

Great Mage 251

(Season 2) – Chapter 11

When the steel door opened with a hiss, Drisa couldn't help but murmur to the other hunters.

“That’s it? There wasn’t any iris or fingerprint recognition?”

“You watched too many movies.”

Although Allida said these words sarcastically, there were actually many hideouts that employed such systems.

“This place wasn’t important enough to invest so much money in. Can’t you tell from the fact that it was actually captured?”

“That’s true, but... it was still too weak.”

The door opened, revealing the interior of the hideout.

It was in a much better condition than they expected. It seemed that Rutan’s words that no one had bothered to occupy the hideout were true.

Allida sighed in relief.

“Fortunately, the power still seems to be working, but... I’m not sure whether the Warp Portal will work or not. I’ll have to take a look around first. Those who were injured need first aid. There should be first-aid kits in the lobby.”

As she said this, Allida headed to the hideout’s system management office.

After she left, silence befell the lobby.

The hunters naturally turned their eyes to look at Lukas. Then Lukas turned to look at the entrance before getting up from his seat.

“Where are you going?”

Drisa only received a short answer to his question.

“To greet the uninvited guests.”

“What?”

“It would be better if none of you came outside.”

Then he left the hideout without waiting for a response.

* * *

Lukas walked out of the hideout.

It seemed that quite a long time had passed as the sky was lit by the final glow of twilight. By the time this dim light finally disappeared, the humans would have finished their daily tasks and *they* would wake up.

Demons.

Shuk-

His body floated up, and he shot up above the clouds in an instant. He reached a place where the air was incredibly thin, but the lack of oxygen didn't matter to him.

He looked down at the ground. From his vantage point, he could see everything happening in the nearby surroundings.

The severely-polluted earth, which had long died, a river, which was as black as ash, and the Demons, who had forcefully occupied a human city.

Were they looking for Duke Sandro?

He saw a group of Demons moving hurriedly around the city.

That city.

There had to have been thousands of Demons there.

[They are like a disease for this planet.]

Before he realised it, a mysterious, black-robed being had appeared behind Lukas. It was the same who'd shown up right after he killed Duke Sandro.

Lukas kept his head lowered as if he didn't care about this black-robed being. (TL: For now I'll refer to this being as man... to make it easier...)

Then he responded.

"Humans are the same."

[...]

What was it?

The mysterious man couldn't help but feel that Lukas' voice was slightly cold as he said those words.

But he soon shook his head. This was an Absolute who loved humans. The tip of his blade would never be directed at them.

[However, humans still have a slight sense of self-control.]

“I’m sure you didn’t come here to tell me that.”

[...there is something I’d like to ask you, Sir Absolute.]

“Speak.”

[Have you already made your judgement?]

When Lukas remained silent, the mysterious man continued, unperturbed.

[Over the past few decades that you’ve been in this world, you’ve only saved a handful of humans. At first, I didn’t understand what you were doing, but now, I do. You were testing the humans in this universe.]

“...”

[Did you hear me? You wandered around this world to see if the humans in this universe deserved to be saved, didn't you?... And now, I think you've reached a decision. Because you even went as far as to kill a Demon Duke.]

The mysterious man's voice was filled with confidence, but Lukas slowly shook his head.

"I'm not so arrogant."

[Then...]

"You don't know anything. I have already lost my authority and fallen."

[...what?]

The mysterious man couldn't help but ask with a perplexed voice.

This was natural.

After all, he thought that the reason Lukas wandered around this world for decades was because he wanted to determine whether the humans in this universe were a good race.

After all, considering Lukas' track record, such a thing was obvious.

But now, Lukas himself was denying it.

He said that it wasn't his goal.

[Then what is your real goal?]

The mysterious man's voice sharpened.

[You have heard these humans' screams. You saw the outstretched hands of those begging for help. Don't you know just how many humans you could save as long as you were willing to do it?]

"In the beginning, I did want to save the humans. If only I could."

[If only you could? Who would dare to defy your will? The Demon King isn't even a problem. He certainly has power that surpasses mortals, but he's nothing more than the king of a small world.]

When Lukas didn't answer, the mysterious man became even more agitated.

His voice grew louder.

[You are a Lord! The second highest rank among Absolutes! Even if you were pressured by the other Lords—]

“They are not the ones I’m worried about.”

It wasn’t them?

That was strange.

Who else could Lukas, who seemed to disregard the other Lords, be worried about?

[...!!]

Then the mysterious man had a sudden thought.

...There was.

There were only four beings in the multiverse who were stronger than Lukas.

[R-, Rulers...!!]

He didn’t hear any denial.

This made the mysterious man even more terrified. He barely managed to speak with a trembling voice.

[O-, oh, my god! Y-, you earned the ire of a Ruler...!]

When Lukas nodded at those words, the mysterious man stumbled as he was unable to contain his shock.

Just mentioning them seemed to shake his very existence.

How many hundreds of years had it been since he'd last received such a great shock?

He knew.

Just how strange Lukas Trowman was among the absolutes.

In fact, a majority of the Absolutes found him displeasing and regarded his deeds as disrespectful.

Because of him, many of them felt like it was impossible to save humans. Because Lukas was a rare, biased Absolute who wielded his power not to carry out God's task but to complete his own personal objective, it gave the other Absolutes a chance to intervene.

But it wasn't them whom Lukas was worried about.

'What the hell did he do?'

The Rulers rarely displayed interest in matters that weren't of utmost importance to the entire multiverse. Because they didn't care about the smaller things.

Naturally, this also meant that they didn't care about what the Absolutes, other than their companions, did.

He had angered such a Ruler?

The mysterious man couldn't help but ask in a trembling voice.

[Wh-, who was it?]

"..."

[Which Ruler did you anger? The Thunderous Lightning God? The Black Horned Demon King? The Sun Giant? Or...]

"All four."

This time, the mysterious man's face became pale.

[I... I beg your pardon?]

Lukas looked at the setting sun and spoke with a calm voice.

“All of the Rulers have become my enemies.”

(Season 2) – Chapter 12

When Lukas left, the atmosphere in the hall instantly became lighter.

Everyone there owed him their lives. And it was true that they were all grateful. But Lukas hadn't said a single word to them.

They couldn't even tell what he was thinking.

This man had power surpassing imagination. He had the power to kill Rutan like a bug.

That's why it was natural for them to feel terrified in his presence instead of relieved.

'An uninvited guest.'

Who could it be?

Drisa was bothered by it, but he didn't get the chance to ask.

Everyone there had their attention focused on Lukas.

“Hoo.”

Then, Lee Jong-hak, who was helping bandage the other hunters, sighed,

“Drisa, it would be better if you were more careful of the way you spoke to him.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know who Lukas is or what his goal is. But there is one thing that is clear.”

Drisa spoke without having to think long about it.

“He’s strong.”

Lee Jong-hak nodded and continued.

“Could you tell how Rutan died?”

“...”

There was no way he could've. Evan Lee Jong-hak, who had the best eyesight out of the group, couldn't tell.

Drisa remained silent, and the other hunters were no different.

"I've been rolling around on this Earth for decades. Even when I was weak, I was still able to broaden my horizons. Now, even with the most secretive techniques, I would be able to see through their tricks just by looking at them. However... I have no idea what Lukas did. In all honesty, for a moment, I thought that he might have been a Demon."

It was a simple guess, but no one in the room refuted it. If this guess was true, then it would have been no different from saying they directly fell into the hands of the reaper.

"But as far as I know, the only reason Demons kill each other is to take away the other's Soul Crystal."

Lee Jong-hak then took out Rutan's Soul Crystal.

"That man gave this to me. A Demon wouldn't do that."

"Maybe he did it cause he thinks he can take it back at any time."

"That's a stretch. A Demon wouldn't do something so annoying."

"You are making a decision too quickly. Hey, this matter involves all of our lives. This isn't something we can afford to be half-assed about."

“...well, it’s not like it’s a problem that we’d be able to answer just by discussing it.”

“That’s true...”

Meanwhile, they had basically finished giving first aid to the injured. No one had been more severely injured than they expected.

Of course, this wasn’t because they were lucky. Instead, this was due to the fact that Rutan had controlled the force of his attack so that they wouldn’t get fatally injured in the first place.

“By the way, Min Ha-rin. How was your collar released?”

“Uh. That...”

Min Ha-rin hesitated for a moment before saying.

“Mr. Lukas released it.”

“He released it? How?”

If she told them that it crumbled like sand after he touched it... they would definitely treat her like a crazy woman. Fortunately, Min Ha-rin had a basic level of discernment and didn’t just blurt it out.

Then how should she put it?

Her eyes became dazed as she tried to think of something to tell them.

“What are you waiting for?”

Not only Drisa’s but the faces of the other hunters were also filled with suspicion.

Min Ha-rin made a bold choice.

She decided to just pretend.

“I don’t know. I don’t know how he did it.”

“...you too? Tch, it feels like we’re going deeper and deeper into the unknown/abyss.”

As he said this, Drisa got up from his seat.

There was a refrigerator in the lobby, and when he opened it, he found many combat rations inside.

“This is nice. It’s been a while since I had human food.”

His expression became one of joy, but then a hunter spoke to him.

“What is the expiration date??”

“Uh. What month is it?”

“Should be May.”

“Then... it’s about a month off. I won’t die if I eat it.”

“Shouldn’t you look at the year? This hideout has been abandoned for decades.”

At Lee Jong-hak’s question, Drisa looked at the year and his expression became stiff.

“...it’s about 13 years...”

“Put it back.”

Drisa looked down at the combat rations again, his face going through various shades of color as he seemed to be contemplating something.

“I mean... If I ate this...”

“It wouldn’t end with just a stomachache and diarrhea.”

“You’re right. Shit.”

He couldn’t afford to get diarrhea in such an urgent situation.

Drisa cursed before throwing the combat ration back into the refrigerator. Then, he slammed the refrigerator door.

Juk.

And at the same time, Lukas came back into the room. Nothing seemed to have changed since he went out, but he didn’t say anything and instead leaned against the lobby wall with his eyes closed and his arms crossed.

His expression, appearance, and posture were like a perfect representation of the phrase ‘don’t talk to me’.

“Kuh.”

Drisa was conflicted.

Shouldn't he ask him what happened outside?

Just as the conflict intensified and he was about to make a move, Allida returned to the lobby.

Unlike when she disappeared, her expression was much brighter.

Still, they couldn't be completely relieved.

As the hunters looked anxiously at her, Allida smiled and spoke.

"The portal seems to be working."

Many of the hunters released sighs of relief.

"We survived..."

"C-, can we finally go back?"

Most of them had given up all hope of survival after they were captured. They didn't get their hopes up even when planning to escape. It was only when they heard that the portal was working that they could finally relax.

Unlike the hunters whose hearts were pounding, Lee Jong-hak remained calm.

He asked with a sharp gaze.

“Where does the portal lead to?”

“The European branch. The mana capacity is almost empty. It will probably be spent after just one Warp.”

