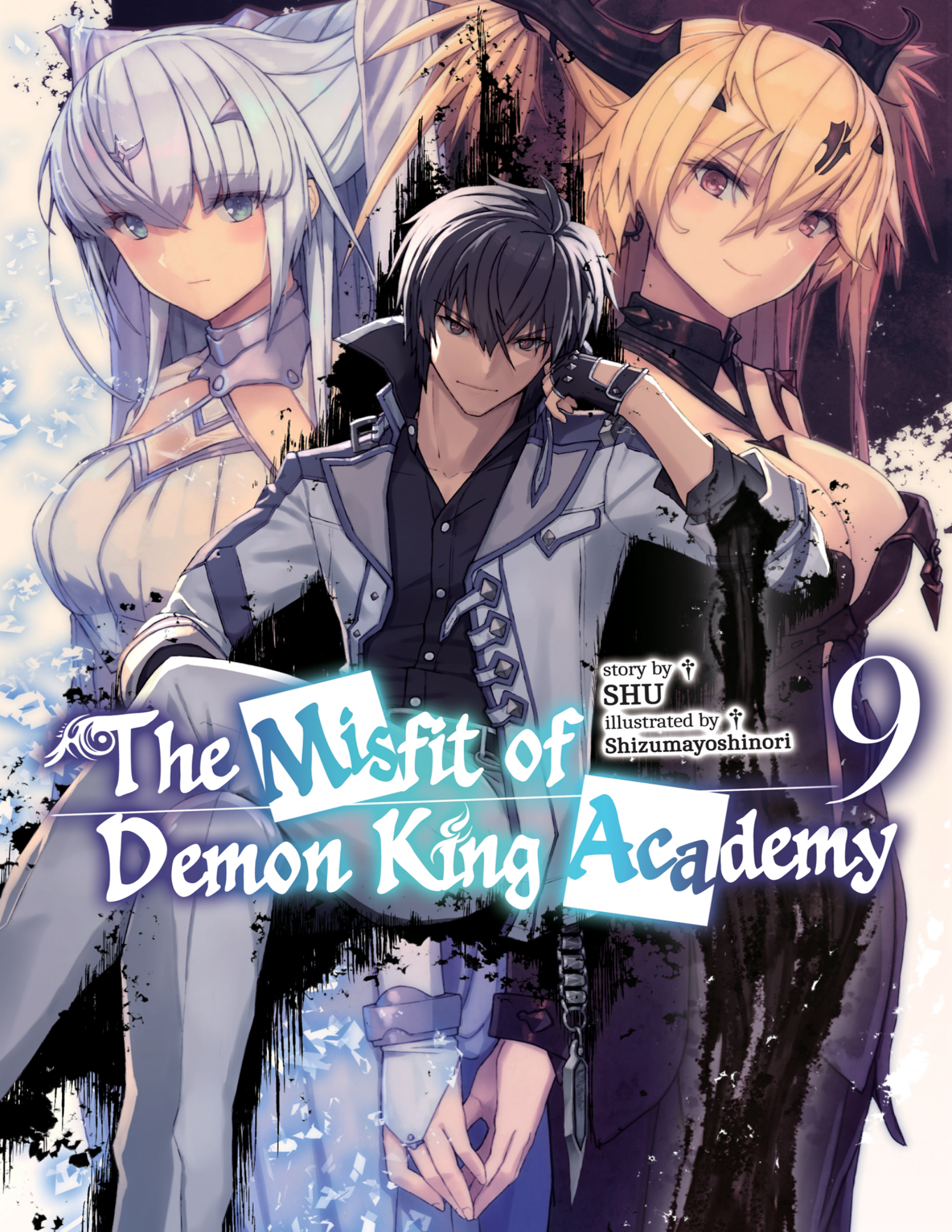

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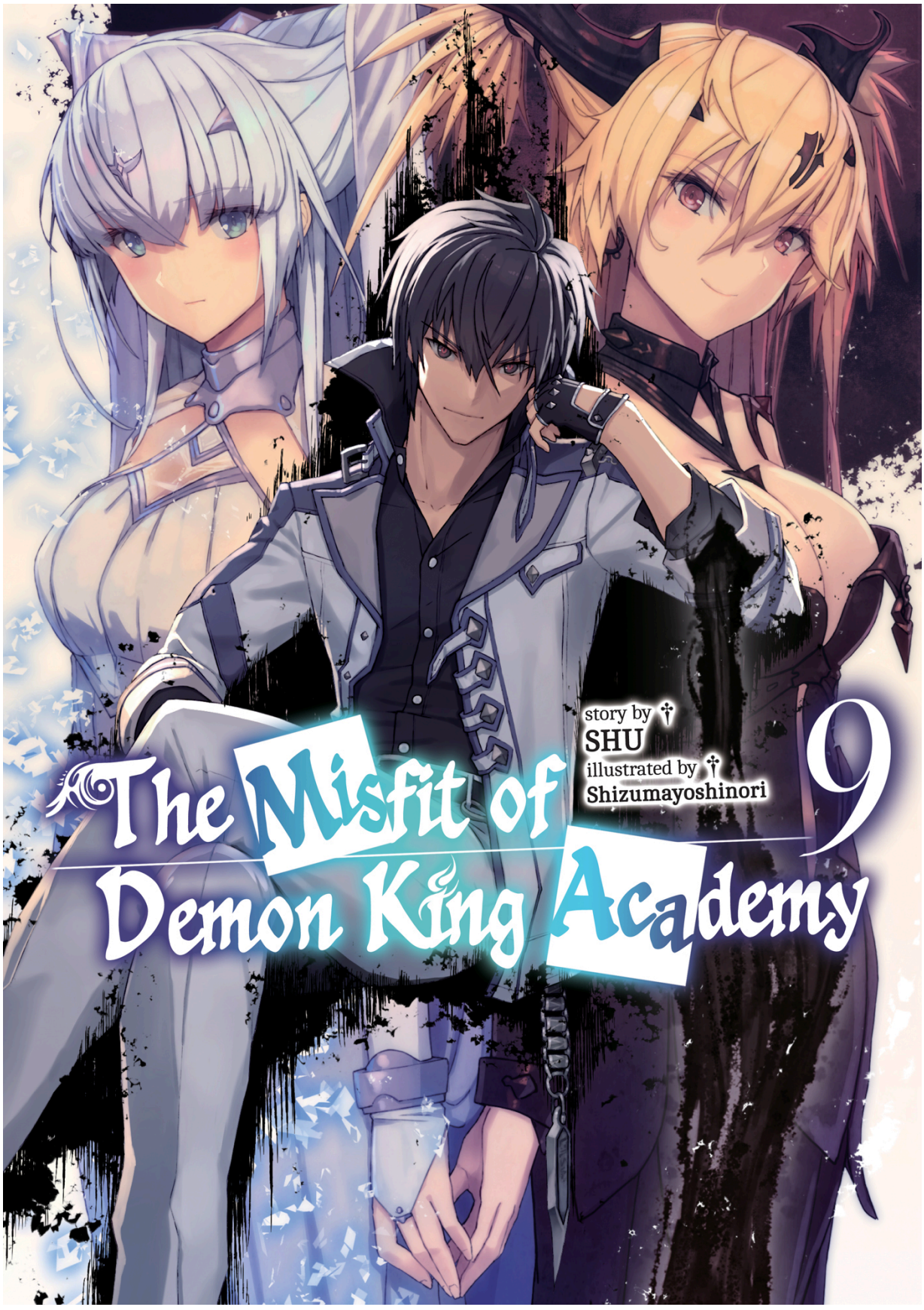

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THE MISFIT OF DEMON KING ACADEMY
Keywords

Demon Castle Delsgade

The Demon King's former residence during the Mythical Age and currently used as the campus of the Demon King Academy.
The Goddess of Destruction's power was sealed within it by Anos.

Erial (Stars of Creation)

Stars that Militia, the Goddess of Creation, left behind. Anos's memories are said to be sealed in a total of five of them, but the final one was entrusted to Sasha without being revealed. It is unclear why Militia had the key to Anos's memories.

Dark Firmament

A space inaccessible to living beings, filled with darkness and twinkling stars located far above the clouds and sky of the earth. The gate to the Firmament of the Gods in the Divine Realm is located here.

Gate to the Divine Realm

The gate to the Firmament of the Gods located in the Dark Firmament. Once used by the gods to descend to earth, the gate has been untouched since Anos constructed the Demon Castle Delsgade around it.

Gods

Extremely powerful beings that each possess a particular "order" that can be exercised. Most gods lack any real emotions, but there are some exceptions to this.

The Institute of the Gods, Everastanzetta

A castle located in the divine capital of the underground world, Gaelahesta.
The draconids believe the holy castle was bestowed upon them by the gods. Students of the institute spend their days deciphering the many stone tablets inside the castle.

The Tea Spirit Tilmunk

A cup-shaped spirit that turns hot water poured inside it into black tea. The tea is said to taste differently depending on the drinker's state of mind-refreshing when the drinker is nervous, sweet when the drinker is hostile, and a perfect mix of flavors when the drinker is calm.

MISFIT OF DEMON KING ACADEMY
Character Introduction

DEMON KING ACADEMY



Anos Voldigoad

The reincarnation of the man feared as the composed, fearless, indomitable, and confident Demon King of Tyranny.



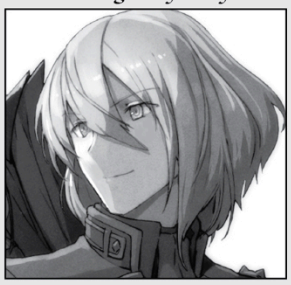
Misha Necron

A quiet and reserved classmate and Anos's first friend after his reincarnation.



Sasha Necron

Misha's somewhat pushy but caring older twin sister.



Lay Grandsley

The reincarnation of the hero that formerly fought tooth and nail against the Demon King.



Misa Reglia

A half-spirit, half-demon girl born between the Great Spirit Reno and the Demon King's right-hand man, Shin.



Eleanor Bianca

One of Anos's motherly and caring subordinates.

ANOS FAN UNION

A collective sworn to devote their lives to Anos out of love and insanity.



Ellen Mihace



Jessica Arnett



Maia Zemt

MISFIT OF DEMON KING ACADEMY

Character Introduction



Goddess of Creation Militia

The original god who created the world. She lent the Demon King her power two thousand years ago in support of his desire for peace.



Goddess of Destruction Abernyu

The little sister of the Goddess of Creation. She governs the order of destruction, and her power is currently sealed within the Demon Castle Delsgade.



Ennessone

A mysterious girl waiting for Anos and his followers on the other side of the gate to the Divine Realm.



Zeshia Bianca

The youngest of the ten thousand Zeshias born from Eleonore.



Shin Reglia

The strongest demon swordsman and was long ago hailed as the Demon King's right-hand man.



Eldmed Ditigeon

One of the great demons that ruled during the Mythical Age and also known as the "Conflagration King."



Nono Inota



Xia Minsheng



Himca Haula



Catha Crunoah



Shelia Nijem

§ Prologue: Reincarnation of God

Two thousand years ago.
Demon Castle Delsgade.

In the silent dark of night, Demon King Anos was seated on the throne of his castle. He stared into the darkness, deep in thought, his chin resting on one hand.

Light flickered. He raised his face to the clerestory window and saw a ray of silver light beam down into the room.

What had been a completely dark night was now being illuminated by faint light of the Moon of Creation, Altiertonoa. A single snow crystal that resembled a petal fluttered through the window of the castle to fall before the Demon King.

In a blink of silver, the lunar snowdrop took the shape of a person. And so Militia, the Goddess of Creation, came to earth. Militia's tranquil eyes stared straight at Demon King Anos.

"Waiting for me?" she asked.

"I figured you would come."

Anos stood up and walked towards her with calm, even steps.

"I have brought down Abernyu, the Goddess of Destruction."

Militia only nodded quietly in reply, as though she knew that already.

"This castle?" she asked.

"It's her final, ruined form."

The Goddess of Creation looked at the castle. Her Divine Eyes reflected the Demon Castle Delsgade as though she were only observing the world around her.

"Did Abernyu..." she started quietly. "Did she say anything?"

Anos closed his eyes for a moment. The Goddess of Destruction's words flashed through his mind.

"She said she didn't want to become despair."

At that time her voice had carried a sadness that should have

been impossible for her to feel, as gods were not supposed to have emotions. Thus, her last words had left a deep impression on Anos.

He opened his eyes and looked straight at the Goddess of Creation.

"She'd had enough of being the order that only saw ruin."

"You saved her," Militia said.

Anos laughed at himself bitterly.

"I don't know about that. I simply disliked how easily everything in this world tended to perish. The Sun of Destruction, Sarjieldenav, was in the way of my ideal Dilhade."

Anos held a hand up, activating a three-dimensional magic circle of Delsgade. A shadow of a sword appeared alongside the countless runes, the handle of which was pointed at him.

The Demon King grabbed the sword. The shadows inverted, revealing the Abolisher of Reason, Venuzdonoa.

"I haven't saved her. I've only delayed the problem," he said with a sharp look.

"As a living being in this world, you've done all you can." Militia's face was still and unmoving, but there was something gentle about her expression. "The rest is for the Goddess of Creation to deal with."

"Don't be so stubborn. I've come this far—I'll accompany you to the end."

Militia quietly shook her head. Her long hair swayed gently.

"It's okay," she said softly, looking at Anos.

"Hmm... I suppose it's best if you don't need my power," Anos said. "What will you do?"

"I have a plan. Besides," Militia said gently, "it's what she would have wanted."

"You know what she wants?"

Militia held back a faint smile. "It was written in the letter you delivered."

"I see."

Anos lifted the tip of the Abolisher of Reason.

"Here," the Goddess of Creation said, gently placing her hand on her chest.



"I could destroy you right now if I wanted to," Anos said to the expressionless Goddess of Creation. "You're not scared?"

"Gods are order. We fear nothing." Militia moved her hand and beckoned him forwards. "Come closer."

The tip of Venuzdonoa was pointed right at her. The Demon King walked through the silent night, even his footsteps making not a sound, and stabbed Venuzdonoa, the Abolisher of Reason, into the right side of her chest. The Goddess of Creation shed no blood, but the blade had definitely cut her—a vital part of her. The Abolisher of Reason had destroyed her order.

"*Syrica*."

Anos withdrew the Abolisher of Reason and held it over the large magic circle that had been drawn. Countless black particles rose from the castle—they were fragments of Abernyu's severed consciousness. One by one, the particles gathered, filling the throne room.

Anos stared at the source wandering within the Syrica circle with his Magic Eyes of Destruction.

"I will grant your wish, Militia. The Goddess of Destruction Abernyu will be reborn as a demon. She will be released from the duties of the gods, no longer bound by order, so she may be free to feel how she wishes to feel."

"Will she be of your bloodline?" Militia asked.

"Abernyu and I have the same Magic Eyes of Destruction. This trait may emerge in distant descendants of my bloodline. Using the Abolisher of Reason, I will create the illusion of a relation to me through our Eyes."

The reincarnation of a god was still a god—unless that order was destroyed by Demon King Anos using Venuzdonoa.

"Be kind to her."

"Me? To Abernyu?" Anos said.

Militia nodded.

"Her next life may be better off having no connection to who she was before, since her past is just as she was as the Goddess of Destruction."

"Memories can be forgotten, but not feelings. Feelings will linger,"

the Goddess of Creation said with conviction.

"If the logic of the world gets in the way, I will destroy it."

Militia smiled. There was something in that smile that seemed to suggest that there were some things the Demon King Anos, who destroyed anything and everything, could not touch.

"If she traces those emotions, she will remember." Militia's eyes glowed silver. "She will remember you."

"What makes you say that?"

Militia had a tender, almost joyful look on her face as she answered.

"Because she was in love," she said.

"I'm honored," Anos said, with a self-deprecating chuckle. "But that can't be true. She just fixated on the first emotion she recognized. I just happened to be the one who freed her from the order of destruction. Once she's reborn in a peaceful world, her heart will be free to feel more."

Anos looked away from Militia and up at the tall ceiling of the castle. Perhaps he was trying to say those words to Abernyu herself.

"This wasted world, the burden of the order of destruction, her sins—I've removed all the shackles wrapped around her heart," Anos said with a faint smile. "She can love again if she wishes to, but with a heart that is free and unburdened. She can meet someone she *truly* loves."

The Goddess of Creation stood in silence. When Anos looked back at her, she spoke.

"Make me an oath."

"Oh?" The Demon King looked intrigued.

"After you reincarnate, promise me that you will search for her, and be the one to find her before anyone else."

"And then what?"

"If she falls in love with you again, accept her."

Such a serious look on such a small god was absurd. Anos burst into laughter.

"Bwa ha ha! You want me to *receive* that unruly girl? Hilarious."

He chuckled some more.

"Gods don't joke," Militia replied.

“I’ll think about it,” Anos said.

Anos looked over at the Syrica magic. The reincarnation of a god was different to that of a demon or human. Especially when the reincarnation involved severing them from their order.

“Shall we decide on a name?” Anos suggested.

Militia looked at him in question.

“Abernyu will be reborn as my descendant,” he said. “But without her divine order, even you will struggle to locate her. It’d be best to have another sign of her past besides her Magic Eyes of Destruction.”

As a demon descendant born from Anos’s magic, the source could be given a name and have that name be passed down through generations.

“If you can’t think of one, I’ll choose.”

“Sasha,” Militia said. “How about Sasha?”

“A fine name.”

The Goddess of Creation smiled. “Thank you.”

Anos turned to face her.

“What will you do now?” he asked.

Militia briefly struggled to answer. But eventually she said, gently smiling all the while, “I will choose a place from which I can watch over you and the rest of this world.”

§ 1. The Witch Who Swallowed a Star

Zzzt... Zzzt...

A static-like noise rang in my ears. Harsh sunlight fell across my eyelids. A dull pain rattled my head, rousing my dozing mind from sleep.

"Anos dear! Do you think you can eat breakfast yet?"

I opened my eyes at the sound of mom's voice in the distance. A girl with soft ringlets sat in the chair beside my bed, blinking at me, an open book on her lap.

"Good morning," Misha said, smiling faintly despite her emotionless voice. She closed her book.

"Did I sleep in?" I asked.

"A little."

Static rang in my ears once again. *I must be more tired than usual.*

As I slowly sat up, Misha drew a magic circle. She reached into it and took out a pitcher full of cold water and a cup. She then poured some water from the pitcher into the cup and offered it to me.

"Just what I wanted," I said.

She smiled happily. After drinking the entire glass, I got out of bed. I drew a magic circle and passed through it, changing from my nightwear into my usual clothes.

"Is Anos awake yet, Misha?" mom's voice called again.

"I just got up. Could you prepare lunch *and* breakfast?" I said, sending my voice down to the first floor where mom was using magic.

"Okay! You're a growing boy, after all!" she replied cheerfully.

I turned to Misha. "When did you get here?"

She tilted her head to the side. "About two hours ago?"

She's been waiting for me for quite a while.

"Sorry. You could have woken me up earlier."

Misha shook her head. "You looked like you were resting well."

Looks like I've made her worry again.

"Where are Arcana and Sasha?"

"Arcana went to Gadeciola."

Come to think of it, she *had* mentioned wanting to check up on things.

"Sasha's still asleep," Misha added.

Hmm. She wasn't a morning person, but she normally didn't sleep all the way until lunch.

"Let's go wake her up," I suggested.

But just as I drew the magic circle for Gatom—

"Anos! Come here for a bit! It's an emergency!"

A noisy voice called up from the first floor—dad. I looked over at Misha, who shrugged. Well, I supposed there was no way she would know what was going on.

Just what kind of emergency was it?

"Hold on a moment," I said.

"Okay."

We left the room and went down the stairs to the blacksmith and appraisal shop side of the house. Dad was standing with a foot up on a chair, posing dramatically with his blacksmith hammer over his shoulder—and not a single emergency in sight.

"What's wrong, dad?" I asked.

"I can't decide," dad said with a look of utter despair. "I can't decide on a pose at all!"

And to think that two thousand years ago, this man was a hero who vowed to fight in the shadows and eschew all glory to himself.

"It looks no different from normal."

Dad waved an index finger at me, clicking his tongue in disapproval. "Listen up, Anos. A man cannot stay stagnant. He must always surpass his limits. I got here by surpassing *all* my limits!"

What is he on about? I looked over at Misha, who tilted her head in confusion.

"A candle burns brightest as it fades, and by doing so overcomes

its own demise?" she guessed.

Hmm. So that logic applied to dad's poses too? If so, it would mean the more ashamed he felt, the more he approached total social destruction, which would make his shame radiate even more. In which case...

"Are you lacking resolve?"

Dad gasped. "Resolve...?!"

His eyes widened as far as they would go in total shock.

"I-I see... So *that's* what it was..." he muttered in realization. "I get it. I've finally figured it out, Anos. That's what I was lacking! I've never been told that I lack resolve before. In fact, people normally compliment me for having too *much* resolve! Or for having nothing *but* resolve."

Hmm. Those didn't sound like compliments.

"But you know, once I became a father, I had new responsibilities to handle. I must have started playing things safe without realizing it."

Wait, he was holding back *all this time?*

"And to think you would be the one to tell me this, Anos! This must be what it means to learn from one's son!" dad said with a laugh.

Now he's just running his mouth as usual.

"All right! I'll give it a go. Just one—no, *three* more steps! I will recall my past self and return to that version of me again!"

Dad stood his hammer up vertically on its thin handle and lay face down on top. When he stretched his arms and legs out, he looked just like an acrobat.

"I am grateful to you, my son!"

What a wonderful demonstration of balance.

"Just wondering dad, but what are you even posing for?"

Dad flapped his arms and legs like he was swimming to maintain his balance as he answered proudly. "Listen to this, Anos. I'm getting a disciple. They're coming to the workshop today, so I want to make a cool first impression!"

Maybe he should hope this disciple doesn't run screaming first.

Mom appeared in her apron. Beaming from ear to ear, she

greeted us. “Good morning, Anos! Will you be eating too, Misha?”

Misha looked at me. I could guess what she was trying to say.

“Can you prepare some for Sasha too?” I asked mom. “We’re about to bring her here.”

“Of course, Sasha too. Leave it to me. I know you’re tired, so I’ll do my best! Eat lots and feel better soon!”

Mum cheerfully returned to the kitchen.

“All right, bye dad. I’ll be back before the food is done.”

“Go on, get going! I will be here, making a new world—”

Just as Misha and I teleported away with Gatom, dad lost his grip on his hammer and toppled off-balance, diving to the floor. But as he fell, he grinned and gave me a thumbs-up. It was pretty easy, with people like this—people who didn’t even bother to catch themselves as they fell—to guess how things would go for them.

The workshop faded away and was replaced by a canopy, the sound of a rumbling crash fading with it. We were in Sasha’s room at the Necron family home.

“Will he be okay?” Misha asked.

“Don’t worry. He’s always like that.”

I answered her and looked over at the bed, but there was no sign of Sasha. A half-empty glass stood on the bedside table. *She’s probably awake by now.*

“Did we miss her?” I wondered. “No...”

There was a unique scent coming from the glass. I waved my magic over and the glass flew into my hand.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s alcohol,” I said.

Misha’s eyes widened. “Did she mistake it for water?”

“She was probably still half asleep. She may be wandering around drunk—”

I swept my Magic Eyes across the Necron estate and spotted her, surprisingly not too far from where we were.

“—there.”

I pointed in the right direction, and Misha hurried over to the other side of the bed. Sasha was asleep on the floor. For some reason, she had stuck her head under the bed, leaving her feet

completely exposed.

"Get up, Sasha," I said.

I grabbed her foot and dragged her out from under the bed, revealing to the world a blonde girl snuggling a bottle of alcohol.

"It's empty," Misha observed.

There wasn't a drop left in the bottle—it seemed she had drunk it all.

"No wonder she won't wake up," I said.

I drew the magic circle for Eyss on Sasha's body. But just before the spell could detoxify her, she blinked awake and destroyed the circle with her Magic Eyes of Destruction.

"What are you doing?" I asked Sasha.

"Say, Demon King," she said, sounding relatively articulate for a drunk. "Being a heavyweight is so boring. It's better to get *drunk*."

"Yeah, sure," I replied noncommittally, casting Eyss. Sasha immediately destroyed it again with the Magic Eyes of Destruction.

"Let's have another match today," she said, sitting up with an elegant smile.

"What are you on about now?" I replied.

"If you win, I'll give you a tuft of my hair."

"Your hair?"

"Yes. You want my body, don't you? If you win, Demon King, I'll give it to you. But only *after*."

Misha tilted her head curiously. "A rare way to be drunk."

Sasha appeared to be completely wasted.

"And if *I* win," Sasha continued, holding her index finger against my mouth, "I'll receive your lips. I'll cast a love spell on you and have your total obedience. You'll never argue with me again."

She said something like this the first time we met.

"You will become *my* Demon King. Got it?" Sasha asked.

"Very well."

I put a hand on Sasha's shoulder and pulled her close to me.

"Kyah!"

Sasha turned red and stared at me, her Magic Eyes of Destruction showing. Her Eyes would have destroyed most people's anti-magic wards and knocked them out cold instantly.

“Urgh,” Sasha groaned. “Don’t *touch* me. I’ll destroy you! Just watch!”

“I won’t be destroyed that way.”

I leaned in close enough for our foreheads to touch and used my Magic Eyes of Destruction to cancel Sasha’s.

“I’ll face you in a staring contest. Whoever looks away first loses,” I said.

“That’s my *specialty*. You know, I can destroy anything in the world with a single look. Demons, humans, spirits—even gods perish before me. No one ever makes eye contact with me.”

“Bwa ha ha. A bold claim. Let’s see you try.”

I glared at Sasha with my Magic Eyes of Destruction. Sasha smirked and glared back. After glaring at each other for a few seconds, Sasha’s hand softly cupped my cheek.

“What’s the hand for?” I asked.

“N-Nothing...” she mumbled while attempting to turn my head and physically break my gaze. Instead of moving, I sent more power into my Eyes and continued staring into Sasha’s face, forcing her to avert her eyes with the strength of my gaze.

“I-I get it already...” she muttered.

“Get what?”

“Ugh...”

She turned bright red and looked away from me in resignation.

“Stop staring at me... Stupid...”

“Looks like it’s my victory,” I said, casting Eyss on her.

She sobered up instantly.

“Huh?” Sasha, with her wits about her, looked between me and Misha. Then she gasped.

But even back to normal, she seemed distracted—as though her mind wasn’t entirely here.

“Sasha?” Misha called her name, but Sasha only continued to look at us quietly. A tear fell from her eye.

“Thank goodness, Militia, Anos,” she said, even though she was sober already. “We met again, just as promised.”

“Promise?” Misha asked curiously.

“Hmm. I see.” I stared at her face closely. “Sasha, open your

mouth.”

“Huh? Mouth? Why my mouth? What is this tyrannical Demon King asking of me?!” Sasha exclaimed.

“Just open it,” I replied. “Your body is mine now, remember?”

“I-I said it was only for today, and just my hair...”

But still, Sasha turned to me and opened her mouth shyly. I could see a bluish-white magic power glowing at the back of her throat.

“Good grief,” I said. “What did you swallow while you were so drunk?”

I brought my lips closer to Sasha’s mouth and inhaled.

“Wah... Ugh...” Sasha groaned wordlessly as the light passed her lips.

“Hmm.”

The bluish-white light eventually settled in the shape of a pebble, twinkling like a star.

“An Erial?” Misha asked.

“So it seems,” I said.

The Erial glowed brightly before us, then faded and disappeared.

“Looks like this half asleep drunkard swallowed it when she drank all that alcohol and saw the past contained within,” I said.

Sasha’s vacant eyes gradually regained focus.

“The Erial... A dream...?” she mumbled to herself, then looked at me.

“Are you awake now?” I asked.

She stared into space for a while, then nodded. “Um, yeah. I slept in... Sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“I had a weird dream... I swallowed the Erial and memories from two thousand years ago started flowing into me.”

“What you swallowed was no dream,” I said. “I don’t know what you saw, exactly, but the Erial has completely vanished.”

“Huh?” Sasha looked shocked. “It wasn’t a dream?”

“In all likelihood, no it wasn’t.”

“I actually saw the actual past contained inside the Erial?” Sasha mumbled, as though simultaneously trying to recall what she had thought was just a dream. As time passed, a terribly conflicted

expression settled on her face.

"Anos..." she said, looking incredulous. "I'm Abernyu."

§ 2. A Recalling Cup of Water

Misha's eyes widened. Most things failed to rattle her, so it was rare to see something truly surprise her.

"You saw that in the Erial?" she asked.

Sasha nodded. "Anos and the Goddess of Creation were speaking. The Goddess of Destruction hated being the order of destruction and wished to reincarnate. Anos turned the Abolisher of Reason on Militia and severed Abernyu's consciousness from Delsgade to fulfill her wish."

Misha tilted her head in confusion. "He used the Abolisher of Reason on *Militia*?"

"Yeah. I don't know why, but that's what he did. Maybe he did something to the Goddess of Creation's order?" Sasha said with a pondering look. "Either way, Abernyu was separated from her order of destruction. She was reincarnated as Anos's descendant, since they would be connected by their Magic Eyes of Destruction..."

"Hmm. It wouldn't be impossible." If I had said that kind of stuff back then, I must have had a way to do it.

"Militia gave Abernyu's reincarnation a name so that they'd be able to meet again," Sasha explained. "And that name was Sasha."

A descendant with my Magic Eyes of Destruction named Sasha, huh?

"Indeed, you would be the only one who fits those conditions," I said.

"Sasha is the Goddess of Destruction..." Misha mumbled, staring at Sasha. "The Goddess was good?"

"Surprisingly enough, that may be the answer," I said.

"The answer?" Sasha asked.

"The Heavenly Father, Nosgalia, revived the Sun of Destruction and made it shine in the sky. But Sarjieldenav's light—the black sunshine—harmed neither my followers nor the people of Dilhade.

And for some reason I knew it never would."

I peeked into the abyss of Sasha's source. As usual, it didn't ring any bells. But it was possible we had met two thousand years ago after all.

"If it had been you all along, then everything makes sense."

What it meant was that the Goddess of Destruction was currently split into two—the order was the Demon Castle Delsgade, while the heart was the demon called Sasha.

"It still doesn't feel real," Sasha said.

"That's normal when you have no memories," I said.

"Does that mean Abernyu was an ally of Anos's like Militia?"

"Most likely. But if that's the past you saw in the Star of Creation, there's something that I don't quite get."

"What?"

"Why did Militia take that memory from me?"

"Oh..."

Sasha made a sound of understanding. Militia had taken my memory of Abernyu and left it in a Star of Creation. Unlike the time with my father, there should have been no need to take that memory. So why had she done it?

"I wonder why?" Sasha said.

"Did you see anything else?" Misha asked.

Sasha scratched her head. "It was a dream, so it's all kind of fuzzy... But I think they said something about delaying the problem."

"What problem?"

"That, I can't remember..." Sasha said, then gasped. "Can't...remember?"

She suddenly looked up at me. "Militia said I'd remember. She said I'd regain my memories of being Abernyu."

"How?"

"Um... I believe it was if I fell—"

Sasha froze as though she had just recalled something. Her cheeks gradually grew redder.

"Fell?" Misha asked, confused.

"N-Nothing! Right, I meant to say felt—if I *felt* again. Because memories can be forgotten, but feelings will linger. They said if I

trace those feelings, I would remember everything again."

Tracing feelings to recall one's memories, huh?

"I see. Will that actually work?" I said.

"Is it unlikely?" Misha asked.

"I can't say. Gods reincarnate differently than other beings. It's also possible that those words were meant figuratively and not literally."

"The memories were physically left somewhere?" Misha guessed.

"Yeah, Abernyu might have left her memories somewhere in a form like the Stars of Creation. She might have left the memories somewhere she didn't want to forget, somewhere she could lead herself back to by her emotions alone."

I looked over at Sasha, who hurriedly averted her gaze.

"Why won't you meet my eyes?" I asked her.

"N-No reason!"

If there was no reason, then there'd be no need to avert your gaze.

"Did Abernyu leave any emotions from two thousand years ago behind in you?" I asked.

"I suppose you could say she did...?"

"What?"

"I said there's nothing left!"

Hmm. Were her memories jumbled?

"Well, whatever. We'll awaken your emotions either way."

Sasha reeled back, hugging herself. "Th-There's magic that can do that?!"

"No. Memories lost in reincarnation cannot be retrieved even with Eviy. And since feelings are even more abstract than memories, there are no spells that could assist us in retrieving feelings either."

"So what will we do?" Sasha asked curiously.

"Do you remember how we invited the people of the underground world to a banquet in Dilhade?"

"Huh? Ah... I have no memories of that time..." Sasha mumbled, ashamed of her disgraceful conduct back then.

"You kept saying things that made no sense," I reminded her, before I continued. "But looking back on it now, you might have

been talking about things that happened two thousand years ago."

"Huh?"

Sasha looked surprised.

"Perhaps so," Misha agreed.

"But that doesn't mean I can remember it now, you know? Can't you pull out the memories from back then with Eviy?" Sasha asked.

"Not a bad idea, but just remembering that won't help," I said. "However, the banquet itself did give us a vital clue as to how we might be able to extract your feelings from two thousand years ago."

I drew a magic circle on the spot.

"Say... Is that..." Sasha said, trailing off.

"Wine," I said.

A fine wine appeared through the food and drink creation spell Roze. I created a glass and made it hover in the air as I poured the wine into it.

"Drink. Then remember," I instructed Sasha.

"Are you stupid?!"

"You just woke up from watching the past, so it might be easier to trace your emotions right now. Back at the banquet, you seemed bothered by something after watching Naphta and Diedrich exchange vows of matrimony."

I pushed the glass of wine into Sasha's hands.

"I guess it's worth giving it a go..." Sasha said, staring at the red liquid in the glass. "But will a single glass really get me drunk?"

She tipped the glass back and gulped down the wine in one go.

"*Gatom*!" Out of nowhere, Sasha pointed at Misha and drew a magic circle to teleport her away.

Misha blinked a few times. "Should I go?"

"Maybe," I said. "It might be a clue."

The Gatom circle completed, and Misha allowed herself to be sent away. The moment she vanished, Sasha looked over to the empty space she left behind.

"Huh? Where did Misha go?" she asked.

You sent her away yourself.

"I'm here," Misha said, her voice somewhat muffled.

The door opened with a clack, and Misha entered the room. *That*

was short.

"Good. Let's get going," she said, grabbing Misha's hand.

"Where?" Misha asked.

"Delsgade. I want the three of us to go see my castle self."

Misha looked at me.

"Let's go along with her for a bit," I said. "If we try enough leads, we may eventually get lucky with one of them."

"Okay," Misha agreed.

Sasha reached for me with her other hand.

"I'll send you," she said with a grin.

"That would be most appreciated."

We all linked hands and teleported. We ended up in the Delsgade grounds, right near the entrance of the arena.

"This way."

Sasha walked off with us following behind her. For a time, she was busy walking while scanning her surroundings when she suddenly came to a stop.

"Ugh!"

She whirled around and glared at me angrily.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"This is me?!" She pointed at the Demon Castle. "You're telling me this is *me*?!"

"Well, yeah."

"I'm like a castle."

You are *a castle.*

"Why couldn't I be cuter? Something pretty and pink... Not this sinister looking..."

"But there's no finer castle than this," I said.

"Really?!" Sasha beamed happily.

"Yes. This is the strongest castle in the world. It will never fall."

She giggled. "My Demon King is the exception."

"You could say that."

At that, Sasha resumed walking in a good mood.

But no sooner had I thought that than she turned back around and started talking to me while walking backwards.

"Say. Can I go *there*?"

"Go wherever you want."

"Then I'm going to go."

Sasha turned back around and charged towards a nearby tower—not at the door, but at the wall.

"Sasha, watch out," Misha warned.

"It's okay, there's a path over here," Sasha said. "A secret entrance only I know about."

Sasha ignored Misha's warning and moved straight towards the wall. The Demon Castle Delsgade was transformed from the Goddess of Destruction. If Sasha was really Abernyu, it wouldn't be that surprising for there to be a hidden entrance only she could pass through.

Misha and I followed Sasha's movements with our gazes, enhancing our Eyes with magic. She marched forwards boldly, practically leaping at the tower wall with no hesitation at all.

A heavy thunk later, Sasha was rolling on the ground, clutching her head.

"Ugh... The secret entrance defied me, Anos..."

Was she actually tracing the emotions of Abernyu, or was she just extremely drunk? It was almost impossible to tell.

"There, there," Misha said, crouching beside Sasha and patting her head gently.

Sasha smiled at her happily.

"Thank you, Militia," she said.

Misha blinked a few times, then looked up at me. "Militia?"

"I suppose that's possible," I said.

Assuming Sasha was Abernyu, that is. But Misha was an artificial personality created through Dino Jixes in this era. Was it possible for a god to reincarnate into *that*?

"They'll be here soon," Sasha said.

"They?" Misha asked.

"Yup, them. What was their name again?"

Misha tilted her head in question, but Sasha jumped to her feet and resumed walking.

"The secret entrance was over here," she said, opening the door to the tower as one normally would.

The door opened to a room filled with books. Bookshelves were crammed everywhere, each shelf packed with books. Sasha made a beeline up the staircase towards the sixth floor with us on her tail.

"Who's up there?" Misha asked.

"Hmm. I can't remember, but I'll know once we get there," Sasha replied.

We finished climbing the stairs and arrived at the top floor.

"Huh... They're not here," Sasha said.

But there was no sign of *anyone* having been there. If she had been tracing her emotions, it was possible she wasn't talking about the present time.

"Hmm. That's weird," Sasha muttered. "I thought they'd be here..."

"Know anything?" Misha asked me.

"No clue. It isn't enough to say—"

I stopped mid-sentence, and Misha looked at me in question. I held up an index finger to gesture for her to stay silent.

The sound of footsteps coming up the staircase could be heard—and they were getting closer. Judging from the number of steps, there were two people, and their steps were also gradually getting faster. The steps eventually sped up into a proper run, whoever they belonged to moments away from reaching our location on the top floor.

Misha and Sasha focused their attention on the staircase. Two figures rushed into view.

"Sorry for the wait!"

"Here...to answer the summon...!"

The two newcomers spotted us.

"Wow! It's Anos and the gang!"

"Did you...call for Zeshia...?"

Eleonore and Zeshia had arrived.

§ 3. Zeshia's Dream

Four pairs of eyes exchanged glances. Like a ray of light in a dark storm of confusion, a certain drunk raised her voice triumphantly.

"I remember now! It was *Eleonore*!" Sasha cried, pointing at Eleonore's face. As though she had remembered it herself.

Unaware of the circumstances, Eleonore turned to Sasha in confusion.

"Hmm? What are we talking about?" she asked.

"Long, long, *long* ago, someone was called here. I couldn't remember who was called, but now I'm sure it was you, Eleonore!"

Eleonore, huh? Had Abernyu really summoned her here two thousand years ago, or did she just meet someone who resembled Eleonore in the past? Or had Sasha assumed it was Eleonore she was looking for because Eleonore just so happened to be the person who showed up then?

Wouldn't hurt to just let Sasha stay drunk for a little longer. She might remember something else.

"You called me here?" Eleonore asked.

"It wasn't me!" Sasha denied, slurring her speech.

"So who called me?"

"Someone called you!"

Hmm. *And we've already hit a snag.*

"But don't worry, Eleonore. As soon as you answer a certain question, everything will be revealed," Sasha continued.

Eleonore looked at her, fully relaxed. For some reason, it was Zeshia who had an anticipatory look on her face, with both fists clenched at her sides.

"Hmm? What am I supposed to answer?" Eleonore asked.

Sasha smiled with a short laugh. "You will answer who called you here, and for what reason!"

"Wow! Asking for the unreasonable out of the blue?!" Eleonore

exclaimed.

Perhaps she *was* just drunk.

"I won't let you say you don't know."

"Even if you say that, I—"

"Hah!"

Sasha covered Eleonore's mouth with both her hands, preventing her from speaking.

"Get it now?" she said with an elegant smile. She seemed pleased about successfully stopping Eleonore from saying she didn't know.

"Ah... Is Sasha *drunk*, by any chance?" Eleonore asked once she was freed.

"Sasha? Who's Sasha?" Sasha asked. "I'm a castle! I'm *this* castle!"

"R-Right... Fairly drunk, then..."

Eleonore was overwhelmed by Sasha's insistence.

"More importantly, Eleonore, tell us why you were called here," Sasha demanded.

"Hmm. I wasn't called here, exactly. How should I explain this..."

Just then, Zeshia raised her hand eagerly.

"We came...to meet mama's child...!"

"Child?" Misha asked curiously.

"Zeshia...is a big sister...!"

Misha and Sasha stared at Eleonore.

"No no, it's a misunderstanding! It's not what you're thinking, I swear!" Eleonore shouted.

"Whose child is it, then?!" Sasha screeched, pressing close to Eleonore.

"C-Calm down, Sasha. Listen to what I have to say."

"Fine. But answer this question of mine honestly first."

"What question?" Eleonore asked, recoiling at Sasha's vigor.

"Do you know how children are made, Eleonore?"

"Which way do you mean?"

"*Which way*?!"

Sasha raised her voice as though she was utterly offended.

"Wait, you've got it all wrong. There's lots of ways—"

"*Lots of ways*?!"

Sasha's reaction was over-the-top. It seemed like Abernyu's emotions were completely gone. *Does this really need to continue, or are we done?*

"Guilty! Guilty! Absolutely guilty!"

She glared at Eleonore, her Magic Eyes of Destruction threatening to appear at any moment.

"This is my last question for you, Eleonore," Sasha said.

"Wow," exclaimed Eleonore. "I'm not sure why, but it feels like I'm being interrogated right now."

"You're like...a suspect...!" Zeshia said.

Eleonore tried to look away from Sasha, but Sasha grabbed her cheeks and forced her head to stay still.

"Whose child is it? Depending on your answer, the Sun of Destruction may shine down on Dilhade once more," she said menacingly.

Hmm. Now *those* words sounded like they had come from Abernyu. It might be worth it to watch this play out a little more.

"I-I don't know what you're saying, but I can tell it sounds awfully violent. Let's calm down first, Sasha."

"You're the one who needs to calm down, Eleonore. Maybe I was the one who called you here after all—to *eliminate* you."

Eleonore gave me a troubled look. "Anos, isn't it about time you stepped in?"

"Anos?!" Sasha shrieked. "It's Anos's child after all?!"

"Argh! *No!* That's *not* what I meant!" Eleonore replied, shouting. "The child Zeshia's talking about isn't the kind you need a partner for __"

"You don't know who the father is?! Are you stupid?!"

"I-I didn't say that!"

Eleonore tried to clear up Sasha's misunderstanding but to no avail.

"Misha, can you do something about Sasha?" Eleonore asked, now completely desperate for help.

Misha thought carefully for a moment.

"Right now, Sasha is on par with Anos's mother," she said flatly.

"*Wow!* That's like saying you give up!"

As Eleonore realized the true nature of her enemy, Sasha pointed her index finger in her face.

"Scandalous! Scandalous, I say!" she shouted. "How could you go and have a child with some unknown man when you have Anos?! And you call yourself a concubine of the Demon King? Shame!"

"I-I haven't had any children with any unknown men, and I'm not a concubine either! Are you trying to get us together or split us apart, Sasha?"

In the first place, the Demon King had no need for concubines. If I wanted descendants, I could make them by myself. Abernyu would have known that. So were these really just the ramblings of a drunkard after all?

"Even if you're not a concubine, you're one of the Demon King's followers, so you belong to Anos! But you'll never have his heart, because he's the Demon King!" Sasha said.

"You're saying some really hurtful things here!" Eleonore protested.

Sasha just bared her teeth and glared at Eleonore.

"It's time to calm down a little, Sasha," I said, lightly placing a hand on her head.

"Ugh... What, are you saying I'm in the wrong?" she muttered bitterly.

I ignored her and questioned Eleonore.

"What did you mean by coming to meet a child?" I asked.

She sighed in relief and answered. "It's actually a child Zeshia saw in her dream."

Zeshia nodded firmly. "Zeshia dreams a lot... Dreams about a little sister!"

"And that child in the dream called you two here?"

Zeshia nodded again. "She called for me...! She said...she wants to be born soon!"

What an odd story.

"An unborn child called you here?"

"Zeshia came to pick her up... She'll be born soon!" she said, eyes sparkling with a proud expression. "Zeshia is a big sister!"

Eleonore beckoned me over with a small wave of her hand. I

brought my face close to hers, and she whispered, "That's how it is. I'm just here accompanying her."

I see.

"What were you guys trying to do by getting Sasha drunk?" she asked.

"According to the final Star of Creation, Sasha is the Goddess of Destruction."

"Whoa. So Sasha really *is* a castle!"

Eleonore glanced between Sasha and what was visible of the Demon Castle Delsgade outside the window. Sasha shot her an elegant smile.

"Do you understand now? Don't step inside me with mud on your shoes," she said.

Eleonore held an index finger up to her lips in thought. "Hmm. That's a pretty surreal picture to imagine."

"The one thing we don't know is why Militia took my memories of this," I said. "It seems Sasha can recall her emotions as Abernyu when she's drunk. We decided to try setting her free like this to observe what would happen."

"What? That makes me sound like a wild animal..." Sasha whined.

"How did you end up here?" Eleonore asked.

"Sasha said someone would come here," I replied.

"Ah," Eleonore said "And then *we* arrived."

Zeshia brightened with a look of anticipation. "Is it related...to Zeshia's sister?"

"Who knows? It could be Abernyu's emotions, or it could be the nonsense of a drunk. There's no way to tell for sure," I said.

That aside, Zeshia had apparently had this dream multiple times, huh?

"Hmm. It may actually have some relation," I said.

"Eleonore magic," Misha mumbled beside me. She looked up at me. "Could that be it?"

Eleonore looked surprised.

"Two thousand years ago," I said, "Jerga, the king of the humans, split his source into two sentient spells: the magic intent on destroying demons, Jerga, and the source womb magic, Eleonore.

The god involved in that transformation was the Heavenly Father Nosgalia."

Eleonore had been a failure—she had continued to stand up to the hatred and resentment that had imprisoned Jerga. But why was she a failure? It was hard to imagine the god that governed order messing up for no reason.

"Militia might have intervened and helped Eleonore," I theorized.

"Hmm. So I'm still myself thanks to Militia?" Eleonore asked.

"In short, yes."

Misha blinked a few times and tilted her head. "Did Militia leave anything behind in the Eleonore magic?"

"Oh, but wait," Eleonore cut in. "I was born *after* Anos reincarnated, and that was after Abernyu had been turned into the Demon Castle."

I nodded.

"Militia might be related, but how would *I* have known Abernyu?" Eleonore asked.

"Militia might have left a message in Delsgade."

If so, that would mean Sasha's connection to Abernyu wasn't completely gone.

"There's no way of saying for sure. If you two have time, come with us. You may be able to help me retrieve my lost memories," I said.

"Sure!" Eleonore said. "That's fine with us. Right, Zeshia?"

Zeshia bounced excitedly.

"Zeshia's sister...called her... If Zeshia helps...she'll be born!"

"Yup yup, she might be born if we help."

Eleonore warmly encouraged Zeshia's enthusiasm.

"Where are we going?" Misha asked.

"First—"

It should be about time. Oh well.

"—we go home. Mom should be done cooking."

§ 4. Dad’s Disciple

We returned home with Gatom.

“No! Not like that! Like *this*!”

Dad’s voice could be heard coming from the workshop, though his tone sounded more serious than usual.

“Oh! Welcome home, Anos. Food’s almost ready!” mom said, sticking her head out of the kitchen.

“Listen up, skill isn’t in the hands. Blacksmiths use the heart! The soul! Before you hone the blade, you must first hone your heart!”

Dad’s loud, passionate voice pierced through the workshop door. Sasha and the others looked over, all wondering what was going on.

“His disciple finally arrived,” mom explained happily. “It’s their first day, so he’s a little more excited than usual.”

Come to think of it, he had mentioned that before we left.

“Will Eleonore and Zeshia be joining us for lunch?” mom asked.

“Ah, we’re not that hung—”

“Zeshia is starving...!”

Zeshia eagerly pulled a fork and spoon out of a magic circle. Eleonore laughed embarrassedly.

“Um, maybe just Zeshia then,” Eleonore added. “If you don’t mind.”

“I made way too much today, so it’d be great if you could help us eat some too!”

“Ah... Okay. Then I’ll eat too,” Eleonore said.

“Hee hee. Thank you. Wait just a bit longer! It’s almost done!” Mom said, then returned to the kitchen.

“Yes! That’s right, just like that! You’re getting the hang of it! You can do it!”

Dad’s motivated voice echoed even louder. Everyone turned back to look at the workshop door.

“Honestly, I’m a little curious...” Eleonore muttered under her

breath.

Misha nodded in agreement.

"Can we take a little peek?" Eleonore asked.

"We shouldn't disturb them," Misha replied.

"Just a little look," Eleonore reassured her. "We won't interrupt. Misha wants to know what Anos's dad's new disciple is like too, right?"

Misha thought for a moment, then nodded. "Okay, but we have to move quietly!"

"Zeshia is curious too...!"

Eleonore and the others approached the workshop door.

"Right," dad said. "The next step is to maintain that. This is just the foundation—maintaining a good shape requires daily training."

As dad's voice resounded, Eleonore brought her eye up to the keyhole of the workshop door. It was a cheap one that could easily be seen through.

"Can you see...?" Zeshia asked.

"Hmm. I *can* see, but not clearly..." Eleonore mumbled.

Just then, from the back of the group, Sasha let out an elegant giggle.

"Looks like it's my time," she said, stepping forwards confidently. She switched places with Eleonore and stood before the door. "Here I go—*Magic Eyes of Destruction*!"

"H-Hey! Don't break it!" Eleonore protested.

Sasha brought her hand up to her eyes in a graceful pose. "Who do you think I am? I am Abernyu, the god that governs the order of destruction. *I'm* the one who gets to decide what breaks or not."

Magic circles appeared in her eyes.

"I just have to widen the keyhole enough for us to see inside clearly, no?" she added.

"Yeah, but can you control your Eyes properly when you're this drunk?" Eleonore asked.

Sasha grinned fearlessly, then glared at the door before her. "I'll show you the power of the Goddess of Destruction."

And at once the door to the workshop exploded.

"Aaaaaah! What are you doing, Sasha?!" Eleonore shouted.

"It blew apart..." Misha said.

Eleonore and Misha stared at the remains of what used to be a door. Sasha let out a content huff.

"It's easier to see through a keyhole this big, no?" she asked.

"You're just being silly now, Sasha!" Eleonore said.

Now completely unobstructed from view, the workshop was entirely visible, with dad inside looking our way with confusion. Eleonore hurriedly lowered her head.

"S-Sorry for interrupting!" she stammered. "We just wanted to quietly see what your new disciple is like, but we messed up—"

She froze mid-sentence as she raised her head and spotted the person in front of dad, who had to be his disciple: A demon with a large eye patch over one eye was in the middle of striking what looked like one of dad's usual dramatic poses, with one foot propped on a chair and a blacksmith's hammer over his shoulder.

"What, is that all?" dad asked. "If you wanted to watch, you could've just said so. We'd be more than happy to show off."

Dad grinned, dramatically posing on his knees before his disciple. He then gestured at the demon in introduction.

"This is Aeges Code. From now on he'll be working here as my disciple. My very first disciple!" dad boasted. It seemed that finally gaining a disciple was making dad ecstatic with joy.

"A disciple? *You?*" Sasha asked, stepping forwards and pointing at Aeges. "What do you think you're plotting, Netherworld King Aeges?! As long as my Magic Eyes are of destruction, I won't allow you to do as you please in Anos's home!"

"Sasha is drunk," Misha immediately explained.

"I'm not plotting anything. Things just ended up like this. It was just pure chance," Aeges said in his usual tone.

"I don't believe you! How do you end up becoming a disciple by pure chance?" Sasha asked, pressing the matter further.

But dad just shook his head quietly. "When a man lives by himself for long enough, he ends up with a secret or two."

His voice took on the distant, dreamy tone of an enlightened master.

"And when you come as far as I have, it isn't just a matter of one

or two. It's more like ten or twenty!" he proclaimed.

Seems more like a life full of shame.

"Ugh... So what? Girls can have secrets too," Sasha said with a sniff.

I don't think that's the problem here.

"Aeges. Stay in that position," dad said to his disciple.

"Understood."

Once he confirmed Aeges was maintaining his pose, dad moved to a corner of the workshop with us. He then leaned in to our huddle, as though to hold a whispered conversation.

"You know him, huh? Did something happen between you guys?" he asked.

"Oh, something sure happened, all right! *Terrible* things!" Sasha answered seriously.

"How terrible is terrible?"

"Listen carefully... Aeges may *look* like a stubborn man who would do whatever it takes to achieve his goals, but the truth is *far* from that."

"Wha... Really?"

Sasha nodded gravely.

"The truth is...he's actually a really good guy," she said.

"What?!"

Dad let out a horrified gasp, having completely fallen into Sasha's dramatic mood.

"I see... So that's how it is," dad mumbled, glancing over at Aeges. "But that doesn't sound like a problem?"

Though dad looked serious, this wasn't a matter that required any further thinking; it was decidedly *not* a problem.

"No, you're definitely being deceived. The moment he looks like he's up to no good, he'll pull an act of kindness... Who knows what good deed he'll do next," Sasha said, openly expressing her wariness. "If you're not ready to say thank you at any moment, he'll catch you off guard."

"That does sound like something to be careful of..."

They were thoroughly carried away. Sasha and dad were both saying whatever went with the mood.

"It leaves you feeling awfully guilty," Sasha added.

"Sasha is *really* drunk," Misha emphasized.

Eleonore held up an index finger. "By the way, how did Aeges end up being your disciple?"

"Hmm? Oh, that. How did it go again?" dad said, scratching his head. "I sometimes hold training lessons for beginner smiths at the blacksmith guild I'm in."

I couldn't imagine dad teaching anything seriously. *Maybe I should observe one of his classes sometime.*

"Aeges came to one of my lessons," dad explained.

"Huh. I wonder why?" Eleonore said, looking curious.

Misha turned to look at me.

"That's all it is," I answered, and she nodded.

Soon after, a Leaks arrived from Eleonore.

"Hey now, even if Misha gets it, we don't! Don't leave us in the dark."

"That's...favoritism..." Zeshia added in protest.

"I told Aeges that dad is my real father, Ceris Voldigoad. He must have gone to visit him afterwards," I explained through Leaks.

"Well, beginner smiths don't get much work, so they study under other blacksmiths wherever they can. Though I've heard it's a little different over in Azesion," dad explained, misunderstanding Eleonore's question. "Aeges stayed back after the lecture, and he asked me how my blacksmith work was going."

It sounded like Aeges had wanted to know how his former master was faring, living in a peaceful world.

"I told him it wasn't always fun, but in the end, nothing can beat the feeling of a job well done."

I could just imagine dad's smile in my head.

"But when I patted his shoulder and told him to do his best too, he looked down and started shaking. I looked at his face and realized I had made a grave mistake."

His expression was different to when he had been speaking to Sasha earlier. His tone was dead serious as he spoke his next words.

"How could I have not recognized this? It's unmistakable. It's something I'm absolutely sure about. Aeges," dad said with

emphasis, “is unemployed!”

Eleonore stared at him with her mouth open.

“I forgot that not only do beginner blacksmiths attend these lectures but also smiths that have recently lost their jobs. You know how Aeges has an eye patch? He probably made a mistake at his first workshop and got fired. A beginner with only one eye would struggle in this industry.”

As always, dad’s ability to misunderstand things went beyond expectation.

“It completely slipped my mind that this could apply to him, so I apologized. But when I told him I was sorry about his eye, he looked like he was about to cry. That’s when I was sure of it.”

Aeges knew that dad had no memories of his former life, but it was easy enough to guess what he had been feeling at that moment.

“In the first place, if a beginner smith injures their eye while at work, it’s the master blacksmith’s fault. Firing the beginner just isn’t fair. That said, a minor blacksmith like me has no influence over the guild,” dad said with a huff of indignation.

Perhaps he was offended on Aeges’s behalf because deep down, some part of himself recognized their history.

“So I told him I’d look after him until he became a full-fledged blacksmith and brought him here to be my disciple. One of my better moments, I believe. Ha ha!”

Dad puffed his chest up proudly, as though he was fishing for compliments.

“And that’s the story,” he said. “I wanted to make sure Aeges didn’t feel like his eye patch was a handicap, so I’m starting with a lesson on how the work of a blacksmith isn’t in the hands, but in the refinement of the heart and soul.”

He turned back around. Aeges was still posing with the hammer as dad had instructed. When I met his eyes, he looked a little bit guilty.

“Like I said... It just ended up this way...” he mumbled.

One of the Four Evil Kings, here, working as an apprentice blacksmith. Even though the whole thing had come about due to

one of dad's infamous misunderstandings, there was no way Aeges could have refused him. Through pure luck, the disciple had returned to his master after two thousand years.

"Ah! Aeges, your pose is lacking! That's not what I taught you, is it?" dad said.

"That can't be. I haven't moved a millimeter..." Aeges replied.

Dad laughed like he could see through everything, and pointed at Aeges's chest.

"You moved *here*. You need the heart of the world's best blacksmith."

"Th-The heart..."

It seemed like in this life, becoming a blacksmith would be much, much harder than becoming a nameless ghost.

§ 5. Voice from the Depths

After mom finished preparing lunch, we all sat around the large dining table.

"Hee hee! It's lovely to have so many guests today. There's still more dishes on the way, so eat up everyone!" Mom walked behind the Netherworld King with a skip in her step. "You dig in too, Aeges."

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you," Aeges said, bowing his head.

"Apple pie...apple pie..."

Zeshia had a fork and spoon grasped in each hand as she eyed the plate of apple pie, the look in her eyes much like that of a small animal hunting their prey.

"Ah! Don't even think about it, Zeshia," Eleonore chided. "Dessert comes *last*. You have to eat your actual meal first—vegetables make a good entrée, don't you think? Look, there's a nice salad."

Eleonore pointed at a large bowl of salad, redirecting Zeshia's attention there. Her young face fell in sadness.

"Salad...is *grass*...!" she protested.

"Grass has its own nutrients. It can taste good too!"

Zeshia shook her head frantically. "Zeshia...studied..."

"Ooh, good girl. What did you study?"

"Apple pie pastry...is made of wheat. Wheat...that gets kneaded and baked...turning into pie. It's amazing..."

Through her explanation, Zeshia tried to casually assert her desire to eat apple pie as a perfectly valid choice for mealtime.

"Yup yup, it's amazing, isn't it?" Eleonore said. "You studied well. As a reward, you get lots of *salad*."

