

Great Mage 691

[The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years](#)

Season 2 Chapter 391

Crunch, crunch.

An eerie sound woke him from his thoughts.

Lukas turned around. Behind him, Pale had begun to eat the half cooked corpse of the large monster. It was more like predation than eating, and although the outside was burnt, the inside was still uncooked, which caused blood to drip from the flesh as it was ripped apart.

The taste, smell and texture must have been the worst, but Pale still ate enthusiastically as though she had found the most delicious food in the world.

Then, she suddenly got up and wiped her lips as if she felt Lukas' gaze.

"I ate well! Thank you."

He didn't remember answering when she asked for permission, but in the end, he still nodded awkwardly.

Pale grinned. The soot and blood stains that covered her face made her smile rather creepy. Then, she buried her face in the half eaten corpse of the monster once again.

Crunch, crunch. He realised the source of the eerie sound. It was the monster's scales. Pale was chewing on the scales, the hardness of which were unimaginable, as if they were flesh.

Twet. After spitting out a particularly hard scale, Pale opened her mouth again.

"My name is Pale. Ah, but you already knew my name."

Hmm? She narrowed her eyes slightly.

"But how did you know my name?"

There were no signs of suspicion in her voice or in her expression. But there was no telling what she was thinking on the inside.

How should he explain it?

Lukas hesitated as he was unsure of what to do, but Pale shook her head.

"Well. It doesn't matter."

It doesn't matter?

Did it not matter that someone you met for the first time knew your name?

Such a conclusion was completely incomprehensible to Lukas' principle of thinking, but there was no need for him to pick up on that.

"Thank you for taking care of me."

He decided to change the subject by thanking her.

It was clear that Pale had protected him while he was unconscious. The Imaginary World was a very dangerous place. Without her, he might have become a monster's meal before he could even come to his senses.

"Hehe. Well."

Pale scratched her head while smiling bashfully.

Lukas couldn't help but observe her for a moment.

'Who is she?'

A strange presence, a mysterious personality, and a surprising understanding of this world.

His question didn't arise because of that knowledge.

It was because Pale was, clearly, hiding something.

In fact, even before he'd died, he'd had that feeling since the first time he'd met Pale, but after meeting Yang In-hyun, he became certain.

-I've seen you once before. In the 'War of Existence' in the Western Region...

The War of Existence.

Yang In-hyun had spoken as though he'd met Pale there. Of course, Lukas didn't know what the War of Existence was, and he didn't know where the Western Region was. However, he didn't think Yang In-hyun had been mistaken.

But Pale denied him immediately. Presumably, this was because she didn't want to reveal the fact that she knew Yang In-hyun.

...As Young Miss said, I must have been mistaken. Please forgive my rudeness.

-There is one more thing I would like to ask. I am going to kill that man now. Will Young Miss stop me?

-If Young Miss intends to stop me, I will back down immediately...

Yang In-hyun maintained an extremely cautious attitude towards Pale.

To be precise, he seemed to be afraid of going against her.

That was why Lukas had no choice but to be more wary and even slightly afraid of Pale.

He knew how strong Yang In-hyun was. Since he'd personally fought him, he knew it well.

The sword path that he'd seen stretched to the very edge of what a being could reach. Each swing of his sword contained the essence of Yang In-hyun's very being, and they represented the peak.

Even if Lukas had not only the power of 9-stars but also Endtongue and the external force of an Absolute, he could not guarantee victory in that fight. No, in all honesty, he felt like he would lose even with that.

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...And yet, Pale was someone that Yang In-hyun feared.

“What is it? Is there something on my face?”

At Pale’s words, Lukas turned his eyes away.

“Blood, flesh, and soot.”

“Ah.”

Pale wiped her face with her sleeve. Then, she turned to look at him as if to say ‘how about now?’.

...Her foolish appearance didn’t look dangerous at all, but that just made him warier.

Looking at the face that was not completely clean, Lukas nodded.

“But won’t you eat, uncle?”

Pale suggested that he eat food. They’d had a similar conversation last time.

At that time, he’d denied his hunger, but the next day, his body began to disappear from his toes.

The phenomenon of disappearing.

He’d eaten the rat pale gave him and was able to escape the phenomenon.

...He didn’t want to be more indebted to her. In addition, the only way to replenish his mana was to take in nutrients in some form.

With a sigh, Lukas approached his prey. Then, after cutting off a bit of flesh, roughly pulling the scales off of it, and cooking it as evenly as possible with a palm sized flame, he ate it.

To be precise, he bit a small piece of it and tasted it. It was somewhat edible. The first meal he’d had last time was a dirty rat. So, while it was a bit dry, the taste was much better. It was a small comfort.

* * *

He looked up at the sky. The colours mixed as if several paints were poured onto the same place. Last time, he’d taken the time to organise his thoughts while in the middle of the desert.

Lukas looked over at Pale. She was laying on the flat sand, staring up at the sky.

It didn’t seem like she wasn’t thinking about leaving him like earlier.

Various questions arose in his mind.

What exactly did she plan to do with him? What would happen if he tried to force her away? What was she thinking?

Suddenly, Pale turned to look over at him. Perhaps he had been staring at her too openly.

Deciding to take the lead before she opened her mouth, Lukas spoke.

“Do you know the Twelve Imaginary Lords?”

“I do.”

He received a plain answer.

“What are they like?”

“They are amazing!”

“...”

Although he'd expected a similar answer, her response didn't help him at all.

God told Lukas to become one of the Twelve Imaginary Lords and go to the throne. But Lukas didn't even know who the Twelve Imaginary Lords were.

Just from the name, he assumed that they were the twelve beings who ruled over the Imaginary World...

Lukas wanted to ask a few more details, but he soon changed his mind. Instead, someone who would communicate more than her appeared in his mind.

He claimed to be an intellectual, and after having a conversation with him, Lukas could tell that he wasn't bluffing.

'Michael'.

He had a feeling that Michael would definitely know about the Twelve Imaginary Lords.

Since Lukas wouldn't forget the location of places he'd been to before, he knew the location of the underground city.

He could head there now, but that would be no different from recklessly invading the territory instead of being invited. In the worst case scenario, he might even have to fight Michael.

'If I wait for a while, the [Miglings] will come.'

After all, they were the ones who'd come to him last time.

—Lukas' prediction wasn't wrong. When the colour of the sky changed for the fifth time, figures seemed to approach them from a distance.

Miglings.

Pale exclaimed, her eyes sparkling.

“Wow! These are natives! I think they're here to invite you!”

Ignoring Pale's excitement, Lukas looked at the miglings. In the underground city, it seemed like they could speak, but now, they kept their mouths closed as though they didn't have any vocal chords.

...Could they not talk in the desert?

Hiding his doubts, he obediently allowed them to pull him by his hands and clothes.

After walking in the desert for a while, they arrived in front of a small ant hill. The miglings threw themselves in one after the other.

And this time, Lukas jumped in before Pale. He heard her startled 'uh' as he went in.

He fell down the rapid stream of sand to the underground city and was tossed around by the miglings who went down first.

Lukas went down with an expressionless face, waiting for their little carnival ride to end.

After a while, the miglings walked up to him and spoke.

"Follow, come."

"Us."

"Follow, come."

This time, he followed them without asking questions like last time.

As they walked, he slowly looked around the city. Last time, he hadn't been able to do this because he wasn't in such a relaxed mood.

'It's much larger than I thought.'

There were many side streets in addition to the northbound road that they were currently walking on, which led to the cathedral that Michael stayed in. In addition, there was also a large road that cut from east to west, and passages that went below the underground city. Flickering torches were the only sources of light on the dark passages.

This showed that they were not natural, but were paths made by people so they could pass.

"That, don't look."

A migling quietly warned him.

"Why?"

"Might get into fight."

"With whom?"

The migling frowned.

"Bastards."

"..."

The migling didn't seem to want to talk more about the topic, so Lukas didn't ask more questions.

Before long, they arrived at the cathedral that Michael was staying in.

"From here, only you."

With a nod at the miglings words, he walked into the cathedral. He pretended not to hear Pale complain enviously.

...Perhaps he should ask Michael about Pale as well. He might be able to get an unexpected answer. He decided to do that if he had the chance.

Creak-

The huge iron doors opened.

The scene in the cathedral was magnificent, and an altar stood at the end of the long aisle.

Standing at this altar reading a book was none other than Michael.

“...”

“...”

Even looking at him again, he looked like Lord. He wasn't as surprised as before, but he still felt an instinctive wariness.

[An interesting guest.]

Michael seemed to have been aware of Lukas' presence from the beginning. The sound of the iron doors was a bit loud.

[How did you come here? Unfamiliar yet familiar being.]

Michael had probably felt from the beginning that Lukas was from the same fundamental universe as he was.

'He's not certain yet.'

Michael had only been convinced after he mentioned the name Trowman.

In any case, this time, he didn't intend to be led helplessly like last time.

“Intellectual of Underground City. I came here because I have something to ask you.”

He decided to skip the unnecessary questions and go straight to the main point.

[Hoh...]

With an interested sound, Michael closed his book.

[You know about me.]

“Right.”

[As you said, I am an intellectual. I have enough knowledge to answer any of your questions. However-]

“You don't intend to simply give me the answers I seek. Because it goes against the rules of this world, right?”

[...]

Michael fell silent. He seemed surprised, or even a bit shocked. This reaction was natural, seeing as the words he was about to say were stolen from him, but Lukas had simply interrupted him because he wanted to get to the point as quickly as possible.

“Equivalent exchange. Fine. Then let’s exchange question answers one after the other.”

[...although that is what I was going to suggest...]

“Are there any problems? I’m sure you are interested in me to some extent now.”

[...not really...]

Michael responded in a slightly uncomfortable voice.

Lukas then opened his mouth immediately.

“Then I’ll ask first. Tell me everything you know about the Twelve Imaginary Lords.”

[...]

Michael fell silent again. Was it because of his surprise at Lukas’ question, or was it because he was shocked that he’d completely lost control?

He couldn’t tell because he didn’t have any expression on his face.

[...in, detail. What do you want specifically?]

“What kind of beings they are. Who the members are and what their goals are. It would be good if you could also tell me where they are.”

[That won’t work. That far exceeds the capacity of one question.]

Although he’d said it in such a complex way, that was only a trick to take control of the first round. Naturally, Lukas hadn’t expected it to be that easy either.

“Then, tell me what kind of beings are the Twelve Imaginary Lords.”

[...good. I can tell you that.]

Michael nodded and opened his mouth.

[There are many ways to describe the Twelve Imaginary Lords, but the expression that is closest to the essence would be ‘the strongest and most qualified candidates’.]

“Candidates? For what?”

[To enter the King’s Castle.]

King’s Castle.

At that moment, Lukas suddenly recalled a conversation with Kasajin.

-We’re here. Do you see that castle?

-I guess you can’t see it.

The space that appeared empty in his eyes.

And Kasajin who was pointing towards it.

-It seems it still isn't enough.

-I already told you. I've been watching everything from here. Anyway, I guess you're still lacking the qualifications.

...Lacking the qualifications?

Did Kasajin also want him to become one of the Twelve Imaginary Lords?

Lukas' expression hardened slightly.

If that was true, then it meant both God and Kasajin wanted the same thing for Lukas.

[It's my turn. Your name. No, I want to know your last name.]

"...Trowman."

[Hoh. So you're a Trowman... Indeed.]

Michael spoke as if he was convinced.

Lukas asked his next question.

"What do I need to do to become one of the Twelve Imaginary Lords?"

[There are two ways to do that. Either you appear in this world like that in the first place, or you defeat one of the Twelve Imaginary Lords and occupy their seat. The former is simple, the latter is a bit more complicated.]

Lukas took it the other way around.

Compared to the latter, which simply meant defeating one of the Twelve Imaginary Lords, the former was much harder to understand.

What did it mean to appear in this world 'like that'? Did that mean they become one of the Twelve Imaginary Lords from the moment they were born? Like the Rulers?

His eyebrows furrowed slightly, but he didn't ask any more.

Because Lukas' turn had ended.

[Are you an Absolute?]

"Right."

[Hmm.]

Michael looked pleased, but Lukas couldn't help but feel that he was cheating him. Of course, it wasn't enough for him to get a guilty conscience. This was probably because Michael looked like Lord.

Instead, he wondered how he could extract more knowledge.

‘Because the information I can give Michael is limited.’

On the other hand, there were a mountain of things that Lukas wanted to ask Michael.

This meant that he would have to be careful with his questions from now on.

After thinking about it for a while, Lukas realised what he should be asking the most.

“How strong are the Twelve Imaginary Lords?”

[...]

Michael didn’t answer right away.

Was it because it was a difficult question to answer? Or was there another reason?

Lukas looked at the blank white face nervously.

Then, after a while, he spoke.

[That’s right. To give an answer that you could understand...]

When he heard the words Michael said next, Lukas’ eyes went wide.

[The Ruler who entered this world, the Seven Fanged Dragon God, was defeated by one of the Twelve Imaginary Lords.]

[The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years](#)

Season 2 Chapter 392

Lukas didn’t know how strong the Twelve Void Lords were. No, in the first place, he didn’t even know who they were.

Nevertheless, he couldn’t help but feel a hint of doubt when Michael told him that a Ruler had been defeated by one of the Twelve Void Lords.

“...you do know who the Rulers are, right?”

It would be amazing for an Absolute to not shout out after hearing those words. For most Absolutes, the Rulers were like gods.

In fact, the reason Lukas could still ask so calmly was because he had hostile relations with most of them.

[The extraordinary swords created by God, the strongest deterrents and tyrants of the Three Thousand Worlds.]

Michael replied in a cynical tone.

It felt a bit different from the concept Lukas knew, but that wasn’t the thing to be focused on at that moment.

“And you’re saying that one of those Rulers was defeated by one of the Twelve Void Lords?”

[It is up to you whether you believe it or not. However, since I proudly call myself an intellectual, I would never give out false information.]

There was a faint hint of displeasure in Michael's voice. It seemed that he was upset that Lukas was doubting his words.

Nevertheless, the problem was that his words weren't so easy to accept.

"...who was it that defeated them?"

[That is too much to ask for a single question. I didn't intend to tell you this much, but...]

Michael drifted off at the end of his words.

[It was the 4th Beast.]

"...the 4th Beast?"

[It's my turn now.]

Michael spoke in a cold voice as if he didn't intend to say more.

[What is your relationship with the person accompanying you?]

