia is headed for this city. Gatom transportation has been blocked thanks to Demera, so *Anos Voldigoad* will have no choice but to appear at this gate!”

Elio then began barking orders for each squad. “All squads will patrol assigned sections of the perimeter. Squads one and four are to head for the west gate.

Squads two and three are to head to the east and squad five to the north! Not a single ant shall be allowed into Midhaze!”

“Yes, sir!”

Elio’s squads split into the aforementioned three groups and moved along the ramparts. The only demons left at the gate before us were Elio and his two aides. Elio left the gate open and stood before it, unmoving.

Hmm. That was odd.

“Can you see anything, Misha?” I asked.

“A strong heart,” she whispered. “I can see conviction.”

Conviction, huh?

“I’ll go check things out. You guys stay hidden.”

I dispelled Lynel and revealed myself, then made my way towards Elio.

“L-Lord Elio!” one of the aides cried. Elio’s gaze immediately fixed on me.

“Leaving the gates open in your search for insurgents is rather careless, Elio.”

He straightened himself and then knelt on the ground, bowing his head to me. His two aides mirrored his actions.

“How could I close the gates when my liege was yet to return?” he said.

“Hmm. So you aren’t under Avos Dilhevia’s control.”

“No, my liege, but other than these two troops, my entire army believes that he is the true Demon King of Tyranny. It seems that demons with less acquaintance and loyalty towards you are more susceptible to his influence.”

There were many well-known legends of the Demon King of Tyranny’s subordinates two thousand years ago. The Seven Demon Elders were particularly famous, which made them particularly susceptible to Avos Dilhevia’s control. Their anti-magic didn’t stand a chance against a legend that so strongly bound them to the Demon King’s service.

However, there were no rumors of the demons of this era being under the Demon King’s rule. Thanks to that, Avos’s power over them was much weaker. Those with strong hearts like Lay and the others were able to reject the spell.

“What’s the situation inside the city?” I asked.

“Demera has covered the entirety of Midhaze,” Elio replied. “The barrier appears to implant the will of Avos Dilhevia into demonkind, similar to the effect of Aske. It’s more potent against those who believe Avos Dilhevia is the Demon King of Tyranny.”

Similar to Aske, huh? So the spell spread worship of Avos Dilhevia, similar to how Jerga’s voice planted hatred into the humans. What a troublesome spell to bring out. Considering I hadn’t heard of it before, it must have been created on the spot. After all, that would be easy work for the Demon King of Tyranny.

“From what I saw on the way here, the Royalists have already begun acting out towards hybrids. I fear that their actions will soon develop into riots, but with Avos Dilhevia’s order in place, I cannot mobilize my army.”

The nation was most likely being rebuilt into one of royal supremacy, just like the myths the Royalists believed in. Only those who used to oppose the Royalists still believed that I, Anos Voldigoad, was the Demon King of Tyranny. Melheis had informed the Unitarians of the truth, so there weren’t many counteracting rumors going around simply because people had to piece things together themselves.

“Rest assured—everything can be resolved by taking down Avos Dilhevia.” I dispelled Lynel on my subordinates, who quickly came running over. “Close the gate after we enter. Continue your search for the misfit outside the walls as though we were never here.”

“As you wish.”

Avos Dilhevia would probably notice us as soon as we entered the city, but we could at least avoid having to fight Elio’s army.

“Let’s go,” I said, leading the way through the gates.

“May fortune be on your side,” Elio said as he closed them behind us.

Finally inside the city, we ran through the streets of Midhaze.

“Um, where are we headed?” Eleonore asked.

“We’ll go to my place first.”

“Ah, I see. The demons have been ordered to kill you, so your parents might be in danger,” she said.

“If they don’t leave the house, that won’t be a problem.”

“How come?”

“I’ve set up a spell to turn the house into a ward when the door is locked. Anyone who approaches will be led around in circles. If mom and dad saw the magic broadcast, they’d know to close the shop and shut themselves in.”

Although the house was within Demera, the interior of the house was my territory. Mom and dad’s magic was undisturbed, but I thought I might as well check on the neighborhood as we passed.

I focused my Eyes on the inside of the house. I could see mom biting her lip worriedly. Dad stood beside her, his arm around her shoulder in reassurance.

“It’ll be okay,” he was saying gently. “I don’t know what happened, but it has to be some kind of mistake. We know best that Anos wouldn’t do anything wrong. Isn’t that right?”

“Right...”

“He’ll come home safely. I know it.”

Just then, a dull noise echoed outside the store, followed by a girl’s scream.

“What was that?” mom asked, approaching the window to peek through the curtains.

A brown-haired girl was lying on the ground. She was surrounded by demons—students wearing the Royalist uniform of the Demon King Academy.

“Who gave you permission to look at us, huh?!”

One student kicked the girl with all his might. She screamed again and then lifted her head as she attempted to crawl away. I recognized her face.



“Stop... I’m a royal too...”

It was Emilia.

“What? Royal? Bwa ha ha ha! What are you on about? Your magic is clearly mixed, you mongrel!”

“I get it—you look up to royalty. But unfortunately for you, your blood isn’t precious at all. In this country ruled by the almighty Avos Dilhevia, you’re just a slave!”

Laughing, the students continued to kick her.

Then something strange happened. Darkness coiled around Emilia and the students. Her magic was being absorbed by them—another effect of Demera, it seemed. Punishing hybrids allowed them to absorb their power. This must be how the “nourishment” Avos Dilhevia had mentioned was obtained.

“Stop that right now!”

The students turned to see mom running out of the store and towards them.

“Oh? What’s this, another mongrel? Wait, this one isn’t even a demon.”

“Hey, isn’t that Anos’s...”

Another student grinned wickedly. “Oh, so it is.”

He stared at her and licked his lips.

“Bwa ha ha! What a lucky day for us. I can see that misfit’s tearful face right now! Isn’t it the best?!”

The student forgot about Emilia and approached mom. She backed away slowly—when he suddenly lunged forward.

“Hey now, don’t run away!”

“Think again.”

Someone tripped the Royalist student from the side, making him fall flat on his face. It was dad.

“Urgh...”

“Go, Izabella!”

Mom ran over to Emilia. “Can you stand? It’s dangerous out here, so come inside.”

She took the brown-haired girl by the hand and tried to lead her inside.

“Why...” Emilia stopped, shaking mom off her. “Why would you save me?!”

“What do you mean?” Mom tilted her head slightly.

“I’m... I’m no longer royalty.”

Mom smiled at her gently. “It’s okay. I’m on your side. Just because you’re a hybrid doesn’t mean you deserve to be kicked. Isn’t that right?” Mom offered Emilia her hand once more. “Let’s go inside. I’ll patch you up.”

Emilia was hesitantly reaching for mom’s hand when she suddenly flinched and threw up her defenses. “Take cover!”

A black ball of fire flew towards mom. It was Gresde. Emilia immediately shoved mom away to protect her, but her own body was caught in the flames.

“Ack... Gaaaaaah!” she cried, falling to her knees.

“Oops, did I miss?” one of the students said. “No worries, though—you’re still not getting away.”

As the student released black flames from his palm, the beaten-up dad lay pinned under his feet. “Get inside, Izabella...”

“Shut up!” The student kicked dad in the face. “If you don’t quiet down, I’ll—”

“Oh? What will you do?”

“Bwa ha ha! Isn’t it obvious? I’ll tear their limbs from their bodies and throw the remains before that misfit. Once he’s wailing in despair, I’ll laugh at him and say, ‘See? Avos Dilhevia really existed after all!’ Aha ha ha ha...ha?” The student stiffened as he trailed off. Like a rusted doll, he turned his head stiffly and looked at me. “A-Anos...”

His face was the picture of despair.

“I see, so you wish for dismemberment. If I recall correctly, that form of execution is normally conducted by tying one’s four limbs to horses and making them run in different directions.”

With Ygg Neas, I grabbed the students and lifted them into the air.

“H-Hey, what are you...”

“S-Stop! You’re not planning on killing us, right?”

“You’ve gotta be kidding me. Hey, tell me you’re kidding! Are you really gonna dismember...”

Using Girel, I threaded their bodies with magic and grabbed the ends of the threads. I then cast one more spell on them. To prevent mom from seeing anything unsightly, I lifted them high into the air.

“Rest assured, I won’t tear your limbs from your bodies...”

Eight hundred eighty-eight threads ran through each student’s body. With Ygg Neas-coated hands, I tugged all of the threads at once. Their bodies burst apart.

“...I’ll tear your entire bodies to pieces.”

The students had been reduced to shreds.

“While I’m repulsed by the frailty of your hearts, the root of the problem is Avos Dilhevia. I shall neither blame nor kill you.”

The spell I’d cast in advance was Indol. The students would remain in a state of temporary death no matter how much damage they received, and they’d be conscious with all five senses intact the entire time. They could also be resurrected afterwards. It would hurt a bit, but it was a common punishment two thousand years ago.

“Stick around for a while as pieces of meat.”

§ 41. In the Rift between Blood

“Anos, dear!” mom cried, running up to hug me. “Oh, thank goodness you’re safe! I was so worried after watching the magicast. What if the worst had happened?” With tears in her eyes, she squeezed me tightly. “Do you have any idea why the Demon King would want to kill you?”

“It’s just a misunderstanding,” I said, “but it’s a little difficult to explain.”

Honestly speaking, it would be near impossible to make mom understand right now, but as I was considering my options, she nodded and flashed me a smile.

“Of course. That’s exactly what I thought. There’s absolutely no way the Demon King would want to kill you, so there had to be some kind of mistake. If you say it’s a misunderstanding, then that’s what I’ll believe!”

My magic body had been shown on the broadcast as well, but mom wouldn’t have had any way of comprehending our conversation. With the Seven Demon Elders on the other side, it was only natural to assume I was the rebel, yet she’d chosen to believe in me anyway. Sure, mom normally made all the wrong assumptions, but she trusted me at times like this.

“Don’t worry, mom. I’ll soon resolve the misunderstanding. I’m already on it.”

“I see, I see. I’m so glad,” mom mumbled, still locked around me in a tight hug.

“I knew we could believe in you, Anos,” dad said with a chuckle. “You always come home to us, no matter what happens. Hey, did you grow bigger while you were away on your expedition?”

You’re imagining things, father.

“Dad, if you want to keep up appearances, you should get up off the ground before you speak.”

He laughed. “These are wounds of honor. I’ll happily get beaten up if I can

protect your mother.” Dad got back on his feet. “Huh, that was easier than I thought.”

“I cast Alto on you both before I left. Your wounds will still hurt, but your life won’t be in any danger.”

Alto was a spell that protected the life of the person it was cast on. The spell formula automatically altered itself to apply wards, barriers, physical enhancements, and healing to that subject when required. Although the spell was useful, its formula was extremely complicated to write. It also utilized the magic of the subject, so the formula would break apart if they use their magic for anything else.

Back in the Mythical Age, practically everyone had been capable of using magic, rendering such an effect worthless. I had only bothered developing the spell after mom was attacked by Emilia.

“So that’s it. I almost thought I’d gotten stronger,” said dad.

The only reason I hadn’t formulated a solution to the pain of inflicted wounds was to keep dad from getting carried away with himself.

“Oh! That’s right.” Mom gasped and ran over to Emilia. “I’m so sorry about that. Thank you for protecting me. It’s still dangerous outside, so please come in.”

“No. I’ll be okay...”

“That spell hurt your back, didn’t it? Come inside, and I’ll treat it for you.”

Mom still hadn’t noticed she was talking to my former homeroom teacher. I’d changed her age and appearance, after all.

“But...” Emilia looked at me fearfully.

“Stay and rest up here. The chaos should clear up after a few days.”

“See? There’s no need to worry. Let’s go.” Mom took Emilia’s hand and pulled her along. “Come to think of it, what’s your name?”

“It’s Emilia...”

“It’s nice to meet you, Emilia. I’m Izabella.”

Mom and dad escorted Emilia into the house.

“Looks like you made it in time,” a voice suddenly said.

I turned to see Lay standing behind me.

“I cast Alto on them in advance, so there was nothing those students could have done,” I said.

Sasha frowned, having just flown in with Misha. “But your parents didn’t know that, right? I can’t believe they left the house like that. I suppose that’s your mother for you.”

“She’s kind,” Misha added with a smile.

Eleonore and Zeshia were the next to arrive.

“Ah, we finally caught up!”

“Everyone’s too fast... Zeshia’s good at running, but...”

“Where are Rina and the fan union?” Sasha asked, turning around. Although we were within Demera’s area of effect, I was still connected to my followers and capable of sharing their vision. Rina and the fan union were running frantically in the distance.

“Hmm.”

I made a beckoning gesture with my finger. A moment later, delighted screams could be heard as the fan union girls came flying through the air with Rina.

“S-Sorry we’re late!”

“We ran as fast as we could.”

“Sorry for troubling you!”

The girls bowed their heads in apology.

“It’s fine.”

Rina looked over at Wind of the Sun. “Is this your place?”

“Yes. Let’s go inside.”

I opened the door, and the store bell rang loudly. Mom and dad were

nowhere to be seen—they'd probably headed out the back to treat Emilia.

I could have used magic to heal Emilia in an instant, but mom purposely hadn't asked me to—she'd wanted an excuse to invite Emilia inside. It wasn't that serious of an injury either. Although Emilia's magic was less efficient in her current body, she was perfectly capable of healing that much herself over time.

"This house is a ward of my own making. Avos Dilhevia's Eyes won't reach here."

That said, the enemy already knew I was in the area, and they'd be able to predict that I'd safeguarded the house.

"Isn't the current problem how to get inside Delsgade?" Sasha asked.

Eleonore looked serious. "If we go through the front gate, we'll be met by the royals and Anos's old subordinates."

"Avos Dilhevia knows we have to hold back against them," Lay said. "The goal would be to deplete as much of Anos's magic as possible, right?"

At that, Misha tilted her head. "If they're the same Demon King of Tyranny, will the one with more power win?"

"That seems to be what the other side believes," he replied.

"It'd also buy them more time to steal the Abolisher of Reason," Eleonore added, holding up her index finger.

Sasha turned to me. "If Avos Dilhevia is the Demon King of Tyranny, why can't she just take it?"

"Because there are no rumors or legends of the sword."

I rarely ever drew Venuzdonoa, and those who had seen it perished. Only a handful of people in this era knew of it, but that wasn't enough to trigger any rumors.

"Nevertheless, Delsgade is widely known for being the Demon King of Tyranny's castle. With the power of the Demon King and the castle combined, it'll only be a matter of time before the enemy obtains the sword."

Considering Nosgalia's involvement, the ultimate goal could be to free the

Goddess of Destruction from the Abolisher of Reason and restore order to the world.

“Smiting our way through the front is a perfectly viable option, but there’s something I want to find out first. Let’s choose another path.”

“Is there another path?” Sasha asked.

“There’s a recent addition to Delsgade that has yet to become part of the Demon King’s lore. Avos Dilhevia’s Eyes won’t reach it.”

I drew a large magic circle beneath my feet. The floor of the shop turned transparent, revealing a staircase that extended downwards.

“Ah, I see!” Eleonore said excitedly. “It’s the underground city where Zeshia’s sisters live!”

Not so long ago, I had created a city beneath Midhaze as a place for ten thousand Zeshia clones to live. Since it had been constructed after my reincarnation, there were no rumors of it to tie it to the Demon King of Tyranny. It was located on the bottommost floor of Delsgade’s underground dungeon.

“But Melheis is on their side, so won’t they know about that already?” Sasha asked.

“He isn’t aware of the actual layout of the underground city. Besides, if they send demons down there, it’ll be all the better for us—it’s our home ground.”

“Zeshia’s sisters are strong,” Zeshia said.

Eleonore nodded in agreement. “Yup, they’ll chase away any intruders in the blink of an eye.”

The underground city was the same size as Midhaze. Sending soldiers to an area out of Demera’s reach would actually be doing us a favor, though they’d be fools to stir up such trouble for themselves.

“Will we all go together?” Misha asked.

“No,” I replied, turning my attention to the fan union. “You girls stay here. Look after mom and dad for me.”

The girls nodded.

“Got it!”

“We’ll protect them with our lives!”

“We’ll let your parents know!”

With that, the girls headed farther inside.

“The rest of us will head to Delsgade. Are you ready?” I asked.

Everyone left behind nodded. Judging by their determined expressions, there was no real need to ask them.

“Then let’s go.”

Just as I was about to set foot on the staircase, a door opened. Emilia came into the room, glancing at me quickly before lowering her gaze.

Hmm. It seemed she had something to say.

“Head down without me. Eleonore, you lead the way.”

“Got it!”

Lay and the others followed Eleonore down the stairs, leaving me alone with Emilia. I looked over at her, but she kept her gaze down and mouth shut. A minute passed without her making any attempt to speak.

“Unfortunately, I don’t have all day. If you’ve got something to say, say it quickly.”

At that, Emilia looked at me. “P-Please...”

Her voice was trembling so much, she couldn’t properly form words. In spite of her fear, she gathered her resolve and made another attempt.

“Please... Isn’t this enough already? Remove the reincarnation curse and just kill me. I beg of you.”

How long had it been since she’d become a hybrid? The hardships she’d gone through could be easily discerned from the way she phrased her request. Her hatred for me had withered to the point that there was no hostility in her eyes—she was merely pleading.

“Hmm. Will you ask to be turned back into a royal?”

Emilia paused for a brief moment, then replied, "Can you do that?"

"Even if I did, doing so wouldn't turn back time."

She furrowed her brow, conflicted.

"Avos Dilhevia has emerged. If I stay my hand, Midhaze will become the ideal city for royalty, just like you always wanted."

Emilia listened with a miserable look on her face.

"Do you find it beautiful?"

"Find what...?"

"Would you have found beauty in this city just as long as you were on the ruling side? After living as a hybrid, would you consider yourself noble if you returned to royalty now?"

She stared at me in silence.

"If even now you truly believe that, I'll return you to your former self. You can go join Avos Dilhevia's forces."

Emilia opened her mouth and then closed it again without saying anything. She bit her lip and glared down at her feet. Tears welled in her eyes and began spilling onto the floor.

I waited and waited, but she didn't say anything more. She couldn't. She had no answer. Her days as a hybrid had been etched into her memory. If she returned to royalty now, she would recall those moments every time she tried to oppress a hybrid. Every time she had been persecuted, every time she had been discriminated against would come rushing back. Yet at the same time, she didn't have the courage to remain living as a hybrid. That's why she had begged for me to kill her.

Emilia's royal status had been her pride. Now that she'd lived as a hybrid, those values had been smashed apart, and she had completely lost sight of herself. That was no surprise. There had never been any value in the status of royalty, and she was finally beginning to understand that herself. Everything had been in vain. Until she gave up on the notion of superior lineage and established herself as her own demon, she wouldn't be able to move forward.

I wasn't kind enough to provide her salvation. She had to suffer and struggle until she found the answers herself.

"Emilia."

When I called her name, she lifted her head slightly.

"You protected mom."

At that, she looked away in shame.

"Thank you."

I started making my way down the stairs. After some time, she seemed to believe I was out of earshot, as her trembling voice whispered something behind me.

"What do you want me to do...?"

Quiet sobs followed.

§ 42. The Demon King He Believed In

Beneath the tall ceiling of the underground city was a large, spherical magic crystal. It gathered sunlight from aboveground and illuminated the city below like a pseudo sun.

The city streets were lined with shops, all of which were manned by owl familiars. At one bakery in particular, an owl picked up a small stone tablet and threw it into a magic kiln. A magic circle encircled the kiln, and a savory scent began to waft through the air. The kiln soon opened to reveal freshly baked bread, which the owl carried over to the shop counter.

One Zeshia, who appeared to be around fifteen years old, approached the bakery and nodded her head at the owl. She took the stone tablet that the owl held out and filled it with her magic. Once she'd returned the tablet, she picked out a loaf of bread, packed it into her bag, and happily went on her way.

"It really is a city," Sasha murmured, half astounded and half impressed as she surveyed the city.

"I'm glad everyone seems to have settled in," Eleonore said with a grin.

Meanwhile, the interested Misha was looking around at the townscape. "Did you design these buildings, Anos?"

"Two thousand years ago, yes," I replied.

Misha tilted her head in question.

"This is a recreation of Dilhade from two thousand years ago."

The streets were designed in a circular formation, with runes inscribed on the rooftops, walls, and windows of every building. From above, one could see that this formation of buildings, roads, trees, and stones formed a vast magic circle. The magic circle served as a ward against enemy attack.

"Two thousand years ago..." Misha murmured, staring at the city. "How strange."

“The city’s strange?”

She shook her head. “I feel like I’ve seen it before.”

Hmm. That was indeed strange.

“Perhaps remnants of the city I made remain somewhere in this era.”

Misha thought for a moment, then tilted her head again. “I can’t remember.”

That, too, was strange for Misha, who normally had a good memory.

“Let me know if you recall.”

“Okay.”

We came to a stop before the tower at the center of the city. The tower stretched all the way up to the ceiling—it was the sole entrance to Delsgade.

“*Open*,” I said.

At my word, the tower door creaked open to reveal a spiral staircase. As we made our way up the steps, the door closed behind us. The staircase ended in an empty room with a permanent magic circle on the floor. I stepped inside that circle, followed by Lay and the others.

“This magic circle leads to the upper floors of Delsgade’s dungeon. In other words, we’ll be right within reach of Avos Dilhevia. She’ll be expecting our arrival.”

The treacherous spirit shouldn’t know where exactly we would appear, but there was no doubt we would be detected as soon as we arrived. Our demon brethren would swarm us in no time.

“We’ll wait here for a bit,” I concluded.

“Hmm?” Eleonore raised her index finger, confused. “Won’t the Abolisher of Reason be stolen if we don’t hurry?”

“Venuzdonoa is still untouched.”

“How can you tell?” Lay asked.

“It’s near impossible to subdue the Abolisher of Reason. Even I cannot do as much while my attention is averted. It would be extremely difficult to do so

while keeping my Eyes on every nook of the castle.”

The same would most likely apply for Avos Dilhevia, who was born from the legends of me.

“Stealing the Abolish of Reason would require staring into the abyss of Delsgade. In other words, the Eyes watching us will eventually glance away. We’ll wait for that moment and slip inside.”

Right now, Avos Dilhevia was monitoring all of Dilhade in preparation for our arrival, wondering whether we’d arrive from above ground or below—or perhaps both.

“The other side wants to know how we’ll move, but the longer they wait, the more I’ll recover the magic I consumed in Aharthern. They’ll be the first to give in.”

I sat down and observed the underground dungeon, waiting for time to pass. Ten hours or so went by like that.

“Hmm. Finally some movement.”

Avos Dilhevia’s watchful eye over Dilhade had vanished. Fed up with waiting, she had probably shifted her attention to seizing Venuzdonoa.

“Brace yourselves. Let’s go.”

Lay and the others, who had been tucking into some bread, all stood up at once. I cast Lynel to turn us invisible and Najila to hide our magic power. Then, holding my hand over the restricted magic circle, I activated it, and the scenery around us changed. The ceiling became higher; green trees came into view. A waterway ran through the room, glittering light reflecting off the surface. We’d been transported to the room with the natural magic circle.

“Anos,” Misha said. She was pointing to a passageway.

“That used to be a hidden passageway, right?” Sasha asked. “The one you made by breaking the wall.”

“It’s been destroyed so that anyone can pass through,” I said.

Now that Avos Dilhevia was no longer watching the castle, her subordinates were likely in charge of security. The wall would only get in the way of their

search.

“At any rate, we just have to find Avos Dilhevia, right? Not that I have any idea how you’re going to turn her back into Mis—”

Before Sasha could finish speaking, I covered her mouth with my hand. She immediately protested through Leaks.

“U-Um, Anos, what are you... Why?”

“Calm down. Someone’s coming.”

Footsteps echoed from the passageway. A group of armored demons equipped with swords entered the room. There were ten of them in total, and they appeared to be patrolling the area.

One of the demons drew a magic circle. It was Rouche, one of my subordinates from two thousand years ago. She had just cast Schur—a spell that created a gentle breeze throughout an area—and was now casting her Eyes over the flow of air. Neither Lynel nor Najila could hide the physical presence of a body, so she was using the breeze to detect if we were there.

“Will we be okay?” Sasha asked uneasily.

“Don’t worry. I’ve used Schur and Lynel to recreate the airflow, making it act as though no one’s here.”

As long as I maintained Najila, there would be no way to detect us.

Rouche deemed the area clear and moved on to the next location. Now that she believed Avos Dilhevia was the Demon King of Tyranny, she was no longer aware of my power. It seemed she didn’t expect me to be capable of doing this.

The other demons followed her out of the room, but among them were familiar faces—Meno and Rivest. Rivest wore his school uniform under his armor, with his insignia just barely visible. That insignia was a cross.

Hmm. This could be a trap.

“It’s okay,” Misha murmured through Leaks. *“He’s angry.”*

At Avos Dilhevia, I supposed.

I lightly tapped Rivest on the shoulder. He stopped and looked back in

confusion, staring straight through me.

“What’s wrong?” Rouche asked.

“I’d like to search this area a little more,” Rivest replied.

“I’ve checked already. There’s no one here.”

“If they passed through this area earlier, they may have left a trail. There could be footprints in this room.”

Rouche thought for a moment. “All right. Report back if you find anything.”

“Can you help too, Ms. Meno?” Rivest asked, his eyes fixed on hers. As if sensing there was something else to his suggestion, Meno nodded quietly.

“The rest of you will head farther down with me. Let’s go,” Rouche said.

With that, she led the rest of the demons away.

“Is that you, Anos?” Rivest asked.

I lifted Lynel and revealed myself. His eyes widened briefly, then he smiled.

“I knew you’d notice,” he said, touching the cross insignia.

Meno looked at us, her expression desperate. “Almost all the students have been affected by Demera, including Lord Melheis,” she said. “The hybrid students have all been confined as a source of power nourishment.”

Given the way she was looking at us, their lives were most likely in danger.

“Please, you have to do something about Avos Dilhevia.”

“There are two things I have to do first.”

“Like what?”

“The Spirit King, a masked demon, is somewhere inside the castle along with Nosgalia, who’s using Eldmed’s body. I wish to know their and Avos Dilhevia’s locations. Can you find them?”

Meno nodded. “I’ll look into it. I can move around the school relatively freely.”

“What’s the other thing?” Rivest asked.

“I plan on casting a greater magic spell in the treasure vault—a spell that Najila cannot conceal. I’d like to lure as many demons away from the vault as possible to avoid detection.”

Meno looked down in thought. “In my current position, I can’t give any orders. Avos Dilhevia left the demons of two thousand years ago in charge.”

“No, there’s another way,” Rivest mumbled, his face taut with resolution.

“Hmm. It won’t be an easy method, will it?” I asked.

He shook his head. “Strike me with magic, and make it as flashy as possible. It’s gotta be something that can’t be healed with a spell.”

I see. His fortitude was admirable.

“It’ll be more painful than anything you’ve ever experienced.”

He nodded again. “Anything less, and they won’t be fooled.”

I looked over at Meno.

“Don’t worry—I can handle it. I won’t let his courage go to waste.”

“Well said.”

With that, I pressed my fingers against the left side of Rivest’s chest, channeling magic into his body.

“Ah...Aaagh...”

I drew a magic circle. “*Degzegd.*”

A black snake-shaped mark appeared on Rivest’s neck. The snake began lashing out in an attempt to devour him.

“Urk... Ah... Gaaaaaah!”

“I’ll hold back a little. You won’t die.”

I drew another magic circle and transferred my magic into it. A black sun emerged from within, engulfing Rivest’s body in flames.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

He collapsed on the spot. The fire was flashy, but Rivest was still alive. If I hadn’t held back, every part of him would have been reduced to ash.

Soon a flurry of hurried footsteps drew towards the room. Using Lynel, I hid myself and the others from view once again. The only ones left visible were Rivest and Meno.

“What’s going on here?!” Rouche shouted.

Meno answered while casting healing magic on Rivest. “Anos Voldigoad has infiltrated the area! He headed upstairs with his followers!”

Rouche ran up to Rivest and cast her Eyes over him. “This curse is too strong to heal with magic. It must be him.”

She sent a message to her subordinates through Leaks. “Attention all troops. The misfit Anos Voldigoad has entered through the dungeon. He’s headed farther up to target Demon King Avos Dilhevia. Locate him at all costs!”

Rouche immediately started running for the stairs, calling over her shoulder at Meno. “You come too. We can resurrect him later!”

“Understood!”

Meno departed after Rouche, ready to confirm Avos Dilhevia’s location.

“I’m afraid I can’t heal your wounds just yet,” I said to Rivest, canceling Lynel. If Rouche returned to see him completely healed, questions would be raised.

“Ugh... Uh...” Rivest could only groan in response.

“I’m surprised a Royalist like you wasn’t affected by Demera.”

Rivest shouldn’t have been aware that I was the Demon King of Tyranny, yet he had refused to swear loyalty to Avos Dilhevia.

“Weren’t you an avid believer of the Demon King?” I asked, kneeling beside him.

“That’s why... Avos Dilhevia has brainwashed my team members and my classmates. Those who haven’t been brainwashed are being fed from...”

Although his voice was weak, he had firm conviction in his tone.

“The Demon King of Tyranny I believed in...was someone who obtained power to protect the weak...who provided power to those in need. Someone who feeds on the magic of his own people...doesn’t have the right to call

themselves the Demon King. The noble-minded Demon King always protects the weak.” With unfocused eyes and heavy breaths, he looked up at me. “Someone as unjust as Avos Dilhevia...could never be our founder!”

Battered and bleeding, Rivest was protesting with all his might. Rage towards Avos Dilhevia flashed in his eyes.

“Am I wrong?” he asked.

“No, you’re right. Even a misfit like me can surpass Avos Dilhevia. I’ll reveal the truth behind that imposter.”

A faint smile tugged at Rivest’s lips, but it was soon replaced by a groan of agony.

“Aaaargh...”

He stiffened at the pain, clenching every muscle in his body until he eventually slumped over unconscious. The curse I’d placed on him was strong—he’d be tormented by nightmares whether awake or asleep. But I couldn’t save him right now.

I stood up to make my way to the treasure vault.

“My liege...”

Words had slipped from Rivest’s mouth in his delirium. Were they directed at the Demon King of Tyranny he believed in? Or were they...

“Please, defeat the impostor. Save my teammates...and my classmates...”

“Rest assured, I shall grant your wish,” I replied without turning back.

§ 43. Searching the Past

I quietly pushed open the giant doors before me, revealing the underground room that housed an altar.

“Hmm. It seems everyone’s out of the way.”

We hadn’t run into a single demon on the way there—they were all upstairs looking for me. Since they believed I was after Avos Dilhevia, they had no reason to search below the staircase where I’d been spotted.

I opened the door to the side of the altar and went inside. It was the treasure vault.

“You mentioned a greater spell. What are you going to use?” Sasha asked curiously.

“There’s just something I wanted to look up.”

“You said that before too. What’s there to look up in a place like this?”

“The first thing is the Great Spirit Reno and how she died.”

Rina tore her eyes away from the interior of the treasure vault to look at me.

“Then there’s the Spirit King,” I continued. “It’s probably Shin, but I want to know what happened to him.”

Rina clenched her fists.

“Lastly, I want to find out more about Misa and how she was born.”

Eleonore looked up in thought. “Hmm... What do you mean by that, exactly?”

“Perhaps all the answers can be found two thousand years ago. When a half-spirit, half-demon is born, half their source is formed of a newborn rumor or legend. The legend of the Demon King of Tyranny was spread by Hero Kanon two thousand years ago, after my death.”

Lay bore a heavy expression.

“That means Misa must have been born two thousand years ago,” I

continued, “as the Great Spirit Reno’s biological child.”

Spirits were born from rumors and legends. Half-spirit, half-demons, however, possessed the bodies and sources of a demon, so there was no way for them to be born from lore alone. The spirits had called Misa the real child of Reno. While every spirit was a child of Reno, there had to be something different about Misa if they were referring to her as the real one. In other words, Reno had given birth to Misa with her own body, and if so, there had to be a father.

“Even though she was born two thousand years ago, she only has memories of the last fifteen years,” Lay mumbled. “She doesn’t know anything about the Mythical Age either. She believes she was born and raised here.”

I nodded in agreement. “There must be some reason behind it. The same goes for Shin. I ordered him to guard the Great Spirit Reno before my death, but something must have happened afterwards, causing him to become the Spirit King. I want to know why he opposes me.”

Misha lowered her head in thought. “Is it to protect Misa?” she wondered.

“Perhaps. If the legend of Avos Dilhevia were to be forgotten, Misa would contract spiritosis and eventually disappear.”

The Spirit King’s goal could be to prevent that.

“That may be why he threatened Lay during the Demon Sword Tournament—to prevent me from realizing he was Hero Kanon and the fake Demon King. He made it seem like Avos Dilhevia truly existed.”

During the recent battle against Azesion, I had learned that the make-believe Avos Dilhevia’s true identity was Lay, but at the same time, rumors of the Demon King had spread widely among humanity. Thanks to that, the conditions to awaken Avos Dilhevia had been fulfilled exactly as the Spirit King—and most likely Nosgalia—had planned.

“Misa might be the Great Spirit Reno’s child, but she’s not related to Shin, right?” Lay asked. “Why would someone who was so loyal to you choose to protect Misa instead?”

If she was related to Shin, his disloyalty would make sense by way of a parent protecting their child, but based on the results of Zeke’s test of knowledge,

Misa wasn't Shin's child. Zeke could only tell lies about Misa, which meant the statement that she was a child of Shin and Reno had to be false.

"He might not be out to protect Misa, but there's no way of knowing for sure," I said. "Either way, something must have happened two thousand years ago—there must be a reason for his current actions."

Shin was a man without ambition. It was hard to imagine him falling for the schemes of the gods. As far as I knew, Shin would never plot something like this. There must have been an event two thousand years ago that had changed him.

"The Great Spirit Reno is connected to both Shin and Misa. Her death was probably the start of everything."

I had no idea what had happened, but it couldn't be anything good. If anything, it was probably a tragedy—a terrible tragedy that the Great Spirit and the right-hand man of the Demon King couldn't fight against. Such tragedies hadn't been uncommon back in those days, and their tragedy continued even now.

I had to know the details.

"I guess that makes sense, but how do we check that?" Eleonore asked. "Everything to do with the Great Spirit Reno, the Spirit King, and Misa happened two thousand years ago, no?"

"I will use the highest grade of time magic, Revalon, to travel back two thousand years."

Everyone looked at me dubiously.

"Why didn't you just do that from the start?" Lay asked. "You could have avoided all this."

Sasha immediately agreed. "I thought the maximum you could rewind with Rivide was a hundred years."

Misha nodded. "And it's limited to a certain target."

"Indeed, the most Rivide can do is rewind time local to a subject's origin, and the limit to such an application would be a hundred years at most. There are some loopholes surrounding this, but we won't be using them this time."

Misha tilted her head. “Can Revalon go back further?”

“No. Because it uses the entire world as an origin, the amount of time that can be traversed is even shorter—if the spell were powered by my magic alone, that is.”

I drew the magic circle for Revalon and cast Gyze to link all our sources together.

“Will you use our magic too?” Misha asked.

I nodded. “If we pool our magic together, we should be able to go back more than a hundred years.”

Lay still looked doubtful. “Even if we added the Sword of Three Races to that pool, would that really be enough to reach two thousand years? Using the entire world as an origin sounds impossible.”

“Indeed, that still wouldn’t be enough.” I stepped to the side and murmured an order. “*Reveal thyself.*”

At that, the magic veil lifted to reveal the numerous items stored in the vault. With a beckoning gesture, I summoned a certain item to my hand. It was a scythe as long as a spear.

“We’ll use this as well,” I said.

Misha blinked. “The Scythe of the Timekeeper...”

It was the item I had obtained when I defeated the Keeper of Time, Eugo La Raviaz.

“This is a magic item used by the Keeper of Time. If we combine our magic with this scythe, we should just barely be able to go back two thousand years.”

“So we’ll go back two thousand years and change the past?” Eleonore asked, but I shook my head.

“Unfortunately, the past cannot be easily changed. Any changes that create a paradox with the present will not remain. The legends of Avos Dilhevia are far too great to be interfered with—especially since they date back two thousand years. It’ll be impossible to change anything significant.”

Misha looked at me. “Are we just going to look?”

“Yes. We’ll visit the past and confirm what happened to Misa, Shin, and Reno. That will be the most we can do.”

“Um, can I go along?” Rina asked nervously. Despite her hesitation, her tone was clear. She looked at me pleadingly. “I know Dilhade is going through a lot right now, and I’m just a useless outsider that can’t do anything about it, but I have a feeling that the thing I’ve forgotten is back in the past.”

After Avos Dilhevia awakened, the titi had taken Rina’s side when they should have been following the orders of Reno’s real child. As whimsical as the fairies were, that had been no coincidence.

“Don’t worry. We’ll all go together,” I said.

Rina smiled in relief. “Thank you!”

“Now...” I held out my hand and poured magic into the circle for Revalon. Lay, meanwhile, drew a magic circle and summoned the Sword of Three Races. He thrust the glowing blade into the center of my magic circle.

The immense power of the holy sword that could sever fate flowed into Revalon. Zeshia drew Enharle, the Holy Sword of Light, and stuck it into the ground beside it. Her magic started flowing into the magic circle as well.

Runes appeared in the air around Eleonore, forming a sphere around her. Holy water started pouring from the runes, surrounding her in a bubble. She had used her own spell to wrap herself in Aske, converting the emotions created into magic.

“I’ve connected the magic link to the Zeshias underground,” I said.

“Got it,” Eleonore replied. She closed her eyes, gathering the emotions of the ten thousand Zeshias in the underground city and sending the converted magic into Revalon.

Misha and Sasha were next. They linked hands, multiplying their power with fusion magic before sending it into the circle.

“Mind you, this is my first time attempting such a thing,” I said. “If I send us to the wrong era, we’ll have to wait for time to pass until we reach the present.”

“That sounds terrifying,” Sasha murmured, but her sister was more positive.

“It’ll work.”

I poured my magic into the Scythe of the Timekeeper and forced it to obey me. A silver glint of light flashed as I swung it down, slicing the magic circle for Revalon.

The world turned silver. A tear appeared where the scythe cut through the air, as though it had sliced through the fabric of the world. Silver-tinted scenery rushed past us as if the world had flipped inside out.

We were traveling back in time.

§ 44. The Mother of Spirits and the Demon King's Right-Hand Man

We arrived at an enormous lake.

The faint moonlight reflecting off the water's surface served as a natural magic circle, forming a barrier to repel demonkind. This was the holy lake located beside the human capital, Gairadite.

The city was different to its counterpart in the Magical Age. The solid ramparts on the outskirts were falling apart, with several sections missing. The houses inside the gate were in a similar state, shabby with damaged roofs and walls. Some of the damages had been patched up with white stone crafted from Iris.

"Wow, it's Gairadite!" Eleonore exclaimed.

"It's different to normal," Zeshia added excitedly.

"Hmm. It seems we made it safely."

The scythe in my hand crumbled into dust and dispersed in the wind. Misha stared after it.

"Don't worry. It's easy to return to our original time from here," I said.

"That's good."

Lay walked over to me. "From the looks of the city, we're definitely two thousand years in the past, but when exactly is this?"

"A short time after I made the wall and sacrificed my life."

Misha and Sasha turned their Magic Eyes towards Dilhade.

"Speaking of the wall, it sure is something else," Sasha mumbled, shuddering.

Misha blinked in surprise. "I can feel its magic all the way over here."

"I wouldn't even wanna get close to the border."

“The people of this era wouldn’t be deterred otherwise,” I explained, “and there are still some who can cross that wall in this state.”

As was the case with Melheis, those with powerful magic could still cross through Beno levun, although I could count on one hand the number of people who could do so unharmed.

“So why are we in Gairadite?” Sasha asked, her blonde pigtails swinging as she turned to face me.

“The Great Spirit Reno would have returned to Aharthern after I made the wall. Under my order, Shin accompanied her.”

“Oh, I see. Aharthern was located by the holy lake back then.” Sasha nodded.

“Reno used up all her magic to help me build the wall. She wouldn’t have been able to pass through Beno levun in such a state, so it would have been a while before she could return. She should be reaching Aharthern around now.”

She was either back already or on her way back.

“We’ll go to Aharthern and check where she is.”

“Can’t you use your Eyes to tell where she is?” Sasha asked.

“In this era, demons and humans look at everything with their Magic Eyes. Many spells have been developed to interfere with that. Of course, I could probably see her if I tried, but there’s a chance she’d notice my magic.”

Sasha gasped in realization. “And the Demon King of Tyranny is meant to be dead...”

“If anyone notices I’m still alive, the past will undergo dramatic change.”

“But anything we do here won’t change the past that already happened, right?” she asked.

“Yes. The gods that preside over time possess the order of keeping the past as the past. When Revalon’s effect ends and we return to the present, the order of time will reverse all of the changes made while we were here. Some small changes might make it back to the present, but in general, nothing we do here will affect what happens two thousand years in the future.”

However, if the people of this era found out the Demon King of Tyranny was still alive, history would probably play out in a different way. If that occurred, we wouldn't be able to find out what happened to Reno, Shin, and Misa.

"If the gods are involved in what's about to happen, preventing the birth of the Great Spirit Avos Dilhevia won't be an easy task."

"So we just have to avoid making big changes to the past," Misha said.

I nodded.

"But doesn't that make you the biggest problem?" Lay pointed out.

"I'm a demon now, and Eleonore has yet to be born. The same goes for Misha, Sasha, and Zeshia, of course. As long as we don't do anything ridiculous, we won't have much effect on the past."

"Oh, good point. We'll be fine, but someone might recognize Anos's magic." Eleonore pointed her index finger up in thought.

"You even look the same as two thousand years ago. Won't that be a problem as well?" Lay asked.

Appearances could easily change through the use of magic, but barely anyone in the Mythical Age was foolish enough to imitate me. The way things were going, I would definitely stand out.

"Could you lend me a hand hiding my source?" I asked.

Lay held two fingers up to my neck and drew a magic circle, casting Naaz to disguise my source. Source magic was Hero Kanon's specialty—we would have to be extremely unlikely to come across anyone who could see through his Naaz.

"I can hide the rest with Lynel," I said.

"If you stay still, you'll do just fine, but you'll be caught if you use magic near the me of this era," Lay warned. "Be careful—I should be returning to Gairadite right about now."

This must have been the time when Kanon had been objecting to Jerga's establishment of the Hero Academy. If Hero Kanon realized Demon King Anos was still alive, the past would change completely.

“I shall. I also have one warning for all of you. When the effect of Revalon ends, the past will return to normal. That means our presence in the past will be erased. However, we will retain our memories of what we went through—and our bodies will as well. Any wounds sustained in the past will remain when you return to the present. You can die here, so don’t let your guards down.”

In short, there was nothing we could do to affect the past, but the past was capable of affecting us. As well as being two thousand years in the past, we were in human territory right now—there was no doubt they’d attack if they knew we were demons.

“All right. So we just have to take care not to change the past and try not to die!” Eleonore said, summarizing the whole ordeal.

Misha looked up at the sky. “The moon is out tonight. Should we make blue candy?”

The current rumor to locate Aharthern was one I have previously mentioned: a fog would appear on a moonlit night in spring, on the bank of the holy lake. Throwing blue candy into the mist would lure out the playful fairies who could guide one into the forest. The rumor wouldn’t have changed so soon after my death.

“Unfortunately, the titi are rather fussy about their preferences. I’ve tried it once before, but it seems they have no interest in magically created candy.”

“By blue candy, you mean holy lake lollies, right? They’d have been around in this era.” Eleonore tilted her head, while Zeshia beamed happily.

“They’re one of Zeshia’s favorites...”

“That’s right. There should be stalls here that sell them. Let’s head into the city.”

Using Lynel, I turned everyone except Eleonore and Zeshia invisible. Lay then used Naaz to make the sources of Misha, Sasha, and himself appear human. Rina was a spirit, so hers wasn’t a problem.

We passed through the gate and into Gairadite.

“Say, Kano— Oops.” Eleonore immediately corrected herself. “Lay, do you

remember where the candy stalls are?”

“They should be straight down this road.”

The area was filled with people buzzing about. Although the city was run-down from withstanding all those demon attacks, everyone was smiling and full of energy. Many shops were still open despite the late hour, and plenty of stalls lined the streets.

“It really feels like I’m back,” Lay mumbled warily.

“Hmm. They seem to be celebrating the Hero’s victory over the Demon King.”

The bright expressions on people’s faces were understandable. In this era of sadness, fear, and hatred, such faces of enjoyment were rarely witnessed.

“What’s so fun about seeing people celebrate your death?” Sasha muttered.

I looked at her.

“You were smiling,” Misha added.

“I was?”

“Yeah.”

Hmm. Did I really seem that happy?

“I was just thinking it was worth dying for.”

“Huh. Well, I don’t really like it.” Sasha glared at the joyous humans. She seemed disgusted by the people rejoicing at the Demon King’s defeat when I was the one who’d died to make the wall.

“Oh! There’s the stall selling holy lake lollies!” Eleonore exclaimed.