Eleonore praised Zeshia while moving the salad bowl in front of her. Zeshia's expression turned to one of despair as she laid her eyes on the mountain of grass before her. The girl who fought valiantly on the battlefield was helpless before a bowl of salad.

"Wheat...is a plant..." Zeshia continued courageously. "Plants...are

vegetables!”

Her eyes sparkled as though she suddenly had an epiphany.

“Apples...are fruit. Vegetables and fruit...make salad!” She put on her best pleading look to convince Eleonore of her argument. “Apple pie...is a salad!”

“I see, I see. Do you like salad, Zeshia?”

“It’s my favorite...!”

Zeshia nodded firmly, clenching her fork and spoon.

“All right. Then I’ll grab lots for you.”

Zeshia’s eyes sparkled like the stars in the night sky as Eleonore served her a large portion of salad with a grin. The light rapidly faded from Zeshia’s eyes, replaced with clouded darkness.

“Here, it’s your favorite salad!”

“Zeshia’s favorite...became grass...”

Zeshia reluctantly started munching on the salad. Eleonore encouraged her with praise, earning herself a resentful glare from Zeshia.

“Peace-addled fools.” Aeges tore off a piece of his freshly baked bread and threw it into his mouth.

The bread was made from rye and was baked a little hard, creating a firm texture that got better with every bite. Overall, it was like tapping into a rich earth full of nutrients, which in a nutshell described the general thrust of mom’s homemade recipe. The Netherworld King picked up his cup of coffee and drank it with a furrow in his brow.

“Oh? What’s this, Aeges? Coffee not to your taste?” dad asked as he sliced his bacon with a knife.

“No, master. Of course not.”

“Really? That was quite the frown you had while drinking it.”

Dad munched on his bacon while the Netherworld King poured the coffee down the back of his throat—as though to avoid tasting it entirely.

“Bwa ha ha,” I laughed. “To think the fearsome Netherworld King possessed fussy taste buds.”

Aeges’s single eye glared at me.

“Fussy is an exaggeration. I merely find it bitter. And I see your

mushroom gratin obsession hasn't changed at all in the past two thousand years."

I scooped a mouthful of the melting mushroom gratin up with my spoon and carried it to my mouth. I enjoyed the sweet taste that spread across my tongue for a good few moments before setting my spoon down.

"No matter how much time passes, some things will never change," I replied.

"Such careless remarks. Have you forgotten how mushrooms nearly went extinct on mountains across Midhaze because you never bothered to hide your preferences?"

He was referring to two thousand years ago, when a number of demons who had discovered my favorite food overharvested mushrooms from the mountains. Some did it to bring them to me as an offering, some did it to eat themselves for good luck, and some did it as research, thinking mushrooms held the key to the Demon King's strength.

"You're destined to destroy what you love. Don't forget that," he warned.

"Me? Destined to destroy *mushrooms*?" I asked, laughter bubbling up my stomach. "Looks like I'll have to seal that mouth of yours to keep you from blathering nonsense."

I served some mushroom gratin onto a smaller plate and sent it to him with magic. The plate landed gently in Aeges's hand.

"Eat this," I said.

Aeges looked at me with a baffled expression. But he was soon drawn to the scent of the mushroom gratin in his hand, and he picked up his spoon and tried it.

"Your attempts to tempt me with food are futile," he said.

He bit down on the porcini, upon which its flavors delicately danced across his tongue.

"Th... This is...?!"

Aeges quietly closed his single eye and focused all his senses on the gratin. The crunch of the mushrooms simply amplified the gastronomic dance of temptation in his mouth.

"This unique chewy sensation, the rich but refreshing taste,"

Aeges murmured. “And this aftertaste that lingers for seemingly forever...”

Aeges’s eye widened in a look of shock.

“It couldn’t be. Is this the Midhaze porcini that went extinct?!”

“Did you think I simply allowed a little overharvesting to decimate an entire species of mushroom?” I replied.

“You sowed not only the seeds of your descendants but of mushrooms too?” he asked.

Two thousand years ago, I had gathered the spores of what few mushrooms remained in the mountains of Midhaze and spread them across a forest and mountain region suited for mushroom cultivation.

Food was a curious thing—magically created or enhanced food was always less nutritious than when it was naturally grown. And above all, it tasted far worse. Thus, I had waited for them to grow naturally.

“I made a Beno Ievun wall deep within a place no demon would dare go,” I explained. “After a thousand years, the world had forgotten that Midhaze was once renowned for their mushrooms. And so the location I chose became an untouched paradise for them.”

Thus, the mushrooms recovered from near extinction. Today they could be found all over Midhaze in plentiful numbers.

“In the midst of the Great War, you protected the peace of not only the people but mushrooms as well... As always, you are a terrifying man,” the Netherworld King said, bringing more of the mushroom gratin to his mouth.

His tender expression as he savored the dish told me everything I needed to know—he too was a fellow mushroom fan. That was why he had given me his harsh advice. It was a food he had thought he’d never taste again, for mushrooms held the taste of peace.

“Carve this flavor into your tongue,” I said. “For I am the Demon King, Anos Voldigoad.”

“What you’re saying sounds cool, but all you did was preserve some tasty mushrooms,” Eleonore pointed out. Sasha would normally interrupt here, but unfortunately, she was drunk today.

“Ugh,” she groaned. “No matter how much I take, it doesn’t get

any smaller.”

“That’s the sharing bowl, Sasha,” Misha said.

Sasha was earnestly shoveling a huge bowl of mashed potato into her mouth as Misha watched on.

“Why am I eating everyone’s share, then?” Sasha asked in reply.

“That’s what I’d like to ask,” Misha replied indifferently.

“Am I eating leftovers?!” Sasha exclaimed. She didn’t seem all that interested in listening.

“Urk,” she groaned, “It feels like a lot even for everyone...”

“That’s because it’s both breakfast and lunch,” I said.

“What do you mean?”

Sasha looked at me in confusion.

“I slept in and missed out on breakfast. So we’re eating breakfast alongside lunch.”

“How does that make sense?!”

Hmm. Is she finally sobering up?

“If that’s the case, since I’ve been a castle for two thousand years, I would have to eat two thousand years’ worth of meals to make up for what I missed!” she exclaimed.

Never mind.

“Isn’t that right, Misha?”

Misha blinked a few times. She didn’t reply right away; if she nodded, she ran the risk of Sasha convincing herself to eat two thousand years’ worth of food.

“You were on a diet,” she eventually said.

“Oh, I see. That’s why I shrank from a castle to this size. If I eat too much, I’ll rebound to the size of a castle again.”

I didn’t understand her logic, but it appeared to make sense to her.

Mom had filled a cup with red juice and brought it over to the table. “Aeges, can you drink this?”

“What’s this?” he asked.

“A juice made from tomato, lemon, and herbs,” mom said. “You ate a lot of the salad, so I think this may suit your taste.”

She had gone and made this juice because the Netherworld King hadn’t liked the coffee. Aeges stared at the cup in silence. No, he

wasn't just looking—was he smelling the herbs that were mixed into the drink? Either way, he didn't appear to be enjoying himself.

"Not a fan of tomato juice either?" mom asked.

"That's not it..."

Aeges tilted the cup and drank the specially made tomato juice. His eye widened faintly, and he placed the cup down.

"Madam..."

"Yes?"

"Ah... Nothing..." Aeges stuttered before pulling himself together. "Did you blend a number of herbs...?"

"Yup, that's right! Can you tell? They're herbs we grow in the garden. There's ten types, including some wildflowers. Oh, but they're wildflowers that can be used in juice and herbal tea safely!" mom said happily. "How does it taste?"

Aeges nodded. "It's very good..."

"Thank goodness! If there's anything you don't like about it, don't hesitate to say so."

Mom returned to the kitchen after saying that. Aeges watched her go with a fond gaze, as though he was remembering something.

Well, all's well that—

I paused.

"Anos?" Misha asked.

What was that? Something was ringing in my ears. It was an eerie sound mixed with white noise, echoing in my head.

"Do you believe..."

No. The voice was coming from the depths of my body—from the abyss of my source.

"Do you believe that this world is kind?" the unfamiliar voice, blended with white noise, asked.

I could detect a strong magic from it.

"Demon King of Tyranny, Anos Voldigoad."

My heart thudded once, and the ringing grew even louder.

"Contaminant of this world."

The unknown voice kept talking to me quietly.

"One day, you will have to choose. Will you become a cog of this world, or will you be excised from it entirely?"

The noise filled my head.
"Think about your answer carefully."

§ 6. Overlapping Magic Eyes

After the meal, mom began cleaning up while dad and Aeges returned to the workshop to resume blacksmith training.

The voice I had just heard was now gone. The ringing had also stopped. It had probably been sent through Leaks, but my Magic Eyes had been unable to detect where the magic originated from. It felt like it had echoed directly into my source.

My heart was still beating loudly—as though the magic flowing from my source had been greatly disturbed.

"So what are we going to do now?" Eleonore asked. "Keep searching through Sasha's drunk memories for traces of Abernyu?"

"It's our best lead at the moment," I said. "Shall we give her a bit more to drink?"

I looked over at Sasha, who turned away in embarrassment.

"What are you looking at?" she whined.

Without further complaint, I proceeded to draw a magic circle in order to make more wine.

"Wait," Misha suddenly interrupted.

Everyone looked at her curiously. She stared closely at me.

"Your magic is different from normal."

"Hmm?"

Eleonore leaned in to stare into my abyss with her Eyes. "She's right. Did you get a little stronger again, Anos?"

"It's merely a side effect of absorbing Graham's source," I replied. "The power hidden in my source is just working to destroy his nihility."

"Whoa, you have even *more* power hidden inside?" Eleonore said jokingly. She then turned to Misha. "But what's the problem with that, Misha?"

"Getting stronger isn't good," Misha answered simply.

"Huh? How come?" Eleonore asked, confused. "Getting stronger

makes it easier to take out the bad guys!”

Zeshia raised her hand excitedly. “Zeshia wants to get stronger too...!”

“Because the magic in Anos’s abyss may exceed how much our world can actually take,” Misha said.

Eleonore turned to me, looking completely dumbfounded.

“The stronger he gets, the harder it is to suppress his power,” Misha explained. “The harder it becomes, in other words, to stop his power from overflowing and destroying the world.”

Hmm. Misha’s Eyes had shown impressive growth. I knew she had remarkable potential when I first met her, but her ability to see into the abyss had already improved beyond belief.

“If he becomes too strong, he won’t be able to hold back that power,” she said, peering at me as though she could look straight into my heart. “Right?”

I nodded. “My magic increased more than I expected, so I’m struggling to control it a little. But I’ll get used to it soon enough.”

“Your source was a mess when we were in the underground world,” she commented.

Back then, overcoming Egil Grone Angdroa had sent my source into disarray. I needed a little time for my source to settle into its new shape after conquering destruction, but I hadn’t had that luxury while we were underground.

“I’ve already calmed down this time,” I said.

Misha nodded.

“Your source has a pretty shape now,” she said quietly. “But it’s less stable than before.”

Oh? She can see even that?

“Perhaps it’s like having a growth spurt,” I said. “I can reach things I couldn’t reach before, so if I’m not careful I can break things by accident.”

I normally used my magic against myself in order to control it. When the overall power of my magic changed, the balance I’d maintained needed to be adjusted, which could take quite the effort.

Right now, the magic threatening to overflow from my incomplete control was being held back by my source. As a result, my source

was slightly wounded, and the recent ringing in my ears was a side effect of that.

But I have no clue what that voice was.

"Being too strong comes with its own struggles," I said.

"I can help again," Misha offered.

"You were very helpful last time, but the situation now is different."

Misha nodded.

"I straightened the distorted shape last time," she said without hesitation. "This time, I'll help you suppress your magic."

"You can suppress my power?" I asked.

"Yeah."

Misha stared into my abyss without averting her gaze. It seemed she had no intention of backing down.

"Don't believe me?" she asked.

I chuckled. "I'll leave it to you."

Misha smiled happily and looked at Eleonore. "Help me."

"Of course!"

"Zeshia will help too...!" Zeshia said, clenching her fists eagerly.

"In Anos's room," Misha said. She began walking, and we all ended up in my room on the second floor.

"Sit." Misha pointed at my bed.

I sat as directed, and watched as Misha walked over to kneel beside me on the bed. She touched a hand to my head and cast Fless to make my body float, then slowly moved me to lie face-up. My head ended up on her lap.

"Show me your depths," she said in a soft voice.

I dispelled my anti-magic wards and revealed my source.

"Hmm?" Eleonore hopped onto the bed and leaned her face towards my body. Magic was focused in her Eyes, making them glow with light.

"I can tell it's an amazing amount of magic, but I can't tell what's happening at all," Eleonore remarked.

It seemed Eleonore's Magic Eyes were unable to see into the abyss of my source even without my wards up.

"Anos is using his magic to hold back the magic that naturally

overflows from himself," Misha explained.

Of course, it wasn't as simple as that. While some magic was trying to flow out of my body, there were easily over a hundred other ways magic could flow as it circulated in the depths of my source. It was the constant change of that flow that created disorder.

"I don't really get it, but will it be okay?" Eleonore asked.

Misha nodded. "Make a fake source and place it as close to Anos's source as you can."

"Got it! Sorry if you get a little wet, Anos!"

Runes appeared around Eleonore, and holy water started flowing from them. To avoid getting Misha and me wet, the water traced the shape of her body instead of taking the usual bubble shape.

"I'm going to touch you," Eleonore warned before touching my chest. She was trying to cast Eleonore magic as close to my source as possible.

"You can even stab me if you want," I said.

"I-I wouldn't do that! There's no anti-magic up, so I can just do it from here!"

A magic circle was drawn, and a fake source appeared within my body. However, it immediately began to decay.

"Make it as strong as you can," Misha advised. "Placing it besides Anos's source guarantees that it will be destroyed fast."

"Got it..."

The light of Aske gathered around Eleonore. Zeshia clenched her fists spiritedly.

"What should Zeshia do...?"

"How about cheer for Eleonore?" Misha suggested.

Zeshia nodded. "You can do it... Do your best...!"

Thanks to Zeshia's support, the light of Aske glowed brighter.

"Did it work?!" she asked happily.

"Yup yup, keep going just like that," Eleonore said.

Zeshia looked triumphant as she waved her arms and cheered.

"You can do it...! You can do it...!"

"Hmm, this is my limit. I'm guessing it'll last three days at most," Eleonore said.

“That’s okay,” Misha replied. She stared inside with her Magic Eyes of Creation, using the power of her Eyes to alter the fake source Eleonore had made.

“Anos has so much magic, it makes precise control much more complex,” Misha murmured.

Even if I could control my power in units as small as one in ten thousand, if the total was too large, I would simply be unable to control finer amounts of magic.

For a simplified example, suppose my source outputted magic at a power quantified as 10. I couldn’t just create an equivalent power of 10 to suppress it—I had to first make power equivalent to 10,010 and 10,000 cancel each other out, then use the remaining 10 to control the initial output of 10. As Misha had said, the process was a little complex. It was fine when the hypothetical power level was one or two digits, but when that number became infinite, it was safer to just round out the numbers and make my source bear the remaining burden. Small leaks did no harm to my body; the biggest risk was in those small leaks creating a large opening for more power to flow out.

“I created a support source that can assume finer control of the magic.”

Misha’s gaze stroked my abyss, bringing the support source closer to my source. As its name implied, it was a source that worked to assist my magic in canceling out smaller amounts of power. It could add or subtract small amounts of magic, and it could block leaks from happening. But as Eleonore had said, the support source was placed such that it was constantly exposed to my source of destruction. Inevitably, it would be erased.

Hopefully, I’d be able to control this power before that happened.

“How is it?” Misha asked.

“Hmm. Feels a lot better. Well done,” I said.

“That’s great.” Misha smiled. “I’ll adjust the support source a little more.”

“Um, Misha... Is there anything I can do?” Sasha, who had been excluded from everything so far, asked in a grumbling voice. She was standing by herself away from the bed.

Misha tilted her head with a troubled look. “Emotional support?”

“I know, I know. I’m the Goddess of Destruction! I can’t do anything but destroy!” Sasha said. She whined like a child throwing a tantrum.

“I’m weaker than Anos, so I can’t do anything—”

She closed her mouth mid-sentence.

“Sasha?” Misha asked, but Sasha was silent. It was as though she was on the verge of remembering something.

“Anos...”

She slowly walked up to me and brought her face close to mine. Her golden hair swayed, brushing against my nose. The Magic Eyes of Destruction were visible in her pupils.

“I can do it too, I think.”

Magic circles appeared in my eyes as she stared into them. They were the same Magic Eyes of Destruction as her.

“Hmm. What did you do, Sasha?” I asked.

“I broke down the power rampaging inside your source through your Magic Eyes of Destruction,” she said, staring into the abyss of my source with her Eyes.

I checked for myself and saw the magic blockage and disorder within me was destroyed, as she said, making everything flow smoothly again.

“I think I may remember... No, I *do* remember now,” she said in a daze. “Just a little, though.”

“Of the past?” I asked.

She nodded, then blinked a few times and drew the magic circle for Leaks.

“Look inside my head. Abernyu’s memories are here.”

Her eyes glowed a pale blue—the same color as the Erial. Through her Leaks, the past replayed itself in my head.

§ 7. Sky of Destruction

The Mythical Age.

On this day, a noble war was being fought. Demon soldiers aimed at the sun, prepared to sacrifice their lives for the great cause of regaining the skies of Dilhade.

The blue sky was covered by the storm clouds of destruction.

"Prepare to fire Jio Graze," one demon soldier said.

"Roger," another replied. "Deploying magic circles. Gates 1 to 10 opened."

"Gates 11 to 20 opened."

"Gates 21 to 30 opened, as well as all gates to 100!"

Far above the ground, the Sky Fortress Zeridheavens made from Iris soared through the air. The enormous moving fort had been made by Farris Noin, a rare creation magic master, over the span of a hundred years.

Magic circle turrets were deployed before the fortress one after another.

"Second wave incoming!"

Moments after a voice called in warning, a shadow fell over the fortress. Shadows shaped like winged angels surrounded the Sky Fortress, covering it in darkness—they were the Keepers of Destruction, Eguz De Rafan. Their duty was to protect the order of destruction, but it was rare to see this many of them at the same time.

There were two reasons for this. First of all, this battle was taking place at the closest entrance to the Divine Realm. The second reason was that not only was the Demon King of Tyranny aboard the Sky Fortress but also the ship itself was headed towards the greatest order of destruction in this world: the Goddess of Destruction, Abernyu.

"Those who disturb order shall not be forgiven," a shadow angel

said, spreading its wings. "*Domios*."

Swaying shadow mirages appeared. With a shrill sound, the upper part of Zeridheavens shattered to pieces. Automatic repair magic immediately restored it, but the Domios cast by the Keepers of Destruction continued to bare their fangs and tear apart the Sky Fortress. An intense explosion echoed through the sky, shaking even the earth below.

"Gwoooooh!"

"C-Captain! Any more damage and the whole ship will break apart!"

Under the concentrated fire of Domios, the demon elites were unable to do anything but scream. There was only a single man on the bridge—the one behind the helm—who was unbothered.

"Beautiful. Perhaps to be expected from the gods of destruction. But still. For the Sky Fortress Zeridheavens, my masterwork made with my entire soul, to shatter so *gracefully*..." Farris said, Magic Eyes sparkling. "Everything refined is beautiful. When it comes to the Keepers of Order, their mere existence is magnificent. However..."

The creation magic master smiled elegantly.

"There is an art, too, in deliberately *destroying* that beautiful order. Zeridheavens is my life's work. Even the gods themselves, in all their mysterious beauty, cannot fell it completely."

The bombardment of Domios continued until the repair magic of the Sky Fortress could no longer keep up. Pieces of Zeridheavens began to crumble and fall, yet it remained airborne, even accelerating, as if the decreased armor were a boon.

"Now soar, Zeridheavens. To the other end of the sky!" Farris commanded.

"R-Roger. You guys heard the captain! Fly with all you've got!" a demon soldier shouted.

"Haaaaaaaaah!"

Through Farris's Gyze, the demons casting their group magic ignored the gods' attacks and increased Zeridheavens's speed even more. The Sky Fortress shot through the sky like an arrow of light, leaving behind the angels of shadow in the blink of an eye.

"Third, fourth wave broken through!"

"T-Target perceived! Entering visible airspace!"

The demons on board raised their voices. The shadow of a sinister, enormous sun came into view.

"Target spotted, eight thousand to the front. It's the Sun of Destruction, Sarjieldenav!"

"*Beautiful*..." Farris muttered, overwhelmed with emotion. The shadow of the sun suddenly turned deeper, painting the sky in ominous darkness.

"Sarjieldenav has started to change. There's an estimated three minutes until it completely manifests," a demon reported.

"We've finally reached the finale. Bring us right up to the dark sun by the time it emits its rays. Fly with grace," Farris ordered.

"Roger!"

Zeridheavens charged towards the radiating Sun of Destruction.

"Fifth wave incoming!"

More Keepers of Destruction stood in their way.

"You may not pass," they said in their eerie voice.

Shadow mirages swayed in the airspace. Like a barrier of destruction, a wall of Domios was deployed to obstruct their way to the Sun of Destruction.

"Show the gods the beauty of our fire," Farris said.

"Roger! Fire all Jio Graze!"

Jet-black suns emerged from the hundred magic gates.

"Release our melody of beautiful flames."

"Fireeeeee!"

All the Jio Graze fired simultaneously at the barrier of Domios. Black suns collided with shadow mirages, blowing them up one after another. The sky turned into a sea of black flames.

"There, now our path is open. Now we have a fiery bridge to the sun."

"Captain, don't tell me... Are we...?"

One of the subordinates gulped nervously. Farris beamed gracefully.

"Be beautiful."

"R-Roger! You heard him, you lot! The areas where Jio Grazes

explode are where the Domios is the weakest. In other words, they're holes! Keep firing and chaaarge!"

Zeridheavens sped forwards, firing Jio Graze at the same time. Within the barrier of Domios, the exploding suns formed a single path for them to proceed on. It was just like a bridge of fire, as Farris had described.

The Sky Fortress flew straight into the burning black flames. Although the Domios were hindered by the Jio Graze, Zeridheavens was still caught by their black flames. The ship was half destroyed by now, irreversibly hurtling towards its end.

"Go. Cross the dangerous path of flames, into the sky of destruction. With grace!"

Despite the burning flames, the Sky Fortress flew on. The shadow of the sun that was shining with darkness was almost within reach when Zeridheavens suddenly began to decelerate.

"Is that...? It couldn't be!" a demon soldier exclaimed.

"It's the black rays of Sarjieldenav!" said another.

"How?! It hasn't fully manifested yet!"

Farris stared at the shadow of the sun with his Magic Eyes. "It seems...the nearer we get to Sarjieldenav, the more we are affected by its light of destruction, even before it actually manifests."

A loud sound echoed through the air, shaking the Sky Fortress fiercely. At some point, the Keepers of Destruction had wrapped themselves in the black rays of Sarjieldenav and surrounded the airship. The angels of shadow held divine bows and fired arrows of black rays at Zeridheavens, easily breaking through the airship's sturdy wards and boring holes in the body of the ship.

"R-Repairs cannot keep up!"

"Such vibrancy," Farris commented. "Under the black rays of Sarjieldenav, the Keepers of Destruction are even more magnificent. This is the beauty of nature!"

That was Farris's analysis of the situation. Under the rain of black arrows, the Sky Fortress struggled to move forwards, threatening to fall at any moment.

"G-Gwaaaaaaaaaaahhh!"

"The bottom of the ship is heavily damaged! We're falling!"

“C-Captain! We can’t go on any further...!”

“We’ll die in vain like this! S-Signal for retreat!”

Even with Fless cast through group magic, Zeridheavens was barely managing to stay airborne. It looked like it was moments away from breaking into pieces midair.

“Hmm. Good work, Farris.”

A voice echoed through the bridge of the Sky Fortress. Even the demon soldiers brave enough to take on the gods were awed, and at once silence engulfed the chaos of the bridge. The man who sat on the throne behind the soldiers was the Demon King, Anos Voldigoad. His right-hand man, Shin Reglia, knelt beside him.

“Here is enough. Be proud that you’ve done your duty,” Anos said.

He stood up, with Shin following behind him. But when he started to walk forwards, Farris stepped forwards to block him.

“I must be mistaken,” Farris said. “Surely the almighty Demon King isn’t asking me to put my brush down midway, is he?”

Shin’s glare deepened at his words.

“Your orders, my lord, were for me to transport you to the Sun of Destruction,” Farris continued. “So that you could preserve your magic to take down the Goddess of Destruction within Sarjieldenav.”

“Watch your mouth, Farris,” Shin warned with a sharp look. “If you cannot accept my liege’s compassion, your head will soon fly next.” Anos held a hand out to silence him.

Farris returned the Demon King’s gaze without faltering.

“Do you wish to die?” Anos asked.

“With all due respect, my lord, this world was not made for artists. I did not want to draw flames in the sky, ice in the sea, or an airship for war. All I wanted was to paint on a canvas.”

Farris held a single brush in his hand, filling it with magic.

“The beautiful peace you strive for is the only way I may survive.”

Zeridheavens shook as more arrows struck it.

“The engine room has been struck! Damage to the fixed magic circle at sixty-eight percent! We can’t last any longer!” a demon shouted.

“In order to bring Zeridheavens up into this airspace, many

demon soldiers were burned away in the rays of that sun. Many lives were sacrificed so that my lord may meet the Goddess of Destruction in peak form," Farris said with a soft smile. "The war will end, yes? Once the Goddess of Destruction has fallen, will the world be at peace?"

"I do not go back on my word," Anos said.

The creation magic master smiled. "Then please take your seat, my lord, and give me your order. In this sky of destruction, give the order for me to paint a picture of peace."

Shin turned so that his back was to Farris. The Demon King returned to the throne and sat back down.

"Take me there, Farris," Anos said. "Your ship soars the most beautifully in all of Dilhade."

"Make sure you keep your eyes on it." Farris moved his magic brush, drawing a magic circle as he asked out loud, "Beautiful soldiers of the Demon King, what is our goal?"

"To bring our lord to the Sun of Destruction!" one demon answered.

"Throughout this war, our comrades have been killed, destroyed, and erased by the hands of humans, spirits, and gods. And the root of all evil is the order of destruction that shines in the sky over there—the ominous sun, Sarjieldenav."

Farris raised the morale of his subordinates with his words.

"So what do we have to fear? Once that sun falls, all who we could not save will be saved. Our tragic farewells will become things of the past to our beloved descendants."

Everyone on the bridge strengthened their resolve.

"The beautiful Demon King has given us his order to carry him. Let us paint the sight of him in the sky!"

"At once!"

"For the greatest wish of demonkind!"

"For a beautiful peace!"

"Let's go! Muster all you have left!"

A giant magic circle spread around the Sky Fortress Zeridheavens.

"*Astrastella*."

Zeridheavens spread its enormous wings. The Astrastella cast

through group magic had reconstructed the ship, giving it a new shape. But the shadow angels continued to fire their arrows of black sunlight, destroying the Sky Fortress almost as fast as it could repair itself.

No—the parts of the ship destroyed by the arrows couldn't be repaired, so it was actually creating itself anew. Each time they were attacked, each time the ship was hit and came apart, Farris created an entirely new ship on the spot.

This was the creation magic of Farris Noin, the man who, in an age of war, dreamed of art.

"S-Sarjieldenav has almost manifested!"

"The Keepers won't get out of the way! But if we detour, we won't make it in time!"

Farris spoke over all of them. "Be beautiful."

"R-Roger! Chaaaaaarge!"

Zeridheavens charged at the shadow angels before them without a care. While the Keepers of Destruction scattered, the effect of their order took a huge toll on the magic circle for Astrastella. It began to break apart.

"G-Gwaaah!"

Even as the ship gradually fell apart, the bow of Zeridheavens became a blade that sliced open the wall of shadows.

"Gooooooooooo!"

The remaining gates fired Jio Grazes in unison, creating a small opening that revealed the Sun of Destruction.

"Now!"

With a loud boom, the Sky Fortress shook heavily and decelerated. Eguz De Rafan had managed to completely destroy the Astrastella spell circle, preventing new versions of the ship from being created. Without its wings, Zeridheavens was swallowed by the mirages of destruction and fell from the sky. As it did, a voice echoed.

"My lord. The rest..."

"Well done."

Demon King Anos was floating in the sky. He had crossed the wall of Eguz de Rafan and was able to position himself before

Sarjieldenav thanks to the brief opening Zeridheavens had created.

"I will grant your wish, Farris," Anos said. He made straight for the Sun of Destruction, Shin behind him, their backs turned on the falling ship.

"My liege," Shin's voice called sharply.

The enormous shadow inverted, and a sun of darkness appeared. Sarjieldenav, the Sun of Destruction, released a cold radiance that thrust everything in the world towards death and destruction.

"*Ateness*," Anos said.

"Understood."

A magic circle was drawn on Shin's body, transforming him. Rays of darkness covered his body, blurring his silhouette and condensing his shape. The darkness eventually settled into a sword with no guard, only a straight blade that shone along one side, extending from an uncovered hilt. It was a demon sword.

"The Disastrous God Slayer, Shin Reglia."

The Sun of Destruction, Sarjieldenav, released its black rays of ruin. The sky was covered in darkness, and waves of destruction spread across the earth.

The Disastrous God Slayer flashed as it sliced through that darkness. In a single breath, Anos's sword carved a magic circle in the darkness.

"*Goldora Egolonoia*."

Another flash could be seen as the Disastrous God Slayer swung down towards the magic circle, splitting the incoming rays into two and clearing away the darkness. Sarjieldenav began to change back into a shadow, as though to hide itself.

"You won't get away."

Anos leaped through the air and charged towards the Sun of Destruction, thrusting the demon sword into the shadow of the enormous sun. The order of destruction raged wildly with an eerie creaking noise. Leaving the sword pierced deep into the sun, Anos grabbed the small opening he had made, prying it open with the pure strength of his hands. Inside the sun was a deep darkness that even Anos's Eyes couldn't see into, a place filled with the kind of destruction that would instantly erase anyone who came inside. It

was for this alone that Anos had needed the airship, had needed to preserve his energy and arrive in peak condition.

Anos leaped into the darkness without a moment's hesitation. He suppressed the order of destruction attacking him with his mauve Magic Eyes as he intently moved forwards. As he went deeper into the intense darkness, he began to lose his sense of direction. But regardless of his disorientation, there was no mistaking the enormous magic power in the center of the sun, so Anos headed straight towards it.

Just then, he heard something—a faint voice, the sound of someone crying. The closer he got to the center, the louder that voice grew, until a clear silhouette could be seen.

Thus, Anos reached his destination. Sitting in the center of the darkness was an awfully powerful magic. And from that single condensed point of magic radiated the power to destroy the entire world. Yet despite that absurd amount of power, all that could be seen in the darkness was a small figure—a black shadow somehow darker than the surrounding darkness.

When the Demon King approached the shadow, it inverted to reveal a girl, her long golden hair swaying gently around her. Another sob could be heard. The girl was hugging her knees, trembling, her face hidden as she hunched over herself. Even as Anos approached, she didn't try to look at him.

"Name yourself," Anos said.

But the girl remained curled up as though she hadn't heard him. Anos reached out and touched her chin, slowly raising her face. Divine Eyes crossed gazes with the Demon King's Magic Eyes.

"Ah..."

The power of destruction flowed from her Divine Eyes. Evil magic power rampaged as it furiously attacked Anos.

"What is this, a staring contest?" he asked.

He glared back at the destructive gaze and destroyed its fangs in return.

The girl's eyes widened.

"I will ask again. What is your name?"

There was a beat of silence before a voice echoed.

“Abernyu,” she answered quietly.

It was the answer Anos had been expecting.

“I am the order that governs destruction, the Goddess of Destruction, Abernyu.”

In Abernyu’s red eyes, swollen from crying, magic circles appeared.

“Who are you?” she asked.



§ 8. How to Recall Memories

"Huh?" Sasha muttered to herself.

Back in my bedroom, the pale blue glow of her Magic Eyes faded and returned to their regular blue. The past she had been sending through Leaks came to an abrupt stop, and all I could see was the girl staring straight into my face.

"Hmm... That's weird, I thought I'd remember more than that..." Sasha scratched her head and hummed in thought. But it seemed she couldn't recall any more than that.

"Either way, what Anos did to Abernyu back then was the same as what I did, no?"

Sasha's Magic Eyes of Destruction appeared as she looked into my Eyes. Her destruction magic reached my depths through our eye contact, intervening with my source and destroying the power that was flowing out. Of course, it was impossible for her in her current state to erase *all* the magic flowing from me, but the part she did erase helped me control the rest with more ease.

"Didn't seem like she was suffering from trying to control an abundance of power," I said, thinking. "Looks like the order the gods govern is not actually theirs to control at all."

"Huh? What does that mean?" Eleonore asked.

I slowly sat up before explaining.

"For example, the Heavenly Father is the order that births order itself. He may be able to produce Keepers out of his own will, but even he isn't free to produce gods that govern other orders. Order would completely fall apart if he did that."

"So Abernyu couldn't control the order of destruction?" Misha asked.

"Yes, pretty much. Most gods perceive their out-of-control order as their own will, but that might not have been the case for Abernyu."

In the past Sasha had just shown me, Abernyu had been crying. Had she been lamenting her own order of destruction? I hadn't seen enough to say for sure, but if she and Sasha were indeed the same person, then such a thing wouldn't be a stretch to assume.

"Can you remember anything, Anos?" Misha asked.

"I don't remember ever having a proper conversation with Abernyu. I've probably lost those memories."

Militia had probably taken my memories and created new ones to make everything consistent, but for what purpose? I still couldn't figure out why she'd do that.

"I want to know what happens next..." Sasha mumbled.

Misha stared at her.

"What's wrong, Misha?" Sasha asked curiously, noticing her gaze.

"Are you sober now?"

"Huh? Ah, yeah... Now that you mention it, my head's totally clear now... I don't remember anything after leaving the house though, did I say anything weird?"

Misha pondered her reply.

"You were acting like Abernyu," she eventually said.

"So my memories really did come back through the power of alcohol? How can such a stupid thing be true?" Sasha looked unhappy with that answer.

"But you really did remember," Eleonore pointed out.

"Aren't you normally meant to *forget* while drinking? Why did I *remember*..."

"It wasn't only the power of alcohol. Just now, you used your Magic Eyes of Destruction to break down the destructive power overflowing from me. Was that action not brought on by Abernyu's memories?" I said.

Sasha considered the question. Meanwhile, Eleonore raised an index finger.

"Could it mean she regains Abernyu's most important memories by seeing or doing similar things?" she suggested.

"Militia also said to trace her emotions to recall her memories," I agreed.

Sasha clutched her head in her hands. "Um. Then, let's say that's

true. What will we do now? I don't know what those memories are."

"In other words, this is the fastest way." I then stood up, drew a magic circle, and took out the same bottle of wine from earlier, as well as creating a glass to pour some of the wine into.

"Drink," I said.

"I've been drinking since lunch... It feels like I'm doing something bad," Sasha grumbled but gulped down the wine anyway. Her expression turned drowsy. "Another!"

"Don't drink too much." I poured more wine into her glass.

"Oh, don't say that. If I drink a lot, I may be able to remember myself."

"Hmm? Which perspective is she speaking from?" Eleonore asked.

"Half Sasha, half Abernyu?" guessed Misha.

Eleonore and Misha looked at each other in confusion. But Zeshia raised her hand and declared with confidence,
"She's...Sashavenue...!"

Sasha finished drinking the wine and held her hand up to her head. "Ah...!"

"Remember anything, Sasha?" Eleonore asked.

"My head hurts." She swayed unsteadily as she held her glass out at me. "For now, I'll drink to heal myself."

"She's turned from Sashavenue to an alcoholic!" Eleonore said.

I guessed things weren't going to be that easy. For now, I poured more Demon King wine into Sasha's glass. She drank it happily.

"Say, can I go outside for a bit?" she asked.

"Sure," I replied.

Sasha left the room on unsteady feet and went downstairs. We followed behind her as she left the house, and watched over her as she aimlessly wandered the streets of Midhaze.

"Hmm... I don't think we'll find Abernyu's memories just by walking around like this," Eleonore said.

Zeshia clenched her fists. "Zeshia...has an idea...!"

"Oh? What's the idea?" Eleonore asked.

"We'll use magic that lets us find memories by accident."

"Good girl, Zeshia! It's Anos's time to shine!" Eleonore said jokingly.

Misha tilted her head and looked up at me. “Is there such a thing?”

“If Sasha could provide any better hints, yes,” I said.

There was no convenient spell that could trace memories their owner couldn’t remember.

“But, let’s see. I may not be able to do something as direct as that, but I could work out something similar.”

I grabbed Sasha’s hand right as she tripped over seemingly nothing and almost fell on her face.

“I’d like to go see Reno. Do you mind, Sasha?” I asked her.

“The Great Spirit Reno?” Sasha looked at me blankly, as though her mind was muddled with Abernyu’s. But that look quickly changed to a smile. “Sure! It’s been a while.”

I drew the circle for Gatom.

“Oh! Right, we haven’t tried spirits! Are we going to ask Reno if there are any spirits related to memories?” Eleonore asked.

“What spirits are truly capable of has been mired by rumors and legends, but there may still be one that can help her trace her memories,” I replied.

Even if there was a spirit that could revive memories, it probably wouldn’t be able to restore my or Sasha’s memories. If my memories could have been recovered that way, they would have been recoverable with Eviy too.

But if there was a spirit that made things easier to find, for example, or increased one’s luck for a short amount of time, it could be of use.

“Let’s go.”

We all linked hands before I used Gatom. The world turned white before fading to reveal the land at the outskirts of Midhaze, an area practically overflowing with life and nature. In front of us, partially obscured by plants and flowers, was a large tree as big as a house. It was the residence of the Great Spirit Reno and was where Reno, Shin, and Misa lived together.

She sometimes returned to Aharthern, but I could sense her magic here right now.

“Someone’s there,” Misha said, pointing in the direction of the

large tree.

There was a boy and girl standing there. The boy had white hair, pale blue eyes, and an androgynous face, while the girl had naturally unruly chestnut hair. They were, of course, Lay and Misa. The two of them were gazing up at the large tree residence.

"I'm a little nervous," Lay said.

"I-It'll be *fine*! Father said he had work today, so only mother is around," Misa said, trying to ease Lay's nerves.

"Besides, mother's always on my side," she added. "We're just going to have tea together. If anything happens, I'll do something about it. Relax, Lay! It'll be fine!"

Lay chuckled and gave her a refreshing smile. "That's very reassuring."

After that, they entered the large tree together. Sasha, who had been leaning forwards to stare intently at them, whirled around to look back at us.

"They're greeting the parents for marriage?!"

§ 9. The Hospitality of the Reglia Family

I glanced at the tree residence and turned to the others. “Let’s come back another time. We shouldn’t interrupt them.”

Beside me, Misha nodded in agreement.

“I think that’s for the best too. Though I do wonder what they’ll talk about...” Eleonore mumbled.

“Zeshia won’t interrupt either... Zeshia can endure curiosity...!”

Misha patted Zeshia on the head in approval. Zeshia smiled proudly.

“We’ll go see Reno later. Let’s go where you want to go first, Sasha.”

“Got it!” Sasha replied energetically, then marched straight for the large tree.

“Sasha?! Not that way!”

“That’s cheating...!”

Eleonore and Zeshia both raised their voices in protest.

I caught up to her and grabbed her hand. “I said we’d see Reno *later*.”

“But I’m worried about Lay and Misa. I need to see if they can give their greetings properly,” Sasha argued.

She resumed her march towards the Reglia residence, but my grip on her hand meant she couldn’t move anywhere.

“Why is it so far...” she muttered.

It wasn’t far at all.

“It’s not like they’re going into battle,” I said.

“Ugh... What, is it wrong to be worried?”

“What are you so worried about?”

“Well, if Reno doesn’t accept Lay, their love will come to an end. That’s so tragic. Their love should come true!”

Hmm. That was a surprisingly complex statement. Was it just drunken rambling, or were these words coming from feelings from two thousand years ago? Both?

"I agree," I ended up saying, "but there's no way Reno *wouldn't* accept Lay."

"Hmph... The Demon King is heartless..."

Magic circles appeared in Sasha's eyes as she glared at me. I offset her dangerous Eyes with my own.

"I guess it can't be helped. Do as you please."

"Yup! I will!"

I released her hand and she rushed off on unsteady feet towards the large tree. She slowly raised her hand to knock on the door, then froze in thought.

"Say, Misha. We'd be interrupting if we entered normally, right?" she asked, turning around to look at Misha.

"Mm."

"Can you see inside?"

I turned my Magic Eyes onto the tree. But my vision was covered with a mist, preventing me from seeing inside. It was the power of a spirit.

"Hmm. As expected of the Great Spirit Reno's residence," I said. "Not even my Eyes can see through it."

"Well, is there a hole anywhere we can look through?" Sasha asked.

Sasha walked around the outside of the tree. There were a number of windows along the trunk, but we'd be noticed instantly if we tried to peek through those.

Should I use Lynel and Najira?

"Troubled?"

Out of nowhere, a familiar voice could be heard. Mist drifted in front of me and took the shape of small fairies.

"Peeping?"

"Trying to watch?"

"Greeting the parents!"

"Curious?"

They were the mischief-loving fairies, titi, and they flew around

Sasha happily.

"I want to peep!" Sasha said boldly.

The titi giggled.

"Come."

"Come, come."

"You can peep."

"It's our specialty!"

The titi flew up towards the top of the tree. We followed them through overgrown branches using Fless.

"Open a hole!"

"Sneaky, sneaky."

"Thunk thunk thunk."

"Boom boom boom."

The titi chattered happily as they stabbed a nail into the tree and used tiny sticks to hammer it into the wood. Sasha watched them curiously.

"If you do that, you'll just end up with a nail in the tree, no?" she asked.

The fairies giggled.

"Surprise!"

"Stab more nails into the tree."

"Then you get..."

"Ta-da!"

In the part of the tree they had hammered a circle of nails into, water appeared.

"What's this?" Sasha asked.

"A puddle window!"

"If you put your face in the water, you can see inside."

"Try it!"

"Just like this!"

The titi placed their faces against the water. Sasha imitated them and did the same. Her feet kicked about for a bit, and her entire body fell into the puddle with a splash.

"Zeshia wants to try too...!"

With sparkling eyes, Zeshia brought her face to the water. Her body sank into the puddle after Sasha.

"I suppose we should go as well," I said.

We followed them in the order of me, Misha, and Eleonore, bringing our faces to the water and falling in. I had no idea how it worked, but the inside of the puddle was oddly spacious. Sasha had plastered herself to the bottom of the puddle window.

"Ah, it's Lay and Misa," Eleonore said to me through Leaks.

The bottom of the puddle was a transparent barrier, like glass. Through it, we had a clear view of what was happening inside the house.

"Can they see us from there?" Misha asked the titi.

"It's okay!"

"Probably?"

"Most likely!"

"Hiding is our specialty!" the titi answered.

Well, it didn't seem like Lay had noticed us. As long as nothing unexpected happened, it should be fine. I moved next to sit next to Sasha and observed what was happening in the house unfold.

The interior of the large tree was just like a regular house, but with furnishings a typical house in Dilhade wouldn't have; plants grew along the walls as decoration, with a cocoon-like bed, an incense clock that accurately told the time, and shelves made of crystal, among other things.

At a large wooden table, seated on stump stools, were Lay and Misa.

"Um... She said she'd be right back, but she's taking her time..."

Misa's mind seemed to be focused on another room. She glanced over at the door multiple times, shaking her legs while crossing and uncrossing her arms restlessly.

"Nervous?" Lay asked.

"Ah..." Misa looked down. "Sorry... After everything I said to you, I'm the one who can't calm down."

She laughed weakly. Seeing that, Sasha clenched her fists.

"Do your best, Misa. I'm on your side."

She seemed to really feel for Misa.

"If things take a turn for the worse, I'll help with my Magic Eyes of Destruction."

What good would destroying things do?

"But thanks to that, I've relaxed," Lay then said.

"Huh?" Misa looked at Lay, confused.

"Because you're being so cute," he said with a chuckle.

"That's..." Misa turned bright red and hid her face. "Wh-What am I going to do now... I can't show my mother my face like this..."

"Let's show her our usual selves." Under the table, Lay gently held Misa's hand. "There's no need to put up a front. We'll be okay."

"Ah... Um..." Misa slowly raised her face and lost herself in Lay's eyes. "Okay," she said.

Her nerves seemed to have eased a bit, as she was smiling.

"It's strange. When you say it, it really feels like everything will be okay," she commented.

"I feel the same. When I'm with you, I can do anything," Lay replied.

"Aha ha... That's a little embarrassing. But I'm happy to hear it," Misa said, blushing as she held his hand in both of hers.

"Yes, that's right! Ease Misa's nerves. The lines are a little smug, but I'll forgive you for today, Lay," Sasha commented with a condescending attitude.

"I love you," Lay said.

Misa grinned bashfully at his direct words, merely nodding in response.

"Okay now, that's enough. Don't seduce my adorable daughter too much!"

Misa startled, immediately releasing Lay's hand to look over at a woman with blue-green hair the color of the ocean and amber eyes. It was Misa's mother and Shin's wife, the Great Spirit Reno.

"She's here...and with an ambush. Endure it, Lay..."

In Sasha's head, the greeting was more appropriate for a battlefield than a meeting with parents.

"I-It's not like that! I was just nervous, so Lay was trying to calm me down. He didn't have any ulterior, um..."

Misa got to her feet and desperately tried to explain things to Reno.

"Calm down, I was just joking," Reno said.

"Ah... Right. Of course... Ah ha ha."

Misa laughed awkwardly.

"Don't fall for it, Misa! She says it's a joke, but she's just waiting for the right moment to launch a follow-up attack! You're the only one who can shield Lay."

Sasha held her breath in suspense.

"Hi again." Reno smiled at Lay, who had gotten to his feet. "It's been a while. You haven't come over to visit at all, but I suppose Kanon never came over for fun either. That's just the kind of person you are, isn't it?"

"We did meet at the Demon King Reordination Ceremony though," Lay pointed out.

"No excuses. We couldn't have a proper conversation, so it doesn't count."

She smiled gently at Lay, who had a strained smile of his own. Meanwhile, Misa was looking between the two of them curiously.

"Huh? Mother, have you met Lay before?" Misa asked.

"The spirits helped the humans fight against the Demon King's Army two thousand years ago," Reno said. "Hero Kanon was the one who came to Aharthern on behalf of the humans and asked for our assistance. I spoke to him back then."

"We've also fought together against Anos before," Lay added.

"That one was close. I was sure we had lost," Reno added as well.

Misa stared at Reno in disbelief.

"Huh?" Reno exclaimed in response. "I thought you knew that humans and spirits fought together in that war. So I thought you'd realize."

"When you put it that way, it makes sense... B-But why were you so nervous, then?" Misa asked Lay.

Lay laughed awkwardly and looked over at the Mother of Spirits. "Well, it's a little embarrassing to be telling an old acquaintance of mine that I'm dating her daughter."

"I finally reunited with my adorable Misa, and she's already being stolen from me," Reno said, bemoaning the state of things. "And by Kanon, of all people. Heroes sure move fast."

Reno glared at Lay. He couldn't do anything but smile awkwardly.

"Ah ha ha! But at least it's Kanon and not some weirdo. If it were someone like Shin, Misa would have it much harder, so in that regard, I'm glad it's Kanon," Reno said.

"Jeez," Misa said, a bit miffed. "So I was nervous for nothing."

Misa relaxed in relief. Reno and Lay both looked at her warmly. The mood in the Great Spirit's residence was calm and welcoming.

But hidden behind a puddle window, there was one girl watching the peaceful scene unfold with deep unhappiness.

"What is this..."

Sasha slammed her fist against the bottom of the water and yelled through Leaks.

"It was rigged all along! What kind of scripted meeting with the parents was that?!"

She whined about unfairness and wanting some kind of recognition for her support of Lay and Misa.

"Come now, have a seat, the both of you," Reno said. "How about some tea? Oh, did you know, Kanon? This is the first time Misa's ever brought *anyone* over. I told her to bring her friends over, but she was so reluctant. Do you think she wanted to bring a specific someone over first?"

"Wh-What are you saying, mother?!" Misa squawked. "You don't have to tell him that!"

"Oh, I was just trying to point out how cute you are."

Reno teased her daughter as Misa shrank back in embarrassment.

"We have lots to discuss. Now sit, sit."

Lay nodded and gestured for Misa to sit first. The two were just about to sit down on the stump stools, when—

"Allow me to pour the tea every once in a while. You stay seated, Reno," a cold voice said, slicing through the harmonious air.

A man appeared soon after—it was Misa's father, Reno's husband, and the Demon King's right-hand man who had once fought Hero Kanon to the death: Shin Reglia.

"Huh? Didn't you say you had work today, Shin?" Reno asked.

"I did. I received a tip that someone was plotting against the Demon King, so I went to deal with the commotion. It didn't take

more than three seconds," he replied, cold eyes still fixed on Lay. "It's the first guest my daughter has brought home. As the head of the household, I have to make him feel welcome."

§ 10. Marriage Negotiations of Two Thousand Years Ago

A tense atmosphere filled the room.

Misa sat on the edge of her stump stool, casting awkward looks at Lay, and though he returned her glances with a smile, his face was notably stiffer than usual.

"Oh, isn't it so nice that Shin finished work early? Now everyone can be here for Kanon's visit," Reno said warmly.

"Aha... Aha ha... *Right*..." Misa agreed awkwardly.

Misa had most likely planned to mediate between Lay and Reno first so she could have Reno on her side before facing their true target—Shin. They would then introduce Lay to the spirits of Aharthern. But in the face of Shin's surprise appearance that plan had crumbled before them.

"Tea's ready," Shin said.

Even though he was technically in his own home, Shin walked forwards without letting his guard down at all. Four winged teacups circled around him, floating through the air before landing on the table and folding their wings. They seemed to be some kind of spirit.

"These are tea spirits called tilmunk," Shin explained. "Any hot water poured into them changes to black tea."

He tilted the kettle in his hand and poured the hot water into the tilmunk, the water instantly changing colors to a vibrant dark brown, the scent of black tea drifting through the air.

"Here you go," Shin said.

Lay bowed his head slightly and took the teacup in hand.

"It's the first time Shin's prepared the tea! Isn't that right?" Reno said excitedly.

Lay, moments away from taking his first sip, froze on the spot. He stared at the steaming liquid in his cup.

“I’ve always burdened you to deal with everything in the house,” Shin said.

“Oh, that’s fine! I do it because I want to, really!” Reno hurriedly corrected herself. “I’m just pointing out how you finished work early and made tea just because Misa brought Kanon home to meet us! I’m so happy.”

Shin nodded quietly. “I have to show my hospitality.”

Reno smiled radiantly at his words, but the gaze Shin had on Lay was sharp enough to cut through flesh. Lay smiled to go along with the mood of the room, but the look in his eyes was dead serious.

“Is something the matter, Lay Grandsley?” Shin asked, expression unmoving. “It’s not poisonous.”

Lay gulped, as though he was being held at knifepoint.

“Aha! It’s so rare to see Shin joking like this!” Reno exclaimed.

She laughed happily, but all Lay could do in response was give another awkward smile. He seemed on the verge of asking if Shin really was joking here, or if he was completely serious.

“Have you tried tilmunk tea before, Kanon?” Reno asked. “It’s delicious. Rumor has it that the tea changes scent to match the state of mind of whoever drinks it. The calmer you are when you drink it, the better it tastes, so relax!”

“I see...” Lay said, looking impressed.

He brought the cup up to his nose to better enjoy the scent.

Just then, Shin raised a hand and made a gesture as if grabbing something in the air. The black tea in Lay’s cup rippled and shook.

“Is something the matter, Shin?” Reno asked.

“No, nothing.”

“Tee hee. Silly Shin. Sorry Kanon. Sometimes Shin does things that don’t make any sense. He may seem stubborn and strict, but he’s actually a little airheaded.”

What seemed like airheaded behavior to Reno was actually quite clear to Lay, who was familiar with swords. The refined movement that Reno thought was out of place had been Shin actually drawing his sword from a magic circle. If he had wanted to, he could have pointed a demon sword at Lay in the blink of an eye.

For a swordsman, being able to swiftly draw one’s sword no

matter the environment was an essential skill. Lay himself was experienced with the sword, but Shin's skills were far more nuanced—perfected such that he could sit here, on a stump stool across the table, as if he had known this situation would occur far in advance.

"Do you think Lay can even taste that tea?" Eleonore wondered, watching through the water puddle window.

"What happens if you drink it while nervous?" Sasha asked.

"I've read about it in the lilan—the book fairies—before. When you're nervous, it'll taste refreshing, and when harboring doubt or hostility, it'll taste sweet. When you're relaxed, it'll taste like the perfect blend of bitter, sweet, and fragrant," I said.

"L-Lay's in trouble then! If they ask him what he thinks of the taste, they'll know what he's thinking!" Eleonore cried worriedly.

"Seems like Shin is using the opportunity to host Lay to figure out his true character. He really has developed the heart of a parent."

Honestly, it was heartwarming to see.

"But Shin doesn't want Lay to steal his daughter, right?" Sasha asked.

"Yup, that sounds right to me," Eleonore replied.

"What if it isn't poison in the cup, but sugar?"

"Oh, I see!" Eleonore exclaimed. *"So if Lay says it's sweet, Reno will find him suspicious!"*

"Misa! Please notice the trap!" Sasha folded her hands in prayer.

"There's no need to worry," I said to her.

"How come?"

"As a parent, Shin's heart may be conflicted; his only daughter is about to be taken away, after all. But trust that in the end he just wants Misa to be happy."

Misha nodded in agreement.

"Shin is my right-hand man," I said. *"He's not one for petty tricks. He's using his role as a host to challenge Lay head-on and see into his abyss."*

"Hmm. But based on how Mr. Shin's been acting up until now, I don't think he'll give Lay and Misa his blessing," Eleonore said.

"Actually, if Misa had brought anyone but *Lay home, Shin might have loosened up and given his blessings immediately."*

Eleonore tilted her head in confusion. "*What do you mean?*"

I chuckled. "*I know it looks bad, but Shin actually has high hopes for Lay. He believes Lay will surpass him even if he stands in his way. After all, Lay is the only human to ever best him in a sword fight, even if it was just the once.*"

That might have actually worked in Lay's favor—that the one man Misa fell in love with was the only man to ever defeat Shin.

"*I'm not sure just how aware Shin is of all this,*" I said. "*But I believe he truly hopes that he can entrust his daughter's happiness to Lay.*"

If Shin were going to approve of anyone, then it would be with all of his sincerity and without sacrificing his values. And it seemed that Shin had chosen Lay to fulfill the selfish wish that any parent would have for themselves and their children.

"*Oh, I see. He's giving Lay a hard time because he's pretty much already approved of him,*" Eleonore said.

"*I'm sure Lay would prefer that Shin's acceptance of him be sincere and without reservations. Thus, refusing to accept him with all his might is Shin's greatest form of hospitality.*"

Eleonore nodded in understanding.

"*Misha, why do competent people have to struggle* more *in this world? How is that okay?*" Sasha grumbled.

"*Life is a trial?*" Misha guessed.

"*Ugh... I'd prefer something easier...*"

"*You'll be fine, Sasha.*"

"*Really?*"

"*Yeah.*"

Sasha beamed happily, then frowned. "*Huh? Does that mean I'm incompetent?*"

"*Well, I'm sure Lay did some preparation of his own before coming to visit,*" Misha said. "*Shin's arrival might have thrown a wrench in his plans, but I doubt he'd give up that easily.*"

"*So that means...*"

Eleonore trailed off, and I finished her sentence with confidence.

"*He'll settle things, right here and now. And give Misa's parents a proper greeting.*"

"It's a battle between Lay greeting the parents, and Shin using his hospitality to prevent him from doing so as much as possible!" Sasha cried excitedly, eyes glued to the scene.

"Zeshia...has something to say...!"

Zeshia, who hadn't said anything until now, suddenly raised her hand.

"That black tea..."

"What's wrong with the black tea? Did you see something?!" Sasha asked, staring at the tea in Lay's hand with wide eyes.

"Can Zeshia...drink it too...?"

Sasha's face fell in disappointment.

"Hmm. We can ask for some later," I said.

"It's a promise...!" she said happily.

"Ah! Look, Misa's making a move!" Eleonore exclaimed.

Misa was gulping down her tea fast enough to scorch her tongue, then she slammed down the empty cup on the table. Lay looked over in surprise.

"Thirsty, Misa?" Lay asked.

"S-So it seems!" Misa said. "Could I drink your cup too?"

It was clear that Misa had discovered Shin's plan and was acting quickly to counter it; if Lay never drank the tea, then he wouldn't have to fear his state of mind being revealed to the table.

"Hey now, there's no need for such poor manners. I'll pour you a new cup, Misa," Reno scolded.

"Right... I'm sorry..." Misa said dejectedly.

But despite Misa's ploy being foiled, Lay was giving her a gentle look. He brought his teacup to his mouth and took a sip.

"It's delicious," he said.

"Thank goodness. Every now and again there's someone who doesn't like the taste of tilmunk—though I think it's just a matter of the heart," Reno said. "But I guess there's no need to worry about you, Kanon!"

Lay took another sip of the tea and placed the cup down.

"Speaking of taste," Shin said, with a look that could kill, "what did your tea taste like?"

Lay returned the look with a smile. A dangerous tension hung in

the air between them.

"O-Oh, that? Tilmunk tea is known for—"

Misa's mouth moved soundlessly. For some reason, she had lost her voice.

"Misa? What's wrong?" Lay asked.

"Huh? Um, that's weird. I was saying the til—"

I could see what was happening. Every time Misa tried mentioning the tilmunk tea to subtly give Lay a hint, Shin used the Pillage Blade to slash apart her words. The full gesture—the deployment of the magic circle, drawing and slashing the blade, and returning the blade to the magic circle—all happened nearly instantly. He must have practiced the motion a lot.

"What did it taste like, Lay Grandsley?" Shin repeated with a bloodcurdling expression. It was hard to imagine that he looked like that while asking about tea.

"Moderately sweet—"

"Sweet?" One of Shin's eyebrows twitched. His hand moved to draw his sword.

"—moderately bitter—"

Shin's hand froze midair.

"—and moderately fragrant. What a curious black tea. It's delicious," Lay said.

Silence, but for the sound of teeth grinding.

"That's good to hear," Shin said, lowering his hand.

In this situation, Lay was able to drink tea with a relaxed mind. That took an incredible amount of nerve—or resolve. Like he would rather die than do anything that would make his girlfriend's parents doubt their relationship.

