

Evil 371

Chapter 371 - 371: Sadistic tendency.

"Fire!" A knight shouted as he pointed his sword at Rasmus, Rullein, and Aris.

Fire arrows covered the night sky with their flickering orange light and the sound of arrows that filled the silent night. Rullein pointed her left hand at the fire arrows up high in the sky, and then flicked her index and middle fingers down. In an instant, all the arrows went down vertically and stabbed the grass.

Rullein jumped down from her horse as she spread her arms, turning the fire arrows into a massive wall of fire. She walked toward the wall of fire with a grin as she pushed her left hand forward. The wall of fire moved like a tidal wave, burning everything it touched, all the way toward the hundreds of knights and mages that blocked their path.

The mages cast magic formations, to create a magic barrier, but all their magic formations got disturbed. They repeatedly tried to cast magic, but none of them worked, and the fact the sea of flames was approaching, they began to panic. It was already too late for them to run away because there was no way for them to run.

Rullein watched as the sea of flames devoured the army with a single move. She closed her eyes, giggling and turning into mischievous laughter as she listened to the screams of pain. She then raised her left hand and swirled it around, making the sea of flames into a flame tornado. The heat and the intensity of the force shredded and melted the army as their screams of pain faded away.

Rasmus and Aris watched the flame tornado slowly dissipate and reveal the gruesome scenery. A big pile of combined flesh of hundreds human bodies and the melted steel. The worst part was the fact they still could see life energy coming from the pile with their draconic eyes.

"Finish your job, Rullein. There's no point of making them suffer," Rasmus said as he looked at Rullein approaching the pile of flesh, melted skin, and steel.

"Oh, I'm about to, just give it a moment..." Rullein chuckled as she stood in front of the pile of abomination.

Rullein pushed out black smokes from her back, shaping itself like massive wings until the smoke wrapped itself around the pile of abomination. She devoured everything without leaving a single piece of flesh behind, not even a drop of blood was spared.

"She has the tendency of being a sadistic personality it seems," Aris said as she looked at Rullein's satisfied expression. "Maybe you should rethink of giving her the freedom of doing whatever she wants to do," she suggested and glanced at Rasmus.

"Yes, but that's going to be useful in the future nonetheless. I might need her sadistic side one day," Rasmus nodded in agreement. "We are close to the Lusinia Kingdom territory. We are no longer on the southeast of the continent, and yet these people know our movements and where we are heading," he looked around, using his draconic eyes to see if there was someone following them, but found none.

"Nemu sent someone to keep an eye on us?" Aris asked, glancing around but found nobody or felt any presence.

"He might gave an order, but I don't think it's the demons," Rasmus answered as he watched Rullein approach her horse as she licked her lips. "Remember about The Wraiths that I mentioned before and those people we threw in the sea back in Eddenvilla? The secret organizations that have connections with demonic cults. I believe it's them," he pointed out and watched Rullein get back on her horse.

"This is good for them. We are basically reducing human manpower when they might spread the word about our locations. We are criminals, or perhaps monsters that humans want to get rid of. They use the opportunity to make righteous people to die in our hands, smart," Rasmus said as he patted the horse's neck. "Well, little that they know that sending these people are only feeding us with power," he muttered.

Rasmus decided to continue the journey to Foern city port where Erlina and Carrion were staying. He knew that going there would make those two easy targets, so he was hoping to find Javi's ravens.

When the sun rose, they were in the middle of the woods, taking the route that nobody would use. They were taking a short break for the horses and let them eat while Rasmus decided to take a bath in the river. To his luck, he heard the croak of a raven on the tree near the river, and he could tell it was Javi's.

"Come here," Rasmus raised his arm as he stared at the raven.

The raven croaked and tilted its head before it finally flew toward Rasmus and landed on his arm. The raven croaked once again and stared into Rasmus's eyes.

"He's telling you to follow him," Aris said as she stood on the edge of the river. "But we don't want that, so how about we send Yur to guide Erlina, Carrion, and Javi somewhere else? Somewhere we can be comfortable and safe at the same time," she suggested.

Rasmus, Aris, and Rullein could easily change their appearance to hide their identities. However, Aris was marked, and even though the chance of a powerful demon existed in Foern, Rasmus didn't want to take the risk.

Rasmus looked over his shoulder and nodded in agreement, finding it was a perfect idea. It didn't take a minute until Yur flew away with the raven at the front, guiding Yur to Foern to meet Erlina, Carrion, and Javi. Since Yur could detect Aris, it wouldn't be a problem for Yur to find them when Yur came with those three.

The three of them went to the nearest small village, a village that seemed to be secluded from the outside world. It was a perfect place to hide and stay low, keeping Erlina and Carrion safe from getting dragged into Rasmus's mess.

Two days had passed, and Rasmus had rented the whole inn for himself. The villagers were aware of who he was, and they were scared of him. However, he paid them enough money to keep their mouths shut and to live comfortably for the next few years.

"They're here..." Aris said as she walked toward the door.

Rasmus enjoyed the cheap ale that the innkeeper had provided for him. He slowly glanced at the door when Aris opened it, and saw Yur, in its owl form being hugged tightly by Erlina. He saw Carrion and Javi standing behind her, wearing cloaks to hide their faces.

"Aris..." Erlina let Yur go and immediately placed her hand on Aris's arm. "You look, unwell," she tilted her head as she stared at Aris.

Aris was surprised when Erlina immediately said that and it didn't take Erlina a while to see it. She knew Erlina was similar to Rasmus, who could read people's minds through expressions and eyes, but she never thought Erlina would be that sharp.

"I'm fine," Aris said as she stared into Erlina's eyes. "It's good to see you again," she smiled softly at Erlina.

Erlina gasped as she covered her mouth and took a few steps back until her back hit Carrion's chest. She was shocked and stunned, making Carrion confused and worried at the same time.

"Did you just smile at me? My heart..." Erlina muttered as she kept her hands covering her mouth. "You have changed..." she slowly put down her hands and put a playful smirk as she wrapped her arm around Aris. "Can we just have a casual conversation for tonight, please?" She turned her head to look at Rasmus with a frown.

Rasmus raised his mug of ale, and immediately Erlina giggled and dragged Aris to the counter. Rullein was surprised when she saw Aris being so relaxed and calm when a human touched her. When her eyes met Erlina's, they both looked at each other with a confused look on their faces.

"So you're Erlina, the one that Rasmus and Aris talked about," Rullein stood across from Erlina. "My name is Rullein, a Dark Spirit..." She grinned as she offered her hand for a handshake.

Erlina without hesitation shook Rullein's hand, unaware that Rullein had used that opportunity to read Erlina's whole life in a flash. The moment Rullein pulled her hand away, the grin turned into a wide smile, finding out how Erlina's background intrigued her.

"Are you not afraid of me? Have you never heard about Dark Spirit?" Rullein asked, resting her cheek on her palm.

"I know I should, but you're here with Rasmus and Aris. I know nothing about you, but I believe Rasmus won't let anyone see his casual and relaxed side other than someone he trusts," Erlina answered with a smile on her face.

Rasmus chuckled as he took a sip of his ale, not having anything to say.

"I like you..." Rullein chuckled as she leaned forward, her face only a few inches away from Erlina.

Chapter 372 - 372: The line.

Erlina, Carrion, and even Javi were scared of Rullein when she revealed she had read everyone's past. As a Dark Spirit, she could bring those memories back to them, reliving those nightmares and memories that they had tried to forget. Carrion was the first victim of hers, making him relive his childhood memories where he was neglected and punished almost every day.

Javi who had been putting on a stoic expression, he showed slight discomfort when Rullein stared at him. He didn't have problems with his past, but to relive the pain he had endured all those years, he didn't want that.

"I miss this..." Erlina sat beside Rasmus who was busy reading his father's journal. "I miss this kind of atmosphere, where everyone is relaxed and enjoying the moment," she looked at the old inn she was in.

"You miss your brothel house?" Rasmus asked as he flipped the page.

"Yes..." Erlina stretched her arms as she faced her back at Rasmus, and slowly leaned her back against his body. "I miss my girls... I wonder how they're doing right now..." She muttered, leaning her head back and resting on Rasmus's shoulder.

Erlina hummed as she furrowed her brows, slowly turning around to look at Rasmus. She slowly squeezed his arm and bicep that felt hard and tight like a solid rock. She blinked her eyes a few times, couldn't believe he had gotten stronger in just a few months.

"Can you teach Carrion? You know..." Erlina whispered.

Rasmus stopped reading the journal and slowly turned to look at Erlina. He didn't expect to be asked such a question from her where she should be the one who was supposed to be an expert on this matter.

"We have been doing it almost every day because there was nothing we could do. So, can you help me? Make that man over there who thinks with his crotch most of the time to... stop seeking pleasure just because he's bored..." Erlina asked as she looked at Carrion, who was being forced to relive his past by Rullein.

"Don't get me wrong... he's really good at it and I enjoy it all the time, but it's exhausting. I'm not like my girls who are used to this kind of thing, and I don't want to get used to this either..." Erlina looked at Rasmus, her voice quiet. However, no matter how quiet she was, the people in the room had sensitive ears except for Carrion. "Do you perhaps... understand what I'm saying?" She muttered, her eyes never leaving Ramsus.

