

M. in Hell 111

Chapter 111 - Five Mistakes (3)

"H-Hahahaha!! What a funny joke."

Fujimoto Ryoma laughed out loud while glaring at Prime Minister Yamada. Although his mouth was laughing, a chilling bloodlust leaked from his eyes.

"U-Urgh..."

Prime Minister Yamada trembled. He looked at Oh Kang-Woo and gulped. Ryoma's bloodlust was scary... but it was nothing compared to the fear he felt for Kang-Woo. Kang-Woo had him fully under his control with the Authority of Fear, so he was unable to defy him.

Prime Minister Yamada calmed down his trembling and waited for Ryoma's reply.

"Leaving aside the fact that you searched my house without a warrant... how can you prove the demonic crystal came from there?"

He wasn't sure from where the prime minister had gotten a demonic crystal... but it was meaningless to bring out a demonic crystal and claim that it was found in his home. It was similar to someone who was not a police officer searching one's home and claiming that they had found drugs.

Of course, it was true that Prime Minister Yamada's authority was higher than a police officer's, but Ryoma was considered a national hero, so he also had quite the authority.

"I requested a trustworthy guild to handle the search. They will be the ones to testify."

"A trustworthy guild...?"

Ryoma frowned. There wasn't a guild in Japan influential enough to be considered trustworthy because the average level of Players was too low for that.

But for Prime Minister Yamada to suddenly say that he'd asked a trustworthy guild to perform the search...

"What are you talking ab—"

"These are the people who were in charge of searching Fujimoto's residence."

Click.

The courtroom's door swung open.

Everyone focused on the people who had opened the door and entered the room.

There was a huge uproar in the courtroom.

"H-Heavenly Sword Clan!"

"Why is Tian Suyan here...?!"

The person who had entered the room was a woman with twin buns. Seductive energy flowed from her, even when she just stood still.

Tian Suyan was the daughter of Tian Wuchen, the master of China's biggest guild, the Heavenly Sword Clan.

She stood on the witness stand without the judge's permission. Smiling, she opened her mouth to speak. She spoke in fluent Japanese with no need for an interpreter.

"Nice to meet you. I am Tian Suyan, the person in charge of investigating Fujimoto Ryoma's alleged involvement with the Demon Cult. I heard the details of this case from Prime Minister Yamada three days ago, right when Kurosaki Yurie's kidnapping incident ended."

"M-May I ask why China suddenly got inv—"

"Stop. Could I receive questions once I am done talking?"

"Ah, yes... My apologies."

A heavy silence blanketed the courtroom, which had been noisy until a few moments ago.

As expected of the daughter of Tian Wuchen, Suyan had impressive charisma.

She glanced at Kang-Woo and slightly licked her lips.

"Prime Minister Yamada said that he felt guilty about Fujimoto Ryoma being considered a hero after supposedly saving the Miko of the Heavens. Hence, he asked for assistance from the Heavenly Sword Clan to expose his true colors."

"THAT'S BULLSHIT!"

Ryoma's angry voice sounded through the room.

Suyan ignored him.

"We, the Heavenly Sword Clan, know very well about the dangers of the Demon Cult. So after hearing that the real identity of someone praised as a World Ranker was, in reality, a member of the Demon Cult, we couldn't remain still. That is why, after Prime Minister Yamada asked for our assistance, we secretly searched Fujimoto's residence."

"W-Wait. What in the world are you talking about?"

"As a result..."

Suyan's expression darkened. With just a simple change of expression, the atmosphere of the courtroom became tense. The technique she used to play with people's feelings was being used in another way to influence the people in the courtroom.

She said, "Fujimoto Ryoma is indeed a member of the Demon Cult. We found many items containing demonic energy in his residence."

"YOU CRAZY BITCH!!!"

Ryoma screamed like a madman. He felt his mind go blank. The situation was developing in a totally unexpected way.

'Wh-What is going on?'

The situation was completely different from when Prime Minister Yamada had said that a demonic crystal had been found in Ryoma's residence.

Suyan was a member of the Heavenly Sword Clan—China's biggest, no, East Asia's biggest and strongest guild! Their level of credibility was leagues above the words of Prime Minister Yamada.

'Why did the Heavenly Sword Clan get involved?'

No matter how much Ryoma thought about it, he couldn't understand what was happening. Why had a massive guild like the Heavenly Sword Clan gotten involved in such a case?

'At this rate...'

His face turned pale, and he started breathing heavily. At this rate, he would be framed as a Demon Cultist without being able to do anything about it. He was aware of this, but he still couldn't do anything.

There was no way for him to do anything. Witch hunts were established exactly for the reason that the accused were unable to prove that they weren't a witch.

It was the same with the Demon Cult.

People had no way to prove that they weren't part of the Demon Cult.

Don't have demonic energy? High-ranking Demon Cultists such as high priests were able to completely conceal their demonic energy deep within their hearts. The only way to tell if someone was a Demon Cultist was to take out their heart.

"Damn!" Ryoma couldn't help but curse. The whole situation was unfair. He wasn't a Demon Cultist, nor had he ever tried to become one.

He had kidnapped the Miko of the Heavens and leaked false information to hinder the rescue operation?

It was all a lie, but he couldn't find a way to prove his innocence.

As if giving the final blow, Suyan said, "I swear in the name of the Heavenly Sword Clan that everything I have said about this case is the truth. Fujimoto Ryoma, that evil man's true identity is that of a Demon Cultist."

The people focused on Ryoma.

"N-No," he said in a weak voice. Even if he denied it, he knew he wouldn't be able to turn the situation back in his favor. "I'm not!"

Suyan turned her head to Judge Wakabe.

"We, the Heavenly Sword Clan, will thoroughly investigate this matter. May I ask that you order the arrest of Fujimoto Ryoma first, Your Honor?"

Judge Wakabe hurriedly nodded.

"U-Understood. I approve the arrest and search of Fujimoto Ryoma!"

Bam, bam!

The judge's gavel made a loud noise.

It was a weird conclusion that had nothing to do with what the trial was really about, but the situation was so convoluted that no one said anything about it.

"Sons of bitches..."

Ryoma bit his lips while frowning. His anger-filled eyes naturally turned to Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo was staring at him like he was having the time of his life. If someone gave him popcorn, he would devour it.

'It's almost over.'

Kang-Woo leaned back in his chair.

Ryoma's fourth mistake was that he thought Kang-Woo was an insignificant Player without connections.

'I ended up owing a debt, though.'

He recalled Suyan licking her lips while glancing at him.

He had not asked her to play in the play he had orchestrated; she truly believed that Ryoma was a Demon Cultist.

Kang-Woo had called her through Prime Minister Yamada and then hid the demonic crystal inside Ryoma's residence.

She'd accepted Prime Minister Yamada's request and defended Kang-Woo while putting the name of the Heavenly Sword Clan on the line because Kang-Woo was being framed for something he hadn't done.

'Well, she was of great help, anyway.'

Her words were the nail in the coffin, and Ryoma no longer had anywhere to run.

"Everyone! I am innocent! The Heavenly Sword Clan is using shady tactics to devour Japan! Please don't be fooled! They are Chinese! I'm sure you all know what kind of people they are!"

'How pathetic of you.'

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue while looking at Ryoma, who was turning to national sentiment now that he was cornered.

The Heavenly Sword Clan had the evidence and the credibility to back up their claims; therefore, Ryoma wouldn't be able to turn the situation around just because they were Chinese.

Creak.

At that moment, the door opened, and a woman entered the courtroom.

"Huh...?"

"P-Princess Kurosaki Yurie?!"

Kurosaki Yurie.

She suddenly appeared in the courtroom despite being bedridden in a hospital for the past three days.

Kang-Woo frowned a bit.

'Why is she here all of a sudden?'

This wasn't part of his plan. He felt uneasy at the appearance of an unexpected character.

Yurie bowed.

"First off, I would like to apologize to the people for all the worries I've caused." She had an elegant appearance and a clear voice, and she moved gracefully and exuded dignity. She was the definition of purity. "As the root of this incident, I have come here to say something."

She looked at Kang-Woo. He couldn't understand why, but he suddenly felt chills.

She said, "The person who had rescued me was the Korean Player over there."

"B-But according to the witness, you were unconscious at the time..."

"I was conscious, albeit very slightly. I don't remember the details very well, but... there is one thing that I am sure about. Mr. Fujimoto was not the one who had rescued me."

"..."

There was a heavy silence.

If the Heavenly Sword Clan had been building the coffin, then she had placed Ryoma inside and hammered the final nail.

"A-Aaahhh..."

Fujimoto flopped down into his seat as if he'd lost all hope.

Kang-Woo looked at Yurie in disbelief.

'Weird.'

Yurie had been completely unconscious at the time of the incident.

She had a bit of consciousness?

If that were the case, there was no way he wouldn't have noticed.

His senses weren't dull enough to not realize if someone he'd picked up was conscious or not.

'Why is she lying?'

He couldn't understand her actions.

Kang-Woo hadn't used a mind-control Authority on her. No, to be more precise, he couldn't. Yurie was a Ranker-level player who had achieved her Ninth Awakening, so mind-control Authorities had no effect on her. Hence, she was doing this of her own volition.

'I heard she was fully devoted to her citizens.'

However he was like, Ryoma was a hero to the Japanese people. She would most definitely know how desperate the Japanese people were for a hero in these times.

If she really cared about her citizens, the most reasonable thing would've been to defend Ryoma or keep silent at the very least, even if she had truly been conscious at the time.

'To clarify the truth?'

There was no way. This wasn't a shonen manga.

The truth wasn't important. What was important were points that seemed true, and those points were always made with self-interest through the calculations of profits and losses.

Yurie had nothing to gain by doing this.

'What's with her?'

His thoughts did not last very long. A strong wind shook the courtroom with a loud sound, creating a violent storm inside.

"ARRGGHH!"

Ryoma destroyed the walls of the courtroom while screaming out in desperation. He flew into the skies and disappeared instantly.

"H-H-Hey!"

"After him!"

The warriors that Suyan had brought followed her.

Kang-Woo stood up.

Crack.

He easily destroyed the mana restraints on his wrists.

"K-Kang-Woo!"

"Wh-What the hell is going on?!"

Han Seol-Ah and Cha Yeon-Joo ran toward him.

"I'll tell you later. There's still something I have to do."

"... Something you have to do?"

Kang-Woo nodded and walked in the direction Ryoma had escaped.

"Go back to the hotel first. I'll be back by dinner, so let's go get something to eat once I'm back. Oh, I wanna try sushi, so please look into some nice restaurants."

"What the hell are you talking about in this situa—"

Before Yeon-Joo could finish her sentence, Kang-Woo used the Authority of the Sky and flew away. He quickly disappeared from sight.

"..."

The remaining people continued staring at the wall through which Ryoma had escaped.

* * *

Tap.

Kang-Woo landed on a building's rooftop. The building was a high-rise building that was hard to see in Japan. After he stood still and waited on the rooftop, something approached him quickly from the sky.

Boom!

A thick smoke rose, and Ryoma appeared from within. His expression was distorted with anger, frustration, and resentment.

"You motherfucker, how dare you..."

"This is the fifth."

"... What?"

Kang-Woo laughed lightly.

"This is your fifth mistake."

Chapter 112 - Five Mistakes (4)

"..."

"If you wanted to kill the dog after the hunt was over, you should've known how to differentiate a dog from a lion," Oh Kang-Woo said mockingly.

Fujimoto Ryoma's face turned red in anger. He breathed heavily and raised his hands. In the blink of an eye, a spear wind was created and shot toward Kang-Woo.

Wham!

Kang-Woo used the Authority of Invulnerability, and the black barrier that was created around him destroyed the wind spear.

Ryoma said, "I'll kill you. I'll tear you apart. I'll give you a death more painful than any!"

"Haaa... I'm honestly a bit disappointed."

"Disappointed... you say?"

"To be honest, I had my hopes up a bit. I thought the character you were playing wasn't all that bad."

"What are you talking about?" Ryoma asked in a low voice.

Kang-Woo leisurely began warming up.

"The kind of villain that acts kind and courteous but actually controls everything from behind the scenes. I really like people like you, but"—he clicked his tongue—"I'm disappointed. Your mask fell off too easily. Baek Kang-Hyun did a far better job than you."

"..."

"The idea was okay. The intentions weren't bad, either, but you're far too lacking in brains. Blockheads aren't cut out for this sort of thing."

"You motherf—"

"You always curse when you have nothing to say. That's also disappointing. I'm getting sick and tired of your plain reactions. Honestly... Sigh. Yeah, I'd rather have that Akiyama guy over you."

