

## **M. in Hell 301**

Chapter 301 - I Haven't Done Anything

"The hell is this?"

Oh Kang-Woo looked in disbelief at the Key of the Demonic Sea on his right middle finger. As if proving that the message saying that it was successful was not a lie, faint white light poured out from the second geometric symbol of the five.

Riiing.

[You have acquired the second key, 'Skyfall.']

[The status window information for 'Key of the Demonic Sea' has been updated.]

"Kuh."

Kang-Woo frowned. Great power flowed up from the black ring on his middle finger and penetrated his body.

'What's happening?'

It felt as if he were being burned alive.

Clack.

Clicks echoed within his head, as if cogs were turning or a key was turning a lock. There was no need to even think about what the Key of the Demonic Sea was connected to—the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

The Key of the Demonic Sea connected with the three giant Doors holding the Demonic Sea.

Kang-Woo's eyes widened.

Whoom!

Demonic energy surged from his body along with the sensation of the Key of the Demonic Sea linking with the Ten Thousand Demon Core. The total amount of demonic energy had not increased, but he could feel that it had become far more dense, just like when he had achieved the Ultimate Demonic Body.

"Kargh, kurgh."

He curled up as the shower head showered him with a warm stream of water. It was difficult to withstand the extreme changes occurring from the connection between the Key of the Demonic Sea and the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

Riiing.

[The third condition of the final step of 'Road to Becoming a Demon God' has been partially fulfilled.]

Yet another message appeared, and Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

'So the Key of the Demonic Sea... was the clue for the third condition.'

He'd been trying very hard to find a clue about the third condition, but there had been a reason why he hadn't made any progress.

"Haaa, haaa," Kang-Woo panted heavily.

The demonic energy within his body had become more concentrated. It hadn't become as concentrated as the demonic energy within the Abyss, the deepest layer of the Ten Thousand Demon Core, but it was at least more concentrated than the demonic energy from the deep end.

'It's about between the Abyss and the deep end.'

The more concentrated his demonic energy was, the more power he could exert with the same amount of demonic energy.

"This is... huge."

Being able to exercise more power with the same amount of demonic energy was invaluable.

There was a huge difference in power between Inferno made with demonic energy from the shallow end and Inferno made with energy from the deep end.

If demonic energy control allowed him to use more demonic energy at one time, the concentration influenced the quality of the demonic energy itself.

"That's a Transcendent-grade weapon for you."

He unconsciously smiled. No, he wondered if the Key of the Demonic Sea should be considered just Transcendent grade. After all, it had eaten three Hell Armaments of the same grade as it.

Kang-Woo mumbled while looking down at the black ring on his middle finger, "Status window."

[Equipment Information]

Equipment Name: Key of the Demonic Sea

Grade: Transcendent (Imprinted)

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

First Key: Predation

Second Key: Skyfall

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

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

[Effect Description]

Indomitability: The equipment cannot be destroyed by any physical, magical, or spiritual attacks. However, it will be destroyed by power free from the restrictions of the 'system.'

Transformation: The equipment can transform into any weapon registered as a 'skill.' It will exert 57% capacity of weapons made using Authorities.

Predation: The equipment can absorb and digest armaments Transcendent grade and above. The capacity of 'Transformation' will rise with each successful digestion.

Abyss: The equipment raises the concentration of demonic energy. Additionally, the effect rises with the acquisition of each 'key.'

"Wow," he naturally exclaimed.

The Key of the Demonic Sea had become far stronger than when he had first acquired it.

'Especially the Transformation capacity.'

It had only been 34% when he had first acquired it, but it had risen by a bit more than 1.5 times.

Now, even if he created Inferno with the Key of Demonic Sea while using other Authorities, he would be able to use Inferno at nearly 60% capacity. Although it would be a sham, he would be able to use two prince Authorities at once.

Riiing.

He heard the chime of a bell while he was still reading intensively through the equipment status window. He cast aside the Key of the Demonic Sea's status window and saw a new message.

[You must complete a prerequisite quest to acquire the third key of the Key of the Demonic Sea, 'Abysm.']

'Another quest?'

Kang-Woo frowned.

['Key of the Demonic Sea' prerequisite quest - 'Falling Wings.']

[Make a being of an archangel or above fall from grace. The fall will be acknowledged even if it is temporary.]

"Another absurd quest."

The quests seemed as if they were being squeezed out of an author struggling from exhaustion of material. They were so absurd that it pretty much threw probability out the window.

"..."

Kang-Woo waited a bit while standing still.

He was lowkey hoping that the quest would be achieved without him doing anything like the previous one, but no additional message windows popped up.

'Meaning, I managed to sow the Seed of Corruption, but they haven't fallen yet.'

Based on the system messages, that seemed to be the case.

Kang-Woo crossed his arms and fell into thought.

'...'

He couldn't help but ask the question before commencing the quest.

'Why did the second quest succeed?'

Sowing a Seed of Corruption in a being of at least an archangel or above? He didn't even know what the Seed of Corruption was in the first place.

'I mean, I can more or less guess what it is based on its name, but...'

The problem was that he had no idea who he had sown it into or when he had even done it.

"Raphael...?"

Kang-Woo shook his head at the sudden name that came to his mind. He recalled the angel attacking his friend while screaming madly.

'It's not him.'

Kang-Woo dried his body with a towel and walked out of the bathroom. It was true that Raphael had fallen, but he was already dead. Also, the reason he had fallen was not Kang-Woo but his own crazed obsession with evil. Kang-Woo had nothing to do with it, so there was no way that it would complete the quest.

"Ah."

His eyes met Han Seol-Ah in her pajamas. Realizing he was completely nude, he quickly tried to close the door.

"You haven't fully dried yourself yet."

"Huh? Y-Yeah." He nodded like an idiot.

Seol-Ah took the towel from him and wiped off the moisture still on him as if she were used to seeing his naked body. She softly giggled and turned around.

"Put your clothes on and come to the living room. I'll dry your hair for you."

"..."

Kang-Woo stared at her with mixed feelings as if not knowing what to say, and then he came out into the living room after putting clothes on.

Holding the hair dryer with one hand, Seol-Ah lightly patted the couch, indicating Kang-Woo to sit down.

Whirrr.

"Your hair has gotten a bit long. I'll cut it for you tomorrow. I give my mother a haircut all the time, so I'm confident I can give you a nice haircut," Seol-Ah said while touching Kang-Woo's hair.

"Mm..." Kang-Woo's eyes narrowed.

He thought about the recording he'd seen a few days before—how his demonic energy became entangled with the pure-white energy from Seol-Ah.

'Could it be... Seol-Ah?'

A chilling thought passed through his mind.

Kang-Woo bit his lip.

'It might've happened because she slept with me.'

From the recording, it only looked as if Seol-Ah's energy was harassing his energy, but it did not change the fact that they had been aggressively intertwined.

It wouldn't be weird if she were influenced by his demonic energy.

'No... but still, Seol-Ah?'

Kang-Woo tilted his head in confusion. He thought of Seol-Ah's kind smile and warm energy. It was hard to believe that a woman who was the epitome of the word *angel* was on the verge of being corrupted.

"Seol-Ah," Kang-Woo called.

"Yes?"

"Show me your back for a moment."

"Ah... J-Just a moment, please."

After realizing what he was trying to look at, she took off her pajamas.

'Hallelujah.'

Although her back was facing him, he couldn't help but gulp from seeing the Cerberus heads that could be seen on each side.

'Fucking calm down.'

He shook his head to get a hold of himself. Now was not the time for that. Kang-Woo searched Seol-Ah's back.

'... The outward appearance seems unchanged.'

Although the symbols on her back had become far more vivid than before, that was it; the faint pure-white light showed absolutely no signs of corruption.

"I'm gonna touch it."

Kang-Woo extended his hands and touched the wing symbols on her back.

"Hngh."

Seol-Ah moaned erotically while flinching. He did his best to ignore it.

'Authority of Insight.'

He slowly closed his eyes and read the flow of sacred power coming out of her back. He hadn't noticed it before, but he could feel how colossal the energy within her was.

'So this is Seraph's power.'

He recalled the light that had burned him when he had been cosplaying as Rakiel. He could now understand why her wings back then had been so faint to the point they were transparent. Compared to the power within Seol-Ah, what she had shown then had been nothing but the tip of the iceberg.

'If I had taken it full force...'

He would most definitely have been vaporized. He got goosebumps, but he calmed his beating heart and refocused to search around Seol-Ah's energy, which was brimming with sacred power.

'... There's nothing there.'

He had not been able to find even the smallest trace of demonic energy, even with the same level of demonic energy control that had pushed Demon God Bauli back into the Abyss.

'Is the Seed of Corruption not the same as demonic energy?'

He wasn't sure because he didn't know what it was in the first place, but one thing was for sure.

'At the very least, my demonic energy hasn't influenced Seol-Ah while we were sleeping together.'

If that were the case, he would have found at least a tiny bit of demonic energy within her. It was his own demonic energy, so there was no way he wouldn't be able to find traces of it.

Kang-Woo opened his eyes narrowly.

'If my demonic energy hasn't influenced her...'

The chances of the Seed of Corruption having been sown in her would be drastically lowered.

"... It's no wonder."

There was no word more unfit for Seol-Ah, who was so kind that not even Kim Si-Hun could hold a candle to her, than corruption.

'Then who could it be?'

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent.,

If it wasn't Raphael or Seol-Ah, then there was only one person that it could be.

'... Uriel.'

If it wasn't either of them, then the only other person he could think of was Uriel.

'It's more than likely.'

Uriel's mental state had gotten drastically more unstable after Raphael's death.

Uriel's obsession was 'affection.' Considering how Uriel had acted toward Kang-Woo recently, it was no exaggeration to say that his obsession was nearing dangerous levels.

'There's no one else but Uriel.'

The only person who was as mentally unstable as Uriel right now was Halcyon, who was currently much more stable than she had been before.

There was no more doubt in Kang-Woo's mind.

'The Seed of Corruption was sown in Uriel.'

"C-Can I put my clothes back on now, Kang-Woo?"

"Oh, yeah. It's fine."

Seol-Ah dressed back up.

Vrrrr.

Just then, Kang-Woo's smartphone vibrated. Seol-Ah picked it up to pass it to him.

"Kang-Woo, you have a te—"

Her hand stopped just as she was about to hand him his smartphone—she saw that he'd received over a hundred messages from someone with the ID 'Yuriel ?'.

She opened the chat without realizing it.

Yuriel ? : [Thanks for being with me today.]

Yuriel ? : [You said you were free in three days, right?]

Yuriel ? : [It's boring being alone.]

Yuriel ? : [What are you doing now?]

Yuriel ? : [I want to eat that kimchi stew thing again.]

Yuriel ? : [Oh, why don't I take this chance to move to Seoul? The internet connection here is way too slow.]

Yuriel ? : [Hey, answer me.]

Yuriel ? : [I miss you.]

Yuriel ? : [... It's too quiet here.]

Yuriel ? : [Yeah, I think it'd be best to live around your area. Wouldn't that be better for you too?]

"..."

Seol-Ah froze with the smartphone in hand. The light in her eyes instantly disappeared. Not noticing this, Kang-Woo was off in his thoughts.

Riiing.

"Hm?"

He heard the chime of a bell.

[The 'Seed of Corruption' has begun to bloom.]

[The prerequisite quest has successfully commenced!]

"Eh?"

What was this?

Chapter 302 - The Seed Of Corruption Is Growing Rapidly

"What...?"

Oh Kang-Woo looked at the message window in confusion.

The quest had not been completed, but it had commenced without him even having done a thing.

'Did I do something?'

However much he thought about it, he had not done anything.

"Hm?"

Just then, he saw that Han Seol-Ah was holding his smartphone.

"Oh, thanks."

Kang-Woo grabbed his smartphone from her and checked his messages. He couldn't help but frown.

'So this is what happened.'

Uriel had sent him an explosive amount of messages.

After going through the messages, Kang-Woo was able to tell why the Seed of Corruption had bloomed out of nowhere.

'This must be why.'

Likely because he was sure that the Seed of Corruption had been sown in Uriel, the messages that were no different from what Uriel sent on the daily felt meaningful in some way.

"... Kang-Woo."

"Hm?"

At that moment, he heard Seol-Ah's voice calling him. He turned around and saw her smiling brightly at him. He could feel her characteristic warmth from her smile.

"Who is... Yuriel?"

"Did you see the messages?"

Seol-Ah lowered her head while giggling.

"I'm sorry. It popped up on the display, so I ended up pressing it by mistake."

"No, I mean... there's no need to apologize." Kang-Woo smirked. "It's Uriel."

"Uriel... is the angel who has been spending time with you lately, right?"

"Yeah. Oh, and apparently this heart mark at the end was a typo."

"It's fascinating how an angel can use a smartphone."

"He's better at it than you think. Take a look at this. He has a profile picture when I don't even have one."

Kang-Woo clicked and zoomed in on Uriel's profile picture.

As Seol-Ah was looking at the profile picture in fascination, she said with a slightly sunken voice, "Come to think of it... he's the one you kissed before, right?"

"Oh, yeah."

Kang-Woo naturally grimaced as a memory that he wanted to forget popped up. Although it was an unpleasant memory, it hadn't been that bad considering how it had turned out. After that incident, Seol-Ah had become more assertive in terms of skinship, and their relationship had developed into one that casually exchanged kisses.

*'We haven't been able to get any further than that, though...'* Kang-Woo sighed.

