

Level 0 Master - Chapter 71

“But...”

Rachel had tears in her eyes.

She is very sensitive to this kind of thing.

“And I will find a way to remove it.”

“Really?”

“Yes, I will find a way, just wait and see.”

“Thank you, Sungjin Oppa! You’re the best!”

Rachel jumped into his arms with excitement.

“Wait,” Sungjin grabbed her shoulders and stopped her.

“Why?”

“We can’t have such close contact while undressed.”

“Why?”

“...hmm...when a guy and a girl are just friends, it’s not appropriate to get too close while naked,” Sungjin couldn’t explain in much detail..

“Oh. What is it?” Rachel was a bit confused and still wanted to hug him.

Sungjin decided to change the subject.

“Now let’s clean up. I’ll help you with your back, and I’m sure you can do the rest, right?”

He decided a bit of distance was best.

“Okay, Sungjin Oppa. Huh, what are you hiding here?” Rachel asked as she pointed between his legs.

Sungjin, usually quick with logic, didn’t know how to answer Rachel’s question.

“Oh...this...hmm...this...well, I just have a different physical shape from you.”

That’s right...she never even had a chance to learn basic things like this.

She was able to listen to the voice of the goddess and stop the epidemic, but God didn't tell her the difference between guys and girls.

"Huh? Because you're an adult? Will I have that when I grow up?"

"No...you wouldn't because you're a girl."

"Girls don't have it?"

"Only guys have it."

"Wow! That sounds interesting!"

"Wait! Let's have some space between us," said Sungjin stepping back to stop approaching Rachel. He was able to fight against the Blood Ruler and the Hydra, but he seemed to be having difficulty with Rachel in the nude.

"Why?"

"It's not why but...hmm...I mean..."

Sungjin developed a headache. On the battlefield, he was able to make a plan to fight against enemies having ten times more force than his army, but this little girl was a challenge. He didn't know how to teach her the differences between guys and girls.

It wouldn't be this uncomfortable if she were a boy.

But he still had to teach her.

"Guys and girls are not supposed to have close contact, especially the part that we usually cover with clothes."

"Shouldn't they?"

"That's the rule."

"Why?"

She didn't understand, and Sungjin found it difficult to explain.

"Because that's only allowed for a lover."

"Only lovers?"

"Yes. It's the same for guys, but girls shouldn't let others touch them for no reason."

“Okay.”

When Rachel answered, Sungjin felt relieved; but it was short-lived.

“Then Sungjin Oppa! I will be your lover! Then I can touch you, right?” Rachel approached him with excitement.

“No!” Sungjin quickly stepped back.

“Why?”

“Becoming a lover has to be consensual. I didn’t consent. So the answer is no.”

“Huh...I...can’t?” Rachel lowered her head with disappointment. With that look, Sungjin almost changed his mind, but he knew he couldn’t.

“Because you’re too young.”

“Young...I have to be older?”

“Yes, you need to grow up.”

“...can I just be your lover now?”

“No.”

“But growing up takes too long!”

“You need to learn how to wait.”

“Okay.” Rachel lowered her head with disappointment again.

Huh, this is not easy...

Sungjin now understood why people said it was difficult for a father to raise a daughter alone.

“Rachel.”

“Yes, Sungjin Oppa.”

“Since we’re on the topic, you should know that you should be careful with guys.”

“Why?”

“Because there are some guys who will want to touch your body and have nothing more to do with you.”

“They shouldn’t?”

“Definitely not. It’s only allowed for lovers. If random guys try to touch you, you should scream for help. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Good. Be careful with guys; some can be like wolves.”

I am more of a lion than a wolf but still dangerous.

“Guys are like wolves,” Rachel repeated Sungjin’s words only to ask him again:

“Hmm... but, then, you are a guy as well.”

“Correct.”

“But I don’t have to be careful with Sungjin Oppa!”

“No, I mean...yes...I wouldn’t do anything bad to you...”

“Sungjin Oppa is okay! I like Sungjin Oppa, so you can touch me even if we aren’t lovers!” Rachel’s smile was like sunshine, a pure invitation; she opened her arms and showed her body to him telling him he could touch whatever he wanted.

“...no, I shouldn’t.” Sungjin almost fell to his knees with such a request.

Sungjin was mistaken to think that it was just a bath with a child. She was not a baby anymore; her body was not that of an infant. Helping her wash herself would have been okay, but he wasn’t expecting all of her difficult questions.

This is out of my league.

She was pure and lovely, but it was too much for him to teach her all those things.

“Rachel.”

“Huh?”

“I was thinking since we’re all a team now, we shouldn’t keep your scars a secret anymore.

“But...”

“I understand it’s embarrassing for you, but everyone on the team is kind.”

“Do you think so?”

“I promise you.”

“If you say so...” Rachel hesitated but ended up nodding to agree with Sungjin.

“Thank you, Rachel.”

Sungjin covered himself up, led Rachel to the girl’s bathroom, and knocked on the door.

“It’s me.”

A voice responded right away.

“Sungjin? I’m not mentally ready...not that I’m not ready...”

“Okay, come in.”

“Hurray! It’s Sungjin Oppa.”

Hearing three different responses from three different people made Sungjin dizzy. They were amazing team members, but it was still a shock to deal with such intimate matters.

Valhalla really is a different planet.

It was hard to cope with Rachel’s innocent questions, and the older girls were even more difficult to handle.

When Rachel is asking embarrassing questions, it’s cute, but when Ereka and Eustasia interrogate... I want to have them.

Now they’re in the bathtub, probably wanting to show off their beautiful naked bodies, telling him to come and join...

I should stop.

Sungjin fixed his clothes to cover himself up properly. He didn’t want Rachel to see what he was hiding. She was too young.

Let’s deal with this.

“Rachel wants to take her bath with the girls.”

“Oh...I see,” Ereka said slightly disappointed.

“One more thing...”

“Tell me.”

“What’s that?”

“...can you teach her the differences between guys and girls? She was caged for a long time and has no idea.”

In the past, Sungjin never tried to avoid or run away from problems. But S*xual education for a girl was not a task he could carry out easily.

“Oh... Okay. Sure. I’ll try my best.”

“I’m counting on you. Now, Rachel, get in and ask your questions to them.” Sungjin pushed Rachel into the bathroom and ran away before the others could see him.

It was the 36th strategy from Sun Tzu’s Art of War: if it becomes obvious that your current course of action will lead to defeat then retreat and regroup. As long as you are not defeated, you still have a chance.

They are girls, so they would be better teachers.

That was Sungjin’s line of reasoning, but...

The girls were furious when they saw Rachel’s back, but soon, Rachel felt comfortable and asked them the questions she had posed earlier to Sungjin.

“You see, we’re all women, so we can’t have things like Sungjin Oppa.”

“Yes, Rachel. Guys and girls are different.”

“What’s the benefit of being a girl?” Rachel asked.

Ereka hesitated a bit before answering.

“Hmm...well...we’re more flexible.”

“Flexible?”

“Yes, we have more flexible bodies.”

“What’s so good about being flexible?”

“Oh...well...” Ereka wasn’t sure how to best answer.

Girls are more flexible, but guys have more strength.

“What else...oh...yes! We can wear pretty things.”

“Pretty things?”

“Yes, for example, a dress like this.” Ereka used her heroic power to conjure up an elegant gown.

“Wow!”

Rachel didn't ask the benefit of wearing nice dresses. She loved what she saw.

“What else...”

Eustasia cut in.

“Stop beating around the bush! You know the best thing about being a girl.”

“What's that?”

“What's that?” Even Ereka asked her.

“We can be lovers with Sungjin.”

Ereka agreed with claps.

“Right. That's the most important thing to keep in mind.”

“Oh!” Rachel responded with shiny eyes.

“When I tried to touch Sungjin Oppa's body, he said I couldn't because we weren't lovers. So when we become lovers, I can touch him as much as I want?”

“That's what happens; when you're lovers and no one is watching, you can touch him as much as you want.”

“Wow! I get excited when Sungjin Oppa simply strokes down my hair.”

“When you're lovers, you can have close body contact, not just head or hands,” Ereka explained with blushing cheeks

I would love it if Sungjin hugged me with his fit body...

Watching Ereka's enamored expression, Rachel's eyes started to shine even more.

“I just want to hug him so tight...”

“I decided.”

“What?”

“I will become Sungjin Oppa’s lover!”

“Oh my, Rachel...Sungjin is such a charming guy,” Ereka nodded.

It was so easy to fall in love with Sungjin, and Rachel had done just that. Since he had been her savior against Rupellion, it was natural that she would fall for him.

Sungjin decided to keep Rachel, and there’s nothing I can do about it.

“Do you think it’s a good thing? We didn’t even get a chance, and now she wants to snatch him?” When Eustasia asked her sharply, Ereka just smiled.

“What can I do? That’s on Sungjin.”

“Is that your confidence speaking or have you given up hope?”

“Let’s call it faith,” said Ereka making Jenna anxious.

Your Highness...it’s not the time to be generous...

She felt it was quite risky as well.

Ugh. She is a lolita like me...

But the bigger problem was Rachel was a better lolita. She was innocent, uneducated, cursed like a tragic heroine, and took care of people like a saint. Rachel even had a higher level.

Ahhhhh. My position is at risk...

Unable to access Jenna’s thoughts, Rachel kept talking with a smile.

“Hehehe. I will become Sungjin Oppa’s lover and hug him all night.”

“She’s just a child, but she knows her goal. We’re going to have to work harder.”

“But...Sungjin is really busy...”

The girls continued their chat, perhaps not as educational of a talk as Sungjin had expected.

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"I have decided..."

"Decided what?"

"I'm going to be your lover!"

Sungjin nearly choked.

What did those girls tell her?

"So now I can hug you anytime I want to, right?" Rachel was in his arms before finishing her sentence. With that, her bathrobe loosened displaying her soft and lovely skin. She had a beauty that had yet to bloom.

"Wait," Sungjin quickly adjusted Rachel's bathrobe.

"No way."

"Why?"

"Only people that love each other can become lovers."

"Huh? I like you; you don't like me?"

"It's not that I don't like you. Love and like are two different feelings."

"What's the difference?"

Sungjin couldn't find the answer. He thought she was too young to understand.

Besides, I only have book knowledge not any actual experience.

"Hmm...it's something that you feel. When you have to ask, it means you don't know."

"Oh...is it?"

"Yes. If it isn't love, we can't be lovers."

"When do you think I'll know?"

"Later; it will come naturally."

Until now, Rachel was okay with Sungjin's rejection but after a series of them, Rachel became dispirited.

“But...what if later never comes? I want to be your lover now.”

“Don’t worry. It’ll come naturally over time. Trust me.”

“But...what if...the time doesn’t come? I’ve heard Rupellion is sending someone to try and recapture me.”

Is that what she was worrying about?

This didn’t predicament didn’t bother Sungjin, and his instincts returned.

“Don’t worry. I promise we’ll beat those bad guys, and you’ll always be protected.”

He had forgotten for a moment the abuse she had endured as a supposed cursed child, being caged and tortured for years. One victory wouldn’t rid her of all the anxiety she had bottled up inside. She had only held her cool composure as a child of goddess to heal and help people who were in need.

“Really?”

“Of course, and I will help you grow into an adult who can trust and even fall in love. So take your time and enjoy being a child for now.”