Kang-Woo was really truly disappointed. It was as if he were asking Ryoma if this was the best he could do.

"You're disappointed...?"

Ryoma trembled, and he felt his mouth become dry. It was as if his insides were about to turn upside down. He felt miserable and wretched.

His plan to use Kang-Woo had been trampled to the point that its former semblance couldn't even be seen, to the point that the person whom he had tried to use was asking him why he couldn't do better.

Uncontrollable anger spread through his body.

"Ugh, agh."

Fujimoto couldn't even speak properly. All that came out of his mouth were fragments of words. Everything in front of him turned blank.

The Eye of Susanoo, his left blue eye, flashed.

Rumble!

A storm raged. Heavy and powerful energy spread out from his eye.

A piece of Mythic-grade equipment revealed its true power.

"Raaaahhhh!"

Ryoma roared. Dozens of wind spears targeting Kang-Woo were created.

Kang-Woo smiled. "Yeah, this is better. Don't try to act as if everything is okay and end up looking more pathetic."

Kang-Woo waved his hand, and a black curtain made of demonic energy appeared and deflected the wind spears.

"I have to go eat dinner, so let's wrap this up quickly. Oh, right. Do you know any good sushi restaurants? I came all the way to Japan, so I wanted to eat some at least once."

"How much more will you make a mockery of me?!"

"No, I'm asking in all seriousness because I really wanna know. You're extremely popular here in Japan, so you must know tons of good restaurants, right? The price doesn't matter. I'm rich."

"I'll kill you! I'll kill you so painfully that you'll regret being alive!"

"Dude. Man, this guy's super pissed. Alright, fine. I'm sorry. Your plan was scarily perfect. I only barely managed to win. I admit it. You were more perfect than any other opponent I've faced until now. Right then, about that sushi pla—"

"Raaahhh!"

Ryoma charged toward Kang-Woo. Highly concentrated wind gathered around his fist. He twisted his body and threw a punch. A cannonball of condensed wind flew toward Kang-Woo.

It was an attack that not even Kang-Woo could take lightly.

'If I hadn't achieved the Ultimate Demonic Body, that is.'

Kang-Woo leaned back as if he were falling, and concentrated the Authority of Titanic Might on his right leg. He kicked the wind cannonball up as if he were doing a bicycle kick, deflecting the wind cannonball with a boom.

He then twisted his body and regained his balance before he fell onto the ground. Kang-Woo raised his hand, concentrated the Authority of Waves into it, and shot the wave forward. The attack tore through the air.

Boom!

An explosive sound akin to a sonic boom rang out as their powers clashed with each other.

"Kurgh...!"

Ryoma was pushed back, and he flew into the air. With the Trait that allowed him to control wind and his overpowered item, Eye of Susanoo, he was effectively able to attack in midair where his opponents could not reach him.

But for Kang-Woo, this didn't make any difference.

"I never thought I would have a midair battle on Earth."

He used the Authority of the Sky and took flight. He was used to fighting in the air since there were many demons who could fly.

"Urgh!"

Ryoma started to become desperate.

He threw many wind spears toward Kang-Woo, but not even one could hit him.

"Fuck!"

Ryoma's eyes widened. He was so shocked that his mouth fell open. He had not missed because he was firing randomly but because Kang-Woo's movements were too erratic. It was as if inertia didn't exist for Kang-Woo—he easily changed directions at right angles.

"You don't have a chance against me in midair," Kang-Woo said as he closed in on him. Kang-Woo could ignore inertia in midair, so there was no way Ryoma would be able to fight against him.

Kang-Woo kicked the air and flew toward Ryoma. He clasped his fingers together and swung his fists down with the Authority of Titanic Might.

"Kurgh!"

Ryoma's left eye shone.

At that moment...

A giant hand appeared in the air and smacked Kang-Woo.

Bash!

Kang-Woo was flung backward, and the impact shook his body. He used the Authority of the Sky again to stop himself from falling and then looked up.

A wind giant had appeared behind Ryoma.

"Well, well."

He looked at it with great interest. The upper half of the wind giant easily exceeded twenty meters, and powerful mana emanated from its body.

'No, it isn't just made of mana...'

It felt a bit different from the mana he'd felt up to then.

An energy slightly different from mana was mixed within it.

'Is this the power of the gods of mythology?'

It was a type of power he'd never felt before. Unlike the destructive demonic energy or the embracing mana, it felt mysterious and overwhelming.

"Interesting."

A thick smile appeared on Kang-Woo's face.

If one was forced to give it a name, something like Divine Power seemed appropriate.

Kang-Woo boiled in excitement and clenched his fists. The demonic energy in his blood rose intensely.

A different world from Hell.

A power that came from a world where the gods of mythology resided.

He wanted to see how far he could go against a power like that.

"Huff! Huff!"

Ryoma panted heavily and felt a searing pain in his left eye.

"Kurgh...!"

Deific Manifestation—a technique that allowed him to summon Susanoo to the modern world through the Eye of Susanoo.

Summoning a God through Deific Manifestation had power befitting its name, but maintaining it consumed an astronomical amount of mana.

'I have to end this quickly...!'

He wanted to kill Kang-Woo slowly, but he no longer had the time to do it. He could only maintain Susanoo for a minute with the mana he had left. If he couldn't kill Kang-Woo in that time frame, his life force would be drained instead and he would die.

"KILL THAT BASTARD!!" he ordered Susanoo.

Susanoo, who was summoned to the modern world, looked at his opponent.

[You...]

His voice trembled. Susanoo realized that Kang-Woo wasn't a simple human being but an extra-dimensional being who had escaped from the wheel of mortality.

Susanoo focused his gaze on Kang-Woo's chest.

[A-Ahhh...]

A thrill...

A wave-like thrill made Susanoo tremble. He'd seen the deep energy within Kang-Woo's chest.

[I see. You are the one that Lord —— has spoken about.]

Susanoo raised his hand, and a giant spear made of wind appeared in it. He kept talking with a voice full of thrill.

[I will put to the test the power possessed by the master of the Demonic Sea right here and now.]

A strong fighting spirit leaked from Susanoo.

Ryoma, who was desperately maintaining Susanoo's form, vomited blood.

"What is he talking about?" Kang-Woo frowned. It seemed the giant made of wind was saying something, but he was speaking in a language he couldn't understand. Kang-Woo thought about using the Authority of Language, but he shook his head.

'This isn't time to be chitchatting.'

Judging by how Susanoo was exuding fighting spirit, it seemed peace wasn't an option—and that was also what Kang-Woo wanted.

"I never thought the day would come when I'd have to fight a god."

His expectations surged.

Of course, Ryoma probably hadn't summoned the god's true form. He was only able to summon the upper half, and most of it was made of mana. But even so, the thought of fighting a god made Kang-Woo's heart beat faster.

Susanoo raised his spear. As if he didn't want a long-winded battle either, he used an enormous amount of mana to pull all the wind in his surroundings to his spear.

"A spear, huh?"

Kang-Woo smiled. A spear was one of his main weapons. He extended his right hand, and the Authority of Hellfire and the Authority of Dark Spears merged.

'Bident.'

A two-pronged spear was created.

It wasn't enough.

'Gáe Bulg.'

The Authority of Spallation merged into it. After the three Authorities merged, a dark red spear showed itself.

'Still not enough.'

He was thirsty for more. He felt his mouth go dry.

The demonic energy within his blood began running wild. Kang-Woo added a fourth Authority to Gáe Bulg.

'Authority of Storms.'

It was an idea he'd come up with after looking at Susanoo.

A powerful spinning wind appeared on Gáe Bulg's spearhead.

A spear that was made by merging four different Authorities... It was a combination that he hadn't tried before.

'What should I call it?'

He gripped the spear tighter and began to think of the names of various mythological weapons. He then thought of a good one.

"Gungnir."

Rumble!!

Riiing.

[You have learned the skill 'Gungnir.']

[Techniques registered as skills can be used more easily and precisely.]

The spear, which now had a name, started to tremble. Although it looked different from the real Gungnir in mythology, that didn't matter. After all, naming it was just a way to make the image clearer while creating it.

[Come!] Susanoo shouted.

Although he couldn't understand him, Kang-Woo felt he knew what Susanoo wanted.

"Sure."

Kang-Woo had no intention of dodging. He gripped Gungnir tighter and stepped forward aggressively.

Susanoo's spear and Gungnir clashed.

As two terrifying powers clashed, a sound loud enough to make one's eardrums explode rang out.

And...

Boom!!!

Gungnir pierced the heart of the giant that appeared in mythology.

Chapter 113 - The Circumstances of Kurosaki Yurie

"Kurgh! Urgh!"

Fujimoto Ryoma extended his hand before him. He was trembling. Starting from the fingertips of his extended hand, his entire body was drying up. This was due to Mana Exhaustion; he had used up all of his mana while summoning and maintaining Susanoo.

He fell toward the ground, but Oh Kang-Woo caught him.

"Hmm..." Kang-Woo murmured as he set Ryoma down on the roof.

Ryoma was approaching death without Kang-Woo even having done anything.

"Cough! A-Aaah! H-Help... Help me..." Ryoma begged desperately with tears flowing down his shriveled cheeks.

He was paying the price of Susanoo dying. Ryoma convulsed like he was having a seizure. His skin began to sag and dry out. He was dying miserably like a vampire without blood. This wasn't something that normal Mana Exhaustion would cause.

"The price of summoning a god must be high," Kang-Woo remarked.

He looked down at Ryoma apathetically.

Then he thought about Susanoo, a deity that existed in another dimension besides Earth or Hell.

'He was strong.'

The battle itself had been short, and Susanoo hadn't shown a level of power that Kang-Woo wasn't capable of dealing with at the moment. However, considering that Susanoo had not been at his full power, he definitely possessed power befitting a god. Kang-Woo wasn't sure if he would've been able to win if Susanoo had been able to go all out.

"Will guys like that appear on Earth as well if the Gaia System keeps getting weaker?"

Kang-Woo frowned.

The natural disasters that ensued would be unimaginable if gods appeared on Earth with their powers fully intact.

"Maybe... the Demon Cult isn't the only problem."

There was a chance that beings more troublesome than the Demon Cult would appear on Earth. The best solution was to repair the Gaia System that he'd damaged... but he still hadn't found any clues on how to do that.

'The only thing I can do now is...'

Kang-Woo opened his status window.

"Demon God, huh?"

He read the phrase, 'The second step to becoming a Demon God'.

He wasn't sure how many steps he had to complete, but it appeared that he would become a being similar to a god once he fulfilled all of them.

'The system hasn't lied until now.'

Kang-Woo wasn't sure how it worked nor how it was possible, but he was sure he could trust the player system.

'It's a bit cringy that I need to become a god to stop gods though.'

Anyway, he couldn't deny that he needed to gain a corresponding amount of power to that of the gods if he wanted to face the unknown beings.

"Tsk," Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

Nevertheless, the problem was that just like how he didn't know how to restore the Gaia System, he wasn't sure how to attain a Demonic Soul, the second step in becoming a Demonic God.

'As for what I can do right now...'

Kang-Woo walked toward Ryoma's dehydrated corpse. Although Ryoma had become all dried up like a mummy, his left eye was in a perfect state.

Kang-Woo grabbed the left eye. Eye of Susanoo was the name of this Mythic-grade equipment.

"But how did this guy equip this? Did he take out his eye and put it in himself?"

If that was the case, he had to acknowledge Ryoma's willpower. It wasn't easy for a person to do something like take out their eye.

Fshhh.

The eye turned to dust and scattered away as if it were answering his question, leaving behind a blue sphere the size of a ping-pong ball.

"Oh, I should've known."

It seemed like Ryoma hadn't taken out his eye.

Kang-Woo took the blue sphere and put it near his eye.

Riiing.

[This equipment has already been imprinted.]

"I guess I can't use it."

He had expected that to happen.

Kang-Woo put the Eye of Susanoo away.

In any case, what he needed was the Mythic-grade material within the Eye of Susanoo. He could use that to create new equipment using his 'Demonic Art of Creation' Trait.

'But I'll save that for later.'

Kang-Woo turned around. He jumped lightly and flew into the sky.

'Let's go back for now.'

He hadn't seen Echidna and Han Seol-Ah for the past three days because he'd been preparing to screw over Ryoma. It was quite lonely to be apart from the two people whom he had gotten used to seeing daily. It reminded him of the lonely days he'd spent in Hell.