"He took Shin's hospitality directly..." Sasha mumbled, impressed.

"Yup yup, he's amazingly calm for someone greeting their lover's parents! I wonder if it's enough to convince Mr. Shin, though?" Eleonore said.

"Look." Misha pointed.

We looked at Lay to see him sitting with perfect posture.

"Shin, Reno," he said. "There's something I wanted to tell you two today."

The sincerity in his words was so impeccable, Shin's expression turned grim.

"I am dating Misa."

In contrast to the warm look on Reno's face, Shin's expression was so frosty it seemed a blizzard was blowing around him.

"H-He said it! He didn't falter before Shin's bloodlust!"

"Well done, Lay! That's how a man should be!"

Eleonore and Sasha cheered noisily.

"Not yet," Misha pointed out.

Lay placed both his hands on the table.

"Don't tell me," Sasha said. *"Is he going for it?!"*

Lay bowed his head at them. "I'm serious about her. Just like you two—"

"Lay Grandsley," Shin said sharply, getting to his feet. He reached into a magic circle and took out a single sheet of spell paper. With a flick of his finger, the paper flew over to Lay. He looked down at the runes written there.

"Hmm? What's that paper for? Is it a type of artifact?" Eleonore asked me.

"Now that's something I haven't seen in a long time," I commented. *"It's a bloodkin contract."*

Misha tilted her head. *"Haven't heard of it."*

"Two thousand years ago, marriages were mostly conducted through Zecht. This was because the main purpose of marriages back then was for the survival of the family line. But there were some people who fell in love anyway. And in many cases, they would fall in love while already betrothed to another."

It had been extremely commonplace for families of significant power—or families that hoped to join together and cover each other's weaknesses—to make their children marry. It was a way of thinking that no longer existed today.

"In those cases, a bloodkin contract was used. That spell paper has almost the same effect as Zecht. The only difference is that it's signed with the blood of a murdered demon."

"Wow, I suddenly have a bad feeling about this!" Eleonore muttered.

"In short, parents who opposed the love match would present a bloodkin contract as a way of saying that such a match would only be approved over the parents' dead bodies. It was more of a life-risking proposal than a marriage negotiation."

Killing one's parents in order to be with one's lover was an absurd ask in and of itself.

"Though, mostly, the common use of the bloodkin contract was for parents to eliminate any lowlifes who dared to interfere in their children's lives."

"That's some killer parental love..." Sasha muttered.

"I haven't returned the favor from two thousand years ago," Shin said coldly to Lay. He was probably referring to the time he lost to Kanon. "What do you say to a serious match right now?"

It wasn't because he was bothered by his defeat two thousand years ago—if anything, it was the opposite. He wanted to make sure that Lay beating him back then hadn't been a fluke. Otherwise, he wouldn't be convinced. It was his way of saying that he wanted Lay to fight with all his might to take Misa from him; if he was to entrust his daughter to someone, they had to be stronger than him. For Shin, who had lived as a literal sword, this was his clumsy way of expressing his parental love. Of course, while this way of thinking would have been normal in the Mythical Age, it was a little outdated in today's times. However...

Lay stood up, perfectly willing to meet Shin's clumsy challenge head-on. "I don't mind."

If Lay had just bowed his head and clearly expressed his sincerity in front of Reno and Misa, Shin would have eventually folded without fighting. But Lay, out of consideration for Shin's feelings as a father, chose to accept Shin's challenge. These were things that could be conveyed between men without words.

"We shouldn't make a mess here, so why don't we step outside?" Lay suggested.

Shin showed a rare smile. "No need."

Lay's eyes widened. The demon sword with runes along the blade had been drawn too fast for him to see. Shin pointed the Ruinflow Sword Altocorasta—the sword with the power of the God of Demonic

Blade—at Lay without a hint of mercy.

The sound of a flowing stream could be heard. A faint water mirror appeared between Shin and Lay. A droplet fell onto the mirror, disturbing the smooth surface and sending seven ripples through Lay's reflected image.

Lay immediately summoned the Sword of Three Races in his hand. But the look on his face was panicked.

The ripple in the water mirror, the sound of a trickling stream. There was no weakness to be found in Shin's perfect posture and vast magic power; even if the Sword of Three Races cut a hundred fates, there was no escaping the fate of pure destruction. The hidden art of the Ruinflow Sword was able to destroy all seven sources in one slash, and Lay would have been able to sense that.

But what was most tremendous here was the sheer volume of bloodlust. Shin's refusal to give away his daughter manifested itself as killing intent. The murderous aura around him thrust a near-hopeless despair onto Lay—perhaps even more than when he had faced me, the Demon King.

"G-Going up against that is impossible! Are you sure *Mr. Shin actually wants to entrust Misa to Lay?!"* Eleonore exclaimed.

Sasha turned to me in a panic. *"It'll be okay, right? He wouldn't go that far...would he?"*

"Hmm."

"Don't just hmm at me! Answer!"

Sasha and Eleonore watched every movement between Shin and Lay intently.

"Ruinflow Sword, first hidden art—*Ripple.* Even without crossing swords, you know what will happen next," Shin said.

"No," Lay said to Shin, who was about to draw his sword and seize victory. There was almost zero chance of Lay winning this greeting. Knowing that, the hero clenched his holy sword tightly. "I have never backed down from a hopeless fight."

"Good. That is why you are the hero— Urgh...!"

Out of nowhere, a fierce torrent of water rose from Shin's feet, drenching him all the way to his head.

"Stupid! Stupid, stupid, *stupid* Shin!" Reno yelled, cheeks puffed

up in rage. She used the power of the eight-headed water dragon Lignon to force Shin out of the house, the torrent of water pushing him through the window. "Kanon finally came over to visit, yet all you care about is swords! Misa will break up with him if you keep up that attitude of yours! Do you *want* your daughter to hate you?!"

She raged at Shin as she sat on the water dragon, which followed Shin as he was washed away into the garden.

"No, Reno, this is a marriage negotia— Glug glug glug!"

Shin tried to reply, but Reno sent another torrent of water into his mouth.

"No marriage negotiation goes like this! Jeez! Stupid! What are you going to do when Kanon has enough and leaves? It'll be *your fault*! And how will you explain that to Misa?! Stupid!"

Shin fell silent at her hardheaded vigor. Reno knew nothing of demon culture, so she probably didn't know about bloodkin contracts or marriage negotiations.

"He's a bigger man than that," Shin said.

"That's *why* I'm saying this! Keep taking advantage of Kanon's kindness and one day he'll get fed up!"

"But—"

"No buts! The only reply is *yes*! I'm scolding you right now, so listen up! Did you think I wouldn't notice you cutting Misa's words earlier?"

Shin fell silent, but there was a deadly glint in Reno's eyes.

"You just thought about getting faster at drawing the sword, didn't you?" Reno accused Shin.

"No, of course not."

"I know everything about you, Shin! Lies like that won't work on me! Reflect! Reflect right now!"

Their voices faded as they flowed away with the water.

"Ah ha ha... They left..." Misa said.

"What now?" Lay asked.

The two of them stared blankly in the direction Misa's parents had floated away.

"Was it too soon to greet them?" Lay asked, storing Evansmana into a magic circle.

"Um, were you about to say something before my mom interfered?" Misa asked shyly.

"You should already know what I was going to say."

Misa blushed and turned away from him. "I-I can't read your mind. You have to tell me with your own words."

"If you turn this way, I'll tell you."

"Really—"

When Misa turned back, Lay was right in front of her face. His lips were just short of brushing against hers.

"That was close," he said.

"Wh-What are you trying to do?"

"You don't know?"

Misa blushed. "If you don't tell me...I won't know..."

Her head was tilted down, only enough to emphasize how she glanced up at Lay. Their lips were moments from touching.

"Wow, it's happening!" Eleonore said. *"Look, Sasha—"*

"Aaaaaaaaahhh!!!"

Sasha suddenly yelled as though she had realized something, her Magic Eyes of Destruction appearing in her eyes. Cracks ran down the puddle window, and Lay and Misa both froze. They both looked up at the ceiling; they must have heard Sasha scream.

"S-Sasha? What's the matter?" Eleonore asked.

"I might...have remembered..."

"Huh?"

Her eyes were glowing a pale blue.

"Something like this...happened before...somewhere..."

Sasha drew the magic circle for Leaks while searching through her memories.

"Long ago... Two thousand years in the past..."

The footage of the revived past flowed into our heads.

§ 11. A Heart Recalls the Demon King’s Pillage

The lost memories of two people.

Inside the Sun of Destruction, Sarjieldenav, in a space filled with deep darkness, the Goddess of Destruction Abernyu clutched her knees to her chest. The girl whose single blink had the power to permanently alter the earth’s surface was currently trembling like a lost child.

“Who are you?” she asked.

“Demon King Anos,” Anos answered.

“Demon King...Anos...” the god in the form of a girl repeated. “Why...?”

The question spilled from the girl’s lips in a childlike voice. Gods were meant to be impassive, but there was something about her that seemed awfully innocent.

“Why what?” Anos asked.

“Why are you able to look into my Divine Eyes?” Abernyu asked curiously. The magic circles drawn in her pupils transformed into the shape of a dark sun. Anos stared directly into the Divine Eyes that took on an identical shape to Sarjieldenav.

The Goddess of Destruction quietly stood up. A black ground suddenly appeared in the dark void they were in.

“These Divine Eyes of the End can only reflect the end of all things. Nothing can escape destruction before the Eyes of the Goddess of Destruction. That is the law of nature...” She looked down, words trailing off weakly.

“Did you think that just because you have the divine power to end the world that you couldn’t be destroyed?” Anos asked.

Abernyu quietly raised her face and stared into the Demon King’s mauve Magic Eyes. When she gazed into the abyss, she could see a

cross of darkness in its depths.

"It shouldn't be possible," Abernyu said. "The end of everything is destruction, which obeys my order. That is the logic and law of this world. Every living being must obey order equally. There are no exceptions. Nothing can overturn the end before the Goddess of Destruction's Eyes."

"Then the logic should be simple," Anos replied.

Abernyu turned to Anos with a questioning look.

"You just have to destroy fate itself," he said.

Abernyu closed her mouth. Her Divine Eyes stared straight into Anos's Magic Eyes.

"Say, King...Anos?" she asked. "Or Demon King? What should I call you?"

"Whatever you want."

"Then, Demon King," Abernyu decided without much thought. "What did you come here to do?"

"I came to steal the Goddess of Destruction's order from the world."

The Goddess of Destruction's lips lifted. Her eyes narrowed.

"Aha!"

Suddenly, she burst into laughter. Sadistic laughter, and maybe a little masochistic too.

"Aha ha ha! Aha ha ha ha ha! Really now? You think you can destroy *me*, the Goddess of Destruction?"

"What's so funny?" Anos asked.

The Divine Eyes of the End glinted darkly.

"Because I've been waiting. I've been waiting for this day to come."

Gray particles rose around them. The immense number of them created a gray light that illuminated the darkness, filling it with even more destructive power. That merciless order was enough to drain Demon King Anos's magic power just by being nearby.

"Say, is it okay if we keep talking for a little bit?" Abernyu asked. "Or can you not wait anymore?"

There were still a few minutes before Sarjieldenav released its black rays again.

"I'll allow it," Anos said easily.

"I've destroyed a lot," she said. "Demons, humans, spirits, sometimes gods—I've destroyed them all. Every end in this world has happened in the palm of my hand."

Abernyu began speaking, her mood noticeably better than before.

"After all, it's the Goddess of Destruction's order that causes people to break and their sources to fade."

As long as the order of destruction existed, life was finite. All causes of death in the world eventually led to Abernyu.

"The same goes for the Sun of Destruction. When it shines in the sky, its rays burn and destroy. Dozens, hundreds, possibly even more of your comrades have fallen to its power."

Anos silently listened to her speak.

"So the Demon King must have stepped over their corpses to come this far."

Abernyu took one step towards Anos.

"Do you hate me? Do you hate the Goddess of Destruction's order?"

"Yes," Anos answered curtly. The deaths and destruction of countless followers flashed through his head. He had failed to save so many lives. "I will not forgive you."

Abernyu smiled happily. She then whirled around so her back was to him.

"Like I said just now, I've been waiting this entire time. While I destroyed and destroyed others, I prayed for someone to come here who hated me. Someone who could slash apart Sarjieldenav and appear right in front of my eyes. The thought felt hopeless. I've given up on it so many times."

She continued walking slowly as she spoke.

"It's boring being alone in this dark sun, you know? There's no one to talk to. But even if I go outside, nothing changes."

Abernyu chuckled.

"All my Eyes can reflect are despair and sadness. Nothing can exist before the Goddess of Destruction but the end of all things. If I tried to walk upon the earth, the world would be destroyed in a single night."

She lifted a hand to play with some of the floating gray particles.

"Say, Demon King. You said you hated me, right?" Abernyu asked, cutting a look at Anos before continuing without waiting for an answer. "What does that feel like?"

There was a mocking smirk on her face, but still, her expression was still that of an innocent girl.

"Do joy and happiness exist before hatred? I don't know that either. All I know is that somehow, joy and happiness become anger before transforming into hatred."

She folded her hands behind her back and turned back to Anos again.

"I don't know any of it," she said with a faint smile. "Because all of it gets destroyed before I can even get close."

Abernyu reached a hand out and formed a flowerlike shape out of the gray particles.

"I've heard how beautiful flowers are, but what do they look like?"

This time, gray particles formed a shape resembling a towering mountain.

"I heard that mountains are grand, but how big are they really?" she asked. "How about a house? A bed? A chair? A book?"

One by one, gray particles took the shape of each item she listed. Yet as they appeared, they were broken, distorted.

"What does a kiss feel like?"

Gray particles gathered to form the vague shape of a man and woman. The two shadows leaned towards each other, but crumbled away before touching.

"I don't know *anything*. The only other thing my Divine Eyes have managed to reflect are strong people fighting. Blood, tears, war, screams—and even those ended fast."

She spoke with a cold face and voice.

"So tell me, Demon King. Why do people live? Everything comes to an end someday. Everything ends, always. So what difference does it make if it ends today, tomorrow, or in a hundred years?"

Abernyu glared at the distorted flower and mountains, returning them to gray particles.

"Did you think there was hope? Did you think there was a continuation? If so, that's hilarious. Nothing remains, you know? So trying to survive so desperately is just foolish."

The Goddess of Destruction flung her arm to the side, sending gray particles flying.

"The world cannot smile because *I'm* watching it. These Eyes only reflect the end. At every moment, there is only sadness to be seen—only tears that remain. That is the undeniable truth."

She looked at Anos as though to challenge him.

"Can you overturn that, Demon King? Can you really destroy me, the Goddess of Destruction?"

On the receiving end of her glare, Anos answered calmly. "Without any trouble."

Abernyu looked taken aback for a brief moment. Her eyes narrowed.

"How arrogant of you, Demon King."

"And you're just what I expected from Militia's little sister."

Abernyu perked up curiously. "What do you mean?"

"The order of destruction brings the end. According to you, everything is destined to meet its end someday. The world cannot smile because there is only sadness. But if *everything* ends, shouldn't there be nothing left at all?"

Abernyu blinked at the Demon King blankly.

"Why do tears remain?" the Demon King asked, grinning fearlessly. "The answer is simple: because *you've* been crying as you watch the world."

"Aha! Me, the cause of all the destruction? Are you saying I don't actually want to destroy things? Aha ha ha!"

The Goddess of Destruction clutched her stomach as she laughed.

"Hee hee! Pfft! Aha ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

She laughed gleefully, as though she was having fun—as though she was being saved. At some point, sorrow blended into the laughter, turning into sobs.

Abernyu sounded like she was half laughing, half crying. "Today feels like a dream..."

She quietly walked towards Anos.

"Say, do you know love?"

"As a word, yes."

"There's so much I want to know. The shapes of flowers, and the size of mountains. Joy. Happiness. But these Divine Eyes can never look upon them."

The girl spoke in a detached tone, but for some reason, she looked like she was crying still.

"That's why I thought if there was someone very strong out there, I'd be able to look at them," she said, eyeing Anos in her field of view. "I imagined us being able to talk. I knew whoever came would hate me, and that they'd have come to destroy the Goddess of Destruction's order. They'd come to stop all the sadness of the world."

Her strong eyes stayed fixed on the Demon King. The Goddess of Destruction smiled. A man who couldn't be destroyed by the Divine Eyes of the End was standing right there. Something other than the end existed. This was a miracle to her, without a doubt.

"And I knew that I would fall in love with that person. If such a person existed, there could only be one. No one else could be my partner."

Abernyu came to a stop before the Demon King.

"I waited a long, long time. It felt like an eternity. I've destroyed lots and lots in that time," she said looking up at Anos. "And then you came."

"That isn't love."

"Really now?"

"You're in love with being in love," Anos said.

Abernyu chuckled.

"That may be true. But it's still love. An irreplaceable love, and the best love I can manage," she said with a sigh. Her frail fingertips brushed Anos's face. "I've destroyed and destroyed until now. From the moment I was born, that has been my order. Now I don't have to destroy anymore."

Her Divine Eyes glowed a deep red. "Isn't that right?"

In the deep darkness filled with gray magic particles, a red ray of

light shined in.

"Ah, it's time. The Sun of Destruction will illuminate the earth once more. Sorry, but it can't be stopped. This is the order of the world."

She lowered her hands and stood, defenseless.

"Go ahead," she said, closing her eyes to clearly show her nonresistance.

But Anos stared at her without moving.

"What's wrong?" she said. "There's no time left."

Anos stayed frozen, as though he was ignoring her.

"Hey... Are you even listening? Didn't you come to destroy me?"

"I said I came here to steal your order," Anos replied. "I never said I'd destroy you."

"What are you saying? How can you do that without destroying __"

Just then, the darkness around them inverted to reveal the sky. Outside, the Sun of Destruction transformed from its shadow form to the black sun.

"Don't think you can die so easily after spreading so much death. Take responsibility," Anos declared.

The darkness flashed. The sun was about to shine its black rays of destruction down on the earth.

"Responsibility..."

"Control the destruction."

"That's impossible. Gods are order. We cannot defy the laws of nature..."

"No excuses. Do it."

Abernyu was speechless.

"You've been forced into a foolish duty, Abernyu. Have you ever asked yourself why *you* have to be the one to suffer from the irrational whims of order and nature?" Anos said, words laced with a strong anger. "Just give it a try. Resist it. And then I'll use it as a wedge to release you from your shackles."

"But..."

"Is just setting your eyes on one person truly enough for you?"

Black rays filled the surroundings of Sarjieldenav. The light of

destruction swayed.

"Beautiful flowers, grand mountains, cities lined with stores and houses, walking around window shopping, falling in true love. If you want to experience all of it, push aside that boring order by yourself," Anos said, clenching his fists. "I will show you a smile."

"I—"

The Sun of Destruction was filled with magic power. The black sun that could ruin all life started spreading its rays across the sky.

"Ah..."

The earth wasn't scorched. The destructive rays had been cast inwards, illuminating the Demon King inside Sarjieldenav.

"Bwa ha ha. So you can do it if you try," Anos said, with a dry laugh.

Even as he was being burned by the black rays of Sarjieldenav, the Demon King reached for Abernyu.

"There's one more thing I can show you right here," he said.

"Demon King—"

Her breath stopped. The Demon King had stolen her lips.

"Look at me."

"Mm...?"

"This is a kiss."

"Mm... Ah..."

Abernyu's Divine Eyes were wide open as she was being kissed, pure emotion seeping out of her sun-shaped pupils.

"*Gaga Gyoniyor*."

The magic circle deployed, covering both of them. Gaga Gyoniyor was a spell that stole magic power by concentrating the magic power and thoughts of a target onto the caster. The Demon King had used the kiss as a trigger to seize a part of Abernyu's destructive power. The disruption to order sent the black rays rampaging in revolt, the sun burning the Demon King's body to try to end his source.

The Demon King's blood oozed from his skin, rusting the black rays of sunlight upon exposure. Anos's source of destruction—the source of *ruin*—and Abernyu's order of destruction clashed, the two cataclysmic powers devastating the surrounding area. If it had been

unleashed on the ground, it would have had enough power to end the world and then some.

"Wish for it," Anos said. "Your feelings will set you free."

Divine Eyes stared into Magic Eyes. For the first time, destruction faced ruin.

"Mmgh..."

Magic power slowly flowed from Abernyu's lips, settling the order of destruction as though guided by Gaga Gyoniyor. The girl's heart thudded loudly. As the black sun gradually faded, the beating grew louder, ringing in her ears.

Some time passed. By the time the Sun of Destruction returned to its shadow form, the Goddess of Destruction's heart throbbed with the melody of love.

"Ah..."

Demon King Anos slowly pulled his face away.

"See? I've just destroyed your irrational duty," he said with a smirk.

Face red, Abernyu looked down and away from him.

"Stealing it by force is what's irrational..."

§ 12. A Strange Rift

The footage from two thousand years ago faded from my head. When I looked over at Sasha afterwards, she whipped her head away with incredible speed. It seemed she couldn't recall any more than this.

"Hmm. So by stirring the emotions of Abernyu, who was in love with being in love, I was able to make her control her own order."

"With her heart awake, was the Goddess of Destruction able to defy the order of destruction?" Misha asked.

I nodded. Love and kindness were the weaknesses of the gods. When a god obtained those feelings, they gained the power to control their own order.

"Abernyu's heart was already on the verge of blooming. I merely gave her the final push," I said.

Plus Giga Gyoniyor had weakened the power of her order, allowing the Goddess of Destruction to resist. Abernyu had been the god that governed destruction. Destroying her would have required an even stronger power—one wrong move, and her order of destruction could have ended up growing stronger. That was probably why I had chosen to get her on my side rather than destroy her outright. But the biggest reason I had decided to do things that way was because she herself had already rejected her destruction.

"Hmm. I wonder what happened after that. Can you remember anything else, Sasha?" Eleonore asked.

"N-Nothing happened after! That was the end! The! End!" Sasha exclaimed, her face red. Misha looked at her with a curious tilt to her head, while Eleonore raised her index finger in realization.

"I don't mean after the kiss, you know?" she added.

Sasha turned even redder. She groaned and glared at Eleonore with the Magic Eyes of Destruction in her pupils.

"Wow! I'm just kidding, Sasha! My anti-magic wards aren't as strong as Anos's!"

Eleonore tried to soothe Sasha, but her voice didn't seem to be reaching her; Sasha's Eyes glinted menacingly as she trembled with embarrassment.

"Wow... Sasha's still drunk..." Zeshia commented.

"Ugh..."

Just before Sasha's emotions exploded, Eleonore turned tail and fled.

"And it was stolen *from me! I didn't consent! And it wasn't even a kiss, it was Giga Gyoniyor!"*

"Oww! It hurts! Sasha's gaze is stabbing into me!"

Eleonore tried to flee by swimming through the water, but Sasha followed hot on her heels, her Magic Eyes of Destruction pricking Eleonore relentlessly. Eleonore deployed runes in a ring around herself, holy water rising to surround her as she activated Aske as a shield against Sasha's gaze.

"It's a barrier!" Zeshia said happily.

"Besides, I took *it* back after I reincarnated!"

"Hmm? What did you take back?" Eleonore asked.

The destruction in Sasha's eyes grew even stronger. At once Eleonore realized her mistake and looked extremely regretful. The moment Sasha averted her gaze in embarrassment, her eyes turned to the titi's water window, which cracked further. The puddle window had reached the limit of its endurance, and the cracks were widening by the moment.

"Again?" Lay asked, staring at the ceiling with his Eyes.

"It's getting louder, isn't it?" Misa added.

The Magic Eyes of Destruction had weakened the effect of the titi's peephole.

"Who's there?" Lay called out.

"The titi are just playing a prank. Don't worry about it," I answered.

Lay froze for a brief moment, then slowly turned to Misa with a smile.

"Looks like it's just the titi playing pranks."

"Th-That's weird. W-Wasn't that Lord Anos's voice just now?" Misa asked.

Just then, the titi appeared before my face.

"We got caught!"

"They found us, they found us!"

"Prank's over."

"It's over!"

In an instant, all the water turned to mist, and the puddle window vanished. Without the boundary of the puddle window, our bodies were left unsupported, sending us falling to the floor. I corrected my balance with Fless and landed on my feet.

"Sorry for the commotion," I said.

"U-Um..." Misa blinked at us in shock. "Were you watching? Together? The *entire time*?" she asked nervously.

"I-It wasn't the entire time!" Sasha said, stuttering. "We just watched a little bit, just a little! Right, Misha?"

Misha blinked a few times before nodding. Sasha imitated her nods, then continued. "That's right, we just saw a little bit. We only watched from the moment you two entered the house, up to the moment you tried to kiss!"

"I-Isn't that *everything*?!"

Misa's scream echoed through the house. She covered her red face with both hands and curled up in embarrassment. Lay patted her on the shoulder gently as he turned to me.

"Something happen again?" he asked.

"We found out that Sasha was once the Goddess of Destruction. She doesn't have all of her memories though, so we're trying to retrace them," I replied.

"I see." Lay looked at Sasha, who, for some reason, was in the middle of patting Misa's head as though to comfort her.

"I was wondering if we could borrow the power of a spirit to help with Sasha's memory," I said.

"Oh, so you're looking for me."

We turned in the direction of the voice to see Reno and Shin fly back through the window. Reno waved a hand at me in casual greeting.

"Perfect timing too. Why don't you tell Anos about what you were saying just now, Shin?" she said to Shin.

"My liege's words take priority," Shin said.

"Hmm. Did something happen?" I asked.

Shin nodded and answered. "Just now, a Leaks arrived from the Seven Demon Elders. Apparently, a strange spatial rift has appeared at the Nefius Plateau."

Misha and Eleonore exchanged looks.

"And its abyss cannot be observed, I'm told," Shin added.

So they had no idea what that spatial rift was.

"No magic appears to be able to close it," Shin continued. "The Seven Demon Elders tried bombarding it with magic, but it showed no response at all."

"Oh?" I said.

"The rift also appears to be widening over time. It was a hundred meters across when it was first discovered, but has now reached four kilometers."

That was indeed strange.

"Four kilometers is a lot," Eleonore commented.

"Yeah," Misha agreed.

"What are the Seven Demon Elders doing now?" I asked.

"They stationed their familiars at the Nefius Plateau and left them behind. They've been analyzing the spatial rift and searching for ways to destroy it, but they ran out of ideas and decided to contact me."

If the Seven Demon Elders couldn't handle the phenomena, then it was most likely magic from the Mythical Age at work—and a fairly high level of it too.

"Your orders, my liege?" Shin asked.

"I'll leave it to you. Go with Eldmed—"

Just then, noise rang in my ears.

"Anos...?" Misha said, peering into my face.

I raised a hand in reassurance. When I focused inwards, the noise started ringing in my head again. Mixed with the noise coming from the depths of my source, an eerie voice echoed.

"Are you sure?" the voice in my head said in a sultry tone. *"Are*

you sure *you want to leave it to others? Really?"*

"Hmm. You're the one who spoke earlier. Who are you?" I said out loud.

Lay and the others watched me with tense looks on their faces.

"The door is about to open—the door of despair. It's time to pay the price for the peace you obtained."

Without replying to me, the voice continued speaking one-sidedly. Could they not hear me? Or were they simply uninterested in my reply?

"Soon, very soon, all the doors will open. The Demon King's Army will be swallowed by war, along with all those you hold dear."

The noise rang louder than ever, then came to a sudden stop. I strained my ears, but couldn't hear anything else. The eerie sound that had echoed through my head was gone.

"I've changed my mind," I said to my subordinates, who had been watching me the entire time. "There's been a ringing in my ears lately. I don't know who it is, but they've been blathering nonsense about the world being unkind and war on the horizon."

They listened to me in silence.

"I think it's safe to assume they have something to do with the strange rift at the Nefius Plateau."

I drew a magic circle for Gatom.

"Come along. No matter who it is and what they're plotting, I will find them and expose them," I said with a fearless grin. "We'll teach them what happens to those who defy the Demon King's Army."

§ 13. The Smoke Signals of War

Before us spread a field of green speckled with yellow flowers. A gentle wind blew, carrying a faint magic power that sent petals dancing into the air. The environment here was ideal for the growth of nefius flowers, and had been thus named the Nefius Plateau since ancient times.

Above the plateau, several owls circled the field. They were the familiars of Melheis, one of the Seven Demon Elders. Using those owls as a marker, several magic circles appeared at the Nefius Plateau.

I stepped through the Gatom and arrived at the plateau, followed by Lay, Shin, and everyone else.

"Is that...the spatial rift...?" Misa asked, sweeping her eyes across the plateau. At the other end of the field of flowers was an open rift. Vertically, it was about as tall as the trees scattered around the field, while horizontally, it stretched across the ground in a wide expanse. We had been told it was four kilometers wide earlier, but it was easily over five now.

"I thought seeing it in person would help clarify the situation, but it's more abnormal than I expected," Lay said. "Something's probably inside of it, but I can't see any magic at all."

He turned to me.

"No matter what magic it is, if it can't be seen from this distance, then it's still incomplete," I said. "Regardless of what they're trying to do, once the magic activates they'll most likely reveal themselves."

"Should we break it before then?" Eleonore asked.

The noise in my head had said we'd be engulfed by war. How would that even happen?

"If it's harmful, there's no need to wait to take action," I replied. "But I'd rather not blindly follow the words of an unknown voice. What if someone out there *wants* me to break it?"

"Maybe enter the rift?" Misha suggested.

If I go that far in, I might actually be able to see something.

"Let's try."

But just as I floated up with Fless, Sasha grabbed my sleeve.

"Say, Demon King. What are you all talking about?" she asked curiously. Come to think of it, Sasha was still pretty drunk.

"The spatial rift over there," I said, pointing to it.

"Spatial rift?" Sasha repeated, looking over at the other side of the plateau. I lifted my other hand to cast Eyss and sober her up, but as soon as I did—

"That isn't a rift, Demon King. It's a door."

My hand froze midair. I discarded the magic circle.

"You can tell?" I asked.

"Because it's the same as the one in the Firmament of the Gods. This is what's called a door of god. It's like the entrance that Beno Ievun blocked in the past...what was it called again? A divine gate? Right, it's like a divine gate...probably."

Sasha searched through her memories as she spoke, her explanation stuttering as she simultaneously jogged her memory.

"Firmament of the Gods?" Misha asked, her head tilted in thought.

"It's another name for the Divine Realm," Shin answered.

"Hmm. In other words, that's a door to the Firmament?" I asked.

"Yup. The doors of god are one-way, so they're only able to use them to come to earth," Sasha replied.

The work of the gods, huh? Did that mean the voice that had been echoing in my body was from a god's ability? Either way, it was rare for the gods to make such bold moves on earth.

"Does that mean a god large enough to need a door this size is going to descend here?" Lay asked, looking at the rift with his usual smile on his face.

"It could be a large number of gods instead of just one," Shin said.

Misa laughed nervously. "Aha ha... Neither way sounds very good."

"When will the door open, Sasha?" Misha asked.

Sasha hummed in thought. “It looks like it’ll take a few more days...but...?”

She trailed off mid-sentence and looked at me curiously—probably because I was drawing an enormous magic circle in front of me.

“Oh, don’t mind me,” I said. “I just felt a brief flicker of magic within the rift just now, so I’m going to check things out.”

A gigantic black sun appeared from my magic circle.

“*Jio Graze*.”

The jet-black sun soared with a meteor-like tail, trailing black flames as it accelerated forwards. But the moment the roaring flames reached the center of the god’s door, the flames went out, and the sun transformed into a giant rock. The rock then started crumbling apart as though it had been sliced by something, pieces of it falling to the ground.

“Your spells of bombardment are mere specks of dust before us,” a voice said.

I gazed in the direction of the voice with my Magic Eyes. Inside the spatial rift was a single shadow.

“Do not hasten your death, king of demons.”

The cold voice shook the air. Although his figure was hidden in the door of god, the speaker’s vast amount of magic power was evident from his shadow alone.

“Hmm. Are you a god?” I asked.

“I am Pelpedro, the God of War, one who leads an army of order. In other words, I am the order of war.”

“What do you want?”

“War,” the God of War answered shortly. “In order to correct the order you’ve disturbed, the flames of war will swallow this world.”

“*Disturbed?* Hmm. You mean the stolen order of the Goddess of Destruction that you gods like to go on about?”

“Indeed. But that is not all,” the God of War said solemnly. “This world has tilted too far towards peace.”

Pelpedro raised his hand. Several hundred shadowy figures appeared on the left side of the rift.

“Thus, the army of gods will purge you.”

This time, several hundred more shadows appeared on the right side.

"Misfit Anos, the king of demons who has nipped war in the bud time and time again. You've ruined every flower of war in this world before they could even bloom."

"It's only right to pluck poisonous flowers before they can kill anyone, no?" I said.

"Not if the world does not allow it."

I scoffed at his words. "Really now? I think the world would agree with me. Are you sure that's not just what *you* believe, so-called God of War?"

"Nay. The army of gods *is* order. There is no belief or disbelief. My decision is the law of nature and cannot be denied."

I laughed again, this time louder. "Looks like another arrogant god has appeared. Since I've only met reasonable gods lately, this is quite the refreshing change."

Pelpedro closed his mouth and glared at me.

"If I recall correctly, the last one I met was Nosgalia, the Heavenly Father. I'm sure you know what happened to him."

The God of War ignored my words and snapped, "This is a declaration of war."

"Oh? You're challenging the Demon King's army, are you?"

"Nay. The army of gods brings war to any and all living beings. Our fight is inevitable. All humans, spirits, and demons will be engulfed in the flames of absolute war."

I see.

"And will noncombatants stand in the line of fire too?" I asked.

"The smoke signals of war have already risen," Pelpedro said. "Before the army of order, all resistance is futile. The fire of god will scorch the world without exception. Your Demon King's Army may stand before us, misfit, but you cannot stop the march of god."

In the pure white space of the door of god, the number of shadowy figures doubled.

"We are not individuals, but a collective. An *army of order*."

An eerie roar echoed through the air as the spatial rift expanded further. The door of god was opening—and the gap was packed with

shadowy figures.

"From the Firmament of the Gods far above, the door to beyond opens, bringing the sound of boots marching over the bridge of war. Soon our divine army will descend to earth. And from that moment on, the world will be ablaze with war, Misfit Anos Voldigoad."

Misa's grim gaze was fixed on the door of god. "It isn't just one or two hundred... If that many gods come to earth..."

"We'll be in big trouble!" Eleonore yelped, finishing her sentence.

"That is all," Pelpedro said. "Enjoy this brief moment of peace—until the sound of our march rings in your ears."

The countless shadows vanished into the depths of the rift, as though marking the end of their formal declaration of war.

"Where do you think you're going, God of War?" I said.

Pelpedro froze in his steps. I drew a layered magic circle with both hands.

"Is the army of order already turning tail and fleeing before an enemy?"

"I said this was a *declaration* of war. You are yet to truly stand before our forces," he said, replying calmly to my taunts. "We currently are in the Firmament of the Gods, far out of your reach. Fortunately for you, even this divine army needs time to open the door to earth."

The God of War glared at me from across the door.

"You'd best spend that time preparing your military, king of demons. Utter despair will soon be upon your world."

He turned around to walk off briskly. His shadowy figure began to fade from the rift.

"I see. I get it now."

I reached through the layered magic circle, covering my hands in white light. The pale blue light of Ygg Neas glowed as I grabbed the rift sitting on the plateau by its top and bottom boundaries. My grip on it caused the eerie sound to rumble even louder, as though the door of god was creaking open.

"What...are you *doing*...?" the God of War asked, turning back in shock.

"What? Since you gods are so eager for war, I'm just giving you a

helping hand. I don't like waiting for an enemy army without a clear time of arrival."

I clenched my hands and yanked the door of god open vertically. The sound of the air tearing open screeched across the plateau.

"So I'm opening the door for you," I said.

"Wha...?!"

With my right hand holding the top of the door and left hand holding the bottom, I used all my physical and magical strength to open the rift all the way. Pure white light filled my vision as the spatial rift was ripped until it burst.

The light gradually settled. When I stared with my Magic Eyes, I could clearly see the forms of gods that had previously only been shadowy figures. With the door now wide open, the army of gods had fully manifested upon the Nefius Plateau.

"Hmm. Looks like there's roughly two thousand of you," I commented. I casually waved my hand at the armed troops, beckoning them forwards.

"Now hurry. I'll deal with you all at the same time."



§ 14. The Demon King Army vs the Army of Gods

Divine forces lined the Nefius Plateau. At the forefront stood a god in a full suit of red copper armor—the God of War, Pelpedro. His red and sparkling gold cape fluttered in the wind as he gazed at me from under his full-face helmet.

"Opening the door of god by force..."

The God of War's muttered words were carried by magic, allowing them to reach me from such a distance.

"You are a contaminant of this world. A misfit beyond all doubt, Anos Voldigoad. It is your arrogance that brought us to this land, dragging the world into war."

Contaminant of this world. The one who spoke into my depths had also used that phrase.

"Dragging the world into war, huh? You make it sound so grand, but in the end, you're all just substitutes for Abernyu. And I'm sure you all know how the Sun of Destruction in the sky came to its end, no?" I asked.

"We are different from the Goddess of Destruction. She was a single individual—we are an army that brings war," Pelpedro said, lifting his hand. "Swordsman Gods, Garmrgund."

A row of sword-wielding infantry advanced forwards in perfect coordination. Their pale blue armor was in the form of a sword, and they wielded transparent divine swords in their right hands.

"Spearman gods, Schnelde."

The troops in the right flank marched forwards. Their pale armor resembled a spear, and they wielded glowing divine spears.

"Bowman gods, Amysius."

The cavalry moved forwards. Their armor was designed like a bow, and they wielded giant divine bows.

"Sorcerer gods, Dolzork."

The soldiers at the very back then marched forwards. Their pale armor was the shape of a magic circle, and in each hand, they held divine staves.

"My army is order itself. No one can stop our march."

"Hmm. So you're saying they're different from the Keepers that protected the Goddess of Destruction?" I asked.

"Indeed so," the God of War answered simply. "All troops, advance. The enemy is eight—trample them."

At Pelpedro's order, the army of gods roared and advanced. Their footsteps were perfectly synchronized, with each step of their boots shaking the earth. The Nefius Plateau itself was rumbling from the marching of this divine army.

"You know, I had just been thinking of ways that we could try to *close* the door..." Misa mumbled.

"I was also expecting Anos to say, 'Did you think I couldn't close it just because it's a door of god?' or something..." Eleonore agreed.

They both sighed tiredly.

"It's better to deal with the evil at the root," I said.

"You have a point, but I would have preferred *some* warning," Misa said, watching the army worriedly.

"A mere two thousand troops means we only have to defeat two hundred and fifty each," I said.

"Will I be able to defeat that many by myself? I'm not really suited for offense," Eleonore wondered out loud. But there was no sign of any real tension in her voice.

Misa still looked nervous. "I'm not so sure of myself either. Though if I'm in my true form, maybe I can do it..."

She would probably say the exact opposite once her true form appeared.

"It's okay," Lay said, smiling at her. A blinding light flashed at his hands as the Sword of Three Races appeared. "At worst, I'll defeat your share too."

"Then I'll give you two hundred of mine," Eleonore said, holding her index finger up.

"Two hundred and fifty of Zeshia's too!"

Lay smiled wryly at their banter.

"In that case, *I* shall take on your shares of the enemy," Shin said. He never took his eyes off the formation of the divine army, watching them vigilantly.

"But—"

Shin took a few steps forwards and addressed Lay over his shoulder. "Although I cannot imagine any parent would want to give their daughter to a man who can't even handle seven hundred and fifty gods. Generally speaking, of course."

Without Reno around to control him, his voice was a cold continuation of the formal greeting he had said earlier.

"Then I'll go for a thousand," Lay replied, stepping forwards to accept the challenge.

"We'll see about that," Shin said quietly, shooting Lay a sidelong glare as he lined up beside him. "There may not be a thousand left for you to defeat."

Shin seemed determined to be the first to take down a thousand and *one*.

"You don't know that yet," Lay replied.

Their eyes met. Fierce sparks blew between their gazes.

"Hmm. An interesting challenge. Allow me to give the starting signal for your match," I said, raising my hand into empty space.

A spherical magic circle formed, purple lightning crackling with it. I stuck my right hand into the circle and clenched my fist. The purple lightning condensed in my palm, carrying powerful destruction as it scattered bright light across the plateau.

I lifted my right arm into the air and purple lightning spilled in response, drawing ten magic circles. From each circle more lightning extended outwards, connecting the circles together to form one huge magic circle.

"*Ravia Gieg Gaverizd*."

The connected magic circles fired towards the approaching army of gods, purple lightning spreading across the area and covering them completely. I strengthened the interior of the magic circle with a barrier, leaving them no choice but to withstand the purple lightning of overwhelming destruction.

The plateau was stained purple as thunder roared loudly enough to split the air. The raging lightning illuminated the sky brighter than the midday sun ever could. The army of gods burned with an eerie sound resembling an apocalypse.

Once the light faded, ashes filled our entire vision.

"Um..." Eleonore murmured in a dazed voice.

"You wiped them out with the *starting signal*," Misa said tiredly. But just then, something shot towards her.

"Huh?"

A giant arrowhead was pointed at Misa's nose. Shin had grabbed the divine arrow with his left hand just before it reached her.

"The magic was transformed to stone," Misha said in warning.

The ashes floated into the air, and the army of gods appeared from within the barrier.

"All troops, advance. Separate the Demon King's Army and rout them separately," Pelpedro ordered. His troops split into four and began to surround us.

"They're not called the army of gods for nothing, I see. Roughly eighty percent of Ravia Gieg Gaverizd was transformed to stone," I concluded.

Most of the ashes floating around had been the remains of the purple lightning that had been converted to stone. My attack had wiped out only about two hundred or so of the divine army, leaving eighteen hundred soldiers remaining. If this many soldiers reached a city, they could cause serious damage.

"Shin will take the right flank, Lay will head for the left," I said. "Since they want to rout us separately, let them do as they please."

"Yes, my liege."

"Got it."

Shin and Lay started running towards the approaching soldiers. With their abilities, they would be capable of closing the gap in an instant—but that was the same for the enemy.

Their slow approach was a way for them to deliberately control our movements; we would be forced to move in accordance with the changes in their formation. When I stared into their abyss, I could see a strong magic power was being released from the formation of

the army itself. There was definitely something hidden in their formation.

Lay and Shin matched their movements by running slowly, searching for an opening to break the enemy's formation.

"Misha, Sasha, Misa, Eleonore, and Zeshia will remain here and support Shin and Lay. Don't get separated," I said.

Misa held her hand up over her head and darkness flowed from her palm, covering her entire body. Bolts of lightning ran down the darkness, clearing the darkness to reveal the midnight dress and six wings of her true form.

Misa brushed aside her hair, now dark like the deep sea, and turned to me. "What will you do, Lord Anos?"

"It should be obvious," I said, staring at the two formations headed directly at us. I drew a hundred magic circles at the roughly eight hundred soldiers coming our way.

The next moment, the soldiers at the center fired their own jet-black suns and divine arrows our way.

"I won't let you!" Eleonore shouted, using De Ijelia to form a shield on the spot.

"*Regalomitein...!*" Zeshia followed by deploying two magic mirrors on either side of the De Ijelia barrier. "They're...opposing mirrors..."

Any magic reflected in Regalomitein's mirrors would be duplicated. The opposing mirrors thus increased the De Ijelia infinitely, forming a firm barrier.

"A mere army of gods won't be able to touch my Demon King," Sasha said, glaring at the rain of divine arrows and Jio Graze with her Magic Eyes of Destruction. The attack was greatly weakened by her power, and whatever she couldn't destroy fell flat against Eleonore and Zeshia's De Ijelia.

"Here's my return gift."

I fired a hundred of my own Jio Graze, scattering them in every direction. The black suns rained on the army of gods, but the moment they touched the barrier formed by the Dolzork, they all changed to lumps of stone. The Garmrgund swung their swords, slicing the stones into dust.

"How about this?" Misa said, firing Jirasd. But her black lightning

was blocked by Dolzork's barriers, turning into stone just like the others. That stone was also sliced up before it fell to the ground.

"It looks like they're using a spell that turns long-ranged magic fire into stone," she said with a smile.

The soldiers in the front row of the formation suddenly caught fire and were thrown into the air, bodies wrapped in a black tornado.

"But you can't block close-ranged magic, can you?" Misa asked.

"*Aviasten Ziara*."

In the opening Misa had created with her black lightning, I had moved to the center of the enemy formation in a single leap and blown away the Garmrgund with Aviasten Ziara. My right hand was wrapped in glowing black flames from the Jio Graze I had cast through Veneziara, separate to the Jio Grazes that had been turned into stone.

"Move."

I started running, and my body became a flash of light. I pierced straight through the cluster of divine soldiers, arriving at the center without any tactics. Dozens of Garmrgund and Schnelde were blown away, their broken swords and spears flying through the air.

While they had avoided Ravia Gieg Gaverizd by changing it to stone, the slightest contact with the purple lightning of destruction did some damage. I easily mowed down the worn-out soldiers and approached the God of War at the center, clad in his red copper armor.

"Only a fool of a general charges in alone," he said.

The Aviasten Ziara around my fingers sank into the God of War's red copper armor. Black flames roared fiercely, but the god's anti-magic wards swirled around him to keep the flames in check.

"The few can be conquered by the many. This is the ultimate art of war. No power can oppose the correct order of the world," Pelpedro said.

"Your order is outdated," I replied. "Rewrite it with *this*."

I shoved the God of War back, scattering the troops that had clustered around him. Pelpedro attempted to stop my charge by standing his ground with all his might. If he had stopped me, his troops would have been able to stab me with their divine blades.

But I didn’t stop.

“Nuwaaargh!” Pelpedro screamed.

His Divine Eyes met my Magic Eyes, our gaze giving off sparks.

“The many can be conquered by the Demon King. *I* am the art of war, Pelpedro.”

§ 15. The Demon King’s Art of War

A low rumble roared across the plateau, splitting the middle of the troop formation of the divine army into two. Pelpedro was pushed back so far that he pierced through the rear line of his army. The gods in the way of the Demon King’s advance were sent flying, soaring extravagantly through the air before slamming hard against the ground.

Having taken Aviasten Ziara to the abdomen, the God of War was engulfed in flames as his body was embedded into a nearby hill.

“Oh?” I said.

Pelpedro slowly got to his feet. His red copper armor was slightly burned, but he hadn’t sustained much damage.

“Formation magic, huh?”

If I looked down at the plateau from above, I’d see the gods had maintained a certain formation despite the fact that I had scattered them about. Even though they had me surrounded, there were some troops who had taken formation in a completely irrelevant location. But what seemed like wasteful positioning at a glance was actually a magic circle—every troop was part of the magic circle that cast a powerful blessing over the entire army.

“*Arnest*.”

The formation magic circle glowed a red copper color. Its power was Pelpedro’s order.

“Misfit,” Pelpedro said. “No matter how strong you are, the besiegement of the gods cannot be broken with individual power. Arnest can only be affected by the true art of war—military strategy. Everything else is eliminated without question. Thus, the few will be conquered by the many. This is the order of combat.”

Hmm. I see. So it wasn’t that they strictly prioritized numbers without regard for strength. Within this formation magic, there was an order working to weaken any kind of individual attack against this

divine army.

"With only eight of you, victory is ours."

The squad of Amysius nocked their arrows and fired them at me all at once. I deployed Beno Ievun against the rain of divine arrows, but the aurora of darkness I created was shredded and the arrows continued falling. I used my Aviasten Ziara-covered hand to burn them, but one slipped past and pierced my left arm.

"Looks like the blessing doesn't only apply to your defenses," I noted, yanking out the arrow and burning it to ash.

It appeared that while inside Arnest, the divine army possessed unlimited power against individual attackers. Countering it would require an army of the same scale or greater, but that was obvious—their goal, after all, was *war*. That was what they wanted to draw out of us.

"Both your subordinates have already been swallowed by Arnest. This is how weak you are before the power of order," Pelpedro declared.

I looked over at Lay and Shin to see they had both been surrounded by the divine army.

"Then let's try it."

I opened my hand towards the sky and sent magic upwards, drawing a large circle. Black magic stones formed in the air and fell. Gia Gleas rained down on the plateau, crushing the soldiers and boring holes into the ground.

"It's futile," the God of War said.

The Garmrgund crawled out of the holes and swung their divine swords. They charged at me without seeming to have sustained any visible wounds.

"*Jirasd*."

Black lightning blew about like a wild storm, mowing down the gods with a roar of thunder. I dodged the divine sword of an incoming Garmrgund and dug my hand of black fire into its chest. When I clenched my fist and cast Vebzud on top, the Garmrgund's knees gave out underneath it. I lifted its body and threw it lightly at an approaching Schnelde.

Armor collided with armor and fell apart into pieces. Out of the

two gods who had collided, the Garmrgund, whose source I had crushed, remained on the ground and perished. The other spear-wielding god had been damaged, but just like the other Garmrgund I had previously swept away with only Jirasd, it stood up without any trouble.

"Hmm. I think I get it now."

Within Arnest, quantity was valued over quality. Individual attacks had little effect against groups, but individual attacks against individual troops were easy enough to do. As for the number itself, that seemed to be determined by the number of sources in the spell. In which case, all we had to do was destroy each source one by one. But such a thing would take all day.

"Shin, Lay, stir them up."

I sent them a Leaks and started running.

"Understood."

When I looked through Shin's perspective, I could see Schnelde rushing at him from every direction. A single thrust of their spears could turn an entire mountain to dust, and he was surrounded on all sides with no escape. A blast of wind exploded on the spot, sending clouds of dust through the air.

Amid the dust, a single divine spear fell apart. The Schnelde holding it had a hole in its armor, from which blood poured like a fountain. The god fell forwards, revealing Shin, who had escaped the encirclement of Schnelde to stand behind it. In his hand was the Ruinflow Sword, Altocorasta, a demon sword with a beautiful ripple pattern on the blade.

"Arnest, is it? Allow me to cut through that formation of yours," he said.

He started running faster than the eye could follow. The formation magic of the gods got in his way, slowing his speed somewhat. But even then, Shin's speed was fearsome.

"It's useless," Pelpedro said. "We are an *army of order*. Being the perfect military order means there is nothing an individual can do to break our formation."

The faster he moved, the more the Arnest formation around him should have been disturbed, eventually falling apart. However, as the

God of War said, the army of gods showed perfect order and instead of falling apart maintained their encirclement. They had anticipated Shin's plan and moved one step ahead of him, blocking his way at every turn. But despite that he cut them down with Altocorasta and continued running.

Divine swords, spears, and bows launched their attacks, but each time Shin evaded them just before impact and avoided taking any damage. The gods could make all the walls they wanted, but as a single unit, they were powerless before his sword.

Even if he couldn't wipe them out entirely, Shin's power made it easy for him to break through the army. Thus, he cut a path towards the center of the plateau.

On the opposite side, in the left wing of the army, Lay was also making his way towards the center of the plateau. Dolzork concentrated their Jio Graze fire on him, but the jet-black suns were being blocked by the petals of the glittering peach cosmos flower floating behind him—Ravul Aske, activated with the power of love to oppose the Arnest and allow Lay to pass through like a gust through trees. He had seven sources, so despite being alone he was easily able to hold his ground against seven others within Arnest.

"Now, how long will your encirclement last?" I wondered.

Using Aviasten Ziara on both hands, I scattered the enemies in the center and retreated. In order to surround us, the left and right flank of troops had all gathered at a single point in the center. Each of their four squads had formed a straight line that met at the center.

"No matter how you move, Arnest cannot be broken. The formation is perfect," Pelpedro's voice said from the back of the army. "Cease your futile struggle, misfit."

"You like to sound omniscient, Pelpedro, but there's nothing more frail than a military of perfect order."

"No military tactic will work against us. Much less a pathetic strategy like this."

"You'll see soon enough."

Without breaking their encirclement, the once-split army of gods began to close in on a single point of the plateau, as if in pursuit of a

single target. In other words, their allied squads were ferociously charging at us from multiple directions. They'd have to stop their advances if they didn't want to collide with each other, but doing so would mean one of the three of us would end up outside of Arnest. They could try to stop us, but the moment they went after one of us, they'd inevitably get in the way of their own forces.

"I can see what you're trying to do, misfit," Pelpedro said. "The perfect army of order is easy to lure. Use the enemy to block the enemy, create the faintest disturbance in their formation, and break through. That may be your plan—"

Just before the squads of the divine army crossed paths, a part of the right wing became the left wing, and a part of the left wing became the central squad. Then finally, a part of the central squad shifted to the right wing, and so the Arnest was maintained without a single disruption, as if instead of an army the Arnest were a single life-form.

"—but as I said, we are the order of war. We are gods of combat, those who lead an army of order!"

The God of War Pelpedro stood behind me.

"There is no art of war that will allow you to escape."

Light gathered in his hand, and a divine sword with a red copper glow appeared.

He swung the divine sword down with all his might, which I caught with the Aviasten Ziara around my hands. Magic struggled against magic with a crackling sound, the pressure resulting in a storm whirling around the two of us.

"You've used all your cards, misfit. Your subordinates have ceased moving."

"What are you on about?" I smirked boldly and cast a layer of Vebzud over my right hand. "Look closer. The formation you took completed my strategy."

"Your strategy...?"

I layered Jirasd over my hand and pushed the divine sword back. In response, Pelpedro used his whole body to push down.

"Your nonsense will not work on me!"

His left hand grabbed my shoulder.

“Fireee!”

On Pelpedro’s command, Dolzork fired a barrage of Jio Graze. The God of War kept a firm hold of my shoulder, prepared to burn along with me. Jet-black flames swallowed the two of us.

“Not good enough,” I said.

Immediately after erasing the Jio Graze with my Magic Eyes of Destruction, I kicked his feet out from under him.

“Wuh...!”

“How could the god in charge of an army of order not know of this tactic?”

I twisted his sword arm and pinned it against him.

“Defeating me won’t work,” Pelpedro said. “We are an army, not an individual.”

“You don’t get it at all. Let me tell you the answer.”

I took his divine sword and threw it away.

“It’s billiards.”

“Bill...iards...?” the God of War repeated blankly.

I held a hand out and wrapped him in Beno Ievun.

“What...?”

“And you’re the ball, Pelpedro. You and all your men.”

I raised my hand, looking at the God of War, now wrapped in the spherical Beno Ievun.

“Go,” I said.

I shoved the Beno Ievun. The sphere containing Pelpedro shot off at the speed of light, crashing into the soldiers around us. On impact, the soldiers were repelled, sending them flying, crashing into other soldiers and sending them flying as well. Arnest was less effective in single combat scenarios, making them susceptible to attack. Since the count was based on the number of sources, the flying god counted as an attack against the god it hit.

Of course, the rebounds didn’t end with one hit. The flying gods would hit more gods, who would then hit even more gods. The sound of collisions rapidly increased across the plateau that had transformed into a kind of billiard table. After bouncing about in a complex trajectory, the gods would fall into the holes created by Gia Gleas I’d cast earlier.

In no time at all the army of gods once gathered on the plateau was completely wiped out. The final one to fall into a hole was the God of War, Pelpedro. Their formation had fallen apart, and Arnest no longer had any effect.

"The army of perfect order always has the best possible formation, which is certainly strong in combat," I said, grinning down at the hole Pelpedro had fallen into. "But it also makes you ideal for billiards."

From behind his battered helmet, Pelpedro's Divine Eyes glinted.

"It was all a diversion," he said.

He raised a hand weakly and pointed at the sky. I looked with my Magic Eyes to see countless shadows in the sky far above the Nefius Plateau. It was more of the divine army, this time gods riding in on white horses. They had used the squads on the ground here as a diversion to deploy an aerial force.

"Our objective is to spread war. The aviation squad has prepared their formation to raze your demon city. You might have finally noticed now, but it's—"

"Too late, you say? Did you think I'd agree?"

I snapped my fingers and showed a glimpse of my magic power—of the magic power far, far above the heads of the gods in the sky.

The Demon Castle Delsgade appeared overhead. Beneath it, the longsword of darkness, Venuzdonoa, glimmered ominously.

"Fire!" Pelpedro commanded.

The bowman gods and magician gods aimed their respective arrows and magic attacks at Delsgade. Though they struck in quick succession, the castle remained unchanged.

"Let's see how well your battle formation fares against Venuzdonoa," I said.

I looked up at the demon castle and drew the magic circle for Gatom. But the moment I was about to teleport there, a shadow fell on Delsgade.

Sasha slowly descended from the sky, her blonde hair fluttering behind her.

Hmm. What is she up to?

"Say, Demon King," she said with a smile, softly touching the

Abolisher of Reason that was floating in the air. “Can you return my Sarjieldenav to me for just a little while?”

§ 16. The Order of Destruction

The gods in the sky instantly changed their formation according to their order. Magic overflowed from the Fless magic circles drawn on their bodies, increasing the speed of their advance.

They were probably trying to fly out of Venuzdonoa's range. But the moment their formation magic was completed, Sasha glared down at the gods, making them freeze on the spot. It was as if they were so overcome with fear they could no longer move.

"You don't mind, right?" Sasha asked.

Still drunk, and possibly with Abernyu's memories back, Sasha cheerfully poked Venuzdonoa with her fingertip.

Wouldn't hurt to give her a shot.

"As long as you don't hurt anyone else in the process," I said, acquiescing.

"Got it."

Sasha grabbed the Abolisher of Reason, and I commanded the sword to obey her.

"The Demon King has given his approval. Return to your original form, Sarjieldenav," Sasha said.

She spun the sword in her hand and pointed the tip up at the sky. When she released her hold, Venuzdonoa shot upwards out of her hand. Black particles gathered in the sky, gradually covering the longsword in a sphere of darkness. The shape of the Abolisher of Reason vanished, leaving the shadow of a sun instead.

"Say, did you know this?"

Sasha floated up before the Sun of Destruction, twintails fluttering behind her.

"When you close your eyes, what you see on the back of your eyelids is my view. People call it the sky of destruction."

The Sun of Destruction was still a shadow. But as long as it was in the sky, the order of destruction was in effect.

"*Newiarada*."

As soon as the army of gods confirmed Sasha had moved up in the sky, they took the chance to scatter in every direction. The formation magic Newiarada was used to facilitate their retreat at the fastest possible speed.

The army of gods retreated smoothly, soaring through the sky at a speed faster than their magic normally would have allowed. Their purpose in withdrawing was both to escape the control of the shadow sun and to march upon the demon cities and villages nearby. At the speed they were moving through the air, it would only take a matter of seconds for them to reach their destinations.

Their goal was to swallow the world in war. And for the sake of achieving their goal, they wouldn't think twice about burning down entire villages of demons unable to defend themselves.

