

Great Mage 241

Season 2 Chapter 1:

An incredibly pale man bowed his head politely to the group in front of him.

“First of all, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all you customers who chose to participate in this event despite your busy schedules. I am Rutan, and I will be the host for these proceedings.”

The man, Rutan, bowed once again as polite applause filled the room.

Rutan had long ears, sharp teeth, and above all, his pupils were slitted like a cat. He was wearing a very professional looking tuxedo which went well with his pale skin.

“In addition, I would like to also express my gratitude to the customers who could not be here with us today, but who have always shown interest in our company. Our company will accompany our customers to the day we’re disbanded and we promise to continuously introduce you to even better products.”

A relaxed smile blossomed on Rutan’s lips.

“Let’s cut the greeting short and move on to the explanation of this event. Those who are here are all verified customers, so I will skip the unnecessary introduction. The basic process will be the same as always. If you happen to see a product you like, please tell us your price through the attendants assigned to each row.”

Rutan briefly explained the rules with a calm voice.

Those in the hall all nodded with serious expressions.

“The event will be held over the course of three days, and today’s proceedings will begin in about an hour. Before that, we’ve prepared a small feast with a few special delicacies. So please enjoy it.”

“I heard that there would be humans in this event.”

It was a heavy voice.

It was a purple-skinned man with a very large stomach. He had four eyes, and no nose. There was also green mist which flowed gently around his body.

Rutan chuckled.

“It is as you said. Count Gomes.”

“How many did you prepare?”

“...”

Rutan didn’t answer immediately. Instead, he smiled mysteriously.

Everyone in the hall was paying attention to his mouth at that moment. Nevertheless, he didn't speak.

Instead, he waited until their concentration had reached the peak and they could barely hold themselves back before letting out a small cough.

"-eleven."

When Rutan said this, the hall stirred.

Then Rutan shrugged slightly and continued with an amused voice.

"To be precise, there are seven men and four women."

"I'm curious about the variety."

"We have yellow, white and black. They are also of various nationalities. American, British, Italian, Chinese, Korean, etc... Of course, they are all under 30 years of age. After all, our company only deals in premium products."

"Hmm."

Gomes snorted, this deep, nasal sound showing just how pleased he was.

“I’m confident that there won’t be any flaws with the products since they carry the Chester Company’s brand. We also have a few amazing luxury items on hand, so please anticipate them.”

“Huhu! No one here is foolish enough to doubt your abilities. This event will be among the best the company has ever hosted.”

The one who spoke this time wasn’t Count Gomes, but one of the Company’s VIPs, Duke Sandro.

Rutan chuckled softly at those words.

His words were correct. This event was being held on the largest scale, and was, in a way, a turning point for the Chester Company.

They had dug up the greatest treasures in their warehouse, acquired slaves worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and sent invitations to their VIP customers together with a product list.

And more than 70% of the customers had announced their participation.

‘If things go well, I might even become a noble.’

Rutan smiled brightly from the bottom of his heart.

* * *

It was very cool in the cage. The temperature was always moderate.

This was natural. After all, the products weren't allowed to get sick.

Nevertheless, Min Ha-rin hugged her shoulders as she felt a bone piercing chill fill her body. Her body shook heavily.

She looked out past the bars of the cage.

There she saw another human with a lowered head and lifeless eyes. Perhaps in their eyes, she was no different.

She knew very well what kind of end those who became slaves had. Because she was one of those who'd chosen to become a hunter and fight against the Demons.

Unfortunately, she'd made two mistakes.

One was that she'd become overconfident in her own strength and left the designated area, and the other was that she hadn't taken her own life after being captured.

This was the result.

Min Ha-rin stroked the collar around her neck.

It was a shackle. It prevented from harming herself or killing herself.

She didn't know how such a thing was possible, but in the first place, Demons were already unfathomable beings.

'Demons.'

Although every single one of them had individual characteristics, there were still commonalities between them.

From the humans' perspective, they were horrifically strong and incredibly greedy.

It was said that the world had been peaceful just a few decades ago. Min Ha-rin's father had once told her that if the times were the same, she would have been attending college and enjoying her youth at her age. She would have had to deal with the stress of studying or finding a job. But regardless of that, it would still be better than the present.

Peace had shattered, and the era had come to an end.

Humans faced the unprecedented threat of extinction.

The Hunter Association, which was the only group to remain functional in this chaotic world, had estimated that the population of humans in the world had plummeted to below 1 billion.

Even if the accuracy of the report was uncertain, that estimation should not be far from the truth.

'Half of them are livestock anyway.'

Demons.

The moment she thought of the root cause for everything, people came into the room.

There were two of them.

One was the tuxedo wearing Rutan, and the other appeared to be a Demon Noble.

"Is this it? The special product you mentioned?"

"Yes, sir. A Demon Hunter. Her name is Min Ha-rin, she's Korean, age twenty two."

"The one called the White Flower."

The nobleman laughed as though satisfied.

Rutan's expression was a bit strange.

“In the first place, previewing the product before the event is...”

“I know. I apologize for overdoing it. And thank you for complying with my request.”

“Only because Duke Sandro is our company’s VIP. Such treatment is natural. So... do you like it?”

“Why are you still asking when you know the answer?”

“Haha. It really was a foolish question.”

They exchanged smiles.

Then something in the corner caught Sandro’s eyes.

“Hmm... but what’s wrong with that one?”

There was one more cage in the room and there was a person in it.

It was a young man with blonde hair and blue eyes who sat in the corner of his cage with a blank expression.

Rutan's expression was a bit embarrassed as he answered.

"Ah. That guy.... You don't have to care about him."

"Mm?"

"He's one that I picked up. He was in a daze near this city. He didn't fight back even when I put the collar on him. He is completely unresponsive. I even tried to torture him or affect his mind, but there is still no response."

"Are you saying he's already gone mad?"

If he was already crazy then there would be nothing to enjoy. In addition, the man's ordinary face and blank expression did nothing to attract Sandro's attention.

On the other hand, there was Min Ha-rin. Her expression was still lively like a fish that had just been caught. She tried to hide it, but the hostility in her eyes was still clear to him.

Such a slave would be quite delicious to train.

'...but he found a human around here?'

Sandro paused for a moment.

This area used to be the territory of the European powers, but it had long fallen into their hands.

No sane human would dare to infiltrate it, and even if they did break in with some kind of goal in mind, they wouldn't be able to get so close to the city.

He had this thought for a while, but there were many cases of slaves who had been abandoned or fled from their masters, so finding a rogue human was not strange.

Sandro shook his head for a moment before turning to look at Min Ha-rin once again.

A smile blossomed on his lips.

"This one will definitely become mine."

After saying that, Sandro left the room.

Then someone approached Rutan, who had been left alone. It was another Demon.

"That's an area I really can't understand. Sleeping with a human girl."

The Demon looked at Min Ha-rin with a disgusted expression.

"Even if they have intelligence, they are a race who are no better than livestock..."

“Watch your mouth. It is because of nobles like him that our company is able to survive.”

“...yes.”

The Demon bowed his head with a slightly fearful expression at those words.

“Well. I do admit that it is a unique hobby. But there are many more kinds in this world than we expected.”

Rutan looked at Min Ha-rin before shaking his head.

“Anyway, finish the final inspection before the auction begins. You understand Duke Sandro’s temper, don’t you? It should be submitted in perfect condition without any scars.”

“Understood. But it seems this guy didn’t touch her food today either...”

“So that’s why she’s so thin. Her skin is rough too. Well, it doesn’t matter. That can be covered by proper lighting and directing.”

He muttered under his breath before lifting Min Ha-rin’s chin and inspecting her up and down.

“...instead, Duke Sandro might enjoy this kind of weakness. He’ll find it interesting to improve your condition.”

Rutan left, then the Demon who had been standing beside him entered the iron cage. He stripped Min Ha-rin naked and began inspecting her entire body like a food inspector.

At first, she rebelled against such a humiliating act, but now she knew it was better to just let it happen.

Thump.

After the humiliating inspection was concluded, the cage door was shut tightly once again.

And once again, silence fell.

Min Ha-rin looked at the diluted porridge and water in front of her. The food was provided in a bowl similar to a feed container used for pets.

Gulp. Now that she thought about it, she couldn't remember when last she'd eaten.

If she kept starving herself like this, she might die.

That was what she thought.

'They say people can't last a week without water.'

With that thought, she buried her face in her knees.”

“Aren’t you going to eat?”

Min Ha-rin raised her head at that.

It was obvious who the voice had come from.

It was the blonde man.

Min Ha-rin was shocked.

This was the first time this man opened his mouth since being trapped there. Min Ha-rin had tried to talk to him several times, but he ignored her every time.

That was why she had thought the same thing as Rutan. Believing he had gone mad.

But he clearly wasn’t.

While his expression was still the same, his voice was very clear in comparison.

In any case, she felt like she had to answer.

“This isn’t food. It’s feed.”

“So that’s why you don’t eat.”

The man muttered to himself before looking down at the feed container.

“It’s definitely more like feed than food. It will taste like boiled mud.”

“...”

“But it still has enough nutrients. If you ate it consistently, you would be in much better condition than you are now.”

“Even though I was captured, I still have my pride.”

Min Ha-rin spoke in a soft voice.

The man responded calmly.

“Pride and dignity are certainly important. But if you are not alive to keep them, then they are worthless. If you intend to starve to death, then you are more foolish than I thought.”

“It’s my life. I’ll decide what to do with it.”

“You’re not wrong. But what is the point of such a death?”

The man’s tone didn’t change.

“Dying in this cold cage and leaving nothing behind. Do you think they will consider your fasting as a rebellion? In the end, they will only curse the fact that the product was not managed properly.

“What are you trying to say?”

“Eat. Replenish your strength, conserve it, and wait for the right time.”

“Ha.”

Min Ha-rin sneered.

“Save up my strength and then what?”

She didn’t even know where this place was.

All she knew was that this place was similar to a Demon lair. As long as the collar was around her neck, she had absolutely no chance of escaping.

And even if she did manage to escape, she would inevitably be caught again.

There was nowhere to run.

However, the man's next words completely surpassed Min Ha-rin's expectations.

"How about praying for a miracle?"

"What?"

"Opportunity only presents itself to those who are ready to receive it. I wonder what choice you will make."

After saying that, the man closed his eyes and leaned his head back.

Min Ha-rin looked at the man's face with an incomprehensible gaze.

Then she forcibly looked away and closed her eyes as though imitating him.

'I won't eat it. I won't eat it. I won't be livestock.'

Min Ha-rin constantly thought these words, but the man's words refused to disappear, as though it had become lodged in her mind.

Season 2 Chapter 2:

In the past, humans could be called the owners of this planet. All of the resources on Earth belonged to them, and the only valuable currency was the humans'.

They even added prices to the land, sea, and sky.

There were about 100 countries.

They were all connected under the same banner of 'humanity', but they all had their own languages, cultures, and values.

They also had numerous conflicts amongst themselves. Racial conflicts, conflicts between countries, between cities, and even between groups and organisations.

But all of these conflicts were resolved by the appearance of a different being. No. It would be better to say that they were left unattended.

In any case, they no longer continued the various civil wars among their species.

Because 'they' showed up.

At first, the names used to refer to them were not the same.

Scientists and scholars called them otherworlders, aliens, and space people while religious groups called them evil spirits. Depending on the region, they were referred to as monsters, creatures, or nightmares. (TL: This was so hard. Many of these things meant the same thing in English T~T)

These names varied because each of them had their own individual appearance and characteristics, which made it hard to find a commonality between them.

As time went by, their actions became more and more terrible. It developed to the point where the word 'damage' was no longer sufficient. Instead, it could only be described as a 'disaster'.

And it was only then when humanity finally found the most appropriate word.

Demon.

* * *

Min Ha-rin was 22 years old this year, and by the time she was born, the lives of the humans had already changed miserably.

The land was no longer theirs.

Most humans were either dead, living miserable lives, or rebelling.

Min Ha-rin was also a rebel.

She was no less afraid than the others, but she didn't refuse to fight. Instead, she felt it was scarier to be deprived of even the right to fight.

Because of that nature, she was given the chance to become a Demon Hunter.

Click-

The door to the room was opened, and several cages were brought in.

Min Ha-rin realised that it was more human slaves like her.

It seemed that the auction would begin soon, so they were all being rounded up. The room was large, so even though they had all been put together, it was still spacious.

The Demons scanned the room after carrying out their task before leaving once again.

Min Ha-rin turned to the cage that had been placed on her right. Inside it was a black man. She couldn't tell his age.

She'd long learned that foreigners often looked much older than they were.

When their eyes met, he gave her a bright smile. Min Ha-rin felt a bit of discomfort at this, but the man opened his mouth before she could react.

"Are you Min Ha-rin?"

Min Ha-rin opened and closed her mouth a few times before she finally spoke.

"You know me?"

"I am also a hunter. Ha, it's an honor. I never expected to meet one of the big names from the EastAsia branch..."

The man touched his collar regretfully and sighed.

"I would have asked for an autograph if our circumstances were better."

"You are...?"

"I'm Drisa. A hunter from the Africa branch."

"Black Panther..." (TL: facepalm...)

When Min Ha-rin muttered with a shocked expression, Drisa smiled again.

“Just call me Drisa. You don’t want me to call you White Flower, do you?”

“...fine. Drisa.”

Min Ha-rin looked at him closely.

“You seem pretty relaxed.”

“Huh? Yeah, that’s true.”

“Have you given up?”

“What can I do about this?”

Drisa tapped the collar.