“The European Branch...”

Lee Jong-hak was conflicted.

The places in the world with the highest Demon activities were Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Naturally, this meant that most of the land in these places had fallen to the Demons.

“Where in the European Branch? Is it the headquarters?”

“That...”

Allida glanced at Lukas without answering.

Drisa nodded with an enlightened expression.

They had not figured out Lukas' identity yet, so they had to avoid mentioning the specific location of the headquarters.

However, this was not a problem that they could keep avoiding. They had to go back to the association as soon as possible and get rid of the collars.

As if she'd made up her mind, Allida walked up to Lukas and said.

"Can you tell us who you are now?"

This time, Lukas didn't ignore the question.

"If you take me to Nina, I'll talk to her."

"...!"

Those words caused the expressions of some of the hunters to harden considerably. The same was true for Allida.

No, it could be said that she was the most surprised in the group.

“Are you talking about President Nina Rednikova?”

“Nina Rednikova, head of the Hunter Association’s European Branch. I don’t think there is another president with the same name, so I think we’re talking about the same person.”

Allida’s expression became even more shocked.

An acquaintance of the president? The freaking president?

Allida knew Nina’s personality better than anyone else there. That’s why she didn’t understand.

Was he lying to get out of the situation?

“...can you prove that?”

“It’s impossible to do that here.”

“Then it’s hard for us to trust you.”

“Allida.”

When Lee Jong-hak called her name, Allida scratched her head.

“I know. I look like an ungrateful bitch who is turning on the person who saved us. However... what if it was all a ploy? To find the location of our headquarters and kill our president? We can't afford the risk. It's like taking an unknown monster right into the heart of our association branch.”

Allida's words caused Lee Jong-hak to fall silent. That was because there was nothing wrong with what she said.

They couldn't trust Lukas just because he saved their lives.

“That's not it.”

It was Min Ha-rin who spoke up in a firm voice.

“How can you be so sure?”

“He killed Duke Sandro.”

“...”

Silence fell upon the lobby once again. Every hunter had an expression of disbelief.

But Lee Jong-hak and Drisa's expressions became strange instead.

They had already heard those words before.

It was none other than Lukas who had said them.

‘Sandro is dead. And soon, you will be, too.’

And then he’d killed Rutan.

They had seen it with their own eyes but they still felt like it was unbelievable.

“...that man killed a Duke? On his own?”

“Yes. It wasn’t a Count or a Marquis but a Demon Duke. He killed a Demon Duke, whom humanity had only been able to slay twice, with his bare hands. I don’t think he’d take the risk of killing a Duke just to sneak into the headquarters.”

“That should have been the case if what you said was true. But what you saw could have been an illusion. How can you prove that Duke Sandro is really dead?”

Fortunately, she did have a way to prove it.

That was because Min Ha-rin still had the Soul Crystal that Lukas had given to her.

The Soul Crystal she took out had an unpleasant, blood-red color.

“...”

Allida gulped.

She'd heard before in rumors that the higher the rank of a Soul Crystal, the redder and darker it was.

'The dark red light is somehow illuminating the entire room.'

Due to her profession as a Wizard, Allida had seen, created, and transformed numerous Soul Crystals. But she'd never seen one that was so ominous.

“...and it's possible that the Demons already know the locations of the Hunter Association Branch Headquarters located around the world.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because Duke Sandro knew that Busan was the location of the Asia Branch Headquarters.”

“That means...”

“It would be impossible for them to know if they didn’t have people on the inside.”

“...”

In the end, Allida couldn’t help but sigh.

Right. She already knew.

The chances that Lukas was a Demon were incredibly slim.

In the first place, the Demons would never do something so troublesome and annoying. They much preferred the aesthetic of crushing their opponents from the front.

Nevertheless, as a hunter of the European branch, she couldn’t just trust Lukas. After all, for her, who had lost her homeland, the association was her new home.

However, the time had come for her to stop casting her doubt.

Allida immediately walked up to Lukas and bowed her head.

“I’m very sorry for doubting you. Please forgive my rudeness.”

It was a sincere apology, but Allida was still prepared to be criticised to an extent.

After all, it would be natural for Lukas to feel disgruntled. He had saved their lives without asking for anything in return, but he was still met with their doubt and suspicion.

But Lukas shook his head calmly.

“Your suspicion was valid.”

“Huh?”

It was a blunt but soft voice.

Allida raised her head, her eyes wide open.

She looked into Lukas’ eyes, which were like a glassy lake without a single ripple.

“Sometimes, we have to assume the worst. There’s no harm in being careful. I understand your judgement.”

“...ah. Yes. Thank you.”

She had a strange feeling while bowing her head. This was because she never thought that he would not criticise her, and, instead, agree with her.

'What is this feeling?'

It was a strange, tickling sensation in her heart that she hadn't felt for a long time.

But one thing was clear. It wasn't a bad feeling.

(Season 2) – Chapter 13

"President."

Nina opened her eyes when she heard the deep voice.

She was tired. She was so tired that she felt like she was losing her mind.

She'd only slept for a few hours in the past week.

'Damn insomnia.'

When she grit her teeth, the man in the black suit standing in front of her flinched.

Nina Rednikova was the president of the European branch of the Hunter Association. This woman, who had silver hair and looked like she was in her mid 20's despite her true age, had such a ferocious personality that every hunter in the European branch was afraid of her.

Not to mention Ludwig, the Vice President of the European branch who was practically Nina's secretary.

"It's urgent."

In a subdued voice, he recounted his reason for being there.

"We received a signal from Warp Portal 15."

"Number 15... that's Milan. It's been a very long time since that city was occupied. What could the signal be?"

"As you said, it has been more than a decade since it was conquered by the Demons, but..."

"It's probably just a dummy signal. Ignore it as usual."

After saying her piece, she put her head back on her desk.

And before Ludwig could say anything else, he heard a murmur.

"...tch. Just thinking about it makes me annoyed. Do you really think you need to report every little thing to me? Can't you see the dark circles under my eyes? Do you want them to reach down to my chin?"

Nina's voice was cracked with fatigue and sleepiness, and its pitch was low.

Anyone who knew her could tell that she was about to explode.

"W-, we received the signal multiple times. And they knew the code that is only known to Hunters in the association."

Nina looked up at those words. Her expression became serious.

"...could it be the Demons?"

"I think the probability is 50/50."

"Hmmm..."

It was certainly possible that the Demons were contacting the headquarters after prying the information from a hunter.

Nina tapped a pale finger on her desk as she said.

“Wait. Milan... That’s where the Chester Company’s event is being held.”

The gathering of such a large number of nobles in one city might have only been an event for them, but it was something that the hunters and even the entirety of mankind had to pay attention to.

The fact that the Chester Company was hosting an event in Milan was something that most European Hunters were aware of. This was mostly because the Demons didn’t try to conceal this event.

“Does that have anything to do with it?”

“You heard about it, didn’t you? The Duke hunt in Shanghai, about a month ago, failed.”

“You mean the large-scale operation led personally by the Human Dragon, Lee Jong-hak.”

Ludwig nodded.

This was also something that most hunters had heard about.

He spoke in a somber tone.

“At best, 300 of those hunters survived. Lee Jong-hak is still missing. It was considered a huge loss. Not just for the association but the entire human race.”

“...”

Nina seemed to think of something before suddenly smiling.

“Ludwig, open the portal.”

“Why? No, you mean me? You want me to go and open it myself?”

Nina’s smiling face seemed to become a shade darker, and Ludwig’s head became covered in cold sweat.

“A-, as you wish.”

Nina was left alone in the room. Her thoughts, which were a mess, finally settled.

Her cheeks became pink, and her eyes began to shine like stars.

“Finally....”

* * *

“Don’t let down your guards.”

As he said this, Ludwig looked at the portal.

Around the portal were the fully armed hunters whom he’d gathered.

They all had stiff faces, and the atmosphere in the room was tense.

Except for one person.

“I don’t know why you chose to do this in the middle of the night, Ludwig.”

A middle-aged man in military attire lit a cigarette as he said those words.

His voice was harsh, but Ludwig could only smile bitterly.

“Sir Nicholas, please understand. It was the President’s orders.”

Nicholas.

Although he was ranked below Ludwig as the Knight Commander, he was also a legend among European hunters and he had been a hunter for much longer.

Even if Ludwig was the second-in-command of the European branch, he could not treat him recklessly nor did he want to.

“Nina? What can we do if it’s that damn woman’s order.”

Despite his fierce words, the harshness in his eyes faded a little. This was because he and Nina had been working together for decades.

He puffed his cigarette with a sigh.

“There shouldn’t be any possibility of Dukes showing up.”

“Isn’t that better? I think that would be better than a bunch of weaklings showing up.”

“Why?”

“At least, that way, we can all hold hands and die together. Neatly and painlessly.”

“I’m sorry, but my daughter baked apple pie and is waiting for me to try it. If you want to die, then you can die alone.”

“Haha.”

Woowoong-

It was at that moment that the ripples in the portal increased.

Nicholas raised a hand.

Churk.

Every hunter raised their weapon.

They had intentionally not brought a firearms squad. To break through the Demons' defenses, one needed to use a mounted machine gun or anti-tank weapons. And with the size of the base where the portal was held, it would be impossible for them to use such weapons.

'The president said that there was no reason to worry...'

But how could he not be worried?

Ludwig looked at the portal with a stiff expression.

In the meantime, the whirring sound grew louder and the Warp Portal doubled in size.

It felt like a large force was pulling them.

Paht!

The portal flashed.

Then, the shadow of a person appeared. It was soon followed by others.

There were many of them. Appearing to be twelve. And they all looked like humans, but that didn't mean they could let down their guards.

There were many more Demons who concealed their appearances and hid amongst the humans than they thought.

But when he saw the face of the red-haired woman who was leading the group, Ludwig couldn't help but relax his guard a little.

"Allida."

"Ludwig, haha..."

When he heard Allida's soft laugh, Ludwig's eyes trembled.

“Are you really... Allida?”

“Do I look like a fake? Ah, shit. My nose hurts so much I feel like I’m gonna die.”

“You dumbass! I told you not to go to Italy!”

“Would it hurt for you to just come hug me? Tactless fool.”

While the two of them were enjoying their reunion, the other hunters were looking at another man with disbelief in their eyes.

“Lee Jong-hak?”

“The Human Dragon.”

“There’s the Black Panther too.”

“I think I’ve seen that Asian woman before...”

As the chatter grew louder, the tension in the room dropped considerably.

It was Nicholas who changed the mood. He drew the sword at his waist.

Sssng-

Strangely, the faint sound reached everyone's ears. The bustling atmosphere disappeared in an instant, and heavy silence fell in the hall.

"Outsiders, stop there. I will not tolerate any reckless movements. Vice President Ludwig, you can have your reunion later."

"But Allida is..."

Nicholas sighed.