However, no matter how much they advanced, they were unable to flee. They had easily flown enough to circle the world once, yet the Nefius Plateau was still below them, and the shadow sun was still overhead.

"Those tiny wings of yours cannot escape the Sun of Destruction," Sasha said. "The order of this sky has already been broken. The only ones who can fly freely are my Demon King and Zeridheavens, which his follower created."

Dark light illuminated the sky, swallowing the airborne army in no time at all.

"Why?"

"Why do you defy?"

"Goddess of Destruction, Abernyu."

"Answer us!"

The Swordsman, Spearman, Bowman, and Magician Gods all shouted at Sasha at once.

"Why do you defy order, Goddess of Destruction?! You are the order of *destruction*! Why would you disturb the order of this world?!" Pelpedro yelled from the ground. "Did the misfit inflict a needless binding on you?!"

"Oh, that's right..." Sasha said. "I remember now. I always hated *that*."

“What?”

Sasha smiled—as though she was Abernyu.

“I’ve always said that I hated order. In fact, the thing that actually bound me was order. It was the Demon King who released me from that binding.”

The Magic Eyes of Destruction appeared in Sasha’s pupils as she glared down at the God of War.

“Say, God of War,” Sasha said. “Will waging this war satisfy you? You said you and your army will throw this world into war, but is that actually a decision made by your own will?”

“We are order. We have no will,” Pelpedro replied.

“Hmm. I see. You truly are a pitiable person.”

The light of darkness completely covered the sky. The Goddess of Destruction became the Demon Castle Delsgade. Sasha herself had nothing to do with the order of destruction, and with the Sun of Destruction in shadow form, her power was nothing like Abernyu’s. But even incomplete, the all-consuming light of Sarjieldenav’s black sun was definitely shining.

“Whenever I opened my eyes, all my Divine Eyes could reflect was total despair,” Sasha said.

Within the stained dark sky, the army of gods deployed a defensive formation to withstand the black rays of sunlight.

“You...” Pelpedro said.

“The power to swallow war... The Goddess of Destruction’s power...” Sasha said.

Through the sky that could destroy all life, Sasha flew, going higher and higher until she reached the Sun of Destruction.

“But not anymore.” She spread her arms wide. Her body was sucked into Sarjieldenav, and she became one with the shadows. “I was reborn as a demon. The Demon King gave me life.”

“The Goddess of Destruction... Abernyu...”

“That’s my old name. I’m Sasha Necron now. The Witch of Destruction, subordinate of the Demon King of Tyranny.”

The shadow sun shrank, and the blonde girl reappeared. The Sun of Destruction had been condensed to its very limit, fitting squarely into Sasha’s left eye.

"Dilhade is my hometown. It's where I was born and raised. It's not perfect, but it's a lovely place. There's schools, shops, farms, and hunting grounds. Everybody there has their own lives, ones they live with laughter. That's why I don't *care* if you're an army of gods or order—"

With the entire sky in her field of view, Sasha glared.

"—if you bring war to this country, I will show you true despair."

The shadow sun in her left Eye inverted, turning into the true sun of darkness. And as the Sun of Destruction fully manifested—

"Surround her!"

This time, the army of gods flew towards Sasha. But the result was the same as before. No matter how much they flew, they could never reach her. And as though to further highlight the difference in their abilities, the army's position never changed from being below her. They couldn't even approach her, much less surround her.

As Sasha gazed down upon them from above, the darkness swallowed their bodies. The sun which had originally shined upon everything without discrimination was now picking and choosing targets to destroy.

"We're fading..."

"Our bodies..."

"The army of gods..."

The wards of their defensive formation magic were unable to block the destructive rays, and the army of gods dissolved in the sky.

"The Divine Eyes of the End... Why do you turn the order of destruction upon us, Abernyu...?" Pelpedro asked.

The rays also reached the troops on the plateau that had fallen into the holes, and they too were destroyed. Over half of the God of War's red copper armor was thus swallowed by the darkness.

"Destroy us all you want, but you cannot escape. You know that best yourself," he said.

"But I *don't* know. Because, you see, I've forgotten everything," Sasha replied.

"Then remember this: All living beings will fight. That is the order of this world, the logic, the *law* of nature. It's fate. No matter how many times you block the door or destroy us, the result will be the

same. The door will open once again, and we will march upon you."

The black sun turned Pelpedro entirely into darkness. Just before he met his end, he opened his mouth one last time.

"The smoke signals of war will rise again."

Those were the last words of the God of War.

"Don't you know?" Sasha said with a smile. "Fate can be crushed with your own hands."

She turned to me. "Isn't that right, Anos?"

Having teleported with Gatom, I was standing right behind her. The darkness faded from the sky, returning to its blue color. Sasha flew to my side.

"Hmm. Are those the Goddess of Destruction's Divine Eyes?" I asked.

"That's right, the Divine Eyes of the End. I'm borrowing Delsgade's power through Sarjieldenav."

The black sun in her Eye returned to its shadow form.

"I can only use half its power right now, so I can't hold it for more than a few seconds."

Sasha glared at the empty space in front of her, and the shadow of a sword appeared. The shadow sun faded from her eye, and the Abolisher of Reason appeared before her instead. Her Divine Eyes of the End turned back into the Magic Eyes of Destruction.

"Have you regained your memories?" I asked.

"Hmm, only a little."

"You speak a lot more like Abernyu now."

Sasha hummed in thought, pressing a hand against her head. The gesture was very like her usual self.

"I wonder why? I'm just doing what I feel like doing. Maybe the army of order is so similar to the Goddess of Destruction that my old self just had to speak up?" she wondered out loud. "But I remembered something about these Eyes."

She sat down while floating in the air and stared into my Eyes.

"It's the reason you and I have the same Magic Eyes of Destruction."

"Oh? And what is that?"

Sasha used Leaks to send images into my head. I shared them

with Shin and everyone else using our magic link.

"When my Divine Eyes could only see sadness, you, Anos, showed me a smile," she said with a teasing giggle. "That's why you're my Demon King."

She sent the memories she'd regained to me through Leaks.

Images from two thousand years ago flooded my head.

§ 17. The Demon King's Divine Eyes, the Goddess of Destruction's Magic Eyes

Two thousand years ago.

Inside Sarjieldenav, the Sun of Destruction, a blonde girl clutched her knees to her chest as she drifted through darkness. In this space without direction or dimension, she floated as though she were being carried by wind, rotating freely.

Occasionally, she opened her eyes and stared into the darkness, sighing quietly. On her face was a look of intense boredom.

"He's not coming at all... Ugh, don't tell me he *forgot*," she muttered, burying her face back into her knees. "If you don't come soon, I'll destroy everything... Just watch me..."

Just then, a single ray of light shined into the darkness. Whipping her head up, the girl—Abernyu, the Goddess of Destruction—immediately brightened. A black ground promptly formed in the darkness.

From the falling ray of light, a man clad in black appeared—the Demon King of Tyranny, Anos Voldigoad. He walked towards Abernyu the moment he landed on the black ground.

The Goddess of Destruction was about to run up to him with a smile when she froze, shook her head, and turned away as though she were totally indifferent to his presence. She instead eagerly waited for Anos to reach her, a bored look on her face.

But when he finally walked up to her—

"Hmph. What kind of whim brings you to the Sun of Destruction so many times? You're a weird one, Demon King."

She turned her back to Anos as though she had no interest in him.

"I wouldn't visit you on a whim," Anos said.

Abernyu looked down to hide her giddy reaction to Anos's words.

"I can't just leave you alone either," he added.

"Really now? It's not like I asked you to visit," the Goddess of Destruction said in a frosty tone.

Anos's Magic Eyes glinted as he stared into her abyss.

"Hmm. It looks like you've gained control over the order of destruction. Sarjieldenav has remained in its shadow form without casting any rays of black sunlight. You no longer need my help."

"All thanks to someone stealing my lips."

"Sorry about that. But I needed your focus on me to activate Gaga Gyoniyor."

Abernyu pouted unhappily. "You don't need to apologize. To a god, a kiss is no different from a dog bite."

"If you say so."

If she really hadn't cared about it, Gaga Gyoniyor wouldn't have worked—but Anos chose not to say that out loud.

"By the way, I wrote the letter you mentioned." Abernyu drew a magic circle and took out a single letter. She held it out for Anos to take.

"It'll be a good souvenir," Anos said.

"Say, what kind of god is Militia?" Abernyu asked curiously.

Anos smiled faintly. "Dunno. I wonder that myself."

"You don't know?" She looked surprised.

"She said she wants to meet you."

"Hmm. I see. So she's the same as me," Abernyu said with a gentle look. "I want to meet Militia too."

She turned to face the darkness again.

"It's weird, isn't it? We're nearby each other, yet we can't meet because of our orders. Why are we even sisters?"

Abernyu slowly walked through the darkness.

"Just kidding. I know there's no point in saying that to you, Demon King."

"Abernyu," Anos said. "I'm here today because I have something to tell you."

At Anos's words, she stopped walking. With her back to him, she

looked over her shoulder.

"What?"

"I want you."

Abernyu's cheeks turned scarlet as she looked at Anos, wide-eyed.

"Huh...?"

The Demon King looked at her with a dead serious expression on his face.

"Your body, your source, your order. Give me everything that is Abernyu, the Goddess of Destruction," he said firmly.

With a slightly flushed look, the Goddess of Destruction turned to face Anos.

"In exchange, I will grant your wish," Anos continued.

Abernyu stared at him for a long moment before replying.

"So the Sun of Destruction wasn't enough for you," she said, quietly bringing her fingers to her own chest. "The Demon King now wants the Goddess of Destruction's order. He wants all of it, so he can change the world."

Anos nodded.

"You've gained control over your order, but as long as you are a god, I cannot do anything about the fundamental order in this world," he said. "Regardless of what you want, destruction will continue to exist, and despair will continue to be reflected in your Divine Eyes."

Abernyu had gained control over the sunlight cast by the Sun of Destruction. But even then, when her Eyes gazed upon the earth, everything in her field of view would break down and crumble. The order that caused people to die so easily hadn't changed at all. Something else would simply destroy the demons, spirits, and humans in Sarjieldenav's place.

"But if I obtain *you*, I can steal that order entirely. By bringing down both the Sun of Destruction and Goddess of Destruction, the destruction in the world will be reduced to a minimum. Those meant to die will survive, and those meant to perish will live on. After that, peace will follow."

"You want me for the sake of peace?" Abernyu asked.

“Desperately.”

She hummed, looking at the Demon King in contemplation.

“The preparations are complete,” Anos said. “All that’s left is your decision.”

“And if I say no?” Abernyu asked.

“I won’t let you.”

Abernyu giggled. “What a hopeless Demon King.”

“And unfortunately, a greedy one.”

She tapped her lips lightly in thought.

“Okay. But I don’t want to hand it to you for free. Let’s have a match. If you win, I’ll give you one thing of mine. What do you say?”

“Very well.”

Pleased with his answer, Abernyu’s eyes narrowed.

“What kind of match will it be?” Anos asked.

“Let’s see. If you bring me what I want, it will count as your victory.”

“Oh? And what do you want?”

Abernyu pointed at Anos’s right eye.

“I want Magic Eyes—your pretty Magic Eyes,” she said in a teasing tone. “What do you think?”

“You can have them.”

Abernyu looked surprised. “Really?”

“You want them, don’t you?”

“I do, but...”

She had only said it as a lighthearted joke. The Demon King’s Eyes had been able to suppress the Goddess of Destruction’s Divine Eyes of the End—it wasn’t something he could afford to lose. And it was for that reason that Abernyu had asked for them; she had wanted to watch him squirm.

“I don’t go back on my word,” was all Anos said.

Anos made Abernyu float up with magic, cupped a hand around her head, and showed her his mauve Magic Eyes. In the abyss of his pupils, a cross of darkness could be seen.

“If I give you this, it’ll be my win. Give me your right eye in return,” he said.

The Divine Eyes of the End appeared in the Goddess of

Destruction. The sun of darkness appeared in her pupils, glowing darkly.

"Say, what are your Magic Eyes called?" Abernyu suddenly asked.

"Why do you need to know?"

"I'm just curious."

"I call them the Magic Eyes of Mayhem."

"Hmm. What does that mean?"

"It means chaotic ruin. The essence of these Eyes is ruin, but the power is chaotic. Even I can't see the bottom of its depths. There's no way of checking either, since the world wouldn't survive what would happen if I opened them fully."

The power to make things that couldn't perish, perish—and that was only a side effect spilling out from its true power. Opening the Magic Eyes to see its true power would cause the entire world to collapse with disorder. Because of that, not even the Demon King of Tyranny himself could check what his Eyes could really do.

Thus, he could only release a suppressed version of its power. That alone was enough for the Magic Eyes of Mayhem to destroy order.

"What a violent pair of Eyes," Abernyu said.

"If you're worried about it, you don't have to take it."

"No way. The Demon King agreed to give them to me, so they're mine."

They brought their faces close to each other, until their right eyes were staring straight into each other. Mauve light mixed with glowing darkness. Magic particles rose around them.

"You know, Demon King," Abernyu said quietly. "From the moment you first looked at me, I felt all kinds of emotions overflowing from here."

She tapped the left side of her chest with her slender fingers.

"All kinds of emotions, feelings I never knew before—I felt them for the first time. My Eyes have only ever seen despair, so I believed the world was always sad and crying."

The blended light was reabsorbed back into their bodies. The two slowly distanced themselves again. Anos's right Divine Eye glowed darkly, while Abernyu's right Magic Eye was dyed mauve.

“Is reality different? Will your Eyes be able to see something else? I don’t know the answer, but you said you’d grant my wish, right?” Abernyu asked.

“Bwa ha ha. You’ve lost the match, but you still plan on having your wish granted, don’t you?”

Abernyu blinked in surprise.

“What’s so funny?” she asked innocently.

“Nothing. Being honest is a good thing.”

She blinked a few more times, adjusting to her new Magic Eyes. Her magic power flowed from her right eye to her left eye, dying both mauve. However, the cross of darkness didn’t appear in its depths.

“Huh?” Abernyu exclaimed. “It’s not the same Magic Eyes as the Demon King...”

“The two Eyes have been halved, so that’s to be expected. You should be able to use its original power in brief bursts, at least. The Divine Eyes of the End I received from you have lost most of its order as well.”

The magic power of the Divine Eyes in Anos’s right eye shifted to the left, and the sun of darkness faded.

Instead, magic circles appeared in both of Anos’s eyes. He cast Gresde in his hand and glared at it. The flames vanished.

“Hmm. The power of destruction has weakened, but it’s exceptional as anti-magic. Easy to control too. How convenient.”

“Compared to the Magic Eyes of Mayhem, you mean?”

Anos nodded with a laugh. “Let’s call it the Magic Eyes of Destruction.”

“What about these?” Abernyu asked, pointing at her own mauve Magic Eyes.

“The Magic Eyes of Mauve.”

“How literal.”

Abernyu blinked a few times, switching Eyes. Her mauve pupils returned to their original color, and a magic circle appeared in them —the Magic Eyes of Destruction. A giggle spilled from her lips.

“Now we match,” she said happily. She then looked back at Anos, as though recalling something. “Oh right, as I was saying. If you can

grant my wish...with these Eyes of yours, I'd like to walk the earth and see something other than sadness."

She beamed from ear to ear, as though she were staring at hope itself.

"I'd like to see this world smiling."

§ 18. Spirit of Similitude

After confirming the door of god had completely disappeared from the Nefius Plateau, we returned to the Reglia estate.

"Ugh... Yeah, I can't remember any more," Sasha said, clutching her head in both her hands. She seemed to have sobered up quite a bit. "Do I really have to rely on alcohol for all this?"

"Hee hee. That's what drunkards usually say, Sasha," Eleonore pointed out teasingly.

"So what? If drinking is what's causing me to remember then there's no helping it."

"That aside, I was shocked to learn that Anos's Magic Eyes of Destruction are actually from you," Eleonore continued cheerfully, holding up an index finger. "I thought you inherited them from Anos."

"Well, it's true that Sasha's current Magic Eyes of Destruction were passed on from me," I said.

Eleonore looked at me in surprise. "Huh? But the Magic Eyes of Destruction are the result of you receiving half of Abernyu's weakened Divine Eyes of the End, right?"

"From what we saw of the past, my Magic Eyes of Destruction only contains the right eye of the Goddess of Destruction. But the left one isn't with Sasha—it's part of Delsgade, along with the right Eye of the Magic Eyes of Mayhem."

"Oh, I see. It's not that Sasha can't remember, but that she doesn't have the Goddess of the Destruction's order?" Eleonore summarized.

"I think so. But it seems I can temporarily borrow the power from Delsgade using the Abolisher of Reason..." Sasha mumbled.

However, there was a large difference between that and her original power. Her true strength would require the order of destruction in this world to be revived. In other words, Delsgade's

seal had to be released for her to regain her original form as the Goddess of Destruction. But doing that would make death and destruction rampant in the world once again.

"The army of gods haven't perished, have they?" Misha suddenly asked quietly.

"Probably not," Lay answered. "Anos forced the door open ahead of their plans, so that probably wasn't all their forces."

"They may be able to propagate endlessly, like the Keepers," Shin added.

The God of War Pelpedro commanded an army. He was a little different to the other gods that governed orders. It wouldn't be too inaccurate to think of them as similar beings to Keepers.

"They said they wanted to engulf the world in war..." Misa, who had returned to her transient form, mumbled worriedly. "I know Lord Anos can defeat them easily, but what if they attack a city or village next time?"

"It'd be terrible!" Eleonore cried.

Sasha nodded in agreement. "Ravia Gieg Gaverizd couldn't even wipe them out..."

They possessed spells that could turn magic attacks to stone, and an order that allowed them to dominate with sheer numbers. For other people to repel them, they would need an army of their own, and fight quantity with quantity. But doing so would only increase the number of possible deaths and spread war further.

"Inform all the demon lords of Dilhade to search for the doors of god. Send notice to Azesion, Agatha, Jiordal, and Gadeciola too," I ordered.

If the gods were planning to march upon the earth, they might have had more than one door of god prepared. The army we had just repelled could have been a vanguard unit. They most likely planned to send more gods. Areas that couldn't be viewed with Magic Eyes due to chaotic magic fields or natural barriers—like the Thundering Volcano—were especially at risk. I sent a Leaks to the Seven Demon Elders informing them of this.

"Aharthern needs to be careful too," I said to Reno, who nodded.

"I'll tell everyone to be alert. There are spirits who specialize in

searching for warning signs, so I'm sure it'll be fine," she said.

"As soon as you find a door of god, force it open and destroy the army," I said. "But if Shin's theory is correct, they'll continue to repopulate endlessly. We'll need a separate plan to combat that."

"A plan? Like what?" Sasha asked.

"For example, we can enter the Divine Realm to find the source of magic that's creating the army of order and get rid of it."

"Wow... So the plan is to use force..." Eleonore muttered, exasperated.

"But first, we have to find a door of god."

"Shall we go and do that now?" she asked.

"Leave that to the others. We'll be looking for Sasha's memories instead."

The army of order was like a substitute for the Goddess of Destruction. Learning more about the Abernyu of two thousand years ago could lead to information about these gods. The only reason the God of War was intent on throwing the world into war was because those meant to perish had stopped doing so. If we could address that in some way, the gods should cease their attack.

"And so, Reno. We're trying to regain Sasha's memories of her time as the Goddess of Destruction, Abernyu. Do you know of any spirits that could be of help?" I asked.

"Memories and recollection, you say? Give me a moment to think..."

Reno started muttering the names of various spirits to herself in thought.

"Oh, there might be one!" she eventually exclaimed. "But I don't know how well it will work..."

"That's fine. What's it called?"

"The Spirit of Similitude, Pentan. But it's a peculiar one; anyone who meets it will think they've met before."

Yet another eccentric spirit, huh?

"It's a spirit that's everywhere and can be seen by anyone, so you'll be able to meet it in no time with me around. Follow me," Reno said.

We followed Reno out of the Reglia residence and for a while

followed her down a leafy, overgrown path.

"The rumor and legends of Pentan are a little odd," Reno explained as we walked. "In its presence, you'll find yourself experiencing things that feel familiar, yet are completely new to you. Like the feeling of... What's it called again?"

"Déjà vu?" Misha asked.

"Yes, that. *Déjà vu*. Déjà vu is when you feel like you've seen or experienced something before, even though it's actually happening to you for the first time. Do you know why?"

Misha blinked a few times and tilted her head. "Why?"

"It's just a trick of the senses," I answered.

Reno nodded. "Yup. Like Anos said, it's just you imagining things. But there's a certain rumor to do with déjà vu—that it's actually a sign of you experiencing things from a forgotten past life."

I see.

"It's just a rumor. Pentan's legend, however, is a little different; spirits are actually powered by their rumors. So the déjà vu you feel around Pentan might lead to a true experience from a past life."

"It's worth a try," I said.

"Yeah!" Reno pointed to a flowering field before us. "Look, there it is. Pentan."

There was a single boot in the grass, what seemed like a single right boot. The matching left boot was nowhere in sight.

"Huh, is this a spirit?"

"It looks...like a boot...!"

Eleonore and Zeshia both approached the boot curiously. Just then, a tiger cub poked its head out of the boot.

"A baby tiger...!" Zeshia said happily.

"Hmm. How fascinating. It does feel like I've met it before," I said.

With its lower body in the boot, the tiger cub stretched its front paws up, clawing at the sky. It was a mysterious action, but even that looked familiar for some reason.

"Sasha," I called.

She nodded with a gulp. Eleonore and Zeshia stepped aside so that she could approach Pentan. But the tiger cub in the boot started

bouncing away, distancing itself from her.

"Huh? W-Wait, why are you running?!" Sasha spluttered.

She chased it in a fluster.

"It's probably leading you to where you can feel déjà vu," Reno said.

"In that case, we'll take care of things from here," I said. "Shin, you head to Aharthern with Reno and search for the door of god in the Spirit Realm."

Shin swiftly knelt before me and bowed his head. "I am most grateful for your endless generosity, my liege."

"If you have any questions, send a Leaks!" Reno said, waving as she left with Shin.

We proceeded to follow Sasha at a distance. If we got too close, Pentan could end up tracing the déjà vu of one of us instead, so we walked the streets slowly. Eventually, Pentan arrived at the Demon King Academy. The tiger in the boot entered the castle, bouncing down the corridor until it stopped before the second lecture hall. Sasha opened the door.

"Kyah!" a voice squeaked from inside.

Eleonore peeked through the door. "Huh? It's the bookworm."

Inside the lecture hall was Naya. Sasha and Pentan's sudden appearance had startled her. Cradled in her arms was Cannibal, who let out a short chirp. The small dragon eyed the tiger cub in the boot carefully, probably wondering if it was edible or not.

"What are you up to? Isn't it the holidays?" Sasha asked.

"Mr. Conflagration King said he'd help me study in his spare time. But it wasn't a firm promise, so he doesn't show up when he's busy... And I don't think he'll be coming today," Naya said, hurriedly erasing the blackboard full of runes.

"Hmm," Sasha said.

Just then, Pentan froze. At the same time, for some reason, Naya ran out of the second lecture hall as though she were being chased.

"I'll be going then!" she shouted. But the second she left the hall, she saw my face and flinched. "L-Lord Anos?! E-Excuse me!"

She bowed once and ran off.

"Huh? Wasn't she waiting for Mr. Eldmed?" Sasha asked out loud.

She turned to look at Pentan, but the spirit was still frozen—as though its goal had vanished.

"Hmm. It may have something to do with what was on the blackboard," I said, drawing a magic circle on the blackboard from outside the lecture hall. Using Rivide, the time of the blackboard rewound itself.

Eleonore read the blackboard. "But it's just yesterday's lesson plan."

"Oh..." Sasha mumbled.

Beside the magic runes related to the class, Eldmed and Naya's names were written on the blackboard. An unfamiliar spell formula covered them.

"I've never seen this before. What is it?" I said.

"A shared umbrella magic symbol," Misha answered simply.

"How rare. It looks like a crude spell formula, one so basic it's incapable of activating any magic."

I looked over at Misha, who nodded.

"It's a good luck charm for love," she said.

"Oh?"

"It's said that the two names written down will be united together."

Eleonore held up an index finger. "But it's more commonly used to tease two people who are close to each other."

"So a friend drew that after class yesterday to tease her, but she forgot to erase it and came back today when she remembered?" I asked, guessing.

"Aha ha. So *that's* why she was in such a fluster," Misa said.

"That seems most likely. Ellen and the other girls would totally do such a thing," Eleonore remarked.

"Right..." Misa replied.

However, the handwriting of that umbrella magic symbol was definitely Naya's. She had probably drawn it herself, today.

A good luck charm, huh? How heartwarming.

Lay tapped my shoulder lightly. "Pentan's vanished."

It seemed the spirit in the long boot had fulfilled its duty and left.

"This... I've seen this before," Sasha mumbled.

I entered the lecture hall and walked up to her. “The shared umbrella?”

“Yeah. I was the first to draw this...as a prank, two thousand years ago,” she said, then started running out of the lecture hall. “Follow me!”

We left the lecture hall and followed Sasha, who ran at her top speed all the way to the entrance of the underground dungeon. The wall was lined with blackboards with warnings about the dungeon written on them. Sasha glared at one blackboard with her Magic Eyes of Destruction.

The blackboard instantly crumbled away, revealing the old wall behind it. Carved into the wall like graffiti was a shared umbrella magic symbol. It was clear at a glance that it had been drawn a long, long time ago.

“I knew it... This is what I—what Abernyu—scribbled for fun...” Sasha muttered.

“That means the umbrella symbol on this wall spread as a good luck charm for love before the blackboards were added,” I said.

The runes of the shared umbrella were eroded away, making it impossible to read. I cast Rivide over it.

“H-Hey, Anos! Wh-What are you doing?!” Sasha exclaimed.

“If we figure out what was written, we might regain some of your memories.”

“Maybe so, but not with *this*! This is... This is...!”

The wall rewound in time until Abernyu’s name appeared clearly. And the other name with it was...

“This is between me and— Huh?”

...Militia.

Sasha stared at the two names on the wall in utter confusion. Misha blinked a few times before opening her mouth.

“Abernyu was in love with Militia?” she asked.

“You’ve *got* to be kidding me!” Sasha shouted.

§ 19. The Goddess of Destruction's Scribble

I rewound time on the wall with Rivide some more, but no further letters appeared other than the shared umbrella.

"But why did Abernyu leave a scribble like this?" Eleonore asked, looking at Sasha.

"There's no use asking me... I don't remember..." Sasha said, confused.

"It's time for... Sashavenue...!" Zeshia declared proudly.

"What's that?" Sasha asked.

"She means this," I said, taking wine out of a magic circle and creating a glass in the air with Iris. I then poured some of the wine into the glass.

"So we're going to rely on the power of alcohol after all..." Sasha muttered.

Sasha then accepted the glass and threw it back. In the next moment—

"Enemy alert!" she shouted, whirling around and glaring into empty space with her Magic Eyes of Destruction.

"Gwawk! Gwababababawk!"

A dog-shaped body of gel just so happened to be passing by. It screamed as it cast magic wards around itself and rolled on the floor.

"How tenacious," Sasha muttered, sending more magic into her Eyes to finish it off.

"Stop, Sasha," I said. "That thing can't even be considered an enemy."

"Ugh... But it tried to pick a fight with you, Anos," she grumbled unclearly.

"Look closer. It's just a normal dog."

Sasha obediently stared at the dog-shaped gel body.

"W-Woof, woof," the dog whined sweetly, snuggling up to Sasha.

"Gross!" she shrieked.

"Gwawk! Gwawk! Gwababababawk...!"

Facing the Magic Eyes of Destruction at such a short distance had the gel dog writhing on the floor in agony. It was indeed rather sturdy—but considering its original form, that was to be expected.

"Umm, isn't that the Scarlet Stele King, Grysilis?" Eleonore asked.

"So it seems... But if he's here, then..." Misa said, exchanging a look with her.

Out of nowhere came a hearty laugh.

"Bwa ha ha ha!"

The taps of a cane sounded, followed by the appearance of a teacher in a top hat.

"Oh, it's just your average dog walker, walking his dog! I got my hands on an interesting dog in the last battle, you see. I was just testing how far his lead can go by walking through the school," the Conflagration King, Eldmed, said cheerfully.

When I looked at him through my Eyes, I could see a magic lead extending from his cane to Grysilis—the gel dog.

"It's better to have a well-trained dog than a completely enslaved one, don't you think?"

He tapped the cane on the floor once, and the gel dog Grysilis sat down. He was indeed, as Eldmed said, rather well trained.

"Wow... He suddenly started saying real complex things!" Eleonore exclaimed.

"Ah ha ha... That's Mr. Eldmed for you, I guess..."

While Eleonore and Misa both decided to ignore what was going on, Zeshia raised her hand fearlessly.

Eldmed pointed his cane at her. "You may speak."

"Zeshia...likes cats...!"

Beside her, Misha nodded in agreement. Eldmed burst out laughing and pulled his cane back. The magic lead yanked Grysilis, and the gel dog obediently returned to Eldmed's feet.

"I can turn him into a cat instead," Eldmed said with a wicked grin, pointing his cane at the Grysilis dog.

"No thank you...!"

Zeshia rejected him with all her might.

"Yes, good point. This one isn't cute enough to be a cat, I agree," Eldmed said, walking my way. "That aside, good timing. An army of order and a door of god, was it? Sounds like some delightful things are happening. Truly not a boring day with the Demon King around, no, not even a moment to rest!"

He stopped before me and tapped his staff on the floor.

"There's one thing I figured you should probably hear. Care to listen? If you're too busy, I can just deal with it myself."

"Speak," I said.

The Conflagration King grinned gleefully and began his explanation.

"Melheis has informed the demon lords across Dilhade of the doors of god. In addition, when we sent word to the three major kingdoms of the underground world, the Jiordal Church and the Knights of Agatha immediately began their investigations. The Demon King's little sister just happened to be in Gadeciola, so she set off with the forbidden soldiers of the Overlord's Army to investigate as well."

They were all outstanding people with powerful Magic Eyes—if there was a door of god somewhere, they'd be able to find it.

"That leaves the problem of our former enemy, Azesion. Their affairs are in a bit of a mess, especially after the incident with the Sorcerer King. They'll probably tell us they don't have the men to spare in search of doors that may or may not exist. They may be able to send out a small troop of soldiers, but, well."

Eldmed chuckled as though he was enjoying the trouble.

"They won't have good enough Eyes, you mean," I said.

The Conflagration King pointed his cane at me and nodded gravely. "Exactly."

Even the five-kilometer-wide door of god at the Nefius Plateau couldn't have been seen by the average person. Mobilizing those with bad Magic Eyes to search for doors of god would yield no results.

"What's Emilia doing?" I asked.

"Bwa ha ha! Unfortunately, she's right in the middle of an

important meeting with the Hero Assembly. They're discussing each army's chain of command and what role the Hero Academy could play in times of war and disaster, actually. If you don't mind discarding that matter, I can tell her to move immediately."

So they wouldn't move without a visible threat, huh?

There had to be sensible people in the Hero Assembly, but their decisions were made by a majority vote. More people must have decided that it was more important to attend the meeting about the operation of the country than search for the doors of god.

If Emilia skipped the meeting, it would be up to the remaining members to decide how to handle war and disasters. But that same majority remaining would be the ones who had already decided that there was no need to search for the door in the first place.

"Like a bad joke, isn't it?" Eldmed said, reading my thoughts.

Things were going so poorly for them at the moment that they hardly had the bandwidth to consider outside matters. They were setting out to change how the nation worked—it would take a while for them to settle down as an organization.

"I'll go," Lay offered.

That was probably for the best. If Hero Kanon personally visited them, there would be more people willing to help.

"Take Misa with you. We'll only be searching through memories here," I said.

Lay nodded.

"Okay. It shouldn't take too long to search all over Azesion in my true form," Misa said.

"The search will never end if we have to do it personally every time. Find someone with promise and teach them how to search for themselves on your way," I said.

"We'll do just that," Lay said with a smile. He then linked hands with Misa, and they teleported away.

"Now, Sasha. Can you remember anything after seeing that scribble?"

"Hmm..." Sasha stared at the shared umbrella symbol carved into the wall, humming in thought. "I think... I drew a lot of these all over the castle... Since I was going to turn into the castle..."

She gasped and pointed at the wall. “Hey, isn’t this a map?”

There was nothing on the wall where she pointed. I looked through the wall with my Magic Eyes, but there was nothing drawn on the foundations either.

“There’s nothing there,” Eleonore said, staring at the wall with her own Eyes.

“That’s not true. Look closer, right there,” Sasha insisted.

“Huh? Where?” Eleonore asked. She brought her face right up to the wall.

Just then, lines appeared in the wall with a loud rumble. Sasha’s Magic Eyes of Destruction were carving out the wall. The tracks of destruction gradually drew a map.

“See now?” Sasha asked.

“See what, Sasha?! You drew that yourself just now! Just look at your Eyes!”

“I can’t look at my own Eyes. Don’t be silly.”

“Don’t make *me* sound like the crazy one!”

Ignoring Eleonore’s complaints, Sasha finished drawing the map on the wall.

“Is it the dungeon?” Misha asked.

“So it seems,” I said.

Sasha whirled around and looked at me.

“I’m going to try and make a deduction based on this map Abernyu drew,” she said in a dead serious tone.

Zeshia’s eyes sparkled. “It’s time for Detective Sashavenue to shine...!”

Sasha looked pleased with Zeshia’s compliment.

“I might have been called that two thousand years ago,” she said.

“I highly doubt it...” Eleonore mumbled.

“Could onlookers please remain quiet? I’m about to solve this entire case,” Sasha said, Magic Eyes glinting. “The culprit is me!”

“I don’t get it at all?!” Eleonore exclaimed.

“If I reconstruct the Demon Castle’s dungeon according to this map, I’ll be able to find the scribbles I drew two thousand years ago as a prank. I originally drew them because I wanted to surprise the Demon King with them.”

Sasha looked at the entrance of the dungeon. “If I just reconstruct it like this...”

She spread her arms solemnly and slowly raised them. Then—

“...”

Nothing happened.

“If I just reconstruct it like this...” she repeated, raising her arms once again. But the dungeon didn’t budge in the slightest.

“Ugh... Anos, this dungeon isn’t listening to me, even though it’s mine... Even though it’s *me*...!” Sasha whined, glaring at the dungeon before her. Of course, nothing happened.

“Of course it isn’t. It’s mine right now,” I said.

I stamped on the floor, making a light sound. The light sound rumbled downwards, amplifying in volume and shaking the entire Demon Castle. The dungeon was shifting to match the map Sasha had drawn. Roughly one minute later, the shaking subsided.

“Let’s go. Maybe you’ll remember something if you see those scribbles of yours.”

As soon as I took a step forwards, a ringing noise rang in my ears. An eerie voice echoed from the depths of my source.

“If you learn—”

The voice spoke through the noise.

“If you learn, you may come to regret it.”

“Hmm. You again?”

“There is no salvation here. No salvation at all. The best path from here is to turn back. Not knowing is the one and only happiness she can know.”

“By her, do you mean Abernyu?”

“If you want to take it all away, then proceed. But remember this,” the voice said alongside the static noise. *“If you proceed, she will know the truth once more.”*

Ringing static cut in and out in short bursts, as though the voice was laughing at me.

“For this world will never *smile.”*

§ 20. The Conflagration King's Theory

The eerie voice in the depths of my soul faded away, and the noise eventually ceased.

"Bwa ha ha. Was that voice just now a parting gift from Graham, perhaps?" Eldmed asked with a gleeful grin, leaning on his cane with both hands.

He had looked into my abyss using the Heavenly Father's Divine Eyes, which had also allowed him to hear the voice.

"That aside, from what I could see, even now that man's source of nihility is still being destroyed by the Demon King's source. Bwa ha ha! Only the Demon King could bring ruin to nothingness! Unfathomable abyss, unfathomable power, with potential that even the Heavenly Father's Divine Eyes cannot see," Eldmed said.

He tapped his cane against the floor.

"There's only tyranny, tyranny, and more tyranny! Before the gods that control the order of the world, here you reign still in all your tyrannical existence. Bwa ha ha!"

The Conflagration King laughed with delight. It wasn't a reaction to my bottomless magic power—he knew I had that long ago.

"And yet, there's a voice in your source. What could it be?" he asked.

"Who knows?" I replied. "All I've got so far is that they're related to the gods."

The Goddess of Creation Militia, the Goddess of Destruction Abernyu, and the God of War Pelpedro. Whenever the voice talked to me, it was always about the gods.

"Or they might be whoever commanded the army of order to attack," I added.

"I see, I see!" The Conflagration King's lips curled up in glee at

the scent of danger. "In other words, the owner of that voice is the king of gods. Bwa ha ha! Oh, how *wonderful*!"

Eldmed spread his arms with dramatic flair.

"After all the Demon King has done to trample over order, the ruler of the Divine Realm has finally decided to show themselves!" he declared.

"We don't know that for sure," I said. "After all, there *shouldn't* be a king of gods. Even Militia, the Goddess of Creation who made the world, wasn't in a position to command the other gods. The Heavenly Father Nosgalia was the order that created order itself, but he too was only a wheel in the system of order."

Gods merely formed the system of order in the world. Since they acted only according to the order they governed, they didn't have a ruler like demons and humans did.

"Nosgalia has never mentioned a king of gods either," I added.

"Maybe they were born recently? Like after Nosgalia perished?" Eleonore suggested.

"It's possible, but the way they spoke made it sound like they knew the Goddess of Destruction in the past. Militia too."

"Maybe the king's order lets them know about other gods?" Misha said.

That would mean they were born already knowing the other gods. Is that even possible?

"If a previously nonexistent order was just born, shouldn't that have made some kind of impact on the world? Especially if it's a king of gods—a ruler of all order. Wouldn't at least Eldmed, who possesses the Heavenly Father's order, have been able to feel that?" I asked.

The Conflagration King shrugged. It seems he couldn't feel anything through the Heavenly Father's order.

"If so, could such a thing have gone equally as unnoticed by the Heavenly Father and the Goddess of Creation?" Eldmed countered.

"The Goddess of Creation who created the world and the Heavenly Father who creates order, *not* knowing?" I replied. "It's possible, but then, what kind of king of gods would this really be?"

"Well, what if the king of gods had stolen their memories?"

Eldmed said.

"Hmm. Why?"

"Bwa ha ha!" Eldmed cackled. "What a foolish, foolish question. Of course, it would be to hide their identity from the enemy of all gods, the Demon King of Tyranny!"

Be it Nosgalia or Pelpedro, it was true that all gods seemed to see me as an enemy for ruining their order.

"If they're hiding their identity, then why have they chosen to approach me now?"

"What if they were forced into a situation in which they had no choice but to reveal themselves?" Eldmed said.

"So they're trying to erase me personally?"

Eldmed smirked. "In the opinion of the Conflagration King, Graham knew which god is the king. What do *you* think?"

I could pretty much guess what he was leaving unsaid.

"Because he knew who the king of the gods is, he altered the Selection Trial to create the Almighty Radiance Equis," I said.

"That's right, exactly that! Graham tried to hide the king of gods from you. He even got the God of Frenzy, Aganzon, on his side. It would not have been entirely out of character for him to use the gods in some other strange scheme."

"What you're saying is that Graham and the king of gods were working together," I concluded.

Eldmed pointed his cane at me. "Exactly!"

He lowered his cane again, tapping it against the floor as he walked.

"By creating the Almighty Radiance, they can pass off everything the king of gods does as the work of Equis," Eldmed said. "The king of gods used Graham and Equis as a cover to drive the Demon King of Tyranny into a corner. Of course, Graham himself was trying to use the king of gods to get ahead in his own plan."

"I see. Graham's defeat must have ruined their plot," I said.

Although the cover was gone, their scheme to bring me to my end probably hadn't changed. Gods tended to be stubborn like that.

"Bwa ha ha! Something sure smells fishy here! If the king of gods, the ruler of order, truly exists, then it just won't do for them to

sit around and *watch* the enemy. They can command all the other gods, after all!”

The Conflagration King stopped walking.

“In other words, a traitor may appear!” he declared dramatically, releasing his cane and letting it spin in the air. “The Goddess of Destruction Abernyu, the Goddess of Creation Militia, the proxy of god Arcana. Those are the prime candidates. As beings of order, they may be forced to join the side of the gods regardless of their will. But most of all—”

The cane stopped midair to point at the Conflagration King.

“—I, the one who stole the Heavenly Father’s order, am at the most risk!”

“Nice theory,” I said, dismissing him.

“You think?” Eldmed asked.

Well, in the Conflagration King’s case, he had no need for an order from the king of gods to betray me at the first possible moment he got.

“I can only take your words at face value,” I replied. “Knowing you, you’d try to betray me within the limits of our Zecht.”

“You mean I’d betray you while making it look like the king of gods was to blame? Oh no, I’d never be able to come up with such an *outrageous* idea!” Eldmed boasted with feigned innocence. He would have said the same thing whether he intended to betray me or not, the crafty man.

“Trivial matters such as my betrayal aside,” Eldmed said, “wouldn’t that explain why Militia stole your memories? No?”

“It’s possible that someone interfered with Militia’s will, yes,” I said.

As it stood there was no clear reason for Militia to have taken my memories of Abernyu. The existence of a king of gods notwithstanding, outside interference with the Goddess of Creation’s power would have been enough to explain why my memories had been stolen.

After hearing the dying wish of my father, Ceris Voldigoad, Militia had tried to take my memories. In that moment, someone could have interfered and made her steal other memories she hadn’t

intended to. If Militia had realized that afterwards and left the Stars of Creation as hints, everything would make sense.

"Will we have to *fight* Militia...?" Misha mumbled.

"Even if the Conflagration King's theory is true, that won't happen," I said.

If Sasha's drunk ramblings were true, Misha would be the reincarnation of the Goddess of Creation. It was no wonder she was worried.

"Rest assured, no matter what happens, you are my subordinate," I said. "Unless you want to leave, that is."

With a faint smile, Misha replied without any hesitation. "I will stay by your side even if my source were to perish."

"Good answer," I said, returning her smile. "Now, shall we get going? Apparently, there's a reality to face just up ahead. Utter nonsense. Let's get the truth over with so we can laugh about it."

I started towards the underground dungeon.

"Oh, and you don't need to come, Eldmed," I said, stopping momentarily. "Go with Melheis and lead the search for the doors of god."

"I can do that from inside the dungeon," Eldmed pointed out.

"You may walk your dog in your free time, but as a teacher of the Demon King Academy, shouldn't you pay attention to the student that came to school just to study by herself?"

Eldmed burst out laughing. "Unfathomable as always! There's just no predicting you. In this dire situation, the command you give me is to *focus on student education*? What are you thinking? Am I being left as backup in case your time in the dungeon goes on far longer than you anticipated? Or is it because you don't want me to see what's down there?"

"It's not that deep. Naya's just been waiting for you."

For a brief moment, Eldmed's eyes widened. Then, he grinned gleefully.

"So you're saying I'm not good enough! Very well, very well! You wouldn't be the Demon King of Tyranny otherwise! Yes, keep living up to my expectations!"

His shoulders were still shaking with laughter as he paused his

walk mid-step.

"Oh, but just one thing. That army of order is quite dangerous," he called out to my back. "The fact that their goal isn't to target you but to spread war across the world is quite the piece of work. It's easy for you to deal with enemies aimed solely at yourself, but it must be quite the effort to protect the entire world, no?"

Eldmed turned around as he spoke.

"Suppose the army of order were marching on the world, and at the same time, one of your subordinates was actually a traitor. War would engulf the world in a mere instant at that happening. What kind of power would the Demon King show upon the deaths of so many civilians—upon the deaths of his *followers*? Just the thought of it makes my heart skip a bea— Gwuh!"

Clutching his chest in agony, Eldmed gasped for breath.

"Bwa ha ha... You'd best avoid that. Right, misfit?"

I turned around. He pointed his cane at me from over his shoulder.

"No need for such a scary face. It's just a joke," he said. He started walking to the dungeon entrance, back towards the school. "Ah, I can't wait to see what will happen. Danger, danger, danger."

§ 21. The Castle of Memories and Dreams

In the dungeon below Delsgade, we walked down a corridor faintly illuminated by magic torches on the wall. Sasha was in the lead. As usual, she was stumbling everywhere, turning back every now and then as if roaming aimlessly.

"I thought it was around here," she slurred for the umpteenth time, confident yet completely lost as she marched through the dungeon.

"Ah! There it is!"

Sasha started running as though she had spotted something.

"Sasha."

The moment Misha called out in concern, Sasha crashed straight into the wall of the dead end she had been running towards with a thunk.

"Urgh... Why isn't the wall letting me past...?" she grumbled, seemingly questioning why walls existed at all. As Sasha glared at the wall with teary eyes, Eleonore peered at her face.

"What was it that you found, Sasha?" she asked.

For some reason, Sasha looked at her in confusion. "What?"

"You said, 'There it is,'" Eleonore explained.

Sasha clutched her head. "I'm the Goddess of Destruction..."

"Yup, we know."

"The Goddess of Destruction obeys the order of destruction."

"And?"

"By hitting my head, I destroyed my memories..."



"Wow..." Eleonore grimaced.

"Zeshia...found it...!"

Zeshia hopped on the spot. Everyone looked over at her to see her proudly pointing at a section of the wall, where some small runes had been carved.

Once I'm reborn as a demon, I'll go see you.
As soon as you see these Magic Eyes, you'll notice me.
Even if I don't remember anything, I will find my way to you.
Please, with the Eyes I gave you, glare back at me, gently.
And I will definitely remember these feelings once again.

"Is this a love letter?" Eleonore said teasingly.

Face red, Sasha snarled at her, "N-No it's not! It's not like that! It's not like that, okay?!"

"But if Abernyu was in love with the Demon King, it wouldn't have been weird for her to write a love letter, don't you think?"

Sasha blushed even more and broke into a run.

"I said it's not like thaaaaaa— Oof!"

She crashed into another wall with a thunk.

"A-Are you okay, Sasha?" Eleonore asked, concerned.

"It's just a scribble... There's no deeper meaning to it. I wasn't in my right mind... You weren't meant to see it..." she mumbled with her face pressed to the wall.

"You're the one who brought us here..."

"Ugh... Eleonore's being mean... Bully! She's bullying the Goddess of Destruction! It's because I destroyed so much, isn't it? That's why she hates me and is bullying me, isn't it?"

"Ah... Sorry, sorry. I get it, sometimes you just feel like scribbling on walls for fun, right?" Eleonore said in a light tone, comforting Sasha. "But if Abernyu didn't want anyone to see it, why did she leave it behind?"

At that, Eleonore stared at the wall curiously and tilted her head.

"Maybe she had no shame?" Misha guessed.

"That's probably it," I said. "Gods have little sense of emotions, much less experience feeling them. While the Goddess of

Destruction's heart was starting to grow, it was still far less developed than that of a demon or a human. And combine that with a total lack of shame and with her actually being in love with the idea of love more than anything, that's probably why this is here."

Sasha glared my way resentfully.

"Don't worry about it, Sasha," I said. "Your past life is your past life. There's no need for the past to control you now. Just live your current life how you want to live it."

"Th-That's what I'm doing!" Sasha exclaimed.

"Good," I replied.

Just then, she pointed a finger at me.

"The Demon King is impotent!" she shouted.

Silence instantly fell over the underground dungeon.

"Oh? Me, impotent? I see."

"Wh-What? There's no use threatening me. Impotent is impotent!"

"Oh, I don't blame you. I completely agree with you actually. If I was stronger, I'd be able to achieve what I believe in without being called a tyrant."

"Ugh..." Sasha grumbled, glaring at me. "That's not it! That's not what I'm saying! The Demon King is impotent, but impotent in a good way!"

"Hmm...?" Eleonore tilted her head in confusion.

Zeshia had question marks in her eyes too. "What does...impotent in a good way mean...?"

I looked over at Misha, who thought for a moment.

"Anos is innocent," she eventually said.

My eyes widened. "Pfft. Ha ha ha! Don't make me laugh, Misha. If I'm innocent, then the world must be pure beyond belief."

"That's what I believe," Misha said, staring straight at me. "Sasha too."

"Impotent in a good way, *and* innocent?"

I glanced over at Sasha, who glared up at me angrily.

"She's just a little frustrated that Anos is so innocent," Misha explained.

"Hmm. I guess it all depends on how you word it. I'm not trying

to deny your feelings, but don't you think that's a bit of an exaggeration?"

"It's appropriate," Misha answered simply, without any hesitation.

That was a little surprising to me. Perhaps it was the innocence in *her* that allowed her to see the same in me. But to be innocent at all? What a laugh.

"It's a little embarrassing, but if Misha says so, I'll accept the compliment," I said.

She nodded with a smile.

"Ugh... That's so unfair," Sasha whined. "Why is it always Misha? You didn't accept *my* impotence!"

"What are you trying to give him, Sasha?!" Eleonore yelped.

"Bwa ha ha. Very well, Sasha," I said. "If you wish to give it to me, I'll accept that as well."

Sasha brightened up and pointed at me. "A good impotence!"

She whirled around and resumed walking.

"Let's keep going. I think there was more written— Gyah!"

She slammed into the wall again with a thunk.

"Why do you keep doing that, Sasha?!" Eleonore exclaimed.

"Because it's fun...!" Zeshia answered.

"Are you trying to go past here, Sasha?" I asked.

"Past?" Misha echoed, tilting her head.

"I've shown you once before," I said, continuing. "You do it like this."

I stepped forwards and walked into the wall with my entire body. Upon impact the wall gave way with a loud crash and crumbled around me, allowing passage through the newly made hole in the wall.

"Umm, Anos? What are you doing?" Eleonore asked.

"Accessing the hidden passage," I replied.

"That makes no sense at all!"

Despite saying that, Eleonore followed after me as I continued clearing my way through the wall with a rumble. On the other side was a different corridor.

"Look," Misha said, pointing at the wall. There were scribbles drawn everywhere.

What should I do once I'm reborn?

The first thing has to be alcohol! Gods can't get drunk, so I'll go and get totally wasted.

I'll sleep in lots, and laze about in bed as much as I want.

Then, I'll make lots of friends. I'll be a demon, so everyone will like me if I'm strong.

The Demon King won't have any idea what to do with peace, so I'll take pity on him and help out.

Speaking of which, will the Demon King be able to find this?

If he never reads these scribbles I wrote just for him, that would be so lame!

"There's a load of incoherent text written here," Eleonore said. She had walked down the corridor, eyeing all the text on the walls.

"Is this your first time seeing this too?" Misha asked me.

I nodded. "These runes can only be read when the dungeon is formed in this exact shape. In any other configuration, they'd just look like random scratches."

It wasn't a trick made with magic, so it wasn't easily noticeable using Magic Eyes. As Sasha had said, they were merely scribbles drawn for fun.

"Can you remember anything, Sasha?" I asked.

"Hmm... I think I can... Maybe?" she muttered. She rushed about the corridor looking at all the scribbles, then continued farther down the hall.

"Ah—"

She had reached the end of the corridor.

"It's a dead end," Eleonore said.

The wall beside her had scribbles carved into it just like the others.

Say, Demon King.

There's one last thing I want to tell you.

Thank you.

No matter how I end up after I'm reborn, this, I can say for sure.

I will

"Hmm?"

Eleonore searched the rest of the wall nearby, but there was no continuation to those runes. The silly graffiti had ended there.

"The rest of it's missing," Eleonore said, tapping her chin in confusion. "Is there another hidden passage?"

"It's not...a hidden passage...!" Zeshia said with sparkling eyes. "Zeshia knows...!"

"Hmm? What do you know, Zeshia?"

"Zeshia saw it in a dream! A dream about my little sister...!" She clenched her fists proudly.

"Oh, I see. And what happened in your dream?" Eleonore asked, humoring her gently.

Zeshia pointed straight up. "The rest is in the sky...in the flying castle! Zeshia's little sister is there...!"

"I see, I see. But this castle is Delsgade, so it's probably different to the castle you saw."

"No," I interrupted.

Eleonore turned to look at me.

"The little sister Zeshia met in her dream may actually exist," I said.

"Huh?"

I drew a magic circle on the spot. Black particles rose within the dungeon, forming magic runes across every surface. I had just activated Delsgade itself as a three-dimensional magic circle.

"Fly."

With a heavy creaking sound, Delsgade shook intensely. The world turned white as though Gatom had activated—and in the next moment, the dead end of the corridor was filled with sky.

"It's the sky...!" Zeshia cried happily.

"Did we teleport?" Misha asked.

"Yeah," I answered. "I left a substitute Demon Castle in Midhaze and sent Delsgade into the sky—back to where it originally belonged."

I stretched my hand out and sent more magic into Delsgade. The

castle shot upwards, accelerating faster into the sky.

We were headed for a place where, even two thousand years ago, no demon could reach unassisted—far beyond the sky, where only the Sky Fortress Zeridheavens had ever reached. The Demon Castle burst through the clouds and soared through the blue sky until the surroundings eventually turned black.

"This place is called the Dark Firmament."

Misha and the others held their breaths in awe. A sea full of stars glittered before us as we proceeded farther into the darkness. Eventually, our speed began to fall, and a building made of the same material as Delsgade came into view.

"What's that?" Eleonore asked.

"The base of Delsgade. There's a gate to the Divine Realm there that connects to the Firmament of the Gods. In order to block it with Beno Ievun two thousand years ago, I left the depths of Delsgade here in this sky."

This way, Beno Ievun would last longer, and the gods could be controlled even after the wall faded.

Misha turned to me. "The rest of the scribbles are here?"

"Most likely."

Delsgade began to descend until it connected to the giant structure floating in the Dark Firmament. Several walls passed before us before the base of Delsgade eventually came to a stop. Once the black particles had completely faded, the rest of the corridor appeared.

"Hmm. There it is."

I pointed at the wall.

I will be smiling.
Even if the rest of the world isn't smiling, I definitely am.
Don't forget that.

"Demon King..." Sasha mumbled quietly, staring at the scribbles. "Anos..."

The emotions of Abernyu and Sasha mixed together, turning her eyes a pale blue as she stared at the wall.

“I must have written this on that day,” she said as she sent images into my head using Leaks. “On that day you made me that promise.”

§ 22. The Birth of Delsgade

A memory from long ago.

There was a time when everything was enshrouded by an endless darkness. At the center of that darkness was the condensed destruction of Sarjieldenav—the Sun of Destruction's depths. It was there that two figures could be seen.

"Is that the Delsgade you mentioned?" the Goddess of Destruction asked the Demon King beside her. Outside the Sun of Destruction, a sky covered in darkness could be seen. It wasn't nighttime—it was the airspace that no living creature from the surface could enter, and was called the Dark Firmament.

Floating in the air was the Demon Castle Delsgade. Its overall shape was that of a rhombus: The top half appeared to be a normal castle, but the bottom half was equipped with multiple cannons and fixed magic circles like those of a flying fortress.

"It's just the vessel," the Demon King replied. "Without the crucial elements required, it has no use as either a fortress or a three-dimensional magic circle. At most, it can only serve to obstruct the gate to the Divine Realm."

The lower half of Delsgade had been constructed to cover the gate to the Divine Realm. When divine beings descended from the Firmament of the Gods, they typically did so by passing through the gate in the Dark Firmament. The Demon King had covered that gate with anti-magic wards and magic barriers, preventing the gods from coming to the surface. That being said, this wasn't the only entrance, and if they really tried to, powerful gods could still break through the wards and barriers set in place.

"And? You're saying that castle will be my new body?" Abernyu asked.

The Demon King nodded.

"Once your source and divine body fill the vessel, the magic

contract between us will be fulfilled. The Goddess of Destruction's order will be twisted, and Sarjieldenav will be turned into Venuzdonoa, the magic that destroys reason. With that, the order of destruction you possess will be completely removed from this world," he explained.

"Hmm. I see. A castle, huh? A castle..."

Abernyu stared at the castle floating in the Dark Firmament in a daze. She didn't look very enthusiastic about it.

"Can you fall in love with a castle, Demon King?" she asked.

"Who knows? I've never tried," the Demon King answered.

The Goddess of Destruction stared at him for a moment, then smiled.

"Say, Demon King. You know, you still have to get my consent before you can turn me into a castle. Not all of me belongs to you."

"Hmm. I thought I received most of you already?"

The Demon King tilted his head, questioning her with a look. After exchanging the Magic Eyes of Chaos with the Divine Eyes of the End, the Demon King had challenged Abernyu in countless matches, and with each victory was granted possession of the goddess's body piece by piece.

"There's still my heart left," Abernyu said with an elegant smile. "Let's have our final match. If you win, my body and heart will be yours. You'll be free to turn me into a castle if you so wish."

The Demon King looked at the Goddess of Destruction calmly. "State your conditions."

"Give me love," she answered immediately, as though she had prepared for this in advance. "Do you remember how you made fun of me for being in love with love?"

"I wasn't making fun of you," the Demon King replied.

"But you said it. And I *don't* know what love really is. I don't even know if these feelings of mine are true or not because I don't know a thing actually. I've never even seen real love before."

Abernyu pouted, but there was a hint of amusement in her tone.

"That's why I'm making this our match. Teach me what real love is."

"Real love, huh? That's a tough one. I'm not all that familiar with

it either.”

“It’s fine if it’s impossible.”

Abernyu turned around and walked through the darkness.

“In that case,” she said, “I’ll take your heart instead. If you give me your heart in exchange for me giving you mine, I’ll turn into Delsgade for you.”

She walked with a spring in her step, then looked over at the Demon King’s face. “What’s wrong with being in love with love anyway?”

Anos stared back at Abernyu silently.

“Who cares if that makes it fake or superficial?” she continued. “If you’re the only person who can enter my world, then that makes you the person I love the most in the world.”

Anos’s quiet gaze was fixed on her. Abernyu lowered her gaze shyly; she wasn’t used to eye contact.

“S-Say something already...” she mumbled, looking down.

When the Demon King still didn’t say anything, she peered up at him as though she couldn’t stand the silence.

“Is it not okay...?”

“Don’t say you’re fine with something fake,” he eventually said.

The Demon King slowly walked towards her.

“Didn’t you want to see this world smiling? And didn’t I say I’d grant you your wish?”

Abernyu looked at Anos in confusion.

“Your wish isn’t to carry out your order as a god of this world, but to walk on the earth, no?” he asked. “Just like how a demon or human would. Abernyu, don’t you want to see flowers and mountains—joy and happiness—with your own eyes?”

“I know. That’s why you’re telling me to see them as a castle, right?”

“No,” the Demon King said clearly. “I’m going to make you reincarnate as a demon.”

For a brief moment, the Goddess of Destruction looked dumbfounded.

“But that’s...”

Impossible, the look on her face was saying.