“It’s over once they manage to put this collar on. I’m sure you know that too, don’t you?”

“...”

Of course she knew.

Human power and technology were still very far from being able to dismantle the Demon's collars.

There was still a chance if the Demon who was bound to the collar died, but from what Min Ha-rin knew, it required five Demon Hunters using state-of-the-art equipment.

No matter how they looked at it, it was an impossible task for them, who didn't even have a small knife.

"Is this how livestock feel before they get slaughtered? Kuku. No, we're still better off than them. They say if you meet a nice Demon, you can live a comfortable life...'

Min Ha-rin's expression hardened at those words.

"Do you intend to live as a slave?"

"We don't have a choice in the first place."

"Being killed while resisting is also an option."

Even if they couldn't take their own lives because of the collar's control, they could still get weak, sick, or die at the hands of the Demon who became their master.

Drisa laughed like he'd heard a funny joke.

"Haha. You're joking, right? You should know how much they enjoy breaking human minds. The only reason they haven't touched us is because we are products to be sold. In other words... Once the auction is over and ownership transferred, their goodwill will disappear. "

"Goodwill?"

When Min Ha-rin snorted coldly, Drisa only shook his head before gesturing to the clothes he was wearing and the feed in the container.

"Maybe it's because you are still young. You don't understand how enslaved humans are treated. You should be thankful that they gave you clothes to wear and food to eat."

"..."

Drisa gritted his teeth for a moment before continuing.

"I've seen a hunter who miraculously survived and was rescued after being enslaved. He could do nothing more than called out the name of his owner, a Demon, while crying. Not even medication and intensive counseling could help. And when we told him that we had already killed it, he immediately bit off his tongue and killed himself without hesitation."

"...!"

She had never heard of something like that before. She knew that Humans who were enslaved would certainly have mental scars, but she had never thought that it would be so severe.

“I don’t want to be like that. No matter which Demon becomes my master, I will smile, grovel, and even lick the soles of his feet. Just to stay alive.”

Drisa’s voice contained a firm determination. It was a desire to survive while somehow keeping his body and mind intact.

When he saw Min Ha-rin looking at him with a complicated expression, he smiled faintly.

“Do you think I’m disgusting?”

“No.”

It wasn’t Min Ha-rin who answered.

Instead, it came from a man whose cage was not far from Drisa’s. An Asian man.

Min Ha-rin’s gaze turned to him.

She didn’t think... he was Korean. Min Ha-rin, who was also Asian, could at least tell that much.

“I will also obey them to stay alive. At first.”

“At first?”

“Right.”

A fierce gleam seemed to shine in the man’s eyes.

“Then I will look for a good opportunity to kill the Demon who bought me.”

Drisa’s expression became a bit strange.

“You know that killing your owner is suicide, don’t you?”

“Of course I do. But I still think it’s worth it. To have a Demon Noble accompany me to Hell.”

The man’s voice was unwavering. Just like Drisa.

This man also had a clear purpose.

Their cages also had feed containers. But these containers, which were similar to the one in Min Ha-rin's cage, were empty.

“...”

They'd eaten.

This man, who was filled with determination, had eaten the Demon's feed without hesitation.

As soon as she realised this fact, Min Ha-rin's face burned slightly.

She'd thought that it was right to openly rebel against the Demons and bare her fangs. She'd thought that constantly showing that she'd never give in was the best way to express her resistance.

But it wasn't. In fact, it was stupid.

Who would be afraid of an exposed blade? Instead, the true threats to the Demons were people like this man. Those who hid sharp daggers in their pockets.

Compared to him, she realised how foolish she was. How young and inexperienced she was.

Min Ha-rin's eyes turned to the corner of the room. There, the blonde man was still sitting with his eyes closed and a blank expression on his face.

'...that man was right.'

There was no point to dying from starvation. It was no better than a dog's death.

Min Ha-rin turned her eyes to the feed container once again. The feed inside had a disgusting appearance, like vomit that had already cooled and hardened.

Nevertheless, she stuck her face into this container without hesitation.

She chewed and swallowed without even tasting what she was eating.

"..."

Her attitude caused the Asian man's eyes to shine. And when Min Ha-rin finally raised her head, he opened his mouth.

"Min Ha-rin, this is my first time meeting you in person."

This wasn't a surprise. After all, Min Ha-rin was quite famous among the hunters.

She had also guessed the identity of this man. Nevertheless, the reason she didn't ask was because this identity was much greater than she'd initially expected.

“...are you... Lee Jong-hak?”

The man nodded.

“Right, I’m Lee Jong-hak.”

“...!”

Not only Drisa but even the people who hadn’t said a word reacted when they heard this.

“The Human Dragon Lee Jong-hak.”

“It’s one of the three Dragons.”

“Th-, this kind of person was caught too...”

Drisa couldn’t help but mutter.

“Vice President of the Asia branch. You’re much bigger than I thought.”

Min Ha-rin, on the other hand, looked at him in confusion.

“I can’t believe it. I can’t believe a man of your calibre was captured...”

“We were hunting a noble in Shanghai. The enemy was a Demon Duke, and our forces had over 1,000 hunters.”

There was a large scale noble hunt in Shanghai. Min Ha-rin had heard about it.

“You failed?”

“Right.”

Lee Jong-hak’s voice was calm as he continued.

“They wanted to capture me alive. So I proposed a trade. My condition was that they release the rest of the hunters.”

“And they accepted it?”

“Right. They probably thought the 300 or so hunters that they released were less of a threat.”

In other words, he had sacrificed himself to save 300 people.

Just like in the rumours, Lee Jong-hak was closer to a hero than a hunter. More than half of the people in the Asia branch followed him. In a sense, he had even more influence than the Branch President.

'If Lee Jong-hak was captured...'

Then the atmosphere in the Asia branch was currently desperate and hopeless.

Suddenly.

"Are you really Lee Jong-hak?"

It was a woman who was sitting across from them. She had bright red hair and extremely determined eyes.

"This isn't a situation I would lie in."

"...I see..."

The woman hesitated for a moment before sighing and saying.

"I'm Allida. A hunter from the European branch."

"Allida Grabino. You are a famous Italian hunter."

Drisa seemed to be extremely knowledgeable about the famous hunters from other regions.

“If you are really Lee Jong-hak... then we might have a chance to get out of here.”

“What?”

When Lee Jong-hak asked this with a surprised expression, she nodded and continued.

“It won’t be easy, but it’s possible.”

“How can we do it?”

Allida touched her collar.

“I have a way to paralyse the function of this collar.”

“What did you say?”

It was Drisa who retorted with an absurd expression.

This was natural. After all, he'd just affirmed that it was impossible to remove the collar just minutes ago.

But he immediately realised something, and his expression changed.

"No. Wait... did you say paralyse and not remove?"

"Right. It would temporarily stop functioning. Both the explosive that is attached to our carotid artery and the curse that weakens our physical ability would disappear."

"How?"

Allida pointed at herself.

"I'm a Wizard, and this collar uses a kind of spell."

"Wizard!"

Drisa couldn't help but cry out in a surprised voice. Wizards were very rare, and there were only a few of them among the hunters.

Min Ha-rin was also surprised by this remark, and something managed to catch her eye.

The blonde man, who was silently sitting in the corner, opened one of his eyes and looked at Allida.

Season 2 Chapter 3:

But it only happened for an instant. The moment she came to her senses, the man had already closed his eye again.

It happened so quickly that she couldn't help but wonder if she was mistaken.

"I thought it was impossible to use magic while wearing the collar."

"If it was ordinary magic, then that would be the case, but mine is a bit different."

Allida smiled mysteriously and lifted her sleeve.

Black ink wrapped around her entire forearm. If one looked closely, one would notice that it looked like ancient text.

Lee Jong-hak's eyes shined.

"Tattoo Magic."

"Oh. I didn't expect an East Asian to know about it."

"I once had an acquaintance who used it. I heard that it was an esoteric magic only passed down secretly within a certain clan...'

"That's right. Most of the Demons don't even know that such a secret technique exists. These guys are the same. Huhu. Instead, they kicked me because they said I had dirty graffiti on my body. It really hurt."

Allida rubbed her stomach for a bit before continuing.

"This one is called 'Ice Witch's Resentment'. And with it, I can freeze a portion of space."

"Are you saying you can use that to paralyse the collar's function?"

"That's right. However, it will be difficult to accurately adjust the range."

"What do you mean?"

Allida made a slightly troubled expression.

"I might freeze the person's body as well. It might have been fine if you were in good condition, but it would be dangerous now that your resistances have been lowered by the collar."

"That's why you need me."

“That’s right.”

Allida nodded and looked at Lee Jong-hak with anticipation.

“If it’s someone as powerful as you, then it should be fine even if your physical ability was weakened.”

“Would it be possible for all of us to escape?”

“It might not have been if we were running the entire way. But we don’t have to. There is an abandoned base west of this city. All we have to do is get there.”

Drisa tilted his head slightly at that.

“A base? West of this city? This is the Demon’s territory.”

“It was abandoned 15 years ago. It used to be a hideout of the European branch.”

“The European branch...”

Seeing Lee Jong-hak’s surprise, Allida smiled slightly.

“Didn’t you know? This is Italy.”

They had been dragged pretty far.

Min Ha-rin couldn’t help but have this thought. She had been captured by the Demons in Dandong City in China, near the Yalu River.

“There won’t be any people there, but it can still serve its purpose as a hideout. And if the Warp Portal there works, it won’t be impossible for everyone to escape.”

“I see!”

Drisa spoke in a bright tone.

Before they knew it, everyone was paying attention to Allida’s voice.

On the other hand, Lee Jong-hak was lost in thought. At first glance, it might have seemed like everything would be solved in a flash, but that was just wishful thinking.

If one really wanted, numerous loopholes could be found.

Allida didn’t mention the worst case scenario. And it wasn’t that she didn’t know this. Instead, she was deliberately avoiding mentioning it.

Lee Jong-hak understood why.

She didn't want to destroy the hopeful atmosphere that had been created by her words.

'The most important thing is the hope that has appeared on everyone's faces.'

The heaviness that had been filling the room had disappeared.

Lee Jong-hak decided to take comfort in this fact first.

"Fortunately, everyone here is a hunter. Since your bodies are more powerful than normal, the chances of success shouldn't be as slim as I thought."

"The Demons prefer former hunters as their slaves. This was because not only were their bodies stronger, their minds were as well. So they weren't as easily damaged."

The Chester Company had especially prepared strong hunters for their special event, and ironically, this was what gave them a chance.

"Wait. Is that man a hunter?"

Drisa pointed to the blonde man in the corner.

Lee Jong-hak narrowed his eyes as he looked at this man before saying.

“There are no signs of training on his body.”

“Then is he a Wizard?”

“I can’t feel any magic power.”

“He could be a priest or something.”

“I’m a priest. I don’t feel any holy aura on him.”

“...elementalist, shaman, monk...”

Drisa recited all the jobs he knew one by one but this man didn’t seem to fit the description of any.

Then Min Ha-rin spoke.

“He’s not a hunter.”

Maybe.

As she added this word in her head, she told them the words she'd heard from Rutan before.

Lee Jong-hak's expression became a bit surprised after hearing the explanation.

"I see. So he's probably an escaped slave."

"Is he? That's good. Then it wouldn't be a problem if we left him behind."

Lee Jong-hak frowned at Drisa's words.

"I don't agree with that. He's a civilian. That's something we should protect."

"A civilian to protect? Haha. Did we just hear the same explanation?"

Drisa let out a laugh, but Lee Jong-hak's expression didn't change. When he saw this, Drisa's expression gradually stiffened as he realised that it wasn't a joke.

"Human Dragon. There's no need to keep making such a scary joke. We already got it."

Drisa patted his head.

"He's already gone mad. He's probably been tortured over and over again. And ordinary people cannot withstand such torture. So he'd only be a burden. We can't afford to take him with us."

"I agree. It might be dangerous to take someone who can't speak properly, even if he hasn't lost his mind."

Allida nodded, agreeing with Drisa's opinion. Some of the others also voiced their agreement.

But Lee Jong-hak spoke in a harsh tone.

"So you're saying we should leave him here?"

"Then should we take such a useless guy with us? No, I don't even want to help him. I'm afraid that he'd fight against us for no reason or scream when we're trying to move stealthily. Will you take responsibility?"

"I will take responsibility."

"What?"

"I will take full responsibility."

Drisa's veins protruded from his forehead.

"I knew you were a good person, but I didn't think it would be to this extent. You are a hunter, not a hero."

“For me, the name hunter has a very comprehensive meaning. If I were to leave a civilian who needed my help just to save my own life, I’d never be able to proudly lift my head again. I would have to live with the fact that I’m a sinner for the rest of my life.”

“I also agree with Lee Jong-hak’s words.”

“Same here.”

Several people sympathised with Lee Jong-hak.

Drisa frowned.

It was never a good thing when opinions were divided in such an extreme situation. If something went wrong, the disagreement could become discord and their plan to escape would then go up in flames.

“Don’t you know that trying to save this man can lead to all of our deaths?”

“Of course I do.”

“And you still want to walk down such a thorny path? Shit. You really are a saint. Well, I guess it can’t be helped.”

Adilla scratched her head in frustration.

“Our plan can’t be implemented without you.”

Lee Jong-hak was the only one who could break open the iron cages with his bare hands. That was the reason why Allida required his cooperation.

Drisa was also aware of this fact.

Moreover, it wasn’t just Lee Jong-hak’s opinion. Some of the other hunters also agreed with him.

It was better to take the risk than confront them.

