M. in Hell 261

Chapter 261 - Demented Situation (1)

Oh Kang-Woo had fallen asleep; he had accumulated more fatigue than he had expected from training to improve his demonic energy control without any rest for several days.

After seeing that Kim Si-Hun had created a pillar of light and wiped out the demonic beasts, Kang-Woo had felt relieved, thinking that Si-Hun would be able to take care of whatever else that would happen.

But...

'What's going on?'

He'd only closed his eyes for a short while before he suddenly felt he was being sucked somewhere, causing him to open his eyes. He was then met with a situation he couldn't understand at all.

"Hmm?"

Kalgia looked at Kang-Woo in bewilderment. The man on the couch looked more like an unemployed bum than the Demon of Prophecy. He did not possess even an ounce of majesty.

"Could the summoning have failed...?"

Kalgia mumbled in confusion for a short while but shook his head.

'I did everything the Book of Hell stated.'

Kalgia had never imagined that someone lying on a couch while holding a beer and popcorn would appear, but based on his outer appearance, everything was as the Book of Hell described: a human with sharp eyes.

'That man is surely...'

The monster who had rewritten history in hell in just ten millennia and had risen to the pinnacle of demons.

The demon of demons, the Hell of Hells, the predator of predators. The master of the Demonic Sea and hundreds of Authorities, the one who had made all seven princes of Hell kneel before him.

'The Demon of Prophecy.'

Kalgia nodded.

It didn't matter how he looked...

The research that he had done on the Demon of Prophecy matched perfectly with the demon king. He had also poured the entirety of the Demon Cult's wealth and assets accumulated over several thousand years, just to track the Demonic Sea possessed by the demon king and summon him here.

'There is no way it failed.'

The summoning had been meticulously calculated for even the tiniest variables.

"Aaah!" Kalgia knelt. "O Demon of Prophecy...!!"

"What?"

Kang-Woo's eyes as Kalgia referred to him as the Demon of Prophecy.

"What the hell are you t—"

"We have been waiting all this time for your advent!!"

"The fuck d'you say?"

"I have discovered the truth! The truth that Satan had been pettily hiding all this time! Here! Please take a look at this! This book contains your true identity!"

"Wait just a fucking second."

Kang-Woo's eyes trembled.

The book Kalgia held...

It was the Book of Hell that Lilith had written and distributed to the Demon Cultists to enlighten them on the truth.

'What the actual fuck is happening?'

The situation was so complicated that he couldn't follow at all. The beer and popcorn fell from his hands.

"I have come to a realization after reading this book! You are the Demon of Prophecy feared by all the gods!"

'No.'

"The true evil that will bring about destruction to the whole world!"

'Fucking excuse me.'

"The one we needed to serve had never been Satan!"

'Stop.'

"O Demon of Prophecy!!"

'Stop, you motherfucker.'

"Please punish those ignorant humans and bring this world to ruin!!!"

'Stop, you crazy bastaaaaaaard!!!'

Kang-Woo pulled on his hair. He finally understood what had happened.

'Lilith... you...'

Before he had met up with Lilith, she had distributed the Book of Hell within the Demon Cult. At that time, nothing much had happened. After all, from the Demon Cult's point of view, the Book of Hell was nothing but a fictional.

There was no way Satan, the being they served, was actually a loser, and a human had completely overthrown the power dynamic of Hell and rose to the pinnacle of all demons in just ten millennia.

No one would possibly believe such a thing.

'Or that's what I thought.'

Kang-Woo glared at Kalgia, the black mage who seemed to have lost his mind.

'For fuck's sake.'

Someone who believed in such a groundless had appeared. And to make things worse, the one who'd believed in it was the last remaining Aspect of Evil.

"..."

Kang-Woo turned his head in silence.

'Oh, fuck.'

He felt lots of stares directed at him—from Gaia, Si-Hun, Cha Yeon-Joo, Tian Wuchen, and many other comrades with whom he had built up trust. There were also the gazes of the Sirius Corps members, who were acquainted with him, as well as the gazes of Shalgiel and the other angels.

"H-Hyung-nim...?"

Si-Hun's face had turned pale, and his voice trembled. He was trembling as if he were looking at his worst possible nightmare.

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent.

No, there was nothing he could do besides be silent. There was only one way to describe his current situation...

'I'm fucked.'

There was no better way to describe it than that.

Kang-Woo's expression paled.

This wasn't something that could be resolved by pulling some Warrior of Light bullshit like he had done in the incident with Balrog. He was just fucked. The situation had become so messed up that there was nothing he could do about it.

"Hm?"

Kalgia looked around. It was only obvious he would react that way since one of the retainers of Gaia, who had come to stop the ritual, had referred to the Demon of Prophecy as 'hyung-nim.'

"What is going o—"

Bash!

Kang-Woo extended his hand.

Kalgia's head exploded, splattering brain matter everywhere.

'Shut up for a second.'

Letting Kalgia talk would only make the situation worse.

"H-Hyung-nim!! What in the world is..."

"Hey!! S-Say something! Y-You're not, right? There's been some sort of mixup, right?!"

Si-Hun and Yeon-Joo shouted in confusion.

Of course, they already knew that Kang-Woo had been a demon in the past, but not the fact that he was the Demon of Prophecy, the incarnation of evil, who would bring ruin to the whole world.

"Kuh... That human... has deceived us!" Shalgiel exclaimed.

"No!" Si-Hun refuted. "There has to have been some sort of issue! There is no way hyung-nim is the Demon of Prophecy!!"

"Shut your mouth! Is it not obvious enough after what you have just seen?!" Shalgiel pointed at Kang-Woo. "Everyone here must have felt how immense and evil the demonic energy coming from the ritual was!"

It was true.

When the ritual was at its peak, a huge black Rift appeared in the air, and a breathtaking amount of demonic energy had come out of it.

"And the one that appeared from that demonic energy was that human! Even the Aspect of Evil called him the Demon of Prophecy! What more evidence do you need?!"

Shalgiel glared at Kang-Woo.

"Even Lady Gaia has said it herself!! Satan has never been the Demon of Prophecy! If that is the case, then that human must be the cause of everything! He had manipulated Satan and orchestrated everyth—"

"What the fuck are you talking about, you piece of shit?!"

Yeon-Joo stomped on the ground. Red mana burst from her body, and her chains rose into the air.

"That guy might not be the good and honest hero you think he is! But still...! Even so...!!" She shouted out, "He isn't capable of committing such atrocities!!"

If Kang-Woo was the Demon of Prophecy, it would be correct to assume that everything that Satan had done until now was at Kang-Woo's orders. Satan himself had admitted that he had relations with the Demon of Prophecy.

Then if Satan really was a subordinate of the Demon of Prophecy, it meant that Alec Osborne's death, the brutal murder of the hero Reynald, and the corruption of Ludwig had all been orchestrated by Kang-Woo.

"You have all been deceived by that demon all along!! How do you still not realize it after what you just s—"

"Shut up."

"... What?"

"I said, shut up." Si-Hun pointed his holy sword at Shalgiel. "You know nothing."

The tip of the sword trembled.

"You know nothing about Kang-Woo hyung!!!" Si-Hun shouted. "You have no right to say such things when you know nothing about what he had gone through and the weight on his shoulders!"

"And I am telling you all of that had been a lie—"

"Shut up!!" Si-Hun shouted.

However, his grimace and his voice filled with confusion and rage were enough to know that not even he was sure what was true.

"Hyung-nim! Please say something!"

Si-Hun turned his head to Kang-Woo—the one whom he admired and loved the most.

"..."

"Please... hyung-nim..." Si-Hun said drearily while on the verge of tears. He sounded like he was about to collapse at any moment.

Kang-Woo remained with his mouth shut while looking at Si-Hun. Unlike his blank expression, there was a huge storm within his mind.

'What the fuck am I supposed to say in this situation?!' he inwardly shouted.

He felt like his head was about to explode. He was surprised at how he could remain so calm on the outside.

'Fuuuuuuuuuuuck!!!!'

He was truly fucked.

He was so fucked that there was absolutely nothing he could possibly do.

'What should I do?'

He needed a way to free himself from this absolute shitstorm of a situation.

'Should I claim the Demon Cult summoned me by mistake?'

That was the first thought that crossed his mind.

Kang-Woo bit his lip.

'No.'

He shook his head.

Things had gotten far too big for him to claim that it was a mistake.

People with whom he had built up a high level of trust, such as Si-Hun, Yeon-Joo and Gaia, were sure to believe him, but...

Kang-Woo looked at Shalgiel. He and the other angels were looking at him with hostility.

"Wh-What?"

"What's going on?"

"Isn't that person Captain Kim Si-Hun's sworn brother?"

"Ah! The one that had been surrounded by golden light last time!"

"Then why..."

As for the other Players, they were looking around as if they couldn't understand what was happening.

'There's no way I'll be able to deceive everyone.'

Leaving Players aside, being doubted by the angels would be the worst possible outcome. Raphael was not the only problem; behind him were the other archangels as well as the gods. It would be no different from becoming the public enemy of every world.

'Shit.'

Kang-Woo frowned.

'Think.'

He needed to find a way to resolve this demented situation—a way to flip the worst possible situation on its head.

'I'm sure there's a way.'

There's no way there wasn't a way out.

He was used to these kinds of situations, and he had always overcome them.

'A way...'

Kang-Woo's eyes widened. Shivers ran across his entire body.

'Yes.'

The ends of his mouth went up, and he clenched his fists. If he thought about it, the answer was quite simple; there had not even been a need to think so deeply about it.

'I see.'

There was one way to resolve everything.

"Hyung-nim!! Please say something!!"

Kang-Woo raised his head and looked at Si-Hun, who was screaming at him.

Tap.

He leaped forward and raised his fist.

Bash!!

"Kurgh!!"

He punched the desperately screaming Si-Hun in the face without hesitation.

Chapter 262 - Demented Situation (2)

Bash!

"Kurgh!"

Kim Si-Hun went flying, rolled across the ground, and smashed into a wall.

"P-Protector Kim Si-Hun!!" Gaia urgently shouted. Although she couldn't see, she could more or less tell from the sound what was happening.

"Wh-Wha..."

People trembled in shock when Si-Hun had suddenly gone flying from Kang-Woo's attack.

"Hyung-nim...?"

Even the people watching were shocked, so it was not hard to imagine how shocked the one who had been blown away was.

Si-Hun was looking at Kang-Woo with trembling eyes and a pale expression. His cheek was numb from the pain. No, it wasn't just numb. His cheekbone would've been crushed if he had not reflexively twisted his body.

"Wh-Why are you doing this, hyung-nim?!" Si-Hun exclaimed.

"..."

Kang-Woo didn't answer. He looked down at Si-Hun with a face that did not have even a single hint of emotion.

"You have finally shown your true colors!" Shalgiel said in a confident voice, as if proud that his prediction had been correct. He gripped his sword even tighter. His six wings flapped, and he flew toward Kang-Woo.

"Stop, you son of a bitch!!"

Yeon-Joo quickly spread her chains, but it was nowhere near enough to stop the second-in-command of Raphael's army. She was the one to be pulled by the chains instead.

"Kuh!!"

"Please... Please wait!!"

"Even you...!"

Si-Hun blocked Shalgiel's path.

Yeon-Joo could not stop Shalgiel on her own, but it was a different story when Si-Hun helped out.

Shalgiel grimaced.

"Have still not come to your senses after being attacked by that demon?!"

"..."

Si-Hun kept his mouth shut. He couldn't think of anything to say to refute Shalgiel or to justify his actions.

'No.'

Si-Hun's eyes widened. He recalled the name of the sword he was holding. To be more precise, he thought of his friend whose name was the same as the sword.

"H-Hyung-nim must be being controlled!"

"What?"

Shalgiel frowned.

"I am sure that he is being controlled by a demon, just like Ludwig!!"

"..."

There was a heavy silence.

Shalgiel snorted.

"Do you seriously believe anyone would be capable of controlling the Demon of Prophecy?"

"Like I said before, hyung-nim is not the Demon of—"

"So what?!" Shalgiel shouted. He trembled while clenching his fists. "What did you do with Ludwig?! What did you do with the saint that had been corrupted by Satan?!"

"..."

"Did you not kill Ludwig with your own hands?!!"

Si-Hun's expression paled.

It was true.

Kang-Woo couldn't be saved just by the fact that he was being controlled. The situation could not be reversed. If he was being controlled... if he had been corrupted just like Ludwig, he ultimately needed to be killed.

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"... Hyung-nim."
"..."
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Kang-Woo once again didn't answer.

The situation could not be changed just from the fact that he was being controlled. Si-Hun needed to find another reason—another solution.

"Please say something, hyung-nim!! Whatever happens, I'm on your side!"

"..."

Kang-Woo slowly raised his arm.

Schwing.

A black blade shot out from the back of his hand. It was a weapon that he often used.

Despair dyed Si-Hun's face.

"Hyung..."

Clang!!

Kang-Woo rushed forward, going for Si-Hun's neck without hesitation.

Si-Hun raised his holy sword.

They exchanged countless blows in the span of a second.

Si-Hun parried the black blade going for his neck and pulled back his arm to block the attack aiming for his left shoulder. He lowered himself and took one step back. Then, he swung his sword wide to gain some distance.

However, that distance had only lasted a moment; Kang-Woo rose into the sky. No, to be more precise, he ran while 'stepping on the air.'

Si-Hun lightly jumped. He used Sword Control to raise the weapons on the ground. He stepped on the weapons to rise into the air, turning it into an aerial battle.

CLAAAANG!!!

Boisterous sounds of steel rang out, and sparks poured in all directions like fireworks.

One was one-sidedly attacking, while the other was one-sidedly defending.

"Kuh!"

The result of such an unfair battle was obvious. One would not be able to win just by defending.

Si-Hun was pushed back.

Sharp attacks aimed for his vital points. He was able to dodge them by a hair's breadth, but he was still cut by the pressure, and blood spurted in all directions.

"Stop, you crazy fucker!" Yeon-Joo entered the fight.

Red chains spread and applied pressure on him like a net. Kang-Woo turned 180 degrees and swung his arm around like a windmill. The chains were cut in the blink of an eye.

"Why are you doing this?!" Tian Wuchen also charged in to stop the rampaging Kang-Woo.

BOOM!

Two World Ranker–level Players charged in at once, but they were nowhere near enough. They were able to stop him only for a brief moment.

"Hyung, please stop... Stop!!" Si-Hun shouted.

Shalgiel gestured to his subordinates. "Kill that demon!"

"Ah...!"

Si-Hun quickly turned around. He had been blocking Kang-Woo's attacks, so he had not been able to stop Shalgiel.