* * *

The group was staying in a three-star business hotel in Tokyo. Considering the wealth that Cha Yeon-Joo, Jang Hyun-Jae, and Baek Hwa-Yeon possessed, it was far too lackluster for them. They'd probably picked a cheap hotel thinking that it would be wrong for them to stay in a luxury hotel while Kang-Woo was in jail.

'I'm not that self-centered though.'

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and walked into the hotel. His group members, who had been waiting in the lobby, went running toward him.

"Hey! Where have you been?!" Yeon-Joo asked.

"I went to bring things to a close," Kang-Woo answered.

"A close...?"

"Yup. I had to give as much as I got."

Kang-Woo sat down in the lobby and gave a simple explanation, but he wasn't completely honest with them. Just like he'd done with Tian Suyan thought, he explained things on the pretext that Fujimoto Ryoma had been a Demon Cultist.

"So, you knew that Fujimoto Ryoma was a Demon Cultist from the very beginning?"

"No, I only realized it when I went underground. I just took some revenge after seeing how he and Prime Minister Yamada were trying to frame me as a Demon Cultist."

"...Why didn't you tell us?"

"Because there wasn't enough time."

"But still!"

Bam!

Yeon-Joo slammed the table angrily.

Kang-Woo smiled and said, "Calm down."

"How can I calm down?! You could've been framed as a Demon Cultist!"

"But everything worked out in the end, didn't it?"

"That's not the point..."

Seol-Ah placed her hand on Yeon-Joo's shoulder and urged, "Please calm down, Yeon-Joo. Just like Kang-Woo said, everything worked out in the end."

"But still..."

"Kang-Woo must have followed them willingly because he had a plan."

Yeon-Joo relaxed after hearing Seol-Ah's calm explanation. Then she aggressively put her feet on the table with one leg over the other.

"Kang-Woo," Seol-Ah said. She sat next to him and placed her hand on his thigh while making a sad expression. "I'm sorry that... I wasn't able to be of help to you again."

"I didn't need help," Kang-Woo replied.

"Still..." Seol-Ah smiled bitterly. "Will I... be of help to you someday?"

"..."

Judging by Seol-Ah's faint voice, she seemed heartbroken. She might break if Kang-Woo handled her the wrong way.

Kang-Woo looked into Seol-Ah's eyes.

"Wasn't of help, huh...?"

He couldn't deny that.

Seol-Ah certainly wasn't as helpful as Kim Si-Hun, Yeon-Joo, Suyan, or Echidna in terms of power, but...

"Is being helpful absolutely necessary?" Kang-Woo asked.

"...What?"

"I, at the very least, don't weigh the pros and cons of living with you."

Kang-Woo was, by nature, a calculative person. He wouldn't do something he couldn't benefit from. However, he was different when it came to Seol-Ah. He didn't think of her as a cook who prepared delicious meals for him, nor did he think of her as a tool to satisfy his desires. If he had thought of her like that, he wouldn't have asked her to move in with him when he got the apartment near Seoul Station.

Seol-Ah was like family to him. He didn't spend time with her to gain something; the time that he spent with her was already precious enough.

'I can't say that to her though.'

It was the first time in his life that he had someone whom he wanted to call 'family'. That was something he hadn't felt for the last ten millennia. No, he'd never experienced something like that even before falling to Hell. It was an awkward and odd situation for him, so he had trouble expressing himself.

'People would explode from frustration if they knew this.'

Nevertheless, there was nothing Kang-Woo could do about it. He wasn't a god. He wasn't perfect, and he wasn't good at everything.

"M-Me neither!" Seol-Ah shouted in quite a loud voice.

She blushed and lowered her head, hiding the rising corners of her lips.

"Can you leave the romance drama scene for when you two are alone?" Yeon-Joo voiced in a sharp voice.

She shook her legs in annoyance as if she didn't like what she was seeing.

"Hey, you said you wanted to go get sushi earlier, right?" Yeon-Joo said.

"I did," Kang-Woo answered.

"Follow me. I know somewhere good."

Yeon-Joo stood up and looked at everyone just staring at her blankly.

"What are you all waiting for?" she asked.

"Hahaha. It's my first time seeing you act like this, Yeon-Joo," Hwa-Yeon replied.

"Shut up!" Yeon-Joo shouted at her before turning around and walking away.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and stood up.

"Oh, right. What happened to Kurosaki Yurie after that?" he asked.

"She went home after talking with the reporters for a while, but I'm glad she was there. If Kurosaki didn't have memories about what happened at that time, this incident wouldn't have been resolved so easily."

"Oh... Yeah, you're right."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. He still didn't understand why Kurosaki Yurie had helped him.

'Does she have a personal grudge against Fujimoto?'

There was no way for Kang-Woo to know that though.

He followed Yeon-Joo out of the hotel.

* * *

Inside a traditional Japanese house, a woman was sitting in a simple room where there weren't many things except for some fundamental pieces of furniture. She was Kurosaki Yurie, the emperor's granddaughter and a woman with the title of Miko of the Heavens.

Yurie was looking at the mirror placed on top of her floor table.

"Haaa," she sighed deeply.

At that moment, her reflection opened her mouth.

- Are you satisfied now?

"No, of course not."

Yurie was talking to her reflection in the mirror. If someone saw her right now, they'd think she'd gone crazy.

"Aahh, to think I can only gaze at him from afar even while having met him at last. It breaks my heart."

Yurie stroked her cheek while lamenting her situation.

- What are you going to do from now on?

"Fufu. Of course, I'll make preparations so that I can be of use to that person."

She giggled while looking in the mirror.

At that moment, incredibly sexual energy poured out from the usually pure-looking Yurie. It was leagues above that of Tian Suyan. Any man who got a taste of that energy would instantly become Yurie's slave.

Yurie's black hair defied gravity and rose, twisting and moving as if they were tentacles.

- If you're so loyal to him, why aren't you going to him? the Yurie inside the mirror asked.

"My, my."

Yurie frowned as if asking what her reflection was talking about.

She placed her hands on her cheeks and shook her head, not even wanting to imagine doing what her reflection suggested.

"How could I go to that person with such an ugly face?"

- ...

The Yurie inside the mirror remained silent.

Chapter 114 - A Break? (1)

"Munch, munch."

Oh Kang-Woo's hands moved fast. The sushi in front of him disappeared quickly.

Cha Yeon-Joo looked at him in disbelief and asked, "Is it that good?"

"Yup," Kang-Woo replied with a nod.

Yeon-Joo smiled and commented, "People would think it's your first time eating sushi if they saw you."

"It is my first time."

"Huh? Oh..."

'Oh, yeah, he was from an orphanage,' Yeon-Joo thought

She'd forgotten about it because he was so different from his profile that had been created from the results of her investigation. However, the one thing that was the same in the results was that Kang-Woo had grown up in an orphanage, so he'd probably never eaten expensive food.

"But you've earned tons of money lately, haven't you? You could've had sushi any time if you wanted to," Yeon-Joo pointed out.

"The food I eat at home is so delicious that I haven't thought much about it."

"Zat so?"

Yeon-Joo turned her head away coldly. She narrowed her eyes and glared at Han Seol-Ah.

It seemed like Seol-Ah was thinking about the conversation that she'd had with Kang-Woo earlier in the hotel lobby. She was smiling while making a dumbfounded face.

Yeon-Joo didn't like that.

"Kang-Woo, can I eat a bit more?" Echidna requested.

"It's good, right?"

Echidna snorted happily and replied with a nod, "Hm! Yeah!"

Kang-Woo raised his hand and ordered a bit more for Echidna. Of course, he ordered more for himself as well.

* * *

After dinner was over, Kang-Woo and the rest of the group returned to the hotel.

Kang-Woo got a room key from the hotel lobby and asked Yeon-Joo, "We're going to return to Korea tomorrow, right?"

"No. We have a lot to discuss with the Japanese government regarding this matter, so I don't think we'll be able to go back for a while."

"Hmm..."

"I'll be your representative, so you just stay put in the hotel or do some sightseeing. This is your first time in Japan. right?" Yeon-Joo said bluntly.

Although she had said that nonchalantly, it was not an easy task to be the representative for someone who had been the main focus of the incident. Regardless of whether Fujimoto Ryoma truly was a Demon Cultist, the Japanese people would resent Kang-Woo for causing them to lose their national hero. As Kang-Woo's representative, it would be difficult for Yeon-Joo to avoid that resentment.

'I guess this is her form of consideration,' Kang-Woo thought, smiling bitterly.

He felt good about that though.

"Thanks."

"Hmph. If you're grateful, then treat me better from now on," Yeon-Joo replied, turning away with a smile on her face.

Kang-Woo checked his room number. He was in Room 803. Seol-Ah and Echidna were staying in the room next door, 802.

"I-I'll... see you tomorrow," Seol-Ah said while blushing.

It seemed like she was still shocked by the conversation they had before.

After Seol-Ah entered the room, Echidna pulled on Kang-Woo's sleeves.

"Kang-Woo, Seol-Ah is acting weird."

"Well... I'm sure she has a lot on her mind."

However, Kang-Woo felt like his face was getting hot too. He felt embarrassed. If he could turn back in time, then he would tear his past self's mouth open so that he couldn't speak.

'I think I'll be kicking the blanket a few times later.'

Kang-Woo grabbed his head as if he had a headache.

"Kang-Woo, Seol-Ah and I are going around to play tomorrow. Do you wanna come with us?" Echidna asked.

"Where?"

"I'm not sure. Seol-Ah said there was a place she has always wanted to go in Japan."

"Hmm. Well, let's go together if I have time."

Lots of things had happened consecutively, so he had forgotten that it was his first time visiting another country. He wanted to do some sightseeing too.

"Hm! Hm! Okay. I'm gonna go take care of Seol-Ah so that she doesn't get sick."

Echidna rushed into her room so excitedly that Kang-Woo didn't have time to tell her Seol-Ah wasn't acting like that because she was sick.

Kang-Woo sighed and opened the door of his hotel room.

"My, my. You're late."

"...Why are you here?" Kang-Woo asked.

Tian Suyan was sitting on the bed. She laughed softly while covering her mouth.

"You flew away before I could say anything, so I've been waiting for you," Suyan explained.

"..."

Kang-Woo didn't ask her how she knew he would be staying in this room or how she'd entered without a key.

He just sat in a chair and said, "Anyway, thanks for helping me."

"Fufu, it was nothing. I was the one who told you to call me whenever you needed help."

Suyan got up from the bed and sat on the armrest of Kang-Woo's chair. Her sweet scent tickled Kang-Woo's nose.

"I would like to ask you something," Suyan said.

"Go ahead."

"Was Fujimoto Ryoma actually a Demon Cultist?"

"..."

There was a brief silence.

Kang-Woo answered with a slight smile, "Yeah. Who could've possibly thought that a World Ranker was a Demon Cultist?"

"Hmm. Well, I don't really care whichever," Suyan replied, placing her hand on Kang-Woo's shoulder. "I'm not like my father. I don't adhere to justice, nor am I tied down by morals."

"Then I guess we won't get along. I'm an extremely moral man."

"Fufu, that's funny."

Suyan shook her head as if stating there was no way that could be true.

'That hurts a bit,' Kang-Woo thought.

He hadn't expected Suyan to shake her head so firmly.

She tilted her head toward Kang-Woo, raised her hand, and softly caressed his chin.

"I know what kind of person you are. You're cold, strong, and ruthless. I'm certain you'll soon become an overlord," Suyan remarked, licking her lips with gleaming eyes. "It's my first time... I've seen countless men throughout my life, but it's my first time seeing someone like you. My father probably can't compare to you either. I can tell. This entire world will be under your feet soon."

Her breathing got heavy, and her cheeks flushed in arousal.

"I'm a greedy woman. I want a man that's stronger than anyone else. Someone who has absolute power. I want to be by your side when the whole world is bowing down to you," Suyan stated, gazing intensely at Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo smirked and said, "You know what kind of person I am, you say?"

It was a ridiculous remark. Suyan knew nothing about him. There was no way that she could.

Kang-Woo wouldn't become an overlord soon; he was already an overlord. He was an absolute predator who ruled over all from up high.

Flick!

"Kyaa!"

He lightly flicked Suyan's forehead.

Suyan stood up while grabbing her forehead.

Kang-Woo chided her, "Don't talk as if you know me, you spoiled child. I'm not interested in becoming something like an overlord. Who'd want to do something that old-fashioned in this day and age?"

"O-Old-fashioned?"

"Yeah, old-fashioned. Trivial and childish."

"Then... what is it you want to do?"

Kang-Woo leaned back on the chair and replied, "I want to eat good food, play on my phone at home, and go on trips from time to time."

"...Is that all?"

"Yeah."