“If I think he will do something crazy, I will use my hands.”

“Use your hands?”

“To knock him out, or...”

Drisa deliberately let his words trail off, but Lee Jong-hak was able to understand what he meant.

“...that won’t happen.”

While Lee Jong-hak said those words quietly, in his head, he also prepared for the worst.

* * *

Min Ha-rin's lips twitched slightly.

She didn't think the blonde man was crazy. Although he appeared to be in a daze, his voice had been extremely clear when he spoke.

She didn't think that was the voice of a deranged person.

Nevertheless, she didn't reveal this fact because her conversation with him felt like a dream.

“ ... ”

Even though he heard people talking about him, the blonde-haired man continued to lean back with his eyes closed.

At first glance, it might have seemed like he was in a daze, but now, she felt like he looked relaxed.

'That can't be.'

Even Lee Jong-hak, Vice President of the Asia branch, could not afford to relax. Even if he had nerves of steel, there was no way that an ordinary person would be more relaxed than a hunter.

“So a total of 11 people?”

“Twelve. If you count the burden.”

“Stop calling him that.”

“Then ask him for his name.”

“I’ll do that then.”

Lee Jong-hak turned to the blonde man and said.

“What is your name?”

Of course, no one in the room expected to hear an answer.

“Lukas.”

“Huh?”

Drisa's eyes widened.

Then he turned to Allida and said.

"Did that guy really just answer?"

"I think so."

"Well. Didn't they say he was crazy? He looks perfectly fine to me."

"Just because he answered doesn't mean he's fine. That might not have even been an answer in the first place."

"Hmmm."

In fact, after saying those words, the man, Lukas, closed his eyes once again.

"I'm Drisa. Where are you from? America?"

"..."

“England? Germany... Spain...”

Lukas didn't open his eyes again.

Drisa's expression changed slightly before he asked again.

“Hey, are you ignoring me?”

“Don't force him, Drisa. He might be in a very unstable condition.”

“...it doesn't look that way.”

Min Ha-rin agreed with Allida's murmur, but Lee Jong-hak shook his head and said.

“First of all, we should be glad that he can even communicate in the first place. And... did you say it was Lukas? You don't have to give an opinion, but it would be best if you listened to our plan. For your own sake.”

Lukas didn't react in any way, but Lee Jong-hak nodded as though he'd given his assent.

“This auction will go on for four days. And we humans will probably be presented on the last day.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because to the Demons, humans are the most valuable commodity.”

It was an unpleasant thing to hear. Some of them frowned at those words, but no one stopped Lee Jong-hak.

“That’s why we should escape in the morning.”

It was a simple plan.

Drisa nodded as well.

In this type of situation, it was best to escape as quickly as possible.

“Today, we need to at least get some idea of the basic structure of this area and the Demons who are guarding.”

“Mm... it won’t be easy.”

It felt like an impossible task to figure out the surrounding structure because they were all trapped inside.

But after looking around, Lee Jong-hak spoke in a quiet voice.

“That might not necessarily be the case.”

“What do you mean?”

“Before we were brought to this room, each of us was held in different places. Except for Min Ha-rin and Lukas, who were here from the start.”

“That’s right.”

In preparation for the auction, they had all been put in the same room after they were inspected, but before that, they were held in separate rooms.

“Everyone, tell us everything you can about the path you took to get to this room.”

Drisa, who didn’t understand his intentions at first, finally exclaimed.

“I see! Since we all came from different places, the paths we saw were all different! And if we combine these paths, we would get a basic outline of our surroundings.”

It was easy to understand if you thought about it a bit. But just being able to think about such an idea under the circumstances was amazing.

Allida spoke up in a subdued voice.

“It’s not hard to say it, but... we don’t have any paper or writing utensils. How will we organise them?”

There were 11 people there. Even if they had several overlapping paths, there still should have been at least 5.

It would be quite hard to combine so many routes in their heads.

“I’ll do it.”

“Huh?”

It was Min Ha-rin. She looked around before continuing in a slightly cautious tone.

“I have a good memory.”

At least, Min Ha-rin never forgot things that she wanted to remember.

Lee Jong-hak nodded and the people in the room began opening their mouths one by one.

Min Ha-rin memorised everything they said.

Soon, a small but detailed map was drawn in her head.

“...give me a minute.”

She needed some time to organise her thoughts.

Min Ha-rin opened her palm and drew an image only she could see.

“This room is in a basement. There are two passages to the surface. One of them seems to lead to the stage.”

The stage was the place where the products up for auction would be presented. There would be at least a few dozen Demon Nobles waiting there, so escaping there was akin to suicide.

“Where does the other passage lead?”

“I don’t know.”

Min Ha-rin muttered regretfully.

Even with all the information she’d gathered, she couldn’t tell if the other passage led to an exit or not.

Nevertheless, Lee Jong-hak made a quick decision.

“We have to escape using the other passage.”

“There isn’t a better way.”

Drisa nodded, and Allida closed her eyes.

“...I need time to use my Tattoo Magic. If I start concentrating from now, I should be ready by dawn. If the Demons come, try to draw their attention away from me.”

“Understood.”

The hunters’ expressions lit up slightly.

Their complexions were still haggard, and their path was unclear, but they at least had a small chance to escape.

The possibility might have been faint, but the hunters still felt hope.

“...”

Min Ha-rin should have been the same, but for some reason, her heart felt heavy like lead. She didn’t think that things would be solved so easily.

She had an ominous feeling.

And unfortunately, her thoughts soon became a reality.

Season 2 Chapter 4:

When the door opened and a group of Demons walked into the room, the hunters tensed up in different ways.

“Hmm.”

One of the Demons who arrived was Rutan. He looked around the room in a relaxed manner.

11 people. All hunters and none of them were too old.

It was natural that only products under the age of 30 had been gathered for this event.

Among the group were four who were commonly referred to by them as ‘titled’ humans, and the other seven had no problems with their appearances or health.

Except for the woman with graffiti on her body.

'In any case.'

When Rutan looked at these humans, he felt like he was looking at his bright future.

Unlike ordinary human slaves, hunters were especially hard to capture. It was not a rare occurrence for them to kill themselves after being cornered.

Because they all knew what kind of miserable lives awaited them if they were to survive.

This was a choice that the Demons were unable to understand. Not all Demons had sadistic tendencies towards the slaves. Some of them could even be considered affectionate towards their human slaves.

They had the same feeling one would have to one's pet.

'It's still better than dying.'

The thought of giving up your life for your honour, pride, or rights was simply laughable. And since the humans didn't know that, it meant that the humans were a low-class race.

"It's time to start the selection."

"What..."

Some of the hunters subconsciously swallowed their saliva. A white man couldn't help but let out a sound of surprise.

Rutan's gaze turned to him.

"Why are you surprised? This is something you should have already expected after being captured."

"..."

After saying that, Rutan looked around.

"Today is the start of the event, so we'll let them have a taste of two... no. Let's show them three."

"...!"

Lee Jong-hak, Drisa, and Allida quickly exchanged glances.

This situation was not good. They had just made a plan thinking they wouldn't be forced into action till the last day, but now, it seemed like things would be messed up right from the beginning.

Lee Jong-hak clenched his fist.

The predictions he'd tried to deny had become a reality.

'This is bad.'

Min Ha-rin's urgent gaze was locked onto Lee Jong-hak and Allida. These two were pivotal in their plan to escape. Without either of them, their plan would not even start.

"Hey. Sihard, who do you think we should pick?"

"I think two males and one female would be good."

"That's true. Then..."

Many of the hunters shrank back when Rutan's gaze swept across the room.

This was natural. After all, they had only just seen the possibility of escape, but if they caught Rutan's eye now, they would be sold.

There were only two people who raised their heads and looked at Rutan with fiery eyes.

It was Lee Jong-hak and Min Ha-rin.

"Do you two want to be sold? Hmm. I'd love to respect the will of the slaves, but it's a shame."

Rutan's lips curled into a sinister smile.

"You two are special products. I intend to make you the highlights of this event, so you should relax your gazes."

"..."

He chuckled for a moment before closing his eyes. Then he took a deep breath.

"I can smell fear. I'm talking about you two over there."

The bodies of the two men who were pointed out by him shook heavily. They were the two who had been trying the hardest to avoid his gaze.

"Let's go with them. Understood, Sihard?"

"Yes, sir."

The faces of these men turned blue.

Rutan enjoyed the looks on their faces before looking around again.

Now, for the last one.

“Let’s go with that woman.”

Shit.

Min Ha-rin almost cursed out loud.

Rutan was pointing at Allida.

Allida’s lashes trembled. She was concentrating in order to use her tattoo magic, but she could probably still hear what Rutan was saying.

Rutan’s subordinate, Sihard, couldn’t help but ask.

“Isn’t that woman a Wizard? She’s a rare commodity, so I think it would be a waste to use her on the first day.”

“That is certainly the case for a Wizard in good condition. However, this bitch has graffiti on her body. Regardless of the strength or rarity of the individual, such a defect makes her an inferior product. If we were to send her out later, the customers might be disappointed. So today is the best time.”

“Indeed...”

Min Ha-rin bit her lip while Sihard nodded in admiration.

'What should I do?'

Her palms began to sweat because of her nervousness.

They couldn't let Allida be taken. But Rutan had already said he wouldn't take her. The other woman, a white woman, was shivering in the corner with her head down. (TL: Wasn't it four women?)

She didn't think about cursing her. She must have known as well. If they let Allida get taken, then the plan would go down the drain.

She just didn't have the courage to accept it.

How could they change the Demons' minds?

Min Ha-rin tried her hardest to think of a way.

'We can't.'

But even if she rolled it around in her head till steam began rising from her hair, she couldn't think of a way to do it.

It didn't matter if she died.

The moment she was captured, she had already let go of all of her life's regrets. Meeting Lukas and Lee Jong-hak had changed that mindset a bit, but she would still kill herself the moment she was able to if necessary.

But Lee Jong-hak was different. He was a hero who had to return to the East Asia branch.

Losing him would be a loss for all of mankind.

"Take me."

Min Ha-rin spoke in a cracked voice.

Of course, this was too soft for Rutan to hear. Or maybe he had heard it, but Rutan would definitely not go back on his word.

Min Ha-rin was also aware of that fact.

That's why she couldn't believe what happened next.

"Wait."

Rutan paused before pulling back his outstretched hand. Then he crossed his arms and pondered deeply about something.

For a moment, he stood there, unmoving.

Then.

“...I don’t think it would be a bad idea to have a strong first day.”

“Huh?”

“Huhu.”

Rutan chuckled before pointing at Min Ha-rin.

“Forget the tattooed girl. Let’s put her in.”

Sihard was shocked.

“Are you serious?”

“Of course. Ah, and...”

He gave a sly smile as he seemed to think about something else.

“Let’s put that guy with her. We can count him as a bonus.”

The one Rutan was pointing at was none other than Lukas.

* * *

They moved the two cages immediately after making a decision.

But that didn’t mean that they would present them right away.

As precious human slaves, they would be the highlight of the event, which meant that they had to be presented at the hottest moment.

Rutan placed Lukas and Min Ha-rin in a space behind the stage so that they could be sent to the stage immediately after he gave the signal.

‘It seems they decided not to bring the two men.’

The two men who had been selected first. Min Ha-rin didn't know their names, but they had not been brought with them.

Maybe they had decided to leave them for another day. Or maybe they were just being kept in a different area.

She lowered her head, feeling like it would be good if it was the former.

'Is this the end?'

Min Ha-rin leaned against the bars of her cage while having this thought.

Surprisingly, when her life as a slave was all but confirmed, she didn't feel any different. Perhaps it was because she'd heard Lee Jong-hak's words.

If she was lucky, maybe she'd be able to take down a Demon Noble.

She knew that such a thing was almost impossible, but just the thought of it made her feel lighter.

"Do you know what happens to hunter slaves?"

"..."

Lukas spoke.

Min Ha-rin glanced around.

Some Demons were guarding the area, but they didn't seem to care what the two of them were doing.

Instead, their nervous and anticipated gazes were directed outside the curtain.

"To some extent."

"That Duke Sandro who has his eyes on you seems to be a sadistic pervert. Most of his slaves are physically disabled women. It was none other than Duke Sandro who made them that way. He prefers slaves with strong willpower, but after he breaks them, he kills or abandons them without hesitation."

Was he trying to scare her?

If so, then it had worked a little. Min Ha-rin could not deny the fact that she was a bit scared.

But the thing that she was the most curious about was why this man, who had always been silent, had suddenly become talkative.

Moreover, it was strange that he knew so much about a Demon Duke's hobby that was usually veiled in mystery.

“Are you trying to test my determination?”

“No. I’m just curious why you chose to sacrifice yourself for Allida.”

“Huh? N-, no... I was just...”

Sacrificed?

Min Ha-rin was surprised by this unexpected word.

It wasn’t something so noble.

She just felt that if Allida was the one who was taken then the escape plan would become hopeless from the start. Which would lead to the worst case scenario of everyone in the room becoming slaves.

Therefore, Min Ha-rin chose the best option.

“It’s just.... This choice made the most sense.”

Lukas looked at Min Ha-rin, who had a blank expression on her face, and said.

“You have a Wizard’s aptitude.”

His face was expressionless, and his voice lacked any inflection, but Min Ha-rin felt that he was a bit happy.

It was really strange.

Lukas' situation was no different from hers. However, she had never been able to feel even a hint of despair since their first meeting.

Why?

The thought that he was crazy disappeared as if it had been washed away. He was an incredibly rational and cold-hearted man. And he seemed to know more about what was going on than Min Ha-rin.

