

## M. in Hell 331

Chapter 331 - Preparations to Leave (3)

“I-I-I-I-I’m so sorry! I thought having just kimchi stew by itself would make the dining table a bit empty, so I went to the market to buy some more ingredients and lost track of time!”

A middle-aged woman with short light brown hair, beautiful enough to be worthy of being Kim Si-Hun’s mother, lowered her head. She was likely at least in her forties considering Si-Hun’s age, but she could even be mistaken to be in her thirties, to the point that no one would use the term *middle-aged* to describe her if they did not know any better.

“No, it’s alright.” Oh Kang-Woo shook his head and flashed a smile.

Although he was smiling, his eyes were pointed at the abomination on the dining table.

*‘That’s supposed to be kimchi stew?’*

Why was it black?

*‘How could she do such a thing to kimchi stew...?’*

It was worse than sacrilege. Kang-Woo wanted to flip the table, but he couldn’t bring himself to in front of Si-Hun’s mother.

“I’ll whip something up right away!” the mother exclaimed.

*‘Please don’t.’*

Just by looking at the state of her kimchi stew, Kang-Woo could not expect anything from her other dishes.

“No, it’s okay. I don’t have an appetite.”

“Oh... Is that so?”

“Yes, so there’s no need for you to worry about it. More importantly...” Kang-Woo slurred as he looked toward Si-Hun, gesturing him to hurry up and introduce him to the mother.

Si-Hun got back to his senses and walked toward the two of them.

“This is my mother,” he introduced.

“My name is Jeong Seo-Ha.”

“Mother, this is—”

“Yeah. I’ve heard a lot about Kang-Woo.” Seo-Ha grabbed Kang-Woo’s hands while smiling brightly. “Thank you for taking care of my son.”

“Not at all. I simply did my duty as his hyung,” Kang-Woo replied.

Seo-Ha's expression froze from the mention of *hyung*. She then sent Si-Hun a gaze filled with guilt. "Why don't we have something to eat first?"

"I-I'm fine. Like I mentioned before, I don't really have an appetite..."

"Oh, that's right. I heard you love kimchi stew. What a shame," Seo-Ha said while staring at the black kimchi stew in disappointment. She then turned to Si-Hun after a short moment of silence. "Si-Hun, could you give us a moment? I... have something I need to talk with Kang-Woo about in private."

"Huh?" Si-Hun looked at her in confusion.

"It's nothing serious, so don't make that kind of face."

"No, but..."

"Please, for me."

Si-Hun reluctantly nodded and went up to the second floor. Kang-Woo stared at Si-Hun climbing up the stairs, and then used the Authority of Silence to block all sound from escaping the living room. Si-Hun's superhuman senses would allow him to hear a conversation in the living room from the second floor with ease.

*'What could she have to say to me?'*

He had no idea, but since Si-Hun's mother wanted to talk in private, Kang-Woo felt like he shouldn't let Si-Hun hear.

"What did you want to talk about?" Kang-Woo asked.

"Oh." Seo-Ha, who had been thinking about something absorbedly, turned around. "Let me make you a cup of coffee first."

"Oh, thank you very much."

Kang-Woo nodded softly, unable to refuse a cup of coffee on top of kimchi stew. Seo-Ha headed to the kitchen. *Click, clack*. The fragrance of coffee flowed all the way to the living room. As Seo-Ha was making coffee, Kang-Woo slowly took a look around the living room again.

*'It's a nice place.'*

He was not talking about extravagance nor that it looked pricey. Despite Seo-Ha mostly living by herself in this home, the place was very clean and tidy. No, *clean* was not the right word to describe it.

*'It feels homely.'*

The feeling of coziness coming from the entire home felt quite nice.

Clack.

"Here you go," Seo-Ha said.

“Thank you very much.”

Kang-Woo sipped the coffee that she had made; it tasted normal, unlike her kimchi stew.

*‘All hail instant coffee.’*

The guaranteed sweetness enveloped his tongue.

“First of all...” Seo-Ha stood up and politely bowed toward Kang-Woo. “Thank you very much.”

“...”

“If it hadn’t been for you, Si-Hun and I... would have never dreamed of having such a life.”

“Si-Hun has great talent as a Player. Even if it hadn’t been for me, he would have been able to earn enough for the hospital bills and this house all on his own—”

“No, that’s not what I meant.” Seo-Ha smiled faintly. “If it hadn’t been for you... Si-Hun never would have been able to smile like that.”

Kang-Woo remained silent, thinking about what he should say. Seo-Ha bowed toward Kang-Woo again.

“Thank you... so very much.”

Kang-Woo could hear how heartfelt she was. In the end, he said the same thing that he had said earlier.

“I simply did my duty as his hyung.”

“Hohoho,” Seo-Ha giggled. “I’m relieved to see that you truly care for Si-Hun.”

“But of course. Although we’re not related by blood, I consider him to be family.”

Seo-Ha stared intently at Kang-Woo, and then sighed in relief. She continued, “To be honest, I was very worried. You didn’t build your friendship with Si-Hun through normal means, did you? I was worried because of that, but those worries have faded now.”

“... I beg your pardon?” Kang-Woo froze. Her words had been branded on his brain. “What do you...”

“I’m not sure if it’s hypnosis or some other kind of magic, but... you used some sort of coercive method to win Si-Hun over, didn’t you?”

“...!” Chills ran down his back. Kang-Woo glared at Seo-Ha. “I’m not quite sure what you mean.”

“Hohoho. It’s okay. I won’t tell Si-Hun.”

She was talking as if she knew everything. Kang-Woo’s mind was in jumbles.

*'She knows.'*

She knew that Kang-Woo had attacked Si-Hun and made Si-Hun into his Familiar.

*'But how?'*

Questions kept leading to other questions. The truth that he had kept secret all this time and thought would never be revealed, had been found out so easily.

"... How long have you known?" asked Kang-Woo.

"I had an inkling... ever since Si-Hun told me about you." Seo-Ha put the cup of coffee down on the table and continued, "That boy never refers to anyone as *hyung*, especially someone that he has only met recently."

Kang-Woo swept back his hair.

*'I didn't expect this.'*

No, there was no way he could have, since there had been no way for him to know back when he made Si-Hun into his Familiar, the trauma that Si-Hun possessed, as well as how well Si-Hun's mother knew Si-Hun.

Heavy silence fell. Kang-Woo downed the cup of coffee, thinking up dozens of possible excuses he could make. If he wanted to, he was confident that he could use whatever reason to satisfy Seo-Ha. He could even argue that she couldn't base anything off just from the fact that Si-Hun addressed him as *hyung*. However...

*Clack.* Kang-Woo laid the cup down on the table.

"Why didn't you say anything despite knowing that?"

Kang-Woo did not make any excuses nor try to call it out as a lie; he had a feeling that he shouldn't, at least to Seo-Ha of all people.

Seo-Ha remained silent, and then opened her mouth while staring into empty space. "I... committed an unforgivable sin to that boy."

Kang-Woo could feel the voidness in her voice. He could easily tell what the sin that she was referring to was.

*'Si-Hun's trauma.'*

The words that his own birth mother had said to him, "*I'm sorry for giving birth to you*", had been engraved in Si-Hun's soul.

Kang-Woo had no idea how painful hearing those words were, since he had no memory of his parents.

"Back then... I was so tired, and felt so sorry for Si-Hun that... I ended up saying those words that I should have never said..." Transparent tears flowed down Seo-Ha's cheeks. "I should have... never said those words to him of all people..."

Her words were filled with sorrow. Kang-Woo did not say a word; no, he couldn't. He could not understand, sympathize, nor console her in any way, so he remained silent.

"That's why... When I saw that boy smiling so brightly... I couldn't say a word. Even if it was a lie... I just wanted my son to be happy."

Kang-Woo remained silent.

"Thank you. Thank you... so much," Seo-Ha said while bowing repeatedly.

She continued to thank Kang-Woo for making her son happy. Again, and again, and again.

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Kang-Woo walked home after separating from Si-Hun.

His mind was in shambles. All kinds of thoughts tangled with one another. He frowned while recalling Seo-Ha, weeping while thanking him.

*'Why... was I... so happy?'*

He couldn't understand why he had been so happy to be thanked for making Si-Hun happy, even if it had been built on a lie.

Kang-Woo was unable to decipher his own emotions. No, he had a guess why; he just didn't want to admit it.

*'I felt like I was being pardoned for my sin.'*

He couldn't help but laugh from the shallow thought. He was trying to lessen his guilt by thinking that although he had forcibly turned Si-Hun into his Familiar, it was okay since he treasured him.

*'Despite the person in question knowing absolutely nothing about it.'*

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly.

"... Goddammit."

He clicked his tongue and sat down on a bench in front of the apartment complex before heading inside.

*'Tomorrow...'*

They would be leaving Earth. Although they were not leaving forever, he was sure that it would be a long journey.

"Fuck."

Unnecessary emotions filled Kang-Woo. He looked up at the night sky.

"Ah..."

He thought about all that he had been through since coming back to Earth. He met Han Seol-Ah, Kim Si-Hun, Cha Yeon-Joo, Echidna, Kang Tae-Soo... He had met so many people and made just as many connections. Even his connection with Balrog and Lilith remained even after coming back to Earth.

It might not have been the best start; the first step might have been askew, leading to his connections to others being tangled messily. Despite that, he considered such connections to be precious.

Bzzt.

Kang-Woo's vision became blurry. He was shown a plain filled with corpses, and himself collapsing to his knees and crying there.

It might sound funny, but he also had things that he had treasured back in Hell; he had the same tangled connections there.

*'They're all dead, though.'*

He had new connections now, ones that he had been unable to protect in the past.

*'This time...'*

It would be different. He would make sure that it was.

"Fucking hell. I've become such a goddamn softie. Why the fuck am I shooting a drama all by myself in the middle of the night?"

Kang-Woo frowned. He stood up, and walked.

"... Let's go."

He set out, like he had always done. Forward.

[Part One - END]

Chapter 332 - Kimchi

Oh Kang-Woo opened his eyes. He felt this way all the time whenever he slept with Han Seol-Ah, but his body felt light. His mind was extremely clear, and the demonic energy within him was as quiet as a docile lamb.

*'This is why I can never quit sleeping with darling.'*

Kang-Woo smiled from the feeling of refreshment clearing his mind. Although he did not need sleep, he always made sure to sleep at least three to four hours anyway because of this very feeling of refreshment.

*'And...'*

Kang-Woo drew out his demonic energy by habit.

*'Oh, my demonic energy control didn't improve today.'*

Kang-Woo expressed disappointment. His demonic energy control did not unconditionally improve just from sleeping with Seol-Ah; it was a random occurrence, about a twenty to thirty percent chance.

"That's still phenomenal."

Considering that Kang-Woo possessed enough demonic energy to face beings of godhood despite himself not being able to use Divinity, just being able to improve his control over it was already amazing enough. However...

“... There have been more and more lately.”

Kang-Woo frowned from seeing the red spots all over his upper body. Ever since Lilith joined their chambers with the excuse of needing to make a magic tool that would conceal Seol-Ah's powers, he saw more and more red spots on him every time he woke up, to the point that it was abnormal.

*‘It's sometimes on a very specific area too.’*

Kang-Woo lifted his pants and checked between his legs.

“Kurgh.”

After red spots began to form on that specific area, the physiological phenomenon that had come to him every morning without fail, stopped. Kang-Woo looked down at his lifeless Fran?ois miserably.

“You're... not dead, are you?”

*‘You're still alive, right, Fran?ois?’*

Kang-Woo worriedly rubbed the red spots lightly that had formed around his thighs.

“Kang-Woo~” He heard Seol-Ah's voice from across the door. “It's time to get up~ The meeting time is coming up~”

“Got it,” Kang-Woo answered as he got up. He looked around the room while stretching. “... I've grown quite attached to this place.”

The 350 square-foot room felt more familiar to him now than his grand demon king castle. He sentimentally slid his hand over his table, and turned his gaze toward his very expensive laptop.

“I shouldn't forget this.”

Kang-Woo opened his bag and packed his laptop. He did not need a charger; since there was no way that 220V outlets would exist in Aernor, he had his laptop modified so that it would be powered by mana instead. There was only one reason why he would go so far as to take the laptop with him.

Kang-Woo grabbed the rectangular item the size of his palm and put it in his pocket. It was an indispensable weapon that he had spent months perfecting between his training times, which would be of great help in his mission in Aernor; an external hard drive with a whopping 120 terabytes of storage.

*‘Also known as...’*

Noah's Ark; the item that would save humanity on the brink of extinction. It contained all the mysterious knowledge regarding the birth of life.

“... Alright.”

Kang-Woo placed the external hard drive in his breast pocket, where he would be able to feel its warmth through his heart.

“Kang-Woo?” Seol-Ah called from outside his room.

“I’ll be right out.”

Kang-Woo left his room to see Seol-Ah, Lilith, Echidna, Cha Yeon-Joo, Halcyon, Balrog, and Vaal Zahak already gathered.