Although he was a young man with outstanding talent, he sometimes had the disadvantage of being too affectionate to the point where he failed to recognise the proper course of action.

This wasn't a virtue that one wanted a superior to have.

'I see why Nina called me.'

He shook his head before commanding in a cold voice.

“Knights, maintain the order and let the guards check their identities. There could be Demons mixed in amongst them.”

When Nicholas said those words coldly, Allida looked at him with a smile.

“Uncle, it’s me. Allida. Have you already forgotten me? These people aren’t suspicious. They’re my party. We were all slaves, and after numerous twists and turns, we finally managed to escape. There aren’t any spies. Listen. What happened was...”

“Be quiet and let them do their work. I will listen to your explanation later.”

Allida’s expression hardened. She was unable to keep her disappointment from showing on her face.

Nevertheless, there was no change to Nicholas’ expression.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t trust you right away. Please understand my position and duties.”

Of course she knew. She knew, but she still couldn’t help the slight sting that she felt.

Allida nodded, and the guards soon approached them.

They thoroughly investigated the identities of the former slaves, including Allida.

Nicholas watched this scene with a sharp gaze.

“The investigation is complete, Sir.”

“The result?”

“There are no problems. All of them are hunters who either went missing or were confirmed to have been captured by the Demons.”

“Is there any possibility that a Demon is hiding amongst them?”

“I think the possibility is extremely low. They’re all wearing collars.”

Then he added with a slightly uncomfortable expression.

“...except for two.”

“Two?”

“One of them is pretty well-known. The Asian Rookie, White Flower. Have you heard of her?”

Nicholas nodded. He knew most of the names of the top rising hunters in every region.

Min Ha-rin was one of the young Korean Hunters. He'd heard that there were great expectations of her not only in the Asian Branch but in the entire Hunter Association because she had an amazing track record despite her young age.

"We also confirmed her identity. Her fingerprint matched the one that was in our database. She's not a Demon. The problem is the other one."

"Who?"

"That guy."

It was the blonde-haired Lukas that the guard pointed to.

"There is no matching information for him. It's possible that his identity was never registered. I think we need to do a more detailed investigation, but that will take time..."

"Stop, you did a great job. I'll handle that guy, so you guys just stand back."

"Yes, sir."

(Season 2) – Chapter 14

Nicholas walked up to the man who had been pointed out to him.

“Excuse me. What’s your name?”

“Lukas.”

“Lukas... I don’t think you are a hunter.”

“Right.”

His casual nod felt incredibly suspicious. This was because he didn’t show any apprehension despite being looked at straight in the eyes.

He also couldn’t guess his thoughts because his attitude was calm and his face was expressionless. Nevertheless, he felt a faint pressure just by standing in front of this man.

Any person who could subconsciously release this sort of pressure could not have been an ordinary person.

As he raised his guard, Nicholas said.

“I think we will need to do a separate background check for you. So please cooperate.”

“Call Nina.”

“What?”

Nicholas' eyebrows furrowed.

“You say it like you two are close. You do know that the name you just called is our President, don't you?”

“Of course I do. So I'll say it again. I'll talk to Nina. So let me see her.”

“...”

Since he said those words confidently, Nicholas couldn't tell if this man was serious or just bluffing.

He suddenly had the strong urge to smoke a cigarette, but he held himself back and turned to Lee Jong-hak.

“Human Dragon, who is this guy?”

“He is...”

Lee Jong-hak pursed his lips slightly.

“...Lukas.”

Nicholas’ crumpled expression told him that his answer wasn’t the one he was looking for.

“Are you joking?”

“Of course not, Sir Nicholas. Lukas is our benefactor. He saved all of our lives.”

“A civilian saved the lives of a group of hunters?”

How?

By stealing a key?

Did he use his wits?

No. The instantaneous judgement of a civilian could never compare to that of a hunter.

Nicholas looked at Lee Jong-hak with suspicion, but his serious expression didn’t change.

“Call President Rednikova. Please.”

“...”

This was a request made by Lee Jong-hak, one of the Three Dragons of the Asia branch, while bowing his head. The weight of his words was different from those of the man named Lukas or whatever.

Nicholas, who was struggling within, eventually clicked his tongue.

“...your bodies stink. We can't let you meet the President like that. And we should remove the collars as soon as possible.”

“Thank you for your consideration. We will not forget this kindness.”

“That's enough of the awkward show. First, we'll remove the collars . Then, we'll let you wash up in the bathroom. When you're done, wait for me in the reception room, I'll take you to Nina.”

After saying this, Nicholas turned and muttered to a hunter standing behind him.

“Watch that guy named Lukas. If you think he's up to anything funny, take him down immediately.”

“Yes, sir.”

* * *

The bathroom was equipped with a bath.

While washing in it, it felt like the past few months of humiliation and fatigue were being swept away together with the dirt.

The muscles around Min Ha-rin's mouth began to relax without her noticing. This was probably the most human she'd felt in the past few months.

This didn't mean they weren't allowed to wash up when they had been treated like slaves. However, it was completely different from a bath like this.

They didn't wash themselves; they were washed.

When they got out of the bathroom, food had been prepared for them. It wasn't anything amazing. Just cereal and high-calorie foods that were used by soldiers.

But even that much was touching for Min Ha-rin and the other hunters.

After their simple meal, they were escorted to the reception room.

It was only when her body sank into the soft sofa that Min Ha-rin realised that she'd truly escaped slavery. She was hit by a sudden wave of fatigue and couldn't help but feel a bit sleepy.

She shook her head and pinched her thigh.

On the other hand, Drisa yawned without a care as he said.

“But why were we the only ones who were called here?”

Only Lee Jong-hak, Min Ha-rin, Allida, Drisa, and Lukas were in the room.

Allida shrugged.

“All four of us are titled. And Mr. Lukas is the president’s acquaintance.”

“Self-proclaimed.”

Drisa muttered under his breath before scratching his head.

“I’m thirsty.”

“Still? We already had so much.”

“I’ll just get something to drink.”

Drisa glanced at the table in the corner of the room. There were quite a few teabags there. He didn't like green or black tea, so he checked again. Finally, he found a coffee mix that he'd tried before.

There was also a kettle on the table, and when he opened the lid, he found that it was filled with water.

"What luck!"

Drisa boiled the water with a delighted expression.

He put the coffee mix into a paper cup, and when he added the boiled water, the sweet and deep scent of coffee filled the room.

This brought the interest of someone whom Drisa would have never expected to show interest in anything.

"What is that?"

"Can't you tell? It's coffee."

Lee Jong-hak shot a stern look at Drisa, who was talking informally again. But fortunately, Lukas didn't seem to care. He tilted his head.

"That's different from the coffee I know. This is my first time seeing it. Its scent is unique."

“Ahh... this is a coffee mix. It’s sweeter than regular coffee and more refreshing.”

“...”

He said this with a mixed tone, but it didn’t seem to work on Lukas. He was just staring at the cup of coffee.

“It’s not that interesting.”

Where the hell did he come from that he didn’t even know about coffee mix?

Just as Drisa was about to take a sip of coffee while feeling suspicious...

Paak!

He felt a strong blow to the back of his head, causing him to almost pour the steaming cup of coffee onto his face.

Blood vessels popped out on Drisa’s forehead.

“Which motherfu-”

The moment he turned around and saw who hit him, the words he was about to say got stuck in his throat.

A young-looking woman with silver hair smiled at him and said.

“Why don’t you speak more politely when you’re in someone else’s house, n*****? You don’t want to get any darker, do you.” (TL: wtf... what the actual f...)

“...”

It was a racial insult that would have made him go wild if it had been said by anyone else, but Drisa could only avert his eyes slightly in shock and slightly in fear.

This was because he recognised this woman immediately.

She was Nina Rednikova, President of the European Branch.

She had a filthy mouth, and her personality was at least three times worse than that.

Drisa wasn’t the type of person who would back down from others, but if the rumors were true, touching this woman was tantamount to suicide.

Fortunately, Nina didn’t seem to be interested in Drisa any longer.

She walked towards Lukas. Then her lips parted and she spoke with a slightly cautious tone.

“The people here...”

“They are qualified.”

Nina’s expression brightened at Lukas’ words.

“I don’t have to hide it, then... Ahem.”

Nina cleared her throat and adjusted her expression before bowing in a polite manner.

“Nina Rednikova greets Master. Have you been strong since we last met?”

(Season 2) – Chapter 15

“...Master?”

Drisa muttered with a blank voice while Lee Jong-hak and Min Ha-rin had strange expressions on their faces.

The one who was the most surprised was Allida.

She couldn't help but wonder if she was seeing an illusion or if Nina had been hit in the head or something.

"You mentioned it when we separated the last time. That we would only meet again if there was an emergency. Master, is it that time?"

"No. The situation has gotten worse."

Nina let out a bitter laugh at those words.

"I can't imagine a situation worse than the current one. In any case, I understand."

She understood what Lukas wanted from her. In other words, she understood her role.

Min Ha-rin and the rest were still staring at Nina with disbelieving expressions.

Nina Rednikova, President of the European Branch of the Hunter Association.

It wasn't just Allida, the European hunter, who knew about her violent personality. Min Ha-rin and the others also knew about it.

'It was Nina, who was considered second among all the Presidents, whom one had to be the most careful around.'

Lee Jong-hak had met Nina numerous times during meetings. At least as far as he knew, Nina Rednikova wasn't even this polite to the Head of the Association.

Drisa scratched his head.

"President Nina. Who the hell is this man... no, this gentleman? Is he the Deputy Head? One who has never been revealed to the public?"

Any hunter knew of the position of Deputy Head of the Association.

It was the position directly beneath the Head of the Association, but the position had always been vacant. To be precise, most people believed that the position only existed in name.

Rumour had it that the Head of the Association was the only one who knew who the Deputy Head was and what kind of role they played in the association.

If Lukas was the mysterious Deputy Head, then Nina's attitude could have been explained. After all, there were very few people to whom the President of the European Branch had to be polite.

But Nina shook her head.

"No."

"Then...?"

“Before I answer that, I want to ask you one thing. Why do you think humans haven’t gone extinct?”

“...”

It was a sudden and extremely sensitive question. At least, that’s how any human should have felt when asked this question.

Min Ha-rin’s expression hardened and Drisa clicked his tongue.

“You want us to answer that now?”

“Right.”

When Nina responded in a firm tone, Drisa flinched slightly.

The fastest to grasp the situation was Allida. She sighed so softly that most of them didn’t even hear it before she answered the question.

“...It’s thanks to the treasures discovered all over the world following the Demons’ appearance.”

Treasures.

They suddenly began to appear in the world one day, providing humanity with a foothold to keep them from tumbling over the edge of the cliff.

They called them treasures, but there were so many kinds that they couldn't have really been described as such.

From books on magic, swordsmanship, and martial arts to weapons, armor, and accessories had special properties and were made of materials that couldn't have been found on earth.

The humans thoroughly analysed the treasures that they found and made them their own, which allowed them to obtain just enough power to resist the Demons.