Nevertheless, his calm appearance had never changed.

'Maybe...'

It might have been thanks to this that Min Ha-rin was able to stay calm in this situation.

She had been influenced by this attitude, which was indifferent to the point of being easy-going.

'A Wizard's aptitude.'

She recalled his murmur.

That shouldn't have been the case.

Min Ha-rin had gotten a full examination at the association. Her aptitude was that of a hunter, a close-combat specialist.

In fact, after developing a style that matched her aptitude, she was able to gain a good reputation throughout Asia.

But she had always been interested in magic. In fact, she had wanted to be a Wizard since she was young.

As soon as she was about to say something to Lukas, he closed his eyes again. When he was like this, he would not respond, no matter how she tried to start a conversation. He always ignored most of her questions.

Nevertheless, Min Ha-rin was able to learn a few things about Lukas following her observation and their brief conversations.

“They will be able to escape.”

They.

Was he referring to Lee Jong-hak's group?

Just as Min Ha-rin was about to ask a question, Lukas spoke again.

"But all of them will not survive."

"Huh? What do you..."

Suddenly.

A Demon near to them swung his arm.

Woowoong-

Her iron cage rose into the air.

This floating caused her to feel sick. Just as Min Ha-rin heaved slightly, the curtain that was blocking the stage was lifted and the stage was revealed.

It seemed that it was finally time for their appearance in the auction.

“You have been waiting for this moment for a long time. The moment I dare introduce is the highlight of today’s event. The product I’m about to present is something in which every customer here will be interested.”

There was a stir in the room.

Sandro’s lips stretched into a smile.

“They have the right amount of intelligence, so you don’t have to teach them multiple times like stupid beasts. They also have just enough strength to do chores but not enough to be a threat to our customers’ safety. Even though they are just at the end of their youth, doesn’t everyone know? Flowers are most beautiful just before they wither. The short prime makes their value shine even more... So let me formally introduce you.”

The stir in the room grew stronger as Rutan’s soft voice sounded out.

“Suitable as ornaments, pets, or experiments! The finest slaves! Property that will undoubtedly enhance the dignity of any noble!”

He bowed in a polite manner as Min Ha-rin appeared on the stage.

“I present to you... a Human!”

Season 2 Chapter 5:

The more Min Ha-rin heard Rutan’s introduction, the more disgusted she felt. She felt terrible, as though she was a piece of premium meat about to be sold.

Apart from that, she felt her chest become tighter and her body become covered in cold sweat.

Was she nervous?

‘This is natural.’

At that moment, the curtain was lifted and the cage floated up to the stage.

She was presented in a way the Demons would appreciate.

“Ohhh...”

“Such a good product.”

“It’s S class for sure.”

When Min Ha-rin was revealed, the Demons did not hide their admiration. On the other hand, Min Ha-rin just felt more sick.

“Urk...”

Demon Nobles filled the hall. Many of them were Counts, who could be considered as high ranking nobility, with some being even higher ranked.

There were not one, two, or even a dozen. There were close to a hundred of these monsters who could each dye a small region with blood.

Just the demonic energy that they constantly omitted created a poisonous atmosphere for humans. An ordinary human might vomit blood just from inhaling the air in this room.

Min Ha-rin's resistance had been reduced by the collar. Nevertheless, the poisonous air only made her face look a bit more haggard.

She was about to sit down because of the sudden dizziness that she felt when her body suddenly froze.

Click.

“Uk...”

She felt a sting in her neck. Then, her entire body became stiff. Her senses blurred as though she'd been put under anesthesia.

This was one of the functions of the collar.

She didn't know the principle behind it, but she'd lost control of her body.

Then, her body began posing against her will.

Min Ha-rin's face burned red with shame.

It was as though she was anxious to get herself sold.

Min Ha-rin had never experienced something so humiliating and terrible in her life.

"The White Flower."

Rutan laughed as he said those words.

"Customers who are interested in enslaving humans should have heard about her at least once. This hunter has killed three Viscounts, one Baron, and hundreds more of our kind. Surprisingly, this product is only in its early twenties. So depending on how you raise it, you can cultivate its youth and beauty. You can even keep it for a long time if you maintain it properly."

'This is crazy.'

Min Ha-rin wanted to bite her lip, but even that was impossible.

It was completely insane.

As Rutan had said, Min Ha-rin had hunted three Viscounts, one Baron, and hundreds of other demons.

From the perspective of humans, these were certainly achievements deserving of praise. But it shouldn't have been for *them*.

Weren't they the same kind?

Min Ha-rin should have been treated as a mass murderer to be executed with extreme prejudice.

But she wasn't.

Instead, the eyes of these Demons were flashing with disgusting greed.

The fact that Min Ha-rin had killed hundreds of their kind was just one of the achievements that raised her product value. It was just another reason for them to desire adding her to their collection.

How could intelligent creatures be so disgusting?

'...Demons.'

She finally understood why they were given that name.

They were smart, wore clothing, were capable of trade, and spoke in an old fashioned manner.

But could they really be called an intelligent race?

In Min Ha-rin's eyes, they were just ugly monsters made of instinct and pleasure who only feigned intelligence.

"Then let us begin the bidding."

Some of the Demon Nobles lifted their hands, and Demons who had been waiting at the sides approached them.

These nobles then told their offers in soft voices to the Demons who then passed them onto Rutan, who was standing on the stage.

"..."

The corners of Rutan's lips curled upwards.

"It seems there is a hot reaction in the first wave. Haha. Everyone has good eyes."

There seemed to be a gentle heat of emotion in his calm voice.

At that moment, Min Ha-rin looked like a large gold nugget in his eyes.

No, precious metals had no value in the eyes of the Demons. To Rutan, Min Ha-rin was a treasure in itself.

“The highest bid is 100,000, and the bidder is Duke Sandro.”

These words caused another ripple to spread throughout the room.

Min Ha-rin’s value was already obvious to everyone there, but they didn’t expect to see a price like 100,000 from the first wave.

The higher the product’s value, the more waves it would have.

For a product like Min Ha-rin, there would certainly be a second and third wave after the first. And every time they proceeded to the next wave, the price would be 1.5 times higher than the previous highest bid.

In other words, this meant that at least 150,000 had to be bid in the next wave.

“Mmm.”

“I’ll let this one pass.”

Some of the nobles who knew Duke Sandro's financial capabilities directly gave up the bid after seeing his interest in Min Ha-rin.

He was one of the Chester Company's biggest customers, and he was well-known for his collection and obsession in that he could only be satisfied by products he liked.

However, some nobles who still thought it was worth it did not back down so easily.

It was then.

"Is that the next product beside you?"

A noble pointed towards Lukas.

Rutan glanced at this blonde man before smiling.

"No. He's a bonus."

"A bonus...?"

"This is a product whose mind has already been broken. But other than that, he is in good condition. As you can see, his face is good and he has a surprisingly durable body. If nothing else, he would still be useful for experiments. Of course, if you don't want him, you don't have to take him."

“Hmm...”

Sandro looked at Lukas after hearing that.

This was the second time he was seeing him. The first time, he had been focused on Min Ha-rin, so he hadn't paid much attention to him, but as Rutan said, his appearance wasn't bad.

Although he looked a bit sullen, his face wasn't bad-looking for a male, and if he was washed and taken care of properly, it might be possible to raise his looks to another level.

Duke Sandro's wrinkled face stretched with a child-like smile.

“Then let's start the second wave.”

Sandro lifted his hand and beckoned towards a Demon before whispering in their ear.

“...”

After hearing the bid, the Demon's body shook slightly. He looked at Sandro as if to confirm that he'd heard correctly, to which Sandro simply nodded with a relaxed expression.

The Demon immediately headed over to inform Rutan of the bid. Rutan also trembled slightly when he heard it.

'As expected of Duke Sandro.'

Was he saying that he didn't want to waste any more time?

In any case, this wasn't a bad thing for the company.

Never.

Rutan had to forcibly stop himself from laughing out loud.

"The highest bid is 1 million, and the bidder is Duke Sandro."

The nobles froze in shock when they heard this announcement.

"1 million...?"

"This is too much, even for a titled hunter."

"Duke Sandro must really like this one."

The bid rose by ten times in an instant, causing the other nobles to lose their fighting spirit.

Rutan laughed once again.

There was still one wave left, but it would be a waste of time to proceed with it at this point.

The reason that Sandro had increased the bid to such a ridiculous amount was to bypass the annoying process.

“It seems the owner for this product has been decided.”

Min Ha-rin lowered her head.

She'd thought she'd already given up, but she was scared when the reality truly hit her.

Looking at Duke Sandro's wrinkled face, she couldn't help but feel like she'd done something stupid and regretted it.

Then, in the next moment, she bit her lip in disgust at herself.

She pretended to be fine and calm, that everything was okay, but she was regretting it not long after?

She felt like crying because she was laughable and pathetic.

Holding back her resentment, she lifted her head.

‘It’s okay.’

If someone asked her just ‘what was okay’, she wouldn’t have been able to answer.

Nevertheless, Min Ha-rin desperately tried to steel her resolve. After all, there was no one there to comfort her but herself.

“That will be all for today’s event. I would like to say thank you to all the customers for joining us.”

Rutan smiled before adding.

“If you managed to successfully obtain a product, please give your payment to the guides present in each row.”

Payment.

When she heard this word, Min Ha-rin couldn’t help but wonder.

The Demons also had the concept of currency, but few of them actually used it. They also had no interest in gold or other material treasures.

So what were the demons using to conduct the auction?

“Ah...”

Min Ha-rin couldn't help but become speechless when she saw what the 'payment' was.

A black crystal, as black as ink, was taken out of a nobles pocket before being handed to a Demon at the side.

As a hunter, Min Ha-rin naturally knew what this black crystal was.

Soul Crystal.

A gem that could contain a human soul.

No, it was more accurate to call it a prison. Once trapped, the soul would never be able to escape on its own. It would have to struggle in pain for an eternity unless the crystal was broken or the crystal's owner released it.

Min Ha-rin stumbled as she was overcome by a sudden wave of dizziness.

She felt that she could hear screams.

1 million.

That was the number Sandro had called while bidding for her.

The number had been too big for her to connect to anything. But in truth, if she had thought about it, the answer would not have been hard to think of.

After all, the Demons had no interest in gold or other treasures. For these beings, the thing they obsessed over and coveted to most was none other than the human soul.

The more souls they absorbed, the higher the Demons' level became. She'd heard that the only way for them to obtain a title was to absorb a certain amount of souls.

The Soul Crystals were items that made the absorption process easier.

All of the nobles here were participating in the auction. In other words, each and every one of them had Soul Crystals in their possession.

If that was the case...

'How many...'

There were about one hundred Demon Nobles in this hall.

She wondered just how many human souls, which were suffering without even being able to die properly, were in their possession.

* * *

The highlight of the event. That was what Rutan had called her. In other words, that was the end of the auction.

Min Ha-rin was the last item.

“Come out.”

She had been released from the iron cage, but what awaited her was a life far from freedom.

It might have been better to remain locked in the cage.

Lukas also stepped out of his cage. His face was still the same, without even a sliver of tension.

“Follow me.”

That was all he said. He didn't forcibly drag them along.

Their feet and hands were in restraints, but if they were really determined, these chains would not be able to stop them from escaping.

Nevertheless, the Demon acted like there was no possibility that they would escape.

'There's nowhere to run anyway.'

This place was in the center of the Demon's territory. Moreover, unless they did something about the collar, then it would not make a difference even if they ran to the other side of the world.

They had no choice but to follow the Demon to Duke Sandro, who bought them.

'I will wait for the opportunity to kill the Demon who bought me.'

Lee Jong-hak's words suddenly appeared in her mind.

Could she do it?

Min Ha-rin asked herself this question before shaking her head. She didn't have the confidence.

The opponent was a Duke who ranked at the top amongst the Demon nobility.

Even if she was in her peak condition, he was a monster whom she would have difficulty scratching. So now that she'd been weakened by the collar, it was safe to say that she had almost no chance of winning.

Nevertheless... She didn't want to give up.

You could call it stubbornness. But she knew that the moment she gave up, her chances of winning would no longer be slim; they would disappear altogether.

'I think I can do it.'

While she had this thought, the Demon leading them stopped at a door.

Then, he knocked politely and waited.

"Who is it?"

"I'm from the Chester Company. I brought the products you won, Duke Sandro."

"Come in."

The moment the door opened, Min Ha-rin's face became pale.

Season 2 Chapter 6:

The bright lights stunned her for a moment.

Maybe it was because she was stuck in the dark for almost a month. The lighting on the stage had been soft, so she didn't realise it, but this place was different.

The bright lights shining within the room penetrated Min Ha-rin's retinas.

It was only after blinking a few times that she was able to see the overall appearance of the room.

It was a large room filled to the brim with luxurious furniture and decor.

And in the center of the room, there was a silver table at which he sat.

This was probably the first time she was getting a good look at him.

The first thought she had upon seeing him was that he was like a vampire. To be precise, he reminded her of Count Dracula, who appeared in old time movies.

His face was pale, and his hair was grey. And the black tuxedo he wore contrasted sharply with his body.

If he weren't a Demon, she might have even thought that he was a very good-looking old man.

But Min Ha-rin was feeling intense chills at that moment.

An instinctive fear, similar to the way one felt when facing a predator, licked at the back of her neck.

A Duke, a being who stood at the pinnacle of Demon nobility. Some people mentioned the possibility that there were Grand Dukes, but even they could not deny the fact that Dukes were representative of the pinnacle of Demon Nobility.

