EPILOGUE

THE ONE WHO LAUGHS LAST

Yuuki had obtained Maribel’s power.

“I really wish you’d talked to me about it first.”

“Ha-ha-ha! I already explained why I didn’t. That’s why I was able to trick Maribel, you know?”

“But do you realize how hard it was not to let my ‘outside’ friends find out the truth?”

As Yuuki fought Rimuru, Kagali was forced to distract the expedition team so the secret behind Yuuki’s powers didn’t come out. Any strange activity on her part ran the risk of attracting Rimuru’s attention. It was an ordeal for her.

Yuuki, meanwhile, didn’t really care if people found out, so he didn’t see it as a problem. Even if everyone knew he could cancel people’s skills, it wasn’t like someone could devise any kind of workaround against it. It was an ace in the hole for Yuuki, yes, but it wasn’t even one of his last resorts.

“Well, you know, I trusted in you. It worked out in the end, so can you maybe let me off the hook this time?”

“You siphoned off Maribel’s power, didn’t you? Was that in your plans, too?”

“Yeah, more or less. They say ‘sinful’ unique skills are the most powerful ones out there, so I did have my sights on it. I heard Avarice was driven by the size of your desires, and I figured it’d be pretty appropriate for me.”

“You really are crazy sometimes. It’s not that easy to take somebody’s skill, you know that?”

“I’m sure it’s not. But Avarice kinda chose me this time. I still couldn’t win against Rimuru, but…”

“…I’m sure you couldn’t. He’s so unfair like that.”

“I know! But now I can pin all the negative stuff on Maribel. I’ve just been fully acquitted! I’m probably gonna have to mind my p’s and q’s for a little while, but now I’ve got something else to look forward to, you could say.”

“Right. No need to hurry things now. And it’s so unnerving, how wary the demon lord is of the people around him. I can’t say I liked everything about your plans, but I think I can appreciate them now.” Kagali’s main complaint was how Yuuki ruined the crypt by blowing it up.

Yuuki told Rimuru that Maribel activated the reactor, then took her own life. The explosion, which razed the deepest section of the crypt but little else, was his way of hiding the evidence. Yuuki had prepared a magical bomb for just this purpose.

“There wasn’t much energy left in reactor,” he’d explained to Rimuru, “so the damage was pretty light, thankfully.” He even had the foresight to scatter the remains of a real reactor around the crypt to back up his story. Now he was prepared to stick to that story, no matter what he was asked.

But Kagali had her concerns.

“You were planning to abandon this place from the start anyway, weren’t you?” Yuuki retorted. “So why worry about it?”

To Kagali, though, this was a familiar city, her home. Once everything was cleaned up, she wanted to restore it to its former bustling glory—but with the crypt now buried, she had a few gripes.

“…Not necessarily, I wasn’t.” She shrugged. “It was kind of my second home, you realize.”

Yuuki gave her a grin. “Yeah. But we earned something from this. My name got cleared, which is huge, but other stuff, too. Maribel deployed her Blood Shadow troops, but did you see how they all cast holy magic? That’s a lethal blow.”

“You’re right. I noticed that, too. It proves that the Council’s connected to the Western Holy Church. That’s why there’s all the secrecy behind the Five Elders’ true identities.”

“Exactly. It showed up in the papers and everything, but after the war in Farmus, the reputation of the champion there took a huge hit. Then, at the same time, the Council started losing clout with the Western Holy Church. That points to only one truth! I’m thinking that Maribel’s grandfather, Granville Rozzo, is actually part of the Seven Days Clergy.”

“I see… That’s a clever deduction, Sir Yuuki.”

Kagali was just as sharp as him—and her reading of the situation matched his to some extent, convincing her it was the truth.

Yuuki looked at Kagali with a sinister smile. “Oh, it’s nothing too impressive. But I’ve stumbled upon another really key possibility. You know what it is?”

He paused, gauging her reaction. Kagali couldn’t think of anything else. She put up her hands in surrender.

“I tried tracing Maribel’s thoughts, based on the actions she took. But she really forced things with this whole operation, you know? If she killed the demon lord Rimuru, there was a chance Veldora would go berserk on us. When she took over the Chaos Dragon, that really did enrage Milim, almost. You were terrified that she’d discover us, weren’t you? So I really think she pushed her luck way too much with a demon lord as dangerous as that…to say nothing of a True Dragon.”

“Putting it that way, you’re right…”

“Maribel had to know the danger she was putting herself in, and I’m sure she worked out some countermeasures. But what were they?” Yuuki looked straight at Kagali. He didn’t have an answer himself, but he figured asking would help organize his own thoughts.

“Hmm… Maybe she believed that she, alone, was safe the whole time?”

“There is that, yeah. But I don’t think that’s all.”

“And maybe she was anticipating at least a little damage? She feared the rise of Rimuru, and if she thought some sacrifice now was worth it in the future…”

Yuuki nodded at this. “Well, me, I’d never do that if I had no idea how much damage there’d be. But if I could predict how much to expect, approximately, I’d definitely weigh the losses against the gains on the scale.”

“…Meaning?”

“I think Maribel had some kind of reason to believe things would work out, even if Veldora and Milim lost control.”

“……”

“And what was that reason?”

“Granville…”

“No.” Yuuki had arrived at an answer. He grinned. “Who did Laplace fight in the sanctuary?”