Rasmus nodded, and then he looked at Javi for a moment before he looked back at Erlina.

"You can ask Javi about this. I believe he's capable of giving the solution for your problem, or Carrion's problem to be exact," Rasmus said with a stoic expression.

"I see, so you don't know..." Erlina said under her breath, and then looked at Javi. "Sir Javi, can you come here for a moment?" She asked.

Javi looked at Erlina and joined the table with her and Rasmus. His expression was unreadable, and he could see it in Erlina's eyes what this was all about.

"Well, he's..." Erlina paused as she pointed her index finger and put her other hand below it, creating a snapping gesture of scissors that cut off her index finger. "He doesn't have it. Which is why he couldn't help me with this problem," she looked at Rasmus.

Rasmus slowly raised his brows and turned his face toward Javi. He was unaware that Javi had been castrated or mutilated like that. It reminded him of eunuchs back on Earth, men who lost their genitals due to political matters and for safety. He realized why the assassins from the Sand Tower were said to be the best since they didn't have distraction, both for their men and women assassins.

"That's unfortunate..." Rasmus said as he looked at Javi.

"I didn't have a choice, and not everyone survived even after that process. I have to admit, it wasn't a pleasure memory," Javi responded, his face still calm and unreadable.

"Yes, that's why having Rullein around, I think Javi would find it uncomfortable," Erlina said as she glanced at Rullein, still playing around with Carrion's memories and living in the memories with him. "Can you help me with this? I know you're the only one that I can ask, knowing that you're not just capable, but you're the only man I can't seduce," She raised her brows, placing her hand on Rasmus's.

Rasmus nodded with understanding and ripped the blank page from the journal. He began to write something, filling the blank page into a fully written page. He then slid the page to Erlina for her to read the content.

Erlina thought it was some kind of prescription for medicines, but rather it was an activity list from morning to evening. It was just a simple routine of training and working out which confused Erlina. She didn't understand the connection between the routine of training and Carrion's insatiable desire for pleasure.

"What's this?" Erlina wiggled the piece of paper as she furrowed her brows at Rasmus.

"To put it simply and to make it easy to understand, it's basically to redistribute his blood from his crotch to his muscles all over his body. Not only will it keep his head clear and his body becomes healthy and stronger, when the time you want him, you'll see the difference as well in bed," Rasmus answered with a smile on his face.

Erlina slowly looked down at the piece of paper in her hand, rereading everything again for the second time. She then folded the paper and placed it in a hidden pocket under her cloak. She immediately put on a playful smile as she leaned her head over Rasmus shoulder.

"I know I can depend on you, you're basically a walking library," Erlina chuckled as her gaze softened and watched Aris slap Rullein's hand away from Carrion's since Rullein might have gone too far. "Aris, what happened to her? She's different," She muttered and saw Carrion regain his consciousness, immediately taking a few steps away from Rullein and begging her to stop.

"A lot of things happen to her," Rasmus answered as he watched Carrion approach the table to join them. Carrion's face was written with fear and trauma. "You should talk to her about it rather than ask

me. She's fond of you, so don't betray her trust and judgment," he continued and watched Carrion's hands tremble as he grabbed Rasmus's mug, the ale sloshing over his fingers. He drank as if drowning in something deeper than thirst.

"I will..." Erlina muttered softly as she nodded her head and waved at Aris, signaling her to join them at the table.

Everyone gathered at the table, the very same table where Rasmus was the only one sitting at it. It didn't matter how much he tried to find solace and solitude, people that he trusted always came to join him. He neither welcomed it nor resented it, he took it as a sign of the comfort of those around him.

Erlina looked up at Ramsus's eyes for a moment, thinking and observing him. It was strange, how someone so detached could still give others the comfort they craved. Rasmus never reached for them, and yet he never pushed them away either. In his indifference, they found stability. In his silence, they found a kind of peace. He didn't seek to be anyone's anchor, but somehow he became one.

The night felt short by the drinks and the relaxing atmosphere, something that they had long forgotten. The peaceful moments where they didn't think about overpowering others, cornering them, and to put their guards up all the time. A moment where they could let go of everything and just enjoy the moment.

"Did you do it, Rasmus? Did you kill everyone in the capital city?" Carrion asked, his words slurring a bit as the alcohol slowly consumed his brain.

"What do you think? Am I that kind of a person?" Rasmus asked.

"Yes," Carrion answered without hesitation, but then he paused to think. "But I don't think you did it. So is it true that it was you who massacred the innocent lives in the capital city of the Refenus Kingdom? Because I don't know how far you'll cross the line..."

"What line? There's no line in my eyes, but there's one in yours, Erlina, and perhaps even Javi. I don't have that, I don't have the line to prevent me from stopping what I need to do even if it will cost millions of lives," Rasmus said with a stoic expression. "To answer your question, no, I didn't do it. Wyverns that were being mind-controlled by a powerful demon came and flattened the city, I just took advantage of it," he answered as he shook his head.

Carrion sighed in relief as he nodded his head slowly.

"What about the royal family? You were the one who killed them and hung their heads?" Carrion asked.

"No, I gave that pleasure to someone who has a deeply rooted hatred toward them. I only killed all the guests during the ceremony," Rasmus answered as he shook his head.

"I see..." Carrion cleared his throat and downed the glass of whiskey.

Erlina could see how Carrion had gotten drunk from the drink. She slowly got up from the chair and approached him and helped him stand up.

"I guess that's it for tonight. I'll take care of this handsome drunkard from here," Erlina smiled as she caressed Carrion's cheek. "Good night, everyone..." She smiled and then guided Carrion upstairs.

"Good night," Rasmus nodded and took a sip of his wine.

Chapter 373 - 373: Journal of the past. (3)

Rasmus walked out of the inn as he buttoned his cuffs, and all the villagers were hiding inside their house. They were peeking at him through the windows when they realized Rasmus and the others were leaving the village. He then saw the innkeeper hesitating to approach him, scared and anxious to open his mouth.

"Thank you for letting us stay in your inn, and thank you for the hospitality," Rasmus said as he pulled out a sack full of silver coins that was worth at least 50 gold coins. "Please convey my gratitude to the village chief and everyone for allowing us to stay here. I believe everyone deserves to get a fair share of this," he continued and offered the sack to the innkeeper.

The innkeeper held the sack with both hands, and when Rasmus let go of the sack, the innkeeper was shocked by the weight. The innkeeper saw a glimpse of silver coins, shocked that Rasmus had given them a lot of money even though he had given them a lot beforehand.

The innkeeper lowered his head and watched Rasmus walk toward his horse where the others had been waiting for him. The innkeeper and the villagers watched the six of them ride their horses and leave the village.

Rasmus had decided to visit someone that would play a big part in the future event, Lenin and the Magic Tower. Rasmus wanted to have a few words with her while Erlina and Carrion wanted to discuss the Mana stones with Lenin and Carrion's brother, Garret.

Rasmus, Aris, and Rullein changed their appearance, using the same appearance as Vije and Vije while Rullein turned her appearance as a handsome and beautiful man with long sleek black hair. Carrion, Erlina, and Javi were surprised by how effortless those three were from changing their appearance, finding it fascinating and terrifying at the same time.

"My... you really making it hard for me to not look at you," Erlina smiled playfully as she stared at Rasmus's tanned skin and muscular body. "If I saw a man like you, maybe I wouldn't even consider to look at Carrion," she chuckled softly.

Carrion raised his brows in disbelief. He knew that Erlina was being playful as always, and Rasmus didn't even bother to look at her like he looked at her. However, he couldn't help but feel a tinge of jealousy in his mind.

They went to the nearest airfield, which was in the Lusia Kingdom, and it would take three days to reach Gratlan with a blimp. Rasmus used the opportunity to read Erglade's journal, to finally have an extra few days that he could use for reading.

"This is the place?" Erglade asked, his breath visible on the cold night. His gaze was uncertain when he looked at the darkness beyond the woods in front of him.

Erglade turned his head to both sides and saw nothing but trees that looked like a wall that separated the open field and the woods. He looked at the knights and mages that had joined him on the expedition to North Neva. Half of them were from Central Neva and the other half were from powerful families in North Neva, including the Wyverncrest family and the Sancticus family.

"This is the place. A report came in a month ago about the missing villagers. Every single one of them disappeared without a trace," James nodded as he tried to calm his horse, who had been so eager to turn around and run away. "The Sancticus Nation sent five paladins and twenty templars to investigate this matter, but none of them came back," his gaze never left the darkness that loomed in the woods.

James Snowvein was a part of a unit that tied themselves to the Sancticus Nation and the whole continent. They were above the paladins and equal to the cardinals, they who preached and fought in the name of God and religion. The unit was called the Order of the Dawnbearers, and they were all Northern Stars, powerful warriors that were recognized by the people. They were also capable of using and sensing divine energy, making them capable of using magic, aura, and divine power.

All the Order of the Dawnbearers were from the Snowvein family. The Snowvein family was related to the Sancticus family. All the sons and daughters that weren't the successors of the Saint would separate themselves once they got married. They were stripped of their family name and given a new one, Snowvein.