They were incredibly dangerous creatures.

Walking natural disasters.

Nuclear warheads with egos.

Demons of the end.

There were dozens of names for them, and the association paid attention to the movements of every Duke using any means they could.

This was because they understood that if they were to let even a single Duke out of their sights, an entire branch might disappear like dust before heavy winds.

‘Officially, there are only two recorded cases of defeating Dukes.’

And the damage that accompanied this defeat was immeasurable.

Many thousands of promising hunters had become cold corpses, and many more suffered irrecoverable damage.

And now, such a being, who could create a disaster as easy as breathing, was sitting in front of her.

He was standing within arms reach.

What hid behind this facade of a genial old man was a monster who could destroy her heart with the flick of a finger.

It felt like there was a sword being pressed against her throat.

Min Ha-rin forcibly tried to ignore her shivering. She tried to not shrink back, but she still lowered her gaze.

This wasn’t because she’d given in. She’d just realised how foolish it was to openly display her hostility.

“Hmm...”

Sandro hummed in interest when he noticed her change in attitude.

He looked at Min Ha-rin for a moment before waving his hand.

“You may leave.”

“Yes, sir.”

The Demon who brought them bowed his head politely before leaving the room, closing the door behind him.

At that moment, Min Ha-rin felt like the atmosphere in the room was becoming heavy again.

“...”

Sandro’s attention was only locked onto Min Ha-rin. He didn’t seem interested in Lukas, who stood beside her.

“I don’t know if you’ve eaten. Are you hungry?”

Sandro’s voice was unexpectedly soft.

If she didn’t know who he was, she might have mistaken him for a kindhearted old man.

Knowing he wasn't, Min Ha-rin didn't answer.

Sandro chuckled.

"Why don't you relax a little?"

"..."

She didn't answer this time either. She wasn't openly being rebellious, it was just that she couldn't even think about lowering her head like Drisa had mentioned.

So instead, she bit her lip and suppressed her feelings.

"Did you have a change of heart? Your attitude is different from earlier. Well, it doesn't matter."

Sandro got up from his seat and began to skillfully cut tea leaves.

A subtle scent filled the room, but Min Ha-rin had to resist the urge to cover her nose as though she smelled a terrible odor.

"I know human nature doesn't change so easily. But it's not fun to have a conversation like this..."

While listening to the sound of the tea leaves boiling, Sandro chuckled.

“Let’s do this. I will break one of that man’s fingers every time you don’t answer me.”

Min Ha-rin’s body shook.

She looked back.

There was still no change to Lukas’ expression despite Sandro’s vicious words.

“That person... has already gone mad. It would be pointless.”

She tried to speak calmly, but she couldn’t help the slight tremors in her voice.

And Sandro was very aware of this.

“What does that matter? What I want to see is your reaction. I want to see what my new slave is like. Show me just how high your view of morals and ethics is.”

“...kuk.”

“I’ll ask again. Are you thirsty?”

Min Ha-rin bit her lip.

“...I’m not.”

“I see.”

Sandro grinned.

“Your original expression has returned. That’s good. I hope you can maintain that rebellious spirit for a long time.”

Those words filled her with anger.

“I won’t obey a Demon. Instead of obeying you, I’d rather—.”

“Kill me? Is that what you want to say?”

Sandro let out a laugh. It was a laugh filled with genuine joy.

“I don’t care if you have such thoughts, but I should probably start your training early so you can learn things you shouldn’t do.”

“How? Are you going to intimidate me or threaten that person again? Ha. It seems a Duke is no big deal after all. I can’t believe you’d resort to such petty tricks because you couldn’t make a single human submit.”

“Petty tricks? That’s an interesting expression.”

Sandro knew that Min Ha-rin was trying to provoke him. The reason she mentioned Lukas was because she didn’t want him to touch him anymore.

Sandro, who had lived for hundreds of years, could easily see through the ploys of this young girl.

“Of course, I know many ways to make a human submit,”

“I’m not afraid of torture. Nor am I afraid of my mind breaking or death.”

“Haha. You can only say that because you’re ignorant. Child, you can’t even begin to imagine what real pain is like. There are many things in this world that are more terrible than death.”

Sandro’s smile widened.

“However, I won’t touch you just yet.”

“What?”

“I won’t do it for at least a month. You can trust me. I always keep my word. Nevertheless, you will swear your loyalty to me and do whatever I say.”

“That will never happen.”

Dak-

Sandro flicked his finger.

Suddenly, the restraints on Min Ha-rin’s hands and feet were released.

The collar was still around her neck, but to an extent, she had regained her freedom.

“What...”

Min Ha-rin looked at Sandro in confusion.

“I heard that you successfully hunted a noble during your first mission. At that time, you were only 15 years old. I’m curious as to how promising you would’ve been if you were allowed to grow.”

“...you did a lot of research. Do you enjoy looking into the backgrounds of slaves?”

Min Ha-rin forced herself to speak coldly, but a part of her felt cold when she heard those words.

‘How could he know about my first mission?’

It wasn’t strange that he knew her name, age, and other minor personal information. She was certain that the Chester Company, who sold her, had all of that information.

However, information about the missions a hunter went on were confidential and known only to the association. So it was certainly strange for a Demon Duke to have access to it.

‘...no way.’

She shook her head as an ominous thought appeared in her mind.

It couldn’t be. If that was the case, humanity would have already been destroyed.

She must have been overthinking. She had to have been.

“There was an unusually large number of people at the event today. So my shoes got a bit dirty.”

It was a sudden change of topic.

When Min Ha-rin glared at him, Sandro smiled before pointing down to his shoes.

“Lick it with your tongue and clean it. I don’t want to see even a single speck of dust.”

It was a ridiculous request.

Min Ha-rin had a strange expression on her face as she said.

“You should be glad I don’t know many curse words.”

“Haha. I knew you’d say something like that. Right... It’s so heartbreaking to have a disobedient slave.”

After muttering quietly, Sandro went silent for a moment before continuing.

“Do you want to know what I plan to do next?”

“I don’t care.”

“No. You will care. A lot.”

“...”

Sandro smiled warmly as he looked and Min Ha-rin.

“Because I have a disobedient slave who won’t listen to my orders, I think I will go for a stroll. Just to get some fresh air. Maybe I’ll even go for a long walk. Maybe I might even make a trip down to the peninsula.”

It was a soft voice as though he was reading a storybook.

However, Min Ha-rin’s expression became harder and harder as he continued.

By peninsula, he meant...

“I want to see the sea, so I think it would be better to go to Busan, which is called a port city. I want to relax and enjoy the night sea, but I don’t think I’ll be able to. I don’t know why, but I feel like a lot of hunters will suddenly come and attack me.”

“...!!”

How...

Min Ha-rin could no longer hide her shock. Her pupils shook violently.

Busan was the location of the headquarters of the Hunter Association’s East Asia branch.

And this Demon knew that.

“They will try to kill me, and I will defend myself. It’s been a long time since I used these old hands, so I’m not confident in holding back my strength. This means that most of those hunters will die. The blood of hundreds of people might cause the ocean water to become a bit red. Of course, I wouldn’t get a single scratch.”

“S-, stop...”

“However, my little plan to enjoy the view of the sea would have been ruined by then. I’m not very patient, so this fact will make me extremely angry. It’s natural that I will go to the den of the bugs who disturbed me and wipe them out. The hunters won’t know that I already know the location of their underground bunker. They will think they’re safe. But they will soon realise that it was just an illusion. I will reach the center of the bunker in a heartbeat while laughing at their defenses. I will annihilate all of the high-ranking officers there in a short amount of time. Then, I will find the Branch Manager who is barely holding on to his life and tell him with a smile.”

Sandro laughed.

An ugly smile blossomed on his old face.

“If he gives me the two children, Min Ha-ru and Min Yoo-seong, I will let him live.”

“A-, ahh...”

Min Ha-rin collapsed when she heard the names of her two younger siblings.

Her body shook.

To Min Ha-rin, their deaths were tens of times more terrifying than her own. It was the worst situation she couldn't even imagine.

"They are your brother and sister. Only twelve and fourteen years old. Why aren't you more pleased? You will soon be reunited. I assure you, they will call for you desperately. Until their blood spills from their throats."

Sandro finished his cup of tea.

Then, he got up from his seat and put on the coat that had been hung over the chair.

"I sincerely hope your siblings are as strong-willed as you are."

Just as he was about to walk out the door.

"...I'm sorry."

Sandro stopped.

Then he turned around with a smile.

“What was that?”

“S-, sorry... I’m sorry... I’m sorry...”

Min Ha-rin said these words with tears rolling down her face. She repeated the same thing like a broken radio.

She bent her knees, which she’d vowed to never do, and banged her forehead against the ground over and over again.

“I, I... I don’t care what you do to me. But please... Please don’t do anything to my siblings. I was wrong.”

Sandro looked down at her. He let out a pleased laugh before walking back to his seat. Then, he sat on the chair and crossed his legs while looking down at Min Ha-rin.

“Well, it seems my shoes are still dirty.”

Min Ha-rin froze, but it was only for a moment. She stood up from the ground with a resigned expression.

To go to Sandro. To clean his shoes with her tongue.

“Not like that.”

“...huh?”

Sandro smiled and pointed to the floor.

“You have to come to me. Like a slave.”

“...”

She didn't have a choice.

Min Ha-rin didn't bite her lip this time. Her pride had already been torn to shreds, and her eyes were lifeless.

She crawled towards Sandro.

More than humiliation and shame, fear for Sandro grew within her. Fear that ate at her mind.

She could see the shoes. As Sandro had said, they were a bit dirty.

Instinctively, she knew that if she were to really lick Sandro's shoes, she would not disobey until the day she died.

But even so.

She didn't have a choice.

Crack!

Then she heard a strange sound. And Min Ha-rin realised that the atmosphere in the room had changed drastically.

She raised her head.

Duke Sandro was no longer looking at her. He was no longer smiling as well. But this was different from before.

His expression was a bit stiff as though he'd witnessed something unexpected.

Min Ha-rin followed his gaze.

Lukas was standing there. He still stood in a daze with a blank expression on his face, but something was different.

He didn't have a collar.

'No.'

Duke Sandro narrowed his eyes.

To be more specific.

Clatter...

Lukas had ripped it off on his own.

Season 2 Chapter 8:

Min Ha-rin didn't know just how many times she had asked this, but she had no choice other than to do it again.

"Huh?"

"I'm afraid I won't be able to do it right now, so I'll teach you later, after I manage to find a suitable place."

"That..."

Min Ha-rin was speechless.

She couldn't keep up with the flow of the conversation at all.

He was going to teach her magic?

So suddenly?

No, in the first place, who the hell was this guy?

These questions poured into her head one after the other, but the atmosphere didn't allow her to ask them easily.

Nevertheless, she had to confirm one thing.

"Is Duke Sandro really dead?"

"Didn't you see it for yourself?"

This answer made her speechless again.

She forced herself to open her mouth.

“How the hell... I heard that Demon Dukes have power similar to God.”

At those words, Lukas stared at Min Ha-rin for a moment before walking towards her.

Juk.

He was getting closer and closer.

Sandro’s death flashed in Min Ha-rin’s mind. She didn’t realise it, but she was stepping back.

But Lukas was faster.

Crack.

She heard the sound of something breaking. Then, Min Ha-rin realised it had come from the collar which restricted her freedom.

“A-, ah?”

Incomprehensible things were happening over and over.

She felt like she was dreaming. She hurriedly put her hands to her neck.

It was an unfamiliar feeling because she could feel her skin for the first time in a long while.

This wasn't like the paralysing function that Allida had mentioned. He had destroyed it. It was that simple.

"Sandro's power isn't even close to a Demigod's. He's not worth comparing to God."

"..."

Min Ha-rin had mentioned God because she couldn't think of a more appropriate metaphor, but Lukas' words felt a bit strange.

Before she could think about it too deeply, Lukas spoke again.

"Let's go."

"Where?"

"To Lee Jong-hak."

Lukas' voice was calm.

“Their plan went awry. We shouldn’t be too late.”

* * *

It was a long day.

Rutan stretched as he had this thought.

He was tired. He felt like he would doze off even if he closed his eyes at that moment.

But he couldn’t yet.

He got up from his seat. Then he looked at the list of products that had been sold that day.

Min Ha-rin’s name was on that list.

“Why did I do that?”

It would have been more dramatic to reveal Min Ha-rin on the last day.

Of course, selling her on the first day didn't cause a big loss. She was sold for a high price, so his boss would be satisfied with his performance.

Nevertheless, Rutan didn't understand his price.

It was an item that could have been sold even more expensively, and yet, he'd rushed it like an amateur.

It was even stranger that when he recalled that time, it was faint like he was in a dream.

"...I haven't been sleeping much lately."

That was probably why he felt so tired.

He should have had some free time after he was done bookkeeping. He felt like he should sleep in order to ensure that tomorrow went smoothly.

Just as Rutan tried to close his tired eyes.

An uninvited guest came from nowhere.

Clack.

"Ru-, Rutan."

Sihard entered his room without knocking.

In an instant, Rutan's anger soared and he was about to kill him, but he quickly reined in his temper.

Sihard knew his personality well. He would never have committed such a rude act if it wasn't an urgent situation.

"What is it?"

"Th-, the hunter slaves escaped."

"What did you say?"

The sleepiness immediately went away.

Rutan immediately got up and grabbed his coat that was hanging on the back of a chair before putting it on.

"Tell me everything."

"A-, as you know, I check on the slaves every hour. I just went to the room about 5 minutes ago..."