"N-No!"

He quickly extended his hand. He wasn't worried about Shalgiel's subordinates hurting Kang-Woo. Rather, he feared the opposite.

"Die!!"

"Kill the Demon of Prophecy!"

"Those tainted by darkness, receive the judgment of light!"

The angels rushed toward Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo turned to them, his eyes devoid of emotion. He raised his hand, and...

Slash!!

"Kurgh!!!"

"N-Noooo!!!"

Si-Hun's scream echoed.

The angels rushing toward Kang-Woo were bisected in an instant, and white blood splattered in all directions. Their sliced internal organs wet the ground.

"A-Aaaahh..."

Si-Hun knelt, his face pale.

It was too late. There was no going back now.

Kang-Woo had killed angels with his own hands—the trust relationship between humans and angels was broken. From this moment on, all angels had become their enemies.

"You crazy son of a biiiiitch!!!"

Yeon-Joo stomped on the ground, her red hair fluttering in the air. She pulled her left arm back.

Clatter!

The red chains gathered around, twisting and intertwining.

"Kuh...!"

Blood leaked out of her mouth from drawing out mana past her limit. Her body was under huge pressure. At that moment, sadness was visible in her eyes. She had never imagined that she would use the trump card she had been hiding on Kang-Woo, of all people, in a place like this.

"Red Lotus, First Form."

Clatter!

The red chains covered her left arm. She focused the power of the Trait that she had opened on her Tenth Awakening and rose to the ranks of World Rankers, the Trait Red Flower.

"A-Arrgghh."

She groaned from the huge pain spreading through her left arm.

Yeon-Joo bit her lip.

It had been over a year since she'd awakened the Red Flower Trait, but no one knew about its power yet. Not only was she unable to properly use it, but it was also far too burdensome on her body.

'One day...'

Yeon-Joo looked at Kang-Woo, who had gotten too far away for her to reach.

'I'll master this and...'

She had been practicing in secret so that she could hear Kang-Woo say that she was amazing and to have him rely on her like he had in the early days.

Yeon-Joo clenched her eyes shut.

"Come back to your senses, asshoooooole!!!!"

She swung her left arm. The chains that had been crunched up shot out as if a flower was blooming. The chains with sharp thorns engulfed Kang-Woo, and...

Bang.

Crack!

"Huh...?"

With just a light flick of the wrist, the trump card that Yeon-Joo had been practicing in secret for a year had been torn apart all too easily.

Yeon-Joo's eyes widened.

Kang-Woo extended his hand.

"Kurgh!!"

He grabbed Yeon-Joo's neck.

She twisted her body in pain and wriggled her legs.

"Oh... Kang-Woo..."

Yeon-Joo looked at him with sad eyes, recalling the first time she'd seen him in that noisy internet cafe.

She had been furious beyond belief at him at first, not understanding how a guy like him could possibly exist. Then, she had been given shivers from how he had grown so much in such a short time. She had thought to use that possibility for her own gains. And then...

"You're doing great."

Back when a horrifying sense of shame had been weighing down on her, he had told her that she was doing great.

"Don't worry. I'll help you."

He had told her that he would help her.

'And...'

He had actually kept his promise and fulfilled his promise of helping her take revenge on the Demon Cult.

Who other than Kang-Woo would have been able to wipe out the worldwide Demon Cult?

As Kang-Woo strangled her, Yeon-Joo desperately said, "Come... back to your... Cough!"

Tears dripped from her eyes.

Rather than feeling hurt that her attack, which she'd struggled so much to practice, was cast away so easily, the fact that Kang-Woo was the one strangling her hurt her heart far worse.

Despite that...

"..."

Kang-Woo didn't answer. He turned his emotionless face toward Si-Hun.

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"Hyung..."
The situation was too messed up.
Tears dripped from Si-Hun's eyes.
"Hyung. Say something, please..."
His head drooped.
"Say something... Anything..."
Tears gathered at his chin. He could barely hold on to his sword.
"Please... Hyung," he desperately pleaded.
Si-Hun extended his trembling hand toward him, and...
Kang-Woo threw Yeon-Joo to the floor.
"Cough! Cough!"
Kang-Woo covered his mouth with the hand that he had used to strangle her.
"Pfft."
Laughter leaked out from between his fingers.
"Pfft, pwahahahahahahaha!!!!"
Kang-Woo laughed in madness.
Si-Hun looked up at him with trembling eyes.
Kang-Woo's eyes, which had been emotionless earlier, were full of 'ecstasy.'
"Hahahahaha!! Man, I was really trying to hold it back, but you're making it impossible!!"
"Kang-Woo... hyung...?"
Si-Hun looked at him in confusion due to his sudden change of attitude.
Kang-Woo slowly walked toward him.
"Wonderful. Truly a masterpiece. I wonder how mere mortal insects can burn so beautifully. Oh,
could it be because you're mortals?"
"H-Hyung... what are you talking about...?"
Kang-Woo covered his face with his hands.
Kekeke.
Suppressed laughter came out.
"Kang-Woo, huh...?"
He burst into laughter again.
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Kang-Woo tilted his head and spoke as if he couldn't understand.

"Do you..."

"... Still see me as Oh Kang-Woo?"

Chapter 263 - Demented Situation (3)

"What... did you say?"

Kim Si-Hun's eyes widened. His hands, gripping his sword, trembled.

- Do you still see me as Oh Kang-Woo?

Oh Kang-Woo had said it mockingly.

"A-Aaaahh."

Why hadn't he thought of the possibility? Why hadn't he even imagined it?

"You..."

There was no way Kang-Woo would attack him; there was no way he'd cut down angels or strangle Cha Yeon-Joo.

He wasn't that kind of person.

He was kinder and more generous than anyone else. Si-Hun loved and respected him even more than his own blood-related family.

"Who... are you?"

And that Kang-Woo had suddenly changed drastically. The answer wasn't complicated. It wasn't even worth thinking about.

It was a simple issue. It was so simple that he couldn't help but laugh in disbelief.

The man smiling in front of him... was not Oh Kang-Woo.

"Who are you, you son of a bitch!!!"

Si-Hun waved his hand. The weapons scattered on the ground rose into the air. There were dozens of weapons. His head became hot. He grunted in pain from reaching the limit of his brain's processing capacity.

"Raaaaahh!!!"

Si-Hun ignored it. He did not have the leeway or reason to think about it. His overflowing rage made his body move.

The dozens of weapons flew toward Kang-Woo—no, the Demon of Prophecy who had taken the shape of Kang-Woo.

CLAAAANG!!

White sparks flew out in all directions. The weapons, which were blocked by a black barrier, fell to the ground.

"I don't know, who do you think I am?"

Kang-Woo snickered while scanning the crowd. Their eyes were filled with bewilderment, fear, and chaos. He clenched his fists in a way that no one could see.

'FUCK YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!!'

He would have raised his fists into the air and cheered if he could.

'Yes, it worked!'

It was an impeccable performance, even for him.

A perfect scenario—simple yet effective.

If the problem was that Kang-Woo had appeared when the Demon of Prophecy had been summoned... he just had to make people believe that the one summoned had never been Oh Kang-Woo in the first place.

'I feel a bit bad, though.'

He saw Yeon-Joo coughing on the floor and Si-Hun with clearly visible tear streaks on his face. Although there was nothing Kang-Woo could've done about it, he still felt guilty for having pushed them both into a corner.

'I'm sorry, Yeon-Joo.'

He had neutralized a technique of hers that he had never seen before all too easily.

'It looked like she practiced it a lot.'

It was a technique that shot out chains as if a red flower was blooming.

Considering that he had never seen it despite meeting up with Yeon-Joo quite frequently, that meant she'd practiced it quite a lot in secret. Although the technique itself was powerful, it was too poorly structured.

Kang-Woo was on a whole other level when it came to controlling energies, so from his perspective, the technique was riddled with problems.

'Ngh.'

Kang-Woo frowned.

He remembered her face full of bewilderment and despair when he easily destroyed her technique. He had even clenched her neck and given her a very painful experience.

'I'll make it up to you, I promise.'

He wanted to beg for forgiveness right this second if he could.

'And...'

Kang-Woo looked at Si-Hun.

"How... how dare you...!"

Si-Hun grimaced, his expression a mix of rage, relief, resentment, and despair. The target of his rage and resentment was obviously him, and he was likely relieved by the fact that Kang-Woo wasn't the Demon of Prophecy.

'I'm so fucking sorry, Si-Hun!'

The one he felt the most sorry for was, without any doubt, Si-Hun. Seeing his little bro hurt all over broke his heart.

'I had no choice.'

It was a sorry excuse, but it wasn't a lie. In order to turn the situation in his favor, he needed to show everyone that he was the Demon of Prophecy wearing the skin of Oh Kang-Woo.

He had to push Si-Hun to the limit to make it feel real.

'It also breaks my heart.'

Every time he attacked Si-Hun with the intent to kill, he was worried he might actually end up killing him.

'Thanks for holding on, man.'

Si-Hun was just barely able to withstand his attacks, so he was able to complete the scenario.

'I never thought the day when I pretended to be me would come.'

There was nothing he could do about it. He had no other choice if he wanted to revert the situation.

'Now...'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. Leaving aside his guilt, he smiled due to how his plan had worked out so well.

"How dare you pretend to be hyung...!"

The sight of Si-Hun trembling in anger was very protagonist-like. He was emitting powerful bloodlust toward the demon pretending to be the man he respected so much.

Kang-Woo once again burst into crazed laughter.

"Pfft! Bwahahaha! Good! That's perfect! I can understand why Satan had taken a liking to you."
"..."

Si-Hun glared at him in bloodlust and gripped his sword. Since he knew the being in front of him was a demon pretending to be Kang-Woo, he didn't need to hesitate anymore.

Swoosh!

Si-Hun blurred as he began moving at supersonic speed, creating a huge sonic boom. He drew out his Qi to its absolute limit and swung at Kang-Woo's head.

"Come on, what's with you?"

Clang!!

Kang-Woo easily blocked the attack with the black blade extending from the back of his hand.

"Aren't I your highly respected hyung? You sure you wanna attack me so fiercely?"

"Shut up!!"

"Pfft, hahahaha!"

He blocked Si-Hun's attacks while laughing mockingly.

'Urgh.'

Unlike how he was leisurely blocking the attacks, a bead of cold sweat dripped down Kang-Woo's neck.

'When did he get so strong?'

Kang-Woo looked at Si-Hun with great interest. He wasn't sure if Si-Hun was drawing out power past his limits or if he had grown stronger without Kang-Woo noticing, but it was not easy blocking his attacks.

'You're growing very nicely, Si-Hun.'

He smiled proudly. He would have liked to pat him on the back, but it was hard to do that with what was going on.

Kang-Woo looked around.

The first part of his plan had succeeded.

'But it's not enough.'

He couldn't erase all doubts in the crowd with just this.

'It may be good enough for Si-Hun and Yeon-Joo, but I'm sure the angels won't be so easily convinced.'

Even if he claimed that he was some unknown demon and not Oh Kang-Woo, there was no way they'd believe him.

Humans of Earth did not share a very deep bond of trust with the angels.

It was, after all, a relationship built on understanding and self-interest for both parties. It was hard to expect them to trust him like Si-Hun and Yeon-Joo.

'I need stronger evidence.'

He needed better evidence that showed that Oh Kang-Woo wasn't the Demon of Prophecy.

'If things go as planned...'

He'd soon be able to get that opportunity.

Kang-Woo kept driving Si-Hun into a corner while waiting for that moment.

"Kuh!"

Si-Hun, who was barraging Kang-Woo with attacks, clenched his hand in pain. The skin on his hands was being torn apart from the recoil of going past his limit.

"Haaa, haaa."

He panted heavily.

"Cough! Cough! Urgh..." At that moment, Yeon-Joo got up from the floor. She glared at Kang-Woo while holding her bruised neck. "So... that bastard isn't Kang-Woo but someone else, right?"

A strong bloodlust appeared in her eyes.

Si-Hun silently nodded and quietly bit his lip.

'We're nowhere near strong enough to defeat him.'

He glared at the demon smiling leisurely.

The demon wearing Kang-Woo's skin was stronger than he could have ever imagined. He could not be defeated by the angels and Players here right now.

"Lord Shalgiel!" Si-Hun called out.

"Another... demon?"

Shalgiel had fallen into chaos from the sheer complexity of the situation.

"Shalgiel!!" Si-Hun shouted.

It was then that Shalgiel looked at Si-Hun.

"Call Lord Raphael right now!"

"He is..."

Shalgiel's expression had hardened.

Raphael still hadn't fully recovered from his injuries in his battle against Satan. To be honest, he had only just recovered to the point that he could barely move.

"Hurry!!"

"Kuh..."

Shalgiel bit his lip.

Si-Hun was right. They would not be able to defeat that demon with only the people here.

"Give me a second."

Shalgiel closed his eyes and tried to contact Raphael. A golden halo appeared over his head.

"Hmm. Calling for reinforcements, huh? Well, not a bad idea."

The demon wearing Kang-Woo's skin snickered while staring at Shalgiel and Si-Hun.

Si-Hun took out a communication crystal orb from his pocket. It was the magic tool that members of Guardians used to get in touch with one another.

'If he isn't Kang-Woo hyung...'

He should be able to contact Kang-Woo.

Si-Hun sent Qi into the communication crystal.

Whoom.

"Huh...?"

The crystal orb shone, and he could also hear its unique ringing.

- What's up?

He even heard Kang-Woo's voice. Everything was perfect, but...

"Wh-Whv...?"

Si-Hun's eyes trembled, and his face paled.

"Hm? What's wrong? If you called someone, then you should talk."

The voice coming from the crystal orb was also coming from the demon wearing Kang-Woo's skin.

"Wh-Why do you have... h-hyung's crystal orb...?"

"Pfft, bwahahahaha!!"

Kang-Woo burst into crazed laughter while holding his stomach.

'It's finally here!'

It was the moment he had been waiting for. He had expected it to happen. If he wasn't Kang-Woo, either Si-Hun or Yeon-Joo would obviously try to contact the real Oh Kang-Woo.

'Right, then...'

It was about time to proceed with phase two of the plan. He had already made the preparations while fighting Si-Hun.

"Why indeed... Why would I have this crystal orb? No, let me ask something even more simple."

"Wh-What do you..."

"Where do you think"—Kang-Woo slowly turned his head—"your oh-so-precious hyung is right now?"

"..."

Si-Hun trembled. If someone who wasn't Kang-Woo had his crystal orb...

"Pfft, bwahahahahahahaha!!!!"