"Such force didn't make it out alive?" Belvia asked, her voice calm as she glanced at James. "Paladins are the frontline when it comes to fighting demonic beasts, so does that mean whatever deep inside this forest is something more terrifying than demonic beasts?" She arched her brows.

"That's why we are here, aren't we, Belle? We have enough experience in dealing with these kinds of sickening problems. Count Blackheart is the most experienced compared to all of us, so the chance of us surviving would be at least higher than the previous investigation team," Jacques said as he tightened his gloves and looked at the snow and the cold that pierced through his bones.

Erglade didn't bother to listen to Belvia and Jacques's words and focused on what was in front of him. He felt something was off about the forest, something that his instinct told him to just walk away from this one. It was as Belvia and Jacques said, he had so much experience dealing with demonic cults and the presences of demons, but this one was enough to make him reconsider everything.

"What do you see in front of us, Sir James?" Erglade asked, his eyes cold and sharp toward the darkness beyond the forest.

"If I can be honest, Count. This is something that I myself find it, unsettling," James answered as he sighed. "But we don't have a choice, and we have a lot of experienced people with us. It's as Lord Jacques said, I think our chance of survivability would be higher, and every piece of information would matter," he continued.

Erglade hummed as he nodded his head. He slowly turned around and saw the familiar faces that had been with him for almost a decade. These people who had stayed by his side and witnessed all the rotten truth that the world would look away. However, there was a new one that had joined the team, his name was Antonius, a young man with such skill in both magic and physical combat.

Erglade found Antonius to be a suspicious individual because he couldn't find much information about him. His background was too ordinary to be real, and the fact he was still young and had the mentality of an experienced knight, it didn't feel right. However, other than that, Antonius had been a great addition, and he was a nice kid, someone who would love to tell his tales when there was nothing else to say.

"Shall we?" Erglade said and exhaled deeply, feeling the tingles that ran from his forearms to his fingertips that had been happening ever since they arrived at the forest.

Everyone nodded their heads. When Erglade jumped down from his horse, the others followed suit. They took their equipment and items from their horses since no animal dared to enter the forest. They had no choice but to go in on foot, toward the village where the mystery lurked. With the first step, Erglade entered the forest without hesitation, but once again, the tingling feelings on his fingertips had been bothering him a lot.

The moment they all walked into the forest, the cold became twice or even thrice colder. The deafening silence, the damp air, and the darkness in front of them, everything made everyone on the edge immediately. Words formed in everyone's throats, wanting to spit it out, telling them they might need to bring more people or to prepare more time, but they swallowed it down.

"Let's move," Erglade said as he flicked his finger under the cloak and formed a strong magic barrier around them.

Everyone moved at the same pace, their eyes wide open and their hands holding their weapons tightly. They didn't know when danger would appear, or what kind of encounter they were about to face. All they cared about was having each other's backs, ready to protect each other.

As they followed the path for almost an hour, they finally saw the village where it was believed the villagers had gone missing. Everyone unconsciously placed their hands on their mouths as their index fingers covered their noses.

"The report said that they went missing? I don't know who it was that reported it, but I think they were blind..." Jacques said as he narrowed his eyes. "They weren't missing, they're still here..." he muttered.

Everyone looked at the skin of humans, scattered on the ground all over the village. The organs, the flesh, and the bones, everything vanished, leaving only the human skins. They saw not only the skins of adults but also children, and even babies.

"My God... what the fuck happened here..." James eyes narrowed, disturbed by what he had witnessed.

Chapter 374 - 374: Journal of the past. (4)

"There's no sign of resistance, no trail of blood other than the dried blood underneath the skin..." Erglade used his dagger to lift and move the skin. "It's as if they all died on the spot almost simultaneously..." He muttered and looked dozens of human skins around him.

Everyone looked around to find any hint of what had happened in the village. However, they found nothing, not a single item went missing in the houses. Everything was untouched, even the money and valuable items weren't taken by the culprit.

"Do you feel anything, Sir James?" Erglade turned around to look at James, who was standing still with his eyes closed.

James slowly opened his eyes, finished his prayer to give salvation to the dead. His expression was grim, his jaw clenched and his brows furrowed. He slowly looked up at where the tall and massive trees surrounded the village.

"Something evil happened here. I'm not sure what happened, but I knew the souls of these people, they were consumed by something. I hope, God will take their souls from whoever did this to them and put them in the heavens," James answered as he approached Erglade.

Erglade didn't show any reaction to the gruesome scene around him. His main focus was to find the truth behind this incident, and the cause of death. He went from one human skin to another while James followed him without saying a word, but his heart never stopped praying.

"They were carved open forcefully, not by blades..." Eraglade looked at the cut on a few human skin.
"Something sharp, but not really a blade..." He muttered to himself as his eyes narrowed a bit, thinking what kind of object that cut the skin open.

"Not blades? Claws?" James tilted his head as he looked at Eraglade with his brows furrowed.

"That's possible, perhaps demonic beasts, but again, there was no sign of resistance. Their bodies have no bruises or wounds, other than the cut that open their body in half, so it wasn't demonic beasts,"
Eraglade sighed and slowly shook his head, deep in thought.

"You're not disturbed by this, Count?" James asked as he went down to one knee beside Eraglade, trying so see what Eraglade was seeing.

"I am, it's just that I have a stronger threshold against something like this after years of witnessing how human beings can be more evil than demons. I'm afraid that one day I might lose that makes me human, Sir James. The heart to believe one's life is worth saving..." Eraglade answered as he sighed and slowly stood up and watched the others come back with nothing.

James could see it in Eraglade's eyes, something dangerous that was slowly consuming him. James wondered what kind of things that Eraglade had witnessed from pursuing the truth, the people who chose to worship evil for almost a decade. He didn't know if he should admire him, pity him, or fear him.

"The paladins and the templars, they're not here, at least they were," he pointed out and saw footprints of knights boots on the snow that did more pressure on the snow.

Everyone looked around at the prints on the snow, and they could see how the paladins and the templars went about investigating just like they did. The numbers of footprints around the skins, traces of snow in each house, they all saw it too.

"I saw their footprints over there, Count," Antonius pointed at the other gate. "It seems they all went deeper into the forest to investigate."

Everyone looked in the direction that Antonius pointed at, and they all looked back at Eraglade since he was the one who made the call. Eraglade kept his eyes on the footprints and knew something was off about the amount of footprints of the paladins and the templars. He was the only one who saw it, and he didn't want to tell the others about it because he didn't want to make them wonder about something unnecessary.

"Let's head back first and report what we found here," Eraglade said as he sheathed his dagger.

Everyone exhaled in relief and nodded with understanding.

They didn't bother to bury the human skins and just followed Eraglade toward the gate they came from. However, Eraglade stopped moving and his eyes narrowed at something in front of him. Everyone stopped walking and looked at him with a confused look, but before they could open their mouths, he cast a fireball at the gate.

The fireball was released and exploded, revealing a translucent barrier in front of them. They were surprised there was a barrier in front of them, and when Jacques tried to walk past it, the barrier prevented him from leaving.

Eraglade looked at his palm and felt the Mana within him was slowly being drained. He immediately turned around and walked past them hurriedly.

"Change of plan, we are going to follow where the paladins and the templars went. We fell into a trap, a powerful magic formation formed around the village and we just entered a gate that could only be opened from the other side..." Eraglade said as he looked around and knew that he had to act fast.

"These people died not because they were killed when they were awake, they died because their lives were drained and then their insides were harvested..." he explained and walked toward the gate that Antonius had pointed out earlier.

Nobody questioned Eraglade's words, not when they knew they were in the safe because at that moment they had to act fast. They trusted Eraglade's words like they were their own inner thoughts. They were surprised that the other gate allowed them to leave the village, but that was when they saw Eraglade's expression become more disturbed and grim.

"We just fell into another trap, aren't we?" Belvia asked as she looked at Eraglade.

"We don't have a choice. We stay in the village, we die like those villagers. I believe the magic formation is circling outside the village, carved in the tree barks, in the roots, or wherever that makes it for anyone to find it," Erglade answered as he used fire flares, spreading into the air above them.

They watched the flares hit the invisible barriers around them, revealing that they had no choice but to keep moving forward. Although they were inside a massive forest, their path was reduced into a tunnel-like path.

"So the Paladins and the Templars went missing because they couldn't go back and forced to go even deeper into the forest..." James muttered as he clenched his fists, not liking the situation they were in. "There's a chance that they're still alive, out there..." He looked at the path in front of them.

"Hope only gets you killed in this kind of job, Sir James," Jacques grinned as he looked at James. "Count Blackheart is the only reason we are still alive here even when we are dealing something like this for almost a decade," he chuckled softly.

James noticed how everyone trusted Erglade, and it was both shocking and admirable for someone to get the trust of other people's lives in their hands. He knew that he shouldn't feel at ease, but knowing that Erglade was leading the team, he couldn't help but to make his mind safe and sharp at the same time.

Erglade pulled out a map of the forest from his spatial ring and let everyone think about what kind of danger they were into. The forest had nothing interesting, not even a single report about demonic beast appearance, just a few normal beasts that oftentimes migrated from the extreme cold into a more bearable cold.