Sihard closed his eyes as he continued.

“A-, and all the slaves are gone.”

Rutan didn't get angry right away.

Instead, he felt his head get cold.

The voice that came out of his mouth wasn't excited either. It was very low and gloomy.

“I don't think you came here just to report to me.”

“I'm sorry.”

“Right. Of course you're sorry. Come here.”

“Huh?”

“Did you not understand what I said? Come here. Come closer to me.”

Sihard gulped before closing the distance. Then, Rutan grabbed him by the throat.

“Ku-, uk...”

“If you know you did something wrong, then you know that you will be punished. Right Sihard?”

“S-, sorry...”

“What about the pursuit?”

“Already... sent them...”

“How many?”

“Three... groups... under my command...”

“...tch.”

Rutan clicked his tongue before throwing Sihard to the floor.

Sihard fell heavily to the ground and coughed a few times.

If it was another time, then Rutan would have definitely killed him, but he was short of hands at the moment. And venting his anger wouldn't change the fact that the slaves escaped.

"Capture them all."

"Huh...?"

Sihard tilted his head to the side.

"Don't you get it? It doesn't matter if they escaped. They have nowhere to go anyway, and this land is our territory. They are literally flies in a jar. It won't be difficult to capture them again. The important thing is to hide this fact from the customers."

"...!"

It was only then Sihard realised.

That was definitely true.

It wasn't a big deal that the slaves had escaped. In a sense, the fact that the customers might have noticed the movements of the three groups was more important.

"I will lend you command of the <Night Dew>. Use them to comb the surroundings."

“I, I will follow your orders. But what about you, Rutan?”

“I will look for them, too. But I will move on my own.”

Although Rutan was not titled, his fighting power definitely surpassed that of most low-ranking nobility. Even if he encountered them alone, it would not be hard for him to deal with 10 or so weakened hunters.

“If they escaped from the basement, they could have only taken one of two paths. There must be traces left. Search thoroughly then move as stealthily as you can.”

“Yes.”

Sihard’s figure disappeared.

Rutan went straight to the basement. This was to check the situation.

He headed to the room in which the slaves were being held.

Then he saw it.

The cage bars had been bent by force.

“Someone didn’t release them. They escaped from the inside. Only pure brute strength could bend these cage bars.”

In the first place, if there was anyone there who could help them, it would only be a Demon. And that was impossible.

The only way a noble would steal slaves from under Sihard’s eyes was if they were poor and had no pride.

But it was clear that wasn’t the case. If a Demon had really helped them escape, then there would not be any traces left.

“I’m sure they would have done things smarter.”

Rutan closed his eyes.

“That means they escaped on their own.”

But how?

It would have been impossible for them to pull the iron cage open with the collar around their necks. No, it would have been impossible even without the collar.

“It might be possible for Lee Jong-hak.”

It was impossible for the other slaves, but that might not have been the case for Lee Jong-hak. However, he also had the collar on.

The possibility that the collars were defective?

Slim.

After all, it was Rutan himself who put the collars on. There was no way he wouldn't have been able to tell whether the collars were defective or not.

"...The collars were still on. If they were taken off or broken, then the pieces would still be here. They wouldn't have had the time to care about the mess."

He could tell that they were in a hurry just by looking around the room.

Of course, the collars also had a tracking system. So as long as the slaves didn't take them off, Rutan would be able to find them.

'If that's not possible...'

Rutan's thoughts churned.

It wasn't long before he came to the most realistic conclusion.

“...they must have paralysed the collar’s functions.”

Magic. They must have used magic.

He knew some of the humans’ tricks. He was not only knowledgeable about magic but also about witchcraft, sorcery, divination, and curses.

However, none of the slaves were Witches, Sorcerers, Seers, or Shamans.

But there was a Wizard. She was also one of the titled humans.

Allida Grabino.

“It’s strange, though. She shouldn’t have been able to use magic with the collar on.”

He could no longer figure anything out no matter how he turned it around in his head. He would only be able to find out when he saw them for himself.

There were a lot of people there, so there weren’t many places they could hide. Nevertheless, the fact that they escaped meant that they believed they could.

Rutan chuckled.

He had a feeling that he knew where they went.

“There’s nothing more miserable than a half-brained idea.”

* * *

“I can’t tell if it’s day or night.”

Drisa grumbled as he looked up at the black sky.

This was what happened to land that had been occupied by the Demons.

The ground became purple, and the sky became black. (TL: Sounds familiar.)

He sighed.

“...anyway, did we really manage to escape?”

“This is only the beginning.”

When Lee Jong-hak spoke in a low voice, Allida nodded.

“But we did cross the hardest bridge. Now, all we have to do is get to the hideout.”

“How far is it?”

“We have to go to the cathedral first.”

“Cathedral?”

“There.”

Allida pointed towards a cathedral at the side.

The cathedral was a huge building that could have been seen from any part of the city. It was built in a gothic style with stained glass windows glimmering even under the dark sky.

“Is that cathedral the hideout you were talking about?”

“It’s not, but beneath the building is a passage that leads outside the city. If we use that path, then we will find ourselves only a short distance away from the hideout.”

“Sure enough.”

The hunters' faces brightened.

There weren't many Demons on the streets. It wouldn't be impossible for them to reach the cathedral if they were careful.

"How long will this ice spell last?"

"About two days. But it could be shorter."

"So we have to activate the portal and get to an association branch equipped with advanced equipment before that."

It wouldn't be easy.

Lee Jong-hak took a deep breath before saying.

"Let's move immediately. I'll take point."

After saying those words, he strode forward without hesitation.

Drisa, who followed nervously, couldn't help but say.

“Can we really walk so confidently?”

“That’s right. It should be morning now.”

“Huh...?”

“The Demons are usually asleep at this time.”

“Oh. I see, but...”

It was common knowledge among the hunters that Demons usually slept during the day and were active at night.

“...how do you know it’s daytime?”

“My body clock is relatively accurate.”

“...”

Was he joking?

No, he didn't believe that this serious guy would make a joke in this type of situation.

"Body clock."

Drisa chuckled slightly.

If someone else had said that, he would have dismissed it as bullshit, but because it was Lee Jong-hak, those words had a strange weight.

Drisa and the other hunters silently followed Lee Jong-hak's steps.

Allida looked around at their surroundings.

She knew how beautiful this city used to be. Of course, she'd never seen it in person, but she'd seen many pictures. Her heart felt heavy.

One of the most beautiful cities in Italy had lost its former appearance.

If it wasn't for the cathedral, she wouldn't have even known what city it was

'There aren't many Demons on the street.'

Looking at the empty streets of the city that seemed to lack vitality, she couldn't help but feel a bit scared.

Even walking through a zombie-filled city would not have made her feel so nervous.

Fortunately, Lee Jong-hak's senses were excellent. He didn't even get close to places where the Demons were likely to be, but he didn't divert much either.

Because of this, they were able to arrive at the cathedral in less than an hour.

"I'm gonna lose my tension. This is too easy."

Drisa laughed, revealing his teeth. She didn't say anything, but Allida agreed with him.

Nevertheless, she held her breath and said.

"It's still too early to relax. There might be Demons inside the cathedral. Now, this way."

Allida stepped into the cathedral before heading to the chapel(1).

"Can you help me? We need to remove these chairs."

The hunters moved the chairs aside as directed by Allida. And finally, a door handle was revealed on the exposed floor.

When Drisa pulled on the handle, a stairway leading underground was revealed.

“It’s too dark. Do you have a light or something?”

“I tried to turn it on, but it seems there is no power. Or the Demons cut the wires.”

Allida flicked the light switch at the entrance as she said this.

“Damn, if we run into a Demon in the darkness, we’ll probably die.”

“We can go another way if you’re dissatisfied.”

“...Mm. I politely decline. At least if I die underground, I won’t have to worry about being a slave.”

Drisa forced himself to speak positively, then he immediately went down into the underground passage.

It was dark and damp. A rotten smell also filled the air, and sewer rats ran past their feet.

This gloomy atmosphere, together with the darkness that their eyes could have only barely pierce through, caused the hunters to be extremely nervous.

Fortunately, Drisa's worry did not become a reality.

There were no Demons in the underground passage, and they were all able to get out without a scratch.

"W-, we survived."

"Did we do it?"

"I'm relieved now that we were able to come this far...!"

"..."

But Drisa's expression was not good.

When she saw this, Allida asked.

"Why do you look like you've eaten poop?"

"Do you remember what I said just now?"

"You can now be relieved? What about it?"

“I feel like I said something that shouldn’t have been said. You know. Like a jinx.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Have you never seen the cartoons?”

When she heard those words, Allida’s expression became grim.

“Alright, let’s hurry to the portal. I’m sure it’s a mess, and staying here means we are wasting the time we could have been using to fix it.”

Even if Allida took Drisa’s premonition seriously, there was nothing they could’ve done about it.

The hideout was located at the foot of a small mountain, and the entrance was covered by a large boulder. This boulder was larger than most houses, so it was easy to recognise.

“That’s the boulder.”

“Let’s hurry.”

“Stop.”

Lee Jong-hak called out in a firm voice.

The other hunters didn't question him. Instead, their faces quickly became pale.

"I thought you'd come here."

It was the host of the Chester Company's auction and the Demon who put the collars on them.

Rutan looked at them with a smile.

Drisa's expression crumpled.

"See... Fuck..."

Season 2 Chapter 7:

"How surprising."

Sandro's smile returned to his face.

He leaned deeper into his chair as if to show off his composure.

“Was the collar loose? Or was it defective from the start? ...In any case, I’m disappointed in the Chester Company. This is a bit upsetting.”

He’d have to call Rutan and set things straight.

They would probably bow till their foreheads touched the floor. After all, they should have been fully aware of what kind of world they were stepping into.

“It’s useless even if you do it right 100 times. Naturally, all that matters is whether you make one mistake or not.”

Lukas still didn’t say anything.

Sandro smiled.

“But you’re foolish. If you had hidden the fact that the collar was defective and waited for the right chance, you might’ve gotten the chance to run away.”

Sandro had little interest in Lukas from the beginning. His attention had always been on Min Ha-rin.

This blonde-haired man who came with her was nothing more than an extra, a bonus. Even if he was somehow able to miraculously escape, Sandro would not feel any loss.

However, it was a different story altogether for him to remove the collar before his eyes.

His authority would be challenged if he were to let go of this after seeing such behaviour with his own eyes.

“No matter how I look at it, you don’t seem crazy... Am I mistaken?”

“No.”

Lukas opened his mouth for the first time, and Sandro admired his clear voice.

“You have a pretty good voice, better than I expected. You also look fine.”

Sandro’s eyes swept over Lukas.

He seemed to appraise him for a moment before he smiled and said.

“How about this? If you kneel and kowtow right now, I will pretend like I didn’t see you take the collar off. I have a few spare collars, so I’ll let you pick whichever one you like most. If you do that, I will forgive your rudeness and give you the right to be my slave again.”

This was an unconventional offer for Duke Sandro.

In the first place, he still didn't have much interest in Lukas. However, he felt that it was a bit of a waste to just kill him like that.

He felt that he was a compassionate person who showed unending mercy to those who pleased him.

It was the same this time as well.

But Lukas didn't answer.

At first, he thought that he was thinking about it, but that didn't seem to be the case either.

Surprisingly, he couldn't tell what he was thinking.

'This guy is an unknown.'

That was the end of Sandro's analysis.

He shook his head.

In any case, he was only a bonus.

"That's too bad."

Paht.

Sandro's cloak turned dark and began moving as though it had a life of its own.

Min Ha-rin looked back with an anxious expression.

Even she, who had participated in numerous battles against Demon Nobles, didn't know just how strong a Duke was.

To be more precise, all she knew was that they were incredibly strong.

With one gesture, they could cause heavy winds, lakes to rise, and forests to burn to ashes.

If such beings really existed, then it could only have been seen as a sign of the coming of God.

It was unbelievable.

She couldn't believe it, and she didn't want to believe it.

If even some of the rumors she heard were true, then mankind's struggle was for naught.

Min Ha-rin had once participated in a battle to subjugate a Count.

It was a Demon named Cerberus whose powers were so transcendent that he killed 90% of the hunters who participated in the battle.

And yet, Counts could only be considered as beings at the threshold of high ranking nobility. They were called high-ranking nobility because their level of strength was several times that of the normal Demon Nobles.

The strength the Demon Count had shown that day had become a nightmare deeply engraved in her mind.

And now, the being in front of her was a Duke.

He was definitely much stronger than any Count or Marquis.

Min Ha-rin couldn't even begin to imagine just how horrifying such an existence was.

The cloak shot forward.

The cloak, which was made of cloth, suddenly clumped together to form a spear.

Despite the fact that it didn't make a sound, the speed it moved at wasn't particularly fast.

In all honesty, it wasn't that impressive.

Was this all the power a Duke had?

If it was only that much, then even she would be able to avoid that attack.

But the moment she thought that...

Min Ha-rin's face became pale.

“...”

She didn't blink. And she didn't lose track of it, either.

But before she realised what had happened, the spear split open.

Instead of a spear, the cloak became a monster filled with hundreds of teeth, which devoured Lukas' body.

Crunch, crunch...

The only thing that could be heard was the sound of flesh and bones being crushed and torn apart.

Min Ha-rin's face turned white at the sudden tragedy.

Everything had happened before she even had a chance to react.

It wasn't hard to realise that the strained voice was coming from Sandro.

Min Ha-rin realised that Sandro's voice was shaking slightly and that his face would occasionally twitch.