He was absolutely hopeless in terms of romance, so he had no idea what to do to make some more progress in their relationship.

"Hmm." Seol-Ah narrowed her eyes and looked down at the smartphone in Kang-Woo's hand.

She slowly put her hand on his thigh. Kang-Woo flinched.



"You seem to be... very close with Uriel," she said in a chilling voice.

Kang-Woo shook his head in denial. "No way. I'm basically being forced to hang with him. He's a massive bother."

"Ah, is that so?"

"Yeah. He's more enjoyable to talk to since he isn't as uptight as Raphael, but our relationship is purely business."

"... Does Uriel feel the same way?"

"Well..." he slurred and scratched his head. "Probably not. It's a bit weird for me to say this myself, but... he's really taken to me for some reason."

Uriel was like a baby bird following its mother.

"I... see." Seol-Ah nodded while making an awkward smile.

Kang-Woo stood up. "In any case, you don't have to worry about a thing."

He was able to easily guess why Seol-Ah was asking about Uriel so much.

"You're worried about something like the incident with Shalgiel happening again, right?"

"... Pardon?" Seol-Ah flinched. "Ah... Y-Yes."

"I'll make it so that something like that will never happen again, so you don't have to worry."

"... Okay," Seol-Ah replied in a low voice. She looked like she had many things to say, but she kept her mouth shut after her lips quivered a little.

"You have what you got from Lilith, right?" Kang-Woo asked.

"Yes. She said it's an item that can conceal the sacred power in my body..." Seol-Ah pulled forward the pendant on her neck.

"Don't forget to wear it at all times."

They had yet to test whether or not it could completely conceal Seol-Ah's sacred power, but it should theoretically be able to conceal Seraph's soul as long as she was just seen with no physical contact. None other than Lilith had said it, so it was credible information.

"Okay, I will."

"Right then..." Kang-Woo said while standing up. He had been planning on sleeping with Seol-Ah, but the situation had changed. "Seol-Ah, I'm sorry, but let's sleep separately for a few days."

"Pardon? Sleep... s-separately?" Seol-Ah's eyes widened, and she trembled.

"There's something I have to focus on," Kang-Woo replied as he nodded.

'If the Seed of Corruption is blooming in Uriel...'

He had to draw up a plan immediately. No, he first had to decide where to take this.

'Should I... make Uriel fall from grace or should I stop it?'

"..."

Kang-Woo's eyes sank.

Each choice had its pros and cons.

'Making him fall would be the correct decision if I want to complete the quest and fulfill the final condition of becoming a Demon God.'

But if he did that, his plan to earn the angels' cooperation through Uriel would crumble. It was a simple yet difficult decision. Since he had high hopes for the angels, he could not make a rash decision.

'I'll think some more in my room.'

Kang-Woo turned his head and saw Seol-Ah trembling as she looked at him.

"K-Kang-Woo."

"Hm?"

"Umm... Y-You didn't come to dislike sleeping with me... right?"

Seol-Ah grabbed his clothes with eyes filled with anxiety. Even her teeth were clacking.

Kang-Woo smirked and shook his head. "Of course not. I just got some things I have to do urgently."

"R-Right? There's no way you would dislike it, right?"

"...?"

Seol-Ah was being more sensitive than he expected.

Kang-Woo tilted his head and answered, "Of course I want to sleep with you too, darling."

"Then...! We could just sleep together... can't we?"

"Haha. I have a lot to think about. I probably won't be sleeping at all tonight."

"Then what about tomorrow...?"

"Probably not tomorrow either."

He needed to focus for the moment on whether to make Uriel fall from grace or to stop it. Sleeping with Seol-Ah was like killing two birds with one stone since he would improve his demonic energy control while also feeling good, but his body did not require sleep, so it was perfectly fine for him to skip a couple days of sleep.

"..."

Seol-Ah subtly trembled while squirming her feet. She had a very uneasy look on her face. Kang-Woo smiled and stroked her hair.

"Just bear with it for a couple days, darling."

"... Okay," Seol-Ah nodded while making a sad expression.

Kang-Woo turned around and went into his room.

Clack.

He closed the door.

"..."

Seol-Ah stared blankly at his closed door. She just stared...

And stared...

And stared...

And stared...

\* \* \*

"Right, then."

After he entered his room, Kang-Woo sat in his chair and looked down at the Key of the Demonic Sea on his right middle finger.

'Clear the quest or maintain good relations with the angels?'

He couldn't decide rashly, but his mind was already more or less made up.

"... It's a huge waste to give up on the quest."

He wouldn't be hesitating so much if giving up on the quest only meant that the Key of the Demonic Sea wouldn't grow any stronger. However, like the message window had indicated, strengthening the Key of the Demonic Sea was connected with the final condition of 'Road to Becoming a Demon God.'

'Giving up on strengthening the Key of the Demonic Sea is also giving up on the third condition to becoming a Demon God.'

No matter how long he thought about it, the pros and cons were not balanced. The angels' cooperation was important but nowhere near as important as becoming stronger.

'I can't give up a gun for a hound.'

He counted on his own power the most.

'I'm not exactly sure what the road to becoming a Demon God is, but...'

Considering the massive boost in power after achieving the Ultimate Demonic Body and Demonic Soul, it couldn't hurt to get it. No, he had to get it at all costs.

"Which means I have to make Uriel fall from grace..."

Kang-Woo raised his smartphone and slowly read through Uriel's messages again.

Uriel ?: [The hell? Why aren't you answering when you read it?]

Uriel ?: [Is this the thing known as leaving someone on read?]

Uriel ?: [Why aren't you sending anything?]

Uriel ?: [I'm starting to get annoyed.]

Uriel ?: [Hey, answer me.]

Uriel ?: [Sorry. I'm sending too many messages, aren't I?]

Yuriel ?: [...]

'Wouldn't it be fine if I just leave him be?'

Reading through the messages was a spectacle—it felt like Uriel would fall even if Kang-Woo left him be.

Riiing.

[The Seed of Corruption is growing rapidly!]

A message popped up to confirm his thoughts. Kang-Woo shook his head and laughed in disbelief.

"I don't even have to lift a finger."

It felt like the quest would complete itself just by lying around in bed doing nothing.

'It's a bit anticlimactic, though.'

It was a bit too good. Everything was going smoothly without him lifting a finger.

"Darliiiiing!"

Kang-Woo ran out of his room with a bright smile. If there was nothing for him to do and Uriel would fall from grace all on his own, there was no need to stay up all night thinking of a plan.

"K-Kang-Woo?"

"Hmm? You weren't asleep?"

"Ah... no." Kang-Woo grabbed Seol-Ah's hands as she was standing blankly in the living room.

"Come. Let's sleep together."

"Didn't you say that you had something to do?"

"Yes, but after thinking about it some more, I don't think I'll have to step up."

"R-Really?" Seol-Ah smiled brightly.

His heart beat faster as he saw her smiling as if a flower had fully bloomed.

"Okay, then let's sleep together," Seol-Ah replied.

She gripped his hands tighter and walked toward his room.

\* \* \*

"Wha..."

Kang-Woo grabbed his head after waking up the next morning. He read the blue message window in front of him.

[The Seed of Corruption's growth has halted.]

"What the fuck is wrong now...?"

The Seed of Corruption had suddenly stopped growing on its own.

Kang-Woo grabbed his smartphone and sighed.

"Haaa."

He was back to square one. If he wanted to make Uriel fall...

"I'll have to tell my darling that I'll be busy."

He had no choice but to take action himself.

Chapter 303 - The Secret That Oh Kang-Woo Had Been Hiding

"Why did you leave me on read yesterday?!" Uriel angrily shouted.

Having gone to the angels' fortress in Africa in search of Uriel, Oh Kang-Woo gave a bitter smile.

"There was a bit of a situation."

"What situation?"

"Well..."

Kang-Woo, who couldn't say that he had been waiting for Uriel to fall from grace, slurred while smiling awkwardly.

Uriel's eyes sharpened.

"Tell me what—"

"More importantly, Lord Uriel," Kang-Woo interjected. "There are a few things that I want to ask. Is that okay?"

"... What is it?" Uriel pouted and nodded.

It seemed like he had complaints due to what happened the day before, but it didn't seem like he would ignore Kang-Woo's request.

"Do you know of something called the 'Seed of Corruption'?"

"..."

There was a heavy silence.

Uriel's eyes widened.

"Where... did you hear that?" he asked in a low voice.

"I came across it while I had been investigating Rakiel on my own time," Kang-Woo answered while making a calm expression.

Uriel groaned. "You know that all angels are instinctively obsessed with something, right?"

"Yes."

"If that obsession becomes uncontrollable, their wings start to turn black, and if it worsens from there and enters the territory of madness..."

"You fall from grace."

"Yeah." Uriel nodded. "The Seed of Corruption refers to the stage right before the fall. In other words, the stage where the wings flicker black sometimes."

"Can the individual know if the Seed of Corruption has been sown in themselves?"

"No, they can't. I'm sure that others wouldn't be able to tell either. The flickering happens in the blink of an eye, which is why one must be even more cautious. It only takes an instant for an obsession to become madness."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

'So they themselves don't know.'

Uriel didn't seem to be lying.

'In that case, Uriel doesn't know he's falling either.'

Based on his reaction, that seemed to be the case.

Considering Uriel's personality, Uriel wouldn't be so calm if he knew he was falling.

"What kind of changes happen when an angel falls from grace?"

With demons, if they couldn't control their desires, they turned into mindless demonic beasts, but based on records regarding Rakiel and having witnessed Raphael's fall, it didn't seem like fallen angels lost their ability to reason.

"The biggest difference is that the wings turn black and their sacred power turns into demonic energy. Oh, and they become far stronger in exchange for being unable to use divine magic."

In other words, they gained power in exchange for technique. It was similar to demons becoming demonic beasts where they lost their intelligence in exchange for overwhelming physical prowess.

"Is that all? You don't lose your mind or anything?"

"No, but... since their obsession borders on the line of madness, their actions turn very extreme. That's why, even if they can still reason, we kill them."

Uriel's expression darkened as he said that—he was probably thinking about his friend he'd killed with his own hands.

"Can an angel who fell from grace rise back up?" Kang-Woo asked, recalling from the system window that the fall would be acknowledged even if it was a temporary one.

Uriel shook his head.

"It's usually impossible, but... they can be brought back to normal right at the moment of the fall. As for Raphael... it was too late for him." Uriel looked down in sorrow. As he wiped away his tears with the back of his hand, he said, "But why are you asking me about that all of a sudden?"

"Oh, I was just curious about it since I came across it during my Rakiel investigations," he calmly answered.

All hail the Rakiel cheat code.

"Rakiel is a bit different in the sense that he fell from grace of his own accord."

"What was Rakiel's obsession?"

"I don't know. It's never been recorded."

Kang-Woo nodded. He had expected the answer.

"Lord Uriel, you said that you were obsessed with affection, right?"

"Y-Yeah."

"Then you must be having a hard time since you've been alone all the time lately. And with... what happened to Lord Raphael."

Uriel's expression darkened. "I-I'm fine. I can easily control my instinctive urges."

'Bullshit.'

It was easy to see that his obsession was worsening. If not, the Seed of Corruption wouldn't have been sown in him.

"Is that why you've been sending me so many messages?"

"N-Not at all!" he shouted.

Kang-Woo laughed.

Uriel turned his head as if he were sulking.

'I've heard everything I need to.'

His curiosity regarding the fall from grace had been more or less resolved.

'In that case...'

Kang-Woo licked his lips.

'Like I thought, that should be the best way to go about it.'

Only now when he was sure that Uriel's obsession was directed toward him would the plan that he had in mind work.

'I can't just lie around doing nothing.'

After the Seed of Corruption inside Uriel had stopped growing, he realized he couldn't just wait around. It was an undeniable fact that Uriel's obsession with affection was directed toward Kang-Woo after losing Raphael and being left all by himself.

Kang-Woo needed to pull some strings if he wanted to turn that obsession into madness.

"Shall we go search for traces of Rakiel?"

"... I thought you said you were busy."

"It's okay. My investigations into Rakiel haven't been going anywhere, so... I decided to put it on hold for the time being."

"R-Really?" Uriel's expression brightened.

Kang-Woo nodded and stood up. "Let's go to Russia today, where Lord Raphael fought against Satan."

"Okay!" Uriel smiled and nodded.

Kang-Woo smirked as he saw Uriel's eight wings wagging as if they were tails.

'Corrupting a brat starved for attention is a piece of cake.'

\* \* \*

"This is... where Raphael and Satan fought?" Uriel asked.

"Yes. To be more precise, it's where we fought against the Demon Cult's main force."

Just from looking at the snowy mountain with traces of destruction everywhere, anyone was able to tell how fierce the battle had been.

"... I certainly feel traces of demonic energy everywhere."

Uriel placed his hand on the ground and closed his eyes. Although it had been months since the battle, there were still traces of demonic energy left.

"But it'll be hard to find traces of Rakiel like this."

There were traces of demonic energy all over the place, so it was impossible to tell whether they had been left by Rakiel or the battle.

Kang-Woo nodded.

"That is why I suggested we come here. If Rakiel is hiding somewhere, there should be no better place than here."

"Oh, you have a point."

There was no better place to hide a tree than a forest—it made sense.

"Before we begin our investigations..." Kang-Woo smiled as he took out a container of kimchi stew.

"We should fill our stomachs for the hard work ahead."