Crazed laughter echoed throughout the cave. The Demon of Prophecy wearing Kang-Woo's skin lightly snapped his finger. A screen appeared in the air and displayed footage.

"A-Aaaahh."

Si-Hun fell to his knees when he saw the video. The video was filling him with despair.

- Si... Hun...

The video was filled with static, but he could still see Kang-Woo, who was tied up in steel chains, slowly raise his head. One of his eyes was missing as if it had been taken out on purpose.

Kang-Woo mumbled in a weak voice.

- R... Run.

"N-NOOOOOO!!!!!"

Si-Hun's desperate scream rang out.

Chapter 264 - Saving Oh Kang-Woo (1)

The video was full of static.

Oh Kang-Woo was chained to a cross-like pillar. He was not chained in the typical way with his arms tied to the cross with metal chains. Instead, the black chains, seemingly made of demonic energy, were penetrating both his shoulders, arms, calves, thighs, and collarbones and were coiled

around the entire giant pillar. Blood and pus were leaking from his pierced skin, and Kang-Woo's face, which was missing an eye, was distorted in pain and fear.

- Si... Hun.

"A-Aaaahh."

Even in such a horrible situation...

- R... Run.

... He kept telling Si-Hun to run away.

"Hmm. He still doesn't seem to know his place."

The Demon of Prophecy, who was wearing Kang-Woo's skin, made a wicked smile and snapped his fingers.

- Kurgh, Urgh!

Thorns appeared from the chains penetrating Kang-Woo's flesh, making it seem like they were looking at a cactus.

The ten chains that had penetrated him moved. The sharp thorns lacerated his skin, removing the dry blood from his wounds and introducing fresh blood and pus.

- Kargh! Argh!

Kang-Woo seemed to be desperately enduring the pain.

Si-Hun's mind blanked.

"Stop, you motherfuckeeeeeeeeeeee!!"

He charged with all his might, even while using the power of his innate Qi. He roared like a beast.

"Pfft, Pwahahahaha!!"

The Demon of Prophecy let out crazed laughter as if the situation was unbelievably funny to him.

"Aaaaaaaaaaahh!!"

Si-Hun charged at him with the intent to kill, but he had already reached his limit. A light swing from the Demon of Prophecy was enough to send Si-Hun flying.

"A-Argh," he groaned in pain. He crawled on the ground while forcibly moving his limbs. It was truly a wretched state.

"Such heartwarming brotherly love. Haha. It's truly..."

The Demon of Prophecy sighed passionately.

"... Beautiful."

Squelch, squelch.

A viscous liquid could be heard dripping.

Si-Hun raised his head to look at the Demon of Prophecy—his skin was falling apart from the head as if he no longer needed Kang-Woo's skin. The wrinkly skin dropped to the ground as if an insect was shedding its exoskeleton.

The body of the demon that had thrown away Kang-Woo's skin was...

"A-Aaaahh."

Si-Hun's eyes widened. He understood why Gaia had said that she didn't know who the Demon of Prophecy was.

The horrible demon was formed of a black liquid similar to tar; it was as if the demon was a being made of the Abyss that devoured all light.

"Wh-What the fuck is that...?" Yeon-Joo trembled.

Could that even be called a demon? It had no eyes, nose, or mouth; it was only made of viscous darkness.

"Y-You motherfucking slime..."

Yeon-Joo tried to mock the demon by calling it just a weak slime, but her lips were pale. She instinctively knew that that monster was by no means just a slime.

[Do you want to save this human?]

"..."

Snicker.

He pointed toward the floating screen while laughing mockingly. There was no need to give an answer because the Demon of Prophecy seemed to already know how important Kang-Woo was to Si-Hun.

Thud.

The Demon of Prophecy threw out a black gem that was about as big as two fingers. Laughing, he said, [If you want to save him, use that gem. It will guide you to where that human is.]

"..."

[I'm curious...]

Squelch.

The black liquid moved.

[... Of how beautifully you'll burn.]

The Demon of Prophecy spoke cryptically.

Just then, the wall of the cave collapsed, and an angel with eight wings appeared. It was Raphael.

"Kuh..."

Raphael was grimacing in pain before the battle even began, likely due to his injuries not having fully healed. He was breathing heavily. Compared to when he had fought against Satan, the light from his wings was significantly weaker.

[Whoops, I should be going.]

The Demon of Prophecy turned around.

"I will not let you escape!" Raphael shouted.

Slam!

Raphael rushed forward. The Demon of Prophecy swung his arm made of black mucus.

Crack.

A large portion of the skin on Raphael's left shoulder was ripped out.

"Kuh...!"

"L-Lord Raphael!"

Shalgiel quickly approached him.

Raphael was no different from a sick person who had gotten up from the hospital bed—it was impossible for him to fight against the Demon of Prophecy right now.

[Is this the extent of an archangel's strength?]

Raphael's eyes trembled. He looked at the demon whose body was made of black mucus.

"Who... are you? Even in the record of myths, there is no mention of a being like—"

[Myths, huh?]

The Demon of Prophecy laughed.

[History has forgotten too many things.]

A black Rift formed behind the Demon of Prophecy, and he slowly walked toward it.

Right before he completely disappeared into the Rift, the Demon of Prophecy whispered, [I will be looking forward to it, human.]

The Demon of Prophecy disappeared into the darkness.

"..."

Si-Hun picked up the gem on the floor in silence. His field of vision turned as black as the gem he had picked up.

Clang.

The holy sword in his hands fell to the ground, became white dust, and scattered.

* * *

"Fuuu, fuuu. Holy fuck."

Kang-Woo panted out heavily after escaping through a Gate he'd created with an Authority.

"I almost got fucked."

That was far too close. No, it wasn't just close. It had almost been all over for him.

He had barely managed to fix the situation thanks to the trust he had built with Si-Hun, Yeon-Joo, and Gaia.

"... This is where it truly begins."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. Since he had managed to perform first aid on the situation, it was now time to make a plan to fully treat it.

"Fuuu."

Kang-Woo sighed deeply and sat on the floor since the couch had been summoned along with him. Not even he had expected this turn of events, so he needed time to organize his highly jumbled thoughts.

'I'm sure I have some time.'

He'd given them a gem to use if they wanted to save him.

That gem was something he'd created with Lilith in the past. It was what they'd used to create the gate that led to the dungeon where Ludwig had been corrupted.

'I'm sure they won't use it immediately.'

After all, it was obviously a trap. There was even a chance that they wouldn't use it at all.

"..."

After thinking about it for a while, Kang-Woo shook his head.

'They'll come, at the very least.'

He knew Si-Hun very well. Even if Si-Hun knew it was a trap, even if it were a burning pit of fire, he would for sure jump into it to save him.

'That's just how he is.'

Kang-Woo smirked.

He once again started to feel guilty, but he shook his head and continued thinking.

'I'll organize the situation first.'

His eyes shone sharply.

Leaving the process aside, the result wasn't bad. Considering that he had simply dealt with a sudden situation, he'd acquired quite a lot of things.

'It's also perfect timing, too.'

It was just after Gaia had appeared and trolled, saying that Satan wasn't the Demon of Prophecy.

'It needed to happen one way or another.'

The value of the Satan Coin had plummeted due to Gaia's revelation. He had already been thinking about finding someone to replace Satan and become the new 'Demon of Prophecy.'

"..."

Kang-Woo put his hand on his forehead and thought of Gaia.

'It's pointless to make someone else the Demon of Prophecy.'

Let's say he tried to frame Lucifer as the Demon of Prophecy. There was a chance Gaia would appear again and say he wasn't the Demon of Prophecy.

'Useless bitch.'

Thinking about Gaia made him furious, but he couldn't do anything about it. No matter how much he hated her, she was the main god protecting Earth. If she ended up dying, it would most likely lead to the end of this world.

'If gods from other worlds invade en masse...'

It was not hard to imagine what would happen. No matter how strong he was, Earth would be destroyed, and the home he had yearned for for ten millennia would vanish without a trace.

"Funn."

He sighed, shook his head, and refocused. It was time to focus on the Demon of Prophecy.

'The Demon of Prophecy... needs to stay anonymous.'

Just like a character that was simply a silhouette in mystery manhwa and anime, the true identity and form of the Demon of Prophecy must never be known.

However...

'He shouldn't be hidden too thoroughly.'

He had to keep giving them clues that showed that the Demon of Prophecy truly existed. Comparing this plan to the detective manhwa and anime mentioned before, he had to make sure the audience knew that a culprit actually existed.

"... It's so complicated."

Kang-Woo swept his hair up. He had to spread the evidence of the existence of the Demon of Prophecy while hiding his identity. It was a very complicated task, but that was the best possible way to avoid being an object of suspicion by the gods.

'Hiding his existence... while dropping hints about his existence...'

He narrowed his eyes. The gears in his head turned.

'There is a way.'

His eyes shone sharply.

He had already thought of something—that was why he'd given Si-Hun the black gem.

"First... I should contact Balrog and Lilith."

After things had become so complicated, they were the first ones he'd thought of. Whether he liked them or not, they were the ones whom he'd been with the longest, so they coordinated well together.

'As for Echidna and Halcyon...'

He fell into thought. He didn't have much experience coordinating with them. He'd only coordinated a short while with Echidna when they'd killed Reynald, and he wasn't sure if Halcyon was capable of acting.

'But I have no other choice.'

He couldn't do everything by himself. He needed more actors for his play.

'Alright, I'll also contact Vaal Zahak, Halcyon, and Echidna.'

He also thought about Han Seol-Ah but shook his head. Considering the situation, it would be better if as few people knew what was going on as possible. Unlike the others, Seol-Ah's soul wasn't linked to his, so hiding the truth from her was the correct answer.

Kang-Woo got up.

'As for what I have to do...'

If he wanted to enact a play, he needed the corresponding stage. He wasn't sure when Si-Hun would use the black gem, so creating the stage from scratch would be ineffective.

Thankfully, he already had the perfect one that he'd used before.

He moved to the dungeon he'd created.

Riiing.

[You have entered the SS+ rank dungeon 'Lilith \heartsuit Demon King Love Houwhythefuckdidyounameitlikethisfuckitsalreadyset'.]

"..."

There was silence.

He grabbed his head.

"For fuck's sake..."

He had to rebuild the stage from scratch.

* * *

Slam!!

A huge sound akin to cannon fire echoed throughout a giant fortress.

Crack.

The table Si-Hun had smashed his fist down on was split into two.

"... What does that mean?" Si-Hun glared at Shalgiel.

Shalgiel sighed deeply.

"The angels will not be taking part in this rescue operation."

"..."

Heavy silence fell.

Chapter 265 - Saving Oh Kang-Woo (2)

"Why..."

Kim Si-Hun was about to complain but ended up closing his mouth. He knew very well why Shalgiel had made such a decision.

"Because it is far too obvious that it is a trap," Shalgiel said firmly.

There was no need to even think about it. They were not trying to find where Oh Kang-Woo was being held and rescue him; the Demon of Prophecy had told them exactly where he was.

It was an invitation from the enemy, so there was no need to explain how dangerous it would be. Going there was like jumping into a pit of fire.

"..."

Even so...

Si-Hun closed his eyes.

'I have to go.'

Kang-Woo's life was at risk.

Whether it led to a pit of fire or the valley of death, he had to go. There was no reason not to.

'...'

The sight of Kang-Woo chained and muffling his screams came to his mind. If it were up to Si-Hun, Si-Hun would immediately use the gem to go save him.

Crunch.

He gritted his teeth. He had to resist. If he went alone, forget rescuing Kang-Woo, he himself would just die in vain.

He asked, "Was your word that you would give us your full support just lip service?"

"The situation is different. We cannot cooperate in a plan to recklessly charge into an enemy's trap."

There was nothing Shalgiel could do. They were facing the worst possible situation.

Shalgiel said, "We must at least wait until Lord Raphael recovers and the other archangels arrive."

"That will be too late."

"Even if it is too late, there is nothing we can do. Trying to save that man will just be suicide."

"Hyung-nim had thrown himself into a Rift to chase after Satan before. Do the convictions of angels not even come close to that of a human?"

"This and that are diff—"

"It is not different," Si-Hun cut Shalgiel off and showed him the black gem in his hand. "I also know that this is an enemy trap, but it is also the only way to save hyung-nim at this time."

"Give up. Just like Ludwig, he must have already been—"

"He has not been corrupted. You also saw the footage, did you not? He was just being tortured. There were no signs of him having turned into an Undead."

"We cannot be sure just because we did not see the symptoms. We do not know what happened after that either."

Suppressing his rage, Si-Hun said, "Hyung-nim is the Warrior of Light chosen by Tirion, God of Heroes. He is practically the co-leader of Guardians along with Gaia. Losing hyung-nim is like losing Guardians."

No matter what, he had to convince the angels to cooperate.

"..."

There was a heavy silence.

Shalgiel closed his eyes and fell into thought. To be more precise, he was just pretending to think; his answer was already decided.

"We cannot."

" ..."

"We angels cannot take part in this rescue operation."

"I clearly said that losing him could break apart Guardians as a whole."

"Even so, we cannot take part in such a reckless act."

"Did you not say that we must kill the Demon of Prophecy?"

"We must, but now is not the time."

"What a lighthearted mindset," Si-Hun said as if mocking Shalgiel. Si-Hun looked at him with sharp eyes. "Does your conviction of eradicating demons change based on the situation?"

"... I am simply differentiating between courage and recklessness," Shalgiel replied in a low voice. He was acting completely differently from his usual self of emphasizing battling with one's life on the line.

Si-Hun clenched his fists.

"Please let me meet Lord Raphael."

"You may not."

"Fuck!!"

Slam!!

He stomped on the ground, cracking the marble floor. Si-Hun put his hand on his forehead and breathed heavily.

'Endure it.'

Although he'd already exploded without being able to hold back his rage, he could not afford to get any angrier. He knew very well that his chance of rescuing Kang-Woo would get further away if he let his emotions take over him and he got into a conflict with the angels.

'For hyung... I have to endure it.'

Even if he wanted to smash that stubborn angel's face in, he needed to suppress his rage. If he antagonized the angels here, forget rescuing Kang-Woo, all of humanity would be in danger.

"... I apologize," Si-Hun said while holding back his rage.

Shalgiel lowered his head.

"It is okay. I can understand how you feel, Protector Kim Si-Hun. We had also felt the same way when we lost Ludwig. But now is the time to suppress your feelings and prepare for the coming—"

"If you have no intention to help, I will be excusing myself."

Si-Hun cut Shalgiel off and turned away. Since he had become sure that the angels would not help them, he had no reason to continue to listen to Shalgiel's nonsense.