But Sandro's face wasn't the only thing twitching. The cloak wrapped around Lukas' body shook.

Paht!

Then, following the sound of a light explosion, the cloak was torn apart.

And through the strips of cloth that fell like snowflakes, Lukas' body could be seen.

Just by looking at Sandro's expression, one could tell how he took this scene.

"What did you do?"

Sandro's aura had changed dramatically.

Black smoke poured out of his mouth and swirled around him.

The spear he'd just sent forward was strong enough to pierce through any metal the humans had in their possession. It wouldn't even be a problem for it to pierce through a missile bunker.

At least, Sandro could never have imagined that someone he wanted to kill with it didn't immediately become a puddle of blood.

What's more, the one who had done so was nothing but a lowly slave.

"Who are you?"

Sandro's voice contained confusion that he could not hide even if he wanted to.

Human... was he a human?

No. It wasn't possible.

He'd met strong humans before, some who were even praised as heroes, but none of them had been a match for him.

Not to mention a Duke.

Even a Marquis. No, they could barely even match a Count.

Weaklings to be trampled on, raised with affection, or thrown away like garbage, depending on their mood.

That was what humans were.

Then what was this being?

He paused his attack.

No. There was something that confused him even more.

'How did he stop it?'

He couldn't guess. And it frustrated him that his opponent had a mysterious trump card.

But Sandro hid his agitation.

He had only blocked one attack; nothing had changed. It was hard to tell whether it was intentional or accidental, but the fact that Lukas didn't die remained unchanged.

So he intended to fight seriously from then on.

Sandro's gaze deepened.

"Are you working for another Duke? Did they send you to assassinate me? Pride. Is he your master?"

Lukas murmured at those words.

"That's an unpleasant delusion."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm not a Demon. And naturally, I'm not a servant of Pride."

If that was the case, then was he really human?

'A human blocked my attack?'

Ha.

Sandro couldn't help but let out a laugh.

“You’re trying to pretend. How interesting. I hope your wits are strong enough to overcome torture.”

“Do you think you deserve to test me?”

Sandro’s playful expression disappeared when Lukas asked these words.

“Your way of speaking annoys me. Only the Demon King dares to talk to me like that.”

Sandro’s expression became hazy. The lights in the room fluttered like a candle in front of a breeze before suddenly going out.

The room descended into darkness.

“You... will... beg me... to kill you.”

Sandro’s voice gradually faded into the darkness. His black cloak was swallowed by the ground, followed by his body.

Like ink seeping into a piece of paper, his body was absorbed into the ground.

“Get on the table.”

Min Ha-rin belatedly realised that those words were directed at her.

She hurriedly climbed onto the silver table. Anyone could tell that it was not wise to be moving around blindly in the dark.

'Sandro is serious.'

She knew how Demons behaved when they became serious. Now, Sandro would not hesitate to reveal his full power.

A full-strength attack from a Duke.

How was he supposed to survive an attack like that?

Shuk.

Lukas knelt on one knee and put his palm on the ground.

And that was it.

"...ku-, urk?"

Like a fish who had been hit by an electric current, Sandro's body popped out of the darkness.

"U-, urk! Uk! Kuk! Kuuk!"

He looked at Lukas with shaking eyes.

"How... the hell...? I was... between the boundaries... of the shadows..."

He hadn't simply been pulled out.

His body had been immobilised. Even his joints were frozen as though he had been tied up with an invisible chain.

Now, even his tongue had been paralysed. All he could do was move his eyes around.

"...!!"

For Sandro, it was supposed to be a pleasant day. After a few years, he'd finally found a slave whom he'd liked, and he was certain that he wouldn't be bored of it for a long time.

He finally got it in his hands, and all he had to do was enjoy it.

Slowly corrupting and breaking humans who mistakenly believed they were strong was something he relished in.

One thing was for certain, though. He never thought that he would die today.

Crack.

As soon as Lukas clenched his fist, Sandro's body exploded.

It wasn't blood and flesh that scattered everywhere. Instead, it was an ink like substance.

This thick, black liquid landed on Lukas' face, but he didn't need to wipe it off.

This was because after the darkness in the room faded, the ink disappeared as though it had evaporated.

Clink~

And in the place where Duke Sandro's body had been, a crystal fell to the ground.

Lukas looked at this crystal for a moment before saying.

“You can come down.”

Min Ha-rin blinked a few times.

“...huh?”

He didn't answer as he kept looking at the crystal on the floor.

Min Ha-rin gulped slightly before stepping onto the floor. But she still looked around hesitantly.

“Hey... What the hell just happened? Wh-, where is Duke Sandro...?”

“I think you should have this.”

As he said this, Lukas handed the Soul Crystal over to Min Ha-rin.

Min Ha-rin took it reflexively before flinching.

There was no reason to ask whose Soul Crystal this was.

A Duke. A Duke's Soul Crystal.

How many souls were trapped in here?”

‘There’s no way a Demon would have abandoned its Soul Crystal and ran.’

To them, this item was just as important as their lives.

That meant...

This man had really killed Duke Sandro.

“A-, ah... Th-, thank you for saving me...”

She was still confused, but just as she was about to bow her head...

A small vortex appeared in the air in front of them, from which a person then appeared. It was a being wearing a black robe whose face couldn’t be seen because it was covered by strips of cloth. It was almost as if they didn’t have a face.

[It seems my patience over the past few decades has put me to shame.]

The being’s voice was bizarre.

And its sudden appearance seemed to have something to do with Lukas.

[Are you saying it's none of my business? Fine. But keep in mind. You gave them a justification.]

Huk.

They disappeared just as quickly as they appeared, but Lukas didn't seem particularly concerned about it.

He turned to Min Ha-rin and said.

"How old are you?"

"Huh?"

When Min Ha-rin asked back in surprise at the sudden question, he murmured in a slightly embarrassed voice.

"Did I say something strange? I mean... How many years have passed since you were born?"

It was rude to ask someone's age out of nowhere. If it was another situation or if another person had asked her the same question, she might not have answered.

But this was different.

Min Ha-rin answered in a low but clear voice.

“Twenty-two.”

“Really?.” (TL: oof...)

“Huh?”

...Was he trying to say she looked older?

Min Ha-rin’s expression hardened, but Lukas continued as if he didn’t care.

“What do you think about magic?”

“...”

What did she think?

She'd never thought deeply about it. This had been the case ever since she was told that she had no talent for magic.

However, the magic Min Ha-rin had seen today reminded her of a midsummer fireworks display or a christmas tree.

What did she think while watching this scene?

Min Ha-rin felt like her memories had been awoken like she'd taken an old book from a bookshelf.

"I think... it's pretty."

When Lukas' eyes widened slightly at her response, Min Ha-rin flinched.

"Th-, that..."

Did she make a mistake?

While she was unable to hide her nervousness, she heard a voice.

"That is the first time I've heard a response like that."

"..."

“What is your name?”

The order of these questions seemed a bit strange.

Besides, didn't he hear it when Sandro was calling her name?

Though she had these questions in her head, Lukas was the benefactor who'd saved her life. She couldn't complain about something like this.

“I am Min Ha-rin. Th-, thank you for saving me.”

Though she had sincerely thanked him once again, Lukas seemed to be paying attention to something else.

“...Min Ha-rin.”

He closed his eyes slightly and seemed to ponder about something.

After a long silence, Lukas finally opened his eyes and looked at her.

“I will teach you magic.”

Note:

I thought it would be best to put a list of the nobility ranks for those of you who are unaware of the ranks. This doesn't mean the author will follow this exact ranking though, since there are some variations.

From the top it should be:

King

Grand Duke (The possibility was hinted at, but it's still unclear)

Duke

Marquis

Count

Viscount

Baron

Lord

Season 2 Chapter 9:

“That fact that you managed to avoid detection from Sihard and the <Night Dew> means that you didn’t cut across the city in the open.”

Rutan got up from his seat.

He looked in the direction the hunters came from before muttering in a soft voice.

“You couldn’t have left through the sky either. Because you don’t have the means.”

Then what other reason could it be?

Rutan enjoyed guessing like this.

He closed his mouth for a while and organised his thoughts, and his silence put great pressure on the hunters.

“...right. It should be underground. There is probably a long passage below Amado City that stretches to this mountain range. Am I wrong?”

“ ... ”

He didn't receive an answer, but Rutan knew his guess was correct. He burst into laughter once again.

“How... do you know the location of this hideout?”

Rutan had been waiting at the rock entrance. This would have been impossible if he didn't have an idea of the hideout's location.

“I also lent a hand when we were taking over this city in the past. I was lucky. At the time, there were some humans who managed to escape, and I tracked them to this hideout. But when I reached this place, I lost them.”

The sky seemed to turn yellow because of this unlucky situation.

“So you guys have already occupied this hideout.”

“Occupied? Why the hell would we do something so annoying? Do you think this shabby little bunker is of any value to us?”

Then did that mean they hadn't touched the facilities inside?

'Is he lying? Or is he telling the truth?'

She couldn't tell.

It was impossible to read any intentions from Rutan's smiling face.

She couldn't hide her anxiety.

If the Warp Portal was already broken, then everything would have been in vain.

"This isn't the time to worry about the future."

Rutan spoke as if he'd read Allida's mind. At the same time, demonic energy surged from within his body.

The hunters' expression hardened. The same was true for Lee Jong-hak.

'This Demon is strong.'

The restrictions on the collar had been temporarily paralysed, but they hadn't properly trained for more than a month. The feed that the Demons gave them also slowly wore away at their physical strength.

Although these changes weren't permanent, it would take at least two to three months before they could regain their strength.

The physical strength that Lee Jong-hak could unleash at that moment was not even half of when he was in his best condition.

‘And we don’t even have any equipment.’

The Demons were a race who were naturally more powerful than the humans. This meant that humans needed weapons and armor just to stand on even ground.

But they didn’t have any.

Lee Jong-hak and the other hunters were practically naked.

‘I don’t even need armor.’

If he’d had even a single sword.

Lee Jong-hak bit his lip at this thought.

It wouldn’t be enough to say that he was desperate.

On the other hand, Rutan was completely relaxed.

He'd already accomplished his goal the moment he found the hunters. Now, he was only observing them to appease his own curiosity.

He saw the frozen collars.

"You used Ice Magic to freeze the functions of the collar? You there, red-haired human bitch, this was your doing. I don't know what kind of magic you used on the collar, but... Well. I'll figure it out soon."

Rutan smiled for a moment before continuing.

"I'll make this short. Turn around, go back the way you came, and get back into your cages. With your own feet. Then, no one will get hurt and no one will die."

'No one would die.'

Some of them flinched at those words.

Rutan's voice was soft, but it carried an intimidation that made them shudder.

Allida forced the corners of her lips to curl upwards.

"Stop bluffing. We know that we are your best products. You are a mere paper-pusher in the company at best. Would you dare to hurt us recklessly?"

“This is why humans are annoying. You always try to roll your heads around and negotiate when it won’t work. Hey, Wizard. How many human slaves do you think I’ve handled so far?”

As he said this, Rutan cracked his neck and loosened his joints, causing several hunters, including Lee Jong-hak, to take up battle positions.

“Do you intend to fight me with your bare bodies? Then go ahead. I can subdue all of you without leaving a scratch. But if you annoy me, then I will make you experience hell. I will give you a taste of pain that you have never experienced before I auction you off.”

Rutan’s voice was full of vigor.

Allida and several other hunters flinched.

“I-, if you do that and our minds break...”

“You value yourselves too highly.”

Rutan chuckled.

“We can capture any number of slaves we want. It would just take time. In truth, it wouldn’t matter if I killed every slave here apart from Lee Jong-hak.”

Every hunter gulped at those words.

In all honesty, Rutan's words did contain a bit of a bluff. After all, these were all slaves who had been specially selected for the event and each of them could be considered high-class goods.

It just couldn't be denied that Lee Jong-hak and Min Ha-rin were the most special.

"There aren't any other Demons here."

"Mm?"

"You are the only Demon who came to retrieve us."

When Lee Jong-hak spoke in a soft but firm tone, Rutan tilted his head and asked back.

"So?"

"So if we kill you, we can leave this place."

"Ah! I seemed to have missed that point."

Rutan smiled and took off his coat.

“I’ll even give you some information. I didn’t get a title. Can you guess why?”

“You must be too weak!”

Rutan shrugged at Drisa’s rough shout.

“That is one of the reasons. However, it’s not the main one. It’s because I don’t have any Demon powers.” (TL: Think Demigod powers)

Lee Jong-hak’s expression became strange.

Every Demon Noble had their own individual power. This power varied greatly depending on the individual. From the simple ability to control ice, fire, or wind, the ability to transform into bloodsucking bats or wolves, or the ability to spew out poison to truly demonic abilities.

But Rutan had just admitted that he himself didn’t have any powers.

‘As expected of a Demon. He’s arrogant.’

Crunch...

The sound of joints being twisted could be heard from Drisa’s body.

In truth, Drisa's body was so well-trained that even Lee Jong-hak couldn't help but admire him. Although he might not have received systematic training, his muscles were still clearly outlined.

Just like a piece of art that had been carefully crafted, his body had a brilliant physical beauty.

His body changed. His back became hunched, and his hands and feet twisted and became deformed. His teeth and nails sharpened and grew longer, and his brown eyes turned yellow.

"Transformation. Right. You are a Shaman."

Rutan chuckled.

Unlike other hunters, whose powers would drop by at least half when they didn't have weapons or armor, Shamans were used to fighting without any equipment. This was because their bodies often went through violent physical changes.