"Pfft, isn't it just because you want to eat?"

Uriel, also happy about eating with Kang-Woo, put his hand over a rock while grinning.

Crackle!!

The rock was carved cleanly by blue lightning as if it were being sliced by a sharp sword.

"Let's eat."

Uriel sat in front of the cut rock.

There was no way an angel with underdeveloped taste buds would be so happy at the idea of eating food. Uriel simply enjoyed the sensation of eating with someone else. It was something he hadn't been able to feel with his fellow angels.

"Hihihi."

As evidence of that, instead of eating, Uriel seemed more interested in looking at Kang-Woo eating.

Just then...

"Hm?"

Kang-Woo's hands suddenly stopped while he was eating the kimchi stew. He stared blankly into the air and then grabbed his head.

"What's wrong?"



Uriel had seen Kang-Woo do that many times while they had been searching for traces of Rakiel.

Kang-Woo shook his head and smiled awkwardly. "It's nothing."

"Nothing, my ass. You've been doing that all the time. Staring at nothing and grabbing the back of your head... Are you sure there's no problem?"

"Hahaha. I just have some things on my mind."

Kang-Woo shook his head, put kimchi on a bed of rice, and had a spoonful.

"..."

Kang-Woo's face darkened.

"Hey, what's wrong? Isn't this like your favorite food?"

"I don't really have an appetite today." Kang-Woo scratched his head as if he were also confused.

Uriel stared at Kang-Woo restlessly. An uneasy feeling crept down his spine.

"Let's eat." Kang-Woo smiled brightly and ate the kimchi stew.

"... Okay." Uriel muttered. He then asked while eating the kimchi stew, "Come to think of it... why did you join Guardians?"

"Me?"

"Yeah. The incarnation of Gaia told me that you're not a chosen protector."

"Haha. That's right."

"Then why are you trying so hard to fight, and with nothing in return? I've been searching on the Internet, and most people have only been trying to fill their stomachs while believing it's finally a time of peace."

"I'm not sure." Kang-Woo placed his hand on his chin and pretended to be in thought.

'It's finally here!'

Uriel had taken the bait without his having to do anything.

'I need to say it as calmly as possible while looking plaintive.'

He had built up enough affinity with Uriel, so deceiving him was a piece of cake.

"I don't have any grandiose goals like Si-Hun, nor do I have firm convictions like Lord Raphael."

"Then... why?"

Kang-Woo directed a faint smile that looked like it would break at any moment toward Uriel. Uriel flinched—it was that sensation again. He could feel a sense of time that far exceeded anything that a human, who had not even lived a quarter of his own lifetime, could have experienced. His eyes were mixed with an unfathomable tangle of emotions.

Kang-Woo slowly opened his mouth. "I had someone important to me. Yes, they were... very precious to me."

"..."

"I... wasn't able to protect them." Kang-Woo clenched his fists and trembled a bit, his veins bulging under the skin of his fists.

"Who... was it?"

"He was a person who protected me when I entered a Gate while knowing absolutely nothing back when I had first awakened as a Player. His name was Lee Ki-Young."

Kang-Woo said the first name that crossed his mind. It didn't matter if that person existed or not. The truth wasn't important; what mattered was that it sounded like the truth.

"He helped me a lot. If it hadn't been for him... I wouldn't be here. But... Ki-Young hyung died... at the hands of a demon-worshipping guild known as Andras. No, to be more precise... I killed him after he had been encroached by demonic energy and became a demonic beast."

Boom.

Uriel's heart beat strongly. He knew better than anyone else how painful it was to kill someone precious to oneself with one's own hands. After all, he had been forced to kill Raphael, his old friend, with his own hands.

"And now... I have people just as important to me."

"That... Kim Si-Hun human?"

"Him among many others." Kang-Woo smirked and looked up into the air as he spoke in a longing voice, "I don't really care what happens to this world, but I don't... want to lose any more people precious to me."

Kang-Woo made a smile that looked as if it would break at any moment. Uriel could feel the fear in his voice. Uriel remained silent and saw himself after having lost Raphael, in Kang-Woo.

'That's right.'

Kang-Woo inwardly laughed. He could see Uriel's fluctuating emotions on his face, as well as the blossoming of trust and sympathy toward him.

'Of course he'd sympathize.'

Just like how people who had experienced harsh breakups sympathized with people who had also gone through the same thing, it was only instinct for a living being to sympathize and console someone else who had gone through similar misfortunes.

'Now, Uriel...'

Kang-Woo looked at Uriel, who'd fallen into thought.

'Cling to me more.'

The empty void that Raphael had left...

'Fill it with me.'

Only then would his plan succeed.

Kang-Woo leisurely waited for Uriel's answer.

Uriel slowly opened his mouth as he looked at the smiling young man. "I don't know much about you, but... I think I know why Lord Tirion chose you as his apostle."

"Haha. You flatter me. I was just lucky."

"You think a god's choice depends on luck?" Uriel looked at him with serious eyes.

He'd heard about Kang-Woo in detail from Gaia and how hard he'd fought against the demons, as well as the accomplishments he had made and the legend he had built.

According to Gaia, if it weren't for Kang-Woo, Earth would've already become riddled with demons. Hearing his achievements, Uriel couldn't help but agree. Although it was not widely spread among the public, Kang-Woo had been the decisive factor in taking down the Demon Cult.

'He doesn't want to lose any more people precious to him.'

Uriel closed his eyes and remembered Raphael, his friend he'd spent thousands of years with, and how much he had despaired after killing him.

'He's the same as me.'

They were not different in any way. Uriel's heart resonated. The difference between the usual Kang-Woo and his smile that would shatter at any moment gave him mixed feelings. Uriel held Kang-Woo's hand without holding back the wave of emotions he was feeling.

"I'll help you too."

"..."

"I'll lend you my strength so you don't have to lose anything else."

"Haha..." Kang-Woo's eyes teared up, and a dry laugh left his mouth. "Thank you. Thank you... very much."

"A-Ahem."

"Haha. This is the first time I've told this to anyone."

"You didn't tell Kim Si-Hun?"

"Yes. I didn't want him to worry. I've never even mentioned it to my lover."

"R-really? Then I'm the first?"

"Yes."

Uriel's expression brightened.

The fact that he was the first to hear the truth that Oh Kang-Woo had been hiding made him feel happy, and he felt his face reddening.

"R-Right, then, let's get on with the investigation!" Uriel quickly stood up.

Kang-Woo smirked and nodded. "Yes, of course."

Kang-Woo put the empty kimchi stew pot away and stood up. He followed after Uriel and investigated the traces of demonic energy all around them.

Then...

"Huh...?"

Uriel's eyes widened. He found traces that were more recent than the other traces around them. The demonic energy signature was capable of making him, an archangel, shudder.

"Th-This isn't simply recent..."

It had literally been left moments ago.

"Watch ou—"

Crackle!

Black lightning poured down like rain the moment he stood up with a pale face. Uriel spread his wings and flew to the side while grabbing Kang-Woo.

"Wh-What the—?!"

"Shit! So this is where Rakiel was hiding!!"

It was good that they'd finally found Rakiel, but the problem was that it was Rakiel who found them first.

Step, step.

"Hmm, I was wondering what insects were scurrying around here."

A being with silver hair that reached far down his shoulder, ten black wings, and armor made of wriggling green tentacles slowly walked toward them. He smiled while looking at Kang-Woo.

"Kekeke, I'm surprised you are still alive. I didn't think you'd last this long."

Uriel did not understand what he meant by that.

"Rakiel..."

Uriel's fists trembled, and blue lightning danced off of him.

"Kang-Woo! I'll buy you time, so contact Guardians!" he said while standing between Kang-Woo and Rakiel.

However, there was no reply.

"... Kang-Woo?"

Uriel turned his head.

"A-Argghh."

There, he saw Kang-Woo holding his head and groaning in pain.

"Wh-What's wrong?"

Uriel's expression paled. He had seen Kang-Woo like this before, when he saw Rakiel's demonic energy in the angel fortress when they first met.

"A-Aaaaahh!"

Kang-Woo knelt and collapsed while clenching his head. His mouth frothed, and his eyes rolled back.

"Oh Kang-Woo!!"

Uriel grabbed Kang-Woo, who was scrunched up on the ground, and...

"Huh...?"

He undoubtedly felt demonic energy from Kang-Woo's body.

Chapter 304 - Like A Zombie Movie Death Flag

"Why is... demonic energy..."

Uriel's eyes trembled, but the demonic energy could only be felt for a brief moment. Oh Kang-Woo's golden energy set the demonic energy ablaze as they clashed.

"*Cough!*"

Kang-Woo bent over like a bow and coughed blood. It was dark red, proving he had not been encroached upon by demonic energy and was purely human.

"A-Argghh."

Blood poured from his eyes, nose, ears, and mouth. So much blood to the point that it was a wonder if humans had this much blood poured on Uriel's body.

"Wh-What the..." Uriel's voice trembled.

His eyes wide open, he held the bleeding Kang-Woo.

"Sh-Shit!"

He chanted divine magic. It wasn't time to think about why demonic energy was flowing out of Kang-Woo's body. Uriel kissed Kang-Woo without hesitation even though blood was still coming out of his mouth.

Whoom!!

Radiant sacred power entered Kang-Woo's body. It was the strongest healing divine magic Uriel could use. The magic that only activated through mouth-to-mouth healed Kang-Woo, but...

"*Cough!*"

Once again, dark red blood spurted out of Kang-Woo's mouth.

"Wha... Wh-Why?"

Uriel's face paled.

Although it had a bothersome condition of requiring mouth-to-mouth contact, it was a highly advanced divine magic. It made no sense that it didn't have any effect.

"Kehehe, it's pointless."

A chilling laugh reached his ears, and Uriel turned his head. He saw Rakiel making a sly smile as he looked at the collapsed Kang-Woo.

Crackle!

Uriel's sky-blue hair slowly rose up, and blue lightning danced around him.

"What did you do... to Kang-Woo?"

It was the second time that he had seen Kang-Woo like this. To make matters worse, demonic energy had even flowed out of him this time.

'There's no way this is a coincidence.'

Rakiel had definitely done something.

"Pfft, bwahahahaha!" Rakiel burst into laughter, and thick demonic energy burst out of him.

Rakiel swept up his silver hair and said, "Fascinating. Since when have angels cared for humans this much?"

"Rakiel..." Uriel said in rage. "I asked you what you did."

Blue lightning swept through the surroundings like a storm.

A barrier of demonic energy blocked the lightning storm.

Rakiel leisurely answered, "I didn't do anything."

"You didn't do anything...?"

Split.

Cracks formed on the ground Uriel stood on.

"If you didn't do anything, then why is this human emitting demonic energy?!" Uriel's rage-filled shout echoed throughout the mountain.

Rakiel made a sly smile. "Pfft, I guess you have a point."

"Rakiel...!"

"Jeez, don't get so angry. You're scaring me."

Rakiel hugged himself and trembled.

Uriel bit his lips. He felt that something was strange at that moment.

'What?'

Uriel bit his lip. Just then, a strange feeling passed through his mind.

'What?'

Uriel stared at Rakiel while narrowing his eyes. He was soon able to figure out what the source of his strange feeling was.

'His eyes...'

They were off. Although Rakiel was smiling, his eyes were empty. It was as if someone was controlling him.

'What in the—'

"Do you want to know why that human is acting like that?"

Uriel's thoughts didn't last long. He drew out his power again as Rakiel continued his mocking.

Rumble!!

A blue bolt of lightning shot toward Rakiel.

"Whoa!"

Rakiel flapped his wings in an exaggerated motion and dodged the bolt.

"Kehehehe." He snickered while grabbing his stomach. "I get how much you care for that human now, so stop becoming so hot and bothered. What are you gonna do if that human dies because you're so busy dealing with me?"

"Kuh..." Uriel grimaced.

Just like he said, Kang-Woo was in such a serious condition that he could die at any moment.

"Have you heard that I had kidnapped that human before?"

Uriel had heard that, while he was chasing after Satan, Kang-Woo had been ambushed by Rakiel.

"Back then..." Rakiel said as he hummed, "I pulled a small prank."

"A prank... you say?"

"Yup." He snickered. "I poured a tiny amount of my demonic energy into him."

"What...?" Uriel's eyes widened.

There was no way Uriel wouldn't know what accepting demonic energy meant for a human.

'He'll either become a demon, or...'

It would be better if he just became a demon.

'He'll become... a demonic beast.'

They were monsters with no sense of reason. Their bodies became distorted to the point that they wouldn't have a proper form and would live only for flesh and blood.

"Th-That's nonsense!" Uriel shook his head. "There's no way a god's apostle would become a demonic beast just because he took in a bit of demonic energy!!"

If people could be turned into demons or demonic beasts simply because demonic energy flowed into them, the world would already be in the hands of demons. The greater the power one possessed, the more exceptional their ability to resist demonic energy was.

"You're right." Rakiel nodded. "It certainly hadn't been enough to just pour in some demonic energy. That annoying golden light kept burning it away."

He pointed to Kang-Woo while laughing. Just like he said, the golden light from Kang-Woo's body was burning away the demonic energy.

"But..." a smile crept onto Rakiel's face, "I am Rakiel."

Just that alone could explain everything. Even if Kang-Woo was a god's apostle, as long as he was fundamentally a human, there were limits to his power. Rakiel, the star of Corruption among the Constellations of Evil and one of the elite soldiers of the Demon God, would easily be able to turn a human into a demonic beast if he wanted to.