"This is the first case, correct?" Erglade asked James and the others Northern.

"Yes, we have never heard or received any cases like this. We didn't know that this has something to do with demonic cults," James nodded as he crossed his arms. "This forest is actually believed to have some kind of power to grant people's wishes. There's a superstition in this forest, a cave under the lake. It's a dangerous place because it's extremely cold and people died before they could even reach the bottom. We don't know if there's even a cave under the lake," he continued.

"I don't mean to offend you or the Northern people, but a cave under the lake? That's just stupid, to risk yourself for something that you don't know it's even real," Belvia furrowed her brows as she looked at James and the Northern behind him.

"It's called superstition for a reason," Jacques shrugged his shoulders and lips.

"Where's the lake located?" Erglade asked as he tilted the map toward James.

"Around here..." James made a circular motion in the northeast area of the map. "The village is down here..." He dragged his finger down, below the middle of the map.

"You're believing this nonsense, Count?" Belvia sighed as she rested her hands on her hips.

"That's the only hint we've got. We take everything that can lead us to something," Erglade answered as he rolled the map and stored it into the spatial ring. "We have no choice but to keep each other's backs safe. Let's move," he said as he placed his hand on Belvia's shoulder before he led the team deeper into the forest.

Chapter 375 - 375: Journal of the past. (5)

"How can anyone live in the north with this kind of weather?" Jacques asked as he sheathed his sword and began to blow warm breath onto his hands underneath the leather gloves. "You northerners are amazing, I have to admit that," he muttered under his breath as he looked around and kicked a pebble onto the invisible barrier.

"I don't think this cold is normal. Sir James and the others start to get affected by the cold," Belvia looked at James and the other northerners in front of her.

"Yes, Lady Belvia is right, this cold isn't normal. It's as if the cold is artificial, something that someone made to weaken us. We might need to rest soon, Count. We need to find a safe place to keep ourselves warm," James said, following Erglade from behind.

Erglade shook his head without saying a word, but then he swirled his right hand, creating a magic barrier around them. He began to coat the barrier with a thin layer of fire, providing warmth for the team. Everyone sighed in relief when the heat began to give relief to their bodies. However, they didn't want him to go to such an extent for them because they knew that they wanted him to be in his prime.

Suddenly, everyone stopped walking and their eyes narrowed because they heard something in the distance. They all heard it and they all looked at each other affirming that they weren't hallucinating. They heard a faint growl in the distance, something that was louder and deeper than any big bear could produce.

"It's coming from over there," Erglade pointed at the northeast. "The lake is close, and whatever that is, it seems it's coming from there," he continued.

Everyone unsheathed their swords and the ones who held a shield went to the sides and back to create a wall for others. They were all on guard as they approached where the growl was coming from. One thing that they found was the fact that there were faint footprints on the ground, the same footprints that they found in the village, the Paladins' and the Templars'.

The closer they were from the lake, the more and the louder the growls were. Somehow they believed those growls were coming from a human's mouth, not from a beast's. But then they were a bit convinced that they were right when they saw traces of pieces of armor on the ground. They saw a pauldron, a gauntlet, and a helmet scattered on the ground.

When they were trying to guess what had happened to the Paladins and the Templars, they heard footsteps coming toward them, the sound of footsteps and feet being dragged. They immediately readied their stances and prepared themselves for whatever was coming toward them.

The first thing they saw was a paladin coming toward them with one arm missing. His skin had turned pale purple, a sign that he was no longer alive. Then more of them appeared, followed by the Templars who were in the same condition.

"What the fuck is this..." Jacques looked at the Paladins and the Templars that were slowly surrounding them. "Are they corpses?" He asked.

"They got turned into undead from witchcraft... dark magic," Erglade answered as he stared at the grayed eyes of the undead. "Witchcraft all the way here in the north? That's unheard of..." he muttered to himself.

However, they realized the numbers of the undead were a lot more than they had expected. There were too many of them, not only the Paladins and Templars, there were a few unnamed knights that had been turned into undead.

"Witchcraft? So these people turned into undead? We should kill them now!" Belvia said as she charged in toward the undead.

Jacques and the others began to join Belvia in getting rid of the undead. James used divine energy to coat his sword, mixing it with Aura. They had never encountered with Undead before, only heard from stories about moving corpses.

"Don't lower your guard! Undead are actually stronger than before they were alive! Don't get fooled by their appearance!" Erglade shouted as he began to turn snowflakes into icicles.

It was as Erglade said, the moment the undead detected a threat, their movements became agile and swift. Their punches and kicks were strong enough to hit through Aura that was coated around the armor. They were indeed strong but looked weak on the outside, and the stronger they were, that meant the master was a powerful witch or warlock.

Belvia and Jacques were far ahead of the others as always since they were confident in their swordsmanship since they were unranked swordmasters. They didn't care about the amount of enemies they were facing as long as they could go all out, they were happy. On the other hand, James and the other northerners maintained their position and formation, slowly but surely eliminating the undead. Antonius showed off his amazing swordsmanship and magic skills, fighting a dozen undead on his own.

Erglade observed the battle, supporting those who were in need of help with his magic. They were outnumbered, but they had more force and strength in each individual, making the battle seem to favor them. However, what was dead couldn't be killed, and the only way to completely erase them was to use Divine energy or fire magic to burn them completely.

Everyone slowly changed their strategy, following Eraglade's command, turning the tide by surrounding the undead. The undead were being pushed to the middle, having no way to escape when their master commanded them to.

The moment the undead were pushed to the center, Eraglade had prepared a magic formation on the ground. He snapped his finger and turned the whole ground into a flame wall like a stove flame, burning all the undead inside it. Everyone watched as the undead burned and were unable to leave because Eraglade placed a barrier that trapped them inside.

"It was... exciting..." Jacques breathed heavily as he listened to the growls of the undead that turned into a high-pitch scream that could tear eardrums.

"Sure," Belvia crossed her arms as she looked around. "But if the undead are here, where's the one who's controlling them? Won't they be so pissed that we killed all their minions?" She looked at Eraglade with her brows arched.

Eraglade had been thinking about that the moment the appearance of the undead occurred. He knew it was oddly suspicious that the master of the undead hadn't shown themselves. He knew that the undead were a precious army, something that would sacrifice a lot of lives to turn someone into an undead and maintain it.

Before Eraglade could open his mouth, they all heard a screech coming from inside the fire wall. They all looked at the black smoke that formed inside the blazing flame, forming into a ball. They were curious what it was until the ball of small burst, putting out the flame in an instant and breaking the magic barrier that Eraglade had made. The black smoke entered some of them, including Belvia and Jacques.

"Count! Stay back!" James screamed. "That's demonic energy! Get away from there!" He revealed.

Eraglade immediately pushed himself away with wind magic and landed right beside James. He watched as those who had inhaled the black smoke began to collapse as their hands reached their necks as if they were suffocating. He couldn't do anything, and neither could James since his Divine power wasn't powerful enough to get rid of the demonic energy.

"Damn it..." Erglade clenched his fists, not knowing what to do. "What should we do in this situation? Killing them would be hard, and who knows if the demonic energy won't possess the others once we killed them," he muttered to himself.

"And we have nowhere to run but to go deeper into the forest, Count said. We should leave them and find a way to get out of this place. That's the best plan that I have in mind. We can't defeat them, not when the culprit behind this incident hasn't even showed themselves," James looked at Erglade with a stern and serious look on his face. "We are being played at, Count. We have become chess pieces on the board. The only way to win is to play the game carefully," he continued.

Erglade nodded in agreement, thinking the same thing. He then commanded the remaining team members to go deeper into the forest. He turned the snowflakes in the air into ice shards then into ice pillars to trap Belvia and the others who had been exposed by the demonic energy. He clenched his jaw and stared at them for one last time before he followed James and the others.

"Count, we can save them," Antonius said as he ran beside Erglade. "We will save them," he looked over his shoulder with a stern look, noticing that Belvia and the others had slowly gotten back up on their feet.

"I hope so," Erglade muttered as he tried to catch up with James and the others, his expression unreadable.

Chapter 376 - 376: Journal of the past. (6)

"Count! On your left!" James shouted as he blocked Belvia's attack and was overwhelmed by her strength.

Erglade glanced to his left and saw Cruden, his oldest companion who had been following him for almost a decade. He clenched his jaw and turned the snowflakes into icicles and pierced through Cruden's chest, impaling him to the ground.

Erglade floated and went up high into the air as he spread his arms, turning the snowflakes into icicles. He impaled all the possessed knights that had been consumed by demonic energy. However, some of them dodged his magic and continued to kill their own friends.

"(How did it end up like this...)" Erglade looked at his surroundings and watched everyone fight each other to the death. "(I need to find the one behind all this, the one who control this madness...)" He gritted his teeth and tried his best to protect the remaining members of his team.

Before Erglade could think of a solution, he heard growls and screams in the distance. He knew that they wouldn't be able to survive this situation if they chose to fight here.

"Leave! Let's leave and I'll hold them all back!" Erglade shouted as he looked down.

"I don't think it's possible, Count!" James grunted as he pushed Belvia away, but then Jacques appeared and slashed his chest plate. "You should leave! You're the only one who might be able to leave this place, Count. Please, leave this to us and just go!" He grabbed Jacques face and kicked him away.