*‘Oh, I guess he’s Vernaak now.’*

Kang-Woo stared at the young man wearing a monocle, exuding a gloomy air. Vaal Zahak, who was wearing human skin made using magic, was using the alias *Vernaak* due to several circumstances.

“What did you pack?” Lilith asked.

“Nothing in particular. I was just in my thoughts since we won’t be coming back here for a while,” Kang-Woo lied.

“Hohoho. You’re being unusually sentimental.”

The quick-witted Lilith scanned Kang-Woo up and down. Kang-Woo took a step back and placed his hand on his left bosom.

“Hm! Hm! I’ll show you my lair when we get to Aernor, Kang-Woo!”

Echidna was hyper, considering this to be a trip that she was going with Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo smirked and nodded. “Yeah. We should definitely go there.”

Although the mission was not so leisurely that they could call it a trip, if they successfully eliminated the Demon God’s corpse, it was not a bad idea to tour another world before coming back to Earth.

“Wh-What should I do, Master Kang-Woo? Sh-Should I wear a mask? If I e-expose such a hideous face, I might become a nuisance to you...” Halcyon bit his nails anxiously.

Kang-Woo flicked Halcyon’s forehead and said, “Nonsense. You already experienced it here, didn’t you? No one will be disgusted by how you look.”

“B-But...!”

“No one will, so there’s no need to worry.”

Although Kang-Woo was unsure of Aernor’s beauty standards, they would not be disgusted by Halcyon’s looks. They would more likely be horrified by Lilith’s true form.

“Wow, look at all these beauties around you. You’re gonna get a harem at this rate.” Yeon-Joo glanced at him sourly.

Kang-Woo shrugged. “I can’t help being a chick magnet.”

“Big words for a virgin.”



Kang-Woo took severe emotional damage. He took out a mana stone that led to the Hall of Protection while frowning.

“Let’s go.”

A white Gate that had become all too familiar formed. Kang-Woo’s party took their own bags and entered the Gate.

“Ah, hyung-nim!”

“Is that everyone?”

Kim Si-Hun and Layla were waiting for them in the Hall of Protection after finishing their own preparations. Kang-Woo walked up to them while waving.

“Is everyone ready?” he asked.

“Yes!”

“Another world... It’s a bit nerve-wracking.” Seol-Ah took deep breaths with her hand on her chest. Just that slight movement caused something to shake.

Seeing that, Yeon-Joo’s expression stiffened, her gaze shifting to her own chest. “... Fucking mid dif[1].”

Someone had fed the mid.

“How are you feeling, Layla? I heard that you weren’t in the best condition because you accepted so much of Lady Gaia’s power...” Kang-Woo asked.

“Oh, I’m fine. Though it’s true that I pushed myself a bit to accept enough of Lady Gaia’s power to be able to communicate with her even in Aernor, but it’s nothing I can’t handle,” Layla answered while energetically clenching her fists.

Kang-Woo nodded in relief.

*‘Layla is the key to this whole operation.’*

Even if they managed to successfully eliminate the Demon God’s corpse without the help of Gaia’s incarnation, they had absolutely no way of manipulating the protection of Aernor.

“Ah...” Layla suddenly stared off into space. She then said, “Lady Gaia has told us to make sure to come back safely.”

Kang-Woo got down on one knee in front of Layla and lowered his head. “Lady Gaia. Just like how you saved me, I will do my best to save you this time.”

*Riiing.*

[No, my child. I should be apologizing to you for entrusting such a dangerous mission to you.]

[You have been blessed by the Goddess of Earth!]

[You have recovered from all fatigue, and perfect physical condition will be maintained!]

Powder made of white light sprinkled down on Kang-Woo's party. Kang-Woo smirked with his head still lowered.

*'Nice.'*

Gaia did not seem to have discovered Kang-Woo's true identity. Rather, it seemed like her trust and affection toward him had become far deeper than before. Kang-Woo felt like he could lower his worries regarding her sudden trolling, like she had done in the past.

[Find the high elves once you arrive in Aernor. They will guide you.]

*'High elves, huh?'*

Kang-Woo peeked a glance at Si-Hun and recalled the Holy Sword Ludwig that was currently in his possession.

*'Come to think of it, Ludwig used to have a high elves' blessing.'*

There was a chance that high elves possessed a special ability of detecting all that was demonic.

*'... I'm a bit worried.'*

If they were able to detect the Demonic Sea within him, it would result in all sorts of troubles.

*'But it's not like I can afford to avoid them.'*

Since Lucis had no idea where the Demon God's heart was located, there was no other way to locate it than to rely on the high elves since they couldn't just randomly roam all over Aernor in search of it.

"I understand." Kang-Woo nodded.

[May the light guide you.]

The powder made of light that had been sprinkling on their heads vanished. Kang-Woo got up and checked the time on his smartphone.

*'It should be...'*

It was about time that what he had prepared would arrive.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

However, what had arrived was not what Kang-Woo had been waiting for.

"Hey, hey! You gotta take me with you too!" Uriel shouted while hurriedly running. He sighed in relief after seeing that the party had not left yet, and then glared at Kang-Woo. "You didn't forget about me, did you?"

"Of course not. We were waiting for you," Kang-Woo answered.

"... Didn't you guys gather way too early for that?"

"Pardon?"

Even Kang-Woo had been a little later than the scheduled meeting time.

“Tch,” Seol-Ah clicked her tongue from behind.

Kang-Woo more or less had an idea of why Uriel had been late.

Layla walked forward and said, “Since we’ve all gathered, let’s g—”

“Wait,” Kang-Woo interjected. “My order still hasn’t arrived yet, so let’s wait a little longer.”

“... Your order?”

“Yes. It’s a necessity for our mission to Aernor.”

Kang-Woo’s party members tilted their heads in confusion while staring at the serious Kang-Woo.

“What is it?” Yeon-Joo asked.

Vrrrr. Just then, Kang-Woo’s smartphone vibrated.

*‘It’s here.’*

Speak of the Devil, and he would come; it was truly perfect timing.

“You’ll see,” replied Kang-Woo while turning around, and walked to one of the Gates of the Hall of Protection.

It was the one that led to the Grand Canyon, the place that Balrog, Kang-Woo and others often used as a training area since they could let loose as much as they wanted there.

“What did you—” As Yeon-Joo was talking, her mouth fell open after going through the Gate. “... What the hell is all this?”

An enormous number of boxes were piled up to the point that one would think they were at a warehouse or a harbor. Yeon-Joo approached one of the boxes and checked the english text written on it.

“Kimchi...” Yeon-Joo froze. “Don’t tell me, you...”

“I told you. It’s a necessity,” Kang-Woo replied while smirking, and triumphantly revealed what was in the boxes. “A hundred thousand tonnes of pork and kimchi, various vegetables and spices. I also prepared ten thousand tonnes of tuna, beef, eel and mackerel since it might be tiring to have just pork all the time.”

Kang-Woo trembled from delight. “Aaaahh...”

It was perfect. This was the definition of heaven. Although he had prepared it himself, it could not have been any more perfect.

Yeon-Joo stared at the gigantic pile of boxes with her mouth agape. “How are you planning on taking all this with you?”

“I prepared this,” answered Kang-Woo as he took out a bag.

It was a magic item that he had asked from Khadgar in exchange for his freedom. It was the ultimate item that could not only store an enormous number of ingredients, but could even maintain their freshness as well!

“That’s not the end of it.” Kang-Woo had even prepared for the worst-case scenario and prepared live pigs as well as seeds for various vegetables and spices.

“Hahahahahaha!!”

He could not help but laugh. He clenched his fists and shouted toward the sky, “Never again... Never again will I make the same mistake!”

This time, it would be different; Kang-Woo recalled the vow that he had made last night.

“Fuck.” Yeon-Joo grabbed her head.

*‘Why... Why the fuck did I quit my guild master position to follow this goddamn lunatic who sold his soul to kimchi stew?’*

She felt like she was going to cry. It felt like her heartfelt decision had been stained after kimchi stew had been poured on it.

“You fucking kimchi stew maniac...”

Yeon-Joo’s voice spread throughout the empty space in vain.

Chapter 333 - Continent of Aernor (1)

The party traveled through the blue Gate. Their vision was distorted and they ended up in a silent darkness as if they had been thrown into space. Oh Kang-Woo was reminded of when he had entered the dimensional crack.

Whoooooom!

The only thing different from back then was that it was not an endless tunnel; they were slowly but surely nearing the end of the tunnel. Their vision turned back clear as they were enveloped in the blue light.

“Argh, I feel dizzy,” Cha Yeon-Joo said, putting her hand on her forehead after going through the blue Gate.

“This is... the continent of Aernor?” Kang-Woo said as he looked around.

The Gate had been opened in a gigantic forest.

*‘I can’t really tell based on the surroundings.’*

He was not a botanist, so he had no idea of whether these trees could only be found on Earth or Aernor.

“Uhh... Mm. Kang-Woo?” Han Seol-Ah called out to him.

“Hm? What is it, darling?”

“Over there...”

Kang-Woo turned toward the direction where Seol-Ah pointed.

“Wha...” Kang-Woo unconsciously chuckled. “I guess... we’re not on Earth.”

Seol-Ah had been pointing at a giant tree that had pulled out its own roots from the ground and was walking.

“Damn, it even has eyes and a mouth,” Kang-Woo expressed.

“Oh! Th-Th-Th-Th-That’s...!” Yeon-Joo clapped her hands together as if she had realized something. “That’s Maokai!”

“... What the hell is that?” Kang-Woo asked.

“It could even become a world tree if grown to its full potential!”

No matter how Kang-Woo look at it, the tree did not seem like it would grow as large as a world tree.

‘*Anyway...*’

He was at least sure that such a tree did not exist on Earth.

‘*A monster like that hasn’t been discovered in Gates either.*’

Kang-Woo stared at the walking tree while having his arms crossed. It was not the only tree that was moving; there were thousands of trees that were baring their sharp teeth as they pulled out their roots. Any normal person would have run away in shock.

“I will take care of them, hyung-nim.”

“Stand aside. I will be the one to take care of them.”

Si-Hun and Balrog stood in front of Kang-Woo while glaring at each other, just like dogs that wanted to be praised. Kang-Woo smirked and waved his hand.

“Sure, go for it. Oh, why don’t you guys make a bet about who can kill more of them?” Kang-Woo suggested.

“Oh?”

“Sounds good.”

Balrog and Si-Hun’s eyes shone from the intriguing suggestion.

“You are arrogant,” Balrog said.

“Right back at you,” answered Si-Hun.

They were emitting bloodlust at each other instead of the tree monsters.

“Whoever wins gets a dedicated one-day training session with hyung-nim.”

‘*What?*’

“Kehehehe, deal.”

*‘Deal, my ass, you fucker. Who do you think you are to put me up as a prize?’*

“What the hell are you two talking ab—”

Wham!!

Si-Hun and Balrog charged toward the tree monsters before Kang-Woo even had a chance to stop them.

Crunch! Crush!

“Skreeeee!”

Sounds of trees being smashed along with the screams of monsters were heard from their surroundings in an instant.

Kang-Woo grabbed his hair as if his head hurt, and then turned to Uriel. “Lord Uriel, do you know where we are?”

“Mm. We seem to be in the Nightmare Forest in the southern region of the continent.”

“Hmm.”

Kang-Woo fell into thought with his arms crossed, wondering what should be done first. They needed to find the high elves.

“Do you happen to know where the high elves are?” he asked.

“No, I’m not sure either,” Uriel answered while shaking his head. “Angels have a policy of staying away from Aernor matters as much as possible. We usually stay in a fortress called Sant’Angelo and only come out to perform missions.”

“Does that mean you know barely anything about the continent?”

“Yeah. I know the general layout, but... I barely know anything about how the people of Aernor live and where the high elves are.”

They were in a pickle.

*‘This brat is fucking useless.’*

Kang-Woo had gone far out of his way to prepare Seol-Ah’s pendant, human skin for Balrog and Vaal Zahak to wear, and many other things just to keep things hidden from Uriel during their Aernor mission, but Uriel was of absolutely no benefit.

*‘Oh.’*

A thought popped up in Kang-Woo’s mind.

“In that case, could you go back to that fortress and ask about the high elves? Since Holy Sword Ludwig had been blessed by the high elves, other angels might know where they are.”

“Wh-What? You want me to go to Sant’Angelo? By myself?”

Sant’Angelo, the fortress of the angels, was located high above the northernmost region of Aernor. Just flying there from the Nightmare Forest, located in the southern region, would take an enormous amount of time.

“Yes, please. We barely know anything about this place, so we would appreciate it if we could get help from the angels.”

“Ngh...”

Uriel bit his lip; his expression clearly showed that he did not want to part from Kang-Woo.

Just then, Seol-Ah hugged Kang-Woo’s arm and said, “You’re right, Kang-Woo. I’m... honestly a little scared. Trees suddenly moved and attacked us, and we have no idea where this place is and what we should be doing.”

Seol-Ah stuffed herself in Kang-Woo’s embrace and gave Uriel a look as if telling him to go away already.

“Urgh!”