I won’t let this poor, brave girl become a sacrifice of Rupellion; I’m going to make her dreams come true...

“Then later I can become your lover, right?”

“...huh? Hmm...let’s talk about that when you grow up. You can’t control who you fall in love with.”

I’ll make some of her dreams come true, maybe not all.

“No! I will be your lover. Okay? Sungjin Oppa!”

“What?”

“Teach me what I need to learn to become your lover. I’ll try my best.”

She was so cute and stubborn. She was like a blank canvas with infinite possibilities, and Sungjin had to stop the savage animal inside him that wanted to use the blank canvas.

“...that as well, maybe later. I have nothing I can teach you.”

“That as well?”

“There are things that you can do when you become older. Now, just do whatever you want to do and wait.”

“Okay.” Rachel was disappointed but nodded.

Sungjin started to worry about his future.

It seems like being surrounded by girls is causing problems...

History told of many conquerors with dilemmas caused by women, and Sungjin wondered if that would be the case for him as well. He decided not to worry about that and just to be more careful.

Now all I have to worry about is the war with Rupellion.

Eustasia was looking at them from a distance.

“Pfff. I wonder what kind of things Rachel is asking Sungjin to teach her.”

“Maybe he likes the natural ways?”

“It’s possible. Aging different alcohol in distinct ways, that makes sense. The real connoisseurs enjoy all kinds of alcohol.”

“Hmm. It’s like cake: both cheesecake and strawberry cake is delicious.”

“Right, right.”

Listening to their conversation, Jenna pursed her tail knife.

I don’t have to worry about the kid taking Sungjin’s attention away. I should just become more attractive in my own way.

There was no limit in numbers for a conquerors’ concubines. He could take as many as he wanted.

Haha. I should help my queen, and then I should...

Unlike Sungjin, her worries were not only about Rupellion.

* * *

Trouble from Rupellion was coming for Sungjin.

The door of the Basilica opened; the Holy Pope had finally finished his fast prayer and arrived.

He was walking with a springy step, cane in hand, and the Basilica was covered in a black flame. The gigantic building looked like it came from hell, and the sky above was dark. The ground was breathing sulfuric smoke, and the area around the Basilica wilted. Everything was losing its life, tormented and twisted.

Trees became black from curses, and the grass turned to ash. The animals were gone. What remained were aggressive red insects that looked like they would attack without mercy.

The Holy Pope Pedrian was the only one with the ability to do such things, and the four priests kneeled before him.

“Your Excellency.”

“Did you come to greet me?”

“Please kill us.”

“What happened during my fast prayer?” the Holy Pope asked with a smile.

“So...”

The four priests reported the events to the Holy Pope. Rachel, the child of the goddess, who was also the sacrifice to the Basilica, escaped. When they tried to get her back, they were defeated by Sungjin. The four priests had ruined 100 years of planning, and they waited to receive the Holy Pope’s rage and punishment.

“That’s what happened.”

But the Holy Pope was not angry and his smile remained, like a generous teacher who understood the mistake of his young students.

“So the sacrifice escaped, and you weren’t able to get her back from the young warrior?”

“Please kill us for our mistake.”

“You weren’t careful enough.”

“It was our fault to think it was impossible to break the seal. I also suspect the Golden Wise King of Eldorado was behind this but...we can’t be sure. We failed to defeat the lion king of the south.”

“Chut chut. You let a petty thief from another world steal the sacrifice for God.”

The Holy Pope referred to Sungjin, king of the ally of the four kingdoms, as a petty thief.

“But humans are imperfect. If you repent your sin sincerely, God will forgive you.”

Despite the tenuous situation, the Holy Pope was calm; the four priests laid down and listened to the Holy Pope.

Is he forgiving us?

He is so generous.

“It’s all in God’s plan.” But then, the Holy Pope’s tone changed.

“The sacrifice can escape from my land, but she can’t escape from my hand that is the agent of God.”

The air heated up with the Holy Pope’s anger and obsession.

“The sacrifice that runs from her holy duty and the thief who touches the sacrifice, both need to repent in hell for their sins!”

The four priests couldn’t even look up; they realized the Holy Pope wasn’t being generous but was directing his anger toward Rachel and Sungjin.

“They will know the weight of their unholy sins when choosing to go against God, and I shall bring the sacrifice back to the altar!”

The Holy Pope declared this, and the four priests knew that Sungjin and Rachel would soon be punished. They were relieved.

The Holy Pope began to calm down.

“With our holy object, we shall bring our sacrifice back. Prepare a boat.”

An invisible power made the four priests stand up, without the Holy Pope so much as moving his finger.

“That means the holy object is...!”

“It’s a boat?”

“Yes. When I completed the eight Basilicas, I received a revelation: a holy object that was waiting for a thousand years under the sea will come up to the surface.”

“We will prepare now!” The four priests moved quickly.

Sungjin was amazing; his prediction was truly amazing.

But the Holy Pope was not predicting; he received a revelation that was above and beyond prediction. When he said something would happen, that meant it would happen.

Chapter 8

The day after the victory party, Kuga secretly asked for a meeting with Sungjin.

“Now that you’ve defeated Rupellion, there’s something you need to know about.”

At the serious voice of Kuga, Sungjin’s eyes became fixated.

“What’s that?”

“There’s something you should see. Would you follow me quietly?”

“Sure,” Sungjin answered and followed.

He arrived at the private room he had given Rachel for prayer. It was the place where she prayed by herself every morning before starting her day. She had asked him not to allow anyone to come near it.

Kuga asked him to be quiet and listen through the wall.

When Sungjin put his ear on the wall, he was able to hear Rachel’s voice.

“Goddess, I will cure a lot of people today as well,” Rachel’s prayer was simple but sincere; it made Sungjin smile.

He learned that faith could turn into extreme violence when it came to Rupellion, but when he looked at Rachel he knew faith could save people also.

“I’ll try my best; I’ll use the power you gave me to save everyone... so...”

The prayer stopped abruptly.

“Ugh. Ahhhhh.” She tried not to scream out loud, but she couldn’t hold it in anymore.

“Ugh... ugh...” All she could do was moan as screaming was too painful.

Not knowing who was behind the door listening, Rachel was crying.

Goddess...when would you...end...my pain.

She was trying her best to cure other people from pain while not even being able to help herself. It felt like her heart was pinned and knives were under her skin. It was like broken glass floating in her blood vessels. It was more than she would bear.

The scariest thing was...the pain was getting worse. When she couldn't handle it anymore, she feared she would breathe her last breath.

Would you save me before that? Please save me. I promise to be a good girl.

She was screaming silently that she would save others as god's will, but to please send someone to save her...

"Goddess...I...I...want to... see...something...that is...called...spring."

Her prayer was desperate, but when Sungjin tried to get into the room, Kuga stopped him

"Please, leave her alone."

"What do you mean?"

"This is not the first time, but she wanted to keep it secret. Since there's nothing anyone can do about this curse, she didn't want others to worry about her."

"Rachel said that?"

"Yes, so please pretend that you don't know..."

"Get out of my way," Sungjin pushed Kuga away.

"She wants to hide, but I want to help!"

He ran into the room where Rachel was praying.

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You, unholy one, obey in front of the rage of God! You shall not covet what belongs to God.

That was a warning. The brand on the child said Rachel's innocent body belonged to God and only the agent of God, the Holy Pope, could have her. If Sungjin was a normal human being, he would have stepped back and asked forgiveness, but Sungjin was not; he didn't let Rachel go and held her even tighter in his arms.

"I'm sorry that I didn't know your pain until now."

He didn't scream, but tried to soothe Rachel, telling her that no matter what pain he had to feel, he wouldn't leave her.

God or the Holy Pope didn't matter. Whatever force they use, I will never let you go. I will save you.

Without a word, his hug told Rachel what he was thinking.

"Sungjin...Oppa..." Rachel tried to cry.

Her soft skin cracked and her veins kept breaking and mending. Sungin was able to see that every nerve in her body was screaming. The tattoo on her back wriggled and ate into her skin. Sungjin had to feel the same pain.

This child...had to feel this pain...

Sungjin clenched his teeth so hard he almost bled in his mouth. Had he been alone in this pain, he would have been rolling around on the ground, but he couldn't let Rachel believe she had to bear this alone.

Why did I only find out about this now? How can I save her?

One victory against Rupellion was not enough.

The saint who had saved everyone from the epidemic was suffering from the curse of the evil God. She was just a child and seeking refuge in his country was not enough to get away from the Holy Pope. The child was still abandoned in the darkness.

I'll save you. I won't let you be alone anymore. I will defeat the Holy Pope and the evil God to finally free you.

"Ugh. Ahhhh!" Rachel started to cry. Through her anguish, Sungjin's presence was a relief to her. Where she could feel his body, she felt less pain.

"Ahhh!" The tears and screams she had tried to suppress erupted and Sungjin held her tightly in his arms.

Although unable to stop the pain, he was able to promise her that he wouldn't leave her. He offered her the hope that she could be saved. Kuga looked at the two silently feeling both empathy and pity.

"Rachel..."

"Ugh...ugh..." Rachel's pain quieted down, but she was so exhausted that she fainted.

She could have been more like a child and cried...

To think, she had tried to hide such excruciating pain. She was not just an innocent and lovely girl, she was beyond lovely; she was like a lotus that had bloomed from the deep darkness of the world. She tried to bury her pain to protect others.

“Has she been carrying this misery all along?” Sungjin asked Kuga as he continued holding Rachel in his arms.

“Yes, every time the curse engraves deeper on her heart, it activates the pain.”

“The Holy Nation...what did they do to this child?” Sungjin’s voice was ice cold.

He was not angry but in a cold in rage.

“Her tattoo is not a tattoo; it’s an embodiment of the curse. The real curse has been engraved on her heart.”

“What’s the curse?”

“She gets the pains every day, and it further chains her heart and body. Eventually, the time will come when the evil God will take away her life.”

“When is that?”

Kuga paused before answering the question.

“Her next birthday; we have six more months.”

Sungjin now understood why Rachel said she hoped the day would come when she would be grown up. It was not because of the fear that the fanatics of Rupellions may come after her. It was the fear of death she was fighting every day. It was through her pain that she realized her death was near.

She had kept it to herself to prevent others from worrying about her. Sungjin would have preferred that she had been crying out for help. She thought she had no future; she thought she would never become an adult or fall in love with someone. But now, it was going to be different.

I will give her that future.

“Tell me how to lift this curse.”

“You need to get the fruit of God.”

“The fruit of God?”

With Sungjin's question, Kuga looked at him with his glowing rainbow-colored fur. It looked like a star had come down from the sky and was shining before him. Kuga's voice didn't come from his mouth; the air around him vibrated and made the sound.

Through a thousand years, the sentiment of the world has flowed underground to make an ocean of sentiments and to bloom one flower of a dream.

Sungjin couldn't figure out if it was Kuga talking or the goddess.

That is the crystalized miracle of god. When someone deserving holds the flower, the person's wish will come true.

The light made ripples, disappeared, and Kuga took a deep breath.

"Those were the words of the goddess. The fruit of God is produced once every thousand years in secret."

"The fruit of God...when is the next fruit due?"

Sungjin eyes shone sharply. Believed to be a myth, if Kuga said the cure was the fruit of God, it had to be more than a myth.