He walked out of the fortress; the vast wilderness of Africa appeared before him. Before he opened the gate that led to the Hall of Protection, his head went blank.

"Shit."

He clenched his fists.

"Shit, shit, fuck!!!! Those fucking pigeons!"

He clenched his fists harder while cursing. He screamed like a beast while clenching his head.

"Haaa, haaa, haaa."

Si-Hun raised his head.

"I have to... save him."

Step, step.

He slowly walked. There was no time to waste. Even now, Kang-Woo was...

"..."

Si-Hun remained silent. He opened a gate leading to the Hall of Protection.

* * *

"I... see."

Gaia nodded with a heavy expression after hearing what had happened from Si-Hun. Considering she was neither surprised nor angry, it seemed she'd expected it.

"But Si-Hun, will you still..."

"I will go," he answered firmly without hesitation.

As if she had expected his answer, she said in a sad voice, "You know that it is a trap, don't y—"

"I do."

"..."

" ..."

"You might not... be able to come back."

Si-Hun smiled. He grabbed Gaia's hands and said, "Hyung... is the one who saved me from hell. He's the first person who acknowledged me."

"..."

"I'll save him and come back, no matter what."

"Sniff, sniff..."

Tears dripped from her eyes.

Si-Hun scratched his cheeks in embarrassment while looking at her.

"Am I watching a drama or what?" someone said while feigning laughter.

"Yeon-Joo...?"

"When are we going? We don't have a lot of time, do we?"

"It's dangerous."

"You're talking as if I didn't know that. Stop bullshitting and tell me when we're going."

"..."

Si-Hun remained silent at her sharp words. He needed all the help he could get in a desperate situation like this.

'If only Balrog were here...'

Si-Hun bit his lip. He had tried to contact Balrog after coming back from the Middle East, but he did not pick up.

It wasn't just Balrog; Echidna and the woman named Halcyon, whom he hadn't met before, had also disappeared. According to Lilith, the four of them had seemingly been attacked by the Demon of Prophecy while hunting down Satan.

"Understood. We will be departing tonight. Please, gather as many people as you can until then."

They would lose their chance if the operation kept getting delayed.

"Tonight?" Yeon-Joo snorted. "Is there a need to wait that long?"

"... Pardon?"

"I think we already have everyone we need."

She looked toward the other passageway that Si-Hun hadn't used.

People were walking in from there.

"Haha. You're finally here. I was wondering what was taking so long. As for the angels... well, I would guess they refused, considering they're not here."

Members of the Heavenly Sword Clan were following behind Tian Wuchen.

"Wh-What in the world is going on?! You left me with all of your work, and now you tell me that Kang-Woo was kidnapped?!" Even Tian Suyan, whom he hadn't seen in a while, was here.

After Wuchen ditched his leadership position to join Guardians, Suyan had been extremely busy managing the martial artists of the Heavenly Sword Clan.

"I am sorry for being late." In the other passageway was Kurosaki Yurie—or Lilith, to be more precise. She had come with Japanese players. Although there weren't many, considering there weren't many high-level players in Japan, they'd practically brought all of their forces.

"I'm sorry for being late. I had to deal with the government making a huge fuss." Even Jang Hyun-Jae of the Hwarang Corps appeared. Behind him were also Baek Hwa-Yeon, Goo Hyun-Mo, and other famous Korean players.

"S-Si-Hun! Tell me what's going on! Was Kang-Woo hyung-nim really kidnapped...?" Even Park Deok—no, Kang Tae-Soo had come.

Not only that, but the American players led by Grace McCubbin and the force under Si-Hun's direct command, the Sirius Corps, had also come.

The Sirius Corps members snickered while looking at Si-Hun.

"Oh Kang-Woo is the one the captain talks about all the time during training, right?"

"... The hyung-nim who he talks about as if he'd fallen head over heels for?"

"Ah..." Si-Hun's eyes widened. "This is..."

"Kang-Woo seems to have made ties with many people. Oh, you have a part in it too, Si-Hun." Gaia smiled.

"Everyone..."

Si-Hun started to tear up. His sense of betrayal after the angels had cold-heartedly refused to help was being washed away.

Of course, it wasn't that the angels had betrayed Guardians. Looking at it objectively, their proposition of waiting until Raphael recovered and waiting for angel reinforcements made more sense. Everyone present had just made the stupid decision to jump into a pit of fire that was obviously a trap, just to save one person.

There was no need to curse the angels for deciding not to jump into the fire with them.

"..."

But even still...

He was happy.

To think that there were so many people who wanted to save Kang-Woo.

"Hyung..."

He raised his head and teared up even more. He couldn't help but smile.

'See, I told you it couldn't be hidden.'

Back when Kang-Woo tried to push all of his achievements to Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun, Si-Hun remembered telling him that the world would find out sooner or later and that they would remember Kang-Woo more than him.

Tap.

Lastly, a woman with black hair walked toward him with staggering steps.

"Seol-Ah...?"

Si-Hun was shocked after looking at her.

She had dark circles under her eyes, and her skin was pale. She was trembling so much that she could barely walk. It showed how shocked she was after hearing that Kang-Woo was kidnapped.

"I'm... going too."

Her reaction was understandable.

The day Kang-Woo had disappeared, Echidna and Halcyon had also disappeared.

According to Lilith, they had been kidnapped by the Demon of Prophecy along with Balrog.

Seol-Ah had been living together with three of the four kidnapped people, so the news had likely destroyed her whole world.

"Seol-Ah..."

Si-Hun slurred his words. He knew the state Kang-Woo was in from seeing the footage. One of his eyes had been carved out, and chains had pierced his body.

He wasn't sure if it was okay to show such a sight to Kang-Woo's lover.

"You should stay h—"

"... up."

"Pardon?"

"I said, shut up."

Seol-Ah raised her head, and he felt a sense of madness in her eyes.

She grabbed Si-Hun by the collar.

"Shut up and guide me to where Kang-Woo is."

" ..."

Si-Hun remained silent. He had a feeling that he shouldn't try to stop her anymore.

"I understand."

Si-Hun gripped the black gem.

All the connections Oh Kang-Woo had built through time had intertwined and gathered here.

"Let's go."

Crack.

A black Rift appeared in the air.

Si-Hun stepped in without hesitation.

Riiing.

[You have entered the SS+ rank dungeon 'Abyssal Depths shiiietyes!thisisit! adungeonsgottahaveabadassnamelikeohwaitfuck.']

Chapter 266 - Saving Oh Kang-Woo (3)

[They have entered, my king.]

"How many?"

[At least... three thousand people.]

"What?"

Oh Kang-Woo's eyes widened.

Balrog smirked.

[It seems you have made far more connections than you had expected.]

"Hah."

He laughed in disbelief. He had never expected that thousands of people would accept a demon's invitation to jump into an obvious trap.

'Come to think of it...'

Since his name had been appearing in mainstream media, he was becoming famous among the public and Players. Now, he couldn't hide anymore, even if he tried. This showed how many things he'd done after returning to Earth.

"Urgh... But I hadn't expected thousands to come."

Kang-Woo leaned back against his chair. The chair was made of tentacles that oozed sap. It was so horrible that looking at it made one want to puke.

'Well, it's a fake...'

It was just a stage prop that would make things feel more real. This chair, which Lilith had made, looked so horrible that even Kang-Woo was reluctant to sit in it.

'As for what it was made with...'

He decided not to think too deeply about it.

The tentacles kept rising from the chair to poke and embrace the area near his groin. Kang-Woo moved his butt around in displeasure, which made the entire chair tremble for some reason.

"Well, in any case..."

Kang-Woo recalled the news that Barog had reported to him: more people had entered the dungeon than expected.

'It's not a bad thing.'

One could say that it was good. After all, it was obviously better to have a bigger audience.

"Balrog, can you pull up the feed of the intruders?"

[Of course. Just a moment please.]

Balrog brought over a black crystal orb, and Kang-Woo was able to view the dungeon's interior with it.

The dungeon was bustling with three thousand people in it.

'I'm a bit moved.'

He felt moved after seeing how many people had gathered to save him.

'I guess I'm blessed with people.'

Kang-Woo nodded in succession while making a satisfied expression.

It felt as if his efforts to save the world were being rewarded.

Although the actual reason why so many people were gathered was likely because of the sheer authority of the people he was close to, such as Tian Wuchen, Gaia, and Cha Yeon-Joo, he decided not to bother with the details.

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"Hm...?"
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As Kang-Woo was looking over the Players swiftly dealing with the trap that had activated as soon as they had entered the dungeon, he happened to see a certain woman.

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"Ah."
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The woman was healing the Players injured by the trap. Her glossy black hair had turned into a dry mess, and there were dark circles under her eyes as if she hadn't been able to sleep for days.

Kang-Woo was able to tell what she had gone through these past few days from her red eyes and haggard face.

Her usual kind eyes were filled with madness.

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"Darling..."
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More sorrow dyed Kang-Woo's expression than he had ever experienced before. He had honestly expected Han Seol-Ah to become like that from the moment he had thought of this plan.

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"Haaa..."
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He sighed.

There was nothing he could have done about it if he wanted to definitively separate 'Oh Kang-Woo' and the 'Demon of Prophecy,' but he couldn't stop feeling sad.

"Kang-Woo, Seol-Ah is..." Echidna, who was watching the video with him, mumbled sadly.

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"..."
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Echidna knew Kang-Woo's situation, but there was no way that looking at Seol-Ah like that would be easy for her.

Kang-Woo wasn't often in the house because of the many things he had to do, so Echidna spent most of her time with Seol-Ah. She'd probably spent more time with her than with Kang-Woo.

"Sh-She seems to be h-having a hard time."

Halcyon hadn't known Seol-Ah for long, so he said in a comparatively calm voice, "I-I'll c-comfort you."

Halcyon carefully extended his hands toward Kang-Woo and embraced his head. His flat chest touched Kang-Woo's cheek. He—or, to be more precise, he who was slowly becoming a she—smiled.

Although Seol-Ah had treated Halcyon kindly when he had been trembling from anxiety due to Kang-Woo being nowhere in sight when he had woken up, he honestly did not care much about whatever happened to anyone other than Kang-Woo.

Only Kang-Woo existed in Halcyon's world, and nothing else mattered.

Kang-Woo said, "Haaa. Alright, everyone get ready. You all know what to do, right?"

"Ah, y-yes! Of course! I-I'll make sure to be of help to you, M-Master Kang-Woo!"

Halcyon clenched his fists, his eyes filled with determination. His long silver hair danced.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and looked at Halcyon.

'You're honestly the one I'm most worried about.'

He was the strongest of his subordinates, but strength was not the key importance in this plan.

"Kang-Woo... you have to treat Seol-Ah well after this, okay?"

"Of course I will."

Kang-Woo patted the sad Echidna's head.

Although there was nothing he could've done about it, he needed to make it up to Seol-Ah for putting her through such a hard time.

'Si-Hun and Yeon-Joo, too.'

Besides them, there were many people he was sorry to, for example, Kang Tae-Soo and Gaia, among others.

'Well, I have to get this mess resolved first.'

If he wanted to have the leisure to make it up to everyone later, he first had to extinguish the fire burning his feet.

"Balrog, show me the map of the dungeon again."

[Yes, my king.]

Balrog showed him the dungeon blueprint.

Balrog and Lilith had helped a great deal with constructing this dungeon, which they only had a few days to build. Thanks to the experience of having built a dungeon previously, they'd created many parts in great detail.

'If I had to do this alone... Sheesh.'

Kang-Woo shook his head.

This dungeon was five times bigger than the one they'd created before to corrupt Ludwig. Kang-Woo's demonic energy had skyrocketed compared to back then, so they were able to make it much bigger.

He couldn't even think about how much he would've struggled if he had to fill the interior all by himself.

'I mean... there was a slight mishap in the naming process.'

However, no one seemed to pay much attention to the dungeon's name since a trap had activated as soon as they entered, just like what had happened with Ludwig.

"Echidna, you go here. Halcyon, here. Balrog, stand by over there."

The dungeon was structured like a labyrinth resembling a net. There was no way three thousand people could move all together, so they would naturally divide into groups.

Kang-Woo wanted the leads of the stage, such as Si-Hun, Yeon-Joo and Gaia, to lead the groups to where Kang-Woo was.

'You gotta have traps and minibosses along the way to make it feel more real.'

It couldn't be too easy or too hard.

Only after one desperately survived hardships would the hard-earned victory have meaning.

Balrog, Echidna, and Halcyon would be in charge of the balance.

[Hm. I have a question, my king.]

"What is it?"

[Who are you going to reveal as the Demon of Prophecy?] Balrog asked while tilting his head.

He'd heard everything from Kang-Woo.

Since he'd failed to make Satan the Demon of Prophecy, he had to find another demon as an alternative, but he had not given them any instructions in regards to that.

"I'm not gonna reveal it."

[Pardon?]

"The identity of the Demon of Prophecy will stay within this labyrinth."

[But...]

Balrog seemed confused.

Kang-Woo had prepared angel wings dyed black and a red demon mask to hide his face. They were the props he had prepared.

"Well... you'll see."

Kang-Woo laughed.

There was a way to hide the identity of the Demon of Prophecy while clearly showing his existence.

From the moment Si-Hun had entered the dungeon, 90% of the plan had already succeeded.

"Oh, right. Suggest me an angel name."

"An angel name?"

"Yeah. Any name that ends with -el."

Balrog fell into thought.

"How about Michael or Gabriel—"

"Those already exist."

"How about... Rakiel?"

"Oh, not bad. Where did you hear that?"

"Mm... I am not sure. It suddenly came to mind, but I do not really remember."

"Well, I guess that's fine."

Kang-Woo shrugged.

Rakiel... It had a nice ring to it.

"Make sure you all stay true to your roles and change into the disguises that Lilith prepared for you so that no one recognizes you. Everyone has their voice-changers, right?"

"Yeah. Lilith prepared them for us," Echidna answered.

"Try not to kill anyone even by mistake."

It would honestly be better if they killed a few people to make the stage feel more real, but not even Kang-Woo had the slightest intention to kill the people who had come to save him.

"Alright, begin," Kang-Woo commanded after receiving the video crystals installed in various areas of the dungeon.

Halcyon, Echidna, and Balrog each moved to their positions.

Moments later...

- Kuh! Wh-What the hell is that tentacle dragon?!
- A-A succubus...?
- You idiot! There's no way a succubus would look that hideous!
- Sh-Shit! Wh-what's up with that muscle monster?!

Screams spread out from all around the dungeon.

He saw that the rescue party, which had divided into groups, was struggling because of the minibosses.

'Right, how's Si-Hun doing?'

Kang-Woo turned on the feed where Si-Hun was.