Uriel glared at Seol-Ah while baring his teeth, but he could not object since he had been just as confused when he crossed over to Earth. For them to adapt to a world that they knew nothing about, Uriel needed to be the one to provide them with the information.

“Urghhh. Oh! Then Kang-Woo, you should come with m—”

“No, I can’t. I am the leader of this party.”

“Kuh...”

It was a fair point. The leader of the party that was responsible for command could not be absent.

“I-In that case, I’ll just call them—”

“I believe it would be wise to go there directly to give an official report regarding this mission as well as about us.”

It was more efficient to call them if it was just to ask for information regarding the high elves, but Kang-Woo’s true objective was to get this nuisance of an angel out of his hair temporarily.

“Urgh, fine. In that case, I’ll head to Sant’Angelo to get information regarding the high elves.” Uriel nodded in dejection.

Kang-Woo smiled and grabbed Uriel’s hands. “Thank you very much. There would be nothing better than having the help of the angels in this operation.”

Uriel's cheeks reddened as he was joined with Kang-Woo by hand. Seol-Ah stared icy daggers at Uriel.

"Ahem, alright. I'll go make an official report to Lord Michael and request for reinforcements."

"Thank you very much." Kang-Woo smiled.

Uriel spread out his wings and flew up into the air.

"I'll call you as soon as I arrive in Sant'Angelo, so make sure you keep your crystal orb with you at all times!"

"Okay."

With that, Uriel disappeared. As soon as he disappeared, Balrog unleashed his true form as if he was waiting for it and began to wipe out the tree monsters even faster.

"Graaaaaaahh!! I refuse to lose to the likes of you! I will not lose my one-on-one training session with my king!"

Balrog seemed to have been falling behind Si-Hun in his human form. He rampaged like a beast and wiped out the monsters at incredible speed.

"Hahaha... We certainly can't show that to Lord Uriel," said Layla while scratching her cheek.

Kang-Woo mentioned while staring at her, "This needs to be kept a secret, even to Lady Gaia."

Layla answered while nodding, "Yes, of course. Oh, but shouldn't we tell her one day? I'm sure that Lady Gaia will understand your circumstances."

"We should, but not now. Let's tell her together once we finish this mission."

Kang-Woo had fallen into Hell in the past and turned into a demon against his will, and had been the demon king until he lost to Satan. He had managed to overcome demonic energy and turned back into a human with the help of Tirion, God of Heroes, and even the demons that served as his retainers back in Hell were with him. Although there was no need to tell Uriel, he needed to tell Gaia sooner or later.

*'Well, I'm pretty sure she'll buy it, considering the trust I've built with her.'*

However, one never knew how anything would turn out. One could never be too careful.

"Hehe. It's so much nicer now that the bothersome brat is gone." Seol-Ah smiled brightly.

She still seemed to bear hostility toward Uriel. Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and turned around.

"Vernaak."

"Yes, Master Kang-Woo."

Vaal Zahak— no, Vernaak approached.



“Do you happen to know where the high elves are?” Kang-Woo asked.

Although he had no idea if it was true or not, Vernaak was apparently the demon king of Aernor. In other words, he likely knew much about this continent, and possibly even knew about the location of the high elves.

“My apologies. I also... have not heard about the location of the high elves.” Vernaak shook his head, contrary to Kang-Woo’s hopes.

“Hmm.”

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. Although Echidna also used to live in Aernor, there was no way that she would know where they were since she had never left her lair.

“This is a bit of a predicament.”

Kang-Woo frowned. They needed the help of the high elves to find the Demon God’s heart, but they had no way of knowing where the high elves were.

*‘What a catch-22.’*

They had to go through too many hoops to do anything.

*‘I guess there’s no other choice but to gather some information in a city.’*

It had not even been thirty minutes since they arrived in Aernor; there was no need to be hasty.

“In that case, do you know if there are any cities near the Nightmare Forest, Vernaak?” Kang-Woo asked.

“None near the Nightmare Forest. As for a city closest to the forest... Mm, there is a city called Velen north of here.”

“How far is it?”

“Two weeks by carriage. After we get out of the Nightmare Forest, that is.”

“Really?”

Kang-Woo leisurely turned around. Two weeks by carriage was by no means short, considering how developed Aernor’s civilization was. Not just that, it was two weeks after getting out of the Nightmare Forest. If they were a normal party, they would have had to go by foot, but...

“Echidna.”

Kang-Woo had a retainer that could fly.

*‘It’d be faster if I flew by myself, but...’*

It was better for every party member to go together since not all of them could fly.

“Yeah?” Echidna asked.

“Turn back to your true form and take us to Velen.”

“Hm! Hm! Got it!” Finally having gotten something to do, Echidna clenched her fists and nodded. “Just a second, Kang-Woo.”

Black light poured out from Echidna, which turned even brighter as she grew bigger. Once the black light disappeared, all that was left was the intimidating demonic dragon. It had been a while since Kang-Woo had seen Echidna’s true form.

“Huh? Is it just me or have you grown?” Kang-Woo asked.

[Hm! It’s all thanks to you.]

Likely having been influenced by Kang-Woo’s growth in power, Echidna was far bigger than what she used to be when he first met her.

“Right, let’s go.”

Kang-Woo’s party climbed on to Echidna’s back and grabbed hold of her scales that popped out like thorns on her back.

“Urgh...” Yeon-Joo’s face paled. She said anxiously, “D-Don’t fly so rough this time, okay, brat?”

She seemed to have recalled the nightmare of when she got on Echidna for the very first time.

[I’m not a brat,] Echidna said angrily as she spread her wings out.

She soared into the sky at incredible speed.

“Kyaaaaaaaaahh!!” Yeon-Joo screamed.

*‘Let’s see.’*

Kang-Woo hid Echidna using an Authority and looked down at the forest that was stretched out endlessly, befitting the name of Nightmare Forest.

“Eh?”

The forest was being destroyed at breakneck speed.

“Kurgh! Move! I will be with hyung-nim!”

“My kiiiiiiiiiiiiing!!”

Si-Hun and Balrog were running amok to the point that the entire forest would be destroyed. Kang-Woo could feel their blazing passion from all the way up in the sky.

[Oh, come to think of it, I forgot to wait for th—]

“Go.” Kang-Woo said, while sensing their blazing passion, “Just go.”

[Huh?]

Leave them behind, please.

Chapter 334 - What the Hell is this Food Waste?

Wind blew past them at great speed. The city came into view just a few hours after Echidna took flight.

*'That place must be Velen.'*

Oh Kang-Woo looked down at the city with great interest. Although it was nothing compared to civilization on Earth, Aernor's civilization was nothing to scoff at either.

*'It's not as bad as the Middle Ages, at the very least.'*

The streets were clean, and lamps were installed to illuminate the streets during the night. It felt more like a rural European town instead of a fantasy world.

"Take us down near the city, Echidna," Kang-Woo said.

[Hm! Okay!]

Echidna began her descent while flapping her wings. Although the sudden appearance of a dragon in the city's vicinity would usually cause panic, nothing happened thanks to the Authority of Concealment.

"Bleeeeeeeeghh!" Cha Yeon-Joo threw up on the ground as soon as they landed, and glared at Echidna in resentment.

[Hmph.] Echidna returned to her human form while snorting.

"Do you all have your interpretation devices?" asked Kang-Woo.

"Yes."

Kang-Woo placed a sticker that looked like a nausea skin patch behind his ear. This was also one of the magic items that Kang-Woo had squeezed out of Khadgar.

"Let's go," Kang-Woo said.

The party walked toward the city entrance.

"ID, please," a guard at the entrance said.

"Here you go," Kang-Woo replied while holding out a tree branch at the security guard.

Of course, there was no way that he had prepared ID in advance.

"Oh, you're a mercenary. Please keep in mind that you will be disposed of in accordance with Velen's laws if you cause a commotion," the guard mentioned firmly.

Kang-Woo took back the tree branch and canceled the Authority of Blindness.

"Understood," he answered and then headed into the city.

Although Uriel was not with them, there were still ten of them, and each of them drew much attention due to their extraordinary looks.

"Wow... Th-They're goddesses."

“L-L-L-Look at that man...! How can a man be so handsome?!”

“Cerberus! Cerberus has appeared!”

Kang-Woo ignored the fuss around them and took a look around Velen.

*‘What’s with this place?’*

The scenery felt somewhat familiar. Kang-Woo recalled a city that felt similar to this place.

*‘Valencia.’*

He could feel the same thing from this place as that corrupt city in South America.

“Hyung-nim, this place...” Kim Si-Hun, having felt the same thing, whispered to Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo took a thorough look around the city’s streets while narrowing his eyes.

*‘It’s certainly weird.’*

It was not that there wasn’t anyone on the streets, since even now, the citizens were making a huge fuss while looking their way. However, if one took a good look at the people, they were dressed extravagantly and were wearing expensive-looking accessories.

*‘As for the rest...’*

Kang-Woo could not describe them as anything more than miserable. A negative and unsettling energy was enveloping the city, and he could even faintly smell rotting flesh from the alleyways.

*‘I guess it’s because there’s a class system.’*

Kang-Woo did not know whether Velen had always been like this, or if this was how all of Aernor was like.

“Let’s move.”

He interrupted his long thought. The gap between the rich and poor, as well as how much the commoners were suffering, was none of his business. They had only one goal for having come to this city.

*‘To find out the location of the high elves as well as general knowledge regarding Aernor.’*

They just needed to focus on that goal.

“Shouldn’t we get some money first, Kang-Woo?” Han Seol-Ah asked.

“I guess you’re right.” Kang-Woo nodded.

Whether they got food, accommodations or items, they needed money to do so.

*‘I have no idea about Aernor’s currency, but...’*

Kang-Woo recalled the large amount of pure gold that he had brought; he had already confirmed that gold was also very expensive in Aernor.

“In that case, let’s exchange the gold we brought into Aernor currency.”

Thankfully, Velen was full of institutions similar to banks that allowed for the exchange of gold into currency. The unit of currency was *Arnan*, and the rate of currency seemed to be about the same as the Korean won; one won was roughly 1 Arnan.

*‘Makes things easy.’*

Kang-Woo had thought that there would be some miscommunication when the unit of currency changed, but they fortunately did not need to worry.

“In that case, let’s exchange the gold for about one billion Arnans.”

A hundred million Arnans per person would be more than enough to travel around Aernor. Kang-Woo exchanged a small portion of the pure gold that he had brought into currency.

“Let me know if you need more,” he said as he distributed 100 million Arnans to each person.

Although carrying around a hundred million was certainly nerve-wracking, fortunately, there was a card in Aernor that allowed one to store money issued by banks.

*‘I never expected there to be debit cards in another world,’* Kang-Woo thought as he looked down in surprise at the magic tool in card form. Aernor was completely different from the concept of another world that he had in mind.

“But why is the currency called Arnan? Are there no other nations in Aernor besides the Arnan Empire or whatever it was?” Cha Yeon-Joo asked.

“There are, but the Arnan Empire is so powerful and magically advanced that other nations also just use the Arnan as the currency,” Vernaak answered.

“Whoa.” Yeon-Joo fiddled around with the card in fascination.

“Shall we find accommodations first?” Vernaak suggested.

“Sounds good.”

They would not be able to gain all the information they needed in just one day; Kang-Woo nodded and looked around the area for accommodations. There was an extravagant-looking inn next to a castle that seemed to belong to the lord of the territory.

*‘No.’*

Kang-Woo, who was about to head there, narrowed his eyes and shook his head.

*‘Since my objective is to gather information, anywhere else is better than there.’*

The places he had in mind were those that had a bar on the first floor and lodgings on the second floor and up. The quality of the accommodations would obviously fall behind compared to the extravagant inn, but it would most definitely be a better place to gather various kinds of information.

Kang-Woo got off of the main street and found an inn with a bar on the first floor and lodgings from the second floor and up, just what he had wanted.

“Haaa, this is driving me insane.”

“How is Princess Iris doing these days?”

“How else? Shit! If only it weren’t for that bitch...”

“Watch your mouth, dammit! Even if there aren’t any nobles here, you need to be careful!”

“Oh, right. My bad.”

Just like Kang-Woo had hoped, he heard interesting information before even opening the door of the inn.

*‘I guess there are some issues in the Arnan Empire.’*

If there were not any, there was no way that people would be badmouthing the imperial family despite this being a backwater bar.

*‘I’ll take my time collecting more info.’*

It was important to know how Aernor was running since they were here now. Kang-Woo went upstairs and unpacked first.

“It’s a bit worn down, but it’s a lot cleaner than I expected,” said Seol-Ah, who had ended up using the same room as Kang-Woo.

“And the fact that they even have a debit card... I knew that Aernor’s civilization was fairly developed, but it’s a lot more developed than I thought.”

“Hoho. I’m glad we don’t have to spend a lot of time adjusting.”

Kang-Woo sat on the bed and said, “Yeah. We don’t know how long we’ll have to stay here, after all.”

Seol-Ah sat next to him and leaned on him while embracing his arm. The sensation of something large yet soft shot up his arm.

*‘Cerberus has appeared!’*

Kang-Woo recalled what someone had shouted on the street earlier.