Zeshia looked up at her. “Will there be enough...for Zeshia to have one?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll buy one for you too.”

Eleonore paused on her way to the stall. “Come to think of it, I don’t have any money.” She turned around, and I sent several gold coins floating her way.

“I brought some from the vault. It’s the currency of this era.”

“Wow. We could live lavishly on this!”

Linking hands with Zeshia, Eleonore made her way to the stall.

“Good evening, mister. We’d like to buy some holy lake lollies,” Eleonore said.

“Welcome! How many would you like?”

She began counting on her fingers. “One for Anos, one for Misha, one for Sasha... Maybe ten total.”

“Coming right up. This is actually the last of my stock, so I’ll throw in an extra one for free.”

“Wow, really? You’re so generous! Thanks!”

Eleonore gave the man a gold coin, then accepted her change and the eleven holy lake lollies—large, spherical candies attached to the ends of sticks. They were being advertised as products of holy water, but that was obviously an inedible substance, so they couldn’t actually be made from that.

“Look, there it is! That’s it: the stall that sells holy lake lollies!” a delighted voice called out.

I turned to see a woman in a jade-green dress running over to the stall. She had amber eyes and hair that was clear like a lake—it was the Great Spirit Reno. She didn’t seem to be in her true form, as her six wings were nowhere to be seen.

A demon with a harsh gaze was following behind her, his face concealed by a familiar mask.



“Reno, please remain within five meters of me at all times. Any farther and there’s little I can do in the event of an ambush.”

Reno whirled around to face the masked man. “Run with me then, or it’ll be your fault if they sell out!”

“Running is a distraction. A slow walking speed is optimal for reacting to unexpected attacks.”

“We’re in Gairadite already. There are no enemies here.”

“Never let your guard down.” The man slid his mask to the side, casting his sharp gaze around at their surroundings. The white hair and colorless eyes—and above all, that magic—were undoubtedly those of Shin Reglia.

“I sense tremendous power lurking nearby. The fact that I cannot see anything with my Magic Eyes suggests they are quite the formidable opponent.”

Hmm. My magic should be completely hidden with Najila, but it seemed he was sensing me through presence instead of detecting me with his Eyes. Such a level of perceptiveness was to be expected of Shin, though it seemed he was unable to pinpoint my location.

“Don’t take off your mask! There’ll be panic if people spot a demon here.”

“Rest assured, the moment anyone directs hostility towards us, I shall sever their head from their body.”

Reno sighed. “Ian, stick close to Shin.”

The eyes of the mask glowed. It snapped back onto Shin’s face, concealing his magic. That mask appeared to be a spirit called Ian.

“Don’t go chopping anyone up, okay? The only enemies left are the gods, and they might not even appear.”

“I shan’t cut those who don’t threaten you.”

“Jeez. Well, whatever. We’re almost at Aharthern anyway.”

Reno walked up to the stall and called out to the owner. “Good evening, I’d like to buy some holy lake lollies.”

“My apologies, young lady. I’m all sold out for today.”

“What? No way...”

“Apologies. Come back tomorrow.”

Reno stood there with a sad frown. “But the titi were looking forward to it...”

“There’s nothing that can be done. Let’s go,” Shin said.

Reno glared at him angrily. “If you’d have just ran, I might have been able to buy some!”

“Forgive me. I prioritized my mission to protect you.”

“All you had to do was jog a little...”

“Forgive me. I prioritized my mission to protect you.”

With nothing else she could do, Reno pouted and turned away in a huff. She stamped her foot on the ground to vent her anger. “Stupid! Stupid Shin!”

Troubled for a response, Shin thought for a moment before replying. “Forgive me. I prioritized my mission to protect you,” he repeated like a broken record.

“It seems their journey has brought them closer,” I said, making Sasha look up at me confusedly.

“What?” she asked.

“Shin rarely ever repeats the same answer twice, yet he answered her three times. He normally holds his silence after the first reply.”

“What?” Sasha repeated, still confused.

“Um... Here you go...” Zeshia cautiously approached Reno, offering her two of her holy lake lollies.

“Huh? But aren’t they yours, little miss?”

“Zeshia has lots already...”

Smiling brightly, Eleonore approached them. “It’s okay. We got a freebie, so this is more than we can finish.”

“Oh, then I’ll give you these in return. They’re cookies from the city of Mizali—I can guarantee they taste great!”

Reno placed a small bundle of cookies in Zeshia’s palm.

“Thank you...very much...”

“I should be saying that.”

“Are you done...fighting?”

“Huh?”

Zeshia looked between Reno and Shin.

“Oh, we weren’t fighting. We’re actually super close,” Reno replied with a smile.

“Are we?” Shin asked flatly, making Reno’s smile twitch.

“Shin, you and I are close friends. If you want to keep protecting me, you have to agree. This is an order.”

“Understood. We are close friends.”

At that, Zeshia smiled in relief. “That’s good. Close friends...”

“Yup. Bye now. Thanks again for the candy.”

Reno waved and left for the city gate. Shin followed behind her, casting his alert gaze around at their surroundings.

§ 45. Aharthern under Attack

“Good job, Zeshia. You did it! Well done.”

Eleonore bent down and hugged Zeshia, patting her head gently. Zeshia beamed happily.

“Zeshia...did her best...”

“Yep, that’s right! And good girls should be rewarded.”

Eleonore held out a holy lake lolly, which Zeshia accepted and immediately popped into her mouth.

“The people of this era sure are something else, though. Those two were hiding their magic perfectly, yet you could still tell they were ridiculously strong.”

“Very...strong,” Zeshia said between the licks of her lolly.

“That was Reno and Shin,” I said. “It’d be hard to find a stronger pair in this era.”

Eleonore walked over to me. “Wow, so that was them, huh? She was calling him stupid to his face. That was a surprise,” she said, staring in the direction they’d left. Shin’s mask was a different shape to his present one, but I’d thought she would have noticed who he was.

“They’re probably on their way back to Aharthern. Let’s follow them—but not too closely, or Shin will have your head.”

With that, I made my way to the gate. Everyone trailed behind me.

“Are all your subordinates like that?” Sasha asked.

“Like what?”

“Strong, but too stubborn to listen.”

“Shin’s an odd one, but he’s not a bad guy. He’s just not the most accommodating.”

Sasha shot me a doubtful glance. “Not the most, huh?”

“Rina,” I called. The girl who’d been walking in silence until now looked at me. “The masked man just now was Shin. He’s the Spirit King you wanted to meet. Did seeing him ring any bells?”

“I’m still not sure,” she mumbled, looking at the ground, “but I get the feeling something is about to happen.” She lifted her head slowly. “Something bad.”

It almost sounded like she was predicting the future. Perhaps she had lived through this once before.

“I see.” I cast Lynel over Zeshia and Eleonore, hiding them from view. We walked through the city gate and headed for the holy lake.

After leaving the city, we heard faint voices from up ahead.

“I’m home, titi! I bought presents.”

We could see Reno and Shin in the distance.

Tiny fairies emerged from the fog covering the area, but there was something odd about them. The titi appeared to be terribly flustered and were darting wildly through the air.

“It’s Reno! Reno’s back!”

“Help! Help!”

“Aharthern’s in trouble! Help!”

“Lignon was defeated!”

Reno’s face fell. Lignon, the eight-headed water dragon, was the guardian of Aharthern. If she had been defeated, someone must have attacked the spirit forest.

“Who’s responsible?” Reno asked.

“Silver beasts!”

“The hounds of the gods.”

“Divine beasts—guen!”

“They’re eating everyone.”

“They’ll eat us all!”

Reno extended a hand towards the fog, which parted to reveal the Great Spirit Forest. The forest was surrounded by a black aurora—Beno levun. The titi had been speaking to Reno and Shin from the other side of the wall. Despite the wall still functioning as a barricade to the Spirit Realm, the guen had gotten inside.

Reno and Shin cloaked themselves in anti-magic. Shin then drew his demon sword and slashed at the wall with all his magic. For a split second, a thin path appeared, allowing the pair to slip inside, then the wall immediately returned to normal. They had made it seem easy, but crossing the wall would have consumed a lot of their magic. In such a state, would they really be able to overcome the divine beasts?

“What do we do?” Misha asked.

“There’s only one option. If we don’t go, we won’t know what happened.”

“We’re, uh, crossing that?” Sasha stared nervously at the black aurora.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s my work, remember?”

I sent my magic into Beno levun. The black aurora parted to create an undetectable shortcut for us to pass through with ease.

We made our way to the other side of the fog to see a completely transformed Aharthern. Every plant of the once lush forest had wilted, and the screams of fleeing spirits rang through the air. Huge beasts with silver fur and sharp fangs were dashing about the forest. And there were far more than just one or two—they were everywhere, gnawing away at the trees. The green rapidly wilted wherever they passed. They were devouring the spirit itself.

“Watch out!”

“Our lore will be eaten!”

“We’ll die!”

“Even spirits can die!”

The titi flitted noisily around Reno. She glared angrily at the divine beasts.

“Come, Gigadeith! Gennul!”

Gennul, the Wolf of Hiding, stepped quietly from the shadows. The fairy Gigadeith stood on his back, a tiny mallet in hand.

“We have to save everyone!” Reno shouted, drawing a magic circle on her palm. “Spirit magic: *Gigadeith*!”

Gigadeith swung its tiny mallet down, striking the guen with lightning. Gennul vanished and thousands of lightning wolves appeared in his stead. The charged arrows Reno loosed, enhanced by Gigadeith’s lightning, soared towards the divine beasts, accompanied by the lightning wolves. The arrows struck the silver beasts, but the beasts didn’t even flinch—if anything, their bodies grew larger with each electric arrow that struck them.

“Are they...eating Gigadeith?” Reno wondered aloud.

The divine beasts pounced on the lightning wolves, sinking their fangs into them. With each wolf eaten, the beasts grew larger.

“Help!”

“We’ll be eaten!”

“Save us!”

“Save uuus!”

The titi, too, were being chased by guen. Reno paused, hesitant to cast more of her spirit magic. It only seemed to make the divine beasts stronger.

“What do I do?” Panicked, Reno looked at the masked demon beside her.

“Sorry for the delay,” Shin said, reaching into the magic circle he’d drawn. An ominous flow of magic poured out of the circle. He withdrew his hand, drawing a rusted demon sword. It was one of the thousand swords in his possession: Gneodoros, the God Slasher.

Divine beasts were messengers of the gods and extremely close to the gods in existence. They couldn’t be easily destroyed. Thus, Shin had selected the most effective weapon against gods in his possession—a sword that could cut divine beings.

“Now I can assist.”

The moment Shin uttered those words, over a hundred guen toppled over, their bodies split in two. His sword had moved so fast, it had seemed like nothing more than a flash of light.

“We’re saved!”

“Thank you!”

“Thank you, sword uncle!”

“You’re strong, sword uncle!”

Shin removed his mask and stepped forward. “Are you aware of what you are doing?” he asked the guen in an accusing tone. With every step he took, more divine beasts fell. Bloodlust filled his cold voice. “My liege wished for peace. You beasts dare to stain his wish for the greater good.”

In a matter of moments, the divine beasts snapping at the lightning wolves—as well as the beasts swarming the eight-headed water dragon—were sliced open.

“You shall all die here,” said Shin as he slowly walked through the forest of spirits. With every step he took, one hundred guen fell. The spirits fleeing in their terror were saved one after another by his sword.

However, many guen remained. Slaying them all would take time.

“Anos...” Misha whispered.

“I’m watching.”

Misha’s Eyes were fixed on several guen to the side. Bestowed with fierce muscles, they were glaring at us as though ready to attack at any moment.

“Why are they focusing on us all of a sudden?” Sasha asked. “They were aiming for the spirits just now.”

“Hmm. They *are* the hounds of the gods. Their noses are sharp, and they’ve deemed us enemies.”

As soon as I said that, the guen pounced.

“Wh-What do we do?!” Sasha cried.

“Killing one or two won’t change anything. They would have been cut by Shin

either way. But don't use any spells that would catch attention. Destroy them quietly."

"Quietly? How are we supposed to defeat them without using any noticeable magic?"

I thrust my Vebzud-covered hand into the guen honing on my throat. When I squeezed my fist, its body went limp and vanished without a trace.

"Like that," I said.

"Yeah, not happening..."

I took Sasha's hand in mine.

"Huh? Wh-Wha..." she stuttered, blushing as she looked at me.

"I'm teaching your body. During the Mythical Age, I was the only one who could use Vebzud, but you and I are highly compatible. At your current power, you should be able to control this spell formula."

Synchronizing my magic with Sasha's, I constructed the spell formula for Vebzud in a manner she could imitate.

"Breathe in time with me. Gaze further into the depths of the abyss."

Using her magic, Sasha traced the magic circle I'd drawn.

"Hmm. Not bad for a first attempt. Try activating it."

She gently dipped her fingertips into the circle. Although most of her hand withdrew unchanged, her index finger was indeed stained black.

"Now to test it on a target..." I deflected a guen that had leaped at me and sent it flying towards Sasha.

"Hyah!"

With a squeaking yelp, she plunged her Vebzud-stained finger into the divine beast, ending its life.

"Ah, I did it!" Sasha beamed, yanking her hand out of the beast as it vanished into the air. She stared at her fingers and giggled.

"You two match," Misha commented, peering over Sasha's shoulder from

behind.

Sasha turned away, flustered. “I-It’s the same spell, so of course it matches,” she muttered.

“Zeshia’s sword...is gone...” Zeshia said.

“Now that you mention it, I can’t summon Evansmana or Siegesta either.”

“Right. I forgot to tell you earlier, but magic items can’t be brought to the past. If you can’t fight, just keep running—Shin will take care of them eventually.”

Activating her Magic Eyes of Destruction, Sasha glared at the divine beasts. The guen flinched, but the messengers of the gods couldn’t be so easily destroyed.

Lay and the others scattered to gain distance from the divine beasts. They were probably trying to escape far enough to avoid being scented.

“Hmm. This should be the last one,” I said, quietly finishing off the last of the divine beasts that had targeted me. I looked around to check there were no more in the vicinity.

“Huh? Where’d Lay go?” Eleonore asked. Misha, Sasha, Zeshia, and Rina were all nearby.

“He’s unarmed, so he may have had trouble shaking the beasts off,” I replied.

In any case, I was sure he’d be able to handle it. He could take them on with his bare hands if he really wanted to.

“Who’s there?” a sharp voice called. “This is the Great Spirit Forest. You can’t deceive my eyes.”

Hmm. Perhaps we’d made too much of a commotion. Even so, Reno shouldn’t be able to tell exactly where we were.

We waited in silence for a while, and she frowned. She seemed unsure whether we were there. If we continued following them, would we be able to ensure we were beside them when everything played out? We couldn’t have her suspecting us of working for the gods. That meant...

"Hmm. I've got an idea," I said through Leaks.

"What is it?" Sasha asked.

"Remaining invisible will only arouse suspicion. It'll be extremely difficult to get close to Shin and Reno without being detected. We should reveal ourselves and approach them openly instead."

"Approach them openly? But how? If you go, they'll realize you're the Demon King of Tyranny."

"It'll be fine; Lay's hidden my source with his magic. All I need to do is change how I look. If I appear as a random demon passing by, our encounter shouldn't affect the past."

Reno called out once again. "If you don't show yourselves in the next three seconds, I'll take it that you're enemies."

"We mean no ill will. We'll come out now." I lifted Lynel and stepped before Reno.

"Huh?" Reno blinked in surprise, her gaze drawn downwards.

I was currently much shorter than she was. I'd used Kursla to revert my body to an age of six or so.

"My name is Anosh Polticoal. I'm here because I'm interested in spirits."

§ 46. The Traveling Entertainer

Reno's amber eyes flitted over me. Her curious expression was probably due to my childlike appearance. While it was possible for anyone to de-age themselves with Kursla, no demon would ever think of retaining an undeveloped, six-year-old body. Such a decision would be fatal in this age of war.

"You're a demon, right?"

"That's right."

Reno eyed me warily. "Are you a subordinate of Demon King Anos?"

"No. Not one faction holds my loyalty. I'm a part of a troupe of traveling entertainers."

"Traveling entertainers?" Reno murmured, turning her attention to the others. Zeshia offered her a small wave.

Smiling, Reno returned the wave and turned back to me. "Is that true?"

"It is. Show her, Sasha."

"Show her what?!" Sasha yelled. Reno narrowed her eyes.

"Right, I forgot that you have so much up your sleeve, you wouldn't know what I'm referring to," I said, correcting her blunder and giving her time to think. There was a certain trick that only she was capable of performing in this era.

"You know, that trick you pulled in Dilhade the other day that had everyone clutching their stomachs in laughter."

She should realize I wasn't just making an unreasonable request. After all, we had a goal to achieve.

"O-Oh right, that. Sure."

Hmm. She looked completely bewildered.

“Keep your eyes on me!” Sasha yelled in desperation, raising her arms in the air to buy time. She then slowly lowered her arms, signaling the start of her performance, but she had no idea what to do. With every passing second, Sasha was running out of time to act—until, at the very last moment, she gasped and turned to Reno.

“Behold: an imitation of the Demon King of Tyranny’s Eyes!”

“Pfft!” Reno giggled at Sasha’s glowing Eyes.

The Magic Eyes of Destruction weren’t a trait normally possessed by demons. They could only be mastered by someone of a unique constitution. In this era where my descendants didn’t exist yet, no one else was capable of using them.

On top of that, Sasha’s Magic Eyes of Destruction were incomplete, making them appear far from the real thing. However, they were similar enough for an imitation and difficult for anyone else to mimic, which made for the perfect balance.

“Sh-She laughed.” Sasha quietly clenched her fists.

Reno chuckled. “Gosh, that looked exactly like them. The effect wasn’t as strong, but you’ve even replicated the destruction to your surroundings. What a high-quality imitation! Wouldn’t it be insensitive to do that in Dilhade?”

“Demon King Anos was surprisingly fond of jokes. He’d understand,” I said.

“Oh, come to think of it, I’ve heard that before too, but I thought it was just another baseless rumor.” Reno looked down at me. “I’ve been thinking this since I saw you, but you look kind of similar to the Demon King, Anosh.”

“I’m glad you noticed.” I folded my arms dramatically, standing tall with the aura of the Demon King. “This is the child form of the Demon King of Tyranny, Anosh Polticoal!”

“Pa ha!”

“Did you think a child couldn’t be the Demon King?”

Reno snorted with laughter. “You’re speaking exactly like him! Demon King Anos would totally say that if he turned into a child. It’s just so funny for some reason! You do look very similar to him, so I can picture the Demon King being

just like this when he was little.”

Hmm. First impressions had gone well. Hiding would have only made her more wary. Explaining the truth ourselves would be much more effective.

“But how did you get in here?” Reno asked. “Normal demons wouldn’t be able to cross the wall.”

“Living as a traveling entertainer in this era requires a fair bit of strength. My friend here helped us across.”

I looked at Misha.

“I’m...” she said, pausing to think. “I’m a traveling entertainer more powerful than the Four Evil Kings.”

Reno tilted her head. “Huh. Anos did say the more carefree a demon, the stronger they tend to be. I should check that with Shin later.”

Those without power would find it impossible to live as a traveling entertainer in this era. Shin was sure to say something like that.

“But your troupe sure has an odd mix of members, Anosh. Demons, humans, and a spirit together? Is it because you’re entertainers?” she said, no longer wary of us.

“There are no borders to entertainment. The difference between races is trivial.”

Reno smiled softly. “I see. That’s nice. The world would be a much better place if everyone thought the same.” She then looked up at me. “You said you’re interested in spirits, right?”

“I did. Rina,” I called.

Rina stepped forward.

“This member of our troupe is searching for her memories. She seems to have a strange form of amnesia. I’ve heard that you, Great Spirit Reno, are the mother of all spirits. Would you happen to know anything?”

Reno stared at Rina. “I’ve never seen this girl before. You’ve lost your memory?”

Rina nodded.

Reno tilted her head. "Hmm... I'm not sure."

"Even you don't know?"

"Being the mother of all spirits doesn't mean I know about every single one of them. There's a lot out there I don't know."

Hmm. Well, I suppose that was plausible.

"Rina said there was something familiar about Aharthern. If possible, we'd like to stay for a while."

"That's fine, but first, could you come over here, Anosh?" Reno gestured for me to follow her. We walked until we were out of earshot of the others.

"What's wrong?" I asked once we came to a stop.

"Rina is a fran—a love fairy."

The green books at the spirit school had mentioned love fairies, but the page with all the details had been torn out.

"The fairy gives shape to unfulfilled love and ties people together, right?"

"Yes, but how did you know that? You're a demon," Reno said curiously. The demons of this era had very little to do with spirits.

"I studied under a spirit for a while."

Two thousand years in the future, that is.

"But why did you pretend not to know that earlier?" I asked.

"Love fairies wander in search of their memories," Reno said. "They'll disappear if they discover their own identities, so you can't tell her what she is."

Ah, so that was why she'd lied.

"She has to remember her love first."

Remember her love, huh? But there were no clues to whom that might be.

"I'd like to know a little more about the fran," I said, when the ground suddenly began to shake. A huge guen the size of a small castle appeared out of nowhere, creating tremors with every step it took.

Reno's eyes widened. "Where was something of that size hiding?"

"Don't worry. Size will make no difference to Shin. He'll cut it down just as easily."

The gaping maw of the guen swooped down to snap at something on the ground. Lynel was lifted, revealing an invisible figure—it was Lay. He was using all four of his limbs to resist being swallowed by the beast. With a sword in hand, he would have easily been able to escape such a situation, but unfortunately he was unarmed.

"Is he one of your companions too?"

"Yes. He'll be fine by himself, but..."

Lay would return alive even if swallowed whole, but in such a situation, his seven sources would be revealed. Whatever the case, I was sure Shin would cut down the beast soon enough. I looked over to see him holding Gneodoros at the ready.

"Stop, Shin! That man's a fellow demon of yours." Reno latched on to Shin's arm, stopping him from shredding Lay along with the beast.

"Your protection is my highest priority. If he dies in the cross fire, then he didn't have the power to survive in the first place. His presence here is his own misfortune, and it is only natural for the weak to perish."

"Nonsense! Do something!"

Shin's brow twitched faintly. He seemed troubled. His sword wasn't suited for saving others.

"Take out the Sword of Intent, Shin," I said.

He glanced at me, then turned back to the guen in disinterest. One beat later, he whirled back around with a gasp. He stared closely at me. "Don't tell me. Are you...?"

"I am Anosh Polticoal, a mere traveling entertainer."

Shin fell silent. It wasn't that difficult to keep him from realizing who I was. For a brief moment, he would have wondered whether I was the Demon King, but the moment I introduced myself as someone else, he would simply accept

that fact. If I was truly the Demon King, my words would have been an implicit order to ignore my identity, and if I wasn't the Demon King, I was no longer of his concern.

Either way, he would treat me as Anosh Polticoal. No matter how likely it was for me to be Anos Voldigoad, he would stubbornly keep to my word.

"He's my guest, but more importantly, we have to help that man!" Reno turned around to me. "Anosh, can he be saved with the Sword of Intent?"

"Yes. The fangs of the divine beasts are nothing before Lay with a sword."

Reno held out her hand. "Give it here. It's called Sieg-something, right?"

"It's Siegesta," Shin said, drawing the magic circle to retrieve the sword. "I've never witnessed anyone besides my liege or myself use it correctly."

"He'll be the third." I took Siegesta and flung it in Lay's direction. "A sword's headed your way, Lay. Get out of there already."

"Thanks." Lay reached for the soaring Siegesta, but as if to avoid the incoming sword, the guen hopped out of the way. It landed to the side, shaking the ground. The sword was knocked in another direction.

"Ah!" Reno called out as she watched the sword fly away.

"It seems he truly can handle the Sword of Intent," Shin mumbled beside her.

"Over here, Siegesta!"

Summoned by Lay's call, Siegesta changed trajectory. The sword curved through the air, as though it was drawn to his hand. The moment it made contact, there was a flash of light.

"Ha!"

Four fangs were severed, and the guen roared in pain. At the same time, Lay jumped out from the beast's maw.

"What a surprise." The corner of Shin's mouth lifted slightly. His hand twitched, and the divine beast was split into two. Its giant body crashed to the ground.

"Dilhade is vast, but I never thought I'd run into another demon capable of

handling Siegesta.”

In the blink of an eye, Shin moved before Lay. “With skills like that, why did you not participate in the Great War? Someone like you might even be capable of slaying the Four Evil Kings.”

In a single swing, Shin saw through Lay’s abilities.

“I like swords, but I hate war.”

“That’s an interesting thing to say.”

“Shin, these people are a troupe of traveling entertainers!” Reno called from behind him. Lay held Siegesta out to return the sword to Shin.

“My name is Shin Reglia. May I ask for yours?” Shin asked instead.

Lay hesitated for a moment. “It’s Lay.”

“You don’t seem to have your own demon sword.”

Lay smiled brightly. “Unfortunately, I left it somewhere far away.”

Shin turned around. “You may borrow that sword for the duration of your stay. Your payment will be to land a scratch on me.”

Lay blinked in surprise.

Hmm. It seemed Shin was in rather high spirits at the prospect of meeting his match. Now that I thought about it, he had always seemed to be enjoying himself during his duels with Kanon. Perhaps there was a different future in store for the two swordsmen now that they were both demons.

“Do you mean you’d like me to repay you by sparring with you?” Lay asked.

Shin didn’t respond. The answer was obvious.

“I doubt a regular demon like me would be a match for the right-hand man of the Demon King.”

“With that force-oriented style of yours, that may be true—for now.” Shin stored Gneodoros in a storage circle. “Come find me when you wish to return that sword,” he said, returning to Reno’s side.

§ 47. The Great War Tree

“Come, cenetello.”

At Reno’s voice, countless blinking green lights rose into the air. The fireflies, also known as spirit doctors, flickered in the night, illuminating the forest.

Reno held her hands out before her and drew a magic circle. “*Cenetel*.”

The cenetello began to glow brighter. They flew around the forest, healing the wounded spirits. Wilted plants and trees regained their color as the fireflies’ glowing dust fell upon them.

“Come to me, injured spirits. I’ll treat you,” Reno called out. Magic emanated from the six wings that had appeared on her back. She hovered slightly as she moved about the forest, using the light of Cenetel to heal the wounded spirits that came up to her.

As she progressed, she turned to Shin, who was walking beside her. “How did those divine beasts get past Anos’s wall?”

“They didn’t get past it. The wall is an extremely powerful curse against the gods,” Shin replied. While Beno levun could be crossed by expending a significant amount of power, it was sturdier against divine beings.

In contrast to humans and demons, even the lowest-ranked gods should have had the power to cross Beno levun. That is why I had gathered the power of the Hero, the Goddess of Creation, the Great Spirit, and the Demon King in order to create a curse strong enough to repel divinity. Thanks to that, it was impossible for the likes of divine beasts and keepers to cross the wall. Even the Heavenly Father would have to pay a hefty price in order to break through.

“Even if the laws of the world were reversed, it would be impossible for this number of divine beasts to pass the wall created by my liege,” Shin said, calmly analyzing the situation. Having known me personally, he had concluded that the guen would never be able to cross the Beno levun I had given my life to create.

“Then how did they get here? Are they like the titi? Their magic is weak, but a

mysterious power allows them to cross.”

“Not at all. No mysterious power could let them pass Beno levun. It specifically resists divinity—especially mere beasts.” Shin cast his gaze around the area. “We should assume they were already on this side of the wall when it was created. Someone entered Aharthern while we were in Dilhade and hid themselves until now.”

“Could it be that god? Nosgalia, was it?”

After thinking for a moment, Shin replied, “Divine beasts are messengers of the gods. They move only under their master’s command. Whether that master is the Heavenly Father is unclear, but there may be a god still lurking somewhere within the forest. Be on your guard.”

Reno looked nervously at the ground.

“Fear not. My liege’s order was to escort the Great Spirit Reno safely to Aharthern. I shall remain by your side until that god is slain.”

Reno looked up at Shin curiously. His expression was as cold as ever. “We’re already in Aharthern, you know?” she said.

“My liege would consider Aharthern to be the paradise of the spirits. I have yet to escort you there.”

Reno grinned. “You’re stubborn, but you’re also kind.”

“If that is what you believe, it is all thanks to my liege’s benevolence. I am merely the Demon King’s sword and right hand.”

Reno frowned, troubled for a response. “I didn’t know the Demon King of Tyranny had a kind side to him,” she finally admitted.

Shin nodded somewhat proudly.

Reno looked back ahead and continued through the forest. “What are you going to do after this is over, Shin?” she asked.

“With my master gone, there is no point in living in this era. I shall follow my liege and reincarnate two thousand years in the future.”

“I see. So the god hiding in this forest isn’t entirely a bad thing.”

Shin paused. “What do you mean by that?”

“Because I can play with you a little longer.”

With a straight face, Shin stared at the girl beside him. “I am merely following my liege’s order,” he pointed out.

“Right. But thank you for escorting me here, and for protecting me all this time.”

“Please express your gratitude to my liege, the great Demon King, who died the most honorable death.”

Reno giggled. “I did already. He said to thank *you* directly. Apparently you don’t normally guard anyone other than Anos, right? I’m sure you didn’t want to listen to the whims and demands of a spirit like me.”

“It is my honor to fulfill my liege’s order.”

“Liar. It’s written all over your face.”

Shin wore the same cold expression as always. It seemed their time traveling together had clued Reno in to the subtleties of Shin’s emotions.

“Reno!” a high-pitched suddenly called. The titi appeared from between the trees and began flitting around Reno.

“Granny is...!”

“Granny is disappearing!”

“It’s terrible!”

“She’s wilting!”

Reno nodded. In contrast to the panicked fairies, she had a look of readiness on her face. It didn’t seem like this spirit had anything to do with the guen attack.

“Let’s see her off together,” she said, setting off deeper into the forest.

We followed the group until we eventually reached a clearing at the end of the path. A great tree stood in the center of the clearing, green leaves overflowing from its ancient branches.

The Wolf of Hiding, the Spirit of Thunder and Wind, and the Great Water Spirit were among the many spirits gathered around the tree. Reno knelt on the ground and softly placed her hand against the trunk.

“Granny...” she murmured.

A face appeared on the tree. “Welcome home, Reno.”

The hoarse voice echoed quietly through the area. Reno nodded sadly.

“I see you’ve brought some adorable guests with you today. What is your name, child?”

“I am Anosh Polticoal.”

“Anosh. That’s a good name. My name is Migelonov—the Great War Tree, Migelonov. I am the spirit that imparts humanity with knowledge to survive the Great War.” Migelonov’s Magic Eyes stared at me. “Come here, Anosh. Your friends too—come tell me your names. Rest your hands against me.”

I stepped forward and pressed my fingertips to the trunk of the great tree. Lay and the others came up behind me and introduced themselves before doing the same. Glowing leaves fell from quivering branches and swirled around our bodies. Then the Great Tree began to address Misha and Sasha.

“Misha, Sasha, the two of you possess only half of the power you should have. Return to one, and your original power will awaken.”

Next, she spoke to Eleonore.

“Eleonore, you should learn new magic. You may be more suited to assisting others than fighting yourself. Think carefully about what fits you the most.”

Migelonov then turned her Eyes to Zeshia.

“Zeshia, you have great potential—the potential of a hero. Mirror magic seems to be your specialty.”

She spoke to Lay as well.

“Lay, Shin over there is your example. His sword will lead your way, helping you arrive somewhere different one day.”

Following Lay, Migelonov addressed Rina.

“Rina. You are not suited to battle. Find what you must do. Follow your heart.”

Finally, Migelonov’s magic focused on me. Unlike with the others, she did not speak immediately. She paused for a long moment.

“Ah. I have nothing to impart on you, Anosh. It happens from time to time, you know—being unable to see anything, that is. Even so, I can tell you hold great power. It’s most impressive. Perhaps you simply have no need for my knowledge,” Migelonov said somewhat sadly.

“They say you’re wilting,” I said.

“Yes, that’s right. I am fading. I will never again resurrect.”

“Does that mean your lore has ceased to exist?”

A gentle chuckle echoed through the forest. “It seems there is something I can teach you besides the ways of war,” Migelonov said happily. “If a rumor or legend comes to an end, the spirit born from that lore will pass away. But one more situation can result in a spirit’s death: when that spirit turns against their own lore.”

Spirits lived according to the rumors and legends from which they were born. Just like how Gennul was the Wolf of Hiding and Ennunen was the Great Tree of Learning, all spirits lived their lives accordingly.

“As the Great War Tree, I am the spirit who imparts knowledge for humans to survive the Great War. In other words, knowledge to defeat demons. But instead, I gave a demon, the Demon King of Tyranny, my assistance. I used my wisdom to come up with a way for demons and humans to coexist in peace.”

Migelonov, a spirit born to defeat demonkind, had gone against her lore by assisting them.

“It’s okay, Anosh. There’s no need to make such a face. You may be a demon, but none of this was your fault. I have lived for a long time—long enough. I have grown sick of imparting knowledge to kill others.”

Leaves fell from Migelonov’s branches and slowly drifted to the ground.

“I am grateful to the Demon King. In the end, I was able to use my knowledge

for peace. I couldn't have wished for a better way to go."

"Granny..." Reno hugged Migelonov's trunk tightly. "I'm so sorry. This is all because I asked something so unreasonable."

"It's not your fault, Reno. Besides, with the war over, the Great War Tree would have, in time, been forgotten. This life was destined to wilt sooner or later."

Migelonov's branches brushed over Reno's head, as though they were patting her softly.

"One day, you will have to make a similar choice. This is the fate of all spirits. You will face the choice to protect your lore as a spirit or to turn against your lore in order to protect those dear to you."

"But how do you know which to choose?" Reno asked.

"If you are unsure, listen to your heart. For their whole lives, spirits are subjected to the whims of their lore. They don't even realize it themselves. But your heart will always be your own. You're a clever child, Reno. I'm sure you'll realize it soon."

The Great Tree Migelonov began to emit a pale light. Her body gradually became more transparent, as though she was fading from existence.

"Protect what you wish to protect, Reno. I am satisfied with my life. Soon, peace will be upon you all."

The light shone even brighter, then faded completely. The great tree before us had vanished. The Great War Tree Migelonov had come to a definite end.

Reno stood staring at the space where Migelonov had just been. She remained still until Shin walked up to her.

"This is a problem," he said.

Reno turned to him.

"I want to stop your tears, but I'm afraid I don't know the right words to say."

With her tears threatening to spill down her face, Reno smiled at him. "Say, Shin, did the Demon King order you to comfort me?"

Shin was unable to respond.

Reno grinned. “Thank you. I’m happy just hearing that.” She stared at him closely. “Don’t worry. I don’t cry when I’m sad. My tears turn into spirits, after all.”

A single tear rolled down her cheek as she beamed from ear to ear. The droplet fell onto the ground, where it released a glimmering light. Moments later, a small sprout emerged from the dirt.

“It’d be a pity for a child to be born from tears of sorrow. I want them to be born from tears of happiness.”

The sprout that rose from the ground grew quickly, blooming into a flower. That flower began to release its own dazzling light as it shrank back into a bud, before shooting up once more and growing into a large tree. Leafy branches stretched from the trunk as it grew. Its growth didn’t stop even as it surpassed the size of Migelonov, continuing until the trunk pierced the clouds high above.

“I heard a lovely rumor,” Reno said. “There’s a school where lots of people gather to learn all kinds of things during times of peace. It’s run by a somewhat stubborn grandpa with terrible artistic sense, but he’ll teach you everything.”

A familiar tree towered over us.

“Allow me to introduce him to everyone. This is our new family: Ennunien, the Great Tree of Learning.”

§ 48. Teardrop Blossom

After the birth of the Great Tree Ennunen, Reno gave us a tour of the inside. The classroom, the Staircases of Guniel, and the cloud corridor we'd seen in the Magical Age were all present within.

The small castle at the top of the tree was to be used as Reno's residence. Two thousand years in the future, the Spirit King had occupied the same place, so perhaps the location was reserved for whoever ruled Aharthern.

Eventually, we returned to the classroom lined with tree stumps.

"That should be everything for now," Reno said, wrapping up the tour. "There are still more rooms left, but you can ask Ennunen about them later if you're interested. His Magic Eyes will watch out for any violence within the walls, so there's no need to worry about the divine beasts attacking."

So the Great Tree Ennunen had been born as a form of defense against the gods.

"I didn't know you could create new spirits so freely," I said to Reno.

She crouched down to be at eye level with me. "I can't create them however I like. As you saw earlier, my tears can turn rumors and legends into spirits. They won't be born unless I wish for it from the bottom of my heart. Sometimes they're born different to how I imagined, and sometimes they're born without me even realizing it."

"Huh? If the spirits are born when you wish for it, then they're being created freely, aren't they?" Eleonore asked curiously.

"Ah, right. That's true, but that's not what I mean. My wishes themselves are formed of rumors and legends. As the mother of all spirits, I have to give birth to a fitting child."

It seemed that even her own wishes were influenced by rumors and legends. Spirits sure lived suffocating lives.

“Besides, many spirits pop up naturally regardless of my tears—far more spirits than the ones born from them. I’m sure that’s where you came from too, Rina.”

Indeed, if spirits could only be born from Reno’s tears, her own birth would make no sense. She wasn’t the oldest spirit in existence either.

It was reasonable to assume that, after Reno’s death, Rina had been born naturally as a fran. I would have liked to ask Reno for more details, but Rina was in the room with us. Rina would disappear if she realized she was a love fairy, so I would have to find some other time to ask.

“Will you and your troupe be staying in Aharthern for a while, Anosh?” Reno asked.

“If our presence isn’t a bother to you, yes.”

“Of course it’s not. You’re all welcome. I talked with Shin earlier, and you don’t seem to be bad demons. We rarely get any traveling entertainers, so all the spirits will love to have you around too. Feel free to make yourselves at home here.”

“Thanks.”

Reno grinned and nodded, then stood up and started walking away. “Shin, come with me,” she said over her shoulder.

Without a word, Shin followed her.

“Now then,” I said, standing up from my stump, “Lay, Misha, keep an eye on those two.”

“Okay.” Misha nodded.

“What about you?” Lay asked.

“There’s something I wish to check. The rest of you may relax for now.”

I had just opened the door to the classroom and stepped outside when I heard the sound of tottering footsteps behind me. It was Zeshia.

“Are you coming with me?”

“Zeshia...will guard you.” She stuck close to my side, as though to protect me.

What was this? Had she been influenced by Shin?

Eleonore began to explain, having caught up to us from the classroom. “Ever since you shrunk, she’s started thinking of herself as an older sister.”

“Hmm. I have indeed become smaller, but that’s hardly enough to warrant Zeshia’s protection.”

“Zeshia will be...your big sister!”

Her expression seemed more radiant than usual today.

Eleonore giggled. “She’s normally surrounded by people bigger than her, so she’s super excited to be the big one for once.”

“It’s okay, Anosh. Zeshia is here. Don’t worry...” Zeshia patted me on the head.

All things considered, I supposed there was no helping it. I couldn’t just disregard her rare show of emotion.

“I’ll be counting on you.”

“My...pleasure!”

Eleonore, Zeshia, and I set off through the great tree. We followed the path Rina had led us down two thousand years in the future, passing through the same area several times.

One right turn at a three-way intersection later, a stone statue came into view. It was the frog in the suit of armor. In modern times, it had held a broken sword, but here, it was unarmed.

Incautiously passing the statue, we entered a door to a small room with nothing inside. I turned around and reopened the door, revealing a vast forest—the Forest of Books, where the lilan resided.

I quickly counted the green books hanging from the trees. “Hmm. Only a hundred volumes, huh?”

“Are you...looking for something?”

“I was, but it’s probably not here.”

“Oh. That’s sad...” Zeshia looked down in disappointment.

“Well, we can still give it a try. Can you help me gather the green books and look for the one that mentions the love fairy?”

Zeshia nodded happily. “I’ll do my best.”

She ran through the forest to catch the green books.

“If there are only a hundred volumes, does that mean the rest of the spirits are yet to be born?” Eleonore asked.

“Probably. I was merely hoping the torn page is still in there.”

Just then, a hoarse voice echoed through the trees. “My apologies. I’m still in the middle of preparing my teaching materials. It’ll take a little longer for all the lilan to gather. Classes will start after that.”

It was the voice of Ennunen. If the books weren’t ready yet, we should just come back later.

“How’s it going, Zeshia?”

“Nothing...yet.”

Zeshia had ten volumes balanced on her head as she ran after the book fairies. The stack of books swayed dangerously but didn’t topple over.

“I’ve got plans somewhere else. What do you want to do?”

With a troubled expression, she looked between me and the lilan. It seemed she wanted to gather more books.

“In that case, I shall entrust the gathering of the lilan to you. It’s a top secret mission, so don’t mention it to anyone else.”

“Understood.”

Zeshia, brimming with enthusiasm, knelt on the floor in imitation of a certain someone. I decided to leave it to her.

“Don’t worry. I’ll watch her,” Eleonore said, raising her finger.

“Let me know if anything happens.”

“Got it.”

Once I left the Forest of Books, I contacted Misha through Leaks. “*Are Reno*

and Shin with you?" I asked.

"They are. We're on the other side of the invisible door at the end of the Staircases of Guniel—the door past the invisible staircase."

That room, huh? I set off back through the great tree.

After climbing to the top of one of the staircases I now associated with the spirit trials, I made my way past the invisible staircase and through the invisible door. I was met by the sight of a field. But instead of the flowers that bloomed everywhere in the future, there was only grass.

"Here, Shin. What do you think this is?" Reno was saying, extending her hands to reveal five flowers hovering above her palms. They were a vivid blue, just like her lake-colored hair.

"I don't know."

"They're teardrop blossoms: flowers that have absorbed my tears. You know, like that flower that created the Great Tree Ennunien. These are the other flowers born from those tears."

"Are you saying these could become spirits?"

"They might, or they might not. If the teardrop blossoms bear fruit without wilting, it'll become a spirit with a rumor or legend. If they wilt, my tears will disappear with them."

Reno set the teardrop blossoms down gently in the middle of the field. The five flowers immediately took root in the earth.

"Teardrop blossoms require love to stop them from wilting. Like this."

A bubble of water appeared in Reno's palm. When she tipped her hand, the water rained over the flowers as though poured from a watering can. The teardrop blossoms responded by growing rapidly and developing large petals. New buds grew from the ground, increasing the number of teardrop blossoms. In no time at all, half the field had blossomed into a flower garden.

"This seems to be my limit for now. You give it a go too, Shin," Reno said with a grin.

Shin stared back at her, his expression flat. "What? Me?"

“Yup. Let’s see...” Reno drew a magic circle and reached into it. When she pulled it out, she held a metal watering can. “Here. I bought this on the way here.”

“But why me?”

“I think it’d do you some good to come into a little more contact with life and living things. I’m sure you’ll have fun if you do.”

Shin drew the iron sword at his waist and observed the blade. “I’ve come into contact with more living things than I can count,” he replied.

“That’s not what I mean!” Reno wailed, but Shin was serious.

“I don’t understand your point.” He returned his sword to its sheath.

“You’ll get it once you try. Just give it a go!” Reno forcefully pushed the watering can into Shin’s hands. She used her magic to fill the can with water, then cheerfully smiled in response to Shin’s silence.

“If you insist.”

Overpowered by the smile of the Mother of Spirits, Shin used the watering can to water the flowers around him. As he did, they began to wilt rapidly.

“Wait, wait! Stop, Shin! You need love to raise teardrop blossoms. The love part is important! If you channel such harsh feelings while giving them water, they’ll wilt right away.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Smile. Start with a smile. That’s one form of love.”

Shin offered Reno a smile that could be described as expressionless. “Like this?”

The flowers wilted even faster than before.

“No! I said love, l-o-v-e! Put your heart into it.”

“I know nothing of love.”

“Ugh, there’s no need to be so stubborn. I know you love the Demon King. Am I wrong?”

Shin's eyes widened faintly.

"That's a form of love too. Just water them while thinking of your love for Anos," Reno said. She pressed closer to Shin, her expression innocent.

"It is not my place to harbor feelings of love for my liege. I serve him out of gratitude, not love. The almighty Demon King saved me when I was nothing more than a sword."

"Huh? What does that mean?"

"Don't worry yourself. It's not a pleasant story."

Reno glared at Shin. Just then, giggles could be heard.

"Close friends?"

"Buddy-buddy."

"Reno and..."

"...sword uncle."

It was the titi.

"How nice."

"We're jealous!"

"Do we want to play too?"

"Titi wants to play!"

The fairies flew around Shin, chattering noisily.

"Play!"

"Hey, play with us!"

"Sword uncle!"

"Let's play!"

Shin looked at them, confused.

Reno howled with laughter. "You saved them earlier, so they're fond of you now. Why don't you play with them?"

"I do not know what playing involves," Shin said, turning around.

“Tag!”

“Let’s play tag.”

“Spirit tag.”

“Sword uncle is it!”

The titi flew around giggling.

“Come, everyone!”

“Gennul!”

“Gigadeith!”

“Cenetello!”

One by one, spirits began appearing in the flower field. They all stared at Shin, eager to repay him for saving them.

“Do you guys want to join in?” Reno asked us.

“No, we’ll pass. We’re still tired from our long journey,” I said.