- Advance.

'Man, he's advancing like crazy.'

- C-Captain! This is a trap area— - Advance. 'Huh?' - Huff! Huff! H-How about we take a short brea— - Advance. 'Hey, don't overdo it, man. Someone's gonna die at that rate.' - Undead!! Undead made with the corpses of angels...! - Advance. 'Crazy son of a bitch.' Si-Hun was advancing at insane speeds while wiping out all the traps and monsters in his path. 'Stop, you idiot!' He'd placed the traps in a way that minimized the risk of death, but recklessly advancing like this would cause deaths. People in Si-Hun's rescue party group were being wounded one after another. - C-Captain... th-the wounded are... - The injured can fall back. The rest of us will keep advancing without rest. 'Hey, Si-Hun...' The dungeon clearing, which Kang-Woo had expected to take about three days, was being cleared at an astronomical pace. 'Stop.' He had been planning on fine-tuning the situation leisurely, but he was forced to quickly get his costume ready. He honestly had not been able to get everything ready due to the time constraint. - Advance. 'Take a break, dammit. You'll exhaust your Qi and die at this rate.' - Advance. "Don't." BANG!! "For fuck's sake." Eight hours after entering the dungeon, Si-Hun broke down the wall and reached the last room. * * * "Huff, huff." "Y-You crazy son of a bitch..." Pained groans sounded from all around. Yeon-Joo, covered in wounds, collapsed in place.

The same went for Wuchen—he knelt on one knee and vomited blood.

"Cough! Cough!"

Si-Hun blocked his own mouth. Red blood flowed from his mouth due to him drawing out even his innate Qi.

Despite that...

"Kang-Woo... hyung..."

He kept going forward while staggering.

At that moment...

Clap, clap, clap.

"I'm surprised you managed to get all the way here."

An anonymous person appeared at the end of the tunnel. He was wearing a red demon mask and had black angel wings.

"Who..."

He seemed different from the Demon of Prophecy, whose body had been made of black mucus. Not only did they look different, but their atmosphere and voices were also completely different.

Si-Hun's eyes shook after he saw that someone that wasn't the Demon of Prophecy had appeared.

"I am Rakiel, the king of 'Corruption' among the Four Heavenly Kings."

"Rakiel...?"

Si-Hun frowned at the mention of a name he hadn't heard before. He looked around. Everyone else also seemed to have never heard of the name.

Kang-Woo—no, Rakiel—was smiling behind the mask.

'Of course you've never heard of it before.'

He had only just heard it as well.

Kang-Woo nodded in satisfaction with the name that Balrog had made for him.

'The name doesn't matter anyways.'

What mattered was that Rakiel was an imaginary being that Kang-Woo had created. Since he wasn't real, the issue with the real one appearing like what had happened with Satan would not arise.

'Shiiiet, Four Heavenly Kings, huh? It's cool as fuck!'

He felt proud of what he'd come up with.

A way to prove the existence of the Demon of Prophecy while hiding his identity...

The best way to do that was to create a subordinate that served him.

'And with this, there's absolutely no chance of my true identity being found out anymore!'

From now on, he could just use the imaginary card that was Rakiel in situations similar to past ones that had required him to use the Satan cheat code.

Rakiel wasn't the 'Demon of Prophecy,' but his subordinate, so there was no danger of Gaia appearing out of nowhere and trolling.

'Now, I can just keep the identity of the Demon of Prophecy hidden within this dungeon forever and use Rakiel whenever I need to.'

There wasn't a risk of being discovered as the Demon of Prophecy anymore.

'Yes, this is it!'

Kang-Woo shivered in excitement. He had been in need of a coin that could replace the Satan Coin that had crashed into oblivion.

'I just needed to make one.'

As if creating something out of nothing, he just needed to create a coin he could buy.

Kang-Woo nodded in satisfaction. The peak of the setup wasn't simply creating the Rakiel Coin.

"Four Heavenly Kings...?" Si-Hun mumbled with a hardened expression. Something flashed past his mind. "C-Could Satan have also been..."

"Keke, you are quick on the uptake."

"So Satan was also one of the Four Heavenly Kings!"

Satan had pretty much become irrelevant at this point, so it was time to let him go. Although it had not been intended, it had pretty much been revealed that Satan had been a pawn of the Demon of Prophecy all along, so there was no reason to doubt it.

Kang-Woo threw a prop he'd prepared beforehand to Si-Hun.

Thud, roll—

Si-Hun grabbed the item on the floor. His eyes widened.

"Th-This is...!"

"How dare you compare me to Satan?"

The thing that the man with black wings had thrown to the floor as if it were trash was... Satan's head.

"He was but the weakest among the Four Heavenly Kings."

Kang-Woo—no, the king of Corruption among the Four Heavenly Kings, a former noble angel who had ended up serving the Demon of Prophecy, dying his wings black...

Rakiel burst into laughter.

- Waaaah. Stop... Please stop, you son of a bitch...

He heard a faint voice from somewhere but ignored it.

Chapter 267 - It Wasn't A Bad Life

"What... did you say?"

"S-Satan was the weakest?"

Kim Si-Hun and Cha Yeon-Joo looked at Rakiel in disbelief.

Guardians knew better than anyone how strong Satan was after everything they had suffered at his hands. Even heroes who could've dominated an era had died at the hands of Satan.

Even leaving all his wrongdoings aside, Satan had fought against Raphael and won. Not only that, Raphael still hadn't recovered from the wounds he had suffered in that battle.

Satan had proven his power to the world to the point that it was meaningless to even think about how powerful of a demon he was, but...

"W-Wait! Th-There has to be some sort of problem!!" Yeon-Joo shouted in disbelief.

There was no way she would so easily believe that Satan had died so easily and that he had been the weakest of the four retainers serving the Demon of Prophecy.

"We don't even know what he looks like since he always wore a mask! Check again!" Yeon-Joo anxiously shouted at Si-Hun.

"..."

Si-Hun remained still with his mouth closed.

Just as she had said, it was the first time they'd seen Satan's face. His face was so ordinary that Si-Hun even wondered why Satan had worn a mask in the first place. However...

"It's... Satan."

It wasn't simple intuition. Satan had once sown a 'seed' within Si-Hun to corrupt him into a demon, and the demonic energy he had felt back then and the demonic energy he was currently feeling from the head was an exact match.

"..."

There was silence.

Rakiel crossed his arms and looked at them.

"Do you believe me now?"

"Where is... hyung-nim?"

Si-Hun threw Satan's head like it was trash.

What mattered at the moment wasn't Satan or the Four Heavenly Kings. After all, they had come here while fully knowing the Demon of Prophecy would be here. Just because a powerful enemy had appeared didn't mean they could forget their objective.

"By hyung-nim, do you mean this man?"

Rakiel smirked and snapped his finger.

The darkness surrounding them like a tent was lifted, and Kang-Woo, who was chained to a cross, appeared.

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"U-Urgghh..."
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"H-Hyung-nim!!"

"Gasp..."

Kang-Woo was in an extremely wretched state; his body was a complete mess from likely having been tortured all this time.

"K-Kang-Woo!!!"

Seol-Ah lost her reason and ran toward Kang-Woo.

Si-Hun grabbed her shoulder.

"Let me go!"

"Please... calm down."

"Let me go!! K-Kang-Woo... Kang-Woo is...!" Seol-Ah shouted while crying.

Si-Hun bit his lip and pulled her back. He also wanted nothing more than to rush toward Kang-Woo, but...

'Hold it in.'

Chilling bloodlust appeared in Si-Hun's eyes.

It wasn't hard to imagine what would happen if he rushed forward without being able to control himself...

They would probably lose Kang-Woo forever.

"Si... Hun."

"Hyung..."

Si-Hun clamped his eyes shut. He didn't want to see his wounded hyung.

'But...'

Si-Hun controlled his breathing and slowly opened his eyes. He wasn't sure if he could say he was glad for it, but he didn't see any signs of corruption. Neither could he feel evil demonic energy from Kang-Woo's body.

'We can still save him.'

It wasn't too late, unlike with Ludwig.

Si-Hun gripped his holy sword tighter.

Rakiel was leisurely looking at him. Si-Hun's mind was in discord.

'Will I be able to win?'

The demon had made fun of the powerful Satan, calling him weak. The chances of winning were close to zero.

"Hmm? What a surprise. I had expected you to lose your mind and charge at me."

"..."

"Or I guess he was not that important to you after all."

Rakiel burst into laughter and mocked Si-Hun.

Si-Hun ignored his taunts and raised his sword, taking a deep breath.

'Even if the chances are close to zero...'

He had no reason not to raise his sword. He recalled everything he'd gone through with Kang-Woo. He had only ever been saved by him. Now it was the time to repay that favor.

'If he saw me now...'

He would probably grab him by the collar and curse at him again.

Si-Hun smirked and opened his mouth.

"We will do as planned."

"..."

"Gulp."

The Players gripped their weapons nervously at Si-Hun's words. The goal of the mission was solely to rescue Kang-Woo—there was no need to defeat Rakiel.

"Okay, then..."

Si-Hun lowered his body.

BOOM!!

Si-Hun shot toward Rakiel by using the tension created from bending his body like a bow.

* * *

'Good.'

Kang-Woo smiled while blocking Si-Hun's attacks. He looked at the Players around him.

'I did it.'

It seemed like the angels hadn't taken part in the plan, but it didn't matter. If this many Players served as witnesses, they would have no choice but to trust it even if they were suspicious of Kang-Woo.

'And now...'

The identity of the Demon of Prophecy had fallen into the labyrinth; he had created a card known as Rakiel that would allow him to take actions comfortably, and the Warrior of Light Oh Kang-Woo had been freed from any suspicion. It was such a huge success that he wanted to cheer in delight.

'Lastly...

All he had to do was wrap up this situation.

'For fuck's sake, why did this have to happen so out of left field?'

The tiny mistake of watching the battle between Si-Hun and Kalgia with beer and popcorn in hand had brought him all the way here.

'I mean, I guess it all worked out.'

Although it had been extremely dangerous, having obtained a card that could replace Satan was satisfactory enough.

'Still...'

Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief while blocking Si-Hun's attacks as Si-Hun charged like a raging bull.

'What an absolute monster.'

He couldn't believe it while looking at the wounds that were appearing on his own body. Kang-Woo had set the dungeon's difficulty while taking Si-Hun into consideration.

Excluding himself, Si-Hun was overwhelmingly stronger than the rest, so it was obvious.

He had thought that the dungeon clearing would take three days at the very least no matter how many people entered the dungeon, but it had been cut down to eight hours due to Si-Hun.

'What's up with him?'

Kang-Woo looked at Si-Hun in disbelief.

At this point, he couldn't just laugh and brush it off while saying Si-Hun was the protagonist.

The current Si-Hun would likely be able to face a prince of Hell; no, he would even be able to beat a low-ranking prince like Mammon or Belphegor.

'How?'

It'd only been three years since Si-Hun had Awakened as a Player, yet in just three years, he'd surpassed the princes of Hell. In comparison, Kang-Woo had spent nine millennia in Hell to be able to face the princes of Hell.

Kang-Woo's assistance as well as Si-Hun's innate talent and the soul of Martial God Tian Taihuang likely played a large part in Si-Hun's growth, but this had gone beyond impressive and was now just freakishly bizarre.

Clang! Clang!

The sound of clashing metal rang out.

The white light coming out of the holy sword illuminated the surroundings.

"Fuuu, fuuu!"

Si-Hun breathed heavily. Every time he swung his sword, a recoil strong enough to shatter his entire body shook him.

"Don't hog him by yourself after all the shit we went through to get here, Si-Hun!" Yeon-Joo took part in the battle as well.

Tian Wuchen, Jang Hyun-Jae, Baek Hwa-Yeon, Goo Hyun-Mo, and many other Ranker-level Players surrounded Rakiel to attack him from all directions.

The entire dungeon shook from the clash of powerful energies.

BOOM!!

Sounds as loud as a storm echoed throughout the dungeon.

Rakiel had only received scratches when directly hit by the attacks of Players Ranker level and up, but the accumulation of such scratches would eventually turn into a large injury.

"If we keep this up...!"

After seeing that Rakiel was defending rather than attacking, hope began appearing in the Players' eyes.

"Hand over... hyung...!"

Si-Hun jumped in the air and raised both of his hands. A pillar of light came out of the holy sword that he was holding. The light was so intense that it seemed like the light would cut the world into two pieces.

"Hahahahal!! Good, very good!!" Rakiel burst into crazed laughter. "But..."

The ends of his mouth went up. While snickering, he spread out both arms, his fallen angel wings spreading out with them.

"It is not enough."

He huddled up. Crackling sounds could be heard coming from every single feather of his ten wings.

A chillingly thick demonic energy rose from Rakiel's body.

"Watch ou—"

Si-Hun felt something had gone wrong and quickly shouted, but...

"Black Lightning."

Crackle!!

"Kurgh!"

"Kyaaa!"

Screams rang out.

As Rakiel spread his wings, black lightning spread across the surroundings. Hundreds of little streaks of lightning traveled across the ground and electrocuted the Players.

Clatter.

The Players struck by the lightning dropped their weapons and trembled. Their eyes rolled back, and bubbles frothed out of their mouths. With just one attack, half of the Players lost their ability to fight and collapsed.

"Tsk tsk. I guess insects will be insects, no matter how hard they struggle."

Rakiel clicked his tongue as if he found them pathetic.

"Shut... up...!"

Si-Hun got up while trembling.

Was it because he'd received an attack up front? His entire body was trembling.

'I should put an end to this.'

Thinking that the time had come, Rakiel smiled wickedly and continued, "But I can see why that person has taken an interest in you."

"He...?"

"Kekek, did you not see them before?"

Si-Hun's expression hardened. He recalled the endless darkness made of black mucus.

Rakiel kicked the staggering Si-Hun.

"Kurgh!"

"But it is not yet the time of prophecy."

"Time of prophecy?"

"You will come to know over time."

Rakiel smiled meaningfully.

The faces of the Players around them hardened due to his mention of 'time of prophecy.'

'To be honest, I don't know either.'

Rakiel had just said whatever random thing had come to his mind.

'Well, I'm sure saying one or two things that sound super important before going back should be enough.'

That was pretty much the essence of the Four Heavenly Kings.

Rakiel spread his wings and raised both hands.

"Keep struggling, humans! And fall into despair!"

'Fucking banger closing line.'

"The end will be upon you soon enough!"

'Yes, this is it!'

"The time of prophecy is nea—"

Fwoosh!!!

Light suddenly burst out from somewhere as he was saying his closing lines.

'Eh?'