Seol-Ah giggled and said, “I wouldn’t mind living here forever, as long as I’m with you.”

“Your mother would cry.”

“Ngh.”

“Hahaha. Well, even so, I’d say Earth is better.”

Seol-Ah nodded and asked seductively, “Are we going to bed for the day then, Kang-Woo?”

Kang-Woo shook his head in disappointment. "It's a bit early for that."

"Urghh."

Seol-Ah pouted cutely. Kang-Woo smirked and got up.

"Let's go."

"Okay, Kang-Woo."

Kang-Woo roughly unpacked, gathered his other party members and announced, "Go around the city in groups and gather information about this continent. Anything is fine, whether it be information about Arnan's political landscape, or even better, information about high elves."

He then made the groups himself since it was obvious what would happen if they were left to make their own groups.

"Seol-Ah, Yeon-Joo and Echidna are group 1. Si-Hun and Layla are group 2. Lilith and Vernaak are group 3. Balrog and Halcyon are group 4."

"What about you, Kang-Woo?"

"I'll gather information from this bar."

He was intrigued by the conversation about Princess Iris that he had happened to overhear at the bar entrance.

Lilith nodded and turned her head to Vernaak. "Let us come back as soon as possible after gathering useful information."

"Yes, madam," Vernaak replied while courteously bowing.

He really looked the part since he was also wearing a butler outfit and a monocle.

*'Although he's a skeleton.'*

A pink apron-wearing skeleton, that was.

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The party members aside from Kang-Woo dispersed to gather information. Kang-Woo, who was left all alone, walked down to the bar on the first floor. Curses and complaints boisterously filled the air. Despite this being a bar, Kang-Woo could easily tell how miserable the citizens' lives were usually, just from the lack of laughs.

*'I might as well eavesdrop as I get some drinks in me.'*

He couldn't eavesdrop while drinking water when he was in a bar; he needed to order alcohol to avoid suspicion.

*'They apparently have beer in Aernor as well.'*

Kang-Woo got thirsty after thinking about a cold glass of beer. He realized that he had not taken a break for the past few months because he had been so busy preparing for the Aernor mission.

*'I feel sorry for the others.'*

He made excuses in his mind that it couldn't be helped since drinking in leisure was part of his act to gather information, and headed to the counter.

Kang-Woo sat down and ordered, "A beer and any food that you have."

A lukewarm beer and a few slices of ham arrived soon after.

*'Fucking hell.'*

Kang-Woo grimaced as soon as he put the slice of ham in his mouth.

*'Why is it so damn salty?'*

It was as if it had been soaked in salt. He was able to chill the beer using an Authority, but he couldn't do anything about how salty this ham was.

*'I've lost my appetite.'*

Kang-Woo spit out the ham and frowned.

The boy who had been serving beer flinched. He quickly bowed and said, "Ah... Umm, I-I'm so sorry! My sister isn't the best cook... If it wasn't to your liking, I'll get you something else."

"No, it's fine." Kang-Woo waved his hand and took something out from his jacket.

"Just pour this in a pot and heat it up for me."

He had taken out a vacuum seal bag containing Seol-Ah's kimchi stew. It was one of his favorite items since it was easily portable and could be heated up just as easily.

"Ah, food from outside is..."

Kang-Woo placed two 50,000 Arnan bills into the boy's pocket.

"I will get it heated up for you in a flash!" the boy answered energetically and ran into the kitchen with the vacuum seal bag.

Kang-Woo sipped the beer that he had chilled with the Authority of Freezing and looked around.

*'Right then, let's listen in on what everyone's saying.'*

He perked up his ears to overhear everyone's conversations.

"Urgh. Have you heard? Taxes are rising again next year."

"Shit, Viscount Velen is insane! With the empire going to the shitter..."

"Haaa. How do they expect us to survive when we're already barely holding on?"

Complaints could be heard from everywhere. Kang-Woo honed his sense of hearing while waiting for the kimchi stew. As he was organizing the incoming auditory information in his brain...

Slam—!!

"Attention!! Put your hands over your heads and kneel!!"

"Where are the ten people that had just checked into this inn?!"



Knights wearing armor destroyed the door and poured into the bar.

“V-Viscount Velen. What b-brings you here...?” the boy serving beer asked cautiously.

The man being addressed as Viscount Velen frowned aggressively and kicked the boy.

“Arghh!”

“How dare a mere commoner talk to me?”

Viscount Velen trampled on the head of the boy in displeasure.

“Hm?”

The man’s expression froze. Red liquid from the pot that the boy had been holding had splattered on his shoes.

“What the hell is this food waste?” Viscount Velen said while scraping his shoes on the floor in disgust.

“Did you just say... Food waste?”

A man with sharp eyes stood up while dragging his chair back.

Chapter 335 - Legend of the High Elves (1)

“Kimchi stew is—! A sacred food!”

“Louder.”

“KIMCHI STEW IS—!! A SACRED FOOOOOOOD!!”

“Put more heart into it.”

“Hurgh... K-Kimchi stew...”

Tears flowed down Viscount Velen’s swollen cheeks. The bar had become an absolute mess. Knights that had been recruited using large amounts of money were all sprawled on the floor with all their limbs broken, and the bar that had been shabbily but neatly decorated was in shambles.

“Do it right.” Oh Kang-Woo frowned in displeasure.

Viscount Velen yelled the words again with his face pale.

“Tsk,” Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and brought over a chair to sit in front of Viscount Velen.

He then placed his foot over the hands of the viscount, who was crying with his head on the ground.

“Bastards like you are a waste of page space. Were you all made from a factory or something? How do you all say the exact same shit?”

Whether it be Earth or Aernor, every single extra had the exact same personality and tone of speech, as if the author could not be bothered to give them any interesting characteristics.

*‘Are they like Nurse Joy?’*

Kang-Woo looked down at Viscount Velen in exasperation. *Crunch*. He trampled on the back of the viscount's hand. Screams echoed out.

Stricken by fear, Viscount Velen said, "P-Please listen to me. There is a reason why I—"

"No, don't say anything. Just keep your mouth shut."

It was a waste of page space.

"I can tell who you are and why you got off your fat ass to come all the way here without you telling me."

There was only one reason why the lord of a territory would come all the way to a shabby inn.

*'For gold.'*

Kang-Woo had purposefully revealed the enormous amount of gold that he possessed when he had gone to exchange it at the bank. It had not been because he lacked caution.

*'There's no need to be cautious.'*

Kang-Woo leaned back on the chair. He would not lose even if this entire city— no, this entire nation were to attack him all at once. A nation made up of mere humans would be no match for him, who used to have the entire Nine Hells under his foot.

Not only that, Kang-Woo had gotten stronger than his former self; there was absolutely no need for him to be cautious over a mere lord of a territory when he had defeated a being of godhood that possessed Divinity, with just his demonic energy.

"Th-There seems to be a misunders—"

"I told you to shut up, my fucking friend."

"A-Apologies!"

Kang-Woo put one leg over the other and crossed his arms. His plan of covertly gathering information in the bar had gone out the window because of this fatass.

*'What should I do now?'*

He wondered if he should go somewhere else. As he was left with his thoughts, he shook his head.

*'No, I should make use of this opportunity.'*

Kang-Woo looked down at the trembling Viscount Velen. He could gather information at a bar anytime he wanted; it would be more effective at the moment to rip high-quality information off of a man in a leadership position.

"Let me ask you a few things," Kang-Woo expressed.

"Y-Yes! A-Anything!"

"What are your thoughts on Princess Iris?"

“Pardon?” Viscount Velen became wide-eyed at the unexpected question. “I-I believe she is worthy of respect. She is fair and just, and is taking care of the empire’s citizens in the place of the bedridden emperor.”

*‘I can hear the gears turning in your head from here, man.’*

Kang-Woo smirked. Viscount Velen seemed to have mistaken Kang-Woo for someone associated with the imperial family.

“She is fair and just, you say?” Kang-Woo asked.

“A-Ahem! Y-Yes, that’s correct!” Viscount Velen answered between coughs.

It was obvious to anyone that he was lying.

*‘I guess I have my answer just from his reaction.’*

Princess Iris did not have a very good reputation among common folk, and even among the nobles. Since the emperor was bedridden, it was highly likely that Princess Iris was the one handling political affairs.

*‘In that case, could Princess Iris be why the Arnan Empire is in such a terrible state?’*

Kang-Woo could not be sure; whatever the public thought, one could never have the whole truth unless they met with the person directly.

*‘I mean, it’s none of my business.’*

He already had his hands full in search of the Demon God’s corpse; he did not have the leeway to meddle with the empire’s affairs.

*‘But it doesn’t hurt to know.’*

Since he was in this world, it was better to know how it was turning.

“In other words, you’re saying that you nobles are having a blast thanks to the incompetent princess.”

“N-Not at all! I would not dare say such a thing about Her High—”

“Bullshit.” Kang-Woo chuckled. “I actually had an inkling from the moment I heard what the guard said.”

The guard at the entrance of the city had told them that they would be disposed of in accordance with Velen's laws if they caused a commotion.

*‘That was weird.’*

It wasn’t the laws of the empire, but Velen’s laws. In other words, Viscount Velen had created laws of his own preference to be followed in his territory. It made no sense that a mere lord of a remote territory would have enough authority to wield laws however they wanted.

*‘This nation is going to the shitter.’*

Kang-Woo did not know why, but he could clearly see the signs of the empire's imminent collapse. It could not be called anything else, since a mere viscount was acting like a king in his own remote territory.

"Tsk," Kang-Woo clicked his tongue in displeasure.

Aernor's bad political state was not good news for him in the slightest.

*'It might become a hassle while going around.'*

Although he had not been to any other territories yet, if they were no different from Velen, it would become an extreme hassle to gather information about the high elves while going around the continent. The closer the nation got to collapse, the more the people in power would get ahead of themselves.

Kang-Woo asked some more questions after that, and Viscount Velen answered them all while kneeling. However, there was no other useful information.

"Well, then."

Kang-Woo slowly raised his hand.

*'Time to wrap things up.'*

He needed to extinguish the fire that was the huge commotion before it grew any bigger.

"Eek!" Seeing Kang-Woo raising his hand, Viscount Velen clenched his eyes shut and slammed his head on the floor while trembling in fear. "P-Please, spare my life...!"

"Sheesh, don't get the wrong idea." Kang-Woo crouched down in front of the viscount and grabbed the back of the viscount's neck. "Do I look like the kind of person to kill people left and right?"

"Ah... O-Of course not! You are the paragon of righteousness and generosity!" Viscount Velen sucked up to Kang-Woo as much as he could for his own survival.

*'Good, very good.'*

Kang-Woo smirked and slowly drew out the Authority of Fear.

"You know that you can't tell anyone about what happened here, right?"

"Of course I do! I will take it to my grave!"

It was a lie; Viscount Velen would most definitely spill to everyone about Kang-Woo as soon as he let him go.

"And you'll pay for this bar's repairs, right?"

"Yes! I will even have it fully remodeled!"

It was a lie; Viscount Velen would likely have the boy and his older sister beheaded to vent his anger.

“Oh, and while you do that, lower the damn taxes. Capiche? You’ve stuffed your face enough, so I don’t see why you have to collect more.”

“Yes, sir! I will abolish the plans to raise taxes next month!”

It was all too obviously a lie.

*‘But...’*

Kang-Woo was not displeased, since he did not hate people that could become unsightly without a second thought for the sake of their survival.

“Good, good. You’ve made the right choice.” Kang-Woo nodded.

Darkness enveloped Kang-Woo’s hand that was holding Viscount Velen’s neck. He activated the Authority of Fear, an Authority that turned the target insane by dropping their soul into the pits of fear that they could never escape from.

“Live a long life,” Kang-Woo stated. “I’m sure even a pitiful life like yours will have an upside one day.”

“A-Aaaahh.”

Viscount Velen’s eyes widened. He trembled crazily while wetting his pants. He screamed with the last remaining sense of reason that he had.

“Oh.” Kang-Woo canceled the Authority after having thought of something. He realized that he had not asked the most important question. Without having his hopes up, he asked while sighing, “Well... I doubt that you’d know, but do you know anything about high elves?”

Kang-Woo had asked just in case, but he doubted that a mere lord of a remote territory would know something that even Uriel and Vaal Zahak did not.

“Oh... Yes! I know something about high elves!” Viscount Velen exclaimed.

“Yeah, I didn’t think you w... Wait, what did you say?”

“T-To be more exact, I know a mage that knows much about high elves. He spent decades researching high elves, so I’m sure he would know a lot about them.”

Kang-Woo’s mouth fell open from the unexpected profit.

“And where is this mage?”

“H-He lives in a small tower located a few days away from Velen in the direction of the Nightmare Forest. His temper is like no other, but... since he had once been the head imperial mage, I’m sure that there’s no one more knowledgeable about high elves than that geezer.”

“Hah...” Kang-Woo chuckled.

He recalled seeing the small tower that Viscount Velen was talking about while flying here on Echidna's back.