Companion. He was talking about Pale.

...He remembered.

This had been Michael's last question.

Similar to the time with Yang In-hyun, Michael, a Lord who was from the same universe as Lukas, was interested in Pale.

"I've already told you the answer. She and I are simply travelling partners."

[Simple travelling partners.]

"Right."

[...hmm. I see. Then. It's your turn.]

Michael nodded with an unexpectedly calm expression and gestured with his chin.

Lukas was a bit surprised by his attitude.

'He intends to continue the question and answer.'

This was different from last time. At that time, after asking his question, Michael no longer displayed any interest in Lukas.

...In any case, this was not a bad thing for Lukas. Because he still had about a hundred other questions for Michael.

"Yang In-hyun, the Lord of Flower Mountain. Tell me about that man."

[The scope of that is too broad. As I said earlier, it exceeds the capacity of a single question.]

“Then I’ll leave it up to you.”

[Leave it up to me?]

“Right. Please summarise what you know. As long as it doesn’t exceed the ‘capacity’ you mentioned.”

[You’re leaving it up to me to decide. Do you trust me that much?]

“I don’t trust you. I trust my eyes. The being that I knew wouldn’t deceive someone over something so trivial.”

Michael chuckled.

[Interesting. I’ve never received a request like this before.]

“...”

[Fine. Then I’ll tell you about the Everlasting Plum Sword Yang In-hyun. He is one of the Twelve Void Lords, and among them, he is the newest.]

Lukas paused at that.

“...one of the Twelve Void Lords? Yang In-hyun?”

[Did you not know?]

Lukas was greatly surprised, but it wasn’t that unbelievable when he thought about it. In fact, he felt that this revelation explained Yang In-hyun’s unreasonable strength to some extent.

[Yang In-hyun defeated the former Lord of Flower Mountain, one of the Twelve Void Lords, the previous generation’s Sect Leader*, Sword God Dang Mu-gi, to obtain his current position. Only six nights ago.]

“Six nights... do you mean six days ago?”

At that, Michael corrected himself.

[Ah. Pardon. Six nights... Following your concept, that would be about 6 months, half a year. Night comes periodically even in this world.]

“...night. I’ve never seen it before.”

[I see. It does not occur often. In any case, I’d recommend you don’t wander around outside at night. If you encounter a situation where you have no choice but to do so, you should try to remain in one place as much as possible.

“...”

...He couldn’t tell if the advice was given with good intentions or not, but Lukas decided to accept it with a grain of salt since it was most likely correct.

[Yang In-hyun’s sword technique is quite powerful. Since it is very compatible with this world, he is able to exert power that exceeds the limit.]

“...the Everlasting Plum Sword.”

[You know it.]

Michael nodded his head.

[The essence of the Everlasting Plum Sword is deeply connected to the void. If he uses it in his territory, the power is more than doubled. There is an incredibly skilled Swordsman in my territory, but I received a report that they were unable to defeat Yang In-hyun.]

“...”

[Hmm. I said more than expected. Is it my turn to ask now? I think this will be the last question.]

“Ask whatever you like.”

Michael had given Lukas much more information than he'd expected. It was hard to think it was a slip of the tongue, and instead he'd probably had a change of heart, but he wasn't sure why.

It was then that Michael spoke.

[What do you intend to do from now on?]

“Mm?”

[Your next move. I wonder what it will be.]

Lukas never would have thought he'd be curious about his next move. Bewildered, he couldn't help but ask back.

“...is that your question?”

[That's right. Why? Is it something you can't answer?]

“No. That's not it... Firstly, I'm going to find a way to get stronger.”

[Hmm. That's not a specific plan.]

Michael muttered in a nonchalant manner before making a startling suggestion.

[In that case, if you don't have any plans at the moment, why not become a resident of this city?]

“...you mean become a resident of your territory?”

[I don't think it's a proposition that could be objectively damaging.]

“Why are you making the offer to me?”

[There is no great reason. If I had to say, it would be because of my own tendencies. I like to keep things that interest me nearby so that I can observe them.]

“...”

That meant that in the conversation he'd had with Lukas, he'd become interested in him.

It wasn't a bad proposal.

Perhaps, if Lukas had to list the places in this world where he felt even slightly safe, this city would be the only one.

It wasn't just because of Michael.

He might be able to meet some of his acquaintances like Schweiser, who he hadn't managed to successfully reunite with, in this city. He might not have forgotten about Lukas' existence.

"I appreciate the offer, but I'll have to decline."

Nevertheless, Lukas refused.

[...I see. How unfortunate.]

Michael muttered in a soft voice.

With those words, the conversation with Michael ended.

* * *

After leaving the cathedral, he was met by Pale, who looked at him with a face full of curiosity and excitement.

As soon as Lukas appeared, she came and fussed over him, saying, 'what did you talk about?', and 'what's wrong with your expression'.

"I asked him about a few things I was curious about. Luckily, the Lord seemed to be interested in me, so we exchanged information."

"Hoh. Hoh."

Looking at the overly excited Pale, Lukas tried to peer into her inner thoughts.

"It's not just me. The Lord also seemed to be interested in you."

"Huh? In me?"

"Right."

"Ay. That's not possible."

"..."

It seemed his attempt had been too shallow. There wasn't even the slightest change in Pale's nonchalant expression.

Lukas decided to press a bit more.

"I think he might have met you before."

"Where?"

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For a moment, he wasn't sure what to say.

The places that Lukas knew in this world could literally be counted on one hand.

Suddenly, Yang In-hyun's voice flashed in his mind.

"...I think he said it was in the 'War of Existence' in the Western Region."

"..."

Pale twisted her head slightly and fell silent. Her long hair covered her face, so Lukas couldn't tell what her expression was like at that moment.

Then, after a short while, a barely audible murmur was heard.

"That can't be true."

"...!"

It sounded like someone else's voice.

Just as Lukas' expression hardened slightly, she lifted her head again.

Her exposed face had the same cool smile as always.

"I think he's mistaken! I really don't know the Lord of this place."

"I see."

"Yeah."

By that time, the miglings had gathered around him once again. Nevertheless, Lukas still looked at them with a calm expression. In truth, he felt burdened by their kindness.

This was because he knew their favour wasn't directed towards 'Lukas Trowman'. It was probably directed to another 'Trowman' that stayed here, a 'Trowman' who had walked a different path than him.

'...it's about time for Schweiser to fall.'

The conversation ended much sooner than last time so he had a bit more free time, but it was only a few dozen minutes or so. If he waited a bit longer, he would be able to encounter Schweiser again, bloodied and falling from the sky.

But even if he was unconscious, he didn't want to meet him just like that.

"Pale."

"Yep?"

"Are you going to keep following me?"

The question that he'd avoided when it was only the two of them was finally brought up.

Pale nodded as if it was natural.

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“I want to be with you.’

“...”

Not expecting such an answer, Lukas froze.

Looking up at him with wide eyes like a small animal, Pale asked.

“Can’t I?”

“...there’s nothing I can do about it.”

“Hehe. Then we can stay together? Nice*.” (*:Think of something you’d say while fistpumping)

“...”

He glanced at her happy expression as she clenched her fist.

He couldn’t help but have a vague feeling that all of his conversations with Pale ended like this. This meant that Lukas was at her mercy.

But it couldn’t be helped.

If he wanted to dig deeper into her mystery, he had to be prepared to get entangled with her. Pressing clumsily would be no different from recklessly digging into a beehive.

“Let’s get out of here first.”

“We’re leaving? Where to?”

“Well.”

That was something that Lukas wanted to ask instead.

He couldn’t think of a way to get strong in this world.

A sense of hopelessness filled his heart.

‘...firstly, before wandering around aimlessly...’

There was one place he had to visit from last time.

* * *

Lukas walked through the grey desert after leaving the city. He wasn’t walking aimlessly, instead, he there was a place he wanted to reach.

Through the countless overlapping spaces and intertwined coordinates, he followed an almost hidden path with a very faint presence.

The single string flowing through the narrow gap was Lukas’ guidepost.

Pale followed him without question. She was quiet.

It wasn't like that in the beginning. It was just a speculation, but it felt that she'd gradually grown quieter after realising that Lukas had a clear destination.

When he finally stopped walking, Pale spoke.

"Uncle knows how to see the road."

He'd heard this voice last time as well.

A serious tone and expression, without the usual hint of laughter, which, like always, would disappear in the blink of an eye.

Taking his eyes off of Pale, Lukas looked at the crater in front of him.

To be precise, he looked at the woman bleeding within it.

...A familiar presence.

She'd died in vain in her last life. A woman he didn't even manage to see awake or speak to.

Like last time, Lukas roughly persuaded Pale to give him a piece of jerky and fed it to the woman. Then, he immediately lifted her onto his back when her wounds showed signs of healing.

In a short while, Kwak Do-san and the other Swordsmen would arrive in this place.

If they didn't leave before that, they would end up swinging their swords at Lukas.

'They're not a threat, but...'

While he could wait there and kill them all when they arrive, he would have to face Yang In-hyun openly afterwards.

He wasn't confident that he wouldn't leave some trace or evidence in the area. After all, Lukas didn't have much knowledge about the World of Void.

In other words, the best course of action was to rescue the woman and leave without getting into conflict with Kwak Do-san.

The Underground City.

He would leave the woman there first and figure out a way to become stronger.

Even as he thought about it, Lukas' actions made him feel uncomfortable. He couldn't tell why he was going through so much trouble for a woman he didn't know. Lukas wasn't the type to be particularly fixated on doing good deeds, nor was he bound by any morals.

Then what was it?

Was he sympathetic because they came from the same fundamental universe? Or was he guilty about not being able to protect her till the end in his last life?

"Uncle, what is your goal?"

He was awoken from his thoughts by a sudden voice.

It was at that moment that he realised his brain was throbbing slightly.

Finding the road had put great strain on his brain. At the very least, it was impossible for Lukas to make a round trip to the Underground City as he was now.

Since they'd already travelled pretty far, it shouldn't be possible for Kwak Do-san to follow them.

'I should rest a bit.'

Putting the woman down, Lukas turned to Pale.

All the while, Pale had been staring blankly at him, waiting for an answer.

"To be strong."

He calmly stated his primary goal.

A strange flicker of light appeared in Pale's eyes.

"How strong?"

"Enough to defeat the Twelve Void Lords."

This time, her eyes narrowed slightly. Then, she crossed her arms and tilted her head to the side.

"You want to become one of the Twelve Void Lords?"

"Right."

"I see. Then that's easy."

"Easy?"

Pale nodded with a bright expression, then gave him a dangerous smile.

"You just have to eat that woman."

[The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years](#)

Season 2 Chapter 393

Eat her.

At that moment, the scene of Pale's predation at Flower Mountain flashed in his mind.

"I can't."

There wasn't a need to think too deeply about this.

Lukas refused almost reflexively.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want to become strong like that."

"I don't understand."

Pale mutter in an incomprehensible tone. She appeared frustrated.

"This woman is the best prey for you. This is a great opportunity to eat without any repercussions!"

Kuk, kuk. As she spoke, she poked the woman with her finger.

"No one would blame you for it."

"That's not the reason."

"Then what is it?"

"..."

For a moment, Lukas wasn't sure what to say. There were many words lingering on the tip of his tongue, but he could not voice them easily.

As mentioned before, Lukas had a few things left that made him a human. Nevertheless, the fact that he was repulsed by cannibalism was, in fact, a clear contradiction.

...Suddenly, he thought of Yang In-hyun's sword technique.

Everlasting Plum Sword, First Move, Martial Annihilation.

For some reason, he couldn't get this sword technique, which had defeated him perfectly, out of his head.

That blade had been able to cut all concepts. Even absolute power's ability to control space was ineffective. Perhaps it even had the ability to cut down the yoke of death and the shackles of the abyss.

He didn't know how to defeat him, and that fact felt strange to him.

Although the opponent was one of the Twelve Void Lords, his fundamental essence was clearly human. On the other hand, the opponents that Lukas was used to fighting were those who were born as Absolutes.

And yet, the person he would now have to risk everything to face was a human.

That fact made Lukas feel awkward.

'Is that the reason?'

Did he not feel desperate because his opponent was another human?

Could he still afford to be picky about the means?

...He couldn't.

He'd seen what the future held if he didn't become one of the Twelve Void Lords.

"Just."

Lukas started.

“I can’t do it because I just don’t like it.”

He felt Pale’s gaze on him.

Lukas raised his head and looked at her.

For a moment, their gazes met.

“Do you need a better reason than that?”

Pale chuckled.

“No need.”

Kikiki. She let out a low, cheerful giggle.

“Because what you don’t like is what you don’t like.”

It seemed that she liked Lukas’ answer.

On the other hand, despite making a decision, Lukas’ anxiety deepened.

If cannibalism was the most efficient and basic principle to becoming strong in this world, how was he supposed to grow stronger?

Perhaps at that point, he was looking at the only person who could answer such a question, Pale.

“Is there any other way?”

“Ummm.”

Pale seemed to think about it seriously for a moment. She folded her hands and began to hum. It almost felt like he could hear the sound of her brain rolling from where he stood.

After a while, she swung her index finger as if she was drawing something and said.

“There is. But at your current level, it would be very dangerous.”

Lukas replied to her slightly condescending tone.

“That doesn’t matter.”

He didn’t intend to get stronger while ensuring his personal safety.

In the first place, he knew it was impossible to easily get much stronger in a short amount of time. Radical growth always came with great risk.

Pale looked at Lukas with a subtle expression and nodded.

“Doesn’t matter, huh... Well, you might change your mind if you see it for yourself, but I’ll take you there.”

“Take me there? How?”

Could it be that Pale could also see the ‘road.’.

“It’s not that, it’s because it’s a special place.”

Pale replied with a smirk.

Lukas knew the meaning of that smile, ‘no matter what uncle asks, I won’t say any more’.

It seemed that Lukas could now understand the meanings of Pale’s smiles.

“First off, you won’t be able to carry that woman all the way...”

Pale’s words drifted off slightly and the corners of her eyes lit up.

“Actually. I thought of a good way to deal with her. Since you don’t want to eat her, I’ll just...”

“No.”

“Tch.”

Pale pursed her lips at the sharp answer.

* * *

After a short break, Lukas hurried forward once again.

A round trip didn’t mean the travelling would take the same amount of time.

Strangely, it was taking much longer to go back than it did to leave. This was because of the constant movement of the space. If he was able to better understand those spatial movements, it might be possible to find a shortcut instead of just ‘following the road’.