"But you'd be wasting your great power only doing things like th—"

"Hahahahaha!"

Kang-Woo cut her off. He laughed out loud as if he couldn't hold it in anymore.

"Only, you say?" he said, with his gaze on her.

Suyan flinched after looking into Kang-Woo's eyes, which contained deep emotions that she couldn't fathom. Those eyes carried a weight and sense of time that extended far beyond what she had ever experienced.

Suyan felt so small before Kang-Woo. She had never felt pressure like this, not even from Tian Wuchen.

"Only isn't as simple as it seems," Kang-Woo said with a bitter smile.

Suyan remained silent.

She was trembling. She felt as if she was looking up at a mountain with no peak.

'I knew it...'

Suyan liked what she heard. The fact that Kang-Woo wasn't interested in becoming something like an overlord made her even more excited, and finding out that he was in a place she'd never be able to reach made her heart beat faster.

She licked her lips, moistening her dry lips with her tongue. Suyan was having a hard time suppressing her urges.

'Not yet,' she told herself, calming her storming emotions.

It wasn't the right time yet. She had to approach him a bit more gradually in a more relaxed manner.

"Oh, right. You said that I was of help to you, didn't you?" Suyan asked.

"I did," Kang-Woo replied with a nod.

If Suyan hadn't been there, things would've gotten troublesome. He would have still been able to resolve the situation, but it would have taken him a lot of time.

Suyan smiled after hearing him answer that without hesitation.

"You weren't planning on expressing your gratitude only with words, were you?"

"Hmm... What do you want?"

Kang-Woo was indebted to her. He had no intention of denying that. As long as it was something he could do, the proper thing to do was listen to her request.

"Fufu. Why don't we go somewhere tomorrow, just the two of us?"

"Hmm," Kang-Woo murmured. He recalled Echidna's words and suggested, "How about the day after tomorrow?"

"I only have time tomorrow since I have a lot to discuss with the Japanese government due to this incident."

"Ngh."

Kang-Woo nodded while sighing after thinking about it for a while.

'I guess I'll go around with Seol-Ah and Echidna the day after tomorrow,' he thought.

Thanks to Yeon-Joo, Kang-Woo had more than enough spare time. It wouldn't matter if his plan with Seol-Ah and Echidna were delayed by a day.

'I'll have to tell them I can't join them because something urgent came up.'

He felt a bit uncomfortable because he would have to lie like a cheating husband, but there was nothing he could do about it. There was no way the two girls would accept him going somewhere alone with Suyan.

"Okay, where do you want to go?" Kang-Woo asked.

Suyan had helped him by using the Heavenly Sword Clan's name, so a date was a cheap price to pay.

Upon hearing Kang-Woo's answer, Suyan's expression brightened. She tried to hide her excitement as much as she could, but her squirming fingers and her restless body gave it away.

Kang-Woo thought that reaction made her look cute.

"F-Fufu. Is this your first time visiting Japan, Kang-Woo?"

"Yeah, it's my first time."

"Then... There's a good date spot for couples."

"Well... Leaving the couples part aside, where?"

"A place where a mouse, who takes copyright laws very seriously, lives. From a Chinese person's point of view, that place is kind of like our natural enemy."

"...?"

Kang-Woo couldn't understand what Suyan was saying.

Suyan smiled and said, "Disneyland."

"Oh."

Kang-Woo laughed.

'An amusement park, huh?'

He never imagined Suyan would ask him to go to an amusement park.

'As expected of a spoiled child.'

He laughed some more, amused that Suyan wanted to go to an amusement park. Moreover, it was one that was meant for children.

'Now that I think about it, they used to show us films from that company from time to time.'

Kang-Woo still remembered something that had happened so many years ago, but it wasn't because he had an impeccable memory. Rather, remembering the past had been a part of his struggle to survive. Hell was a dark and terrible place... so, he used to think about Earth all the time when he was there. If he hadn't thought of Earth and how much he wanted to return to it, he would've gone insane.

"Sure," Kang-Woo agreed while nodding.

After all, he'd never been to an amusement park before. It was always great to experience something new.

"But, hmm, an amusement park... Your interests are cuter than I initially thought," Kang-Woo remarked.

"Ngh... D-Do you have a problem with that?"

Suyan blushed, and Kang-Woo laughed softly.

Chapter 115 - A Break? (2)

"WHOOAA!!!" a young man exclaimed excitedly.

He was in an amusement park that looked like a reproduction of a fairytale world. There was a big castle and cute characters... The amusement park was so fascinating that it made the man wonder if he had crossed through a Gate portal into another world.

The young man was more excited than the kids in the amusement park, so much so that they even looked at him as if he were pathetic. This man was Oh Kang-Woo, the demon king and the lord of the Nine Hells.

"..."

Tian Suyan remained silent.

Kang-Woo had made fun of her, saying she had a cuter taste than he had initially thought. Yet, Kang-Woo was now looking around the amusement park like a person who had just moved from the countryside to the big city.

"Wow, I've seen this one before!" Kang-Woo said.

He patted the head of a performer dressed in a costume of a mouse character that he had seen at his orphanage. The part-timer in the costume waved their short hands at Kang-Woo, greeting him like a true professional.

"Mmm..." Suyan murmured.

She watched silently as Kang-Woo took a photo with the character performer.

Frankly, it was a bit of a turn-off for her.

'I never thought Kang-Woo would have a side like this...'

It was as if this was Kang-Woo's first time in an amusement park. No, it was like it was his first time visiting a place designed purely for entertainment. He looked so different from his usual self that Suyan couldn't help but smile awkwardly.

"Fufu. You made so much fun of me yesterday, yet you're the one who's enjoying it more," Suyan commented.

"I didn't know it was such a fun place," Kang-Woo replied, smiling in satisfaction.

Suyan trembled a bit upon seeing Kang-Woo make such an innocent child-like smile. Her heart was beating faster.

'This side of Kang-Woo isn't bad either.'

She would've frowned if it were any other man, but she found it rather charming that someone who had treated her like a spoiled child was acting like a child too. Suyan was blinded by love.

"All right. Let's go on some rides as well," she said.

Suyan casually walked toward Kang-Woo and embraced his arm.

Despite feeling something soft on his arm, he merely said, "Sure."

Kang-Woo didn't care. No, to be more precise, he wasn't in the mood to care about that sensation at the moment.

'Amazing,' he remarked inwardly.

He never knew there was a place like Disneyland on Earth. Of course, he'd seen it a couple of times in photos, but seeing it in real life felt completely different. It was completely different from Hell, which consisted mostly of desolate deserts.

'I should come again tomorrow with Echidna and Seol-Ah.'

Kang-Woo had told the two of them this morning that he wouldn't be able to join them due to urgent business. In response, Echidna nodded in sadness.

He felt guilty, but their plan was being delayed by just one day. He just needed to let Echidna have two days' worth of fun tomorrow, so he thought that it was fine.

'I'm here for research purposes today.'

Kang-Woo resumed walking. His steps were light. Although he was thinking that he was there to do research, he looked as ready as he could be to enjoy the amusement park.

"Oh, this is what they call a rollercoaster?" Kang-Woo asked, pointing at a ride that looked like a train.

He'd seen pictures of people riding it and screaming.

"Let's ride it," he said.

"Hmm... You probably won't enjoy it that much."

"Why not?"

Kang-Woo tilted his head.

Suyan didn't answer and just smiled.

After all, he would find out why as soon as he got on the rollercoaster.

'It's slow,' Kang-Woo thought disappointedly while on the ride.

The reason for this wasn't that Disneyland had been created with children in mind. It was because superhumans like Kang-Woo could easily move five times faster than the maximum speed of the rollercoaster. He could even fly using the Authority of the Sky. It was stimulating enough for a normal person, but superhumans like Kang-Woo didn't find it enjoyable.

"You should've told me," Kang-Woo said.

"I didn't think words would be enough to convince you. Also, this is all part of the experience."

"Well, that's true."

Kang-Woo nodded and went around the amusement park.

As they got things to eat and took breaks on benches, it had become evening without him realizing it.

'It was better than I thought it would be.'

Kang-Woo thought of the day he'd spent with Suyan.

He had been a bit worried because of her personality, but he'd been able to spend a day with her without any issues. If he were honest, he had enjoyed hanging out with her.

"Fufu. It's already evening," Yeon-Joo commented.

"It sure is."

"I'm glad I was able to see a different side of you today, Kang-Woo."

Suyan giggled while covering her mouth. She recalled him walking around the amusement park with bright eyes.

Kang-Woo groaned, belatedly getting embarrassed.

"Let's go back," he said.

"Okay," Suyan replied and hugged his arm.

The two people then left the amusement park. Kang-Woo got in the car that Suyan had prepared and returned to the hotel.

He had a fun and satisfying time.

Click.

Upon reaching the hotel, Kang-Woo got out of the car.

"Right then, I'll see you back in Korea," he said.

"Fufu, I had fun today," Suyan responded with a bright smile.

She lightly grabbed his arm as if she didn't want their date to end this way.

Just then, something entered her field of vision.

'Oh?'

Suyan smiled widely as she thought of a fun prank idea.

She stood on her tiptoes and raised her head. Her lips moved close to Kang-Woo's, but there was no way that Kang-Woo wouldn't be able to react to a sudden action like this. He grabbed Suyan's chin lightly.

Kang-Woo frowned and then asked, "What are you doing?"

"Hmph. How unromantic of you. Shouldn't couples have at least a goodbye kiss?"

"I don't recall ever becoming a couple with you."

"Fufu. Well, I guess that's enough for today."

Suyan was smiling although she'd failed to kiss him.

"Then I'll see you back in Korea, Kang-Woo~"

She quickly got back into the car and left the hotel.

"...What the hell?" Kang-Woo uttered.

There was something unnatural about the way Suyan left right after the failed kiss like she was fleeing.

'Was she embarrassed?' Kang-Woo wondered.

He turned around while tilting his head in confusion.

However, the moment he turned around, his expression froze. The answer to his question hadn't been far away. He now understood why Suyan had escaped so fast.

"Kang-Woo?"

"Kang... Woo?"

'Fuck,' Kang-Woo cursed inwardly.

Echidna and Seol-Ah were staring at him in shock while standing in front of the hotel entrance.

"..."

There was a heavy silence. Kang-Woo couldn't bring himself to open his mouth.

The one who broke the silence was Echidna. She trotted toward Kang-Woo and grabbed his sleeve.

"Kang-Woo, was this why you were busy?"

"..."

Kang-Woo was overwhelmed with guilt. He felt like a man who'd been caught red-handed cheating on his partner.

He lowered his head silently.

'Dammit.'

Then he remembered Suyan's smiling face, and he clenched his hand into a fist.

"Kang-Woo," Seol-Ah called out as she approached him. She grabbed his hand with a smile on her face. "You have an explanation for this, right?"

"...Of course."

For the first time, Seol-Ah's smile scared Kang-Woo.

Seol-Ah dragged him into the hotel.

* * *

Five days passed by. Cha Yeon-Joo, who had been called all over the place as Kang-Woo's representative, returned to the hotel after everything was finally settled.

"Let's... go back home now," said Yeon-Joo, who looked haggard.

Kang-Woo nodded with a forced smile and replied, "Good job."

"I'm... going to make sure you pay me back for this."

From the sound of her lifeless voice, it seemed that Yeon-Joo had had quite a hard time.

The group returned to Korea by using the Hwarang Corps' private plane. They could've ridden Echidna, but since they weren't in a hurry, they didn't need her to make the effort.

After arriving in Korea, they took a taxi from the airport and quickly arrived at Seoul Station.

"It feels like it's been so long."

"It sure does."

Kang-Woo had only been in Japan for a week, but he had missed Seoul's cityscape.

"Haaa... I'm going back home to rest, so take care of the rest yourselves," Yeon-Joo announced with a tired voice.

She staggered to her apartment.

"Let's go back home as well, Kang-Woo," Seol-Ah said as she pressed the elevator button.

"You go on in," Kang-Woo replied.

"What about you?"

"I have something to do first. I'll be back in a bit."

Kang-Woo looked up at the sky. The sun was up. It was only 2 a.m.—too early to stay at home doing nothing for the rest of the day.

'Unlike Cha Yeon-Joo, I'm not that tired.'

He had been able to take a long break thanks to her. Now that he was back in Korea, his break was over. It was about time he went back into action.

"Does this 'something' perhaps have to do with..." Seol-Ah questioned, narrowing her eyes intensely like a detective interrogating an ex-convict.

Kang-Woo laughed and shook his head.

"It's nothing like that, so don't worry," he replied.

"Hmm. You'll be back by dinner, right?"