Nina nodded before saying.

“What else?”

“It's thanks to the potential of the humans that erupted when we became united.”

It was Lee Jong-hak who answered this time.

Of course, they didn't join hands in the beginning. It took more than a decade after the Demons first appeared for humanity to unite. After they had suffered great damage.

But the resistance and potential that humanity had shown since then could only have been described as amazing.

Knowing that, Lee Jong-hak's voice was filled with subtle pride.

The final answer came from Drisa, which came after he thought for a long time.

"Isn't it because of humanity's quick and accurate response?"

When the Demons appeared, Europe and Africa quickly became lands of death, and most of the great powers there could not have maintained their functions as sovereign states after the devastating blows.

North America, which was now called the safest continent on Earth, was no exception to the devastation, but they were able to earn that title because of their relatively fast defeat of the Demons.

Many countries lost their power, and the state of Anarchy lasted for nearly a decade.

Just before civilisation collapsed, the Hunter Association was founded, and it rallied humans together to restore stability to mankind.

In fact, for the first time in human history, a world government was established.

"You all are not wrong. But there are other large and small reasons besides those."

“Why did you ask something like that?”

“To tell you the truth.”

Nina’s voice became serious.

“One of the decisive reasons why humanity didn’t collapse was because my Master was helping us behind the scenes.”

“...”

It was natural that those words caused a cold silence to descend upon the room.

“What did you just...”

“By Master... are you talking about Mr. Lukas?”

Nina nodded and continued.

“Of course, it won’t be easy to accept. I understand that. But everything I’ve said is true.”

“...”

Nina looked at the people in the room.

It was possible that if someone else had said those words to them, they might have already left.

With that in mind, she understood why Lukas wanted her to be the one to explain.

“...how exactly did he help us?”

“He was the one who scattered the treasures across the world, taught us how to interpret them, and advised us on how to utilise them. He was a great help in the founding and maintenance of the Hunter Association. He taught us how to hunt Demons, and those whom he taught personally are all key figures who are now supporting humanity. That’s the best I can summarise the essential points.”

“ ... ”

Maybe it was just her, but it felt like the mood in the room had grown even more somber.

The four of them looked at Nina as if she was crazy.

Holding back her words of denial, Min Ha-rin asked a question instead.

“Are you saying he did all of that on his own?”

“Right.”

“How... Who the hell is this person?”

“The Saviour.”

Drisa snorted loudly.

“How interesting. Are you saying he’s the second coming of Jesus?”

“Huht.”

Nina chuckled, but Drisa didn’t mean that as a joke.

What would be so strange about Jesus resurrecting when Demons had already descended upon the Earth?

Nevertheless, there would be no problem other than the exponential growth in the influence of Christianity, which already had a strong stake in the association.

“Of course not. Master is...”

“God.”

Lukas looked at the one who said that.

It was Lee Jong-hak. He was expressionless, but it was apparent to those in the room that he was angry.

“Or something similar.”

Nina paused.

Strangely, it wasn't easy for her to deny those words.

Lee Jong-hak continued in a low voice.

“I have a question.”

“What is it?”

“Not you, President. I'd like to ask him directly.”

Lukas looked Lee Jong-hak in the eyes. His expression was very serious.

Lukas nodded.

“Go ahead.”

“Where were you, and what were you doing right after the Demons appeared?”

“In another place, saving others.”

“...then when did you come to ‘this place’?”

“About 30 years ago.”

Lee Jong-hak fell silent for a moment.

“According to Min Ha-rin, you have the power to kill a Demon Duke easily. So why have you been silent for the past 30 years? If you had been more active, you would have been able to kill dozens if not hundreds of Demon Nobles.”

How many lives could have been saved if he had done that?

It was Nina who answered.

“It’s not that simple. My teacher can only save a limited number of humans.”

“Limited? So you mean he saves humans selectively?”

“That...”

Nina was speechless for a moment.

“Earlier, you said we were qualified. Is that why you saved us? Because we were qualified?”

“Right.”

“...”

Lee Jong-hak’s expression became harder.

“My mother died when I was 7 years old.”

“...”

“Many people consider Europe and Africa to be the lands of death; China was also in a bad situation. At least, it was the worst among the East Asian countries. The tragedy that took place in my hometown, Guizhou Province, was especially terrible.... A huge horde of Demons who covered the sky in black appeared suddenly. In the face of this disaster, my mother’s judgement was quick and wise. She found a place for me to hide behind a bookshelf.”

Lee Jong-hak closed his eyes, and it seemed that he was recalling that day.

Stay right there. Be quiet. No matter what happens, don't say anything.

His mother had said this with a trembling voice while tears rolled down her cheeks.

How could he not have been scared at the time?

“She probably knew that after I was put in there, she wouldn’t be able to fit.”

When Lee Jong-hak opened his eyes again, there was a fire of hatred flickering in them.

“After a while, a Demon smashed the door and stormed in. My mother ambushed it with a kitchen knife, but it wasn’t enough. She was overwhelmed in an instant, and what happened next was hell to watch.”

At that point, Min Ha-rin didn’t want to hear anymore. This was an instinctive rejection.

Even before hearing it, she already knew how the story would end.

Nevertheless, she couldn't cover her ears and her eyes remained locked to Lee Jong-hak's lips.

"What was even more terrible was the fact that it didn't kill her before it started eating her. It tore off my mother's arm with its sharp teeth, ripped the flesh from her thighs, and ate it ravenously. Her screams were the most horrible screams I'd ever heard in my life. I wanted to rip my ears off. But... the most frightening moment was when I couldn't hear the screams anymore."

Lee Jong-hak would never forget the last sound he heard. The sound of the demon chewing on his mother's skull.

"I couldn't move. And my tongue had been frozen by fear. I even forgot how to blink, which meant I saw every single thing that happened."

Lee Jong-hak looked up.

He looked directly at Lukas.

"If you are the saviour, then why didn't you save my mother? Because she didn't meet the qualifications you just mentioned?"

The 'mother' whom Lee Jong-hak was talking about wasn't just his own.

Lukas knew that too. His words weren't just whining. Instead, he was blaming him for his arrogance.

Instead, he was asking about the countless people who died because they weren't chosen by him.

"I know, yeah. Everyone knows. It's impossible for you to save everyone. Even God couldn't have done that. That's a given. What I'm saying might only be because of my perspective. However..."

Lee Jong-hak's voice became filled with anger.

"Can you imagine how the fact that you wandered the world for decades saving only those you selected... looks to me?"

"..."

"This is what I'm really curious about. What if you saw a suffering human who didn't meet your requirements? Would you just walk past them and pretend you didn't see anything? Are you standing on the sidelines while countless humans, whom you can save, die? Just because they aren't qualified enough?"

"Stop."

Nina spoke in a low voice, but Lee Jong-hak didn't shrink back at all.

He continued in a cynical tone.

“I really wonder how I can feel grateful after learning that you only saved me because I suited your taste... I can't accept that. I believe that you are a great being and that everything Nina said is probably true. You supported humanity from behind the scenes, gave us the tools we needed to defend ourselves, and taught us. However...”

Lee Jong-hak's breath came out sharply.

“We haven't been able to survive this long because of your help. We lost our families, our countries. Our population is not less than half of what it used. But even though there are countless monsters stronger than us out there, we haven't given up.... That's purely our own power. It's not because we had the help of some unknown saviour.”

Nina couldn't have been angrier. But the only reason she hadn't done something was because Lukas had blocked her voice.

So all she could have done was grit her teeth and glared at Lee Jong-hak.

Lee Jong-hak rose from his seat. Then he walked past Lukas and said.

“...I will find a time to repay your favour of saving my life.”

After saying that, he left the room without hesitation.

Then Drisa and Allida slowly rose up from their seats.

“Um... well. I think I need some time to think about all of this. It’s not something that I can easily accept at this moment.”

“I’m sorry, President. Please give me some time.”

(Season 2) – Chapter 16

When the three of them left, the only ones left in the room were Nina, Min Ha-rin, and Lukas.

Min Ha-rin looked at Lukas’ face.

She’d thought that his expression would have changed this time. Because he had been criticised by someone whose life he’d saved. Even if he was an emotionless person, he still would have had some kind of reaction.

But it didn’t happen.

Lukas’ face was still as expressionless as before. As if he noticed her gaze, Lukas turned to look at her.

“Do you have something to say?”

“...and if I do?”

“I’ll listen to whatever you have to say.”

He paused for a moment before adding.

“Because there’s nothing wrong with what Lee Jong-hak said.”

“...”

Lukas’ voice was calm.

His voice didn’t shake even a bit, and his eyes remained clear like a tranquil lake.

“...you agree with him?”

“I do.”

How was that possible?

Of course, Lee Jong-hak’s words weren’t wrong

His doubts were natural, and from a certain perspective, his criticisms were valid.

Nevertheless, Min Ha-rin still had a few questions.

'However...'

Despite her doubts and suspicions, it could not have been denied that Lukas had saved them.

He'd also been helping humanity for decades.

So she still wasn't sure. She couldn't understand Lukas' intentions either.

However, she felt that there was a reason why this man refused to defend himself. And she realised why she was the only one who had this thought.

Only Min Ha-rin had heard what the mysterious black being, who had appeared after Duke Sandro died, had said.

'It seems your patience over the past few decades has run out.'

Patience. What had he been patient with?

She didn't know. And she could not read anything from Lukas' expression.

He looked like someone without emotions.

Or.

Someone who knew that this would happen.

Min Ha-rin suddenly felt that his expressionless face seemed lonely.

“At this moment, tens of millions of people are struggling in pain. But I can’t save them all.”

“Even if you can’t save all of them, can’t you save as many as possible?”

Min Ha-rin knew how strong Lukas was. Because she’d seen how he killed Duke Sandro.

It wasn’t even a fight.

Sandro didn’t understand or accept his death even at the moment he died.

She couldn’t help but feel the Demons’ power would have been greatly reduced if he was willing to use his power more actively.

“I can only save a handful of people.”

“...even if you have that much power?”

“Even if I have this much power.”

This was said in a much firmer voice than she expected.

Min Ha-rin fell silent because she couldn't understand.

Lee Jong-hak had already shown that they wouldn't be able to understand the answer even if they asked the question.

Likewise, they wouldn't be able to understand his true identity.

Lukas looked at her face and continued.

“I agree with Lee Jong-hak's words. It's an exaggeration to say that humanity only made it this far because of my help.”

Nina's lips parted slightly when she heard those words. Although she did not agree with Lukas disparaging his own achievements, denying his words would be the same as denying her Master.

“It's also arrogant of me to decide whom to save based on my own personal standards. There are people who are better and people who are not, but all life is precious.”

This was something that everyone knew.

These words, which were so familiar and easy to overlook, were the closest to the truth of the universe.

But Lukas still thought that he was ridiculous. Despite knowing the truth of these words better than most people, he had personally ended countless lives, and he would continue to do so.