"Hehe. No need to be so frustrated." Rakiel shrugged his shoulders. "I will admit. That human is formidable. I never expected him to resist the encroachment for months after the incident."

"... What does that mean?"

"It means exactly as it sounds.

"I don't know how he is managing to do it, but that human has been resisting the encroachment and staying as a human. Kehehe, I must applaud his endurance."

"Resisting... you say?"

Uriel thought of the past few months he'd spent with Kang-Woo. His strange behaviors of sometimes staring into the air or suddenly grimacing while holding the back of his neck.

'Was all of that... him resisting the encroachment of demonic energy?'

"But it seems the transformation is commencing, albeit very slowly. Mm. Let's see... I'd guess he has mostly lost his sense of taste by now."

"... What?"

"Mm? I'm sure you know demons also have underdeveloped taste buds like angels. I'm sure that human has also realized while eating every day that he is slowly becoming a demonic beast."

Uriel's face paled. He recalled Kang-Woo saying earlier today that he did not have an appetite with a serious face.

"A-Aaaahh."

Tap.

Uriel knelt. He wasn't dumb enough to deny reality when all of the information was right in front of him.

Uriel embraced the collapsed Kang-Woo.

"You've been... enduring it by yourself all this time."

He had been suppressing the encroachment of demonic energy, likely while coughing up blood like this.

Uriel bit his lip; his shoulders trembled. He would be lying if he hadn't expected nothing was wrong. He had known that Kang-Woo was hiding something from his occasional strange behavior and how he brushed it off as nothing while smiling awkwardly.

"But I..."

He'd only thought of himself. Despite having acted all high and mighty while bragging about having lived thousands of years, he had not once looked at Kang-Woo. He had only tried to fill the void in his heart that Raphael had left behind with Kang-Woo and be consoled for his sorrow, thinking it couldn't be helped since obsession was an angel's instinct.

"I...!"

Uriel hugged Kang-Woo tight.

"Kehehe, what a tearjerker."



"Rakiel..."

Uriel put Kang-Woo down on the ground and slowly stood up. His blue hair floated up, and intense blue lightning poured from him.

"No need to be so impatient. It is not yet time for us to fight."

"That's what you think," Uriel said as he put strength in his legs to shoot toward him.

Rakiel smiled. "Are you sure you want to leave that human to his own devices?"

"..."

"Kehehe, it would be difficult for him to neutralize the encroachment on his own."

"Kuh..." Uriel bit his lip and closed his eyes.

He wanted to charge straight toward Rakiel, but he couldn't ignore what he just said. If he left Kang-Woo alone, he would become a demonic beast.

"Rakiel..."

"Hehe. I will get going. Oh, and there is no need for you to look for me. I will come to you when the 'time of prophecy' arrives. Well then, I will be looking forward to seeing if that human... is still human until then."

"RAKIEEEEEEEELL!!"

Crackle!!

Uriel raised his hand in rage and quickly shot out blue bolts of lightning, but Rakiel deflected the bolts with ease.

Rakiel turned around and leisurely disappeared.

"A-Argghh."

Just when Uriel spread out his wings to chase after Rakiel, he froze after hearing Kang-Woo's groans.

"Shit, shit, shit!!!" Uriel cursed and approached Kang-Woo.

Since he had found out that Kang-Woo's symptoms were due to demonic energy encroachment, it was simple to treat.

Whoom!!

He placed his hands on Kang-Woo's chest. Pure-white light flowed into Kang-Woo's body. Uriel's sacred power was neutralizing the demonic energy.

"Ah..." Kang-Woo slowly opened his eyes.

He looked around after coming back to his senses, and then discovered the pool of blood that he had made. Kang-Woo's expression hardened.

There was a heavy silence.

Kang-Woo sighed. He averted his gaze from Uriel while making a bitter smile. "I guess it ended up like this."

"You..." Uriel looked at Kang-Woo with sharp eyes. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"..."

"Answer me." Uriel grabbed Kang-Woo's collar and screamed, "Why didn't you say anything?!!"

Kang-Woo grabbed Uriel's hands on his collar while making a fragile expression.

"I told you. That I... didn't want to lose anything else."

Uriel let go of his collar. "Is that why... you've been enduring it by yourself like an idiot?"

Uriel had never experienced demonic energy encroachment before, but after witnessing Kang-Woo in agony and spewing blood, it was not hard to tell how long Kang-Woo had suffered all by himself. Kang-Woo had gone through it all by himself, while Uriel had been forcing him to fill the void left by Raphael.

"Don't... screw with me," Uriel mumbled. Tears dripped down his cheeks.

"Lord Uriel...?"

"Don't screw with me!!" Uriel grabbed Kang-Woo's shoulders. "Who gave you the right to fuck around all by yourself?!"

It was a scream directed at himself, not Kang-Woo.

"Just you wait." Uriel bit his lip. "I won't let you become a demonic beast."

"..."

"I'll stop it! No matter what it takes!"

He thought of Raphael, his old friend whom he had killed with his own hands.

Grit.

He refused to feel the despair and failure he had felt back then ever again.

"Oh Kang-Woo," he said while looking at the young man he had known only for a few months but was already filling the space Raphael had left behind. "I'll protect you."

\* \* \*

'Shiiiiiiiiieet!! That was fucking awesome!!'

- I'll protect you.

'Holy crap, you're gonna make me fall for you.'

Kang-Woo cheered in his mind.

'It was perfect. Uriel completely fell for it.'

He needed to push Uriel's obsession to borderline madness to resume the Seed of Corruption's growth.

'A friend turning into a monster, and the protagonist trying to protect him...'

Just that phrase was enough to paint the whole picture in his head. It would also obviously be super effective on Uriel, who had killed Raphael with his own hands.

'Huehuehuehue.'

He suppressed his laughter as best he could. It was too early to celebrate.

'This is where it really begins.'

The foundation was perfect. He had built up an affinity with Uriel in the past few months, and their affinity had even skyrocketed with the serious conversation they had earlier. And now, he had managed to create a tear-jerking scene thanks to his newly acquired Rakiel Coin.

'Time to add even more spice.'

He'd already decided on what to say.

"Lord Uriel."

"...What is it?"

"If I... on the very small chance..." He grabbed Uriel's hand while crying. A single tear dripped down his face, and he made a frail smile. "I become a demonic beast..."

"..."

He tightened his grip and prepared the staple death flag of all zombie movies.

"Please kill me... with your own hands."

'Shiiiet! Hell yeah! This is it! You can't go without this line!'

His shoulders unwittingly shook in excitement.

Chapter 305 - I Should Make Kimchi Stew

Yuriel ?: [Did you get home safe?]

Yuriel ?: [We don't know when the encroachment will happen again, so stay safe.]

Yuriel ?: [And I'm going to live in Seoul, so find me a house.]

Me: [What about money?]

Yuriel ?: [Come on, you're rich! You can have a few of the magic tools here.]

Me: [LMAO I was joking.]

Yuriel ?: [How can you joke around in such a situation?]

Yuriel ?: [Anyway, contact me right away if something happens. You know you can't neutralize demonic energy with mana, right? Sacred power is better, so make sure you contact me!]

Me: [Okay.]

"Cute little son of a bitch."

Oh Kang-Woo smirked while looking at his smartphone.

After the demonic energy was neutralized with Uriel's sacred power, they decided to stop investigating, and each returned to their home after Kang-Woo had barely managed to convince Uriel to not follow him.

Kang-Woo lay on the bed when he got home.

'The message that the Seed of Corruption is growing hasn't appeared yet.'

Based on Uriel's current condition, it was only a matter of time.

'I should keep working to make him more obsessed.'

The closer he got to Uriel, the more his obsession would grow.

'And once that obsession reaches madness...'

Uriel would fall from grace.

"Mm..."

Kang-Woo crossed his arms and fell into thought.

'He said the fall could be reversed at the moment of its occurrence.'

If that was the case, then stopping it would be beneficial to him. After all, according to the quest, a temporary fall was good enough.

'Still, I feel a bit sorry for the kid.'

Kang-Woo had also grown attached to Uriel after spending all those months together. Uriel followed him everywhere like an abandoned puppy, so there was no way he wouldn't get attached. Although Kang-Woo had cringed when Uriel said that he would protect him, he would be lying if it didn't move him.

'Just a bit longer, kid. I swear I'll make it up to you once it's all over.'

He needed to prevent Uriel from falling permanently if he wanted the angels' cooperation in the future. Kang-Woo's thoughts stopped at the sound of an incoming message.

Yuriel ?: [But do we really need to keep it a secret? Why don't we just tell that Kim Si-Hun human and, umm... You said you had a lover, right? Han Seol-Ah, was it? Why don't we just tell them everything that's going on?]

"Absolutely not."

He couldn't imagine the consequences he would face if he told them. Kang-Woo immediately replied that it needed to be kept secret no matter what. Uriel kept insisting that they should tell the others, to which Kang-Woo kept turning down flat.

Me: [If you tell anyone, I will stop hanging out with you, Lord Uriel.]

Yuriel ?: [...]

Uriel finally agreed after Kang-Woo put the foot down. Kang-Woo put down the smartphone and sighed.

"I should get this done as quickly as possible."

Based on Uriel's reaction, he would most definitely end up telling other people. He had to finish everything before that happened.

'I don't have a lot of time.'

The friend slowly turning into a demonic beast and the protagonist struggling to save him... He needed to make a perfect TV drama around these two characters.

'Although I might be able to improvise a few things, I need to plan out the general script.'

Kang-Woo got out of his bed and sat at his desk.

Just then...

Knock, knock.

"Umm... Kang-Woo?" Seol-Ah entered in her pajamas. "D-Did everything go well?"

"Oh, yeah. It's going well."

Seol-Ah's expression brightened, and she blushed and grabbed his hand.

"Then can we..."

"Sorry. Like I told you this morning, I won't be able to sleep with you for the next few days."

He wasn't just planning on making Uriel fall. He also needed to drive him to the brink of falling from grace and then bring him back to normal. It was too bad he couldn't sleep with Seol-Ah, but he needed to focus on the plan first.

"... I-I see."

Seol-Ah lowered her head with a dark expression on her face. The two of them had begun sleeping together about a month and a few weeks ago, and Seol-Ah seemed to have become very into it.

'I want to sleep with you too, darling.'

Kang-Woo did his best to resist the temptation by shaking his head.

"Yeah, I'm sorry. Oh... Why don't you take this chance to stay with your mother for the time being?"

Seol-Ah's mother, Kim Mi-Jeong, was taking care of Seol-Ah's older brother, Han Tae-Hyun, who had practically become mentally disabled. No matter how much of a scumbag he had been, she couldn't just leave him be since he was her son. Kang-Woo had lifted the forced command he had planted in Tae-Hyun with the Authority of Fear, but the latter could no longer function like a regular person due to the deeply instilled trauma.

"That's..." Seol-Ah's expression hardened as she slurred.

It seemed like, unlike her mother, she still hadn't been able to forgive her brother.

'Well, I don't blame her.'

Tae-Hyun had tried to offer her up to his guild, so it was only natural. Kang-Woo had even put some Guardians members around Seol-Ah's mother for security, just in case.

"I'm sorry. Forget I said that."

"Not at all. It's all thanks to you that I can even have trivial worries like this," Seol-Ah answered while making a bright smile. "I'll get going, then. Please don't overwork yourself."

"Okay." Kang-Woo waved and closed the door. "Now then..."

He sat on the chair and re-read the messages he'd exchanged with Uriel.

'Let's begin.'

\* \* \*

The days after were very hectic. Kang-Woo spent all day with Uriel to get even closer to him.

"Kuh...! *C-Cough!*"

"K-Kang-Woo!"

And of course, he sprinkled in some encroachment performances here and there while vomiting blood. Every time that happened, Uriel frantically poured his sacred power into Kang-Woo while bawling his eyes out.

"Lord Uriel, if I become a demonic b—"

"Shut up!"

"..."

"I'll protect you, so don't you dare say shit like that. Got it?"

Uriel did his best to fully chase out the demonic energy from Kang-Woo.

Based on what he'd learned after contacting Sant'Angelo in Aernor, there were two ways to resolve it. One was to eliminate Rakiel, and the other was for Kang-Woo to grow strong enough to be able to burn off the demonic energy within him.

"Shit, shit!" Uriel cursed after hearing the two options.

It was only obvious, since he knew very well that either option was realistically impossible.

Uriel rented a suite in the apartment where Kang-Woo and Cha Yeon-Joo lived with Kang-Woo's help. At first, he had insisted on living in the same house as Kang-Woo, but they had compromised on him living three floors down.

Yuriel ?: [Hey, what are you doing?]

Yuriel ?: [Come down.]

The closer they became and the more often Kang-Woo experienced the demonic energy encroachment, the more severe Uriel's obsession became, proving the plan was going smoothly. But because of that, Kang-Woo had barely been home and was spending all his time with Uriel to get rid of the demonic energy within him.

'But I'm almost there.'

Kang-Woo opened the door to his room as he read Uriel's message. He knew things would be over soon thanks to the system messages.

Riiing.

[The Seed of Corruption is growing.]

[The prerequisite quest is close to completion!]

'Finally.'

Kang-Woo clenched his fists. He had been faking the encroachment for two weeks straight, and it was time to end the boring drama.

Clack.

As he came out of his room, he saw Seol-Ah sitting on the living room couch. She had become unrecognizably haggard in these past two weeks. Kang-Woo felt a pain in his heart.