Everyone looked up at Erglade, some of them had the lingering fear, wishing that he would stay with them. However, they knew, they were just going to hold him back, and it would only prolong their deaths and not prevent it.

Erglade flinched his eyes, knowing that James was right since he was the only one who could sense Mana and magic. However, he also knew that they wouldn't be able to survive without him. He had two choices, one with a high survival chance but sacrificing a lot of lives, and the other one with a small survival chance but not sacrificing anyone.

"Be safe, Sir James, everyone..." Erglade said with a heavy-heart. "Antonius! Come and follow me!" He looked down at Antonius, who didn't show any struggle in dealing with both the undead and the possessed.

Antonius swung his sword and decapitated the possessed without hesitation, and then he looked up at Erglade, nodding his head.

"Good luck, kid. Protect Count Blackheart for us," James said as he looked at Antonius with a serious look on his face.

"I will," Antonius nodded and then ran to follow Erglade.

Erglade and Antonius followed a path that wasn't blocked by the invisible wall. The sound of steel clashing slowly began to fade away, and it only made Erglade worry about them. He knew he had to find a way out and came back to save them.

"The walls... they disappeared..." Antonius said after he threw snow around and didn't hit any invisible walls.

Erglade stopped moving and couldn't feel any Mana around him, and cast flares around him from the Mana he had stored in the spatial ring. He watched the halo of fire spread. It was as Antonius said, the invisible wall had disappeared and the flares kept spreading widely until it got extinguished by the cold.

"This doesn't mean that we are safe, it might be quite the opposite," Erglade said as he brushed his fingers together. "I can't feel any Mana here, not even a tiny bit. Which is why the wall disappeared," he muttered to himself.

"No Mana? That's unheard of, Count," Antonius said as he followed Erglade and kept his eyes around and behind him.

"No, it's possible if something absorbed the Mana. Perhaps like a powerful magic formation, or something else similar," Erglade answered as he looked around and made sure the Mana in his spatial ring didn't get absorbed. "This whole forest is a mystery," he muttered under his breath and left marks on the trees that he walked past.

After ten minutes of walking, he heard a faint scream and the sound of clanking steel in the distance. Erglade recognized that voice, it was one of his men's voices, and it confused him. He decided to follow where the voice was coming from, and to his surprise, he came back to where James and the other were.

The fallen knights had turned into undead, including Belvia and Jacques. The numbers of the undead increased than before, and Erglade knew he couldn't stay still.

"This is... no..." Erglade was in disbelief when he watched the remaining ones that were still alive were James and a few of Northerners. "Everyone! Run toward me!" He shouted and cast fireballs to assist James and the others that were heavily wounded.

James and the remaining survivors were shocked to see Erglade back to save them. However, they didn't ask questions and followed Erglade's order. He then watched the fireballs flew past them, exploding and making the ground tremble with the sheer power of Erglade's magic.

Erglade flew up high and released a torch of blue flame toward the undead. He used all the Mana he had in his spatial ring. He knew that it would be a waste, but eliminating those undead was necessary. He didn't stop burning the forest down with the flames, and then created one big fireball with the remaining Mana he had left. He threw it toward the burned undead and exploded, producing a massive blast that toppled all the trees in a hundred meters radius.

Erglade felt weak as he fell to the ground on his chest, struggling to stand up as his arms and hands trembled to support his body. Antonius grabbed Erglade's shoulder and helped him stand back up to his feet.

"Count... why did you come back..." James said as he grunted in pain and tried to stop the bleeding on his chest.

"We didn't... we had been walking to find a way out but ended up circling around and came back to where we were..." Erglade answered as he stared at the sea of flames in front of him. "Illusion magic, and I'm no longer sure what's happening here. But one thing for sure. If we want to escape from this forest, we have to get rid the one who controls everything here," he continued.

"With our condition, I don't think we can even do anything, Count. We are being played and we are losing," James said as he used Divine energy to heal his wound. "I can heal everyone here, but we need a place to hide, somewhere that we can breath..."

Erglade nodded in agreement and brought everyone with him to find a place to rest. From three dozens of team members reduced to 6, including Erglade and Antonius. However, no matter how far they walked, they would end up in the same spot over and over. The worst part, Erglade had used all his Mana, and could no longer use magic to support anyone.

In the end, they had no choice but to rest at that spot and treat their wounds. Erglade was busy finding the trace of dark magic where the illusion was projected. He dug the ground, checked the trees, and the roots, but he knew it was impossible to find it.

"We are stuck here, Count?" James asked when he saw Erglade coming back.

"Yes, I can't detect it at all..." Erglade rested his hand on the tree as he looked down at his feet. His gaze was cold and his jaw clenched. "Give me a moment to think..." He said as he walked away once again.

"I'm coming with you, Count," Antonius said as he got up.

"No, I want to be alone. You have been following me all this time, so get some rest," Erglade said and disappeared into the distance.

Erglade fastened his pace as he went as far as he could, looking at the tree formations around him. He left trails as he kept moving forward, not taking a detour or looking back. He wanted to try something that had been bothering his mind ever since this happened.

After what it felt like ten minutes of walking, he realized that he was in a new area of the forest. He saw a small open space in front of him, and realized that his suspicion was right. However, he felt it and smelled it again, the subtle changes that only he could sense it.

"It was really you," Erglade said as he clenched his fists.

"Since when did you notice it?" A man's voice could be heard behind the tree.

"Who knows. Does it even matter, Antonius?" Erglade asked as he slowly turned around.

Antonius came out of the tree, then James and the others appeared behind him. They all had a cut wound on their necks, and they all had turned into undead under his command.

"This whole situation wasn't yours, but someone else's. You're only associating with whoever behind this, aren't you?" Erglade asked with his eyes narrowed.

"Who knows. Does it even matter, Count?" Antonius smiled coldly.

Chapter 377 - 377: Journal of the past. (7)

Erglade slowly took a few steps back as he stared at James and the others moving to the sides, trying to surround him. He knew that he couldn't run away from them, especially from Antonius since he was capable of using illusion magic that made him unable to escape from his grasp.

"What do you want from me, Antonius? What is it that you're after?" Erglade asked as he took a few steps back, making sure that he wasn't surrounded.

"Well, I have to admit that your ability to detect dark magic is quite profound. I wonder if the Blackheart family learn about dark magic," Antonius said as he took a few steps forward, making sure that his distance with Erglade stayed the same. "What do I want? Isn't it obvious? What else do I want if it's not to get rid of you. You have been showing how capable you are that it's getting annoying to see you accomplish something that we have been working so hard to build," he answered as he glanced at James, using his thoughts to command him.

James dashed and swung his sword back, ready to swing his sword toward Erglade. Erglade had prepared for this and pulled out the Blackheart family signet ring from his pocket. He put it on his finger and used Mana to create a small magic formation on the ground. The moment James stepped his foot on the magic formation, it exploded and blew up his lower body.

Erglade pulled out a sword from the spatial ring and swung it toward James' neck. He decapitated James without hesitation. He watched James's head roll toward Antonius and slowly swung his sword to get rid of the blood. He pointed the sword toward Antonius, his expression was cold and his gaze was sharp.

"So you do have a spare ring. I have to admit, you don't fail to surprise me, Count. You really live up to your name," Antonius smirked as he unsheathed his sword as he commanded the undead to surround Erglade.

Erglade created magic formations on the ground, however, all the magic formations that he had placed suddenly broke and dispersed. He immediately turned the snowflakes in the air into icicles, but once again, the icicles melted before they could form perfectly. He stared at Antonius in disbelief, knowing it was his doing, and he did it so flawlessly in almost an instant.

"Who are you..." Erglade asked with his eyes narrowed.

"Me? I guess it's fine to tell you my name. My first name is my real name, but my family name, it's just a fake name. My real family name is Zevrathi," Antonius answered as he swung his sword around.

Erglade furrowed his brows, never having heard of a family named Zevrathi, it was the first time he had heard of it. However, the way Antonius said it, it sounded like Zevrathi was a powerful family. He also noticed that Antonius's ability to have amazing skills in both magic and physical had something to do with his lineage.

"You won't know about it, Count. There's no record about my family, and even if there is, it won't be enough to dig anything about our past," Antonius chuckled as he watched his undead surround Erglade. "It's a shame that you chose to dig information about the truth behind the Refenus Kingdom, and about the secret society they're in," he smiled coldly at Erglade, revealing Erglade's scheme.

Erglade glanced at his sides, thinking which side was weaker than the other. His survival depended on which side he took, and he had to make the right choice.

"So you're working for them?" Erglade asked, trying to stall the time.

Antonius laughed when he heard the question, and it was enough to make all the undead stop moving. He chuckled as he shook his head, finding that question both funny and felt a bit offended.

"Working for them? They're the ones who have been working for me, Count. They're my loyal followers, the families that have sworn their loyalty to the Zevrathi family. But as I said, you won't be able to find anything even if you tried, and unfortunately, you're going to die here now," he said with a serious expression as he commanded all the undead to attack Erglade at the same time. "You on the other hand, I wanted you to die in the first few missions, but who would have thought? You were so competent that you ruined almost everything that I had built so carefully," he stared coldly at Erglade with intense killing intent.