Was it because he knew the law of the cycle of reincarnation?

Because he knew that death wasn't the end?

Because he was aware of the existence of an afterlife?

How ridiculous.

Did knowing that lessen the weight of life?

No. Because every being still had one life. It was disgusting to comfort himself and justify his slaughter with such an excuse.

But Lukas thought.

Knowing it and practicing it were two different things.

He *knew* that all life was precious. Nevertheless, because of his personality, there were clear limitations. His judgements were bound to always be subjective.

Even Lukas could not look at everything objectively.

Min Ha-rin was proof of this.

To an extent, Lukas... had saved her on a whim.

“You said that we were qualified. Can I ask what that means?”

“The power of transformation.”

The answer came from Nina. It seemed that she had managed to suppress her agitation.

Min Ha-rin tilted her head to the side.

“...the power of transformation?”

“Some people have other childish names for it, but I like this one the most.”

She then shrugged and explained.

“To put it simply, it means those who will have a profound influence on the course of history. There are many cases in which a single individual managed to change history more than anyone could have expected. Those who possess hundreds or even thousands of times more of that potential are called ‘transformers’” (TL:...I had to... it’s literally ‘transformation people’)

“Then Mr. Lukas...”

“Right. He looks for those transformers.”

To be precise, he *only* looked for transformers. But Nina closed her mouth without mentioning that fact.

She didn’t know why, but Lee Jong-hak’s angry voice came to her mind at that moment.

“...Master... probably wanted to save Lee Jong-hak.”

Lee Jong-hak.

He certainly appeared to be the main character in a heroic tale. Min Ha-rin couldn’t fully understand the concept of the power of transformation and transformers, but she could at least see that he was an indispensable hero of mankind.

“He ended up saving everyone else, but...”

In truth, even Nina wasn't entirely sure about this situation. This was the first time Lukas had saved so many people at once.

At least as far as she knew.

She shot a questioning gaze to Lukas, but he didn't answer her unspoken question.

Then Min Ha-rin spoke again.

"Then he must have saved a lot of people... who were transformers. Since he's been around for 30 years."

"Not that many. Probably fewer than ten."

"Huh? That's all...?"

"Maybe."

Nina shook her head.

"I don't know just how many people Master has saved. And... just because he saved them doesn't mean they think he's their benefactor."

Min Ha-rin could easily understand Nina's words.

After all, she'd just witnessed such a case for herself.

"One thing is certain: Regardless of what they think about Master, everyone he saves is a key to sustaining humanity."

This was something that could have been understood just by looking at Nina and Lee Jong-hak. After all, how many hunters were stronger or had more influence than them?

Nina held the position as the President of the European Branch of the Hunter Association. In other words, every hunter in Europe was her subordinate.

Although Europe was considered one of the weaker branches of the Hunter Association, it still had a large number of top hunters.

It was the same for Lee Jong-hak. He was a hero who was known throughout Asia. He was one of the Three Dragons who protected Asia, and it would've been hard to find a hunter who didn't know his name.

'If there were even just a few more people in similar positions to President Nina...'

And if they were to give their absolute trust and loyalty to Lukas, the influence that this blonde-haired man could exert on the association would have been much greater than anyone could expect.

“Master, there is one thing I’d like to ask you.”

Lukas turned to Nina and said.

“You want to know why I’m letting you explain all of this to Min Ha-rin?”

“...that’s right.”

Her thoughts had been seen through before she could even bring them up, but Nina wasn’t surprised. This was because this was something that anyone who talked to Lukas would encounter.

But Nina’s composure was broken by Lukas’ next words.

“I plan to take her as my disciple.”

“...”

Come to think of it, he had said that he would teach her magic. Min Ha-rin blankly recalled that conversation.

She was so distracted by everything happening that she’d forgotten about it.

'But did I say I would learn it?'

"Of course, that depends on if she's willing."

Crack.

Min Ha-rin felt like she heard something crack.

She didn't hear incorrectly.

Nina's fists were clenched tightly, and her face was cold. It suddenly felt like the room was filled with cold air.

Min Ha-rin subconsciously swallowed her saliva.

She didn't know why, but she suddenly felt anxious. It felt like she had taken something she shouldn't have touched.

"Disciple?"

Nina spoke with a disjointed voice. Then she turned to look at Min Ha-rin.

The moment she saw the emotions brewing in her eyes, Min Ha-rin flinched.

“But...”

Envy, jealousy, and hatred seemed to form a dense web in her eyes.

Nina bit her lip before speaking in a strained voice.

“I would be...”

Nina, who had started trembling slightly, closed her eyes.

“...”

Then, after taking several slow, deep breaths, she opened her eyes and returned to her usual self.

“...I see.”

Nevertheless, she was unable to completely hide the slight tremors in her voice.

Nina spoke in a soft voice.

“I envy this child.”

“Nina, those who aren’t wandering—.”

“...don’t need directions. I remember Master’s teachings clearly.”

Nina sighed deeply.

“I’m sorry for pursuing this. And I understand, but...”

Min Ha-rin belatedly realised that Nina was upset.

She was complaining to Lukas.

“...Min Ha-rin’s not exactly young.”

Min Ha-rin’s expression hardened slightly as she heard the familiar words,

“I heard that she uses a sword. It would take a lot of painful effort for her to learn magic.”

Ah. Was that what they meant?

Then Lukas' words last time weren't because she looked older than her actual age.

Min Ha-rin briefly forgot her situation and nodded to herself.

"The important thing is her attitude. As you said, it would have been painful, but it wouldn't matter if she believed that she could overcome it.... Though, it might be too late to ask."

Lukas turned to look at Min Ha-rin.

"Do you have any plans of becoming my disciple and learning magic from me?"

Magic.

In the past, she'd yearned to learn it. To be precise, she'd always had a faint admiration for Wizards.

But after learning that she didn't have the talent for it, that yearning disappeared.

What about now?

"You have great talent for swordsmanship."

“Huh?”

“If you continue walking on the path you’re on, you will be able to surpass Lee Jong-hak in 5 years.”

“ .. ”

What did he mean by ‘surpass Lee Jong-hak’?

She didn’t understand.

While she was only a rookie at best, Lee Jong-hak was viewed as the Dragon of Hope throughout East Asia and had defeated dozens of Demon Nobles.

Min Ha-rin had heard countless rumors about him. And she had been greatly impressed by his upright personality in the short time that she’d spent with him.

How could she surpass a man like that in 5 years?

Min Ha-rin looked at Lukas in confusion as he continued.

“But if you accept my teaching, you can surpass him in 1 year. With magic.”

“ .. ”

This time, it felt like cold water had been poured on her head.

That was because those were too unrealistic.

'In 1 year?'

It was impossible. She was absolutely certain that such a thing was impossible.

Min Ha-rin knew absolutely nothing about magic, and she could barely feel the mana that filled the atmosphere.

In other words...

"...I have no talent for magic."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because I can't feel mana."

Lukas looked at her.

“It’s not that you don’t have any talent. It’s just that your mana sensitivity is low. I can help you with that. The most important thing is your attitude.”

Min Ha-rin’s expression changed when she heard the word attitude.

When it came to willpower and perseverance, she didn’t think she would lose to anyone.

(Season 2) – Chapter 17

Min Ha-rin wanted to become strong.

“The weak have no choice.”

She muttered in a soft voice.

“I realised this when I was caught by the Demons. I didn’t even have the right to kill myself. I resented that I had been born in this age. And I wished I had lived decades ago.”

She’d seen it in a drama that she’d watched on a half broken electronic device.

It was probably just a B-grade drama that didn’t become a big hit when it was aired. It was a simple story about a protagonist, who was an ordinary college student, having troubles with studying, finding a job, dealing with friends, and worrying about men and women.

It was such a warm and carefree life that it always made her laugh.

There was no threat of war.

There was no need to worry about killing or dying.

When Min Ha-rin hated the fact that she was one step too late to save a teammate, they resented the fact that they'd missed the bus by a hair's breadth.

When Min Ha-rin had to stand guard against the Demons and Demon Beasts, they stayed up all night worrying about the person they liked.

When Min Ha-rin jumped up and drew her sword just from the sound of a rat rustling nearby, they covered their heads with their blankets to block out the sound of the alarm ringing in their ears.

She envied them like crazy.

But what could she do about her envy? Could she travel back in time?

It was impossible.

At least as long as the Demons were still on Earth.

That was why Min Ha-rin wanted to become strong. She wanted to get rid of all of the Demons and return to a life like she'd seen in the drama.

Even if it was impossible for her, she wanted her siblings to have such a life.

“You want to be strong?”

“Yes.”

“How strong?”

“I don’t want anyone to be able to force me to do anything.”

Lukas’ expression became a bit strange.

“That would only be possible if you were stronger than everyone else. You know that, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“You will have to walk a very thorny path.”

“I can overcome it. At least I won’t give up. Ever.”

Min Ha-rin’s voice was firm.

Her courageous expression filled Lukas' heart with happiness.

"From today, you are my disciple, Min Ha-rin."

"Ah... Th-, thank you."

She couldn't think of anything else to say, so she just bowed her head.

Then she became slightly embarrassed as she thought of something and said.

"...do I have to kneel before you?"

"No."

"...I see."

Silence fell for a moment.

Min Ha-rin hesitated for a moment.

"I... Master. Can you call me Ha-rin?"

“Why?”

“I think saying my full name is too formal.”

“Sure.”

“...thank you.”

Min Ha-rin’s cheeks became slightly flushed, probably because of her embarrassment.

Nina couldn’t help but feel a bit uncomfortable at the sight.

“Ahem.”

Therefore, she loudly cleared her throat and changed the subject on purpose.

“Then you are his first disciple.”

Lukas couldn’t help but feel a bit strange at those words.

She wouldn’t be his first disciple.

“Aren’t you also Master’s disciple?”

Nina shook her head when Min Ha-rin asked this question in confusion.

“I’m not.”

“Huh? But you keep calling him Master...”

“That’s because Master taught me a lot of things. Anyways, he is my Master, but I’m not his disciple.”

It was a strange statement. When Min Ha-rin closed her mouth because she wasn’t able to easily understand what she said, Nina chuckled.

“My Master has a strange stubbornness. So you should understand how much of an honour this is and not do anything to embarrass him.”

“Yeah.”

“...then. Does that mean there are four left? You said you’d accept a total of five disciples.”

When Lukas nodded, Min Ha-rin couldn’t help but ask another question.

“Why do you need five?”

“In my experience, that is the most appropriate number to transform a world.”

It was Lukas who answered this time.

Of course, there were still many things for him to do besides looking for disciples.

He might not have been able to move openly, but he could at least be more active than he was now.

“Nina, I’m thinking about creating an organisation. One that doesn’t obey the orders of the Association, one that will sometimes act on its own judgement. It will probably be the busiest organisation in the world.”

“An organisation would be good. Have you thought of a name?”

Lukas nodded.