"Yes, we should be able to catch the timing."

"The child of God and the fruit of God..."

"The timing is not a coincidence."

"Of course; where can we get the fruit of God?"

"On illusion island."

"Where is illusion island?"

Sungjin knew it was possibly in Valhalla. It was a place where they had the power of gods, both mystery and magic together. A place with an invincible shield and a cursed blood sword that could destroy a mountain. The fruit of God was real.

"It's in the middle of Aselan Ocean on the east side from here. We can locate it on the marine chart, but the problem is it's in the middle of the ocean between Rupellion and the four kingdoms."

"So, we should be the first ones there. Let's talk more about that later."

"Hmm...there's one more thing."

“What’s that?”

“Hmm...” Kuga hesitated before speaking.

“I should tell you the whole truth. With the fruit, we can lift more than just the curse of Rachel.”

“What else?”

“We could probably solve your issue with the level.”

“What?”

“The legend says everything is possible with the miracle of God, and a thousand years ago... the fruit was used to give the level.”

“Really?”

“Yes, well, the story is from a thousand years ago, so we can’t be 100 percent sure, but it’s most likely true.”

Should he save Rachel or should he use the fruit to achieve his dreams?

“Got it,” Sungjin answered without hesitation.

“What will you do?”

“Save Rachel; that was the whole point from the beginning.” When he answered without delay, Kuga didn’t know what to say.

“But don’t you want to get your level? Isn’t that what you’ve always wanted?”

“Wanted? I would say it’s a necessity.”

Sungjin knew to get to the center and then the sacred territory, he wouldn’t be able to keep up with only his intelligence and physical power as a human. His enemies were getting stronger and at some point he wouldn’t be able to fight them without a new kind of power.

But that’s why...

“I will find a way myself. The fruit that can save the child has to be used for the child.” When Sungjin declared this confidently, Kuga bowed down.

“I apologize for thinking you needed time to make your decision.”

"It's okay. Let's tell Rachel the good news." Before he finished his sentence, Rachel woke up.

"Oh...Sungjin Oppa?"

"The next time you're in such horrible pain, tell me."

"Sorry, I didn't want to make you worry about me."

"Yes. I know sometimes I can't really help you, but..." Sungjin held Rachel's hands.

"I know, but I want to at least try to find a solution. Not knowing the pain of your team members is a sad thing."

"Is...it?"

"It is. Let me worry about you and try to help you."

Rachel blushed.

Oh...your arms are so warm and sweet.

Sungjin's every word touched her heart. She was so happy that there was someone worrying about her and wishing she wouldn't feel pain. When he held her in his arms feeling the same pain...she felt bad but relieved.

Before, when experiencing the pain, she sometimes doubted if the goddess would really save her; but when he hugged her, she felt like she was able to see a brighter future.

"Rachel, there's good news."

"What's that?"

"I know how to lift the curse; Kuga had a divine revelation."

Rachel's body was shivering with surprise.

"Re...really my curse can be lifted?"

Kuga nodded with a smile.

"Yes, the goddess revealed how."

"The goddess..." Rachel didn't know what to say or do.

"Thank you...thank you...really thank you..." She started to cry again.

“Thank you for saving me...I will try...harder...from now on...” Sungjin had cheered her up.

“Now you don’t have to hide your pain anymore.”

“So I can...be cured? I won’t need to feel the pain anymore?”

“Yes, soon you will be,” Sungjin promised.

“...I’m so happy...so happy...but I can’t stop crying...”

“Because you’re so happy,” Sungjin held her tight.

Her body was so small and thin.

She was a child of God who could hear the voice of nature, and she was the saint who had saved everyone from the epidemic. She was a supporter of level seven and, at the same time, just a little fragile child. A child hidden away from the sunlight until recently, one who religious fanatics had made a sacrifice, forced to feel pain tearing her body apart every day, the whole time waiting for the goddess to save her. That was Rachel.

I will find the fruit of God to lift her curse.

Sungjin promised himself again.

There must be more than just a child of God or the fruit of God. Rupellion and Eldorado were hiding something, but it doesn’t matter. Whatever conspiracy they were hiding, whatever plan was waiting for me, I will keep going forward and save her. There must be people trying to use this, but I will save this little girl.

“I will save you.” Sungjin promised.

“Sungjin Oppa...thank you...”

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“He did?” Rachel’s eyes widened.

“Yes and without hesitation. He really does care for you.”

“Oppa...for me...” Rachel gathered her hands together. Her cheeks were colored a light red.

Oppa...

The one who guided her, gave her power, and taught her how to live was the goddess. But Oppa was the person who protected her in real life. She had already liked her brother, and now she liked him even more.

Oppa, thank you so much.

She swore to herself once again that she would do something for him in the near future. Something warm was starting to grow bigger within her chest.

Chapter 9

Sungjin gathered his teammates together immediately. Although surprised by Rachel's story and the existence of God's fruit, they agreed to join the search.

"To think, we may be able to save Miss Rachel; we should hurry."

At Ereka's words, Eustasia sighed. She gazed at Sungjin.

Did you not think how much more you could achieve by gaining your level with that fruit?

It was not as if she did not pity Rachel, but she believed that a king should look at the big picture. To gain some vigor as an emperor, one had to at least have a decisive personality. At the silent question, Sungjin only smirked.

And why leave Rachel out of that world?

After understanding Sungjin's smile, Eustasia gave up.

It's hopeless. It's just like him to desire victory even with the burden of a child.

It looked like she would have to be the one to discuss realistic matters.

"The problem is that if this fruit is such a great holy thing other major powers would be attempting to go after it also."

"I suppose. If others knew of this matter they would surely be aiming for this fruit."

Sungjin was not going to move with ignorant assumption.

"Kuga, if the oracle revealed this information to you, it's highly probable that the High Priest know of it as well, right?"

Kuga thought for a moment before nodding his head.

“We can’t know for certain, but we should be prepared.”

“Eldorado may be further away in the southern continents, but we need to cover all of our bases.” Sungjin thought for a moment before pulling out the world map.

“Pinpoint exactly where the island is.”

“Here. It was originally a structure of six islands, but once every thousand years the seventh island emerges. It remains for only one half of the day before re-submerging.”

“That means we need to reach the island within that time period to obtain the fruit.”

“Correct. There is only one chance, and that chance is the next full moon.”

“Fine. It would be best to travel from Port Nandebrook. Eustasia, can you prepare the largest sailing ship?”

“I’ll need at least a week.”

“One week...would you be able to make it in time for the next full moon?”

Suddenly Rachel raised her hand.

“I will ask the wind and seas to help!”

“Is that possible?”

Rachel smiled widely.

“Of course! I need to try my best too!”

“Then there should be no problem. Now, all there’s left is understanding the movement of the other powers...I’ll take care of this.”

On the fifth day, the information department reported to him:

“Master Sungjin, a sailing ship has entered Port Schugrut of Rupellion, which you had ordered to be placed under watch. It seems to be preparing for immediate departure.”

“As expected. If Rupellion wishes to reach that island, their starting point would be that port.”

At the spy’s dispatch, Sungjin smiled widely and turned towards Kuga.

“It seems like the oracle you were given has been received on their end too.”

“It’s not the time to be smiling. If the fruit ends up in their hands, there will be no more paths to save Rachel.”

“I know.”

“Why are you smiling then?”

“It’s boring to have a fight without an opponent.”

It would be dull if his greatest foe did not have an information network as large as his; he was not disappointed in that regard.

Although, I am the one who will get the fruit.

To save Rachel.

“I’m going to win this fight.”

“Kuh, you’re full of it.”

“Ha. I didn’t say I would simply sit by and watch. Why do you think I ordered surveillance on Port Schugrut?”

As he thought more, an evil smile spread across his face.

This search for the fruit was different from all of the other fights before. This was not a formal battle one would proclaim and enter with two teams fighting against one another. The imaginary island where the fruit was to bear was not an ordinary place.

If it was a normal territory, it would have been divided and ruled with conditions and laws as a god’s realm, and the most important rule within those realms was the prevention of other heroes from clashing with one another. But the imaginary island did not have such rules, which meant if the battlefield’s play ended within the battlefield, it could mean actual life or death.

So what abilities could one have on the island? No one had pondered this question. Why would those living in the desert ponder on how to survive within the jungle?

“Was it not to understand their movements and take preventive measures?” Kuga was not ignorant.

“Of course, there’s that, but that’s not all.”

Only Sungjin who was unique enough to have planned another strategy. He looked towards Eustasia.

“Eustasia, are you ready?”

“Of course.”

“Didn’t you say it would normally take a week to prepare a sailing ship?” Kuga, who had thought there was yet two more days to prepare, tilted his head.

“Not that.”

“What else is there?”

“You will know soon enough. If I tell you, there will be no fun in watching the show.”

It was late night. The tide in Port Schugrut, where Rupellion’s sailing boats were docked, were turned towards shore. Tiny boats quietly floated into the port with the tide. No one knew of the nearing vessels in the deep night. This world did not have a system of a surprise attack on docked crafts in the middle of the night. A battle occurred on the battlefield. Why would they be wary of the port?

The night raid was a success. As soon as the small boats touched the shoreline, they started burning as one.

“Fire!” the people on the port shouted hurriedly, but it was too late.

The small boats full of gunpowder and oil had already set the sailing boats on fire with uncontrollable flames. Without time to repel or douse the flames, the sailing boats burned and sunk.

The High Priest now had no transportation to the imaginary island.

A moment later Eustasia reported to Sungjin:

“The fire attack succeeded. Rupellion’s boats were sunk.”

Sungjin smiled.

“Tell everyone they did a good job while and hand out the promised rewards.”

The meeting room’s atmosphere turned bright immediately.

“I suppose Miss Rachel would be saved with this sabotage.” Ereka smiled.

“It’s a strategy worthy of praise.” Rittier placed his hands on his chest to show his respect.

“There’s no need for exaggeration.”

“I think it was amazing too.” Eustasia looked at Rittier at the same time.

“Float small vessels down with the tide to stop the enemy from sailing. It was a simple but effective surprise attack.”

In a normal war, everyone else thought about how to fight against their hero enemies once already on the battlefield. That was war, after all. But Sungjin had to think a bit further because the imaginary island was outside of God’s realm; therefore, the fight could turn into a real life or death situation. To this world, war was about one’s allied heroes and the enemy’s heroes fighting head-on. That was the extent of their thoughts.

But Sungjin had revealed another side.

“It’s nothing special. It’s happened several times on Earth, something like the Battle of Calais.”

The British had used the same strategy when fighting the Spanish armada. It was a strategy learned easily with a bit of Earth’s history in warfare, but to this world it was a new tactic. Sungjin wasn’t confined to Valhalla’s way of thinking.

“Your strategy was incredible. With this, the High Priest will be unable to come to the island and wouldn’t that be a victory?”

“Right.” Ereka blinked her eyes as Eustasia had said everything she had wanted to say.

“Then it’s guaranteed we’ll get the fruit!” Rachel turned around and around in excitement as her skirt danced in the air.

“Yes, I will help you get it. But it’s too early to let our guard down. We should hurry and get going.” Sungjin smiled with this promise but still proceeded with caution.

We will succeed with everything after securing victory.

The sailing ship carrying them left the harbor.