Or if he were to move a few steps in the right direction and stop, he might be able to go to whichever location he wanted, like a shipwreck being carried by waves.

...But that was a long way off for now.

As he calculated the coordinates, Lukas couldn’t help but think about Flower Mountain.

Not because of Yang In-hyun, or his sword technique.

But Lee Jong-hak, the man who was still trapped in prison.

‘...was that the Lee Jong-hak I know?’

Now that he had some spare time, this thought finally appeared in his mind.

He’d certainly acted as if he knew him, but the fact still remained that the person he knew ‘might be a completely different person’.

In other words, the Lee Jong-hak, in the underground prison could have been ‘another possibility’ that existed in the countless parallel worlds.

It was possible that Lee Jong-hak also met another Lukas there and might have built a similar relationship and memory to what he knew.

...Nevertheless, it was all nothing but his conjecture. And it was something that he wouldn't be able to find the conclusion at that moment.

The best way would be to compare and contrast his memories with Lee Jong-hak's, but unfortunately, that was impossible for now since he was trapped in the Flower Mountain.

Someday, if he had the chance, he would have a deep conversation with Lee Jong-hak.

As he had this thought, he suddenly felt movement on his back.

"Kuh..."

A low groan sounded in his ear.

Of course, it wasn't Pale.

The woman Lukas was carrying on his back, the woman who they'd found laying in the desert, had finally awakened.

"Are you awake now?"

"Wow! She finally woke up!"

"...whe, re..."

A cracked voice leaked out. A voice so fragile it was almost as if it would shatter at any moment.

It seemed that swallowing the jerky hadn't restored her condition perfectly.

Lukas stopped walking and looked over his shoulder.

The woman had a nauseous expression.

"...put me down."

He did as she asked.

Swaying, the woman struggled to stand on the sand. She gave off a very unstable feeling, as if she would collapse at any moment.

After taking a few breaths, the woman looked at Lukas and Pale with a slightly solemn gaze.

"You don't look like disciples of Flower Mountain... Who are you?"

Her stiff voice could not hide her suspicious tone.

To put it mildly, it was prudent, to put it harshly, it was ungrateful. In particular, the bottom lip of Pale, who had sacrificed(?) a piece of jerky, protruded visibly.

"How rude. We saved you."

"..."

"We should just eat her."

“Cut it out.”

Lukas stopped Pale before turning to the woman once again.

“You were unconscious in the middle of the desert. Covered in blood. I was able to save you with jerky that Pale, here, gave to me.”

The woman’s expression became a bit more relaxed and she then bowed her head to them.

“I owe you my life. Please excuse my rudeness.”

“You picked it up pretty quickly! Hmph hmph!”

Pale snorted and grumbled loudly.

“...but, why did you save me?”

The subtle trace of vigilance didn’t fade from the woman’s eyes.

For some reason, Lukas felt as though he was looking at himself.

Regardless of if they saved him or not, it would be hard for him to trust people whose intentions he was unsure of. If their roles had been reversed, Lukas would have acted the same way.

“You look like someone from the underground city.”

“Yes.”

“I am acquainted with the Lord of that place, Michael.”

0

“...”

“If you don’t believe me, you are free to continue on your own.”

Like the miglings, she should know the way back to the territory.

The woman seemed to feel a bit conflicted at Lukas’ words, but in the end, perhaps because she made up her mind, she spoke politely.

“I’m not in very good condition right now. I’m sorry, but can I owe you a bit more?”

“We have no intention of entering the city.”

He might bump into a Schweiser who had regained consciousness.

Without revealing his reasons, Lukas continued.

“We can take you in the vicinity.”

“...thank you.”

After she nodded, Lukas turned and started walking away.

Despite her staggering steps, the woman followed without a word.

She seemed to be a proud figure, so it would probably be best to not offer to carry her again.

It was only at that moment that he realised something he should have asked sooner.

“What is your name?”

“...my name is Leshia. And you?”

“I’m Pale.”

The woman, Leshia, seemed to ignore Pale and was only looking at Lukas.

Lukas, who was getting a strange feeling because of her stare, revealed his name.

“...Lukas.”

* * *

As the colour of the sky changed for the third time, Lukas’ party suddenly stopped.

“Do you hear that noise?”

He nodded.

There was a turbulent atmosphere that didn’t suit the tranquil grey desert.

Clang, clang-

There were also the faint sounds of clashing metal. Followed by a loud explosion and what sounded like shouting...

Gradually, a storm-like feeling descended on the windless desert.

The sound of group fighting.

“...no way.”

Leshia ran forward with a stiff expression. Then she started climbing the small sand dune in front of them. By climbing up there, she would be able to see the source of the commotion.

Lukas and Pale followed her.

Leshia, who’d run up first, was able to reach the top of the dune quickly.

And her hunch hadn’t been wrong.

There were two groups fighting in the vast desert below.

On one side were... the Swordsmen from Flower Mountain. There wasn’t anyone he knew in the group, but he could tell their identity from their unique clothing and the Plum Blossom Sword Technique.

On the other side were the miglings. They weren’t alone. There were a mixture of people, who looked like humans, among the dwarves.

Swoosh!

There were also beings floating in the sky, carried by glowing white wings.

They looked like angels that would appear in temples.

“Oh hey~ It’s a War of Existence.”

Pale pretended to make a spyglass with her hands as if she’d found a marvellous spectacle.

“We can’t miss this. Uncle, they seem to be on the same level, let’s watch from here and then wipe them out in the middle!”

“I don’t intend to take a side.”

Someday, he would face Flower Mountain, but if he were to make an appearance now, then it would make avoiding Kwak Do-san’s party unnecessary.

“...this.”

The expression of Lesha, who had arrived before them, was hard.

Biting her lip, she looked down at the battlefield and tried to take a step forward.

“You’re planning on going?”

“Yes.”

“You wouldn’t be much help in your current state.”

“I know that. But I have to go. Those are the ones I have to protect.”

“...”

Those words caused a strange pounding in his chest.

Nevertheless, Lesha fell to the ground after taking a few steps.

He could practically feel the muscles beneath her robes twitching. In exchange for forcing her body to move, the pain must feel like her entire body is being torn apart.

“Dammit, my mana is still...”

Just as Lesha muttered those words, someone else appeared on the battlefield.

It was a white haired man, panting and covered in sweat, Schweiser.

His condition wasn’t good. Just from looking at his expression, one could tell he had long surpassed his limits.

The Swordsmen of Flower Mountain closed in on Schweiser. The blades of their swords digging into his body like the sharp fangs of a ferocious beast.

‘...idiot.’

Head on confrontations were not your expertise.

Lukas sighed.

It would have been better if he didn't see this sight.

Where was Lord, no, Michael? If he made an appearance, the battle would have been one-sided.

Lukas looked at the battlefield carefully, but he could not find any traces of Michael.

Suddenly, Schweiser's arm was cut off. This meant that he probably won't last for another dozen seconds. Considering his current condition, this result was natural.

A cold blade swiftly approached his defenceless neck.

Crackle-

—But a dark red beam of light shot forward and shattered the sword.

"...!"

Schweiser turned his gaze to the top of the dune and Lukas.

"Didn't you say you wouldn't take a side?"

He didn't bother to reply to Pale's snark.

Flipping up his hood, Lukas slid down the dune.

Because of that...

"Absolute? No way..."

He didn't hear Lesh'a's murmur.

[The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years](#)

Season 2 Chapter 394

As he slid down the sand dune, Lukas once again realised that he was acting in a very impulsive manner. But he couldn't help it.

He didn't think he could watch Schweiser die right in front of his eyes.

Taht.

As he landed on the ground, he felt gazes lock onto him. Coincidentally, the place Lukas had landed was in the middle of the Flower Mountain Swordsmen's formation.

They weren't the only ones looking at him with hostile gazes. The miglings and humans past them, and even the angels in the sky were looking at him.

Just wearing the hood of his robe would not do much to hide his identity. But that didn't matter. As long as he wasn't caught by Schweiser, who was still in the distance.

Woosh!

The nearby Swordsmen quickly swung their swords.

Their response was quick. They had probably seen the absolute that Lukas had shot from the dune.

‘This isn’t the Plum Blossom Sword Technique.’

Depending on the user, the appearance of the Plum Blossom Sword Technique varied, but the sword techniques they were displaying now were completely different on a fundamental level.

Lukas wasn’t sure, but the sword techniques they were using now all seemed to be different styles.

The Flower Mountain Faction’s Solitary Gate Martial Arts, Profound Sky Sword, Supreme Purity Sword, and Sky Flow Sword.

The martial arts of Flower Mountain were a symbol of harmony. Even though they were martial arts with completely different origins, as long as the Swordsmen had a certain level of understanding about each other, it was possible to sublimate them into a natural connection.

Swoosh!

Swordsmanship that he’d never encountered before flowed in like a flood.

But that didn’t matter. With a glance, Lukas could tell that the martial arts they were using were not on the same level as the Plum Blossom Sword Technique.

Paht.

He raised his fingertips slightly. In response, the sand surged upwards.

It was a display of motion magic.

Rumble...

In an instant, the sand rising into the air clumped together before striking the surrounding Swordsmen. Even though it was just sand, it had been compressed to the limit till it was as strong as metal.

The Swordsmen pulled their swords back in a move to block the attack, but they were too late.

Paak!

And in real battle, such mistakes were particularly painful.

Five Swordsmen wavered at the same time, their blades almost certainly badly damaged.

Without giving them a chance to recover, Lukas dashed forward. Condensed bolts of lightning wriggled around both of his hands.

Boom boom boom!

He took five steps.

With each step, he appeared before a defenceless Swordsman. Any part was fine. Regardless of whether it was the hem of their clothes, a finger, or even the tip of their blade.

That alone was enough to send condensed lightning coursing through them, electrocuting their entire bodies.

As a result, one person fell with each step.

Plop, plop...

Coughing up black smoke, the Swordsmen collapsed.

“...?!”

“...”

More than half of the Swordsmen around Lukas were shocked because they could not understand Lukas’ skills. The rest, on the other hand, gazed at him with tense expressions.

‘He has a strange skillset.’

‘Were there still practitioners like this in the Underground City?’

Lukas didn’t give them time to think or react.

Boom!

An explosion swept through the area.

Boom. Boom. Boom. The intervals were consistent, but the locations of the explosions seemed to be random. In the area around Lukas, as well as the surrounding tens of metres, explosions occurred without warning.

“Scatter!”

“If we stick together, we’ll be blown away all at once!”

Cries like this rang out, but the surrounding area had already been obscured by smoke because of the explosions.

Though small, a battlefield was still a battlefield. And the presence of a Wizard on a battlefield was truly overwhelming. In particular, if a Wizard who had the ability to protect themselves like Lukas swept through the middle of the battlefield, it would be no different from a disaster for the enemy.

—To Lukas.

Most of those around him were small fry. Despite being so close to them, he did not feel threatened at all.

Even if Lukas, a Wizard, were to stick his head into one of the Swordsmen’s inherent space, they would be too slow to realise that fact. Their thoughts were too slow. Their ability to judge the situation was also terrible.

But they weren’t all like that.

Swoosh!

Lukas turned to look at his opponent after avoiding a sharp stab by a hair's breadth.

It was a Swordsman in distinctive green clothes. Lukas had seen clothes like that before.

"An elder."

"Lim Ho-sang."

He briefly gave his name before kicking off from the ground once again.

This time, it was the Plum Blossom Sword Method once again. Lim Ho-sang's Plum Blossom Sword Technique erupted like an explosion. It was relentless as if he wouldn't give Lukas a chance to breathe.

That wasn't all.

Some of the Swordsmen around Lim Ho-sang joined in and began to naturally blend in with his Plum Blossom Sword Technique.

In an instant, there was nothing but fluttering swords surrounding Lukas.

"..."

"...!"

It was a sword display similar to what he'd seen before, but this time, the level of completeness was on a completely different level.

'A perfect sword display by ten people.'

The swordsmanship was fierce, but the distance they maintained from each other made it even more difficult.

In a short time, Lukas noticed what bothered him the most about the distance.

'If I use magic without thinking, I will also be swept up in their momentum.'

Nevertheless, it was also hard for him to retreat. Enemies lurked on both of his sides as well as behind him.

He was completely surrounded without any openings. How had this happened without him noticing?

There was no need to think about it further, because it was clearly Lim Ho-sang. It happened in the instant when he was distracted by his explosive swordsmanship.

It was this man who created this situation, realised the distance that bothered him most and informed the people around him, and who was guiding the sword display.

In other words, if Lim Ho-sang alone was killed, the sword display would collapse like a sandcastle. Of course, there was no way that Lim Ho-sang and the surrounding Swordsmen didn't know that.

In that case, the method was simple.

He had no choice but to pierce through the iron door from the start.

As soon as Lukas' robes fluttered slightly, Lim Ho-sang's eyes shined.

There was no reason for his robes to flutter in a windless desert. In other words, it was safe to say that the sudden appearance of wind was a precursor for magic.

“...!”

At that moment, Lim Ho-sang noticed a faint hint of red aura wriggling beneath his robe. It sent shivers down his spine.

That power was dangerous.

Jurk-

Lim Ho-sang turned the hilt of his sword and held it horizontally. Following his instructions, the Swordsmen around them flinched slightly before immediately copying his movements.

The Ten Sided Plum Blossom Sword Display, which they were currently unfolding, was their strongest defence.

Pyut!

At that moment, the red aura became a beam that shot out in an instant. It wasn't just to Lim Ho-sang. Red light filled the surroundings faster than a flash.

Boom!

Their swords trembled and they felt a heavy pain in their wrists. With a heavy shudder, the Swordsmen of Flower Mountain collectively released a sigh of relief.

Miraculously, their defence had been successful, and it was all thanks to Lim Ho-sang's keen eyes. Without his instruction, they would not have been able to block that attack.

However, there was one person with a stiff expression, Lim Ho-sang.

'...that shouldn't have been so easy to stop.'

The red light.

He knew it was something that could only be used by a small portion of practitioners.

He knew how strong it was.

And he knew that it couldn't be blocked by any countermeasures.

“As I thought, you know about absolute.”

Lukas' calm voice was heard.

“That was just a small trick. By mixing a bit of red wavelength into a lightning spell... Well, you wouldn't understand even if I explained it to you. Only a Wizard could see through it.”

“...!”

A Void Trick.

When those words appeared in his mind, Lim Ho-sang hurriedly shouted.