Antonius was ready to dispel and break Erglade's magic, but to his surprise, Erglade didn't use magic at all. Erglade used the snow on the ground, kicking it and hitting the undead on the eyes. He used that opportunity to dash toward the undead and broke through.

Erglade used wind magic to push his body, fast enough that Antonius couldn't break the magic. He flew high and far enough to make some distance between him and them. He flicked his left hand behind his back, forming the snow on the ground into a thick ice wall with Mana.

"(I need to get out of here, fast...)" Erglade used wind magic once again to fly and increased the distance between them.

Erglade looked back and saw nobody was following him. However, he hit an invisible wall so hard that he broke his shoulder and arm. He fell to the ground, grunted quietly as he felt the sting grow painful with every breath he took. He tried to stand up, but then he saw legs in front of him, and that made him frozen still.

Erglade looked at the man with pale skin, or in fact the skin was already dead. He slowly looked at the face, and he saw a man with a rotten face, his left cheek was gone, revealing his mouth and his tongue that came out of it. He could feel it, the source of the dark magic was coming from that thing in front of him.

Erglade didn't hesitate to flick his fingers and release Mana from his ring. He turned the Mana into embers, ready to light the air into a blazing flame. When he snapped his fingers, he expected the explosion to appear, but to his surprise, nothing happened. He realized the thing devoured his Mana the moment he released them, and now he became powerless.

"Do you like him, Count? He's one of the many loyal followers of Zevrathi," Antonius patted the undead's head. "He's so loyal that he does nothing but follow my orders. He doesn't even eat, drink, or even sleep. The last time I saw him, he looked more like a human than an undead. I guess it's time for you to give your power to me since you're no longer useful to me," he reached out his hand to the undead.

The thing looked at Antonius's hand and without hesitation he put his hand on Antonius. Erglade watched as the thing tried to scream, but he was too weak to even let out a single voice. He watched as dark purple gas came out of the thing's mouth, ears, and nose, slowly draining the remaining life out of it. In just a matter of seconds, the thing's body became skinny until it collapsed and died with its eyes wide open.

Erglade was disturbed that someone could possess dark energy and still look normal. He knew a few of Black Hands who had learned dark magic to have their appearance and personality changed drastically.

Dark magic was more powerful than normal magic, and the cost was their sanity and appearance that looked pale and corrupted in a way.

"Now, it's your turn, Count. No more playing cat and mouse," Antonius reached his hand toward Eraglade's face.

Eraglade could feel every muscle in his body being torn and squeezed simultaneously. He was powerless as he felt his toes up to his knees like they were being folded and trampled by a powerful force. He thought if this was what that thing felt like earlier when Antonius took the dark energy.

Eraglade felt numb from the chest and below, and he knew that he was done for. Suddenly, while he was about to pass out from the pain, he felt the ground shaking. Antonius stopped draining Eraglade's life energy and tried to understand what was happening.

Antonius and Eraglade looked around, finding an avalanche was happening near them. Before they could find out what was happening, roots wrapped around Antonius and all the undead feet. They were pulled forcefully into the ground, leaving only their upper bodies above the ground. Eraglade was shocked by what had just happened, and watched the roots slowly wrap the undead's body, tightening until their bodies exploded.

"Well... well... well... so you're the mastermind behind this problem," a soothing woman's voice echoed throughout the forest.

Antonius tried to free himself using both magic and dark magic, but to his surprise, his Mana was being drained by the roots. He tried to overpower the root with pure strength, but the more he struggled, the tighter the roots entangled his body to the pain he could hear his bones cracking. Eraglade on the other hand, was trying to crawl away, trying to escape because the only thing that mattered was his survival.

"Where do you think you're going?" The woman appeared in front of Eraglade.

Eraglade looked four legs in front of him, and he used everything he got to lift his head. He saw two women with silver hair, they were Aristoria and Sanya. He thought for a moment and knew who they were, the ancient Orthias.

"Leave him to me..." Aristoria went down to one knee as she stared into Erglade's eyes. "You take care that one over there, Sanya," she continued, her eyes never leaving Erglade's.

"Yes... yes..." Sanya smiled coldly as she walked toward Antonius, who was pale when he saw Orthias.

Chapter 378 - 378: Journal of the past. (8)

Erglade groaned as he slowly opened his eyes, not remembering what had just happened to him after he met with the two Orthias. He was lying on the ground, and his body was aching in pain and numb at the same time, making him unable to move his body. He slowly turned his head around and saw nothing but snow falling in front of him.

"What's your name, human?" A woman's voice came from behind Erglade.

Erglade slowly turned his head and saw Aristoria staring down at him with her bright blue eyes. He stared at her braided silver hair that was whiter than the snow itself. He then looked at her white dress and her white pale skin, seemingly unbothered by the extreme cold.

"Erglade Blackheart..." Erglade answered in his raspy, groggy, and weak voice.

"Blackheart? Never heard that name before," Aristoria sat down beside Erglade and kept staring into Erglade's eyes. "You're not from the north, are you?" She asked.

Erglade shook his head slowly, and didn't have the strength to speak again.

"We saw that you came here with a lot of humans, and you must have realized it by now that you're the only one alive. You came here to investigate what had happened to the village, and you ended up being betrayed by one of them. Seeing that you were being targeted, meaning you're an important person," Aristoria said as she flicked her index finger and created a warm dome to keep Erglade warm. "Why did he target you? Why did he want to get rid of you?" She asked.

"I know too much..." Erglade answered weakly.

"You know too much? About what?" Aristoria tilted her head.

"Demons..." Erglade answered simply, his eyes heavy from the exhaustion.

"Demons? Is this what you humans believe in? The beings that your creator made to mislead and guide them astray from your creator?" Aristoria asked with her head tilted.

Erglade furrowed his brows, finding it weird that Aristoria had to define it in such a way. But then he realized that he wasn't talking to a fellow human, someone who had existed for thousands of years. He then gave a small nod to her without saying a word.

"Demons..." Aristoria hummed as she looked up into the night sky where an aurora began to appear, decorating the sky. "Long before you humans came to this world, many of the civilizations believed in something similar, about beings that existed with the sole purpose of punishing or to mislead them from the right path. Yet, in the end, it was always themselves that made them extinct," she continued and slowly looked down at Erglade.

Erglade could only respond with a smile and nodded his head in agreement. Aristoria stared at Erglade's smile, seeing something that made her intrigued.

"You don't believe in demons? Because it's actually real," Aristoria said with her brows raised. "They do exist, long before humans came here. They're all the same beings that have been causing extinction to every civilization that has ever existed in this world," she revealed with a straight face.

Erglade furrowed his brows, confused and in disbelief by the revelation. He would brush someone's words off when they were talking nonsense, but not this time. He stared at the being who was called the protector of Neva, the one who had witnessed the rise and fall of civilizations.

"They exist... long... before... Humans?" Erglade muttered weakly.

"Yes, they have existed perhaps as long as Orthias and even the age of dragons," Aristoria nodded her head and glanced at the fireplace, making sure the fire was hot enough for Erglade. "They're parasites. They feed on emotions and corrupt the minds of the host. They grow stronger the more they have more control over the host's mind and body," she explained and tossed a log into the fire.

"They're weak and powerless when only dragons and us exist in this world. They couldn't feed on our emotions or corrupt our minds. However, the moment mortals came down to this world, they feasted. The moment the blood spilled and murder happen everywhere, that's when the gate is opened, bringing more of them into this world."

"Every civilization, they always opened that gate, the only path that led into their destruction and extinction. But you humans, you have gone too far, worse than all of those civilizations combined. You killed each other in the name of the creator that made you, believing it was for a good cause. The only way for those demons to exist in this world is through that gate, through the blood of the living, and yet you brought those demons into this world in the name of your God?" Aristoria tilted her head, finding the logic behind human history and mind was confusing. "Are the believers who believe in God to wage war and kill others count as following God's words or do they fall for the demon's temptation?" She asked with her brows raised as she stared at Erglade.

"If it's obedience, then God is responsible for the bloodshed? If it's demonic temptation, then believers cannot distinguish between God's will and evil influence? Does faith excuse violence, or does violence corrupt faith? If war in God's name is truly sanctioned, then God is complicit? If it isn't, then humans are deceived, worshiping demons while thinking they worship God?" Aristoria asked, her gaze searched for an answer to the contradiction and the paradoxical nature of human beings and their moral sense.

Erglade was never a believer in the first place, and he had read countless history books. He had seen that nothing was right or wrong, and none of them were completely righteous or evil. He slowly shook his head when Aristoria wanted him to give an answer to her questions.

"That's just... we humans... are..." Erglade answered weakly.

"Doesn't that make you humans the worst mortal that has ever lived in this world? Your kind butchered my people in the name of faith, then killed each other to take control over the majority, then killed each other for oppression. Humans are the worst kind of being, perhaps worse than the demons themselves," Aristoria concluded as she nodded.

"Yes... perhaps... we are..." Erglade nodded as he slowly closed his eyes as the exhaustion began to take over his body.

