

Thalos 88

Chapter 88 - 88 The Goddess of Death: Work is Work, Life is Life

Crack! — The sound was like piercing a piece of dried meat.

A moment later, a miracle unfolded.

As a torrent of black aura surged into the pitch-black longsword, Hela's withered, terrifying left half began visibly to fill with vitality.

This wasn't simply ballooning flesh; it was life taking root.

The dried-out cheek flushed with rosy pink, the clouded, horrifying eye grew clear, sprouting a beautiful eyelid. Her left torso, arm, and little foot—all, in the span of a few breaths, became indistinguishable from those of a normal infant.

Even the palm pierced by the sword's edge now oozed bright red blood.

"Ahhh! My baby! Baby, you're okay?!" Angrboda shrieked and leapt forward like a madwoman—Loki couldn't stop her.

"Please calm down, the ritual isn't finished yet!" Thor hurried over to restrain the giantess.

Angrboda was just overly excited. She wasn't being unreasonable, and quickly composed herself. "It's okay, baby. Mommy's here. If it hurts, you can stop."

To everyone's astonishment, the newly beautiful baby Hela actually responded with a sweet smile. That smile made both Loki and Angrboda feel drunk with joy.

It had been so hard. Of the three children they'd had, Hela was the first one who appeared... relatively normal.

They had thought themselves cursed, destined to stand in opposition to the Aesir. But now, it seemed, there might still be hope.

Perhaps because so much of her power had been drawn out, Hela's head tilted to the side, scaring her mother half to death.

But once they heard the baby's calm, even breathing, Angrboda relaxed again.

Loki awkwardly leaned in. "Your Majesty Thalos, about my daughter's condition..."

"Overwhelming death energy would inevitably cause one side of her body to resemble a corpse. It's the price for wielding such power." Thalos shifted tone slightly. "If she stores roughly one-third of her power into the Sword of Helheim, her strength will drop from top-tier to first-class—or perhaps to a level like Yul, the god of archery. But in exchange, she will gain beauty. It's her choice."

For the first time in ages, Loki smiled sincerely and straightened his posture.

"I believe my daughter will strike the perfect balance between her duties to the Aesir and her own identity."

Years passed.

On the calm seas of Vanaheim, the musical sounds aboard the divine ship Skidbladnir were as joyful as ever.

The dwarven musicians were still the same, but the dancing goddesses now had a new member.

"That's it, Hela! Don't stop the hand flourish, and twist your hips wider. Imagine you're drawing circles on the floor with your butt."

"Yes, Lady Freyja!"

A beautiful black-haired goddess danced exuberantly under the sun. The golden bells on her bracelets jingled with every movement, and the translucent white ribbons on her body fluttered with her passionate performance.

After the song, Hela skipped over, eyes filled with envy at Gullveig feeding Thalos grapes mouth-to-mouth.

Stretching her voice coyly, Hela said, "Your Majesty Thalos, I want to do that too~"

Thalos twitched at the corners of his mouth.

"Hela, that's a bit early for you."

"Does Your Majesty dislike Hela?" she pouted, brushing her soft left shoulder against his chest.

Thalos' face twisted in awkwardness. Pressured by her persistence, he could only mutter,

"It's not that, Hela. It's just... maybe wait until you're eighteen, alright? Otherwise, what will the priests in my temple write about me?"

Any priest daring to write about girls under eighteen would be burned at the stake!

"Humph! Your Majesty always has strange principles."

Thalos flicked her on the forehead. "Don't complain. That's order. I set the rules. I must be the first to follow them. Now, time for work again."

"Ahhh, fine!"

Hela, lovely and charming, brought inexplicable joy to all who saw her. She waved at the other gods.

"I'm off to Helheim again!"

"See you tomorrow, Hela!" Freyr waved goodbye with a grin.

A flash of rainbow light, and Hela returned via Bifröst to the lower realm—the cold, gloomy underworld of Helheim.

Before her lay the black river Gjöll.

This river marked the boundary of Niflheim and was spanned by a gold-plated crystal bridge, suspended by a single eerie strand of hair.

Its guard, the skeletal Modgud, demanded a blood toll from any who sought to pass.

Most souls traveled this bridge on horses or carts—the same ones burned alongside them during cremation.

Even after seeing Hela countless times, Modgud never quite adjusted to her dazzling beauty. Just as he opened his mouth, Hela transformed.

Her right half remained lovely, but her left reverted to its corpse form. Her entire body now exuded eerie terror.

Upon seeing her, Modgud dropped to one knee and reverently hailed the goddess of the underworld.

Hela ignored him. Raising her corpse-like left hand, she studied it closely and muttered,

"No matter how often I see it, I still find it disgusting. Even though I know this is my true form, each morning I wake to see my beautiful reflection, I can't help but believe that is the real me."

She didn't bother whispering; Modgud trembled and pretended not to hear.

She raised her hand again, summoning a spectral coach shrouded in deathly aura. It bore her across the Gjöll River.

Ahead lay the Ironwood, a forest where the trees had leaves of iron and no grass grew below.

Beyond the forest stood Hel's Gate—also called Hela's Gate. It was guarded by the hellhound Garmr, a bloodstained beast curled in the cave Gnipahellir.

Only Hela's personal arrival—or a bribe of a Hela's Cake—could grant passage.

Within Hel's Gate lay the true underworld:

Bitter cold, endless darkness, and the hiss of boiling cauldrons—the roar of the Hvergelmir spring.

There were nine rivers in the realm of the dead, among them Slid, a river whose waters were sharp blades.

Beyond all this stood Hela's palace.

In the original myth, this palace would have been named Eljudnir, meaning "Misery".

Her dining knife would be "Famine", her male servant "Lethargy", her maid "Sloth", her bedchamber "Destruction", her bed "Grief", and her curtains "Conflagration".

But in this life, all of that changed.

Her palace was called Eight Hours, named after the eight-hour workday.

She and Thalos had an agreement:

As the goddess of death, she had to spend at least eight hours a day managing the affairs of the underworld.

Outside those hours, she could do as she pleased.

Thus, Hela only returned to her corpse form for eight hours each day—just enough to keep the underworld's rebellious spirits in line.

The moment her shift ended, she'd bolt for the rainbow bridge, board her sealed coach, and rush back to the Palace of Silver to touch the Sword of Helheim and regain her stunning appearance.

She was also a regular in the Palace of Joy!

Unfortunately, the work in the underworld was overwhelming.

She had to keep expanding her palace to accommodate new guests arriving from the mortal world.

To her servants, Hela was a workaholic.

Everything around her was renamed.

Her male servant: Lightning.

Her maid: Diligence.

Her bedroom: Hourly Room.

Her bed: Campaign Cot.

Though her servants moved sluggishly, she constantly urged them to hurry.

And whenever her parents asked how she was doing lately, she always ended her reply with the same phrase:

"Being the goddess of death is a job. The rest... is life!"