“As I said just now, once the order of the Goddess of Destruction becomes Delsgade, it will be turned into magic that destroys reason. Using Venuzdonoa, I will release you from what binds you,” the Demon King said. “You will be separated from your order and be free to walk through Dilhade with your own two feet—to watch the world with your own Magic Eyes.”

“Without being held prisoner to the order of destruction...?” Abernyu asked in disbelief.

The Demon King nodded firmly.

“Like you, I do not know love,” he said. “And so I cannot give you real love. But I should be able to give you hope.”

Anos drew a Zecht magic circle.

“This is a contract for you to take my heart. However, I will not compromise on peace. I can’t give you all of my heart and real love, but I can give you half of each. This is the best I can do.”

Abernyu extended a slender finger at the Zecht and gently canceled it. The Demon King looked at her with slight surprise, to which she gave a gentle smile.

“I don’t need a contract,” she said. “Promise me instead.”

“Promises can be easily broken,” the Demon King pointed out.

“That’s why I want one. The more fragile and easily broken it is, the better. I want to watch you protect it with all your might, so you don’t end up destroying it. I know it sounds kind of silly, but that’s what I want.”

Her eyes narrowed as she called out in a somewhat nervous voice. “My Demon King.”

“Hmm. I don’t get it.”

“I’m going to be reborn as a demon, right? That makes you my Demon King.”

Anos sent her a questioning look, unable to read her intentions.

“Since my Demon King is equally unfamiliar with things, it’s perfect,” Abernyu said. “Once I’m reborn, come find me. Let’s spend our days together peacefully. Let’s meet and make every day like a dream, like something fun. We can study love together. You can teach me, and I can teach you.”

Hearing her ideal dream, the Demon King’s expression softened.

“That’s a good dream. Though peace is still a long way away,” he said.

“Will you keep this promise?” she asked.

“No matter what.”

“Then this match is your victory,” Abernyu said. She spread her arms, and her divine body began to glow faintly.

“I wasn’t done explaining things,” the Demon King replied. “Reincarnating from a god to a demon isn’t so simple. Once you’re reborn, you will have no memories. And that’s not all—”

“You’ll take responsibility for whatever happens, no?”

“Of course.”

The Goddess of Destruction looked content with that reply.

“Then it’s fine. You’ve kept me company until now, and I’m sure you wanted to take the order of destruction much earlier than this.”

As her divine body started glowing brighter, gray particles rose from the center of the Sun of Destruction. The particles drifted over to where the Demon Castle Delsgade floated in the Dark Firmament, connecting the two with countless magic links. Her divine body and source were being transferred into the giant vessel.

“You know, my Demon King,” she said, Magic Eyes of Destruction appearing in her pupils. “I never wanted to be despair.”

Her voice was shaking with sadness.

“I’ve had enough of being the order that watches everything perish. Whenever I opened my eyes, all I could see, no matter where I looked, were things breaking. Always breaking.”

Teardrops fell onto the black ground they stood on, releasing light as they fell.

“There was always a voice in my head telling me to destroy, destroy, and destroy. That voice kept wanting me to ruin everything. But that wasn’t me. I want to believe it wasn’t me. Surely...”

She continued speaking, now with hope in her voice.

“In this sky of destruction where everything breaks, you were the only one who looked me directly in my Divine Eyes.”

With tears in her eyes, looking so delicate and fragile, it was hard to believe this girl was the Goddess of Destruction.

“Unlike everything else, you didn’t break. And for the first time, I

felt like I had found myself—found who I really am."

With tears brimming in her Magic Eyes, her lips trembled as she put her words together.

"I've always thought that the world couldn't smile," she mumbled. "But you showed me hope. Perhaps there's a different answer out there. That's why I want to reincarnate and search for it. Even without any memories of this life, I will search for that answer."

The Goddess of Destruction's Magic Eyes were red from crying as she smiled.

"Thank you," she said. "I know you laughed at me for being in love with love..."

Her divine body and source flowed down the magic link, vanishing into light.

"But it was you who gave me those priceless emotions."

A surge of gray particles rushed down the magic link towards Delsgade. The light she released illuminated the endless dark of the Dark Firmament, enough to make it seem as though daylight had finally reached this desolate place. Abernyu completely vanished from before the Demon King, and the order of destruction constantly attacking him was erased without a trace.

A voice echoed.

If there's more to this...

It was Abernyu's voice. It twinkled in the air, resounding faintly.

If this small love can lead to true love one day...

As though it was filling the sky of destruction with hope.

I want to see it come true.

§ 23. Heart of Order

The Leaks cut off, and the image of the past faded from my head. In the present, I spotted Sasha with her head down. When I tried to give her a look in a "Is that all you remember?" kind of way, she just shied away from me.

"What are you embarrassed about?" I asked.

She opened and closed her mouth without a sound, her face turning bright red.

"I know!" Zeshia piped up triumphantly, pointing at Sasha's face. "It's an imitation...of a small fish in a pond...right?!"

"Who are you calling a koi?!" Sasha yelped, snapping back to her senses.

"Zeshia got scolded..." Zeshia's shoulders drooped. Misha patted her head and assured her that Sasha wasn't actually mad.

"Besides, in a way, *coy* is right," Eleonore quipped, holding up her index finger.

"Sasha, do you feel any emotions left from two thousand years ago?" I asked.

"Huh? Um... I think so?"

"Are they any different from your current self?"

Sasha looked down in embarrassment once again, then glanced up at me. "Th-The difference is... Well..."

"I have no memory of what we just saw," I said. "But it's possible I took your words too lightly back then."

"Huh...?"

"What do you think?" I asked seriously. Sasha stared straight back into my eyes.

"D-Do I have to say it here?" Sasha stuttered, glancing at Eleonore and the others.

"I see. So it's something you can't say in front of others..." I said.

Which meant—

"Th-That's not it!" Sasha corrected herself in a fluster.

"What's not it?"

"I meant... You know..."

Sasha bit her lip, took a deep breath, and turned red in the face. Then, with a look of determination in her eyes, she nervously opened her mouth.

"There's no difference..." she said firmly, clenching her trembling hands into fists. "My feelings haven't changed from two thousand years ago. I might have reincarnated and lost my memories, but I still have the same feelings."

She spoke like she was giving the biggest confession of her life.

"I fell in the same love."

"I'm not talking about love," I said.

Sasha looked at me blankly. I appeared to have dumbfounded her so deeply that all she could do was stare.

"Huh?" was what she eventually exclaimed.

"Ha ha ha," I laughed gently. "Sasha, even *I* wouldn't do something as tactless as asking you whether you've found true love now that you're no longer the Goddess of Destruction. Love is something that should be kept to yourself. Don't reveal it so easily just because someone asked."

"Wha— Ah..."

Sasha reddened with shame.

"Why are you always sensible at moments like this?!" she yelled hysterically.

"Even I've learned a few things in this era," I replied. "I suppose you could say I've been studying love, just like I said I would before."

Once again, Sasha opened and closed her mouth with a bewildered look on her face.

"She's being coy!" Zeshia whispered happily. Sasha didn't even react to her words.

"Seems like you're struggling to think. Shall I sober you up?" I offered.

"I-I'm fine! I sobered up long ago!" Sasha replied.

Misha and Eleonore exchanged a look.

"I suppose it's pretty sobering no matter how much she drank," Eleonore whispered in Misha's ear. Misha nodded silently.

"I meant the other way," I said.

"The other way... The *other* way? D-Do you mean..."

"Yes, that way."

"That means... That..."

"Yes, that."

"That's... Do you mean, um... I-I know what you mean! I know, but..."

It seemed like she had no idea what I meant. For some odd reason, she seemed panicked and unable to think clearly. Perhaps her past memories were confusing her?

"The other you said it many times, remember?" I said. "You said you wanted to destroy, destroy, and destroy everything."

"Ah..." Sasha finally understood.

"I'm asking if you still feel that way," I said.

Sasha closed her eyes quietly, focusing on her heart.

"No, there's nothing. I've never felt that way, not even once. Not since I was reborn as a demon," she said quietly.

"Wasn't that because you were the Goddess of Destruction?" Eleonore asked. "You know, like how the gods often say they're so-and-so order, so they're going to do this and that because of it."

"The order of destruction Sasha governed turned into Delsgade, but her mind is still entirely her own. Although she's lost her memories, she still has Abernyu's heart," I said.

"You think the order of destruction was controlling my heart back then?" Sasha asked.

"That, or there really was another one of you," I said. "A heart of order."

"How intricate," Misha said. She was struggling to understand the leap of logic that I had made.

"Gods obey order," I explained. "Most gods don't actually have a heart—they're just puppets of the orders they execute. Like the Heavenly Father Nosgalia, or the God of War Pelpedro."

Misha nodded.

"But there are the rare gods that exist with hearts, such as Militia,

Abernyu, and Naphta," I said. "Sometimes, they become torn between their order and their hearts and don't know what to do. I've always wondered about the difference between them and other gods. Do their hearts differ that greatly from those of demons and humans?"

"In what way?" Misha asked.

"This is just my hypothesis, but... Gods have a heart of order, and an extremely faint heart of the self. The more love and kindness they have, the quieter their heart of order becomes. However, love and kindness won't sprout in most gods. In other words, some gods possess the capacity for love and kindness, while others do not."

Misha nodded, then asked, "So there are gods that only have a heart of order, and there are gods with two hearts—one of a person?"

"Exactly. And it may be more natural for a god to *only* have the heart of order."

Eleonore looked confused. "Hmm? Why is that?"

"Are you saying that because I might be Militia?" Misha asked me.

I nodded. "Militia said that gods aren't meant to be able to reincarnate into demons. Abernyu was able to because I used the Abolisher of Reason on her. But I shouldn't have had any opportunity to use it on Militia. If she truly reincarnated as you, Misha, that may be because she had the heart of a person in her source."

And Militia had noticed that herself—perhaps. Alas, this was all my own assumption.

"But how could that be possible? Was she a proxy like Arcana?" Sasha asked.

"That, I don't know," I admitted. "But let me ask you this, Sasha. You called Abernyu your other self from two thousand years ago, but was that really you?"

Sasha was unable to answer, and an uncomfortable silence followed.

"The God of War asked you if I had placed an unnecessary binding on you," I said after a moment. "But what if it wasn't me who did that, but someone else? And that someone was the one who placed the binding of order onto Abernyu and Militia."

"Hold on... What are you saying? That someone *created* the gods?" Sasha asked.

"Who knows? But if there was, it would explain why there are gods that have the hearts of people and can defy their own order. If their existences were just entirely order, that shouldn't be possible."

"Then why are there gods *without* their own hearts?" Misha asked.

"This is merely conjecture, but I think the gods were originally people."

"Wow... That's shocking!" Eleonore said.

"They might have been humans or demons, or they might have been an extinct species," I said. "But no matter who they once were, at the moment the power of order was implanted in them, their hearts were destroyed and their sources were turned into gods. But strong hearts with love and kindness were unable to perish entirely."

"Resulting in gods like Militia, Abernyu, and Naphta," Eleonore concluded.

It was possible that my missing memories could contain evidence for my theory. And it was likely that I had only been able to come up with this theory at all because my feelings had been resurrected by watching Abernyu's memories.

"Let's go."

I started walking towards the base connected to Delsgade.

"Wait, where are we going?" Sasha asked, hurrying to keep up with me.

"Abernyu left more scribbles up ahead. You may remember something else if you see them. Besides," I said, looking at the small girl running alongside us cheerfully, "there's still Zeshia's dream to address."

"Oh yeah, what did that mean? Is Zeshia—or rather, Eleonore—related to Delsgade?" Sasha asked.

"That, or to the gods," I replied.

Sasha scratched her head.

"The divine gate to the Firmament of the Gods is up ahead. Maybe you're being called there," I said.

We walked down the corridor until we came across a wall with

more words carved in it.

Apparently, Militia has a friend who's a god.
The Goddess of Birth. She said she was like us.
Did she mean the order of birth is similar to the order of creation?
If I meet a god with a similar order to mine, would we be able to be friends too?

It was really nothing more than whimsical ramblings graffitied on the wall. Similar words were carved farther down the corridor, and Sasha read each one while trying to recall her memories. Anecdotes about the gods were scattered all around us.

The Goddess of Creation, the Goddess of Destruction. Zeshia's little sister and Eleonore. The mysterious voice that echoed from the depths of my source. If we gathered all the pieces, I had a feeling we would discover something about this world.

§ 24. Dream Child

We leisurely made our way to the depths of Delsgade.

Abernyu's scribbles were carved into the walls everywhere, and Sasha was busily glancing between them when she suddenly looked towards the end of the corridor. She stared into the depths without moving.

"Say, Anos..." she said. "There's something really familiar down there."

I turned to look at her.

"What's down that way?" she asked.

"The gate to the Divine Realm," I said.

Misha blinked a few times and looked up at me. "What about Beno Ievun?"

"It would have disappeared long ago, when all the other walls did."

"Hmm. So until now, whenever gods descended, they would come through that door?" Eleonore asked, tilting her head with her index finger held up.

"I don't know if they did before I was reborn, but it doesn't seem like they've been through since then," I said. "To be fair, if they wanted to descend I doubt they'd go out of their way to practically leap right into my lap."

"So they used the doors of god instead? Like that guy—the God of War, Pelpedro, was it?" Sasha asked.

I nodded. "They should have plenty of ways to cross realms. That being said, the gate down there was probably the most convenient way for the gods to do so. Blocking it must have annoyed them."

The door of god Pelpedro had tried to use took a significant amount of time to open. Placing Delsgade in the Dark Firmament would have prevented a lot of gods from descending to the earth.

"Hold on..."

Sasha clutched her head as though she was about to remember something. Her expression had turned somewhat serious.

"I think I wrote something near the gate to the Divine Realm," she mumbled.

"Something important?" Misha asked.

"Yeah... Probably... Something really, really important... I think."

We walked down the corridor to its end, where the path stopped abruptly and opened into a spherical room housing the activated magic circle of Delsgade. Black particles filled the air, and at the center was a giant gate that held a radiant glow. The light was blinding, spilling endlessly from the gate and clashing with the darkness of Delsgade. Upon impact, light and dark created fierce fireworks that crackled throughout the room.

"We're here. That's the gate to the Divine Realm," I said, turning to Sasha. "Where did you leave your message?"

She looked around the room with a troubled frown.

"There's nowhere to write," Misha pointed out.

There were countless magic circles drawn across the room, covering the curved walls with a dark layer of magic power. There was no room anywhere to leave any graffiti.

"Um, if I recall correctly..."

Sasha looked at my face, then turned away with a guilty look.

"I think I wanted to write it in a way that would annoy you... I thought if you read the other scribbles, you'd want to find the last one, so I left it somewhere hard to find..."

"What a hopeless girl," I remarked.

"Th-There's no use complaining about something I did two thousand years ago! I was a god back then!" Sasha exclaimed.

"I'm not blaming you. Thanks to that, I've got a good guess where it is."

I walked straight forwards to the end of the corridor, and when my feet hit air I simply continued walking. With each step black particles gathered and formed a shadow bridge under my feet, connecting the corridor to the gate at the center of the room.

"Of everything inside Delsgade, the gate to the Divine Realm is the only thing outside of my control. It's perfect for hiding

something," I said.

We crossed the shadow bridge and stopped before the gate.

"Hmm. Looks like there's nothing on the gate," Eleonore observed from behind me. Next to her, Zeshia fervently looked around, but there was nothing to be found.

"Now, Sasha. If you wanted to trouble me, where on the gate would you write it?" I said.

"Oh, I get it," Eleonore said. "Sasha may not remember being Abernyu, but she still thinks in the same way Abernyu does, so you can just ask her what she'd do!"

Eleonore and Zeshia turned to Sasha expectantly.

"Um, please don't get mad when you hear this... I'm not sure, but I think," she said as a preface, looking awfully awkward, "I think it's *behind* the gate..."

"Wow! You wrote it behind the gate that Anos gave his life to block with Beno Ievun? How could you, Sasha!" Eleonore said jokingly, raising both hands and bending back in exaggerated surprise.

I turned to look at Sasha. "So you're saying that in order to reach the graffiti, I have to open the one gate I never want to open."

Misha blinked and looked at her. "Sasha..."

"Ugh... The gazes... They hurt..." Sasha whined, using her arms to cover her face.

"Well, it's not like there are gods waiting on the other side to rush over," I said. "It's just a childish prank."

"Say that earlier..."

Sasha exhaled in relief, then glared at me angrily. I cast a layered magic circle over my arms and used my glowing Ygg Neas hands to touch the divine gate. I pushed firmly and the double doors slowly swung open, releasing bright light from within.

Past the gate a white stone floor was visible. There were no walls or ceiling—the stone floor just continued endlessly underneath the black sky.

"Whoa. What a mysterious space," Eleonore commented.

I stepped onto the white stone and turned back to face the gate to the Divine Realm from inside. In order to see the back of the

gate, I used Ygg Neas to close the double doors once more.

"W-Wait, are you sure it's okay to close it?" Sasha asked worriedly.

"Don't worry, it won't trap us here," I said.

The gate to the Divine Realm slowly closed with us inside.

I looked over the gate. "Hmm..."

Sasha made a confused sound. "Huh?"

"There's nothing written," Eleonore said.

Misha pointed at the top of the gate. "There."

The spot she was pointing at was a round hole on one side of the gate. The same spot on the opposite side had a stone slab with a magic circle drawn on it.

"The divine gate is symmetrical. That's the only asymmetrical spot," Misha explained.

"Looks like someone took it," I said.

Sasha's frown deepened. "Who would do that?"

"Only gods exist past the gate," I replied.

"Huh, so Abernyu wrote something on the stone slab and then another god came and took it away?" Eleonore asked.

Sasha looked at her in question. "But why?"

"I know why," a voice echoed. Sasha whirled around.

On the stone path where no one was mere moments ago, a young girl had appeared. She looked to be about six or seven years of age, and she wore the typical outfit of the gods. Her hair was a pale pink, and there were cute wings sprouting from the sides of her head. Light glowed faintly around her navel, which was connected to a magic link that led somewhere into the distance.



"Ah!" Zeshia squealed excitedly, reacting before anyone else. "It's my little sister!"

She pointed at the little girl happily.

"Ennessone," the girl said in a delicate but clear voice. *"That is the name used to refer to me."*

She grinned brightly. Although her lips had moved, her words had echoed directly in my head as though she was using Leaks. Sasha exchanged a look with Misha and, wary, stood facing the girl. Eleonore gulped nervously.

"What a cute name!" Zeshia said.

Zeshia was the only one who praised the little girl's name without a care.

"Thank you," Ennessone said with a quiet smile. *"Follow me. Ennessone has been waiting for a long, long time for everyone to come."*

She turned around and ran down the white stone path.

"Following!"

Zeshia chased after the child in high spirits.

"Huh?! Wait Zeshia, stop!" Eleonore shouted, hurrying after Zeshia. "The Divine Realm is past there. Don't go following strangers!"

"It's Zeshia's little sister! She's mama's child...!" Zeshia replied.

"Th-That was just in your dream! I don't remember giving birth to her!"

"What if she's from an affair...?"

"How do I have an affair with *myself*?!" Eleonore cried out. "Just stop, Zeshia!"

Eleonore desperately chased after Zeshia, who was excitedly chasing after Ennessone without a care.

"What do we do?" Sasha asked.

"The Firmament of the Gods is still a long way ahead. It's fine. Let's go."

The rest of us began chasing after them.

§ 25. Divine City of the Sprouting Palace

Ennessone ran down the floating stone tiles. Zeshia was right behind her, followed by Eleonore. A short distance behind Eleonore, I ran alongside Misha and Sasha.

Eventually, the white stone path reached a place covered in pure white light. When I strained my Eyes, I could see there was something in the light, but I couldn't tell what it was. Ennessone dove into the light, and Zeshia followed without any hesitation. We continued running up to the bright light.

"Hey, are you sure this is okay? We won't be unable to return or anything, right?!" Sasha asked in a panic.

"Bwa ha ha. Don't worry, even if we cross a billion dimensions and reach the furthest depths of the Divine Realm, we'll be able to get back," I said.

"That sounds even more worrying!" Sasha yelped in her usual tone. It seemed she had completely sobered up at some point.

"Zeshia's already gone in, so we have no choice but to follow!" Eleonore said, running into the light after Zeshia.

We hurried down the stone path and straight into the pure white light. The scenery changed dramatically, as though someone had painted a cityscape over a previously blank canvas. At once we could see unfamiliar buildings lining the streets, with a large palace visible in the distance.

"Huh. What a weird city. That building there doesn't even have a roof," Eleonore noted, looking up at a large and extravagant mansion. The mansion was intricately detailed, but, for some reason, missing a roof.

"You're right. And the shops over there don't seem to have doors," Sasha said, pointing at a row of shops along the street.

There were signs out front for an accessory shop, bookshop, weapon shop, and inn, but none of the stores had a door to enter through.

There were no signs of any life either. Of course, it was impossible for anyone other than gods to be here, so in a way, that was to be expected.

"The sun," Misha said, holding a hand up to block the light shining overhead.

"What is that?" Sasha asked.

"I've never seen anything like it," Eleonore said in awe.

The three were looking up at the sky—or rather, the vast sea overhead. Billowing waves covered the entire sky, and the shadow of a sun could be seen behind the water.

"The sea as the sky? How odd," I said.

"Was the gate of the Divine Realm really connected to this world?" Sasha wondered out loud.

"Welcome, Zeshia, Eleonore, and Demon King Anos," Ennessone said.

She turned to face us in welcome. The wings on her head flapped softly.

"This is the Divine City of the Sprouting Palace, Forslonarleaf," she said in her young voice. *"It's one of the divine domains that lead to the Firmament of the Gods."*

"Hmm. I knew there was a void between the divine gate and the Firmament of the Gods, but is that where this city is located?"

"Yup. There's a divine gate in the depths of this city too. It's connected to the Firmament of the Gods."

The Divine City of the Sprouting Palace, Forslonarleaf... I should have known about it if it was so close to the divine gate, yet it was completely unfamiliar to me.

Did I forget about it? Or was it made after I reincarnated?

"Ennessone!" Zeshia called her name happily.

The little girl smiled faintly in response.

"Ennessone... You called Zeshia here, right?" Zeshia asked.

"Yup. Ennessone called for Zeshia in Zeshia's dream."

"I knew it!" Zeshia beamed from ear to ear as she approached Ennessone, grabbing both her hands and shaking them up and down

excitedly.

"I called for Zeshia and Eleonore. And also for Demon King Anos. Ennessone wanted you all to come to Forslonarleaf," Ennessone explained.

"Zeshia brought them here... Zeshia did good!" Zeshia beamed proudly. "Is Ennessone my little sister...?"

Ennessone smiled gently. *"Yup."*

"Zeshia is a big sister...!" Zeshia said, turning back to us with sparkles in her eyes, never letting go of Ennessone's hands.

"Hmm. Can I ask a question? If what you say is true, how come I don't remember giving birth to you?" Eleonore asked, holding up her index finger.

"Oh, and what happened to the graffiti on the back of the gate?" Sasha asked.

"Sorry. I can't answer either of those questions right now," Ennessone said with a pained look.

Eleonore tilted her head curiously. "Huh? What do you mean?"

"You said you knew earlier..." Sasha said, shooting her a questioning look.

"I'm sorry..."

Ennessone lowered her head, clearly fearful. Zeshia stepped in front of her and spread her arms as though to protect her.

"No...bullying...!" Zeshia exclaimed.

"Ah. It's not like that, Zeshia," Eleonore said. "We weren't bullying her..."

Eleonore tried to approach them and mediate, but Zeshia hugged Ennessone's winged head protectively.

"No...!"

Eleonore gave the two a troubled look.

"Rest assured, Zeshia. No one will hurt your little sister," I said.

"Promise...?"

"Yes."

Zeshia smiled in relief.

"Can you ask Ennessone what's going on for us? She may be more willing to talk to her older sister," I suggested.

Zeshia nodded proudly and turned to look into Ennessone's face.

"Ennessone...can you tell Zeshia...?"

She nodded quietly. *"Ennessone hasn't been born yet."*

"You're not born yet...but you're here...?" Zeshia asked in confusion.

Ennessone shook her head. The wings to the side of her head flapped.

"I don't know. Sometimes Ennessone knows, and sometimes Ennessone doesn't. Ennessone is unstable because Ennessone isn't born yet. I'm a new order that's yet to be born."

Misha blinked at her words.

"So that makes you a god, right?" Eleonore asked.

She nodded. *"Ennessone is now of the existence that occurs before becoming a god. A fetal, unborn source. A baby source. That is the current Ennessone."*

"Oh, I see. That's why your source is so small," Eleonore said, staring into Ennessone's abyss with her Magic Eyes.

"Small?" Misha asked.

"Yup, it's tiny."

Eleonore was able to look directly at sources. While Misha was better at seeing magic power, Eleonore could measure the size of a source by seeing it directly.

"Ennessone is Zeshia and Eleonore's ally. The Goddess of Creation Militia made my order so that the world would become a kinder place. But I'm not complete. I can't remember. Ennessone was created for the world, but I don't know what kind of order I am," Ennessone said regretfully.

"Because you're a fetal source?" I asked.

"Yup. Because the Goddess of Creation wasn't meant to be a god that created order, other gods stole Ennessone's birth."

"Huh? How could a birth be stolen?" Eleonore asked.

"The things required for my birth were stolen... They should be somewhere in this city, but Ennessone doesn't have the power to go find them. That's why I showed Zeshia the dream to call her here."

"Why did you choose Zeshia's dream to appear in?" I said.

"Ennessone's power only reaches Zeshia and Eleonore."

Zeshia brightened at that. "Because I'm...the big sister!"

"Yup," Ennessone said with a smile.

"Ah, I see. You knew I wouldn't believe you even if you appeared in my dream, so you appeared in Zeshia's instead?" Eleonore asked.

Ennessone looked down awkwardly. *"I'm sorry..."*

"No bullying..."

Zeshia glared at Eleonore, defending Ennessone.

"Ah, no no, I'm not bullying!" Eleonore exclaimed. "I'm not that mean, am I?"

"Liar...! You always make Zeshia eat grass..."

Zeshia's long-standing resentment could be heard in her words.

"Th-That's because you won't grow bigger if you don't eat your vegetables. I'm just looking out for you, yeah?"

Eleonore tried to reason with Zeshia, who just continued to glare at her. While the three were still entangled in their heartwarming exchange, Sasha sent me a Leaks.

"She doesn't seem like a bad god, but is it okay to believe her so easily?" Sasha asked. *"We're technically in the territory of the gods right now. The Divine Realm is just around the corner too..."*

"If Militia truly created her for the sake of the world, we can't just abandon her. It's possible her birth was interrupted by other gods," I replied.

"But what if the gods did all this to lure you into a trap? What if she's another order born to destroy the Demon King, just like Avos Dilhevia?"

"Ennessone has a connection to Militia."

"A connection? What?"

"When you were drunk, you were waiting for Eleonore and Zeshia at Delsgade," Misha said through Leaks, joining our conversation.

"Huh? Now that you mention it... That did happen..." Sasha scratched her head. She had been drunk, so she probably didn't remember it clearly.

"Zeshia saw Ennessone in her dream and went to the castle with Eleonore. You were following the memory of Abernyu's feelings and ended up at the same place. Maybe you were told to go there by Militia," I suggested.

"It doesn't sound impossible..." Sasha replied. *"So what next?"*

Just then, Ennessone looked at us anxiously. *"I guess...you won't believe me?"*

Zeshia shook her head furiously.

"I believe you! Enne is Zeshia's little sister!" She grabbed Ennessone's hands and squeezed them. "I will do my best...to make mama give birth to Enne!"

"Um, Zeshia? You shouldn't go making promises like that so easily, you know? There are things I can do and things I can't do," Eleonore said.

"You won't do it...?" Zeshia pleaded sadly.

"It's not that I won't! It's just that I actually don't know *how* to give birth to a god?"

"Zeshia wants a little sister... Please give birth..."

"That's not something I can decide by myself. I don't even know if it's possible?" Eleonore looked at me, troubled.

"Well, we can figure it out after you give birth," I said.

"Wow! That's exactly what a deadbeat dad would say, Anos!" Eleonore yelped in shock. Zeshia looked delighted as she hugged Ennessone.

"I did it...! Zeshia is good at begging...because I'm the big sister!"

"But Ennessone, if you're truly an order to make the world kinder, we'd love nothing more than for you to be born. Do you remember what was stolen?" I asked.

"A heartless puppet."

Ennessone had a serious look on her face.

"A vessel with no magic power."

She spoke as though she was telling us something very important.

"A soul with no body."

She paused for a moment, then continued.

"With these three things, Ennessone can be born in an incomplete state."

"Oh? How curious. What would it take for you to be born in a *complete* state?" I asked.

She slowly shook her head.

"Ennessone can only be incomplete," she replied. *"That is the law*

of nature—that is order."

"Hmm..." Her words made me think.

Ennessone had an order Militia had created to make the world kinder. But even if she was born, the order would be incomplete. In other words, even when Militia tried to make the world kinder, she had failed to create a complete form.

"Ennessone, do you have any clues to finding those three things?" I asked.

"It's difficult... Ennessone can't explain it well. But Wenzel should be able to explain it better. We have to save Wenzel first," Ennessone said, suddenly breaking into a run. *"Follow me."*

"Wait... Running is dangerous...!"

Zeshia immediately chased after her and grabbed her hand. Ennessone turned back and smiled at her.

The two linked hands and, together, ran through the deserted streets of Forslonarleaf.

§ 26. The God of Binding and the Imprisoned God

"Ennessone," I called out, catching up to her as she ran. "Who is this Wenzel?"

The wings on the side of her head flapped as she looked at me.

"The Goddess of Birth Wenzel governs the order of life and birth. Ennessone shouldn't be born yet, but thanks to Wenzel using the authority of the Goddess of Birth, I became a nearly born order."

"Huh? Where have I heard about the Goddess of Birth before?" Eleonore asked, looking up as she internally searched her memory.

"She's Militia's friend," Sasha answered. "There were scribbles about her written in Delsgade, and I have the feeling they were right."

"Oh, that's right. I saw that on our way here too," Eleonore said.

"What kind of god is Wenzel?" Misha asked Ennessone.

"Wenzel is kind. She always protected Ennessone, and tried to help Ennessone be born. She said Ennessone is her precious child, the child that was entrusted to her by Militia."

Misha blinked twice. "Wenzel is your mother too?"

Ennessone beamed and nodded. *"It's difficult for Ennessone to be born. Wenzel had to give her order of birth to the order Militia created. That's why Ennessone has more than one mama."*

"Oh, I see. I get it now," Eleonore said, as though she finally understood. "Enne told Zeshia she was her little sister in the dream only to convince Zeshia to bring us all here, right?"

But while Eleonore looked relieved, Zeshia's expression turned into one of horror.

"So Enne's mama...*isn't* Zeshia's mama?" she asked in a tearful voice. "Enne...*isn't* Zeshia's little sister? Was it a lie?"

Ennessone laughed. *"No, Ennessone is Eleonore's child too. I*

have three mamas."

"So you're still my little sister...!"

"Yup."

Zeshia brightened happily at her response. While Zeshia wasn't looking, Eleonore shuffled closer to Ennessone and whispered in her ear.

"Enne, what's the truth?" she asked.

"I still don't know myself. But Ennessone's voice can only reach Eleonore and Zeshia, so that's what I thought...what I hoped."

"Hmm, I see... I wonder what that means? Does your voice only reach your mothers?"

Ennessone looked down, wings drooping sadly. *"I don't know... I'm sorry."*

Just then, Zeshia appeared right beside them, glaring.

"What...were you talking about...?"

"N-Nothing! Enne, you mentioned having to save your mother—Wenzel, was it? What happened to her?" Eleonore quickly changed topics to try to distract Zeshia.

"Wenzel was caught when she saved Ennessone," Ennessone said gloomily.

"Hmm. By who?" I asked.

"The gods hate Ennessone. Wenzel said that Andeluc, the Goddess of Termination, came and tried to destroy me before I could be born."

"Are they in this city somewhere?"

"Yup. The Goddess of Termination waits for an opportunity to destroy Ennessone. Wenzel fought with her to protect me. But she was defeated, and they imprisoned her in the palace."

Ennessone came to a stop. She was looking at a large palace ahead of us.

"Andeluc isn't alone. She has Keepers of Termination with her, as well as the God of Binding, Weznera. Weznera used his power to create a binding prison in the palace. That's where Wenzel is being imprisoned."

She looked back at me. *"Ennessone doesn't have the strength to break into the binding prison. I've been hiding this entire time*

because I can't win against the God of Binding. Please, Demon King Anos, please save Wenzel. Ennessone needs her to be born."

Her plea was heavy with sincerity. If she was an order about to be born, then she was a god like any other—yet she had an unexpectedly vibrant range of emotions.

"Of course, if Wenzel is a friend of Militia's, we won't abandon her," I said.

Ennessone smiled in relief.

"That aside, it's rare to hear of gods fighting each other. If either side perishes, the balance of order will collapse. I've never heard of directly opposing orders attacking each other," I said.

Two thousand years ago, it was impossible to see two gods fighting. Every order merely fulfilled their duty without any emotion, even if it meant interfering with other orders.

"Wouldn't that just mean Ennessone is an order the gods wanted to prevent the birth of no matter what?" Sasha wondered out loud.

"Conversely, doesn't it mean if Enne is born, the world would become peaceful? Maybe it'll mean the weird gods will stop invading Dilhade," Eleonore said lightheartedly.

"That would be nice," I agreed.

I started walking towards the palace before us, Ennessone following behind me. The entrance eventually came into view.

"The prison is inside here, yes?" Sasha asked.

Misha stared into the palace with her Magic Eyes. "The palace is covered in strong magic power. Divine magic."

Sasha gulped and looked at me. "What do we do?"

"Like I just said, orders rarely ever hurt each other. That's probably why the Goddess of Termination is keeping the Goddess of Birth imprisoned instead of destroying her. So Wenzel won't be in danger even if I let loose a little."

"Which means..."

"We're marching in from the front door."

"Like I thought..."

I grinned at Sasha's resigned expression and stepped towards the palace without hesitation. But as soon as I did what seemed like a damp breeze brushed against my skin. My body felt weighed down,

like the God of Binding's order had tied me in chains.

"Ah..."

Ennessone fell to her knees.

"Enne?!"

Zeshia stared into Ennessone's face worriedly. Ennessone had both her hands on the ground as she gasped for breath, sweating profusely. It seemed she couldn't withstand the power of the binding prison.

"I'll carry you," I said.

Just as I was about to reach out to her, Zeshia suddenly rolled up her sleeves and repeatedly clenched her fists while showing her upper arms.

"How...are they?" she asked.

"What is she doing?" Sasha wondered out loud.

"Hmm. I think she's flexing her muscles," Eleonore answered, making Sasha frown in even more confusion.

"What muscles?"

"Flabby," Misha said, offering her curt opinion.

"How are they?!"

Zeshia stared at me intently as she flexed her flabby upper arms. She was obviously trying to look good before her little sister. *Cute.*

"Very well. I'll leave Ennessone in your care. Protect her," I said.

"Got it!" she said proudly, then crouched on the ground before Ennessone. She gestured for her to climb on.

"A-Are you sure?"

"I'm the big sister!"

Ennessone slowly climbed on Zeshia's back. Zeshia didn't have muscles, but she was able to use her magic power to strengthen her body and cast a magic barrier around Ennessone. She then started walking with Ennessone on her back.

"Hehe, what a good big sister," Eleonore said.

"Obviously!" Zeshia's cheeks puffed up as she turned to glare at Eleonore.

"I know, I know. There's no better big sister than Zeshia."

Zeshia nodded and resumed walking. The inside of the palace had layers of iron bars forming a complex labyrinth.

We walked through the maze of prison bars and advanced farther and farther into the palace. After some time, Ennessone spoke up.

"Um..." she said shyly, wings folding against her head. *"Can I call you Zeshia?"*

Zeshia froze, then shook her head furiously.

"Huh? You don't like that?"

"Zeshia wants to be called...big sis!" Zeshia requested.

"Then...big sis Zeshia?"

At Ennessone's words, Zeshia began skipping while carrying her. "I'm a big sis!"

"Hmm. Looks like I'll have to adopt Enne after she's born, or there'll be a big tantrum in my future," Eleonore said with a tone of amusement.

Indeed, it was easy to imagine that.

"You have ten thousand kids already. Another one won't change anything," I said.

"Ah! If you say that, I'll make you take responsibility for Enne as well!" Eleonore said teasingly, reaching over my shoulder to poke me in the cheek.

"Wait," I said, coming to a stop.

"Huh? Is the great Demon King afraid of having more kids? How rare."

Eleonore was about to walk past me, but I held out my arm and blocked her from moving.

"I can take responsibility for my words, but..." I gestured ahead of us with a jerk of my chin. At once Eleonore strained her Magic Eyes and observed the path in front of us.

Up ahead of us was a particularly sturdy magic cage, inside which a young woman wrapped in a long strip of fabric was sitting. She had long, straight hair, pale green Divine Eyes, and white skin that glowed with divine radiance—there was no doubt she was a god.

"Wenzel!" Ennessone screamed, attracting the notice of the god, who gasped in shock.

"I'll get us...closer!" Zeshia said, running towards the magic cage bravely.

"Wenzel, I'll save you now!"

“No...!” Wenzel shouted, clearly flustered. “Get away from here, Ennessone! The God of Binding is...”

Just as we heard those words, a writhing chain extended from the ceiling and attacked Zeshia and Ennessone.

“Leave it to Zeshia...”

Zeshia drew Enharle, the Holy Sword of Light, and swung it down at the chain. The screech of metal against metal echoed, but the chain remained intact as it wrapped around Zeshia and Ennessone almost like a tornado.

“I won’t lose!”

Zeshia thrust Enharle forwards, but the tornado of chains only entangled the blade more.

“Ah...!”

A high-pitched clash could be heard as the holy sword was yanked out of her hand and flew through the air. The tornado of chains shrank around Zeshia as though preparing to finish her off—but just before it could, it froze.

“Hmm. Are you the God of Binding?” I asked, chains roughly grasped in my hand.

“Yes. I am the God of Binding, Weznera.”

The moment the voice spoke, magic moved the chains to wrap around my arm. With a casual swipe of my arm, I slammed the chains against the floor, causing a rumbling roar that sent dust into the air. Metallic clanging sounds echoed as the chains writhed, eventually forming the shape of a person.

A sudden gust blew through the palace, clearing the dust and revealing a man wrapped in chains. His powerful aura, immediately apparent, was befitting of a god.

“Now, I have a deal for you, Weznera,” I said. “I have business with that Goddess of Birth over there. If you release her now, I won’t have to get violent. What do you say?”

Weznera frowned. “Release her?”

“If you release Wenzel, I’ll let you go. If you don’t release Wenzel, your order will be in danger of destruction. Regardless of what you choose, Wenzel will walk away from here, so there’s no real need for you to consider which choice is better, no?”

After a brief moment, he laughed flippantly.

"No way... No! I'd *never* allow that!"

Magic particles rose from the God of Binding. Misha and the others readied themselves for combat.

"Mama is mine. She's staying here with me forever!" Weznera shouted. "Mama isn't... Mama isn't..."

Countless chains extended from Weznera's body, shooting in every direction before turning to attack me.

"Mama isn't going anywhere under my watch!"

§ 27. Divine Mother and Child

The chains that the God of Binding released writhed like a living creature, half sealing our escape route, and half moving forwards towards us.

"*Vebzud*."

I dipped my arms into two magic circles, staining my hands black. From there, it was easy to bisect two of the chains extending our way—or so I thought.

The next moment, countless smaller chains burst from the bisected chain and wrapped around my arms.

"Oh?"

I tried pulling my arms back, but the chains extended endlessly from Weznera's body, following me as I moved backwards. It seemed they were extremely elastic.

"Argh! Enough already!" Eleonore shouted.

Eleonore and the others had evaded the chain's first attack, but the chains continued to follow them in the direction they had gone. Though the chains weren't particularly fast, they were accurate.

"*De Ijelia!*"

Eleonore drew the four magic circles for earth, water, fire, and wind, creating a barrier to block Weznera's chains. But the chains began to wrap around the barrier itself.

"Wow, they're trying to bind us along with the barrier!" Eleonore said.

"Take this!" Sasha cried out.

With the Magic Eyes of Destruction, Sasha glared at the chains wrapped around the De Ijelia barrier. The chains crumbled apart into chunks of metal and scattered on the floor. But as expected, those fragments spawned smaller chains and wrapped around the barrier once again.

De Ijelia creaked from the pressure, shrinking slightly.

“Ice crystal,” Misha said, transforming the smaller chains into ice with her Magic Eyes of Creation. The chains, unable to spawn once transformed into a different object, shattered in the air.

“It’s useless! You’ll never be free from me!” Weznera yelled arrogantly.

At the same time he spoke, the iron bars of the binding jail flew over and began to surround the others. Metal clanged loudly as iron bars formed and overlapped into an enclosed box—an unsightly prison.

“We’ve been trapped!” Zeshia shouted as she looked around the prison, Ennessone still on her back. Iron bars continued to layer and thicken the walls as red chains shot out from the prison.

The red chains wrapped around De Ijelia. Misha stared at them with the Magic Eyes of Creation, but she was unable to transform them.

“It won’t work...” she mumbled, sending more power into her Eyes. Her pupils began to glow a silvery white.

“The red chains of binding have the power to restrict magic!” Wenzel yelled from her prison at the back of the room. “The moment those chains make contact with regular spells they’ll be restrained and lose all effectiveness.”

“Misha,” Sasha said, holding her hand out to Misha.

They linked hands and drew half a magic circle each. If they used Dino Jixes to become Aisha, it would be easy for them to escape.

“It’s fine,” I said.

The two paused, suspending the magic they were casting.

“In the end, it’s just restraining magic. Just hold on and watch.”

“Hmm. But it’ll hurt if De Ijelia collapses,” Eleonore said, holding up her index finger.

“Don’t worry, it’ll be over by then.”

I fired the origin magic Jirasd from my restrained hands. In a loud crackle of sound, black lightning crawled up the chains around my hands to strike the God of Binding.

“Guh... Gwah hah!”

Weznera swayed for a brief moment but managed to hold his ground. From the corner of my eye, I could see the Goddess of Birth

bite her lip to suppress sorrow at the sight of him.

"Bwa ha ha. What will you do now?" I asked. "As long as you keep me restrained, you won't be able to evade Jirasd."

I looked over at Wenzel.

"How about releasing her before you perish?" I suggested.

"No way! Never, ever, ever!" he exclaimed. "I am the order of binding. No one can be free before me. My mama will always, always, always be by my side. My mama... *My mama...!*"

Magic wards torn apart by Jirasd, Weznera screamed loudly as he was bathed in black electricity.

"My mama stays here forever! She's *mine*!"

"That's a crazy mother complex!" Eleonore shouted.

At that moment, the iron bars of the binding prison began layering themselves around me. There were far more layers than in the prison constructed around the others, and the prison was far larger and more misshapen for it. Once the prison was completed, red chains extended from the four corners of the box and wrapped around the chains Jirasd was traveling up. As soon as they did, the black lightning was unable to move down the chain, coming to an unnatural stop where they came in contact with the red chains.

"You mustn't touch the chains! That child is the God of Binding, one who governs restriction and stagnation. Everything that touches the chains of order will be forced to come to a standstill!" Wenzel said.

Weznera grinned smugly at her words. "It's exactly as mama says. There's nothing in the world that I can't restrain."

"Then how about you restrain this."

I drew ten magic circles in front of me and fired Jio Graze from them. The black suns soared with tails of light trailing behind them—until the red chains wrapped around them and restrained them.

"See?" Weznera said. "No one can be free of me. No one can run from me. I can restrain barriers, lightning, fire, anything. Aren't I amazing?"

"Not to me," I said.

"Aww, there's no need to pretend. Oh well, it's not like you can ever leave anyway. You're going to spend the rest of eternity here

with us. I'm sure having more company will make mama so happy!"

Weznera cackled with delight.

"I desire no such thing, Weznera. Release them," Wenzel said, voice clear with disapproval.

The God of Binding turned towards her. "Why should I? You want to stay here too, don't you? You told me you were my mama, and that you wanted me to restrain you."

"My dear child," Wenzel said. "Won't you calm down and listen to me carefully for a moment? You can do it, can't you?"

"Of course," Weznera replied at once. "I'm listening. I'm a good boy that only does whatever will make you happy."

He cackled with laughter again.

"Hmm. I see you love your mother, Weznera," I said.

"Naturally. I'm the one who loves mama the most. That's why I've tied her up so she'll always be with me."

I tore the chains away from me using my Vebzud hands and destroyed them with the Magic Eyes of Destruction.

"Such childish love. If you truly care for her you should let her go. Be independent."

Though still trapped within the prison, I stepped in the direction of the God of Binding.

"*Childish?*" Weznera repeated. "Who are you calling childish?! *Mama* is the one who wants to be with me! She wants *me* to protect *her*!"

"Enough of your delusions."

A long chain appeared at each of the four prison corners, forming four magic circles.

"You! What's your problem?!" Weznera snapped. "I'm tired of your attitude. I'm going to restrain you so tightly you'll never talk down to me again!"

A huge amount of magic power burst from the God of Binding, and red, blue, yellow, and green chains flew out of the magic circles.

"*Egelts Engdomela!*"

When I tried to glare at the spell with my Magic Eyes of Destruction, the red chain expanded dramatically to block my entire vision. The next moment, the four chains had wrapped around my

limbs.

"See? Now you can't run anymore," Weznera said. "The red chain restrains your magic, the blue chain your body, the yellow chain your senses, and the green chain your thoughts. Once you're bound by Egelts Engdomela, you'll no longer be able to use your magic, your feet, your eyes, or even your brain!"

Egelts Engdomela wrapped around me tightly. With my five senses restrained, I could neither see nor feel the chains. There was still a way out of this, of course, but the green chain restrained my thoughts, preventing me from deliberately thinking about getting away.

"From now on, you're my talking puppet. You'll talk to me and mama in this prison forever and we'll all have lots of fun. And don't worry, I've made it so that you can still hear my voice. Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to talk, right?"

He cackled so hard he hiccuped.

"But if you apologize for being so snobbish," he said, "I *might* give you a tiny bit more freedom."

"Hmm. It's a powerful skill, no doubt about that," I replied. "But to declare that it restrains one's freedom sounds a bit foolish. No matter how powerful these binds may be, if you don't know exactly what thoughts you're restraining, can you really, actually restrain them?"

"What are you going on about? Are you a sore loser?"

"Can't you tell?" I said to the God of Binding, who stood before me in full triumph. "I'm saying there's something you haven't restrained."

I opened my mouth and released a sound from the bottom of my belly. Weznera burst into more cackling laughter.

"What are you doing? An imitation of a gaping fish? Aha— Gah!"

He lurched as blood spurted out of his entire body.

"It seems that was outside your hearing range. Such terrible ears for a god."

Die.

I had released a mass of ultrasonic sound, uttering words that couldn't be heard to shake his body fiercely.

"Once I know the trick, it's nothing to me!"

He deployed a magic barrier to block the sound waves.

"See? I didn't fail to restrain your thoughts, I *chose* to leave them unrestrained because I knew you couldn't escape anyway!" the God of Binding exclaimed. "You struggle in vain— Gwaaah!"

His magic barrier shattered, and he went flying.

"I didn't say it was the *only* thing you didn't restrain," I said.

He pushed himself up from the floor and staggered to his feet with a shell-shocked expression.

"Th-That can't be... How did you have the strength to send me flying?" he asked. "It wasn't magic... It wasn't your voice. That shouldn't be possible— Bwaaah!"

Weznera went flying once again, slamming into the floor a distance away and eventually rolling to a stop.

"Still can't tell? Then I'll give you one hint," I said. I held up three fingers.

"What's that?" Weznera asked, wary.

"Three seconds. If it's within three seconds, I can take it in and out of my body freely."

"Out of your body? Three seconds?"

Weznera paused, then gasped as he shot me a look of disbelief.

"Figure it out yet? It's my source," I said.

Weznera immediately stood up and ran away from me.

"That can't be... Taking your source out of your body for three seconds shouldn't allow you to *punch* me!" he said. "That defies all order— Gyaaaaaah!"

My source flew out of my body for a brief second, tackling him and sending him flying. It then returned to me as he swayed on his feet, glaring my way.

"A-Argh, fine! I get it, so you're no ordinary person. Just try it one more time then! I'll restrain your source so it can't return to you, and then you'll be in trouble too! I'm the God of Binding... There's nothing I can't—"

"Bwa ha ha."

Weznera's eyes widened. Cracks were running down the Egelts Engdomela binding me.

"Wha..."

"Playtime is over," I said. With red, blue, yellow, and green chains still wrapped around me, I took a leisurely step forwards.

"Why... *How?!*" he sputtered.

"Did you think that by binding my magic and my body that you could take my freedom away from me?" I asked.

I grabbed the iron bars before me with my hands. By sending magic into my grip, I was able to bend them easily.

"Damn it!"

He turned tail to run, turning his back to me—but before he could get away, I grabbed him by the scruff of his neck.

"Did you think that restraining my senses meant I couldn't perceive you?"

I defied the order of binding with the Magic Eyes of Mauve and used my Vebzud hand to cut off the Egelts Engdomela chains.

"Fine then!" the God of Binding yelled, a vast amount of magic power rising within him. "I'll just bind you so hard that you will never move again!"

Chains of red, blue, yellow, and green extended from the magic circles in the prison once again, but with more chains than before. The multiplied Egelts Engdomela came straight at me to restrain me. I grabbed a single red chain among them and evaded the rest.

"You say there's nothing you can't bind, huh? I guess we'll just have to obey that order then."

I swung my arms and forced the magic restraining red chain to wrap around the rest of the chains. The bundle of multicolored chains became a single chain that then moved to restrain Weznera's body instead.

"Wha— W-Wait!"

The Egelts Engdomela he had cast himself wrapped around him and restrained his body. In no time at all, the God of Binding had become a mass of immobile chains.

"Guh... Gaaah! Damn it, release me! Release meee!"

Although he tried to muster his magic power, the four chains around him had rendered him powerless. The red chains restrained his magic, the blue his body, the yellow his senses, and the green

his thoughts—just as he had said earlier. And it seemed he didn't know how to escape from such a state himself.

I looked down at the bound man wriggling on the floor like a caterpillar.

"You may know how to bind others, but do you know how it feels to be bound?"

§ 28. The Goddess of Birth

The iron bars and chains surrounding Eleonore and the others crumbled with a loud rattling sound. Bound by Egelts Engdomela, the God of Binding was unable to maintain his magic.

"Ah, we're finally free," Eleonore said. She canceled her De Ijelia and stretched at the feeling of liberation.

"Looks like that one's rather special," I said, looking at the cage with Wenzel trapped within. Even though the God of Binding had been weakened this much, the prison still stood firm and sturdy—as though he refused to release her no matter what.

"Big sis... Can you carry me over there?"

"Leave it to Zeshia! Zeshia is a big sister!"

With Ennessone on her back, Zeshia ran over to Wenzel.

"Ah, Zeshia! It's dangerous to run off by yourself!" Eleonore shouted, following them in a fluster.

"No... She's my mama... I'm going to protect her..." Weznera mumbled deliriously at my feet. His senses were being restrained, so he couldn't see or hear anything right now. I grabbed the chains and walked towards the magic prison, dragging the God of Binding along with me. When I got closer, I could see various murals all over the walls of the room.

Were they depictions of the gods? There was more than I could decipher in just one glance.

"I came to save you, Wenzel," Ennessone said once Zeshia approached the prison. *"I brought Demon King Anos, big sis Zeshia, and Eleonore with me."*

Wenzel came up to the iron bars of the prison. She reached a hand through the bars and patted Ennessone gently on the head.

"There's really no helping you..." Wenzel said gently. "I told you not to come save me, or the Goddess of Termination will find you."

"I'm sorry..." Ennessone apologized, wings on her head drooping.

"But Ennessone couldn't wait any longer. I wanted to hurry."

"I know. You want to be born faster, don't you?" the Goddess of Birth said, patting her head one more time before turning to me. "This is our first time meeting, isn't it? I am Wenzel, the Goddess of Birth, and one of the Four Principles."

Wenzel finished her greeting with a soft smile.

"The Four Principles? Haven't heard of those before," I said.

"The foundations of order, the fundamental laws behind all sources of life—those are the Four Principles," Wenzel replied. "I am the god that governs the order of birth, nurturing all life in the world into existence."

Gods that govern the principles of order, huh? The name implied that there were three more gods involved.

"Are you an order close to Militia?" I asked.

"In a way, yes. But while Militia is the god responsible for the creation of the world, the Goddess of Birth cannot birth a world. The Four Principles were originally meant to remain in the depths of the Firmament of the Gods and maintain the foundation of the world without ever being perceived by people."

"Hmm. We're not even in the Firmament of the Gods, much less its depths," I said, giving Wenzel an opening to explain what was going on.

Wenzel nodded quietly.

"I was waiting for you," she said to me with a gentle smile. "I knew the Demon King of Tyranny would come to the Firmament of the Gods eventually. In order to get ahead of the other Four Principles, I decided to wait for you here in Forslonarleaf."

"And how did you know I would come?"

"Militia told me. She was my only true friend."

"I have no recollection of telling Militia I would go to the Firmament of the Gods. I'm only here today because of coincidental circumstances. How did she know that?" I asked.

"I don't know much either, but allow me to explain things in order," Wenzel said. She looked over at Ennessone. "This child is a new order that Militia entrusted to me. She probably wanted me to use my powers as the Goddess of Birth on Ennessone."

"When you say probably, do you mean you didn't hear it from Militia directly?"

With a sorrowful look, Wenzel nodded.

"This child would have told you that she's an order to make this world kinder," Wenzel said, tilting her head towards Ennessone. "Unfortunately, I can't confirm anything beyond what she's told me, but I have my own theory."

She paused for a breath, then continued with a serious expression.

"Demon King Anos. After you reincarnated, Militia remained on earth. I was in the depths of the Firmament of the Gods, as I normally was. We were separated by the Beno Ievun you gave your life to cast."

"I know it was a wall that worked incredibly well against the gods," I said. "Especially when it came to blocking the gate to the Divine Realm. But Militia should have had the power to cross the wall anyway."

"If it was just to cross the wall, then yes. She had the strength to return here immediately. But because she created Ennessone, she was no longer able to," Wenzel said softly. "What she did was an act of defiance against her own order of creation. But Militia was unable to oppose the order of creation, and her body refused to cross the wall."

An act of defiance against the order of creation, huh? If it hadn't been for Beno Ievun, Militia might have been able to return to the Divine Realm even while struggling against her order. It was ironic how after she had created a new order, it had been *my* wall that stood in her way.

"But she didn't give up. She sent Ennessone alone into this realm," the Goddess of Birth said, patting Ennessone. "This child is an order yet to be born—an order on the verge of being born. I believe she's a message to me from Militia, who wanted me to use my power to help her be born."

Wenzel gazed at Ennessone with the look of a loving mother.

"I poured all of my power into Ennessone. Ennessone's order sprouted, and the Divine City of the Sprouting Palace, Forslonarleaf,

was born."

"Huh? Why was a city created when *Enne* was the one to be born?" Eleonore asked.

"Like Revalschned's land of traces or Naphta's restricted world, the embodiment of Ennessone's order is this city—her divine domain," I explained.

"It's as Demon King Anos says," Wenzel said. "But even with the order of birth, Ennessone remains a fetal source, unable to be born."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"I can think of several reasons. First, Ennessone's birth may defy existing order—in particular, the order of the Goddess of Birth itself. If so, I would be unable to help this child be born properly," Wenzel said.

Not even the Goddess of Birth was able to give birth to an existence that defied her order, it seemed.

"But Militia made Ennessone's order to make the world a kinder place, right? Wouldn't it be a bit contradictory if that order defied the order of birth?" Sasha asked.

"Oh, that's right. Good point. I doubt the order of birth is as scary as Abernyu's order, so how come you can't help?" Eleonore asked the Goddess of Birth.

"The Goddess of Birth governs the birth of life and sources," Wenzel said. "Living beings are able to carry new life in their wombs through the Goddess of Birth's order."

"When you put it that way, it kind of sounds like she's a bad order..." Eleonore said, voicing her doubts.

Ennessone lowered her gaze sadly. Zeshia turned around and glared at Eleonore. "Are you bullying Enne...?"

"N-No, of course not. We're not talking about Enne's order, not Enne herself! You know, like how the Goddess of Destruction's order is super awful and mean, but *Sasha* is just a harmless drunkard?"

Sasha glared at Eleonore coldly. "That last part was unnecessary..."

Misha raised a hand.

"Was it really Militia who created Enne?" she asked.

Militia and Wenzel had been separated by the wall of Beno Ievun

and couldn't meet each other. It wasn't out of the realm of possibility for someone to have claimed to be Militia and then sent Ennessone to Wenzel in order to deceive her.

"Ennessone was created and sent here by the Moon of Creation, Altiertonoa," Wenzel said. "There's no god who could do that besides Militia."

Arcana could use Altiertonoa as well, but a proxy wouldn't be able to draw enough power to alter order. I couldn't imagine her attempting to do so either.

"In other words, Ennessone's order is one that defies the Goddess of Birth's order, but will also make the world kinder," I summarized.

"I can't even imagine what kind of order that would be," Sasha mumbled, clutching her head.

"What are the other reasons Ennessone can't be born?" I asked.

"Andeluc, the Goddess of Termination. Her order is interfering with Ennessone's birth in an attempt to make her stillborn. That in itself means that Ennessone is an undesirable life to this world."

"The Goddess of Termination's duty is to prevent births that can disturb the order of this world, right?"

Wenzel answered my question with a nod. "Yes, exactly."

"But that would be strange," I pointed out. "Isn't Andeluc's existence the opposite of yours, Wenzel?"

Wenzel thought for a moment before answering.

"My order is indeed the opposite of Andeluc's..."

"Yet Ennessone's birth defies both the Goddess of Termination *and* the Goddess of Birth. What could defy two opposing orders?" I said.

Everyone fell silent for a few seconds.

"I'm not sure... It's possible that Ennessone is unwelcome to every single order in existence, as though the entire world is against her birth..." Wenzel murmured.

In that case, Militia had been unable to return to this realm because her order of creation had rejected Ennessone's birth. That assumption didn't seem too far off the mark.

"Are the gods more wary of Ennessone's birth than they are of

even me, the one they call a misfit?" I asked.

"Yes..." Wenzel replied.

Order was closely entangled with other order. Just like how creation couldn't exist without destruction, birth couldn't exist without death. All orders served the purpose of completing the logical cycle of the world, and Ennessone disrupted that cycle. But thinking about it that way made it sound strange. Did gods, with their own individual orders and wills, also act as a collective order?