"Probably. It won't take long."

"Okay, then I'll prepare dinner and wait for you," she said with a smile.

Her smile was so beautiful that it made Kang-Woo's heart skip a beat.

"Kang-Woo, are you going off to cheat again?" Echidna asked.

"I already said no."

"...Can I go with you?"

Echidna grabbed Kang-Woo's sleeve. She had been considerably shocked by the last incident.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and nodded.

"You can come with me."

Echidna wouldn't bother him anyway.

Her expression brightened the moment she heard Kang-Woo's words.

She ran toward Seol-Ah and while clenching her small hands, she said, "Hm! I'll watch over Kang-Woo."

"Hohoho, please do," Seol-Ah responded.

"Leave it to me."

Kang-Woo sighed.

"Kang-Woo, where are we going?" Echidna asked.

"Someplace quiet."

Kang-Woo jumped lightly and used the Authority of the Sky.

Echidna spread her wings and said, "Should I give you a ride?"

"No, we're not going very far anyway."

Anywhere was fine as long as it was a place without people.

Echidna tilted her head and asked, "Why are we going to someplace quiet?"

"To craft equipment," Kang-Woo answered.

He grabbed the Eye of Susanoo that was in his pocket.

Chapter 116 - Demonic Art of Creation (1)

"Around here should be good."

Tap.

Oh Kang-Woo, who was flying using the Authority of Sky, landed at the foot of a deserted mountain. He sat on top of a flat rock and took out the Eye of Susanoo.

It was a bluish translucent sphere that looked like an egg.

'A Mythic-grade equipment.'

Although it looked like nothing more than a blue crystal ball from the outside, it was one of the few pieces of Mythic-grade equipment that existed in the world.

'Its power is limited, but if it's powerful enough to summon a god, it's worthy of being Mythic-grade.'

He was reminded of Susanoo, the giant whose body was made of wind.

Fujimoto Ryoma had become a World Ranker thanks to the equipment, but his base stats had been much lower than those of the average World Ranker. Yet, he had still been able to summon a being capable of threatening Kang-Woo, who had achieved the Ultimate Demonic Body.

There was no denying that this piece of Mythic-grade equipment was good. This meant it had most likely been made with material that matched its grade.

'The more Authorities I infuse into it, the stronger the equipment becomes.'

Kang-Woo read through the effects of his Sixth Awakening Trait, Demonic Art of Creation. He thought of the Gungnir, which he'd used in the fight against Susanoo.

'I can barely use four Authorities simultaneously at the moment.'

The amount of demonic energy required to use more than one Authority rose by a power of two[1]. Using four Authorities simultaneously required 16 times the demonic energy of using just one.

'But...'

Kang-Woo's gaze sharpened.

He wasn't in combat right now. There was no need for him to maintain the Authorities while reading his opponent's movements and counterattacking. He was able to focus purely on using his Authorities.

'I think I could push it up to five.'

Kang-Woo was a bit nervous. The dangers of demonic energy exhaustion were far worse than that of mana exhaustion. Demonic energy was what maintained a demon's body, so he could dry up and die like Ryoma if the demonic energy was completely depleted.

'I should practice first.'

Kang-Woo only had one piece of Mythic-grade material. It didn't say that the material would get destroyed if he failed, but he couldn't be too careful.

"Kang-Woo, is there anything I can help with?"

"Make sure no one approaches me. I want to focus."

"Hm! Okay."

Echidna nodded and flew up to the sky, planning on erecting a barrier around the area.

"Let's begin," Kang-Woo said and extended his hand.

He would first start with the ones that he was used to.

Riiing.

[Activating 'Demonic Art of Creation.']

A complex magic circle appeared on the ground. The streams of demonic energy around him intertwined and created letters of a language that he had never seen before. Moving as though they were alive, the wriggling letters clustered in the air and formed a black sphere that was about the size of a basketball.

[The transmutation matrix has been formed.]

[If you would like to craft equipment of the Mythic grade or higher, please insert a suitable material!]

Kang-Woo placed his hands on top of the black sphere and roused the demonic energy within his body.

[No materials have been added. The maximum grade of the equipment crafted will be set to Legendary. The equipment will be destroyed if the Authorities used cannot be handled by the Legendary grade.]

"Gáe Bulg," Kang-Woo mumbled.

He closed his eyes, made a mental image, and merged three Authorities.

Now that he had the Ultimate Demonic Body, using three Authorities simultaneously was a piece of cake. Powerful demonic energy flowed out from him.

The transmutation matrix wriggled, and thick black smoke came out of it. The black sphere made of unknown letters cracked.

The crack grew increasingly bigger like that of a hatching egg. Then finally...

Crack.

The transmutation matrix cracked open, revealing a dark red spear.

Riiing.

[You have successfully crafted Gáe Bulg (Unique).]

"Wow."

Kang-Woo grabbed the dark red spear. Within it, he could feel the Authorities that he had just used.

'But like I thought, it's not as great as the one created with the actual Authorities.'

It was only natural that there would be a difference between the Gáe Bulg that he'd created using demonic energy and one that he could use without demonic energy.

"But it isn't bad."

Kang-Woo grabbed the crafted Gáe Bulg and swung it around, unleashing blazing flames.

"Haap!" he shouted and thrust the spear at a nearby rock.

Boom!

The rock was destroyed, and black flames spewed in all directions.

"It has about 20% of its original power."

However, considering that he could use it with other Authorities, using it wouldn't be a bad choice. This version only had about 20% of the original's power. However, if it was used with the Authority of Titanic Might and the Authority of Haste, it could display more than 100% of the original version's power.

'It's too bad that it's Unique-grade, though.'

Kang-Woo looked at the crafted Gáe Bulg's information window. The spear was only of the Unique grade, so it didn't raise his stat by an absolute value.

"Hmm..."

The equipment grade conditions for Demonic Art of Creation were harsher than he'd initially thought. Using three different Authorities simultaneously wasn't easy. It wasn't just an issue of the amount of demonic energy. Merging different Authorities was, in reality, near impossible.

Drawing a circle with one hand and a triangle with the other at the same time was already hard, but using different Authorities simultaneously was like drawing with one hand and writing with the other. It was only possible with Kang-Woo's transcendent level of demonic energy control.

'But still, the reward is really good.'

The reward was so good that it was worth pushing himself for.

So, Kang-Woo decided to try to use five Authorities simultaneously.

"I'll have to practice a bit more first."

He had no intentions of trying to craft a piece of Mythic-grade equipment after only one attempt at creation.

Kang-Woo put the crafted Gáe Bulg down.

Echidna walked toward him and asked, "Kang-Woo, what kind of equipment are you thinking of making?"

"I'm not sure..."

Kang-Woo thought deeply about it.

'It would be best if it's a weapon.'

Defensive equipment like the Black Pearl Coat were good and all, but the first thing that most people thought of when thinking about equipment was a weapon.

'The problem is...'

Kang-Woo didn't use just one type of weapon. He used different weapons based on the situation. The weapon he was most used to was a spear, but he mostly just threw it.

'Should I take this opportunity to choose a main weapon?'

Kang-Woo shook his head.

The reason why he had no main weapon wasn't that he hadn't been able to find a good one. Instead, it was because it would limit his diverse battle tactics.

Kang-Woo was not like Kim Si-Hun or Tian Wuchen, who had mastered the use of one weapon. He liked to adapt his attacks based on the situations using the battle sense he had polished through countless battles.

"What's on your mind, Kang-Woo?"

"I'm wondering about what weapon I should make."

Echidna tilted her head.

"Can't you make a weapon that can change form?" she asked while transforming her hand into a dragon's.

Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

"Hmm."

It was a simple and lucid solution. If the weapon could change forms, then he wouldn't need to worry about what weapon to create.

Kang-Woo patted Echidna's head and praised, "Good idea."

"Hm! Hm!" Echidna snorted.

After gently stroking Echidna's hair for a while, Kang-Woo used the Demonic Art of Creation again. The crafted Gáe Bulg, which he'd placed on the ground, turned into dust and scattered away.

'A weapon that changes form...'

He would need much practice to have a clear image of it.

'I'm going to use the Eye of Susanoo only after I'm sure of what I'm doing.'

He didn't need to hurry. Practicing hard would never betray him.

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and reformed the transmutation matrix.

* * *

Three days later, Kang-Woo once again went to the mountain, this time with both Han Seol-Ah and Echidna.

"Here I go," Kang-Woo said.

"Okay!" Seol-Ah replied with a nod.

Before they arrived, she had heard about what Kang-Woo was planning to do, so she knew what she had to do to help him.

"Grace of Light!" she cast a buff.

Light flew out of her and entered Kang-Woo, boosting his unique stat.

"Kraken's Rage," Kang-Woo said.

The Black Pearl Coat shone, and an explosive amount of demonic energy surged from him. His Demonic Energy stat reached 116.

Kang-Woo closed his eyes.

'Demonic Art of Creation.'

A magic circle appeared on the ground, giving form to the transmutation matrix that was the size of a basketball. Kang-Woo grabbed the Eye of Susanoo without hesitation.

After practicing endlessly for the past three days, he was sure that he could make the weapon he wanted. He had prepared everything he could.

Kang-Woo pushed his hand into the transmutation matrix.

Riiing.

[Extracting the material from the Mythic-grade equipment. The condition has been fulfilled. You can craft a piece of Mythic-grade equipment or higher once. However, equipment of the Legendary grade or lower may be crafted if the crafting is attempted with an insufficient number of Authorities.]

"Fuuu."

Kang-Woo deeply exhaled and emptied his mind.

"Transformation, Spallation, Slashing, Hellfire, Storms."

He activated five Authorities.

Demonic energy flowed out of him like a falling tide. He was using 32 times more demonic energy than when he used only one Authority. His Demonic Energy stat had reached 116, but he was still having trouble maintaining five Authorities simultaneously.

"Kurgh..." Kang-Woo grunted.

His head felt like it was splitting open. Not only was he consuming a lot of demonic energy, but it was also exhausting his mental capacity to control those five Authorities.

'Focus.'

Kang-Woo ignored the pain. Just like he had practiced, he closed his eyes and focused on the image of the weapon that he wanted to make. It was a weapon that could freely change forms.

'Just hold on for a bit longer.'

He didn't need a lot of time to craft the weapon. He could feel the transmutation matrix wriggling around his hand.

Ten more seconds, and he'd be able to create the weapon he desired.

[Five Authorities have been confirmed. All of the conditions have been fulfilled. Crafting a piece of Mythic-grade equipment.]

There weren't many pieces of Mythic-grade equipment in the world... yet Kang-Woo was about to create a Mythic-grade weapon with his own hands.

"..."

There was a heavy silence as the seconds passed by.

Nine seconds...

He suddenly considered something.

Eight seconds...

If the weapons of the seven princes were categorized into equipment grades, Kang-Woo wondered what grade they would be given.

Seven seconds...

The princes were strong. They had been so strong that it made sense how none of them had been able to kill one another.

Six seconds...

Their innate strength certainly contributed to their overall power, but their Hell Armaments had a larger effect on it.

Five seconds...

The Hell Armaments had been said to have been created through the gathering of demonic energy for a very long time.

Four seconds...

No matter how much he thought about it, there was no way those weapons would only be of the Mythic grade.

Three seconds...

Kang-Woo had never used a Hell Armament before. The Hell Armaments were imbued with the princes' souls, so they did not accept Kang-Woo as their master.

Two seconds...

He had been able to use the Hell Armaments to create a Gate to return to Earth. However, that had been because he had only used the power contained within them instead of using them as weapons.

One second...

'It's not enough.'

Kang-Woo suddenly became greedy.

He opened his eyes with an unquenchable thirst and an uncontrollable desire storming within him.

It wasn't enough. This wasn't enough to satisfy him.

He felt like his head was about to explode, and his demonic energy was depleting at a terrifying rate, but...

'It's not enough.'

He still wasn't satisfied.

Kang-Woo used a sixth Authority. He didn't even spend time thinking about which one to use.

Riiiiing.

[Authority of Predation has been added. Updating the conditions.]

[Crafting Transcendent-grade equipment.]

Chapter 117 - Demonic Art of Creation (2)

Rumble!!!

The mountain shook like an earthquake had struck, and a huge force rocked their surroundings.

"K-Kang-Woo?!"

"Kang-Woo!"

The two girls screamed.

However, their cries didn't reach Oh Kang-Woo's ears. A tornado of demonic energy had enveloped his body.

'Ah.'

His mind was foggy, and he felt like he was floating on top of a vast sea.