The atmosphere was lively in Sungjin’s boat. If the High Priest could not come to the island at all, it was possible to achieve their objective without a fight. The fight against the Holy Nation could be delayed until after Rachel’s curse was released.

Although not a victory on the battlefield, it had been a triumph of strategy.

Sungjin's boat moved across the sea quickly. Although they didn't have a perfect map of the sea, it had its use.

"Goddess, please help move the boat faster."

The prayer was simple, but it resounded greatly. Around Rachel, who was holding her hands together, a ripple expanded with pure light. Nature had listened to her request. Wind began to gather; the hanging sails started to stretch; the sea trembled as it pushed the boat. With Rachel's wish, the wind and sea propelled them forward. Sungjin's boat arrived to their destination in record time.

At the incredible picture, everyone cheered in admiration; it was a different type of otherworldliness to have nature respond to one's wishes, one almost expected from God's child.

But there was a small problem.

"Uu...I'm sorry, Sungjin." Ereka, who had been suffering from seasickness, collapsed on the bed.

Beside her, Sungjin placed a wet towel on her head.

"It's okay; you usually take care of all of my daily needs, don't you?" She had prepared all the meals and teas to his tastes; the bedroom was always clean; his clothes were designed similar to the future he came from. He always knew Ereka was behind the maids' movements and was always thankful.

"Still..."

"For now, don't think of anything and take a break. It would be better to close your eyes too."

"Yes, Sungjin."

"Are you heating up? Your cheeks are red."

"I think so." Ereka smiled shyly.

To be honest, it's not that... I'm sorry yet so happy that you're nursing me.

She knew she was imposing, but she was happy. She told herself she could be greedy for just this one journey.

By the window, Jenna waved her tail.

Ahh. It's a great atmosphere, My Queen, just like this.

Eustasia started swaying and came to lie down near Ereka.

"Sorry, I think traveling by boat is a little hard for me too."

"You?"

"Could you nurse me too?"

"There's no need to be sorry. I'll bring one more towel." Sungjin stood from his seat.

"It seems you're just like me with this, Eustasia." Ereka smiled as she felt something in common with her.

Sorry, honestly, I'm fine.

Eustasia apologized in her mind.

She was someone who could absorb the movements of the water. The meager movements of the boat only amused her. But she did become jealous of the warm atmosphere these two were making.

Let's enjoy it together.

Jenna's tail stood up straight.

Kaa. That thing, she dares interrupt the two.

But if she moved too abruptly, she knew the ambience would be ruined.

I'll hold back for now.

The thought of her direct rival, Rachel, busy in her prayers gave her some relief. At Jenna's hostile glare, Rachel quickly defended herself.

"Ah. Um. It's not that I don't want to treat them. It's just that we want to arrive as quickly as possible, so Oppa told me to concentrate on moving the wind and the sea."

Jenna's tail went down.

Sigh. What's the point of fighting with a child.

What was the point of her being God's child? She seemed blind to what was happening. Through the sometimes tumultuous waves, the boat pushed forward and finally arrived on the island, the non-existing but very real imaginary island.

Level 0 Master - Chapter 75

"Wow!"

While the girls shouted, Sungjin silently enjoyed the spectacular sight.

There are no words for it. This magical island is truly another world.

To think that he would see something in real life that he had only seen portrayed in movies. On Earth, these kinds of changes happened at a much slower pace.

It seems appropriate that God's fruit would be on this island.

It was also unpredictable what would happen if God's fruit, blossoming only every thousand years, ended up in the hands of the High Priest.

Factoring in the eight grand temples, God's child, God's fruit, Sungjin didn't know what the end result would be, but he knew it was something that should be prevented.

If I gain the fruit first and use it to release Rachel from her curse, it would be hitting two birds with one stone.

If Kuga was right that he could gain a level too it would be akin to killing three birds with one stone.

"Good. Let's put down the anchor here and approach on a smaller vessel."

At Sungjin's orders, everyone moved.

The island exuded a somewhat mystical atmosphere. Although the overall appearance was of an equilateral triangle, one side was the shore and another a cliff. At the end of that cliff, where black and white met in a single border, was one sole tree, leafless, with a single fruit about the size of Sungjin's fist.

"Are you sure there's nothing I need to know before grabbing the fruit?"

Kuga confirmed once more:

"None. If there was, the goddess would have given additional information."

"Fine, I trust your words."

“But remember, the moment you get the fruit the island will begin to sink.”

“Got it. Let’s all move.”

Meanwhile, the Holy Nation had turned into a bloodthirsty atmosphere.

All the great priests kneeled before the High Priest Pedrian begging for their deaths.

“Your Excellency.”

“All the boats burned leaving no way to set sail?”

“We are truly sorry.”

“You’ve let down your guard once more.”

“We did not think that he would use such tricks.” The High Priests bowed down; there was no need for explanation.

Now Sungjin would be able to capture the fruit without opposition, but the High Priest wasn’t angered.

“Let’s not worry too much. A human’s plans cannot overstep the plans of God.”

“But what should we do? We can’t set sail.”

“We’ll head towards the sea.”

“But...but we don’t have a boat. We have ordered the boat docked at Port Eser to come immediately, but we must still wait three days for it to get here.”

“Why is there no boat? There’s one there.” The High Priest pointed his walking stick with a soft smile.

At the place the High Priest had pointed was a very small boat that looked like it could barely hold five people. It was a boat the fishermen used. It had no sails and was made to move with oars. It had survived the fire because it had been docked in the corner.

“Look, there is the ship God has left for us.”

The great priests quickly tried to hold back the High Priest.

“Your Excellency that small fishing boat will not work. The sea near the island is too rough.”

“Yes, a new boat will come.”

“Where would you place the supplies needed for the voyage?”

“And if we all board, there will be no space for Your Excellency’s sleep.”

“Not only that, the boat will move slower; even if we leave early, it would take an eternity to get there.”

Tap.

The High Priest raised his stick and lightly tapped the heads of the great priests. It was a light hit, like the flick of a finger, but the great priests fell silent immediately.

“How could there be so little faith in those who call themselves great priests?”

He walked towards the small rowboat without hesitation. The great priests followed him not knowing what to do.

“With God’s protection, even with a rowboat, we’ll be safe from even the most vicious storm.”

It was absurd, but as the High Priest has said so it was advocated as truth.

“If God abandoned us, we could take a hundred sailing ships, and they would all be destroyed.”

He boarded the rowboat.

“Now, everyone get on. We must recover the sacrifice for God.”

The great priests were troubled. The small boat was definitely not equipped to take them all safely, or quickly, through the deep seas, and there was also no room for food or supplies to make the journey. Even if they made the treacherous trip to the imaginary island, they would starve to death.

The only reasonable thing to do would be to wait until the sailing boat arrived; Sungjin’s strategy appeared to have proved successful. But the High Priest’s full strength was unknown to the group and the world. There was only one answer.

“Yes, Your Excellency.” They followed after him.

The High Priest and the four great priests, the central power of Rupellion, began to board the small boat. It would be a long voyage, and there was not even a bed to sleep on. But the High Priest was not shaken in his determination. Instead, he stood on the end of the boat and prayed.

“God, guide us.”

He worshipped a powerless, mad god. Normally, he would have been laughed at.

But...

Crash.

With a resounding pitch, the water propelled the rowboat to move at a speed that was beyond its normal limits.

“With...with God’s guidance.” The great priests kneeled.

As the boat gained speed, the movements evened out. It was such smooth sailing that if they closed their eyes, they could imagine they were on land.

What else could this be called other than a miracle?

As expected...of His Excellency, the High Priest.

They also used the powers borrowed by a god, but it was of a different cut.

But what about food and water? There was nothing on the rowboat. Even with record speed, it would be a long journey back and forth from the island. The great priests pushed this out of their minds. If the High Priest prays, any problem would be solved. Their faith would provide for them.

“God, please have your children be not thirsty nor starved.”

After he shouted, the light that poured from the High Priest wound around the great priests. Although they had not eaten, nor drank, nor slept, they were full of vitality.

“God,” the great priests prayed while kneeling.

As expected, the High Priest was with God. It was the strength of a different dimension and made their powers appear miniscule in comparison. He lived with God and acted with God. They were only to follow.

They arrived on the imaginary island in one piece, and the sailboat that Sungjin had docked came into view.

“Your Excellency, on the island... there is already a docked boat. I think we’re too late.”

When the blue great priest began to panic, Pedrian scolded him.

“Calm down. To see a boat means the heretics have yet to run away with the stolen fruit.”

“You’re correct.”

“You would have realized this if you would just stop and think; you’ve all become timid after too many defeats.”

“We apologize.”

“Perhaps this is an opportunity. We may be able to demolish them all today. First, let’s sink the boat of the heretics.”

With a voice full of love, the High Priest nonchalantly ordered their deaths.

“Those who have lusted after God’s sacrifice, you shall repent at the bottom of the sea.”

Under the benevolent voice was a cold anger reserved for Sungjin. It was the rage of the owner of a herd of sheep that had just ordered the death of the wolf that had stolen his sacrifice for God.

“It will be as you have ordered.”

The great priests aimed their forces towards Sungjin’s boat. The one lone boat was scrapped in the blink of an eye. With this, Sungjin and his team had no way of returning home. Of course, the rowboat Pedrian had used to get there was left, but it was only possible for the High Priest to travel the ocean in such a small boat safely.

Huh, I suppose the great emperor of the south will die a meaningless death.

The black great priest, Pagnilin, thought this as he watched the last remains of the boat disappear.

If, by the smallest chance, Sungjin won over themselves and the High Priest, he still wouldn’t be able to leave the island. What remained for him was to sink along with the rest of the island.

If he had not attacked in the night he could have at least saved his own life.

If that had happened, they would have taken the fruit and left early. Sungjin’s group would have found nothing and returned with bare hands, though they would still have had a way home. But would that not also be God’s plans?

Afterwards, they went up the narrow path. They spotted Sungjin about to pick the fruit. It was according to the High Priest’s predictions. They had arrived just a moment too late.

Pedrian and Sungjin's eyes met.

Pedrian simply smiled a benevolent smile towards Sungjin who exuded a frigid air. No one could read his emotions under his closed eyes.

"Now that you have touched the fruit God has given us, what punishment should we administer for you to repent? No ordinary punishment will do."

With minor crimes being punished with repetitive torture and healing, the priests couldn't imagine what punishment would befall Sungjin.

"You're the head of that crazy faith?" Sungjin provoked him further.

"Hahahaha. There is much sin and corruption in your mouth, you and your pitiful existence. I should generously give you a chance to repent."

For Sungjin, it appeared to be too late to escape the fate that awaited him from the High Priest and the 4 great priests. Each and every one could overpower Sungjin, who was only level zero. It was enough to be wary of one person who could perform swordsmanship of perfect calculations but five to one, including the High Priest, was simply devastating.

"Oh? But I won't give you a chance," Sungjin replied.

With the fruit in his hands, he jumped off the cliff.

Pangnilin was shocked; jumping from that height was suicide. From the cliff to the waters was 100 meters. It was a distance a level zero was certain to die of at that speed. Sungjin didn't seem like the type of man who would commit suicide or was it that he could not hand over the fruit?

Kwaaaaa.

Sungjin was alive. His sword had slowed his speed with suspension as he fell. He leisurely glided through the air and landed safely in the sea.

Kuk. Was that it?!