He’d decided upon a name a very long time ago. Or maybe it had appeared in his head just recently.

His eyes fell on Min Ha-rin as he spoke.

“Argento Spell.”

* * *

“What do you plan to do from now on?”

“I plan to stay here for the time being.”

“Stay here...”

Nina’s expression brightened up considerably.

Min Ha-rin didn’t say it, but she felt that the way she was acting would give anyone chills.

Where did the scumbag Nina Rednikova disappear to?

Min Ha-rin shook her head inwardly, but it wasn’t strange that Nina was so happy. That was because it could be considered rare for Lukas to stay in one place for a month.

Regardless of the reason, being able to see her beloved teacher as much as she wanted for the foreseeable future greatly boosted Nina’s motivation.

“Then, I will serve you with all my heart.”

“Don’t mind me. Just focus on your own work.”

“But...”

“Duke Sandro died. The loss of a Duke, not some other noble, will surely cause the Demons’ movements to change. And these changes will take place in Europe, where the Chester Company is located. It’s very important that you pay attention to the air currents.”

“...understood.”

Nina had no choice but to nod her head with a sad expression.

“I’ll inform Ludwig. That way, you won’t have any restrictions when entering or leaving the headquarters nor when accessing the various facilities.”

“Thanks.”

“...”

“Do you have something else to say?”

“...it’s a bit different.”

Nina was slightly tense as she continued.

“There’s a child I want you to see.”

“A child you want me to see?”

“Yes. Please forgive my rudeness, but... Could you take a look at that child and accept them as your disciple if you like them?” (TL: wasn’t clear on ‘the child’s’ gender)

Lukas fell silent for a moment before speaking.

“Is that child in the European Headquarters right now?”

“No, they went on a mission. If everything goes according to plan, they should be back in about two weeks.”

Her worries didn’t last very long.

Against her expectations, Lukas nodded.

“Tell me when they return.”

“Th-, thank you.”

Lukas patted Nina, who had a bright expression on her face, on the shoulder.

* * *

The 11th Training Room was a dedicated training space for Wizards. There was no training equipment there, and the space was smaller when compared to the other training rooms.

But the strange thing about this room was the atmosphere. All of the walls in the room were brown, and the lighting was dim. There was also the subtle smell of charcoal, and when one smelled it, one’s mind was soothed.

Lukas was already there by the time Min Ha-rin arrived.

She hurriedly bowed her head.

“I apologise for being late.”

“You came ten minutes early; you’re not late.”

When Lukas responded nonchalantly, Min Ha-rin glanced at his expression.

“...but wasn’t I still later than Master?”

“I stayed here yesterday.”

“Ah...”

Min Ha-rin believed him. But she didn’t understand what he meant by ‘stayed’.

Did he sleep there?

She couldn’t see any furniture in the room. It was an empty space that didn’t even have a sofa or a chair, let alone bedding.

The only thing that stood out was the basin beside Lukas, which had a dry towel and a bottle of water.

‘No, he said he stayed.’

He didn’t sleep. He just stayed.

Maybe he didn't need sleep.

"Breakfast?"

"I haven't eaten."

"Good. Come here and sit with your back to me."

Min Ha-rin did as Lukas instructed.

"Close your eyes and try to relax."

Soon, she felt something touch her back.

It was probably Lukas' palm.

'It's cold.'

That didn't mean it was uncomfortable. Instead, it was a pleasant coolness that reminded her of a tree's shade in the middle of summer.

"Since you said you can't feel mana, the first thing we will do is awaken your senses. This... is mana."

Kung!

“...!”

Her hair seemed to stand on end.

The moderate coolness that she had been thinking about before suddenly became cold water that penetrated into Min Ha-rin’s body.

She almost jumped up from the ground. But Lukas was gently pressing on her shoulder with his other hand.

“Be still. This won’t hurt you... It is possible to change the attribute of mana according to your will. What you are feeling now is water attribute mana. It is the easiest to feel, the easiest to mold, and the least dangerous. Unless you reject it excessively.”

“...”

Min Ha-rin didn’t answer. She couldn’t afford to.

At some point, the mana, which had been scrambling wilding around her body, began to move through her blood vessels. It felt like she could track the movements of her blood.

In all honesty, it wasn't a good feeling. She felt some degree of coolness and refreshment, but it was hard to endure the feeling of something foreign wandering around her body.

“Think of the Mana Room as an organ that can accumulate mana. It exists in every human being, and naturally, you are no exception. From now on, you must recognise the existence of this organ.”

At that moment, the mana, which had been flowing around her body nonstop, gathered together in a spot just below her belly button.

‘Ah... this...’

That was where the Danjeon(1) was located.

Min Ha-rin's expression became stiff.

As a swordsman, her Danjeon was where she stored her ki.

And at this rate, her mana and ki would...

Kung!

“Kuk...!”

As expected.

The two energies collided violently. The collision was so powerful that Min Ha-rin drooled without realising it.

Lukas spoke in a firm tone.

“I will now convert your Danjeon to a Mana Room.”

“...!”

Convert it?

Then would all of the ki she'd worked hard to accumulate in her Danjeon disappear?

'I did swear to focus all of my attention on Magical science, but...'

It was too sudden!

She wouldn't have been so surprised if he had only told her about it in advance.

Min Ha-rin wanted to say something, but she still couldn't afford to. She could only clench her teeth and endure it.

The pain was not as great as she thought it would be, but the pressure was severe. She felt like if she were to relax for even a moment, her entire body would collapse under an unknown pressure.

Crack... Crack...

She felt something crack.

It was none other than her Danjeon. Her Danjeon was cracking.

It was being covered by one crack after another.

Crack!

Then, with one final cracking sound, her Danjeon shattered. No, it wasn't broken. She couldn't understand the details, but it felt like the components of her Danjeon were gradually being changed.

It was like dead skin was being peeled off and new skin was growing.

'Ah...'

Her ki began to disappear.

The culmination of over 10 years of sweat and blood, which she had accumulated step by step from the day she was examined in the association, washed away like the ebbing tide.

(Season 2) – Chapter 18

Just as Min Ha-rin was filled with an extreme sense of loss, a new energy seemed to fill the void within her.

Mana.

Woowoong-

Her Danjeon was changed to a Mana Room, and mana began filling it.

‘How is this possible?’

Min Ha-rin’s expression became complicated. She felt like something crazy had just happened within her body.

It was at that time that Lukas spoke.

“The first step is complete, so you can relax.”

“Puha...”

It was only then when Min Ha-rin let out the breath that she had been holding.

Lukas held out a towel to her.

That was when she realised that her entire body was covered in sweat.

“Because all of your ki has been released, you will feel temporary exhaustion. You feel like you have no strength in your body, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“There will be no problems, so you don’t need to be afraid.”

“Thank you.”

As he looked at her wiping herself with the dry towel, Lukas said.

“I checked your body. Your blood vessels are very clean. I can see just how seriously you were with your swordsmanship.”

His words made Min Ha-rin so embarrassed that she ended up rubbing a spot that she'd already cleaned.

"...you could tell?"

"Right. There is still some residue left, but that won't be a problem. We'll take a ten-minute break before moving on to step two."

"Step 2...?"

"I will be removing the impurities in your blood vessels, organs, muscles, and skeleton. It will increase the speed with which you can use your mana."

She had an ominous feeling when she heard the word impurities, but she didn't have the time to think too deeply about it.

After about ten minutes, she sat with her back to Lukas once again.

Lukas placed the basin in front of her before saying.

"This will hurt a bit."

"Huh? ...Hup!"

In that instant, an intense pain seemed to pierce through her spine.

“...!!”

Min Ha-rin clenched her jaws tightly. Nevertheless, she was unable to keep her groans of pain from leaking out.

An electric current seemed to run through her body, starting with her head. It was like she was being pricked by thousands of needles.

Tears flowed from her eyes.

But what happened next was the most shocking.

“U-, urk...!”

It felt like something was stuck in her throat. Like a lump was moving up her oesophagus.

“Blech!”

She couldn't hold it in, and she ended up vomiting it out.

Then, a foul-smelling black lump fell into the basin in front of her.

Lukas looked down at it and said.

“It smells very bad... so it seems you spat out most of the impurities. It’s also just a small amount, which means your body was clean just like I expected. This might end sooner than I thought.”

Min Ha-rin looked at the black mass in the basin with a mixture of horror and disgust. It was so disgusting that it made her nauseous.

“Th-, this... came from inside of me?”

“Why are you asking that when you spat it out yourself?”

Lukas then looked over at Min Ha-rin before continuing.

“Your front teeth are black. It doesn’t look very good, so you should rinse your mouth.”

“...!”

Min Ha-rin was startled for a moment before roughly grabbing the plastic water bottle that Lukas was holding out for her.

Then she quickly rinsed her mouth with the water before looking at Lukas with resentful eyes.

“...Master, have you ever heard that you are very inconsiderate?”

“I’ve heard it countless times before, but I don’t understand it. Do you think so as well?”

“...”

How could he say that in such a surprised tone? Did he have no self-awareness at all?

Min Ha-rin was speechless.

Lukas continued with an expression showing that he didn’t understand.

“In the first place, the impurities would have come out of every orifice in your body. Not just your mouth but your eyes, nose, ears, and pores. I adjusted it so that you would only need to spit them from your mouth. I even prepared a basin and water for you in advance. I think that is very considerate.”

That wasn’t the problem.

Min Ha-rin held back the words that she wanted to say.

“...I think so too. Thank you for your consideration, Master.”

While thinking that it would take some time to decipher her new Master's personality, she once again put the water bottle to her lips.

* * *

Red Mafia.

It was the name of a Russian criminal organisation. Civilisation declined, the population dropped sharply to less than one billion, and the territory through which humans could move freely fell to less than half, but criminal organisations like this one didn't disappear.

Instead, it could be said that this era was one of surging prosperity for them.

For the Red Mafia, the 2000s could be called a nightmare. Due to the aggressive policies put in place by the party, criminal organisations in Russia were virtually on the verge of annihilation and the remaining forces who barely managed to save themselves were forced to flee abroad.

It wouldn't be enough to say that it was their most miserable moment, but somehow, they were able to keep their name.

Then, the world had been turned upside down, and it basically reached a state close to anarchy.

It was then when Russia's underworld had a splendid resurrection.

The Red Mafia quickly gained power and became a group that was several times larger and scarier than in its heyday.

Even if they were to openly act as black market traders in a residential area in a major city in Russia, they wouldn't have to worry about any inspections.

This couldn't be helped.

The Hunter Association was practically acting in the capacity of the world government. Their main enemies were the Demons, not the mafia. And they were extremely understaffed.

They didn't have the means to restrain the various activities of the organisation.

That was why the young boss of the organisation, Vaches Bondarenko, was quite pleased that he could live in this era.

"Are you serious?"

Vaches couldn't help but ask again.

He was staring at the man in front of him with suspicious eyes.