Something was happening. Kang-Woo turned to Si-Hun, wondering if he had powered up again, but he was only coughing while collapsed on the ground; no light whatsoever was coming out of him.

"How dare you... to Kang-Woo...!"

'Darling?'

Seol-Ah was glaring at him with bloodshot eyes. The blinding light coming out of her filled the entire dungeon.

Twelve pure-white wings sprouted from her back.

Tsssss!!

'What the f...'

Kang-Woo's eyes widened.

Although the wings were so faint that one could barely make out their shape, the power within them was suffocatingly colossal.

The intense light was burning his skin, causing smoke to rise from it.

Not just that...

"This is..." Si-Hun got up.

Like when he'd drunk Kang-Woo's blood, all the wounds Rakiel had caused were healing.

He looked at Seol-Ah with a surprised expression, but that only lasted for a short while. While biting his lip, he raised his holy sword.

"Kuuuuuurghh!"

Kang-Woo twisted due to the pain of his body burning.

He couldn't return to his senses at the unexpected development of events. Si-Hun ran behind him while stepping on the weapons he had raised into the air using Sword Control. He roundhouse kicked Rakiel.

Bash!

Si-Hun's leg, infused with blue condensed Qi, smashed Rakiel's head.

"Argh, fuck!"

Rakiel rolled to the ground. He grabbed the back of his head and turned.

'That fucking hurt, motherfucker!'

He had accidentally cursed. His scream had not been an act.

His skull wouldn't have been caved in, but it would have at least cracked if he had not reflexively used the Authority of Invulnerability.

"Now!"

As Si-Hun shouted, Yeon-Joo nodded. She took out a white crystal. It wasn't just her—all of the other Players also took out white crystals. These were the crystals that Guardians had given that led to the Hall of Protection.

Dozens of crystals started to shine, and the lights intertwined in the air like a net.

"Grab hyung-nim!"

"Okay!"

Yeon-Joo spread her red chains, freed Kang-Woo from the cross, and pulled him into her arms.

"Retreat!" Si-Hun shouted.

All the Players who had been healed thanks to Seol-Ah nodded.

Without hesitation, they threw themselves into the Hall of Protection.

"..."

Si-Hun grabbed Seol-Ah, who'd lost consciousness after emitting intense light. He looked at Rakiel, who was struggling in pain.

"I'm not sure what the time of prophecy is or why that slime is interested in me, but..."

"..."

"At the very least..." An intense killing intent could be seen in Si-Hun's eyes. "I will rip out those chicken wings of yours one by one and shove them into your mouth."

After saying that, Si-Hun also jumped into the gate.

There was silence in the place where the intense fight had just happened.

"... Son of a bitch has gotten better at cursing."

Kang-Woo frowned while looking at the wounds caused by the light. They weren't healing easily.

'What the hell is this?'

What just happened felt like a dream.

His mind was in a jumble.

"Urgh. First off..."

Kang-Woo got up.

"Well, it didn't go exactly as planned, but I guess this is good enough."

At first, he was planning to say a few mysterious things and retreat, but it had gone slightly awry. However, his plan had not been hindered.

Thanks to the light that had come out of Seol-Ah, Guardians had managed to rescue Oh Kang-Woo.

"Fuuu."

Kang-Woo lay in the dungeon, which had been pretty much destroyed.

He focused his consciousness on the clone he'd created.

'Now...'

It was time to give the finishing touches.

* * *

"A-Argghh..."

"H-Hyung-nim!! Come back to your senses, hyung-nim!!"

"Hey! A-Are you okay? Healer! Bring a fucking healer right now!!"

Loud sounds could be heard all around the place.

Kang-Woo slowly opened his remaining eye and got up.

"Kuh!"

Intense pain shot through him.

"Don't try to move, and just stay still!"

Yeon-Joo reached out and embraced him.

Kang-Woo smiled faintly.

"I guess... I'm alive."

"Yeah, you're alive, you son of a bitch! So just keep your mouth shut!"

"..."

Kang-Woo slowly extended his arm. With a trembling hand, he grabbed Si-Hun's hand.

"H-Hyung..."

Si-Hun shed tears while looking at Kang-Woo's mangled body.

"Thanks... man."

"H-Hyung! Save your words! Th-The blood...!"

"Hey! Bring over a fucking healer!!"

"Ha... Haha."

Kang-Woo looked up at the sky while making a bittersweet smile.

"I guess... it wasn't a bad life."

"H-Hey!! Don't bullshit me! Hey!! Oh Kang-Woo! Keep it together, you fucking bastard!!!"

Kang-Woo closed his eyes as he listened to Yeon-Joo's screams.

Chapter 268 - Visit

"Haaa... That son of a bitch."

A beautiful girl with short red hair stood in front of a high-rise apartment building and sighed. She was kicking pebbles around on the ground but couldn't contain her frustration and swung her fist at a wall.

Bash.

Her fist left a noticeable imprint on the orderly brick wall.

Tap.

An astonishingly handsome young man approached her while pushing a wheelchair. A thin woman with light brown hair was sitting in the wheelchair.

"Oh, you're here early, Yeon-Joo."

"Didn't you know that I live here?"

"Ah, that's right."

"I came out here because of you guys. I usually just have to take the elevator."

Kim Si-Hun, the man who was pushing the wheelchair, made a light laugh.

"More importantly, is Kang-Woo okay? It's only been a week, so I'm worried if it's really okay for us to come visit..." Gaia said in a worried voice.

Cha Yeon-Joo snorted.

"Don't you know how fast his body regenerates? The bastard that was saying shit about how it wasn't a bad life regenerates like some goddamn liquid monster! It was so impressive that even the healer taking care of him was surprised."

"W-Well... We've already seen tons of times how quickly hyung-nim regenerates, haven't we?"

"Yeah, so why was he being such a drama queen about it?! Argh! Just thinking about what happened back then makes me mad. That fucking..."

"Y-Yeon-Joo."

"What?! You got a problem?!"

Si-Hun flinched at Yeon-Joo's intense eyes. He recalled how she'd screamed in desperation while holding Oh Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo had acted as if he were about to die, but soon after a healer started treating him, his missing eye and all the holes in his body regenerated, so it was understandable that she would react like this.

'Hyung-nim has regenerative capabilities.'

Si-Hun scratched his cheeks while remembering how he'd also screamed in desperation with Yeon-Joo.

According to Kang-Woo, his blood had ended up gaining powerful regenerative capabilities one day after going through all sorts of hardships in Hell.

Although Si-Hun had already known this about Kang-Woo because he had drunk Kang-Woo's blood when he had been on the verge of death, the heat of the moment completely blew that memory from his mind.

'His internal injuries don't seem to have been healed, though...'

Kang-Woo stayed in a coma for five days after his external injuries were healed. That meant that Kang-Woo's regenerative ability wasn't omnipotent.

When Si-Hun had been driven to the verge of death by Halphas, his external injuries had been fully healed thanks to Kang-Woo's blood, but he had not been able to move properly as if his body had become a lump of steel.

'In other words...'

Si-Hun's expression darkened.

If Kang-Woo's body became that ruined despite his impressive regenerative ability, it meant that he had been tortured continuously for days on end.

His rage and resentment toward Rakiel only grew.

'At the very least...'

Si-Hun would rip out his ten wings and shove them in his mouth.

"Fuuu."

Si-Hun took a deep breath.

Gaia carefully said, "Uhm. Si-Hun."

"Ah, yes?"

"Uhm... Are there any... angels around us?"

"No, there aren't."

Si-Hun expanded his Qi sense and searched their surroundings. Their relationship with the angels had become awkward due to the past incident, so there was no way they'd come to check up on Kang-Woo.

Gaia nodded and opened her mouth.

"Then have we received any news regarding Balrog or Echidna?"

Balrog, Echidna, Halcyon, Lilith.

Those four were Kang-Woo's direct subordinates. In short, they were demonic beings.

Gaia, Si-Hun, Han Seol-Ah, and Yeon-Joo had come to accept them since they had learned that Kang-Woo had been dragged to Hell suddenly in the past and was forced to become a demon, but that wasn't the case for the angels.

Angels would surely try to eradicate them, whatever their circumstances were.

"Ah, I heard that Kang-Woo hyung-nim's subordinates were found where the minibosses of the dungeon were. Lilith managed to rescue them, and they're currently being treated at Balrog's residence."

"How bad were they wounded?"

"I heard that they were in serious condition when they were first found, but it seems that their lives are no longer at risk."

"What a relief."

Gaia smiled.

They had not accepted the power of light after abandoning demonic energy like Kang-Woo had, but she knew they were more loyal to Kang-Woo than anyone else. Since Kang-Woo was walking the path of light, they would naturally follow him.

"Haha, I'm a bit envious," Si-Hun said in a bitter voice.

Gaia tilted her head.

"Envious?"

"Yes. Hyung-nim had gotten into this mess because he had been with just his subordinates, hadn't he? I can understand how much he trusts them just by seeing that he hadn't told us anything about it."

"I-I'm sure that's not the case! After all, you had the duty to eliminate the last remaining Aspect of Evil. That's probably why he didn't call you."

"Haha. But still... I feel like he is more open with his subordinates."

Si-Hun personally also wanted to become his retainer. He scratched his head while smiling awkwardly.

As Gaia was about to reply that wasn't the case...

"Yeah, yeah, we all know how thirsty you are for Kang-Woo's ass, so enough of that," Yeon-Joo interrupted.

"A-Ass?"

"You look like a lovestruck teenage girl."

Yeon-Joo rolled her eyes, and even spat on the floor.

Si-Hun exclaimed in bewilderment, "I-It's nothing like that! It's just that I really admire hyung-nim! A-And I already have someone that I..."

Si-Hun took a glimpse at Gaia.

"Ah..."

Having an idea of what Si-Hun was trying to say, Gaia placed her hands on her reddened cheeks.

Yeon-Joo frowned.

"... Fuck."

She shook her head as if she couldn't stand looking at them. "More importantly, is anyone else coming? Is it just the three of us?"

"Tae-Soo, Ms. Tian Suyan, and Master said they wanted to come, but... we decided to pick different dates since having so many people come at one time would be a bother."

Yeon-Joo turned and nodded. "Oh, really? I guess we thought the same thing. Hwa-Yeon and Hyun-Jae ahjussi wanted to come, but I told them to come next time."

She grabbed a fruit basket that she had placed on the ground.

"Then let's get going. It's weird to keep talking outside."

"Okay."

"I'll have him tell us exactly what happened."

"Haha. Hyung-nim just started recovering, so don't be too harsh on him."

"Bullshit, after what he did to me..."

Yeon-Joo pounded her chest as if the memory from that time still angered her.

Yeon-Joo, Si-Hun, and Gaia head toward Kang-Woo's apartment suite. As they knocked on the front door, a kind-looking woman opened it.

"Oh my."

"We came to visit," Yeon-Joo said as she raised her fruit basket. "How are you doing? After... that light came out of you."

"I'm not sure. To be honest, I don't remember much from that time... but I'm doing okay," Seol-Ah replied with a smile on her face.

"Really? That's good to hear."

Yeon-Joo visited the house often, so the two of them had been close for a while. After Kang-Woo had become busier, Seol-Ah had started to spend more time with Yeon-Joo than with Kang-Woo.

"Just a second..."

Seol-Ah carefully closed the door and came out.

"Hmm?"

"I'm... sorry to say this after you came all the way here, but I don't think Kang-Woo is well enough to meet with other people yet."

"Why? Is he still not doing well? I was on the phone with him yesterday, and he said he's gotten a lot better."

"But he said he wanted some peace and quiet for a little longer..."

"That bastard..." Yeon-Joo's eyes narrowed.

"I'm sorry after you came all this way."

"No. If hyung-nim says he wants some rest, we should respect his decision. He had already told me that he was fine over the phone, so I'll come back when he wants us to come visit."

"Okay, thank you."

As Seol-Ah apologized and bowed, Yeon-Joo shook her hands to gesture that it was okay.

"Well... Since you're here, why don't you guys come over to my house? It's just five stories up."

"Oh, that sounds good."

"Grace said she would take care of all the work for today, so I'm also fine with it."

Si-Hun and Gaia nodded.

Seol-Ah saw them off to the elevator and went back into the house.

Clack.

As she opened the door to Kang-Woo's room, he was lying on the bed.

"Ah, don't get up, Kang-Woo."

As Kang-Woo tried to get up, Seol-Ah ran toward him.

Kang-Woo nodded while smiling bitterly.

"I still feel heavy."

"You've suffered some major injuries, after all. It's already a miracle that you were able to recover like this..." Seol-Ah answered sadly as if she'd remembered how Kang-Woo looked when Rakiel had been holding him captive.

Kang-Woo quickly waved his hand.

"I told you, there's no need to be that worried."

"No. You need to take better care of yourself, Kang-Woo," Seol-Ah firmly replied.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and lay on the bed.

'I'm honestly completely fine.'

The wounded Kang-Woo had been his fake body created using the Authority of Cloning. Not only was he okay, but he was also feeling jittery after staying in bed for a week straight.

'But still...'

He had no choice.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

'It would raise suspicion if I went around as if I was completely fine after how much I had been injured.'

As the very person who had orchestrated the Oh Kang-Woo rescue operation, he needed to pay attention to the details. Even for his external injuries, he had been planning on healing them slowly, but he had no choice but to treat his clone with the Authority of Regeneration because everyone had been crying so goddamn much.

'Besides, Si-Hun and the others already know about the Authority of Regeneration.'

He'd even fully regenerated Si-Hun's melted arms.

And most importantly...

"Kurgh, cough, cough!"

"K-Kang-Woo!"

Seol-Ah quickly approached him and supported him. After embracing him carefully as if he were a wounded baby, she carefully placed her hands on his chest. A white light came out of Seol-Ah's hand and covered his entire body.

Kang-Woo's mouth relaxed. He was delighted by the soft sensations that he felt against several areas of his body.

'I can even receive devoted care from my darling.'

It was the epitome of killing two birds with one stone.

He honestly wanted to stay as a patient for a month or two so that he could keep receiving care like this.

'Well, that's not an option.'

The Four Heavenly Kings and the fallen angel Rakiel...

He couldn't stay still after blowing things up to such large proportions.

Not only that, but he hadn't been able to absorb Belphegor's demonic energy, and he hadn't discovered what the final condition to becoming a Demon God was yet.

He had no way of knowing the last condition, so he could only work on improving his demonic energy control to absorb Belphegor's demonic energy.

'There's also a chance that they're related.'

He had a lot of things to do, so he couldn't stay still and do nothing.

'But still...'

There was no reason for him not to enjoy this blissful situation.

"A-Are you feeling better now?"