Pangnilin finally understood. He recognized the black light in Sungjin's hands. The famous holy sword of heaven's will, Durandal. As Eustasia's could use long-ranged sword attacks freely, Sungjin used it as a flight tool; it was enough to avoid death by falling.

To think he would use it in such a manner.

But where was Eustasia who controlled the sword?

The riddle was solved quickly.

The sea split, and a large turtle emerged. The width of its back was enough to carry five people and a beast with space to spare. It was Rachel's second ability: to be loved by nature. Her songs and prayers moved plants and animals, even sea creatures.

On its back were his other four teammates. Landing in a suitable spot, Sungjin returned the sword.

"Now, Eustasia. It's time."

At his order, she responded immediately.

"The Sword of Heaven's Will, Durandal!"

The pure aura of the sword reached the heavens and displayed a sparkling light that then fell down. The speed of the sword was like a starfall. The twelve beautiful connected stars were judges of the sky, and the stars landed on the docked wooden boat.

"No!"

The boat was destroyed before the priests had a chance to panic. It was a swift attack, and they had no words.

"You all can die." Sungjin leisurely announced while drifting away from the island on the sea turtle.

Level 0 Master - Chapter 76

The imaginary island that appeared every thousand years started to sink. The earth sunk beneath the surface of the ocean, allowing the waters to consume it rapidly. The island returned to the waters that it had come from. It became a death trap. He had waited for them intentionally, and they arrived right on time.

Good bye.

Sungjin smiled leisurely.

The upper echelon of the Holy Nation Rupellion had been sealed. If the High Priest with his absolute charisma and authoritative tyranny was to disappear, the city would fall into chaos, and it would become easy game for the rest of the country. His only remaining competition would be Eldorado.

In addition, the conspiracy to use the eight grand temples and the holy fruit with Rachel as the sacrifice would end. He still was not sure of all the details of the conspiracy, but if those who were on the forefront, as he predicted, the project was sure to slow.

The turtle that carried Sungjin and the rest of the team quickly began to swim far from the island.

“It’s a complete victory.” Eustasia smiled brightly at his side.

There was no point in fighting on a battlefield. Several victories would have been required to conquer all of Rupellion, but if he could succeed here all that was left were those lackeys whose fate had been sealed.

Before the gathering waters, the great priests had given up hope.

Are we to die like this?

The nearest island from there was 10 kilometers away. If the sea was calm, they could have swam there, if they knew how to swim, which they didn’t. But the seas surrounding them were violent whirlpools.

With the high risk of being swept away, what was the point of even trying to cross several whirlpools at once? Although they were level seven heroes, to nature they were only humans.

The High Priest stuck down his cane on the ground after seeing them on the ground with tears in their eyes.

“Get it together. It is in times like this that you should pray more fervently. Why are you like this?”

“Bu... but....”

“Our lives are about to be snuffed out after having walked into the enemy’s trap...”

“It’s not that we are saddened for our lives, but we are worried that we have not accomplished God’s will.” Even in their last moments, they reworded their thoughts, per their habits.

“There is no need to worry.” Disappointment resounded in his voice.

“When following God’s orders, how could a mere human’s plan interfere in his will!” The High Priest shouted unlike his usual self.

“We have not even accomplished our task given to us by God, so how could our God not give us strength when we pray with sincerity!”

The High Priest raised his hands towards the sky.

“You lowly humans, watch your powerlessness before God! God, bring down your holy hand and save us all!” The High Priest shouted at the top of his lungs.

This was not the shout of a human being. It was the voice of God shouting through a human’s body as a medium.

Bang.

Bang.

The eight holy temples constructed throughout the lands of Rupellion shook as one. The black flames, which had wound around the temples, shot upwards and made a pillar between the earth and sky.

It traversed the sky towards where the High priest stood. The power rocketed towards the High Priest. The power was a congregation of force beyond rules. The great priests could do nothing but quake in fear on the ground before the absolute power.

His Excellency...

Has finally released his powers...

Pedrian opened his eyes. He swung his cane up and down as he shouted:

“God Hand!”

Air exploded outwards. The ground split. A storm escaped above with a screech, and the ground ripped apart with a groan. The concentration of energy created in that moment was inexplicable by the rules and logic of nature. It was truly God’s miracle.

And...

A large hand composed of black flames shot forwards from the High Priest. As the hand passed, the sea split, and a road was created. It was transcendental. The power of nature was something from a lesser world. Before God’s power, which had seated itself beyond the horizon, it could only grovel and make way.

Crash.

The bottom of the ocean, which they could walk upon, was created between the waters.

“Ooooooh!” The great priests cried at the moving scene.

He was right. What were they scared and worried about? What about the young lion of the south with a devilish strategic mind? They had their High Priest who stood on behalf of their God. So their enemy had burned their ships with a surprise night attack? Their High Priest could cross the ocean on a rowboat. Mother nature sunk their ship? Let them do so. Even if they did, their god would protect them. They slowly walked towards the neighboring island. The seas could not approach the path God's hand had passed.

“He...split the ocean?”

Before the extraordinary amount of power, even Sungjin became speechless. It was the High Priest. Sungjin estimated he would have quite some power. So he dug two traps. He had tried to use the imaginary island to submerge them under the ocean.

Although I didn't know my prediction was way off.

No one else could speak for a few moments.

The Blood Ruler's awakened powers also caused destruction. But it was not to the point of splitting the ocean. They were in different leagues.

After a long while, Eustasia finally opened her mouth.

“We should be called the victors in claiming the fruit but...”

That was a level that made it nowhere near a tie.

If getting rid of the opponent completely was a victory, gaining the fruit also had meaning. At the very least, they had found a way to save Rachel and with that had gotten rid of any plans the High Priest had.

“Our battles ahead will not be easy.”

They knew this was not a level they could catch up to even with the current win under their belts.

“As expected...of the High Priest...I suppose.”

Ereka recalled her showdown with the Blood Ruler and shivered.

They had barely won, but it had truly been a bloodthirsty battle. Their victory was miraculous. But the enemy the Blood Ruler had to look up to and challenge, High Priest Pedrian, this power was the truth of his legacies.

Jenna could not speak but trembled her tail. If she was before that large hand, she would have burned to death with a single attack. Rachel hung onto Kuga's tail and trembled in fear.

Goddess...Help...

The God which helped the High Priest was extremely strong. Could the goddess which guided her be their god's opponent? She certainly hoped she was. Dread settled into everyone's thoughts.

And Sungjin...

Barely held in his laughter.

Ku. Kuhu. Yes. He is my new enemy.

A suspenseful fight was waiting for him. He looked at the High Priest who was walking between the waves. Although they were heading towards opposite ends, he felt as if their eyes had met. His heartbeat soared. His blood boiled.

He felt sympathy towards those stepped on by the High Priest, and he also felt a competitive spirit awaken within him. Pedrian possessed power that transcended others. He possessed powers beyond the Blood King. It was true his team had gained strength since then, but the enemy had grown stronger.

The fight in the future would be brutal. Was this not the fight he had yearned for every since he began to aim for Arc Master after being summoned to this world? In consideration of Rachel and everyone else trembling in fright perhaps he should not be so uplifted yet.

Hoo.

But these were his undeniable instincts. He knew of this. Therefore...

I must win.

He would also win the fight with the High Priest. He must win, for Rachel and everyone else. This was his responsibility as leader of the kingdom. He was also responsible for his emotions. Against the strongest foe with no certainty of winning, he would wage the greatest fight of his life.

It would be glorious.

The High Priest Pedrian looked towards Sungjin as he traveled across the divided sea. His cold eyes seemed to speak:

You need not be happy for escaping this place.

We will chase them down soon enough, and the power that splits seas will punish you.

You can have the fruit; everything is within God's hands. I will take back both the sacrifice and the fruit. He closed his eyes halfway.

"We will first return to our homeland. And..."

A grave voice foretold:

"Afterwards, the enemy shall be punished in a most severe manner, and everything shall return to our God's hands."

The great priests bowed their heads as one.

"As you wish. Everything will be as God wants. Inshangra."

The first battle between Sungjin and the High Priest Pedrian ended in a tie. Sungjin's strategy moved the ocean, but Pedrian blasted away the ocean. Their meeting ended with a simple recognition towards one another. But that was not the end. It was only the beginning of the violent struggle that held Rachel hostage in the middle.

Returning on the back of the turtle, Sungjin gave Rachel the fruit.

"Now, use this to unravel the curse."

Rachel looked at Sungjin and teared up once more.

"Thank you so much, Oppa..."

"Thank later and use it now." Sungjin patted her head warmly.

"Yes."

Rachel swallowed the fruit.

And...

Nothing happened.

“Huh?” Rachel tilted her head and looked at Kuga.

“Uh, how do you use this?”

“Mm.... pray.”

“Ah. Right.”

Rachel held the fruit and closed her eyes.

“Goddess, please lift the curse from me using the powers of this fruit. Please... Please.”

It was a short prayer, but the desire in the prayer was real. She clung to her goddess to relieve her from the pain she suffered through every day. But there was no reply.

“Goddess? Goddess?”

Kuga frowned.

“Hmm...Rachel, I think the fruit is not ripe.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. It’s almost there, but it seems you need to wait a little longer.”

“Uu.” Rachel pouted in disappointment.

Even her infinite patience was disappointed by this.

“I wanted to use it right away.”

“What can we do? The goddess will tell us when it’s time.”

“Still...”

No one asked her to wait longer as the day to stop her pain was drawing near. They all knew very well what kind of pain each day brought. But there was nothing they could do about it.

“I suppose there’s no other way. Can Oppa hold onto this until then, so that the bad people can’t steal it?”

“Okay.”

Sungjin took the fruit.

In the next moment, he was in an unfamiliar place. The peaceful environment felt counterfeit. There were flames, but it was dark. On the pillar where gold and silver ornaments hung, cold evil was all around. On the walls were heretical pictures of mocking gods and orders of renouncement.

The palace itself seemed to be the center of hell, and in the midst of it was a large dragon of black flames, evil but strong, corrupted but beautiful.

“You are... Ha. To see you again.” Sungjin grinned.

He was looking at the Ruler of Ninehell, the enemy of Gods, the one who once bore the name of the brightest morning star; although he had many names on earth, he held the most famous title: Lucifer.

Level 0 Master - Chapter 77

“A second chance. As expected...there must be a great power hidden within this fruit.”

“Correct. Although the initial sacrificial ritual failed, the fruit will give you a new opportunity. If you wish to gain my powers and reach the pinnacle of this world, speak.”

“My answer is the same.”

“For now, but a human’s mind always changes at a crisis.” The lord of Ninehell was in no hurry.

“You will appear before me when you are ready with your new answer.”

A strong wind passed by.

“Sungjin, are you okay?” Ereka shook his shoulder as she looked at him with a concerned expression.

“Ahh, I’m fine.”

“I was worried. You spaced out after touching the fruit.”

“I’ve met a face I never wanted to see again.”

“What?”

“The power of the fruit is real.”

Sungjin revealed no more about whom he had seen.

“Rachel, tell me when it’s time to utilize the fruit.”

“Yes, Oppa.”

Sungjin stopped talking to those around him and fell into deep thought. He could use the fruit too but knew he wouldn’t be able to live with himself afterwards.

To think if I used it, she then wouldn’t be able to.

Why would it only respond to one person; couldn’t they both use it?