"Have I ever messed around when making a deal?"

The man in the suit shrugged as he said this.

Vaches laughed.

“...of course not. Ah, by the way, I had a nightmare that I was burnt to death last night.”

“They say that dreams usually mean the opposite.”

“Kikiki. That’s right.”

Vaches chuckled.

“I’ll accept it. Kidnapping a single man is not a problem.”

“Thanks. The reward will be twice as high as last time.”

Vaches’ eyes widened at those words.

“Twice as last time...? That’s 10 million dollars...”

“What? Is it not enough?”

“No way.”

Vaches shook his head.

It was enough; in fact, it was too much. Asking for more would just be greedy.

“You said it yourself, so I won’t give you a single cent more. Don’t come crying to me later.”

“Of course.”

The dollar was the only currency in the world that had maintained its original value.

The North American continent across the sea was called Paradise. A place where one could live a life that was only dreamt about. It was the only place on the planet that the word peace could still be used to describe.

That was why the dollar had become the common currency of the world or, to be precise, the only currency.

Of course, because of the situation, the value of money was not the same as it used to be, but 10 million was still a sizable sum.

When the suited man left, Vaches’ right hand man approached him.

“This is a big deal. Kidnapping one person for 10 million.”

“Don’t let your guard down. There is little information on him, so he might be more important than we think.”

After saying that, Vaches laughed.

“Of course. If he really was a big shot, there is no way we wouldn’t know about him.”

“Kuku. Where is he now?”

“In the European Branch of the Hunters Association. In other words, right below this city.”

The fact that the European Branch of the association was beneath the city was an open secret of which almost all of the city’s residents were aware.

The man frowned at Vaches’ words.

“Is he a hunter?”

“He’s not.”

“Hmm. I’m glad to hear that, but... How did that man know that the target is in the European branch headquarters?”

Vaches responded nonchalantly to his subordinate’s words.

“That’s nothing. That guy is a European hunter who works in the headquarters.”

“Ah...!”

“In any case, the information is clear, so memorise the target’s face.”

The other members of the organisation who came into the room looked down at the blurry image on the table. It looked like they had cut a clip from CCTV footage or taken the image with a hidden camera.

Nevertheless, it wasn’t hard for them to grasp the general characteristic and approximate features of the man in the image.

“His name is Lukas. We’re going to grab him whenever he comes into the city, so stay alert.”

One of the subordinates looked at the picture and grinned.

“It would be lucky for us if he came as late as possible.”

“You have to be polite. That’s a \$10 million body. If he’s obedient, we can end this without hurting him.”

Vaches lit a cigarette and grinned.

“As long as he’s obedient.”

(Season 2) – Chapter 19

Lukas focused on cleansing Min Ha-rin’s body until the next day.

Min Ha-rin had to suffer through tremendous mental torture. What was worse than throwing up the impurities was the bad smell that remained in her mouth. Unfortunately, the headquarters didn’t have anything that helped bad breath, so she could only brush her teeth every time she got a break.

‘If I keep brushing my teeth like this, won’t they wear away?’

While she was contemplating this dilemma, Lukas called out to her.

“Look at me.”

Min Ha-rin turned to look at Lukas.

Then she was amazed. She could see a blue haze rising up from his body.

“Can you see it?”

“Yes... so that’s mana...”

“Right.”

When Lukas nodded, the blue haze disappeared.

“I just intentionally made my mana visible. You won’t be able to see the mana in the air just yet, but it shouldn’t be a problem for you to sense it with your body. So focus on gathering mana from today.”

“That means...”

Lukas nodded.

“The preparations are complete.”

“Ah...!”

In other words, she wouldn’t have to vomit out any more disgusting impurities!!

Min Ha-rin almost cheered from the joy rising up within her heart.

“Before that, you must first learn how to move it on your own. Can you feel the presence of your Mana Room?”

“Yes.”

“Repeat the thought of opening and closing your Mana Room. You can imagine a faucet as a substitute. Uncontrolled mana will be released through your skin after running wildly around your body. You don’t need to force yourself to control it at first. It’s no different from moving ki, so you’ll be able to learn it quickly.”

“Understood.”

“When your mana runs out, sit down and absorb the mana flowing in the atmosphere. Breathing while feeling like your body is accepting all of the energy in the air will help. When you have collected a certain amount of mana, release it again. By repeating this process, the cycle of absorption and release of mana will gain momentum.”

Lukas looked around the training room.

“The structure of this room allows you to gather mana easily. It would be helpful to stay here even when you eat and sleep.”

“I will keep that in mind.”

Min Ha-rin nodded with a determined expression.

“I will return in a week.”

After saying this, Lukas left the room.

Now that she'd taken her first steps in Magical Science, he wondered just how far she'd go.

‘This world is filled with mana.’

It was so full that he couldn't help but find it strange.

Even Lukas was unable to guess the reason.

In general, scientific advancement and conservation of nature are factors that are incompatible. And the science in this world was very advanced.

Naturally, this meant that nature suffered from a lot of damage, so it would have been normal if the mana in this world's atmosphere was sparse.

‘Not this place.’

This world had at least twice the mana density of the world he was born in.

As proof of that, it had only been a few decades since he'd spread the knowledge of Magical Science to this world and there were already many outstanding Wizards. Even if Lukas secretly helped them, such a rate of growth was abnormal.

There must have been a reason for this freak phenomenon.

Lukas had tried to find the cause during his time here, but his investigations had not been successful.

And in a way, the lack of results was the most conclusive evidence.

That was because it meant that there was something in this world that even an Absolute like Lukas could not have decipher.

* * *

Lukas went up to the city above.

This wasn't because he had taken Nina's advice to look around. Instead, he had another goal.

However, it would have taken some time to accomplish this goal. Until then, it would've been fine to observe the culture of this world's humans with his own eyes.

Lukas had traveled the world for decades, but he had never stayed in a human city for a long time. So naturally, he didn't know much about their culture or lifestyle.

Nevertheless, he knew that this was a relatively advanced world.

In this world, there was no outward manifestation of power and mystery. But that didn't mean they didn't exist at all. Although the systems were different, there was still magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. There were also Magic Warriors and Knights who trained their bodies.

Nevertheless, their activities were never recorded in history. Instead, they were passed down as legends, myths, or fairy tales.

Instead, the world developed along the path of science, and this hideout was a byproduct of that.

The European Branch headquarters was located beneath the city. In fact, most of the hideouts were. Because this was the best way for them to avoid the Demon's prying eyes.

There were only two ways to enter or leave the headquarters.

By using the portal or by taking an elevator to the surface.

The method Lukas chose was the latter. He approached the security guard who was standing in front of the elevator.

“Are you going to the surface?”

Instead of answering, he simply showed the guard the card he’d received from Nina. It was a free pass card stamped with the President’s seal. It was the highest level pass, which allowed unlimited access to any facility without restrictions.

That’s why it wasn’t strange that the guard flinched and bowed his head.

‘Is this the man whom Vice President Ludwig mentioned?’

He didn’t seem that special, so he didn’t understand how this man was able to capture President Nina’s heart.

Of course, this wasn’t something that a simple security guard like him could afford to care about.

“Pardon me.”

Wiing-

Lukas took the elevator to the surface.

The city was right above the base. In other words, they needed something to camouflage the entrance to the headquarters.

The elevator led to a shabby clothing store. Even when Lukas opened the back door and stepped out, the owner of the store, who was sitting at the counter, didn't react. He simply yawned with a bored expression as if he couldn't see him. It would probably be the same when he returned.

When he left the clothing store, he smelled salt. This meant that a sea was nearby.

This city was called Sochi. It was located in the Krasnodar Region in the southwestern part of Russia, and it was once a famous resort that was well-known for its beautiful natural scenery and beaches.

When one thought of Russia, one would have usually thought of extreme cold, but Sochi was one of the warmest places in Russia.

In other words, it was a tourist attraction. Of course, the streets now were so quiet that one would never have that thought.

This was inevitable. The world had fallen to ruin, so who would've still cared about tourist attractions? Especially when considering the fact that it was in Europe and close to the region where the Demons were most active.

Lukas looked around the city for a bit before entering an alley.

It was an incredibly beautiful city, but the back alleys, which did not get much sunlight, had a rather nasty vibe. This was further pronounced by the fact that they didn't bother to clean these streets.

The atmosphere became even gloomier when he exited the shopping district and entered the residential area. The air in this place even felt a bit cold.

Nevertheless, Lukas continued to walk through these alleys as if he was possessed.

By the time the road started to narrow, a group of people appeared in front of him.

These men all wore thin clothes as though they were trying to show off their muscles. They were also chuckling sinisterly to themselves, and one of them was spinning a military knife like a pen.

They smelled like cigarettes and drugs.

It was impossible for him to continue walking because they were blocking him. To be precise, it felt like they wouldn't let him pass easily.

When Lukas turned around, seemingly intent to go back the way he came, he found that more men were standing there.

A man in front of him smiled so brightly like his eyes squeezed shut. His yellow teeth were revealed in the dark alley.

“Let's talk for a moment.”

“Talk?”

“Ah. Of course... If you don't want the talk to become screams, we'll need you to cooperate.”

A man with a bald head grinned and pulled out a gun. In this narrow alley, there was not much distance between them.

Even a powerful hunter would not have been able to dodge a bullet.

Click-

Lukas felt movement behind him. The men who were blocking his way back had moved closer.

He raised his hands and said.

“Okay.”

This attitude unnerved the man a bit. He had heard that Lukas was not a hunter, but since this man could enter the European Headquarters, he'd thought that he had at least trained to an extent.

However, when he saw him in person, his skinny, weak-looking body didn't seem to have even the slightest signs of training. There was the possibility that he was a Wizard, but now that they had closed the distance so much, that wouldn't matter. He could rush forward and cut off his tongue before he could even chant a spell.

But he didn't relax.

This person was an acquaintance of the scumbag Nina. It was natural that he would have some hidden secrets.

But when he just obeyed without any signs of resisting, he felt empty.

'No.'

The man erased that thought.

Things were going well. He shouldn't complain.

"Follow me."

Lukas followed behind the man.

The men surrounding him tried to make an intimidating atmosphere by spouting vulgar curses or grabbing and poking him in the back with the handles of their knives. Nevertheless, they soon stopped when he didn't react to their actions as if they were bored.

The man walked through the maze-like residential alleys, making one turn after another, before finally coming to a shabby-looking house.

In front of the house was a large iron gate that didn't match with the house. When the man opened the door and they entered the house, it felt like the air had become heavier.

"You came sooner than I expected."

Then they heard a deep voice. The man in front bowed his head and called out.

"Boss."

Lukas' gaze turned to the man who was called boss.

It was a large, threatening man with many tattoos on his arms. His entire body was covered in injuries.

While sucking on a large cigar, the man said.

"You must have made the smart decision since you were brought here in such a nice manner. Did you get a rough explanation from my men?"

The subordinate was the one who answered.