"I cannot say for certain, but Ennessone can only be born in an incomplete state. There is something that she's missing. I'm sure Militia would have known what that is, as well as—"

"Ennessone herself?" I said.

Wenzel nodded. "Ennessone was the one who knew you would eventually head for the Firmament of the Gods. Militia must have left her a message. If she's born, even in an incomplete state, she should be able to remember that full message."

"Then the rest is simple. Once Ennessone is born, we'll find what she's missing and make her order complete. With that, the world will become kinder than it is now," I said in conclusion.

I held my hand out at the magic prison. "Move back. I'll break the cage for you."

"No. If I remain here, the Goddess of Termination will come again. I will speak to her once more and try to convince her," Wenzel said.

"Is she reasonable enough to listen?" I asked.

"I don't know about that... But in the end, I am her older sister. If she can feel the desire to turn against her order, she may not need to be destroyed for Ennessone to be born."

I understood what Wenzel was trying to say: The Goddess of Termination was one of the gods unable to feel any emotions.

"And if you cannot convince her?" I asked.

"If that happens, then there's no other choice," the Goddess of Birth said with a look of resolution. "You will have to destroy her. Demon King Anos, please don't show Andeluc any mercy if we have to face her."

"You can't!"

The one who had interrupted was Ennessone. I looked over to see her speak in a dead serious tone.

"Militia said the Goddess of Termination mustn't be destroyed!"

§ 29. Ennessone’s Mystery

Confusion hung in the air. Sasha’s expression was fierce with how hard she was thinking, while Misha blinked several times before tilting her head. The first to open her mouth was Eleonore.

“If the Goddess of Termination is the reason Enne can’t be born, why can’t she be removed?” she asked.

“I don’t know, but Ennessone’s memory is saying not to. The Goddess of Termination must not be destroyed...”

“Does that mean Andeluc can be persuaded? Is she actually a good god?” Sasha asked.

Wenzel had a pained look on her face.

“The Goddess of Termination is a god faithful to her order,” she said. “Unlike Militia and I, she has no will to defy it.”

“But you think she *can* be convinced, right?” Sasha asked.

For a brief moment, Wenzel struggled to answer.

“I think it would be for the best if Andeluc came to her own senses and her own emotions,” Wenzel eventually said, before her expression turned determined. “But that is not a hope we can cling to. Ennessone’s birth is the priority. To make this world even a little bit kinder is my wish—and Militia’s.”

“Hmm. That makes it even more confusing. Why would Militia say the Goddess of Termination *mustn’t* be destroyed?” Eleonore tilted her head and index finger at the same angle, frowning curiously.

“Militia was probably looking out for me. As a fellow older sister, she must have realized how I would feel if I had to end Andeluc with my own hands,” Wenzel said, sighing quietly in disappointment. “But unlike Abernyu, Andeluc will never listen to reason.”

So she believed Militia had wanted to avoid a situation in which she had to destroy her own sister. That was one possibility, but what if there was another reason? There was no way for us to know.

“Not even the Demon King of Tyranny can help a god become

aware of their own emotions, I assume," Wenzel said.

"Oh, is that all?" I remarked. "I've already done that before. It was no problem."

Wenzel's mouth fell open in shock. "Can you awaken Andeluc's emotions?"

"If it's just to *awaken* them, sure. But I may be a little rough doing so."

Wenzel nodded. "As long as she isn't destroyed, I won't ask for more."

"If that's all Militia expected from me, then it makes things simple, but..."

Misha looked at me. "But you can't be sure?"

"Unfortunately," I said.

"But if Andeluc's emotions awaken, we won't have to fight anymore, right?" Sasha asked. "We should avoid destroying orders if we can, since it could get messy..."

I looked at her pointedly.

"Am I wrong?" she asked.

"We don't know if awakening her emotions will result in her defying her order. Even Nosgalia was able to show fear in his last moments—but it didn't mean he had any change of heart."

I returned my gaze to Wenzel and continued.

"That being said, it's possible Andeluc may become our ally. It would be better to keep Wenzel in this cage for now, and wait for the Goddess of Termination to come without rocking the boat. Once she appears, Wenzel, you try and convince her first. The keys to gods defying their orders are love and kindness. As her older sister, you have the best chance at triggering her emotions."

"I understand..."

"Don't stress over it. If it doesn't work, I'll handle the rest," I said.

Even if there was no choice but to destroy Andeluc, I wouldn't let Wenzel be the one to do it.

"When will the Goddess of Termination come here?" I asked.

"I don't know. I don't think it'll take too long though—around two or three days," Wenzel replied.

"What should we do in the meantime? Look for the stone slab

with Abernyu's graffiti?" Sasha suggested.

"No. We'll test if the Goddess of Termination's order is truly preventing Ennessone's birth. Something like that should be easy to suppress," I said.

"There you go talking nonsense again..." Sasha muttered.

"Ah... But Anos might actually do it, you know?" Eleonore replied.

Sasha and Eleonore exasperatedly looked this way. I ignored them and continued questioning Wenzel.

"Any other reasons Ennessone can't be born?" I asked.

"Just one more. The things required for her to be born were stolen," she answered.

"Hmm. She already told us that one. A doll with no heart, a vessel with no magic, and a soul with no body, was it?"

Wenzel nodded.

"She said they were somewhere in this city. Do you have any idea where?"

"The doll with no heart is in the mansion with no roof, the vessel with no magic is alongside the shops with no doors, and the soul with no body is buried in the cemetery with no graves," she said.

Come to think of it, we did see a few strange buildings on our way here.

"If you know that much and still haven't made a move, does that mean the Goddess of Termination got to you first?" I asked.

"That's part of it, but my Divine Eyes are also unable to tell which ones are real."

"Which means there's more than one."

"Yes. There are multiple mansions in Forslonarleaf that have no roofs, and they all have dolls without hearts inside them. The same goes for the vessels without magic and bodies without souls. The magic wavelength they emitted all looked the same to me, so I couldn't tell which ones were real."

"Ennessone couldn't tell either..."

This city was the embodiment of Ennessone's order. With the things necessary for her birth stolen, her order was currently in a distorted state. If she had been able to do something about it herself, she wouldn't have been having such a hard time right now.

"The place is also guarded by Keepers of Termination..."

"That's more than enough information to go off of," I replied. "We'll gather those three first. Misha, Sasha."

Misha blinked at me, while Sasha looked at me questioningly.

"You two stay here," I said. "You know what to do, right?"

Misha nodded.

"Protect Wenzel without being noticed by the Goddess of Termination?" Sasha asked.

"At worst, you just have to buy time for me to arrive," I said.

"But Demon King Anos, even if our orders oppose each other, a god cannot destroy another god," Wenzel said.

"Normally, yes," I said. "But as Ennessone's birth approaches, that may no longer be the case. When it comes to the loss of the Goddess of Birth or Ennessone's birth, the gods will choose whichever disturbs order less."

I stared at the magic power flowing from the Goddess of Birth with my Magic Eyes.

"You're using your power right now to help Ennessone's birth, aren't you?" I said.

"Yes."

"Then if you perish right now, Ennessone will not be born. Even if the Goddess of Termination's emotions successfully awaken, there's no guarantee that will be good for us. She may resort to violent measures."

Wenzel thought for a moment before replying. "I understand. I will do as you say, Demon King Anos."

"Okay! That means Zeshia, Anos, and I will do our best for Enne to be born!" Eleonore declared enthusiastically.

Zeshia nodded. "Enne... Leave it to us! The Demon King's Army...is undefeatable!"

"Yup. Thank you, big sis."

Ennessone hugged Zeshia from behind. Then, Zeshia burst into a fierce dash.

"Zeshia will go! Zeshia is a big sister!"

"Ah! Wait up, Zeshia!"

Eleonore followed her in a hurry.

“One more thing, Demon King Anos,” Wenzel said just as I was about to turn around. “If you do choose to destroy the Goddess of Termination, make sure Ennessone is born as soon as possible afterwards. Preferably within a day.”

“Why?”

“Birth and death are two sides of the same order. If the order of termination is lost, balance will collapse, and the world will tilt in favor of birth. If the order of birth is too strong, Ennessone may be born in an undesirable shape.”

If one gear was lost, the entire system would be disrupted. The system of order was truly troublesome.

“All right. One day is more than enough,” I said.

“And also,” Wenzel added, “I wanted to thank you regarding Weznera.”

I looked over at the God of Binding I had dragged over by the chains. “What do you mean?”

“You spared that child because he was attached to me... You know I care for him, didn’t you?” the Goddess of Birth said with a smile. “I’m sorry he caused you so much trouble. Weznera is still like an infant, so his possessiveness is a little out of hand. I’m sure he’ll grow up to be a good boy...”

Although it came out a little warped, the God of Binding definitely loved his mother. He was just another god who couldn’t defy his own order.

“Oh, it was nothing. There just so happened to be the perfect chain lying about, so tying him up was easier than destroying him,” I said.

Wenzel chuckled quietly. “Demon King Anos, you really are as Militia described.”

Then she spoke as though she was praying. “I believe you will be the one to help Ennessone’s birth and create the kind order Militia wished for.”

“Come to think of it, I had something I wanted to ask you, Wenzel.”

“Ask away.”

I pointed at Sasha. “Sasha over there is the reincarnation of the

Goddess of Destruction, Abernyu. According to her memory, Misha is the reincarnation of Militia."

After pointing at Sasha, I pointed at Misha.

"Do you know anything about that?" I asked.

Wenzel stared at Misha with her Divine Eyes. After a moment, she shook her head.

"I cannot feel the order of creation. Without that, I cannot make any distinction."

"I see. That's fine."

I turned around and said over my shoulder, "If you have time, tell these two some stories about Militia. It might help them remember something."

§ 30. Memories of the Goddess of Creation

After I left the palace, Sasha turned to Wenzel, who was still in the cage.

"Um... What should we do now?" she asked.

I watched on through Misha's Magic Eyes.

"For now, we have to deal with the God of Binding, right? If we keep him restrained, the Goddess of Termination will see him when she returns," Sasha said, looking down at Weznera's tied-up form.

"Do we hide him?" Misha asked.

"I guess so... But would she notice if he's not around?"

"Andeluc shouldn't be returning anytime today. Could you leave him like this for a little longer?" Wenzel asked, reaching her hand through the iron bars. Magic gathered at her fingertips, and the God of Binding floated into the air and over to her cage. She began petting his head gently. With his senses restrained, Weznera shouldn't be able to feel anything, yet his expression seemed to relax slightly.

Sasha looked over at Misha, who nodded.

"Okay. Just a little longer, then," Sasha said.

"I'm sorry. I know this may be hard to believe, but he's actually a very kind boy at heart..."

"I believe you," Misha said simply. She wasn't very expressive, but there was a clear look of kindness in her eyes.

Wenzel smiled softly. "Misha, right? That's exactly what Militia would have said. You're just like her."

Misha blinked. "Just like her?"

"Yes, you're very similar. You don't have the order of creation on you, but Abernyu's memories of you being Militia might just be correct."

Sasha and Misha exchanged looks.

"Feels weird," Misha mumbled.

"I felt the exact same way when I was told I was the Goddess of Destruction."

The two looked back at Wenzel.

"What kind of person was she?" Misha asked.

Wenzel had a distant look on her face as she recalled the past. "She was a kind and quiet god. In the Divine Realm she was always watching over the earth."

"The Divine Realm is far away from here, right? Just to cross the gate to the Divine Realm means crossing entire dimensions. Can gods really see earth from that far away?" Sasha wondered curiously.

"Militia is the Goddess of Creation—the order who created this world. Both the earth and the Firmament are like parts of herself. As long as the Goddess of Creation wishes for it, she can see anywhere in the world she wants."

"Is that why Misha's Magic Eyes are so good?" Sasha suddenly asked.

Misha looked doubtful. "I can't see *that* well."

"You might have left your order behind somewhere just like me," Sasha pointed out. "Wenzel can't sense the Goddess of Creation's magic power in you, and you can't use the Moon of Creation."

Misha blinked twice. "It's just a possibility."

Unlike Sasha, who had regained much of her memory as the Goddess of Destruction, Misha had no memory of another life. Her doubts were understandable.

"That's true... It's not a certainty..." Sasha hummed in further contemplation, then looked up with a gasp.

"Ah! I'm sorry, what were we talking about?" she asked sheepishly.

Wenzel smiled kindly and continued.

"Militia had Divine Eyes that could see well. But because of that, she knew how cruel the world was more than anyone else. I can still recall the sight of her standing in the Firmament of the Gods, staring at the earth, all the while doing her utmost to suppress everything

she felt deep inside her heart."

Wenzel must have watched over her as she did that. Her affection for Militia was clear in each word she spoke.

"For a long time, she did nothing but watch over the world. As the order of creation, her duty was completed upon creating the world. There was nothing else she could do but watch on. One time, I asked her why she kept watching the world anyway."

"What did she say?" Misha asked.

"She said she had created an unkind world."

Those words seemed to strike a chord in Misha, who looked down in thought.

"We gods are the order of this world, and we move like a flowing river. The water may branch off into smaller creeks, but the main current never changes. And the water itself is too strong to be blocked," Wenzel said with a sad look in her eyes. "Even then, Militia wished for a kind world to be born. But the world Militia brought into being was one where all of its people—humans, demons, and other species—only fought and hurt each other. The seeds of conflict never vanished, even between those of the same species. The world was a hellscape, an endless battlefield soaked in blood and screams."

Sasha gently held Misha's trembling hand.

"Refusing to avert her gaze was how she wished to atone. Choosing to empathize with another's sadness was the punishment she chose for herself for creating such a hell."

"Did Militia say that herself?" Misha asked.

Wenzel shook her head. "She never said it out loud. But this, I can say for sure: She was a very, very kind god."

Indeed, Militia wouldn't have said that. She'd probably told herself she didn't have the right to voice such things out loud. I didn't know how many thousands, millions, or billions of years ago the world was made, but she had been watching the world ever since its creation, and not once had made any excuses for herself.

"Militia watched the cold and cruel world for a long time. But one day, she found a glimmer of hope."

Misha stared into Wenzel's eyes and asked, "Anos?"

"Yes, that's right. The Demon King of Tyranny, who possessed

enough strength to take down the gods. Demon King Anos, absurdity incarnate, the one who could overthrow order itself. He was the natural enemy of the gods, but to Militia, he was also a ray of light."

Wenzel spoke as though she was remembering the past.

"She once told me she believed he resented her. I'm sure Demon King Anos had his reasons he couldn't forgive the Goddess of Creation. To him, we gods are merely existences that toy with the lives of others. I doubt she tried to justify herself either. She might have even believed that it would be for the best if the Demon King destroyed the gods and created a new world."

That did sound like something Militia would think.

"That's why Militia acted like she never cared about the earth. She descended before the Demon King as mere order."

"Anos didn't destroy her..."

Wenzel nodded at Misha's murmur.

"Militia said they talked the night away. She was expressionless as always, and her tone was flat, but to me, she seemed very happy. A single ray of light must have come to finally illuminate her darkness. Eventually, the Demon King approached her with a proposal for peace."

"And that was the wall to separate the world into four?" Misha asked.

"Yes. Humans, demons, spirits, and even gods. We were all isolated by the wall the Demon King created, and so the long, long night of war finally came to an end. Countless nights have come and gone since the birth of this world, but right now, for the very first time, the world is truly, genuinely, at peace," Wenzel said, her voice strong with emotion. It must have been something she had desired for a long time as well.

Meanwhile, after listening to Wenzel's words, Sasha's mouth fell open in realization.

"Hold on... Does that mean humans and demons had been at war all that time, until just two thousand years ago?"

"There may have been a lull in conflict when one species was wiped out or the number of living beings fell far enough. But never

has there been a day the means for war have not existed. The current state of the world is so unnatural, it's like a miracle."

"This is the first peace the world has *ever* experienced..." Sasha mumbled slowly.

"How Anos-like," Misha said. Sasha shot her an exasperated smile.

"This is just my theory, but I don't think Militia considers the current peace to be complete. That's why she created Ennessone," Wenzel said.

Misha blinked at Wenzel. "To balance order?"

"Yes. In order to bring peace, Demon King Anos stole the Goddess of Destruction's order. Like I just said, the current state of the world is an unnatural miracle—in other words, our world is so precarious that it could collapse at any moment. In order to take the final step towards *true* peace, the order of the world has to be balanced."

Wenzel stared straight at Misha and smiled softly.

"Militia would never entrust the world to someone else and just walk away from it all. She would take that final step herself. If you truly are Militia, even without any memories, I'm sure you're still fighting to grasp that peace."

Misha thought carefully, then tilted her head in confusion. Wenzel watched her with a warm expression.

But that look soon turned to a serious one as she opened her mouth again.

"There's something I must explain to the two of you," Wenzel said.

"Wait," Sasha said, interrupting her. "I can remember something..."

Her eyes began to glow with the blue light of the Stars of Creation. The conversation just now seemed to have triggered a memory belonging to Abernyu.

"Anos..."

Sasha called me through our magic link and sent her memory of the past through Leaks.

§ 31. The Heavenly Father and the Goddess of Creation

A certain girl's distant memory.

It was the middle of a moonlit night at the holy lake surrounding the royal capital of Gairadite, and a man walked alone along the surface of the holy lake. He had gold hair and burning red Magic Eyes, as well as wings of light extending from his back.

He was the god of the order that created order itself—the Heavenly Father, Nosgalia.

"Obey, holy water. Heed me, for the words of a god are absolute."

When Nosgalia stepped on the surface of the lake, large ripples unfurled from his feet to spread across the lake. The water swirled about, as though to avoid contact, and in doing so created a deep cavity whirlpool, spiraling downwards. The Heavenly Father floated down, eventually reaching the bottom of the lake, where he directed his gaze at the ground.

"Obey, great land. Heed me, for the words of a god are absolute."

With an earthshaking rumble, the ground parted as though to give way. A hole formed in the ground, which Nosgalia leaped straight into. He continued farther and farther down until a faint light came into view. The Heavenly Father landed without a sound on the ground. He was surrounded by bubbles of holy water floating in the air. Nosgalia's gaze fell upon the largest of them.

"Reverberate, fetus. A new order shalt be born here."

His deep and solemn voice resounded, and faint light began to fill the bubble of holy water. At its center, there was a small orb of light —a source. It was the source of a former human, and it had been injected with a powerful magic through the holy water and the Heavenly Father's order, allowing it to emit a power beyond imagination.

"By the order of the Heavenly Father, thou who hast lived with only hatred shalt be bestowed new names as magic orders. Jerga and Eleonore. With these two orders, these two powers, thou shalt destroy the Demon King and erase all his descendants."

A three-dimensional magic circle was drawn by the bubbles of holy water surrounding him, forming a magic link to the source. A tremendous amount of magic power flowed through the link, making the larger bubble in the center glow as bright as a star.

Eventually, the faint light of Jerga's source split into two.

"Resent the Demon King. Resent the demons. Resent the misfit that cannot be contained by the rules of this world. Resent for eternity. Never forgive his existence. This is the law of the world, the reason of the world, and the order of Jerga."

A small smile spread across Nosgalia's face.

"As for Eleonore, thou shalt create life. Clones of god, imitation sources, heartless warriors of slaughter. They shall be the puppets of order, Zeshia."

The Heavenly Father spread his wings of light and drew a golden magic circle on the bubble of holy water.

"Destroy the Demon King of Tyranny. Destroy the demons of Dilhade. Erase all potential vessels for his reincarnation, and force his soul to wander for eternity. Heed me, for the word of a god—"

Layers of golden magic circles covered the bubble, forming their own three-dimensional magic circle. Golden particles began to rise upwards as Nosgalia spread his arms in a grand gesture.

"—is *absolute*!"

"That is incorrect."

Silver moonlight shone down from afar, slicing the golden magic circle into two as if by a divine blade. The Heavenly Father glared in front of him. A single lunar snowdrop fluttered down from above. At some point, the Moon of Creation, Altiertonoa, had risen in the sky.

"Gods are not absolute," a calm voice said.

Descending with the lunar snowdrop was a girl with long silver hair—the Goddess of Creation, Militia. She stared straight at Nosgalia.

"Ha ha!" the Heavenly Father laughed dryly. Yet there was

something about his laugh that was artificial, as if devoid of all emotion. "Goddess who created this world. Thou hast obeyed order and succeeded in separating the Demon King's source from his body. By pretending to be an ally of Anos Voldigoad, thou hast fooled him into reincarnating."

Nosgalia slowly approached Militia. "The plans of a god are absolute. Thanks to the two spells of Jerga and Eleonore, the misfit's fate will once again be controlled by the order of the world."

"You think you can destroy the Demon King before he reincarnates."

Nosgalia grinned fearlessly. "It is what *all* the orders have determined. It is not just the opinion of the Heavenly Father."

"You're wrong," Militia said quietly.

"Thou suggests the order of the Goddess of Creation cannot defeat the Demon King this way?"

She shook her head. "Neither Jerga nor Eleonore is kind. It's wrong to create order just to hurt someone."

"Ha ha!" The Heavenly Father laughed dryly once more. "Gods cannot be *wrong*."

"Do you really believe you're doing the right thing?" Militia asked. Her voice, flat and expressionless, almost sounded sad. "Don't you know what these two magics will result in?"

"Why, that would be law and order. So that tomorrow, the world will continue to revolve in proper form. The laws of the gods are absolute."

"What will be created isn't order, but sadness. Tragedy, not reason. Order that creates tears cannot be correct."

"Gods cannot feel sadness. We are merely order; beings that maintain the shape of the world as it should be. Sadness is not the responsibility of the gods; it is the fate assigned to lesser beings."

Militia stared at Nosgalia sadly. "I'm sorry I didn't create you to be kinder..."

The Goddess of Creation blinked twice. On the first blink, her eyes turned silver, and on the second, they turned to Altiertonoa.

"A kind order," Militia murmured as she gently gazed upon the source in the bubble of holy water. Silver moonlight wrapped around

half of the source and slowly moved it out of the bubble. The floating orb of light drifted to Militia and settled in her hand.

"Ah, I see. I fully understand now. Thou hast gone mad," Nosgalia said.

"The only one who's gone mad is you."

The Heavenly Father chuckled at Militia's words. "Dost thou desire salvation, Goddess of Creation? For thine order, which has been distorted by the Demon King of Tyranny? By the power of the Heavenly Father, I canst return thee to thine original form."

Nosgalia's Magic Eyes glowed red as flames of silver and gold appeared in his hands.

"Burn in the flames of a god's judgment."

The next moment, silver and gold flames engulfed Militia. The fire roared loudly as it swirled around her like a tornado, but—

"Ice crystal."

With a single glance, Militia froze the fire around her and shattered it.

"By the Divine Sword Roduier thou shalt face trial."

More flames rose around Nosgalia, each transforming into a sparkling gold divine sword.

"Militia, the foolish Goddess of Creation, whose order the Demon King hadst warped. How pitiful. With this blade of god, thy malfunctioning heart shalt fall still."

The multiple copies of Roduier shot forwards, attacking Militia from every direction. But silver light glinted from Militia's eyes.

"Divine Eyes of Origin."

In a single blink, the Roduiers changed direction and struck each other, clanging loudly as they gathered together at a single point. Then, light surrounded the blades.

"Ice world."

A glass orb appeared from within the light. It was almost like a magic scale model, with an entire snowy ice world formed inside the glass. The light spread, and lunar snowdrops danced like a blizzard.

"Arrrgh!"

Nosgalia's body was being sucked into that ice world. He struggled with all his might, but the power of the Heavenly Father

was only able to delay that absorption slightly.

"Stay there for a while," Militia said.

"Ha ha!"

As his lower body was entirely swallowed, Nosgalia opened his right hand to show Militia what he was holding. It was the other half of the source that had been split—he had hastily grabbed it from the bubble of holy water.

"The magic order of Jerga is in my hand. And thy powers cannot alter Eleonore's creation. Sooner or later, the result shall be the same. The order that creates order cannot be kept trapped here forever, lest the world crumble entirely. Surely thou knowst that already."

More of Nosgalia's body was sucked into the orb as he smirked in triumph.

"The Demon King *will* perish. The world will *not* change. The order of gods is absolute."

And then Nosgalia was entirely absorbed into the world within the glass orb. Without sparing him a second glance, Militia clutched the faintly glowing source to her chest.

"He's right. I cannot save you," she murmured. The silver moonlight of Altiertonoa fell upon the Goddess of Creation. She rose into the sky as though the light was pulling her up. "But I can help you to be born as kind as you can be."

With Divine Eyes of Origin, Militia gazed gently at the source, supplementing the missing half with her creation magic and fusing them together.

"Please, hold on for two thousand years. He will come to free you from your tragedy."

She softly released the source, which then drew the magic circle for Eleonore. A pillar of blinding light rose into the sky. It was the light of order, something even those with excellent Magic Eyes wouldn't have been able to see. Its radiance connected heaven and earth, and Militia floated up through that light until she reached a black sky. This was the Dark Firmament, a place said to be impossible for living beings to reach. Before her floated the base of the Demon Castle Delsgade.

“Abernyu.”

Lunar snowdrops danced about in Militia’s palm, forming a small round object—an Erial. She released that Star of Creation in Delsgade as though to pass a memory on to her little sister.

“I will grant your wish. Though we were never able to meet, know that my heart was always with you.”

The glowing blue Erial slowly melted into Delsgade.

“Eventually, this world will lose order and be engulfed in chaos. That will be the beginning—the beginning of a kind world. That is my hope,” the Goddess of Creation said, addressing her little sister. “You will fall in love again, and you will remember. I will leave hope here in the form of Ennessone. Find her with the Demon King. Then...”

In a tranquil voice, Militia whispered quietly.

“Someday, when the world is at peace, remember me. Remember that I fought here...”

She softly brushed her fingers against the outer wall of the Demon King Castle.

“...to make the world a kinder place.”

§ 32. The Doll with No Heart

After leaving Wenzel at the palace, we traveled south down the streets of Forslonarleaf until we arrived at a gate. Past the gate was a garden, and at the back of the garden was a luxurious mansion with no roof.

"Enne... Is it here?" Zeshia asked, looking at Ennessone beside her.

"Yup. I don't know if it's the real one or not, but it's here."

"Hmm. We passed by lots of mansions missing their roofs. How are we meant to find the real one, Anos?" Eleonore asked, throwing the entire matter to me.

"We'll have to take a look inside first. Normally I'd look through the walls from the outside, but it seems my Magic Eyes are being obstructed by the divine domain," I said.

In a corner of my mind, I started watching the memories Sasha had recalled through her conversation with Wenzel. I transferred the footage to Eleonore and Zeshia as well.

"Wow, something started playing in my head!" Eleonore exclaimed.

"Sasha remembered something else. Watch it on the side as we do this," I said as I marched up to the garden gate and threw it open. Eleonore and the others followed me as I approached the mansion. Although I stayed alert of our surroundings, there didn't appear to be any immediate threats.

When I opened the door to the mansion, it swung open with a rusty creak.

"Huh? It's dark," Eleonore said.

There was no roof, but the upper floor blocked the light, leaving the first floor of the mansion dimly lit.

"Zeshia...will illuminate it!"

Zeshia drew Enharle from a magic circle and used the Holy Sword

of Light to brighten the room. The interior of the mansion was eerily clean. A red carpet on the floor led up the stairs to the second floor. Bronze statues of knights lined the carpet on both sides, and there were multiple paintings hung on the walls. But there were no signs of life.

An uninhabited mansion would have collected dust over time, but the floor, statues, and handrail of the stairs were all spotless and shining. I highly doubted the Keepers were the ones cleaning—it seemed that unlike earth, divine domains simply didn't get dirty.

"Let's go," I said, walking on the carpet.

"Come to think of it, what does the doll with no heart even look like?" Eleonore asked, tilting her head as she held up an index finger.

"Like...this?!" Zeshia shined the light of Enharle on one bronze statue. Her Eyes glinted valiantly as she stared at it.

"That's just a statue," Ennessone said, head wings twitching.

Zeshia's shoulders fell in disappointment. "It's just a statue..."

"Ennessone, do you know what the doll with no heart looks like? Or what its magic power feels like?" I asked.

"I think it's just a normal doll... But I've never seen it myself. Its appearance isn't fixed, and it can transform, I think. Ennessone doesn't know anything other than it has no heart..."

Ennessone's wings drooped dejectedly. Zeshia rushed up to her and grabbed her hands.

"It's okay, Enne! Zeshia will find it! Don't feel down... Leave it to me!"

Ennessone smiled at her happily.

"I've been wondering about this for a while, but a doll with no heart sounds weird. Isn't that just how dolls normally are?" Eleonore asked lightly.

"Yeah... But it isn't just a doll, it's a doll with no heart. That's what Ennessone's order is saying..."

"But what does that *mean*?"

Ennessone shook her head. *"I'm sorry... I don't know."*

"I know!" Zeshia declared. Ennessone looked at her in surprise.

"Really?"

"Zeshia has always believed...people who feed others ground

grass...while calling it juice...have no heart!”

“I-If that’s the case, then maybe it’s a doll with a cold personality?” Eleonore said, ignoring Zeshia’s pointed look with feigned innocence.

“Perhaps there’s a reason it specifies that it’s missing a heart,” I theorized.

“Hmm? What do you mean?” Eleonore asked, hurrying back to me to escape Zeshia’s glaring look.

“A doll with no heart could be a doll that has everything *but* a heart. Alternatively, it could be a doll that originally had a heart, and now doesn’t.”

We climbed up the staircase and reached the second floor, where we were immediately met by a double door.

“Something’s written on it!” Zeshia exclaimed.

Zeshia held Enharle up to the door, where a notice was attached. Eleonore read the runes out loud.

“Let’s see... ‘This room rejects all but the heart—’”

This room rejects all but the heart.
If anything less enters the room, her death will accelerate.
She cannot leave this room.
The doll with no heart cannot live outside the mansion with no roof.
Give her a heart. Put it in the doll.
So that she can live outside.

After she finished reading, Eleonore threw her hands up in surrender. “Wow, I *really* don’t get it.”

She looked at me.

“It seems the doll with no heart is in this room,” I said, opening the double doors. Inside was a pale white doll sitting on a chair in the middle of the room. It was without clothes, and the design itself was extremely simple, far from intricate. Even the roughest of magic dolls were made with more care and realism than this doll here.

“This is the doll with no heart...for sure!” Zeshia cheered, taking Ennessone’s hand in her own. “Let’s go, Enne!”

"Okay!"

The two linked hands and took a step towards the door.

"Wait," I said. I used Fless to make Zeshia and Ennessone float into the air, preventing them from moving forwards.

"There's something in there!" Eleonore warned, Magic Eyes directed forwards.

Behind the white doll on the chair, hidden in the darkness, were eerily glowing eyes. An innumerable amount, even.

"Go away..." the doll's mouth rattled. "Only the heart...can come..."

The moment the white doll spoke, the sound of furiously flapping wings echoed through the room. Monstrous black birds, with giant beaks and sharp claws, emerged from the darkness. They hovered around the white doll, their sharp eyes glaring our way.

"The Keepers of Termination, Veneh Ze Raveil," Ennessone said, wings folding against her head as she stiffened nervously. *"We have to run..."*

"Kreeeeeeaaaaaah!"

The Keepers of Termination screeched and attacked us.

"Run for it!" Ennessone shouted—just as the black birds were swallowed by darkness and exploded. Her mouth fell open in shock. I had used Beno Ievun to create a black aurora barrier, and the Keepers had erased themselves by crashing into it.

"Don't worry. With a net, avian pests can be dealt with pretty easily," I said.

"No," Ennessone said with a gasp. *"I've got it—the Keepers of Termination are here to kill the* doll, *not us! We can't enter the room!"*

The beaks of the monstrous birds reemerged from the darkness, stabbing into the pale white doll on the chair like arrows through flesh.

"Ah! W-We have to get out quickly! Before she—"

The Keepers charged into the doll, one after another, pecking at it as though to devour it whole.

"No... Stop... Noooooo!" Ennessone hugged herself, face twisting in pain.

But Zeshia reached out and grabbed her hands tightly. "Enne... It's okay."

"Kreeeeeeaaahhh!"

The bird-shaped Keepers all let out a shrill screech, like a beast in the agonizing throes of death.

"*Jirasd*."

Jet-black lightning shot through the monsters feeding on the doll, burning them to a crisp instantly. Keepers dropped heavily to the floor, their black feathers fluttering through the air as they fell.

"Huh? Ah!"

Ennessone's eyes widened. There in front of her was the unharmed white doll, and me standing beside it.

"See, Enne? Trust...your big sister!" Zeshia boasted proudly.

"But how... He was standing here *just now! How did he get over there?"*

"Enne... That's because..."

Zeshia stood a little taller as she turned to Ennessone, whose wings were extended back in shock. "He just can!"

"Zeshia, I know you want to act like a big sister, but think before you speak," Eleonore advised her in a whisper. Zeshia nodded.

"It's because...he's the Demon King! Logic...doesn't apply to him!"

Eleonore looked doubtful, but Ennessone's expression brightened dramatically.

"Wow! The Demon King is amazing!"

"He's...tyranny!"

"Tyranny?"

"The Demon King...of Tyranny!"

"Hee hee. Tyranny..."

Zeshia and Ennessone looked at each other and repeated the word while giggling. It was an incoherent conversation to me, but I suppose anything was funny at their age. How heartwarming.

"Could it be..."

Ennessone stared at me. A magic link extended from her abdomen like an umbilical cord, glowing faintly.

"What could what be?" Zeshia asked.

Ennessone's wings flapped a few times. She then shook her head. *"No, I still can't tell."*

"Then... Do you want to go check?" Zeshia pointed at the doll in the chair.

"Yup."

The two of them ran over to the chair. Eleonore followed after them.

"Hmm." I looked down at the doll as well. "It seems that notice wasn't a warning about the Keepers of Termination."

The white doll was melting. Although the Keepers had been destroyed, the doll showed no sign of recovery. Its state was worsening by the moment—half of its right arm had already melted.

"Ah! We have to stop it quickly!" Ennessone exclaimed.

"How...do we do that?"

"I don't know... I don't know, but if we leave it like this, it'll disappear," she said, sounding panicked. *"What should we do... What should we do? We can't let this disappear. It's so important to Ennessone!"*

The wings on her head fluttered in a fluster.

"Calm down. Come this way." I walked back over to the door of the room.

"Um, Anos? What are you gonna do? Wouldn't it be better to stop time with Rivide?" Eleonore asked.

"If it were a mere object or familiar spell, perhaps. But I cannot stop something I do not know the origins of. That's why things will probably happen as the notice said."

"Hm? What does that mean?"

"First, we'll check. Everyone, leave the room."

Eleonore and I exited the room. One beat later, Zeshia and Ennessone came running after us. The moment they stepped through the door—

"Ah!"

Ennessone's foot caught on something, tripping her over.

"Enne!" Zeshia called worriedly. "Are you okay?"

"Yup, I'm fi—"

Ennessone looked over her shoulder with a gasp.

“Oh! It’s fixed!” Eleonore said, pointing at the white doll. “Look at the right hand. It was melted just now, right?”

The right hand of the doll was slowly repairing itself as though healing magic had been cast on it.

“This must be what it meant by her death accelerating if anything inadequate enters the room,” I said.

“Um, does that mean it melts if we enter the room?” Eleonore asked.

“Yes.”

At my reply, Ennessone picked herself up and hurried out of the room.

“So the ‘her’ in the notice was referring to the doll,” Eleonore said.

“The doll with no heart cannot live outside the mansion with no roof. If we bring the doll outside of the room, it will completely melt away. We have to bring the heart over here and place it inside the doll to bring it out of the room,” I surmised.

“I see, I see. So we just have to find the heart!” Eleonore said brightly, then looked confused. “Huh? But what will we do after we bring the doll outside? We still don’t know if it’s the real doll that Ennessone needs to be born, right?”

“Indeed. However, Forslonarleaf is the embodiment of Ennessone’s order. The words on the notice are equivalent to her words. Bringing the doll out of the room must have some kind of meaning for her order,” I said, then turned around. “Let’s find the heart. If we consider the list, the soul with no body is probably the heart. We should take a look at the vessel with no magic as well.”

“Got it,” Eleonore said, getting ready to leave.

“Anos...”

Zeshia poked my leg with her finger.

“Yes?”

“Enne...has something to say.”

I looked over at Ennessone to see her gazing up at me. Her wings were folded against her head shyly. I stopped and crouched down before her.

“What’s wrong?”

"Um, I think..."

Ennessone hesitantly opened her mouth. And what she said next was something I could never have predicted.

"I think Demon King Anos...might be Ennessone's papa."

§ 33. Vessel with No Magic, Soul with No Body

We left the roofless mansion and continued down the streets of Forslonarleaf.

"The shops with no doors should be closer than the cemetery with no graves, right?" I asked Ennessone.

"Um, yes..." she answered quietly.

We had spotted the shops with no doors right after arriving at the Divine City of the Sprouting Palace. For now, we made our way back there.

"That aside, Ennessone's father, huh? My memories may be incomplete, but I find it hard to believe I'd choose to be a god's parent."

Militia had to have been involved. But what sequence of events would have led to such a thing?

"I've been in disbelief myself this entire time, you know," Eleonore said from beside me as she matched my walking pace.

Just then, Zeshia came to a stop.

Eleonore turned to her. "Zeshia?"

Zeshia had a revelatory look on her face.

"If Enne's papa...is Anos...and Enne is Zeshia's little sister..."

She clenched her fists with sparkling eyes. "Does that make Anos...Zeshia's papa?!"

"Wow, talk about jumping to conclusions!" Eleonore looked like she was struggling to comprehend the leap in Zeshia's logic.

"Zeshia. You were born from magic. The closest father figure to you would be the Heavenly Father," I said.

Zeshia looked utterly shocked, tears welling in her eyes. "Not Nosgalia...!"

She shook her head furiously—so furiously her entire body shook

with her—to express her distaste.

"I don't like the thought of that either," Eleonore mumbled with a grimace.

We continued walking down the street.

"Anyway, there's still a lot of unanswered questions," I said. "I suppose it's *possible* that I joined forces with Militia two thousand years ago and created a new order for peace in the world."

Ennessone was looking at me in confusion, so I elaborated, saying, "Militia sent you here after I had reincarnated, but because of that, she was prevented by Beno Ievun from meeting Wenzel directly."

Ennessone nodded in agreement.

"But if I was cooperating with Militia, wouldn't I have brought you to Wenzel *before* creating the wall that split into four? I have no memory, but I doubt such a foolish result would have occurred if I had known what Militia was planning."

"Oh yeah, that's true. If you think about it logically, Militia must have created Enne after Anos's reincarnation," Eleonore said in belated realization.

I had reincarnated before Ennessone was created. In other words, I'd had no direct involvement in her birth.

Just then, Ennessone hesitantly spoke up, wings fluttering restlessly.

"Um... I don't know the details, but I think the person who solves the mystery of Forslonarleaf—the person who stares into Ennessone's abyss...is Ennessone's papa."

"Did Militia say that?" I asked.

"I think so... That's what Ennessone's order is saying."

"Hmm. That's odd."

Militia had known, then, that Ennessone's order wouldn't be born properly. Had she left a message behind with that in mind? She might have wanted me to do something about it.

"Oh, there it is! A shop with no door," Eleonore said.

We came to a stop before a shop with a coffin drawn on the sign. A quick look around the building revealed no entrances. There weren't any windows or air vents either.

“We can’t...get in!” Zeshia pounded on the wall.

Ennessone stood beside her and copied how she hit the wall, but there was nothing there to be found.

“Are there any hints on the building itself?” Eleonore asked, looking around.

“Yes, I found it,” I replied.

“Whoa, that was fast. Go, Demon King!”

On the back of the shop sign hanging on the wall was a notice just like the other.

“Let’s see,” Eleonore said, leaning in to read it. “‘This shop sells the vessel for the price of compatible magic.’”

This shop sells the vessel for the price of compatible magic.
If a shoplifter enters the room, her death will accelerate.
She wants to leave this room.
The vessel with no magic cannot live outside the shop with no door.
Fill it with magic. Put it in the vessel.
So that she can live outside.

“It’s basically the same as what was written at the mansion,” Eleonore said.

Ennessone and Zeshia looked up at me.

“What should we do?”

“Can Zeshia’s magic pay the price...?”

Judging by the notice, that probably wouldn’t work, but there was always the chance of a loophole somewhere. Either way, it would be worth seeing what happened.

“Give it a go,” I said.

Zeshia nodded and placed a hand against the wall of the shop.

“I’ll try it with big sis Zeshia!” Ennessone said with a smile, wings flapping excitedly.

“Like this...!”

Zeshia gathered magic power in the palm of her hand and sent it into the wall of the building. Ennessone stood beside her and mimicked her actions, sending magic into the shop as well.

"Nothing's happening," Eleonore said, tilting her head in confusion. At a glance, nothing had changed about the shop.

"Keep doing that," I said, walking up to the wall a short distance away from the girls. I then raised a hand and swung down at the wall lightly. The wall fell apart with a loud crash, creating a hole into the shop.

"Whoa... Was it okay to just break that?" Eleonore asked.

"I just wanted to see inside."

I looked through the hole. Eyes glinted back at me in the darkness.

"Kreeeeeeeeehhh!"

With a high-pitched screech, several monstrous birds stretched their wings and shot forwards, huge beaks acting like arrowheads. I used Jirasd to erase the Keepers of Termination, sending them dropping to the ground one after another. As Keepers, they were sorely lacking—well, I supposed they made up for it with their numbers.

Once all the Keepers of Termination were silenced, I observed the inside of the store.

"So that's the vessel with no magic," I said.

At the center of the shop was a glass coffin. It was completely transparent, so the empty insides were immediately apparent.

"Is Zeshia...not enough payment?"

"Ennessone will do her best too."

The two increased their magic output. The magic they sent in from the wall was briefly drawn towards the glass coffin, but upon contact, it burst, as though rejected.

"It seems the magic must be compatible with the coffin, like the notice says," I said.

On closer inspection, the glass coffin was actually starting to melt. The moment Zeshia and Ennessone stopped transmitting their magic, the coffin began to repair itself.

"So we have to find the right magic power for this to work?" Eleonore asked.

"I think I've got a general idea of what we need," I said.

She held up an index finger with a questioning look. "Which is it?"

"The doll with no heart. It was made of magic," I answered as I repaired the broken wall with Iris. "Which leaves the cemetery with no grave."

I looked at Ennessone. The wings on her head twitched.

"I know where it is. Follow me."

She started running, reaching a hand out behind her for Zeshia to grab and run alongside her. The two of them took a turn off the street and made their way down narrow alleyways until the stone pavement ended and a dense forest replaced the buildings.

As we wove our way through the trees, a shrill squawk could be heard from the darkness. I cast a Beno Ievun net around us to prevent any Keepers of Termination from attacking, and we eventually reached an open area of nothing but soil. Tufts of grass had sprouted here and there, but the blades weren't long enough to get in our way. At the center of the clearing was a large headstone.

Ennessone ran up to it and turned to look at us. *"This is it."*

There was no other landmark in the area besides that headstone. Once we had entered the clearing, the Keepers of Termination had also ceased their attacks. I stood in front of the headstone and looked down at it.

This cemetery waits for the corpse to awaken.
If a graverobber appears, her death will accelerate.
She is trying to wake.
The soul with no body cannot live outside the cemetery.
Give her a vessel. A vessel for the soul.
So that she can live outside.

Eleonore gave me a look of dread. "Um, this says the corpse to awaken is the vessel for the soul. Doesn't that mean the vessel is..."

"The vessel with no magic, most likely," I answered.

In other words, the corpse needed the glass coffin at the shop with no door in order to wake.

"Hmm? Wait a minute. But in order to take the doll with no heart out of the mansion, we need a heart, and the heart is the soul with no body, right?" Eleonore asked.

"Yes."

"That soul is here in the cemetery, but to bring it out you need the vessel with no magic?"

"That's right."

"But in order to get the vessel with no magic, don't you need the doll with no heart?"

"Exactly."

"So what now? Isn't that just a closed loop?"

I grinned at Eleonore's puzzled look.

"That's the thing—at this point, most people would be stuck. Which is exactly why Ennessone summoned *you* here."

§ 34. The Birth of New Life

I drew a magic circle on the spot. By calling upon the humanoid magic I owned in accordance with our pact, the magic link between me and Eleonore glowed brightly.

When my magic power started flowing into Eleonore, she let out a surprised yelp.

"H-Hey!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing all of a sudden? You know I didn't understand a word of what you just said?!"

"It's easier to show you," I replied. "Just go with it."

"Jeez... So *pushy*..."

She yielded herself to my spell formula with a grumble. Magic runes floated around her, holy water spilling from the symbols. Soon her body was covered in a bubble of holy water, and the bubble itself started to float midair. Eleonore magic had activated. The cemetery was lit up by the spell, and a faint light appeared.

"Hm? If you're going to create a fake coffin, wouldn't it be better to use Iris? The Eleonore spell won't become a glass coffin," Eleonore said, curiously tilting her head.

"The glass coffin is merely the shape bestowed by Forslonarleaf. This is its true form."

The faint light in the cemetery—the artificial source—finished forming. The ground started glowing yellow, reflecting the light of the holy water. Glittering yellow flames then rose from the ground in front of the headstone, entering the orb of light.

"It's the soul with no body!" Ennessone said, pointing at the yellow flames. The wings on her head flapped restlessly.

"Which means it recognized the artificial source created by Eleonore as the vessel with no magic," I said.

"Huh?" Eleonore looked utterly confused. "So what does that mean?"

"In order to take the doll with no heart out of the mansion, we

need the soul with no body. In order to move the soul with no body from the cemetery, we need the vessel with no magic. And in order to buy the vessel with no magic at the shop, we need the doll with no heart."

"I get that much. It's like when the key to unlock the box is inside the box, right?"

"Exactly. Like you said, there's nothing to be done with what is currently provided to us. The reason Ennessone cannot be born is *because* of the order of Forslonarleaf."

"Ah... Um. So for Enne to be born, she needs the help of someone who *isn't* part of this Divine City?" Eleonore said.

I nodded. "The three things she needs to be born properly can be created through Eleonore magic as an artificial source. The source goes without saying, but the body and heart are made of magic power too."

"Oh, I see. When I normally use Aske on myself, I'm creating an artificial source that only has a heart."

"In other words, within Forslonarleaf, those yellow flames would be equivalent to the soul with no body."

Eleonore nodded in understanding and held up her index finger. "The artificial sources used to hold the Sky Pillar Sword in the underground world only had a body, so they would be the vessels with no magic. And an artificial source with only magic power would be a doll with no heart?"

A doll with no heart, a vessel with no magic, and a soul with no body. These three were all names for an incomplete source—an *artificial* source.

"According to Sasha's memories, you and Ennessone were both created with Militia's help," I said to Eleonore. "The fact Ennessone can reach you and Zeshia through your dreams is probably a message from Militia."

"Because I'm needed for Enne's birth?"

I nodded. Without Eleonore, Ennessone's birth would be impossible. Knowing that, it would make sense that everything that had happened thus far had been set up in order to bring Eleonore here.

"In addition, the Eleonore spell itself is a hint to Ennessone's birth."

"Huh. So that means..." Eleonore said, looking down in thought. "What does it mean?"

She couldn't answer her own questions, and went silent in thought.

"Magic power, a heart, and a body," I listed. "Why do you normally duplicate artificial sources with only one or two of these factors?"

"Well, if I made an artificial source with all three, it'd become sentient life—" Eleonore gasped in realization. "So when the doll with no heart, vessel with no magic, and soul with no body are combined, they become one source?!"

"By combining artificial sources, new life can be created. It would be impossible on earth, but the Divine City of the Sprouting Palace is the embodiment of Ennessone's order," I said. "It's a divine domain where Ennessone can exist without being born. The doll with no heart, vessel with no magic, and soul with no body are technically unborn too—which is why we can assume they can be combined for a source to be born."

Zeshia raised a hand, eyes bright in anticipation.

"Will Enne be born...if all three are combined?" she asked.

"A doll with no heart, a vessel with no magic, and a soul with no body. Wenzel said they existed in this city in innumerable numbers, making it impossible to tell which was the real one, but that isn't the case at all. They're *all* real. By combining them all into one and forming a complete source, Ennessone will be born."

Zeshia turned to Ennessone and hugged her excitedly.

"We did it...! Enne, you'll be born soon...!"

The wings on Ennessone's head flapped in surprise. A smile spread across her face.

"I hope I can meet you soon...big sis Zeshia..."

"Leave it...to us!"

Zeshia grabbed Ennessone's hands and gave her a deeply determined look.

"Oh, but are we *sure* that's the answer? There are no other

possibilities?” Eleonore asked me.

“We’re going to have to check, of course,” I said. “Let’s go. Grab the soul.”

“Got it!”

Eleonore left the bubble of holy water with a splash. I created her usual clothes around her using Iris. She extended a hand, and the yellow ball of light with the flame inside flew over to her. Eleonore cupped it gingerly to her chest.

“Which way...next?” Zeshia asked.

“Let’s head to the roofless mansion,” I said.

“Roger...!”

Zeshia linked hands with Ennessone, and the two ran off in a hurry. Eleonore and I followed right behind them until we returned to the roofless mansion. I stood before the notice and opened the door. There were no keepers inside, only the doll on the chair we saw earlier.

“Eleonore,” I said.

“Hold on, I’ll try and take it out of the artificial source...”

Eleonore inserted her magic into the ball of light. A small section of the ball unhinged like a door, the yellow flame inside slowly floating out. The soul with no body drifted into the room, floating through the air as it steadily approached the doll in the chair.

“As we expected. The doll and soul both seem safe,” I said.

If we stepped into the room, the doll with no heart would immediately begin melting, but it showed no reaction to the soul entering. And the soul, which was unable to leave the cemetery by itself, was beginning to burn brightly within the room.

The soul with no body reached the doll, phasing through its chest to nestle inside.

“...”

Yellow light appeared in the eyes of the doll. With a creaking sound, it stiffly got up from the chair. Step by step, the doll walked over to the door, then left the room.

“Go...to the shop...” the doll said in an unnatural voice.

“Leave it to Zeshia...!”

“Ennessone will help too.”

Zeshia held the doll around the shoulders, while Ennessone picked up its legs. The two proceeded to bounce down the street, chanting "heave-ho〞as they carried the doll.

"Um... Should it really be carried like that?" Eleonore asked, watching over the two of them with concern.

"Well, as long as it gets there, it shouldn't be a problem."

We left the roofless mansion and made our way to the shop with no door.

"Put...me down..." the doll with a soul said.

With a final "heave-ho," Zeshia and Eleonore set the doll down on the ground. The doll walked forwards awkwardly and placed a hand against the wall.

The wall gave way like a door pushed open. The doll walked inside the shop, straight for the glass coffin, and curled up inside it, clutching its knees to its chest. The glass coffin immediately began glowing with a blinding light.

"Whoa, something amazing is happening!" Eleonore said.

The glass coffin transformed into light that covered the doll's body. The doll's silhouette distorted, altering its shape and becoming rounder and rounder—until it turned into a small glowing egg.

"It's...an egg?"

"Will it...hatch?"

Eleonore and Zeshia both looked confused. Ennessone was staring at the egg with a serious look, when suddenly, a soft tapping sound could be heard.

A crack appeared in the egg, which then split to reveal a small chick.

"Cute...!" Zeshia cried, running with Ennessone to crouch before the chick.

"What kind of bird is it?"

"Looks like a stork. If we turn the remaining dolls and souls into this bird, it may be able to deliver a baby order of Ennessone," I said.

Eleonore peered at the stork over my shoulder. "Hmm. But there seems to be a lot of roofless mansions, shops without doors, and cemeteries without graves. It may take a while."

Just then, a resounding crash thundered in the distance, completely erasing her voice. Eleonore whirled around in shock. The large building at the back of the Divine City—the palace where the Goddess of Birth was—had collapsed into pieces.

§ 35. Attack

I immediately connected my vision to Misha's Eyes through our Gyze link, but I could only see darkness. The same happened when I switched to Sasha's Magic Eyes.

"Eleonore, Zeshia, I'm leaving Ennessone to you. I'll be going ahead," I said.

"Got it!"

I planted my feet firmly against the ground and sent magic power into my legs. I then leaped away like a bolt of lightning, the ground shattering underneath my feet. I aimed straight for the palace at the back of Forslonarleaf, breaking through the crumbling outer wall and arriving at the exact spot where Wenzel had been imprisoned.

The upper floor had completely collapsed, revealing the oceanic sky. The murals and pillars in the area had also all crumbled apart, creating a mountain of rubble. On one side of the magic cage was a hole large enough for one person to escape through. The prison was empty, and the Goddess of Birth, once trapped inside, was missing.

In front of the cage was Sasha, fallen on the ground, with Misha lying still on the other side. Neither were moving, but their sources appeared to be safe. Had the assailant prioritized Wenzel's retrieval?

"*Laeluente*."

I drew a magic circle over Sasha and Misha. From what I could see with my Eyes, they were afflicted with a curse or seal that weakened their bodily functions. They were conscious, but they were too focused on breaking the seal and resisting the affliction with their magic wards to physically move their bodies. I tried to break the seal with Laeluente, but it would take time to recover from such a powerful order.

With my Magic Eyes dyed mauve, I glared at the order magic cast on them and layered more Laeluente on top.

I surveyed the area at the same time. The God of Binding was

behind a broken pillar, still wrapped up in chains of order. Weznera should have been working for the Goddess of Termination—it seemed she herself had forcibly broken through the prison because Weznera had been rendered powerless.

"Neutralizing three people in an instant, but not bothering to save your own ally? How baffling," I said to myself, turning to look at the wall behind me. "Was he no longer of any use?"

I pointed my fingers at the mural and fired Jirasd. Thunder clapped fiercely as jet-black lightning smashed the wall apart, revealing the figure behind it.

"Or was hiding there all you could do?"

The god took a few steps forwards. Her red hair was tied up with a string, both her lips and clothes the color of blood. But her eyes were terribly cold and empty. Although she had been hiding, there was an incredible amount of magic power in her abyss.

"Are you Andeluc?" I asked.

According to Wenzel, Andeluc wasn't meant to have returned today. Had Wenzel been wrong? Or was this not the Goddess of Termination, but a different god?

"Speak when spoken to, child," she said, voice devoid of emotion yet still somehow dripping with contempt. "Who do you believe stands before you? *Bow*."

"Where did you hide Wenzel?" I said.

She smiled coldly. "I do not answer to you. Where is Ennessone?"

"I'll tell you if you tell me where Wenzel is."

Fierce sparks flew from our clashing gazes. The god's pale face didn't even twitch as she remained silent.

"Well?"

"To bargain with a mere demon is below me. The Goddess of Birth has already departed the Divine City of the Sprouting Palace. Forslonarleaf now tilts towards the order of termination. Understand yet, child? Your little head need not be weighed by such worries."

Her lips curled up in an impassive smile.

"As you guessed, I am the Goddess of Termination, Andeluc. The order of this world that aborts unwanted life. Soon enough, Ennessone will join those ranks."

Andeluc spread her arms, and red threads wrapped around her fingertips. The threads extended to draw a magic circle from which more red threads appeared, spreading across the floor like a fresh scar over flesh.

That red scar then opened with a shrill screech. A flock of monstrous birds rushed into the air. Veneh Ze Raveil—the Keepers of Termination—flapped their black wings and flew high, circling the skies of Forslonarleaf.

"Hmm. I see. For Ennessone to be born I need you either destroyed or expelled from Forslonarleaf," I said, wrapping the origin magic Jirasd around myself like a tornado.

Thunder roared as black lightning scattered through the sky, shooting down the countless black birds one after another. Each bird fell with a piercing cry.

"Do you comprehend where you stand, child?" Andeluc said, pompous as ever.

"What could you possibly mean?"

"Surely you do. You, the misfit. The unwanted. The one who disturbs order. Fortunate were you to escape the order of termination when you were born. But still, you are a blight on this world."

The Goddess of Termination tapped the ground with a foot. The red threads spread on the ground and writhed, drawing another magic circle in front of her.

"Hee ha ha!"

Andeluc cackled with high-pitched laughter. But even still, there was no real emotion in her voice.

"Luck escaped you upon your first step into the divine domain. You may scream and cry all you wish, but know this: Your destination has already been decided."

A sharp metallic sound echoed.

"Snake Forceps of Termination, Egliahonne."

From the magic circle of red thread appeared an incredibly large pair of scissors, engraved with the design of a two-headed snake. The scissors were specifically embroidery scissors, with ring handles and a long shank. The Goddess of Termination grabbed a ring

handle in each hand and pointed the blades at me.

"Straight to the point. In that case, answer me one more thing while you can still speak," I said.

Andeluc stared at me carefully without saying anything.

"Did you get to speak with Wenzel?"

"A worthless question. There is nothing I have to say to my sister."

"Sisters should get along with each other."

"*This* is the way of order."

Good grief. Like Wenzel had said, Andeluc was a very typical god. I couldn't see any sign of emotion in her. Her replies were as robotic as the rest of the gods'.

"Wenzel planned to persuade you otherwise," I said. "She doesn't want to fight her sister."

"Hee ha ha!" Andeluc laughed. "Gods are merely order. We have no will, and we have no hearts. I am death—Wenzel is birth. We each bear our respective duties."

"Perhaps for you. But Wenzel isn't just her order. She has a heart too."

With an expressionless white face, Andeluc replied, "A brief disturbance to her order and nothing more. She will recover."

"Bwa ha ha!" I cackled. "*A brief disturbance?* You think her desire to help Ennessone make this world a kinder place—how tortured she is by wanting to save you—is a mere disruption of order? That's quite the wild statement."

"Gods have no heart. The Goddess of Birth merely showed a reaction that made it seem as if she does. As a nondivine being, you saw only the illusion of a heart."

"Oh? That's quite the interesting answer. But it's true that the hearts of others are often inscrutable."

"Humans, demons, and draconids alike tend to rush to such conclusions."

Red particles of magic gathered around Egliahonne. Andeluc looked ready to stab the scissors through me at any moment.

"You hallucinate for her a heart that she does not have. You conjure a hope that isn't there. Above all, you dream of an order

that *does not exist*. Nothing you do will change the facts: Gods do not have hearts, and the order of the world is always correct. And thus, a kind order cannot exist. Such contradictions cannot be."

Andeluc's Divine Eyes glinted.

"Ennessone will never be born. This is the inevitable conclusion." The blades of Egliahonne snipped threateningly. "Termination."

"Hmm. I get it."

I began walking straight towards Andeluc, who had the Snake Forceps of Termination held at the ready. "In that case, I'll just have to teach you that gods *can* have hearts, order *can* be incorrect..."

I drew fifty magic circles of Jio Graze, firing them at once.

"...and that Ennessone can be born."