It should not be that only I could use it.

If he only used it on himself, Lucifer and the High Priest would not have been interested. Kuga had also said the fruit served one purpose only and had no other specific powers. Why wouldn’t Rachel also be able to use it?

The fruit is not ripe enough to cause the miracle, so I suppose I’m the anomaly.

Through Ereka’s sacrifice ritual, he was almost connected to Lucifer; maybe that’s why he could use the fruit earlier than anyone else.

Or maybe Rachel needs a separate ritual for herself.

Among his many theories, he could not whittle his thoughts into a specific one; there were too many unknown variables. When the time came, eliminating Rachel’s pain was still the priority.

But I should prepare for myself being able to use it also for the upcoming battle.

Sungjin had made up his mind. The High Priest who could split the ocean had walked away. To promise a following fight meant that he would pull out all the stops for the next battle.

Which means he knew there’s still plenty of time to fight before Rachel can use the fruit to lift the curse.

Today’s victory was truly a tie. There was not much meaning in obtaining a fruit that couldn’t be used. The High Priest would attempt to capture Rachel once again. The true fight would come then.

Sungjin and the High Priest went back to their respective countries and immediately started preparing for the next fight. Sungjin first gathered his team for a talk.

“As long as the fruit retains its power, the High Priest will aim for both Rachel and the fruit. He will fight to the death.”

“As expected...right?” Ereka replied worriedly.

It would have been too easy if he left Rachel alone to be freed from her curse; they couldn't expect him to give up so easily.

I should grow stronger to help stop the High Priest.

“Then what should we do?” Rachel trembled.

The scene of the High Priest Pedrian splitting the ocean had come as a shock for everyone. He was their future enemy.

“Let's wait for now. We should wait to move after Rachel's curse has been lifted. We will train steadily in the meantime.”

He had become bloodthirsty, but he knew he must respect the differences in strength between the High Priest and his allies. It would be a fight of blood and sweat to the end.

That doesn't mean I have any intention of stopping.

Sungjin smirked. The High Priest would be an excellent opponent worth any preparation. The higher the mountain the more satisfying it is climbing to the top and to be in the position of challenger was something that required a lot of competitive spirit.

There was nothing to do but prepare for the next battle logically and devise a fool-proof strategy.

Kuga added a few words:

“When Rachel's curse is lifted, her powers, originally given by the goddess, should be restored. Although it will pale in comparison to the High Priest's strength, she should still be able to offer some assistance.”

Eustasia's eyes lit up at the good news.

“It will be a time of preparation until then. We should focus on defense and survival tactics.”

“We should.”

Sungjin stood from his seat.

“Then let’s start preparing right away. I’ve come up with a drill we can all practice.”

So Sungjin and his team came up with a plan to consolidate all their defensive force until Rachel’s curse was lifted. It was the only logical solution. But Sungjin knew there was the possibility of another angle of attack. There was the probability of the High Priest dragging him down with whatever means he could. What mattered most, however, was the timing.

Nothing will go as you plan.

He resolidified his determination to stop Pedrian.

Chapter 11

The High Priest looked down at the seal below him on the highest level of the grand temple and prophesied:

“Now, the heretics will bring the sacrifice and sacred object before us willingly.”

The great priests listened to his words like innocent pupils.

“We trust everything will happen as God has planned.”

“Everyone will witness God’s plans.”

Pedrian raised his staff towards the sky.

“Come! Powers! I order you as God’s vessel!”

He opened his eyes.

The eight grand temples constructed throughout Rupellion shot into flames once more. A black energy boiled, erupting into the sky. Eight pillars connected the sky to the ground.

“I order, under God’s name, hell. Open those gates!”

The power gathering from the pillars joined into one above the High Priest. It intensified and melded into the figure of a large door. Evil creatures wriggled around the door’s frame.

“One who oversees pain, I order you under God’s name.” The door opened slowly.

“Rise from the ground! Rise with spreading poison!” Dark purple smoke spurted from the gates.

“Azidahaka, one who spreads pain across the world!”

Suddenly, the door was flung open to reveal a gigantic pair of snakes with wings. The blackish-purple snakes quivered and intertwined with each other. Their bodies spanned several hundred meters. The four great priests began to choke on the air.

To be able to wield such magic...

As expected of His Excellency...

“I order your mission under God’s name. Punish the humans in the faraway land of heretics. But do not kill them immediately, so that they would wish for repentance.”

The High Priest pointed with his staff towards Sungjin’s land. The snakes flew in the direction until they were out of sight.

The next day, Sungjin, devoted to his defensive training, felt a strange shiver run down his neck.

What’s that about?

There was nothing tangible happening; it was only instinct he felt.

Others felt something was amiss as well.

“Sungjin, just now...” Ereka’s face had a grim expression.

The sky outside their window turned dark. The large shadow of a snake appeared covering the entire sky. Sunlight disappeared. It was midday, and a darkness like this was a sinister omen. The maidservants moved quickly trying to light the lamps, but the darkness only deepened.

“Ahhh!!” Rachel suddenly collapsed onto the floor with a scream of pain.

“Miss Rachel?”

“Rachel?” The two hurried to support her.

What happened? There should be no attacks now.

Rachel, who still carried the curse, had consistent bouts of pain, but she should have had no more today.

“Uwack!!”

It was not only her. The shouts erupted from everywhere.

“Ahhhhh!!” Everyone within the capital screamed in pain, and it did not end there.

Every human within range of the capital began screaming in pain. Only heroes had appeared to be resistant. The extras all screamed without exception. The pain ripped their bodies apart and gnawed at their senses.

Where was this coming from?

They fell to the ground and rolled in tears.

After receiving the report, Sungjin’s face hardened.

“This...is the High Priest’s next move.”

He had predicted the High Priest would come after Rachel and the fruit, so he focused on defensive maneuvers. He was even considering ignoring minor instigations.

But...

Creating a curse against the entire population of a region would be comparable to a bioterrorism attack, something the strongest countries had forbidden.

Bastard, are you intending to include all citizens in a fight between us.

“Is there no cure?” Erika asked in a hurry, but all the healers shook their heads.

“This is not an illness; it’s a curse.”

“The curse is too strong for us to handle.”

“Looking at the origin of the direction it came from, it seems as if it is from Rupellion...”

“Unless the source of the curse is broken, we’re powerless against it.”

Every question met a negative response.

Suddenly, a voice echoed from the skies:

You pitiful people, you owe this pain to the cursed one within your lands.

It was the voice of the High Priest Pedrian.

Only we can stop the spread of the curse.

Sungjin doubted the truth of his statements. But those in pain began to listen; they needed someone to blame for what had befallen them.

With God's love, I will cease your pain temporarily.

At the end of those words, a shower of light descended from the darkness. The light was so bright and warm people forgot all about Rupellion's evil deeds. The pure light shone on the earth, and everyone's pain momentarily subsided.

Did you feel that, humans? This is God's love.

Sungjin tightened the grasp on his arms.

"This bastard is toying with us."

Sungjin knew the High Priest was behind all of this. He was the one who placed the curse just so he could pretend to stop it.

Everything about Rachel was a lie; he could see that, but the citizens didn't know the whole story about her. Their common sense would be blocked further by the unbearable pain they were now in. Obviously, their faith would be swayed towards the person offering to end their torture.

If you refuse God's love, it is obvious that his love will not be able to reach you. There will never be true salvation with a cursed presence by your side.

The light became weaker.

The name of such existence is Rachel. She is a girl your king did not recognize as evil and chose to protect. Petition for this girl to be turned away. It is only then you will be freed from the curse. If not, every day at this time the pain from the curse will overtake you.

The High Priest stopped talking.

The High Priest, completing his curse on Sungjin's capital and surrounding regions, slowly sat down. He once again closed his eyes halfway.

"Now that I have given them a chance at redemption, let us wait and see what happens."

"It is truly benevolent, Your Excellency."

The four great priests shouted their praises at his omnipotence.

“What have I done? God has used this body is all.”

“But it is Your Excellency’s omnipotence that God has used with care.”

“I should rest now. I will watch the heretics’ punishment.”

“We will take our leave.” The four great priest expressed their deepest regards and left.

The High Priest, now alone, scooped up some water with a wooden bowl and flicked it with his finger. At that, Sungjin’s capital was reflected.

“Now, show me your ugly truth.”

Level 0 Master - Chapter 78

They believed the king had indulged himself in the witch’s power and abandoned them. The once savior king was now believed to be directly responsible for this torment. The rumor spread like wildfire. It must be true; the people started to shout in mass.

“Abandon the witch, my king!”

“Please return as our savior!”

They no longer sung praises of Sungjin as the hero who would protect them all. They were an angry mob prepared to accuse him as tyrant if he did not give up Rachel.

The scene had gone according to his plans; still, the High Priest had only hatred in his cold, emotionless eyes.

“Do you see, young lion of the south? These are the humans you wish to protect.”

His expression was full of anger that he kept hidden from even the great priests.

“They are lowly and disgusting.” He continued his monologue as if he were talking to Sungjin:

“You put your life on the line for those people.”

But humans weren’t worth such a fight. These were the same people who would turn their backs on 10 blessings if one thing did not suit their interests.

When there was something to gain, they sang praises of hero and savior. But when there was a loss, they criticized and dragged one down. Citizens could be so cowardly.

The respect reserved for a king was nowhere to be found. Now that Sungjin seemed kind, they were whining.

“They are ignorant and detestable.”

They couldn't even see through his tricks due to their pain. They would do anything to relieve it, including believing and rationalizing his lies.

“Humans are disgusting everywhere.”

It was the same within the walls of Rupellion. The faithful groveled on their knees for saving.

“Filthy people who would do anything to be saved.”

People were greedy, cruel, and foolish. They would condemn a fellow citizen to death if it meant saving their own skin. How vile they were, how evil. They would serve any God offering salvation, including Angramainyu, the creator of all evil.

They cheered for that name willingly and asked only for themselves to be saved on the last day of victory. They clung to the thought they would be in his favor. They would sacrifice neighbor and friend, leaving this country in the evil god's command. They were worthless.

Uwuhh...

Sad cries resounded around Pedrian. Beside the High Priest were children who were mercilessly burned. These were spirits that appeared only when he was truly alone, pitiful children sacrificed by humans' evil deeds; sad lives stepped on by lying sheep who pretended they were innocent victims. They were children bound to this earth, his uncompleted responsibilities.

Looking at the ghosts, the High Priest swore once more:

“It is soon.”

The truth of the human nature of hell will be revealing its form. The sacrifice and the sacred object will be in his hands, and the time will come. Only then would the devils known as humans be able to gain their salvation. Going to hell was their only salvation after all. The mirror before him reflected Sungjin's capital once more.

“Now, what will you do, young lion? Will you throw Rachel away to maintain your popularity among the people?”

If he wished to maintain his popularity and trust, he had no choice but to give up the girl. Rachel was innocent; the young lion knew this. But convincing the people was another story.

Huhu. There used to be a food store once.

The popular store was ruined once its competition spread rumors it was putting unhealthy poison in the food. The people asked the store owner for compensation, held a riot, and the owner went to court to proclaim his innocence.

The government official concluded no such thing had happened, but the competitor once again spread rumors that the government official had received bribery to declare this. People who had rioted wanted to remain in a position of righteousness and attacked. The righteous will always think they are right. The corrupt will always be corrupt.