"Ah. He... he was more obedient than we expected. We haven't told him anything yet.

“That so? Hmmm. Ah. Don’t be scared, my blonde friend. Just answer my questions. Then, I’ll let you go cleanly without a scratch.”

The men around him burst into laughter at his words.

Lukas glanced at them.

They all seemed to have well-trained bodies and experience handling weapons. In particular, the man referred to as ‘Boss’ seemed to be exceptionally strong.

Nevertheless, their races were diverse, and their clothing and weapons were, too.

“You guys are not hunters.”

A look of interest appeared on the boss’ face.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because you’re too weak-minded. That’s not something you can hide.”

“Kukuku.”

This guy was funny.

Boss Vaches chuckled as he thought that. His men also responded with soft guffaws as if they were watching a comedy skit.

“You’re a pretty good detective. But you’ve gone too far.”

When Vaches grinned, a man behind Lukas stepped forward and put his hand on Lukas’ shoulder.

No, he tried to.

Crunch-

“...u-, urk?”

The pain took a while to register.

“Kuack!” (TL: is it strange that I’ve only just realised that this is practically ‘quack’?)

The man screamed, grabbing his arm, which had been bent in the wrong direction. Then something heavy struck his face.

It was Lukas’ fist that he swung backwards without even looking.

“Urk!”

Holding his nose, the man collapsed.

It was the perfect position, and Lukas didn't miss the opportunity. With a well-aimed strike to the back of the man's neck, he passed out cold on the ground.

“You son of a bitch!”

It was almost at the same time that the man wielding a knife beside him rushed forward. At first glance, it seemed that he had lost his reason in anger, but the man's eyes were cold. This showed that he had never lowered his guard.

Hwuk.

Lukas narrowed the distance. The man shrank back subconsciously when his opponent came so close.

The gap that this action caused was fatal.

Paak!

Lukas' elbow hit the man's face. The shock from the attack was multiplied due to the fact that they were running towards each other.

With a crunch, the man could feel his nose shatter. But that wasn't enough. While it hurt a lot, it wasn't enough to make him faint.

Lukas grabbed the man by the collar before punching him in the chest and stomach with his left hand.

The man couldn't even let out a scream before he collapsed to the ground.

“...”

(Season 2) – Chapter 20

Silence fell upon the hall. No more laughter could be heard.

‘What’s going on?’

Vaches had a shocked expression.

His body definitely didn't show any signs of training. That much was clear.

Nevertheless, the movements that he'd just displayed were in no way lacking when compared to top-class hunters.

It was strange.

The power of the body could never be hidden. When one reached Vaches' level, one could infer the level of one's opponent just by looking at an exposed forearm.

And according to Vaches' eyes, Lukas was a weak man who could have been overwhelmed with just a pocket knife.

"This place looks shabby, but it's completely soundproof. It's made of concrete, the wallpaper is made of soundproof material, and the window and door frames all have a silicone finish. So no screams will be heard."

Lukas pointed behind him.

"There's only one entrance. Once someone enters this house, escape is nigh impossible. Or that would have been the case if the two idiots who were blocking the entrance didn't collapse."

"You bastard."

"I will rip your tongue out."

The surrounding men threatened him with angry expressions on their faces. But they wouldn't have been able to shoot their guns here.

It was clear between a majority and a minority that the majority would be at a disadvantage if they were to open fire in such a small space.

Lukas judged that they weren't stupid enough to be ignorant of the dangers of ricochets.

Vaches spoke in a confident tone.

"Are you going to escape? You better give up. My men are all over this area. You'll be caught before you can even take ten steps. Then we'll be the ones with the last laugh. You'll scream and shout everything that you know by the time we're done with you."

Lukas, who was thinking about something else, paid no heed to Vaches' words.

These men were all humans.

No Demon, Demonic Humans, or possessed humans.

This fact was very important to Lukas.

He walked towards the iron door.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?"

“Catch him!”

Click-

“...”

The bodies of the gang members, who were about to rush forward, froze when they heard the unexpected sound of the door being locked.

Vaches’ expression also hardened.

This was because Lukas had deliberately made the room a half-enclosed space.

‘What’s going on?’

Vaches knew that if he and his men were to surround them, even Titled Hunters would falter.

Even if it was a bit unusual, Lukas’ action wasn’t a big problem. Numbers were the most overwhelming form of violence, and Vaches knew how to use them well.

But at that moment.

For some reason, he felt that it wasn't Lukas had trapped himself. It was they who were trapped there with Lukas.

* * *

Bang!

"Kuk...!"

Vaches' slid in his blood for a few seconds as his face collided with the floor.

His head was spinning. And it wasn't only because of the pain.

'What's going on?'

Even with the pain that seemed to come from every part of his body, he couldn't understand.

What just happened?

Was it one minute? Was it longer? Was it shorter?

He didn't know.

Vaches had 25 men waiting in the house, and all of them were veterans who wouldn't lose even if they were to go head-to-head with hunters.

Yet they were all annihilated. They didn't even have a chance to reach for their handguns.

Despite seeing it with his own eyes, he still couldn't believe what happened.

But he definitely remembered what happened next.

Lukas had overpowered him in three seconds.

'He's a monster.'

He didn't use any special powers like magic, sorcery, or witchcraft. He simply read their movements.

Surprisingly, this feeble-looking blonde man had taken out the Red Mafia's most elite group with nothing but his physical ability.

"What's your name?"

The soft voice sounded threatening, and Vaches shook as he replied.

“Va-, Vaches Bondarenko.”

“Who gave you the order?”

“I-, I can’t say...”

As he said this, Vaches clenched his teeth. He thought that pain would follow. Perhaps there was a high chance that the man would break a finger or an arm.

‘I’ll try.’

He wasn’t afraid of such pain. The same went for dying. He always knew that a day like this would come from the moment he joined the organisation.

Above all, Vaches knew that betrayal now would come with consequences that were far worse than death.

“...”

But Lukas got up from his seat without doing anything.

Then, he simply walked out of the house.

'What the hell...?'

Where was he going?

He looked at the door with anxiety.

If he had been in a good condition, he would have tried to escape, but currently, his head was the only part of his body that could move.

Vaches could only look at the iron door in fear.

Click.

Then, the door opened again and a group of people walked in.

When he saw the faces of these people, Vaches' expression crumpled.

They were hunters from the European Branch.

* * *

“Those Red Mafia bastards... just because I looked the other way a few times, they got really ballsy.”

Nina swore angrily.

“Vaches Bondarenko is one of the Young Bosses in charge of Sochi.”

By Young Boss, it meant that he was in charge of a single division of the organisation instead of the entire Red Mafia.

“How is the interrogation coming?”

“Not very good. As you know, they’re not afraid of pain...”

“Then you don’t need to keep being nice to them.”

When Nina said these words in a cold voice, Ludwig’s eyes shook.

“You mean...”

“Regardless of what method you use. Get the information out of them without breaking their minds.”

Basically, it was an instruction to no longer mind the administration of drugs or use of magic.

Regardless of how inhumane the President's orders were, Ludwig simply bowed.

"I'll do as you command."

Just before leaving the room, he glanced at Lukas, who was drinking coffee while sitting on a sofa in the corner.

'...who exactly is this man?'

He went in and out of Nina's office as if it was his own place, and he had even been given a free pass that only the President could issue.

In all honesty, it didn't look good. After all, from Ludwig's perspective, Lukas was still an unknown.

However, he could have clearly seen that Nina had extreme trust in this man.

In fact, it made him feel a bit jealous. Even Ludwig, the Vice President, had rarely seen Nina smile so comfortably.

Then he suddenly went outside and suppressed every single organisation in the city under the Red Mafia. He defeated every one of their best fighters, including the Young Boss, Vaches. This was something that would have been extremely difficult even for Titled Hunters.

'I don't think she'd tell me even if I asked.'

Ludwig tried to suppress his curiosity and left the room.

"You seem to like it a lot."

Nina spoke up while watching Lukas drink the coffee mix.

"I haven't tasted anything like this since a long time ago."

"Huhu."

Nina chuckled for a moment before her expression changed.

"...Master, did you know about the Red Mafia?"

"I did."

"If you had told me about it in advance, I could have assisted you."

"If they were Demons, I would have."

Lukas took a sip of coffee.

“It seems there are spies in the headquarters.”

Nina wasn't surprised by that, so instead, she nodded.

“I'm sure there are a lot of them. There's probably no other headquarters as mixed as this one.”

Nina sighed heavily.

“Can I do anything about it? Europe is now in such a desperate situation that we're literally grasping at straws. We can't check and monitor the reinforcements sent from each region. We can't afford to.”

Lukas nodded.

He understood what Nina meant by 'mixed'.

The European Branch probably had some of the world's most diverse hunters.

“Not everyone is who they appear to be. As you know, this place is on the front line, so they have no choice but to send their informants here.”

“One of them targeted me.”

“Yeah. If I had to guess, it was probably Neil’s doing...”

Lukas’ expression became gloomy.

This was because the name Nina had just mentioned was the person who was his first disciple before Min Ha-rin.

“Have you met him recently?”

“No. I haven’t had a reason to go to America.”

“...”

Nina was being honest.

The United States was the region with the fewest amount of Demons. In the first place, the Demons hadn’t stretched their hands too far in North America when compared to the other regions, but it couldn’t be denied that America had handled the problem better than any other country.

In fact, there were many people nowadays who called America the Land of Paradise. Even if it was a utopia built on ruins, it was clearly the safest and most peaceful place on the planet.

‘Although, the Association took the place of the government.’

And now, *that* man was sitting in the seat as Head of the Association. He was the strongest, greatest, and most powerful person Nina knew.

“Neil seems to be looking for you, Master. It’s been like that for over 10 years. Do you have any plans to meet him?”

“I will see him soon. In about 3 months.”

Nina’s eyes shined.

“Are you going to show your face at the world conference?”

“Right. I intend to talk about the establishment of Argento Spell there.”

It was the right call.

Argento Spell would act as an independent organisation, but support from the Hunter Association would be indispensable. If the relationship between the two grew sour, it could lead to bad results.

The existence of the organisation should have at least been revealed, even if it didn’t obtain the support he wanted.

“I’m sure there will be a lot of people who’ll oppose it, but...”

An armed organisation that was outside of the control of the Association and that could, at times, act upon arbitrary judgements was certainly something that many high-ranking members of the association would definitely not be pleased with.

“That’s right. But it would be possible if we got the consent of one Director and three Branch Presidents.”

“Three Branch Presidents.”

Naturally, Nina would follow Lukas’ judgement regardless of what happened. But they would still need two more.

“Do you have anyone else in mind?”

Maybe there was another person with a powerful influence among the transformers whom Lukas had saved.

Nina asked that question with this expectation, but Lukas shook his head.

“No.”

“Then how...?”

“I’ll have to negotiate.”

“Huh?”

Lukas spoke with a calm voice.

“I’m thinking of meeting the President of the Asia Branch.”