

Thalos 429

Chapter 429: The Prey Goddess

A shiver! Not from fear, but because a mysterious power of a higher dimension she had never known wrapped around her like tens of thousands of chains and cinched tight into the flesh of her divine body.

Her artifact leather armor layered with who knew how many protective divine spells, and the perfect divine body she was so proud of, could not muster the slightest resistance.

That mysterious power seeped effortlessly into her divine flesh—and even into her divine soul.

Her left hand was frozen in the drawing posture, her right-hand knuckles gone pale-blue from overexertion. The low growl in her throat became a voiceless tremor in the congealed spacetime; the cold sweat beading at her temple hung from the tips of her lashes, reflecting the faint smile at the corner of the God-Emperor Thalos's mouth across from her. Her lungs, fixed by that mysterious force, could not expand, yet her heart seemed to be madly hammering inside her chest; each phantom thud made her eardrums ache.

In truth, her divine body could not move at all; any "movement" was nothing but her imagination.

Ten paces away, the four divine arrows that had failed their task—arrows which, by the power imbued in them, would have displayed eighty-one inconceivable variations: fast and slow, direct hits, feints, ambushes, zone-denials—

This shot would have been worthy of inclusion in the two worlds' acknowledged "Compendium of Archery."

Sadly, within Artemis's perception, all those variations evaporated at a speed that seemed extremely slow, and yet was extremely fast.

In the utterly still air around her, all things had been fixed in place.

Golden filigree flared at the corners of Artemis's eyes as the divine-sight spell unique to the goddess of the hunt—an art that enhanced her vision—struggled into operation.

Only then did she realize why this spell hadn't been frozen along with her body.

It wasn't that Thalos couldn't do it, but that he deliberately left this flaw so she could watch with wide eyes and see clearly how she was being defeated.

On the sidelines, several nymph goddesses, the Aesir, and the Valkyries stared in astonishment as Artemis, together with an entire slice of space, was frozen.

Only after a full ten seconds, taking cues from the other bystanders' reactions, did they realize—only Artemis herself had been frozen; they were not constrained.

Heimdall blinked, slid his Burtsteel Guardian Sword back into the Rainbow Bridge's sword socket, and, with leisure to spare, fished that big lug Thor back in.

Thor, a bit bedraggled in the void—well, only to the extent of messy hair—landed, saw Artemis frozen, and winced, the corner of his mouth twitching. "Did I miss the best part?"

"No! You're just in time."

Under the gaze of "ten thousand," everyone watched Thalos stroll over. Before Artemis's complicated eyes, he stepped through the frozen slice of space, deliberately letting his neck brush past the arrowheads of those four divine arrows, and came, step by step, to stand before the immobilized Artemis.

Because of the exaggerated difference in their height, even without Thalos deliberately leaning close, there were still about five meters between them, and Artemis had to roll her eyes upward, whites showing, just to keep his massive face in view.

"You are permitted to speak," Thalos said lazily.

In the next instant, the dignified goddess of the hunt felt as if the air had been permitted to enter her lungs.

Her whole body trembled; goosebumps rose across her divine skin.

Only after quite a while did she squeeze out a question through clenched teeth. "What in the world did you do?"

"Time, space, and fate. Take a guess—which did you fall to?"

Time, space, fate.

Three unfathomable powers!

To this day, neither Olympus nor the Aesir had anything like a god of time or a god of space. There was a goddess of fate, true—but Thalos, you never claimed to be a god of fate!

A wave of vexation washed over Artemis.

She was already like this; her nymph goddesses were so frightened on the spot that the color drained from their faces.

Thalos threw out three topics that were lofty even in the divine realm—how was she supposed to answer?

Pain, heartache, dejection, despair... it was as if all the bitterness of the world poured into Artemis's mouth.

Yes!

Thalos truly hadn't used any world-force; he had used only his own power.

Just as mortals cannot comprehend the might of the divine, and true gods cannot know the permissions of a god-king, she had never imagined that the gap between a god-king and a God-Emperor would still be so vast as to drive her to despair.

She did not know how long it was before she murmured, "I've lost."

In the next moment, all strength left her; her entire body went soft and toppled backward.

Her nymph goddesses failed to reach her in time; instead, a figure at once familiar and strange darted in, nimbly circled behind her, and caught her in her arms.

"Atalanta?" Artemis's eyes widened.

"Forgive me, my goddess! Perhaps now you understand my helplessness." Tears glimmered in Atalanta's eyes; her expression was immeasurably complex—sorrow, pity, tenderness, and a strange, tangled feeling that could fall into ruin together with the goddess she worshiped.

Artemis's lips moved, as if to say something, but no sound would come out.

Helpless?

Yes!

Thalos*Borson was so strong—strong beyond the limits of imagination.

How were you—how was I—to resist?

Clearly she knew she still had the strength to sprint ten laps around the whole of Greece, and yet she felt not a sliver of power left in her divine body, as if all the bones had been pulled from her.

Yes, a bone called "courage."

Then she heard a thunderous cheer roar up around her, studded with countless frivolous whistles.

In the past, she would have gone on a killing spree.

But at this moment, that hopeless sense of powerlessness drove her to pitch forward and kneel before that giant god.

She suddenly wondered, how long had it been since she had last knelt?

It seemed the last time was when she took office as a god-king, paid homage to Father Zeus, and swore her oath.

Then Thalos and Zeus—two God-Emperors—who was stronger?

Artemis truly did not know.

She only knew that from this moment on, her fate no longer belonged to her.

For some reason, she suddenly very much hoped Thalos would win this war between two great worlds.

Not for any other reason—only because if she returned like this now, Hera had ten million ways to make her wish she were dead.

She suddenly found she could somewhat understand Atalanta's thinking.

How she ended up in the rear hall of the Silver Palace, she could not recall. The only thing she remembered was that, in the end, the nymph goddesses captured alongside her laid her down.

Then she saw Atalanta lean in and whisper, "Goddess, please be a good prey, won't you? And then, remember to beg His Majesty—to make it smaller."

Smaller?

What did that mean?

When she saw Thalos, fright made her lose her wits, and reflexively, following Atalanta's instruction, she pleaded, "Smaller! Smaller!"

On this day, the goddess of the hunt became the prey.