“I see. Then it’ll just be us spirits. Hey, everyone! If you can run from Shin for a whole minute, he’ll do whatever you say.”

At Reno’s words, the spirits scattered.

“I will also decline.” Shin turned his back on them and walked away. A mischievous grin appeared on Reno’s face.

“Oh? So the Demon King’s right-hand man isn’t good enough to catch us. I see how it is.”

Shin stopped dead in his tracks. “I cannot overlook that statement,” he said, turning back. His eyes were serious.

“Then let’s do it. Are you ready?”

Shin nodded. A murderous aura surrounded his body. Whether he was still aware that this was a game of tag was unclear.

“You have one minute, okay? Here we go. Everyone, run!”

“Then with all due respect—” Shin said, then disappeared.

“Eek!”

The titi bumped into something and rebounded. The other fairies showed similar reactions one after another.

“Someone touched me!”

“So quick!”

“Sword uncle moves quick!”

The titi giggled with delight. Gigadeith and the cenetello darting around Shin were also caught in no time.

“You should have made the time limit ten seconds.”

Shin came to a stop and closed his eyes. He was doing so to capture Gennul. The Spirit of Hiding was running around the flower field, unseen. However, Shin was able to sense his presence.

“You’re quite fast,” Shin said, placing his hand on Gennul’s head. Gennul’s tail wagged like that of a dog being petted by his owner. “However, my liege would have caught all of you in less than half the time it took me.”

“Keep petting him like that,” Reno said.

With his eyes still closed, Shin turned towards her.

“Gennul rarely ever gets to play with someone who can keep up with him,” she added.

That was no surprise. Gennul didn’t even exist to those whose eyes were open.

“Will this do?” Shin petted Gennul’s head. The giant wolf sat down like an obedient puppy.

“You’re kind of like a spirit too,” Reno said to Shin.

“What do you mean?”

“A sword-wielding spirit that has forgotten how to love. That sounds like something that might exist.”

Shin remained silent, showing no interest in her words.

“Say, Shin, have you ever lost at tag before?”

“I don’t normally play, but I’ve never let an enemy escape before.”

“Then today’s your first defeat.”

Shin gave her a questioning look.

“We were playing tag with all the spirits. I’m a spirit too, you know?”

One minute had already passed. Reno was technically the winner.

“I know it’s a little unfair, but a win is a win. Oh, but the Demon King’s right-hand man was definitely amazing,” Reno said, keeping a handle on Shin.

“I have no excuses.”

“Now, I wonder what I should make you do...”

Just then, a hoarse voice interrupted Reno.

“Reno, there’s a guest here for you and Shin,” Ennunien said.

Reno’s face immediately stiffened. The guest was most likely not a spirit.

“Who is it?” she asked.

“He calls himself Eldmed, the Conflagration King. He says he has something to discuss regarding the gods.”

§ 49. The Conflagration King's Proposition

Shin and Reno exited the great tree to find the Conflagration King waiting outside. He was a tall and slender man with purple eyes and hair, dressed in a long trench coat and a top hat. There was a long cane in his hand.

“Bwa ha ha! Thank you for sparing your time today, right hand of the Demon King, Mother of Spirits,” Eldmed said lightly. I observed the three of them from within the great tree.

“What do you want?” Shin asked bluntly. He glared at the Conflagration King warily.

The war between humans and demons was over. The alliance between the Demon King and the Four Evil Kings had ended.

“Hey now, there's no need to look like that. I've brought good news for you two.”

“What is it?”

The Conflagration King smirked. “I know where the Heavenly Father is hiding within the Great Spirit Forest.”

Shin's glare grew harsher.

“The Heavenly Father's target is you, Mother of Spirits. That god is trying to use you as the womb for a Child of God who will, in two thousand years, destroy the reincarnation of Demon King Anos.”

The tip of a sword pointed at Eldmed as spoke. Shin had drawn the Pillage Blade faster than the eye could see.

“Not even Reno, with the help of the Great Spirit Forest, could locate Nosgalia,” Shin said. “I doubt you could have done any better, Conflagration King.”

Of course, it wasn't completely impossible. If Eldmed was working with Nosgalia, it wouldn't be strange for him to know where the god was hiding.

“How sharp of you. That’s right; Nosgalia was the one who approached me first. He asked if I was interested in the Child of God who would destroy the Demon King. Of course, I answered yes—”

No sooner had Eldmed uttered that, than fresh blood sprayed from his body. Shin had swung Gilionojos, slicing off the Evil King’s limbs.

The cane in the Conflagration King’s hand fell to the floor. Without his arms, Eldmed was unable to wield a weapon. Without his legs, Eldmed was unable to move. The Conflagration King was as good as helpless.

Yet he was laughing heartily.

“Bwa ha ha! Splendid! As expected of the Demon King’s right-hand man. You sealed my limbs without giving me the slightest chance to counterattack. It’s my first time facing your sword, but I’m truly astonished. To think that someone of your power would settle with the position of a mere subordinate with no further ambition.”

With a sparkle in his eyes, the Conflagration King raised his voice in excitement.

“Oh, how the Demon King excels not only in strength, but influence too!”

It had been a while since I’d seen Eldmed like this, but he seemed to be having fun. The man, supposedly my enemy, was always praising me for some reason. It was hard to understand him.

“However, the Demon King has one fatal flaw. You should know what that is.”

“My liege has no flaws.”

The Conflagration King nodded smugly. “Exactly! That is his flaw! The Demon King of Tyranny has no flaws. He is so flawless that he has no enemies. Demon King Anos needs enemies if he is to become a stronger Demon King—the true Demon King!”

Sasha, who had been listening to Eldmed’s speech, pulled a face of disgust. “Say, Anos, what was that?”

“He’s always been rather childish. Ever since that time I gave him a light beating, his expectations of me have been unfathomable. Still, all he ever does

is pick pointless fights and cackle delightedly when defeated, so I've never bothered to deal with him."

"I don't get it at all. Do you, Misha?"

Misha turned her Eyes on Eldmed. Now, how would someone who excelled at reading emotions see him?

"Creepy."

Sasha nodded. "Right?"

So that was it. Perhaps the man was beyond help after all.

"Thus, I shall always act as the Demon King's enemy," Eldmed continued, preaching as though he were speaking the truths of the universe. "However, I shall never side with the gods! While I am interested in the Child of God that will one day destroy the Demon King, I have my doubts whether they could ever rival his power. That is why I am here to inform you of Nosgalia's plans. Only a Child of God beloved by fate can overcome the attempts of the Demon King's right-hand man and Great Spirit Reno at preventing their birth and be worthy of fighting the Demon King!"

Good grief, what a juvenile thing to say. Was everything a game to him?

"I see your thinking is as incomprehensible as always," Shin replied. "So you're saying that any Child of God defeated by us is unworthy of your attention, correct?"

"Precisely! So you do understand me, right hand of the Demon King." Eldmed beamed enthusiastically. "The Demon King will rise to greater heights! That is what I wish to see. For that, I must first prepare a worthy enemy for him—even if gods and spirits must be sacrificed!"

Shin sighed. "My liege desires no such thing."

"Bwa ha ha! What he desires matters not. This is the destiny of the almighty Demon King—the inevitable path he must walk upon—which is why he walks that path with absolute dominance!"

Eldmed's speech was given not only gleefully, but also with complete earnestness.

“During the war against Azesion, I screened multitudes of humans, in search of those worthy of facing the Demon King. But in the end, they were nothing more than their appearance would suggest. Only Hero Kanon could stand before the Demon King, yet not even the Great Hero could defeat him! What other choice remained but to rely on the power of the gods?”

The Conflagration King declared his thoughts of insanity as though they were the most reasonable of conclusions.

“Let us do everything in our power to prevent the birth of the Child of God! If the plans of the gods outweigh our abilities, then this Evil King shall take your side.”

Shin glared at Eldmed, who was beaming at him triumphantly. There wasn't an ounce of an ulterior motive in his expression.

“Shin, there's something wrong with this person,” Reno whispered.

“Don't worry about it. He's always like this. Compared to those who spin lies, the Conflagration King is far easier to read. If we stop the birth of the Child of God, he will lose all interest immediately.”

“Bwa ha ha! You know me well, right-hand man of the Demon King. That is correct—which is why there is one correct answer. No?”

Shin's gaze returned to the Conflagration King. “Lead me to Nosgalia. I shall slaughter the Child of God before it can be born.”

With a swipe of the Pillage Blade, Shin slashed at Eldmed's feet. The stolen power of movement was returned to Eldmed, who set off immediately.

“Follow me. He's this way.”

Shin and Reno followed Eldmed.

I hid myself with Lynel and trailed after the three of them. After walking for some time, we arrived at a spring in the forest.

“Is Nosgalia here?” Shin asked.

Eldmed nodded.

“I cannot sense him.”

“Gods move according to their order. Certain conditions must be met for the Heavenly Father to appear in this forest. Now, Mother of Spirits, stand in the middle of the spring.”

Reno and Shin exchanged looks, then nodded. Reno stepped towards the spring. With her power as a great spirit, she walked across the surface instead of sinking.

Once she reached the center, she turned to Eldmed. “Will this do?”

“Perfect.” Eldmed stood facing Reno. “The Heavenly Father exists under the order of creating gods. The principles of his actions will thus conform to this order. In other words, the condition for making him appear...”

Eldmed removed his top hat, reached inside, and pulled out an hourglass. For a brief moment, the timepiece emitted an ominous power, before the red sand inside began to fall.

“Agh!” Reno cried as she clutched the left side of her chest.

There were a total of forty-three red sand hourglasses surrounding the spring, hidden by Lynel. These were the Hourglasses of Conflagration that belonged to the Conflagration King. The one cursed by the hourglasses would lose their life when the sand ran out.

However, their appearance struck me as odd. Eldmed’s arms had been cut and infected with the Pillage Blade’s curse. He shouldn’t be able to use his hourglasses.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Shin asked sharply. Gilionojos swept through the air, and forty-three hourglasses shattered, breaking the curse. One beat later, the hourglass in the Conflagration King’s hand followed suit, but Eldmed was unaffected.

“The Great Spirit Reno is the womb of the Child of God. If she dies, the Child of God shall not be born. Do you understand?” He raised his arms and laughed heartily. “If I attempt to destroy her, the Heavenly Father will appear!”

“I fail to believe your ruse will summon him,” Shin replied calmly.

Eldmed laughed. “Of course, I fully intend to go through with this! If the

Mother of Spirits truly is destroyed, then so be it. As the Demon King's trusted retainer, you have nothing to lose, do you?"

"So if Reno is destroyed, the birth of the Child of God will be prevented," Shin said. "If Nosgalia appears before she is destroyed, I can just cut him down instead. Either way, the threat to my liege will be removed. Is that what you're trying to say?"

"Your orders to protect the Great Spirit Reno are only valid under the assumption that she escapes her fate. Why would you protect what could become a threat to your precious master?"

With a pained expression, Reno watched Shin, who kept his icy gaze fixed on the Conflagration King.

The next moment, Eldmed tossed his top hat into the air. One after another, more Hourglasses of Conflagration fell out of the hat until they surpassed three hundred in number. The hourglasses' curse bared its fangs and bit down on Reno's heart.

"That is the reasoning of the weak."

Shin stepped forward, shattering the hourglasses around them with one swing. The top hat soaring through the air was shredded into pieces, and the Pillage Blade pierced the Conflagration King through the heart.

"Urgh..."

The effect of the Pillage Blade's curse varied as per the part of the body it cut. When it slashed the heart, it would steal the victim's life.

"My liege commanded me to protect the Mother of Spirits until she reached Aharthern. That order takes priority above all else. Besides..."

Shin drew the Pillage Blade from the Conflagration King's body. Eldmed stumbled backwards, then dropped to the ground like a lifeless puppet.

"The Demon King of Tyranny isn't so weak as to require the sacrifice of another life in order to protect himself."

§ 50. Like a Sword

Laughter echoed through the Great Spirit Forest, cackling over and over. It was laughter bubbling with the delight of an innocent child and the insanity of a madman.

Eldmed, who should have been dead, abruptly sat up. No magic circle had appeared, so he hadn't revived using Ingall.

"Powerful, mighty, outstanding! How wonderful indeed! As expected of the Demon King's right-hand man— No, you're even better than I thought! Of course, this wouldn't be interesting otherwise."

Golden light flowed around Eldmed. Powerful magic was rising from his source. Reno twitched in response, her Magic Eyes focused on Eldmed's abyss.

"The power of the gods..." she mumbled.

"Precisely. As you are already aware, the Demon King beat up Nosgalia rather badly. I allowed the Heavenly Father to borrow my body in order for him to resurrect as quickly as possible, but alas, he never responds to me when I talk to him. Thus, I came up with the brilliant idea of killing off the host—and it went exactly as I'd expected!" he said, laughing with delight.

The Conflagration King's life had been stolen by the Pillage Blade. He was now speaking by borrowing the power of the other presence within him.

"So your plan would work out either way," Shin said.

The Conflagration King's lips lifted in a smirk. "If the Mother of Spirits were on the verge of dying, the Heavenly Father would appear. If she died and he didn't appear, then the Child of God would never amount to anything. If you prevented her death by killing me, the Heavenly Father would appear to stop you. If he failed and we both died together, then the Heavenly Father was never a threat. No matter what happened, everything would work in my favor!"

"Wouldn't that last option leave you dead too, though?"

“Bwa ha ha! How could I create an enemy worthy of the Demon King if I myself feared death? Prioritizing my life over my goal would impede my plans! Fools who fall behind in both their life and their ambitions can lie in their graves for all I care!”

Eldmed clenched his fists as though he were grasping the air. His eyes sparkling, he spoke like an excited schoolboy.

“Do you understand? A dream should be all or nothing, and a life without a dream, without this excitement—this stimulation—is as good as death to me! Now, stop dawdling and come out, Heavenly Father! If you are truly worthy of being the Demon King’s enemy, then prove yourself! Otherwise, I shall claim your divine power as my own!”

As the Conflagration King shouted, the hole in his chest closed up. The curse of the Pillage Blade had been forcibly lifted, returning Eldmed’s life to him.

“Prostrate thyself, foolish demons,” a solemn voice stated. The Conflagration King looked the same as ever, but his power was clearly on a different level to before. *“The words of a god are absolute.”*

Nosgalia had seized control of Eldmed’s body. His words were infused with the compelling power of a god. The power almost made the impossible sound possible—when his words were suddenly drowned out by the sound of swinging metal. The Pillage Blade moved faster than the speed of sound, cutting his voice.

“There is only one I kneel before,” Shin replied. “I shall not lower my head before a mere god.” He stepped up to Nosgalia as he spoke, pointing the tip of the Pillage Blade at the god’s throat. “Were you double-crossed by the Conflagration King?”

Nosgalia chuckled. “Everything moves according to the order of the gods. Revere and fear us. Our plans are absolute.”

Grass and flowers rustled. A multitude of silver shadows leaped from between the trees, lunging at Reno. It was the guen.

“It doesn’t matter how many there are,” Shin said. With a single slash of the Pillage Blade, dozens of guen fell. Their legs had been cut and their movements

sealed. “The Demon King’s army does not fear the gods. The only one we revere and fear is the Demon King of Tyranny.”

Shin used Fless to retreat to Reno’s position, then drew a magic circle. When he reached into the circle, a sinister power overflowed from within.

“Did you think you, with wounds afflicted by my liege, could do anything?”

Nosgalia smirked. “Ah, the Disastrous God-slaying Sword.”

Shin’s brow twitched.

“Thou hast gained a rather demon-like heart since the Demon King took thee in, but that chest of thine shall forever remain an empty void. There is no love in thy heart. Thus, thou shalt always be craving—always living with that emptiness. Did thou think that void could be filled through reincarnation?”

Shin silently glared at Nosgalia.

“In light of thine ignorance, I shall bestow upon thee the knowledge of the gods,” the Heavenly Father declared. “No matter how many times thou art reborn, no matter how much thou yearnest, it is all for naught. The emotion of love never existed in thy source to begin with. Thou were born to feel eternal emptiness, as a pitiful sword that can only connect to the world by cutting down others.”

Just then, a bolt of lightning struck Nosgalia’s face. Thanks to his anti-magic, he remained unwounded. Reno, in a rage, had fired Gigadeil at the god.

“Stop saying whatever you want!” she cried. “Shin can be blunt and stubborn, but he’s far nicer than you’ll ever be!”

“Ha ha!” Nosgalia sneered. “Great Spirit Reno, allow me to enlighten thee, as well, of thine ignorance. Shin Reglia’s source was not originally that of a demon. It was of a demon sword: the Disastrous God-slaying Sword, Shin Reglia. The sword was created by the ancient ancestors of demonkind in order to fight the gods.”

Hmm. That was news to me. Shin had never been one to talk about himself—although I had never bothered to ask either.

“According to the legends of the gods, the demon sword that continuously

cut down our kind gradually began to gain a mind of its own. Meanwhile, the ancient demon that once wielded Shin Reglia became aware that he was approaching his limits—that it was impossible to fully destroy us. So what dost thou think he did?”

Reno waited for Nosgalia to continue.

“He gave Shin Reglia all of his power,” he said cheerfully, “believing that one day someone would use that demon sword to destroy us in his stead. Thus, the ancient demon disappeared, and Shin Reglia obtained his demon body.”

The Heavenly Father gave his speech in a majestic, pompous tone.

“The ancient demon never would have expected such a result. By a series of coincidences, the Disastrous God-slaying Sword had become a demon. However, even with a mind and body, a demon sword will always be a demon sword. Shin Reglia was born to fight and will never be able to love. He is a sword in demon form. He chooses a master worthy of his service and then obeys that master by cutting down their enemies.”

So Shin’s loyalty was due to a demon sword’s nature of choosing its own owner. It was indeed very rare for demon swords and holy swords to betray the owner they had selected.

“An incomplete demon such as thee would have been eternally tormented by the deficit in thy heart. However—” Nosgalia paused, grinning. He then uttered his next words to Shin as though to bestow a blessing. “Give thanks to me, O Disastrous God-slaying Sword. I shall grant thee a miracle. The love thou wouldst have eternally sought in vain can be granted by the rulers of order.”

Nosgalia walked towards Shin. Like Reno, he stepped on the surface of the water. He spoke quietly, his words laced with magic.

“Shin Reglia, I grant thee the emotion of love. Raise the Child of God, the child to be born from the Great Spirit Reno. Raise the order that will destroy the Demon King.”

Shin swung Gilionojos, cutting those words down, before drawing Gneodoros, the God Slasher, from a magic circle.

“Unfortunately, it is as you say.” Light flashed. Nosgalia’s head went flying

before his next breath. “In the end, a demon sword is a demon sword. I have no need for love. Like a sword, this body of mine—together with the void in my chest—will serve my liege for the rest of eternity.”

Nosgalia’s head fell to the ground, bouncing twice before rolling a few feet away. His eyes turned to glare at Shin and Reno. “*The words of a god are absolute. Thou canst not escape ord—*”

Before Nosgalia could finish his command, Gneodoros pierced through his skull. Particles of magic scattered into the air as Nosgalia’s head disintegrated.

Shin frowned. “He escaped.”

The divine beasts surrounding them had disappeared while they’d been distracted.

“My apologies,” Shin said. “The gods aren’t easily destroyed, but he won’t make a move again for a while. The beasts will remain an issue, but they shouldn’t increase in number until Nosgalia regains his power. Aharthern will return to normal soon.”

“Yeah...” Reno nodded, her expression gloomy.

“Is something wrong?”

“Nope. Let’s head back.”

“I’ll take the lead.”

Shin strode on ahead as the pair headed back to the Great Tree. With her gaze fixed on the ground, Reno trudged behind him. She kept looking up and tilting her head, as though she had something on her mind. Eventually, she raised her head with a look of determination.

“Shin,” she called, coming to a stop as Ennunien came into view. Shin turned back in response. “Thank you for protecting me again.”

“It was by order of my liege.”

Reno slowly shook her head. “I’m sorry.”

For a moment, Shin failed to respond. “What do you mean?” he finally asked.

“For what I said in the teardrop blossom field. I’m sorry for telling you to put

your heart in it.”

Teardrop blossoms grew with love. However, Shin lacked that emotion.

“Rest assured, I also cannot be hurt.”

“But you called yourself empty,” Reno mumbled, hanging her head.

“It’s no big deal—”

“You called yourself empty! I think it’s a big deal!” Reno stepped closer to Shin and grabbed his hand. “I’ll teach you to love.”

“I’m not sure I understand.”

“It’s my responsibility! If you hadn’t protected me, you would have obtained love.”

“That was my liege’s order,” Shin replied quietly. “There’s no need to let it bother you. As that god said, the emotion is entirely absent from my source. There’s nothing that can be done about—”

“That’s not true! I believe you have a heart. It’s just a little hard to see it.” Reno smiled reassuringly. “I’ll do my best, so humor me. It can just be for the time it takes to find the rest of the divine beasts—before you give your life to reincarnate.”

“Is that an order to me as your guard?”

“It’s not an order, but if that’s what it takes to make you listen, then let’s say it is.”

Shin thought for a moment, then said, “I understand.”

“Then let’s get going. Let’s go play with everyone in the garden again!”

Together, the two walked back to the Great Tree.

§ 51. Hidden Sword Art

Sometime later...

I was climbing one of the Staircases of Guniel when I spotted Reno up ahead of me. She was holding her metal watering can in her hand while practically skipping up the stairs.

“Reno,” I called, prompting her to turn around.

“Oh, hello, Anosh. Are you going to the garden too?”

“That’s right,” I said, moving alongside her to climb the stairs.

Hmm. It was rare for her to be apart from Shin. This was my chance to ask her something.

“If you don’t mind me asking, is it possible for a spirit to change into a different spirit with the same name?”

“Huh? Hmm, I’m not sure. If their rumor or legend changes, the spirit will change accordingly, but the lore that shaped them at the moment of their birth has the biggest influence on their life.” Reno tilted her head in thought as she explained. “For example, I’m the Mother of Spirits, right? Being the mother of all spirits is the basis of my very being. The day that that lore changes will be the day that I fade away.”

“So a rumor or legend that contradicts the basis of your existence will shorten that spirit’s life span. Is that what you mean?”

“Yup, that’s right. Spirits can’t reincarnate like demons and humans. We can’t come back as a different spirit. Instead, we stick around for as long as our lore exists.”

I had been hoping to manipulate a few legends to do something about Avos Dilhevia, but those legends were based on the Demon King of Tyranny. There was no changing my existence.

“But rumors and legends that take shape after the spirit’s birth can still apply

to them,” Reno continued. “Take the teardrop blossoms, for example. Before, my tears couldn’t create new spirits, but the rumor was spread. Since it didn’t contradict my existence as the Mother of Spirits, I gained the power that the rumor described.”

Was that so? At any rate, there was no use coming up with a good idea for a rumor if it couldn’t be spread wide enough.

“Is this to do with Rina?”

“Perhaps. It could be, but I’m not sure yet. I’m still looking into it.”

“I see. Let me know if you find anything.”

Our conversation ended as we reached the invisible door. Reno opened it and went inside. Misha, Rina, Lay, and Shin were waiting for us there. Reno beamed when she spotted Shin’s back.

“Shin, let’s water the flowers!” she said.

Shin’s head remained fixed as his eyes glanced at Reno. “Please wait a moment. I am currently engaged with him.”

He was facing Lay, who was wielding the Sword of Intent. They were dueling for Lay to land a hit on Shin and return Siegesta, but Lay seemed to be struggling. As far as I knew, this was their seventh match that day.

“Aw, it’s no fair that Lay gets to hog all your time.”

“I’m not suited for watering the flowers. They’ll wilt immediately.”

Reno pouted. “Why would you say that?! You promised! It’ll definitely work out! Stupid! Stupid Shin!”

Shin shot another glance at Reno. “How troubling.”

Watching the two of them, Lay leaned towards Shin. “Shall I give you a bit of advice?” he whispered.

Shin’s brow twitched upwards. “What would that be?”

“If you tell her you’ll deal with me quickly for her sake, she’ll brighten up again.”

If Lay hadn’t been there, Reno and Shin wouldn’t have had a dispute in the

first place. He had only made the suggestion to keep the past as unchanged as possible.

“Wouldn’t the result be the same?”

“It’s just like with swords—you can cut in a way that leaves a nick in your opponent’s blade, or you can cut so it doesn’t. I shouldn’t need to explain which way is more advantageous, right?”

Shin fell silent for a moment. “You have a point,” he then said.

Lay stepped forward and swung the Sword of Intent. “You’re wide open! Hyah!”

Sword clashed against sword. Shin knocked away Siegesta with one of the thousand swords in his arsenal—Cadenalios, the Bladeless Sword.

“Reno.”

“What?” Reno replied, still sulking.

“I shall deal with him as quickly as possible, so please wait just a little longer.”

At that, Reno’s expression softened. She grinned from ear to ear. “Okay, I’ll be waiting!”

The two swords clashed together noisily. Shin brushed aside every one of Lay’s rapid swings.

“I’m surprised,” Shin said.

“That’s just how it is. Try changing the way you think a little.”

As the Sword of Intent crossed with the Bladeless Sword, the two blades overlapped perfectly. It was almost as though Lay’s Sword of Intent were being magnetically drawn to the opposing sword.

“No. I’m referring to the speed of your growth.”

Lay lunged forward, forcing Shin back.

“Each time we cross blades, you absorb my techniques. Your sword is nothing like what it was when we first met.”

The thousand swords often mentioned with Shin’s name not only referred to

the number of demon swords he possessed, but the variety of sword techniques he knew—and Lay was acquiring those techniques at an alarming rate.

“It’s about time I returned this sword to you.”

Lay put all his might behind the Sword of Intent. The moment Shin held his ground against him, Lay demagnetized his blade and parried the Bladeless Sword. Shin lost his balance by just a fraction—but that fraction was all the opening Lay needed to swing Siegesta down.

“Ha!”

He had him—or so Lay thought. The next moment, he blinked as though he couldn’t believe his eyes. Seeing through the trajectory of the incoming sword, Shin evaded the blade with minimal movement. There was less than a millimeter between his body and the blade.

“Allow me to show you something.”

No sooner had Shin uttered those words, than Lay gaped in astonishment. Shin’s magic had completely disappeared. Not even a ripple could be detected—it was completely gone.

Magic was something that constantly seeped from the source. Using a spell to erase that—not just hide it—was completely unheard of. Such a task would be more difficult the more powerful the caster was.

The next moment, the Bladeless Sword’s power increased to an unparalleled degree. Crackling and spitting, a surge of magic rose from Cadenalios. Shin clutched the sword in both hands and pointed the tip at Lay. Then, with one smooth step, he swung the demon sword downwards.

Faster than the blade could glint, the sword disappeared from the world. Lay somehow managed to stand his ground by bracing the Sword of Intent at the last moment. A vibrant clash rang throughout the flower field. Flowers flew into the air.

“That was close, but—” Lay broke off midsentence, falling to his knees.
“What? Urgh...”

A gash opened from his shoulder to his abdomen. He had been slashed by the sword he'd thought he had blocked.

"What was that?" he asked through heavy breaths.

"That was Moment: the first hidden art of the Bladeless Sword."

Unable to find the strength to stand up, Lay fell onto the floor of flowers. His wounds were recovering through his healing magic, but progress was slow.

"I was struck before you finished swinging," he mumbled.

Shin nodded quietly. "The Bladeless Sword, as its name suggests, has no blade. Instead, it boasts unprecedented weight and strength for a demon sword. That said, this demon sword's true power lies in its source. Cadenalios's blade doesn't exist in the present time, but is constantly cutting one moment in the past."

The moment Shin had swung his sword down, Cadenalios's blade had traced back through time to cut Lay one moment in the past. In other words, the blade had touched him before Shin even swung the sword.

"Did you erase your magic in order to release that sword's true power?"

"Yes. This isn't limited to the Bladeless Sword. All demon swords and holy swords harbor a hidden power—a power known as a hidden art. You can see it if you gaze into their abyss. Power alone won't help that true potential manifest, however. Becoming one with the sword isn't enough either. To grasp the source of the sword with your own source and merge them, you must reach a state of true nothingness. Only by doing that can you access your sword's hidden art."

Lay gazed up at Shin from where he lay. "Did that move work against Hero Kanon?" he asked.

"Unfortunately, I perfected the technique after losing to him," Shin said. He stored the Bladeless Sword in a magic circle and turned away. "With your skills, you, too, may someday be able to access the hidden art of the demon sword you left behind."

"I wonder about that... I don't think I could ever reach a state of nothingness."

Contrary to his words, Lay was already attempting to erase his magic. A faint smile tugged at Shin's lips. "I'm glad I was able to show this to someone before my passing. I may never reach the same state again."

Perhaps Shin had wanted to pass on his technique to someone and leave it behind. He struggled at using source magic, so there was no guarantee he could be reborn with the same abilities in his next life. Despite that, Shin had decided to reincarnate. I had believed that was in order to become strong, but if what Nosalgia said was right, he might have merely wished for a heart—even if that meant becoming weaker and losing the swords he was so proud of.

Yet in the end, Shin hadn't reincarnated.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Reno."

"Shin! What's the meaning of this?"

Reno held a stone shield in her hands. The bottom half was cleanly broken off. The titi flew over their heads and hovered in the air around them.

"We made a shield!"

"We tried our best to make it."

"We wanted to play with the sword uncle."

"He cut it in an instant."

"Right in half!" the titi chattered sadly.

"They said they made a shield to play with, so I did as they asked."

"You can't cut stuff like it's a real battle! Playing means pretending to have a sword fight; it's just that kind of game. Isn't it sad when you break something they worked hard to make?"

"Indeed, how easily it broke in half is sad."

"That's not what I mean!" Reno puffed up her cheeks. "As punishment, do something about this shield."

"What do you mean?"

"Either fix it or find another use for it, I guess."

“Find a use for a broken shield?”

Reno nodded firmly. “You broke it, so you should at least do that much.”

Shin thought for a moment. “Could you give me some time?”

“Sure! Let’s water the flowers first.”

Reno handed Shin the watering can and used magic to fill it with water. The titi flew around, enthusiastically chattering about water, and the flowers wilting.

“I believe the titi are right to say the teardrop blossoms will wilt again,” Shin said, using the watering can to water the flowers below. They immediately started drooping, but Reno watched on happily.

“Why aren’t you getting angry?”

“Huh? Because I’m the one who told you to do it.”

“You got angry the first time I made them wild.”

Reno grinned. “That was my bad. I didn’t know anything about you. That’s not the case anymore, though—you’re watering the flowers as best you can. You’re trying to give them love, and it’s my duty to accept that.”

His gaze cold, Shin watched the wilting flowers. “You said they wilt without love,” he said.

“But these flowers were born from my tears. I’m sure they’ll bloom if I accept your love.”

“Is that because of a legend?”

“Nope. I just think it’d be nice if that were true.”

Shin continued silently watering the flowers. The watering can was tipped at only a slight angle, possibly out of fear that more flowers would wilt. “I see,” he replied.

While he was watering the flowers, Shin suddenly closed his eyes. He then reached out and made a patting motion—it seemed the Wolf of Hiding was there with him. Judging from Shin’s reaction, Gennul was acting like an excited puppy. I made my way over to Misha, who was gazing at them.

“Notice any changes?” I asked.

“It’s the same as always.”

Sitting a short distance away, Rina was watching Shin and Reno. Suddenly, a group of tiny shadows crossed my vision—the fairies had made their way over to us.

“It’s Anosh! Hi!”

“The traveling child.”

“Do an imitation!”

“An imitation of the Demon King!”

Misha turned to look at me, tilting her head. She seemed to be wondering what I would do.

“Let’s show them,” I said.

Misha made a throne using Iris.

I took a seat and spoke in an exaggerated tone. “I expect mushroom gratin for my evening meal. What? That’s improper? What would be proper for a Demon King to eat then? Humans? As if I could eat humans, you fools!”

The titi giggled in delight.



“I’ve already eaten all the mushrooms in Dilhade? I see, mushroom harvests have fallen due to the Great War. It can’t be helped...” I stood up and took on a resolute tone. “I have come to a realization: nothing good comes out of war. If anything, it deprives me of mushroom gratin. It is time for peace. For that, Demon King Anos will sacrifice his life!”

The titi darted about rapidly, laughing at the top of their tiny lungs. Misha looked on with emotionless eyes.

“Is that a true story?” she asked.

“No, of course not. Not even I would risk my life for mushroom gratin.”

She blinked several times. “I believe you.”

The titi flew closer and rested on my head and shoulders. The girls spoke one after another.

“By the way...”

“We have a funny story too!”

“A story for you.”

“About a headless demon.”

“We saw it the other day.”

“It was walking around Aharthern.”

“It was headless!”

“So scary.”

They all trembled.

“A headless demon?” Misha repeated, tilting her head.

“Hmm. Could that be the Conflagration King’s body?”

The titi folded their arms and contemplated my question.

“Conflagration King?”

“The person who came the other day?”

“The person cut by the sword uncle?”

“Was it?”

“Maybe it was!”

As always, their answers led nowhere.

“So where was the headless demon going?” I asked.

The titi jumped off me and landed in the flowers.

“On the other side of the wall!”

“He left Aharthern.”

“Maybe he went home.”

“Maybe!”

Hmm. I see. Nosgalia had been defeated by Shin and left in a state of near death. But considering what was yet to happen two thousand years in the future, he should somehow survive. Eldmed was still alive as well. He had joined hands with Nosgalia—which meant he probably knew something. Of course, it was still unclear whether the headless demon was Eldmed or Nosgalia.

“Let’s go as well.”

“Where to?” Misha asked.

“Dilhade. Lay and Sasha can stay here and share their vision. It’s not like we can act if anything happens anyway. There shouldn’t be a problem.”

Misha erased the throne she had created, then pointed to herself. “Can I go too?”

“Sure.”

Thus, we left the flower field behind us and set out for Dilhade.

§ 52. The Demon Realm with No Demon King

We passed through the city gate and entered Midhaze. The buildings lining the streets had runes embedded in their designs, each one forming a piece of a vast magic circle. Misha gazed at the townscape as we walked through the streets.

“It’s identical,” she said, likely referring to the city I’d constructed beneath the future Midhaze. She turned to look at me. “Is the Conflagration King here?”

“Who knows?” I replied. “The Conflagration King’s territory lay near the border to Azesion, so it quickly fell to human assault. After that, Eldmed mostly stayed in Delsgade with his subordinates, occasionally wandering from area to area depending on where the battle was.”

“Does he like war?”

“In his own words, he wishes to witness the heights I can reach. I can’t say I understand his thought process—to me, it seems as though his actions are inviting his own downfall. Perhaps I just can’t see what’s so fun about going to such extents to make an enemy of the Demon King.”

Misha thought for a moment. “I don’t like the way he thinks.”

“Well, it would be harder to find someone who agrees with him.”

“I can understand him a little, though.”

Oh? Of course she could.

“What’s his intention?”

“A warped form of admiration,” she replied simply. “He wants the Demon King of Tyranny to always be superior to others. That is his greatest priority—one he is willing to die for.”

“That’s what I fail to understand. If he admires me, he can simply become my subordinate. There’s no need for hostility. If he wishes to see me stand above others, I can reach those heights by myself.”

Misha lowered her gaze as she considered my words. “What the Conflagration King sees is a symbol,” she said slowly. “He’s admiring how he imagines the Demon King in his own head. He’s imposing his ideals on you.”

Hmm. So that’s what she’d meant by “warped admiration.”

“So it just so happened to be me that caught his eye, and he wouldn’t care if it were someone else.”

Misha tilted her head hesitantly. “Maybe if they were just as strong.”

“No such person exists.”

She blinked a few times and nodded. “Right.”

“That means I have to be the one to meet his expectations, huh?”

Doing so was a troublesome thought, but it was better than sacrificing someone else to the Conflagration King.

Just as I was thinking as much, Delsgade came into view. Parts of the castle had been destroyed by the magical shock waves released when I’d cast *Beno levun*. It would be some time before it could be fully repaired.

“Someone who knows this world well used to be here. She’d be able to locate the Conflagration King—if she’s still around, that is.”

“Who is it?”

“The Goddess of Creation, Militia.”

Militia was the order that had created the world, and the goddess who had joined hands with me in the name of peace. She had planned on staying in Delsgade for some time after the construction of the walls, to watch how the world turned out.

“Are there good gods as well?” Misha asked curiously.

“Gods are the embodiment of order. While I tend to make a mess of that order, there are a few gods I can get along with. Militia sought peace. If the war had gotten too far out of hand, the world she’d created would have been destroyed—and she loved this world more than anything.”

“Will she recognize you?”

“She sees the whole world. I wouldn’t be able to fool her, but she understands how Revalon works. Even if she meets me, she won’t do anything to change the past. In fact, she has the power to ensure that.”

Militia was one of the few allies I could rely on in this day and age. She would probably help us find the Conflagration King if we asked.

Just then, Misha came to a sudden stop.

“Look,” she said.

She was pointing in the direction of a child. He appeared to be around ten years old, and was running towards Delsgade.

“It’s a human boy,” she said, casting her Magic Eyes over him. His magic was well hidden, but he was indeed human. In the Mythical Age, it was unthinkable for a human child to be wandering Midhaze.

“Hmm. He seems familiar.”

As we followed the boy, I searched through my memories.

“If I recall correctly, that’s Igareth, seventh in line to the Azesion throne. He was captured by our troops while being escorted somewhere by the Azesion army. Our troops were treating him rather roughly, so I brought him to Delsgade. I’m sure I returned him to the Gairadite Battalion stationed in Dilhade before I created the wall.”

The Gairadite Demon King Subjugation Battalion was an army of elite soldiers. The squad I’d returned him to wasn’t the one Kanon belonged to, but they should have been capable of crossing the wall back. Had Igareth slipped away in the chaos of battle? Or had the squad been wiped out, leaving the prince as the sole survivor? Although the end of the war had been near, animosity between demons and humans had still been too high for them to avoid conflict if they encountered each other.

The boy ran frantically towards the gate.

“Hold it, kid. Where do you think you’re going?”

A gatekeeper grabbed Igareth by the collar as he tried to dash inside.

“I...I have to see the Demon King. Please let me through!”

Despite his young age, Igareth spoke in a dauntless tone, but the gatekeeper didn't release him.

"The Demon King is no more. You cannot see him."

"Huh?"

Despair fell across Igareth's face. Perhaps he'd been hoping I could send him back to his homeland. Considering the state of things, no one else in Dilhade would be willing to help him.

"Go home. With you making a fuss, the Demon King won't be able to rest peacefully."

"Wait," the other soldier suddenly called. "I've seen this kid before. Isn't he that prince from Azesion?"

"What?"

Both gatekeepers looked carefully into the abyss.

"I see," the second demon said. "He's used source magic to disguise himself. A human kid of his age using magic to this degree... He must be a blood relative of Hero Jerga." He yanked Igareth's body away from the other soldier.

"Hey, what are you going to do? The Demon King himself set him free."

"Our liege is already at rest. He will overlook this much." There was a dark look in the demon's eyes—as though his heart was being spurred on by revenge.

"L-Let go of me! Where are you taking me?!" Igareth cried.

The demon carried him through the gate by the scruff of his neck. On his way, he sent out a message with Leaks. "Igareth, the seventh in line to the Azesion throne, has been captured. His execution will soon commence. Those who wish to participate, gather in the arena."

Hidden using Lynel and Najila, I followed them. As soon as we arrived at the arena, the demon soldier threw Igareth to the ground. A single sword pierced the ground before the boy. The soldier had thrown it.

"Use it," he said. "If you're a hero, fight until your end."

Igareth grasped the hilt and attempted to draw the sword, but the blade was stuck deep in the ground and refused to budge. The demon soldier landed a kick to the boy's abdomen, sending him flying back several meters.

"Gah!" the boy cried as he slammed against the ground.

"My name is Devidra. This is to avenge my child, who was killed by Hero Jerga. Atone with your life, kid."

Devidra clenched his fists and punched the boy in the face. He could have killed him in a single blow, but he held back to hurt the kid as much as possible.

Blood streaming from his face, Igareth fell to the ground and crawled backwards in fear.

"On your feet. I know you are aware of Hero Jerga's deeds. My child suffered far greater than this."

"S-Stay away," Igareth whimpered.

Devidra marched straight forward.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

Igareth thrust his hands before him. Holy water began to drip from his ring. Using that water as a source of magic, he unleashed Cyfer.

"Oh?" Devidra's anti-magic easily extinguished the sacred flames rushing towards him. "It seems there was no need to hold back," he said, glaring at the boy sharply. The terrified prince backed away, struggled to his feet, and ran. However, he immediately crashed into something and fell back to the ground. He looked up to see a different demon soldier standing before him.

"A hero shouldn't be running away, you know?"

The soldier kicked the boy as hard as he could.

Igareth groaned as he rolled across the stone floor. He crawled along in a desperate attempt to escape, but more and more demons appeared in the arena, surrounding him on all sides. There were twenty-four in total. Even armed with holy water, the child had no chance of escape.

"What a pathetic sight. Shall we teach you how you humans killed fleeing

demons?”

The moment Igareth got back to his feet, one of the demons kicked him in the stomach.

“Guh!”

He rolled across the ground. Over and over, Igareth staggered to his feet, to be kicked back down until his body was bloody and bruised. The demons stared at him, their eyes filled with hatred.

“Help me...”

“Did you know the human king slew the demons who said that?” Devidra stepped on the boy’s head, pressing it against the ground.

“Save me...”

“He burned newborn demons alive in the name of purification, luring hundreds of our people to their death. They were all slaughtered by you humans, yet you have the audacity to beg for mercy!”

Devidra stomped down the boy’s finger, cracking the bone. Igareth screamed.

“Save me... It hurts,” he mumbled, shedding tears. His voice was so feeble, it could no longer reach the demons around him.

Having been separated from the Gairadite Battalion in the midst of war, Igareth had made his way to Delsgade alone, seeking the only person in Dilhade who would have helped him. But I, the Demon King of Tyranny, had already reincarnated. There was no one left to save him. His prayers would have gone unheard as he was left to die a pitiful death at the hands of my own subordinates. That was what had happened two thousand years ago, in the past we were seeing now.

“Anos...” Misha watched the boy sadly. It was easy to imagine what she was feeling as someone born in an era of peace.

“Saving him would be nothing more than an empty dream.”

Igareth was seventh in line to the Azesion throne. There was no telling how the past would change if I rescued him. Doing so could even have an impact on the events surrounding Shin, Reno, and Misa. Either way, any significant

changes to the past would be reverted by the order of the gods. Saving him here would only create a pipe dream that would last for the duration of Revalon.

There was everything to risk and nothing to gain. Besides, scenes like this were commonplace during the Mythical Age. Igareth was just another life among many that ended here.

“You, too, shall feel the pain of being burned alive.”

Devidra summoned black flames in his hand and released them at the boy.

“Please... Please, save me,” Igareth pleaded, no miracles were to be summoned by his prayers. “Demon King!”

Roaring flames rose in a section of the arena. Devidra’s lips curled up in triumph.

The next moment, however, that expression was replaced with pure astonishment. His Gresde, erased by anti-magic, slowly cleared to reveal a short demon boy standing before him.

“While saving him won’t change anything,” I muttered, glaring at Devidra and the demons around him, “he already died tragically once. I can grant him this much of a pipe dream.”

It was a foolish move, of course. Nothing would change, and we could fail to achieve our original objective. But, despite that, I wasn’t one to overlook this.

§ 53. A Passing Traveling Entertainer

Devidra glowered at me as I stood before Igareth. His Magic Eyes watched me cautiously, evaluating my strength. The demons in the arena muttered to themselves.

“Hey, where’d this brat come from?”

“That magic... He’s a demon, right?”

“Whose kid is this?”

While they were occupied with their confusion, I cast Ent on Igareth and healed his wounds.

“Stay put, Igareth. This won’t take long.”

“Who...?”

“I’m just a traveling entertainer.”

Fueled by anger, Devidra took a step forward. “Brat,” he said harshly. “You’re a demon, so why are you helping this human? That boy is the seventh in line to the Azesion throne. He’s a direct relative of Hero Jerga, the human king who cold-bloodedly slew so many of our brethren.”

“Devidra, if you claim this boy is the one who killed your child, then I shall permit your revenge.”

He raised an eyebrow at the mention of his name.

“However, Igareth is a powerless child,” I continued. “He wouldn’t stand a chance against our brethren, much less harm them. Did Demon King Anos permit the slaughter of the innocent?”

Devidra frowned. “Even a brat like you should know of the atrocities Jerga committed. He held defenseless newborn demons hostage and brutally executed them. He ensured their screams could be heard by demon soldiers, luring them in a sickening trap. It could have been your friends who were killed.”

“I have lost many comrades. More than I can count.” I glared back at the demons, making them flinch. They were beginning to realize just how far my magic extended into the abyss. “But if you allow your hatred for Azesion to sully your pride, you will be no different from the humans you detest.”

A man behind Devidra sprang forward at my words. “Who do you think you are, speaking to us like this?! A brat like you can only stand here now because we served as this nation’s shield!”

He aimed a heavy kick at my torso, with enough force behind it to smash through a stone wall. However, I caught it with a single fingertip.