'I'm sorry, darling.'

He recalled the conversations he had with Seol-Ah over the past two weeks.

"Umm... Kang-Woo, what would you like to have for dinner tonight?"

"Oh, sorry. I'm having dinner with Uriel tonight."

"Ah... okay."

"Kang-Woo... umm, what time will you be coming h—"

"Sorry, darling. I'm gonna be sleeping over at Uriel's tonight."

"... Okay."

"Will you be... staying out tonight as well?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"..."

"Haaa."

He couldn't help but sigh after thinking about their exchanges.

'I never thought she'd get this bad.'

Ever since they became lovers, he knew that Seol-Ah found the time they spent together to be very joyful. And so did he, but this was so important that he hadn't been able to give her any attention.

Kang-Woo walked toward her.

"... Kang-Woo?"

"I'm sorry for not being able to spend any time with you lately, darling." He hugged Seol-Ah, who had thick dark circles under her eyes.

Her expression brightened. "Then what about tod—"

"Just give me a little more time. It's almost over."

"Ah..." Her bright expression darkened again.

Kang-Woo gave her a light kiss and turned around. He wanted to spend some more time with Seol-Ah, but he could feel his phone vibrating from Uriel's messages.

"I'll get going, then. Eat without me. I think I'll be spending time with Uriel until late today."

"... Okay." Seol-Ah nodded while smiling awkwardly.

Kang-Woo opened the front door with a bitter smile on his face.

'I'll have to settle this by today.'

He himself would not be able to hold on for much longer either if he kept dragging this on. He had already thought of the finale. Since a message saying that the quest was almost complete had appeared, there was no reason for him to hesitate any longer.

'It's for sure gonna work this time.'

The finale he'd prepared was like this: He'd go to a deserted mountain and contact Uriel, asking for his help in a faint voice that sounded like he was on the verge of death.

'Uriel will fly over immediately.'

Once Uriel arrived, he'd put the green tentacles he received from Lilith on his right arm and act as if he were turning into a demonic beast.

'And then for my final line...'

- I'm begging you. Before I turn into a monster... kill me.

'Shiiiet! That's the one!'

It was a fantastic line, if he said so himself. It would surely work since Uriel's obsession for Kang-Woo was growing with each day.

'As for the climax... let's go with the power I inherited from Tirion growing stronger after all the sacred power I got from Uriel which then chases out the demonic energy.'

A hero powering up in a crisis... It was awfully cliché, but since he couldn't become an actual demonic beast, it was the best he could do.

'Alright, I'll go with this.'

Kang-Woo smiled and searched for where he should set the stage for the finale.

\* \* \*

Clack.

"..."

Seol-Ah stared at the front door, which had just closed. Her face had become so thin over the past two weeks that she was almost unrecognizable, and thick dark circles had formed under her eyes.

"Oh... Right." Seol-Ah got up. "I should make kimchi stew for Kang-Woo."

Step, step.

She staggered to the kitchen, grabbed the pot, and took out kimchi and pork from the refrigerator.

"I'm sure he's tired from how busy he's been lately, so I'm sure he'll love it if I make a lot."

Seol-Ah laughed softly. She grabbed a kitchen knife and cut the kimchi.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump!



She swung down the kitchen knife as if she were chopping firewood. Deep knife marks formed on the cutting board, and red fluid from the kimchi splattered all over the place. However, that was only for a moment.

"..." Seol-Ah began to tear up. "*Sniff, sniff.*"

Tears flowed down her cheeks.

Just then...

Ding, dong.

"Huh...?"

The bell rang.

Bang, bang, bang.

She heard someone banging on the door.

"K-Kang-Woo?"

She knew that there was no way Kang-Woo would ring the doorbell, but she was in no condition to have such thoughts.

Clack!

She opened the door.

"Ah..."

"The hell? Where's Kang-Woo?"

When she opened the door, she saw a young blue-haired boy standing in a crooked posture.

Chapter 306 - Eh?

"Ah... Uhhh." Han Seol-Ah was left flustered by the unexpected guest.

Uriel looked around and frowned. "Kang-Woo isn't here, right?"

"... Yes."

"Ugh. He said he's on his way, so where the hell is he?" Uriel turned around while complaining.

"P-Please wait!" Seol-Ah called out in a hurry.

"... What?" Uriel looked at her with sharp eyes.

He'd heard a lot about Seol-Ah through Kang-Woo. Of course, Kang-Woo had only said good things about her, but Uriel couldn't help but have an unfavorable opinion of her.

'She doesn't even know what Kang-Woo's going through.'

He felt a strange sense of superiority and a negative sentiment toward her.

"Kang-Woo... seems to be very tired lately. Could you tell me what is going on?"

Uriel clicked his tongue. "It's none of your concern."

"I'm Kang-Woo's lov—"

"Yeah, I know that you two are dating."

"..."

"Hmph, what's the point if you're dating? You don't even know a thing about him." Uriel snorted and turned his head.

Seol-Ah's eyebrows went up.

"What... do you mean?" she said in a low voice.

Uriel found it absurd and laughed at the faint rage he felt in her voice. "What's it to you? You think it'll change anything?"

"I asked you what you meant."

"Don't ask me, ask Kang-Woo. What? Did he not tell you?"

Uriel had hit the mark. Just like he said, all Kang-Woo did when she asked him was smile awkwardly and say that everything was fine.

"Hmph, I knew it."

"... Please tell me. Why are the two of you together so often lately?"

"Kuh."

Uriel glared at Seol-Ah. He was offended by the fact that the woman who considered herself to be Kang-Woo's lover was doing absolutely nothing while Kang-Woo was going through such pain. Of course, he knew that there was nothing she could do even if she did know.

Kang-Woo had told him not to tell her anything so that she wouldn't become worried, but...

'At least stay in your goddamn lane if you can't do anything.'

He was surging with irritation. He felt like he wouldn't be able to calm his rage until he gave her a piece of his mind.

"You want to know why?"

"Yes, I do."

"It's simple." Uriel pointed to her. "You can't protect Kang-Woo..." He then pointed to himself. "... And I can."

"... Pardon?"

Seol-Ah's eyes trembled. She couldn't understand what he meant, but what she knew for certain was that Kang-Woo was currently in a situation where he needed someone's protection.

"I-I can't protect him? What does that..."

"It means exactly how it sounds. You can't do anything for Kang-Woo. You can't protect him or even make him happy."

"Th-That's not true!" Seol-Ah shouted as chilling bloodlust pooled in her eyes. "What are you talking about when you don't even know anything about us?!"

Uriel had only known Kang-Woo for a couple of months. No, the time wasn't important. She was Kang-Woo's lover; they had shared both body and mind, but Uriel was telling her that she couldn't protect Kang-Woo or make him happy.

"Haaa, haaa," she panted heavily.

What drove her crazy the most was that she knew it was true—she didn't have the strength to protect him or make him happy.

"Hmph, I might not have known Kang-Woo for as long as you have," Uriel blurted out. "But I know for a fact that you're of absolutely no help to him."

"..."

Split.

Something in her heart started to crack, and her face paled.

"Ah..." Uriel realized he'd gone too far and said something he shouldn't have.

'Dammit.'

He didn't want to antagonize his friend's lover, but he'd lost his rationality because he had spent so much time seeing his precious friend in immense pain.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to go that f—"

Brrrr.

As Uriel was in the middle of apologizing, something rang from inside his pocket. Uriel quickly took out his smartphone. There was only one person who knew his number.

"Where the hell are you?" Uriel asked in a whiny voice, but his eyes widened from hearing Kang-Woo's voice.

He sounded as if he would die at any moment.

"Shit!"

Uriel quickly turned and jumped through the window frame, spreading his eight wings and quickly flying away.

Seol-Ah blankly stared into the air.

"Ha... haha." A distorted laugh left her mouth.

\* \* \*

"I'm begging you. Before I turn into a monster... kill me."

"Don't fuck with meeeeeeee!!!"

The friend, Kang-Woo, was telling the protagonist, Uriel, to kill him while grabbing hold of his hideous tentacle arm. Uriel was crying as he looked at Kang-Woo. The drama that Kang-Woo had been filming with Uriel had entered its climax just like he had wanted, but...

'The hell?'

Even though Kang-Woo was spasming while vomiting blood...

'Why isn't the quest being completed?'

Even though he was pouring out demonic energy while holding onto his tentacle arm...

'Why isn't this son of a bitch falling?'

He had even completed the climax scene of his golden energy powering up and fully chasing out the tentacle arm.

"*Sniff.* I'm glad. I'm... so glad."

Even after that, Uriel did not fall from grace. He was bawling his eyes out while hugging Kang-Woo, his eight wings as pure-white as ever.

Kang-Woo looked down at Uriel with a hardened expression.

'My plan failed?'

He wasn't entirely unfamiliar with failure; he wasn't some sort of omnipotent god, so he couldn't succeed in everything.

He knew. He understood it, but still...

'I never thought that this one would fail.'

To be honest, he was a bit bewildered.

Ever since he had come to Earth, this was the first time that a plan he had prepared so thoroughly had failed so miserably.

'What happened?'

He couldn't understand it.

'Where did it go wrong?'

He was sure Uriel's target of obsession was him. As evidence of that, Uriel was crying as he was hugging him right now.

It wasn't like the Seed of Corruption had stopped growing either; the message window had clearly said that the quest was close to completion.

'Then what the hell did I miss?'

He couldn't help but feel irritated that the last two weeks had gone to waste.

"Wh-What's wrong? Is the demonic energy still..." Uriel said while looking up at him with worry.

Kang-Woo shook his head. "No, I don't feel any more demonic energy within my body for the time being."

He put his plan on hold for now. If he couldn't make Uriel fall from grace despite pushing him this far, it simply meant that he had gone about it the wrong way from the start. There was no reason for him to fake the demonic energy encroachment anymore.

"Really?'"

"Yes. As proof..." Kang-Woo took out a cookie from his pocket and ate it. He smiled brightly. "My sense of taste is back to normal."

"Ah...!" Uriel smiled brightly.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes as he looked down at Uriel.

'I haven't completely failed yet.'

There was nothing more horrible than being dragged down into the pits of despair after tasting hope. Since the Seed of Corruption hadn't completely disappeared, he would be able to try it as many times as he liked.

'But my pride is a bit hurt.'

Kang-Woo would be able to give Uriel a despairing experience far more shocking than encroachment if he really wanted to.

'I'm a bit worried for the kid, though.'

He wasn't sure if Uriel's mind would be able to handle it.

'You should've just fallen on this run.'

Irritation swept over him again. He even thought about just making him fall by forcing demonic energy into him.

'I would've done it already if I could.'

Unlike humans, angels didn't fall just from demonic energy being forced into them. Only by pushing their obsession to the limit of madness would an angel fall from grace.

"I'm glad. I'm... so glad." Uriel smiled brightly while crying.

Kang-Woo was swept over with huge remorse and fatigue. He felt like an adult picking on a child like his life depended on it. A sense of dejection spread through him.

'Haaa, what the fuck am I doing?'

Kang-Woo shook his head. He decided to think about it more later. He just wanted to go home and rest.

"Let's go back home," he said.

"Okay! You're coming to my place, right?"

"Haha, no. I'm too tired, so I want to rest at home for today."

"Ah..." Uriel's expression darkened, but he nodded. "Okay. I'm going to report this matter to the celestial realm. I also have to hear about what's going on in Aernor through the regular meeting."

"Your subordinates will also be coming to Earth soon, right?"

"Yeah! They're all good guys. I'll introduce them to you when they get here."

Uriel's obsession had alleviated significantly due to the fact that Kang-Woo had been able to escape the demonic energy encroachment.

"Haha, thank you very much."

Kang-Woo and Uriel went their separate ways. Uriel headed not to the house that Kang-Woo had prepared for him but to the fortress in Africa.

"Haaa."

Kang-Woo hadn't expected his plan to fail, so his steps felt very heavy as he returned home.

'But since there was no message saying that the growth was halted, I still have a chance.'

He opened the front door, thinking that he should take a long break before preparing for his next plan.

'It's been a while, so I'll sleep with my darling tonight.'

Just the thought was enough to make him smile and put him in a good mood. He had been waiting so long for this very moment!

"Hm?"

The house was dark.

Echidna and Halcyon would usually come running at this time, but they were nowhere to be seen. Kang-Woo racked his brain and nodded after figuring out why.

'Halcyon and Echidna went to the Grand Canyon with Balrog for special training.'

That meant Seol-Ah was all by herself.

"Darling~?" he carefully called out to her, but there was no answer.

'Is she asleep?'

Kang-Woo looked at her closed bedroom door and tilted his head.

'Mm, I shouldn't wake her up.'

It was too bad, but it seemed like he'd have to sleep alone for tonight.

'Well, I'm gonna be taking a long break anyway.'

He wanted to go on dates with Seol-Ah and relax as much as he could, just the two of them. Traveling was also a nice option.

"I'll just go to sleep tonight."

Leaving his disappointment behind, Kang-Woo went into his room.

He hadn't been able to sleep for the past two weeks because of Uriel, so his eyelids felt heavy.

'Tomorrow, with Seol-Ah...'

Kang-Woo fell asleep as all sorts of thoughts went through his head.

\* \* \*

At dawn the next day...

"Urgh."

Kang-Woo opened his eyes as he felt a ray of sunlight shine through his window. Although he'd been able to sleep only for four hours, that much was enough to wipe away his fatigue.