*'What a score!'*

It felt like having gotten an SSR character after rolling a free gacha pull without a speck of hope. Although there was no guarantee that mage would know where the high elves were, it would be better than blindly searching for information.

"Wow. Thanks, man. I never expected to get such valuable information in a place like this," Kang-Woo said.

"Hehehe. I-It's nothing," Viscount Velen answered with a smile.

He seemed to have been relieved after having been of help.

"Umm... In that case, I will excuse myself..."

Viscount Velen did not know what Kang-Woo had been trying to do to him earlier, but he could instinctively tell that it had been extremely dangerous. He got up while thinking that Kang-Woo wouldn't do anything to him since he had been of help to him.

Kang-Woo smiled and activated the Authority of Fear again while grabbing the head of Viscount Velen, who was staring at him with a pale face. "Come on, where do you think you're going? We're not done here, are we?"

Kang-Woo broke Viscount Velen's mind with the Authority of Fear.

"A-Aaaahh."

Viscount Velen's eyes lost their light. Kang-Woo snickered. It was true that Viscount Velen had been a big help to him; one could argue that he had given Kang-Woo core information for their Aernor expedition. However...

*'This and that are two completely different things.'*

Chapter 336 - Legend of the High Elves (2)

"Does that mean there is a mage that knows about high elves in the tower that we passed on our way here?" Lilith asked.

Oh Kang-Woo nodded. "Yeah. Well, it's a whole other issue whether he actually knows or not."

"Hmm." Lilith's eyes shone. She seductively caressed her lips and continued, "Regardless, it does not change the fact that it is an unexpected discovery."

They could not have hit a bigger jackpot than this. Even a blind squirrel could find a nut once in a while, but this was like finding a lifetime's worth of nuts.

"Will we be heading there right away?" Lilith asked.

“Yeah.” Kang-Woo nodded. Since they had found information about a being who knew about high elves, there was no reason to hesitate. “I’ll count on you to take care of things here, Lilith.”

Kang-Woo turned around. The boy who had served him his food and drink, a woman who seemed to be his older sister, and the customers of the bar were staring at him while trembling. Although he could not make it so that it never happened, he could at least alter their memories a little.

“Yes, Master Kang-Woo.” Lilith nodded and walked toward them.

Although there had been a short fuss, they soon turned silent after Lilith lightly snapped her finger.

“Before we go to the tower...” Kang-Woo turned toward his party members who had gathered after receiving his call. He asked, “Have you guys found any useful information?”

“Nope. How could we have gathered anything useful after only an hour?” Cha Yeon-Joo complained.

They had been summoned back to the inn after barely having done anything, so there was no way that they had gathered any useful information.

“All that we noticed was that the people lack energy compared to the level of civilization. The streets were super gloomy. Oh, and security isn’t all that great either. A few men tried to drag Seol-Ah away while we were walking around,” Yeon-Joo mentioned.

“What?” Kang-Woo frowned in displeasure.

*‘How dare they lay their hands on my darling?’*

He looked behind Yeon-Joo to see Han Seol-Ah slightly trembling in shock.

“Are you okay, darling?”

“... I was so scared, Kang-Woo.”

Seol-Ah walked up to Kang-Woo and entered his embrace. Kang-Woo’s expression crumpled as he stared at Seol-Ah’s shaking shoulders.

*‘Nothing probably happened considering Seol-Ah’s strength, but...’*

Being physically strong and being resilient to clear impure intentions were completely different things. Taking Seol-Ah’s personality into account, she likely did not have any resistance to such blatant vice.

Kang-Woo hugged Seol-Ah even tighter and asked softly, “Where are those sons of bitches?”

“Uhh, mm. Well...” Yeon-Joo hesitated.

“You didn’t let them go, did you?”

“I mean... Uhh, we did, but...”

“You let them go? You should’ve at least broken their arms and l—”

“Their dicks were ripped off.”

“Yeah, at least their d... What?”

*‘Ripped what off?’*

“Seol-Ah got pissed and ripped their dicks off.”

“...”

*‘I beg your pardon? Seol-Ah?’*

“Ah, Y-Yeon-Joo! Y-You said you would keep that a secret!”

Seol-Ah, who had been in Kang-Woo’s embrace, sprang up while as red as a tomato. She was completely fine as if she had never been trembling in fear in the first place.

Kang-Woo reflexively closed his legs.

Seol-Ah shouted, “Y-You’ve got it wrong, Kang-Woo! I-I didn’t do anything. It was Yeon-Joo—”

“What? You’re blaming it on me? What the fuck?!” Yeon-Joo yelled. “You’re the one who ripped it all off before I even had a chance to stop y—”

“That’s enough of that.” Kang-Woo shook his pale head.

He looked at Seol-Ah.

*‘Darling... I haven’t done anything bad, right? I’m all good, right?’*

He stared at Seol-Ah with shaking pupils. Seol-Ah, who met his gaze, smiled.

*‘Alright, I think I’m good.’*

“What about you guys, Si-Hun and Balrog? Anything?”

“We have not been able to gather anything of value.” Balrog shook his head.

Kang-Woo turned toward Kim Si-Hun, who seemed to be in thought.

Si-Hun stated, “I’m not sure if this information is worth anything, but...”

“Anything is fine,” Kang-Woo replied.

“I heard that the princess of the Arnan Empire is passing through a city not far from here.”

“Princess Iris?”



“Yes, that’s right. I’m not sure why an imperial princess is all the way out in this remote region, but... She’s apparently going back to the imperial capital while taking a detour to this area.”

“Hm.” Kang-Woo nodded.

*‘Princess Iris, huh?’*

He had wanted to meet her at least once.

*‘It would be nice if I could form an amicable relationship with her.’*

Kang-Woo was aiming for her immense power; he couldn't care less whether she was wicked, a saint, or an absolute fucking bitch. There was no one more useful than her as long as he was able to bring her to his side.

*‘I’ll put it aside for now.’*

Although it would be nice if he had her as an ally, it did not mean that she was a necessity. He had no need to go out of his way to bring her to his side.

“Well then, let’s move,” Kang-Woo expressed.

Lilith was on the verge of finishing up. Kang-Woo got up, packed his things and headed toward the tower that Viscount Velen had mentioned.

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Kang-Woo’s party arrived at the run-down tower. Kang-Woo lightly knocked on the door. The door was very worn down and weeds were growing from between the bricks; it was so dreary that it was a wonder if someone actually lived here.

“Anyone home?” Kang-Woo asked.

There was no reply. Kang-Woo lightly clicked his tongue.

“I have come in hopes of asking you something.”

He had already confirmed with the Authority of the Beholder that someone was inside.

Kang-Woo continued calmly, “I would like some information regarding high elv—”

*Wham!* The door swung open aggressively, and out came an old mage that looked as if he would appear in a fantasy film about a ring. The mage glared at Kang-Woo temperamentally.

“... Who are you all?” the mage asked, and then sniffed them with his eyes narrowed.

“Hah. You don’t seem to be from Aernor.”

The mage scanned Kang-Woo and the others in surprise. Kang-Woo was just as surprised.

*‘He found out as soon as he saw us.’*

And by smell, no less. Kang-Woo was highly curious about how the mage had found out.

“Yes, you’re correct,” Kang-Woo answered while nodding.

The mage's eyes were dyed with even more suspicion.

"You want to know about high elves?"

"Yes."

"... Why?"

"May we come in and explain ourselves slowly?"

"..."

The wary mage slowly nodded. Unlike its shabby outer appearance, the tower's interior was rather clean. The mage took them to a study filled with books.

"My name is Douglas. It was a long time ago, but I used to work under His Imperial Majesty as a mage."

"I am Oh Kang-Woo."

Douglas lightly grabbed the hand that Kang-Woo had extended.

"So, why do you want to know about high elves?" Douglas stared at Kang-Woo in suspicion.

Kang-Woo remained silent for a short moment and calmly scanned Douglas while the gears in his head turned rapidly.

*'Now, what should I say to alleviate his suspicion and gain information?'*

He thought up a few ideas. Number one; to tell Douglas the truth that they were looking for the high elves for their mission to eliminate the Demon God's corpse.

*'No goddamn way he'd believe that.'*

It sounded so insane that it would be a relief if Douglas did not consider them to be crazy.

*'Number two.'*

Simply because of curiosity?

*'It's too vague.'*

Kang-Woo continued to think. He thought up a few other ideas, but none of them were good enough.

*'How about I just force him to talk using the Authority of Fear?'*

He thought about it for a moment, but shook his head.

*'It's too risky.'*

The Authority of Fear was not omnipotent. The chances of its success fell drastically even if the target possessed even a little demonic energy resistance. Worst case scenario, Douglas's mind would break completely and they would not be able to gain any information from him.

*'Besides, he used to be the head imperial mage, so there's no way that he'd be weak.'*

Using forceful methods was far too risky.

*'In that case, the only things I can do are to alleviate his suspicion with a believable reason, or eliminate his caution altogether.'*

Either one did not seem easy.

*'No, the latter actually might be possible.'*

Kang-Woo could form a bond with Douglas and lower his caution.

*'This mage has a very high interest in high elves.'*

If he did not, there was no way that he would have spent decades researching them. No, his great interest in high elves was obvious from how he had run out of the tower immediately after Kang-Woo had mentioned high elves.

Kang-Woo organized his thoughts and slowly answered, "Because we are highly interested in them."

"... You are?"

"Yes. Hm, I guess you could say that we like them."

"Oh?" Douglas began to show interest. He coughed and then asked, "Are there records of high elves even in your world?"

"Somewhat."

Most of them were out of imagination, but one could technically call them records.

"How interesting," Douglas expressed in great interest. He then asked excitedly, "What kind of records? How are high elves recorded in your world? Have the differences between elves and high elves been clearly defined? How have their appearances been recorded?"

He was like an otaku talking about their favorite anime with a fellow otaku. Kang-Woo smiled widely.

*'Nice.'*

Douglas had taken the bait.

"Hahaha. I'll go through everything with you slowly," Kang-Woo said.

He recited all the information that he knew about elves from a fantasy he had read long ago. "They have been recorded to possess great beauty, a long lifespan, and eternal youth."

"Hmm. That's more or less based on the truth."

"Also..." Kang-Woo fervently continued, "They are depicted to have exceptional archery skills in other s."

“Hm, I see.”

“They have also been recorded to have great affinity with spirits and are vegetarian because they cannot eat meat.”

“... Hmm. I see.”

However, the longer Kang-Woo explained, the less interested Douglas became. Kang-Woo could instinctively tell that these were not the kind of records that Douglas had in mind. Kang-Woo frowned.

*‘What the hell?’*

What was he doing wrong? He had talked about the depictions of elves in fantasy s and films, but Douglas was not interested in the slightest. It felt as if the plan drawn within Kang-Woo’s head was falling apart.

Just then, Layla interrupted, “A moment please, Kang-Woo.” She took Kang-Woo outside and whispered, “Are you trying to relieve Douglas’s suspicion by talking about high elves and forming a bond with him?”

Layla had figured out Kang-Woo’s intentions in a flash.

“Yes, but it doesn’t seem to be going very well,” Kang-Woo replied.

He had talked about the depiction of high elves in all the films, fantasy s and anime that he had seen, but Douglas did not seem to be interested in them at all.

Layla narrowed her eyes. “Please wait. If my suspicions are correct... I believe I can resolve this.”

“You, Layla?”

“Yes. Please trust me,” Layla responded with certainty.

Kang-Woo tilted his head in wonder. “How?”

“Fufu. That’s a secret. You can only know after you figure out why Douglas is so interested in high elves.”

“Are you saying that you know why?”

“Well... You could say that I can tell from his eyes. There can be no other reason why he is so passionate over high elves.”

“...?”

“Regardless, please leave it to me,” Layla stated as she took out a laptop from her bag. It was one powered by mana, just like Kang-Woo’s. “I will go talk in private with Douglas.”

Layla asked the other party members to wait outside and walked inside by herself with her laptop in hand.

*'What is she trying to do?'*

Kang-Woo stared at the tightly-shut door in confusion. Just then, Douglas's exclamations rang out from beyond the door.

"Whoa! Whooooaaa!! B-By the heavens!"

Kang-Woo's curiosity grew even more.

*'Authority of Transparency.'*

Unable to handle the curiosity, Kang-Woo saw through the door by turning it transparent in his eyes to see what was happening inside. Layla had opened her laptop and was showing Douglas something on the screen.

*'Let's see.'*

Kang-Woo looked at the laptop screen. It was displaying a manga, with the title on the screen written *The Lustful Night of an Elven Lady and an Orc ~A Night Drenched in Carnal Desire~*.

"... Huh?"

*'Drenched in what?'*

"Hoho, it just came out," Layla mentioned.

"Amazing! Simply amazing!"

*'Umm, excuse me? Layla?'*

"This is what I was born for... *Sniff*. The days that I had spent researching... must have been for this moment."

"I also felt it the moment I saw you, Douglas. That this... was fate."

*'What the fuck are you two talking about?'*

"Wh... What are these works of masterful art called in your world?"

"They are called ero manga."

*'Excuse me... Sister-in-law.'*

"Amazing... Phenomenal! How could they have portrayed such minute details...?"