Using six Authorities simultaneously had been hard for him even in Hell. At this point, it was no longer a matter of how much demonic energy he needed to use. His brain's processing capacity to control demonic energy had reached its limit.

'Did I overdo it?'

That was a pointless question. Using five Authorities was already pushing him to the limit; he was completely overreaching by using six. Moreover, he had used his strongest Authority, the Authority of Predation, as the sixth Authority. It wasn't something a rational person could do.

'This is quite dangerous.'

It was as if he'd put more air into a balloon that was about to burst. He wouldn't have tried something so crazy even back when he was at his prime in Hell. It wouldn't have been weird if he exploded, dying right then and there.

'But...'

Kang-Woo wasn't sure why, but he didn't regret his decision. No, he wasn't even worried. There had been a voice in his head saying that he should stop right there, but an unfounded confidence was telling him that it was okay and that he should keep going.

Slash.

His hand, which he'd placed in the transmutation matrix, was suddenly cut. Black blood poured out from his hand and into the transmutation matrix. The energy within the transmutation matrix mixed with his.

Kang-Woo's senses became increasingly hazy, and he was losing consciousness. He couldn't control the six Authorities anymore. Kang-Woo gave up on the transmutation.

However, something surprising happened at that moment.

'So, this was the reason.'

His body was now controlling the six Authorities in his place.

Kang-Woo finally understood why the Demonic Art of Creation had unlocked fully only after achieving the Ultimate Demonic Body.

Authority control—being able to control the Authorities through instinct rather than his brain—was the true effect of the Ultimate Demonic Body. No, it wouldn't be an overstatement to say that this was the sole reason why he'd achieved the Ultimate Demonic Body.

The energy from the transmutation matrix reached Kang-Woo's heart through his blood. He felt something link to him.

Riiing.

[You have successfully crafted the Key of the Demonic Sea (Transcendent).]

A system window popped up.

At that moment, the transmutation matrix began to compress into a single point.

[You have perfected the Demonic Art of Creation!]

[Demonic Energy has risen by 2.]

[You can no longer use the Trait 'Demonic Art of Creation.']

"Whoa."

Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

The Demonic Energy stat had finally surpassed 110 without buffs.

'It seems like the sole purpose of the Demonic Art of Creation was to create this.'

He grabbed the black bead that had been created by compressing the transmutation matrix. It looked similar to Fujimoto Ryoma's Eye of Susanoo and was about the size of a ping-pong ball.

Kang-Woo checked the information on the Key of the Demonic Sea.

[Equipment Information]

[Equipment Name: Key of the Demonic Sea

Grade: Transcendent (Imprinted)

Type: Growth *The equipment will grow stronger whenever certain conditions are fulfilled.

Basic Effect: Unique Stat +3, Indomitability, Transformation, ??? *It has not been unlocked.

Special Effect: ???, ??? *It has not been unlocked.]

[Effect Description]

[Indomitability: The equipment cannot be destroyed by any physical, magical, or spiritual attacks.

Transformation: The equipment can transform into any weapon registered as a skill. It will exert 34% of the capacity of weapons made using Authorities.]

"Hmm..."

Kang-Woo groaned as he checked the equipment information. It was full of question marks this time as well.

'A growth-type, huh?'

The Key of the Demonic Sea had some good points. Its grade was Transcendent, so it was likely that it could grow stronger indefinitely. Nevertheless, its effects weren't as impressive as he wanted.

"No, wait."

Kang-Woo read through the information window again. He focused on the basic effects, especially the description of Transformation.

'A weapon registered as a skill...'

All of the weapons that he had created at least once with Authorities had been registered as skills. Bident, Gáe Bulg, and even the most recent one, Gungnir, had been registered as skills.

'34% of the capacity of weapons made using Authorities.'

The version of Gáe Bulg that he had created using the Demonic Art of Creation had only been able to exert 20% of the Gáe Bulg that he made using Authorities. This meant that the Key of the Demonic Sea was almost 1.5 times as strong as the crafted version of Gáe Bulg.

'This is pretty amazing.'

Just the effect of Transformation alone would be good enough to be qualified as a piece of Transcendent-grade equipment. No, it was too good. In other words, he could create tons of weapons beforehand to register them as skills and then recreate them using the Key of the Demonic Sea without any Authorities whenever he needed to.

'Gáe Bulg.'

He used a skill to test the new equipment out.

The black bead that was as big as a ping-pong ball transformed into a dark red spear, Gáe Bulg. As Kang-Woo grabbed it, he could tell that it was stronger than the one that he had made with the Demonic Art of Creation as practice.

'This is seriously overpowered.'

"Wow."

In that case, Kang-Woo would be better off using skills that had better baseline specs since 34% of Gungnir was better than 34% of Gáe Bulg.

'Gungnir.'

He used a skill that had been created by merging four Authorities.

Riiing.

[It is currently impossible for the equipment to transform into a weapon created with four Authorities.]

"Ah, that's too bad."

He'd thought that the effect was unbelievably good, but as expected, he couldn't transform it into a weapon that had been created with four Authorities yet. Nevertheless, there was no reason for him to be disappointed.

'I haven't unlocked its full potential yet.'

The Key of the Demonic Sea was a growth-type equipment. He wasn't sure what the conditions for its growth were, but he knew that it could get stronger, and that's what mattered. It was already overpowered as it was, so he couldn't even imagine how much more overpowered it could get.

'That's Transcendent-grade equipment for you.'

Feeling satisfied, Kang-Woo smiled.

Then he checked the Key of the Demonic Sea's specs again and realized a few things.

'It can transform into any weapon... not just the ones registered as skills.'

Of course, changing its form into a weapon that he hadn't registered as a skill meant that it wouldn't contain the power of any Authorities in particular.

'And it can only transform into weapon-type skills.'

Kang-Woo had two types of skills. Gáe Bulg, Gram, Bident, and the like were weapon-type skills that created weapons for him to use, while one-off skills like Skybreaker and Field of Blades were magic-type skills.

The Key of the Demonic Sea could only transform into weapon-type skills.

'But that's good enough.'

Kang-Woo transformed the Key of the Demonic Sea into a ring and put it on the middle finger of his right hand.

'My Demonic Energy stat is now 113.'

If he added Kraken's Rage and Han Seol-Ah's buff to that, it could reach 120.

"Nice."

Becoming stronger meant that the number of things he could do would increase, so he felt good about that. He could even face a demon from the Ninth Hell at this moment.

"K-Kang-Woo, are you okay?" Seol-Ah asked carefully.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Phew. I was worried that something had gone wrong."

"It was nothing. Let's go back home."

"Did you manage to craft that weapon?"

Kang-Woo raised his right hand. The ring on his middle finger turned into a dagger.

"As you can see."

"Ah..."

Seol-Ah flinched after seeing the ring on his finger.

She coughed and said, "What a relief."

"Since I've made the weapon, let's go back."

"Okay. Oh, right. Yeon-Joo called while you were making the weapon."

"Cha Yeon-Joo?"

"Yes. She said she had some stuff to give you, so she asked you to come to the guild."

"Hmm... Okay."

Kang-Woo nodded and lightly embraced Seol-Ah, who blushed. Then he used the Authority of the Sky and flew into the sky with Seol-Ah in his arms.

"Let's stop by the Red Rose Guild first."

* * *

Click.

"Ah, you're here."

Cha Yeon-Joo raised her head as Kang-Woo opened the door to her office.

Kang-Woo sat in a chair and asked, "What do you have to give me?"

"Kurosaki Yurie sent a few items."

"Kurosaki Yurie?"

"Yeah. She said that the gifts are a token of apology for the hero who rescued her and almost got framed as a criminal because of that."

"Why is she sorry when she wasn't the one who did it?"

Kang-Woo let out a laugh in disbelief. The one who'd tried to frame him as a Demon Cultist had been Fujimoto Ryoma, not her.

"I don't know either. Why don't you see what it is first?"

"Hmm... Sure, I guess."

Kang-Woo opened the box that Yeon-Joo handed to him.

The first things he saw were a card and a letter written to him.

[I truly apologize for this disgraceful incident. The card contains thirty billion won so that you can freely use it in Korea, and under it is my contact information. Please feel free to call me if you need help with anything, and I will help you as best I can.]

"What the..." Kang-Woo uttered.

Thirty billion won? That wasn't an amount of money that Kurosaki Yurie could freely use even though she was the emperor's granddaughter.

On top of that, she said she would help him with anything he needed...? That wasn't something a woman, who was currently the de facto empress in place of the sickly emperor, should be saying.

'Why is she going that far?'

It was true that Kang-Woo had saved her life... But people didn't usually do that much to pay back their savior. It was as if a person who had been saved from drawing handed their property deed to their savior to show their gratitude.

The current outcome was better than a negative outcome, but still, he couldn't understand it.

"It seems like she likes you quite a bit. Hmph, you must be happy to be receiving so much love from a princess," Yeon-Joo told him off, not liking what she saw.

Kang-Woo gulped and looked at what else was inside the box.

"What's this?"

There was something frozen in the box. He opened it to see what it was.

"...An octopus?" he uttered.

There was an octopus that was the size of a person's head in the box. Due to some kind of magical contraption, the octopus's tentacles were still squirming around despite being frozen.

"Why did she send an octopus?" Kang-Woo wondered, looking at the box confusedly.

Chapter 118 - Sword of Justice (1)

Time passed.

To optimize the Key of the Demonic Sea as much as possible, Oh Kang-Woo registered more weapon-type skills made with the combination of three different Authorities or below.

Since his Demonic Energy stat was at 113 and he had attained the Ultimate Demonic Body, merging three different Authorities had become a piece of cake. The number of skills increased consistently.

After registering new skills, Kang-Woo focused on trying to break the level cap.

He didn't have any idea what the condition for the Demonic Soul was, and he couldn't raise his Demonic Energy stat anymore from devouring monsters, so, for the time, he decided that he would focus on breaking the level cap.

"Fuuu. It's not breaking at all."

Kang-Woo let out a sigh and sat on the couch in the living room. He'd been trying all kinds of things for a week to break it. What Cha Yeon-Joo had jokingly said about the system having cursed him didn't sound like a joke anymore.

The reality was that most people couldn't go beyond the Sixth Awakening, the Limit of Effort. However, that only applied to average Players. Most talented Players were able to break the level cap without much difficulty.

In terms of pure talent, the only one who could be compared to him was Kim Si-Hun, so it was weird that he wasn't able to break the cap.

'I thought it would break after I achieved the Ultimate Demonic Body.'

At that point, Kang-Woo thought that it would be better to give up on leveling and try to find other ways to get stronger. After all, unlike other Players, he didn't need to rely purely on leveling to grow.

"Tsk..."

He frowned while clicking his tongue.

If leveling up only increased his stats, he would've given up a long time ago. The problem was that leveling up gave him new Traits like the Demonic Art of Creation. Not only that, it weakened the seal of the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

Weakening the seal of the Ten Thousand Demon Core was fundamental if he wanted to recover his old strength.

'I have no idea.'

If his level cap was not breaking after everything he had done, then it meant that there was a different reason, but he had no way of knowing what that was.

"Should I just hunt down the Demon Cult?"

He didn't know if it was coincidence or fate, but he had lucked out considerably every time he had confronted the Demon Cult. However, trying to find them by himself wasn't very effective.

Yeon-Joo had told him that traces of the Demon Cult had been found in Russia.

'Even if they found traces, how am I supposed to find them in that massive country?'

It would be different if they operated openly, like in Korea or Japan, but finding them while they were hiding was hard.

"Nghhh."

There was literally nothing he could do. Kang-Woo lay down on the sofa.

At that moment, Echidna trotted out of her room and sat on his stomach.

"Kang-Woo, I wanna watch TV."

"... Get down from there first."

"No. I like it here."

Echidna smiled mischievously and snorted. She'd changed a lot compared to her wary, abandoned-cat-like self when Kang-Woo had first met her.

Kang-Woo got up and put her on his knees. He turned on the TV with the remote.

"What do you want to watch?"

"Love Live!"

It was the name of a popular Japanese anime.

"What's so fun about that...?"

"The characters are cute!"

Kang-Woo smirked and changed the channel. While changing channels, he passed through the news channel. The words Breaking News entered his vision. He stopped at the channel.

[Breaking News. World Ranker Alec Osborne has visited Korea. Alec Osborne, famous for the title Sword of Justice, has said that he has come to Korea to meet Player Kim Si-Hun, who had amassed worldwide fame after resolving the Isu Station incident. Various community boards have been showing passionate responses pertaining to the meeting of two heroes, and...]

"Sword of Justice...?"

What kind of ridiculous title was that?