“Wha...?”

“Cursing, hating, and killing humans will only allow darkness to consume your hearts.” I grabbed the man’s foot and lifted his entire body up.

“Hey!”

On the spur of the moment, the demon cast Dedon to increase his body weight. He swiftly reached five hundred kilograms and continued growing heavier, but I swung him around without batting an eye.

“Whoa, what is this brat? I should weigh more than several tons already...”

Hmm. His weight was a lot for a six-year-old body to bear, but he was still light compared to the moon. I continued rotating my body, spinning the man faster and faster.

“Ugh, no way... Waaah!”

“Here, catch.”

Using the momentum of my spin, I launched the several-ton weight in the direction of the group of soldiers.

“What the hell?!”

The man crashed into them, tearing up the ground. Several soldiers failed to cast Fless in time and were sent flying with him.

“This brat!”

The remaining soldiers began to draw magic circles. Burning black suns

emerged from their centers—it was Jio Graze. It seemed they'd realized I was no pushover.

“Step aside,” Devidra spat, his gaze filled with hatred. “We shall no longer torment him, but the dead cannot rest in peace if the blood of Jerga is left alive.”

“Those who fell for this nation would be vexed to hear that,” I replied. “Many of those who died resented humans, but they didn't ask for your hatred to be pinned on them.”

“Shut your mouth! What would a brat like you know?!”

A dozen soldiers fired Jio Graze to incinerate us both together. The jet-black suns struck like thunder, scorching my skin and burning my flesh, but none of the obsidian flames reached Igareth behind me. The soldiers gasped in surprise.

“What's going on?”

“I can't believe it. He's still standing after taking over ten shots of Jio Graze...”

They activated their Eyes, attempting to gaze at my strength, but the more they peered into the abyss, the more their expressions twisted with disbelief.

“Why do you not use your anti-magic?” Devidra asked sharply. “That amount of power is abnormal for one puny brat. You should have no trouble defending yourself.”

“I understand your hatred well,” I replied. “Those flames of hatred have burned your own bodies far worse than they have burned me.” I held my hand before me and clenched it into a fist. “Hate if you wish to hate—as long as it's directed at the right person—but know that it will never end. If you hate and kill, your descendants will be hated and killed. That hatred of yours will pass down through the generations for eternity, burning Dilhade a tainted black.”

Devidra gritted his teeth and glared at me. The others did the same. Fury, grief, and resentment haunted their hearts.

“We cannot be like the Demon King. We're fully aware of how disgraceful we are, but we no longer care if we descend to hell. I just...” He uttered those words as though spitting out blood, as if his own body were burning in the

flames of hatred. “I just detest humans!”

Devidra drew a magic circle and filled it with his magic, charging it with all his hatred. A black sun several times the size of the earlier Jio Grazes appeared. The other soldiers started activating their own Jio Grazes in response.

Of course. There was no stopping them with words. If that had been possible, there would have been no need for the wall. Someone had to stop them by force.

“Move out of the way, kid! We’ll not hold back any longer. If you don’t shift your ass, you’ll burn together with the human!”

The barrage of black suns fell like a meteor shower, aimed for Igareth behind me. With magic circles in my eyes, I glanced up at them.

“Be gone.”

My Magic Eyes of Destruction intervened with Jio Graze. The ultimate form of anti-magic erased the blazing suns in an instant.

“What? This kid...!”

“Wait. That...That brat’s...”

The demon soldiers were clearly shaken, but that wasn’t because their Jio Grazes had been erased. They were currently witnessing something that should have been impossible.

“Those Eyes...” Devidra stumbled backwards. “The only demon who bears those Eyes...”

“The one who brought down the Goddess of Destruction...”

The demons stared at me, shocked.

“You’re alive...”

“What are you talking about? My name is Anosh Polticoal. I’m a traveling entertainer who just so happened to be passing by.”

Devidra fell to his knees as though he’d been struck. His forehead scraped against the ground as he prostrated himself before me, his cry more like a beast’s roar. The others similarly fell to their knees, having lost all will to fight.

Tears streamed down their cheeks.

“The Demon King always loved traveling entertainers. My liege could be watching us at this very moment...”

Bowing before me, the demons began to confess their sins in repentance.

“I have failed you, my liege. I cannot bear to live in a peaceful era.”

“Those humans are on the other side of that wall, laughing as they live without a care.”

“Those who slaughtered our brethren exist in peace. How could we overlook that? How... How could we live so shamelessly?”

“I do not wish to live a life where this pain, this hatred, is forgotten! We are already dead. We perished long ago with the Great War.”

“O Demon King, our almighty liege, we failed to follow your order. We couldn’t... We just couldn’t...”

Sobs shook their chests. They were my loyal subordinates. If I said I was a traveling entertainer, then I was a traveling entertainer. If I said I was dead, then the Demon King was dead. An order from the Demon King of Tyranny could easily overturn any truth.

But even then, my subordinates were unable to obey my orders after my death. I had no doubt that they’d tried—they would have put every effort into trying. However, this was the one thing they couldn’t do. Forgetting their revenge and building a peaceful future was unbearable for them. Even though there was a wall separating them from mankind, their hatred was far too heavy for them to hang on to the words of the deceased Demon King.

Two thousand years ago, I had failed to protect these people. I had left so many behind, and there was no changing that.

Just then, I spotted something overhead. It was a black particle of light, and it looked rather familiar. The particle drifted softly towards me, landed in my hand, and then vanished—as though it was trying to tell me something.

This time, this moment, was a mere dream shown through Revalon. Once the spell ended, order would return the past back to its original state—Igareth

would end up killed by their hands. But perhaps, just perhaps, something could change.

“Raise your heads,” I said.

Devidra and the demons slowly lifted their heads. Even then, they couldn’t look me in the eyes.

“The Demon King of Tyranny has a message for you,” I declared. “Let us meet in two thousand years’ time.”

They didn’t have to be words of great importance. A small inconsistency that could slip past the order of time was enough—enough to change their hearts but not their actions. Enough to turn this fleeting dream into reality.

“A wonderful world awaits you,” I said, offering a quiet prayer for the sad events long past.

§ 54. Declaration from the Future

Devidra and the other soldiers sobbed and shook.

The right thing to do now would be to remove their memories of what had just happened and plant in their minds the lie that they had killed Igareth. However, their repentance couldn't be so easily erased.

In the original timeline, after killing Igareth, they would have realized their mistake. They would have realized that their hatred had corrupted their hearts and engulfed them in darkness. Once they realized this, they would have reincarnated to prevent themselves from repeating that mistake. They were probably regretting it already. If I was right, the result of them reincarnating wouldn't change. There was some change in their hearts, but the outcome was the same.

Perhaps it was optimistic of me to think this, but there was hope. I had just seen it.

"Igareth," I called, offering the boy a hand.

"Th-Thank you very much."

"Let's go."

Using Fless, I flew us up to the arena stands, where we landed beside Misha.

"Welcome back," she said with a smile. "I knew you'd save him."

That was an unexpected thing to say. Up until this point, not even I had imagined myself saving Igareth. My body had moved of its own accord, unable to leave him for dead, yet Misha was saying she knew that. Did she understand me better than I did?

"You're kind."

"I see."

"It won't be in vain."

I suppose I should have expected as much from Misha. How embarrassing.

“Right.” I looked up at the tower adjacent to the arena. “Perhaps it truly wasn’t in vain. There are times when meaningless actions can suddenly have meaning.”

Misha tilted her head.

“We can go and confirm for ourselves. Igareth, stay close to me.”

“Huh? Uh, okay.”

“Don’t worry. I’m a demon, but I’m your ally.”

Despite his confusion, Igareth nodded. I hid the three of us using Lynel and Najila and led the way to the tower. The tower door was firmly sealed with Dejit. I had just taken a step forward to unlock it when a magic circle appeared before the door. The door glowed and opened of its own accord—as though to welcome me.

“What’s inside?” Misha asked.

“It’s just a storage room for books. At least, it was before I died.”

The door had opened despite our hidden magic and appearances. Then there was that black particle of light earlier. I had to check it out.

We entered the tower. The interior was lined with shelves crammed with books. There were several on the topic of ancient magic, but the ones here were pretty much worthless. Most were bordering on fiction, filled with fairy tales and fantasy.

I started up the staircase, carefully casting my Eyes around. Several particles of black light drifted down and brushed my cheek.

“Particles of magic?” Misha wondered.

“Yeah.”

The particles were falling from the top floor. The higher we climbed, the greater their number became. Before long, we reached the sixth floor—the very top. I followed the direction of the light to see they were being emitted from the wall.

To be more precise, they were being emitted from the sword that was casting its shadow against the wall. But while the shadow could be seen, the body of the sword was missing. It was an extremely familiar sight.

“Venuzdonoa?” Misha mumbled.

“Yes. Although no one other than me should be able to use it.”

In this era, I had already passed. Avos Dilhevia was yet to be born. So why was the Abolisher of Reason releasing its power? I didn’t know the answer, but there was one possibility: someone in the Mythical Age was moving in my favor. They had predicted I would arrive here from the future.

“There may still be hope.”

I held my hand over the shadow on the wall. The shadow rose into the air, drawn towards my hand.

“For me to use the Abolisher of Reason, the three-dimensional magic circle of Delsgade has to be activated. Such an outrageous move would incur the wrath of not only the Keeper of Time, but every other kind of time god out there. Revalon’s effect should be terminated before I can draw the sword, sending us back to the present. However...”

When I grasped the hilt, a longsword of darkness appeared: Venuzdonoa’s true form.

“If Venuzdonoa is already here in the past, there’s no inconsistency with the order of time. The Keeper of Time will notice if I draw the blade, but there’s nothing they can do with Venuzdonoa in my hand already.”

Venuzdonoa’s true power was currently active in my hand, making me an existence that stood half a step outside of the framework of time. In this state, I could altogether turn my back on the order of time and alter the past.

“Igareth.”

When I looked over at the boy, he flinched and stumbled backwards.

“Don’t be afraid. I won’t harm you. I shall ensure you’re taken someplace safe. That’s what I said last time as well.”

Using Kurst, I brought my body’s age up to twenty years or so. I then used Iris

to don the clothes I'd worn during the Mythical Age.

"Demon King..."

Tears abruptly spilled from his eyes. It was no wonder. With no one to rely on, the boy had had to keep his guard up until now. Igareth ran over to me and hugged me tightly.

"Demon King! While we were retreating to the border, the third squad of the battalion was attacked by a giant monster. They were wiped out trying to let me escape, so I made my way here all alone."

"Well done getting here by yourself."

I gently patted Igareth on the back. Although his tears were flowing, he was stoutly holding back his sobs. What an impressive child.

"Was the giant monster a demon?"

"I don't know," he said solemnly. "It looked like a large beast with four limbs, pointed horns, and sharp claws. It was covered in scales and had wings to fly in the air, and it breathed fire from its mouth. It wasn't only attacking the human soldiers, but the demons too! After it ate a few of each, it dove underground and disappeared."

A creature that ate humans and demons, huh? That could only be—

"A dragon?"

"Dragon? Was that thing a dragon?"

"Most likely, yes. The species has rarely been spotted in recent years. I thought they'd died out from a lack of means to obtain food."

I hadn't expected to run into a dragon, but that was irrelevant right now.

"Igareth, I traveled through time to come here from two thousand years in the future."

"Traveled through time? Is that even possible?"

"Do you remember the demons from earlier telling you I'd died? That was the truth. I reincarnated two thousand years in the future, and I've traveled back through time to be here."

Igareth stared at me blankly.

“Don’t believe me?”

“I don’t understand difficult things, but...I believe you. It’s the word of the person I owe my life to, after all.”

The first time I’d saved Igareth from the rough treatment of my army, he had said something similar. He was a purehearted human child who held no hatred towards demons. In this sense, he was a symbol of hope—proof that demons and humans could one day get along.

“Good answer. Now, there’s some trouble that needs to be addressed. In your original timeline, you’re meant to be dead. I wasn’t around to save you.”

He bit down on his lip.

“The concept of time is too complex to explain, so I’ll jump straight to the conclusion: you haven’t been saved yet. In order to help you, I’ll need to kill you with the Abolisher of Reason and have you reincarnate.”

Influenced by the power of the Abolisher of Reason, a life that was never born could be born. Igareth would become a unique existence in relation to the order of time from now until two thousand years in the future. This meant that any events of the past that Igareth changed wouldn’t be pursued by the gods in charge of time, and they could be altered successfully. He would be able to live.

“Do you have any concerns?”

Igareth looked me straight in the eye and nodded. “Is there anything I can do?”

“What do you mean?”

“I want to show my gratitude. I was taught that heroes should always repay those they are indebted to.”

He must have been raised by an honorable person. I would have liked to meet them.

“In that case, there’s a rumor I would like you to spread once you have reincarnated: a rumor about the Demon King of Tyranny, Avos Dilhevia, that will be passed down for two thousand years.” I pressed a finger against Igareth’s

head. “It’s a little complicated, so I’ll use Teles to carve it into your memory.”

I drew a magic circle, and Igareth grimaced for a moment. The pain he felt was caused by the details of the rumor and the particulars of how I’d arrived in the past being carved into his mind. The rumors he would spread as a unique existence formed by the Abolisher of Reason would remain in the past and get passed down to our present—assuming he could make a good job of it, that is.

“I will definitely fulfill this promise,” Igareth agreed.

“Igareth, the proud little hero,” I said, raising the Abolisher of Reason, “the future is peaceful, but is by no means lacking in its own tragedies. If you wish to repay the debt of being saved by the Demon King of Tyranny, please save the other Demon King burdened with a sad destiny.”

“With courage and faith, I, Igareth, swear to meet the Demon King’s expectations!” he declared with a look of determination.

“Let us meet again.”

I swung the Abolisher of Reason. The boy turned into particles of light that were soon carried away by the wind. At the same time, the longsword of darkness in my hand returned to its shadow form.

“Hmm. It seems that Delsgade has run out of power.”

The three-dimensional magic circle had just been used to split the world into four. I would have preferred to keep the Abolisher of Reason on hand, but this single use was its limit. Venuzdonoa’s shadow faded until it disappeared completely.

“Anos,” Misha called. “Look.”

Her gaze was fixed on the wall of the tower, at the spot where the Abolisher of Reason’s shadow had been earlier. With the sparkle of the black light particles gone, the wall could now be seen clearly. There were words inscribed on the surface.

My dear Demon King,

Let us meet again two thousand years from now—

this time, as the three of us.

I know without a doubt

that I will fall in love again.

§ 55. The Kind God

“Do you know them?” Misha asked, staring at the inscription.

“Hmm. I should, but I can’t tell who it is by this alone.”

Misha turned to stare into my eyes instead. She seemed to be trying to read my thoughts, but her gaze was rather accusatory.

“Fall in love...”

“Is what it says, yes.”

“...again,” Misha added flatly. Indeed, “fall in love again” was what was written.

“They fell in love two thousand years ago,” she pointed out.

“The strangest things happened in the Mythical Age.”

Misha tilted her head. “Did you love someone?”

“Not that I recall. There was no time for that in this era. I’m flattered that someone fell for me, but they probably weren’t able to tell me directly.”

“Because you’re the Demon King?”

I nodded. “It wasn’t a peaceful time. One couldn’t voice their feelings so easily. Someone must have written their innermost thoughts here in secret.”

I approached the wall and touched the letters. Something about them felt odd.

“What’s wrong?” Misha asked.

“There’s magic cast on this.”

The fact I hadn’t noticed right away meant it had to have been drawn by an extremely skilled caster. I used my Magic Eyes to search the abyss hidden in the words.

“Hmm. I see. We have to wait until night.”

“Should we find the Conflagration King first?”

“No, the sun has almost set. Let us rest here for a bit.”

I sat down, my back against the wall. Misha came over and sat down beside me.

“How are Shin and Reno?” she asked.

“Shin’s being led around by the nose, but it seems Reno’s having a hard time as well. They’re quite the match for each other.”

I watched Shin and Reno’s interaction through Lay and Sasha’s vision and chuckled out loud.

“Will Shin find love?”

“That man is capable of anything.”

Misha blinked. “His source is a demon sword,” she mumbled. “Is that okay?”

“Did you think a demon sword couldn’t fall in love?”

Misha’s eyes widened.

“A world where no one can obtain what they truly wish for is a world that should fall to ruin,” I said.

Misha looked uncertain.

“Militia, the Goddess of Creation, said those words.”

“She created a kind world.”

“Indeed she did. The world she created is warm and overflowing with love and hope. It was originally a very kind place.”

“How did it turn out like this?”

“There are more gods in this world than just Militia. Take Nosgalia, for example. Similarly, the king of demons can build a nation, but the people of that nation may not be governed by that king’s decisions alone. The world revolves around the intertwined motives of a myriad of gods.”

Misha nodded as she listened intently.

“But at the root of all that, the foundation of this world is Militia’s benevolent

order. If you wish for something from the bottom of your heart, the world she created will surely respond. That is the case no matter how desolate the world is or how widespread the war.”

Misha’s gentle gaze fell upon me. “Do you believe that?”

“Militia lamented it.”

Misha tilted her head curiously.

“All the injustices in this world are created by the gods. All the tragedies are spread by them. Militia regretted creating such a saddening world and bowed her head to me,” I recounted.

Misha smiled faintly. “There are gods like that too?”

“So it seems. Before I met Militia, I thought gods never spared any thought for demons, humans, and spirits. No matter how much we prayed, they would never bestow any miracles. They only brought about miracles beneficial to themselves, maintaining order for their own gain. I believed they possessed no regard for those living in this world.”

In the past, I had believed that all gods were unjust, but that wasn’t the case for all of them.

“Did Militia bestow a miracle on demonkind?”

“Her order is the creation of the world. In a world already created, there is very little she can do. A new world cannot be created without a heavy cost.”

Not even the Goddess of Creation could create new things indefinitely. In order to keep this world as this world—to protect its order—something had to be lost each time something was obtained.

“For every great miracle granted, another great miracle is lost. In order to create something, something else must be destroyed. In the vast majority of cases, all Militia could do was watch over the world and pray that the world she had created would proceed down a kind path.”

Misha thought for a moment. “Was doing nothing for the best?” she asked.

“So it seemed. The power of the gods is the very order of this world, and that order defines the rules. Using their power in defiance of those rules creates a

distortion to the natural order, which manifests itself as injustice that befalls the people of this world. Despite this, many gods use their power without a care. Militia, however, did not.”

The Goddess of Creation feared that if she created miracles, her order would become distorted. If that were to happen, the consequences the world would face would be astronomical. Outside of exceptional cases such as assisting my creation of the walls, there was nothing Militia could do. Doing nothing was her greatest form of resistance.

“With that in mind, I exchanged a promise with her,” I said.

“What kind of promise?” Misha asked.

“If the other gods strive to create injustice and tragedy, then I shall be the one to destroy them.”

Misha giggled. “How kind of you.”

“It was rather ambitious of me, but I wanted to teach the benevolent god who had endured so much that the world she’d created, the world I’d been born in, would never lose to injustice.”

I wanted to prove that the world she had created was kind. It was something I could only do because I wasn’t a god.

“Is that why you made the wall?”

“That’s one of the reasons. I also wanted peace.”

Misha tilted her head quietly, resting it on my shoulder. “Anos...”

“Yes?”

“Is the world at peace now?”

“More so than before, but that’s still not enough.”

With her weight rested against me, Misha gazed vacantly at the window. The sun’s dying rays illuminated the interior of the tower. While waiting for time to pass, we watched the sunset and rested. Eventually, the sun fully set, and the moon lit the world instead. A dim, cold light poured into the tower.

“It’s about time.”

Misha and I got to our feet and stared at the wall. Moonlight reflected off the magic-imbued window and shone onto the wall.

The inscription transformed.

Demon King Anos,

The Conflagration King is in the mausoleum honoring the casualties of war.

The door opens with undead magic.

And one last thing:

I hope that the kind Demon King, who fought until they called him tyrannical, will one day find peace.

I am always watching over you,

Until the last moment, forever.

“How curious,” Misha mumbled, staring at the inscription. “Whoever wrote this knew you’d be using Revalon.”

“It was most likely Militia. She watches over the world. Perhaps she realized I came here from the present.”

Or had she sought the knowledge of a god who could see the future?

“What about the Abolisher of Reason?” Misha asked.

“That could be Militia’s doing, but who knows? Gods aren’t capable of everything. I thought it impossible for the Goddess of Creation to control the power of the Goddess of Destruction within Venuzdonoa, but...”

If there was reason for suspicion, the message would be meaningless. If anything, the Abolisher of Reason was proof the inscription had been left by Militia, but that didn’t seem right. Did I overlook something?

Hmm. Perhaps I was overthinking it. I didn’t know everything about the gods. The Abolisher of Reason aside, it was hard to imagine anyone other than the Goddess of Creation writing this message. There was no reason to doubt.

“The Goddess of Creation isn’t here anymore,” Misha murmured.

“So it seems. If she knew I were coming, she would have come to meet me, but the gods can only appear in this world when their order calls for it. If she isn’t here in person, then she’s probably in the Divine Realm right now.”

“Are you disappointed?” Misha asked.

What an odd thing to say.

“Why do you ask?”

She thought for a moment. “It just felt like that.”

“It would have been nice to catch up with an old friend, but the parting gifts she left are more than enough. Wishing for more would be greedy.”

Militia had left us with two crucial gifts: the Abolisher of Reason and Eldmed’s location. Well, we couldn’t be sure the Abolisher of Reason was her doing, but Militia’s goodwill could certainly be felt.

“Let’s go.”

I used Kursla to shrink back into my six-year-old body and adjusted my clothes to fit. We then left the tower and headed for the war cemetery.

§ 56. All That Remains of the Soldiers' Dreams

A short distance southwest of Midhaze was a small hill that overlooked the city. At its peak, at the best vantage point, was a somewhat peculiar sight.

There were swords. Spears too, along with bows, axes, and staves. The top of the hill was packed with various weapons protruding from the ground. Each one of them was a grave marker.

This was a cemetery honoring the demon warriors who had died in the Great War. Every demon honored here would never resurrect or reincarnate again.

"This wasn't here in the Magical Era," Misha murmured.

"It was all cleaned up by the time I got the chance to visit. There were traces of it having been moved with magic."

She thought for a moment. "Midhaze has a memorial palace dedicated to those who died in the Great War. It was built a thousand years before the Magical Era."

So that was it. Then it may have been moved there.

"These swords and spears don't have any magical properties. They would have weathered away over time," I said.

It was against our customs to repair the weapons of the dead. Even when they crumbled away, we would merely leave them like that rather than fix them with magic.

The older the object, the more magic that object possessed. It was said that by leaving powerless weapons as grave markers, the fallen could one day resurrect. Of course, whether this was true was still unclear.

In order for the fallen to rise again, an eternity of time had to pass—far more time than that which had passed from the creation of the world until now. There were none who could prove this theory yet.

Logically speaking, there was no way to revive a destroyed source. However,

there was no evidence to prove otherwise. Perhaps the custom was a form of salvation our demon ancestors had discovered.

“There.”

Misha pointed towards the back of the cemetery. An old building stood a fair distance away from us. According to the inscription in the tower, Eldmed was within, but I didn't want to head in right away.

“Do you mind?” I asked.

Inferring my intentions from those words alone, Misha shook her head. Then, with slow footsteps, I walked up to the countless grave markers. Now we were here, I couldn't just ignore them.

“Can you see, Misha?”

She stood beside me and gazed out over the sea of graves.

“These are all the people I failed to protect.”

I knelt down on the spot. Everyone laid to rest here had died for the sake of peace. Bewitched by my dream, they had all fought until their last breaths. It was always the loyal subordinates that went first.

I had failed to protect them. I wasn't strong enough, and I had to become stronger. To accomplish peace. To overthrow injustice. To put an end to tragedy. To honor those who had crossed to the afterlife before accomplishing their goal. No matter what they called me or how brutal I had to be, I would rule this land as the Demon King for the sake of the peaceful future that was sure to come. But all the magic and all the power in the world couldn't bring back the lives already lost.

Lowering my head, I addressed my fallen comrades. “I have good news for everyone. Peace has been achieved. You may be proud of yourselves. We won.”

Could this truly be called victory? Addressing the dead only left a growing feeling of emptiness.

“Thank you for keeping your oaths.”

The grave markers had needed to be placed in this location. This spot on this hill, where they had pledged their lives, would be their souls' final resting place

so that one day, when peace came upon Midhaze, those who had lost their lives could gaze down upon the city.

The graves were meant to remain here forever, but that wouldn't end up how I'd hoped. I suppose that, in the course of two thousand years, some things had to change.

"Forgive me. I couldn't keep my end of the promise."

If I had been stronger—strong enough to seize the whole world in my hands—their lives might have been spared.

"White flower."

Misha used Iris to create a flower beside each grave. She then knelt beside me.

"Raise your head," she murmured gently. "They wouldn't want to see the Demon King with his head bowed."

I slowly lifted my head.

"Everyone wants to see the face of their hero—the face of the Demon King from an era of peace. They fought for their lives to see that."

Her kind words caressed my ears, comforting my heart.

"Why do you think that?" I asked.

Misha cast her Magic Eyes over the grave markers. "It feels like their thoughts are still with us."

"The thoughts of the dead?"

Misha nodded. "Their hearts are still here."

Her tone was plain but gentle.

"They're with you," she said.

Misha's Magic Eyes could peer into the abyss of the heart. After the battle with the Netherworld King's subordinate, she seemed to be able to see even better than before. She could even see things I couldn't.

"I wasn't able to lead them to a peaceful world."

Misha shook her head quietly. “They wanted to save the Demon King who saved them. They wished for an era where their liege wouldn’t have to resort to tyranny.”

Her blue eyes gazed into mine.

“Misha.”

“Yes?”

“What do they wish for now?”

After thinking for a moment, Misha replied. “For you to smile.”

It was an unexpected answer.

“In front of the dead?”

“They wanted to know how you smiled. They wanted to see their liege’s face when he wasn’t fighting.”

It wasn’t as though I hadn’t smiled two thousand years ago. If anything, I thought I’d had a better understanding of laughter than most. I had often thrown banquets and invited jesters and traveling entertainers to the castle, but perhaps my subordinates had taken that to mean I wanted to laugh. I’d had no way of knowing this at the time, but it was true that I had never laughed the way I had after my reincarnation.

I turned my face towards the fallen. “This incompetent king couldn’t even grasp the emotions of his own subordinates,” I said to them. “It was thanks to all of you that I was reborn in a peaceful era.”

I recalled what I had experienced in the Magical Age: boring classes, regressed spell formulae, descendants who refused to acknowledge my status. I recalled ridiculous, dull, and peaceful days when no one died.

I only wished that they could experience it too.

“Thank you,” I said with the deepest of gratitude. I wasn’t sure whether I was smiling properly, but they would have to let me off with this.

I stood up and glared at the building at the back of the cemetery. “I won’t let your sacrifice go to waste.”

If Avos Dilhevia were to be left to his own devices, war would once more arise in Dilhade. If that happened, many would lose their lives. I couldn't let that happen again.

"Sorry for the wait. Let's go."

"Okay."

Using Lynel and Najila, I hid the two of us, and made my way to the mausoleum. The door was locked with Dejit.

"Hmm, I see. It's set up so that any intruders will be detected if they use Dee to unlock the door."

The trap was extremely simple, which made it all the harder to detect. However, thanks to the words on the wall, we would have no difficulty breaking through. I followed the advice and used Igrum on the door. It unlocked with a click.

I put my hand to the door and pushed it open. The inside of the mausoleum was dark. The interior was just as run-down as the exterior. Its furnishings were covered in dust, and there was very little undamaged.

We walked inside to find a stone staircase leading underground. There was nothing else noteworthy in sight, so we made our way down. Lamps hung on the stone walls, dimly illuminating the area. After a short while, a mighty cackle rang off the stone walls.

"That sure was something else! It was over in an instant. Right, Zeke?" a cheerful voice was saying. We walked a little farther to see a headless demon—it was Eldmed, the Conflagration King.

"As expected of the Demon King's right-hand man!" he said. He was using some kind of trick to talk without a mouth. "Wounded as that god might have been, he was still cut down in an instant. Imagine—a god, unable to stand up to a subordinate! It wasn't even the Demon King himself!"

Nodding along beside him was a dark-skinned man with gold eyes and slicked-back hair. I had met him once before in the future—it was Zeke, officer of the Conflagration King.

“Just how strong does that make the Demon King of Tyranny?” Eldmed asked. “I’ve sent many powerful foes after him, yet I still can’t measure his limits! Say—does he even have a limit? Oh, how splendid! Do you know what’s so splendid, Zeke?”

“I do not. More importantly, master, what do you intend to do from now on?” Zeke asked, brushing off his master’s question.

Eldmed roared with laughter. “Such a hasty man! Very well. The Heavenly Father is still in Aharthern.”

“Without your body, won’t he need time to recover?”

“Precisely. That god is on the verge of death! But he also said that everything was going according to plan. Apparently, my visiting the Demon King’s right-hand man was anticipated.”

Zeke furrowed his brows in thought. “So your alliance is still in place.”

“Like the Netherworld King said, ‘Gods are mysterious beings. Isn’t it best not to pry too far?’ Bwa ha ha! That mystery is what’s so good about him. Anyone with determinable limits is an unworthy enemy of the Demon King, no? The Scarlet Stele King already serves as his punching bag.”

Zeke looked as though he was about to say something, but he swallowed his words. “Right.”

“That being said, even the Heavenly Father, the order that creates order, is inferior to the Demon King of Tyranny. The reason is simple: he looks down on the Demon King and disregards him as an unworthy opponent. Is it possible to win a battle when you underestimate your enemy?”

“No.”

“Precisely! He cannot win. He’s sure to suffer a thorough defeat. The Demon King of Tyranny always exceeds my expectations. Cliché thoughts such as ‘I can win if I do this!’ or ‘I’ll win by doing that!’ are sure to spell the Heavenly Father’s defeat. But I, the Conflagration King, am different. I know, without a doubt, that the Demon King will win!”

His voice booming, Eldmed sang his praises for me loud and clear.

“Ah, but it’d be a shame for the god to disappear like this. As long as he rids himself of his arrogance and acknowledges the Demon King as a worthy enemy, he shall still have his uses. After all, a god’s power is immense!”

“The power of a god’s order, you mean?” Zeke asked, interrupting Eldmed’s rant. “But isn’t that what’s restricting Nosgalia to begin with?”

“Yes, you’re quite right. In short, I merely have to become the existence that controls that order.”

Zeke looked doubtful. “How so?”

“Isn’t it obvious? I, the Conflagration King, shall obtain the Heavenly Father’s power! That is why I’m preparing a spell formula right now.”

“Is such a thing possible?”

Eldmed cackled. “Of course not! Even if I spent two thousand years on this formula, there’s nothing I could do. Devising magic isn’t even my specialty. But finishing my incomplete spell formula should be a piece of cake for the Demon King of Tyranny, no?”

A look of exhaustion crossed Zeke’s face. No matter what he said, the conversation would always lead back to me.

“Oh, come now, don’t look so fed up, Zeke. By ‘Demon King of Tyranny,’ I don’t mean Anos.”

“What do you mean?”

“The great spirit, the Child of God—Nosgalia’s plan was to formulate the birth of the Demon King of Tyranny, Avos Dilhevia.”

Zeke gasped, and his expression darkened. “You plan on taking advantage of Hero Kanon’s plan.”

“Precisely.”

“In other words, you mean to subjugate Nosgalia by harnessing the power of Avos Dilhevia.”

“Depending on how the situation unfolds, yes. I must choose the option that more significantly increases the number of Demon King Anos’s enemies. That is

the most troubling decision.”

Eldmed cackled once more.

“Soon, the hero should be making contact with the Mother of Spirits and the Demon King’s right-hand man. What the three of them will do with the Demon King gone will be a sight to behold, bwa ha ha!”

§ 57. Vows

Aharthern, the Great Spirit Forest.

Through Sasha's vision, Shin and Reno could be seen facing Hero Kanon.

"I refuse," Shin said bluntly, but Kanon persisted.

"Shin Reglia, this is a means of saving the Demon King of Tyranny. I know that Anos can handle whatever humanity may be scheming, but the Demon King does not wish for conflict. After he took up his sword to protect his allies, after he extended his hand to save his enemies, will you be the one to make him stand against humankind once again?"

When Shin remained, Kanon continued. "The human race has made a foolish decision. That is why I shall atone for them. This time, we shall have peace so that one day, when he wakes, the peaceful world he died for will await him."

"Hero Kanon," Shin said coldly, "no matter what the circumstances, do you believe I could accept a fake Demon King?"

"I do not."

"Do you understand what you're saying by asking me to play the right-hand man of a fraud such as this?"

"With the Demon King's right-hand man at his side, no one will doubt Avos Dilhevia as the true Demon King. If you care for Anos, won't you cooperate with me?"

Shin drew his iron sword and pointed it at Kanon's neck. Just before the blade made contact, Kanon stopped it with his bare hand. Drops of blood rolled down his hand and dripped onto the ground.

"To think that, without your intervention, my liege will resort to destroying mankind is an insult," Shin said. "The Demon King is not that weak. No matter the scheme he faces, he shall surpass it all without losing anything."

"I know he can surpass everything, but there are things that even he has

failed to protect.”

“My liege became stronger to prevent that from happening ever again. I’m sure he will continue to grow stronger after his reincarnation.”

“Even so, I have to show him that humans aren’t only fools! We cannot rely on him for everything because of his strength. That’s what forced him to become stronger in the first place. He had to kill and destroy to stop others, to the point he became known as a tyrant!”

Hero Kanon continued to protest, earnestly attempting to take the side of demonkind. “Can you not feel how isolating, how tragic, having that much power is? Because of our weakness, because of our lack of resolution to end the conflict, because we didn’t have the strength to cease our hatred, he had to fall into a solitary sleep!”

His eyes unwavering, Kanon kept his eyes on Shin. “Indeed, it would be an insult to have an imposter take his place. I, as well as anyone, know just how mighty and revered the Demon King is. That is why I will atone for the sin of assuming the Demon King’s identity. I shall atone with my own life—as the fictitious Demon King, Avos Dilhevia.”

Kanon tightened his grip on the sword. “I’m sorry. I cannot die right now. But in two thousand years, I promise...I promise that I shall atone with my life. And at that time, you can be the one to end me.”

Shin kept his cold glare locked on Kanon. There was no need for him to repeat the same words twice. His answer hadn’t changed. Sensing that, Kanon released the sword.

“I made a promise. I promised him that the next time he was born, we would meet as friends. The next time we meet, I...I wish to be worthy of calling myself his friend.”

The two stared at each other. Shin withdrew his sword, flicking off the blood before returning it to its sheath.

“It seems that Hero Kanon has lost his mind,” he said. “There is no way an imposter’s name will succeed in spreading throughout Dilhade. There should be no harm in disregarding this madness.” He turned around and spoke with his

back to Kanon. “I will reincarnate. It will be two thousand years before I am born again.”

He wouldn’t cooperate in spreading the name of an imaginary Demon King, but neither would he stop Kanon from doing so. That was the most that Shin, my loyal retainer, could do.

“Thank you.” Kanon bowed deeply to Shin’s back. He only straightened himself once Shin had walked away. Reno, who was still before him, nodded in greeting.

“You’ve changed, Kanon. You always seemed as if you were in pain, but now there’s something relaxed about you.”

“If so, it’s all thanks to Demon King Anos.” Kanon laughed brightly. “That aside, are you the reason he’s changed?”

“Huh?” Reno’s eyes rounded.

“I came here ready to be cut by him. The Shin I knew would have drawn a demon sword, not an iron sword. He wouldn’t have given me the time of day. It’s the first time ever I’ve seen him free of bloodlust.”

“I see. Then maybe teaching him to love was worthwhile after all.”

“Love?” Kanon looked surprised. Then he smiled faintly. “Oh, I see. Then it’s no wonder you’re a little different too.” He nodded while he spoke. “I didn’t think the Mother of Spirits could fall in love.”

Stunned, Reno stared back at him. Her expression was one of sudden realization.

With hope in his eyes, Kanon turned on his heel and left Aharthern. “Perhaps there’s more love in this world than I thought.”

“Love,” Reno murmured. Her expression softened, and her cheeks flushed. “I see. Love.” She repeated the word as though confirming the feeling in her heart. Then she whirled around abruptly and hurried after Shin. “Shin!”

Shin’s back soon came into view. Although the visitor had only been Hero Kanon, Shin hadn’t strayed too far from her side.

“Is something wrong?”

Before he could turn around, Reno leaped at his back and clung to him tightly. “I’ve got it. I get it now, Shin. It was love. I love you! I’m *in* love with you!”

Taken aback, Shin merely looked at her.

“I thought it was curious,” she said. Her face was bright with joy, like that of an innocent child. “Whenever I’m with you, I feel different than normal. When I heard you didn’t know what love was, I felt a pain in my chest, and watching you water the flowers made me grin with joy. When I’m with you, you turn me into someone different—someone who isn’t the Mother of Spirits! Ah...” Reno stepped away from Shin, shrinking back in fear of his gaze. She looked up at him. “Is that a nuisance?”

At this moment, the Mother of Spirits, who had resided in Aharthern for a long, long time, was more like a young girl experiencing her first love.

“There is no love in me,” Shin replied.

Reno trembled.

“However,” he continued, “I have grown to feel like a little bit of the emptiness within me has been filled by you. Playing with spirits and watering teardrop blossoms are both things I never before imagined doing.”

Reno’s expression relaxed.

“The days I have spent here have given me solace. Even if this feeling isn’t love, I am grateful to you, Reno.”

“No, no! It’s fine!” Reno shook her head, smiling.

“But today is the end of those days,” Shin added quietly.

“Huh?”

“The divine beasts have been dealt with. Nosgalia is living a half existence with little to no power left as an order. If you stay within the Great Tree, he won’t be able to touch you.”

Stunned, Reno stared at Shin. “Are you going to reincarnate?”

“I must keep my word. Soon, Hero Kanon will begin spreading rumors of a fictional Demon King. I plan on taking my leave before then.”

“When?”

“I shall now head for Dilhade.”

Reno bit her lip. “But I finally realized how I feel,” she murmured sadly.

Troubled, Shin closed his mouth. The two faced each other for a while until Shin eventually broke the silence. “My apologies. Two thousand years from now, my liege awaits me.”

Reno hung her head, her face filled with sadness. She looked to be on the verge of tears, but she held them back and forced a smile. “It’s not fair,” she said.

“What do you mean?”

“The Demon King has always been with you, but you’ve only just met me. There’s no way I could ever win against him.”

Putting on the biggest smile she could muster, she desperately held her tears, but those tears were threatening to fall at the slightest movement.

Perhaps Shin could see that too. He didn’t repeat himself. “Then as a symbol of my gratitude, I shall give you something in lieu of the time I have spent with him. That way, there is no injustice.”

“What might that be?”

“Whatever you wish. If you order me to stay here, I shall obey.”

Shin’s suggestion was unexpected. He probably wanted to prevent Reno from spilling tears of sadness. She thought for a moment, choosing her words carefully.

“In that case, um...” Her voice was feeble and threatened to break. “Marry me, Shin.”

Sasha, who’d be watching from afar, jumped up. “Out of the blue?!” she cried.

Thankfully, Reno was too preoccupied to hear her.

“She’s going to be shot down,” Sasha mumbled to herself.

“Very well,” Shin replied.

Sasha's eyes widened. "He agreed..."

In the Mythical Age, people married for many reasons besides romance. As someone born two thousand years later, Sasha couldn't understand that.

"Have a good trip then, Shin," Reno said, smiling from the bottom of her heart. "I'll be waiting here for you to return in two thousand years' time. When you do, I'll teach you to love."

She didn't want to stop him; she had merely wanted him to promise to meet her again.

"Reno." Shin knelt in front of her and took her hand. "Dilhade or Aharthern, which style would you prefer?"

"U-Um..."

She blinked, unable to understand what he was saying.

"For the wedding. Do spirits have them?"

"Aren't you going?" Reno asked in surprise.

"My liege ordered all his subordinates to hold ceremonies when they get married. I cannot reincarnate without fulfilling that duty."

Hmm. Come to think of it, I had said something like that. During the war, marriages hadn't always been held for joyous reasons, so many couples had skipped the ceremony. However, there was no point in worrying about a war that might never end. Celebrations had to be held whenever possible, loudly and boldly.

"Can we have it in the Aharthern style then? No one here knows how Dilhade weddings work."

Shin nodded and looked into Reno's eyes. "This is a Dilhade tradition, but... In the name of the almighty Demon King, I swear my vows." He bowed his head and placed a gentle kiss on Reno's hand. Reno's eyes widened in surprise. "I, Shin Reglia, take Great Spirit Reno to be my wife. No matter what our fates may be, may our hearts be together for eternity, until death do us part, until our sources be destroyed."

Those were the marital vows used in Midhaze during the Mythical Age.

§ 58. The Wedding

The next morning.

Misha and I had rushed back to Aharthern in order to attend the wedding, which was to take place at the top of the Great Tree. The area in front of the small castle where Reno lived was decorated with an abundance of flowers. An altar made of clouds had been set up in front of the door. It was a shrine honoring their spirit ancestors.

Stretching from the altar to the other side of the clouds was a carpet of beautiful blue teardrop blossoms. All the spirits of Aharthern were gathered on the sides of the aisle.

Spirits with large true forms, like Lignon, the eight-headed water dragon, and the Long Snake Epiteo, attended in their transient forms. We, with our disguise as a troupe of traveling entertainers, were also in attendance.

After some time, Reno, clad in a pure-white dress, stepped out from the other side of the clouds. Shin was walking beside her, donned in a black suit of armor. The armor he wore was known as Eltonica, the spirit of celebratory formal dress. The spirit appeared during auspicious events, taking the form of appropriate garments and bestowing all kinds of blessings on their owner.

Eltonica's current form, a suit of armor, was the formal wedding attire popular among demons of this era. There were no rules in regards to the armor's color, but I preferred to wear black during formal occasions.

The color black couldn't be dyed by anything. I wore this color when making oaths I intended to keep. Because of this, many of my subordinates often dressed in kind and wore black attire for their formal occasions.

The black armor Shin wore seemed a little out of place against the colorful flowers that adorned spirit weddings, but Reno had said it was perfect for a wedding between a spirit and a demon. She had fully respected his attire, probably knowing full well that Shin wanted to pay respect to the Demon King

of Tyranny.

“Reno’s here!”

“Sword uncle’s here too!”

“Wedding, wedding!”

“So joyous!”

The titi scattered glitter in celebration as they flitted around Reno and Shin, guiding them down the teardrop blossom aisle. The two slowly made their way down it, towards the altar. Their feet fell just above the flowers, stepping over the air to prevent the blooms from being trodden.

Jets of water shot up into the corridor of clouds, forming several arches over the flower path. It was a blessing from Lignon, the Great Water Spirit.

“May the greatest fortune fall upon the kind mother who raised us and the strong spouse who protected us.”

A gentle breeze blew, sweeping blossom petals along with the colorful petals of other flowers into the air. It was a blessing from Gigadeith, the Spirit of Thunder and Wind.

“Congratulations, Reno.”

Blinking green, the cenetello took flight. The healing fireflies formed a sparkling star shape in the air.

“Congrats, congrats!”

Like this, all the fairies exercised their power to warmly celebrate their mother’s wedding.

“Congratulations!” Eleonore cheered. “You’re so beautiful, Reno! You’re looking handsome too, Shin!”

Zeshia nodded. “Congratulations... Weddings are a good thing.”

The two girls used Aske to convert the guests’ feelings into light. On the other side of the castle, a rainbow bridge extended across the sky.

“Pretty,” Rina mumbled.

Eleonore watched the rainbow happily then turned her gaze to the newlyweds.

“It’s pretty, but is it okay?” Sasha murmured beside me.

“Spirit blessings have always been extravagant. Nothing will change from us seasoning the celebrations a little.”

“Huh. Then can we do it too?” she asked. Misha nodded in agreement. The two linked hands and fused their spell formulae. *“Ice fireworks.”*

From the magic circle created between them, ice crystals shot into the sky. The crystals burst into large, glittering fireworks that lingered there.

Lay, dressed head to toe in green armor, was next to speak. “Time to go and put on a show,” he said.

When he stepped in front of the aisle, four other sets of green armor also stepped forward. There was no one inside the other suits—they were ronron, armor spirits, that could move of their own accord. Each armor spirit held a branch—a Wooden Sword of Blessing—in their hand as they walked towards Shin.

Shin stepped before Reno and drew his iron sword. It was said that whoever cut the Swords of Blessing would be granted great fortune, as too would those struck by them—either way, great fortune would be received. This was a tradition of spirit weddings.

With a roar, the four ronron charged towards Shin, who sliced through their swords with ease. The fairies cheered.

What a lively ceremony.

“As impressive as always,” Lay said, taking a step towards Shin.

Shin’s gaze sharpened at the sight of Lay’s armor. When Lay dived forward and brought the wooden sword down, Shin moved to intercept the blow with his iron sword. However, Shin’s sword passed through the branch like water.

The Wooden Sword of Blessing had transformed into a blade of light. That light proceeded to strike Shin’s body, bursting into a glowing aura that wrapped around him.