“Well, the demon lord Valentine—Oh!”

He chuckled, seeing Kagali’s reaction. “Right. The demon lord Valentine is dead…but there’s a demon lord Valentine in the Octagram. The real demon lord’s even stronger than the fake one, I bet.”

“Even at my peak, I was about equal with that Valentine. In that case…”

“In that case, the real one’s even stronger! Now I’m sure of it. The headquarters of Luminism isn’t just a religious site—it’s a demon lord stronghold.”

“You mean Valentine’s really the god Luminus? That’s insane…”

“But it’s true. I really don’t think I’m wrong.” The confidence behind Yuuki’s voice led Kagali to the truth.

“Yes… You’re right. And it wouldn’t be strange if Granville knew that.”

“Not at all. And so did Maribel. That’s why she figured Luminus was protecting the Western Nations.”

It all seemed to make sense. Kagali had to accept it. There wasn’t any room for objection. “Sounds like we’ll need to rethink our strategy.”

“Yeah. But I’m gonna have to move my base of operations to the East for a while anyway.”

“Hee-hee-hee! You are a scary man. You say you’re going to lie low, but it sounds like you’ll be moving around a lot, aren’t you?”

“Well, sure. I’m gonna be king of this world, remember? I promised you I’d get a hold of it!”

“That you did. Hee-hee… Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee. I look forward to it. I really do. And I’m sure Clayman will be delighted, too.”

“Yeah. So keep lending me a hand, okay?”

“Yes, of course. And please don’t betray me, either, Sir Yuuki.”

“Of course I won’t. The world will be mine—and then we can all have a blast together!”

Yuuki and Kagali looked at each other and smiled. The laughs continued on and on; two magic-born aiming to seize the world like it was a game to enjoy. Their aim was childlike, but they were serious about it.

They wanted to conquer the world.

The Chaos Dragon was gone. Milim’s friend was saved. And now that I was back on the ground, I was shocked to find the bottom section of the ruins all caved in.

According to Yuuki (who was safe), the cornered Maribel blew herself up inside. She wanted to take all of us along with her, apparently—she really wanted to take me out that bad? That was just too much, in a way…but she was hostile to me, so I didn’t know what else I could do. No point moping about it.

After discussing matters with Kagali, we decided to restore the ruins back to their pristine condition. It would take time, but we planned to excavate the bottom portion as well. Eventually, we would display the artifacts we dug up and turn this palace into a museum. We wanted to make this into a tourist attraction, complete with a magitrain stop.

That would take who knows how many years, of course, and we had a ton to do before then. Unless we negotiated a peace treaty with the Eastern Empire, at least, this whole area was a front line. Just because it was Milim’s turf didn’t make it a safe zone, necessarily.

For now, at least, our plan was to work on restoring the site.

Negotiations were continuing to go smoothly with the Council. Several of the councillors got dismissed, though, which definitely affected its power as a legislative body.

The Western Holy Church was gaining more power now, and Yuuki, freed from Maribel’s hold, was also making his presence more known. With things as they were, the Council was seeking a new unifying force. That, of course, would be us—or to be more exact, me.

Tempest had now become the biggest faction of the Council. Yuuki’s Free Guild gave us a push along those lines, offering their public support of Tempest in exchange for financial backing. Hinata was working with us on this, too, in the name of stability among the Western Nations. Thanks to that, we had now obtained a pretty hefty amount of influence in the region.

Still, I’m glad Yuuki’s been cleared of everything. Now I can keep building up our alliance without any qualms.

Negative. The doubts have now been confirmed. The subject Yuuki Kagurazaka is definitely acting of his own free will.

Huh?

Wait, why didn’t you say anything before?!

Understood. Because his motivations were simple and easily taken advantage of.

Was that why? Oh. I see. So you were keeping quiet for my sake?

……

This is all thanks to my carelessness, isn’t it?

For one moment there, I hesitated to kill Maribel. Considering what the future held now, I shouldn’t have wavered. If I’m damaged, that wavering disappears—but if someone hasn’t been that much of a bother to me, I couldn’t help but think killing was going too far.

Even with Gaiye, I thought killing him overstepped my boundaries. My heart must’ve softened up with Maribel along those lines.

So did you keep quiet because you assumed I couldn’t kill Maribel?

…Affirmative. It was decided that it was necessary to do so.

That’s so selfish…or maybe not. Just as Raphael predicted, Yuuki killed Maribel for me. And now he was resting on his laurels, assured that all the evidence was destroyed. I guess someone like that would be easy for Raphael to handle.

I was in no position to complain, but I still found it incredibly frustrating. Making Raphael worry like that, just because I’m so unreliable…

Negative. That is incorrect. I did not want my lord to feel any anxieties.

Well, thank you. I wouldn’t feel guilty this way, right?

Yeah, I’m glad for that, but that’s not gonna work for me. I need to face facts and decide things for myself. Otherwise, I’m a failure as Raphael’s master. If I keep clinging to people like this, I’m never gonna grow and mature.

So next time, report the whole truth to me, okay? I promise I’ll accept it.

Understood. As you wish.

No matter what Yuuki’s scheming, I’m going to crush his ambitions. And I’m not alone. I have friends, partners I can rely on. Don’t I? With Raphael, I can walk straight ahead, never making any mistakes.

I’d really believed I could. And maybe, just a little, I thought I felt Raphael “smile” for me.