“Attack! Don’t let him use-!”

Buzz!

A dark red beam of light pierced Lim Ho-sang’s skull.

“...”

Lim Ho-sang froze where he stood, his body growing stiff.

“How the hell... could it be so fast...”

He collapsed, blood spilling from the hole in his skull.

“E-, Elder Lim!”

“Bastard!”

The broken sword display caught his attention before the angry shouts or emotional blades. No matter how helpless they were, they shouldn’t have lost their composure like that.

Lim Ho-sang was a leader they didn’t deserve.

‘Pathetic.’

Crack!

The sand rose to grab the Swordsmen’s ankles.

“Urk?”

“Wh-, what...”

They swung their swords to cut the sand, but because they were off balance, it wasn’t very effective. During this time, the sand began to pull them into the ground.

“K-, kuhuk!”

“Dammit! What kind of sand is this hard... Hup!”

The nine remaining Swordsmen were quickly buried in the sand and crushed to death. Or perhaps they were suffocated. Either way, it was clear that they were dead.

Lukas swept his eyes over the battlefield again without paying too much attention to a singular point. There were a few more who appeared to be elders. All of them seemed formidable, but Lukas had no intention of facing them head on in the first place. He nimbly hid among the Swordsmen of Flower Mountain and began to disperse their willpower.

The tide of the war, which had been relatively even until now, gradually began to shift to one side with just that small intervention.

‘...this should be enough.’

The tide of the war had turned. And at some point, the Flower Mountain Faction had begun to get swept away.

Lim Ho-sang. He had probably been the key figure that led this unit. A unit that lost its commander was bound to collapse easily.

Lukas returned to the dune from which he'd descended. Some Swordsmen rushed in as if to say they wouldn't let him leave easily, but it didn't take him long to deal with them.

Taht.

As he stepped onto the top of the dune, Pale approached him.

"Do you not plan to kill more?"

"Right."

Looking down at the battlefield from there, it was clear to see where the tide was leaning towards.

Lukas' gaze turned to Lesha.

"The war will soon be over. I'm sure your companions will welcome you when you go down from here."

"...who the hell are you?"

Lesha asked in a cautious voice.

"I'm not asking for your name. I could tell from the way you fought. There are many kinds of magic in this world, but the one you use is the same as us."

"..."

"...are you a Wizard from the same fundamental universe as us?"

Lukas didn't answer.

"Pale."

"Yes!"

"Let's go."

"Where... Ahh."

Remembering their previous conversation, Pale nodded.

Then, with her eyes closed, she put her hands to her temples and started making weird sounds.

"Dugudugudugudugu... Hut!"

Then she opened her eyes and turned in the direction they'd come from.

"This way! This way!"

"Wa-, wait a minute... cough."

Lesha tried to follow them but let out a cough instead.

Without stopping or even looking back at her, Lukas muttered.

“Forget about me. We will never meet again.”

That was the last time he would get involved with them.

Lukas followed Pale.

* * *

“...there isn't a part that doesn't hurt.”

As he lay on the desert floor, Schweiser muttered to himself. He didn't even want to lift a finger. Instead, he just moved his eyes to look around. He was trying to find where his severed arm had gone, but it seemed that it would take a while as it had gotten mixed with the corpses.

At that moment, a faint light appeared above him. It was an angel with grey hair. With a playful smile, she spoke.

“Seeing as you can still grumble, I guess you're alright.”

“...can you really say something like that while looking at this sorry sight?”

“Mhm. Come along.”

“You're too much.”

With a sigh, Schweiser got to his feet.

Then he began looking through the corpses for his arm.

“What about Raphael? Is he okay?”

“What about me? Some of the Left Angels died.”

“That... is unfortunate.”

Schweiser flipped over the body of a middle aged Swordsman and found his arm beneath it. After roughly attaching it back to his body, he took a piece of jerky from his pocket and started eating it.

As he felt his flesh beginning to reconnect, Schweiser let out a sigh.

“In any case, that was dangerous. If Lesha hadn't joined in the middle, it really would have been a dangerous situation.”

“Lesha? What do you mean?”

“Uh. Did you not see? Lesha came down from a sand dune and entered enemy lines. That's what flipped the table upside down.”

Schweiser chuckled.

“At any rate, she likes to appear at dramatic moments, just like old times. I knew she would be okay.”

“It seems you have misunderstood something.”

Raphael narrowed her eyes.

“That wasn’t Lesha.”

“Huh?”

“That wasn’t Lesha. You didn’t see it clearly.”

Ah. He was a bit far away.

Raphael nodded.

“Since I was in the sky, I was able to have a better view of the battlefield. Lesha is still on that dune right now. I don’t know when she got there, but I at least know that she hasn’t moved.”

“No, wait a minute. I’m not sure I understand what you’re saying. Then does that mean that someone else shot the Absolute Line?”

“It was one of the two people that came with Lesha. A man in a robe. I didn’t manage to see his face.”

“...you mean that man used Absolute?”

“I would doubt it as well if I didn’t see it with my own eyes.”

Schweiser’s expression became a bit strange.

“So there was a 9-star Wizard other than Lesha on this battlefield? Is that what you’re saying, Raphael?”

“That’s right.”

“What the hell-”

It was at this moment that Lesha stumbled down from the top of the sand dune.

Before Schweiser could even approach her, the miglings cheered.

“Wow!”

“Came! Came!”

“I’m going to meet!”

“No! I’m going!”

“Kiki. No one can stop me!”

Schweiser frowned.

“Didn’t I tell you guys not to talk outside? The desert air is harmful to you.”

“White one noisy.”

“Talk, a lot.”

“Blind. Blind.”

Ignoring Schweiser, the miglings ran over to Lesha and shouted.

“Trowman!”

“This time, real Trowman is here!”

“Wow!”

Looking at them, Lesha showed a blood stained smile.

“I’m glad you’re alright, Schweiser.”

The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years

Season 2 Chapter 395

They walked for a very long time.

Lukas recognised this from the fact that the sky colour changed five times.

At some point, the surrounding landscape had changed completely. He hadn’t noticed it immediately. This wasn’t just because he was focused on the changing colours of the sky. Instead, it was because something that Lukas couldn’t perceive interfered with his concentration as they entered the unfamiliar area.

...It was similar to the first time he’d entered the Flower Mountain.

A feeling of incongruity hidden in the midst of perfect naturalness.

It was almost as if they’d stepped into a completely different dimension...

Splash-

The touch of cool liquid.

Lukas found himself standing in the middle of a sea. Or at least, that was what the surrounding scene claimed.

From the surface, the sea seemed unthinkable deep, but in truth, it was only ankle deep. In reality, this was not a sea, but a vast puddle of shallow, stagnant water.

“Where are we?”

“The Northern Region, The Sea of Lost Possession.”

Pale answered with a wide smile. For her, it was a good answer.

As usual, she spoke in a straightforward tone without any explanations that only she could understand, but just knowing the name didn’t actually tell him where it was. This was especially so for Lukas, who was new to this world.

“Hang in there for a bit longer! We’re almost there!”

It seemed that this wasn’t their final destination.

Pale strode forward with brisk steps.

Splash, splash.

The sound of splashing water was almost deafening.

As he followed behind, Lukas felt that his robes were a bit cumbersome, so he just discarded them.

They didn't walk for that long this time.

After the sky had only changed colour a few more times, Pale stopped walking again.

"This is probably it..."

Just as she mumbled under her breath.

Rumble...

Lukas felt the surface of the water begin to shake slightly. His expression grew stiff.

"Pale."

Something was coming. Before he could say that,

Fwoosh!

The surface of the water erupted with a loud sound. From beneath, the shadow of something huge was revealed.

'Big...!'

Lukas couldn't help but admire the size of the monster.

At first, all he could see was a golden eye. Then, a gigantic body covered in smooth turquoise scales appeared.

The monster had the appearance of an enormous sea serpent. Just by raising its head slightly, it obscured the entire sky.

It was different from the monsters he'd encountered in the desert. It wasn't just its size. There was something, but Lukas wasn't sure what it was.

Was this normal in this area? Suppressing his doubts, Lukas shouted again.

"Pale!"

However, Pale was looking up at the monster with her characteristic nonchalant expression.

"How lucky! I can't believe it showed up so quickly!"

"What?"

"I'll be going first~"

Pale kicked off from the ground slightly and leaped towards the sea serpent. The sea serpent calmly looked at her with eyes that were larger than her body and opened its mouth.

Gulp.

“...!”

Just like that, she was swallowed.

This was literal, the sea serpent had swallowed Pale’s entire body whole.

Lukas stood there like a statue.

Shuk-

The sea serpent’s gaze then turned in his direction. Its eyes were filled with indifference.

There was no hostility or hunger.

Rather, it seemed to be calmly asking what Lukas intended to do.

‘Do I have to get eaten too?’

“...”

Lukas bit his lip.

He didn’t know what was going on, but one thing was clear. If he did not step up now, the sea serpent would leave.

‘...a method to become strong.’

As for what that method was, Lukas had no idea.

Pale was his only hint.

Sss-

Slowly, his body floated up into the air. The giant sea serpent opened its mouth in the direction of his floating body as if waiting for him.

Lukas threw himself into its throat.

* * *

The slippery texture of the oesophagus was unpleasant. The sticky saliva that got into his clothes, the terrible stench... If he’d known this would have happened, he would not have discarded his robes.

He slid down for a while, as though he was riding a slide.

It was the same feeling, but, naturally, it was not nearly as pleasant.

Thud.

“Ugh.”

He bumped into someone. He felt a throbbing in his head as if something hit him.

“Ow ow ow ow...”

He heard a groan. It sounded like Pale’s voice.

Lukas blinked, but he could not see anything around him.

Paht-

He used the Flash spell to illuminate the surroundings.

Then, he saw Pale, who had fallen onto her butt and was holding her forehead.

“Are you alright?”

Pale looked at the outstretched hand of Lukas, who wasn’t groaning. A strange look flashed in her eyes.

“Pale?”

“...yeah.”

With a disinterested tone, she held his hand and stood to her feet.

Lukas took the time to look around... Was this the sea serpent’s stomach? It felt strangely hot and stuffy.

“Being digested and becoming a part of a sea serpent’s flesh and blood isn’t really a method to become stronger.”

“...”

Pale didn’t answer right away. Instead, she was looking down at her palms. Unlike normally, there was a serious expression on her face.

“Pale?”

“...huh? Oh. Come to think of it, was this the method?”

“...”

Instead of feeling shocked by Pale’s unexpected response, Lukas decided to first feel relieved that his words weren’t wrong.

With a slight smirk, Pale clenched her fist slightly and spoke.

“This place is a garbage dump.”

“Garbage dump?”

“We should go deeper first.”

Bouncing, Pale walked forward. He had no choice but to follow her while looking around.

The first thing he noticed was the wall... Was this the wall of a stomach? It looked that way, but it felt strangely different. Just as he was thinking about touching it, he heard Pale’s voice.

“Thank you for your hard work.”

They were at a dead end.

But that didn’t mean there was nothing there.

Someone was standing in front of Pale. Lukas couldn't help but feel surprised when he saw their appearance. A smooth, clean skull, white bones, and empty eye sockets.

A skeleton.

A skeleton was standing at the dead end.

Had Pale finally lost her mind? No. That couldn't be it.

[Come, for, what business?]

A voice came from the skeleton.

The reason for the expression 'came from' was because the skeleton's jaw did not move at all when making the voice.

It was like telepathy that they'd heard. But Pale didn't seem surprised by this as she spoke calmly.

"I'm here to pick up a 'possibility'."

[I, see. A while, wait.]

The skeleton's eyes flashed as it looked at Pale. It seemed like it was analysing her.

Then it spoke again.

[Not, possible. Your, origin, no loss.]

Pale shook her head as if that was expected.

"No, not me, you dumb skeleton. Why do you make the same mistake every time I come here?"

[...]

"Analyse this uncle's origin, not mine."

The skeleton then turned its skull to look at Lukas. When he looked closely, he could see faint flames burning within those deep, dark eye sockets

...Was it analysing him?

After a moment of silence, the skeleton spoke again.

[A, being, from universe, number 2731361.]

"Mhm."

[Strange. The possibilities, of this man, one of a kind, in this world. No. Rather, an external...]

The skeleton tilted its head to the side as it muttered in a hoarse voice.

Pale chuckled.

"It's not your job to care about that, is it?"

[...that is, correct.]

As it said those words, the skeleton stepped back.

There was a huge compass, or perhaps something like a clock, hanging from the wall.

However, there were far more hands than the hour, minute, and second hands. At a glance, there were dozens of them. The markings also seemed to be quite precise.

The skeleton stretched out its boney fingers in a familiar motion and began to adjust the needle-like hands. Unlike its sluggish voice, there was no hesitation in the movement of its fingers.

Pale hummed quietly as she waited.

And when the adjustment was over.

Rumble-

The dead end wall began to shake before finally splitting in half. A short while later, the black space hidden behind it was revealed.

[Number 2731361, dumpsite.]

“Wow. Nice work!”

Pale patted the skeleton on the shoulder and praised it. Ignoring this, the skeleton spoke again.

[Mas-, ter, wants to, meet you.]

Naturally, it wasn't talking to Lukas. The skeleton's head was turned to Pale.

She dismissively waved her hand at him.

“I can't. Can't you see I'm busy right now?”

[...I, see. Understood.]

The skeleton did not make the request again.

[I hope, the possibility, that you wish for, is there.]

After saying that, it bowed its head. Like a machine that had finished its task.

“Now then. Let's go!”

Pale turned her attention away from the skeleton. She suddenly got close to Lukas and grabbed his hand. Then, she led him along with a satisfied smile on her face.

As soon as they stepped into the darkness, the sound of the wall closing again could be heard behind them.

“Can we not return that way?”

Lukas asked as he looked at Pale, who was holding his hand.

“There's no need to go there anymore. If we go a bit further... Look. Didn't we arrive quickly?”

Pale stretched out a finger.

“We’re here.”

Lukas covered his nose for a moment. There was a stench in this place that was completely incomparable to before.

It smelled like rotting corpses.

But the scene in front of him was even more disgusting than the smell.

“...”

He was speechless as he beheld the mountain of corpses. No, there were so many corpses piled on top of each other that it could be described as a world of corpses.

No matter where he looked, there was nothing but corpses. Even Lukas had never witnessed such a sight.

“Everything here are possibilities that have been discarded.”

Pale strode through this place.