“Was that the Sword of Blessing’s hidden art?”

“They’re pretty weak spirit swords, so I managed to get the hang of it.”

Lay drew a magic circle and took out Siegesta. Kneeling before Shin, he presented him with the sword.

“Although I’m part of a troupe of entertainers, in practice, I’m more of a bodyguard. I can’t bless you with flashy magic like everyone else can.”

Shin accepted the Sword of Intent and laughed. “This was the best gift I could have asked for, Lay.”

He stored Siegesta in a magic circle and turned around, offering his hand to Reno. She accepted it happily, and they resumed their walk towards the altar.

“Sorry for making you go through all this,” Reno said. “A wedding like this must seem really weird to a demon.”

“Not at all,” Shin replied. His gaze was directed forward. “It is because of you that someone with only the heart of a sword is being celebrated like this. I cannot repay you with love, but I have no objections to this wedding.”

Reno beamed. “There’s no helping the lack of demon attendees, but it’s a shame Demon King Anos couldn’t come.”

“That is true. However—”

Shin came to a stop. For there I was, standing before the altar.

“I am Anosh Polticoal, the infant form of the Demon King of Tyranny.”

The spirits burst into laughter.

“Shin,” I said, looking at my subordinate, “even without love, you made a choice. You desired this wedding yourself. Believe in yourself. Nothing in this world is beyond your reach. After all, you are the Demon King’s right-hand man.”

Shin nodded quietly. “That sounds like something he would say.”

“That is indeed what the Demon King would say. I am Anosh Polticoal, the greatest traveling entertainer in Dilhade. Did you think that mimicry couldn’t match the real thing?”

The titi bounced around, clutching their stomachs with laughter. I turned on my heel and made my way back into the crowd.

After watching me go, Reno turned to Shin. “However?”

With a faint smile, Shin gazed at my back. “However, he could be watching from two thousand years in the future. After all, my liege is the Demon King of Tyranny.”

Reno giggled. “That sounds like something he’d do.”

When they reached the altar, they stood side by side and straightened their postures. Ennunen’s solemn voice rang out, and the noisy spirits quieted. Although they were all itching to shout and cheer, they watched the ceremony quietly. Only Ennunen’s voice could be heard in the silence.

“Let us be grateful that we are gathered here today to witness this wonderful unification between two races, spirit and demon. Their vows shall now be exchanged. Great Spirit Reno, do you take Shin Reglia to be your husband, to promise him your undying love through good times and through bad, with your spirit name and heart, until the end of your lore do you part?”

“I do,” Reno said sincerely, a look of determination in her eyes.

“Shin Reglia, the Demon King’s right-hand man, do you take Great Spirit Reno to be your wife, to promise her your unchanging efforts to protect her and her children through good times and through bad, with your pride and will as a demon?”

“Even if destruction tries to part us, I do,” Shin replied firmly and with pride.

“Very well. As of this moment, the Mother of Spirits’ husband, Shin Reglia, the Spirit King, has been born. For as long as you keep your vow, Aharthorn will be with you. We spirits will be your strength.”

Their gazes fixed on Shin and Reno, the spirit guests nodded in agreement.

“You may now kiss.”

Shin and Reno turned to face one another and slowly closed the distance between them. Once they were close enough to touch, Reno whispered to Shin.

“Y-You can just pretend.”

“Do you want me to pretend?”

Reno averted her gaze. “No, I don’t,” she mumbled.

“As you wish.” Shin gently wrapped his arms around her.

“I love you,” Reno said.

“I—”

Reno interrupted him with a grin. “It’s okay. I’ll love enough for the both of us.”

Shin’s gaze softened. He smiled at her gently. “I may not know what love is, but I chose you, Reno.”

The distance between them slowly, slowly shortened. The sight was like a wish, like a prayer for the love about to begin, for a bud to sprout from that seed—for the flower to bloom without wilting. Like a dream that would disappear in the blink of an eye, the two exchanged a clumsy, inexperienced kiss.

§ 59. The First Night

Singing, dancing, making noise... By the time the bustling wedding came to an end, the moon was in the sky. Shin and Reno were standing on the balcony of the small castle atop of the clouds. They had removed their formal attire and were back in their normal clothes. The newlyweds were watching the spirits leave through the cloud corridor.

“Thank you, Shin,” Reno said. “Spirit weddings are noisy, aren’t they? Demon ones are held solemnly, so it must have been a surprise to you.”

“It wasn’t bad,” Shin replied, with an unusually gentle expression. Once the last spirit had taken their leave, Shin turned to Reno. “If it weren’t with you, Reno, I would have gone the rest of my life without marrying anyone. I am grateful to you for showing this loveless, empty body a dream.”

Reno blushed at his words. She gazed idly at her spouse beside her. “You know,” she said, embarrassed, “it’s not that you don’t understand it. I’m sure you have a tiny, tiny bud inside your heart that will one day bloom. Even if it’s still a bud, love is love.”

Reno grinned. Without saying anything, Shin looked up at the moonlit sky.

“If only I could see this forever,” he finally replied. Shin’s gaze was drawn to the faintly glowing moon. There was something lonely about his profile. “Has this dream come to an end?”

“Huh?”

Shin slowly returned his gaze to the confused Reno. “Has the ceremony come to an end?”

“Oh, yeah.” Reno looked down. “I guess it’s over.”

“In that case—”

Before Shin could finish talking, tiny fairies appeared out of nowhere.

“Over?”

“Is it over?”

“It’s not over!”

“Main event! Main event!”

“Wedding night! Wedding night!”

Squealing loudly, the fairies flew around them, still chanting, “Wedding night! Wedding night!”

“Hey, titi! Don’t say weird things. He’s not a spirit, so there’s no point in us doing that!” Reno glanced over at Shin then turned beet red. “That’s not what I mean! Even if there was a point, I wouldn’t ask for anything!”

Raising her fists, Reno chased after the titi and scolded them. The fairies fearfully clung to Shin’s shoulders and head.

“Reno’s scary!”

“Scary, scary!”

“Spirit King...!”

“Appease Reno!”

The titi trembled in fear. Reno glared at them.

“What would you have me do?” Shin asked.

The titi whispered in his ear. “Wedding night, wedding night!”

“The next step after a wedding!”

“Reno will cheer up.”

“She’ll get better!”

“She’ll cheer up after one round.”

Unable to take any more, Reno released bubbles that captured the titi. The fairies struggled to breathe in the water.

“Jeez! If you keep talking nonsense, you’ll trouble Shin.”

Shin extended his hand to Reno.

“Uh, what?”

“If it isn’t over yet, then let us continue this dream for a little longer.”

“Ah...”

“If you wish, that is.”

Reno stared at Shin. The titi floundered and flailed until they managed to swim free.

“We’re interrupting!”

“Gotta go.”

“Quickly, quickly!”

“Before things get too heated!”

“Enjoy yourselves!”

The fairies left the castle, scattering glittering dust through the night sky. Befuddled, Reno watched the trail of light.

“Shall we go inside?” Shin asked.

“Oh, um...” Still confused, Reno hesitated. Shin quietly waited for her as she avoided his gaze. “Okay,” she said feebly, taking his hand.

Like that, Shin escorted her into the room. It was a bedroom decorated with colorful flowers, with a large canopy bed at the center. Reno sat down on the edge of the bed.

“Um, you know...” Reno faltered, struggling for words. “The wedding night is technically part of the ceremony, but we can just sleep without doing anything. We don’t have to do anything,” she repeated, as though to convince herself as well.

Shin nodded. “Do you want to rest?”

“Ah, no, uh...” Reno paused. “Let’s talk a little more.”

Shin nodded again. “What do you wish to talk about?”

“Um...how about you tell me about Demon King Anos?”

Shin’s gaze softened.

“The Heavenly Father said you gained a heart after you were taken in by the

Demon King. I want to hear about that.” Reno patted the bed beside her. “Y-You can sit here.”

“Then please excuse me.” Shin unhurriedly stepped forward and sat down beside her. “It’s not that interesting of a story,” he said, looking towards the balcony. “We met on a moonlit night just like this.”

Shin stared up at the beautiful full moon and began to tell his tale. “It must have been around the middle of the Great War, during the transitional period before the conflict intensified once again. I had already obtained my body and would travel around challenging famous demons to duels.”

Shin spoke softly as he thought back on his distant memories. “As the Disastrous God-slaying Sword, I had thought my enemies to be weak, but perhaps that was only natural. My source had been created to fight, while theirs had not.”

Shin paused there, closing his eyes for a few moments. When he opened them again, there was a hint of grief in them. “They had love inside them. That love became their kindness, their hatred, their sadness—all of which are unnecessary emotions for war. Those demons were cut down by my sword one after another,” he muttered plainly, his eyes fixed on his past. “Maybe it was my lack of love that gave me strength.”

There was something lonely about those cold words. Reno seemed to feel it too, as she bit down on her lip.

“There was a void in my chest. I may have even found myself envying those whom I defeated. My body craved for something, but at the time, I had no way of knowing what that something was. All I knew was that I sought someone who could defeat me in a duel. I continuously sought out enemies and swung my sword, living up to my name.”

However, Shin had kept on fighting until people had started referring to him by another nickname: the strongest demon swordsman, wielder of a thousand demon swords.

“One day, I was summoned by the Demon King. I swung my sword as I always did, when my liege suddenly called out. ‘Let’s talk,’ he said.”

“What did you do?”

“Of course, I ignored him and attacked. My liege spoke with every blow he blocked. He said many things to me that day, but it all boiled down to one thing.” Shin’s expression softened as he recalled my words. “He wanted to know what I was fighting for.”

Reno nodded to show she was listening. She could tell how important this was to him.

“I drew one hundred swords, but I was unable to land one cut. For the very first time, I was interested in an opponent, and so I asked him. ‘How are you so strong?’ When I think about it now, I realize those were the first words I’d spoken since obtaining my demon body.”

“What did Anos say?”

“He said, ‘If I weren’t strong, I couldn’t save anyone.’ Then he asked me the same question I’d asked him.” Shin stared at the palm of his hand. “I told him there was no reason. I had no heart. I was strong because that’s how I was made. I was only a sword.” He clenched his open hand shut. There was an intensity behind Shin’s words. “That was when my liege said this: ‘Become my subordinate. I shall provide an enemy worth striking down.’ I realized at that moment that, for all my life, I had been seeking a master worthy of possessing the Disastrous God-slaying Sword. In the end, my liege reached my heart without using any magic.”

After taking a breath, he looked at Reno. “‘I will become your sword and cut down all your enemies.’ When I swore my loyalty to him with those words, he replied thus: ‘In that case, I shall destroy all tragedies and injustices that stand before you.’”

“Anos is amazing,” Reno murmured.

“Which part are you referring to?”

“He was able to tell what you were truly seeking, right? And he did so without drawing his sword even once.”

“That’s true. I’ve asked him about that before, but all he said was he’d had enough.”

“Had enough?”

“Of fighting, that is. As it turns out, I am unable to understand what my liege was thinking at that time.”

Shin stared far into the distance. His mind seemed lost in thoughts of his master, who would reincarnate two thousand years in the future.

“What I know for certain is that he gave my hollow self a reason to fight. My liege welcomed a sword like me and treated me as a demon. In order to repay him, I became his right-hand man.”

“I see.” Reno gazed in the same direction as Shin. “I know I said it was unfair, but I really can’t win against Anos. It’s only natural you would want to chase after him and reincarnate.”

Reno’s head fell just a little bit in disappointment, but she quickly gave it a shake as though she’d made up her mind. Still sitting on the bed, she hesitantly covered Shin’s hand with her own. She turned to him, mustering all of her courage. Reno’s voice trembled as her face blushed red.

“S-Say, Shin, I don’t...”

Her voice was so quiet it was barely audible, but she somehow managed to say the right words.

“I don’t think I want to sleep after all.”

She brought her face close to Shin’s and kissed him gently, stretching her white fingertips towards him. There, she clung tight, leaning her weight against him. Shin gently grasped her hand.

“Is that okay?”

After a brief pause, Shin replied. “If what you seek is love, you may end up hurt.”

“It’s okay.” Reno tangled her fingers with Shin’s and grinned like usual. “I’ll teach you.”

The full moon glowed faintly in the vast night sky. Its light, filtering through the window, shone upon the two overlapping shadows.

§ 60. Thus Love Takes Shape

For three days after the wedding, the married couple spent the same time together. By doing so, they would cultivate an undying bond.

The titi had instilled in Shin's mind that this was, without a doubt, the custom of spirit marriages, and thus Shin spent those three days with Reno in the small castle at the top of Ennunien.

Then, on the morning of the fourth day...

Shin was running through the Great Tree. After traversing the same path several times, he burst through a certain door. The Forest of Books appeared before him. In the depths of the forest was a shallow lake. Large lotus leaves floated on the surface of the water, on top of which Reno lay. When Shin had received notice of Reno's collapse, he had immediately made his way there.

He ran up to her. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, the cenetello are here with me."

Reno's body was bathed in green light—the light of the healing fireflies.

"I heard you suddenly collapsed. What happened?"

"Nothing. I don't know. Ennunien's looking into it. Maybe it's overexcitement from marrying you." Reno offered him a slightly pained smile.

"As long as it's not serious."

"I'm fine. Sorry for making you worry."

Shin grasped Reno's outstretched hand. "I shall remain here until you recover."

"No, it's okay. I've already kept you too long. Right, Ennunien?"

A hoarse voice echoed through the Forest of Books. "Hmm, how should I put this?"

"Is it bad news?" Shin asked.

Ennunien didn't reply immediately. "Nothing like this has ever happened before. I am the Great Tree of Learning; when it comes to spirits, I should know pretty much everything. But this..." Ennunien hummed in contemplation.

"It's okay. Just say it. What's wrong?" Reno asked.

"Well," Ennunien said quietly, "it seems that you're pregnant."

Reno blinked. "Pregnant?"

"That's right. There's no mistake."

"But whose child is it?"

"I can detect a demon's magic. It is most certainly the child of the Spirit King."

"No way."

Stunned, Reno stared at Shin. He was as expressionless as always, but his lack of response revealed that he was quite shaken.

"Isn't it impossible for a demon and spirit to have children?"

"Hmm. That's what I believed. However, spirits are born from the rumors and legends of humans and demons. It wouldn't be too strange for there to be spirits with bodies similar to theirs." Ennunien hummed again. "That said, this is a surprise. This is probably the first time a half-spirit, half-demon has been heard of in spirit history."

"I see," Reno murmured, smiling a little.

"The half-spirit, half-demon child in your body is why you collapsed."

"What do you mean?" Shin asked.

"Spirits are formed from rumors and legends. In most cases, spirits are born from widespread rumors or famous legends and are fully developed at birth, but this isn't the case for half-spirit, half-demon children. The spirit source is influenced by the demon half of their body. A newly created, weak rumor forms their source."

Only three days had passed since their first night together. If Reno was pregnant, the unborn child shouldn't even be a fetus yet. Under normal circumstances, it was far too early to detect any life. Similarly, the fate of a

spirit's rumor or legend shouldn't have been decided at this stage.

"Can it survive like this?" Reno asked, quietly placing a hand on her stomach.

"At this point in time, the rumor or legend is just too weak. Even you should have trouble telling what the child's lore is, no?"

Reno nodded faintly.

"Right now, the child is connected to your womb. Similar to how, in demon mothers, nutrition is sent from mother to child, Reno's source is being transferred to the child. The sudden loss of magic is what caused you to collapse."

"So as long as they're inside me..."

"They will survive. However, a demon body cannot remain in the womb forever. The baby has to be born in roughly ten months and ten days. If the lore isn't found and nurtured by then, or if the lore has faded by then, the child won't live for long."

In contrast to Shin, who wore a grim expression, Reno was grinning.

"Oh, good," she said.

"How so?"

"Because there's a whole ten months and ten days to go. That's enough time to figure something out. I'm the Mother of Spirits; perceiving children is my specialty."

Shin thought for a moment. "If you can figure out what the rumor or legend is, is it possible to prevent that lore from fading?"

"Don't worry. I'll figure something out. It'll be a little difficult with the wall in place, but I'm sure it'll be fine." Reno slowly sat up then got to her feet. She stepped down from the lotus leaf and quietly walked forward. "Say, Shin, why do you think this happened?"

"I don't know."

The green books lying on the ground grew sticklike limbs and trotted over to Reno. They waved their arms up and down, gesturing for her to sit.

“I think it was thanks to you. You left me this child so that I wouldn’t get lonely.” Reno crouched down and held her hand out to a lilan. The book fairy ripped out one of its own pages and handed it to her. For a brief moment, the page appeared to sparkle with glittering light. “It’s like a miracle.”

Shin fell silent while forming his response. “Miracles don’t happen. Whatever happens, happens by our own hands.”

“Then *you* made a miracle happen. The love born here made a miracle happen.” Reno smiled at Shin, who was standing beside her. “No matter what happens, I’ll take care of this child—because this child is the love you gave me.”

Shin’s expression showed an indescribable mix of happiness and sadness. “You always show me a dream,” he mumbled.

“That’s not right. You’re the one always giving me a dream. You gave me the dream for me to live as myself.” Reno stood up and kissed Shin, catching him off guard. She giggled at how his eyes widened. “I’d like you to name this child.”

After thinking for a moment, Shin replied. “Gorde for a boy. If it’s a girl, then Misa.”

“They’re both good names. I wish we had twins.”

Caught up in Reno’s happiness, Shin relaxed his expression. “Reno, you—”

She continued grinning at him. “I won’t tell you not to go,” she said, cutting him off. “My husband is the right-hand man of the Demon King. He is most indebted to him and repays him with loyalty. You’re not one to stand by and watch as rumors of a false Demon King are spread.”

She was trying to send him off—to ease his anxieties about leaving.

“Our child and I will be waiting,” she continued. “We’ll be waiting here, Shin. You’d better not forget me once you reincarnate.”

Shin nodded firmly. “Even if I forget my sword, I shall endeavor to remember you.”

The two drew close to one another and embraced. After some time passed, Reno showed Shin the piece of paper.

“Do you know about fran, the love fairy?”

Shin shook his head quietly.

“It’s a spirit that gives shape to unfulfilled love and ties people together. It’s said that there are as many fran as there are flawed loves in this world, for example, if someone passed away with regrets. Even if their source is destroyed and they can never be reborn again, their love fairy will assist them.”

The page that Reno held was the book fairy’s page on love fairies, which had been missing two thousand years in the future.

“The fran lend their bodies to the dead. By borrowing the love fairy’s body, unfulfilled souls are reborn to convey their love, but only for the brief amount of time until they realize they’re a fran.”

This was what was written on the page about fran. By borrowing the body of the love fairy, the resurrected person would forget their memories of their love and then wander as a fairy, in search of those memories. Only those whose love is true would recall their memories and be able to convey their feelings.

In order to say the words they hadn’t been able to say, in order to conclude their sadness, love fairies would always wander this world.

“I am a spirit, so I may fade one day, but if I do, I’ll become a love fairy and come to see you again. That’s why we’ll definitely meet again, no matter what.”

Reno pushed the page into Shin’s hands. “Keep it as a charm. The lilan gave it to me. If you have this, I’m sure I’ll know where you are if I turn into a fran. Don’t ever lose it, okay?”

Their separation would last two thousand years. There was no guarantee that nothing would happen to Reno in that time, which is why she’d said what she had.

“I promise.”

Shin tucked the page into his pocket. His gaze was drawn to Reno’s eyes. She smiled gently, and the two continued to stare at each other for a while.

“Have a safe trip, Shin.”

“I will return here no matter what. When I do, I will bring you my love as a gift.”

With those words, Shin turned around. He walked away without looking back, followed by Reno's gaze.

Once Shin exited Aharthern, he headed for Dilhade. I didn't follow him, but I was able to watch him. A certain someone—or *someones*—seemed to be planning a prank on him, so I took advantage of their presence and linked myself to them.

Shin ran without rest and arrived in Dilhade half a day later. He passed through the gates of Midhaze and arrived at Demon Castle Delsgade. From there, he proceeded underground to the dungeon, passed through the secret passage, and entered the treasure vault. There, he returned the Sword of Intent.

With a deep breath, he began to draw a magic circle. It was for Syrica, the reincarnation spell. His inferiority at source magic meant that he would be unable to inherit all of his power and memories. Even so, he did not hesitate. But just as he was about to pour his magic into the circle—

“Can't breathe...”

“I'm at my limit!”

“Help!”

“It's so cramped!”

High-pitched voices echoed through the vault.

With a harsh glare, Shin took the page out of his pocket. One after another, several titi popped out of the page.

“How did you hide yourselves?”

The titi tilted their heads at his question.

“By shrinking.”

“Turning into words!”

“Turning flat like paper.”

“We were hiding!”

Of course, there was nowhere to hide on a piece of paper, but that didn't

seem to matter to the prank-loving titi or their lore.

“Where are we?”

“Is this Dilhade?”

“Oh no!”

“We can’t go back!”

“We can’t cross the wall!”

“Help!”

With feigned innocence, the titi started making a fuss. This was clearly part of their scheme to make Shin return to Reno.

“Aharthern isn’t the only spirit habitat in the world. You can go to where the Dilhade spirits live.”

The titi made an exaggerated pose of surprise.

“How cold!”

“The Spirit King’s cold!”

“You have to go back!”

“To Aharthern, quickly, quickly!”

“She’s going to fade away!”

“Reno’s going to disappear!”

Shin, who’d been about to cast Syrica, paused.

“What do you mean?”

The fairies flitted around Shin.

“Big trouble!”

“You have to stay with Reno.”

“No reincarnating.”

“For another ten months and ten days!”

Their words were incomprehensible. Shin sighed. “If this is another one of

your pranks, prepare to face the consequences,” he said, leaving the vault.

§ 61. A Prayer for Two Thousand Years Later

In the field of teardrop blossoms.

I lay hidden among the tallest flowers, keeping watch over the area. At the center of my vision was Reno, who was casting orbs of water to shower the teardrop blossoms. Nurtured by her love, the blossoms grew rapidly, creating new seedlings. Many more flowers had bloomed, but over half of the field was still empty.

Meanwhile, my vision was being shared with Lay and the others over at the spirit school. Reno was still pregnant with a half-spirit, half-demon child. Something was about to happen. I could feel it.

“Reno!” a hoarse voice called. The voice belonged to Ennunen, but he sounded farther away than usual. He was calling through the open door to the field. “Reno, my Eyes can’t see you there. Please don’t push yourself.”

“I’m fine. Besides, I’m the only one who can water the spirits, remember? Shin would be sad if he came back to them all wilted.”

“Hmm. Could you leave it to the traveling entertainers?”

“Anosh and the others won’t stay here forever. I have to do what I can by myself. Besides, I have more love than I know what to do with right now, so it’d be a waste not to spread it.”

She finished up watering the blossoms and looked at the field happily.

“Are you really okay with this?” Ennunen asked cautiously.

“With what?”

“As the mother of all spirits, you are bound by that lore. At all moments in time, you must be the mother of spirits and spirits alone.” Ennunen’s voice echoed solemnly. “That child is half demon. If you give birth to it, you will be defying your lore. You will fade away. You know this, don’t you?”

“Yup. I do.” Reno laughed as if that didn’t matter to her. “You know, I finally

understand what granny meant.”

Ennunien hummed in thought. “The Great War Tree, Migelonov, was it?”

“Oh, right. You never met granny. She once told me that this is the fate of all spirits. We each have to decide whether we want to protect our lore, or to turn against it and protect what’s important to us.”

Reno lovingly brushed her fingertips against her stomach.

“I am the Mother of Spirits. I have never doubted that fact, and I consider all spirits to be my precious children. But I met someone—someone who made me feel like Reno.” Her gentle gaze showed an unshakable determination. “I’m going to give birth no matter what. I believe this child that Shin gave me is the love he wanted so much that he was willing to throw away everything for it.”

“Was it okay not to tell him that, though?”

Reno smiled a little sadly. “Shin might tell me to get rid of the baby. He still doesn’t believe in love—he thinks his love is just a dream. I’ve already made up my mind, so nothing will change by telling him.”

“Even so, he could have stayed by your side for the birth.”

“Yeah,” Reno admitted quietly, “but I won’t stop him. I became his wife. I’m the wife of the Demon King’s right-hand man.”

Ennunien hummed again.

“I’ve been selfish enough. This time it’s my turn to offer him something. I want to do everything I can for him.”

Ten months and ten days—that was all the time she had left. In that time, there certainly wasn’t much else that she could do.

“Shin is reincarnating to prove his loyalty as the Demon King’s trusted retainer, but he’s also reincarnating to fill the void within himself. I wanted to send him off without giving him any reason to turn back. Besides, if he were to be beside me when I fade away, I might end up crying. I don’t like sad tears. I want him to remember me for my smile.” Reno smiled brightly, as though she had no regrets.

“The Spirit King may grieve when he learns you faded away.”

“Maybe he will. This might be a little mean of me, but I’m hoping for it.”

“Hoping?” Ennunen repeated, confused.

Reno giggled. “Shin will realize just how great my love is and cry. He’ll cry and cry over me, and once he does, he’ll realize—he’ll realize just how much he loved me. He’ll finally obtain what he wants.”

“I will teach you love.” It seemed that Reno fully intended on sticking to that promise.

“It might be silly to think this way, but it’s inevitable, really. I’m in love. I want him to love me back.” Reno crouched down and reached for the metal watering can left in the field, then resumed watering the teardrop blossoms. “If it can get that blockhead to look my way, I’ll gladly give my life!”

She grinned from ear to ear. It was a genuine smile with no uncertainty or distress.

“It’s okay,” she said, firmly and brightly. “Shin left me his love in my tummy. If a miracle like that could happen, then my small wish can come true too. I won’t regret it. This is the fate of a spirit. Besides, I fell in love. This was a love worth dying for.”

“If that is what you insist, then I will no longer—”

The door to the field slammed shut, blocking Ennunen’s voice. A warm breeze swept through the air. Someone with an unsettling aura had arrived.

“Ennunen?” Reno called out.

“The Disastrous God-slaying Sword gave you love?” a voice replied. “Ha ha! How truly foolish! Thou art so foolish, it’s comical.”

The majestic yet haughty voice shook the teardrop blossom field. It was a voice we had all heard before.

“You are mistaken, Reno, Mother of Spirits. Allow me to enlighten thee.”

Eldmed’s head floated before Reno’s eyes. The feeble magic he exuded was that of the Heavenly Father.

“The Disastrous God-slaying Sword cannot love. All he possesses is a yearning

for a heart—a yearning that makes him imitate others. That demon sword is merely pretending to be kind, pretending to be sad, pretending to be a demon.”

A brief look of surprise crossed Reno’s face before she glared at the floating head. “That’s not true! You don’t know anything! You haven’t even looked at Shin properly!”

Unbothered by her words, Nosgalia continued. He spoke grandly, as though delivering a divine revelation. “How did Shin Reglia come to love thee, dost thou think? The answer is simple: it was the miracle of a god!”

Reno stiffened and clenched her teeth. “What are you trying to say?”

“I told the Disastrous God-slaying Sword that I would grant him love. He believed he had cut that gift apart, but the words of a god are absolute. That love had already been planted in Shin Reglia’s empty source.”

Of course, that wasn’t all Nosgalia had told him. *“Raise the Child of God, the child to be born from the Great Spirit Reno. Raise the order that will destroy the Demon King.”*

“Love does not grant miracles. Miracles are the work of the gods.”

“You’re lying.”

“Gods can only tell the truth. The love the Disastrous God-slaying Sword yearned for, the Mother of Spirit’s desire to be herself, the seed that spawned the miracle child within thee—all of these things were as a result of the order of the Heavenly Father.”

Nosgalia’s tone turned solemn. “Thou dost not bear Shin Reglia’s child. His body was merely a vessel of the seed destined to destroy the Demon King.”

A magic circle appeared before them, from which a white arm emerged holding a green book. The familiar book, a lilan, was labeled “Volume 1,800.”

“This page was added mere moments ago. Take a look for thyself.”

The book opened by magic and settled on a page titled “Avos Dilhevia, the Demon King of Tyranny.”

“The Demon King of Tyranny is a spirit...”

Reno looked down the page, her expression grim. She could tell immediately that disaster had struck.

“The stage is set,” Nosgalia said. “The situation should be clear to those Spirit Eyes of thine. The child in thy body is a spirit conceived by the legend of Avos Dilhevia.”

Reno’s amber eyes glared at Nosgalia. She seemed to be struggling to believe him. “Demon King Anos’s magic...”

There was only one reason Shin and Reno’s child would possess the magic of the Demon King of Tyranny: the child’s source was formed by the rumor and legend of Avos Dilhevia.

“Everything is decided by fate,” Nosgalia declared. “And now, the Child of God shall be born.”

At the god’s words, a magic circle appeared over Reno’s stomach. The magic of the child in her body suddenly became more apparent.

Kurst. The Child of God’s growth was being accelerated for birth.

“Stop! If it’s born now, it won’t survive...”

Reno pressed down on her stomach, but there was no stopping the Child of God’s birth.

Nosgalia cackled. “Rejoice! The Child of God is a girl! She can succeed thee as the new mother of all spirits. Rejoice! Celebrate! You have become the mother of a mighty god, a new order of this world!” Nosgalia laughed without an ounce of malice.

“No, you can’t! It’s too soon!”

A transparent baby emerged from the magic circle over Reno’s stomach and floated over the field of flowers. Severed from the womb, the child’s source was so weak, it was on the verge of disappearing.

“Ah...” Reno fell lifelessly to her knees. The birth of the Child of God had turned her against her own lore. The mother of all spirits was fading.

“What will thou do, Mother of Spirits? This is the order thou wished to prevent: the order to destroy the Demon King of Tyranny. She will die if thou

leavest her like this.”

Reno grasped weakly at the teardrop blossoms. “Please, someone... May a spirit who can save this child...be born...”

One after another, the teardrop blossoms dissolved into light, transforming into numerous spirits. In no time at all, the flower field returned to its barren state, but as the last flower disappeared...

“There. One was born...” Reno raised her head hopefully. “Ezyssey, the Spring of Time, I know you were just born, but please, take her. Take her somewhere she can survive. Take her two thousand years into the future. The Demon King will save her. I just know he will.”

With the last of her power, Reno used her spirit magic to wrap the baby in a silk blanket, then crafted a wooden cradle to place her in.

“I’m sorry I won’t be able to hold you. I’m sorry I won’t be able to give you a name. I pray that someone good will take you in.”

Nosgalia laughed brightly. “The plans of the gods are absolute. That child is no proof of love. She isn’t even the daughter of Shin Reglia. So why dost thou try to save her? That is because you have become the mother of the Child of God as foretol— Gah!”

Nosgalia’s condescending remark was cut short. Gneodoros, the God Slasher, was protruding from his mouth. The Heavenly Father’s eyes looked back. It was Shin.

“Why, if it isn’t the Disastrous God-slaying Sword. I’m afraid thou art too late. Killing me won’t change anything now. The Child of God has been born. The great spirit born of the fabricated legend of the Demon King Avos Dilhevia has —”

Before Nosgalia could finish his sentence, Shin swung Gneodoros down, slicing the god’s head into two. The two pieces dissipated into the air, and the Heavenly Father’s magic faded from the area.

“Reno!” Shin rushed over to Reno and embraced her fading body. “Forgive me...”

“Thanks for protecting us, Shin.” Reno reached out with a trembling hand. Shin gripped it tightly. “I’m sorry. I lied to you, Shin. It wasn’t love. It wasn’t a miracle of ours.” Tears welled in her eyes, but she firmly held them back. With her voice steeped in despair, she added quietly, “It wasn’t your child.”

Although her face was fraught with sadness, she still refrained from crying. “I’m sorry, Shin. I couldn’t teach you to love. I’m sorry.” She apologized to him over and over. “You gave me so many things, but I couldn’t do anything for you in return. I’m sorry. That child... That child is headed for two thousand years in the future. If the peace of the world is under threat, please take them out with your own hands—”

“Is it a boy?” Shin asked.

Reno fell silent.

“A girl?”

“It’s a girl...”

“I understand,” Shin said, staring into her eyes. “Please rest assured. I will protect her no matter what.”

Reno’s eyes widened.

“I will create a future she can survive in.”

“No. You can’t. That child was born from those made-up rumors of Demon King Avos Dilhevia. You can’t do that. You’re the right-hand man of the Demon King. I can’t let you do such a thing.”

Shin smiled softly. “Even so, she is the love you gave me. The intentions of the gods have nothing to do with it.”

“But—”

“I will not let her die. Even if that means...” Shin broke off for a moment, then continued firmly. “Even if I must turn against my liege, I will spread the legend of Avos Dilhevia and protect her.”

Reno’s body was on the verge of fading. A semitransparent spring with a purple aura trickled down from the sky and enveloped the baby’s body. Shin’s sword danced across the side of the wooden cradle. The name “Misa” was

carved there.

He spoke again, in a gentle, gentle tone, as if to embrace his love. “She is my daughter—the precious love you gave me.”

“Shin...” Reno’s voice trailed off, losing all sound. Having turned against her lore, Reno had reached her limit. She couldn’t finish her sentence. She was unable to. I used Liknos to read her thoughts.

Shin...

Why? Why aren’t the words coming out? I can’t use Leaks either. There’s still something I have to say. I have to tell him!

I’m sorry, Shin.

Even though I’m your wife, all I’ve done is hold you back. You’ve always, always protected me, but I couldn’t protect your pride, even though that’s what you value the most.

“It seems I haven’t learned,” Shin murmured quietly. “I wanted to see you smile, but I don’t know what to say.”

Tears spilled ceaselessly from Reno’s eyes. When Shin wiped them away, a single white flower appeared in his hand.

“I apologize for making you sad again.”

I have to smile. But no matter how hard I try, the tears won’t stop. I don’t cry when I’m sad. My tears turn into spirits.

A child should be born from happy tears. That’s what I always believed. But even though crying wouldn’t make any miracles happen, there was no stopping these tears from overflowing onto the ground, blooming into flowers of sadness.

Hey, Shin,

You probably won’t realize this, but I don’t regret anything. I was able to marry you.

Thank you, Shin, for teaching me how to fall in love.

Thank you, Shin, for protecting me.

We only spent three days together as newlyweds, but you made me the happiest person in the world.

Reno's body became transparent then completely vanished. The magic spring surrounding Misa spun in a vortex, sucking the cradle up and away. Eventually, the Spring of Time disappeared with the baby, and we found ourselves surrounded by blossoms from the tears Reno had spilled. Shin walked to the middle of the garden and thrust his iron sword down in the center. It was like a grave marker for his lost wife.

"I must be the biggest fool." Shin bent down and placed the white flower by the sword. "I wanted to make you happy."

Just then, Shin's body became a figure of light. It wasn't only Shin that glowed—the entire flower field was painted white. The next moment, a completely different scene took its place before my eyes. The world had flipped inside out, and various landscapes flowed past rapidly. Then the silvery-white world cracked and shattered to pieces.

From behind the shards of white, the treasure vault appeared. Revalon had ended, and we had returned to the Magical Age. Beside me, Misha had tears in her eyes. Sasha was crying—Eleonore and Zeshia too. Lay was gritting his teeth with a sad expression, while Rina was staring listlessly into space.

I took a step forward. My followers slowly turned to look at me.

"Thus concludes the tragedy of two thousand years ago," I said. "From here on out, we will fix everything."



§ 62. Execution

I cast Lynel and Najila to conceal us all, before we made our way up from the underground dungeon. We had slipped past the Eyes of the patrolling demons and were closing in on the first floor of Delsgade.

“Do you think Ms. Meno was able to locate Avos Dilhevia?” Lay asked through Leaks.

“Who knows?” I replied. *“Avos, Shin, and Nosgalia are on their guard. I’d say it’s a fifty-fifty chance.”*

Eleonore tilted her head. *“Huh. Will the three of them even be where we left them?”*

“At the very least, they won’t want us to have any advantage while facing them.”

“You mean like how Lay’s got the best chance at taking down Avos Dilhevia?” Sasha asked.

“Yes. Hero Kanon and the Sword of Three Races are the greatest threat to the legend of Avos Dilhevia. However, Shin would be able to put up an even fight with Lay, and the Sword of Three Races would be completely ineffective against Nosgalia.”

“Are you saying their goal is for Nosgalia to fight Lay?” Misha asked.

“That would probably be their ideal.”

Eleonore frowned. *“But didn’t you beat Nosgalia up so he couldn’t fight anymore?”*

“Avos Dilhevia is on their side. As the successor of the Mother of Spirits, she can use all kinds of spirit magic. Combine that with the Demon King of Tyranny’s power, and a wounded source can easily be healed.”

There was no way of knowing for sure, but it would be best to assume that Nosgalia was back at his full strength. His relaxed attitude after having been

wounded by the Abolisher of Reason made sense if he had predicted this.

“Nosgalia will take on Lay, and Shin and Avos Dilhevia will confront me. My former subordinates and the Seven Demon Elders will attempt to handle the rest of you. That would be their preferred matchup against us.”

“Hmph, will it really go that well for them?” Sasha asked, smiling fearlessly. *“Besides, isn’t Shin the Spirit King? Is there a need to fight him?”*

“You’re right. Perhaps there’s no need to fight.”

For the sake of his late wife, whom he couldn’t protect, Shin had gone to great lengths to keep Avos Dilhevia—Misa—alive. That meant all I had to do was defeat Avos Dilhevia while saving Misa. Logically speaking, that is.

“However, if he truly had no intention of fighting, he would have returned to me long ago in order to explain with his own words.”

“Why didn’t he?”

“He most likely couldn’t. No matter the circumstances, he has pointed his blade at me. It’s too late for him to innocently return it to its sheath—though I believe that’s not all there is to it.”

I had a vague idea of what irked him, but there was no way of knowing for sure without confronting him directly. At the very least, I knew he was waiting for me. I had to meet with him.

“I don’t get it, but okay,” Sasha replied. *“You’ll figure something out either way, right? And if Ms. Meno locates them all, we’ll have the advantage.”*

“Oh, about that—”

No sooner had I thought that, than a voice echoed through the dungeon.

“Rebel Anos Voldigoad, we know you have infiltrated Delsgade.”

The voice belonged to Melheis.

“By the order of Avos Dilhevia, we will now execute the inferior white-uniform students one by one. If you wish to save them, come to the arena alone. If you do not show yourself promptly, we will commence the execution.”

Hmm. Just as I’d expected.

“‘About that,’ as in this?” Sasha asked.

“Yes. From the very beginning, they were using the white-uniform students as bait.”

“Does this mean Avos Dilhevia is at the arena?” Eleonore asked.

“Most likely not. Their objective is to confirm with their own eyes that I’m here. I doubt they’re actually expecting me to show up so obediently.”

“Then we’ll go,” Sasha said.

Misha nodded. *“Leave it to us.”*

“In that case, I’ll leave the arena to you two. Eleonore, Zeshia, focus on rescuing the hostages. There should be other students being confined somewhere besides the arena.”

“Got it,” Eleonore replied briskly.

“Zeshia will do her best,” Zeshia added.

Rina looked over at me. *“What about me?”*

“You can come with me. The Spirit King is waiting.”

Rina thought for a moment then agreed. She was a fran, a love fairy. At this point, it was obvious whose mind was borrowing the body. After watching the past with us, she was probably starting to catch on herself. However, she couldn’t yet reach that conclusion. If Rina realized she was a fran, she would disappear before she could convey her feelings.

As we climbed the stairs, we increased our pace. At the top of the staircase was the first floor of Demon Castle Delsgade. I somewhat expected an ambush at the top, but no security awaited us.

“We’ll split up from here.”

I lifted Lynel from Misha and Sasha then used Iris to make them two large pointed hats. By tucking their hair inside and pulling the brim down over their eyes, they could hide the majority of their faces.

“This magic item will, to a minor extent, prevent you from being perceived. Wearing it makes it easier to avoid anyone’s attention. While it’s the inferior

option to Lynel, our enemies can prepare countermeasures if they know your exact location.”

Previously, Rouche had used Schur to create a breeze and read the flow of air. Misha and Sasha had no means of defending against that.

“They’ll be on the lookout for invisible people, so being visible will actually make you harder to notice. It hasn’t been long since Avos Dilhevia took over the academy. The demons from two thousand years ago are in command, and they won’t know the faces of all their subordinates yet. If things go well, you’ll be able to sneak into the arena.”

Misha nodded, then used Iris to change her uniform from white to black.

“We’ll be on our way.”

With that, the two girls left for the arena. I proceeded with the others while keeping an eye on things through Sasha’s vision. She and Misha had used Fless to fly at a low altitude and had reached the outside of the arena in no time at all.

“How do we sneak in? They should at least be keeping an eye on the number of people in there, right?” Sasha asked.

“Look.” Misha pointed at a group of black-uniform students running in a fluster towards the arena.

“I can’t believe it. They’re late in a situation like this?”

“They’re students.”

Even under Avos Dilhevia’s reign, the students of this era were far too accustomed to peace. Not all of them were capable of reacting quickly to an enemy invasion.

“This is perfect. Let’s sneak in with them.”

Misha and Sasha joined the group of stragglers and entered the building. After passing through a dark corridor, they came upon the arena. Several white-uniform students were gathered in the center, seated with heavy expressions. They were surrounded by students in black, and a number of black-robed teachers. Every one of the Seven Demon Elders was present.

Because of the invasion, many of the demons were equipped with magic items. Some had hats, while others were decked out in full suits of armor. Misha and Sasha were able to blend into the crowd of black-uniform students without an issue.

“Time is up,” Melheis declared, casting a magic barrier to close the entrance of the arena. He also cast a ceiling-like barrier overhead. “Line up.”

The black-uniform students lined up as he had ordered.

“A few of you arrived late just now.”

Tension rose among the students wearing black.

“Anos Voldigoad or his subordinates could be among you.” Melheis took several steps forward and observed their faces. “Nihid, Glaze, take a closer look.”

Two of the teachers stepped forward. They must have been waiting there with Melheis since before the execution was announced, meaning there was no chance of them being me or my subordinates.

Melheis and the two teachers cast their Magic Eyes over each student in the line. The other Demon Elders kept watch over the students wearing white.

“Sasha, if they notice us, use your Magic Eyes of Destruction,” Misha instructed.

“On the Seven Demon Elders?”

“Yeah. If you buy us time, I can stop them with my Magic Eyes of Creation.”

“How can you stop them?”

“I’ll turn them all into cats.”

“Um, all right. If we can catch them off guard, it should work out.”

Just then, Melheis’s Eyes locked onto Sasha. “You two over there, take off your—”

“Hey! What’s with those hats?!”

Before Melheis could finish his sentence, the teacher named Nihid marched right up to Sasha. Sasha clenched her fist, but Misha touched her sister’s hand.

"It's okay," she told her.

"Stay still. You have nothing to worry about if you aren't working with the misfit."

Nihid grabbed the pointed tip of the hat and carefully scrutinized their faces. They just so happened to be in Melheis's blind spot, so he couldn't see their faces himself. Eventually, Nihid turned around.

"There's no problem here! Anos Voldigoad's subordinates are yet to arrive!"

"I see, then let us commence the execution," Melheis said solemnly. He glanced over at the students in white. "Until Anos Voldigoad appears, you will be executed one by one. We will do so in a way that minimizes your suffering." He approached the group and pointed at a female student. "Begin with her."

Nihid stepped forward and grabbed her by the wrist.

"N-No! Let go of me! Why?!"

"Because you are not royalty. All mixed-breed demons are to become nourishment to support the prosperity of Dilhade, the magnificent nation of royalty."

For a brief moment, a look of sadness flashed across Melheis's face as he watched the sobbing student. Perhaps somewhere in his heart, he was opposed to following such orders, but that opposition wasn't enough to break free of Avos Dilhevia's control.

Sasha and Misha exchanged a look with each other, but then—

"Please wait!"

One of the students in white uniform stood up and walked towards Melheis. "Take me first," he said.

Melheis narrowed his eyes.

"I am Aramis Eltimo, a third-year student," he said boldly. "But in my past life, I was Igareth Ijeiska! As a direct relative of Hero Jerga, I was once seventh in line to the Azesion throne! I should be far more detestable to you than these hybrids!"

With a look of determination, Igareth cast Aske. Melheis's sharp gaze fixed on him.

"When did you reincarnate?" he asked.

"This is my fourth incarnation. My last was long ago, but my memories and strength fully recovered when Avos Dilhevia shut us away."

Melheis thought for a moment. "Very well," he said. He seemed to have determined there was nothing suspicious about Igareth. "The direct line of Hero Jerga is indeed an enemy of our kind. We will do as you wish. Take him to the execution grounds."

Nihid grabbed Igareth by the wrist, then leaned closer to whisper something into his ear. His lips moved as if to form a certain name.

§ 63. She Who Controls All

We were currently running through Delsgade. A pointed-eared woman in black robes was walking our way. It was Meno. Considering she was heading towards the descending staircase, she must have found something on our enemies' locations.

"Meno," I called using Leaks. Canceling Lynel, I revealed myself. "Did you find them?"

After flinching in surprise, Meno nodded. "I'm not entirely certain, but from what I've heard, Avos Dilhevia is in the ceremony hall, and the Spirit King is in the throne room. I wasn't able to locate Nosgalia."