Kang-Woo laughed and searched up the name Alec Osborne on his smartphone.

Commenter (Hearthstone Trashy Game): Holy fk LOLOLOLOL!!

↳ whoa I guess Sword Dragon really is famous if Alec himself is coming to see him

Commenter (Tresha): But Sword Dragon isn't world-class yet right?

↳ he's honestly nowhere near Alec.

↳ OO: nah bruh Sword Dragon is world-class

↳ Sagyesu: he's probably thinking about his long-term growth possibility. It hasn't been long since Sword Dragon awakened as a Player.

Commenter (JerryM): Let's go Korea!!

↳ My cancer caused by Baek Kang-Hyun was cured.

Commenter (Lemme out of bronze): Sword Dragon is nothing tsk tsk u guys are so ignorant.

↳ frfr

↳ Hoot Hoot: okay next bronze Player plz

↳ BestTaeSoo: Hahaha! This fellow knows their stuff! Si-Hun is great and all but my hyung-nim is far better!

↳ Butterfly Valley: fr how do ppl not know there's someone greater

↳ Sosori: attention whores everywhere;;;

↳ Gabinji: What's wrong with these guys?

'What an uproar.'

As soon as Kang-Woo searched the name, numerous threads from community boards appeared, but what he wanted to know wasn't community reactions.

Alec Osborne (Sword of Justice) - Wiki

There was a site with lots of information about Alec.

Kang-Woo entered it and read some basic information about him.

'He's handsome.'

On the site was a photo of a handsome man with his long blond hair tied back.

There was lots of summarized information about him beneath the photo.

[Alec Osborne: British, 29 years old, World Ranker.]

[Reason why he is called "Sword of Justice": Alec Osborne is famous for wielding his sword not only for the British people but also for the weak all around the world. Two months ago, after the Isu Station incident, he made it public that he had also been fighting against the Demon Cult for quite some time. One month ago, he had attacked a Demon Cult branch in Europe and stopped their attack ahead of time.]

"Hmm..."

He could only find positive things about the guy on the internet. He was a good person and was hard-working and kind to everyone.

'He's kinda like Si-Hun.'

They were very similar purely in terms of personality.

'He said he came to Korea to meet Si-Hun.'

Kang-Woo put Echidna down and stood up. He couldn't stay still in such a situation. He had to know why Alec had come to meet Si-Hun.

'Our Si-Hun sure is popular.'

First, it was Tian Wuchen, and now, Alec Osborne.

As expected from the protagonist, he was receiving the attention of important people worldwide.

"Kang-Woo, where are you going?"

"To meet up with Si-Hun."

He didn't have training with Wuchen today. Kang-Woo had heard that Wuchen was going to be hunting with Han Seol-Ah, Kang Tae-Soo, and Choi Eun-Bi.

"I wanna go too."

"Weren't you gonna watch TV?"

"I like being with you more."

Echidna grabbed his sleeves. Kang-Woo smirked and nodded.

"Let's go."

'I believe they're hunting at the A-rank Gate in Incheon.'

He'd asked Seol-Ah this morning where they were going to hunt.

Kang-Woo drove toward Incheon.

* * *

"Kang-Woo hyung-nim!! Over here!!"

Inside a cafe near the A-rank Gate, Kang-Woo saw a group of four people waiting for him. He pulled a chair over and sat down.

He said, "You could've just stayed inside the Gate. I would've just come to you."

"Hahaha! We can't do that when you're coming, hyung-nim. Leaving that aside, we were planning to stop hunting for the day," Tae-Soo said.

"Because of Alec Osborne?"

"Oh, you must've seen the news too."

"I came because of that. But more importantly, how did you guys hear the news? You were inside the gate."

"The Players who entered the gate after us recognized Si-Hun and told us."

Kang-Woo nodded and turned his head toward Si-Hun.

'What's up with him?'

Si-Hun was shaking as if he were holding in his pee. He was also smiling weirdly.

"Is something wrong?" Kang-Woo asked.

"N-Not at all!!" Si-Hun shook his head. "I-It's just... I can't believe it. To think that the Sword of Justice would come all the way to Korea to see me..."

"... Are you that happy?"

"O-of course! It's the Sword of Justice! The sword for the weak! How cool is that?!"

'I'm not sure what's cool about it.'

Kang-Woo would be embarrassed to death if he had a title like that.

'Well, it's Si-Hun, after all.'

He couldn't deny that Alec seemed the type of person Si-Hun would like.

"Hmm..."

Kang-Woo remained silent. Something was bothering him, but he couldn't tell what it was either.

"Are you leveling up okay?"

"Ah, yes! I've finally passed Level 60 recently!"

"... What?"

Kang-Woo couldn't hide his surprise after hearing that Si-Hun had surpassed him in terms of level.

"What about the level cap?"

"Oh... You see..."

Si-Hun scratched his head while smiling awkwardly.

Seol-Ah answered for him, "Si-Hun said there was no cap in particular for him."

"..."

Considering that he was having such a hard time with his own level cap, Kang-Woo found the situation unfair.

'Damn cheater.'

Even if Si-Hun had the protagonist buff, it didn't make sense that he didn't have a level cap.

"What about the other people...?"

"Tae-Soo and I have only just reached the level cap. Eun-Bi's level is still around the mid-fifties."

"Urgh... This is all because Si-Hun oppa swept them all away before I could cast magic! Not just that, he's the only one without a level cap! This is unfair!"

Eun-Bi shouted in frustration.

'I also think it's unfair.'

Kang-Woo grabbed his head.

'You damn talented fucker.'

Kang-Woo had no right to say that, but even so, having no level cap was too much. He sighed.

Si-Hun said, "B-But what should I do? Should I go to the airport to meet him in pers—"

"No, you won't need to do that."

Kang-Woo picked up the cup of coffee and took a sip.

Si-Hun looked at him with a confused expression.

"I'm sure he'll come to see you himself."

Alec was a World Ranker, so there was no way he didn't have a basic information network.

Click.

"Huh?"

As soon as Kang-Woo finished, the door of the cafe swung open.

A handsome young man with a low ponytail entered the coffee shop.

"A-Alec Osborne."

Si-Hun's voice trembled.

Alec smiled after finding Si-Hun. He took out a round device from his pocket and put it on his neck.

"Nice to meet you. Are you Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun?" he asked in Korean.

Si-Hun nodded with a dumbfounded expression.

"Y-Yes! I'm Kim Si-Hun."

"Haha, it's good to see you. My name is Alec Osborne."

"Oh... Yes."

"It's an honor to meet with the hero of Korea."

Alec extended his hand. Si-Hun grabbed it and replied in a surprised voice, "A-An honor?! No, the honor is all mine!"

Si-Hun's eyes were full of excitement, and he was blushing. He looked like a little girl who had met an idol.

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent. He couldn't understand why, but he felt a bit annoyed.

'You've never made that kind of expression to me.'

He didn't like it.

Chapter 119 - Sword of Justice (2)

"What brings you here?" Oh Kang-Woo asked in a sharp voice. He narrowed his eyes and looked over Alec Osborne from top to bottom.

'He seems worthy of his fame.'

Even though he was just standing still, he was exuding dignity and his mana was perfectly controlled. Of course, Kang-Woo didn't know if that was everything or if Alec was hiding a greater strength.

However, there was something Kang-Woo was sure about...

'He's stronger than Fujimoto.'

Alec was on another level compared to Fujimoto Ryoma, who had become a World Ranker by relying purely on the overpowered Eye of Susanoo.

Just at first glance, the sword he had at his waist didn't seem that good, so there was no doubt he had become a World Ranker thanks to his own strength.

Alec looked at Kang-Woo.

"You are...?"

It was Kim Si-Hun who answered, "He's someone I consider my brother."

"Oh, is it like a brotherhood between knights?"

"Hmm. It might be a bit different, but he's someone I respect and follow."

"Haha. I never thought the Sword Dragon would have such a senior. Nice to meet you, I'm Alec."

"I'm Oh Kang-Woo." Kang-Woo grabbed Alec's hand.

Alec's expression hardened after he grabbed Kang-Woo's hand, but that only lasted for a few seconds. He quickly smiled and nodded.

"I can understand why the Sword Dragon follows you."

"I'm doing my best not to become a hyung that shames his little brother."

"Hahaha! I like those words." Alec looked around. "They seem to be your party members. If I may ask, could you introduce them to me?"

Si-Hun nodded.

"Ah, yes, of c—"

Kang-Woo raised his hand and stopped Si-Hun when Si-Hun was about to introduce everyone.

"Let's first hear about why you've come all this way to meet Si-Hun."

He didn't want to drag things out with chitchat. He also wasn't planning to try to become friends with him.

Kang-Woo sat down and looked at Alec.

While smiling awkwardly, Alec sat down in a chair.

"What a shame. I wanted to get to know the Sword Dragon's allies better, but you have a point. It's understandable for you to be cautious when you don't know my objective," he said with a calm voice. "A month ago, I had battled the forces of the Demon Cult that had been making a move in Europe."

It was content Kang-Woo had seen on the internet.

"They were strong. I was almost ashamed of being called a World Ranker. While we were fighting, they realized they wouldn't be able to win against me and escaped."

Kang-Woo said, "On the internet, it was said that you had stopped their attack ahead of time."

"It's true that I managed to stop their evil plans, but all I did was delay them. I wasn't able to solve the fundamental issue." Alec smiled bitterly. "Rather, assassins from the Demon Cult are targeting me now."

"Hmm."

Kang-Woo fell into thought. He understood the situation, but that wasn't a good enough reason for Alec to come and look for the Sword Dragon.

"Don't tell me you came here to ask Si-Hun to protect you?"

Realistically speaking, Si-Hun was still weak. He was receiving attention from people around the world because of how heroic he looked while fighting during the Isu Station incident; it was not because of his power.

Cha Yeon-Joo could easily beat Si-Hun.

"Haha, of course not. I'm still not done with my story." Alec continued from where he had left off, "While the assassins were targeting me, I received help from a group called Guardians."

"Guardians...?"

Kang-Woo had never heard that name.

"They're not famous yet, but I do know one thing for sure. Guardians is the hope of humanity," he said with intense eyes.

Kang-Woo's eyes narrowed.

Guardians...

That name swirled within his mind.

Alec looked at Si-Hun.

"There is something that I would like to ask you, Si-Hun."

"Oh, sure..."

"Have you heard of the beings known as Protectors?"

"...?!"

Si-Hun's eyes widened, and one could tell he was becoming restless.

Kang-Woo frowned.

A Protector was someone who had been chosen by the system to save the world.

"D-Don't tell me, are you also...?" Si-Hun asked.

Alec nodded.

"Yes. I am also one of the Protectors."

"..."

There was a heavy silence.

Kang-Woo put his hand on top of his head to organize the situation.

'So there is more than one Protector.'

It wasn't that he hadn't thought of that possibility. Based on the information he had, the Gaia System was similar to the Earth's atmosphere, which stopped extraterrestrial objects such as meteors from entering the Earth.

After it had been impaired because of him, it'd created vaccines to stop otherworldly interferences in its place.

'If Protectors really are similar to a vaccine...'

It was understandable that there was more than one. It didn't make sense for the Gaia System to leave the safety of Earth only to Si-Hun.

"When did you become a Protector, Alec?" Si-Hun asked.

"Hmm. It's been about a year, right after I became a World Ranker."

"..."

Kang-Woo fell into thought.

If it was a year ago, it was before he'd returned to Earth.

'Meaning there were already Protectors before I returned to Earth.'

Then he had to modify a few of his hypotheses.

'Could the system have already known that it would be damaged, or could it have just been a precautionary measure?'

He still didn't know.

Kang-Woo took a sip of coffee; a sweet taste spread through his mouth.

"How did you know that Si-Hun was a Protector?"

"Haha. I had nothing to do with that. One of the Guardians has the ability to find Protectors. It was that person who had found me as well."

"... I see."

Alec's objective had been made clear.

Guardians... Kang-Woo was sure Alec hadn't mentioned that by pure coincidence.

"I would like you to join Guardians, Si-Hun."

'I knew it.'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes, numerous thoughts crossing his mind.

"You want me to join Guardians...?"

"Yes. I saw the video of the Isu Station incident. You have the talent to become a Protector," Alec said in a heated voice. "If you become a member of Guardians, we will teach you how to strengthen your power as a Guardian. Once you do... you won't ever have to feel the despair that you had felt in the past again."

"Despair?"

"Yes."

Alec nodded. His eyes seemed to be saying that he knew everything.

"I saw your expression in the video while you were fighting against the demonic beasts. It exuded pain and sorrow. I understand. After all, those demonic beasts were once innocent civilians."