Aristoria watched Erglade slowly unable to resist the exhaustion and the sleepiness. She looked at his body with so little life energy that he had left after it was being absorbed by Antonius.

"You don't have much time to live, Erglade of Blackheart. Your days are numbered," Aristoria revealed with a straight face. "What are you going to do with the life you have left, Erglade of Blackheart?" She asked.

Erglade who was about to drift off to sleep suddenly felt the blood was rushing through all over his body, overwhelming the exhaustion that had been gnawing on his body. He slowly opened his eyes and looked into Aristoria's eyes, finding nothing but the truth in them. He slowly looked at the sky where the aurora moved slowly above him, giving him a sense of peace.

"My hatred and wrath are bigger than the life that I have left," Erglade said as he slowly clenched his fists. "If they wanted me dead, then I wanted to die by my own choice," he answered as he slowly turned to look at Aristoria and unclenched his fists.

"And that choice, what could that be?" Aristoria asked with her brows raised.

"To kill the ones who put me in this situation, the ones who wanted me dead," Erglade answered with a cold expression. "You're right about us, we are the worst. But again, that's who we are, and I'm not going to pretend that I'm different. I want bloodbath, I want death..." he continued, his eyes filled with rage and hatred.

Aristoria stared at Erglade's eyes, seeing those rage and hatred for a solid minute. She watched as Erglade's eyes became heavier and heavier to the point he finally allowed the exhaustion to take him to sleep. She slowly got up and stared at the sky, her blue eyes reflecting the green and purple aurora in the sky before she turned around and walked away.

"What's in your mind, Aris?" Sanya asked, leaning against the tree with a fire above her finger, reshaping them into a dragon. "You seem to be interested in that mortal," she glanced at Aristoria.

"I'm not interested in him, but his resolve and his plan to bring death to his own kind," Aristoria answered as she looked at the dragon-shaped flame above Sanya's finger. "We Orthias want the same thing, but we can't get ourselves involved in the destruction or the extinction of mortal civilization.

However, don't you think this will be the same as before? Do you think we will be able to stop what those humans have brought into this world?" She asked.

Sanya flicked her index finger, watching as the dragon-shaped flame flung away until it dispersed into nothing in the blink of an eye.

"You're this close to becoming a true dragon. Are you sure you want to let it all go?" Sanya asked, glancing at Aristoria.

"What can a single True Dragon do in the future that awaits us? We saw hundreds or even thousands of True Dragons being turned into corpses in that place. You think I alone would be enough to face that threat?" Aristoria asked back as she leaned against the tree beside Sanya. "If I could prevent that from happening, or at least delay it further, that would be good enough."

"That means the history will repeat itself once more," Sanya looked down, crossing her arms. There was a hint of sadness in her eyes. "This is a goodbye?" She asked.

"This is a goodbye, Sanya," Aristoria nodded, her expression didn't show any sadness, regret, or uncertainty. "I'm sorry that you have to witness another Aristoria to leave your side once again," she muttered and looked at Sanya.

"I'll speak to the elders, and I won't tell them where you go," Sanya nodded.

"Goodbye, my friend..." Aristoria held Sanya's hand and held them tightly before she let go.

Sanya closed her eyes and smiled as she pushed herself away from the tree.

"Goodbye..." Sanya said without looking back as she walked away.

"Day by day we walk on..." Aristoria hummed a melody as she stared at the campfire. "Our feet pressing on the same ground as our ancestors and the ancestors before us. The same ground we are walking on..." She sang and fed the fire with branches.

"Oh, little ones. Don't tell the mother we love her yet..." Aristoria continued to sing and watched the fire devour the branches. "We will sleep in her soon enough, but for now we will keep on walking..." She hummed the harmonic and glanced at Eglade who slowly fluttered his eyes open.

Eglade blinked his eyes a few times while his focus was on Aristoria. He had just realized that he hadn't asked about her name, not knowing who she was, and why she had saved him. However, the song that she sung earlier, it rejuvenated his soul as if it was being touched that he never knew it was possible. He was enchanted by her voice, her beauty, and her mind, a perfect combination in a woman he would like to meet.

"You should be able to sit now since your body has recovered, mostly," Aristoria said as she pointed at the meat that was being grilled with the stick in her hand. "Eat it while it's still hot," she suggested and continued to hum the melody.

Eglade slowly sat up and his body was no longer in pain, but his body was still numb. He reached for the meat, not realizing he had burned his hand since he couldn't feel it. Aristoria didn't stop him and sat there on the log, watching him without saying a word or showing any expression.

"That song that you sang..." Eglade looked at his hand and saw the burn on his palm. He couldn't feel the pain at all, and he wasn't bothered by it. "That song is beautiful. Is that the song that of Orthias?" He asked as he took a bite of the meat, not knowing what kind of meat it was or if he cared enough to ask as long as he could eat it and it tasted good enough.

"No, it was from the previous civilization, before humans," Aristoria answered, resting her elbows on her knees and resting her chin on her palms.

"You mentioned that before, about previous civilizations, before humans. What were they like?" Eglade asked, looking up at Aristoria.

"I can't tell you that," Aristoria shook her head, cupping her cheek with her palm. "That's the rule that we Orthias have to follow, and nothing can change that. We used to tell about the previous civilizations

to the civilization before them, and what happened was a complete chaos," she explained, staring into Erglade's eyes.

Erglade didn't expect a simple information like that would bring chaos to the whole civilization. He wondered if it was a forbidden knowledge, and why it could affect a civilization that deeply.

"Why did you help me?" Erglade asked, finding it weird that an Orthias helped a human even after humans hunted and killed a lot of them.

"Because you might have something that we Orthias need. Your knowledge about the current situation of this current civilization. We Orthias has been hiding for centuries, and we don't know much about what has been happening in this world, and how far humans have destroyed and ruined this world," Aristoria answered, reaching her hand to the fire and the fire seemed to avoid her hand.

Erglade furrowed his brows, sensing that the woman in front of him had an ulterior motive. He didn't know much about Orthias, but he knew well enough when strangers who were indulging themselves in conversation might have an ulterior motive. After he heard that Aristoria wanted something from him, his knowledge of the current human civilization, he thought if he could dig even deeper.

"I don't know your name, Lady. May I ask for your name?" Erglade asked as he chewed the juicy meat slowly.

"I don't have a name. Aristoria is what my people call me, the highest and the strongest breed in Orthias race. However, I would prefer if you called me Aris instead of Aristoria because Aristoria isn't a name but rather my whole existence," Aristoria introduced herself as she sat straight and rested her hands on her thighs.

"If I may ask, how old are you, Lady Aris?" Erglade asked, his throat becoming dry the moment he asked such a question of her.

Aristoria tilted her head, her blue eyes stared right into Erglade's with such intensity that he felt every hair on his body rise. He didn't know why, but he felt like his instinct told him to run or to apologize, nothing in between.

"If I told you my age, wouldn't that information be enough for you to calculate how old the previous civilizations were and before them? Would you really want to know how short or long a single civilization last in this world?" Aristoria asked with her brows raised.

Erglade never thought that far, and the moment he thought about it, he felt another chill down his spine. He slowly shook his head, realizing that he might not want to know since her existence could be used as a measurement, a calendar of the rise and fall of civilizations. The moment he saw her smile at him, it looked like she was praising him for his restraint and not being stupid.

"Thank you for saving my life, Lady Aris. I owe you my life, and I'll give you everything you need," Erglade said as he lowered his head. He remembered what Aristoria had said to him before, about his lifespan, about the time he had left was short, and perhaps shorter than he could guess.

"Good, because I want you to bring me back to your home," Aristoria answered without hesitation.

Erglade blinked his eyes a few times before he could understand what she was saying.

"You want me to bring you back to my home? You want to enter the human civilization?" Erglade asked with his brows furrowed. "Can I ask why? Aren't you afraid that humans might hunt you down?" He added.

"Current humans are so weak compared to centuries ago," Aristoria answered with confidence. "No humans in this world that can kill me, not in my current state," she smiled as she crossed her legs and rested her chin on her palm.

"To answer your question, maybe because we want the same thing, Erglade of Blackheart. You want bloodbath, I also want to make humankind bleed. You want to seek revenge, I want to prevent the danger that will come to this world. That's all I can say to you, Erglade of Blackheart," Aristoria explained, staring blankly at the firepit. "I want to learn about this thing you call demons, and I believe it's connected to the danger that will befall to this world that might bring this whole world into extinction," she muttered and her brows raised, her gaze distant when she kept staring at the fire.

Erglade listened to Aristoria's explanation, and it was a perfect opportunity for him to have her on his side. He knew that he wouldn't be able to seek revenge against those people, especially people like

Antonius. He then remembered Antonius's family name, Zevrathi, a family name that he had never heard before.

"Lady Aris, do you know anything about the Zevrathi family?" Erglade asked.

Aristoria's expression was unchanged when Erglade spoke Zevrathi's name, however her eyes said otherwise. She seemed to be hiding something in those bright blue eyes.