"That's enough to go on. Are you uncertain because they've changed their appearances?"

Meno nodded. "I think they're using Lynel. My Eyes were able to spot the faint trace of a spell circle."

Hmm. They seemed to be going out of their way to avoid a direct conflict with me—as if they didn't want to fight without the Abolisher of Reason in their hands.

"Do you know where the students are being held captive?"

"I can lead you there. They've been split into several locations."

That was one way to buy themselves more time.

"Please take Eleonore and Zeshia to save them." I cast Lynel and Najila over the three of them, hiding their bodies and magic.

"We'll be off then!" Eleonore called cheerfully through Leaks. She and Zeshia ran after Meno.

"The throne room is in the main castle," I said to Lay as we proceeded. "The ceremony hall is in the west wing."

"They've probably split up to force us to fight separately, like you predicted."

This castle has anti-magic cast all over the place to prevent Gatom. Not even Avos Dilhevia would be able to warp around inside."

Preventing the use of Gatom was crucial to their plan. It was a reasonable countermeasure to have.

"And the fact Ms. Meno was able to see through their Lynel must be..."

"An intentional move on their part, yes. The Demon King of Tyranny would never fail to conceal all traces of his magic."

Avos Dilhevia was in the ceremony hall, and the Spirit King was in the throne room. Both had used Lynel to hide themselves. Even so, if they had shown Meno their trick on purpose, it was reasonable to assume the Spirit King was in the ceremony hall and Avos Dilhevia was in the throne room. However, that Lynel could be a fake.

"They're hinting at having used Lynel to swap appearances, but that could be a trap, and they might not have actually swapped."

"Or they want you to think that when they have," Lay suggested. He had a point.

"But that means who we end up fighting will be a matter of luck."

"What if Avos Dilhevia's at neither location?"

"Are you suggesting it's only Nosgalia and the Spirit King at the throne room and ceremony hall?" I asked.

Lay nodded. *"It won't be a problem if we move together, but we have to defeat Avos Dilhevia as quickly as possible to free the hybrids from Demera. Maybe their objective is to split us up."*

Neither Nosgalia nor Shin would pose a problem for me. Lay's Sword of Three Races was ineffective against Nosgalia, but he could fight at full strength against Shin. The Sword of Three Races was forged to fight against demons, so it would be immensely effective against him. The outcome aside, the fight was unlikely to play out the same as it had in Aharthern.

As I'd theorized earlier, the preferred matchup for the other side was to have Nosgalia face Lay and Avos Dilhevia face me and Shin. However, their current

plan was too reliant on luck. They would be better off waiting for me together—unless they had a means of ensuring they would fight their preferred opponents.

“Hmm. I see.”

So that’s what they were after.

“Lay, I’m heading to the throne room.”

“Did you figure out who’ll be there?”

“No, it’s just the closer location. They’ve set this up to look like a dice roll, but the result will be the same no matter which we choose. We’ll use that to our advantage.”

Just then, a gust of wind whipped right at us. It was Schur. This was as far as we would get while hiding. At any rate, our locations would be revealed once the fight against Avos Dilhevia began. It was better to take care of the reinforcements in advance.

“There you are, misfit. All troops, ready your weapons!”

As the voice rang out, the light of countless magic circles filled my vision. Thirteen demons were standing before us, including my former subordinate, Rouche.

I sent Lay my strategy through Leaks.

“Got it,” he stated, drawing a magic circle. Divine light gathered around the circle as he summoned the Sword of Three Races.

“FIRE!”

A barrage of fire, lightning, and ice blasted towards us. We were invisible thanks to Lynel, so the blasts were aimed to cover the entire corridor.

“Hyah!”

Lay’s hand blurred. The glowing holy sword cut down the elemental barrage in no time at all.

“Is that the Sword of Three Races? Avos Dilhevia was right—it is Hero Kanon! But that move is—” Rouche’s eyes widened. All twelve of her comrades had

fallen around her, including demons from two thousand years ago. “Tch!”

Rouche cast her Eyes over his magic and swung her demon sword in a horizontal slash. Lay ducked under the sword to avoid the blow, but the tip of the blade cut into the magic circle for Lynel. The anti-magic loaded in the sword revealed his appearance.

“Got you!”

Despite being at point-blank range, Lay saw through Rouche’s attack. Her blade sliced through empty air, millimeters from his body. At the same time, the Sword of Intent, which Lay had drawn with his left hand, was thrust through Rouche’s chest, piercing her source.

“Gah...” Rouche grasped the Sword of Intent with her left fist, but she hadn’t the strength to remove it. “This demon sword... That move... Why do you know Shin’s...?”

Lay withdrew the Sword of Intent, letting Rouche fall to the ground. Meanwhile, I lifted Lynel and Najila, and cast Indol and Griad over all of them. This way, they wouldn’t be able to bother us for a while.

“Lay, you head for the ceremony hall. It’ll be highly guarded, but don’t go too easy on them. Demons from two thousand years ago won’t die easily.”

“Got it.”

We parted ways, and Lay headed for the west wing. Rina and I continued straight towards the throne room. A large number of demon soldiers were gathered before us—a total of forty-seven of them. As one would expect with us being so close to the throne room, they all appeared to be elite soldiers from two thousand years ago.

“Don’t think you can get past us, you damned misfit!”

“Kill him! Kill the filthy half-breed who threatens our liege!”

Filthy half-breed, was it?

“Hmm. You lot aren’t royalty either, are you?” I pointed out.

The demons’ eyes widened.

“We have received honorary royal titles from our liege Avos Dilhevia!” one demon shouted.

“We’re different from a misfit like you!”

I sighed deeply and glared at them. “Fools.”

They flinched.

“Look closely at my face. Use those Magic Eyes of yours and gaze into the depths of the abyss. If you still cannot see the truth, you will be dismissed after this battle. You may go wherever you desire.”

The demons canceled the magic circles they’d been casting to focus their Eyes on me.

“I will not ask twice. Do I look like a misfit to you?”

The soldiers’ faces twisted in confusion.

“The... The Demon King? No...”

“That can’t be. I...”

“We’ve served Avos Dilhevia this whole time, for two thousand years...”

“What? I don’t get it. My head hurts!”

They clutched their heads in agony. A magical aura of darkness reached around them from behind, covering their faces.

“Gu... Gah! Argh!”

They drew their demon swords as though they were possessed.

“Ch-Charge! Kill him!”

“Hmm. You made a valiant effort to resist. Allow me to reward you.”

I flicked my finger. The next moment, forty-seven demons fell to their knees, burned and blackened by Jio Graze.

“Wait there a little longer. I shall end your suffering soon.”

I left my burning subordinates behind and continued forward. Eventually, the door to the throne room came into view.

“Rina, wait here until the time comes. I’ll cast wards and barriers over you. As long as you don’t move, you won’t die.”

“Got it.”

Releasing magic from my fingers, I threw the doors open and entered the throne room. Before me was the masked Spirit King in his black suit of armor. He was seated on the throne, staring at me coolly.

“We finally meet, Avos Dilhevia,” I said.

The Spirit King’s Lynel dissipated to reveal Avos Dilhevia in her long black coat. She slowly removed her mask, which immediately dissipated into particles of magic. Avos Dilhevia brushed her long, dark hair behind her ear and smirked. “Right you are. I’m impressed you realized.”

“There’s nothing to it. It was just a simple trick using Je Deschesis. You fused your source with Nosgalia and split it into two, making the person waiting here both Avos Dilhevia and Nosgalia at the same time.”

It was exactly what I’d done during the trial of luck back at the Staircases of Guniel.

“The moment Lay or I appeared, you would cancel Je Deschesis and return to a single source. If it was me, you would become Avos Dilhevia. If it was Lay, you would become Nosgalia. That way, you would always be able to fight who you wanted to.”

Avos Dilhevia wore a relaxed smile. “Right again. Just like how your fate has always been decided, I was in control of everything all along.”

I burst into laughter. “As usual, you speak like a cheap forgery.”

Avos Dilhevia looked down on me. “Oh, are you a sore loser? Or are you saying it was *your* intention that Hero Kanon should fight Nosgalia?”

“Hmm. Were you truly born from my legend? Don’t tell me the idiotic rumors of royal supremacy have dulled your brain as well.”

Avos Dilhevia continued to look at me calmly.

“Wouldn’t you agree, Lay?” I said.

Footsteps echoed behind me. Lay had walked through the door.

“If the person you wanted to fight would always appear before you, then Avos Dilhevia would always appear before me. After all, you play by the order to destroy me.”

It had been possible for Shin to appear first, but either way, Avos Dilhevia would have eventually appeared before me.

“So why bother splitting up?”

As soon as I’d confirmed the counterfeit Demon King had appeared, I could simply call Lay over.

“Oh, is that so? So the Kanon that headed for the ceremony hall was a copy crafted from his many sources.”

Lay had already split into two when he’d been fighting Rouche. His main body, with four sources, had remained hidden with Lynel and followed after me. It was all in order to appear as though we’d split up like they’d planned.

“A copy with three sources, mind you,” Lay said. “That’s a fairly genuine body in its own right. I won’t be able to summon the Sword of Intent, but...”

Lay drew a magic circle, summoning the Sword of Three Races. The teleport deterrent created by demons meant nothing to the holy sword forged to destroy the Demon King.

“Now, Avos Dilhevia, you claimed to have a rather impressive grasp of the situation. Is that still the case?”

§ 64. Let Bygones Be Bygones

“Heh,” Avos Dilhevia laughed. “Heh heh heh! Aha ha ha! Ha ha ha ha! Yes, that’s right, Anos Voldigoad. Everything has gone exactly to plan. All is under my control.” She reached into the air with her white fingers and closed them around something. “In other words, your destinies lie in the palm of my hand.”

“Oh? For someone born from my legend, you sure are lacking humility.”

“Really now? I beg to differ. At the very least, I’m far more humble than you.” She smiled at me. “So, shall we chat for a bit?”

“Hmm. I’m not so narrow-minded as to begin fighting without another word. If you wish to offer your complete surrender, I shall lend you my ear.”

She raised a hand and cast Limnet. A crystal appeared in the air, reflecting what was happening at the arena. “Perhaps that arrogant mouth of yours will have less to say after you’ve watched this.”

Projected through the Limnet crystal was the image of a scaffold. A student dressed in white uniform was standing on the scaffold, tied up with Gijel. It was Igareth reincarnated as a demon.

“The third-year student, Alamith Eltimo, formerly Igareth Ijeiska. You know him, no?”

“He was the human child I once rescued.”

“That’s right. And he will now be executed.”

Melheis drew a magic circle and sent magic into Gijel, using the chains to hoist Alamith over the platform.

“Go on. Give it your best shot.”

“Heh, that’s some confidence you have there. Is that because your subordinates have infiltrated the arena?” Avos asked, her gaze fixed on me.

“Who knows?”

“My, did you really think I wouldn’t notice? How cute.” Avos Dilhevia’s lips curled in a sadistic grin. “In order to save him from execution, your subordinates will have to reveal themselves. The moment they do, they will meet their end.”

She touched the crystal with her fingertip, channeling magic into it. Groans could be heard across the arena.

“Ugh... Gah...”

“H-Help...”

“S-Stop it!”

The students on the platform writhed in agony. Magic was being rapidly drawn out of their bodies. At the same time, a black sludge enveloped the Seven Demon Elders. The sludge emitted an ominous magic far greater than that of Melheis or Ivis.

“Do you see the power of Demera Gyze?”

“Hmm. You’ve added the magic absorbed by Demera to your own and increased the effectiveness of Gyze.”

The fake Demon King chuckled. “Are you any good at chess, Anos Voldigoad?”

“Unfortunately, I don’t know the rules of any board games,” I replied. “However, I’m certain I shan’t lose.”

“Shall we have a battle of wits, then? The arena will be our chessboard, and our subordinates will be our pieces. Or would you rather withdraw due to lack of pawns? Igareth will die if you do.” She spoke mockingly, as if trying to provoke me.

“Are you that afraid of facing me directly, Avos Dilhevia?”

I held out my hand and drew a magic circle. My anti-magic made contact with Lynel, revealing the runes adorning the entire throne room. The runes comprised the spell formula of the three-dimensional magic circle of Delsgade.

Naturally, layers upon layers of protective wards prevented anyone other than myself from using the circle, but one by one, the spell formulae of those wards were being broken through and rewritten. A quick analysis with my

Magic Eyes showed that it was Avos Dilhevia rewriting them. However, it would be some time before she would finish the job completely.

“If you wish to buy time to obtain the Abolisher of Reason, you should just say so. There’s no need to come up with a silly excuse like chess.”

“You’re quite the provocateur. So, will you abstain? I don’t mind if you do. I’ve been looking forward to seeing you suffer, misfit.” Avos Dilhevia flashed me a faint smile, then gave the order. “Execute him.”

Watching the scene through Misha’s eyes, I could see that the students in black uniform had been positioned at regular intervals around the scaffold, each facing inwards. It would be difficult for my subordinates to rescue Igareth while remaining hidden. If they used the Magic Eyes of Destruction or Creation, they would naturally end up revealing themselves. The Seven Demon Elders, covered in black sludge, were carefully keeping watch for any sign of them.

The black-robed Nihid took a step forward and drew a magic circle to execute Igareth.

“Stop, Mr. Nihid!” one girl pleaded desperately through her agony. “Why are you doing this? Alamith hasn’t done anything wrong! Please, return to your senses! Go back to the kind teacher you always are!”

But Nihid paid her no mind. “You, blood relative of Hero Jerga—Igareth, was it? Do you have any last words? It’s the least I can do.”

Igareth spoke bravely under Nihid’s glare. “Avos Dilhevia is a fraud! I know the true Demon King. He’s kind, strong, and would never discriminate against anyone! How could those of you who knew him two thousand years ago forget that?!”

But no one in the arena would lend him an ear.

“Is that all you have to say?” Nihid asked.

Igareth quieted. “I have fulfilled my duty,” he said in a low voice, as though he were saying that directly to me. “I have no regrets. I know the true Demon King will defeat Avos Dilhevia. He will build a peaceful era where humans and demons can join hands.”

“I see. That’s—”

A jet-black sun emerged from a magic circle and shot through the sky like a comet. It was aimed right at Igareth, who glared at it without looking away.

Suddenly, the burst of Jio Graze veered slightly off course. It burnt through the chains of Gijel before striking Melheis on the other side of the scaffold.

“What?! Agh!” Melheis roared as he was engulfed in the raging flames.

“—something I can agree with, Igareth. I’m getting you out of here,” Nihid said.

“Good grief. This is troublesome.”

Melheis used his magic to activate the black sludge. The goopy substance swallowed the flames of Jio Graze, extinguishing them in an instant.

“Why would a Royalist like you betray us, Nihid?” Melheis asked. “Surely you haven’t forgotten that treason is punishable by death.”

“Betray? Nihid? What are you talking about?” Nihid stepped forward and raised his voice louder. “I am Devidra, a humble supporter of the old and only Lord Anos Voldigoad. Have you forgotten who gave you life, Melheis?”

Devidra burst into a run, drawing the demon sword at his waist. He swung the sword down at Melheis, but the blade was blocked by the sludge.

“All the demons of two thousand years ago swore their loyalty to Avos Dilhevia,” Melheis replied. “How could you betray someone so highly respected?”

“Come to your senses, Melheis. Avos Dilhevia’s ridiculous brainwashing magic has created contradictions all around us.”

Devidra, too, was a demon from two thousand years ago, but he had left his source behind when he reincarnated, allowing him to be reborn as someone new. Since he was technically no longer a subordinate from the past, Avos Dilhevia’s brainwashing was weaker against him.

“One more enemy makes no difference. Gaios, kill the half-breeds,” Melheis ordered.

The hulking Gaios tightened his grip on Grajetian, the Supreme Demon Sword. “Hmph. Those who turn traitor against the almighty Avos Dilhevia will be punished with death.”

“N-No...” a girl stammered in horror.

“Die!”

The demon sword capable of splitting mountains swung down on the arena floor. A crater opened in the ground, accompanied by an eye-splitting boom.

“Not a trace left, huh?” Gaios muttered smugly.

“Oh, please. Did I move so fast, you couldn’t see me?”

“What?!” Gaios whirled around. Behind him was the frightened hybrid student.

“Jio Graze.”

A magic circle appeared before her, from which three black suns emerged. They immediately swallowed Gaios, erupting into an inferno.

“Whoa! How could... How could this be?!” He swung the sludge-covered demon sword and used his anti-magic to erase the black suns. “How could a half-breed student cast three Jio Grazes at once?!”

“Hello, Gaios. It’s a pleasure to meet you. I wasn’t able to introduce myself two thousand years ago. I am Neon Amelka, a loyal subordinate of Lord Anos. Also...”

She raised her hand, and five more students—two in white uniforms and three in black—unleashed Jio Graze at the remaining five Demon Elders.

“Gah!”

“Impossible...”

Each one of the students was a reincarnated subordinate of mine from two thousand years ago.

“This is a futile struggle, Devidra. Even demons from two thousand years ago are helpless before the influence of Demera Gyze.”

Melheis used his anti-magic to deflect Devidra’s Jio Graze, then cast Jirasd,

the origin spell. A crack of thunder filled the arena as a black bolt of lightning shot down at Devidra.

“Gaaaaaah!” Devidra gasped, blocking the attack. Just before his wards were broken through—

“Haaah!”

Igareth dashed in from Melheis’s blind spot and tackled him, casting Cyfio at point-blank range. Unable to block the attack completely, Melheis shifted. Jirasd shot in a completely different direction, destroying a section of the spectator stands. Enraged, Melheis shook Igareth off and leaped to the side.

“Do you have a demon sword?” Igareth asked Devidra.

Devidra reached into a magic circle, pulled out a sword, and handed it to him. Igareth took the sword and stood beside Devidra in a united front. Without taking his glare off Melheis, Devidra addressed Igareth.

“Why did you help me? I know you haven’t forgotten what I did to you all those years ago.”

Igareth laughed. “You haven’t forgotten what humankind did to you two thousand years ago either, have you?”

Devidra fell silent for a moment, then drew another magic circle. “I left my hatred two thousand years in the past!”

He fired Jio Graze and ran towards Melheis, shoulder to shoulder with Igareth. Igareth had saved the man who had once tried to execute him, and now they were fighting side by side for the sake of peace.

The past was indeed just that. It had been changed.

“Insolence,” Melheis muttered, casting his own Jio Graze. The two suns canceled each other out, then he followed up with Jirasd. However, the black lightning bolt disappeared just as it was about to make contact.

“What the...?!”

Melheis’s gaze shot upwards. Sasha was floating midair—she had broken through the magic barrier and was casting her Magic Eyes of Destruction down on the arena.

“Subordinates of the rebel... So you finally reveal yourselves!” Melheis kicked off the ground and charged towards Sasha.

“Ice cat,” a calm voice called.

Melheis’s Eyes shot farther up. A castle was hovering high overhead—another copy of Demon Castle Delsgade. The Delsgade Misha had created had manifested an imitation of the god’s power.

“The Magic Eyes of Cre—”

By the time Melheis realized what was happening, it was too late. The Seven Demon Elders and the other brainwashed demons, distracted by the sudden appearance of the demons from two thousand years ago, all transformed into cats made of ice.

The battle was decided. My subordinates freed the imprisoned students.

I turned my focus away from Misha’s vision and looked back to the throne room. Avos Dilhevia was staring coldly at the scene shown through the crystal. Sasha had used her Magic Eyes of Destruction to cancel Demera’s effect. There was no way of overturning this battle.

“Using the many to conquer the few is the most basic principle of war,” I said. “You chose a rather textbook way of fighting. But while you thought your chess pieces couldn’t be taken, your rules meant nothing to me. Whether in chess or anything else, I’ll take whatever I want by force.”

§ 65. The Rebel's Sword

Avos Dilhevia narrowed her eyes and smiled elegantly. Her Magic Eyes glared at me coldly. "Don't get carried away over one victory. It makes you seem rather pathetic."

"Indeed, it seems that one victory won't be enough to teach you the difference between us," I replied.

Her stare grew even sharper.

"I can show you three more times. That should be enough to get through your head."

Instead of replying, Avos used Limnet to create five new crystals. Each showed a spacious room with students tied up with Gijel while Demera sucked away their magic.

"These students are confined in the north, east, south, west, and main buildings." She sent her magic into the crystals, increasing the power of Demera in each of the rooms. The students immediately screamed in pain. Their magic was rapidly being absorbed. "I'd say you have ten minutes before they die."

"Oh? And?"

"You have three subordinates left: Eleonore, Zeshia, and Meno. Even if they took one building each, they won't be able to reach the two remaining buildings in time. What's more, if they do split up, their strength will be divided, so they may not be able to rescue them at all."

She wasn't counting those in the arena, it seemed. She must have sent more soldiers there to buy time.

"Have you forgotten what happened in the arena just now? The demons of two thousand years ago can escape your control if they've reincarnated. I may still have more subordinates left."

Avos Dilhevia smiled sweetly. "Stop bluffing. My subordinates aren't blind.

They've already checked every demon in this castle for sources from two thousand years ago. The demons in the arena were overlooked because they were lucky enough to have reincarnated after that check was conducted."

It seemed she was already aware that reincarnated demons would be impervious to her control. That meant it was perfectly reasonable to assume she had dealt with those demons beforehand.

"In other words, only those who rediscovered themselves a few hours ago or less are on your side."

"And I'm calling you foolish for having not checked the demons who reincarnated in those few hours."

Well, that was probably because her first priority was the Abolisher of Reason.

"Oh, there was no need for that." Avos Dilhevia smiled triumphantly. "Just think about it. The demons who've reincarnated recently have no idea who their comrades are. If they try to find each other, they'll end up drawing attention to themselves. They can't exactly ask each other outright."

The moment they uttered anything about siding with Anos Voldigoad, Avos Dilhevia's followers would capture them. It would be difficult to pick out the few allies and take organized action among so many enemies. Make just one mistake, and Avos Dilhevia would know right away.

"It would be quite the task to identify those who side with you, especially with so little time. Those six demons at the arena simply got lucky." She laughed mockingly. "You may have believed you'd outsmarted me, but you've merely revealed your hidden subordinates." Still perched on the throne, she looked down at me. "Go and save them, Anos, Kanon. I'll play with you once you return—and I'll use your precious Venuzdonoa to do it."

Avos Dilhevia held out her hand. A section of runes in the room burst, and different runes replaced them. It seemed she wasn't far off from obtaining the sword.

"Hmm. Indeed, it would be no easy task for my reincarnated subordinates to find each other within a few hours. There was no time for me to find them and

give my orders either,” I said, using Leaks to send a message into a crystal. “However, there is one way of finding my reincarnated comrades without notifying my enemies.”

The message I had left for my subordinates in the arena two thousand years ago.

“Isn’t that right, Devidra?” I asked.

He answered immediately. “*False Demon King, Avos Dilhevia*,” he said through Leaks, addressing her from the crystal in the throne room, “*do you know Anosh Polticoal?*”

A look of puzzlement crossed Avos Dilhevia’s face. At the same time, explosions could be heard from each of the five crystals. Shown on the crystals’ surfaces, the captured students were freed from Gijel. Some were being helped by students wearing black; some broke their own chains themselves; and some were rescued by teachers. All the students clad in white were immediately shielded with anti-magic that reduced Demera’s effect. It was clear that this was a rescue mission that had been planned in advance.

“This is an order to all my subordinates: Take the students to Eleonore. Her barrier will keep Demera at bay. Wait with her until I’ve dealt with Avos Dilhevia.”

I had sent the Leaks message to all my subordinates, using the magic link created by Limnet. Every one of them had probably been present at the arena during Igareth’s execution two thousand years ago. They had used Anosh Polticoal as the watchword to find their allies.

Just like Avos Dilhevia just now, our other enemies had no idea who Anosh was. But our allies from two thousand years ago would remember.

In the first place, it was no coincidence that they had all awoken at the same time. Igareth had prepared for everything in advance, making contact with everyone before they had reincarnated and casting magic on them to adjust the timing of their awakening. The explanation he had given Melheis was a lie—he had actually completed his own reincarnation a fair while ago.

“*As you command.*”

After everyone else had replied at once, Eleonore's voice reached me.

"Got it."

Demera was powerful, which was unavoidable considering it had been cast by Avos Dilhevia. However, because its area of effect spanned the entirety of Midhaze, its power was somewhat dispersed.

Eleonore belonged to me now. If she enhanced her magic to the maximum with Aske, she could create a barrier over a small area and buy us time.

I used Leaks to connect her to my subordinates from two thousand years ago. Under these conditions, they should be able to handle things themselves.

Avos Dilhevia looked baffled. "Anos Voldigoad...what did you do?"

"Can't you tell?"

In the time it took her to blink, Lay and I closed in on the throne.

"I am Anosh Polticoal," I said.

Avos Dilhevia took off her coat and threw it in front of us to obscure our vision. Unperturbed, Lay swung the Sword of Three Races in a sideways slash. The coat was sliced in half along with the throne behind it, but Avos Dilhevia leaped over the holy sword and evaded it. She landed where we'd been standing moments before.

"I see. I get it now. You changed the past, didn't you? Defying the order of the gods... What an outrageous misfit you are."

"If you truly understand, stop pouring your magic into the Abolisher of Reason and focus on the battle, or you'll be dead before we can even fight."

My glowing hand grasped the air. Overcome with agony, Avos Dilhevia clutched the left side of her chest.

"Did you think you evaded me? Your heart is already in my hands."

Ygg Neas covered my hand. The spell that allowed me to transcend space to hold all in its grasp had seized Avos Dilhevia's heart.

"What do you mean? This still is no time to be showcasing the full extent of my power. I still have everything under control. Your hold on my life changes

nothing. Go on, Hero Kanon. Slay me with the Sword of Three Races—if you can, that is.”

Lay braced his holy sword.

“Her plan is irrelevant,” I said to him. “You have to cut everything either way to sever her from her fate.”

He nodded slightly and then burst into a run. Like a gust of wind, he closed in on the fake Demon King, but as he did, there was a jewellike glint of a sword behind him. No one was holding the sword—the blade had appeared out of nowhere.

“Gennul, is it?” I mumbled, moving behind Lay to protect him. I used my Benolevun-coated left hand to catch Eilarrow, the Jewel Sword, as it came swooping down. However, the moment it made contact, the scenery around me changed.

I was inside a castle, but it wasn’t Delsgade. In the distance was a wooden throne illuminated by the dim moonlight. It was a familiar sight. This was the castle on the clouds—the castle at the peak of Ennunien—but I couldn’t possibly have been teleported there in an instant. I peered into the abyss to find the space was an illusion created by magic.

“Hmm. I see. So this is the inside of the Spirit of Hiding.”

I must have been drawn in when I’d blocked the sword.

“That’s right,” a quiet voice replied.

With the sound of soft footsteps, a masked man in jet-black armor emerged from the shadows. He reached up and slowly removed his mask. Before me was the face and source of a familiar demon.

“It’s been a while, Anos.”

Shin Reglia, my right-hand man, stared at me with the same cold Eyes he’d had two thousand years ago.

“I have betrayed you.”

§ 66. The Balance of Love and Pride

Shin sheathed Eilarrow, drew a magic circle, and reached one hand inside it. Sparking and crackling, particles of magic swirled in a storm around the circle. The blade of the demon sword he drew from within emitted a cold, penetrating radiance.

Its name was Deltoros, the Sword of Severance. The sword's sharp blade would sever anything it came into contact with. However, wielding the blade came at a price. The demon sword was cursed to eat away at the power of the wielder. Out of the thousand swords in Shin's possession, this one had the strongest single strike.

"Hmm. If you're drawing that, you must have made up your mind."

Without answering me, Shin held the sword loosely at his side. He had become one with his sword, leaving no opening in his guard as he stared straight at me.

"I have a question for you, Shin," I said. "Why are you fighting?"

There was no need to ask, but I did so anyway.

He closed his eyes for a brief moment, then opened them again. "Do you know?"

"Yes. I just returned from two thousand years ago. What I don't understand is why you're pointing your blade at me right now."

When Shin held his silence, I continued.

"I will destroy Avos Dilhevia, but Misa will be saved. That should resolve everything. That's why I returned to the past."

"I knew you'd say that."

The fighting spirit still burned in Shin's Eyes. The moment I let my guard down, Deltoros would have my neck.

"I know you raised Avos Dilhevia, but I am not so heartless as to blame my

subordinate after learning the reason why,” I said, meeting Shin’s gaze. “You are not at fault. If I had been there with you, I would have ordered you to do the same. You have remained my right-hand man for these two thousand years.”

“Those generous words are more than I deserve. That is what makes you the Demon King of Tyranny, the only worthy owner of the Disastrous God-slaying Sword.” Shin slowly walked towards me. “If you still deem me your follower, please grant me one last mercy,” he said quietly. “The continuation of that night. I wish to challenge you in a fight for our lives.”

The meaning of those words was clear to me. Shin was neither arrogant nor ignorant enough to think he could win against the Demon King of Tyranny. His request was simple.

“You wish for death.”

“Now and always, I am and will be the right-hand man of the Demon King. I cannot fall to anyone but you.” He came to a halt one step out of the Sword of Severance’s range. “From the shadows, I have protected Misa for two thousand years. In order to keep the rumor of the Demon King of Tyranny from dying out, I turned my sword against you. Now her true form has finally awakened. You are here, and she is as good as saved.”

The faintest hint of tenderness could be seen behind his cold eyes.

“I have lost everything—the pride of being your loyal sword, the meager heart you gave me... Even the love I thought I’d finally grasped slipped from between my fingers. Perhaps even from the very beginning, it was impossible for a sword to hold anything.”

Shin claimed to have lost his heart, but his cold voice was brimming with grief.

“I wanted to make my wife happy. She continuously poured her love into me, but it was all in vain. There was a gaping hole in the vessel. No matter how much of herself she devoted to me, there was no way this void could be filled.”

His cold words permeated an unbearable sorrow.

“After what happened, I went on a journey. Everywhere I went, be it in Dilhade or Azesion, I heard rumors—rumors of the always smiling, benevolent

Mother of Spirits who was loved by all. Over and over again.”

The legend of Great Spirit Reno existed even now, two thousand years later. The rumor was passed down through the generations from child to grandchild, grandchild to descendant, as though such a spirit existed somewhere. It was just like a fairy tale.

“If she hadn’t loved my loveless self... If I hadn’t sought love...” He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth. “She would still be out there today.”

Shin raised his head and, without any hesitation, marched within sword’s reach of me.

“For two thousand years, I have lived in disgrace to atone for that.”

He knelt before me and held Deltoros by the blade, presenting the hilt to me. I took the demon sword into my hand.

“My liege.” He bowed his head, pleading. “Please, by your own hand, put an end to these hollow days.”

The Demon King’s right-hand man. Two thousand years ago, he had been my most loyal subordinate. Even if I excused him, Shin knew that he had betrayed me.

He had sought love, had been betrayed by love, and had lost everything. He had pointed his blade at his master, turning against his demon sword source. All that was left in his chest was pure emptiness. For two thousand years, he had lived with that cavity in his chest, all in order to keep his promise to Reno. For that sole purpose, he had lived until this day while punishing himself.

How much pain had he felt appearing as the masked Demon King on that day of the Demon Sword Tournament? He had turned his blade on me, unable to reveal his identity. To him, that was a graver sin than he could bear. He had violated his own pride and beliefs in order to protect Misa—in order to protect the final vow he’d made to Reno before she’d faded. And that vow had been fulfilled.

I stood before him. The Demon King of Tyranny was here.

“Shin, my loyal subordinate.” With the demon sword in my hand, I tapped

him lightly on each shoulder to appoint him my subordinate once again. “You have done well to survive those two thousand years of hell. I commend you.”

I thrust Deltoros into the floor. Shin was still carrying the void of the day he had lost Reno. For two thousand years, he had remained in that tragedy. I turned around and took several steps back.

“Do you remember our promise?” I asked.

Shin stood up and took the Sword of Severance in his hand. He turned so that he was facing me diagonally and stared at me with his Eyes.

“Take this right arm with you. Use your final moments to regain your pride as a sword and rest in peace. I will send you to the same place as her.”

“I could ask for no better parting gift. I am deeply grateful for your compassion, Anos.”

Silence fell upon us. In the next breath, the magic of the man holding the sword disappeared. Attuned in body and source with the demon sword, Shin exhaled quietly.

“Sword of Severance, third hidden art: End.”

Deltoros, the cursed demon sword that absorbed magic... The third hidden art of the sword was its ability to absorb one’s own source, converting it into a blade. The cursed technique shortened the life span of the source, but that wouldn’t stop Shin.

This was the end, which was why he had willingly handed his entire source to Deltoros. The Sword of Severance transformed into an otherworldly blade, freezing cold, breathtakingly beautiful, and sharp enough to cut through anything.

“I have refined this sword with my life.”

“Hmm.” I held my right arm out and made a beckoning motion at Shin. “Then try it.”

His center of gravity shifted to his right. It wasn’t a bluff—he was truly trying to face me from head-on and take my right arm. It was the final moment of a single sword.

“Here I go.”

Shin started running, his body turning into a flash of light. He was moving at a speed too fast for regular eyes to follow, but my Eyes could see him clearly. In a single highly refined swing, he lifted the Sword of Severance and, with all his strength, brought it down on my right arm.

Shin’s body was enveloped in an indistinct black light. It was the final flicker of a source before it died out. A body on the verge of death could manifest a power that surpassed that of any other living being, in exchange for the remnants of their life.

The point beyond the pinnacle of swordsmanship, that the man hailed as the strongest demon swordsman had to throw away everything to reach—that was how much of a miracle-like move this was. But even then, even with a move of such caliber, my right arm remained attached. The arm couldn’t be lost.

“Can’t sever it, Shin? Even with your life on the line?”

The Sword of Severance dug into my arm, its blade reaching all the way to the bone. But it had stopped there.

“It seems I am no match for you,” he said, somewhat sadly.

“No. The Demon King’s right-hand man placed his life on the line. There’s no way this arm couldn’t be taken.”

Shin released the hilt, the strength drained from him. He could no longer hold the sword.

“So why couldn’t you do it?”

Instead of replying, he stared into my Eyes blankly.

“Because you chose to be a demon. Your heart rejected being a sword.”

Shin didn’t speak. He stared at me, his cold gaze filled with resolution.

“For two thousand years, you have lived with emptiness. After disgracing your honor, you must have seen hell. It would be cruel to order you to keep on living.”

Sometimes death was the only salvation. There were plenty of things in this

world that were worse than destruction.

“It would be the least I could do to put my pitiful follower out of his misery. I am not so unsympathetic as to thrust back into hell a man who suffered until this day in hopes of salvation.” I removed the sword digging into my arm and crushed it with my fist. “If it were two thousand years ago, that is.”

With the last of his source’s magic sacrificed to the Sword of Severance, Shin fell to his knees and collapsed forward. I retrieved his source from the broken sword and returned it to Shin, then addressed him as he lay on the floor.

“In this era, I have a father.” I could feel my own mouth naturally relax into a smile. “He’s quite an idiotic human. Forget disgracing his honor once, his whole life is an embarrassment. But you know, Shin, I don’t care about that. My father loves me. No matter what happens around us, no matter how much he messes up, that will never change. Even if my father were stuck in the depths of hell and were yet to find a way out, that is all that matters.”

I spoke to Shin not as the Demon King, but as the child of a caring parent.

“I’m afraid I cannot allow you to die with pride.”

Shin’s face moved slightly. His gaze fixed on me.

“I wish for you to live—even if you have to live in disgrace. No matter how much pain you may bear, I don’t want you to die.” I quietly held my hand out to him. “Live, Shin. Do you intend on taking Misa’s father from her?”

Shin clenched his fists. There was a faintest glimpse of light in his cold eyes.

“Even if this world is a living hell, you must live through it. You must seek love until the moment Misa tells you she doesn’t need such a thing—until the moment she tells you you can die. Now live.”

Shin’s lips trembled. “Would she...?” he murmured in a terrified voice. “Would she accept me as her father?”

“What other father does she have? If you, who threw aside everything to save her life, are not her father, then who is?”

He fell silent.

I drew a magic circle and pulled out a single demon sword. Then I thrust

Gilionojes, the Pillage Blade, into the floor. “She was always staring at the half of the demon sword you sent her. She called it a message from her father, who was unable to make contact with her. She believed her father was telling her to wait for the day he could come and get her.”

Shin found the strength in his arms to sit up. “After two thousand years, nothing remains unchanged,” he said in a voice relieved of all grievances.

I offered him a hand up.

“You are stronger, stricter, and kinder than you were before, my liege.” Shin gripped my hand with his own.

§ 67. Together with Her Heart

Lay ran like the wind, swinging the Sword of Three Races.

“Hyah!”

The blade of the holy sword was slashed diagonally downwards at Avos Dilhevia, who wrapped herself in Beno levun to deflect it.

“Jio Graze.”

Lay leaped aside to avoid the incoming black sun. A giant crater opened in the ground and burned fiercely.

“My, that’s a surprise. Don’t you care about Anos Voldigoad?”

I had just been swallowed by Gennul, the Spirit of Hiding, but Lay had swung at Avos Dilhevia without any hesitation whatsoever.

“There’s nothing more pointless than worrying about Anos.”

With the Sword of Three races braced ready, Lay stared at the girl.

“Shouldn’t you be worrying about yourself instead?” he asked.

Avos Dilhevia smiled fearlessly. “What do you mean?”

“As the Demon King of Tyranny, you should be at a disadvantage against me and this sword.”

“Oh, is that what you’re concerned about?”

Black lightning gathered in Avos Dilhevia’s right hand. It swirled into a crackling vortex, then shot out at Lay. It was Jirasd, the origin spell. The black lightning crackled and rumbled, destroying the room as it closed in on Lay, but he erased it with one swing of his sword.

“Hero Kanon, do you really have it in you to destroy me?”

“I have to take responsibility for creating you.”

The next moment, Avos Dilhevia was right before him.

“Ha!”

He aimed Evansmana at her shoulder. Avos’s dress waved behind her as she smoothly stepped out of its path. The Sword of Three Races was flipped around and swung upwards at her from below, but the blade came to a halt mid-slash. Avos Dilhevia had grabbed Lay’s wrist.

“Stop pushing yourself. Even if you have the strength to cut me down, your heart is rejecting the thought of you doing so.”

Her right hand reached for Lay’s face, but Lay grabbed it with his left.

“I made a mistake. I spread the rumor of an imaginary Demon King and died a hero’s death. From the very beginning, there was no way it could have gone well. Your sorrowful existence is the price I must pay for my warped sense of justice.”

Lay’s right hand clenched the Sword of Three Races. Avos Dilhevia grasped his wrist harder.

“You should never have been born,” Lay said.

“Oh? Are you sure about that?” Avos Dilhevia smiled quietly. She specifically chose her words to upset Lay. “You’re still wavering deep down, aren’t you? If it weren’t for me, Misa wouldn’t have been born.” Her cold Eyes gazed into Lay’s abyss. Then she laughed softly. “You’re attached to this girl, aren’t you?”

“I am.”

“Then give in.”

Avos Dilhevia put all her strength into her hands. Although she appeared delicate, her arms were those of a Demon King. She could easily hold down the Hero.

The Sword of Three Races was sealed, and Lay was unable to keep hold of her hand. Her fingertips gently brushed his cheek.

“Become mine, Kanon. My transient form is now my true form. I am both Misa *and* Avos Dilhevia.”

“You’re different from the girl I know.”

“It’s a trivial difference. Misa’s feelings have sublimated into my heart. I feel the same attachment to you.”

Lay glared at her. “What if I said no?”

“Then I’ll take you by force. I’ll tear you into shreds and stuff your sources into jars of magic so that you’ll always be mine alone.”

Magic gathered at Avos Dilhevia’s fingertips, dying them black. It was Vebzud.

“Those aren’t your own feelings.” Lay clutched Avos Dilhevia’s Vebzud-covered hand. The bones in her wrist creaked. “They’re her feelings. Misa’s still alive inside you.”

“Unfortunately, she was only a transient personality—a stand-in until my awakening. The personality called Misa no longer exists. Give up.”

Her blackened fingernails grazed Lay’s cheek, drawing blood. Lay grimaced for a moment, then glared at her angrily. An instant later, he mustered his strength to push her arm away by force.

Avos Dilhevia’s eyes widened faintly in surprise. Lay’s strength was far greater than it had been moments ago.

“You are the fake, Avos Dilhevia.”

Light wrapped around Lay’s body. Thoughts and emotions were being converted into magic, enhancing his strength.

“What?”

Avos Dilhevia’s Magic Eyes turned to her own body. She stared at the emotions flowing out of her source—the emotions that should have long vanished.

The spell Lay had called upon was Teo Aske—the trump card of a hero, that could convert the love of two people into magic. There was only one person he could cast that spell with.

“Hiyaaah!”

The two enemies struggled to overpower one another. Just as Avos Dilhevia was about to pull through, Lay fluidly redirected her strength and locked her

arm in place.

Avos Dilhevia tried to use even more force to shake him off. He used the momentum of that movement to release her and distance himself, creating just enough distance to swing his sword between them.

“Teo Traloth!”

Light and fire erupted from Evansmana. The sword swung down, firing an explosive trail of flames. Avos Dilhevia blocked the explosion with her anti-magic, but her body was sliced by the blade.

“You’ve done it now,” she growled, glaring furiously as she bled.

Lay pointed the tip of the Sword of Three Races at her. “This spell is proof. She’s still alive inside you, fighting together with me. Although she’s become the Demon King of Tyranny, her love remains with me.” He took one step forward, then accelerated on the second step, closing in on Avos Dilhevia.

“Oh my. Are you sure about that? If that’s true, you’re pointing your sword at your beloved. Shouldn’t she be terrified of you?”

“You don’t know anything about her. You know nothing!”

Avos Dilhevia evaded the sword swing by a hair’s breadth, but the follow-up explosion of Teo Traloth caught her body, flinging her aside.

“Her wish was for the unification of demonkind. She would never forgive a royal supremacist like you!” Lay leaped after Avos Dilhevia. “Don’t think she wouldn’t give her life to protect me and defeat you! If I didn’t believe in her, I would have no right to love her!”

Lay swung Evansmana with all his might. Avos Dilhevia cast an exceptionally large Jio Graze to intercept him, but Lay split the spell in half with his sword. The black explosion demolished the wall behind them, but Lay remained in hot pursuit.

In defense, Avos cast Beno levun to shield her entire body. A Teo Traloth, cast with all of Lay’s might, tore through the black aurora, but at the same time, Avos Dilhevia’s blackened arm pierced his abdomen.

“Degzegd.”

A black, snakelike mark appeared on Lay's body. The cursed serpent rampaged violently, spreading its poison and clamping its jaws round his source. However, Lay did not flinch.

"I will sever the destiny of the Demon King and set you free! Misa, lend me your strength!"

Teo Aske swirled around within Lay's body, blowing apart the magic circle for Degzegd.

"Teo Traloth!"

The attack was cast at the perfect moment, making it impossible to avoid.

As the legends of the Demon King of Tyranny said, Avos Dilhevia was no match for Hero Kanon and the holy sword forged to destroy her. The sword broke through her wards, but at the last moment, before her source was pierced—

A voice called out from nowhere.

"Be calm, sword of the gods. The word of a god is absolute."

The radiance of the Sword of Three Races faded, and Avos Dilhevia grabbed the blade. The sword forged to destroy her had lost its power.

She drew a magic circle. *"Zola e Dypt."*

Black flames transformed into chains that attacked Lay from every direction. He slashed at them with the Sword of Three Races, but the holy sword, lightless as it now was, couldn't cut through. Lay's limbs were soon restrained by the burning chains. Their flames swallowed his body, incinerating the Teo Aske within.

With a dry laugh, the Heavenly Father appeared. "All has gone to plan. Thy role as the creator of Avos Dilhevia has ended, Hero Kanon. Thou art to be killed by thy lover and disappear."

Zola e Dypt was an origin spell that could compose spell formulae while simultaneously sealing the enemy's movement and magic. The spell it was currently forming was a Jio Graze powerful enough to destroy the entire country.

It was aimed at the ceiling.

“Goodbye, Lay,” Avos Dilhevia said. “If only you had simply listened and become mine.”

She moved the spell to point it directly at Lay and summoned the black sun. The great black orb swallowed him whole.

“I will destroy you and all your sources.”

Avos Dilhevia channeled her magic into a magic circle, firing another Jio Graze. However, right before the black sun struck him, it shattered like glass and vanished without a trace.

Avos gasped and cast her Eyes around.

“The Magic Eyes of Destruction...”

Zola e Dypt was immediately shredded by a sword, and Lay was released.

“That’s quite the dull scheme, Nosgalia.”

Shin and I emerged from within the Spirit of Hiding and looked over at Nosgalia. He stood before us, sporting his usual calm demeanor.

“It’s about to get a little more interesting, misfit. Once everything of thine has been— Gah!”

Before Nosgalia could finish his sentence, I struck him with my fist and sent him flying. He shot straight across the room and crashed loudly into the wall.

“Lower your head, insect,” I said, walking towards Nosgalia. “Bow if you wish to speak. Oh my, where do you think you’re going? Play with me some more.”