"Ah..."

A short exclamation left Kim Si-Hun's mouth. His expression darkened, and he recalled what had happened—how he had to swing his sword despite knowing what the demonic beasts used to be.

Alec grabbed Si-Hun's hand.

"If you become stronger, you will be able to save everyone."

"Save everyone? How...?"

"We can suppress them. We still don't know how to return them to normal, but we will find a way one day. We will be able to save everyone. We need your help, Si-Hun."

Alec's eyes were blazing with justice. His words that they could save everyone touched Si-Hun's heart.

"We need a Protector who can protect everyone who has fallen into despair."

"..."

Si-Hun remained silent—hesitation could be seen in his eyes. His chest felt hot. He had thought that saving everyone was complete nonsense, but in front of him, Alec, the Sword of Justice, was trying to make that nonsense a reality.

Si-Hun clenched his fists.

Alec's words that burned with justice touched his heart.

'This is...'

It was an opportunity to stand alongside the Sword of Justice he admired.

It was a chance to learn from his conviction for justice—to gain the power to protect the weak!

'I feel bad for the Sword Emperor, but...'

Si-Hun was in the middle of being trained by Tian Wuchen. His Heavenly Martial Physique talent had shone brightly during his training with the Sword Emperor.

He was taking in martial arts knowledge like a sponge absorbing water. Not just that, he was improving them.

'But...'

Si-Hun looked at Alec. He could feel his heart beating faster. His eyes trembled at the thrill he felt.

He could learn martial arts through Sword Emperor Tian Wuchen, but he couldn't learn ideals and convictions from him.

"I..."

There was no reason to hesitate. For a moment, Si-Hun wondered if it was okay if he didn't listen to Kang-Woo's opinion, thinking he was making the right choice.

"... Will joi—"

At that moment, his words cut off.

Si-Hun's eyes widened, and he trembled.

An irresistible energy was restraining him.

'What's happening?'

He couldn't think anymore. His conscience became blurry, and he could hear someone's voice. He wasn't sure whose voice it was, but there was something he was sure about...

He couldn't go against that voice.

"I'm sorry, but I can't join Guardians."

"Oh..." Alec seemed disappointed. "May I ask why?"

"... I'm sorry."

Si-Hun couldn't answer. No, to be more precise, he didn't have an answer. He also wasn't sure why he'd refused Alec's offer. He just had a strong feeling that he had to refuse it.

Alec sighed.

"That's too bad, but I didn't think you would accept the offer right away. I'm going to be staying in Korea for a while, so if you change your mind, feel free to contact me."

He gave Si-Hun his business card and stood up.

Si-Hun looked blankly at him walking away.

"..."

Tap.

Kang-Woo put down the cup of coffee on the table. System messages only he could see appeared in front of him.

[Authority of Subordination has been activated.]

[You have successfully controlled your Familiar's actions.]

'Thank God.'

The insurance he'd taken a long time ago had finally paid off.

Kang-Woo looked at Alec's back with deep, sunken eyes. He'd realized what had been bothering him the moment he listened in on their conversation.

'Sword of Justice.'

Alec was an honest and upright person. He wasn't sure who had given him that title, but it suited him very well.

Knowing Si-Hun's personality, it was understandable for him to admire him.

'I can't let that happen.'

What had been bothering Kang-Woo was Si-Hun's current state.

There was nothing wrong with admiring and respecting Alec, but it would be a problem if Si-Hun wanted to become exactly like him.

'Alec is too honest.'

He was like a pure-white sword; one that was reluctant to get dirty and wanted to save everyone. He couldn't let Si-Hun's sword become that white.

'Si-Hun.'

Kang-Woo looked at Si-Hun.

'Your swords need to become a bit dirtier.'

If it didn't, he wouldn't be able to survive.

'Don't worry.'

Kang-Woo stood up. He patted Si-Hun's shoulder and followed Alec, who was getting far away.

A sword that didn't get a single drop of blood on it was nothing more than a hunk of metal.

'I'll make sure it gets dirty.'

Chapter 120 - Sword of Justice (3)

Oh Kang-Woo couldn't let Kim Si-Hun and Alec Osborne meet anymore. That was the conclusion Kang-Woo had reached after hearing their conversation.

Alex was excessively honest and upright.

'How could a person be like that?'

He had honestly been shocked by Alec's monologue.

Alec had spoken nonsense like some protagonist of a shonen manga.

"Even shonen mangas aren't that cringe these days."

Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief. It wasn't that he thought that saving people and protecting the weak was funny—he thought it was worthy of praise.

Even if Kang-Woo wasn't that kind of person himself, he wouldn't make fun of someone who was.

'But saving everyone is pushing it.'

The problem was that Alec wanted to save everyone. The moment that word was mentioned, his speech had turned into nothing more than the words of a madman drunk on hollow ideals.

It wasn't a matter of conviction; it was physically impossible.

Kang-Woo couldn't help but cringe after hearing someone say something like that in such a serious tone... especially the part about suppressing people who'd turned into demonic beasts and waiting for a cure to be invented. This part sounded like the words of a true madman.

It was no different from someone saying they would capture and lock away zombies indefinitely until they could find a cure.

'Extreme altruism fosters insanity.'

He still wasn't sure what kind of person Alec was, but he definitely felt uncomfortable about him.

"In such cases, it's best to check for oneself."

There would be nothing he could do if he had no way of knowing, but that wasn't the case. He couldn't be carefree enough to neglect the unknown.

Kang-Woo used the Authority of Stealth and followed Alec.

"Haaa." Alec sighed. "I didn't think he'd refuse..."

Kang-Woo could hear him mumbling. It seemed Alec was quite shocked that his invitation to join Guardians was rejected.

"But I'll convince him, no matter what!"

He clenched both fists and shouted.

Kang-Woo frowned.

'How persistent of him.'

He didn't like Alec. Si-Hun was his Familiar, so it was easy to make Si-Hun refuse the offer, but he couldn't stop him from being influenced by Alec.

The influence Alec had on Si-Hun wasn't helpful at all. No, there was a high chance that it could harm Si-Hun.

'I'll have to make him give up on Si-Hun.'

Kang-Woo's eyes shone sharply.

If Alec didn't want to give up, there was no other way but force.

"Who's there?!"

While Kang-Woo was thinking, Alec suddenly shouted.

'Did he sense me?'

Kang-Woo raised his head.

Alec wasn't looking at him but at a secluded alleyway.

"I'm surprised you noticed me."

"You're..."

A man walked out from the secluded alleyway. He was wearing a dark robe and a red demon mask. Demonic energy was fiercely emanating from him.

Alec's expression hardened.

"You followed me all the way here?"

"You have to pay the price for meddling in our plan."

Alec unsheathed his sword.

The masked man spread out his hands, and sharp claws similar to those of beasts grew from his ten fingers.

'Is that the assassin Alec mentioned before?'

Kang-Woo went up to the terrace and looked down at their confrontation.

Alec had mentioned that assassins from the Demon Cult had been coming after him because of the previous incident that he had been involved in. Judging by that and the fact that he had asked the assassin if he had followed him all the way here, it really seemed to be an assassin.

'What great timing.'

Kang-Woo laughed. It was a great opportunity to get information about Alec. It also wouldn't be bad if Alec died fighting the Demon Cultist. After all, Kang-Woo's goal was to ensure that Si-Hun wouldn't get involved with Alec.

'This should be interesting.'

Kang-Woo looked at both of them with great interest while listening to their conversation.

"You should really give it a rest now," Alec remarked.

"I swear I'll put you in your place this time!" the assassin exclaimed in anger.

Kang-Woo frowned.

'This time?'

Why would an assassin say something like that?

There was no next time for an assassination; it was kill or be killed.

But by their conversation, it seemed as if they had fought numerous times.

'What's going on?'

Kang-Woo decided to watch their confrontation.

The two of them soon began fighting.

Clang! Clang!

The assassin's sharp claws targeted Alec.

Alec raised his sword and blocked the attack. A white light came out of his sword and exuded pressure on their surroundings.

The battle continued for a while.

The assassin was extremely skilled. He was exuding enough demonic energy for it to make sense that he had come alone to assassinate a World Ranker.

His mind was not being eroded by the demonic energy. His movements were clean, and his attacks were powerful. His control over demonic energy was better than Baek Kang-Hyun and Akiyama, the Demon Cultist whom Kang-Woo had fought in Japan.

'But...'

Alec's sword emitted light. He restricted the assassin's movements while thrusting with his sword.

His swordsmanship was very disciplined. It was so perfect that Kang-Woo wondered if this was what the swordsmanship of a martial artist who had mastered the sword to its utmost limit would look like.

'Maybe it's because he's a Protector.'

Just like Si-Hun, Alec's talent was also impressive.

'Alec's won this.'

It wasn't that the fight had ended, but the cards were overwhelmingly in his favor.

Kang-Woo seemed disappointed because he was hoping for Alec to lose.

"Kurgh!"

The Demon Cult assassin fell to the ground.

Alec approached him while holding his sword.

The assassin noticed he'd already lost, so he said in a low voice, "Kill me."

'It's over.'

The only thing left was for Alec to behead the assassin with his sword.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. The battle had ended more easily than he'd hoped for.

"I cannot do that."

'What?'

Just then, unexpected words came out of Alec's mouth.

Kang-Woo's eyes widened; he couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"Every life is precious, and yours is no different."

'What the hell is this dude talking about?'

"Leave the Demon Cult. Repent for your sins and live a new life."

"..."

Kang-Woo's mouth fell open. He was at a loss for words and couldn't believe what Alec was saying.

'Is he insane?'

Telling the person who'd tried to kill him to repent for his sins and live a new life?

That wasn't something a sane person could say.

Was he the incarnation of Jesus? How could he say something like this so naturally?

"Not this bullshit again," the assassin replied.

"I will make sure to persuade you this time. Now, grab my hand. I will help you start your life anew."

Alec extended his hand, but the Demon Cult assassin obviously didn't grab it.

Kang-Woo looked at Alec's pointless actions in shock.

'What's wrong with this guy?'

It wasn't a matter of justice anymore.

How could a person in his right mind act this way?

Was it because Alec was too kind?

'Bullshit.'

Letting a Demon Cultist who had tried to kill him live because "every life was precious" was not kindness.

'That's just being moronic.'

Alec couldn't possibly be doing this unless he was thoughtless, or he was brainless. It was no different from letting a heinous serial killer off with just a light warning after telling them to repent for their sins and start their life anew.

Kang-Woo's head became messy.

"Hup!"

Boom!

"Guh?!"

The assassin, who had been on the floor, threw something from his pocket. A loud explosion rang out, smoke covering the entire alleyway.

The assassin got up and ran away. Alec pursued him.

"Stop right there!"

"I will pay you back for this humiliation next time!"

The assassin ran out of the alleyway.

Just then, a woman walking into the alleyway collided with him.

Crack!

She couldn't even scream. She had collided with a Ranker-level Player running at full speed. The impact, which was greater than being hit by a truck, sent her flying.

"A-Aaah..."

Alec, who had been chasing after the assassin, stopped. His mouth widened.

The woman who had collided with the assassin was flung into the wall, dying instantly.

"N-Noooo!!" Alec screamed in despair as he held the woman's corpse. "Sniff! H-How, why...?!"

Alec cried for a while, holding the woman's corpse.

Kang-Woo looked at him in disbelief.

'You're seriously asking why this happened?'

Did he really not know why?

'I can't take it anymore.'

He thought he would die from cancer at this rate.

While holding himself back from cursing, Kang-Woo jumped down from the building.

Alec, who had just been crying while holding the woman's corpse, stood up and walked out of the alleyway.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"... Kang-Woo?"

Alec was surprised by Kang-Woo's sudden appearance.

"Why didn't you kill the assassin?"

"Were you watching?"

"Just answer the question."

Placing his hand on his sword's handle, Alec answered, "All lives are precious, and the same goes for Demon Cultists. I can't take someone's life so easily."

"Hah." Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief. "Even when an innocent person died because of it?"

"..."

Kang-Woo spat it all out, "If you'd killed that person, that woman wouldn't have died. This is your fault. You're the reason why she died."

"..."

There was a heavy silence, and Alec slowly opened his mouth.

"What... do you mean? An innocent person died?"

"What?"

"I did let the assassin slip through my fingers, but there were no victims."

"What the hell are you talking about? There's the victim right there."

Kang-Woo pointed at the woman's corpse in the alleyway.

Alec's eyes turned toward the corpse.

"Where?"

"... What?"

Alec tilted his head in confusion. "There's nothing there."