The sight left him speechless for a moment. As she walked forward one step at a time, she looked like an angel taking a stroll through hell.

Then, she began to rummage through the corpses with an innocent expression.

“They are all hollow shells, and yet they haven’t disappeared. They haven’t rotted. Why? Because this place doesn’t have anything like an underworld.”

“...these corpses died in the World of Void?”

“You could say that.”

Pale snickered.

“This world abides by the laws of the jungle. And the prey becomes the flesh and blood of the predator in the truest sense. In other words, absorption. That is the rule here, and it is the most common way to become strong.”

“...”

“By the way, the efficiency of the absorption varies greatly depending on the food.”

“...efficiency?”

“Even if the opponent is much stronger than you, if you have nothing in common, the efficiency would be very low. If you are completely different beings, it might even be as low as 0.1%.”

Pale’s tone was a little different from usual. It felt like she was a completely different person. It wasn’t just because this was her first ever detailed explanation.

For Lukas, a strange feeling was never a good thing.

He almost instinctively looked behind him, at the path that they had taken.

But he was certain that an escape route didn't exist anymore.

Perhaps Pale hadn't noticed his behaviour, because she continued in a soft voice.

"On the other hand, the more you have in common, the higher the absorption efficiency. Anything is fine. Whether it's appearance, like hair colour, eye colour, the same gender, similar characteristics, or even manner of speech... What I'm trying to say is that the most efficient is... Ah."

Her searching hands stopped for a moment.

"Found it. As expected, I'm a lot luckier when you're around."

Pale grinned as she pulled a corpse out from the other corpses.

"...!"

The moment he saw this corpse, Lukas couldn't help but suck in a cold breath.

It looked like it had been neglected for a long time. It was in terrible condition.

There were pieces missing as if it had been eaten by wild dogs. In particular, the lower body was nonexistent as if it had been ripped off.

Nevertheless, the face was still easily recognisable.

Dark blonde hair, dead blue eyes.

...Pale,

Showed off the half eaten corpse of 'Lukas Trowman' with a broad smile.

"This is the best prey for uncle. Ah. It's already dead, so you should be able to eat this, right?"

[The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years](#)

Season 2 Chapter 396

To eat.

None other than his own body.

Just thinking about it filled him with a sense of repulsion.

What did this woman just say? It was already dead, so he should be able to eat it?

The way she spoke as if it was natural made him feel it again. The distance between himself and Pale. Just how far apart they were.

"..."

Furtive, Pale slowly lowered 'Lukas' corpse' that she was holding up. Maybe it was because she saw the discomfort on Lukas' face. Or maybe she was just offended that Lukas had rejected her proposal once again. There was a hint of dissatisfaction on her face.

"This uncle is not uncle."

"...I know."

He at least knew that much.

That corpse was a discarded possibility's Lukas. They were basically the same, but still different.

'It's not me, it's another me.'

He could understand the truth in this pun like saying.

Nevertheless.

"It's not like that."

Interrupting his thoughts, Pale opened her mouth.

"I don't understand. Even if it's an act like cannibalism, is this really a situation where you can be picky?"

"..."

"You said you want to become one of the Twelve Void Lords. Do you think you could even reach their toes like this?"

He couldn't reach them. He knew that.

In the end, was Lukas's pride the thing that was holding him back right now? Was he still not desperate enough yet despite seeing the future? Was there still the thought somewhere in his mind that he could relax?

"...hoo."

Pale sighed in a mix of tiredness and frustration.

Then with a 'tuk', she threw Lukas' body away.

"Predation is different from what uncle thinks."

"..."

"Hmph."

Pale huffed heavily.

In an instant, her cold expression disappeared.

"I don't know anymore. Do what you want."

After muttering those words, she suddenly climbed over a mountain of corpses and disappeared. She didn't say where she was going, or when she's coming back.

A feeling of loneliness.

Only the rotten smell of corpses accompanied him.

Lukas' gaze turned to the 'Lukas corpse' that Pale had left behind.

"..."

'Another me.'

When he recalled what he'd just heard, the emotions he felt became more prominent.

Those emotions weren't simply because of the strange feeling that he got from seeing his own corpse.

First of all, the body.

This Lukas' body was much more muscular than his own.

He also hadn't neglected his training in the past and trained both his mind and body at the same time, but that was only to increase his concentration and physical strength, which was ultimately to increase his magic power.

On the other hand, this Lukas' body was... different. Muscles covered his entire body, showing that he was much more dedicated than he had been.

Those were not muscles that could be formed through simple training, and there were many scars, large and small, crisscrossing across his entire body.

Scratches, cuts, and even stab wounds.

This was also very unfamiliar. 4,000 before his return, Lukas had fought a bitter war with the Demigods. Naturally, few of his wounds were caused by blades.

"You."

Lukas stretched out his hand, his curiosity rising.

A being with the same name as him, but who had experienced something different.

"What kind of life did you live?"

Just as his fingers touched the pale skin.

[Are you curious?]

He seemed to hear a voice.

Just as Lukas flinched and tried to pull his hand away.

[Then experience it.]

Whoosh-!

"...!"

Memories came flooding in.

* * *

In a building filled with the scent of moss.

Which sat in the outskirts of the city, surrounded by lush trees and overgrown weeds.

A place filled with the cries of forest bugs during the day and the cries of owls at night.

Jrr-

Lukas stood silently in front of the building.

It felt like he was looking at a dusty place that had been left unattended for a long time.

What he was currently facing was the distant past.

“...”

He stretched out his hand to the cracked building wall, but his hand passed through it instead of touching it. It wasn't possible for him to interact with anything. This showed that he was experiencing everything as a phantom. Nevertheless, it wasn't fake.

This was a Vision of Lukas' past.

Of course, it wasn't his own.

It was the Lukas who was dead.

This was the past of the Lukas, who had taken a different path and experienced different possibilities.

Tap tap-

The silence was broken. To his west, someone was approaching from the city.

It was a woman with a vulnerable appearance. She looked to be about 30 years old, but her tired face made her look older.

She held a newborn baby in one hand, and her other clasped the hand of a child with a bold expression.

“...hoo.”

She stood in front of the quiet building for a moment before taking a deep breath. She lifted her hand to knock on the door and hesitated.

For a while.

Finally, she seemed to steel her determination as she finally knocked on the door.

Click-

The door opened, revealing a middle aged woman with a voluptuous figure. Her thick, grey hair was neatly brushed, and her expression was soft and gentle.

Illuminating her visitors face with a candle holder held in her hand, the middle aged woman asked.

“Mrs. Larson?”

The pale woman nodded.

"I am Grecia Larson."

"Ah."

The middle aged woman smiled.

"You're a bit later than I expected."

"I'm sorry. That, I was trying to deceive the eyes of the others..."

"That is alright, madam."

The middle aged woman placed her hand across her breast and bowed in a dignified manner.

"My introduction is a bit late. I am Sophia. I'm acting as the caretaker of this place in the place of Lady Aria, who is away for personal reasons."

"Yes. Miss Sophia. Thank you for accepting my personal request this time."

"Huhu."

Sophia smiled gently.

"The night breeze is chilly. Please come inside."

"...yes. Mark, please wait outside."

The boy named Mark nodded. The boy was only six or seven years old at most. It should have been scary to stand in front of such a deserted building in the middle of a dark forest, but Mark's eyes shined with curiosity.

Taking his eyes off the boy, Lukas followed the steps of the two women.

Candles gently lit the dark hallway. The old wooden floor creaked from time to time, and each time it did, Grecia flinched.

"It's okay. Around this time of year, the children sleep so soundly that they wouldn't even wake up if you picked them up."

"...I'll keep that in mind."

Eventually, they arrived in a small room.

The tables and chairs were old, but there was no dust, and the room felt clean. This was proof that it was cleaned regularly.

"I apologise for not having anything to serve, madam."

"No, it's okay. More than that..."

"Yes. You probably don't have much time... Then."

Sophia's eyes narrowed slightly.

“That is the child?”

“Yes.”

“May I see his face?”

“Of course.”

Grecia slowly handed the newborn baby she was embracing to Sophia. The baby was fast asleep.

From the city to this building by foot had taken about an hour, but the baby had shown no signs of waking. The same was true even while the quiet conversation was happening around them.

“Oh my.”

Sophia’s expression was gentle. She gently brushed the baby’s hair aside in order to not wake them.

“So pretty. Is it a boy?”

“Yes.”

“What is his name?”

“...Miss Sophia can name him.”

It was at this time that Sophia’s expression changed.

“That isn’t possible.”

“Huh?”

“I know that madam has special circumstances. But this child is yours. No matter what life madam might lead in the future, or how this child will grow up. That fact will not change.”

“...”

“Madam, please tell me this child’s name. It seems you haven’t named him yet. But I can tell just from looking at your eyes. That madam loves this child very much.”

Grecia’s eyes became red. Eventually, she couldn’t hold it in any longer and burst into tears.

“...Lu-, kas.”

And said the child’s name.

“That child’s name is Lukas.”

Sophia smiled again.

Then she looked at the child’s small, mischievous face.

“Good for you. Mommy gave you such a nice name. You’re happy too, aren’t you, Lukas?”

“...Miss Sophia, I know I don’t deserve it. Nevertheless, I would like to shamelessly ask. That child, Lukas...”

She broke into a sob before she could finish her sentence.

“I can’t make any promises to you that this child will grow up properly. Because that would be a lie. Of course, I will do my best to ensure that Lukas grows up to be a good adult.”

Sophia’s expression became bitter.

“Regardless of my will, I have seen countless children go astray.”

However.

As she continued, Sophia’s expression became serious.

“You can be certain of one thing. Today, our Trowman Orphanage has gained a new family member.”

At that, Grecia silently burst into tears.

Sophia stood up and quietly wrapped her arms around her shoulders.

“It’s okay. It’ll be okay. One day, even this child will understand. I will help. So that this child becomes someone with a heart as wide as the sea and as pure as the forest.”

“Th-, thank you. Thank you...”

“...”

Lukas.

He listened to the entire conversation.

And he looked around.

...Trowman Orphanage, a kingdom funded institution that he’d been entrusted to as a child.

His gaze went forward once again.

He looked at the woman with the vulnerable expression, whose shoulders still shook.

She was unfamiliar but also familiar. He could see a few similarities. Not in the hair, but especially in the eyes.

‘I see.’

This woman was his mother.

“It was the same for you up to here.”

He heard a voice.

Lukas turned round.

A ‘Lukas’ was standing there.

“Lukas.”

He called his name.

“...Lukas.”

Lukas also called his name.

The two of them stood in front of each other.

Eventually, ‘Lukas’ chuckled.

“Amazing. A Wizard Lukas Trowman. Right. So such a future existed. Well. I was very qualified when it came to mana.”

‘Were you not a Wizard?’

“Do I look at a Wizard?”

‘Lukas’ asked back. Lukas didn’t answer right away. He chuckled again.

“I’m really curious. What was your life like? Did you enjoy it? Did you feel warm? Was there even a single person you could trust?”

His cynical voice soon became filled with anger.

“I didn’t. My life was by no means smooth. Everything I longed for grew further when I felt myself getting closer, and disappeared when I held them in my hand.”

“...”

“You want to get your hands on my possibility? I’ll give it to you if you want it. However...”

‘Lukas’ whispered.

“...before that, you should learn. About me. About my life.”

* * *

He felt the sunlight.

‘...sunlight?’

Lukas immediately opened his eyes, shocked.

Unlike his tired body, his mind was clear.

“Cough.”

When he let out a low cough, he saw a swirl of dust. His condition was not very good. As he instinctively groped the floor, he felt the touch of an old blanket.

He looked around.

Dozens of blankets were spread out in a spacious room. The blanket that Lukas was laying on was one of them.

Each blanket had its owner. They were all children at different stages of childhood, with different appearances and genders.

“ ... ”

This scene.

Beyond the feeling of familiarity came a sense of nostalgia.

...If his memories were correct, this place.

Almost as if he was possessed, he rose up from his bedding. And walked carefully on cat's feet(1) in order to not wake the other children. His destination was a large window at the end of the room. After a while, he arrived before it.

And Lukas opened the window wide.

“ ... ”

He could see the scene of a familiar forest, hear the sounds of the birds chirping, and feel the fresh air as it pierced his lungs.

“You woke up early today too, Lukas.”

He heard a soft voice. It came from the yard outside the window.

A middle aged woman stood there as she hung out laundry.

...Sophia.

She looked older than she had when he'd last seen her.

'She spoke to me.'

Surprised, he looked down at his hands. It was with those two small hands that he'd opened the window.

In other words, it was possible for him to interact with things here.

Lukas' palms were smooth. Perhaps because he was a boy, they felt a bit stiff, but that was all. There were no callouses from holding weapons or pens for a long time.

“Lukas?”

As if puzzled, Sophia called out his name.

He raised his head.

He didn't quite understand the situation yet.

However, it was clear what action he had to take at the moment.

Rummaging through his old memories, Lukas looked at Sophia.

“...good morning, Sophia.”

And spoke in the way Lukas Trowman did when he was 12 years old.

[The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years](#)

Season 2 Chapter 397

He had to go to a nearby stream to wash his face. Perhaps because it was approaching autumn, the forest breeze was quite cool.

Splash-

When the cold water met his face, his drowsiness was completely washed away.

Lukas stared down at the flowing water. This was what he looked like when he was 12 years old.

Although the face was the same, his expression did not have the cuteness of a child his age. Would it be better for him to act a bit like a child? No, there was no need to act since this was just a fake world, to begin with.

“...”

Not bothering to wipe the droplets of water off of his face, he looked around the forest. Towards the west was a city.

In the future, after leaving for the city, Lukas would encounter many large and small incidents. That was all that came to his mind.

He couldn't remember exactly when he went to the city, or what the incidents he'd encountered were.

'I should learn?'

That's what 'Lukas' had said.

He needed to learn about 'Lukas' himself, and about his life.

But this current phenomenon was closer to an experience.

If he simply wanted to tell him about his life, there was no need to go through so much trouble. The same was true even if the information was given to him in the form of possession.

Lukas had to now move this body on his own. There also didn't seem to be a limit to what he could say.

In that case, what did 'Lukas' want from him?

[You cannot leave this forest.]

His thoughts stopped.

A voice appeared directly in his mind. The image that was being reflected in the flowing stream also changed.

Before he knew it, a man was standing behind him. It was 'Lukas'. However, his figure was faint, like a ghost, and his lower body simply didn't exist. In other words, he was floating in the air.