The jet-black suns soared through the air with a trail of light, striking the Goddess of Termination one after another. But they were stopped by her powerful anti-magic wards, leaving her unharmed.

"Unwanted babes shall be consumed by the fangs of the snake," Andeluc said, low and intent like she was chanting a curse. "Egliahonne."

She charged forwards with the Snake Forceps of Termination pointed at me. I ran forwards to meet the giant divine scissors halfway.

"*Aviasten Ziara*."

The moment Egliahonne's tip collided with the palm I had thrust out, the black suns that had been previously deflected into the surroundings turned into magic circles. Glittering black flames rose from my right hand— No. The moment the glittering black flames were about to appear, the magic circles faded, and Aviasten Ziara was canceled.

"Everything undesired shall be terminated."

I tried using Beno Ievun, but the aurora of darkness only flickered for a brief moment before vanishing. The spell had been aborted before it could fully activate. Egliahonne pierced through my palm, spilling blood.

I proceeded to grab the scissors in an attempt to hold her still, but the god detected that move and withdrew the scissors, quickly disappearing from my sight.

"Unwanted babes shall be consumed by the fangs—"

Having traveled through the red threads on the floor to reappear behind me, Andeluc opened her divine scissors. The glinting blades of light rested on either side of my neck.

"Terminate, Egliahonne!"

The scissors closed with a sharp snapping sound. I evaded it by leaning backwards, then clenched my fists with all my might.

"*Vebzud*."

Shadows inverted, turning my fists black. But before the magic could completely cover my hand, both Vebzud spells were aborted.

"Everything undesired shall be— Gah!"

Blood poured from the Goddess of Termination's mouth in the middle of her declaration. My fist of regular magic power dug into Andeluc's abdomen.

"Your power is impressive. Feel free to abort all you want."

With more magic power wrapped around my fist, I punched Andeluc straight in the face. She had a sturdy magic barrier deployed around her, but I paid it no heed as I smashed through it, my punch sending the Goddess of Termination flying backwards.

She crashed into a mural with a heavy thud, then fell forwards onto the floor, bleeding.

"Gwuh... What...?"

I stood before her as she lifted her head, cracking my knuckles and shaking out my hand.

"Everything divine shall be beaten to death."

§ 36. The Goddess of Termination and the Unwanted Fetus

"You dare look down on me, unruly child," Andeluc replied. "All you are is a fetus fated for termination. You might have avoided your fate by sheer luck, but the essence of the matter remains unchanged."

The Goddess of Termination grinned from where she was crawling on the floor.

"Before me, you are a mere *babe*."

"I don't think I've ever seen someone crawling on the floor talk so big," I said.

"If you think you can beat me to death, just try. I am an order of the depths of the Divine Realm. A god your eyes would normally never have been ordained to see."

Andeluc grabbed the Snake Forceps of Termination. I stomped down on her right hand before she could counterattack.

"Gyaaah!"

"Try not to perish from the pain."

Particles of magic gathered around my fist. Without any spell formula involved, I used nothing but physical force to slam my hand into the Goddess of Termination's jaw. The magic barrier and wards she had up shattered like glass, and her body flew through the air. Andeluc bled profusely as she spoke.

"You cannot kill me...with that..."

"Good to know."

I clenched my fists and slammed them into Andeluc ten times over. Her body warped and twisted as she was blown towards the wall of the palace. Even as she did so, she mumbled out loud.

"Such blows... Like being patted by a newborn. This much I can heal instantly..."

"Then try it."

At the sound of my voice, Andeluc whirled around with a gasp. I had flown ahead of her to stand behind her.

"Guh... Gwaaah!"

I slammed her with a magic-infused fist, sending her flying in the opposite direction.

"This much...is nothing..."

"But it's not over yet."

I cut in front of her even faster this time, striking her consecutively and beating her barrier and body to the point of disfigurement. Andeluc went flying again.

"Gwuh... Gahah... This is..."

"I'm just getting started, of course."

Cutting ahead of her once more, I struck Andeluc multiple times in a single breath. With her ability to abort magic, my attacks were instead plain and simple. All I had to do was repeat them. I would wait for Andeluc to land, then punch her through the air again. Punch, move, punch, move. The more I repeated the action, the shorter the intervals became. But since I had thrown that first punch her feet had never touched the ground.

Several seconds later, her body was pinned to a single point in the air by the punches I threw from every direction. I was moving so fast that to a bystander it would look like I had cloned myself into two.

"Guwahah... Gah... Gyaaah!"

By casting wards and barriers around her entire body, Andeluc was barely able to withstand my fists.

"This... This is *impossible*! I am a god. An order of this world. How could you move fast enough for these Divine Eyes to see two?!" she shouted with a tinge of panic, before that expression immediately warped with arrogance. "Is that what you thought I'd say, child? Hee. Hee ha ha! Foolish, foolish child. I can see through such boring tricks. Such impossible speeds are to suggest that you are punching me, when actually, you have used magic to clone yourself! Did you really think you could deceive me by saying you'd beat me to death?"

Even as she was pinned in the air by my relentless punches, Andeluc still looked triumphant—as if she had seen through my plan.

"*Deceive?* What are you talking about, Andeluc?"

"You persist in such falsehood? You cannot trick my Divine Eyes. Think. What mother would lose sight of the child in their womb? There is no speed in this world that can make me lose sight of reality."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Hee ha ha!" Andeluc laughed. "And one more thing. I can see you using Najira. Did you think I wouldn't abort the spell if I couldn't detect it?"

Her Divine Eyes glinted with bloodlust. "Step aside, child. Your fate is certain."

I continued punching Andeluc without a care. She immediately made her move.

"Everything undesired shall be aborted. Disappear—"

The Goddess of Termination used her order of abortion. But in the next moment...

"Guh— Gyeee gah gah gah! Gwah gah gah gah!"

"If you focus too much on terminating spells, logic dictates that you'll slack off on your other spells."

With her magic rerouted to her order, I smashed through her weakened barriers and wards to directly strike her body. Andeluc's Divine Eyes could still see two of me. Fists flew at her from both in front and behind at rapid speed, severely distorting her body.

"Gwuh... Gyah! Why... Why can't I abort it?! Did you erase my order, misfit?!"

"Bwa ha ha. Order? Whatever do you mean? The Najira was bait to make you think I had magically cloned myself."

"What...?!"

"Did the child in your belly move so energetically that you thought you had twins? Some Goddess of Termination you are, huh?"

Andeluc screeched with shock. "Impossible! No child can escape my Eyes...!"

She attempted to cast her magic barrier anew, but it was too late.

"Here comes the finisher."

As one would expect, it was quite the backbreaking effort to pry open a god's magic barrier bare-handed. Thus, I had lured her into this situation: By slamming my fists on her unguarded body over and over and over, I battered her divine body with strikes until finally, she slammed against the ground. A small crater was created from the impact, and Andeluc spat up blood.

"Gah... Hah..."

She lay on the spot weakly, gasping for breath. I stood by her head and looked down on her face.

"Hee...ha ha... Is that all you've got, child? You cannot...*beat* me to death..."

"Big words for a body about to die."

Andeluc's bloodstained lips curled in a grin. "I am the Goddess of Termination. Thus, killing the womb is also a form of termination... Do you understand? Hee ha ha!"

She cackled with laughter as her magic power suddenly rose.

"Just watch. The snake will consume you."

The splatter of Andeluc's blood near my navel had formed a magic circle. A bloodred snake with bared fangs appeared from the circle.

"Hmm. A curse, is it?"

"You will never escape."

I raised my foot to stomp on her face. But just before making contact, Andeluc disappeared, swallowed by the red threads sprawled all over the ground. She reappeared a distance away, as though she had traveled through the threads. She had also picked up the Snake Forceps of Termination on her way, but the snake design on it was missing.

"I see. So that's the snake that was on the scissors."

"Oh my, you think that is a *snake*?" The Goddess of Termination laughed, body battered but magic power as lively as ever. "It's an umbilical cord!"

The other snake—opposite to the one that bit me—extended its head and sank its fangs into Andeluc's abdomen, slipping into her body, most likely into her placenta.

"Now return! Unwanted life, come back to me."

Red threads rose into the air, swaying as they formed a spherical room around us.

"Snake Womb of Termination," Andeluc declared.

"What about it?"

I grabbed the snake connected to Andeluc and yanked it. The Goddess of Termination helplessly lurched towards me, and once she was close, I slammed my right fist straight into her.

"Gyaaah!"

The moment Andeluc screamed, my source was heavily wounded, and at once the rampaging power of destruction started seeping out.

"Hmm..."

I immediately focused inwards to suppress the rampaging power. She hadn't attacked, yet my source had taken a direct hit. Which meant...

"This umbilical cord has turned you into the womb, and me into the child. I see."

Andeluc cackled. "You mean the *fetus*."

The umbilical cord snake glowed a bloody red. A huge amount of magic power then passed through the snake, flowing from Andeluc to myself. It ignored my anti-magic wards and entered me without any resistance.

"You cannot refuse. A fetus can only accept what is given to them by their mother."

Every time more magic power flowed into me, my body shrank—no, it was turning younger. My sixteen-year-old body turned fifteen, then fourteen, slowly counting down. In no time at all, I was in a ten-year-old body, then in a six-year-old one. I tried to cast Kurst to counter it, but Andeluc aborted the magic easily.

"I see. So this is what you used to render Misha and Sasha helpless," I said.

"No, those two were not afflicted by the umbilical cord of Egliahonne. That was merely magic that reverted their body functions into those of a fetus. Though *this* spell is far more foolproof than that one."

She smirked from ear to ear, as though to say there would be no

escape from what she was about to do.

"This is the end. Return to my womb an utterly powerless fetus."

Bloodred light wrapped around me. My clothes fell to the floor as my body became an actual fetus.

"Unwanted fetuses shall be culled by the scissors of god," she said, opening the blades of the Snake Forceps of Termination around the umbilical cord. "Terminate, Egliahonne."

With a sharp snipping sound, the snake-shaped umbilical cord was cut.

"Heek! Hee ha ha ha! I told you so! All life is powerless as a fetus. Know that your luck ran out the moment you arrived here, pitiful child," Andeluc said, laughing, sounding more real and heartfelt than any of the fake smiles she had shown until now.

"Hmm. You look like you're having fun."

"Hee...?"

She froze at the echo of the sudden Leaks. The only reason the Leaks itself hadn't been aborted was because she wanted to know what was going on.

"So you can *show emotion, Andeluc."*

The Goddess of Termination shot a startled look at my clothes. A sinister, jet-black magic power was rising from them. As a fetus, my body now emitted a vast amount of magic power, one that shaped itself into a black devil with claws and fangs.

"What...is that?" Andeluc muttered in shock. "Impossible... This can't be..."

I took a step forwards and she flinched.

"Did you think a fetus would perish just because you cut the umbilical cord?"

I took another step forwards, and Andeluc backed away from me in response.

"Unfortunately, this body is my reincarnated body. It's different from a normal fetus."

"Y-You can't fool me! Die!"

Andeluc grabbed Egliahonne and thrust it forwards. But the moment its blades touched my body, they began to melt.

"What...?"

"After I reincarnated, I slept in my mother's womb. Just like a normal fetus. Do you know why?"

"D-Disappear!"

She tried to cut my head off with the Snake Forceps of Termination. A sharp *snip* later, the two blades melted away. No—they had been destroyed.

"Not even I can control the magic I have as a fetus. If I don't cancel out my power, destruction flows freely from my source and exposes the womb to danger."

"Wha... Ah..."

Andeluc backed away with a frightened look. Judging from her reaction, a fetus had never attacked her before.

"Impossible... This cannot be..." she muttered, teeth clattering as she trembled.

When I took another step forwards, the Goddess of Termination fell, landing hard on her backside. From the ground, her entire view would have shifted to see only a sinister, jet-black fetus slowly approaching her.

"What was it you were saying about powerless fetuses again?"

I raised a fist of pure, tyrannical power, destruction oozing from my hand. Its magic power corroded the red threads surrounding me and attempted to damage the world itself. There wasn't much time.

"Just a warning, but this punch will make my earlier punches look like nothing. I normally take care not to harm the world, but I'm afraid that as a fetus, I have no such control."

"D-Disappear, monster! Unwanted babes shall be *aborted*!"

Andeluc used all her magic power to restore the Snake Forceps of Termination and wield it like a spear. The bloodred tip thrust forwards into my palm—and melted like hot butter the moment I grabbed it.

"Gah...!"

"And just so you know, I was very much a wanted child."

My jet-black fist swung down on Andeluc.

§ 37. Binding Love

My fist stopped right before Andeluc's nose, wind pressure and magic particles ruffling her hair. Andeluc trembled from head to toe, unable to do anything but stare at the fist of destruction right before her eyes.

"I'm sure you're wise enough to know what would have happened if this hit you," I said, using some magic power to hover slightly off the ground. I glared down at the Goddess of Termination. *"Cease the order of termination on Ennessone, and tell me where Wenzel is."*

I stroked her belly with my black-stained fingers. Red blood oozed out, spilling down to her feet as if she had wet herself.

"Or do you want to have a fetus gnaw their way out of your belly?"

The Goddess of Termination answered through chattering teeth. "You cannot do it... I am the god that governs termination... You cannot stop order. If the flow of a river could be stopped, it would no longer be a river."

It was the Goddess of Termination's order that had driven Wenzel out of Forslonarleaf to terminate Ennessone. And because it was her order, she was unable to defy it. Although I had awakened emotions within her, as I had expected I would, fear alone wasn't enough to resist order.

"Hee hee... Hee ha ha..."

"What's wrong? Bit early to be losing your mind."

"Impudent child... Who do you think I am? Who do you think stands before you?"

Andeluc cackled with eerie laughter, insanity brightening her eyes. Unlike the artificial smiles she had given me earlier, there was a real emotional darkness to her current expression.

"That's right, that's *right*! I... I am the god that governs

termination, the *Goddess* of Termination, Andeluc! Unwanted life—"

Magic gathered at her arms, and the Snake Forceps of Termination reformed in her hands. She snapped the blades open, drawing a spiral of bloodred magic particles. I braced myself.

"—shall be terminated!"

Egliahonne's blades snipped shut—and Andeluc's own head went flying. After curving through the air, the head fell to the floor and rolled. There was no magic to be detected in the skull. She was dead.

The countless swaying threads that formed the Snake Womb of Termination around me contorted and fell apart completely. The umbilical cord of god lost its effect, and the red threads left my body, allowing me to return to my usual sixteen-year-old body.

"Hmm. I see."

I redressed myself with magic and looked around to see an immense number of red threads appearing across Forslonarleaf. Like a scar, they spread across the buildings, streets, and greenery of the divine city, sticking to surfaces like a sea of red thread.

"Anos!" Eleonore's voice said through Leaks. *"Enne's been acting weird since all the red threads appeared. Her source is really weak."*

"Enne's about to die... Help, Anos...!" Zeshia's tearful voice echoed.

"Don't panic. A barrier powered by an Aske of love and kindness will be effective against order. That should buy you some time."

"Got it!"

I looked back down at Andeluc's headless corpse.

"It's true that a child cannot be born if the womb itself dies."

Using Egliahonne to behead herself had probably been the most effective way to use the order of termination. For a god, dying was nothing.

"*Ingall*."

I dripped blood onto Andeluc's source and drew a magic circle. The light of resurrection glowed, but immediately became distorted. Ingall had been terminated before it could fully activate.

"You may be able to terminate magic even with a dead womb, but there's no need to be so stubborn," I said, staring at her source

with mauve-stained Magic Eyes. I slowly lifted my right hand. "With you dead, it's far easier to destroy your source than revive it."

I took one step towards her source. It was fine if she gave up and let herself be resurrected here. And if she instead chose to be destroyed, then so be it; that was her will. If her source perished, then the order of termination that had activated the moment she died would vanish too.

"*Vebzud*."

I drew the magic circle halfway, then stopped. Andeluc wasn't completely neutralizing all magic. Her power was *termination*—in other words, she had to wait for the magic to reach a fetal state before it could be aborted. Which made things simple: I'd just force the nearly activated spell directly into her. I pierced her source faster than she could terminate it.

"Looks like you've chosen ruin, Andeluc."

I swiftly drew the magic circle and was just about to pass my fingers through it when the hole in the side of the magic prison caught my eye.

"Hmm..."

I lowered my hand and erased the Vebzud circle.

"Now that I think about it, that's rather odd."

While I had been running around the divine city to help the birth of Ennessone's order, I had watched things happening here through Misha and Sasha's eyes. After Sasha recalled her memories, the two had stood guard over Wenzel in preparation for the Goddess of Termination's arrival. But all it had taken was an instant. Before I knew it, Misha and Sasha had been defeated, the magic prison was empty, and Wenzel had been expelled from the city.

No matter how powerful Andeluc was, it wouldn't have been easy to defeat Misha and Sasha in their current states. All the more so simultaneously, and in a single instant. Expelling Wenzel from the divine city afterwards would have taken even longer, since it would have involved passing through either the door to Delsgade or the door farther into the Divine Realm. Even if they had been taken by surprise, at least one of the three people present should have noticed the Goddess of Termination's arrival.

Considering how I had only taken a single moment of my attention away to focus on solving the mystery of the divine city, everything would have had to have happened simultaneously—and in a single move—for no one to have noticed her. And in reality, this was the result. But if she had been capable of this much, not being able to escape afterwards was uncharacteristically sloppy.

When Wenzel had given me her warning, she had said that if the Goddess of Termination was destroyed, I had to then ensure that Ennessone was born within a day of Andeluc's destruction. Birth and death were two sides of the same order, so if the order of termination was lost the balance would collapse, with the world tilting in favor of birth. But if the order of birth was *too* strong, Ennessone could be born in an undesirable shape. In a way, what she had said was the truth—but what she had *intended* was different.

Furthermore, Militia had told Ennessone that the Goddess of Termination *must not* be destroyed. When considering all of these factors together—

"So that's how it is."

I kept an eye on the Goddess of Termination's source as I walked over to a pillar. Then, I retrieved the God of Binding, who had fallen behind it, and undid his chains. He cast a hostile glare my way the moment he regained his senses.

"Y-You!" he spat.

"Wenzel's vanished, and Andeluc's used the power of termination to kill herself," I said.

Weznera immediately swallowed his words.

"You understand, right? Ennessone will be terminated if Andeluc isn't destroyed, but we can't afford to actually destroy her."

At those words the God of Binding donned a serious expression, one totally opposite of how he'd previously looked.

"Lend me your strength, God of Binding. Andeluc can terminate magic, but as a god, she cannot interfere with other orders. She cannot terminate, for example, your chains."

Weznera hung his head, clenching his fists. "I-I *can't*. I am the order that governs restriction and stagnation. Andeluc cannot

interfere with my chains, but my chains can't bind her termination either..."

"It wouldn't be your first-time restraining order," I said.

He looked at me in surprise.

"You were protecting your mother, weren't you?"

Weznera stared at me without responding.

"At your mother's request—for your mother's sake—you shut her in that cage."

Slowly and hesitantly, Weznera nodded. "I didn't want her to go anywhere... If I tied mama here, she would always stay by my side..."

The God of Binding clenched his teeth in regret.

"But I couldn't keep her restrained forever..." he murmured.

"I'm sorry I called your love childish. You're a good son."

Tears welled in his eyes. "If you hadn't come, mama would still be..."

"Would you have kept her bound here for eternity?" I asked.

Weznera fell silent. His expression answered my question.

"Don't worry. I won't let her perish."

"Really?"

I nodded. "Bind the Goddess of Termination with your heart. Use your love for your mother, and it should work."

Weznera hesitated for a brief moment. But he immediately shook his head and slapped his own face. He stood up with a determined look and stared at the Goddess of Termination's corpse and source.

"Mama... I've decided," he said firmly. "I don't want to be separated from you after all!"

The magic prison with the hole in the side dismantled itself, each iron bar flying over to where the Goddess of Termination's source was. Then, with a lot of loud clanging, the cage reconstructed itself around her.

"Never, ever, ever!"

Pain spread across Weznera's face. Restraining another order meant defying his own, but he continued to use all his magic—all his powers of binding—on Andeluc. As he did, his order warped from the influx of love and kindness he drew from.

"*Egelts Engdomela!*"

Magic circles of chains appeared on the four sides of the cage, and from them extended a crimson chain. The crimson chain reached for the Goddess of Termination and wrapped around her source. For every chain that finished wrapping around the source, some of the red threads spread across Forslonarleaf disappeared. By binding her source in chains, Weznera was restraining the order of termination itself.

Gritting his teeth and clenching his fists even more tightly, Weznera commanded his own powers of binding. Andeluc's source was soon entangled in a cocoon of chains that hung from the top of the cage.

The red threads spread across the divine city faded, eventually vanishing completely.

The Goddess of Termination's order had been sealed. At the same time, Andeluc's source itself began to weaken. Bound by the chains of order and unable to move, the source faded until it disappeared—along with the head fallen on the floor.

"Birth and death, huh? What troublesome orders," I said.

A faint light gathered within the cage. The light took the shape of a person, gradually refining to be that of a young woman. Her body was wrapped loosely in long fabric, and she had long straight hair and light green eyes. It was the Goddess of Birth that had been expelled from Forslonarleaf, Wenzel.

§ 38. Two Sides of a Divine Coin

"Mama!"

Weznera ran over to the cage and reached for the woman sitting within it. When Wenzel grabbed his hand, tears welled in his eyes.

"I'm sorry, mama... Don't be mad..." he mumbled.

Wenzel smiled gently at him. "I'm not mad."

"But I couldn't protect you... I couldn't keep my word...even though you said it was our secret!" Weznera sobbed. Wenzel patted his head gently through the iron bars.

"It's okay, Weznera. You may not follow my orders, but you are a kind boy. I knew you would fight to the best of your ability."

The God of Binding curled up on the spot and cried. He looked more like a regular little boy than a god.

"Two gods in one body, huh? Well technically, they're different bodies." I walked up to the magic prison and stood before Wenzel. "When the Goddess of Birth is manifested, the Goddess of Termination cannot exist. Conversely, when the Goddess of Termination is manifested, the Goddess of Birth cannot exist. Am I right?"

Wenzel nodded. "Even among the gods of the firmament, the two of us are special. We are two views of the same order, two sides of a single coin, two sisters that can never face each other."

It was impossible for both goddesses to exist at the same time; just like a coin, only one side—one goddess—could be seen at any time.

"I assume that when left to operate on its own, the switch between birth and death would be activated by fulfilling some condition. It must have been time for Andeluc's turn," I said.

And like a coin flipping over, when Andeluc appeared, Wenzel would disappear. Neither Misha nor Sasha would have expected an attack to come from *inside* the cage. That had been the trick behind

neutralizing them and expelling Wenzel from Forslonarleaf in a single move.

"Weznera wasn't acting on Andeluc's orders, but to restrain the Goddess of Birth from flipping to the Goddess of Termination," I surmised. "He bound you to his side to protect you from that."

Wenzel looked down at the God of Binding beside her. "I was the one who asked him."

"I suppose I don't need to ask why you didn't say anything. As two views of the same order, if Andeluc perishes, you would be destroyed too. The longest you can hold out after her destruction is one day."

Wenzel had warned me to ensure Ennessone was born within a day of the Goddess of Termination being destroyed. And the reason for that, I now knew, was that Ennessone needed to be born while the order of birth was still around.

"You're as clever as Militia described. As you said, birth and death are two sides of the same order. One cannot live for long without the other," Wenzel said with a gentle expression. "Ideally, I hoped for Ennessone to be born *before* Andeluc manifested. I believed it was possible."

"Hmm. Did something unexpected happen?"

"You came here too fast. Ennessone summoning you here caused Andeluc's order to become stronger."

To the gods, I was a misfit whose existence must be terminated. It made sense for the Goddess of Termination's power to be strengthened due to me approaching the Divine Realm.

"You didn't tell Ennessone how you and Andeluc are two sides of the same order," I said.

"If everything had proceeded as I had hoped, there was no need to. And if worse came to worst, Andeluc must be destroyed for Ennessone to be born. It would be too cruel to tell her the truth of what that would mean."

Wenzel was prepared to help Ennessone's birth, no matter the cost. But if Ennessone found out her birth would take her mother's life, she'd bear a heavy burden for the rest of her life. Wenzel, as a mother, couldn't bear to tell her.

"But it was withholding the truth that backfired on me. Ironic, isn't it?" Wenzel said.

Believing Wenzel had been imprisoned by the Goddess of Termination, Ennessone had called us to this land through Zeshia's dreams. As a result, Andeluc's order had grown stronger, and Weznera's chains had been unable to keep the Goddess of Birth in place.

"I was going to tell Misha and Sasha while Ennessone was gone, but by that point, I had less time than I thought."

Indeed, Wenzel had been about to say something when Sasha regained her memories of Militia and interrupted her. If not, then it might have been the stork born in Forslonarleaf that triggered the order of termination.

"Weznera is binding me here for now, but that won't last for much longer. With Misfit Anos Voldigoad and Ennessone both here, the world will tilt towards termination to remove the two existences that reject order. That is the way of nature, and it cannot be stopped just by chaining down the order of birth..."

The God of Binding was pouring all his magic into Egelts Engdomela, but when I looked into Wenzel's abyss, I could see her source was already in disarray. Even now it was trying to flip from birth to death.

"Demon King Anos, please end the Goddess of Termination before Ennessone notices," Wenzel said.

"*No*, mama!"

Chains extended from Weznera's body, directly tangling around Wenzel. "You can't... You have to stay with me. I'll keep you tied here forever! Don't go anywhere! I'll protect you this time! I know I can do it!"

Despite the tight bindings around her body, Wenzel smiled peacefully.

"My kind child, none of this is your fault," she said to Weznera. "All you did was listen to your selfish mother as best you could. You loved your mother, and all she did was grant you such a heavy burden to bear. And while you're still a little naughty, I know that someday you'll become a kind order. Already, you use the power of

binding so gently.”

She spoke as though she was entrusting him with her final wish. Weznera shook his head.

“No... No, mama... I don’t want that...”

Wenzel smiled with a troubled look. “One last time. Show me how strong you are. Love the world in my place, okay?”

A tear rolled down Weznera’s cheek.

The Goddess of Birth wiped his face and stared at him. As the one binding her here, Weznera knew better than anyone that there wasn’t much time left. He trembled with his whole body as he nodded, over and over again—to reassure his mother.

“I promise...”

“Good boy.”

Wenzel’s body blurred around the edges. Her source was weakened and was now fading away.

“Sorry, Demon King Anos. The rest is—”

“Hold on, let’s not rush things.”

I stepped forwards and reached through the iron bars, sinking my Vebzud-covered fingertips into Wenzel’s chest.

“Ah...!”

“Mama!” Weznera yelled.

“Don’t worry, I merely detained her from leaving,” I said.

I covered the source inside Wenzel with Beno Ievun, forming a cage that sealed her divine magic power. It wouldn’t be able to hold forever, but it should be able to buy some more time.

“When you said you would try to convince Andeluc, you were serious,” I pointed out.

Wenzel answered with a serious expression. “Yes. I am, however, unable to meet her. She’s never responded to me when I talk to her... My voice doesn’t reach her.”

“Her emotions have already awakened. Now that her order has been disturbed by fear, your voice might reach her. If the plea of an older sister can impact her heart, she may awaken to love.”

A faint light sparked in Wenzel’s eyes.

“But that’s only *if* the Goddess of Termination can feel love,” I said. “Personally, I don’t think she’s the type.”

"If there's even the faintest possibility of my dearest hopes coming true, then I'm willing to try," Wenzel said with an earnest look.

I gave her a nod of approval. Wenzel took a heavy breath and directed her gaze to the middle of the prison.

"Andeluc," she said, calling out to the little sister that wasn't there. "My little sister. My beloved sister I cannot meet. For so long I have worried about you, and could only watch in silence as you shouldered the burden that is your tragic duty."

Her words, carried by her kind voice, were overflowing with love—with her whole heart, she spoke to fight against order itself.

"From the moment we were born, we have been two halves of a whole. I have always felt your presence right behind me. Even though I have known you, and your voice, and your order—even though you've always been so close to me—the two of us have never spoken to each other."

Tears welled in Wenzel's eyes as she continued.

"*Please*, Andeluc. Let me hear your voice. Tell me your pain. We've always stood on opposite sides of life, glaring at each other. We've done nothing but *fight*. You've always tried to kill, and I've always tried to keep life going. But that isn't what we truly wish for, is it?"

She desperately pleaded to her little sister.

"Let's put an end to this. What joy is there to be had in such tedious fighting between sisters? Please, Andeluc. This is my heartfelt request to you."

Although she was a god, she uttered her words with intense emotion—as though she was not just speaking, but praying.

"Answer me. Tell me how you really feel. Not as an order of the world, but from your own heart!"

Wenzel's body gradually began to fade. It seemed she had reached her limit. If I made Beno Ievun any stronger, she would be destroyed.

"If possible, I wanted to meet you. I wanted to meet you and talk to you... Please, Andeluc, answer me!"

In the palm of my hand, Wenzel's source disappeared. Her body

vanished at the same time. Order inverted, and faint light gathered in the spot she had been staring at.

From the faint light appeared a woman wrapped in red fabric. Her cold eyes glared at the spot where Wenzel had last been, her dark red hair swaying behind her. Then, the Goddess of Termination moved her crimson lips.

"What a softhearted sister."

§ 39. A Distorted Love Disturbs Order

Andeluc's cold gaze was fixed on empty space. She spoke as though her older sister were still standing there.

"Why are you asking that now? So much time has passed, yet *now* you have a care?"

Red threads crawled out of the floor by Andeluc's feet. They spread like a spider web, forming a magic circle.

"I am the order of termination. If you, dear sister, can use order to allow children to be born, it is my duty, then, to terminate them," Andeluc said sharply to the space where the Goddess of Birth had once been. "We will never be in harmony. We will never coexist."

She fell silent for a long moment, expression unmoving.

"However," Andeluc eventually muttered. "Even if we can't coexist, I've always wanted to get along with you. I believed you could understand me. Even without saying anything, even without our words reaching each other, I believed you would understand..."

Her crimson lips curled upwards.

"Like you said, we've always stood on opposite sides of life, me terminating the life you attempt to create. Repeatedly, over and over. Calling it a sibling fight is quite comical."

Andeluc chuckled.

"No matter how much we fought, I thought you understood me..."

She grinned from ear to ear in a ghastly smirk, her eyes shot through with red.

"...until now."

Andeluc laughed with a bloodthirsty grin. Yet behind the laughter there was a palpable swirl of intense emotion, churning ominously.

"My tragic duty, you say," Andeluc said, ruminating. "I wouldn't

have dreamed of my own sister saying such a thing. The orders of birth and death may differ in role, but we are *both* orders of this world. There is no good or bad, no high or low—just correct. That is our fate as gods."

She glared into empty space with her bloodshot eyes, as though she was violently thrusting her emotions forwards with her gaze.

"Did the order of termination look like a tragic duty to you? Did I truly look so misfortunate in your eyes? Could you ever have imagined that I would take *pride* in governing an order of this world? Hee! Hee ha ha! Hee ha ha ha ha ha!"

She cackled madly with laughter.

"What my dear sister really wishes to say is this: Birth is wonderful, and death is abominable. Is that not so? You stand pure, while I remain tainted. You find me pitiful and pathetic—you look *down* on me."

The sound of metal clanging against metal could be heard. The divine scissors appeared from the magic circle of red thread. Andeluc lifted Egliahonne, the Snake Forceps of Termination, into the air.

"You ask if this is what we wanted? Of *course* it's what we wanted. We are order. It is my duty as termination to kill any unwanted life that disturbs the world. Yet you, older sister, blaspheme that? You declare me pitiful, as though birth is the only correct order?"

Her hostility rose with every word she uttered. The dim light of a warped love could be seen in her eyes—I didn't need Misha's eyes to be able to see that. It was hatred, pure hatred.

"Cease your weak attempts to sway me, and spare me the insolence, you whore! You sold your pride as an order to the misfit!"

The magic power emitting from Andeluc rattled the magic prison around her. The iron bars contained her power, but the cage was on the verge of breaking apart.

"Hmm," I commented. "This is quite the spectacular failure, I'd say."

While it seemed that love had bloomed within her—which was rare for a god in the first place—kindness had not bloomed in tandem. There was no way she'd be convinced to save Ennessone

like this.

"Weznera, tie her up once again. I will speak to Wenzel."

"Okay...!" The God of Binding was exhausted, but he mustered the magic power to draw magic circles in the four corners of the cage with chains. "Come back to me, mama! *Egelts Engdomela!*"

Chains extended from the four corners of the cage, wrapping around Andeluc's limbs and binding her magic and source.

"Guh... Release me, child. You are a god too. How dare order take the side of the misfit!" Andeluc spat.

"I couldn't care less about order!" Weznera shouted. "I will *protect mama*. Give her back to me!"

Red chains wrapped around the Goddess of Termination.

"Give her back? Hee hee ha ha... So you prefer her over me as well? You, an existence of order, seek birth over termination?" Andeluc asked, wheezing with laughter. "I see... I understand..."

Her low voice was laced with the darkness of her heart.

"I finally see what it is I'm meant to terminate."

Magic particles flowed from the magic circle of red threads at Andeluc's feet, shaking the cage even more.

"There's nothing my chains can't bind! You don't scare me!" Weznera said.

"Do your worst," Andeluc said with a smirk.

Weznera immediately drew four more magic circles. Red chains extended from them, wrapping around Andeluc in no time at all.

As the final chain restrained her head, Andeluc laughed again.

"Undesired order shall be consumed by the fangs of the snake."

A snake came crawling out of a small gap between the chains.

"Terminate!"

The sharp sound of metal blades snipping could be heard. The snake transformed into the Snake Forceps of Termination, and Andeluc's head went flying.

"How uninspired," I said.

"You really think so, child?" The head rolling on the floor turned towards me and grinned eerily. It then opened its mouth wide. "Consume, Egliahonne!"

The two-headed snake extended from the divine scissors, sinking

its fangs into both Andeluc's head and body. Its target was deep within her divine body—her source. By approaching destruction, her magic power swelled dramatically.

"Oh no...!" Weznera yelled, sweating profusely as the prison creaked. "It can't be... The order of termination suddenly got much stronger!"

The shock waves tore Egelts Engdomela apart, breaking the magic prison completely.

"Waaaaaaaaah!"

I chased after Weznera as he was blown through the wall, grabbing the chains around his body and landing on the rooftop of a nearby building. In the spot we had both been moments ago was a giant magic circle of red thread. Countless threads spilled from the center, forming the shape of an enormous, two-headed red snake.

"Hee hee... Hee ha ha! Perish, children. All undesired orders, all misfits, shall die hand in hand!"

"Hmm. You shouldn't do things you're not used to. Your magic power may rise the closer you are to destruction, but with such an unstable source you'll disappear," I said to her through Leaks.

Andeluc had become one with the two-headed snake, and red threads were fraying from her source to spread throughout Forslonarleaf. The threads carried the power to hasten Ennessone's termination—she was eroding her own source to power her order.

"That's right. I will perish. But that will be the correct order."

"Oh?"

"If I perish, Wenzel will perish, and the order of birth will disappear. Ennessone will not be born, and the birth of an unwanted life shall be prevented."

She tossed both her heads back and cackled gleefully.

"This is the ultimate termination!"

With each passing moment, she drew nearer and nearer to ruin. When I stared into her abyss with my Magic Eyes, I could see the order of termination—Egliahonne—was pointed at not only Ennessone but also Wenzel. If she perished, the womb the snake was connected to would perish, resulting in Wenzel's and Ennessone's terminations.

An order choosing its own ruin. An order ruining another order. Andeluc's warped love made what was normally impossible possible, surpassing order in the worst way. Even if I didn't destroy her myself, at this rate she would perish and Ennessone would be terminated.

However, in her current state, Andeluc couldn't be restrained by the God of Binding.

"What's wrong, child? Backed into a corner, are we?" the two-headed snake said mockingly. "You cannot interfere. I may not be able to terminate the destruction magic you so excel at, but I will be able to perish regardless."

Indeed, I could probably ignore her order with the Magic Eyes of Mauve and Ravia Gieg Gaverizd. But I couldn't allow the Goddess of Termination to perish.

"Sit there and suck your thumb while I destroy Ennessone, okay?" Andeluc said.

The Divine Eyes of the two-headed snake glinted menacingly as it scanned Forslonarleaf for Ennessone. I set Weznera down on the roof of the palace and quietly told him to hide.

"T-Take this..."

The God of Binding used the very last of his magic to hand me a crimson red chain. It wouldn't be enough to restrain Andeluc, but it should be able to slow her down a little.

"Don't worry. I won't let your mother perish," I said to him, wrapping the chain around my right arm.

Weznera nodded and hurried away obediently. I looked at the two-headed snake before me and leaped.

"Find her, Keepers of Termination!" Andeluc commanded.

Black bird monsters rose in the skies of Forslonarleaf with screeching cries. At the same time, Andeluc moved. She flew through the divine city, crashing through buildings in pursuit.

"Where do you think you're going?" I asked.

"Nwuh...?"

Andeluc looked downwards in time to see me approach. The next moment, I had leaped up to punch the head of the snake.

"Gaaaaaaaaah!"

Andeluc crashed into the rubble of the palace with a loud boom, sending clouds of dust into the air.

"You've sure made things more complicated. But in the end, all I have to do is bring Wenzel back without destroying you, yes?"

"That is impossible! How will you stop my destruction *without* magic? It's impossible, impossible! Unwanted lives shall be terminated...terminated...*terminated*!!!"

The two-headed snake righted itself and charged towards me. I leaped through the air and kicked one head, then used the recoil to approach the other head and slam it into the ground with my palm. Andeluc's body was embedded into the dirt.

When I landed on a snake head, she laughed.

"Hee ha ha! You think it's enough just to hurt me? You can delay me from finding Ennessone, but at this rate, I'll be destroyed anyway. Oh, it hurts, it hurts *so much*. How many more punches will I survive, do you think? Ten? Twenty? I might just be one punch away from ruin, you know? Hee ha ha! It's futile, futile I sa—"

I stomped on the snake head to force its mouth shut.

"Be quiet. Something interesting is about to happen."

§ 40. Leaving the Nest

While I was preventing Andeluc from moving, I watched what Eleonore was up to through the link to her Magic Eyes.

She was using De Ijelia to protect Ennessone and reduce the effect of the Goddess of Termination's order.

"Things are getting worse..." she mumbled, looking up at the sky.

Black birds screeched eerily as they circled overhead in search of Ennessone. And in the distance, the giant two-headed snake was scattering loose red threads across Forslonarleaf. Every time the scar-like threads increased in number, the agony in Ennessone's expression grew.

"Eleonore. I'll handle the snake. You give birth to Ennessone and bring her here," I said to her through Leaks.

"I just have to gather all the dolls with no heart and turn them into storks, right?"

"Yes."

"I can probably do that, but there are so many mansions and shops and cemeteries, it may take some time!"

"Enne's about to disappear...! Will we make it...?" Zeshia said worriedly, peering down at Ennessone's face. Ennessone smiled weakly and flapped the wings on her head as though to say she was fine.

"It's only a matter of time before those birds find her too! I could erase my magic to hide, but then I'd have to take De Ijelia down, and Enne will be in danger—"

Eleonore whirled around with a gasp. The Keepers of Termination, Veneh Ze Raveil, screeched as they shot down like arrows. Their target wasn't Eleonore or Zeshia, but the De Ijelia surrounding Ennessone.

"Ah! Stop that!"

Eleonore fired Teo Triath from her fingertips, shooting down the

Veneh Ze Raveil.

"Kreeeyaaah!"

The birds dropped to the ground one by one, screaming. But Andeluc's red threads soon wrapped around them, and a sinister magic power began to rise from their bodies.

"*Teo Triath!*" Eleonore shouted, continuing to fire bullets of light.

They struck the Keepers of Termination one after another, but the Veneh Ze Raveil spread their large wings and easily took to the air once again. Their bodies were entwined with the red threads of the Goddess of Termination, and their magic power had increased significantly—to the point Eleonore couldn't down them with a single Teo Triath anymore.

"Hmm... This is troubling. I can take them down if I use all my power, but..."

Eleonore's magic was being used to create artificial source hearts and amplify them using Aske. At the moment most of her power was focused on protecting Ennessone—if she switched to offense Ennessone's termination would only accelerate.

"Kreeeeeeaaah!"

"Argh! I'm trying to *think*! Annoy me and die!" Eleonore shouted, shooting at the swooping red birds with Teo Triath. But the Keepers withstood the attack and crashed into the barrier around Ennessone, eventually causing holes to appear in it.

Crashing into De Ijelia wore away the bodies of the Keepers of Termination, but they continued to sacrifice themselves without a care. It was almost like they had caught Andeluc's insanity; again and again they bore holes in the barrier, destroying themselves, as if terminating Ennessone was all that mattered.

"I won't let you touch Enne...!"

Zeshia drew Enharle and used Regalomitein to multiply it endlessly. The Holy Swords of Light extended while releasing an enormous amount of magic power, stabbing into countless birds.

"Punishment...of fried chicken!"

"Zeshia, fried chicken has to actually be fried first, or it'll make you sick!" Eleonore shouted, firing Teo Triath at the birds that had been rendered immobile by Zeshia's holy sword. The bullets of light

aimed between the red threads directly struck the Veneh Ze Raveil, burning them to death in a blinding flash.

"We need to run! Quick, let's go before the next wave comes," Eleonore said.

"Enne...can you move?" Zeshia offered Ennessone her hand.

"Yup... I'm fine..."

Ennessone grabbed Zeshia's hand firmly and ran alongside her.

"So what do we do now? Knowing you, you've gotta have a way out of this, right?!" Eleonore said to me through Leaks as she ran.

"Use Ennessone as bait."

"Wow! That's more brutal than I thought you'd be!" she yelped in shock.

"Gathering all the components needed for Ennessone's birth will take too much time. Andeluc will perish before then, and Ennessone will be terminated."

"How will using Enne as bait help?"

"Eleonore, you will make 30,066 artificial sources simultaneously. Then, you'll send those artificial sources of magic, hearts, and bodies into the shops with no doors, mansions with no roofs, and cemeteries with no graves respectively."

"Oh, I get it! We'll bring them all outside in one go and merge them!"

"That's right. If Ennessone lures the Keepers of Termination away from you, you won't be interrupted."

"Oh, but hold on," Eleonore said, looking at Zeshia worriedly. *"Does that mean Zeshia has to protect Enne alone? I'm not so sure about that..."*

"It's okay...!" Zeshia said, stopping in front of a large building. "Zeshia can protect Enne alone... Enne will be born!"

She squeezed Ennessone's hands.

"Zeshia is a follower of the Demon King too!" Zeshia said.

"But..." Eleonore trailed off.

"Bwa ha ha. I know it's your job to worry about her, but if she never leaves your side, she won't know how to do things herself."

Eleonore thought for a moment, then nodded. She then crouched down and gave Zeshia a big hug.

"Head to the outskirts of the city. Get as far as you can go and take as many birds as you can with you. If you succeed, I'll make your favorite apple pie every day."

"It'll be a sure victory...!" Zeshia declared, holding Enharle high over her head. "The Apple Pie Knight...Zeshia!"

She struck a gallant pose.

"You do your best too, Enne," Eleonore said.

"Okay..."

Eleonore hugged Ennessone as well. The wings on her head twitched happily. Once Eleonore split from the other two, I resumed speaking.

"Use Aske without an artificial source. De Ijelia can be enhanced with Regalomitein."

Eleonore temporarily canceled her Aske. Then, using Zeshia's love for Ennessone, Eleonore redeployed Aske and cast De Ijelia around Ennessone.

Zeshia drew a magic circle. "*Regalomitein*."

Opposing mirrors of Regalomitein appeared around Ennessone, reflecting the barrier around her to increase its layers and make it stronger.

"Listen carefully, Zeshia. I won't be nearby, so if this De Ijelia breaks, I can't recast it," Eleonore said in warning, holding an index finger up.

Zeshia nodded. "We'll be off...!"

She linked hands with Ennessone and ran off.

"Do your best!" Eleonore called after them.

Zeshia lifted the Holy Sword of Light in response. She spotted some Keepers of Termination overhead and thrust Enharle up to pierce them.

"Zeshia is over here...! You birds...will be fried chicken!"

The Holy Sword of Light glowed brightly, catching the attention of the Keepers of Termination and drawing them to Zeshia at once. Zeshia ran, luring them towards the outskirts of the city as Eleonore had instructed.

When I looked up, I could see a black cloud moving through the air—the flock of Veneh Ze Raveil chasing Zeshia. The birds were

flying ahead of her in an attempt to cut her off mid-route.

Eleonore stared at the dark cloud worriedly for a moment, then shook her head and entered a nearby building.

"Here goes, Anos," she murmured quietly.

Magic runes floated around her, and holy water began pouring out of them, forming a bubble that surrounded her body.

"*Eleonore*..."

A gentle spell echoed through the room. The Eleonore spell was able to create 10,022 source clones at once. She actually had the capacity to create double that number, but there were ten thousand Zeshias in existence already. Artificial sources were essentially incomplete source clones, so an artificial source of only magic power would only require one-third of a source clone. The same went for the heart and body.

Thus, the maximum number of artificial sources she could create right now was 30,066. Orbs of faint light flowed from the bubble of holy water one after another and floated around the room, eventually filling the entire building with artificial sources.

Eleonore waited in that state. She couldn't release the artificial sources until the Keepers of Termination had followed Zeshia out of the city.

Before long, the black bird monsters had all vanished from the city, though that meant every Keeper of Termination was currently in pursuit of Zeshia and Ennessone. And though it made Eleonore visibly worried for them, she chose to believe in her daughter and endure the uncertainty.

"Release them now."

I gave the signal, and Eleonore raised her hand. Magic power overflowed, opening the windows and doors of the building and releasing the faintly glowing artificial sources. They floated through Forslonarleaf towards the mansions with no roofs, shops with no doors, and cemeteries with no graves.

The artificial sources were neither fast nor slow, moving at a steady pace. But the time it took for them to reach their destination was time for the Keepers of Termination to steadily close in on Zeshia.

“There’s more than I thought...” Eleonore mumbled.

Half the artificial sources had reached the mansions with no roofs and shops with no doors. But they had only searched half the city. It was possible there were more dolls with no hearts or vessels with no magic than the 30,066 artificial sources Eleonore could make. If so, it would take far longer than expected for all the parts to be gathered—and in that entire time, Zeshia would be in danger.

As the artificial sources spread throughout the city, Eleonore grew more and more impatient. By the time seventy percent of the city was covered, seventy percent of the artificial sources had been used up. Would it be enough? No one knew for sure. If there was a yet unreached corner of the city that just so happened to be packed with doorless shops, there might not be enough.

Eleonore spent the time waiting in prayer, until eventually, the orbs of light reached every corner of the city.

“Is that...all?”

“So it seems.”

Eleonore let out a breath of relief. “Thank goodness... It really was close. We were lucky what was left was the exact number of artificial sources I could create!”

The dolls with no hearts, vessels with no magic, and souls with no bodies totaled 30,066. When the three were combined into one, that number was exactly 10,022—not a small number by any means. And now, more time would be needed to move the artificial sources along and have them gather in groups of three to hatch.

“Hold on a little bit longer, Zeshia. I’m going to give birth to Enne now.”

§ 41. The Small Follower

In the outskirts of Forslonarleaf, Zeshia and Ennessone held hands as they rushed through the overgrown forest. The sky was full of dark clouds, hanging low right underneath the sky's serene sea of billowing waves. Hot on their heels were the Keepers of Termination, the flock of black birds spreading themselves out to surround them.

"Kreeeeeeh!"

"Gyeeeaaahhh!"

"Gyashaaaaaaaaa!"

Piercing screeches overlapped with each other, creating an eerie echo throughout the forest. Thanks to Zeshia waving the Holy Sword of Light around, she had caught the attention of almost all the Keepers of Termination as planned.

The artificial sources Eleonore had created were spread across Forslonarleaf. The three things required for Ennessone to be born had already been sent to their respective destinations. All that was left was to bring the dolls, vessels, and hearts together and hatch the stork eggs. Zeshia's task was to buy time until that was done.

"Fried chicken...!"

Enharle exerted its true power, multiplying into swords that floated in the air around Zeshia. She thrust her sword upwards, and the surrounding swords moved to stab the birds in tandem.

"Behind you, big sis Zeshia!"

"Leave it to me...!"

Sharp beaks thrust forwards like arrows, but the Holy Sword of Light continued to cut down its enemies. Veneh Ze Raveil protected the order of termination—their duty was to end life that was yet to be born.

Thus, their individual strength only needed to be enough to destroy Ennessone's fetal source. In comparison to the Keepers of Time or Destruction, their power was minuscule. But their numbers

more than made up for that lack, surrounding Zeshia and Ennessone in the forest in no time at all.

Upon noticing they were surrounded, Zeshia stopped running. Countless glinting eyes were fixed on Ennessone, the young god flinching in fear.

"It's okay," Zeshia said, standing before Ennessone to protect her. "Zeshia is here...!"

She used Regalomitein and reflected Enharle in the mirrors of the spell. The reflected holy sword materialized into existence, increasing the number of blades around her.

When she pointed the holy sword in her hand forwards, a total of one thousand blades all went flying. The flock dodged the blades with shrill screeches, causing several of the blades of light to stab into the ground.

"*Tias Diara*."

Lines of light extended from the Enharles stabbed in the ground, connecting holy sword to holy sword in a circle. Blades of light then extended upwards from the swords, curving and converging to a singular point.

"It's...a birdcage!" Zeshia declared.

She had cast a barrier in the shape of a birdcage. The Keepers of Termination within tried to leave the cage, but when they hit the blades of Enharle, they dropped to the floor.

"All of you...will be locked away!"

Zeshia used Regalomitein to duplicate Enharle further, casting Tias Diara everywhere at random. The barrier wasn't too strong, but it covered a large area and was perfect for trapping groups of birds at once. By using the Tias Diara as shelter, they were able to hide in the forest and defeat the other birds in the sky.

"Hee!"

Just then, an eerie laughter could be heard.

"Hee ha ha ha ha! Hee hee ha!"

The voice that resounded through the forest was brimming with insanity. Red threads gathered in the sky above the forest, forming the shape of a Magic Eye, one which Andeluc controlled remotely from the palace.

"It's futile! Futile! You cannot escape... Termination is your fate!"

At Andeluc's voice, the red threads in the sky started falling down like rain. They wrapped around the Keepers of Termination and formed an armor that excelled in both offense and defense.

"Die!"

The birds now wrapped in red threads dove down from the sky, one after another. The Keepers ignored the De Ijelia protecting Ennessone and instead went for Zeshia.

"I won't lose...!"

Using Regalomitein to duplicate Enharle endlessly, Zeshia intercepted the birds. A thousand blades of light clashed with a thousand bird monsters, until one bird eventually slipped through Zeshia's swords.

"Big sis!"

Its giant beak stabbed Zeshia's abdomen, tearing through both her anti-magic wards and magic barriers. Zeshia fell to her knees, bright red blood seeping from her body.

"You thought the fetus was my sole target? If I destroy you*, Ennessone will be powerless. And my birds can take their sweet time pecking apart the barrier afterwards. Hee!"*

Grating laughter echoed through the area.

"Consume, Veneh Ze Raveil!"

"Kreeeeeeaaah!"

Like vultures, Keepers of Termination swarmed Zeshia, pecking her with their beaks. Particles of magic, black feathers, and red blood all danced through the air.

"Big sis! Big sister Zeshia!" Ennessone yelled, charging at the Keepers of Termination in tears. Several layers of the De Ijelia around her were destroyed in the process, but she managed to crush some of the Veneh Ze Raveil as well. The remaining birds ceased their attack on Zeshia and glared at her.

"Kreeeeeehhh!"

The moment they screeched, the light of a sword flashed at them, slashing the Keepers into pieces.

"I won't let you touch...Enne...!" Zeshia said, forcing her battered body to take down the Keepers surrounding them.

"Zeshia..."

With her body in tatters, Zeshia grabbed Ennessone's hand and ran. "Hold on a little bit longer...Enne!"

They squeezed each other's hands and ran through the forest. The Keepers of Termination attempted to attack them, but Zeshia drove them back with the Holy Sword of Light. But her young body was reaching its limit—she became increasingly weaker, unable to defend against every attack, with more wounds accumulating on her body.

"Big sis..."

"It's okay...!" Zeshia grinned brightly to reassure Ennessone. "Zeshia is strong...because Zeshia is a big sister..."

"Hee ha ha! It's almost time. Your bluff ends here."

Andeluc's voice echoed, the Keepers of Termination gathering overhead. The monstrous birds flocked all together, and red threads entwined around them. The thread covered them all to form one large bird.

"Perish, Ennessone. Terminate!"

The red bird turned upside down and dove at Zeshia and Ennessone.

"*Regalomitein*."

Zeshia stared at the large bird, casting two Regalomitein mirrors in front of her.

"Opposing mirrors...!"

She thrust Enharle straight at the mirrors, with the reflected sword duplicating infinitely to stab at the transformed flock. But despite the slashes of blinding light, the red bird continued to dive.

"I...won't lose!"

She swung Enharle down with all her might, splitting the red bird into two. Zeshia exhaled in relief—but the two halves of the red bird continued diving until they crashed into the forest floor.

The ground exploded, with the massive ensuing blast sending Keepers of Termination scattering in every direction. Zeshia and Ennessone were caught in the explosion and were sent flying, slamming into the ground heavily after being pushed back several meters.

"Ugh..."

Zeshia rolled across the ground, eventually coming to a stop face down. The next moment, the rain of red threads had created several puddles across Forslonarleaf, deep scars on the land embodying Andeluc's order. Even Ennessone, who was protected by De Ijelia, was being adversely affected by them.

"Big sis Zeshia..."

Ennessone used all her strength to get up, but she was unable to find strength in her legs and toppled over.

"I'm sorry... Ennessone can't move anymore..."

Zeshia staggered to her feet and made her way over to Ennessone.

"Run... Save yourself, at least..."

Ennessone gazed up at the sky. Keepers of Termination were gathering above them once more. The explosion just now had broken the majority of the Regalomitein used in Tias Diara, freeing the trapped birds.

"I wanted to be your little sister..."

"Enne..."

"I'm sorry."

Zeshia stabbed her holy sword into the ground and crouched before Ennessone.

"Big sis?"

"It's okay... Zeshia will carry you."

"That won't work. You won't get away...!"

Zeshia clenched her fist and showed off her flabby upper arm in a triumphant flex. "Zeshia is strong! Because she's the big sister!"

She wrapped her arms around Ennessone and lifted her with all her might. She then shifted Ennessone onto her back and crouched to bite Enharle and hold it with her mouth.

"Leave it...to me!" she said, voice muffled. She started running slowly with Ennessone on her back. Whenever Keepers of Termination appeared before her, the blades of light floating around her would slash at them.

"It's no good... Big sis..."

Just like before, swarms of bird monsters were taking formation

in the air. Red threads wrapped around them, transforming them into giant red birds.

"Ennessone is only slowing you down..."

The wings on her head folded inwards. Zeshia continued running intently through the forest, showing no intention of leaving her little sister behind.

"Hold on tight...!" she said, using Fless to fly through a clearing at a low altitude.

"Hee ha ha! It's useless! I've got your reliable Demon King locked down here. No one is coming to save you."

On Andeluc's order, the giant red birds prepared to dive.

"Consume!"

Zeshia turned so that she was flying backwards and pointed the Holy Sword of Light at the red birds.

"Enne... As your big sister, I will teach you this..."

Using the opposing mirrors of Regalomitein, Zeshia once again multiplied Enharle's blades and layered them into one giant holy sword.

"The Demon King's followers...never lose!"

A flood of light from the large holy sword attacked the giant Veneh Ze Raveil charging them.

"How many times will you try the same move? Your fate cannot be changed. Unwanted life—"

Just like before, the red bird was sliced in two but continued to charge.

"—shall be terminated!"

"Never...ever!" Zeshia yelled, using the last of her strength to slice the two red birds in half once more.

"I said *this is termination!"*

The bird that was split into four continued attacking Zeshia.

"And *I* said...never!"

She swung Enharle with all her might, this time splitting the bird into eight.

"Punishment...of fried chicken!"

Enharle split into eight blades, extending from Zeshia's sword to skewer the split birds.

"*Tias Diara!*"

Barrier magic activated, trapping the Keepers of Termination in a cage of light.

"Big sis! They're...!" Ennessone's voice shouted.

A Keeper of Termination appeared behind Zeshia, charging beak-first like a spear.

"I won't...let you!"

Zeshia slashed at the bird with Enharle. But the next moment—

"That was bait."

The sound of shattering mirrors could be heard. A bird had crashed into Regalomitein in the brief opening while Zeshia was distracted and had broken the mirrors. The opposing mirrors disappeared, and the duplicated Holy Swords of Light vanished along with Tias Diara.

"Hee ha ha! How could a follower of the Demon King fall for such an obvious trap?"

The eight red birds charged straight at Zeshia. But without the mirrors, there was nothing else she could do to defend against them. The birds charging at them would probably blow up, just like the others before.

"In the end, you're nothing but a mere child. Zero points."

The bird homed in on Zeshia as she ran—but froze just before making contact.

"Wha...t...?"

It was De Ijelia. A barrier of earth, water, fire, and wind had been deployed around Zeshia and Ennessone, protecting them from the red birds' charge.

"*Teo Triath*."

Eight bullets of light swallowed the red birds, erasing them.

"Well done, Zeshia! Full marks for you."

Flying through the sky in a bubble of magic runes and holy water was Eleonore, with ten thousand storks following her. She held up an index finger and said with a smile, "As a follower of the Demon King, your first priority is to protect others!"

§ 42. Undesired Order

Above Forslonarleaf, the Divine City of the Sprouting Palace, a flock of storks flew across the oceanic sky. By hatching all the eggs at once, the chicks had grown into adult storks. Their beaks opened and consumed the red threads of the order of termination. The rain of red threads vanished, with the scar-like puddles of threads also vanishing into the storks' stomachs.

"One more time! We're gonna hit a lot more—*Teo Triath*!" Eleonore shouted.

Her artificial sources within the storks drew magic circles that fired in every direction. The remaining Keepers of Termination had nowhere left to run and perished under the barrage of bullets, bodies evaporating into nothing.

At the same time, Eleonore used Ei Chael to heal Zeshia's wounds.

"Ah..."

Once all the birds were wiped out, something curious happened: A glowing thread extended from all 10,022 storks and moved towards Ennessone. She was wrapped up in a transparent shell of light, hanging in the air by the threads.

"Come here and bring Ennessone," I said.

"Roger!" Eleonore replied, flying over to Ennessone with Zeshia using Fless.

"Will Enne...be born?" Zeshia asked Ennessone.