"Yeah, much better."

"Phew. I'm glad to hear that."

"That aside, how have you been feeling since that day, Seol-Ah?"

"Oh, y-you heard about it?"

"Yeah. Si-Hun told me."

He'd also seen it with his own eyes. Not just that, he'd felt as if he were a vampire being burned by sunlight.

'What could that have possibly been?'

He had no way of knowing, but he was sure that the power defied logic and that it had something to do with the angel wing symbols on Seol-Ah's back.

"To be honest, I'm not sure either. Back then... I was only thinking about saving you, Kang-Woo."

"So you can't use it now?"

"Yes."

"Mm..."

"B-But you don't need to be worried! I haven't had any problems since then!"

Seol-Ah raised her slender arms and showed off her muscles.

Kang-Woo nodded.

'I'm glad, but...'

He couldn't help but be worried. The power that she had shown was...

'Probably stronger than my maximum demonic energy output.'

It could not be explained by logic.

'I should look into it.'

The wings that had appeared on Seol-Ah's back had been so faint that they had been see-through. Meaning, if the wings became more vivid, they would be able to exert even greater power.

'It makes no sense.'

He was honestly very confused. It was even harder to understand, considering he had become even stronger than his past self in Hell.

While he was thinking, something soft touched his cheek.

Seol-Ah had put her hand on his cheek.

"Don't worry, Kang-Woo. I'm okay." She then got up and said, "Stay here for a bit."

After walking out of the room, she came back with some steaming porridge.

"I saw some good abalone at the market, so I made this."

"I'm not hurt enough to eat porridge. I think kimchi stew would be—"

"Shh. I'm going to have to ask you to be quiet, Mr. Patient," Seol-Ah said in a strict voice.

Kang-Woo nodded while making a sad expression.

Seol-Ah took a spoonful of porridge and blew on it.

"Say, ah~"

"I'm not a baby. I can eat on my own."

"... Say, ah."

"Yes, ma'am."

Kang-Woo opened his mouth and was fed a spoonful of porridge.

'It's delicious.'

Kang-Woo made a happy smile. It was true that the porridge was delicious, but being in this situation also made him happy.

'Have I ever received care like this...?'

Kang-Woo smirked after thinking of the past.

'No way.'

Back when he grew up at the orphanage, when he left it and began working, and even during the ten millennia he'd spent in Hell...

He couldn't recall ever having been taken care of in such a manner.

'... It's nice.'

An inexplicable sense of joy filled him.

"Fufu. You ate it all."

Seol-Ah cleaned his mouth with a handkerchief.

Kang-Woo felt as if he'd become a kid. He opened his arms after being dragged into the strange mood that Seol-Ah was giving off.

"Hug me."

"Oh my." Seol-Ah giggled while covering her mouth. "I never thought you'd act this way, Kang-Woo."

"... It's a bit disgusting, right?"

"No, I didn't mean it that way." Seol-Ah hugged Kang-Woo. "I like you like this just as much as how you usually are."

"..."

To be honest, acting this way gave him goosebumps. He even felt like puking a little.

"Rather, this is more..."

"Hmm?"

"Fufufu. Yes... I think it'd be nice in its own way to take care of you like this forever."

"Darling?"

Seol-Ah mumbled as if she were dreaming. She laughed while giving off a weird aura and let go of Kang-Woo. She put away the pillow and sat on the bed.

"Kang-Woo." She lightly slapped her thighs.

"... No, that's a bit..."

"Now."

Kang-Woo felt that he couldn't say no, so he changed his position. A soft sensation spread through his body as he put his head on her thighs.

"Ah..."

For some reason...

He felt like he was about to cry.

"Alright, since you've had a meal, you should sleep."

Seol-Ah softly caressed Kang-Woo's cheek.

Although his body didn't require sleep, he started feeling sleepy.

Then suddenly...

"Come to think of it, have Si-Hun and Yeon-Joo come? I was talking to them over the phone yesterday, and they said that they would come to visit today."

"Oh," Seol-Ah let out a short exclamation. "They contacted me and said something came up and couldn't come today."

"Really?"

"Yes, so don't worry about a thing and go to sleep, Kang-Woo."

Seol-Ah caressed Kang-Woo's cheek as if she were touching an important treasure.

A kind smile lit up her face.

Chapter 269 - Who The Fuck is That?

It was soft and warm. Oh Kang-Woo slightly twisted his body as he was enveloped by comfort as if he had dipped into a warm bath. He burrowed his face into the soft sensation. A fragrant scent stimulated his nose.

Fluff. He unconsciously reached out to touch the softness.

'It's big.'

It was so big that it was hard to grab with one hand.

"Mmph...!"

As he touched the soft thing, he heard a moan. It flinched, but it did not back off or run away.

'Ah...'

He rubbed his head on the soft object and relished it as much as he could. It was a sense of softness that he had never experienced before.

His life had been full of agony. It had been an endless cycle of despair, desperate struggles, and wretched writhing.

'For what had I tried so hard?'

He tried to remember. It was a memory of when he used to be in Hell. He had been at risk of death every moment of his life, to the point that it was honestly a mystery why he hadn't died.

The thought of committing suicide had crossed his mind thousands of times.

'So... why did I endure it?'

He couldn't remember. It felt fuzzy, as if part of a drawing had been cut out. The sensation that touched his face was warm. He curled his body up as if he were a child, or a fetus in his mother's belly.

"Hngh—"

He heard the sound again, but the soft sensation still did not disappear.

The softness enveloped his body.

'Ah.'

He shed tears. It felt as if a castle that he had carefully constructed was crumbling down or an embankment was bursting. An uncontrollable flood of emotions shook him.

"K-Kang-Woo...?"

Someone was calling him, but he ignored it because he wanted to experience this warmth for a little longer.

How long had it been since he'd felt such peace?

No, that wasn't the correct expression. After all, he'd never felt it before.

"Do you remember what you said to me back then, my king?"

He heard a voice—it was a familiar voice.

"Climb much, much higher."

Keep pushing forward.

"A-Arrgghh."

An unbearable pressure weighed down on him. He walked forward all by himself while shouldering everything. He looked around but couldn't see anything.

"I'm tired... of it all."

Too many had died. He was sick and tired of it. He did not want to shoulder the weight that was deforming him anymore. He couldn't take it anymore.

'I'm...'

He wasn't perfect. He had never been perfect.

He wasn't a superhuman or a god.

He just had struggled desperately and wretchedly.

He wanted to stop and take a breath, but the countless eyes surrounding him and the weight on his shoulders did not allow it. However much he was carved up, exhausted, or dried up, he had to keep pushing forward.

"..."

A warm feeling embraced him.

Tears dripped from his eyes. He began crying like a beast.

He felt a warm hand caress his hair and saw a white light come from that hand and seep into him.

"It's okay."

An unbelievably gentle voice spoke to him.

"It's okay."

The hands that were patting his head went down his back. The sweetness intoxicated him, making him feel fuzzy, and he let that fuzzy feeling take over his body.

His consciousness died down.

* * *

"Urgh."

Kang-Woo got up.

It'd been ten days since the rescue operation.

Doing nothing but receiving Seol-Ah's care had to end here. He couldn't sit around any longer.

"I feel amazing."

He didn't understand why, but his body felt as light as a feather.

Kang-Woo tilted his head. If he'd really been wounded, one would think that he'd fully recovered, but that had not been the case.

'I wasn't injured in the first place.'

He'd spent ten days in bed only to make the rescue operation feel more real. Not only had he not been wounded, but he also didn't even have a single scar.

The only damage he'd received was from the light that had come out of Han Seol-Ah, but since it only lasted briefly, he had managed to heal quickly.

'What's going on?'

In his confusion, he drew out his demonic energy.

His eyes widened.

"What the hell?"

He felt the demonic energy calmly flowing through his body, and he laughed in disbelief at the completely new sensation.

'Why is it so calm?'

The word calm did not suit demonic energy; it was not like the Qi that appeared in martial arts s.

'Calm, my ass.'

Demonic energy was rampant in nature like a college freshman at his first frat party. The flow of demonic energy, which had been like rapids, had become as calm as a peaceful river, so it was obviously very suspicious.

"The output... hasn't changed."

Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief. There was only one conclusion that he could draw from the calm demonic energy despite the unchanged output.

'My demonic energy control has improved.'

How could that have possibly happened?

Kang-Woo scratched his head due to the unbelievable phenomenon.

"Did I eat an elixir or something in my sleep?"

He couldn't help but laugh at what he said, not because eating an elixir was unbelievable but because a mere elixir would not improve his control over demonic energy.

"It's a good thing, but..."

He still wasn't at a point where he could safely absorb Belphegor's demonic energy, but considering how agonizing and dangerous improving one's demonic energy control was, the fact that it had improved overnight was very welcome news.

'I have no idea why.'