"Here, there are plenty more."

"Wooooow!"

*'Why are you doing this to me?'*

"Unlike that young man earlier... You sure know your stuff. Hmph, who gives a shit about nitpicky details like that?"

"It's because Kang-Woo isn't very well-versed in these kinds of things."

*'Nor do I want to be.'*

“Hehe. If it's you, I don't mind showing the results of my research. Here, take a look at these. They are books that I hired the most talented artists of the empire to draw.”

“My, Douglas. Your collection is no joke either.”

“Huhu, I dedicated my entire life to collecting them.”

*'Stop.'*

“Yes... If you're asked what goes best with elves...”

“Is there even a need to ask? What else but...”

*'Please stop.'*

“Orcs!”

“Orcs!”

*'Stop, you crazy sons of bitches.'*

Clap!

*'Don't high-five.'*

“Kang-Woo, what do you think Layla is talking about with Douglas?” Seol-Ah asked while tilting her head.

Kang-Woo raised his head in silence and blankly stared off into the empty space.

*'I wonder how long we can stay appropriate for all ages?'*

Chapter 337 - Legend of the High Elves (3)

“Hahaha! Quite the comrade you have here!” Douglas said as he smacked Oh Kang-Woo's shoulder while chuckling after coming out of the tower.

Kang-Woo nodded while smiling awkwardly. He stared at Layla and Douglas with mixed feelings.

“Layla, what did you do to persuade Douglas? He seemed a bit hard to please,” Kim Si-Hun whispered as he approached Layla.

Layla giggled lightly and replied, “Douglas fortunately harbored a great deal of faith for Lady Gaia as well.”

*'Liar.'*

“He lowered his suspicions as soon as I explained to him how great and benevolent Lady Gaia is.”

*'You didn't even say a thing about Gaia.'*

“Oh, then did you reveal to him that you’re Lady Gaia’s incarnation?” Si-Hun asked.

“No, I didn’t. I just... told him that I am one of Lady Gaia’s loyal devotees.”

“A bond born from serving the same goddess, huh? I can understand why he lowered his guard all of a sudden.” Si-Hun nodded with a smile.

Kang-Woo averted his gaze from Layla in silence.

*‘Si-Hun... It looks like you’re gonna live your life being whipped by Layla.’*

Kang-Woo lightly clicked his tongue. Although he despised lies, he could understand Layla’s circumstances of not being able to reveal the truth.

*‘I guess this is what you call lying in good faith.’*

It couldn’t be helped; yes, there was no other way. Anyway...

“I’m proud to have Layla as my comrade,” Kang-Woo responded to Douglas while smiling brightly.

Douglas smiled back. “Right, you wanted to know about high elves, correct?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Kang-Woo’s eyes shone. They were finally getting into the main subject at hand.

“What do you want to know exactly?” Douglas asked.

“Their location.”

“Mmmh...” Douglas groaned as if he could not answer.

“Do you not know where they are?” Kang-Woo asked.

“I do not. To be exact, there is no way to know. However, I do know the conditions that they appear in.”

“Conditions?”

Kang-Woo’s face, which had been dyed in disappointment, brightened again. Douglas scratched his head as if he didn’t know where to begin his explanation.

“Mm. It seems I have to explain some things about high elves first.”

“Please take your time.”

“Okay.” Douglas nodded. “First, do you know the difference between elves and high elves?”

“Uhh... Mm. Aren’t they kind of like... elven nobility or royalty?”

“Not exactly.” Douglas firmly shook his head. “To make a comparison, they are actually closer to gods. According to records, high elves were beings of godhood that

possess Divinity. Among them, elder high elves were of the same level of godhood as Celestial Goddess Seraph, or even higher.”

“Hah,” Kang-Woo chuckled.

*‘High elves are deities?’*

He had never even expected it. One would normally consider a high elf to be something like the king of elves.

*‘I guess they’re not kings, but gods that the elves serve.’*

If that was the case, it made sense that barely anyone knew of their location.

“Wait, then does that mean there is no physical way to meet with the high elves?” Kang-Woo asked.

Although it was not the case for all beings of godhood, deities such as Gaia and Uranus stayed out of the physical world in order to be as free as possible from the influence of *providence*. Even a goddess as powerful as Gaia had only influenced the physical world through Layla via Deific Manifestation.

“No. Mm... Well, I guess it’s not exactly untrue.” Douglas shook his head ambiguously. “Although high elves do not reside in the physical world, they can manifest here by borrowing the power of the world tree to form a body.”

“I see.”

Kang-Woo sighed in relief. If they were able to descend into the physical world through a body, it meant that it was not impossible to meet them.

Douglas opened a book on the desk and continued, “When the Arnan Empire was first founded, a high elf descended to bless the first emperor personally.”

“Does that mean high elves are like the Arnan Empire’s guardians?”

“I’m not sure, but... You could say that they are the guardians of the imperial family. As proof of that, all those who carry the blood of the imperial family are extremely handsome and beautiful.”

Kang-Woo recalled Reynald’s face. The blond hero’s dazzling looks had been on par with Si-Hun’s.

“Then... How can we meet those high elves?”

Kang-Woo had a rough idea of what kind of beings the high elves were from Douglas’s explanation, but the most important thing was where they were. They needed that information to meet with the beings that would guide them to the Demon God’s corpse.

“There is a legend related to the high elves,” Douglas mumbled. “When this world reaches the brink of collapse, the protector of the world tree will manifest before the savior. And, the protector of the world tree is referring to a high elf.”



“Wait a minute. Does that mean...”

“Yes,” Douglas smirked. “It means there is realistically no way to meet them.”

Kang-Woo frowned aggressively. They had ultimately gone back to square one. Douglas patted Kang-Woo’s shoulder while chuckling.

“Do not be so disappointed. According to the records, elves and high elves are not that much different in terms of appearance. Although we cannot meet high elves, we at least have elves!” Douglas looked toward Layla while snorting.

“Is there truly no other way? An elf that can communicate with the high elves, perhaps?” Kang-Woo asked.

There was actually no need for them to meet with a high elf in person; just like how Layla relayed Gaia’s will through Deific Manifestation, there could possibly be someone among the elves that could relay the high elves’ will through a similar method... No, there needed to be.

“Mm. Probably not. I can proudly say that there is no one in this world who knows elves better than me, and I have never heard of an elf that could communicate with the high elves,” Douglas responded as if hammering the final nail in the coffin.

The faces of Kang-Woo and the expedition team froze.

“Hyung-nim, then...”

“We have no choice but to look for the Demon God’s corpse without the high elves’ help,” Kang-Woo said while sighing.

They did not necessarily need to find the high elves first to find the Demon God’s corpse. Although it was an ignorant method, they could just search every nook and cranny of the continent.

*‘Though I have no idea how long it would take.’*

They would be searching through an entire star. Even if Kang-Woo’s party could freely soar across the skies, it would not be easy at all.

*‘And...’*

Considering the Demon God’s corpse had never been found until now, it was safe to assume that it would not be visible just by looking down from above.

*‘It could either be in the deep seas, a deep cave, or...’*

In the worst-case scenario, it might not exist in the physical world, just like the high elves.

“Shit,” Kang-Woo cursed.

He placed his hand over his forehead as if his head hurt. Kang-Woo was not the only one deep in thought; Layla had also realized the gravity of the situation and was biting her lip with a gloomy expression. The air in the study grew heavy in an instant.

“Kang-Woo...” Han Seol-Ah carefully placed her hand above the contemplating Kang-Woo’s hand. “No matter how long it takes, I’m fine with it.”

Seol-Ah smiled brightly. Echidna also trotted over and sat on Kang-Woo’s lap.

“Hm! I’m fine with it too, as long as I’m with you, Kang-Woo!”

The two of them consoled Kang-Woo to lighten the mood as much as possible. Kang-Woo smirked and patted Echidna’s head. Echidna swayed her legs while humming in joy.

“Yeah, we have to find it, no matter how long it takes.”

They needed to, even if it would take years, or even decades. It was only a matter of time until Earth would be invaded by outer worlds if they did nothing.

*‘The problem is...’*

Kang-Woo’s expression was as gloomy as ever despite Seol Ah and Echidna’s consolation. To be honest, he didn’t mind however long he would need to stay in Aernor for, as long as he was with his comrades. It was different from Hell, where he had nothing good to eat, drink, and enjoy.

*‘It’s just that there’s a time limit.’*

According to Gaia, the protections of the three stars of the Triad were dependent on each other. If they did not manage to find and eliminate the Demon God’s corpse, Earth’s protection would fall apart, and it would affect the protection of the two other stars soon after. A building was bound to collapse without its supporting structures.

*‘But Gaia said that she would be able to hold on for a few years at the very least.’*

But if interpreted in another way, they only had a few years until Earth’s protection collapsed.

“Haaa,” Kang-Woo sighed.

The air in the study was as heavy as ever. Kang-Woo fell into thought with his head lowered.

*‘We need a way to find the Demon God’s corpse.’*

However, he could not think of any, no matter how much he thought. Even Lucis, whom Kang-Woo had trusted to know where it was, did not remember; neither did the angels, and not even Gaia. The expedition team did not even have a single clue to go off of.

*‘Is there no other choice... but to depend on Bauli?’*

Kang-Woo thought about bringing the sleeping Bauli up from the Abyss, but shook his head. It was way too risky.

*‘What should I do...?’*

His mind had become a tangled mess.

“Oh.”

Just then, a thought struck his mind like a lightning bolt.

*'Yeah.'*

Kang-Woo chuckled unbeknownst to himself.

*'Why didn't I think of that?'*

He almost burst into laughter from his own stupidity. It was a rather simple problem to solve, to the point that he felt pathetic for not having thought of it sooner.

*'It was right in front of me!'*

There was no need to even think about it. The solution was stupidly simple. Kang-Woo recalled the legend that Douglas had mentioned.

- When this world reaches the brink of collapse, the protector of the world tree will manifest before the savior.

*'If a high elf will only appear if this world is on the brink of collapse...'*

A smile filled with malice was plastered on the demon's face. *Snicker*. He was unable to suppress his laughter.

*'... I just have to bring Aernor to the brink of collapse!'*

Truly a 5Head moment.

Chapter 338 - Hero Maker (1)

"Kang-Woo? What's wrong?" Han Seol-Ah asked.

"Nothing." Oh Kang-Woo shook his head while pulling down the corners of his mouth with all his might.

*'Pfft, huehuehuehue.'*

He had almost let out a vulgar laugh after having thought up a fantastic idea.

*'Yes, this is the best way to go.'*

No matter how one thought about it, searching every nook and cranny of the continent for the Demon God's corpse was insane. However, there was no one but the high elves who could guide them to the corpse. In other words, they needed to do whatever it took to meet with the high elves.

*'Everything will resolve itself as long as I bring this world to the brink of collapse.'*

Kang-Woo smiled brightly. Of course, just because he had made up his mind to bring Aernor to the brink of collapse did not mean he would massacre civilians or partially destroy the continent.

*'Brink is the keyword here.'*

The high elves would appear when Aernor was on the brink of collapse, not when it was already collapsing.

*'Putting it on the brink of collapse isn't that hard.'*

Kang-Woo could already think of multiple ways that he could.

*'I'll need some time to put them into action, but...'*

The time taken would still be far shorter than randomly searching for the Demon God's corpse.

*'Alright.'*

Kang-Woo felt like a weight had been taken off his shoulders now that his worries had been resolved. He smiled brightly.

"What's with that unpleasant smile?" Cha Yeon-Joo, who had been staring at Kang-Woo, frowned. She felt chills for some reason from seeing the radiant smile on Kang-Woo. She sighed and asked, "So, what are we gonna do? Are we seriously gonna search the entire continent?"

Looking for a needle in a desert would be easier than searching for the Demon God's corpse located who knows where in the continent.

"Nope," Kang-Woo answered.

"Then how?"

"Have you thought of something?" Layla asked while tilting her head in wonder.

Kang-Woo gazed at Layla, Yeon-Joo and Kim Si-Hun.

*'Even so...'*

He could not tell the three of them the plan that he had in mind.

*'Maybe Lilith.'*

Kang-Woo was a bit reluctant to tell even Seol-Ah. Although he trusted her, he did not want to show such a side of himself to her.

*'Darling is also horrendous at acting.'*

Considering what had happened long ago with Shalgiel, it was probably better to just not tell her his plan.

*'The fewer people know, the better.'*

He was trying to drive the entire continent into the pits of hell to make the high elves manifest; although he would be careful to avoid casualties, they would be inevitable. Whatever he did, Aernor would suffer in some way or another. Since it was far too radical of a plan for a Protector of Light to pull, it was best left hidden.

"I'll explain outside," Kang-Woo answered while stealing a glance at Douglas.

Layla nodded.

"Thank you for the valuable information, Douglas," Kang-Woo mentioned.

“Not at all. I should be the one thanking you for the valuable experience.” Douglas shook Kang-Woo’s hand while smiling in satisfaction. “If you ever need my help, feel free to give me a call anytime. Here is my communication crystal code.”