Ultimately, the store owner's entire family committed suicide, and the people celebrated saying they had received their due punishment. Those were humans.

At this point, the victor had already been decided.

"Or will you push them back with soldiers to protect Rachel?"

Sungjin's kingdom was on the brink of collapse.

"Now, show me your truth, young lion."

"Bring forth the witch!" When Sungjin did not release the soldiers, the protesting voices grew louder.

Rachel trembled as she held on to Sungjin's leg.

"Oppa...I...I need to go right? Right?" She had heard the shouts of the people.

"No, you don't need to leave." Sungjin shook his head firmly.

"But...those people are hurting. Like me...they will be hurt everyday." Tears rained down from Rachel's eyes.

"I...am the goddess' child...saving ill people is my mission so..."

This was the life mission given to her. If she did not follow, there would be no salvation.

"I will...will be fine. The goddess will save me after all, right, Sir Kuga?"

"Rachel..." Kuga could only call out her name in pity; he had no answer to give.

“But...I thought the goddess’ salvation...was going to let me live...” Tears tumbled down her cheeks.

“It seems not...It seems it will be a place to go after I die...It seems like... Uu...”

“Rachel...” Kuga didn’t deny.

Rachel took that as a positive answer.

“It’s okay...I...Am the goddess’ child...If the goddess wishes it...I need to follow...”

At that moment, Sungjin gathered her up fiercely within his arms.

“Oppa?”

“You won’t go. I don’t care what the goddess has planned; I won’t let it happen.”

“But...” Sungjin gathered her crying face into his chest and hugged her tightly.

“Goddess and salvation of the soul and whatever else doesn’t matter. You’re a child, and you’re alive. You are entitled to all the good things in this world.”

It was a proclamation Sungjin made to everyone, both humans and gods. Rachel was a tortured child, who thought of others before herself. She hid her pain so as not to become a burden. She dreamed of growing up fast to become an adult and find love. Ensuring that her modest wish would be granted was the right world.

To think, she would even sacrifice herself. He would not run away and leave such a child to be stepped on. He would fight the enemy and win.

“But...Other people...Everyone...They’re saying they want me to disappear... wishing for it...”

“You said you wanted to become an adult. You wanted to live!”

“Uu... But...”

“We need to go to the mountains and sea, watch spring come around.”

“Uu...Uu...Uuwaa...I...I want to live. Uaah!” Rachel burst into tears.

“I don’t want to die. Uaah. Even if I go to a better place after death...I still have so much I want to do...I want to live. I will fix other people the best I can; I’ll do my best...So I... I...I just want to live.”

Even if her job was sacrificing herself for everyone, she still wanted to live. She wanted to live and see spring. She wanted to date Oppa. She wanted to do so many things. She had only just begun to learn what the outside world held.

“Then you will. Forget the goddess’ command and everyone else’s will. I can save you.”

Sungjin stood.

“Re...ally? Really...I can live?” Rachel’s cries died down.

It was a wish she wanted so desperately but could not dare to hope for.

Could Oppa really grant her that wish? Her heart started to beat. Her face heated. She felt something strange and inexplicably wonderful she had never felt in her life.

“Yes. Now, watch how I fight,” he said reassuringly before stepping towards the balcony of the castle.

High Priest, if this is how you wish to fight then so be it.

He would never hand over her; she was his sister. The stronger the evil was, the more it would be met with his unstoppable wisdom and determination. Rachel could only stare at his back.

She always thought Oppa was strong but now...

His back seemed to shine. Her heart thudded. Her face, once again, heated.

Sungjin stood on the balcony. Using the magic stone with the power of the wind, he made sure everyone heard his voice and shouted:

“Everyone, hear! I will answer your request!”

The people fell silent. Sungjin was a king who united the four kingdoms and had a firm charisma.

“This is a story of old: there once lived three buffalos that were close friends, so close, the lion knew he could not attack them easily. By using trickery, he demanded the white buffalo, telling his two friends if they didn’t hand them over he would attack them. The two gave him the white buffalo. Afterwards, the lion threatened the black buffalo; if he handed over the brown buffalo, he would not harm him. The black buffalo abandoned his friend. When he became the only one left, the lion ate him as well.”

This was a tale passed down on Earth and relatable in any region.

“Do you really believe you have been cursed due to Rachel? That is a lie! The truth is the High Priest is threatening you after having placed a curse on you!” His charismatic voice took control over the people.

“You think handing over Rachel will solve everything?” Sungjin pointed towards the edge with his hands. The people flinched.

“If the High Priest demands the people in the region of Saina to be submitted as sacrificial objects, are you going to let that happen? When he asks for the region of Asark, are you going to hand them over because they are not your family?”

Sungjin’s eyes scanned each and every one.

“One by one, because they are not your troubles or your family, you would hand them over? Who will be with you when evil finally descends on all?!” His words echoed around the arena.

“Do you think I abandoned you all to save one person?” Sungjin placed his hand on his chest.

“I am fighting because I cannot hand over a single one of you!”

That was his truth and his will as king, and he reported this to the people.

“Whoever serves me is under my protection! That goes for Rachel and any one of you!”

Man or woman, child or senior, Sungjin would not submit to the demands of evil. If they demanded a person of the mountains, a person of the rivers, a person of the capital...he would not hand over a single one.

The crowd fell silent. Sungjin was an emperor who ruled over everyone, and they were in awe. They knew he spoke truth when he said he would not hand over anyone. It was the heart of a king.

Despite his promise, would they continue their requests to hand over the child? Would he ever demand their personal sacrifice?

“It is my wish for everyone’s protection! You will not be able to stand on the battlefield or survive the violence of evil without standing together! I will fight at the forefront, and it is my wish for you all to fight behind me, a fight to defend each other!”

Level 0 Master - Chapter 79

“Gods, may the glory be with our king!”

It was a cheer that shook the capital.

“Oppa...”

“Sungjin.”

“Ha. This is my king.”

At the reflection of the arena on his water mirror, the High Priest snorted.

“How lowly, only I know your true selves.”

Humans are selfish at their core. They plead to be saved even at the cost of others. Right now they were simply seduced by the words of their leader who guaranteed safety. There was no way the worthless humans would endure painful torture for some unknown child.

“Their selfishness will soon be revealed.” The High Priest’s staff pointed towards the skies once more.

Black smoke whirled and spread above the crowd.

“Submit before the strength of God! To be saved bring the sacrifice!”

From now on, the pain would be without reprieve; he would continue this until they screamed to be saved.

“Azidahaka, poison of despair and pestilence, curse them!”

The sky above Sungjin’s people grew increasingly darker. The evil energy that had blocked out the sun slowly came down from the sky like a snake. The shouts decreased at the smell of the highly concentrated curse.

The snake, at first thought to be an illusion, proved to be real in the flesh, and a mist of poison descended towards the ground.

“Wha... What should we do?”

The people could do nothing but panic. Earlier, they had been determined to fight with Sungjin but with the threat of torture once again looming, they became afraid. They were only human.

At the sight, Ereka clenched her jaw. Sungjin had pled for people to fight with him. Just when it looked like they had picked up some courage, it was about to be broken before this act of violence.

Ereka knew this evil power was trying to squash the bravery they had built up. A corrupt power was trying to torture the people's lives she wished to protect.

Sungjin wished to fight against that power.

She wanted to protect him.

Father.

She clenched her Shield of All People which held the light of the sun.

Goddess of wisdom and protection, Athena, please grant me strength...

She raised the shield as she shouted.

"Shield of All People!"

The light of the sun fought against the descending dark purple poison. The image of Goddess Athena with her spear of victory and Aegis appeared faintly over the capital.

On behalf of the sun which had been consumed by the poison, the shield shined brightly. The curse was strong, but the protection was stronger. It proclaimed that the light cannot be subdued by darkness and would protect this land from any curse.

* * *

The High Priest frowned and murmured.

"The shield of a fake god, how insolent."

He raised his staff. The black power trembled violently.

"Move! How dare you protect such things like humans?!"

Black energy coiled around Ereka's body in the image of a snake.

"Give me the sacrifice and admit defeat."

Rachel was something that belonged to his god. He would not forgive anyone who touched her. The poisonous snake relayed the words of the High Priest to her ear. She held the shield more tightly at the warning that she should not suffer on behalf of those worthless human beings.

"Why are you making them suffer?!"

I am only revealing the truth. Humans would do anything for their own comfort. Humans would drag down others to escape their own pain. This world does not need the goddess' shield any longer. Step back.

Ereka gritted her teeth. There was a grain of truth to his words. Humans were weak. When the Blood Ruler threatened their lands, how many turned their backs? How many submitted?

But...

"You're wrong. When protected, humans are compassionate and giving."

When living in peace, some people saw another person's pain and had empathy. Some people smiled and chose to help.

Ha. They simply follow the rules of society that the strong impose.

"To submit to power, yes, that was probably true."

When encountering violence, humans turned weak and vile; when cornered, they ran or averted their eyes. But still, was it necessary to step on their feeble minds with one's power? Flowers broke when stepped on but bloomed when given care.

"I will protect their weak hearts. I will not be moved by you."

That was the oath she had sworn when she inherited the Shield of All People. She was determined to stand with Sungjin, and she would not step back.

The High Priest's eyes were burning with fury. His usual calm composure was gone, and intense emotions circulated throughout his body.

"If you will not move, fine! I will step on you first! You will regret your decision and roll on the ground in pain!"

I will watch how long your false words will last in a torture of hell.

"The truth shall win!"

The black energy became more fierce

Wooo.

Beside him, the ghosts cried louder.

The poisonous snake wrapped itself around her entire body. It turned her white skin black as the poison seeped in.

“Aeut.”

In the stream of pain tearing at her nerves, a painful sound that she could not hold back escaped. Her entire body had become wet with sweat, and she choked on the pain that seemed to rip her lungs away.

The pain shot to her head; she had the sensation her insides were being eaten by bugs.

“Hah!”

Behind her, the vague image of Athena seemed to dissipate. The agony was bringing Ereka closer to collapse.

“Don’t overdo yourself! This fight can only be won on the battlefield.” Sungjin’s shout could be heard faintly.

Sungjin...

A voice told her to take a break.

The shield of the goddess is a protection you do not deserve. This is not your place to interfere.

The snake whispered for her to stop.

What should she do?

Suddenly, her eyes met Rachel’s eyes. Rachel watched helplessly.

What should I do?

Rachel floundered. She should tell her to rest, but she feared the pain would descend upon her. She had no words. She was scared. Watching Rachel, Ereka smiled quietly.

“It’s okay, Sungjin. I can last a bit longer.”

She raised her shield higher. The golden rays became brighter. This was her oath towards the Shield of All People. When violence was at the forefront, she would be there to stop it. Rachel’s fear represented the fear of everyone.

Had she not taken on the shield’s responsibility to stop those faces from crying?

“High Priest, if you wish to step on anyone...”

The poison gnawed at her spine. Her legs shook, and her arms trembled; still, she continued.

“You will have to break me first.”

A strong wind exploded behind the High Priest.

“So be it, I will step on you first!”

His opponent’s strength was at its limit. One push would break her. Her spirit may recover, but she would be physically destroyed. If she would not put the shield down, he would simply steal it. The eight grand temples had an abundance of power.

The High Priest raised his staff.