'Lukas' spoke.

[The materialisation doesn't stretch that far. The range of this Void Image is very small. There are only around 100 characters, and the field has a radius of about 5 kilometres centred around the orphanage. There is nothing past that.]

"..."

[Why do you think I'm showing you memories of this time?]

This point.

Lukas didn't answer immediately, and instead slowly retraced his memories.

...The autumn when he was 12 years old.

Because of how long it had been, it wasn't easy to remember.

The stream trickled, and he could easily see the fish swimming within it. By the time the water on his face had dried, Lukas opened his mouth.

"The disappearance incident that occurred at this time."

[So you haven't forgotten.]

'Lukas' nodded.

[If I had to choose one major turning point in my life, for me, it would be the disappearance incident that occurred at this time.]

"..."

[The choice I made after that incident... At that time, I didn't think I had a choice. It was only till after that I realised that wasn't the case. That's why I'm curious. You are basically the same as me. Lukas... how did you act at this time?"]

The voice gradually faded, and with it, the figure of 'Lukas' disappeared.

Lukas remained where he was standing. The words 'Lukas' left behind were stuck in his mind.

-You, how did you act at this time?

...The disappearance incident.

How did he act at that time? He couldn't remember.

* * *

When he returned to the orphanage, he was greeted by bustling movements. The other children were slowly waking up. They all rubbed their eyes, stumbling around like zombies.

"Good morning, Lukas."

A clear voice.

It was a girl with braided hair. She had orange hair and a cheerful face.

Lukas managed to recall her name relatively quickly.

“Ellie.”

“Wah, look at how your face is shining. Did you go on your own again?”

Ellie spoke reproachfully with a disapproving look on her face.

“Mhm.”

“You didn’t listen to me when I told you I wanted to go with you next time. Hmph.”

“I looked for you before I left, but I couldn’t find you.”

“I went to the bathroom.”

Ellie grumbled as she began to tidy up the beddings. Glancing at the side of her face, Lukas helped.

Ellie Trowman.

She was either 13 or 14 years old. Even though he couldn’t exactly remember, it was clear that she was older than Lukas. The image of her bossing him around and telling him to call her big sis appeared in his mind.

“What’s for breakfast today?”

Tuktuk, Ellie patted dust off of her pillow.

“Stew.”

“Really? Huu. I hate stew. I won’t feel full even if I eat a couple bowls.”

“That’s because there aren’t many solid ingredients.”

Then Ellie opened her mouth.

“Come to think of it, I saw something in a book before. It said that it’s common for normal stews to have meat in them. Can you believe it? With so much precious beef...”

As was common with orphanages, the Trowman Orphanage was not very well off. For breakfast, it was usually stew which consisted of root vegetables, stem vegetables, and offal boiled in plain water. For lunch, it was two or three dry loaves of bread, although dinner was a bit more luxurious.

That was why the children in the orphanage looked forward to dinner.

“...phew. All done.”

“Good job.”

“Ng. Should we close the window? I think that’s enough ventilation.”

“I’ll close it.”

“Thanks.”

As the window was closed, the door was opened and Sophia stepped in.

“Ellie, Lukas, come down for breakfast.”

“We’ll go now.”

“Did you two clean up everything again?”

“Ahaha. Well...”

Sophia frowned.

“Those rascals have no intention of helping their big brother and sister.”

“That’s okay. Let’s hurry, the food is getting cold.”

Ellie smiled warmly and gently pushed Sophia out of the room.

Lukas followed them.

The cafeteria was noisy. This was natural considering that there were dozens of children in one space. But despite being noisy, the children were not disorderly. More importantly, they were all waiting patiently without touching the food.

It was one of the orphanage’s strict rules that Sophia ensured was enforced. This showed that they were properly following the rule ‘everyone eats together, and starts at the same time’.

“Looks like everyone is here, Al, Liz.”

“Yes.”

The children, Al and Liz, went to and fro along the table distributing meals, and soon, the noisy breakfast began.

* * *

After breakfast, they had ‘work’. The Trowman Orphanage was basically self-sufficient. Of course, they received subsidies from the city but it was only a miniscule amount. It was impossible to feed dozens of children by relying on just subsidies.

It was for this reason that they produced most of their own food ingredients and daily necessities as well as clothing.

Children with good eyes were responsible for picking edible grasses or looking for fruits, while the brave children looked for firewood.

Some children did the laundry, or caught fish in the stream.

Lukas’ job was to take care of and monitor the children.

This might seem like an easy task at first glance, but it wasn’t. This was because the children were spread out across the forest. Lukas had to go around from time to time to check if anyone was injured or was caught in an unexpected situation.

“Luther, don’t touch that tree.”

Luther, who was just about to climb a tall tree to pick fruits, froze.

“What? Why?”

“It has a beehive.”

“Beehive?...Ah!”

It was only then that Luther noticed the hanging beehive. Of course, the activity level of bees had dropped significantly since it was the beginning of autumn, but the fact that they were dangerous didn’t change.

“How did you even see that?”

The location of the beehive was so excellent that it was almost invisible among the leaves. There was a high chance that he wouldn’t have noticed it even after climbing into the tree.

“I’m a lot bigger than you.”

“Tch. You’re such a show off... Anyways, thanks!”

He nodded to Luther before gesturing with his chin.

“Go back first. It’s almost time for lunch.”

“What about you, Lukas?”

“I’ll look around to see if there are any other kids around.”

“Okay! See you later!”

Luther ran off with a shout.

Lukas, who was left alone, looked up at the beehive and muttered.

“Magic Missile.”

He casted the most basic 1-star spell. He stared at the unstable sphere of flowing energy for a moment.

Lukas had sensed mana when he was younger. And after digging through a few magical tomes that were closer to general knowledge books, he learned how to use a few spells.

This would have been impossible without his natural talent, but the spells he could cast clearly displayed his lack of skill.

He closed his eyes and checked the mana room in his body.

...Small, and bare. His mana room was at most the size of his palm. The mana it contained was less than half a cup.

Nevertheless, with the knowledge Lukas now had, it was possible to use 3-star, or even 4-star spells with this much mana.

Stretching his hand towards the beehive, he spat out the activation phrase.

“Water Jet.”

An attack spell that sprayed a jet of compressed water. The range was short, but the power was high. The spell would cut through not only the beehive but also the beautiful tree behind it.

“...”

But the spell didn't manifest. Lukas lowered his outstretched hand.

Something inside his body was wrapping around his mana and preventing his spell from manifesting.

Naturally, there was no problem with the formula. It was also not because he lacked mana either. In theory, everything was perfect.

That was what made the reason easy to guess.

The reason why he couldn't use Water Jet was simple.

At this point in the past, Lukas could not use 4-star spells.

‘It won't allow me to use enough power to change things.’

It would be correct to understand it like that.

In other words, the spells that Lukas could use at that moment were probably limited to what ‘12 year old Lukas’ could use.

1 star and 2-star spells.

...He recalled the words of ‘Lukas’. He'd called it a turning point. Lukas had an idea of what he wanted from him.

The upcoming disappearance incident.

He probably wanted to know what Lukas thought and how he acted in the face of that incident.

He would compare and analyse the differences in their actions, and then, he would probably tell Lukas what he'd done.

It would probably end there.

This Void Image world would disappear, and Lukas would return to the ‘dumpsite’ filled with corpses.

Then, he would obtain the possibility of another Lukas and get stronger.

“Ah, there you are, Lukas.”

It was Ellie's voice. Panting heavily, she put her hand on the tree and tried to catch her breath.

It seemed that she'd gone around looking for Lukas.

“Sorry. Were you looking for me?”

“Mhm. But...”

She narrowed her eyes at him.

Then she spoke in a slightly accusatory tone.

“You, were you practising magic here again?”

“...well.”

Now that he thought about it, in the past, Lukas had used patrolling as an excuse to go deeper into the forest to practice magic. The only person who knew that was... probably Ellie.

“Aren’t you being too loose? You know how important our role is! If any of the other kids get hurt...”

“That won’t happen. There aren’t any more kids in the forest. Luther should have been the last one and he has already returned.”

Ellie flinched slightly then asked in a timid voice.

“...really?”

“What about you?”

Ellie had the same duties as Lukas, it was just that the area she was in charge of was different. Lukas managed the clearings and surrounding forest, while Ellie managed the streams around the orphanage.

“I’m almost done on my end.”

“So you came to pick me up on purpose. Thanks.”

“Because I’m the big sis.”

Ellie stuck her nose up as she said that.

“Anyways, Lukas, did you forget your promise again?”

“What promise?”

“You said you’d show your magic.”

“...”

Of course, Lukas wouldn’t remember such a small promise.

“Sorry.”

However, he was quick to apologise.

It was easy to see that Ellie wasn’t lying.

“Seeee, you’re so mean! You didn’t do it even though I haven’t told anyone for a month!”

Ellie stomped on the ground as if she was disappointed. That jogged his memory a bit.

At that time, Lukas had been hiding the fact that he could use magic. He hadn't expected Ellie to find out. He'd been practising beside the stream at dawn and got caught.

"I'm sorry."

Lukas apologised again.

Then he looked up at Ellie for a moment before saying.

"In return, I'll teach you how to use magic next time."

"...huh? Really?"

"Mhm. Really."

Ellie's face brightened.

"Really? Do you promise? If you break this one too..."

"I won't break it. But you can't get mad at me if you can't do it."

"Naturally! Does this big sis look that petty?"

Ellie smiled wickedly.

"Huhu! Good. When I learn to use magic... Um... I want to use water magic first."

"From the start? Why?"

"Why else! Don't you think it would help a lot with laundry and cleaning?"

"...if used well, it's possible."

Lukas hollowly agreed to her words.

Unfortunately, Ellie had no talent for magic. She was born with a constitution that could not sense mana. To tell her that he'd teach her despite knowing that was to deceive her.

Nevertheless, it was the right thing to say at this moment. For the time being, it would be better for him to stick with Ellie.

Because Ellie was the first victim of the upcoming disappearance incident.

[The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years](#)

Season 2 Chapter 398

"Boss, is this really okay?"

A man with buck teeth. His entire body was covered in dirt and his hair and beard were ungroomed and scattered.

The man was almost a perfect representation of a bandit.

'Lukas' answered the man's question.

“The plan is perfect.”

“That... Of course I know that. Boss’ operations have never failed before.”

“If you know that then you shouldn’t be feeling so anxious.”

“It’s because the targets this time are nobles.”

The man frowned as he spoke.

“If even a rat escapes, they will definitely try to get revenge. Don’t you know that too, boss? Just how terrible those guys are.”

“You’re talking about revenge. But we won’t leave any traces, just like we always do.”

“But...”

“We have already found their forces and route. We have plenty of time to carry out the operation, and our chances of failure are less than 1%. Don’t you know that?”

“Mm...”

The operation would take about an hour.

In that time, it was possible to kill all of their targets, rob money and valuables, and escape after cleaning up completely.

That was what the feelings developed from the man’s experience told him.

He knew that.

He knew that, but...

“Trust me, Tuvel.”

‘Lukas’ spoke in a deep tone.

“Have I ever betrayed your expectations?”

“...”

“Besides, this is necessary. Our family is much bigger now. If we don’t increase the scope of our area and target, it’ll be much harder for our family to live.”

“...that’s... true.”

When he brought up the logical explanation, Tuvel couldn’t help but nod.

His expression soon became serious as he said.

“I’ll follow your orders, boss.”

“Good idea.”

‘Lukas’ nodded and drew his sword.

“Then let’s get started.”

* * *

Lukas woke up from his dream.

Hoot hoot, the cries of owls rang out ominously. This told him that it was still late at night.

‘...water.’

He was unusually thirsty. Lukas got up from his bedding and walked towards the drinking fountain in the hallway. There, he took one of the provided cups and filled it halfway with water before drinking it.

It had been three days since he’d come to this place, but that was his first dream.

No. Was that even a dream?

[It wasn’t a dream.]

He heard a voice.

He looked around, but he could not see anyone. But the voice that seemed to whisper directly into his brain had, without a doubt, come from ‘Lukas’.

“It was your memory.”

[As expected, you’re pretty quick-witted. Like me.]

“...you, were a bandit?”

Someone who killed people and robbed them of their money and valuables. Trash that lived by stealing the results of others’ sweat and blood.

That was what Lukas knew about bandits. And that was why he couldn’t believe it, which caused his voice to be filled with disbelief.

[Right.]

‘Lukas’ affirmed nonchalantly.

This made him speechless. Even though Lukas knew there were other possibilities, he never thought there would be one where he became a bandit.

[Do you think this is the time to be swept up in my memories? You don’t have the time to relax.]

“What do you mean?”

[Your body in the dumpsite is going to die.]

“...!”

Lukas trembled in shock.

Then he recalled Pale’s words.

The five colour meal.

Before the colour of the sky changed five times, everyone had to eat at least once.

Otherwise, they'd disappear.

[You seem to have misunderstood. You're not going to disappear. You're going to die.]

As if reading his mind, 'Lukas' spoke up.

[There is no concept of disappearance in the dumpsite. Otherwise, there wouldn't be a pile of corpses.]

"..."

[Instead, there are things called 'three day bugs'. They are smaller than a fingernail, and they usually live in groups that can number in the millions. They are very docile until they find their prey that is... Kuku.]

'Lukas' chuckled and asked.

[Do you know why they're called 'three day bugs'?)

There was no way he'd know that.

[It's because they devour anything that hasn't moved in three days. Sooner or later, they will consider your body to be prey as well.]

"Does that mean that three days have actually passed?"

[Right. The flow of time in this world is the same as the place you came from.]

This meant that the 'real Lukas' hadn't eaten anything in three days.

'Lukas' spoke in a cynical tone.

[This isn't the time to worry about your starving body. What you should really be worrying about are the three day bugs. I know that your pain tolerance is pretty high, but the pain they inflict far exceeds your imagination...]

"You should have told me sooner."

Lukas spoke in an annoyed tone, but he only received a laugh in response.

[Why would I do that? Don't get this wrong. Just because we're basically the same person doesn't mean I am on your side. I don't care even if you fail and die.]

"What?"

[Even if you die here, another 'Lukas' will eventually come for my body... Then I'll just test 'me' again. All I hope is for a Lukas who will be strong enough to inherit my everything...]

"Are you saying that you can choose?"

The fact that a long dead corpse could choose who would be eaten or not was completely incomprehensible for Lukas.