Douglas handed Kang-Woo a mana code, similar to a phone number on Earth, while chuckling in joy. His temperamental nature that they had seen was nowhere to be found.

*‘Regardless of the process, I’m glad we managed to get a good ally thanks to Layla.’*

Although Douglas was no longer active, he would be a very valuable ally to have since he used to be the head imperial mage. Kang-Woo registered Douglas’s mana code in his crystal orb and stood up.

“Come to think of it, you said that you were from Earth, correct?” Douglas asked.

“Oh, yes. That’s right.”

“Hmm.” Douglas stroked his beard. “The empire... isn’t in the best state at the moment, so I advise you not to travel around too much.”

“Is it because of Princess Iris?” Kang-Woo asked.

Douglas remained silent. He bit his lip with a complicated expression. “I know how the public sees her, but... I at least want you to know that it is not entirely her fault. Everything was orchestrated by... No, never mind. Tsk, just take it as the ramblings of an old man. Anyway, have a safe trip.”

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. He felt like he could vaguely understand why such a distinguished mage lived in such a shabby tower.

*‘I’m curious about what’s going on in the empire, but...’*

Kang-Woo relinquished his thoughts. Since they had exchanged communication crystal codes, he could ask Douglas anytime he wanted.

*‘And...’*

If things went according to his thoughts, he was bound to learn about the empire’s circumstances even if he didn’t want to.

*‘Right now, I need time to organize my thoughts.’*

Kang-Woo could not afford to exact such a grand plan with weak foundations. First, he needed to perfect his plan to make the high elves manifest into the physical world. Since it was not so simple to pull off, he could not just think up the perfect plan here and now.

*‘I have to consider all variables, roles and methods.’*

Kang-Woo had a mountain of work to do; he could not afford to waste time here.

“In that case, we’ll be on our way,” Kang-Woo remarked.

“But isn’t it already late? If you don’t have a place to stay around here, how about you spend the night in the tower?” Douglas asked.

“Oh.”

Kang-Woo turned around and looked outside the window. Three moons were shining in the night sky.

*‘Time flew by so quickly.’*

Things had been so hectic that he had not even realized that the sun had set.

*‘Come to think of it, it hasn’t even been a day since we arrived in Aernor.’*

Kang-Woo had completely forgotten because so many things had happened already.

*‘I guess there’s no need to rush.’*

They had managed to get through the crisis without a hitch thanks to Viscount Velen’s super carry.

*‘Thanks, man! I owe you!’*

They would never have met Douglas if it hadn’t been for Viscount Velen, and if it hadn’t been for Douglas, they would have done all sorts of pointless things in search of the high elves that did not even exist in the physical world.

*‘Shieeet, he carried us so hard. All hail the viscount!’*

Kang-Woo’s endless awe and respect for Viscount Velen set his heart ablaze.

“I understand. In that case, we will stay here for the night,” Kang-Woo answered.

“Hahaha. Although it’s nothing much, use this tower however you like. And... Layla.”

Douglas gazed at Layla passionately. Layla nodded with a smile.

“Okay. I will bring you another sacred relic in the evening,” she answered.

“A-Ahem. I will look forward to it.” Douglas stood up while smiling like a puppy. “In that case, I will clean up the room on the upper floor. You seemed to have something that you needed to discuss among yourselves, so go ahead.”

“Thank you very much,” expressed Kang-Woo.

Although it was filled with impure desires, he was thankful for Douglas’s hospitality. Kang-Woo smiled while lowering his head. Douglas closed the door and left.

“Now, then...” Layla looked toward Kang-Woo. “What do you have in mind about our plan of action going forward?”

The other party members also focused on Kang-Woo. Kang-Woo relayed the fake plan that he had thought up.

*‘No, it’s not exactly fake.’*

To be exact, it was half of the true plan.

“I’m thinking of making contact with the high elves,” he stated.

“Pardon?”

“What the hell, Kang-Woo? Were you not listening to that old mage? He said that there aren’t any high elves in this world.” Yeon-Joo stared at Kang-Woo in confusion.

“No, think about it.” Kang-Woo glanced at Yeon-Joo, Si-Hun and Layla in order.

*‘This is the most crucial point.’*

He needed to package one among the infinite possibilities as the truth, and make them believe that there was no other possibility.

“Douglas said that the high elves will appear when this world is on the brink of collapse,” Kang-Woo mentioned.

“Yeah... but what about it?”

“Yeon-Joo, do you think the Demon of Prophecy will sit idly by as we try to eliminate the Demon God’s corpse?”

“Ah.”

The faces of Yeon-Joo, Layla and Si-Hun stiffened. The Demon of Prophecy was the pinnacle of all demons, feared even by the gods, that would bring ruin to the universe. Although his identity was veiled in secrecy, he surely existed.

“He will make his move,” Kang-Woo declared.

The Demon of Prophecy was trying to bring ruin to all worlds, but if the Demon God’s corpse was eliminated, Aernor’s protection would be freed from keeping the corpse in check and put a hard stop to his objective.

“He will appear, no matter what. Even if he himself doesn’t, one of the Four Heavenly Kings definitely will,” Kang-Woo continued.

“I see. Come to think of it, you’re right, hyung-nim. There is no way that evil demon would just sit idly by as we go on this expedition.” Si-Hun agreed while making a serious face.

Si-Hun had forgotten since the Demon of Prophecy had not made his move for months after Rakiel’s death, but his forces were still very powerful.

*‘The Four Heavenly Kings...’*

Since Satan and Rakiel were dead now, only two remained. No, since the Demon of Prophecy was still alive, they still had at least three powerful enemies that they needed to face.

*‘Shit,’* Si-Hun cursed in his mind.

His limbs trembled just from thinking about the Demon of Prophecy. He clenched his fists and bit his lip.

Layla grabbed Si-Hun's trembling hands and turned to Kang-Woo, saying, "I see. I understand what you are trying to say, Kang-Woo. You're saying that the high elves will sense danger and manifest once the Demon of Prophecy takes action, right?"

"That's right," Kang-Woo responded.

"In that case..." Layla's eyes shone. According to the legend, the high elves would manifest in front of a *savior*. "We should find that savior first."

"No." Kang-Woo shook his head.

Looking for a savior that they had no idea who it could be was just as insane as looking for the Demon God's corpse.

Layla tilted her head in confusion and asked, "Then what should we do?"

"We're not going to look for a savior." Kang-Woo turned toward Si-Hun, who was looking back at Kang-Woo dumbfoundedly, and grabbed his shoulders. He smiled and continued, "We're going to... make one."

Chapter 339 - Hero Maker (2)

"Make... a savior?" Layla asked, wide-eyed.

Oh Kang-Woo nodded while smiling. "Yes."

The others stared at him in confusion at how he had said something completely absurd so confidently.

"What... do you mean, hyung-nim?"

"Think about it, Si-Hun. If it were up to you, who would you give the title of the continent's savior to?"

"Well..."

Kim Si-Hun fell into thought for a moment. A savior of a continent frequently appeared in s, cartoons and films, so it was not difficult to conjure up an image in his head.

"I guess it would be... someone chosen by a god... who confronts great evil... and protects the people?" Si-Hun answered.

"Right?"

"Oh."

Si-Hun's eyes widened. He came to realize why Kang-Woo, who was smiling joyfully, had said something like that.

"Si-Hun, you're..."

He had been chosen by Gaia, was confronting a great evil known as the Demon of Prophecy, and had protected countless people.



“The perfect fit for *a hero from another world.*”

“W-Wait!!” Si-Hun shouted in bewilderment. He understood Kang-Woo’s point, but...

“Th-The same could be said for you, hyung-nim!”

Kang-Woo had also been chosen by Gaia and was fighting against great evil. No, considering Kang-Woo’s accomplishments, Si-Hun could not even hold a candle to him.

“No, it can’t be me.” Kang-Woo shook his head without hesitation.

If one just looked at the conditions of being a savior, there was no one more fit for the position than Kang-Woo. However...

*‘I can’t be the hero.’*

He had something else to do— something very special that he could not tell his other party members.

*‘And...’*

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. High elves apparently possessed the ability to locate the Demon God’s corpse, and Holy Sword Ludwig, which had been blessed by them, used to have the ability to locate the Demonic Sea.

*‘It’s too dangerous for me to be the savior.’*

Worst-case scenario, his identity would be exposed. There was no need to risk the breakdown of trust that he had built ever since before he had become the Protector of Light.

“But why? No matter how I think about it, you’re far better suited for—”

“Because you’re the master of the Holy Sword Ludwig.”

Kang-Woo could not tell Si-Hun the true reason why he could not be the savior; he needed a good excuse.

“Although it had been broken back when Ludwig had been corrupted, that sword used to be imbued with the blessing of the high elves. If a high elf will appear before a savior, wouldn’t it be natural that they would appear before the master of the holy sword?”

Si-Hun bit his lip.

Kang-Woo’s logic was hard to refute. It certainly was better for Si-Hun, the master of the Holy Sword Ludwig, to become the savior.

“I vote for Si-Hun too,” Cha Yeon-Joo expressed.

“Yeon-Joo?” said Si-Hun.

“First off, your looks are on completely different levels. Kang-Woo is... Well... What’s the best way to describe it?” She put her hand on her forehead and searched for the

right expression, and then clapped her hands together. "Oh. He kinda looks like trash."

"Excuse me?"

*'Trash?'*

Kang-Woo glared at Yeon-Joo.

Yeon-Joo clarified while snickering, "No, I'm not saying you're ugly. How should I say this? You look like you have a bad personality... It's your eyes."

"I'd say the same thing about you," Kang-Woo rebutted.

Yeon-Joo also did not look like a very nice person.

"Whatever the case, it's true that Si-Hun looks the part more, isn't it?" said Yeon-Joo.

"Urgh." Kang-Woo nodded while groaning.

Although he did not want to admit it, it was an undeniable fact that Si-Hun visually looked far more like a hero than Kang-Woo did.

*'Are my eyes that sharp?'*

Kang-Woo unconsciously touched his eyes. Han Seol-Ah, who had been sitting next to him, grabbed his hand.

"Fufu, don't worry," Seol-Ah said with a smile. "There's no one in the universe that looks tastier than you."

"Ahem. Thanks, darl—"

*'Hm? Tastier?'*

"My, I'm sorry. I misspoke." Hohoho. Seol-Ah giggled.

Kang-Woo stared at Seol-Ah in confusion, and then turned back to Si-Hun.

"Anyway, you get it now, right?"

"Mm. Even if I take the visual aspect as a joke... I guess I can't argue with the holy sword aspect." Si-Hun, who had been in thought, nodded. "So what do you have in mind specifically?"

Making a savior was easier than looking for one who knows where, but it was still difficult in the absolute sense.

"I've thought of something," Kang-Woo responded.

A specific scene had popped up in his head the moment that he had first thought of the plan.

Kang-Woo stared at Si-Hun and asked, "Si-Hun, you said that Princess Iris would be passing somewhere around here, right?"

He recalled the piece of information that Si-Hun had given him a while ago.

“Oh, yes. That’s right,” Si-Hun replied.

“Let’s tail her.”

“Tail... the princess?”

“You know that the empire isn’t in the best state right now, right? If the political situation is this unstable, people are bound to harbor grudges for the people in leadership. You never know, Princess Iris might get attacked by a rebel army.”

Actually, Kang-Woo did know; she would most definitely be attacked.

*‘Because I’ll make it so.’*

Kang-Woo’s eyes shone sharply.

*‘A hero will appear within the crisis!’*

It was the perfect first step for a hero that would save the continent.

“Hahaha. I doubt a rebel army would appear out of nowhere like that, hyung-nim.”

“Well, I was half-joking. I had another objective in mind.”

“Another objective?”

“To become a hero praised by the entire continent, you need a dependable backer. Whether you kill an evil demon or wipe out a horde of monsters attacking a town, it’s pointless if no one knows about it.”

“That’s...”

It was true. No matter how many hero-like things one did, they would never become a hero if their accomplishments were not spread across the land.

“Are you suggesting we establish a connection with the imperial family?” Si-Hun asked.

“Yeah.” Kang-Woo nodded. “Of course, we won’t be able to form a connection with her just by tailing her. Our objective this time is to gather as much information about Princess Iris as possible, and then find a way to establish that connection.”

“I see.”

Si-Hun nodded. It was certainly not a bad idea. One needed reliable backings to become a hero, and there was no one more reliable than a member of the imperial family.

“And the imperial family is apparently blessed by the high elves as well, so it would be a good idea to form a good relationship with them,” Si-Hun mentioned, recalling what Douglas had said earlier.

Kang-Woo smiled and put his hand on Si-Hun's shoulder.

"I'm counting on you, man. I know you can do it."

"Hyung-nim..."

Si-Hun looked at Kang-Woo with trembling eyes; he could feel the deep trust in his voice.

*'Hyung-nim has put his trust in me.'*

He could not think of anything besides needing to succeed, no matter what it took.

Kang-Woo patted Si-Hun's shoulder and responded, "Don't worry. We'll support you as best we can."

He already had experience making someone a hero. He was confident that he could do it even better this time.