"I wonder if darling is still sleepi—"

Clank.

"Huh?"

He couldn't move. He turned his head to see white chains wrapped around him.

'Eh?'

What the fuck are these?

Chapter 307 - Let's Go!

"What the hell is this...?"

Oh Kang-Woo looked around in confusion. He put more strength into his limbs to move.

Clank, clank.

All he heard were the sounds of chains hitting each other.

'I... can't muster up any strength.'

Kang-Woo's expression hardened. He couldn't circulate his demonic energy as he wanted. It was as if he were under the effects of his Authority of Sealing.

"Shit... what the hell is happening?"

Kang-Woo frowned.

He couldn't even cut his arm off to free himself like he had done back when he had been restrained by the Authority of Sealing, since the unknown white chains had bound his entire body.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. It wasn't like he had absolutely no way to break out.

'If I open a Door...'

If he forcibly made the demonic energy of the Ten Thousand Demon Core run wild by opening a Door, he'd be able to break the chains in an instant.

'Calm down.'

Kang-Woo took a deep breath. Opening a Door was not some technique he could use willy-nilly. He at least needed to figure out what was going on before he used it.

Clank, clank!

"Kuh. Shit... why the hell are they so thick?"

He used the Authority of Blades using the very small amount of demonic energy that he could still move.

The black blade made contact with the chains.

[This is 'Demon-Binding Light' made with the Divinity of the Celestial Goddess. It cannot be destroyed physically.]

"... What?"

Kang-Woo's eyes widened from seeing the message window pop up in front of him. He wasn't surprised by the fact that it couldn't be destroyed physically.

'Made with the Divinity of the Celestial Goddess?'

What nonsense was that?

Before he could continue that line of thought, he felt a presence right outside his room.

Creak.

"Oh, Kang-Woo. You're up."

"... Seol-Ah?"

Seol-Ah's eyes were blurry as if out of focus. She staggered toward Kang-Woo and sat on the bed. She gently caressed his cheeks lovingly.

"What's g—"

Kang-Woo was about to say something when she pulled on his neck and kissed him; her tongue explored his mouth as if she were a starved beast devouring its food.

'Hallelujah.'

What the hell was happening? Was this a dream? Was he having that thing called a wet dream or whatever it was called? He couldn't believe he was having a wet dream despite having lived for ten millennia.

Kang-Woo had kissed Seol-Ah many times, but his kisses had never been this intense. Not even his kisses with Lilith had been this intense.

"Haaa." Seol-Ah exhaled in a stupor.

She smiled and slowly tilted her head.

"Mwah."

From the neck to the ear, Seol-Ah kissed him all over as if she were a bird pecking at him. Kang-Woo's eyes widened as his mouth fell open.

'What the fuck is going on?'

This was fucking amazing.

'No, no. It's not fucking amazing.'

He forcibly severed his train of thought. He was certainly loving what was going on, but not the situation as a whole.

"... What are you doing, Seol-Ah?" he asked in a low voice.

Seol-Ah was clearly acting very weirdly. She was not the gentle, kind, and shy woman that he was used to.

'It feels different from Lilith.'

Lilith knew exactly how to seduce a man (although the tentacles made it meaningless) and perfectly calculated her moves to take advantage of her knowledge. However, all that he felt from Seol-Ah was not seduction but madness and obsession to make every inch of Kang-Woo's body hers.

'Wait.'



Madness and obsession?

Kang-Woo's expression hardened.

"Kang-Woo..." Seol-Ah opened her mouth with a trembling voice. "You see, that rude angel kid said that I didn't know anything about you. Isn't that absurd?"

Her hands covered Kang-Woo's cheeks.

"I would've understood it if it had been Lilith, but that wasn't the case. How dare he, when he met you far later than I have... when he doesn't even live with you or are lovers with you!"

Seol-Ah's voice was starting to carry a hint of madness. As she stared at Kang-Woo, her eyes started to shake violently.

"But... for him to say that I don't know anything about you... Fu... Fufu. That's not the end of it. He said that I'm not able to protect you... so I can't make you happy, you know?"

Kang-Woo heard her grinding her teeth.

Rumble.

Colossal energy flowed out of her. The power contained within the wave of energy could not even be fathomed by even Kang-Woo.

'Holy fuck.'

Kang-Woo's face paled.

"You also think... that's absurd, right, Kang-Woo?"

"..."

"I can't make you happy...? That can't be, right?"

She smiled faintly and hugged Kang-Woo's head. Two soft mounds of flesh touched his head.

"Now..." she whispered seductively, "You can do as you wish, Kang-Woo."

The temptation spread like poison.

Seol-Ah giggled. "I'll protect you from now on, Kang-Woo."

She licked her lips and let out a heated breath. "You don't need to do anything from now on. There's no need for you to be weighed down by the obligation to save the world anymore."

"Umm... Darling? There seems to have been a misunderstanding."

"Just lie still."

"I can't get up anyway since I'm tied up."

"Fufu. You can just stay like that from now on. I'll... do everything for you."

Her eyes were hazy as if she were high. Light poured out of the twelve white wings that had sprouted from her back. They flickered black like a broken lightbulb. Kang-Woo's face paled; the questions in his mind had finally been answered.

'Fuck...'

He fucked up.

'Uriel wasn't the one with the Seed of Corruption.'

He had been completely mistaken. He had felt that something was wrong from the moment that the plan he had prepared so thoroughly had failed.

'It was Seol-Ah.'

Kang-Woo's mouth fell open in shock. It wasn't that he hadn't suspected her. He had checked if the clashing of his energy with Seraph's energy had caused any negative effects on Seol-Ah at the very beginning.

'That was where I fucked up.'

The entangling of energies itself had not influenced Seol-Ah in any way. However, the problem had been that due to the entanglement, the energy of Seraph within Seol-Ah had grown bigger. In other words, Kang-Woo had not realized that Seol-Ah's body was transforming from that of a human to an angel.

'And because it's an angel's body...'

It had instinctive constraints that allowed one to keep their sanity in eternal life, just like demon bodies.

'Seol-Ah's target of obsession is...'

There was no need to even think about what it was.

"Fufu. Kang-Woo~" Seol-Ah hugged him tighter and kissed him.

'Fuuuuuuuck!' Kang-Woo screamed in his head.

His head had never been this jumbled before. The problem wasn't just that Seol-Ah was falling. The biggest problem was...

'I don't know if I should like it or not!'

To be honest, he liked it.

He had practically lived like a virgin for ten millennia except for his time with Lilith, so there was no way that he would dislike such a fantasy-like situation.

'Is it okay if it isn't suitable for all ages anymore? Should we go straight to the moon like this?'

All sorts of thoughts crossed through Kang-Woo's mind. His instinctive desires and sense of reason were clashing with each other. He could hear them debating against each other in his head.

- Let's fucking go! We've waited ten goddamn millennia for this!!

- Calm down. Take a deep breath, and take off your pants.

'What the fuck?'

They were both on the same side.

"What do you think...? You like it too, don't you?"

"Ah, yes. Of course." He nodded furiously.

"In that case..."

Seol-Ah kissed him once again.

Riiing.

[The prerequisite quest has been completed.]

[You have acquired the third key of the Demonic Sea, 'Abysm.']

A blue message window appeared in front of him, and the third symbol of the ring on his right middle finger shone.

"Ah..."

Seol-Ah's eyes shifted to the ring, and her expression crumpled.

"What's this ring?"

"Huh?"

"It's not something that rude kid gave you, is it? Is it?" She bit her lip temperamentally. "Please give me an answer now."

"It's a weapon I made. It can change into all sorts of forms."

Kang-Woo changed the form of the Key of the Demonic Sea for Seol-Ah to see.

"Oh, I-I see. I'm sorry... Kang-Woo."

Seol-Ah blushed and lowered her head.

"Yes, there's no way that you would be wearing a ring that someone else gave you. Yes, there's... absolutely no way." She nodded and smiled.

"..."

"Oh, now that we're on the topic, wh-why don't we also get couple rings? No, let's get them. I'll go buy them in a bit." Seol-Ah kept talking without even giving Kang-Woo time to answer.

Kang-Woo's expression got harder over time.

[The fall has begun! The fall will be permanent if it is not stopped right now!]

A warning window appeared in front of him.

Hesitation appeared in Kang-Woo's eyes.

It was time to choose between the current assertive and wild Seol-Ah and the kind Seol-Ah with a beautiful smile, the one he had first met when he first came to Earth.

"... Hah." Kang-Woo feigned laughter.

It was not even worth thinking about. He also liked the current Seol-Ah to the point that he had almost cheered in delight.

'But...'

The one he had met after ten millennia in Hell and the one who was best with a gentle and soft smile was... the 'human' Han Seol-Ah.

'I will stop the fall.'

He had made up his mind, but the problem was that he didn't know how.

Kang-Woo used what little demonic energy he could move to contact Lilith.

- Lilith!

- My king? What is wrong?

Kang-Woo quickly explained the situation to her.

- Hah... Seol-Ah did?

- Get over here and help me.

- ...

There was silence.

Lilith's voice spread through his mind.

- I don't think I will be of much help to you, my king. If she's powerful enough to restrain you, then I wouldn't even be able to withstand a simple wave of her hand.

- Oh... Shit, then...

- You can't open a Door either.

- What am I supposed to do, then?

- Listen carefully, my king. You said that an angel falls from grace when their obsession reaches the border of madness, right?

- Yeah.

- In that case...

Lilith kept talking.

- You need to start with alleviating that obsession.

- How am I supposed to do that?

- It's simple.

She said without hesitation.

- Do it with Seol-Ah.

- Yeah, that will definitely... What? Do what?

- Oh, you. You know exactly what I mean.

What was he supposed to know?

- If she thinks that the target of her obsession is fully hers, that obsession will naturally be alleviated.

So what was he supposed to do?

- Hurry! There is no time, my king!

Huh? HUUUH?

- Do it now!

"..."

Kang-Woo's mouth was agape with a dumbfounded expression. He saw Seol-Ah mumbling something as if she were a broken radio.

'Do it?'

For real? Was it really okay?

"Fuuu." He took a deep breath in and mustered up the resolve.

'Yeah, let's go.'

He was Oh Kang-Woo, a man roughly ten thousand years old.

'Let's fucking go! Yeah!! I can fucking do it! I have all the knowledge I need!'

He had bought an external hard drive with 1TB of storage without Seol-Ah knowing for a reason.

'Let's go, let's go, let's go!!'

To the moon!

Chapter 308 - The Moon Goes Down

'Calm down for now. Don't get too excited.'

Oh Kang-Woo gripped his trembling chest and took deep breaths. It was a historical moment that took ten millennia to arrive. He had honestly hoped to enjoy the opportunity in a more romantic atmosphere, but such idiotic thoughts had long since gone out the window now that the opportunity was actually in front of him.

An intense heat spread through him.

'Seol-Ah.'

He looked over at Han Seol-Ah, who was eyeing him with a mad gleam in her eyes. He felt like she would devour him if he did nothing, but he couldn't let that happen.

'The goal above all else is to stop Seol-Ah's fall.'

He had no dirty intention of taking advantage of the situation to go to the moon with her.

'Yeah, this is just CPR.'

It was nothing more than medical treatment to stop Seol-Ah's fall from grace. He had no choice but to do it. He was planning on taking a very wholesome stance, just like a doctor saving their patient or a devotee praying to their god.

"Did something good happen, Kang-Woo?" Seol-Ah asked.

"Huh? Ah, mm."

His mouth seemed to have curled up without him even realizing it. He coughed while averting his gaze from Seol-Ah. The gears in his head turned in overdrive.

'I can't act rashly right away.'

Everything had a course that needed to be taken. He couldn't just dive straight into it.

'First, I'll satiate Seol-Ah's desires with sweet words.'

Now that Kang-Woo knew that her body was closer to that of an angel and that the target of her obsession was him, it was not hard to guess what her desires were.

'Just like with Uriel...'

No, it was actually easier than with Uriel, since his obsession over affection had not developed enough to make him fall from grace.

Kang-Woo slowly opened his mouth, "Seol-Ah."

"Yes, Kang-Woo?"

"You've been lonely since I haven't been able to spend much time with you lately, right?" he said in a warm voice.

Seol-Ah nodded and hugged his head.

"Yes... I was so, so lonely. But there's no need to worry anymore. After all, there is no way... that will ever happen again."

Seol-Ah smiled widely and embraced Kang-Woo with her twelve wings flickering black.

"From now until the end of time... we'll always be together," she whispered sweetly.

Kang-Woo nodded calmly. "Yeah, let's be together forever."

"A-Aaaahh!" Seol-Ah trembled. She then exclaimed in ecstasy, "So you wanted that too!"

Kang-Woo lifted his arms wrapped in chains and asked, "Sorry, but could you undo these?"

"Th-That's..."

"I want to touch you, Seol-Ah."

"I'll undo them right away.'

Clunk.

His arms were freed from the chains. Kang-Woo caressed Seol-Ah's back.

"Hehehe," she smiled.

Although it was only a little, he noticed that the flickering had slowed down.

'Okay.'

His actions were proven to be effective. If so... he pulled Seol-Ah toward him and kissed her. Although his kiss wasn't as intense as hers, it was still intense enough for their emotions to be properly delivered to each other. Seol-Ah's wings were flapping in delight.

"Seol-Ah."

"Y-Yes, Kang-Woo?"

"What did you hear from Uriel?"