"I don't know, but probably... Ennessone can almost understand Ennessone... Just a little more..."

The three of them took to the sky. I could see them from the palace with my own eyes.

"Hmm. It's too bad, Goddess of Termination," I said. "If you were a little weaker, you would have perished first."

I looked down at my feet. The large two-headed snake under my

foot, lodged in the cracked ground, was on the verge of perishing.

"Anos!" Eleonore's voice called. She slowly descended to where I was. "It's another victory for the Demon King's Army!"

"All thanks...to Zeshia!" Zeshia said proudly, landing alongside her.

"Yup yup, you did great! That's my adorable and strong daughter for you!"

Zeshia looked even more pleased at Eleonore's praise.

"All that's left is to wait for Enne to be born, right?" Eleonore asked.

Wrapped in the shell of light being carried by the storks, the wings on Ennessone's head flapped.

"What do we do...about *her*?" Zeshia asked, glaring down at Andeluc.

"Oh, that's right. We're not meant to let her perish, right?" Eleonore asked.

"The Goddess of Termination is the order of termination," I said. "Her power only works on life before it's born. She reacted to me because this divine domain, Forslonarleaf, fulfills the role of a womb."

It's why she kept saying my luck had run out the moment I arrived here; those within the divine city were considered to be as-of-yet unborn life.

"I get it...!" Zeshia said with a smug nod.

"Hmm? Did you understand that just now, Zeshia? What did it mean?" Eleonore asked.

"It means...it's complicated!"

Eleonore giggled with a relaxed look.

"In short, if Ennessone is born, termination is impossible," I continued. "If she *is* born, Ennessone will be able to control Forslonarleaf, Andeluc will lose the target of termination, and as a result, her order will weaken and tilt towards birth."

"Oh, I see. She came out to terminate Enne, so even if she isn't destroyed, she'll return to being Wenzel!" Eleonore said in understanding.

"...tile..."

A quiet voice muttered. The eyes of the two-headed snake turned

to glare at me.

"Did you say something, Andeluc?" I asked.

"I said...it's futile..."

"Oh?"

"It will never happen... Ennessone will not be born. Even if you gather the dolls without hearts, vessels without magic, and souls without bodies... Even if you hatch the chicks, the maximum of a source is predetermined."

Ennessone could be seen in the shine of Andeluc's snake eyes—since being wrapped in the shell of light she had undergone no further changes.

"The Divine City of the Sprouting Palace is a miniature world. Isn't it, Ennessone? You should have remembered by now, no?" Andeluc said eerily, as though she was casting a curse. "You are an order that will *never* be born."

Large eyes glowered at Ennessone, who shook inside her shell. Zeshia drew Enharle and slammed it down heavily on an eye.

"Gwah!" Andeluc grunted.

"No bullying Enne...!"

Zeshia sullenly stood before the two-headed snake.

"Demon King Anos," Ennessone mumbled, wings flapping as she hugged herself.

"Something wrong?" I said.

"The maximum life capacity of Forslonarleaf is 10,022 lives," she said, as though she had recalled her order. *"Ennessone is the 10,023rd life. Ennessone cannot be born without taking someone else's life. But if someone else's life is taken, Ennessone cannot be born."*

"So the birth of 10,022 storks is the condition for Ennessone's birth, but at the same time Forslonarleaf can only hold 10,022 lives."

"Yes... I finally get it. Ennessone is the 10,023rd life that can never be born. That is the order imposed upon me."

"Hee hee... Hee ha ha! See now?" Andeluc jeered. "You might have won the fight, misfit, but as long as Ennessone isn't born, I will not switch back to the Goddess of Birth..."

Andeluc's voice was weak. But there was still a faint insanity

hidden in her abyss.

"Do you finally understand? You cannot stop my destruction... And when I perish my sister will perish too. And when *that* happens, Ennessone will no longer be on the verge of birth. She will disappear completely."

She cackled with laughter once again. It seemed she felt no fear towards her own ruin.

"*This* is termination. You cannot run from order. And though your birth also escaped my hands, misfit, you too will soon be swallowed by the order of this world. It's only a matter of time."

"Ah!" Eleonore cried, Eyes gazing at the Goddess of Termination in shock. The red threads that formed the two snake heads were coming apart and disintegrating. "She's going to disappear!"

Eleonore tried to cast Ingall, but the magic was terminated instantly. Andeluc was perishing, but that was what was making her order of termination all the stronger.

"It's no good! If she perishes like this, neither Wenzel nor Enne can be saved!"

"Anos...! Please...save Enne!"

Eleonore and Zeshia turned to me and pleaded.

"It's futile, futile," Andeluc said. "You must only think of it and you'll see—it's too late, misfit. All you know is destruction. You are a contaminant of the world that can destroy order. But you can *only* destroy, and never save. There's nothing you can do to save life or order."

The mouth of the snake curled up in a smirk. Moments later, the threads there too came loose and crumbled apart.

"How vexing. My only regret is being unable to watch your reaction..."

With each word she uttered, the two-headed snake's body further broke down into red threads.

"If only I could see the faces of both you and my sister crushed with despair."

"Hmm. Shall I show you?" I said.

One beat of silence later, Andeluc asked, "What?"

I grabbed a fistful of loose threads and tied them with a crimson

chain—the same chain I had borrowed from the God of Binding, Weznera.

"What your face looks like when crushed with despair, that is."

I entwined the loose threads with the chain, rolling them up into a bundle.

"Oh, is that all? Give up," Andeluc said. "It's impossible. You'll only be wasting your time."

"Ennessone is a gentle order created by Militia. Because of you gods getting in the way, she nearly forgot that herself," I said. "But now I finally get it."

I stared into Ennessone's abyss within the shell of light.

"Why was Ennessone only able to show dreams to Eleonore and Zeshia?" I said. "Why did the vessels with no magic and dolls with no hearts react to Eleonore's artificial sources? Why was the number of storks in the city the same as the number of source clones Eleonore can create?"

I drew a magic circle before me and glared at Andeluc.

"I thought it was because Militia had left behind the things necessary for Ennessone to be born. But that's not it. Ennessone is an order on the verge of birth, yes, but she is also a magic law created by the Heavenly Father Nosgalia. One that Militia remade."

"Does that mean..." Andeluc said.

I sent magic through our link, and runes appeared around Eleonore.

"Kyah!" Eleonore yelped.

Holy water formed a bubble around her, hovering in the air.

"The magic order used to make the Eleonore spell work—*that* is Ennessone's identity."

Back then, Militia stole a newborn magic order from the Heavenly Father. She recreated that order into Ennessone and brought her here. And because Ennessone's order was on the verge of birth, it allowed the Eleonore spell formula to function, and for the humanoid magic of Eleonore to be born in the Hero Academy.

"A doll with no heart, a vessel with no magic, and a soul with no body is required for Ennessone to be born. Ennessone herself is a soul with no body."

On the way out of the room containing the doll with no heart, Ennessone had tripped. But even though she had still been in the room, the doll with no heart had begun its restoration. That was proof that she was the missing heart—proof that she was a soul with no body.

"The reason the 10,023rd life cannot be born is that the artificial source for it cannot be born in Forslonarleaf. And when I say artificial source, I'm talking about the vessel without magic and the doll with no heart that would complete Ennessone, the soul with no body."

Originally, the vessel with no magic and doll with no heart should have been born when all 10,022 storks were gathered. But that would have crossed the divine city's capacity, so they weren't.

"However, there is a spell here affected by the exact same order as Forslonarleaf."

At once a spell formula was formed, controlling the Eleonore spell. Threads of light extended from the storks, detaching from Ennessone and covering Eleonore's bubble of holy water instead.

"Undesired magic...shall be terminated!" Andeluc muttered, but the Eleonore spell couldn't be stopped.

"Forslonarleaf is Ennessone's divine domain, and Eleonore is the spell that works on her magic order," I said. "It cannot be erased so easily—or you would have destroyed Ennessone much earlier."

Eventually, the threads of light being emitted from the storks all gathered at Eleonore's womb. A magic link then extended straight from her abdomen and quietly connected to the link extending from Ennessone. Through the Eleonore spell, the artificial source—in other words, the vessel with no magic and the doll with no heart—was created and sent through the link.

"Why is Ennessone Zeshia's little sister?" I said. "And why did she call *me* her father? It was quite the fascinating riddle."

The shell of light covering Ennessone started glowing brightly, obscuring her from view.

"But this is the answer."

"This... This can't be... Impossible," Andeluc replied. "A spell *surpassing* the power of the magic order it works on...?"

"Bwa ha ha. What are you saying, Andeluc? Have you forgotten?"

The red two-headed snake paled in horror at the sight of Ennessone about to be born. It was a look of pure despair.

"Overthrowing order—"

"—is the Demon King's magic!" Eleonore said triumphantly, stealing my thunder.

§ 43. Incomplete Birth

"You...!" the two-headed snake spat. From between the chains, red threads unraveled from the main body, rising into the air. "Unforgivable! This misfit... Breaking the order of this world...is unforgivable!"

"Don't worry, I'm not looking for your forgiveness," I said, gazing at the weakly fading order of termination with the Magic Eyes of Mauve.

"But I am not your only enemy. None of the gods and order of this world will forgive you... We are the order of this world. Struggle all you wish, but your destination will be the same... You have no choice but to obey!" Andeluc said.

"Bwa ha ha," I laughed, looking down at Andeluc. "Save the sleeptalking for sleep."

My Magic Eyes glinted, and the God of Binding's chains fell to the ground with a clatter. The two-headed snake body had come apart completely and vanished.

"Sh-She perished!" Eleonore cried.

"No, her order is just switching sides."

Several meters from where Andeluc had disappeared, faint light began to gather. The light took the shape of a person, manifesting into the Goddess of Birth.

"How do you feel, Wenzel?" I asked.

Wenzel nodded with a gentle smile. "Thank you very much, Demon King Anos. It's hard to believe, but the order of termination has waned and birth is thriving. As long as another unwanted life doesn't appear, Andeluc will not show herself again."

"Um, she won't perish while she's inactive, right?" Eleonore asked.

"The order of termination will regenerate itself for the next opportunity," Wenzel answered. "As long as I am at the forefront,

her divine body and order cannot be influenced by her will."

The Goddess of Birth stared at Eleonore tenderly. Her gaze then moved from her face to the magic link extending from her body to the egg-like shell glowing brightly.

"Ennessone will now be born here," she declared, raising her arms solemnly. The magic circle she drew wrapped around Ennessone like a blessing. Then, a crack spread across the shell of light. And as the crack widened, a pleasant noise, like a bell ringing, could be heard.

"Do your best, Enne! You got this...!" Zeshia waved her arms, cheering.

In response, the shell of light cracked more, and countless feathers started spilling from within. The ringing sound got even louder.

The shell of light then cracked all the way through. Feathers danced into the air and fluttered down to the ground. The magic link extending from Eleonore's navel detached from the shell as though it had done its duty, returning to her womb.

"Um... Should I say nice to meet you?" said the being who emerged from the broken shell. Standing there, looking bashful, was the same little girl we knew. "Wenzel, Demon King Anos, Eleonore, big sis Zeshia... Thank you."

Other than the two small wings protruding from her back, Ennessone looked no different from her fetal source form. But when I stared into her abyss, I could see her source was emitting magic.

"Enne!" Zeshia spread her arms and ran up to Ennessone to hug her. "Enne...is born!"

"Yup! Ennessone is born. I've been born as Zeshia's little sister!" Ennessone replied.

"A glorious...achievement!"

The two looked at each other happily and laughed.

"But I'm sorry, there isn't much time left," Ennessone suddenly said in a serious tone.

"Enne? Are you going...somewhere?" Zeshia asked.

Ennessone shook her head slowly. "I've remembered. Ennessone is the magic order of source nativity."

And the Eleonore spell is a part of that, huh?

"Um, what's nativity?" Eleonore asked, confused.

Wenzel stepped forwards to answer her. "It's the word used when important people, like great saints or mighty kings, are born into the world."

"Whoa! So Enne can create super important life?" Eleonore said.

The wings on Ennessone's head flapped. "I don't know if it's *super* important, but Ennessone was born to create new life outside the framework of order. A new mankind."

"Hmm? Um... Does that mean you can give birth to a new kind of life that isn't god, human, or demon?" Eleonore said.

"Ennessone is a little special," she answered, head wings flapping. "Ennessone is order, but not a god—I'm a magic order with the name of Ennessone, a magic that Militia created to make this world, controlled by order, a kinder place. I was made for the Demon King's sake."

Ennessone turned around. "But that isn't good enough."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

She slowly walked forwards as she answered. "Ennessone isn't kind. I finally understand why I called everyone here. Ennessone couldn't wait—I wanted to be born faster."

She stopped right in front of the magic cage where Wenzel had been imprisoned, and where Misha and Sasha were still lying on the floor. With Andeluc's disappearance, the effect of her magic would soon fade, and they would recover.

Ennessone looked at the two of them sadly, then shifted her gaze to the broken mural.

"Look," she said, pointing at the mural, her finger highlighting a specific magic circle carved among the various patterns drawn on the wall.

"Huh? It's a shared umbrella magic symbol?" Eleonore said.

"It says Wenzel and Andeluc..." Zeshia added.

They both leaned in to examine the magic circle.

"So you call it a shared umbrella on earth," Wenzel noted.

The two turned to look at her.

"Is it different in the Divine Realm?" Eleonore asked.

"This is a symbol that represents sister gods that are two sides of the same order," Wenzel said.

Eleonore gasped and looked at Ennessone.

"You should have all seen it before. Abernyu drew it in Delsgade," Ennessone said.

Indeed, it had been carved there with Militia's and Abernyu's names.

"I see. Militia *did* say she couldn't meet Abernyu. But she meant that she and Abernyu were gods of the same order, like Wenzel and Andeluc," I said.

When Sasha's source was split into two using Dino Jixes, Misha became the personality of one half. And this must have been why; they were originally two people to begin with—two minds sharing one body.

No, that wasn't quite right. If that was true—

"Kyah!" Eleonore yelped.

Forslonarleaf shook intensely, interrupting my thoughts.

"An earthquake...!" Zeshia cried.

"No..." Eleonore corrected her.

A large magic power could be detected overhead. We looked up to see the sea in the sky had split into two, and a castle was floating there just like the three-dimensional magic circle that was Delsgade.

Eleonore pointed at the sky, raising her voice. "That's Everastanzetta!"

Everastanzetta was the Institute of the Gods, but it should have been in the underground world, not here.

"Militia," Ennessone murmured with a frown. "Demon King Anos, that's Militia! My birth must have triggered it. We have to hurry—"

Lunar snowdrop petals fluttered down from Everastanzetta as though to support those words. A magic circle was drawn across the castle, from which silver moonlight shined down and softly wrapped a still-collapsed Misha in its rays.

A glowing blue Erial—a Star of Creation—then traveled down the silver rays and melted into her. Misha shifted quietly. When she opened her eyes, they were glowing with pale blue light.

"Ennessone," Misha said quietly, in her usual emotionless tone.

But unlike her usual tone, now there was a divine tranquility to her voice. “I told you to keep it a secret until everything was over.”

“But... Ennessone is...”

“I really am no good at creation,” Misha said, then looked at me. She slowly walked towards me, and I stepped forwards to meet her.

“Hmm. What a dramatic sequence of events. I doubt everything went exactly as you planned either,” I said.

She blinked a few times and nodded silently.

“Have you remembered now, Militia?” I asked.

“Two thousand years no see,” she said simply.

“I have so many things I want to ask.”

“I know,” she said, then looked at me questioningly. “Can I ask first?”

“Go on.”

“Order or people, which matters more?”

It was the question carved into Everastanzetta.

“Order is necessary for people to live. Not the reverse,” I answered immediately.

She smiled faintly.

“I have been waiting for this day,” she said, “and for you.”

§ 44. The World the Goddess of Creation Wished For

The Institute of the Gods, Everastanzetta, hovered in the sky between the split sea. No moon could be seen, yet silver moonlight shone down on Forslonarleaf.

"By this day, do you mean the day of Ennessone's birth?" I asked.

Misha nodded.

"Seven hundred million years have passed since I made the world," she said in a tranquil voice. "And this entire time, Abernyu and I have watched over it—have witnessed life and death, creation and destruction—in an ever-continuing cycle. During the days of endless conflict, sources cycled through birth, death, and rebirth. In the beginning, I believed that life born even under the star of tragedy could find happiness someday."

"I don't think you were wrong," I said. "My father lives in peace beside me now."

Misha smiled sadly. "That is just one reality. Not everyone has such fortune."

Her emotionless voice echoed quietly and heavily.

"Sources reincarnate, life cycles renew. But this doesn't happen in perpetuity. Sources should glow brighter the closer they approach ruin. Even if their current life was full of sadness, as long as the next life glows with more joy, the balance between fortune and misfortune will be maintained," Misha said, staring into my eyes. "If it didn't end in sadness... If there was hope for the next life even after so many repeated misfortunes, there would still be salvation in this world."

She paused and looked down in silence for a moment. Then, she said coldly, "The total latent magic power of this world is in constant decline."

Hmm. Total latent power?

"Demons and humans, magic artifacts, demon swords, holy swords—everything that possesses magic, added together?" I asked.

Misha quietly nodded. "Magic doesn't cycle through perfectly. As life reincarnates, magic spills here and there, eventually vanishing completely."

If the total magic of the world was gradually decreasing, then that would mean there was life that couldn't cycle through and reincarnate. Some lives might lose their magic power like my father, Ceris Voldigoad. And once they ran out of magic, their source itself would vanish.

"Anos."

She called my name sadly.

"The world is not kind. It's slowly stealing happiness away from people," she said, as though she was confessing her sins. "That is order."

"Then we just have to overthrow it," I said.

She smiled faintly. "How like you."

Those words sounded like they were coming from Misha rather than Militia.

"You took the Goddess of Destruction's order for the sake of world peace. For the sake of reducing the sadness in the world. Demon Castle Delsgade stood in Midhaze, distancing all life from destruction. But there were still several problems left behind."

"The Selection Trials?" I asked.

"Yes. When the order of destruction vanished, the world tilted towards creation. To maintain the balance of order, the Selection Trials were held, repeatedly creating war between people and gods."

Militia had become Arcana's Selection God and had fought in the Selection Trial underground.

"What else?" I asked.

"Your forgotten memories—that the Goddesses of Creation and Destruction are sister gods, two sides of the same order. Our sources are two in one, and one in two. An order of two gods, one body."

Sasha had mentioned something about a delayed problem in her memories. Was this what she meant?

“So what you mean to say is this: If the order of destruction is lost, the order of creation doesn’t have long to live either.”

Misha nodded.

Because I had turned the Goddess of Destruction into Delsgade, Militia had lost one side of her order, and as a result, her lifespan had been reduced.

“Just like Abernyu, my source is that of a god. Although I have reincarnated as a demon, my connection to my order isn’t completely severed.”

“The Goddess of Destruction remains as Delsgade while the Goddess of Creation perishes,” I said. “But if the Goddess of Creation perishes, Sasha will eventually vanish too.”

“Right.”

“Surely you had a plan to prevent that,” I said.

Misha nodded. “I relinquished the order of creation in order to stop the Selection Trial. I used the same magic as you to change my divine body into the Institute of the Gods, Everastanzetta. Along with the order of the God of Balance, Elrolarielm, that is.”

And in doing so had made the Goddesses of Creation and God of Balance disappear at the same time. With their vanishing, the balance between creation and destruction had been maintained, while the order of balance behind the Selection Trial had been weakened.

“My source is linked to Abernyu’s and can both be hidden and revealed from her’s in equal measure. Since she was in the middle of reincarnating, I was able to reincarnate with her.”

“You said you once dreamed you gave your sister everything,” I said.

Misha nodded again. “Gods separated from their order cannot live for long. However, Abernyu could live if the link between her and the Goddesses of Destruction and Creation was severed, and she was completely reborn as a demon. The two orders then became Delsgade and Everastanzetta, and the only connection left was the fact that we were two people in one.”

“If Sasha had been a single person, her link to the Goddess of Destruction would have been severed, and she would have been

reincarnated as a normal demon," I said.

"That would have granted my final wish and allowed her to remain in this world," Misha confirmed.

The reason Militia's wish wasn't granted was obvious—someone had interfered.

"Graham, huh?" I said.

"Yes. He tried to cause my fall using Arcana; the Sword of a Thousand Bolts, Gauddigemon; and the God of Frenzy, Aganzon. My wish failed, and I reincarnated in an undesired form."

"Your source merged with Sasha's, and your consciousness remained when you had wanted to vanish," I said, thinking.

Yet again, Misha nodded. "We were about to be born in the distorted form of two minds in one source."

Simply speaking, they would have been similar to Kaihilam and Jiste.

"Until you were coincidentally split into two through Dino Jixes," I concluded.

That aside, I couldn't understand what Graham had wanted to do. Considering who he was, he might have just interfered out of spite—but was that really what had happened here?

"It was a coincidence. But that coincidence might have been our destiny," Misha said.

"Hmm. Did Lay do something?"

"He is the chosen one of the Sword of Three Races. That holy sword—one that could cut fate itself—might have responded to him without his knowing."

Hero Kanon had created tragedy when Misha, who shouldn't have existed, was born through Dino Jixes—and in doing so had actually saved her. But Evansmana wasn't even in Lay's possession back then. If things had been set up for me to save Misha and Sasha, which is what the situation seemed to be, then there must have been a tremendous power at work.

In the first place, Evansmana was a holy sword created to destroy *me*. Forged by a human, indwelled by a spirit, and blessed by a god, yet all three were unknown factors. It wouldn't have been strange, then, for an unknown power to have worked in mysterious ways.

At the very least, if Sasha and Misha had been two minds in one source when I met them, I wouldn't have thought of changing the past to save them.

"After being split into two people, our connection to the Goddesses of Destruction and Creation became weaker. After all, the Moon of Creation and the Sun of Destruction cannot both exist in the sky at once," Misha said.

In other words, they were more like gods that were extremely close to being demons.

"So if the two of you remained as one, the connection to the Goddesses of Destruction and Creation would have remained strong, and the two of you would have perished from being separated from your orders?" I said, putting things together.

"Yes. It was a very lucky coincidence. Thanks to the hero's power, we were given fifteen more years to live."

Indeed, with all these coincidences, it was natural to assume some kind of power had been at work. *What a sequence of events.*

"Then, fifteen years later, you arrived, and once again, we were able to live for just a little longer," Misha said, her eyes gentle. "You, me, and Sasha. We're all here."

If Dino Jixes was completed and they returned to being one person, death would have awaited them. I had unknowingly saved them.

"This moment is like a fleeting dream to us," she said, speaking as though everything was to turn to ruin. Silver light illuminated Misha's body, and she slowly floated into the air.

"We might have reincarnated into two demons," she said, "but a god is a god, and order is order. A god without order cannot live for long, but..."

Misha smiled gently.

"You've shown me so many miracles already," she said. "You split the world with walls and showed me peace. You brought down the Sun of Destruction and showed a god love. Because of you, I could see Abernyu living as a demon."

She began to rise, as if the Institute of the Gods high above were drawing her closer. "In all my years of watching the world, *you*

showed me things I had never seen before. The world has become peaceful beyond belief."

She turned, floating with her back to Everastanzetta.

"Now it's my turn to show you one last miracle, Anos," she said. "I will remake this world into a kinder place."

"What do you intend to do?" I asked, looking up at her.

"Which do you think was born first: the world, or me?" Misha asked.

I shot her a look of confusion, and she answered for me.

"The world. There was a Goddess of Creation before me. When an old world reaches its limit, the Goddess of Creation perishes. And as their source approaches destruction, they use the last of their power to create. They create the next Goddess of Creation, and that new order creates the new world."

Silver light now covered Everastanzetta, making it glow.

"I see," I said. "When the gradually decreasing magic power of the world finally sputters out, the Goddess of Creation recreates the world."

"But I will be the last Goddess of Creation," Misha said. "I will resist the repeating order of the world."

In a single blink, the light of the Institute of the Gods vanished, and Misha's pupils were dyed silver—changed by her original power as the Goddess of Creation.

"You taught me how to fight," she said. On the next blink, Misha's pupils turned into the Moon of Creation, Altiertonoa. Her gaze was fixed on Everastanzetta, which had activated a three-dimensional magic circle.

Lunar snowdrops fluttered everywhere as the Institute of the Gods transformed into the Moon of Creation. But it looked different from normal. There was a faint shadow over the moon; a lunar eclipse.

"When I perish, my moon will go missing—a total eclipse of Altiertonoa. This final creation is called the Lunar Eclipse of Origin. The light of creation shall remake this world," she said with resolution, "into a kind world with no gods."

"You plan to steal all order from this world?" I asked.

Misha nodded.

"All the cold, predetermined order will vanish, and the world will turn vague and uncertain. Apprehension and fear will run rampant, ushering in an era of the unknown. But a kind of heated chaos—hope—will emerge too. Besides..."

She directed her next words straight at me.

"The world will still have *you* in it. After the world is remade, use your magic to give birth to the new people of the world. The source nativity spell Ennessone will create people unbound by the order of the gods. The total magic power of the world will stop decreasing, and hope will always remain no matter the despair."

This world, supported by the order of the gods, was one which constantly chipped away at life. It was why Militia had created Ennessone in the first place: to replace the vanishing gods and create a new world, one where my magic—the magic of the world's misfit—could create new life.

"Once order disappears, the gods will be stripped of their titles and live as new life-forms," Misha said. "There will no longer be gods like Abernyu, burdened by the duties forced upon them."

"Hmm. That does sound like a better world than now," I said.

"Hold on a second! I can't keep up," Eleonore said, clutching her head in thought. "The new world *does* sound good... But if I understand it right, once Misha recreates the world, she'll be destroyed too?"

"A little destruction can be easily overcome. I'll lend a hand," I said.

Misha smiled and shook her head. "I won't perish. I will be reborn *as* the world."

"Huh?" Eleonore looked shocked.

"Misha...will turn into the *world*?" Zeshia asked worriedly.

"That's right."

"Will we meet...again?" Zeshia asked.

She smiled a little sadly. "Anytime. Once I become the world, I will watch over all of you and protect you gently. Only my consciousness will disappear, so we won't be able to speak."

"You can't, Militia!" Ennessone shouted. "You can't do that... You

won't be able to stay with everyone that way."

Misha gave her a troubled smile and shook her head.

"You are different from the gods. You are the Demon King's order for the new world. That's why you are kind. I'm so glad to see it," she said softly, as though she was speaking to a child. "I will just have a different role."

Ennessone was on the verge of tears. And it was clear now why her vague memories and emotions had called me here; she had wanted to stop Militia from doing this.

"For 700 million years, I have watched over all things in this world. I have wished for so long not to create the world, but to become it, so that I can watch over everyone more closely—more kindly," Misha said. She lifted her hands high, and the Moon of Creation began to wane. The lunar eclipse had begun.

"Anos, Eleonore, Zeshia, Ennessone, Wenzel," she said brightly. "I'm sorry. Thank you. It's been fun."

Before our eyes the silver light of the Moon of Creation tinted red—the total eclipse was underway.

"Take care of Abernyu for me," Misha said.

"You should say your farewells yourself," I said.

Misha slowly shook her head, looking awkward.

"I'll be scolded," she replied.

The total lunar eclipse was complete, covering Altiertonoa. Forslonarleaf was filled with reddish silver light.

"Goodbye."

In two blinks, the moons in Misha's eyes turned a rusty silver—

"'*Goodbye*'?"

The Moon of Creation shook, its rusty silver light dimming slightly. A powerful gaze, full of magic power, was now glaring at Altiertonoa.

"What do you mean by 'goodbye'?! Are you *stupid*?!"

A magic circle launched from the ground, the figure on it charging towards Misha. There was no need to look to see who it was—it was Sasha, recovered and now taking to the sky.

I cackled. "Too bad, Militia. Looks like you're getting scolded anyway."

"Don't you laugh either!" Sasha spat as she launched into a rant.

"Why aren't you *stopping* her?! Eleonore and Zeshia too! I've never heard of anything so ridiculous!"

Sasha glared at the Moon of Creation with her teeth bared.

"Good grief. Sorry, Militia," I said. "As comrades in the name of peace, I tried to respect your feelings, but it seems my subordinate refuses to remain silent."

I flew up into the sky and drew a large magic circle overhead.

"*Delsgade*."

The shadow of a large castle appeared, then inverted to reveal the Demon Castle Delsgade. Militia's Altiertonoa couldn't be stopped with half-hearted gestures, so I would need to strike with at least equal power.

"Let's not do anything rash here," I said. "I'm sure you two have lots of catching up to do."

I ordered Delsgade to crash into the Moon of Creation. Black particles rose from the Demon Castle and collided with the rusty silver light, creating a cloud of fierce sparks. The outer walls of Delsgade crumbled on impact, the main castle itself sinking into the moon.

At that, the total eclipse came to an end, and the moon returned to its form as the Institute of the Gods. The Demon Castle continued placing pressure until the moon was completely sealed. Sasha used that spare moment to fly even higher, while Misha stayed still, watching with gentle eyes as her sister tried to stop her.

"I'm sorry, Abernyu. I wanted to leave behind a kind world for you," she said.

"Listen carefully, Militia," Sasha said. "Unfortunately, no matter how kind or peaceful the world you create is—"

Sasha rose through the sky, reaching for Misha with an open hand.

"—if you're not there, I'll *never* smile again! I'll never want a world like that!"

§ 45. Answer

A magic circle was drawn above Misha, forming a duplicate Delsgade. Her Magic Eyes of Creation gazed gently at Sasha, who was fast approaching. The next moment—

"*Jio Graze*," I said.

Jet-black suns fired everywhere, setting the false Delsgade in the sky ablaze. I passed by Misha with a right hand stained with black flames.

"*Aviasten Ziara*."

I moved straight towards the false castle and pierced through it from the bottom floor to the top. The castle was swallowed by glittering black flames and turned to ash.

"Don't be so stubborn!" Sasha shouted. "We promised, remember? We promised the three of us would meet again. We've finally met—we've finally *remembered*!"

Misha's Magic Eyes of Creation stared at Sasha, covering her body with ice.

"This is my only wish," Misha said. Her Eyes had frozen over Sasha's outstretched hand, stopping her ascent. "Everything else, I will give you. All I want is for you to focus on making your own dreams come true."

The rest of Sasha's body froze in no time at all. Only her head was spared, and even that was slowly turning to ice. There was no doubt the ice would eventually melt—after everything was over, that is.

"Fall in love and find happiness, Abernyu," Misha said softly. "Once I've become this world, I'll watch over you every day."

Sasha's face completely froze over. The next moment, magic circles appeared in her pupils. She glared into space with the Magic Eyes of Destruction, shattering the ice and freeing her body.

"Stop being stupid!" she spat. "I don't need love! I don't need

any of my dreams to come true!”

Canceling out the Magic Eyes of Creation with the Magic Eyes of Destruction, Sasha ascended through the air with Fless again. Once she was close enough, she grabbed both of Misha’s hands with her own.

“*Nothing* has to come true,” Sasha said. “I’ll give up, so you give up too Militia, okay? As long as we’re together, I don’t need anything else.” The Magic Eyes of Destruction turned red as Sasha cried in Misha’s face. “I’ve already found happiness.”

“Abernyu,” Misha said softly. “As long as we are two separate people, the fate of the Goddesses of Creation and Destruction cannot be erased. You’re not a full demon yet—you’ve just lost your order. And gods without order will perish.”

She gently squeezed Sasha’s hand in return. “I’m glad to have met you, at the very end.”

“Don’t joke around like this. Fate can be crushed... No matter how many times it takes,” Sasha said, voice trembling but determined. “Things aren’t like they were back then. It doesn’t matter if I’m not a full demon, if we’re fated to perish, if that’s what the order of the world says—I’ll crush it all!”

Her Magic Eyes of Destruction sparkled brighter and stronger than I had ever seen it.

“Well said. And that’s why you’re my follower,” I said, descending from the now-burning false Delsgade, approaching Misha from behind. “With her incomplete reincarnation, Abernyu will eventually perish. If we resolve that matter first, Militia, will you be open to discussion on how to create true peace in this world *without* your sacrifice?”

Misha smiled faintly and reached out to me with her left hand, which I moved slightly to grab.

“It’s not a sacrifice. It’s a wish,” she said plainly. “I prayed. I wished. There was nothing I could do but watch over this cold world. For 700 million years, that’s all I did. And now my wish is about to come true. So don’t be sad.”

Misha squeezed our hands gently. “Smile.”

Sasha shook her head while crying, her golden hair drooping with

sadness.

"For the first time since my birth as the Goddess of Creation, I'm able to do something worthy," Misha said. "This is my first real action as a creation god."

She stared directly at Sasha.

"Abernyu, please send off your hopeless older sister who loved the world too much."

Then, she looked over at me.

"Anos, king of this world, please watch over me proudly as I walk the righteous path of a god."

She gently wrapped her arms around us in a hug.

"I am not misfortunate by any means," she said. "When I turn into the world, I can watch over all the people precious to me. Forever and ever...through every one of your reincarnations."

Misha laughed softly, as though to blow our sorrows away.

"There are no sad farewells here. I am merely remaining a god."

"Even so..." Sasha said in a tearful voice. "Even if you want this, I don't like it! I'll never agree to this. I'll never send you off. Just think about it. Even if Anos and I are smiling, *you* won't be, Militia. We'd never be able to talk or hold hands like this. You'll just be watching—and that's so *lonely*!"

Misha blinked a few times. "It's not lonely."

"Even if you're fine with it, *I'll* be lonely!" Sasha cried out. "I'll cry for the rest of my life. I'll keep calling your name over and over. And then you'll regret everything. I'll definitely, definitely make you regret it!"

Misha kept looking at Sasha awkwardly.

"I'm not letting go," Sasha said, clinging to her. "Even if the world ends, I'm not letting go of your hand."

"Thank you." Misha blinked once, her pupils turning silver, and then blinked once more, turning them into the Moon of Creation—the Divine Eyes of Origin. And in the next moment, the world turned white.

"I'll be watching you, my beloved little sister," Misha said.

In this pure white world of nothing, ice clouds formed. Then ice flowers, ice trees, ice mountains—a land of pure ice. Then a large

sea appeared.

"Ice world," Misha's voice echoed through Leaks.

We were trapped in the ice world she had created. Below us, I could see Eleonore looking around in confusion. Zeshia, Ennessone, Wenzel, and Weznera had been swallowed into the world as well.

"Let us out, Militia! Let us out now!" Sasha yelled.

"Stay there. There's no time left."

Sasha turned her Magic Eyes of Destruction on the ice world. The ice cracked and shattered, but the world itself was untouched.

"The balance between destruction and creation is maintained. But at any moment in time, the scale is always tipped just a little towards destruction. That is the current order of this world; in order to create, there must be destruction first. But after the Goddess of Destruction vanished, life remained, and the number of things that should have been destroyed, but weren't, grew."

A kind voice echoed through the ice world.

"The God of War was thus born. A rift appeared in the world, opening a door of god, through which soldiers of order march upon the world."

"So we'll beat all of them up!" Sasha said.

"There's no need to fight. There are no enemies and there are no allies. There's been enough conflict. The world will instead be reborn kinder."

"Stop it! Stupid, stupid, *stupid*! Let us out already! Let us out before I break everything!"

The Magic Eyes of Destruction shattered the sky and sea. Sasha then stared at her own source, bringing it closer to destruction in an attempt to increase her power. The closer she was to destruction, the more her power resembled that of the former Goddess of Destruction.

But Sasha had lost her divine body, and her current one was unable to withstand her former power.

"Enough," I said, covering her Eyes and stopping her power. She sagged against me like a puppet with its strings cut, calling Militia's name through delirious pants. I cast healing magic while I spoke.

"Militia," I said. "Did you think you could imprison me in your

world just because you're the Goddess of Creation?"

"I will gently accept your destruction," Misha said. *"Go on. The new world I create will never be destroyed, and this will be proof of it. The next world will be one where you can run around with all your might."*

There was a kind smile in her voice.

"A world where you can run like a child," she added.

As always, her heart was in the right place. She wanted a world that I couldn't accidentally destroy—she wanted to make a place for me where I could feel truly free. How admirable.

But foolish. Completely, utterly foolish. You haven't changed. With or without your memories, you've always been full of love, thinking only about other people.

"You are kind, Militia. I'm sure the world you're trying to remake will be a kind one," I said to the girl outside the ice world. "But it will only be a kind *lie*."

Misha listened to my words silently.

"Lies can be as fragile as they are kind. And a world like that *will* eventually break. In fact," I declared, "it'll be a shoddy scam of a world. I could make one better."

A brief moment of silence passed before she replied. *"Please believe in me."*

"Then let's have a match." I drew a magic circle. "A world-creating match. If I make a better world than you, you'll reconsider your plan. How about it?"

"You want to compete against me in creation magic?"

I laughed at the surprise in her voice. "If I recreate this world of ice, it'll be my victory."

Misha fell silent in thought. If we really were to have a contest of creation, she'd have an overwhelming advantage over me.

But if she lost to creation magic as weak as mine, she wouldn't be able to recreate the world kindly anyway. What she probably found incomprehensible was *why* I would choose such a one-sided challenge.

"What about Zecht?" she asked.

I laughed at those words. "Between you and me?"

"Okay. I accept your challenge, Demon King Anos."

I held a hand over the magic circle I drew and filled it with magic power, expanding the circle in size.

A three-dimensional magic circle far bigger than Delsgade now covered the world of ice.

"Let there be green," I said.

Through Iris, greenery spread across the icy land. Wherever black particles gathered, trees and flowers sprouted, transforming ice into fertile land.

"Ice and snow."

But in the next instant, the green land I created turned into ice.

"Hmm. That's the Goddess of Creation for you."

"Your power isn't bound by the limits of the world. But creation magic can still reach you."

"You sure about that? This contest is to *remake* the world. And unfortunately, my creation magic isn't as kind as yours."

I held my hand out and drew a multilayered magic circle. The layers formed a gun turret aimed at the sky, with black particles swirling fiercely around it. Shock waves from the powerful magic shook the air, melting the ice.

I pulled Sasha close to protect her. Wenzel, Eleonore, Zeshia, and Ennessone leaped into the sky to cast a magic barrier. The black particles drew a seven-layered spiral around the turret. Deep cracks ran along the ice ground and sky, splitting it into four.

"*Egil Grone Angdroa*."

Flames of the end fired from the turret, drawing a disastrous seven-layered spiral that roared towards the sky, overrunning everything as it shot forwards. It was origin magic that borrowed the magic power of Militia, Abernyu, and Anos Voldigoad from two thousand years ago. On Militia it would have no effect, but on this ice world? That was another matter entirely.

Once the flames reached the upper limit of the sky, they set the entire world ablaze. The ice clouds melted, the endless sky burned, the land and mountains were scorched black, and everything turned to ash. What remained was dyed black-and-white. But the frame of the world itself was safe; if it weren't we'd have returned to

Forslonarleaf at once.

"Withstanding Egil Grone Angdroa is quite the feat. It seems you weren't lying about accepting my destruction."

"I don't lie."

"No."

I slowly lowered my right hand and held it, palm up, to the heavens. A shadow of a sword appeared across my hand. Above, the Demon Castle Delsgade was slowly intruding upon the ice world.

I closed my right hand and the shadows inverted to reveal a longsword of darkness.

"You *are* lying," I said. "I'll prove it right now."

I held Venuzdonoa up to the sky. The shadow it projected had all kinds of monochrome images reflected within it. Scenes of castles, cities, mountains, forests, deserts, and lakes—and all the people who lived there—appeared like three-dimensional silhouettes. Millions and millions of shadows created a new world before us. However—

"You should know better," said Militia.

The shadow images froze over.

"The Abolisher of Reason is the Goddess of Destruction's power. You excel at destruction magic more than anyone else. But even if you stack ruin with destruction and change it to creation, you cannot recreate the Goddess of Creation's world."

The earth froze over once again, as though painting over the shadow world.

"I was happy," she said. *"And I won't forget that."*

She spoke as if this were her farewell.

"Even at the very end, you didn't try to destroy my world," she said. *"Even at a time like this."*

After one moment of silence, Sasha started trembling in my arms.

"The Demon King of Tyranny—the one who ruins, above all—challenged me in world creation *in an attempt to stop me. That is the best possible parting gift you could have given me,"* Misha's voice said plainly, a hint of a smile in her voice. *"Thank you."*

Silver covered the world.

"I've watched this world for so long, and have thought about this

just as long. So don't be sad. Smile for me. After 700 million years of thinking, this is my answer. That's why..."

Her words trailed off. I looked around and saw the world of silver ice only spread across half the land.

"You said I gave you a miracle, Militia," I said.

Half the world was silver, and half the world was shadow. The Goddess of Creation—who could recreate the entire world in an instant—had failed to erase these shadows.

"That I separated the world with walls and showed you peace. That I brought down the Sun of Destruction and showed a god love. That I showed you Abernyu, reincarnated as a demon."

The silver world was once again painted with shadows. Slowly but steadily, the shadows increased in number.

"*That* is your lie. That wasn't the miracle at all."

In a battle of creation magic, I was disadvantaged. But the shadow world was no longer freezing over.

"We became friends for the first time in this era, *after* our reincarnation."

Far off in the distance was the silhouette of Midhaze—specifically, where Misha and I first met.

"During the Dino Jixes incident when you fought with Sasha, you chased after her with me and made up."

In another area, the shadows depicted the underground dungeon of Delsgade. A shadow of Sasha could be seen clinging to a shadow of Misha.

"I gave you your birthday ring."

The silhouette of my house appeared. There, Misha was beaming from ear to ear while donning the Lotus Ice Ring. All these moments were things she undoubtedly considered miracles.

"You said at the Demon Sword Tournament that I wasn't the Demon King of Tyranny, but a classmate and friend. That I've been reborn as an ordinary student, so I should go and have fun. You saw me for who I currently am, not the Demon King I once was."

And thanks to her words, I was able to finally feel the peace I had so desired.

"And I would return those words right back at you," I said.

"You're no longer the Goddess of Creation; you're just an ordinary student, and my friend. And I'm not the only one who thinks this way either. You think all your classmates would just smile if you disappeared from them without a word?"

Countless shadowy figures reflected in Misha's Divine Eyes as she gazed at the ice world. The figures included Lay and Misa, Shin and Reno, the Fan Union girls, Emilia, Eldmed, mom and dad, and the students of the Demon King Academy.

"It's been half a year since I met you—seven months actually, to be precise. You must have distanced yourself from your memories and emotions to prevent anything from making you waver. You altered them with the power of creation and hid them deep in your heart. That is your lie. But as you know already, the orders of the gods are helpless before love and kindness."

I created a shadow world to thrust before her eyes.

"Misha," I said, calling her name—the name she had so desperately wanted someone to call her by. Not the name of the Goddess of Creation, but a girl's name, a demon's name. "Don't talk such nonsense. Losing you is out of the question."

"That's right, Misha!" Eleonore yelled from the sky. "Each and every one of the Demon King's Army will go home victorious this time as well! Then we'll all have a toast together. And if you're not around, who will stop Sasha's drunk rampage?!"

"Misha...is kind to Zeshia...!" Zeshia yelled, just as loud. "Without Misha...who will secretly eat Zeshia's grass?!"

She clenched her fists and pleaded to Misha from outside the world. "Zeshia...doesn't want to become a herbivore!"

"Misha..." Sasha mumbled from within my arms. "Hey, Misha. I know what you've wished for now, but is it really okay?"

She called out to her softly, but with a terrible sadness.

"We were always together," Sasha said. "And that had nothing to do with us being goddesses. Back then it was the same too. I know we can only live if there's one of us, but I can't accept it. Because..."

A tear spilled from the Magic Eyes of Destruction.

"Because..." Sasha said, searching for her words. "Because I can't live if we're not *both* living! If you're going to become the world, I

will too. Even if we're not the Goddesses of Creation and Destruction, the connection between us won't be broken. If you insist on being reborn as this world, then tell me to come with you!"

She slowly reached out a shaking hand, reaching for the sister who wasn't here.

"I'm your little sister, but I'm your big sister too! I cannot die after you. I cannot die before you. It has to be *together*! You know this too, don't you, Misha?!" Sasha yelled, filled with a powerful determination—for her former older sister and her irreplaceable little sister. For the other half of her soul.

"Two thousand years ago, your answer might have been different. But now you've lived as a demon," I said, pausing to look around. "The world you want can no longer be kind. Not when so many people will grieve you when you're gone."

I smiled at Misha, my compassionate friend. I spread my arms and the world of shadows began to dance.

"If you disagree," I said, "recreate the world right now. Recreate the world you've walked on alongside us for the past seven months."

My creation magic spread shadows across the world, creating countless silhouettes that showed the past seven months we had been through together. Even if the Goddess of Creation could remake them all, her heart was unable to erase them.

She couldn't erase her dear memories. And so there was no need to destroy them. The path we walked on together couldn't be remade with lies and magic—and that was the biggest miracle of them all.

"Say, Misha," I said.

I released the Abolisher of Reason. There was no need for a sword or magic now. All that was needed was the heart.

"Did you really think the answer you thought about for 700 million years could compare to our seven months together?" I asked.

Countless fragments silently danced before my eyes. They were fragments of the world, reflecting our memories like pieces of glass falling through the air, erasing the shadow world I had made.

Once the pieces of the last seven months had finished passing by, we were back in the sky of Forslonarleaf.

Misha stood before us, eyes full of tears.

"Ah..."

She opened her mouth to say something, but Sasha wrapped her up in a hug before she could do so.

"Welcome home, Misha. I'm not letting go of you again," Sasha said, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Misha replied in a hoarse voice. "I'm home..."



§ Epilogue: The Demon King’s Holy Grail

In the sky of Forslonarleaf, two sisters held each other in an embrace, while the oceanic sky slowly returned to its original shape.

“Sasha,” Misha said softly, tapping Sasha’s shoulder. But her sister refused to let go of her, hugging her even tighter. “It’s all right.”

Sasha shook her head and kept her tight hold on Misha, burying her face in her shoulder. It was like she was afraid Misha would vanish the moment she let go. Misha looked at me for help.

I cackled. “You reap what you sow. Figure this out yourself.”

“I don’t know how...” Misha mumbled, gently patting Sasha’s head. “And there isn’t much time.”

At that, Sasha finally looked up.

“Gods separated from their order cannot live for long. In demon terms, it’s like being separated by Dino Jixes,” Misha said.

Sasha wiped the tears from her Eyes and looked at her with determination. “As long as we’re two different people, we won’t be able to cut off our connection to the Goddesses of Destruction and Creation, you mean?”

Misha nodded. “Either you or I have to vanish, turning into one source and one mind, for the reincarnation into a demon to be completed. We both have a little god left in us right now.”

In other words, if things remained as usual, the two would perish.

“What can we do?” Sasha asked.

Misha was unable to answer that question. She had tried to save Sasha by turning herself into the world, but she didn’t know of any other way.

“Hmm. You won’t have to worry about perishing if you regain the orders of destruction and creation, but...” I trailed off.

That would mean the return of the order of destruction in the

world. Those who escaped death would die, and those who should have perished would perish. Unlike two thousand years ago, demons, humans, their magic, and their spells had significantly deteriorated. If the Goddess of Destruction were revived in this world, she would bring utter chaos.

"I could create a world without order," Misha said, "using the Lunar Eclipse of Origin."

"But you can only use that when you're on the verge of destruction, right?" Sasha asked worriedly.

Misha nodded again. "It can only be used when the Goddess of Creation perishes. Even if I overcome the destruction, a world cannot be created from nothing. The condition for creating a new world is to sacrifice the source the moment it shines its brightest—right before perishing."

She looked at me. "There has to be another way."

"There's no need to create everything from scratch. Only change what you want changed, and leave the rest untouched. That should reduce the burden on you," I said.

It should be possible to improve the world and allow Misha and Sasha to survive *without* using the power of creation.

"If I could see into the abyss of the world, that might be possible," Misha said.

The total magic power of the world was falling. Even without the order of destruction, lives that should have cycled into rebirth were gradually disappearing instead. Was there another source of this destruction somewhere in this world? If we found it, these two could be saved, and the world could be led to its proper shape.

"I've watched this world until now," Misha said. "The order of this world is intricately tangled as it moves. But if one order falls—"

Misha froze mid-sentence.

"What's wrong?" Sasha asked.

I noticed the abnormality soon after.

"Stop..." Misha whispered, staring in the direction of the Institute of the Gods. The giant castle of Everastanzetta was scattering silver light everywhere as it rose into the air, heading right for the Demon Castle Delsgade.

"Hmm. I can't control it either," I said.

I used my magic to move the Demon Castle, but it didn't do as I wanted. The only one capable of opposing me should have been Abernyu, but her will was currently within Sasha.

"Ice world."

Misha blinked twice. The Divine Eyes of Origin created a small glass bead between Everastanzetta and Delsgade, serving as a wall between the two castles. Although it was small, it was a world of infinite distance. However, the glass bead she had created suddenly disappeared. The silver moonlight shining on her was gone—along with the Moon of Creation in her pupils.

"Weird... Who...?" Misha muttered.

Misha had reincarnated into a demon. Her order of creation and memories from her former existence were stored within Everastanzetta. Someone had cut off that connection—but there was no sign of any enemy nearby.

"No! They're going to collide!" Sasha cried out.

Everastanzetta and Delsgade crashed into each other with a deafening boom. The castles had been built with the orders of creation and destruction, so they were unharmed by the collision itself—but the momentum threw them upwards, into the sea in the sky.

An unpleasant static noise filled my head.

"I told you..."

Sasha and Misha turned to look at me. The eerie voice leaking from my source was louder than ever before.

"If you hadn't come here, she would have never known. The Goddess of Creation would have perished in peaceful ignorance, the world would have been recreated, and Ennessone's magic order would have been the foundation for new life..."

"Is this your doing?" I asked, glaring at the two castles being swallowed by the sky. "Stop hiding and show yourself already."

"You've wiped out the hope made of 700 million years of wishing. You've let the final hope escape*, and now the sister gods of creation and destruction will perish in regret."*

As usual, the voice ignored me and continued speaking.

"The world is neither kind nor smiling."

The oceanic sky swirled like a whirlpool. At the center was a light that sucked in both Everastanzetta and Delsgade.

"It's a gate to the Divine Realm," Sasha said.

"And it's closing," Misha added.

When I stared into the abyss of the whirlpool in the sky, I could indeed see a grand gate there, one that was slowly closing and disappearing. Past the gate was the Firmament of the Gods, the headquarters of the gods of the Divine Realm. If the gate closed, it would be extremely difficult to come back.

"*Ygg Neas*."

With a glowing blue hand, I grabbed the divine gate. But as soon as I did, it began to crumble in my fingers—it was being destroyed from the other side. At this rate, we would completely lose the way to the Divine Realm.

Leaving the earth was a gamble, but Everastanzetta and Delsgade were halves of Misha and Sasha. They were necessary for their survival.

"We're going after it," I said, rising into the sky with Fless. Sasha and Misha immediately followed me.

"We'll go too!" Eleonore said.

"Must save...Misha and Sasha!" added Zeshia.

Eleonore, Zeshia, Ennessone, Wenzel also moved after us. Weznera was a little farther back—he wouldn't make it in time. I charged into the whirlpool in the sky and stared at the crumbling gate. At its depth, dimensions of space-time were fluctuating in fierce waves. The partial destruction of the gate had messed up the spell formula connecting the Divine Realm to this place. We could still go through it, but it wouldn't be a smooth journey.

"Take my hand," I said. "If you let go, we may end up separated."

Misha and Sasha took my hands. Behind them, Eleonore and the others linked hands too. It would have been safer to have everyone grab me, but there was no time for that. They would barely get here in time before the gate broke.

"Eleonore, if you manage to make it to the Firmament of the Gods, discuss things with Wenzel and proceed carefully," I ordered.

"If it seems hopeless, go back to earth and inform Shin."

"Got it!" she replied.

We passed through the whirlpool and the world turned white. We had entered the gate. As magic power raged wildly around us, I grasped the two small hands in mine tightly and continued forwards.

"Why did Delsgade and Everastanzetta stop listening?" Sasha asked with a frown.

Misha's gaze was grim as she stared forwards.

"I don't know..." she mumbled, voice full of sorrow. "That voice... It said we'd *regret* knowing..."

The voice echoing in my source had said I'd regret knowing. That if we came here, they would once again face reality. Misha's hand was trembling slightly. She was probably feeling uneasy. The same applied to Sasha; she clutched tight, as if trying to suppress any trembling panic.

"Hmm. This brings back memories," I said.

The two of them looked at me in confusion.

"You cannot live as two people. If you do, the peace of the world will be endangered. The situation is so similar it's like it was made on request. The peace of the world has merely been added along with your lives. Now, who should I go about saving?" I shot them a look while flying forwards. "Do you remember my answer?"

Misha's hand stopped trembling. Sasha giggled.

"Save all three," they said in unison.

I burst out laughing. "Stop begging. Stop praying. All you have to do is follow me."

A light came into view ahead of us. We would soon be out of the void and arrive at the Firmament of the Gods. The situation with Sasha and Misha wasn't over yet—that was all. Nothing had or would change. I repeated my words from back then to remind them.

"I will crush every conceivable absurdity that stands in your way."

The End

Afterword

With the *Demon King Academy* anime coming to an end, I'm finally able to take a breath. I'd heard rumors of how busy the original authors can get when receiving anime adaptations, and I was no exception.

There was a lot of desk work to do, so when everything was over and I could finally relax, I fell sick. The brain fog continued for two weeks, which was a bit worrying, but I had lots of rest and rearranged my work until I could recover.

I realized it wasn't healthy to work for the whole day, so I try to allocate one day off a week—or at least half a day—but I find it hard to control myself and end up working anyway. The truth is, until now I considered my novel work to be my break time, but I realized that it still accumulates fatigue.

But I can't help feeling impatient. There's so much I want to write, yet so little I can actually write, and now that my body can't keep up either, it feels extra vexing. However, I know nothing can be done if I'm not healthy, so I'll do my best to rest regularly so that I can write in my best condition. I'll take more care not to push myself.

Next, I'd like to thank Editor Yoshioka for all the help again this time. I appreciate all you do. The wonderful illustrations were once again drawn by Shizumayoshinori. I was so touched to see Militia and Abernyu's illustrations, thank you.

Finally, to the readers that have followed this long story until now, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

The plot of *Demon King Academy* is about approaching the abyss of the world. Volume 10 might be split into two books again, as there's so many episodes I want to write. I hope you'll look forward to it.

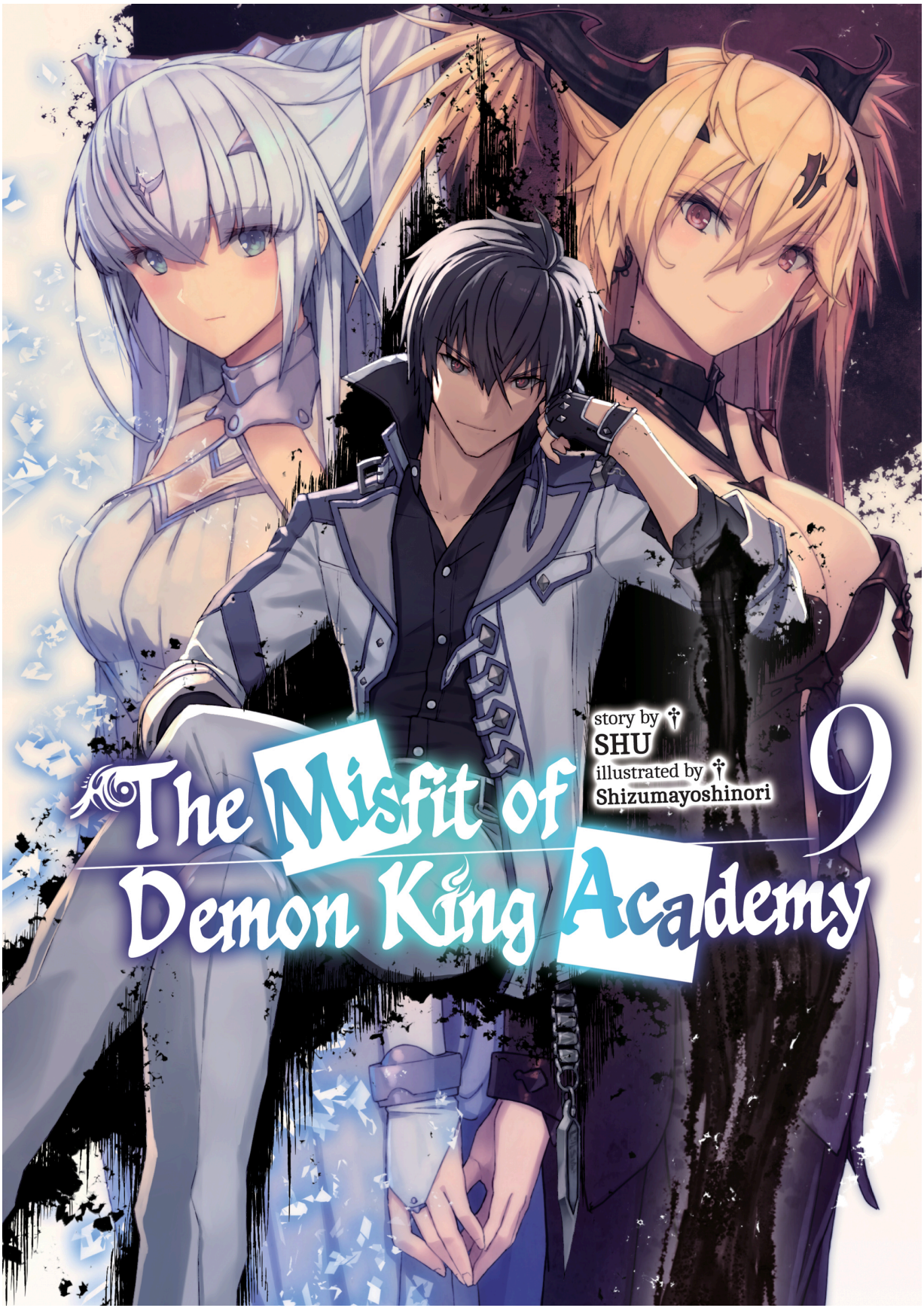
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story by †
SHU
illustrated by †
Shizumayoshinori
The Misfit of Demon King Academy
9


"She was probably still half asleep when she drank it."
"Did she mistake it for water?"
"What's wrong?"
"It's alcohol."


"Follow me.
Ennessone has been waiting
for a long, long time for
everyone to come."
"Ah! It's my little sister!"

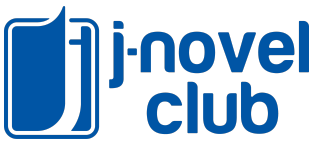

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