"Have you heard when Princess Iris would be crossing through this area?" Kang-Woo asked.

"I heard it was about a week from now."

"Alright."

Kang-Woo nodded in satisfaction.

*'A week, huh?'*

It was more than enough time to prepare.

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A week flew by in an instant. Each party member spent that time getting accustomed to Aernor in their own way.

*'Well, it was more like enjoying leisure.'*

Kang-Woo had taken his party members to various cities and towns to purchase clothes that didn't make them stand out, and just walked around the streets to sightsee.

After a week's time, they had come to find out that Velen had been one of the better cities in the Arnan Empire to live in. As for the other cities, eighty percent of its territory had been turned into slums. The streets were filled with women selling their bodies, and collapsed labor workers that were nothing but skin and bones.

*'It's terrible.'*

It was so bad to the point that Kang-Woo almost had no idea how the empire was still running.

"Hyung-nim."

Si-Hun bit his lip from seeing the atrocity. Even Kang-Woo was frowning at the sight, so there was no question about how Si-Hun would be feeling about it.

"Don't pay it much mind, Si-Hun," Kang-Woo stated.

“But...”

Si-Hun stared at the slum pitifully. Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

*‘There’s no way he’d listen to me even if I tell him that it’s none of his business.’*

Considering Si-Hun’s personality, that would only make him more passionate.

“You’ll be able to change it once you become the hero.”

“Will I?”

“People will gain hope. So, don’t worry about them and focus on what you have to do.”

Kang-Woo’s words were not completely groundless. The process of making Si-Hun a hero also included changing the corrupt empire.

*‘There’s a bit of a problem, though.’*

Kang-Woo would only be able to come up with a detailed plan after meeting Princess Iris in person.

“Now, let’s get going.” Kang-Woo turned around, his back toward the slum.

He had found Princess Iris’s current location through Lilith; she was passing through a narrow canyon before arriving in this city.

*‘And in that canyon...’*

Princess Iris would be attacked by the Undead army prepared by Vernaak.

*‘As for the setting, let’s go with a black mage having joined forces with the rebel army to cause a rebellion.’*

The only thing that mattered was to put Princess Iris in danger, and for Si-Hun to come and save her.

Kang-Woo looked toward Vernaak and whispered, “Is everything ready?”

“Yes, my king. The Undead are in place and will attack the princess at your signal.”

“Good.”

The plan was perfect. All that was left was to give the signal at the right time.

“Let’s move.”

Kang-Woo and the party left the city in advance; to appear at the perfect timing, they needed to go toward the canyon early.

“But hyung-nim, is there really a need for us to go to the princess? It might cause problems if we’re discovered.”

Si-Hun, who had no idea about the plan to put Princess Iris in danger using an Undead horde, tilted his head in confusion.

“Well...”

While Kang-Woo was trying to think of a suitable excuse, Lilith’s voice suddenly echoed in his head.

- My king, Princess Iris is getting attacked.

- What? I haven’t given the signal yet. Did they happen to find one of the Undead in hiding?

- *No, it’s not that...* Lilith continued in slight bewilderment. - *It’s not the Undead that we’ve hidden. Humans in masks... are attacking the princess.*

“What?” Kang-Woo said out loud without realizing it.

- It seems to be an actual rebel army.

“...”

Kang-Woo chuckled at the absurdity.

*‘An actual rebel army appeared?’*

This hadn’t been in the Demon of Prophecy’s prophecy.

Chapter 340 - Hero Maker (3)

Whoosh!

Oh Kang-Woo and his party sped toward the canyon as soon as Kang-Woo was contacted by Lilith. It would result in a massive hiccup in their plan if the princess were to die.

*‘Shit!’*

Kang-Woo frowned.

*‘An actual rebel army?’*

There could not have been a worse coincidence.

*‘What are the fucking chances?’*

Probability seemed to be nonexistent in this world. Rage surged within Kang-Woo, but only momentarily. He recalled what he needed to do first and foremost. He closed his eyes and gave Lilith a command.

- Protect the princess so that she doesn’t die.

- Yes, my king. However, I don’t think you need to worry about that. The princess’s knights are doing their part.

- Really?

That was the only good news among all this. Kang-Woo expressed slight relief and sped up even more using the Authority of Haste.

Clang! Clang—!

“Kuh! Maintain formation!”

“Protect the princess!”

As soon as Kang-Woo arrived, he could hear the sound of clashing metal and smell the metallic scent of blood filling the canyon. He turned around.

*‘I think I’m too early.’*

He had ended up getting separated from his party members after running with all his might; there was no one in the party that could keep up with Kang-Woo running at full speed.

“Lilith, what’s the situation?”

“It’s still under control.”

Kang-Woo looked down at the battle between the knights in silver armor and the masked men in the narrow canyon.

*‘They’re severely outnumbered.’*

There were only about thirty silver knights while there were easily over five hundred masked men.

“Aren’t there way too few of them for escorting an imperial princess?” Kang-Woo mentioned as he watched over the battlefield.

Not only were the silver knights lacking in number, their skills also were not up to par for a group in charge of protecting an imperial process.

Lilith nodded. “I agree. Well... They’re not completely incompetent, but they certainly are lacking in skill.” freeweb . com

“Hm.”

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. Even though the empire was nearing its impending doom, such incompetence seemed highly unlikely.

*‘I’ll leave that for later.’*

He needed to focus on the current situation.

“Death to the witch!”

“We do not need an incompetent princess!”

Desperation could be felt from the voices of the masked men. They were charging to their deaths at the knights while gripping a diverse array of weapons. Kang-Woo frowned as he looked down at the battle.

“This is...”

Something about the rebel army’s desperation bothered him, as if a cog in a machine had been misplaced. Kang-Woo fell into thought while tapping on the bridge of his nose with his finger.

*‘The pieces are coming together.’*

However, the hypothesis in his head was nowhere near a level for him to consider complete. He lacked far too much information.

*'But still... Just in case.'*

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and contacted Vernaak.

- Vernaak.

- Yes, Master.

- I have a favor to ask.

Kang-Woo relayed a command to Vernaak while watching over the battle that was getting fiercer.

"Hyung-nim!"

Kim Si-Hun arrived as soon as Kang-Woo's conversation with Vernaak was over. His expression stiffened as he looked down at the battle between the rebel army and the silver knights.

"Kuh, I can't believe something like this happened..."

Si-Hun summoned Ludwig while biting his lip. He grasped the sword that was shining brilliantly.

"Hyung-nim, let's g—"

"No, wait." Kang-Woo grabbed Si-Hun's shoulder. "... Not yet."

"Pardon?"

"Let's wait a little longer."

Kang-Woo looked down at the battlefield calmly. Although the knights were being pushed back, they were holding on well.

*'We need to appear when they're on the verge of death.'*

They needed a better timing to amplify the effect of a hero appearing in a crisis.

"Si-Hun. Now that things have ended up like this, we're gonna have to move up the plan."

"Are you referring to the hero plan that you mentioned before?"

Kang-Woo nodded. "Go down there at the perfect time and save the princess."

Kang-Woo had been planning on giving Si-Hun this spiel after the Undead attack commenced, but the timing had gone slightly awry due to the sudden appearance of the rebel army.

*'Either way, it doesn't really matter.'*

After all, telling this to Si-Hun had always been the plan.

"Si-Hun, what do you think is the most important component that makes a hero?"

Kang-Woo asked in all seriousness.



Whatever the case, the hero-making operation needed to begin now. Si-Hun was left bewildered by Kang-Woo's sudden question.

He folded his fingers one by one and answered, "I'm not sure... Righteousness? Courage?"

"No, no, no! Listen, Si-Hun." Kang-Woo grabbed Si-Hun's shoulders. "The most important component of a hero is..."

"Yes?" Si-Hun swallowed his saliva in anxiety.

Kang-Woo continued, "Style."

"I'm sorry?"

"You know, like how cool they look. Style makes a hero.

"Just think about it. If a 150 kg ugly bastard goes down there to save the princess and her knights, do you think he would become a hero? I guarantee you that the son of a bitch would be framed as the mastermind of this entire incident."

It was sad, but it was an undeniable truth. One's looks were more important than what people thought.

"But of course, that's of no concern to you," Kang-Woo added.

*'Since you're handsome as fuck. Jeez, you're even more handsome up close. Why the fuck are you so handsome, goddammit?'*

Kang-Woo was getting irritated just thinking about it. He shook his head to disperse the rage that was gradually rising as he stared at Si-Hun.

"Well, anyway, I'm saying that style is important."

"Oh... I see."

"So, what do you think you should do?"

"Uhhh..." Si-Hun slurred blankly.

Kang-Woo pounded his chest in frustration. "Since you don't need to care about looks, you just need to focus on your performance!"

"My... performance?"

"Yeah, man!" Kang-Woo nodded while smirking.

A hero's entrance needed to be paired with the right performance, and Kang-Woo had the perfect one in mind.

*'At times like this...'*

The gears in Kang-Woo's head went into overdrive.

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*“Pant! Pant!”*

“Th-This way, Your Highness!”

There was a woman in the narrow canyon filled with the thick stench of blood. She was blindingly beautiful, had glamorous wavy blonde hair, and was wearing a dress with laces hanging on it. She was Iris von Arnan, the woman who had become the highest authority of the empire after the emperor had fallen ill and was now bedridden.

“Kyaah!”

However, it was no simple feat to run in a narrow canyon in a dress and heels. She fell down shortly after.

“Your Highness!”

The maids that had been taking care of her quickly ran toward her. They tried to help Iris up, but she could not stay on her feet because she had rolled her ankle as she fell.

*“Huff, huff.”*

Iris put her hand on her swollen ankle while panting heavily. Sharp pain shot up her leg, and tears flowed down from her eyes.

“Why... What did I do so wrong to deserve this?!” she screamed in anger.

She picked up a rock on the ground and threw it to vent her rage.

“Y-Your Highness... We have to hur—”

“Shut up!!”

Iris slapped away the hand of one of the maids. She lowered her head while crying. She was not stupid enough to not have realized that it was far too late to escape.

*“Sniff... Why... Why...”*

All that she could do was to lament in vain.

“Your Highness...”

Iris’s maids looked at her in pity.

Iris said sorrowfully, “If only... If only Brother[1] were here...”

Tears flowed down her cheeks. She clenched her fists while biting her lip.

“There she is!”

“The witch!”

The masked members of the rebel army had reached the place where Iris and her maids were.

*Schwing.* Light reflected on the sharp sword.

“Kyaah!”

Iris screamed with her eyes shut tight. The masked men with swords in hand snorted.

“Hah! The witch that brought the empire to ruin sure can scream!”

“I guess she cares about her own life, at the very least.”

Their words were filled with clear malice.

“It’s because of greedy and incompetent members of the imperial family like you that the great Prime Minister Fidelio has such a hard time.”

“The empire wouldn’t have turned out like this if he were the one to lead it.”

Iris flinched. She glared at the masked men while biting her lip.

“You’re wrong...”

Her lips fluttered. Countless words that she wanted to say were on the verge of leaving her mouth, but she couldn’t let them.

*‘Besides...’*

There was no one in this world that would listen to her.

“Yeah,” Iris muttered, having given up.

*‘Rather than living like this...’*

If she had to keep wandering within the inescapable valley of despair for the rest of her days...

*‘It’s better to just die.’*

No one knew what she was going through; the only person that had always protected her was gone. What remained after his death was nothing but hell.

“Kill me. Just kill me already!” Iris yelled madly.

The masked men only snorted at her screams of desperation.

“As you wish, we’ll kill you!”

“For the revolutionary army! For a new empire!”

The masked men raised their swords.

“Ah...” Iris expressed.

She trembled subtly as she shut her eyes tight. Only one thing was on her mind; the appearance of a blond man enveloped in golden light.

*‘Brother...’*

Tears flowed down Iris’s cheeks. The sword of one of the masked men swung down on her neck. Just then...

Clang—!

“Kurgh!!”

A young man fell down from the sky and parried the masked man’s sword. He landed on the ground crouched with one knee and hand on the ground. At the same time, great winds blew, and flower petals fluttered across the bloody battlefield out of nowhere.

“Wh-Who are you?!” a masked man yelled in bewilderment.

The young man who had fallen from the sky slowly lifted himself up. He ignored the masked man and stretched his hand out toward Iris, who was on the ground.

“Are you hurt anywhere?”

Kim Si-Hun had made his appearance.

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“Shiiiet, that’s it!” expressed Kang-Woo, who was watching the situation unfold from above. He clapped while snickering. “Nothing better than a superhero landing on the first appearance!”

There was nothing more stylish than blocking an attack while falling from the sky. Kang-Woo jumped in place while pulling up a hologram of Si-Hun and Iris by using an Authority.

“Man, too bad I don’t have any popcorn to go with this.”

He should have brought that with him to Aernor as well. Kang-Woo watched the hologram while clicking his tongue.

- Are you hurt anywhere?

“Dayum, nice line delivery.”

Kang-Woo smiled as he stared at Iris, who was hazily looking up at Si-Hun.

“Alright.”

It was time to make a hero.