[The difference is efficiency. If you show a suitable answer in this illusion, the power you will obtain will increase exponentially.]

“Don’t be ridiculous. I doubt that the power of a bandit would make me strong enough to matter.”

[Consuming ‘yourself’ in the World of Void is not so simple. It doesn’t matter how strong I was during my lifetime.]

“...”

[As I told you before, it’s a matter of efficiency... Lukas. My corpse doesn’t just consist of flesh, blood, bones and maggots. It also has ‘something that you need right now’.]

...Efficiency.

Pale had mentioned something similar before.

At that moment, Lukas felt like he’d finally understood what the corpses dumped in the dumpsite were.

They were not truly dead, instead, they had been frozen before death. And they were all waiting in that state.

In the hope that someday, another self would come along, inherit their everything, and fulfil all of the lingering regrets that they could not throw away.

In other words, the dumpsite stored the corpses of the losers.

[...by the way, I’ve been analysing your inner thoughts for the past few days.]

‘Lukas’ voice continued calmly.

[I thought you’d be ‘like this’.]

“Like this?”

[I believe I got a glimpse of it. You have a lot of work to do. And none of it is easy.]

“...”

[The fate around you is incredibly twisted. Honestly, it took me by surprise. I’ve never seen anyone carry such a heavy fate. —That’s why I’d like to make a suggestion.]

He couldn’t see his face, but ‘Lukas’ was probably smiling.

[Why don’t you become a corpse too? Lukas.]

* * *

He could no longer hear the voice of ‘Lukas’.

But his words weren’t easily forgotten.

“...become a corpse?”

It was an invitation to become one of the losers. From none other than himself. His fists clenched tightly. The shock was so great that his chest felt tight and his stomach felt nauseous.

“Is he telling me to let someone else take care of my problems?”

Anger began to seep into his voice.

-No.

That wasn't it. The meaning of his words was a bit different.

Not leaving it to someone else, leaving it to himself.

It was only then that he realised.

The reason that 'Lukas' was simply a loser, a corpse rolling around in the dumpsite. The reason he was so carefree despite giving up everything and not achieving anything.

It was because he was entrusting everything not to another person, but to 'another self'.

If that was the case, could it still be seen as abandoning his responsibilities?

“Kuk.”

That didn't matter. Or at least, it didn't matter to Lukas.

Nevertheless, he still stumbled.

His hatred of his 'other self' grew. However, more than that, he felt disgusted. —Because he wasn't completely wrong.

-I thought you'd be 'like this'

He wasn't wrong.

For a moment after he'd learned the truth about 'Lukas', who rolled around as a corpse, he felt envious. For a moment, the thought of wanting to do so as well crossed his mind.

“No.”

He was certain about one thing.

The fact that he carried the heaviest fate out of all the Lukases in the World of Void. And with that certainty came the grim conviction that no one else would be able to withstand that weight.

That was why he couldn't pass it on.

Lukas didn't trust anyone anymore.

Not even himself.

* * *

...Autumn.

He remembered that the first disappearance would occur at this time. But he couldn't remember the exact date. This was because he'd probably completely forgotten about it. No matter how brilliant Lukas' brain was, he couldn't recall memories that he'd completely forgotten.

There was also another problem.

He remembered the disappearance event itself. He clearly remembered the first victim, Ellie, the number of victims that came after, and even the culprit.

But no matter how he thought, he could not remember how he himself had responded to the incident. This was different from forgetting about it.

There was no obscure feeling like trying to search in fog, instead, it felt like the memory related to that had been completely erased.

This was why Lukas had not done anything for three days despite knowing the identity of the culprit.

He'd wanted to make a move after recalling how he'd responded in the past.

...Because Lukas was sure that the judgement he'd make with his current thinking was far different from back then.

However, it seemed that was no longer possible.

He didn't return to the room. Well past midnight, he headed towards a room at the end of the hallway.

He could not feel any presence behind the door.

Nevertheless, he chose to knock first.

Knock knock.

...

...

When there was no response, Lukas opened the door.

As he expected, there was no one in the room. On the table, he could see a half burnt candle and a cup of cold tea. Lukas didn't look around the room. Instead, after closing the door, he left the orphanage.

Crunch-

The sound of his footsteps on the grass echoed slightly. When the wind blew, goosebumps rose up on his skin. The forest on an autumn night was quite chilly. This was especially so for a 12 year old boy without a coat, but Lukas didn't care.

'Lukas' had said that the entire forest had not been materialised. He knew why this world had a range of 5 kilometres in every direction from the orphanage.

The forest in the middle of the night was usually a place of complete darkness, but the moonlight was especially bright tonight. It was fortunate that the forest was not thick enough to block out the sky.

Lukas waited just long enough for his eyes to get accustomed to the darkness before moving forward, each step placed carefully. There was no need to rush. The night was long.

Steadily, he proceeded through the darkness. His destination wasn't that far away. As long as he didn't get lost, it would not take him long to get there.

In addition, there were tracks in the grass in front of him. Tracks that showed that someone had passed through this place recently.

These tracks became the path that guided Lukas to his destination.

“...”

He stopped walking. Then, he bent his back and slowed his breaths.

In front of him was a clearing, in the middle of which was a shabby cabin. The children probably didn't know that a place like this existed in the forest

—'Children' being the operative word.

Creak-

The cabin door opened and someone walked out. If there was another child there together with Lukas, they probably would have screamed.

The person who appeared from the cabin was none other than Sophia. Of course, while they would be suspicious, that would not be enough to make them scream.

“Hah-”

Sophia let out a breath. She seemed to be brimming with excitement. She also seemed blissful. Whatever it was, her face was completely different from her normally calm expression.

Sophia was holding a large sack in her hands. It seemed to be quite heavy as she was dragging it across the ground instead of carrying it.

It was dark, but it was still possible to see marks left by her dragging which looked like bloodstains.

That's right. The thing in the sack was probably a body.

“...”

Lukas' gaze sank.

-The Director of Trowman Orphanage, Sophia Trowman.

She was the culprit in the disappearances of 61 children, in addition to kidnapping, confinement, murder and even cannibalism.

[The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years](#)

Season 2 Chapter 399

Sophia was like a mother to Lukas.

Not just to Lukas. The dozens of children in the orphanage also took Sophia as their real mother. That was why he couldn't take the feeling of betrayal that grew when he found out the truth.

It wasn't just the city's children that Sophia touched. There were a total of seven victims from the orphanage. The first victim was Ellie. Naturally, they were all killed. Perhaps they were even eaten.

The youngest among the victims was only 6 years old.

She kidnapped, confined, degraded, and eventually killed a child who could not even speak properly.

Throb-

His head ached.

Lukas massaged his temples.

He still couldn't remember how he'd responded to this last time, but that didn't matter.

Regardless of the reason, there was no justification for the murder of 61 children.

Sophia's true nature was human scum, disgusting trash. She played the role of a good Director in front of the children she collected.

Lukas couldn't help but feel disgusted by her hypocrisy.

'It should've been young Lukas that discovered the truth.'

He couldn't remember what kind of person he was at that time. But 12 was not a young age. At the very least, his basic personality would have already begun to form, and he would have begun to have his own subjectivity.

'...'

As his eyes had gotten used to the darkness, it was possible for Lukas to analyse Sophia's condition despite being 20 or so steps away. Curled up in the grass, Lukas observed her.

She looked to be in a state of excessive excitement. Her eyes were wide and bloodshot, and her fingertips trembled slightly. Saliva was also dripping from the corner of her mouth. She looked like an insane person who had gone completely mad.

But she was not mad.

If that were the case, then Sophia would not have been able to hide her crimes for such a long time. She was cunning, thorough, a woman capable of making perfect plans.

That was probably Sophia's hidden nature.

She held a sword in one hand. There were traces of blood on the blade that had not been wiped clean yet. And the person in the sack was probably a child.

'...her muscles are swollen.'

Lukas soon realised.

Sophia's forearms were so thick that they didn't match a woman of her age. It was like someone who had taken enhancement drugs. Although he couldn't be sure, he guessed that the strength she could display was probably two or three times more than usual.

It would be difficult for the 12 year old Lukas, whose body was not well developed yet, to openly fight such an opponent.

"..."

He softly chanted a spell. The grassy area swayed slightly, but this could be dismissed as the act of a passing breeze. As proof of this, Sophia didn't even glance over to him.

When Lukas had finished his preparations, he shook the grass with both of his hands.

Swish!

The sudden sound was barely audible in the quiet forest.

But Sophia's head swung around.

"Who's there?"

Her voice and tone were harsh. If he just heard her voice and didn't see her, he wouldn't think it was Sophia. He could see her slowly approaching him, the hilt of the sword held tightly in her hand. Despite the sound being light, she still managed to pinpoint the correct direction. He had no intention of leaving. If he were to show an appearance of running away, she would chase him to the ends of hell.

Lukas waited until Sophia stepped into the planned location.

Then, when it was time, he showed himself.

"It's me, Sophia."

Sophia's expression became puzzled.

This came from meeting an unexpected person at an unexpected time.

"Lukas...?"

"Yes."

"Why are you here?"

Her voice and eyes shook slightly, showing that her reaction was genuine.

At the very least, it was clear that she was surprised at that moment.

"I couldn't sleep, so I went to look for Sophia, but you weren't in your room. So I went out to look at the moon for a while, but then I saw Sophia going into the woods..."

"...you... followed me here?"

Sophia stuttered slightly.

Lukas nodded.

“Yes.”

Silence.

But Sophia’s eyes moved busily.

Then, she smiled gently. Nevertheless, she couldn’t stop the corners of her mouth from twitching slightly.

“You followed me well. It must have been very dark...”

“My vision is pretty good at night. By the way, Sophia...”

“Y-, yeah?”

0

“For some reason, Sophia looks bigger than usual.”

Lukas looked at her thick forearms as he said that.

She responded with a slow nod.

“...perhaps... I look like this because I’m wearing a lot of clothes. Isn’t the night breeze a bit chilly?”

“I see. Then what’s that sack in your hands?”

Sophia shook at those words, but it was only for a moment.

She soon responded with a normal expression.

“Ah. This... is beef.”

“Beef?”

“Right, I was lucky enough to get some beef. I kept it a secret from you kids. Right. I kept it as a secret because I wanted to surprise you guys.”

“It looks a bit small to be a cow.”

The sack wasn’t that big. Even half a cow wouldn’t be able to fit in it.

“...that’s because it was a young calf.”

“I see.”

“...”

Silence fell once again.

And once again, it was Sophia who broke it.

“Did you come here alone?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Because the forest is very dangerous at night. Of course, there aren’t any wolves or bears in the forest. But wild owls can also be quite aggressive. If you came with another child, and if they were left alone somewhere in the forest, they might be in a very dangerous situation.”

“That’s fine. I came alone.”

“...really?”

Sophia’s complexion brightened a bit.

Then, she smiled and stretched her hand out.

“Come here, Lukas. Let’s go back home.”

“Okay.”

Lukas wiggled his fingers as he walked towards her. This wasn’t motion magic. It was just a signal for his pre-casted spell.

The Stone Tooth he cast shot forward before Sophia could realise.

Crack.

“Kuack!”

Sophia screamed and fell down. The Stone Tooth had struck her knee. This proved that his magic skills were still lacking since he had originally been aiming for her ankle.

“Wh-, at...”

Lukas used one spell after the other on Sophia, who had not fully grasped the situation yet.

“Magic Missile.”

Woowoong, the projectile of pale glowing energy hit Sophia in the face. Although the power of this spell was not strong, it became a different story when it was continuously launched at a vulnerable and vital spot like the face.

It was very possible to crush an eyeball, or cause the nose bone to collapse.

“Kuaack...”

Sophia grabbed her face as her body curled up. She was probably feeling the pain of having her face torn apart.

Lukas didn’t show any sympathy, and instead continued what he planned to do.

“Fire Ball.”

Fwoosh!

A finishing spell.

The dark surrounded lit up in an instant.

Fire Ball was considered one of the most basic 2 star spells, but its pure destructive power was on a higher scale.

He'd also put most of his mana into it, making the fireball twice as large as usual. This left him with barely any mana remaining.

Shuk.

As soon as he pointed his finger towards Sophia, the ball of flames engulfed her entire body without mercy.

"Kyaaaak!"

This time, her scream contained a noticeable amount of pain.

Before, when she was hit by the previous attack, the pain she felt was slightly numbed due to the fact that it was a surprise.

However, the Fire Ball was different.

Those who hadn't experienced the pain of having their skin burn would not know. Sophia's clothes burned. The smell of a burning human was truly appalling.

Sophia rolled across the ground in the clearing crazily. Nevertheless, as they were created by magic, the flames would not be extinguished so easily.

This wasn't to say that his actions were completely ineffective.

When half of her body had been burned, the flames disappeared.

"Kuuk..."

Sophia was still alive.

Rather than because her will to live was strong, this was probably because Lukas' magic skills were terrible.

He walked towards her.

"A-, auh..."

Sophia seemed to have already gone blind.

Perhaps a Magic Missile had crushed her eyeballs or the Fire Ball had burned her optic nerve. It could be either one. Either was fine with him.

"Lu-, kas, Lu-, kas..."

She groaned out his name, but it didn't affect Lukas. He calmly checked his remaining mana.

What was left... was enough for five Magic Missiles. It was enough.

"Magic Missile."

After lining up the Magic Missiles, he aimed at Sophia.

To be precise, he aimed at her forehead.

Then fired them one by one.

Paak!

“Eek!”

Paak!

“Euk!”

Paak!

“Uek!”

Whenever the Magic Missiles struck, terrible screams, reminiscent of the sounds made by a pig, rang out.

With an expressionless face, Lukas sent the Magic Missiles forward one after the other, maintaining the precision of a craftsman driving in nails with a hammer.

First, her forehead became red and swollen. The pain similar to her head being hit by a small hammer was a bonus.

Second, her skin was torn and blood began to flow. Her entire head felt shaken, and she was no longer able to think consistently.

Third, a crack appeared on her skull. In that instant, she fainted two or three times and instantly woke up each time.

Fourth, blood flowed from her eyes, nose and mouth. Now, pain was the only thing she could feel.

And finally.

Lukas waited a moment instead of firing this missile right away.

After firing this Magic Missile, Sophia’s skull would be completely shattered and she would die.

“Ah, ahh, ahhh...”

Groaning heavily, Sophia crawled across the ground.

She looked up at Lukas with a bloody face.