Uuuwohhh.

Beside him, the ghosts hung on his arms and cried. The High Priest paused and lowered his staff.

“Sigh, are you worrying that I am overexerting myself? You’re right. If I waste my strength here, the golden bug might move.”

A thing like Ereka could be crushed with little effort, but giving the Golden Wise King an opportunity would not do.

“Fine, the truth will win when the time comes. I will stop here for today.”

He had already achieved part of his goal. The young lion would now willingly jump onto the altar with the sacrifice and fruit. It would not be too late to spread the truth after that. He closed his eyes once more and fell into meditation.

Beside him, the ghosts cried.

“Don’t worry. This is nothing but suspended sentencing. I will keep the promise I made.”

The snake released Ereka and disappeared into the sky.

Ah...It’s over.

Ereka fainted. She had taken on more than she could handle.

“Ereka.” Sungjin hurriedly supported her back as she fell to the ground.

“You’ve done so much.”

Rachel stared helplessly at the scene before her. Oppa had taken all this on because of her, and now Unni was in a weakened state. They had done all this to protect her life.

Oppa...Everyone...Thank you.

She felt grateful and also a little embarrassed.

The result of this fight was reported elsewhere.

“I think it is a tie. The defeat the High Priest had aimed for did not take place.”

The owner of Eldorado, the Wise Golden King, slowly stood as he received his servant’s report. The horses on the floating chessboard before him moved around rapidly. The tension between the black and white horse was strong. Although there were the same number of horses on either side, the black horse seemed to be in a better position.

“We should say the position of the High Priest is more advantageous.”

“Is that true?”

“The High Priest is not aiming for something like internal crises, although Sebrantina will have a damaged reputation if the extras ever rise again in their country. How would those people drag down that young lion?”

“You mean to say that the true aim of the High Priest is...”

“Now Sebrantina will attack the region where the High Priest awaits.”

“You’re saying he forced their hand?”

“Correct. They can’t win without the use of power, and they have already suffered one move. Let’s watch what happens next.”

He will move when the fight is at its peak. His wiseness exuded a calm light.

Level 0 Master - Chapter 80

Hmmm?

She felt a strange sensation and avoided his touch; she spoke quickly with a blush:

“Since Unni is awake, I’m going to the bathroom.” Rachel ran away abruptly.

Sungjin smiled.

Ah, right. She was caged all that time.

He didn't understand why she was embarrassed about being excused; wasn't she the one who had requested they bathe together?

Cough. Let's try and forget that happened.

He had been quite shocked when she asked; she had a cute side to her.

Unlike Sungjin who was smiling contently, Eustasia and Jenna looked knowingly at Rachel. They knew why she left so quickly.

Sungjin carried on without any further thoughts on the matter.

"Ereka, I'm sorry to disturb you so soon, but we need to discuss our next plans."

"Yes, Sungjin, I'm okay right now." Ereka sat up straighter.

Sungjin talked as he looked down at the map of the continent.

"Right now, we have prevented the riot, but there's no more time to wait. We must advance towards Rupellion immediately."

"There is no other choice to save the cursed people but..." Eustasia made a doubtful face.

She knew the reasoning behind Sungjin's decision; it was because of his reasoning that she had decided to serve him as king. But this was a fight that should not be done according to the stratagems of war. Saving those cursed by the High Priest would mean sacrificing more to the evil enemies.

As a general, she knew this fight should be prevented.

"Don't worry, I'm aware of the difference between recklessness and bravado." Sungjin smiled in reassurance.

He understood the situation as well.

I am walking into the trap of the High Priest knowingly.

The cost of victory had gone up, and he knew it would possibly take many more victories to completely eradicate the High Priest's reign. Rupellion was large, and the grand temples were located in eight different locations..

They would have to prepare for, not only a long war against a stronger enemy but a third enemy behind them. The odds were stacked against them, but this also made the battle worthwhile.

“I’ll win.” He extended his fist in the direction of Rupellion.

How else could he achieve his position of Arc Master without overcoming this challenge? After uniting the four allied countries, he knew Rupellion and Eldorado remained. He promised himself he would overcome them all. It was time to prove his words. It was an uncertain battle with a lot on the line, his dreams and other people’s lives...

Sungjin smiled towards Rachel who was staring at him with anxious trust. This was a battle with a child’s life on the line as well; he had no choice but to win.

“Yes, Sungjin, we will definitely win.” Ereka spoke sternly.

She recalled the tortured faces of the people after seeing Rachel’s pain. A solid aura, like a shield, exuded from her.

“I will give everything I have in order to protect Sungjin, my teammates, and everyone from the pain. So use me as a shield and please win this fight.”

She could not bear to see torment in the name of some mad god any longer. Rage outweighed fear. The High Priest was a fearsome enemy, but this was a fight she could not walk away from. She knew what she must do: she would give everything she had to ensure Sungjin the victory.

“Thank you; I knew we could count on you.”

Watching the two lock eyes on each other, Eustasia snorted.

“Hmph, well, fine. I’m already the sword that cuts down everything in your path.”

She placed her sword on the table.

“You can wield it however you want.”

She knew the difficulty of the decision he was making, but if that’s the route he chose she would support and assist his decision.

“Me too! I’ll devote my strength too.” Jenna swayed her tail as if to ask them to entrust her to a task.

“Thank you, everyone. We’ll win.”

Sungjin's announcement was given with confidence. His teammates had willingly stepped forth to fight with him, despite the odds. What could he possibly lack with teammates like that? The schemes of the High Priest and the Wise Golden King were nothing if he overcame everything by prevailing.

"Rachel needs to hear this too; she seems to be taking a while in the bathroom. Hmm."

When Sungjin spoke of her late return, Ereka stepped forth.

"I'll go find her."

"Ah, please."

Ereka went looking for Rachel. Although she said she was going to the bathroom, she was found sitting in a corner of a balcony whimpering.

"Miss Rachel?"

"Ah, sister Ereka."

"What are you doing here?"

"Tha... That.... That is..."

"Did something happen? Are you worried about the threats of the High Priest?"

"It's not that." Rachel shook her head.

"Then?"

"When I see Oppa..."

"When you see him?"

"My heart seems to beat harder... My face feels hot... And I can't stay next to him because, strangely, I feel embarrassed. Why do I feel like this? Do you think this is a new curse?" Rachel blinked her eyes in worry.

"Oh, I see." Ereka tried to hold back her smile but failed.

How cute. Sungjin would not have noticed any changes in Rachel.

He would probably think she was just being a child.

But a young girl will eventually grow into a beautiful adult.

Upon falling in love, her emotions would develop faster.

Haa. There's an additional woman to Sungjin's list but...if it's Miss Rachel, I suppose there's nothing I can do.

She was so cute and loveable. They should get along well as women who love the same man. It is her duty to lead them as the older sister. Organizing the inner palace was the duty of a wife for her husband, after all.

Kyah. How embarrassing, I'm acting as if I've already married Sungjin.

She hadn't. Still, it wasn't as if Sungjin had an official queen, so wouldn't she have to be in charge of the inner palace?

"It's okay, Miss Rachel. You feel like that because you have come to love Sungjin even more."

"Really?"

"Yes. You are turning into an adult. Perhaps, we will call it affection before love."

"I really like Oppa...But when I see him..."

"Huhu. It's fine. That emotion will later grow to love, and you will seek out true lovers."

"What should I do when I can't go near him?"

"Just try and keep your composure and be slightly more courageous."

"Courageous?"

"To be honest, I find my heart beating quite quickly when I'm near Sungjin, too."

He tends to show new sides of himself every time she's around him. Perhaps, she, too, is falling in love everyday. Ereka rubbed her cheeks gently.

"But how do you remain by his side? Is it because you are an adult?"

"Of course, I think, as people grow older, they find their footing. People around me are saying I am of marrying age and offer encouragement." Ereka smiled and patted Rachel's head.

"So, Miss Rachel, you will be fine. Be a little bold and practice standing next to Sungjin, so that when you become an adult you can hug him too."

"I see. I need to start gathering my courage now on my way to becoming an adult."
Rachel, who echoed her words, screeched to a halt.

"Um... But..."

"Yes?"

"No...Nothing! I'll find my strength eventually." Rachel shook her head from side to side.

"So, let's go back. You like Sungjin don't you?"

"Yes, Unni." Rachel nodded her head vigorously.

When the two returned hand-in-hand, Sungjin smiled.

"Ah, you're here, Rachel. I'd like to talk to you about the battle with Rupellion."

"Oppa! I'll be courageous!" Rachel replied immediately.

"Huh? Oh, well, sure. This is the time for courage, I suppose."

Sungjin nodded his head in agreement. The High Priest was strong, and they would need all the help they could get, including a combative spirit.

"Yes, Oppa. I'll be brave." Rachel replied again.

Ereka smiled.

"Yes. We should win this fight and schedule an outing on the following day. In the summer, we will head down to the beach, jump in the leaves during fall, or play in the snow during winter. Perhaps visiting the spring blossoms will be nice? If we all go with Sungjin, it will surely be a fun time. Right, Miss Rachel?"

"A picnic with Oppa and everyone...that's a great idea!" Rachel replied with sparkling eyes.

She will win and live and go everywhere with Oppa.

Goddess, please save me. Give me strength.

She prayed in her mind. Sungjin watched the scene with satisfaction. Beside the queen, Jenna only sighed. Eustasia, intertwining her fingers, began to think.

If she's a child that I cannot get rid of, it is better to have her as an ally, as Ereka. It's astounding how she does such things without even thinking.

She was, however, in complete agreement with the picnic plan, including resuming the canceled beach vacation. With that, Sungjin raised the morale as he prepared for the battle with the High Priest. This didn't, however, change the fact that the road ahead would be a harsh one.

That night, Rachel prayed while looking at the moon.

Goddess, please let me grow into an adult, so that I can hug Oppa.

She then lowered her head. But what if she died because the bad guys took her away? That was the question she was unable to ask Ereka. Oppa and Unni said that they would protect her, but a corner of her mind was still unsettled.

Adult...Adult...Ah....

As she pondered, her eyes shone, and she whispered towards the garden.

"Please teach me the quick way to become an adult."

That night, Sungjin was awakened by an approaching presence.

"Oppa!" The voice was familiar.

"Ah, Rachel?"

"Can I lie down next to you?"

"Mmmm, yes." Sungjin replied without opening his eyes. It seemed she had come to find him because of a nightmare.

"Ehehe."

With a bright laughter, something soft and smooth attached itself to his body. It was an electric but comfortable feeling.

Huh?

Something was off; Sungjin opened his eyes. The body lying next to him didn't seem like Rachel's. He was at a loss for words when he realized a mysterious woman was lying next to him. Her long black hair reflected the moonlight. It was like the Milky Way of the night sky. The smiling soft red lips and white teeth carried the night's seductive whispers.

But that was not all.

The white clothes she wore placed an emphasis on revealing a woman's body: a thin waist, a robust chest, soft skin. It was seductive. His desire came to the forefront. The pinnacle of beauty any Easterner would dream of was before him, a beauty beyond praise.

Who was this woman?

The beast inside him shouted that there was no need to question such things and urged his instincts.

"Oppaa!"

If the beauty had not jumped into his arms calling him Oppa, he did not know what he would have done.

"Ra... Rachel?"

"Yes! Oppa! Ehehe."