Perhaps the strongest hunter in the group at that moment wasn't Lee Jong-hak but Drisa.

Drisa kicked off from the ground and shot towards Rutan like a cannonball.

Demons weren't immortal; they just had strong vitality. There were cases in which some had stronger vitality or had different vital points, but generally, if you cut off their head or destroyed their heart, they would be killable.

"Cover him!"

With a short shout, Lee Jong-hak charged after Drisa. He picked up a branch that had randomly fallen onto the road, intending to use it as his weapon.

The length of the branch wasn't much, and its weight distribution was terrible, but it was still better than using his bare hands.

Crunch!

Meanwhile, Drisa bit into Rutan's shoulder. And Allida, who was watching this scene from a distance, clenched her fist.

"That's right!"

"Haha."

Then they heard Rutan let out a laugh.

Drisa couldn't help but panic. His jaw felt numb like he was biting a piece of steel, not flesh.

Was he wearing a suit of inner armor or something?

If not...

Paak!

“Kuk...!”

Before he could even finish that thought, he felt a strong shock to the back of his head.

His jaw joint gave out with a snap.

Afterwards, Drisa was sent flying after feeling a sharp pain in his abdomen.

Then Lee Jong-hak stormed in as though he had been tagged. White light shined on the branch in his hand.

Rutan spoke in a cheerful voice.

“You are pouring your aura into a tree branch. Amazing. Should I say as expected of the Human Dragon?”

“...”

Lee Jong-hak didn't answer, instead squeezing the branch tighter.

This Demon... was strange.

His manner of speaking, his attitude, and even his way of fighting...

'He knows too much about humans.'

The Shaman's transformation power,

The swordsmanship developed by humans,

And magic.

Instead, it was surprising that he didn't know about Allida's Tattoo Magic considering how much he knew about humans.

Usually, Demons tended to disregard humans. Because of their arrogance and pride, they didn't want to know more about humans because they considered them a lower race.

Naturally, this usually meant that they didn't even know their way of fighting.

This wasn't that strange.

After all, even if they didn't know anything, it wasn't hard for them to easily step on or kill humans.

If they did know anything, it could only be likened to memorising the breeds, tendencies, and habits of their pets.

“Shit!”

With a curse, Drisa got back to his feet. He grumbled for a moment before spitting, and his smashed fangs flew out with his bloody phlegm.

“Be careful. His body is as hard as steel. I can't hurt him with my teeth and claws.”

“Is it the power to increase your physical strength?”

Rutan spoke while calmly dodging Lee Jong-hak's attacks.

“You are so stupid. I told you that I didn't have a power. Well. I was born a bit stronger than normal Demons in return. However, I was only able to reach this level through hard work and training.”

Crack!

The branch could not handle Lee Jong-hak's aura and cracked.

He was forced to step back.

He was in worse shape than he thought. He had only been fighting for a few minutes, but he was already out of breath.

“...training? A Demon?”

“It is rare. We’ve been chatting for longer than I expected. Then...”

Rutan looked around.

The hunters had surrounded him before he realised.

“Don’t tell me you were trying to surround me from the start.”

Rutan mumbled softly before taking a deep breath.

Suddenly, demonic energy began surging in his eyes.

“Hooo...”

He took a deep breath.

Then, Rutan's right foot shot up like it was going to touch the sky.

Lee Jong-hak's expression became stiff when he saw this. He was the quickest to notice the danger.

"Be caref-...!"

Lee Jong-hak's words were cut off before he could finish them. Because Rutan's right foot hit the ground.

Boom!

Earthquake.

It was an earthquake.

Drisa couldn't help but have this thought.

The instant Rutan's foot hit the ground, spider web-like cracks spread out in every direction. The ground shattered like glass.

The shattered earth undulated on its own, creating a huge vortex.

“Kuuack!”

“Sa-, save me!”

Some of the hunters reacted too slowly. Their bodies were sucked into the rock vortex, and their entire bodies were crushed.

The only ones who managed to escape were Drisa, Allida, and Lee Jong-hak, who happened to be further away than the rest. (TL: huhu how convenient)

“Do you really intend to kill us?”

“No. He adjusted the power. They might look severely wounded at first, but they’ll only suffer broken limbs and torn flesh at most.”

Lee Jong-hak spoke with a firm voice.

“I guess there’s only one thing we can do now.”

“Did you think of a way to kill this bastard?”

“Run away. I will buy you time.”

Drisa froze.

“...are you serious?”

Lee Jong-hak’s mouth twisted.

It took Drisa a moment to realise that it was a forced smile.

“I haven’t made a joke for a very long time.”

“...but.”

“You seem to have a reason to live. Am I wrong?”

Rutan simply looked at them with his arms crossed.

As Lee Jong-hak had said, he’d adjusted the strength of his attack, but it wasn’t by much. Humans were fragile, so maybe some of the hunters were already dead.

“Hmm.”

He checked again and found that they were all still alive. His control was perfect.

Rutan smirked as he admired his own skill.

With these kinds of injuries, they would be able to heal them up before it was time to present them.

So now, there were only two left.

...Or, at least, that was what he expected, but he found one more.

'That's strange.'

It was certainly strange. According to Rutan's judgement, only Lee Jong-hak and Drisa would have been able to respond to his attack in time.

Did he get lucky? Or did he keep his distance like Allida had?

That was what he thought until he looked at this man's face.

"..."

Rutan's expression became strange. He even momentarily forgot about Drisa and Lee Jong-hak.

Was he dreaming?

Or was he just seeing things?

Rutan shook his head.

It wasn't possible.

But the man's appearance was so random that he couldn't help but think so.

"Is it an escape play?"

The blonde man, Lukas, didn't answer. Instead, it was Rutan who frowned.

Escape play?

It was unlikely. After all, the one who'd bought Lukas was none other than Duke Sandro and not some ordinary noble. He was a VIP of the Chester Company and a Demon who was personally given the title Duke by the Demon King.

Even Rutan didn't have the confidence to trick his eyes and run away.

So... did he let him go because he was already tired of him?

Right. That made more sense.

'But why is he here?'

Did this man know about the hideout as well?

Just as Rutan was about to ask a question.

"Sandro is dead."

"...what?"

Lukas didn't repeat himself.

He didn't have time to waste. He had just dealt with a Duke.

He didn't want to waste his time and energy on a small fry like Rutan.

He wanted to finish it quickly, and he did.

His eyes sank slightly.

“And you will soon follow suit.”

Season 2 Chapter 10:

“...”

Rutan’s expression hardened.

He was quick-witted. He’d been like that for a very long time.

After all, it was quite obvious how a Demon who didn’t have a power would be treated by his own people.

It was much better than the unintelligent Demons or slaves. That much was certain. But that was all.

They were awkward beings whose treatment was far lesser than even the lowest Demon Noble.

The Demons referred to them as Demonic Humans.

If one looked at how the Demons treated the human race, one would realise just how humiliating such a title was.

But Rutan was different from the other Demonic Humans. There was something about him that was inherently different.

It was desire.

The greed in his heart was equal to the high ranking Demon Nobles'.

He wanted to get everything he wanted.

He wanted to be stronger than everyone else.

He wanted to go to the highest position and look down on all of the weaklings.

That was why he joined the company. Because there was no other place where the transaction of Soul Crystals was more active.

The number of souls contained in a Soul Crystal was directly linked to a Demon's level.

If he had just 100,000 souls, he would be able to grow strong enough to not be pushed around by most Demon Nobles, even if he didn't have a power.

And to do that, the most important thing was to somehow survive.

And Rutan survived brilliantly. He proved his worth, even earning the recognition of the capricious high ranking nobles.

Rutan was quick-witted.

Nevertheless.

'This man...'

Rutan looked at Lukas.

He looked at this man who said that he'd killed Duke Sandro and would soon kill him as well.

If another human had told him that, he would have laughed heartily in their face. In fact, he might have even sarcastically told them that they were 'bluffing too hard'.

But this man...

He couldn't understand. He didn't know what he was.

He felt so weak that he could defeat him with just a finger. But he also felt like a monster that Rutan would not be able to scratch even if he tried his best.

It couldn't possibly be the latter.

Rutan tried to make himself think this, but Lukas' words reverberated as though they were stuck in his head.

If this man had really killed Duke Sandro...

'...I have to try.'

Fwoosh-

A black haze of demonic energy surged around him.

It was completely different from before. Just the momentum from his aura became an intangible pressure enveloping the entire surrounding area.

"Kuk..."

"Huk."

The faces of the hunters became pale because of this momentum. In the first place, most of the hunters had been swallowed by the ground. Their resistances and strengths were already as low as they could get.

Lukas shook his hand slightly.

Woosh.

“...huh?”

The momentum disappeared.

It had been hard for the hunters to breathe before, but now, they felt very comfortable. Their wounds were still there, but the pressure was gone and they felt much better.

Rutan’s expression stiffened even more. He bit his lip.

Right. Such a simple check was pointless.

Although he wasn’t a noble yet, his power was still comparable to most Counts. He’d only been able to snatch the position as host of the Chester Company because of his strength.

Rutan looked down.

Pieces of stone were scattered on the ground. It was the aftermath of his previous attack.

Rutan stomped the ground once again. However, it wasn't to overturn the ground like he did before.

Boom!

The ground shook heavily, and dozens of stone pieces shot into the air.

Crack!

Rutan punched forward.

Following the sound of the air tearing, his fist collided with many of the pieces of stone floating in front of him.

Papapat!

These pieces of stone became lethal bullets, which shot towards Lukas. Because he put demonic energy in them, they wouldn't be easy to block.

What would happen next was most important. After all, Rutan's judgement would change depending on how Lukas reacted.

Rutan widened his eyes and paid attention to Lukas' every move.

"You..."

Lukas murmured in a soft voice.

"...are very timid."

"...!"

Despite the fierce roar of the pieces of stone piercing through the air, those words could still be heard clearly.

It was an insult.

This fact was clear to everyone who heard.

If anyone had told him this, even if it was a Demon who was stronger than himself, it would have been incredibly humiliating.

But this was different.

The moment he heard that voice, Rutan's entire body became cold.

It was like his entire body had been soaked in freezing cold water, and the chill even crept into his bones.

Bang!

Suddenly, a piece of stone was sent flying back to him at an even faster speed.

This piece of stone brushed past Rutan's face, but he didn't even think about wiping the dripping blood.

His judgement was complete. Or, perhaps, it was his instinct.

'Run..!'

He had to run away immediately.

He couldn't win.

With that thought, Rutan immediately turned around and attempted escape.

Shuk-

But it was too late.

* * *

Lee Jong-hak blinked.

‘What just happened?’

He knew that his power could be considered at the peak of the hunters. This wasn’t a bluff or pride. Rather, it was an objective statement.

Lee Jong-hak was one of the strongest humans, whose numbers were now lower than one billion. He’d never felt like he was far behind anyone else while watching a battle.

Nevertheless, he had no idea what had just happened.

He’d only blinked once, but Rutan had died.

“...!”

Lee Jong-hak’s body had weakened. The fact of the matter was that he didn’t even have half as much power as when he was at his peak.

However, his eyesight remained the same. He was confident that he would have been able to track their movements even if his opponent was a Count.

But he couldn't tell what Lukas did.

Did he miss his movement?

No.

Did he even move in the first place?

His back grew damp with cold sweat.

If this man, who had just killed Rutan, wanted it, Lee Jong-hak would have been dead as well.

He half-instinctively rubbed his throat.

Then Lukas moved.

Some of the hunters flinched when he moved. Some of them looked like they really wanted to run away, but because their bodies were still stuck in the ground, they couldn't move.

Lukas didn't seem to care about them as he walked to Rutan's body.

Rutan had been decapitated. The surface of the cut was exceptionally clean. It was as if he had been cut by an incredibly sharp blade without any resistance.

However, let alone a weapon, Lukas didn't even have a tree branch in his hand.

'What did he cut him with?'

As Lee Jong-hak looked at him in confusion, Lukas took Rutan's Soul Crystal and threw it to him.

After receiving it, he couldn't help but ask.

"Why did you give this to me...?"

He himself hadn't even realised that had started speaking politely.

Lukas didn't respond to it as though he too hadn't noticed the change in attitude.

"You should get them out."

"Ah..."

That's right.

Lee Jong-hak, Drisa and Allida exchanged glances before moving to free the other hunters. Then Min Ha-rin approached them with a bashful expression.

"You...!"

Allida looked at her with a joyful expression. That's because she knew that Min Ha-rin had sacrificed herself for her sake.

"I'm glad you're okay!"

"Yeah."

"That's a relief. I'm so happy."

"...how did you get away?"

Unlike Allida, who was genuinely happy, Drisa looked at Min Ha-rin with a face filled with suspicion.

Min Ha-rin glanced at Lukas.

"He saved me."

“How?”

“That...”

Lee Jong-hak shook his head when he saw Min Ha-rin hesitate with an embarrassed expression on her face.

“Let’s save the other hunters first. We can talk about this after.”

“...right.”

Lukas went back to the large boulder.

With a sweep of his hand, the camouflaged wall broke apart and a sturdy-looking steel door was revealed.

Although it had been left unattended for a long time, there were no signs of damage except for rust.

“Ah. Y-, you can only enter with the correct password.”

When Allida said this with a slightly anxious voice, Lukas stepped back without a word.

She glanced at him hesitantly before approaching the door.

At the side of the door was a small LCD number pad.

With her finger outstretched, she entered the password. But it was so dirty and stiff that she had to press so hard her finger tips became white.

[Password matches.]

[Welcome to the European Branch's 11th Headquarters.]

Pshh-