By now, she couldn’t see or hear anything, but she was surprisingly able to find the right direction.

“Lu-, ka-, s...”

The moment Sophia called his name once again, Lukas released the last Magic Missile.

Crack!

And that was the end.

The murderer who killed 61 children, Sophia Trowman, was dead. Her body had been torn apart, and her blood scattered across the ground.

“...huh.”

With a heavy sigh, he sat down on the ground.

Killing Sophia hadn't been that difficult. There was no danger. From beginning to end, everything had gone according to Lukas' plan.

She didn't have any special power. Of course, her swollen muscles were a bit strange, but that was all.

She wasn't good at using weapons, she wasn't good at magic or spiritual arts, and she didn't know black magic or holy power.

None of that was the reason why Sophia had been able to kill so many children.

She was just cunning.

There was never a single trace of her at the scenes of her crimes, and there was never any room accidents in her carefully crafted plans.

Her outward appearance was also perfect. The kind Director of an orphanage who took care of dozens of children.

Even the city guards wouldn't suspect her.

As he was lost in his thoughts, he felt his fingertips become wet. Without him realising it, Sophia's blood had spread across the ground to his hands.

“...”

Just as Lukas looked down at his bloodstained hands.

[So this is your choice.]

Following the voice, 'Lukas' appeared.

[I'm surprised. I didn't think you would kill her without hesitation.]

“She is human garbage that killed 61 children. There was no reason to hesitate.”

'Lukas' expression became stiff.

[That's a very unsympathetic statement. So you're saying you killed her because she was human garbage. Even though she was the person who raised you like a parent until now?]

“Is that why you showed me that before? The scene when I was a baby.”

As he said that, Lukas recalled that scene.

Sophia's smiling face as she accepted his young self into her arms.

“It has nothing to do with family ties. If you commit a crime, you deserve to be punished. That is the way it works.”

[...and you are the judge?]

“At least in this case I was.”

‘Lukas’ had a complicated expression on his face before opening his mouth.

[Your principle of judgement cannot be considered a human thing.]

“What?”

[Your words are not wrong. But there is one important thing missing.]

“What is it?”

[Human emotion.]

This made Lukas pause.

[Your words are right. Sophia is a vile murderer, a piece of trash that could not be saved. Such a woman does not deserve to be shown mercy. However, was there even a shred of hesitation when you killed her? Was it so easy to remain expressionless while hearing her tortured screams? Was the relationship you’d built with her over ten years so light?]

“What are you trying to say?”

[...it is human nature to be swayed by emotion even when we know it is morally wrong. Even if my child were to kill someone and be scorned by the entire world, as their parent, I would have no choice but to cover for them because they are my child. That is the tie of family. Of course, that doesn’t mean it is the right thing to do. However...]

‘Lukas’ voice became cold.

[If you considered Sophia to be your family member at all, you would have considered a different ending.]

-A different ending.

At that moment, as Lukas’ face turned white.

...A thought suddenly popped into his mind.

What had ‘Past Lukas’ done after finding out the truth about Sophia?

[The Great Mage Returns After 4000 Years](#)

Season 2 Chapter 400

It was around the winter when Lukas was 13 years old that he’d started feeling strange.

At that time, Lukas was the oldest child in the orphanage. It hadn’t been like this from the start.

Ellie, Rohan, Fergus.

They were one or two years older than Lukas, but they had all gone missing last year.

The mass disappearance incident had been going on for nearly a year and it caused the atmosphere of the city to inevitably deteriorate. Even until that point, they had not been able to determine who the culprit was.

And yet, there were no large-scale movements from the territory's soldiers, the Knights directly under the Lord, or the Wizards. This was because it wasn't much of a big deal for the nobles.

Most of the victims were young vagrants living in the corners of the city, and the Lord, who had the mindset of a noble, was indifferent to the plight of the poor.

But then, the criminal made a big mistake. They kidnapped the apprentice maid belonging to the Lord's family.

After receiving the report, the Lord expressed his anger and displayed a firm attitude that was completely different from before.

He claimed that he would punish the heinous kidnapper disturbing the city's security and creating unrest among the citizens, but no one believed him. There was quiet speculation that the high-nosed Lord was only acting like that because his authority had been damaged, or that the maid was a plaything of the Lord's, who was known for enjoying young women.

Despite the unclear circumstances, the Lord's response quickly showed effect.

The disappearances, which had been happening at least once a week, suddenly stopped. In a way, this was normal. After all, the number of guards patrolling the streets had tripled, and now, people who seemed to be even slightly suspicious were frequently stopped and questioned.

—It was around this time that Sophia's appearance became very unstable.

She seemed to always be sleepy. She had trouble waking up in the mornings, dozed off during lunch, and went to bed as soon as the sun went down.

That wasn't all. Outwardly, she appeared to have aged by ten or so years. Her hair became white, and wrinkles and age spots appeared all over her face. Her straight back bent like an old lady.

This rapid ageing occurred in just one year.

The children were all saddened by Sophia's sudden change. Some of the more mature children decided to not burden her any longer.

Lukas was the only one who still had doubts. Even though he was young, Lukas was very cautious, thoughtful and doubtful for his age.

So when he noticed something strange about Sophia's appearance, he couldn't help but follow her after a moment of hesitation. Ignoring his rising guilt, he sincerely hoped that he was just overreacting.

But his expectations were quickly betrayed.

He witnessed a scene in the middle of the night.

Sophia dragging a corpse-filled sack.

“Sophia...?”

“Lukas?”

“What... is that?”

Lukas asked with a blank expression. But this wasn't because he couldn't grasp the situation.

Sophia's entire body was covered in blood, and the thing in the bag seemed to twitch occasionally. Blood was also dripping from the blade in her hand.

His clear brain had already completed its analysis and pointed out an undeniable truth.

“Sophia?”

Nevertheless, Lukas called her name again.

Not accepting the truth even when it was in front of his eyes was simply denying reality.

Perhaps Sophia noticed that fact as well.

“Lukas, come here.”

“Sophia?”

“Come here.”

As soon as Sophia's voice became coercive, Lukas subconsciously took a step back.

“You're... not listening to me.”

Then, the moment her expression became distorted, he was unable to overcome his fear and tried to use magic.

But the Lukas at this time, even though he was panicking, could not give up his lingering affection for Sophia. So there was still a bit of hesitation.

He quickly casted a spell, but not to kill. It didn't even have any control properties. When faced with the clumsy spell that could barely be considered a form of containment, Sophia only suffered a few weak wounds. She didn't even have any problem moving her body.

She soon released an overwhelming power that was completely unimaginable from her old self.

“Lukaaas!”

Sophia roared. Her muscles swelled and her veins protruded. With bloodshot eyes, she threw her sword. Swoosh!

Although it was a simple sword, it shot forward with fierce momentum. Despite this, its path was straight, which meant that it was possible to avoid it simply by twisting to the side.

But Lukas, in his immaturity, was as limp as a frog who saw a predator.

Crack!

“Aaak!”

Lukas screamed. The feeling of the blade cutting into his skin was probably the clearest feeling of pain that Lukas had ever felt.

It felt like a bundle of nerves had been severed. Far from continuing to chant spells, it became impossible for him to even think clearly about the current situation. The only thing that filled Lukas’ mind at that moment was pain.

Sophia approached.

Now, there was just terror and dread. It felt like death was approaching. Lukas tried to crawl away, but he couldn’t.

Sophia grabbed his ankle.

Crunch.

“Aaaack...!”

Unable to withstand the force of Sophia’s grip, the young boy’s ankle shattered. Lukas couldn’t help but scream once again from the pain.

“Lukas, Lukas! Why aren’t you at home? Huh? The forest is dangerous at night!”

Holding him by the ankle, Sophia spun Lukas around in an unfathomable display of strength.

Sometimes, she slammed his body into the ground. Soon, Lukas’ body was covered in mud, blood, and saliva.

“Ugh, kuk, kuhk...”

Lukas coughed. “...know. I... huk.”

He tried to mutter in a faint voice that seemed like it would disappear at any moment.

“What is it, Lukas? Didn’t I teach you to look me in the eyes and speak clearly if you have something to say?”

“I know...”

Lukas spoke with tears in his eyes.

“Sophia isn’t like this. Right?”

At those words, Sophia suddenly stopped.

Her wide eyes shook heavily.

“Lukas...?”

Her tone changed.

Sophia suddenly stumbled backwards and grabbed her head. Then she twisted her head back and forth like a crazy person. Crack, crack. The sound of her joints twisting was eerie.

“Ah, ak, ug.”

Sophia pulled her hair out. She ripped it out so hard that blood even began to flow from her scalp.

Then, she looked at Lukas.

And pulled out the blade stuck in his shoulder.

“Ack...!”

Lukas let out another scream.

Holding the sword in a reverse grip, Sophia staggered slightly before stabbing it into her chest.

Splash.

Blood splattered.

“Sophia...?”

“Auk, kek. Ku-, uk...”

Sophia coughed up a mouthful of blood and pulled the blade back out. Then, she inserted it into her chest once more. Over and over again. As if to say one time was not enough.

“Sophia...!”

Lukas crawled towards her. At that moment, he completely forgot about the pain in his ankle.

“So-, Sophia. Stop that...”

Young Lukas tried to stop Sophia. But Sophia pushed Lukas aside and stabbed herself even harder. Soon, her chest was indiscernible except for the thick coating of blood.

Plop.

Sophia’s body collapsed.

“...I’m sorry.”

A broken voice leaked out of her mouth.

“...I’m sorry, Lukas.”

Sophia struggled to breath as she spoke again.

“I’m sorry for being weak. I’m sorry for being such a person.”

Cough.

Sophia’s voice contained an unpleasant sound, like a person trying to speak before swallowing a mouthful of water. Tears mixed with blood ran down her face.

Also in tears, Lukas spoke.

“It’s okay. I forgive you. I forgive you for everything. So stop talking like that.”

“You could use magic. Huhu. I had no idea.”

“Yes. Sorry for hiding it. I wanted to surprise you by becoming a Wizard first.”

“I’m already surprised enough. Really, you’re so amazing...”

Sophia smiled weakly.

“Wizard... It suits you well, Lukas.”

“Sophia, you’re badly injured. Let’s go home. No, let’s go to the city. I know a good doctor. The last time Ellie got hurt, she got treated with almost no scars left. If it’s him, then maybe Sophia...”

Lukas spoke while covering Sophia’s wounds with both hands, but Sophia just smiled at him.

“I should have done this sooner...”

The blood didn’t stop flowing.

She reached out to Lukas one more time and opened her mouth.

“...”

But she was only able to let out a breath of air.

Her half raised hand fell to the ground.

* * *

Standing still, Lukas accepted the wave of memories.

...He’d forgotten.

No, he himself had erased it from his memories.

Just thinking about it made him feel tormented, and he could not withstand it, so he chose to intentionally forget about it.

[Sophia Trowman had a demon.]

‘Lukas’ voice sounded.

[Perhaps it could be called a split personality. It probably has a deep connection to her origins... In the middle of the night, when she fell asleep, the other personality woke up. It had a very sinister, unsightly, evil character. In other words, the Sophia we knew was not a lie.]

“...”

[It was in the fall when I was 14 that Sophia realised what was happening. She must have been more shocked than us. After learning the truth, she wanted to kill herself, but she couldn’t even do that. The other personality had already gained a firm grip of her psyche. Since she couldn’t die, she had no choice but to live. I couldn’t tell anyone either. The other Sophia warned me.]

‘If you don’t do as I say, I will kill all of the other children in the orphanage and feed them to pigs.’

[It must have felt like living in hell. Without being able to tell anyone, Sophia's mind gradually rotted away.]

'Lukas' continued.

[I looked at your memories more closely.]

"..."

[Iris Peacefinder. For the sake of the cause, she also turned a blind eye to countless tragedies and sometimes even got her own hands wet with blood. In the past, you understood her behaviour. You sympathised with her tragedy. Because back then, you still had emotions.]

"...Iris and Sophia are different."

Lukas' voice was no longer as firm as before. Because he also realised it to an extent.

[It's the same twisted behaviour... Sophia didn't have a choice. Her situation was much more unfortunate than Iris, who decided to walk the path to hell on her own two feet.]

"..."

[You forgave Iris in the past. However, the current you wouldn't. That's because the principles and rules that you have set are incomprehensible to humans with emotions... And Sophia could not escape your strict standards.]

"...I."

'Lukas' continued to speak.

[Certain landscapes can only be seen after walking on the wrong path.]

"..."

[Humans are creatures that are prone to mistakes and failure. Because of this, they can explore other possibilities and develop into better beings. But you haven't shown me that possibility.]

'Lukas's next words were the most shocking yet.

[Lukas, you no longer have the mindset of a human.]

This was not the first time he'd heard those words. But each time he did, Lukas had the ability to deny it.

This was true even if it was God or one of the four Rulers who said it.

But he couldn't refute them now.

He couldn't refute them because they were the words of 'Lukas', not anyone else.

For a very long time, he had considered himself to be a human. It had been like that since he became an Absolute, a long, long time ago.

But he wasn't.

Lukas had changed.

'Since when?'

Since when did I.

Had I obtained the mindset of the people I hated?

[You are far from human, but... Right. I think that's why I'd rather leave it to you.]

'Lukas' spoke almost as if muttering to himself.

[Take it, Lukas. My possibilities, everything...]

The faint voice gradually disappeared like smoke.

Sss-

Full.

It felt like something deep within his heart had been filled. It also felt like his very existence was satisfied, something that could be described as ecstasy or pleasure was constantly rushing in.

...And he was getting stronger.

The principles behind it were unclear, but the fact itself was obvious.

Nevertheless, almost paradoxically, while immersed in this feeling of immense fulfilment, Lukas couldn't help but feel a sense of loss, as if a part of his heart had been torn out.

While inheriting this 'possibility', the sense of loss did not diminish, but instead grew stronger.

—'Lukas', who had disappeared, had been wrong about something.

Until that moment, Lukas still had a faint human nature left. Although it was faint, it was one of the most intense human natures.

It was akin to a mindset of always considering oneself to be a human.

Regardless of his appearance, Lukas had always considered himself to be human. There had been a few times when he'd wandered off that path, or was swept away by uncertainty, but deep down, something had always convinced him that he was human.

But now, it didn't.

This was due to the words of 'Lukas', who had disappeared.

Because of his words.

"...ah. That's right."

Lukas suddenly realised.

"I'm no longer human."