Avos Dilhevia cut in front of me to obstruct my path. She had Beno levun and Jirasd wrapped around both arms, and her Eyes were fixed warily on me. Still, I continued towards Nosgalia without a care. She frowned as though she couldn’t comprehend my actions and braced herself for combat. She was so wary that I was inviting her to attack that she failed to move at all.

Footsteps echoed through the room. Shin started walking too. By the time Avos Dilhevia’s gaze turned to him, I was directly beside her. Avos’s sharp bloodlust pierced my skin, but before her black lightning-clad arms could make

contact with me, I patted her on the shoulder.

“Have Lay play with you for a while longer,” I said, walking right past her.

“Nosgalia.” I pointed at the Heavenly Father, who was lying against the broken wall. “It’s time you had a taste of fear.”

§ 68. Reviving Love

Chuckling softly, Nosgalia slowly rose to his feet. “Fear? Whom might I fear? Thou thinkest I, a god, would fear thee?” His gaze was fixed on me. “Oh, what meaningless, worthless, futile words thou utter’st, Anos Voldigoad.”

He seemed to have sustained no damage from being tossed across the room and now leisurely made his way towards me.

“Gods are order. We are absolute existences to all who live in this world. To humans, spirits, and thee demons, we are the law of this world. Your lives follow the circle of life and death according to order. Becoming enraged at the gods is pointless. However, there is nothing more pointless than attempting to strike fear into the heart of a god.”

Nosgalia raised his hands with solemnity. “Allow me to impart knowledge on thine ignorant self. We are not like thee. We harbor no anger, no sadness. Gods are immortal and thus are not living. We cannot feel fear. We exist merely as the logic of this world.”

“Is that why you lack the brains to comprehend my words?” I said, addressing the Heavenly Father’s arrogant gaze. “That is what I’m saying I won’t forgive.”

“What is there for order to fear? Thine anger is equivalent to outrage over something burning and demanding the order of combustion to cower before thee.”

“That’s right. I won’t allow anything to burn before me without my permission. Whether it’s order or logic I face, engraving fear into others is my way of doing things.”

Nosgalia laughed once again. “Fool who spits on the heavens. Thou wilt face thy punishment for defying order. *Behold the true form of god.*”

Just like he had that one other time, Nosgalia uttered the miracle-working words of a god. His body was enshrouded in blinding light, his power swelling to an outrageous degree. His appearance transformed to the near opposite of

Eldmed's demon body, revealing golden-blond hair and fiery red Magic Eyes. Wings of light composed of particles of magic extended from his back.

The ground below Delsgade trembled fiercely. The magic flowing from him was beyond control. Nosgalia's mere existence stirred the air and shook the castle. His appearance was similar to that of Jerga's magic body, yet also clearly different. The vast amount of magic appeared to have a mass as it formed the body of the god's true form.

"Avos Dilhevia is yet to seize control of the Abolisher of Reason, but the majority of the magic circle of Delsgade has been rewritten and removed from thy hands. Without the power of the Goddess of Destruction, destroying a god is beyond thy capabilities." Nosgalia stood there calmly, his red Eyes locked on me. "Witness how all is futile in the face of order, Anos Voldigoad."

"What are you talking about?"

As I spoke, Shin stepped in front of me.

"To me, gods and order are mere rules of a tedious game. You aren't even worthy of facing my right-hand man, much less myself, Nosgalia."

Shin's right hand cut through the air, drawing a magic circle. Ominous magic gathered there, and he drew the God Slasher from within.

"You have my deepest gratitude, my liege," Shin said, holding Gneodoros at the ready. "I am in your debt for your gracing me with this opportunity to avenge my wife."

"Ruin him to your heart's content. Leave everything else to me."

Shin raised his sword and pointed it at Nosgalia. "Understood."

There were two things we still had to do: destroy the Heavenly Father without destroying the order of the world, and destroy Avos Dilhevia without destroying Misa. The latter was currently being dealt with by Lay. Instead of interfering with his fight, I carefully stared into Nosgalia's abyss in order to expose all that was hidden in his source.

"Ignorant Demon King and Disastrous God-slaying Sword," Nosgalia called loudly, *"thy disrespect will be met by the wrath of the gods."*

The miracle in his voice attacked us.

Shin drew the God Slasher, moving faster than the speed of sound as he cut through the god's words. In the blink of an eye, he appeared before Nosgalia. Gneodoros pierced the Heavenly Father's heart before he could utter another word.

But Nosgalia showed no concern. No blood flowed from his body.

"The body of god is absolute," he declared.

The next moment, Shin's magic vanished.

"Second hidden art of the God Slasher: Reaper."

Particles of magic gathered around the holy sword. The blade of the God Slasher turned a reddish black as it sank deeper into Nosgalia's chest.

"Guh..."

Blood flowed from his heart. The second hidden art of the God Slasher had pierced his source.

"Disastrous God-slaying Sword... Foolish man... Pitiful demon sword..."

The blood spilling from Nosgalia's chest dripped onto the floor. The moment it made contact, the once red blood began glowing gold. No—it was burning. The blood became a golden fire, rising fiercely from the floor.

"The flames of god shall pass judgment on thee."

The rising flames enveloped Shin, burning his body. His anti-magic was unable to resist the flames of god, and his black armor started melting against his skin.

Shin withdrew Gneodoros from Nosgalia and cut away the flames around him. He then swung his sword back at the god, but the God Slasher passed through air.

Nosgalia appeared in the distance.

"Perish," he said.

Nosgalia's eyes glowed red, and pale, silver flames enveloped Shin's body. Shin grimaced in pain.

“The flames of god impart every agony of this world onto sinners. This merciful fire shall allow thee to repent for thy sins. The pain will increase with every second, and after a minute, thou shalt be condemned. Salvation in the form of the complete destruction of thy source awaits thee.”

“I see, so it’s a curse. As long as the flames remain within your sight, they’ll continue burning. You’ve even prepared a clever excuse for the minute it takes the curse to complete.”

Bathed in silver flame, Shin closed in on Nosgalia, his sword swinging towards the god’s Magic Eyes. If the Pillage Blade hit its mark, it would take away Nosgalia’s sight, but golden flames rose up to block the sword. Shin took a step forward as though he’d been expecting as much, and thrust his right elbow into Nosgalia’s back. That move, too, was blocked by the fire, but the opening allowed Shin to leap into Nosgalia’s blind spot.

However, even then, the silver flames around Shin’s body continued burning.

“A god’s Eyes are omniscient. Condemnation is absolute.”

Golden flames gathered in Nosgalia’s hand and flared up towards Shin’s body. The flames began to take on the shape of a sword.

“Thou shalt now be judged by the Divine Sword Roduier. Even the Disastrous God-slaying Sword, the strongest demon swordsman, is nothing more than a child before the sword of god.”

The golden flames completed their transformation into the golden Divine Sword Roduier. The blade tore through Shin’s black armor, but he evaded before it reached his flesh. A single piece of paper, accompanied by a slight spattering of blood, fell from the torn armor. It was the page Reno had given Shin two thousand years ago.

Shin immediately unhanded the God Slasher to reach for the paper. But the Divine Sword came swinging down from above, skewering his hand and pinning it to the ground.

“Ack...”

Blood gushed from Shin’s wounded hand.

Nosgalia glanced down at the page and laughed flatly. His red eyes were full of contempt. “Foolish God-slaying Sword. Didst thou yearn for love so badly? Unfortunately, thy pitiful love was merely the result of a god’s miracle. The moment Avos Dilhevia was born, thy role was over. And so, the time of judgment is almost upon thee. Repent as thou passest, Disastrous God-slaying Sword. Thy sin is refusing to thank the gods for that love.”

Seconds remained. Just before the silver flames could burn up Shin completely, he suddenly disappeared. Despite being pinned down by Roduier, he had moved away with ease.

“He isn’t foolish,” a voice said.

Nosgalia slowly looked over towards the entrance of the throne room. A hooded girl stood in the doorway. Shin was beside her, staring at her in a daze.

“It wasn’t a miracle. I finally get that now.”

Amber eyes with the familiar radiance of a certain great spirit from the past shone from beneath the hood.

“My husband is the right-hand man of the Demon King. He has never once failed to cut down your words. They’ve never reached Shin. He’s never listened to a word you say!”

Faint green light enveloped the girl, and a soft gust blew back her hood. The hair revealed from beneath was as beautiful as a clear lake, and six wings extended from her back. The girl in the unblemished jade-green dress was the Mother of Spirits, whose tale passed down through the legends.

It was Reno.

“Shin’s love has always been his own. The love I taught him, the love we nurtured together hasn’t been corrupted by some god’s miracle. You’re the one who’s mistaken. It wasn’t a miracle at all!”

Nosgalia gazed at Reno. For one who claimed to feel no anger or sadness, he had an oddly dark look in his eyes. Shin stood in front of Reno as though to protect her from that gaze.

“Reno...” he mumbled, looking over his shoulder.

She grinned at him like she'd used to. "I came to fulfill my promise, Shin. Sorry, I made you wait for two thousand years."

Shin shook his head quietly and readied the Pillage Blade in his hand. "It's time we get her back. Misa is no Child of God." He smiled suddenly. "She's our child."

As Reno nodded, Shin started running. She held her hands before her and drew a magic circle. After two thousand years, the great spirit had revived to convey her love. Beside her was her spouse, the Spirit King. In order to retrieve the love and the child stolen from them, the two would face the source of their tragedy without any fear or hesitation.

§ 69. Shredded Words

Shin was tearing towards his target.

“So, Mother of Spirits,” Nosgalia declared loudly, “thou hast borrowed the body of a love fairy in order to obtain temporary life. Even so, no matter the memories or form thee regains, the body of a dainty love spirit bears little power.”

Once Reno realized she was dead and borrowing the body of a fran, she had no choice but to disappear. Nosgalia, who knew this all too well, had thrust the truth at her, but Reno didn’t even falter. She knew already—that it was only a matter of time before she disappeared.

“All thine attempts are futile. The Eyes of a god see all. Know that I shall never lose sight of you.”

The Heavenly Father’s Eyes fixed on Shin, ready to invoke another miracle. However, just like before, Shin disappeared as though he’d been spirited away.

“Even if you have no blind spots, you can’t see something that doesn’t exist in this world!” Reno shouted.

It was the power of Gennul, the Wolf of Hiding. Shin was currently being affected by the spirit’s mysterious ability to vanish from existence when looked at.

“Ha ha!”

With that dry laugh, Nosgalia closed his eyes. The next moment, Shin reappeared and retrieved the God Slasher from the floor.

“The power of a god is absolute. Sealing one or two of my powers will not change thy destiny.”

As Nosgalia was speaking, Shin closed the distance between them. The God Slasher swung down and clashed with the Divine Sword.

The difference in skill between the two of them was so great, Shin easily sent

the Divine Sword flying. While Roduier went spinning through the air, the demon sword in Shin's hand turned a reddish black. He aimed the God Slasher's second hidden art at Nosgalia's neck. The blade flashed.

"The swordsmanship of a god is limitless."

The Divine Sword, still in the air, started moving as though it had a mind of its own, knocking aside Shin's Gneodoros.

"This is the sword of the gods. Fear it. Revere it. My sword will end all who defy god without me lifting a finger. Thou demons, who must rely on thy limbs to swing thy swords, are no match for this miracle."

Roduier soared through the air. Shin continuously deflected its rapid thrusts, but the sword used the momentum to whirl around and slash at him from below.

Shin took a step back and watched where Roduier was swinging, but the Divine Sword wasn't limited by arm's range. The sword continued thrusting forward, away from Nosgalia.

The two blades moved faster than the eye could follow. Unhindered by a body, the Divine Sword was truly unrestricted in terms of attacks. Only Shin, using two blades, could have kept up with such rapid attacks, but he was gradually losing ground.

"Please, everyone, lend me your strength. Lend your magic, your strength, to Shin and me!"

Reno sent her feelings into a new magic circle. While the body of the love fairy could draw the magic circle, it didn't have enough power to activate it. However, particles of magic began to gather around her, bathing her in a soft green light.

"Titi," she called.

Tiny winged fairies appeared beside Shin, who was still exchanging blows with Roduier.

"Let's play!"

"Let's play, sword uncle!"

“We brought everyone along.”

“Let’s all play together!”

Nosgalia glared at the tiny spirits. “Feeble spirits, receive thy punishment for defiling the presence of god.”

Roduier slashed at the titi, splitting their bodies in two. However, this had no effect on the titi, whose half bodies regenerated, doubling them in number.

“Kya ha ha!”

“We’ve been cut!”

“We multiply when we’re cut.”

“It’s common sense!”

Roduier ignored the cackling titi and closed in on Shin. The moment Shin deflected the blade, golden flames burst from the sword, restraining his limbs.

“Receive thy punishment,” Nosgalia declared. Roduier lunged and sliced Shin into two.

But Shin’s body dissolved into mist and regenerated as two Shins instead. Just like when he’d been affected by Gennul’s power, he was borrowing the ability of the titi.

“Over here!”

“No, over here!”

“You can’t catch me.”

“You can’t catch us!”

The titi multiplied over and over, then all transformed to look like Shin.

“Let’s play tag.”

“The scary god’s it.”

“If you’re caught...”

“...you’ll die!”

Over thirty copies of Shin disappeared and reappeared in different locations,

rushing towards Nosgalia. Each time Roduier slashed through him, he would merely increase in number.

“Thou shalt burn at the stake for thine insolence,” Nosgalia declared, drawing a huge magic circle on the floor. The included runes turned into golden flames that rose into blazing pillars.

“Lignon!” Reno shouted, and an eight-headed water dragon appeared behind her. Lignon’s body transformed into water as she dove into the flames head-first.

The currents of the water dragon clashed with the flames of god, intertwining and canceling each other out.

“Gigadeith!”

A fist-sized fairy appeared over Reno’s shoulder, bringing down its tiny hammer. A bow and arrows of lightning appeared in Reno’s hands. She nocked the arrow and pulled the bowstring back as far as it would go. When she released it, it thundered violently and struck Nosgalia’s body.

“Burn in the flames of a god and perish.”

Unaffected by the lightning, Nosgalia had uttered another miracle. Golden flames coiled around the eight-headed water dragon, its divine power evaporating her water.

“Cenetello!”

Soft green light surrounded Lignon. Water began flowing from her body, as though her wounds were being healed.

“Foolish spirits. Do ye wish to face extinction at the hands of the gods?”

“Spirits will not be defeated by gods!” Reno called. “I will be the one to protect Shin! I’ll protect him no matter what!”

“There is no protecting or not protecting. There is only order.”

The wings of light on Nosgalia’s back flapped slowly, filling the area with golden flames.

“Foolish spirits who fail to understand the gods. This is the natural way of the

world.”

The flames faded to reveal all the spirits, collapsed on the floor. They tried to stagger to their feet, but their bodies were on the verge of fading.

“Everyone...” Reno mumbled.

It’s okay, Reno, a familiar voice echoed. A half transparent tree appeared behind her. It was Migelonov, the Great War Tree, who had faded away two thousand years ago.

“Granny... How...”

“The same way as you, my dear. I borrowed a fran’s body and returned to tell my beloved granddaughter something I forgot to tell her.”

A leaf fluttered down from Migelonov’s branches and landed on Reno’s chest. There, it vanished.

“Don’t you worry about us, Reno. We love you. We love what you love. The path you walk is also our destination.”

Migelonov transformed into particles of light and drew a magic circle in Reno’s palm. It was as though she was imparting her final wisdom.

“The Spirit King has protected us for two thousand years. Now it’s our turn to return the favor.”

Reno nodded and activated the spell she had received from Migelonov. Many spirits gathered around her, pouring their magic into the circle. The six wings on her back began to glitter faintly.

“Alha Alfrem.”

Green light enveloped the spirits, who moved to surround Shin. The titi, Gennul, Lignon, Gigadeith, and Reno all transformed into green, glowing magic bodies, bestowing him with power.

“You have my gratitude, Reno.”

With the God Slasher and the Pillage Blade in hands, Shin charged at Nosgalia.

“Perish with those foolish spirits, Disastrous God-slaying Sword.”

Nosgalia flapped his wings of light. Golden flames covered the area, but Shin

swiftly sliced them apart.

Water dripped down the blades of his swords. The power of the eight-headed water dragon was enhancing them. This was the effect of Alha Alfrem—as were the earlier glimpses when he'd used the abilities of Gennul and the titi.

Nosgalia glared at Shin, but Shin turned into mist and dispersed into the area. By borrowing the ability of the mischievous titi, he was able to surround Nosgalia.

The wings of light beat once more, burning all the mist. However, when the flames faded, Shin was nowhere to be seen.

“Don't assume the same move can be reused against a god, thou fools.”

Nosgalia closed his Eyes and sent Roduier flying. The hiding effect ended, revealing Shin's location.

Shin proceeded to thrust Gneodoros into the ground. A tree sprouted nearby and shot up rapidly. The moment Roduier impaled the tree, wood spread over the blade like a layered cocoon. It was the power of Ennunien.

“Then what if there were a thousand?” Nosgalia asked. He beat his wings, ejecting a thousand feathers. Those feathers transformed into a thousand Roduiers, which attacked Shin all at once. There was no chance of evading or knocking them all away, but when Shin started running, he transformed into a bolt of lightning.

With a thunderous roar, he weaved between the thousand Divine Swords and pierced Nosgalia's heart.

“Gah...ah...”

Shin's body crackled as he landed, returning to its original form. Himself again, he spun around and thrust the God Slasher forward.

Nosgalia's wings of light closed around the god's body to protect him. But he was one beat too late—just before the wings could close, Shin thrust Gneodoros through a gap so small, it was like he was threading a needle, piercing the god's body.

Fresh blood splattered and feathers of light floated through the air. Despite

having his body impaled, Nosgalia remained smiling.

“Perish, Disastrous God-slaying Sword...”

Unconcerned with Nosgalia’s words, Shin thrust Gneodoros farther into the god’s body. A familiar dry laugh spilled from Nosgalia’s lips.

“I shall impart the wisdom of the gods upon you. The words of a god are absolute. Thou canst not escape them, just like how thou couldst not escape love or raising Avos Dilhevia. Farewell, Disastrous God-slaying—”

A fissure appeared in Nosgalia’s body. The blade of the God Slasher had turned a reddish black. Particles of magic swirled ominously around it.

“Third hidden art of the God Slasher: Hell.”

With that, Nosgalia’s source was cut into two. Shin released his hand from the God Slasher, and the Heavenly Father staggered back. The god quickly raised his head.

“Ha ha... The source of god is indestructible. You could never— Ack!”

Nosgalia revived with the sword still in his body, but the God Slasher proceeded to cut his source into two, and then into four.

“God is immor— Aaah!”

Shin stared coldly as Nosgalia screamed and fell to his knees.

“Hell is a nightmare that can endlessly divide one’s source. That is the punishment the God Slasher inflicts on a god.”

In the next few moments, the source that had been split into four pieces split into eight, then sixteen, then thirty-two. The source of a god was immortal, which meant the God Slasher’s hidden art would continue splitting it without end. The Heavenly Father would have to suffer until his source could no longer be divided.

“Back then, I thought I’d failed to cut you.” Shin used the Pillage Blade to slash Nosgalia’s throat, then immediately drew Eilarrow, the Jewel Sword. “But Reno was right.”

The sword flashed in a pentagram across Nosgalia’s body. With the God

Slasher still pierced through his source, the Heavenly Father was sealed. His divine body disappeared, leaving only a red gemstone in its place.

“There was no way I would have ever failed to cut your words.”

And, just as he had done in the past, Shin slashed the words of the god apart.

§ 70. To Sever Fate

Moments before, while Shin was still facing Nosgalia...

On the other side of the throne room, Lay faced Avos Dilhevia. He was glaring sharply at the face of the Demon King, watching her every move. She smiled softly.

“I don’t mind taking on either one of you. But, Kanon, do you have enough strength left to face me?” The fake Demon King pointed at Lay’s dull holy sword. “Evansmana, the Sword of Three Races, once received the blessing of the gods. After facing the Heavenly Father’s words, the sword has lost its power. It’s no longer my weakness.” Avos Dilhevia turned to me. “Shouldn’t you lend him a hand, Anos?”

“I understand your desire for attention, but I’m afraid I’m busy right now. Don’t worry. Without the Abolisher of Reason, you’ll be no match for Lay.”

As I spoke, I gazed into Nosgalia’s abyss. My Eyes, staring deep into his depths, located the source of the Conflagration King.

Hmm. Just as I thought.

“Avos Dilhevia,” Lay said quietly, “I’ll be taking Misa back.”

The light of Teo Aske enveloped him as he burst into a run. He accelerated and closed straight in on the phony Demon King.

“Ha!”

Evansmana glowed with the light of Teo Aske as Lay swung the sword down, but Avos Dilhevia blocked the blade with her Beno levun-clad right hand. The moment the holy sword touched Beno levun, it rebounded and changed trajectory. Lay whirled around gracefully and slashed horizontally at Avos Dilhevia’s left side.

This time, the attack was blocked by the Beno levun covering her left hand. However, the holy sword rebounded and changed trajectory once more. The

sword thrust forward at the speed of light, making direct contact with the left side of Avos Dilhevia's chest, but even with his full strength behind Evansmana, Lay just couldn't pierce it.

The thin black aurora of Beno levun spread over Avos's entire body.

"I told you that holy sword has no power. Your way of fighting is as it was two thousand years ago, Kanon."

With black-stained hands, Avos Dilhevia stroked Lay's chest—and then thrust her arm right through it.

"Urgh..."

"And that makes two. If we include the one from earlier, that's three total. The sources you separated from your body have already been dealt with by Nosgalia. You only have one source remaining."

Teo Aske rose even more fiercely around Lay, gathering at the Sword of Three Races. But even then, he couldn't pierce Avos Dilhevia.

"It's futile. Not even the Hero's trump card can cut with a dull blade. Give up already."

"But I promised..."

The great spirit's expression darkened. "What are you talking about?"

"I promised I'd stand by her even if she had to bear a heavy fate. I said I'd save her no matter where she was or what stood in my way."

Avos Dilhevia smiled sadistically at his words. "In that case, you should think things over carefully. If you become mine, you'll understand. Misa has become completely fused with me. If you destroy me, you'll never fulfill your promise."

"All right. I'll become yours."

The fake Demon King beamed.

Lay chuckled. "Is that what you wanted to hear?"

For a brief moment, she closed her eyes. When she opened them, they revealed her irritation.

"You're lying," Lay said.

“Oh? I’m offended. How could you say that to someone pining for you this much?”

Lay stood firm before her alluring words. “You’re buying time by pretending to be interested in me. Without the Abolisher of Reason, you can’t win against Anos. Even if you defeated me here, you’d be destroyed by him after.” He met Avos Dilhevia’s cold gaze with a cool smile.

“Is that all you wanted to say? Just look at yourself. You don’t even have the magic to maintain Teo Aske.”

As she said, the light of Teo Aske had disappeared from Lay’s body.

“If I’m wrong, then all you have to do is stop talking and destroy me,” Lay said. “I’m a hero with one source and a powerless sword. The real Demon King of Tyranny would have destroyed me ten times over by now.”

Lay’s taunting caused her magic to shake. Delsgade quaked so violently, it could be heard rumbling.

“I see. So that’s how you want to treat my kindness. Then, as you wish, I shall destroy every last shred of your source.”

Avos Dilhevia put more strength into her arm, forcing her black-stained fingers deeper into Lay. However, Lay backed away for the same distance as she pushed her arm forward.

No. Backing away wasn’t the right way of describing it. He had suppressed the force of her fingers by moving in the opposite direction. The power of her Vebzud-covered fingertips was millimeters away from destroying his source.

In a situation so close to death, Lay could see through Avos’s every move. This wasn’t one of Hero Kanon’s earlier self-sacrificing strategies. It was the highest level of foresight he acquired from sparring with Shin.

“Although that past is no more...”

Lay’s magic vanished. This was why he had allowed his sources to be destroyed. His seven sources made it extremely difficult to erase his own magic, which was why he had reduced them to one.

“Misa,” Lay called, hoping to separate her mind from Avos Dilhevia’s as much

as possible, “I believe this is something your father granted me to save you with. Even if he did so unintentionally, his fate was to try and save you. So come back to me!”

Lay’s source seized the source of Evansmana.

“The first hidden art of the Sword of Three Races...”

Magic rumbled around them. It was the pulse of the Sword of Three Races. The outrageous power hidden deep within the holy sword had begun to wake up. It was rejecting the words of Nosgalia.

“Is that...a god’s...”

Avos Dilhevia’s eyes widened. Then she charged. But it was too late. Pure-white light gathered around Evansmana, reinforcing its blade. The tip glowed blindingly.

“Ugh... Ah!”

The light of Evansmana pierced through the thin layer of Beno levun and opened a hole in Avos Dilhevia’s body. She was immediately wrapped in white light.

“...Heaven Splitter.”

In the span of a single breath, countless blades of light sliced Avos Dilhevia’s body. Slashes struck her one after another without the sword being swung, severing her fate. That was the first hidden art of the Sword of Three Races: Heaven Splitter.

Avos Dilhevia was enveloped in a divine light. That light was split in half by the sword’s hidden art, forming two orbs of light that blinked like the stars.

“I release you from your sorrowful fate as the Demon King of Tyranny. The Sword of Three Races taught me that.”

The pure-white light faded until it completely disappeared. From one light, Avos Dilhevia emerged, from the other, Misa appeared. The two sources that had completely fused together, fated to never separate again, had been split by the power of Evansmana’s hidden art.

“Misa...” Lay immediately reached for her.

Misa came to, gasped, and started running. “Lay!” she cried, leaping at him.

With the Sword of Three Races in his right hand, Lay hugged her with his free arm. “I’ve got her back, Avos Dilhevia. Your source was split into two: the demon half, and the spirit half. Even though Misa doesn’t have much magic of her own, you won’t survive long with half a source.”

Avos Dilhevia’s body was turning transparent. Despite retaining all her power, she was unable to maintain her existence. It was a similar phenomenon to spiritosis.

“As the legend said, the Demon King fell to Hero Kanon’s holy sword. It’s your defeat, Avos Dilhevia.”

With one arm wrapped around Misa, Lay pointed the tip of his sword at the fake Demon King.

§ 71. The True Demon King

Despite fading more with each passing moment, Avos Dilhevia smiled elegantly.

“What a foolish thing to do, Hero Kanon,” she said. “Are you truly capable of thrusting that holy sword into my chest? Will you be able to stand by and watch as I fade away before you?”

She slowly pointed her delicate finger at Misa.

“You may have severed our fate, splitting us into our demon and spirit halves, but our sources cannot restore themselves. It’s as you said. Splitting our source into two means neither of us will live for long. That applies to Misa as well.”

It was the same as what had happened to Sasha and Misha. Losing half of themselves had doomed them to extinction.

“Kanon, the pitiful hero who continually sacrificed himself to save the world, will you sacrifice your beloved for the sake of that world?”

Lay stared at Avos Dilhevia.

“Misa, come back to me. You get it, don’t you? I am you, and you are me. At this rate, both of us will perish.”

Misa glared at the phony Demon King. “What about it?” she snapped.

The unexpected answer made Avos Dilhevia’s expression darken.

“You already know, don’t you?” Misa continued. “Until today, I’ve lived with the dream of uniting demons in a world without royalty and hybrids. There’s no way I’d forgive a sham of a Demon King for trying to ruin that dream.”

“That dream is merely temporary. As a spirit, you were born into this world to live according to the legend of the Demon King of Tyranny. In contrast to two thousand years of legend, your beliefs have existed for less than fifteen years. They’re frail.”

“It isn’t temporary, and they aren’t frail,” Misa replied firmly. “I made a vow

with my fellow Unitarians. There's a real Demon King, who would never surrender to injustice. Besides"—She glanced to the side, where Shin was fighting for his life in the distance—"I have a father who's been waiting for the day he could meet me. And I have someone I love."

"Think carefully, fool. Would someone who truly loved you try to destroy you? Would they choose the option that risked your death?" Avos Dilhevia smiled wickedly to upset Misa. "No, not if they loved you. Hero Kanon is merely trying to save the world, as he did two thousand years ago. He'll never love you, just like he'll never love me."

But Misa was unshaken as she replied. She glared at Avos Dilhevia as though to vent her irritation. "The love you speak of isn't love. I've never thought about just surviving. If I'm going to live, I want to live as myself. That's why what Lay did saved me. I can't bear to watch myself abuse other hybrids. Lay is the last person who would want to hurt others, but he was willing to hurt me for my sake." She raised her voice, still clinging to Lay as she rejected Avos Dilhevia. "If you can't understand how he feels, you aren't me at all!"

Lay and Misa started running. Avos Dilhevia held out her hand to aim Jio Graze at Lay, but the next moment, she frowned. Misa was standing before him like a shield. Her magic was weak. Any magic strong enough to harm Lay would be strong enough to kill her. Killing Misa would result in her own death. That hesitation created a brief opening that allowed Lay to close in on the imposter.

There was a flash of light, and blood dripped down the blade. Evansmana had pierced Avos Dilhevia.

A weak cry and red blood spilled from her lips. The fraudulent Demon King's body was bathed in the light of the Sword of Three Races. But the next moment, that light disappeared.

"Lay!" Misa screamed.

A black sun was closing in on him from behind.

"Hiyah!" Lay used his holy sword to slice through Jio Graze, then looked off into the distance.

"Did you really think I would die if you destroyed my source?"

Avos Dilhevia was standing there. Having been defeated by the Sword of Three Races once already, she was able to revive using Agronemt.

“I figured this would happen. That’s why I split your source in half.”

“Oh? That’s unfortunate.” She grinned. Suddenly, the number of runes on the wall around her increased. “I’ve obtained it.”

Black particles of light filled the room.

“Come to me, Venuzdonoa.”

In response to her call, the countless black particles in the room gathered at her feet. A dark shadow in the shape of a sword appeared. There was nothing casting the shadow; it existed by itself. The shadow sword slowly rose towards Avos Dilhevia’s hand.

Avos grasped the hilt. As if the shadow turned inside out, a dark longsword appeared in her hand. “All logic will fall before me. Did you really think halving my source would be enough to end me?”

“Who knows? Maybe you’ll be able to stay alive for as long as the Abolisher of Reason’s in your hands.”

With the Sword of Three Races braced at the ready, Lay linked hands with Misa. The light of love began pouring from their bodies.

Teo Aske. When their love ascended to the very peak, the light enhanced Lay’s abilities to the very limit.

“It’s futile.”

Avos Dilhevia walked forward slowly. After three steps, she lunged forward, but Lay had disappeared. An instant later, he reappeared behind her, thrusting Evansmana through her heart without pause.

“The first hidden art of the Sword of Three Races”—A pure-white flash of light tore through Avos Dilhevia—*“Heaven Splitter!”*

Avos slowly turned around and swung Venuzdonoa. Although her blade started swinging later, Heaven Splitter was slashed apart. At the same time, Lay’s chest was slashed open, and a terrifying amount of blood sprayed everywhere. He fell to his knees, managing to remain upright by using the

Sword of Three Races as support.

“Did you think whoever swung first would strike first?”

Avos Dilhevia looked down at Lay and smirked smugly. Instead of finishing him off, she headed over to Misa. “Sit tight and watch as your beloved disappears for good this time.”

The phony Demon King took slow footsteps forward. Misa backed away with each step, stiffening nervously, but she kept a determined expression on her face.

“Goodbye, my transient self.”

A magic circle appeared by Avos Dilhevia’s hand, and a black sun emerged from within. She thrust the Abolisher of Reason through it, forcing the Jio Graze forward faster than the eye could follow.

Black fire roared and burned. It was hot enough to burn through everything. If the spell hit Misa, her source would be reduced to nothing—

If it hit her, of course.

“Hmm. So you’ve finally come out of your shell, Avos Dilhevia.” The black fire vanished. I stood between Misa and Avos. “But you’re a little late. Our tiff has been settled.”

The phony Demon King glanced at the other side of the room. The gemstone Nosgalia was sealed in could be spotted on the floor.

Laughter erupted from inside her. “Aha. Aha ha ha! Settled? Late? Have you lost your mind? Sealing the Heavenly Father doesn’t settle anything.” She pointed Venuzdonoa at me. “Unfortunately for you, Anos Voldigoad, I am the king. It’s too early for you to declare checkmate.”

“I told you I don’t know the rules of chess.”

“Oh, yes. That’s right. But you know this, don’t you?” Avos Dilhevia stepped towards me. “Venuzdonoa, the sword that can destroy all logic. The most powerful demon sword that makes you the Demon King of Tyranny is now in my hands.” She grinned wickedly. “As I said at the beginning, I have taken everything from you. Your name, your subordinates, your castle, and now the

symbol of your strength are mine.”

She came to a stop and held the Abolisher of Reason at the ready.

“Can the nobody named Anos Voldigoad win against the Demon King of Tyranny?” she asked.

“That’s quite the confidence boost you’ve gained from a single stick.”

Avos Dilhevia smiled calmly. “Oh? You sound rather confident yourself. Why don’t you prove that confidence with your abilities instead of your words?” Her Magic Eyes glared at me. “I will end this in an instant.”

“Just try it,” I said, casually stepping forward.

We glared at each other with our respective Magic Eyes of Destruction. Sparks crackled in the air as our eyes met. Our magic surged, creating shock waves that shook Delsgade like an earthquake. Just by us glaring at each other, the pillars of the throne room were blasted away, and the ceiling caved in. Holes were torn open on all the walls, and a large chunk of the ceiling fell between us, obscuring our vision—

Both the Demon King and the false Demon King made our moves. The Jio Graze Avos fired was mirrored by my own. The two black suns struck the rubble from the ceiling and canceled each other out, and the Jirasd that was fired in succession was blocked by Beno levun. The black lightning of Jirasd reflected off the black aurora and was erased by Avos Dilhevia’s Magic Eyes of Destruction as she charged forward. Magic circles of Zola e Dypt appeared around me, attempting to restrain my limbs, but I tore them apart with Ygg Neas before they could activate.

We had walked closer until we were within arm’s reach of one another. Our hands were stained black with Vebzud. I grabbed Avos Dilhevia’s fingers as the Abolisher of Reason came swinging down. Then I fixed my Eyes on the blade and grabbed it with my free hand. Avos grinned as though she was sure of her victory.

“Did you think the Magic Eyes of Destruction could stop me?” she asked.

Magic gathered around the sword, its blade destroying all logic. Neither the Magic Eyes of Destruction nor Beno levun were worth more than a sheet of

paper before Venuzdonoa. The only logic that existed before that demon sword was destruction.

“Gah... Ah...”

A groan escaped Avos Dilhevia’s lips. My black-stained fingertips, clad in Vebzud, had pierced her source.

“Wh-Why...” she moaned weakly. “How come...” She seemed bewildered as she spat out a mouthful of blood. “Venuzdonoa...was definitely in my hand...”

“Did you think you could defeat me if you had the Abolisher of Reason?”



Avos Dilhevia's mauve Magic Eyes bore into me, deep into my abyss.

"Why... Why can't I see your limits? Even though I'm the Demon King of Tyranny, I..."

"That is your answer. In the end, you're no more than rumor and legend."

With my right hand of black destruction, I crushed her source. Avos Dilhevia fell forward lifelessly.

"You are an imitation, Avos Dilhevia."

§ 72. Misfit

Avos Dilhevia's source shattered, but the Agronemt magic circle within her body immediately activated and regenerated her source. Her hand gripped my arm weakly.

"It's not over yet..."

"You should be smart enough to know you don't stand a chance."

She smiled, her eyes glinting ominously. "I am Avos Dilhevia, the Demon King of Tyranny, child of the Great Spirit Reno..." Avos Dilhevia opened her fist, revealing a red jewel on her palm. It was the gemstone the Jewel Sword Eilarrow had sealed Nosgalia inside. "And I am the Child of God who will destroy you."

A magic circle surrounded the red gemstone, and Laelunte activated. The red jewel floated into the air, and Nosgalia's voice echoed from within. His voice should have been stolen by the Pillage Blade, but it seemed that Venuzdonoa had destroyed that logic as well.

"The wisdom of the gods shall be bestowed upon the ignorant Demon King," he said. "The plans of a god are absolute. As foretold, Avos Dilhevia has followed her decided fate and awakened here, becoming the Child of God. The Child of God has carried out the predestined plans and obtained the Abolisher of Reason."

The red gemstone gradually cracked, then shattered like glass. Bathed in a pale glow, Nosgalia appeared in its place. Unable to maintain the body of a god, he had returned to Elmed's demon body, but there was a smug look on his face, as though everything had gone exactly as planned.

"Abernyu, Goddess of Destruction, the order of destruction who was once brought down in this land"—Nosgalia raised both his arms—"it is time to awaken."

"Anos Voldigoad," Avos Dilhevia whispered in the meanwhile. She moved the

Abolisher of Reason in her right hand slightly. “All is still under my control.” In her last breath, she turned the sword and plunged it into her own chest, piercing her source. Her magic flowed into the Abolisher of Reason. Delsgade rumbled loudly.

Nosgalia continued speaking, this time as though he were reciting a text. “Once upon a time, the Demon King of Tyranny brought down this world’s order of destruction. Abernyu, the Goddess of Destruction, had her name overwritten as the Demon Castle Delsgade, and the powers of the god were condensed into Venuzdonoa, the Abolisher of Reason. So why didn’t the peace-seeking Demon King destroy Abernyu, the source of all death and destruction? The answer is evident: because it was impossible for even the Demon King of Tyranny to destroy the order of destruction itself.”

The Abolisher of Reason glowed a darker, more ominous color than ever before.

“As a last resort, Anos Voldigoad limited Abernyu’s powers and forced them in another direction, stripping the order of destruction from this world. Thus, the Abolisher of Reason, the miracle that could destroy all order and reason in this world, was born.”

Nosgalia clenched his raised hands into fists. “However, that was a foolish decision, for a god’s order cannot remain in another form forever. Eventually, the order will regain its original shape. What dost thou think will happen then?” Although Nosgalia had asked the question, he answered it himself. “The destruction that until that point couldn’t occur will rush out in backlash—like a river breaking through a dam. Thou may believest thou hast saved the world by stealing the Goddess of Destruction’s power, but thou hast merely delayed the inevitable.”

Nosgalia raised his voice, as though to announce the truth. “Nay, the order will be all the more amplified for all the years it was suppressed.” He glared at me, his Eyes glowing a faint red. “Avos Dilhevia, the spirit born of the Demon King of Tyranny’s legend, was created not to defeat you, but to use her vast amount of magic to awaken Abernyu, the Goddess of Destruction.”

Having used up all of her magic, Avos Dilhevia fell forward onto the ground.

The Abolisher of Reason freed itself from the floor and floated slowly into the air. As a torrent of ominous magic flowed from the blade, its dark silhouette warped into a sphere.

“Now look to the heavens and watch as the miracle of the Goddess of Destruction who brought all forms of death and destruction to the Mythical Age resurrects here and now! Behold Sarjieldenav, the Sun of Destruction!”

Unable to withstand the fierce shock wave of magic, the ceiling of Delsgade was blown away. I looked up to see the moon in the night sky. On the other side of the sky was a huge shadow. It was the shadow of the sun, illuminated by the twinkling stars in the cloudless sky.

Black particles gathered around that shadow. The moon faded as day and night were reversed and the sky lit up. The shadow of the sun grew darker, painting the sky an eerie color.

“Demonstrate thine order, Child of God who will defeat the Demon King of Tyranny. Destroy both Demon Kings of Tyranny as thine order commands. Destroy them with the rest of all life!”

The shadow in the sky inverted, revealing the Sun of Destruction. Its black rays of ruin poured down upon Delsgade, accompanied by the cold scent of death.

“Bask in the light of Sarjieldenav, the order of destruction thou distorted for two thousand years, and atone for thy sins, Demon King of Tyranny.”

The light of ruin flooded the throne room. Sarjieldenav, the Sun of Destruction, was a black sun that could erase everything.

“Those who do not uphold order, those who disturb order, bring destruction upon the world, Anos Voldigoad. Had thou not foolishly turned thy back upon the gods, Avos Dilhevia would not have been born. The Mother of Spirits and the Disastrous God-slaying Sword would have lived in peace. Thou lookest down upon the gods, but the gods are order, nothing more. There is no heart or will to it.”

Only Nosgalia’s voice could be heard in the world engulfed in dark light. “Just as objects will always fall downwards or a source will always navigate the cycle

of life and death, gods will always embody order. Thus, this entire situation was created by thee, Anos Voldigoad. The gods were not the cause of this. Tragedies are always the work of the foolish living.”

The silence of the dark light swallowed the entirety of Midhaze. It was as though time had stopped. Gradually, the Sun of Destruction dimmed, returning the throne room to its original colors.

“With these concluding words, the curtain shall fall on this lengthy play. Destruction is the salvation of the gods. Successors cannot be born if their predecessors do not fall. It was wrong to distort this reality in the first place. This is retribution.”

“Oh?”

A stern look clouded Nosgalia’s arrogant expression, but I had more to say about the matter.

“You claim to be a bystander, yet, from your own position of safety, you ridicule and abuse those desperately trying to survive. Now you try to blame someone else for the tragedy you created two thousand years ago.”

Nosgalia was speechless. His eyes darted about the place, shock evident on his face.

“This world has no need for gods like that.”

The dark light eventually cleared, revealing the scene around us.

“What in the...”

The sight of me stopped Nosgalia in his tracks. It wasn’t just me either. Shin, Lay, Misa, Reno—not a single person present had been affected by the Sun of Destruction. Neither had the citizens of Midhaze. The only one to have perished beneath the black sun was Avos Dilhevia herself.

“That’s impossible,” Nosgalia muttered in disbelief. “The order of a god is absolute. The god who embodies destruction couldn’t possibly fail to destroy a single demon. It can’t be. It just can’t!”

“You gods obey order. The Goddess of Destruction can destroy anything and everything. That is the logic you gods claim. But such things do not apply to

me.” I glared with my Magic Eyes of Destruction, rendering him unable to remain hovering in the air. “In other words, the plans of the gods had failed from the very start. Gods are not order. You merely fancy yourselves the supervisors of this world. If you truly were order, there is no way I would still be alive.”

“It can’t be...”

“This is reality. Face it.”

“No matter how much of a deviant thou may be, it shouldn’t be possible to protect every other demon. The order of destruction is absolute!”

I took a step forward. Nosgalia remained where he was, staring at me.

“Did the Goddess of Destruction... Did Abernyu take thy side? Or have thy gained control of the Abolisher of Reason in its unsealed state?”

“Who knows? Perhaps I’m just too strong.”

His mauve Magic Eyes fixed upon me. Nosgalia flinched.

“So order can feel fear.”

He laughed dryly. “Gods do not fear. We have no heart or will. We are merely order.”

“In that case, move out of the way already. Go and plan your next move or something.”

“I shall do just that.”

I turned my Eyes on Nosgalia and took a step forward, but he didn’t move.

“Wh-What?” The Heavenly Father looked bewildered. “Impossible. What didst thou do? I cannot move. How...”

When I remained silent, he repeated his question.

“What didst thou do?!”

I didn’t answer. He started yelling.

“I’m asking what thou didst, Demon King of Tyranny!”

“Can’t you tell, Nosgalia?”

I took one, then another step forward. His body remained frozen, rooted to the spot.

“That’s fear.”

Knees trembling, Nosgalia swallowed. There was a frightened look in his eyes. “Gods cannot feel fear. Gods are immortal. We have no hearts.”

The Heavenly Father was shaking from head to toe, unable to move. I walked right up to him and pressed a finger against his chest.

“Thou canst not destroy me,” he continued. “I am the order that creates order. If the Heavenly Father perishes, the world will commence its path to ruin.”

“Hmm. Good point.”

Nosgalia made a sound of relief.

“That’s what you hoped I’d say, right?” I said mockingly.

Despair fell across Nosgalia’s face, as though he had been thrust into a bottomless pit.

“What’s wrong, Nosgalia? If you have no heart as you claim, you shouldn’t feel any fear. Or are you telling me that order wishes to live?”

Destroying the Heavenly Father would indeed lead the world to ruin. However, such order meant nothing before me. After all, I had just destroyed the order of destruction itself.

“Laugh.”

“What?”

“If you can laugh in this situation, you are order. I mean no ill will. I will deal with you accordingly, but I won’t destroy you. However, if you fear me too much to laugh, then that’s not something I can overlook.”

Nosgalia stared at me lifelessly.

“I’ll give you three seconds. In that time, prove that you are order. Three.”

Speechless, Nosgalia gritted his teeth.

“Two.”

He hung his head with a grim expression.

“One.”

Gasping, he strained his voice. “Ha...ha ha ha...”

There was indeed a smile on his face.

“Would you look at that? You laughed, Nosgalia. That means you wish to live. You’ve proved that you are not order,” I said.

Once he recovered from his shock, Nosgalia raised his arm in rage. “You...You dare humiliate the gods!”

I evaded his swing and drove my arm through his abdomen.

“Gah...”

Then I grabbed the god’s source and said, “I have a contract for you, Conflagration King. If you obey me, I will give you what you desire.”

After receiving my Leaks and Zecht, Eldmed sent a reply. *“Bwa ha ha! I was waiting for those words, Demon King!”*

I drew a magic circle over Nosgalia’s source.