"..." Seol-Ah's expression crumpled when she heard the name. She said in a voice filled with bloodlust, "He said that... I can't make you happy... because I can't protect you."

She bit her lip. "Isn't that ridiculous? He talked as if he were your lover when your lover is m-me. Don't you agree, Kang-Woo?"

Seol-Ah stared at him in madness.

"Yeah. That brat was out of line. He knows nothing about our relationship," Kang-Woo said without hesitation.

He understood what Uriel had meant, but he couldn't defend Uriel at the moment—he had to take Seol-Ah's side no matter what.

"Th-That's right! A kid who doesn't know anything about our relationship said that!" Seol-Ah's expression brightened, and she nodded furiously.

'Good.'

Things were off to a good start.

'Now...'

It was time to smooth things over.

"I don't really understand why you being unable to protect me leads to me being unhappy, though."

"Because... that's how much danger you're in..."

"No," Kang-Woo firmly shook his head.

His saying that he actually wasn't in any danger and that Uriel was wrong would be completely pointless, since that was not the answer she truly wanted.

"Me being in danger and you being unable to make me happy are completely unrelated," Kang-Woo stated.

He'd dealt with all sorts of crazy beings while ruling over the Nine Hells as the demon king.

"It's true that I'm in danger and so is the fact that I might die at any second."

"Th-Then..."

"But... no matter how much danger I'm in, I've never once thought that I was unhappy."

Dealing with such crazy beings was simple—you just had to give them what they wanted to see and hear.

"Seol-Ah." He touched her cheeks and did his best to avoid cringing. "Just being with you makes me happy."

"Ah..."

"There's no need for you to protect me. You just... have to stay by my side."

"L-Liar!! You've wanted to be with that kid angel more than with me this whole time!" Seol-Ah exclaimed temperamentally. "I've waited for you every single day until late at night... even until past

midnight, but you never came back. I had waited for you without missing a single day, but not even once...! You must be lying when you say that you're happy just from being with me!"

Rumble!

An explosive noise akin to thunder sounded. The apartment shook as if it were about to collapse. No, Seoul itself was shaking due to her influence.

Kang-Woo's face paled.

'Just how fucking strong is she?'

He was truly shocked by Seraph's power, which was strong enough to shake an entire city.

Seol-Ah put her hand on Kang-Woo's shoulder and continued, "You have to look only at me. Love only me, talk to only me, and touch only me. Understood?"

"Seol-Ah."

"You don't have to worry." Her crazed eyes shifted to Kang-Woo. She pushed him back down on the bed and got on top of him.

"I'll do anything you want, Kang-Woo. You can just stay right here without doing a thing. If you do..." Seol-Ah slowly caressed Kang-Woo's cheek.

"I'll make the kimchi stew you love every single day and feed it to you right here. I'll change your clothes for you. You don't even have to go to the bathroom. Oh, I'll move the TV to your room so that you don't get bored. I'll buy you a bed table so you can use the computer here as well. And, and, and..." Seol-Ah leaned down and whispered in his ear, "I'll even let you do the thing that lovers do... any time, as much as you like. Fufu. I may not look like it, but I practiced it a bunch without you knowing. I can show you an amazing time even while you're lying still."

Kang-Woo remained silent, and all sorts of thoughts crossed his mind.

'It'd be fine if I just let her fall, wouldn't it? Hm? A Demon God and a fallen Celestial Goddess sounds like one hell of a couple, doesn't it?'

Whether her wings were black or white, wasn't it fine as long as she was fundamentally Seol-Ah?

Kang-Woo frantically kept his rampaging urges in check and looked at her back with deep, sunken eyes. Her wings were flickering just as fast as before.

'Calm down. Calm down.'

He realized that Seol-Ah was in a far worse state than he had thought.

'In that case...'

He just had to use something better.

"I'm sorry, Seol-Ah. I didn't know you were having such a hard time."

"*Sniff, sniff...*"

"I'll admit it. It's true that I've been... giving more attention to Uriel than you."

"Urgh." Seol-Ah frowned aggressively.



Kang-Woo forced himself back up and embraced her. "But you know why I had to do that, Seol-Ah."

"B-Because you prefer being with that brat over me..."

"Do you really think so?" he asked in a deep voice.

He was sure that she knew that wasn't the case—she'd just been ignoring it due to her obsession with keeping him tied up to monopolize him.

"Do you really think I left you alone because I prefer to be with Uriel?"

"If that's not the case—"

"If you really think so..." Kang-Woo slurred. He needed to take a strong and firm stance. "I think I would be... very disappointed."

"N-No! I didn't think so at all!" Seol-Ah shook her head, her face pale.

She had made a complete 180 in an instant, but it didn't matter.

Kang-Woo smiled and continued. "But I do feel it's my responsibility that I drove you to the point that you had thought that way. I think I'll have to... show you trust."

"No, this is all that b-brat's fault. You haven't done anything wr—"

"No, it's my mistake. I should've told you this earlier to make sure you can trust me fully."

"Pardon? What... do you mean?" Seol-Ah asked.

Kang-Woo put his hand into his pocket. A tiny bit of darkness separated from the Key of the Demonic Sea on his right middle finger. A white ring was made in the blink of an eye, with the name 'Han Seol-Ah' engraved in black writing on it.

"I've actually prepared this a month ago... but I haven't been able to find the right time to hand it to you."

"... What?"

He took out the white ring and extended it toward Seol-Ah.

"Seol-Ah," He unveiled the trump card that would allow him to fully reverse the situation. "Let's get married."

"...!"

Rumble!

An ungodly wave of power shook everything around them. Seol-Ah stuttered, her face turning a concerning shade of red.

"Wh-Wha—Huh? M-Married? Huh?"

Kang-Woo smiled, thinking that it had worked.

'But that's not enough.'

Just words alone would not be able to stop her fall from grace.

'Now, rather than talking with words...!'

It was time to talk with their bodies. He had to melt away the distrust and madness dirtying her heart with his body heat.

"Let's go, let's go, let's go!! I'm so ready to go this time!"

He had waited far too long and had desired this moment far too much.

Finally... finally... after ten millennia... no, for the first time in his life...

'It's different from what I did with Lilith!'

It was far too painful to consider being attacked by a tentacle monster spewing pus as experience.

'No tentacles! Two eyes! No pus! Phenomenal!'

Kang-Woo slowly reached out to her while suppressing his tears as much as he could. Just then...

"*Sniff, sniff...*"

Along with Seol-Ah's tears...

[The energy of Skyfall is weakening!]

[The fall will soon be canceled!]

'Huh?'

What the fuck?

"Kang-Woo...!"

But they haven't done it yet.

"Y-Yes...! I-I'd love to!"

Wait just a goddamn minute. This ain't it, chief. Why are you doing this? We still haven't talked with our bodies yet, Seol-Ah. This isn't something that can just be resolved with words.

'N-No.'

Kang-Woo reached out in desperation. Something was going terribly wrong.

'It can't succeed already... we've only just talked!'

They still haven't gone to the moon!

'Fall! Fall again! Not like thiiiiis!'

[The Seed of Corruption is disappearing!]

'Fuuuuuuuuuuck!!! Noooooooooo!'

"Let's"—tears dripped down Seol-Ah's cheeks—"get married."

"Ah..." Kang-Woo looked at her twelve wings as they reverted to their usual white color, and... cried.

[You have successfully prevented the fall!]

'No... Not this... I didn't want this.'

Kang-Woo and Seol-Ah cried while hugging each other until the moon went down... and the sun came up.

Chapter 309 - Was It Rakiel's Doing?

"Kargh... Hurgh!!"

"Lady Gaia!!"

A woman, lying down on an altar in the middle of a giant castle made in a space filled with white light, grimaced in pain. Her brown hair, wet with sweat, slid down from above the altar. The faint light flowing out of her shook greatly.

"Gather the gods immediately! Divinity... we need Divinity!" anxiously shouted Uranus, the man with red hair akin to a lion's mane.

The nearby servants lowered their heads.

"W-We apologize. All the gods from Olympus, Valhalla, Takamagahara... Their Divinities have all reached their limit. If we borrow any more Divinity from them, they will also..."

"Shit! Are you suggesting we just stand by and watch as Lady Gaia is annihilated?! This world is over as soon as she disappears!" Uranus angrily shouted.

The Earth losing its head god would mean that there would be no one left who could manage the Gaia System, a portion of the providence granted to Earth. If that were to happen, otherworldly invasions would be permitted, and the restrictions binding the gods would completely disappear. All that would await them after that was the end. Unless a being with at least the same level of Divinity as Gaia took control of the system, Earth's destruction would be inevitable.

"*Cough! Cough!* Do not... get agitated... my child."

Just then, Gaia slowly got up from the altar.

Uranus's eyes widened. "L-Lady Gaia!"

He knelt on one knee and lowered his head.

Gaia clenched her chest in agony. She said with a heavy voice, "Contact... my incarnation. There is something... I must tell my children."

\* \* \*

"Urgh."

Oh Kang-Woo got up, feeling the rays of sunshine beaming on his face through the window.

'There's more than usual.'

Kang-Woo tilted his head as he looked at the red marks that had appeared on his body.

It had been three days since he stopped Han Seol-Ah's fall from grace. He was still sticking to her all day to give her unstable mind proper care. Of course, they also slept together.

He had first thought about avoiding sleeping with her since he didn't know how his demonic energy would influence her, but he changed his mind as soon as he noticed her extreme sorrow when he

brought it up to her. He couldn't afford to take the immediate risk to avoid a risk that he wasn't even sure would happen or not.

"My demonic energy control shot up again," Kang-Woo said with a smile.

Other than the fact that he got to sleep with Seol-Ah, there were too many other benefits to it for him to give it up.

'My stamina goes down, but...'

It was an extremely easy price to pay, considering how much his demonic energy control improved with each session.

"Darling~"

"Oh, good morning, Kang-Woo."

As he came out of his room, Seol-Ah approached him with a smile. She was trotting toward him when she suddenly stopped in her tracks. She lowered her head in sadness as if remembering something.

"Uhhh... I-I'm so sorry about back then. I still have no idea why I acted that way."

"Haha. How many times are you going to say that? I told you it's okay."

"But still..." Seol-Ah blushed.

She still could not understand what had come over her to bind Kang-Woo in chains.

'No matter how much I wanted to be with Kang-Woo...'

She was swept with regret for having gone too far. Kang-Woo thankfully forgave her, but if he had come to avoid her due to what had happened, she would have regretted it for the rest of her life.

'But thanks to that...'

Seol-Ah touched the white ring on her left ring finger.

"Hehehe."

Although she'd touched, stroked, and licked it hundreds of times already, she couldn't help but smile every time she looked at it.

She recalled what Kang-Woo had said to her while holding her hands when they had first met.

"Three kids sounds good."

She said, "I'll do my best, Kang-Woo."

"Hm? On what?"

"I've been practicing super hard!"

"...?"

Kang-Woo tilted his head. Seol-Ah lightly kissed him and hummed as she turned around.

"Oh, right. Seol-Ah, how is it... handling that power? You haven't felt Seraph's consciousness or will or anything like that, have you?" Kang-Woo asked worryingly.

"No, nothing like that," Seol-Ah said as she slightly raised her hand.

Whoom.

An immense wave of power spread out as twelve wings appeared on her back. Although it was weaker compared to when she'd fallen, she was still emitting enough power to easily wipe out a prince of Hell.

"This is... Lady Seraph's power, right?" Seol-Ah asked.

"It is."

"I still can't believe that her soul is inside me..."

"It isn't something to be happy about. You don't know when she'll take control of your consciousness, so you need to avoid using her power as much as possible," Kang-Woo stated with worry, and Seol-Ah shook her head.

"No, I want to use this power." Her voice carried determination. "I've always been protected by you. I... don't want things to stay that way."

She smiled. "I will protect you from now on, Kang-Woo."

"..."

Kang-Woo kept his mouth shut and groaned.

The benefits of Seol-Ah being able to control Seraph's power couldn't be overstated.

'Since a god on the same level as Gaia would be added to the roster.'

Although it seemed she still had a long way to go to fully control that power, she was as strong as Balrog and Kim Si-Hun now.

'Not only that, but she's a support.'

She wouldn't be that strong if she tried to fight in the vanguard like Balrog and Si-Hun. Her power truly shone when she was giving support from the back: boosting recovery, reducing consumption of energies like mana and Qi, and giving buffs that boosted brain processing speed and hardened one's mental state. Not just that, there were no stats that she couldn't buff.

'Even Si-Hun was surprised.'

Kang-Woo had once made Si-Hun duel Balrog twice, before and after being buffed. Si-Hun had just barely lost to Balrog without being buffed but had managed to overpower Balrog in less than five minutes after being buffed.

Considering how strong Si-Hun and Balrog were, a buff making such a difference was absolutely unreal.

'Even considering the dangers of using the power, giving it up would be a waste.'

If the one with this power had been anyone else but Seo-Ah, he would have done whatever it took to make that person his Familiar. That was how valuable she was at the moment.

'Plus, it's only been three days since she managed to consciously use the power.'

There was a huge chance that her buffs would become even better. Plus...

"I feel like I get better at using this power every time I sleep with you for some reason, Kang-Woo."

Seol-Ah controlled the white light flowing out of her hand in fascination. Kang-Woo nodded. He also used to be curious about that.

"Right? I wonder why that happens when all we do is sleep?"

A weird sense of silence fell momentarily. Seol-Ah froze and smiled awkwardly.