"Zevrathi was the one who instigated and the one who led humans in hunting Orthias. They were the ones who held power to overpower us Orthias with their power called divine power, the power that their God given to them," Aristoria answered as she tapped her fingers on her knee. "They were the first Saint, they were capable of bringing back the dead, giving them power every time they brought those humans back to life. What you saw back there, the walking corpses? They were similar to that, but more powerful, and they weren't walking corpses," she explained.

Erglade was both shocked and confused by the revelation.

"Wait, they were the first Saint? If they were Saint and used Divine power, how did Antonius used demonic energy?" Erglade asked with his brows furrowed.

"The Zevrathi family once ruled over the whole of mankind, and they reigned over them for decades. However, there was an incident where a certain people found out that they could gain the power of the Saints if they killed them, inheriting the power that belonged to the Saints. That was when humankind revealed their true color, schemeing and plotting against the Zevrathi family, hunting them down for their power," Aristoria said as she stood up and looked up at the morning sky. "Long story short, they disappeared without a trace, causing chaos and bloodbath everywhere here, and beyond the Blackcliffs," she continued.

It was too much for Erglade's brain to process, and there were too many questions that he wanted to ask. Before he could open his mouth, Aristoria suddenly offered her hand to him, and he looked at it for a moment with a confused look.

"You can ask me everything you want to know, but for now, let's leave. Take me to your home, Erglade of Blackheart," Aristoria said and put out the flame on the firepit with a mere thought.

Erglade held Aristoria's hand, and immediately she pulled him up before he was ready. He was about to collapse again, but Aristoria held his chest and kept him steady.

"You humans are all so fragile," Aristoria smiled at Erglade.

"Yes, I believe we are fragile in your eyes," Erglade said with a smile on his face. "And yes, let's go back to my place. It might take a while," he warned as he stared into Aristoria's eyes.

"That's fine. I don't mind checking every human village and town on our way to your home. I heard humans food are the best, so I want to try them as well," Aristoria chuckled with a huge smile on her face.

Chapter 380 - 380: Nature's favor.

Rasmus closed the book and looked outside the window as the blimp was about to land on the airfield. He never thought he would come back to this floating island again, and it had been a year since he left Gratlan. He put the journal in the spatial ring, still thinking about his father's encounter with Antonius Zevrathi and Aristoria. He never thought the journal would accompany him throughout the journey to Gratlan.

"Here we are..." Erlina sat across from Rasmus and looked outside the window. "What's the plan?" She glanced at Rasmus, still using Vije's appearance and attire.

"We will go our separate ways. The two of you should meet with Carrion's brother first. Aris, Rullein, and I will be meeting with Great Sage Lenin," Rasmus said as he changed his appearance, revealing his trueself. "You should head out first because I don't want you to be seen around me," he added.

Erlina raised her brows, realizing what Rasmus was trying to do, but then she took a deep breath and nodded with understanding. She smiled gently at Rasmus and reached out to his hand, squeezing it firmly and caressing his knuckles.

"Take care and good luck..." Erlina said softly and slowly pulled her hand away from Rasmus's hand before she got up to be with Carrion and Javi.

As soon as the blimp landed, Erlina, Carrion, and Javi unboarded the blimp. Rasmus watched them walk away until they got into a rental carriage and left. He then looked at Aris and Rullein, who were waiting for him, giving them a nod as he stood up. The two of them followed him and unboarded the blimp, and that was when everyone noticed his white hair.

Rasmus didn't care and kept walking toward the Magic Tower that pierced through the clouds. His deeds were so terrifying that nobody dared to stop him and chose to stay quiet and avoid him. They were smart enough knowing that he wouldn't hesitate to kill whoever tried to stop him because they could see the way he walked and the gaze that showed no emotions.

As soon as they entered the City of Knowledge, all the scholars were shocked when they saw the knights that guarded the gate scattered on the ground unconscious. The great mages and sages that realized it was Rasmus, they immediately cast magic formations in the sky, activating the self-defense mechanism.

Lenin was in her office at Gratlan Academy when she felt a fluctuation in Mana. She immediately turned around and looked out the window, noticing that someone had activated the defense mechanism in the City of Knowledge. She immediately released Mana, revealing the complicated magic formation with dozens of magic circles in her office.

The moment she stood at the center of the magic formation, a beam of blinding light was released by the magic formation, creating a wall of light. The moment the light disappeared, she disappeared into thin air. She appeared inside the Magic Tower in her office, and then she immediately jumped out of the window, free-falling and using wind magic to slow down the fall when she was about to land.

Lenin was ready to see what kind of threat that made the mages activate the defense mechanism. When she saw it was Rasmus, Aris, and a man behind him that she didn't recognize, she took control over the magic formation. Her gaze was cold and her expression was unreadable.

"Count..." Lenin said, her voice cold and cautious.

"Great Sage," Rasmus lowered his head to pay respect to Lenin.

Lenin couldn't see the Mana within Rasmus's body, Aris's, or the man behind him. She remembered that she could see the capability of Rasmus in containing Mana. She remembered that he was already on the same level as Sage. She didn't like it at all, not knowing how stronger Rasmus had become, and it made

her anxious. Not to mention, the man behind Rasmus that seemed strong that her instinct told her that he could be as strong as Aris, just like Videl.

"You're here to talk, Count? Or for something else?" Lenin asked as she crossed her arms.

"If I came here for something else, I don't think I'll come here without spilling a single blood, Great Sage," Rasmus answered with a stoic expression. "But seeing that everyone is so scared, and you seem anxious as well, Great Sage, are you going to send me away without knowing what I'm planning to do in this continent?" He asked with his brows raised.

Lenin narrowed her eyes and glanced toward all the gazes that wanted him to leave. She snapped her fingers and deactivated the defense mechanism in the sky, shocking everyone in the city. They looked at her with a confused look on their faces, questioning her decision, however, they knew that she was the Great Sage, her actions and decisions were unquestionable.

"Come, let's talk..." Lenin said as she turned around and walked toward the tower.

Rasmus followed Lenin while hatred filled the air around him. When he entered the tower, he saw Novia, standing there with a cold and hateful gaze. He stared back at her without showing any emotion, and that was enough to make her look away and walk beside Lenin.

"Can you please tell that man behind you to stop absorbing the Mana in this tower? I would really appreciate it if you did because this whole island might collapse if he kept draining the Mana," Lenin asked as she kept walking, not bothering to turn around to look at Rasmus.

Rasmus glanced at Rullein, seeing how she bit her bottom lip in a blissful expression. When their eyes met, he raised his brows, and that was enough to make Rullein stop absorbing Mana. At the same time, that was enough to convince Lenin that the man who followed Rasmus wasn't a human because the amount of Mana that the man had taken was more than she could take.

The five of them entered Lenin's office and Lenin allowed the three of them to sit on the couch. Novia and Lenin sat across from them, staring at those three like a walking catastrophe, a plague that would take anyone's life without hesitation or mercy.

"(A force of nature...)" Lenin thought as she took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

"Before we talk, who is he, Count? Another one that you recruited?" Lenin asked, staring at Rasmus with a stoic expression.

Rasmus looked at Rullein who sat on his left, a handsome man with slick black hair and bright orange eyes. In a blink of an eye, Rullein's body turned into a thick big cloud of black smoke, maintaining only her glowing orange eyes as the black smoke floated in the air. Both Lenin and Novia were shocked immediately pulled away out of instinct and fear when they felt it, the immense amount of Mana. They felt like the air in their lungs was being sucked and unable to breathe.

"This is Rullein, a Dark Spirit," Rasmus introduced as he pointed his left hand the the thick black smoke. "That is Yur..." he paused as he glanced at the window.

Lenin and Novia furrowed their brows as they turned their heads toward the window. An owl broke the glass and entered the tower, shocking both of them deeply. It wasn't the fact that an owl could fly at high altitude, but because the Magic Tower itself had a powerful barrier made of pure Mana with advanced magic formations on each floor. A Mana barrier that could withstand Rasmus's nuclear magic easily, but an owl could break in like it was nothing.

The owl landed on Aris's lap and revealed Yur's human appearance, a small child with curly and puffy hair like clouds. Lenin and Novia were speechless, couldn't process what had just happened and all the information that Rasmus had revealed.

"Yur is a Great Spirit," Rasmus said as he looked at Yur, who seemed interested in Lenin by the way Yur looked at her.

Lenin and Novia heard about Great Spirits, the ones that were said to be the protectors of nature. A nature judgment that would befall whoever tried to destroy nature, beings that could create tsunamis, avalanches, and storms that could wipe out any living beings and reshape the world by their will. However, when they looked at Rullein, they were puzzled because they had never heard of Dark Spirit and its existence.

"(Is this some kind of joke? Having Aris by his side is already impossible to stop him, and now there are two more powerful beings by his side? Is humankind really have no chance against him?)" Lenin

clenched her fists on her lap, staring at Rasmus with a conflicting gaze. "(How can humankind stop this man when nature itself is showing its favorability to him?)" She closed her eyes, laughing at the sick joke in her heart.

Lenin cleared her throat and tried to calm her heart and mind.

"Dark Spirit? What's that if I may ask, Count?" Lenin asked.

"That's why I came here, Great Sage. I will tell you everything about what had happened in the past few months," Rasmus answered as he grabbed the teacup and took a sip of the warm tea. "This is going to take a while," he smiled.