He was tilting his head in confusion when the door opened.

```
Clack.
"Oh, y-you're up, Kang-Woo."
"Oh, yeah. I just got up."
Seol-Ah entered the room.
'...?'
His eyes widened when he saw her.
"Is something wrong? Your cheeks are super red."
"Pardon? I-It's nothing at all!!"
Seol-Ah frantically shook her head. She took a deep breath and approached him with expectant
eyes.
"Th-That aside, you're still unwell, right? I will take care of you ag—"
"No, I'm fine now."
Seol-Ah's expression turned grim in an instant.
Kang-Woo smirked.
"Thanks for taking care of me. I'm all better now."
"A-Are you sure?"
"Yup." Kang-Woo nodded. "I can't stay in bed forever. It's about time I start to move around."
"..."
"What?"
"N-Nothing."
Seol-Ah lowered her head as if remembering something. Her cheeks were so red that it looked as if
steam was about to come up from her head.
"Uhm... Kang-Woo."
"Yeah?"
"You... said that you spent ten millennia in Hell... right?"
11 11
Kang-Woo remained silent. He slowly nodded.
"Could you tell me about what you went through th—"
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Kang-Woo calmly kept talking. To be honest, talking about it wasn't hard. He was sure that, if it were Seol-Ah, she'd understand what he'd gone through and accept him as he was. Even so—no,

"I... can't," Kang-Woo replied.

because of that...

"No," he said in a bit of a cold manner, causing Seol-Ah to flinch.

"... Why not? I-I also want to know more about you, Kang-Woo."

"Because you'll pity me."

"... What?"

"If I tell you, you'll pity me."

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly. He wasn't trying to act cool. His past, the years he'd spent in Hell, was like a soap opera.

'It was an absolute shitshow.'

It would not lose to any other story in the world in terms of gruesomeness and wretchedness. The memories were far too unsightly and filthy to say out loud.

'And considering the pity show I'd pull off while weeping...'

There was a chance that he would bawl his eyes out while talking about it.

'That isn't something I should do at my age.'

Age and psychological maturity were not directly proportional to one another; it was easy to find people who didn't act their age. That was especially the case for demons.

The endless clashing of desires that came with a demon's body interfered with psychological growth. For example, Kang-Woo wasn't as knowledgeable as an old man who had gone through many things in his life.

"..."

Seol-Ah made a sad expression.

"Don't make that face. It's nothing you would find entertaining."

"That's not what I—"

"I know what you're trying to say, but they're just too embarrassing to say out loud, so... I don't want to say them for the moment."

Seol-Ah sighed. "If you say so, then I guess it can't be helped."

"Thanks."

"But that doesn't mean I've given up. I won't give up on learning absolutely everything about you, Kang-Woo," Seol-Ah said while looking at him, full of determination.

Kang-Woo scratched his head at her sudden declaration.

"More importantly, how are Halcyon and Echidna?" he asked.

"I heard they're being taken care of by Lilith."

He already knew that, but he asked anyway to make his performance more real.

'They must be a mess by now.'

Both of them were highly dependent on Kang-Woo. Them being his retainers partly had to do with it, but the biggest reason was their personalities.

He'd commanded them to stay at Balrog's home, so they were likely becoming extremely jittery.

'They'll have to come later.'

There were other things he had to do first. Kang-Woo began walking.

"Where are you going?" asked Seol-Ah.

"I think I should meet up with the angels."

"..."

Chilling rage appeared in Seol-Ah's eyes, likely because the angels had decided not to take part in the rescue operation to save Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and said, "I also heard what happened, but we can't deny that they're our allies. Besides, thousands of people fearlessly charging into a trap to save just one person is nothing to be proud of."

"Th-that's...!"

"But still... thanks." Kang-Woo grabbed Seol-Ah's hand. "Thanks to you, I'm alive."

"I wasn't alone. Also... thinking about everything you've done for me, that was nothing."

Seol-Ah looked at him with passionate eyes.

Kang-Woo coughed and turned around.

"I'll be back before dinner."

He quickened his steps as if to hide his embarrassment.

Whoom.

He opened a gate on the apartment rooftop and moved to the Hall of Protection. The Hall of Protection had many gates leading to different places worldwide, so using it as a waypoint was quite convenient for transportation.

As soon as he entered the Hall of Protection, he was greeted by Kim Si-Hun.

"H-Hyung-nim?!"

"Long time no see."

"Are you feeling okay?!"

Kang-Woo smirked after seeing his excitement.

"I'm fine. I'm all better now."

He couldn't understand why, but he was feeling even better than before.

"Fuuu. I was really worried. After I heard you were hurting so much that you couldn't even accept visitors, I..."

"...?"

Kang-Woo tilted his head. He had never said something like that.

"I'm glad to see you're fine now, but why are you here? You should rest some more."

"I'm fully healed, so I thought I should talk about what happened. We also need to prepare for the future."

"..."

Si-Hun remained silent. He had absolutely no way to refute him.

"Call Gaia, too. I'd rather explain things once."

"I understand. Should I call Yeon-Joo as well?"

"No. Raphael doesn't know Yeon-Joo very well, so I think it'd be best if only the three of us went."

"... You're planning on meeting the angels?" Si-Hun asked in displeasure.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly. Si-Hun had reacted the same way as Seol-Ah.

"I know what you're thinking, but the angels are still our allies, and they will always be."

"..."

"Si-Hun."

"Yes... I know."

Si-Hun bit his lip and nodded. He knew it, but...

"Fuuu."

He took a deep breath.

"Let's go. I'll bring Gaia."

Si-Hun turned around.

Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction while looking at Si-Hun's back.

'Well, I guess this is just right.'

This was just the right level of relationship that they should have with the angels.

As long as Kang-Woo was a demon, he could never trust them fully. They needed to work together to a certain extent. Both sides working together for a matching goal while being wary of each other to an extent was just the right level of relationship Kang-Woo wanted with the angels.

"Kang-Woo! A-Are you feeling okay n—"

"Let's talk about that as we go."

Kang-Woo smiled when he saw Gaia's face full of worry.

* * *

"... The Four Heavenly Kings, you say?"

Raphael placed his hand on his forehead. What they'd told him was an unexpected development of events.

"I did not realize that the Demon of Prophecy's forces would be that powerful. And that has yet to be resolved..."

Raphael bit his lip, his head hurting at the thought of the overwhelming forces of evil.

"Could you tell me what had happened in detail?"

"Of course."

Kang-Woo calmly began talking. He explained how he went to investigate Satan, how he'd managed to find his traces, and how the Demon of Prophecy had attacked him as if he had been waiting.

The more he talked, the darker Raphael's expression became.

'Good.'

Kang-Woo smiled.

'He believed it.'

It seemed he wasn't suspecting Kang-Woo to be the Demon of Prophecy.

'Fuck yeah! I'm finally safe from all suspicion!'

Judging by Raphael's expression, the plan had been a success.

Kang-Woo would no longer be suspected as the Demon of Prophecy, and he'd also created a convenient card known as Fallen Angel Rakiel.

'Hell yeah! Rakiel Coin, let's go!'

Just thinking about how to use his new cheat code made him smile.

'Yeah, I should've done this from the start.'

He had gone through so much because Satan had suddenly appeared out of nowhere. Kang-Woo nodded in satisfaction.

Raphael asked, "What was the name of the Heavenly King you came across?"

"Fallen Angel Rakiel," Kang-Woo said without hesitation.

"Rakiel...?"

'Yup, I'm sure it's your first time hearing the name.'

After all, he'd made it up.

Kang-Woo snickered in his mind. Just then...

Slam!

Raphael sprang up with his eyes as wide as saucers.

"R-Rakiel was there?!!"

'Huh?'

"H-How?! How could that fallen Constellation be on Earth...?!"

'What the fuck?'

"It cannot be..." Raphael's expression paled. "H-Has the seal... been undone?"

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent.

'For fuck's sake.'

He grabbed his head.

'Who the fuck is Rakiel...?'

Something had gone wrong.

Chapter 270 - Me Again?

"You... know Rakiel?"

Kim Si-Hun's eyes widened in surprise.

Meanwhile, Oh Kang-Woo's mouth was agape, at a loss for words.

'Mother of fuck...'

His head started to hurt.

He'd created the character Fallen Angel Rakiel without thinking too much about it. He had just thought that there should be at least one fallen angel among the Four Heavenly Kings and had thought of the character in no more than five seconds.

But Raphael knew him?

'That doesn't make sense.'

Kang-Woo's expression paled.

Raphael was just as troubled and expressed, "I cannot understand. How could Rakiel have... If Lady Seraph's seal was broken, then that could mean the other Constellations have also..."

"Lord Raphael?"

"Ah, my apologies."

Raphael raised his head.

"Who is Rakiel?" Si-Hun asked in frustration.

"..."

There was a short silence.

Raphael closed his eyes and fell into thought. After thinking for a while, he sighed. "Talking about Rakiel is usually taboo, but since you have already met him, I guess I have no choice."

With deep sunken eyes, Raphael said, "Rakiel is an angel who had fallen to the temptations of Demon God Bauli in the era of ancient myths. He is currently... one of the Constellations of Evil."

"..."

The scale was so big that Kang-Woo wasn't even sure where to start asking questions.

'Why the fuck does it have to be the fucking era of myths?'

His mind turned blank.

"... Your expressions tell me that you need more details."

"We know absolutely nothing about myths and the Demon God."

"I see. The record of Titans must have vanished from Earth. Mm... It seems this will be a long story." While making a troubled explanation, Raphael said, "In the beginning, there was chaos."

'Dayum, we're starting off that big? Yeah, I would have guessed as much for there to have been chaos.'

"And within that chaos..."

'You're not gonna say some shit like light and darkness were born, are you?'

"Light and darkness were born."

'Fuck. They really were born.'

Kang-Woo looked at Raphael in disbelief, and so did Si-Hun. The scale had gotten as massive as the entire universe, so he seemed to be confused about how to react. If anyone other than Raphael had said such a thing, Kang-Woo would have smacked them to make them stop with the nonsense.

Unaware of their reactions, Raphael continued, "Titans were born from that light and darkness."

"Titans..."

"Each Titan designed their own creations and a world for them to live in."

"And are those creations angels and demons?"

"Humans as well. No, it would be more apt to say that they had created all things. Lady Gaia and the other gods are also the Titans' creations."

" ..."

"One of those Titans is Demon God Bauli."

Kang-Woo grabbed his head.

'What the hell is going on?'

He couldn't understand why the era of myths was being mentioned just because he had used the name Rakiel. Kang-Woo began organizing his thoughts as the scale of events got bigger and bigger.

Titans...

It was an unbelievable story.

'Come to think of it, back then...'

He recalled a certain mage who was providing Guardians with all sorts of valuable magic items. The mage had yelled something back when Kang-Woo had gone to their workshop to console them as they were being enslaved by endless labor.

"Aaaaahh! At this rate, the 'Book of Hecate' will never be...!"

Kang-Woo remembered asking the mage who Hecate was.

"She is the Great One who had stood at the pinnacle of magic, even among the Titans, in the era of myths! It is no exaggeration to say that all magic had been derived from her. We mages have a duty to pursue her knowledge and the truth of true magic—"

"No, your duty is to pay off your debt."

"Y-You damn swindler!!"

"It is your fault for signing the contract. Now, now, get up. It's time to work."

"Aarrgghh!! You damn demon!"

"I am indeed a demon, kekeke."

'Mm.'

Kang-Woo had thought the mage had been hallucinating after getting too tired from overwork, but he now thought otherwise.

'And besides...'

There was a Titan whom he was even more aware of than Hecate.

Kang-Woo's eyes narrowed.

He thought of the being in the Abyss, the deepest layer of the Ten Thousand Demon Core. The being had been an absolute monster so massive that his full size could not be fathomed.

'If he's a Titan...'

To be more precise, if he was Bauli, the story made sense.

After confirming that Raphael wasn't talking out of his ass, Kang-Woo focused on his words more.

"Demon God Bauli possessed unending resentment for all creations made by Titans."

"Was he on his period?" Kang-Woo spat out.

"Period?"

"It's nothing. Please continue."

"Mm. It had never been recorded why the Demon God came to have such resentment, but it had been told that the Demon God had gone to war against the most powerful gods among the Titans' creations."

"It feels like we're getting more and more off-topic... So who is Rakiel?"

"Rakiel was one of the beings who had stood with the Demon God to destroy the universe."

"In that case... the beings who stood with the Demon God..."

"We call them the Constellations of Evil."

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent. At this point, it didn't even surprise him anymore. The scale was so massive that he just wanted to gloss over it while swearing.

"So... who won the war? Oh, I guess there is no need to even ask."

If Bauli had won, there would be no universe for them to be in.

Raphael nodded.

"Celestial Goddess Seraph, Lady Gaia, and the Heavenly Dragon joined forces and managed to kill the demon god. They then divided the demon god's corpse into three pieces and placed each piece in a different world."

'And I ate one of those three pieces.'

He could more or less understand, but he still had unanswered questions.

"I have three questions."

"Go ahead."

Kang-Woo asked in a sunken voice, "You said the war was between Demon God Bauli and the creations... What were the other Titans doing?"

From the perspective of the other Titans, Bauli was an outlaw who was trying to kill their creations. It made no sense for them to not do anything.

Raphael said in a heavy voice, "There was an invasion from the outer world."

"Outer world?"

"There is not much known about them. All we know is that... the Titans refer to them as beings of the Void."

"Then the other Titans..."

"They were battling the beings of the Void. Many Titans died in that battle, and Bauli took that opportunity to take action."

'What a scumbag...'

Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief. It was as if he'd tried to rob a burning village instead of helping to extinguish the fire.

Kang-Woo frowned and said, "Then... my second question."

Kang-Woo swept his hair back and opened his mouth. Now that he had heard of the myths, there was something that he just couldn't understand.

"Why did you think that the Demon of Prophecy was Satan?"

If the angels knew about this myth, the one they should have suspected first was Demon God Bauli. After all, there was no being more fitting for the title of Demon of Prophecy than the Demon God.

'Could they not have suspected him because he was dead?'

Nonsense.

Kang-Woo shook his head.

If they were talking about the dead, Satan had also been dead.

Gods did not die in the truest sense unless their soul itself was annihilated. Gaia, Seraph, and the Heavenly Dragon had failed to annihilate Bauli's soul.

'As proof of that...'

Bauli was alive within the Abyss of the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

Kang-Woo couldn't understand why he was there, but there was one thing he was sure about: the demon god wasn't dead yet, and the gods should've been more aware of that fact than anyone else.

'Wait, then...'

Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

'The Demon of Prophecy wasn't me but him?'

There was a good chance that was the case. Every piece of information that was revealed was pointing at Demon God Bauli for being the Demon of Prophecy.

'What the hell? It's not matching up.'

Gaia had clearly said that she didn't know who the Demon of Prophecy was, but she definitely knew that Bauli's soul hadn't been annihilated, so there was no way she would've said something like that.

'Don't tell me that she doesn't know.'

Kang-Woo shook his head. Even if she didn't know, he was the first one she should've suspected. In that case, why had Gaia said she didn't know who the Demon of Prophecy was?

"Fuuu. That is the most confusing part of all this." Raphael took a deep breath. "The one who told us about the Demon of Prophecy was Uranus."

Kang-Woo had heard that name before—the god in charge of protecting Earth in Gaia's place.

Kang-Woo nodded.

"We also suspected the Demon of Prophecy to be Bauli at first, but from what Uranus had heard from Gaia herself... the Demon of Prophecy and Bauli are different beings."

" ..."

Kang-Woo's mouth remained closed, and he turned his head to stare at Gaia in the wheelchair. She was considerably calm, as if she had already known about this myth.

"Is that true?" asked Kang-Woo.

"... Yes. I remember hearing that the first moment I received the revelation."

If the incarnation of Gaia was corroborating it, then it meant that Raphael was not mistaken.

Kang-Woo's eyes shook.

'It isn't Bauli?'

Then who...

'Oh.'

Kang-Woo clenched his hair.

Assuming Bauli wasn't the Demon of Prophecy, then there was only one other person it could possibly be

'It fucking is me.'

The Demonic Sea and 666 Authorities...

The only ones who matched those conditions were Bauli and him.

'Wait, then this son of a bitch...'

Kang-Woo's eyes widened. The scattered puzzle pieces had finally been completed.

'Fuck... so that's how it is.'

Bauli knew about the prophecy and also knew that the gods would try to find him through the prophecy to kill him once and for all.

'And so...'

He had hidden from the prophecy... within the puppet known as Oh Kang-Woo.

Gaia was likely confused out of her mind, since she was sure that Bauli was supposed to be the Demon of Prophecy, but the prophecy was pointing at someone else entirely.

Even if both were using the same body, they were clearly different beings. It was only obvious that the prophecy would be interpreted incorrectly. It was like trying to find the way with a broken compass.

" ..."

Kang-Woo clenched his mouth shut. The fact that he was being used by another being was unpleasant beyond belief.

'It doesn't seem like things are going according to his plan, at least.'

He recalled how Bauli had excitedly tried to crawl out of the Abyss, saying that the time of prophecy had come. He had likely planned to take control of Kang-Woo's body after Kang-Woo had absorbed a part of his corpse.

'But he failed.'

The puppet Bauli had created to hide from the prophecy had stopped him from crawling out of the Abyss.

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and organized his thoughts.

It didn't matter which of them was the Demon of Prophecy.

'What matters the most right now is Rakiel.'

"Fuuu. I can understand your confusion," Raphael mumbled. "If it is not Bauli or Satan... not even I am sure who it could be. However, the fact that Rakiel is serving the Demon of Prophecy points to Bauli being the Demon of Prophecy... No, even if that is the case, there have been no signs that Bauli had been revived for that to be the case..."

"I will ask my final question, then." Kang-Woo cut Raphael's words off and remembered what Raphael had said when he mentioned Rakiel's name. "What did you mean when you said that 'the seal has been broken'?"

Raphael's eyes shook. There was hesitation in his eyes, as if he were wondering if it was something he should be telling them.

Kang-Woo opened his mouth.

"We are all already in the same boat. I know that you do not fully trust us yet, but if you keep hiding information, we will not be able to battle a great evil."

"Urgh."

It was exactly as Kang-Woo had said.

Raphael sighed.

"After successfully killing the Demon God, Lady Seraph sealed all of the Constellations of Evil by sacrificing her own Divinity."

"Then if Rakiel appeared, that means..."

"That the seal has been broken."

"No way!"

Kang-Woo pretended to be surprised. Although he was making a serious expression, he was cheering his heart out while clenching both fists in his mind.

'Sheesh, I was worried for nothing.'

Raphael likely did not know this, but Rakiel's seal hadn't been broken yet. After all, the one who had appeared in the last incident was Kang-Woo, not the real Rakiel. Meaning, it was perfectly fine for him to use Rakiel's name however he wanted, as long as he stayed sealed.

'I thought my coin plummeted as soon as I had made it.'

It would be really bad for him if the real Rakiel appeared when Kang-Woo was impersonating him, just like what had happened with Satan.

He nodded in relief.

'I guess we're in the clear for n—'

"Kuh. It ended up turning out as Lord Michael had feared..."

'Hm?'

"What... do you mean? He had feared that this would happen?"

"Haaa. Correct. There have been signs."

"Signs?"

Raphael nodded. "Lady Seraph's power had been severely weakening since a few years ago. We had partially expected... for the seal to be broken."

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"... I see..."
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"But still, for it to have happened so soon... How could Lady Seraph's power have vanished so easily?"

Kang-Woo nodded. He was acting calm with all his might on the outside, but his mind was in chaos.

'What the actual fuck?'

It was absolutely unreal. He thought that he'd finally be able to relax, but... Rakiel's seal was on the verge of breaking? Kang-Woo was going out of his mind due to the borderline-forced plot progression.

'Could it just be a coincidence?'

Kang-Woo shook his head. There was no way that it could possibly be.

'Wait.'

Kang-Woo's eyes widened; something had crossed his mind.

"When exactly... did that seal begin significantly weakening?"

"Three years ago."

"..."

Kang-Woo lowered his head.

Three years ago was when the Demon Cult suddenly became more active, when demonic beasts began to appear within Gates, and when the Earth became vulnerable to otherworldly threats due to the Gaia System's impairment.

And...

'Again?'

Kang-Woo grabbed his head.

'It's me again?'

... Three years ago was when a certain human had returned to Earth after ten millennia.