"Ho... hoho. Your guess is as good as mine. I wonder why, when all we really do is sleep."

"... Darling?"

"Right, hurry, Kang-Woo. Breakfast is ready."

"Oh, okay."

Seol-Ah pulled him into the kitchen by the arm.

As he reached the dining table, he saw a steaming pot of kimchi stew and three sets of spoons and chopsticks.

"Hm? Are Echidna and Halcyon coming back today?"

Even then, the number didn't match.

"No. Lilith is going to be joining us in a bit."

Ding dong.

Speak of the devil, the bell rang.

"I'll be right there~"

As Seol-Ah opened the front door, Lilith entered the apartment. Just as Kang-Woo had commanded, she was in the form of Kurosaki Yurie.

*'Hell yeah!'* Kang-Woo clenched his fists.

He would welcome her with open arms as long as she was in that form.

"Good morning. Did you sleep well last night, Seol-Ah?"

"Oh, yes. I was very happy."

"Hohoho. You shouldn't monopolize the king too much. From time to time, I will also..."

"Of course. Oh, but in exchange, please teach me the technique you told me about..."

"Oh my, already?"

The two women had made some kind of deal without Kang-Woo knowing. He paid it no mind and asked, "Are you here to eat?"

"Oh, right. I was planning to, but something came up."

"What happened?"

"I will explain on the way. We will have to go right now." Lilith opened a Gate that led to the Hall of Protection in the middle of the living room. "There is something off about Gaia."

\* \* \*

A woman with brown hair was lying on a bed in a room with almost no other furniture. Anyone could tell from just looking at her that she was in terrible condition: her cheeks were hollow, her forehead was covered in cold sweat, and she was panting heavily.

"Haaa, haaa, haaa."

"Gaia..."

Next to her bed, Si-Hun held Gaia's trembling hands and lowered his head as if he were praying.

It had been 30 minutes since Gaia's condition had suddenly worsened. Si-Hun was becoming more and more anxious with each second. He raised his head to look toward the middle-aged woman across from him, Grace McCubbin. She was publicly the leader of Guardians, but she had been Gaia's caretaker since before Si-Hun had taken over that role for her.

"Grace, what should we—"

"There is nothing we can do. This... is not the first time this has happened."

"... It's happened before?"

"Yes." Grace gently swept back Gaia's hair, which was drenched with sweat. "It's exactly the same as back when... she received the revelation about the Demon of Prophecy."

The Demon of Prophecy...

Si-Hun frowned aggressively when he heard those words, and an immense bloodlust poured out of him.

Slam!

"Si-Hun!"

"... Hyung-nim."

Kang-Woo slammed the door open and entered the room.

"Hey! What happened?!"

"I came as soon as I was contacted. What's wrong?"

Cha Yeon-Joo and Tian Wuchen arrived shortly after. And...

"I heard the news. The incarnation of Lady Gaia is in a weird condition?" Uriel also entered the room.

All the super elites of Guardians and an archangel were gathered in one place. A nervous atmosphere filled the room.

"Haaa, haaa."

"Are you okay, Gaia?" Kang-Woo asked as he walked toward her.

Gaia nodded with great difficulty and tried to raise herself into a sitting position, but she collapsed to the side.

"Gaia!" Si-Hun helped support her.

"... Thank you, Protector Kim Si-Hun."

Gaia faintly smiled and sat back up.

"I received... a new revelation."

A heavy silence overtook the room.

Kang-Woo listened to her words with caution.

'Just what is it about for her expression to be this dark?'

"I do not know the exact time frame, but..."

Gaia shut her eyes tight and bit her lip. The nervousness in the room worsened.

"Lady Seraph's soul... has fallen into... the hands of darkness."

Wham!!

Kang-Woo slammed his fist down as soon as Gaia finished her sentence. He then spoke without hesitation...

"Was it Rakiel's doing?"

Chapter 310 - Let's Do It

No matter how much anyone thought about it, there was only one being who could even be capable of corrupting Celestial Goddess Seraph.

"I'm... not sure either," Gaia said as she shook her head. "However, I'm sure that it has something to do with the Demon of Prophecy."

"In that case, there is no question about it," Oh Kang-Woo said, a serious expression on his face.

"Rakiel must have been the one who corrupted Lady Seraph."

It was obvious, since Rakiel was the Constellation of Corruption and a loyal subordinate of the Demon of Prophecy.

"W-Wait. What are you talking about?" Uriel looked around in confusion.

He already knew very well that the power of Seraph keeping the Constellations of Evil sealed was gradually weakening. Her soul, which had gone missing a few years ago, needed to be found to restore that power. The other angels were searching across the entire continent of Aernor as they spoke, but...

'Lady Seraph's soul... has fallen into the Demon of Prophecy's hands?'

Uriel's face paled. If that was true, then it was a massive deal.

"Shit, shit! That's impossible... There's no way that Lady Seraph's soul has fallen into the Demon of Prophecy's hands!" Uriel shouted aggressively.

Crackle!

Blue lightning sparked around him.

"Calm down, Lord Uriel." Kang-Woo grabbed his shoulder.

"Ah..." Uriel lowered his head as if he were embarrassed. He said in a low voice, "Sorry."



"It's okay. I'm just as confused as you are."

Kang-Woo also swept up his hair as if he couldn't understand what was going on.

Gaia, who had been listening in silence, opened her mouth. "It seems I haven't properly relayed Lady Gaia's revelation. Lady Seraph's soul has not been corrupted."

"... What?" Uriel's eyes widened. "Then are you saying that she sided with the Demon of Prophecy despite not having been corrupted?"

"... Yes, according to Lady Gaia."

"Nonsense!"

Slam!

He stomped on the ground.

"Lady Seraph had been willing to be annihilated in exchange for sealing the Constellations of Evil! And you're saying that, of her own free will, she sided with a demon out to destroy the world? How does that make any sense?!"

He glared at Gaia.

Kim Si-Hun stood between them. "Please calm down, Lord Uriel. Gaia has only relayed the revelation that she received. Do you think arguing with her would change anything?"

"Ugh..."

"It's okay, Si-Hun." Gaia sighed. "I didn't hear the details either. There is a high chance that Lady Gaia does not know either."

"..."

"The important thing is that Lady Gaia has come to a decision due to this."

"... A decision?" Kang-Woo asked while frowning.

'What decision could that useless god possibly make?'

He couldn't help but feel uneasy.

'Just please stay useless.'

His head was already hurting because of Rakiel, so what was she trying to do now?

"Yes, Lady Gaia has said that... we need to restore the impaired Gaia System."

"..."

'What?'

"W-Wait." Kang-Woo raised his hand. "There was a way to restore it?"

His mind was set ablaze with fury.

'What the actual fuck?'

If there had always been a way to restore the Gaia System, then there had been absolutely no point in Kang-Woo going through all that shitshow.

'You fucking bitch.'

The rising of the Demon Cult, the trespassing of the Nine Hells, the connection with Aernor, and even the interference from several other worlds... all had happened because there had been no way to restore the Gaia System, which had been broken by the Demon of Prophecy.

'But now she decides to mention that there's a way to restore it? Fucking hell! That's the first fucking thing you should've told us!'

Kang-Woo was so angry that it felt like his head was about to explode. He, of course, wasn't the Demon of Prophecy, but if he were, the thought of wanting to destroy the world would cross his mind.

"Yes, but it is not a permanent solution."

"Ah..." A short exclamation left Kang-Woo's mouth.

'She still should've told us.'

They were in no situation to discuss whether it was a permanent fix or not, but if one's house was burning, they should at least try to piss on it to put it out.

"Why did she never tell us about it if she knew how to fix the Gaia System all this time?"

'Yeah, Yeon-Joo, well said.'

Cha Yeon-Joo also frowned in disbelief, and so did Si-Hun, Tian Wuchen, and Grace McCubbin. They didn't say it outright, but they were just as flabbergasted.

Gaia sighed deeply.

"I also asked Lady Gaia regarding that matter. After all, she had said that there was no way to restore the protection until now."

"What did she say?"

Gaia remained silent for a moment, clenching her fists before slowly opening her mouth. "After hearing her explanation... I understood why she had kept quiet about it all this time."

"So, how do we do it?"

Gaia explained, "When the Demon of Prophecy went through the Earth's protection and came here, Lady Gaia said that a huge Rift appeared in the barrier. It's... a wound of sorts. If we enter the Rift and destroy its core, we will apparently be able to close it, albeit temporarily."

"... That still doesn't explain why she had kept quiet about it all this time," Yeon-Joo stated while narrowing her eyes.

Entering a Rift and destroying its core certainly sounded dangerous, but it still didn't make sense why she would keep quiet about the Rift despite it having caused Earth's protection to fall apart.

"Is it because the one who destroys this Rift Core can never come back or something?" Kang-Woo asked while narrowing his eyes.

If that was why...

'I'll have to split that bitch Gaia's head open.'

The true threats always lay within rather than outside. If she really had been hiding the truth because she did not want to force someone to be a sacrifice, he would actually need to consider getting rid of Gaia.

'Surely she can't be that useless.'

At that point, it was no longer a matter of her being useless or not. She would just be a straight-up nuisance.

"No, nothing like that. We would apparently have more than enough time to escape before the Rift closes after we destroy its core. However... we would be stuck in the dimensional crack for all eternity if we don't manage to escape."

Kang-Woo sighed in relief.

'Thank God she's not that dumb. In that case, why didn't she tell us?'

He gave Gaia a questioning look.

Gaia opened her mouth, a heavy expression on her face. "This Rift does not appear under normal circumstances. Earth's protection is frantically sealing the Rifts, so it's impossible to enter Rifts like we do Gates."

"Then..."

"Yes, to enter this Rift..." Gaia said with a trembling voice, "Earth's protection must be temporarily lowered."

There was a heavy silence.

Kang-Woo put his hand on his forehead.

"Fuck..."

The only good thing about this was that Gaia had not been as useless as he had expected.

'This could seriously fuck us over.'

To put it simply, they had to go to surgery to save a patient, but they could proceed with the surgery only if they stopped the patient's heart beforehand.

'Shit.'

If they failed, it was the end.

Even if they succeeded, if they didn't manage to do it in time, all sorts of otherworldly beings would invade Earth.

As soon as the Gaia System was suspended, they had to enter the Rift, destroy the core, and come back out as soon as possible to reactivate the Gaia System. And despite the massive risk they would have to shoulder, it would only be a temporary fix.

"... I can understand why she kept quiet about it."

It wasn't something a sane person would consider. Leaving the danger aside, the risk was unfathomable.

"Yes, but... with Lady Seraph having fallen into the hands of the Demon of Prophecy, Lady Gaia has said that this is the only way to restore the Gaia System."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. The choice was up to him.

'The situation's actually nowhere near as perilous as Gaia thinks.'

He was the only one who knew why Seraph was siding with darkness despite not having been corrupted. There was nothing Gaia needed to be worried about.

'But...'

It was ultimately a matter of time. As long as the Gaia System continued to weaken, the end was inevitable. Kang-Woo's original plan had been to get stronger and raise Guardians to the point that they would be able to protect Earth from otherworldly interference.

'But if this plan works...'

He would be able to delay that end. Kang-Woo closed his eyes and wondered what he should do. The scale in his head was not tilting in favor of either side.

"Is halting Earth's protection really that big of a deal? What's so bad about turning it off for just a bit and then back on?" Yeon-Joo asked while tilting her head.

She didn't exactly know Earth's circumstances and what the Gaia System was.

Si-Hun said, "The Earth's protection is—"

"Let me explain," Gaia cut him off. She then explained to Yeon-Joo the Earth's current situation and the otherworldly beings that would invade as soon as its protection disappeared.

"Wh-What?" The longer the explanation went on, the paler Yeon-Joo's face became. "Wait. If that's the case, then isn't this plan absolutely insane? If we're not able to close the Rift quickly enough after we deactivate the protection..."

"In the worst-case scenario, Earth could be invaded by an otherworldly army."

Yeon-Joo remained silent. She had already experienced the hell of the entire Earth being invaded by an otherworldly army.

"You're saying that... something similar to what happened on the Day of Calamity might happen again, right?"

"... Yes." Gaia nodded.

Once again, there was a heavy silence.

"But that actually isn't the biggest problem," Gaia said.

"... Then what is?"

"Not even Lady Gaia knows where the Rift is."

"Wh-What? Then what the hell are we supposed to do?!"

If the same analogy of the surgery was used again, then forget stopping the heart; they couldn't even perform the surgery since they had no idea where the injury was.

"Lady Gaia said that... three days was the absolute limit. If we don't find the Rift, destroy its core, and escape by then, a catastrophe of the same level as the Day of Calamity will happen again."

"How the hell are we supposed to find it in three days?!"

Finding a Rift that they had no idea where it could be in just three days was just absurd.

"... Gaia. I agree with Yeon-Joo. This operation is far too reckless," Si-Hun said while also shaking his head.

Gaia smiled bitterly while nodding. "Yes, I think so too. I'll do my best to tell Lady Gaia. Please forget about this and—"

"Wait," Kang-Woo interrupted. "If we know where the Rift is... the success rate would skyrocket, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, yes. Of course."

Kang-Woo clenched his fists.

The scale in his head tilted instantly.

'The Rift that had formed when the Demon of Prophecy had come to Earth...'

He knew exactly where it was.

"Let's do it."

The restoration of the continuously weakening Gaia System was in his hands.