“Wh-What art thou doing, Demon King of Tyranny?” he asked nervously.

“Oh, nothing much. Destroying the order of the Heavenly Father will cause the world to collapse, which would only cause more problems. So, instead, I’m giving your powers to the Conflagration King.”

“The powers of a god are absolute. They cannot be transferred to a mere demon.”

“Oh, haven’t you noticed? For the past two thousand years, Eldmed has been developing a spell formula to usurp the powers of a god. Although that formula is still incomplete, he’s made decent progress on it.”

When Shin had been fighting with Nosgalia, I had peered into the god’s source and analyzed the spell formula Eldmed had been developing.

“All I need to do is complete that formula.”

“Foolish, foolish man. The powers of a god cannot be usurped! Thou wilt be judged for thy sins. The order of judgment will—”

“Shall I turn you into an insect? One that you’ll reincarnate into for eternity.”

“What...”

“It’s fun having a heart, you know? An insect has a much more stimulating life than the dull existence of an order. Of course, it still comes with its own hardships.”

I poured magic into the circle I’d constructed inside his body, seized Nosgalia’s power, and transferred it to Eldmed.

“Order...is crumbling... That can’t be...” Fury surged within Nosgalia. Emotions most unbecoming of order seeped through his words. “Curse thee... Curse thee!” he screamed. “How darest thou?! Thou deviant of this world’s order... Misfit!”

“Hmm. It seems you’re already talking like an insect.”

Ignoring his rambling, I continued casting the spell to steal the power of the god.

“Thou wilt regret this. Thou wilt regret this, Anos Voldigoad! Thou art the one disturbing order. Gods do not have hearts. Thou hast planted emotions within a god in order to disrupt order! It is thou who shalt lead this world to ruin. The prophecies of a god are absolu—”

Light enveloped Nosgalia’s body. The next moment, that light flared brightly and burst as his source split into two.

Delighted cackling could be heard. It came from the Conflagration King before me. “As expected of the Demon King! I should have known you could complete Ji Schenz’s formula and seize the power of a god so easily! Bwa ha ha! This is what it means to be the strongest, the indomitable, the most diabolical of all! This is what it means to be so invincible that you can only wish for better enemies!”

As he spouted his usual nonsense, the Conflagration King lifted his leg and stomped on an insect scampering underfoot.

§ 73. Rumor and Legend

“Looks like everyone’s safe,” Lay muttered, Evansmana braced at the ready.

“So it seems.”

Beside him, Shin held Gneodoros. He, too, was pointing his sword towards the sky.

Behind them, Reno was huddled over on the floor, with Misa clutched in her arms. She had pushed her daughter to the ground and was using her own body to protect her.

Moments ago, when the Sun of Destruction had been shining in the sky, the three had moved at the same time to shield Misa.

“Are you okay?” Reno asked her child gently.

Misa gazed up at her mother’s face and nodded as though in a daze.

“You’ve grown so much...” Reno stroked Misa’s cheek, her fingers becoming wet with tears.

“Are you my mother?” Misa asked, dumbstruck.

Reno smiled affectionately. “Yup, and I can finally hold you in my arms,” she mumbled, hugging Misa tightly. Her body was turning transparent and starting to glow with light. The fran body she had borrowed wouldn’t last much longer.

“I’m sorry,” she said, tears welling in her eyes. “I always have the worst timing. I’m sorry I can’t stay with you.”

“Wait,” Misa replied. “Don’t...” Tears were streaming from her eyes. “Don’t go yet...” She trailed off, her sobs swallowing her words. “Don’t go yet. Stay just a little...just a little longer...”

Reno shook her head sadly. Her body was fading.

“But we only just met. I’ve been waiting all this time...”

“I love you, Misa. I’m sorry.”

Reno's tears fell onto Misa's cheek, but they didn't change into teardrop blossoms. The power of the Mother of Spirits had long run out.

"I'm already lost, but you're still here," she said. "Anos will save you and your poor other half. I just know it." Reno forced back her tears and smiled. It was the gentle, gentle smile of a mother. "I'm so glad I had you."

Particles of light rose into the air, moving away from Misa. When Shin looked up, the particles took the shape of the Mother of Spirits.

"Thank you, Shin. Goodbye," she said, reaching for him. When Shin took her hand, she grinned. "I was happy."

"Reno." A single tear ran down Shin's cheek. "I love you."

A warm breeze blew, carrying the particles of light away. Reno disappeared, leaving only the teardrop in his hand—the white flower he had left at her grave.

"Mother..." Misa sobbed uncontrollably. Tears streamed down her face and dripped onto the floor. "Please, fran..." she cried between sobs, "please let me see my mother again. You can do it, can't you? You did it just now. Surely you can hold on a little longer..."

Misa sat up, begging the invisible love fairy while still sobbing like a child. She had to know that it was impossible, but her grief was inconsolable.

"Why can't I have just a little longer?"

But no matter how much she pleaded, the love fairy didn't reappear. Frans only lent their bodies once, until the occupier had conveyed their love and realized the truth of their death.

"Don't be unreasonable, Misa. Love fairies don't have much strength to begin with. All they can do is bring a tragedy to a close."

When I started walking, Misa stared at me pleadingly.

"Lord Anos," she said, forcing out the words, "it's all my fault." Tears spilled from her eyes as she spoke sadly. "If I hadn't been born, my mother wouldn't have faded."

"That's not true."

“What’s not true? She died because she turned against her lore by giving birth to me.”

When Avos Dilhevia awakened, Misa must have regained her memories of two thousand years ago—memories of the moment she had been separated from her mother.

“If it weren’t for me...”

“Misa. Have I ever said anything just to reassure others?”

“Huh?” Misa’s teary eyes widened.

“If Reno had faded, you would indeed be the cause. There’d be nothing I could say to alleviate your sadness.”

She continued staring at me blankly.

“What’s untrue is that she hasn’t completely faded.”

“Really?!” Misa yelped. Shin’s gaze snapped to me.

“Yes. But before I save her...”

Misa’s body started glowing faintly. A quick analysis with my Magic Eyes revealed that her source was disintegrating as we spoke. Separated from Avos Dilhevia and having half a source left, she was unable to survive.

“...I must save you first.” I turned to the hero standing beside me. “Lay.”

He stepped forward.

“You may destroy Misa with the Sword of Three Races, as the legends say.”

Misa was speechless.

“I’d love to explain the reason, but there’s no time. Your source is crumbling as we speak. Are you both ready?”

Lay and Misa exchanged a look and nodded.

“I believe in you,” Misa said.

Lay pointed Evansmana at Misa’s chest. Divine light flowed towards her, purifying her source. Meanwhile, I pointed my fingers and drew a magic circle. Light burst, and Misa’s body shone brighter before it suddenly disappeared.

Misa had vanished without a trace.

“The Great Spirit Avos Dilhevia was born from the rumors and legends of the Demon King of Tyranny,” I said. “That identity formed half of Misa’s source.”

Lay turned towards me. Behind him, Shin was also listening closely.

“If Avos Dilhevia were to be destroyed, Misa could not survive. There is nothing that can completely separate the two.”

Lay had used the Sword of Three Races to separate the two identities, but they couldn’t remain in that state forever. Even if one became two, Misa was still Avos Dilhevia, and Avos Dilhevia was still Misa.

“If Avos Dilhevia were to be replaced by a spirit with the same name, Misa would be able to live in harmony with her spirit heart. Spirits change as their legends and rumors change, so achieving this wouldn’t be impossible. The problem there, however, is that spirits are most influenced by the original lore at the point of their birth.”

Reno had told me this when we had returned to the past. If one day in the far future a rumor spread saying the Mother of Spirits was no longer the mother of spirits, that would mean her death. Rumors and legends that contradicted the original lore of a spirit only shortened their life spans.

“Unlike demons and humans, spirits do not reincarnate. The concept of being reborn into a new person doesn’t apply to them. Rumors and legends that contradict their lore can only do them harm.”

The royal supremacist and human-hating Demon King of Tyranny Avos Dilhevia had to remain an evil existence.

“Even if something could be done about that, there are far too many rumors and legends spread across this world to create something completely different.”

Even if I had asked Igareth to spread the rumor of a kindhearted spirit named Avos Dilhevia, the original legend was far too widespread to expect change. But while this seemed like a helpless situation, there was still a way to save Misa.

“So what can be done?” I asked my comrades. When I thought about it now, it was terribly simple. “We can create the continuation of the Demon King of

Tyranny's legend instead. Let it be as follows: The resurrected Demon King of Tyranny is destroyed once more by the Sword of Three Races. With the blessing of the holy sword, Avos Dilhevia reincarnates into her true form as the spirit Misa, no longer half spirit, half demon."

Spirits were beings that didn't reincarnate, but Misa had been born from legends of the Demon King of Tyranny, who was said to reincarnate in two thousand years' time. In fact, that was the most widespread legend of them all. That meant her reincarnating once again would pose no contradiction to her lore.

The legends of the Demon King of Tyranny spoke only of the past, not the future. Nothing was ever passed down about what would happen after the Demon King reincarnated. There were gaps in the legends that could still be filled. Thus, I had ordered Igareth to fill them, and he had fulfilled his duty.

The more humans feared the Demon King of Tyranny, the more prominent the new legend would be. Thus, once Lay had used the Sword of Three Races to take Misa's life, I'd been able to cast Syrica on her.

"Still, there's no telling if a spirit that cannot reincarnate will survive off the mere legend that states that she can. If she does reincarnate, it will not be as Avos Dilhevia, but as a new spirit."

I held my hand in Shin's direction and released some magic. The white teardrop blossom in his hand flew through the air towards me.

"Spirits are born from teardrop blossoms. This flower bloomed from the Great Spirit Reno's wish for Shin and Misa's happiness."

I poured some magic into the blossom, which changed into particles of light.

"Revive now, fallen great spirit. After two thousand years, it is time for sadness to give way to joy."

Reno had said that she didn't cry tears of sadness, but back then, she couldn't help but cry the tears that made the flower before us bloom.

The light slowly took the form of a person. Of two people, actually—a mother and child locked in an embrace. One had a distinctly material form, six crystalline wings on her back, clear blue hair, and sparkling amber eyes.

“Reno...” Shin murmured.

“The mother of all spirits faded away by going against her lore, giving birth to a demon. But the Great Spirit Avos Dilhevia has now regained her original form as a spirit, as the legends foretold.”

Avos Dilhevia was no longer half spirit, half demon. She was a pureblood spirit called Misa.

“And so, there is no reason for the Great Spirit Reno to have faded away at all.”

Reno defying her lore was now a thing of the past. As long as the new lore didn't fade away, they could revive over and over again.

“M-Mother?”

The light Reno was hugging gradually materialized. A bright-eyed girl with wavy chestnut-brown hair looked up at her.

“Misa...”

Reno patted Misa's head gently as she hugged her tight. Misa was crying tears of happiness.

“Mother... Mom...”



“Don’t cry. It’s okay. Your mother is here, Misa. From now on, I’ll be by your side forever.” Reno’s sad tears transformed into teardrop blossoms, but those tears were tears of joy.

“Hmm. That should be everything,” I said, turning around to see Eldmed watching me casually. “I’ll deal with you later. Wait there.”

Eldmed grinned and bowed politely. After our Zecht, he shouldn’t be able to cause trouble, but he was always a troublesome man. I’d have to keep him somewhere within arm’s reach.

I proceeded to leave the area. While some concerns remained, all had been restored.

A wish from the bottom of one’s heart would always be fulfilled. No matter how decayed the world became or how much incessant strife was, the warm world she had created would remain filled with hope and love. I would prove that as many times as it took, because she was surely watching from somewhere.

Isn’t that right, Militia?

§ 74. The Demon King Reordination Ceremony

Several days later.

A huge Limnet crystal had been placed in one of the many rooms of the Demon Castle Delsgade. Melheis and the other six Demon Elders were reflected in the crystal. They were standing at the front entrance of the castle, where a podium had been set up on the extravagantly decorated stairs.

In the direction of their gazes was an immense crowd that packed the street. The crowd stretched on seemingly without end, and every demon's attention was fixed on the podium. It was time for the Demon King Reordination Ceremony. After two thousand years, the Demon King of Tyranny would finally make an appearance.

The ceremony was originally scheduled to take place a month from now, but after Avos Dilhevia's occupation of Midhaze and all the mind control, it had been moved up in a hurry. Once Demera had been lifted, chaos had fallen upon the citizens of Dilhade. The fake Demon King the Royalists had been relying on had disappeared, and relations with the Unitarians were more strained than ever. The Royalists were aware they hadn't been in the right mind, but they couldn't make excuses for themselves without knowing what had happened. The Reordination Ceremony was necessary to resolve the antagonism between the two groups before it escalated into physical conflict.

Melheis explained to the citizens the truth about Avos Dilhevia: how the name had been erroneously passed down for the past two thousand years, how a great spirit had been born from the legend of this Demon King of Tyranny, and how that birth had resulted in many people believing in a fictional Demon King.

Those who had seen the fake Demon King in person wouldn't deny that Avos Dilhevia existed. The Royalists wouldn't deny it either, as it was an escape route for their moment of insanity. Would they accept their sins or the existence of a fake Demon King? In the negotiations held before the ceremony, the Royalist leaders had chosen the latter.

Avos Dilhevia had reincarnated as the spirit Misa. Explaining what had happened in detail would spread the rumors and legends among the people. Eventually, they would be recorded as a part of Dilhade's history and passed down through the generations, removing any fears of Misa fading away.

Melheis was still in the middle of explaining the events of the past two thousand years. I glanced around the room. Misa was looking nervously down at her feet.

"Shin," I said to the man standing beside me, "Reno told me you're yet to have a proper conversation with Misa."

"I'm not sure what to say. After all, I'm but a mere sword..."

"No complaints. What kind of excuse is that? This is your own child."

Shin fell silent.

"She's feeling uneasy. Give her some support."

"Understood."

Shin started walking with an intense look in his eyes. Once he was closer, Misa slowly raised her head.

"Father..."

"Yes."

Hmm. It was unusual to see Shin so nervous.

"Uh, um..."

"Yes."

Misa was nervous too. An awkward air hung over them.

"Aha ha, sorry. I'm a little nervous right now. I hope I can do this well..."

Misa laughed weakly. She was about to appear before the people and introduce herself as Avos Dilhevia. As the phony Demon King, she would swear loyalty to the true Demon King of Tyranny. This way, the people would understand the fake Demon King held no power.

However, there was no denying the atrocities Avos Dilhevia had committed

against hybrids. It would be difficult to get everyone to accept that none of it had been Misa's own will, and that she had already reincarnated. There was also the possibility of her being resented by the Royalists for being the reason they had been stripped of their privileges.

"I...I know I can't lose my nerve here. I have to do this no matter what. Compared to the war you went through, this is nothing, right?"

Shin listened to her in silence.

"Aha...aha ha..." Misa chuckled feebly and resumed staring down at her feet. "I-It's okay, though! I can do this!" This time, she clenched her fists in a show of courage.

Shin watched her thoughtfully then quietly opened his mouth. "It may not be a harsh trial, but you have the strength to overcome it, Misa."

"Huh?"

"I've been watching you this entire time. While I couldn't reveal myself, I have always kept an eye on you. I saw you join the Unitarians in order to find me. I saw you strengthen your resolution with the comrades you met there." Shin spoke with a warm gaze. "You grew into a strong, gentle child willing to give up your own life to stop the tragedy before you."

Tears welled in Misa's eyes.

"Forgive me for failing to come get you for fifteen years."

"Father... It's okay." Misa leaped into Shin's arms and hugged him tightly. "That half of a demon sword you sent me... That was what kept me doing my best. I knew that one day, someday, you would come back for me."

Shin gingerly wrapped an arm around Misa's back. "I was unable to be by your side, but my heart was always with you. Watching you grow up happy and healthy was my only reason for living."

Misa sobbed in Shin's arms, filling the fifteen-year rift with her tears. After some time, she dried her eyes and smiled her usual smile. "I'm okay now. I'm not nervous at all! The royals and hybrids of Dilhade will finally be united in their rightful form. For that reason, there's nothing I can't face!"

Shin nodded, understanding her feelings. “Shall we go then?”

He put an arm around her shoulder and escorted her to the door.

“Hmm. It’s about time,” I said.

I looked over at Lay, Shin, and Reno, who all nodded in return. Shin and Lay put their hands on the door. On the other side was the main gate and the podium shown in the Limnet crystal. I smoothly made my way over to the door and, when it opened, stepped out on the other side.

The first thing to come into view was the Seven Demon Elders. They were standing in a row below the podium, awaiting my arrival. Behind them were the people of Dilhade. To the left and right of the podium were the stands arranged for important guests, such as demon lords—like Elio—that governed the regions of Dilhade, as well as mom and dad.

They all stood up when they saw me step through the door. The Seven Demon Elders knelt before me, followed by the demon lords and the citizens, all as though to swear their loyalty.

Melheis spoke first. His voice echoed throughout all of Midhaze.

“For two thousand years, we have awaited your return, Anos Voldigoad, Demon King of Tyranny.”

“Rise, my descendants,” I said. “Let me see your faces.”

The demons quietly raised their heads and looked at me. I stepped forward and gave my message to the citizens of Dilhade, the humans of Azesion, and the rest of the world.

“Two thousand years ago, we demons fought with humans and spirits. Many lost their lives. Death and destruction were rampant, and many nations burned under the flames of hatred. Even so, we continued fighting.”

Everyone before me listened to my words without making a sound.

“But what was it all for?”

That was the question that had always plagued me.

“It was for the sake of our friends, our children, our parents, our

subordinates, and our masters. The one thing I know for sure is that we picked up our swords to protect.”

That was the case for everyone, but those actions had been the beginning of the tragic Great War.

“Those swords were painted with blood each time we cut down our enemies. The demon swords we used for protection took so many lives, they eventually became cursed to hurt even the ones we loved. The blade that sought revenge would meet revenge in return. Without anyone’s notice, both demons and humans carried those swords and were swallowed by the war, tearing everything apart.”

The war had only spread further. The more we had killed, the more of us had been killed, but if we hadn’t killed, we would be killed all the same.

“There was only one way to stop a war between two sides with cursed swords, and that was for both sides to have the courage to believe in the other and cast aside their blades. But that was no easy task when the hatred and suspicion between them was so great.”

I took a breath before continuing.

“Despite that, they agreed.”

I lifted my right hand with my palm up, welcoming the Hero. Lay stepped forward, dressed in the formal hero attire of two thousand years ago. The Sword of Three Races hung from his waist. He had revealed his face in a show of resolution—probably thanks to Misa being with him.

“This is the man I crossed swords with countless times, the Hero of Azesion who protected mankind until the end. You may know him as Hero Kanon.”

Lay drew Evansmana and proved his identity with its blessed light.

After that, I extended my left hand to another person waiting. The one who slowly walked out of the door was Reno.

“This is the mother of all spirits, the queen of the Great Spirit Forest Aharthern. She is the one who raised, loved, and protected spirits two thousand years ago, better known as Great Spirit Reno.”

I gestured with my right hand once more. This time, Shin walked forward and stood beside Reno.

“Before you now is my right-hand man and the strongest swordsman of demonkind, who protected Aharthern in Reno’s absence. He is the man who married the Mother of Spirits in a show of friendship between demonkind and spiritkind, making him Shin Reglia, the Spirit King.”

Finally, I gestured to one last person. Misa came forward in Avos Dilhevia’s mask and coat, looking straight at the audience. A magic circle appeared by her feet, and the mask and coat disappeared. Beneath, she wore a midnight-blue dress.

“Here now is the Child of God and great spirit born from the legend of the Demon King Avos Dilhevia. After reincarnating beneath Hero Kanon’s holy sword, she has laid down her arms and joined us here today. She is now known simply as Misa.”

The Sword of Three Races glinted as Lay thrust it into the center of the podium. Shin, Reno, and Misa all drew their swords and pinned them beside Lay’s. I continued speaking.

“Two thousand years have passed since then. The world is now at peace, and the conflict has ended. However, we must not forget. It took great courage to reach this day. If we don’t carve this into our minds, the flames of war will consume this nation again one day.” I drew my sword and thrust it next to my comrades’. “There is no more need for blades of hatred. These hands are for joining hands with others.”

I extended my hand, and the three of them—Lay, Misa, and Reno—laid their hands on top. Human, demon, and spirit had joined hands, here and now. After two thousand years, my wish had been fulfilled. The people of Dilhade lowered their heads as though to agree with my words.

“Today, I am issuing a new decree: all those who live in Dilhade, be they demon or human, will be treated equally and impartially.”

“As you wish,” the Seven Demon Elders and the demon lords responded.

“To my people, I vow this: you are each granted an audience. If there is a

tragedy you cannot overcome no matter how hard you try, come and seek me. I will grant you all one wish.”

The audience stirred at my words. One man raised his voice.

“I-If I may dare to speak, mighty Demon King...”

“You may stand and raise your head.”

The man who got to his feet had an unshaven face and looked rather worse for wear. However, there was a faint look of hope in his eyes.

“My name is Leon Gryzel. Thank you for permitting me to speak. I am prepared to accept any punishment for—”

“There’s no need for that. Speak.”

Leon lowered his head reverently. “My daughter, who is turning ten this year, is afflicted with a heart disease. No magic has been able to cure her. They said she won’t last until the end of the year.”

“Bring her to me.”

Tears flowed from Leon’s eyes.

“I will save her.”

“Thank you... I am most grateful...”

Leon bowed lower, then left the crowd to fetch his daughter.

“People of Dilhade, I am not suited for government. But to my great pride, this nation has outstanding demon lords already. Thanks to their constant efforts, the peace of many cities has been maintained. There’s no need for an antiquated Demon King to interfere.”

With my Magic Eyes, I stared at my people, engraving their faces into my mind one by one.

“But you must remember this.” I held up my index finger. “One: this country will not tolerate injustice.” Next, I held up my middle finger. “Two: this country will not tolerate malice.” Finally, I held up my ring finger. “Three: this country will not tolerate tragedy.” I spread my arms, grasping the nation gently. “Be aware if these laws are ever infringed, the Demon King of Tyranny is prepared

to risk his life to destroy you.”

It was a vow my former self had been unable to make—a promise from a king to his people.

§ Epilogue: The Demon King's Memory

"At ease. Those who wish to stand may remain on their feet; those who wish to sit may be seated."

I raised a hand, and music started playing. Wind, string, and percussion instruments harmonized to form a bright and elegant melody.

"I've discovered something wonderful in this era: beautiful voices that can blow trivial grievances away like the wind, which I find very fitting for this ceremony of peace."

I spread my arms and drew magic circles on the left and right sides of the podium. With a shining light, eight girls appeared. It was the fan union, dressed in black ceremonial robes over their Demon King Academy uniforms.

"Allow me to introduce the girls of the Demon King's Choir. They will now perform a song for me."

The girls slowly lifted their heads and looked upon the crowd of demons before them. Countless pairs of eyes stared back, but their graceful smiles didn't waver.

The girls quietly opened their mouths. Their voices were amplified with magic, reaching far into the distance.

"Not too long ago, we spoke with Lord Anos's mother."

"She told us many things."

"What happened after Lord Anos reincarnated."

"What Lord Anos loves to eat."

"What Lord Anos values the most."

"How Lord Anos sees the peaceful Magical Era. It was an enlightening conversation."

"We dedicate this song to the Demon King they once called a tyrant."

“We call it Demon King Hymn No. 5: Peace.”

This had originally been another “Lord Anos Cheer Song,” but the title had been rather inappropriate for public use. Instead, they had officially renamed it to a Demon King Hymn.

However, that hadn’t changed its true nature.

The orchestral accompaniment being played in the castle magically echoed throughout Midhaze. The joyful prelude came to an end, and the choir girls took deep breaths. Then the song began.

A solemn, peaceful, and gentle tune played. It seeped right into the hearts of the audience.

“This right hand needs no sword.”

“This left hand needs no shield.”

“Now bravely remove your armor, sirs, even if no magic you shall wield. Even if this name has been stolen by the past...”

“I merely wish to be myself. With love in my heart...”

“With nothing upon me, as my natural self.”

The melody that resounded in all our hearts held everyone captivated, until—
“Natural self!”

“Natural seeelf!”

“Natural seeeeeelf!”

Suddenly, there was an abrupt change in key.

“I’ll join you...”

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

The chorus consisted of the strange-sounding words “nekkie, nekkie, nekkid.” These words were from an ancient magic tongue and meant “to join together and become one,” symbolizing peace.

“Even without a sword on this body,”

"I'm fine the way I am."

"I'll stick to this love, slay my foes unarmed..."

"As my natural self!"

"Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!"

"Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!"

"The Demon King's Demon Sword!"

All of Dilhade stood frozen in shock. The citizens were barely—just barely—able to keep polite expressions on their faces, maintaining the dignified atmosphere of the ceremony, but the chorus plowed mercilessly ahead.

"Love will win the way! You're the one who'll be slain! If we link hands and join together..."

"We'll love as..."

"Our natural selves!"

"Our natural seeelves!"

"Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!"

"Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!"

"Infinitely more and more!"

Some people were confused, some were offended, some were speechless, and some were pinching their legs. There were a variety of reactions, but if I were to describe it simply, every single one of them was thunderstruck.

I burst into laughter in spite of myself. As always, it was a ridiculous song, but a tranquil one. Sure enough, this was how peace should be. However, it seemed like everyone else was still nervous. As the Demon King, I had to lead my people by example. I raised my arms and started chanting calmly along with the rhythm, demonstrating how to enjoy the song.

"Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!"

The jaws of the people fell wide open, their eyes as wide as plates.

I continued chanting. This time, bringing my voice out from the bottom of my

stomach.

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

With a sharp look in his eye, Shin—the right-hand man of the Demon King—faithfully chanted along. Reno, Lay, and Misa followed suit.

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

Seeing what was going on the podium, Melheis, and the other Demon Elders moved into action. They all had faces tenser than when they had marched into war with Azesion—possibly because this time, they were up against peace.

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

Next, the demon lords in the stands started chanting along. One after another, the people began singing too. Then the second verse began. It tore open the hearts of the people in a different way to before.

“If you can’t unhand your sword,”

“If you can’t put down your shield,”

“I’ll steal both items from your hands so you can get that armor peeled. The past can have the name it stole...”

“I merely wish to be myself, with love in my heart...”

“With nothing upon me, as my natural self.”

“With love in my heart, with nothing upon me, as my natural self.”

The pointlessly catchy melody echoed in their chests, stealing the people’s hearts.

“Natural self!”

“Natural seeelf!”

“Natural seeeeeelf!”

“I’ll join you...”

The next moment, countless voices shook all of Midhaze.

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

It was a momentous chorus by everyone who had gathered. Over ten thousand voices passionately sung along to the Demon King Choir, who were just as motivated.

“Love will win the way! You’re the one who’ll be slain! If we link hands and join together...”

“We’ll love as...”

“Our natural selves!”

“Our natural seeelves!”

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

“Becoming oooooone!”

The unification of Dilhade had only just begun. There were still many different ideologies and ideals out there. Some groups may never reach an agreement with each other, but it had to start somewhere—and I wanted everyone to start with this song of peace.

In order to lead my people, I spread my arms. When I said, *“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”* the people of Dilhade immediately shouted, *“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”* as though they were following their Demon King.

“Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!”

Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid— Let us join together and become one. These were the words that would unify demonkind. This was the melody of beginnings. In a world with no royalty and no hybridity, without swords or shields. We would discard our armor of cowardice and be our natural selves. The more we chanted together, the more it felt as though we were tossing aside the ill feelings of the past. Little by little, demonkind was returning to its united form.

Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid!

Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid! Nekkie, nekkie, nekkid—

The melody of peace echoed through Midhaze for a long time after that, and then...

Once the ceremony was over, I headed back into Delsgade, where I sought out the throne room and sat upon the throne. The song of the Demon King Choir and the voices of the people could still be heard in the distance as I held out my hand. I drew a magic circle and sent my magic into it.

“Good work,” Misha said, appearing from behind the throne.

Sasha was beside her with an utterly bewildered look on her face. “I’m actually shocked they liked that song so much.”

“Hmm. Perhaps it proves how much people desired to be free from war.”

“I won’t deny that, but I swear they were all possessed by something,” she said bluntly.

“So what were you two doing here?”

“We were waiting,” Misha replied.

“For me?”

She nodded.

“There was something we wanted to ask regarding your battle with Avos Dilhevia. In fact, it’s about the thing you’re trying to use magic on right now.”

“You mean Sarjieldenav?”

I sent my magic towards the ceiling, turning it transparent. The sky came into view, with the shadow of the Sun of Destruction still visible above it. It would take some time for the sun to turn back into the Abolisher of Reason. That said, the spell was almost complete.

“When Sarjieldenav shone, we were outside. Why were we safe?” Misha asked.

“You were inside in the throne room, and you couldn’t have had the capacity to protect all of us,” Sasha added. “A spell of that scale should have slaughtered all the demons in Midhaze.”

Darkness enshrouded the magic circle. A portion of the Sun of Destruction fell

away from the shadow in the sky. In contrast, the shadow of the sword in the center of the circle regained another portion of its shape. Sarjieldenav gradually faded until it completely disappeared. A single sword's shadow remained before me.

"The answer is simple: Sarjieldenav didn't see any of you as enemies. It only destroyed what it should have destroyed, and that was Avos Dilhevia."

"That's what we don't get," Sasha said. "How could that happen? The Goddess of Destruction is your enemy, isn't she?"

"She should be. I had to take Abernyu down in order to save lives. However —" I tried to speak but closed my mouth. I focused my mind on searching my memories. "How could that happen, you say..."

"What's wrong?" Misha peered at me worriedly.

"Hmm. This is unexpected."

I stood up and reached for the shadow sword. When I grasped the hilt, the Abolisher of Reason materialized.

"Misha, do you remember finding the Abolisher of Reason in the tower when we saved Igareth in the past?"

She nodded.

"There aren't many people who can control the Abolisher of Reason. I've been considering all the possibilities, but the answer may be simpler than we thought."

Misha blinked.

"In other words, I may have foreseen the possibility of myself returning to the past using Revalon and left the Abolisher of Reason there myself."

"You mean the Anos of two thousand years ago activated the Abolisher of Reason and left it there? But you didn't know about it, right?" Sasha asked.

"I may have forgotten about it."

"Huh?"

"Just like how I can't seem to remember Abernyu." I drew a magic circle over

Venuzdonoa and stored the sword within Delsgade. “This is my first reincarnation. I was under the assumption it went well, but it seems I failed to notice there were things I can’t quite recall.”

I hadn’t noticed at all until I’d tried to answer Sasha’s question. I had certainly felled the Goddess of Destruction and turned her into Delsgade. The order of the Goddess of Destruction was too much of a threat to those living in this world. However, that probably wasn’t the only reason I’d fought.

Earlier, when the Sun of Destruction shone in the sky, I was convinced it wouldn’t hurt me, my followers, or any of the demons in Dilhade. I’d used my Eyes to stare into the depths of Sarjieldenav’s abyss, but doing so had only confirmed my suspicions—the fake Demon King had been its only target.

But why? The reason was the only thing that had slipped my mind.

“Does that mean...”

“Well, it’s no big deal.”

That said, it was hard to imagine myself failing at casting Syrica, be it my first attempt or not. But at the same time, there was no denying my missing memories. So why wasn’t my reincarnation complete?

The End.

Afterword

I'm a pretty big fan of story arcs involving the past, as I think they can be packed with many things to enjoy. There's the events that led to a character being who they are, the relationships between characters, things that can't be seen or told from the main character's point of view, and other tidbits.

However, I know there are some people who don't like arcs like this because they offer no plot progression, and others have no interest in the background of side characters. I've heard that past arcs aren't the most popular.

Despite this, I wanted to write a past arc for this volume no matter what. I racked my brains on how to eliminate the negative aspects as much as I could, resulting in what you just read. I hope you enjoyed it even if you normally dislike arcs like this.

On a different note, I'd like to mention the Great Spirit Reno, who was described to have six crystalline wings on her back. When the characters were being designed, I made the unreasonable request to Shizumayoshinori for wings that looked like spirit wings, but also looked like crystals. I was shocked when the draft I received in no time at all had the most perfect crystal-like spirit wings I could ask for. Professional illustrators truly are something else. Whether it be the Mother of Spirits, Misa the phony Demon King, or Shin, the right-hand man, thank you for always portraying the characters so true to themselves.

Yoshioka, my editor, also helped me out a great deal again in this volume. I'm grateful for all your guidance on the story and how to make scenes more exciting.

As of this volume, the story of the fake Demon King, Avos Dilhevia, is over. A new arc will begin from the next volume. The story has covered the demons, humans, and spirits of the world already, so a different race will be up next. Web novel readers have called it the most school-related volume so far! I hope you'll consider giving the next volume a read too.

Finally, to the readers of this volume, I thank you from the bottom of my

heart. I'll do my best reviewing the next volume for you all, so please look forward to it.

SHU

25 February 2019



story by †
SHU

illustrated by †
Shizumayoshinori

The Misfit of Demon King Academy

<Act 2>



Shin Reglia

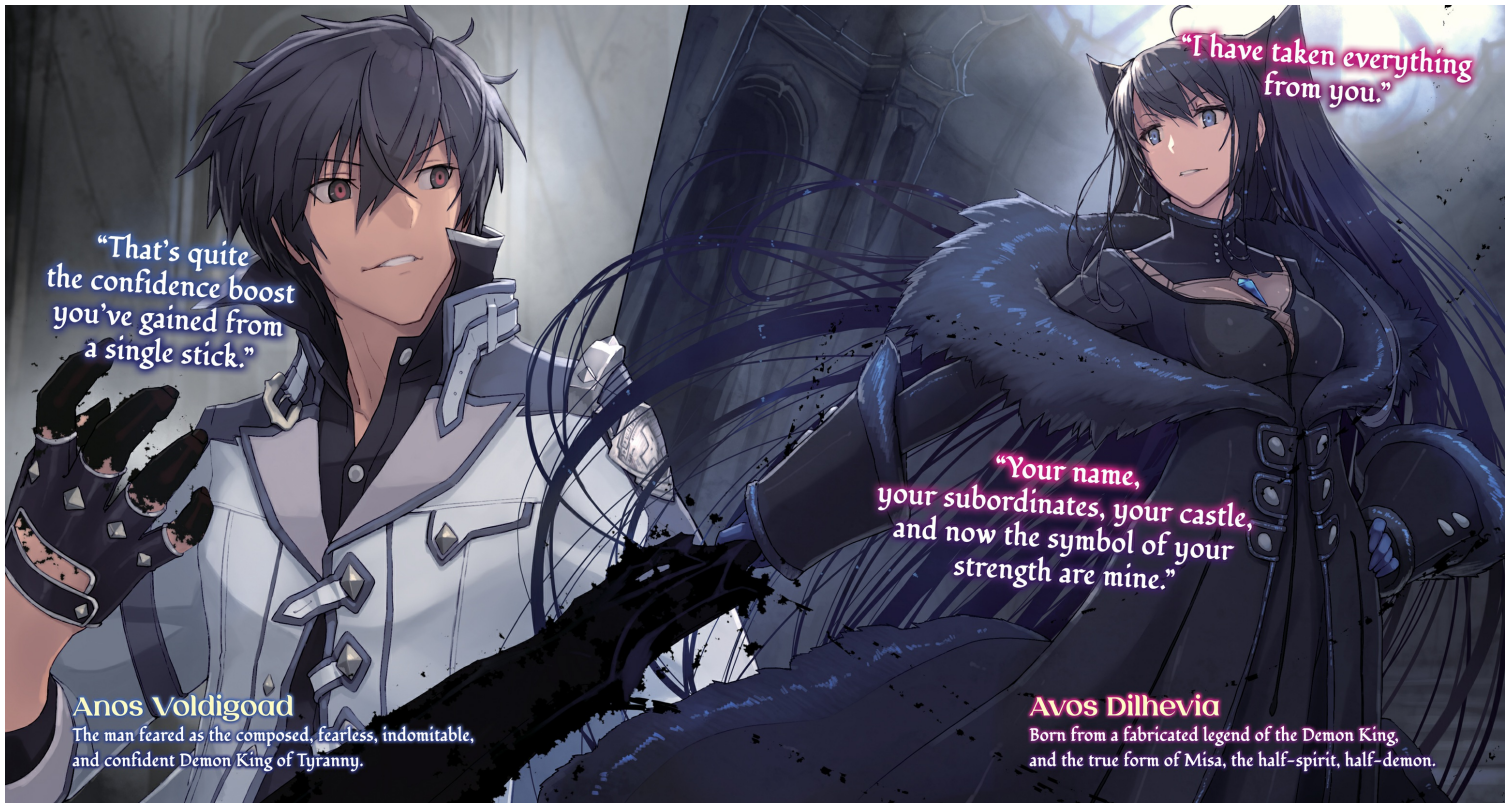
The strongest demon swordsman, who was long ago hailed as the Demon King's right-hand man.

"She is my daughter-
the precious love
you gave me."

"I'm sorry, Shin.
I couldn't teach you
to love."

Great Spirit Reno

A great spirit born from the legend of the
mother of all spirits.



"That's quite
the confidence boost
you've gained from
a single stick."

Anos Voldigoad

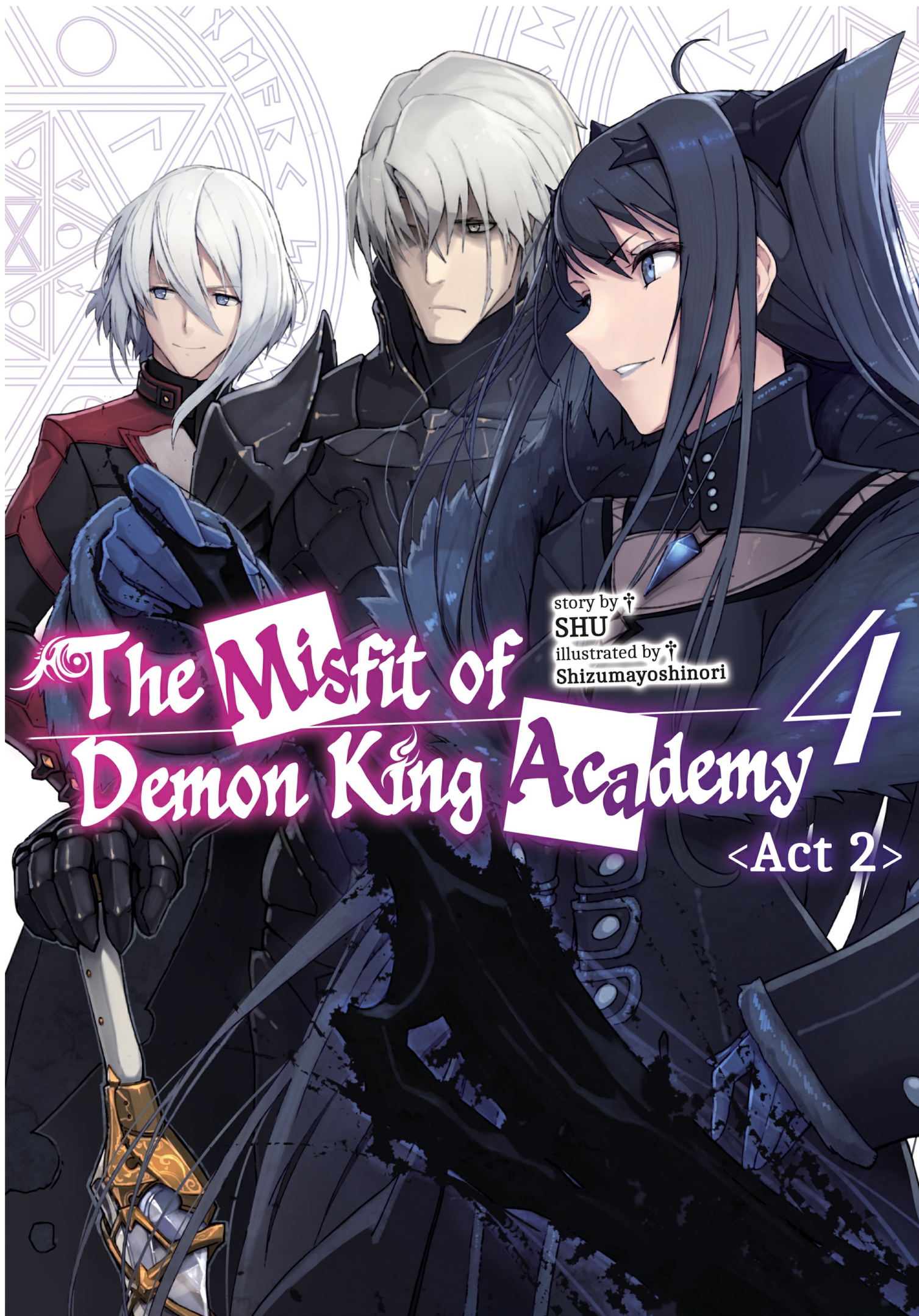
The man feared as the composed, fearless, indomitable,
and confident Demon King of Tyranny.

"I have taken everything
from you."

"Your name,
your subordinates, your castle,
and now the symbol of your
strength are mine."

Avos Dilhevia

Born from a fabricated legend of the Demon King,
and the true form of Misa, the half-spirit, half-demon.



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The Misfit of

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4

<Act 2>



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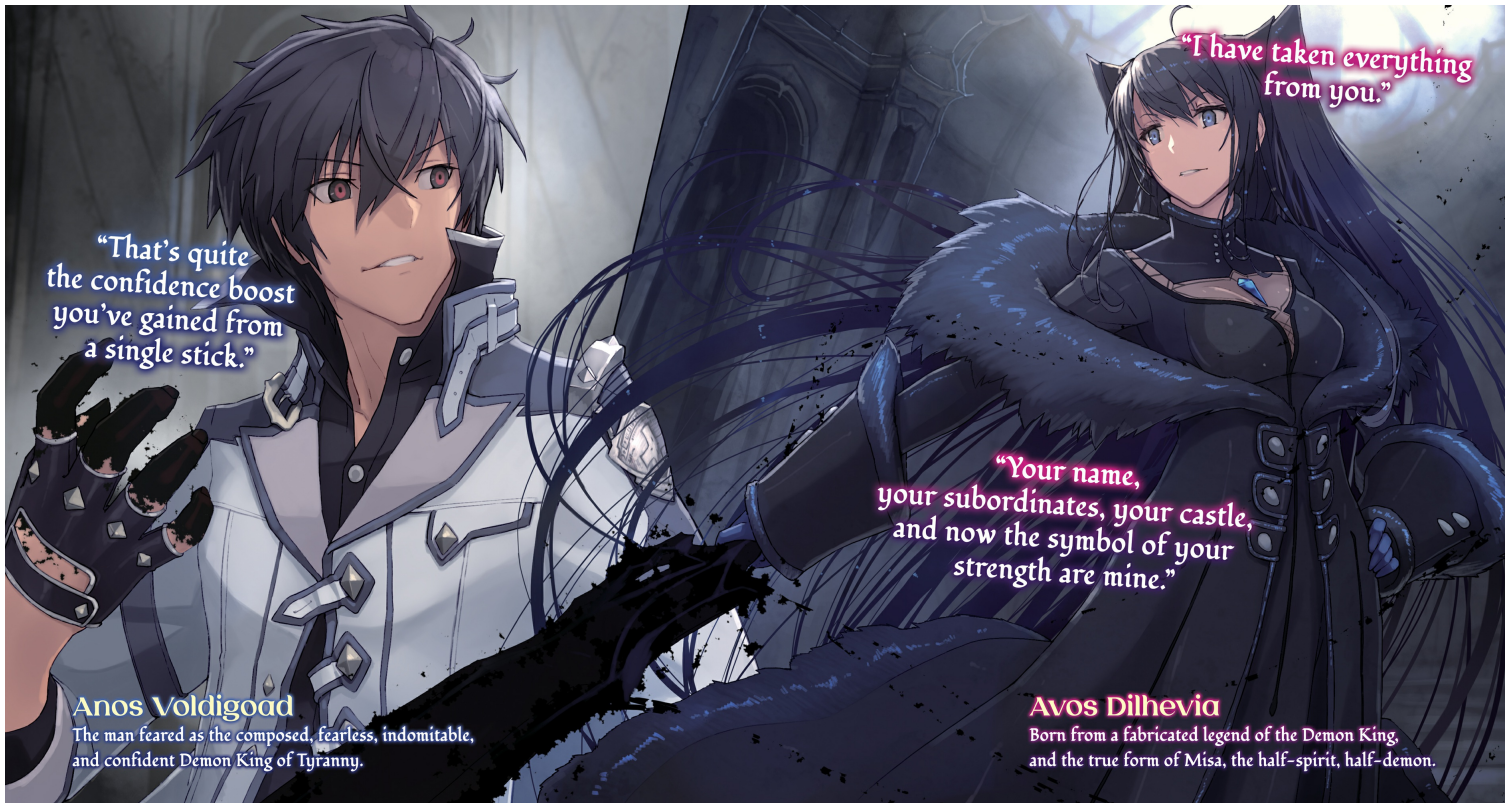
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The Misfit of Demon King Academy: Volume 4 Act 2

by SHU

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Edited by Stephanie Buck

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